THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN POLITICS, CULTURE, AND SPIRITUALITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION OF PERFORMANCE ART ACTIVISM AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETAL PROBLEMS

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Foreword

Initial Interactions with Culture, Politics, and Spirituality

Since my early childhood, and throughout my young adult life, I diligently pursued various cultural experiences and forms of artistic expression. My primary interest, for both personal and academic inquiries, is the investigation of various cultural and sub-cultural groups and their experiences. The rituals and performance customs of particular modern and indigenous communities offers an intriguing glimpse into worlds I have yet to travel. I will briefly discuss my previous adventures with international travel, religious and spiritual quests, and my examination of a multitude of artistic and cultural genres like theatre and dance.

Both my previous cultural experiences and the performance elements of cross-cultural studies directly influenced my choreography while in the School of Dance at Ohio University. Moreover, the cultural exposure I received throughout my life provided a solid understanding of the cultural diversity within the global community. This awareness has led me to question the very nature of culture itself.

I was born in Tampa, Florida and raised as the only child of a supportive single mother. My mom and I relocated to Fort Wayne, Indiana during my third grade year of elementary school. Initially, the move was depressing because I had to acclimate myself to a new and colder climate. Despite this, the change of scenery, people, and experiences was exhilarating. This was only the beginning of an extensive period of international travel.

Surprisingly, the move to Indiana jump-started my artistic pursuits. I signed up for a drama course at the Fort Wayne Performing Art’s Center. This class introduced me to
theatre techniques like improvisation and character embodiment. After a few years of drama lessons and plays, I quickly became interested in a wide array of other forms of artistic expression. I took up the saxophone and the oboe in middle school and performed with the school band for roughly two and a half years. I also began to experiment with drawing, painting, and figure skating.

Upon returning to Tampa, Florida in the seventh grade, I immediately applied to the Magnet school program lottery system. The Magnet program offers a chance for gifted and talented students in the Tampa Bay area to attend a school with a primary focus on their specific abilities, such as science, technology, foreign language, and the performing arts.

Luckily, I was accepted into my first choice. I studied drama and musical theatre at Orange Grove Middle School for the Performing Arts. This experience enhanced my career opportunities because I made lasting connections with a multitude of extremely talented and creative individuals from a wide range of disciplines.

I was exposed to dance for the first time at Orange Grove. I met a few girls who enjoyed tumbling outside in the courtyard before and after school. I approached the girls and would ask them to demonstrate a variety of dance tricks for me. These friendships led me to the dance department during the early morning hours of school.

My female dancer friends would show me dance movements and ask me to mimic them. Astonishingly, I would gracefully perform the movement actions they asked me with little effort. I quickly realized that dance was my true gift, passion, and natural ability.
I continued to train in dance for nearly the entire summer before high school. I was featured in a dance recital and observed the rapid acceleration and refinement of my technique. I decided to audition for a spot at the Howard W. Blake High School for the Performing Arts and was accepted into the drama department. However, I was more interested in movement. I spontaneously auditioned for the School of Dance on my first day of classes and successfully changed my course of study from drama to dance.

The primary technical focus at Blake high school was modern and ballet. I also studied choreography, performance art, career preparation, and experimental dance. These are extremely rare courses for a typical public or private school student to have before a college education.

Upon graduation in 2004, I postponed further academic pursuits and went into the professional world of entertainment dance aboard luxury cruise lines. Between 2004 and 2007, I experienced rich and vibrant cultures of societies spanning five continents, including Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and North America. By working with companies such as Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises, I became intrigued with various cultures and went on to pursue these interests academically.

Many of the experiences I had while dancing aboard cruise ships, remain the highlight of my traveling ventures. I was offered cultural interchange on a daily basis and given brief glimpses into modern, developed, underdeveloped, indigenous, and natural settings across the globe. This fueled my interest in societies and cultures.

In between cruise ship contracts I lived in New York City. I was working full time as a waiter at a scary themed restaurant in Midtown known as The Jekyll and Hyde Club. Additionally, I traveled to Tampa once or twice a year to teach dance and choreograph
routines for my former competitive dance studio, All American Dance Factory. These experiences provided a larger perspective concerning the culture, politics, and spirituality of the global community.

Cross-cultural transitions are experiences I seek regularly. As I traveled to these various locations, I could examine the differences and the similarities between cultures, both positive and negative. I gained insight and deeper meaning into the awareness of the global society and cultural phenomena. These events ultimately led to academic research concerning various cultural forms of dance and movement, such as Japanese Butoh dance, improvisation, and fire arts.

My cultural exposure is not limited to travel and the arts, but also includes a thorough exploration of religious institutions. My mother, a semi-practicing Catholic, influenced my religious beliefs until the moment when I began to question religious theology. My quest for religious affiliations carried me to many Christian churches of varying denominations like Lutheran and Methodist.

My search was for religious awareness, a belief system I could resonate with, and for religious acceptance. Growing up as a multi-racial homosexual in a Caucasian and Christian based environment proved challenging because of the intolerance towards the LGBT community within Christianity. This was the nature of my questions for various religious institutions. I knew in my heart a god would not condemn me for my sexuality because I never chose the feelings I possessed.

In the sixth grade, I found Judaism. I studied the Jewish faith throughout middle school and into high school. I completed my conversion process into the conservative sect of Judaism on my eighteenth birthday, December 18, 2004. I chose Judaism because
the theology of the reform and conservative sects, unlike the Orthodox sect, does not discriminate against homosexuality or other religious institutions. I was satisfied with the accepting nature of the faith. However, organized religion has since been of no interest to me. Religious ideologies, traditional practices, and biblical stories were no longer resonating with what I believed as truth. I found individual spirituality, which is where I remain today.

I have always held extreme opinions and convictions about certain issues like homosexuality and equality. I believe my religious quest was also my first experience with activism because I invested time and education into a cultural system of values, beliefs, and practices only to question the authoritarian quality and deem them all unsatisfactory.

As I got older, my sexual identity and the socio-political and religious discrimination I became aware of led to my interest in activism and making a statement about social concerns and intolerance. My cultural experiences consisted of international travel and exploration of artistic sub-cultural genres like drama, musical theatre, and dance. I experienced a wide array of identity politics concerning my sexual identity and race. Finally, I have persisted with a search for a connection to the divine spirit through an inspection of various contemporary religious philosophies. After analyzing the last several years of my life, I realized I was pursuing social activism and cultural awareness all along.
Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Project

As we examine the current cultural period, which can be described as a monetary driven dominator paradigm, an acute observation of corruption and manipulation becomes increasingly discernible among governments and the general population. I suggest the increased awareness regarding contemporary social problems and political and economic corruption is culminating in a massive global awakening. A global awakening to our present era of crisis and manipulation could be the catalyst for a total transformation and evolution of human consciousness and redefine our collective cultural values. My research displays the initial stages of this shift in contemporary culture and the rapid accumulation of awareness regarding the severity of the global situation.

Our government, through the control of the mass media and mainstream news propaganda, instills and perpetuates a fear-based reality of war, crisis, and manipulation on a daily basis. Ultimately, this maintains a dysfunctional structural system of power that seeks and hoards material gain at the cost of human and planetary health. Today, the threat of nuclear destruction, financial collapse and devaluation, the rising energy crisis, and catastrophic environmental devastation are only a few examples of immensely severe contemporary problems that threaten our existence as a human species.

My research suggests a rapid acceleration towards a paradigm shift* and a transformation of consciousness that can redefine our social and cultural fabric completely. This investigation integrates extensive multidisciplinary research concerning contemporary societal problems and the significance of utilizing performance techniques as a means for social activism. I elucidate characteristics of an emergent planetary culture
within our global society that is altering the modality of activism through the integration of performative elements that were not used by prior generations of social movements. I examine scholarly theories regarding politics, economics, culture, and spirituality, in order to gain a wide synoptic view of four dominant social power structures. I argue these structures are inherently related and play a major role in both the progression and regression of producing and solving contemporary collective issues.

For some individuals, the severity of the corruption within our society is easily understood. However, many others remain blissfully ignorant to contemporary problems such as socio-economic warfare, cultural manipulation, spiritual indoctrination, and political corruption and propaganda. Many Americans remain misinformed and fearful due to the distortion of mainstream media information. A thorough analysis of Western based consumer culture conveys an agenda of distraction and pre-occupation through entertainment and wasteful advancements in technology and material possessions.

Culture demonstrates the values, beliefs, traditions, and even the technology of a particular group of people. Unfortunately, Western culture has evolved a greedy material based obsession. Our society consumes and disregards infinite material objects in the name of progress. This culture is innately parasitic. It only consumes what is best for itself and will ultimately be its own demise if it remains on its current path. In retrospect, the enhancements of technology and the new social media phenomena are establishing an interconnected web of rapid information waves for the mainstream population, which is successfully illuminating the suspicions and evidence regarding corruption in the dominant structures.
Evidence suggests the corruption of the ideals held by most institutions are obscuring and deterring workable solutions to our collective problems. Therefore, I suggest an in depth interdisciplinary investigation and articulation is necessary to alleviate systematic socio-political and cultural corruption. I recommend innovative dialogue and collaborative communication among artists and activists, researchers and scholars, and citizens of all backgrounds, which could lead to solutions for humanity’s problems. Moreover, I support my recommendation by demonstrating numerous contemporary networks, performances, and events that are already developing frameworks for new models of activism.

As an interdisciplinary artist and scholar, I believe it is necessary to creatively articulate and collectively discuss the contemporary issues we presently face as a global community. Although this notion of widespread communication regarding such complicated concerns may initially sound ambitious, I assert that the social media and network technologies that currently exist are already being utilized to facilitate this type of discourse effectively.

For this investigation, I interviewed a multitude of scholars, art activists, experts, and researchers within the modern and contemporary dance world, whose works primarily focus on elucidating the dilemmas of our era. Additionally, I gained insight into the complexities surrounding these concerns when I interviewed several faculty professors from various disciplines at Ohio University. These interviews provided a new and deeper perspective about performance and art as activism concerned with various global disparities.
Utilizing performance methods for activist purposes harmoniously fuses together elements of art, entertainment, education, and activism through illogical absurdities and the use of unconventional performance spaces like urban centers or privatized corporate property. This field incorporates interdisciplinary knowledge for advocating and producing change regarding issues like intolerance, fear, hate, and subsequent war. My research demonstrates performance art activism as a vital tool for generating awareness regarding contemporary societal issues. This rebel art requires further examination and application for the promotion of interdisciplinary education and knowledge about the collective of societal problems and political corruption.

My primary interest concerns the intersection between cultural, political, and spiritual theories of the dominator era. Additionally, I discuss the characteristics of an emerging new culture. I illustrate the influence this new culture has on the transformation of art and performance activism in the new Millennia. My questions are what is the point of connection between these structures? Does the relationship between each structure influence the other? If so, does this serve in the interest of the global society or the perpetuation of the structures? Most importantly, what are the characteristics of the new culture and how is/can this awareness quickly and artistically be communicated to the global community?
Chapter 2
Perspectives on Contemporary Movements and Sociopolitical Problems

Throughout recorded human history, social movements have developed within societies for a variety of reasons. Movements are groups of individuals that employ various tactics and ideologies to reform, restructure or eradicate a dominant system like government or economics. Social movements play a major role in transforming the cultural fabric of any particular society and have been doing so since the beginning of the 20th century.

Author of *Contemporary Movements and Ideologies*, Roberta Garner defines a movement as being, “Constituted by human beings engaged in discourses and practices designed to challenge and change society as they define it. It is formed by people, who over the course of time, are involved in non-institutionalized discourses and practices of change” (7). Garner writes, “Movements are the essential “stuff” from which existing political systems are built” (397). Various movements like nationalism, socialism, liberalism, have all influenced the direction of our present century.

Movements can be religious, social, political, economic, etc. Some movements promote equality and strive to protect the moral rights of oppressed and disenfranchised citizens. Others disguise their profit-oriented agendas with humanitarian values. Each movement has distinct characteristics, values, and practices that separate it from another.

For Garner, social movements are the precursor to transformation. They pave the way for the transition into other movements by influencing the direction of a society or the global community. They also continue to challenge the views of other movements.
These reactions establish monumental social movements committed to transforming the cultural perspective.

Since most movements utilize political means in order to generate transformation, sociopolitical movements is the central topic discussed in *Contemporary Movements and Ideologies*. Garner believes the goal of sociopolitical movements is to transform an entire society. She writes that sociopolitical movements, “Seek to influence, capture, or dismantle the state-the political system- in order to bring about changes in social relationships” (7). Interestingly, most dominant movements strive diligently to maintain the power and order of their particular ideological paradigm at any cost necessary. This is problematic because any dominant sociopolitical movement is potentially dysfunctional.

One of the primary components within all social movements is ideology, which is the common thread of ideas and opinions expressed by active participants within a particular movement. Garner argues that each social movement contains a distinct and specific ideology that possesses, “certain language, a set of rules about how to talk, about how to say things, and about what can and cannot be said” (15). If particular ideologies contain a set of rules that must be adhered to, then in order to create change of any kind, it is important for emerging movements to articulate their positions through innovative language and reframe or recontextualize their arguments to illuminate the problem.

The culture of humanity changes with the tides of time. As new information surfaces regarding the corruption of dominant systems and institutions, the needs, desires, values, and beliefs are altered to fit within the mold of the era. Cultural changes can be noticed in a variety of ways, but in particular the ideology, or the discourse specific to a
movement is significantly noticeable as they collide with the ideology of an older more conservative generation.

Two major global economic institutions are socialism and capitalism. Capitalism can be categorized as a Western based economic system with the movements ideology predominantly associated with classism and competition. The objective, for many of the upper class, is to standardize and privatize property to acquire and hoard immense wealth and capital. The working class struggles endlessly to enhance their capital gain, but the wealthy elite continue to prosper at exponential rates.

Since the dawn of the millennium, the cracks have begun to expand, breaking the solidity of capitalistic ideology and lifting the veil to expose a broken and corrupt system that has reached its limits. The current political and economic system of the United States is a prime example of a dominator culture*. Many people believe we are free citizens living in a democratic society, while others disagree.

Ohio University professor, Susan Burgess, articulates how certain groups influence and benefit from the present political system. Despite this, throughout history various other cultural movements have been able to successfully, “Undermine the powers that be”. Elite and wealthy groups are not necessarily in control of everything. However, evidence points to a vast majority of the population being controlled and manipulated by a few elite through our dependence on social structures like news and mainstream media, food, healthcare, religion, and finance.

Burgess is a political expert who supports my argument regarding the corruption of our current dominator oriented political system. She elucidates this in response to a question about the functionality and efficacy of capitalism. Burgess agrees capitalism is
an unsustainable structure that is, “Probably pretty functional and efficient to certain ends and for certain groups, but probably pretty inefficient for other groups” (Burgess). As more people become aware of the corruption and dysfunction of the Western capitalist based system, new movements are taking shape that oppose Capitalism and its values. This facilitates an accelerated awareness of the flaws in the capitalistic ideology.

According to various scholars and activists, there are severe problems with the capitalistic ideology. The Collective Evolution is a well-researched Canadian independent documentary created by a team committed to exposing the problem with our dominant structures. The issue of money and our overall monetary market system is one of the central topics in the film.

The monetary market system is a debt based structure that is limiting our ability to thrive because it distracts us from our true passions and forces the population to pursue money as their source of survival. This is a tactic used by the elite culture to dominate a society. Businesses and corporations advocate cyclical consumption* with the archaic capitalistic belief that our planet has infinite resources.

Since the transition to fiat currency* in 1971, and the introduction of the fractional reserve and central banking system, the financial elite have amassed tremendous wealth and power in which to control us by forcing us to participate in this debt system despite the non-intrinsic value of the currency. In the past, Americans could enter a financial institution and trade their paper bills for gold. This is no longer the case. Since the money has no intrinsic value, bankers have been printing and loaning funds to the population and attaching interest.
As this devalued money is increasingly printed out of nothing and distributed, hyperinflation begins to occur. This can be seen with the contemporary fluctuation of gas and food prices in our economy as all institutions and individuals are constantly raising prices to compensate for the interest on borrowed money that is not backed by anything. This is the world game of money, which has placed a very few in a position of power over the global population.

A contemporary movement that spawned from this awareness is Occupy Wall Street. The Occupy movement is a newly developed, leaderless resistance movement that has gained enormous momentum in the fight against financial tyranny. In September 2011, the movement began its occupation at Liberty Square in Manhattan’s financial district. Occupy exposes and challenges foreign bank and elite decisions made by the top 1% of the global population, which according to the movement, ultimately led to the economic recession. According to occupywallstreet.org, the movement exploded in 100 U.S. cities and over 1,500 cities throughout the world.

The Occupy movement recognizes the social and economic injustices inflicted upon the general population by the wealthiest individuals in the world. This direct assertion and exposure of socio-economic, political, and environmental corruption, executed by a specific group of individuals in high positions of corporate authority and political power, is a direct threat to their interests. We now increasingly observe the reduction of our rights to free speech and freedom of assembly as the Occupy movement experiences violent treatment from authority figures in order to silence and displace the peaceful protesters. Unfortunately, the unjust treatment towards non-violent protestors is nothing new to our cultural history. These are signals of revolution.
Various multidisciplinary scholars and researchers have verified evidence supporting the claims made by the Occupy movement. William G. Domhoff, a Sociology professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz is a well-established research professor and author of numerous books including, *The Higher Circles, The Powers That Be, and Who Rules America?* Domhoff’s website, *Who Rules America*, summarizes his theories regarding power and domination in our socio-political systems. His website is devoted to his theoretical research, and various other empirical studies conducted about wealth, power, government, and social change.

In an article entitled, “The Class Domination Theory of Power,” Domhoff articulates who is actually running our country. He provides ample evidence for the convergence of wealthy top executives, corporate CEO’s, and other elite individuals with enormous levels of wealth, which utilize their economic position as a means to influence and control the federal government and ultimately the people. Classism or a form of class politics is described in many sections of this article as Domhoff elucidates the various forms of classes and their strengths and weaknesses.

Domhoff points out the extremely wealthy are capable of ruling over a global nation because they “coalesce a social upper class that has developed institutions by which the children of its members are socialized into an upper-class worldview, and newly wealthy people are assimilated” (*Who Rules America*). This demonstrates how ideological convictions and the perpetuation of belief systems can be sustained despite its possibility to be detrimental to contemporary society as a whole. He continues to show how upper class institutions have influential positions towards corporations and non-profit organizations that both produce and hoard the wealth into the hands of the few elite.
Through the Internet, new and alternative media sources like, InfoWars.com and WeAreChange.org, are generating a large body of information regarding contemporary issues. New movements are popping up everywhere and can be observed by the surge of websites developed in response to various socio-political concerns. These new movements are interacting with members from regions throughout the world in order to augment the population of its members.

Many contemporary investigative journalists, like founder of Infowars.com Alex Jones, and Luke Rudowski from WeAreChange.org, refer to our political system as a “Corporatocracy,” or a “Technocracy”. These terms suggest the American government as extremely influenced by privately owned corporations such as the Federal Reserve Bank and giant technological investors. Our government is like a puppet system that attempts to maintain the public’s apparent or supposed involvement in politics as a functioning democracy. In reality, a left versus right debate is deceiving the people because both parties are actually working with the same ultimate agenda; the debt based monetary system of corporate, political and economic dominance of the financial elite.

“The Class Domination Theory of Power,” explores a series of concepts that Domhoff conveys as necessary in order to understand the current power dominator structure of our present era. The concepts he discusses include, “social class, upper class, corporate community, interlocking directorates, the policy planning network, the power elite, the special interest process, and the candidate selection process.”

A social class according to Domhoff is, “a set of intermarrying and interacting families who see each other as equals, share a common style of life, and have a common viewpoint on the world.” Class politics is a reality in our society and is only
now being evaluated as possibly detrimental to the sustainability of a society. In other words, the viewpoints or worldview held by the financial elite is an unsustainable ideological conviction supported by mass political power and dominance through deception.

Domhoff refers to the top 1% of the general population that make up the wealthy elite as, “The Social Upper Class,” or “Those commonly agreed by most members of society to be the “top,” or “elite,” or “exclusive” class.” He claims that roughly 0.5%-1% of this elite population is also sitting in extremely high corporate positions, non-profit organizations, and in government. This exemplifies a concentration of corruption within the Social Upper Class. The wealthy elite uses their corporate power to influence policy and government.

Domhoff argues that many forms of power exist and can be observed by a set of indicators that determine the dominant power structure of the present moment. The three primary indicators of power, for Domhoff, are who benefits, who governs, and who wins. Certain values that exist in contemporary society are unequally distributed, and Domhoff agrees that our paradigm of inequality and corruption is left unresolved. People in the 21st century value wealth, health, high income, safe jobs, and long lives. Since this is a collective value of the general mainstream population, all of these can be utilized as indicators of power for those that possess these privileges.

Classism is a fundamental element of the social class system that structurally exists today. The extreme exclusivity of the wealthy elite usually generates an identity that is far superior to any other lower class. Basically, the wealthy elites are elitist by nature and feel superior to lower classes.
Domhoff summarizes that, “Combining our studies with findings by economists on the wealth and income distributions, it is possible to say that the upper class, compromising 0.5%-1% of the population, owns 35-40% of all privately held wealth in the United States and receives 12-15% of total yearly income. In short, the upper class score very high on the “who benefits” power indicator.” Ultimately, Domhoff is arguing that this situation is a social problem and I would have to agree with him.

As obvious as this may seem, the 1% possess immense amounts of power in the current paradigm. Their system benefits them because of their relationships with government, finances, and corporations. This information is being rapidly transmitted and understood by the masses through recent documentaries like, “The One Percent,” and “The Corporation.”


Batra explores the political power and social movements of various societal paradigms within a contextual framework of historian and philosopher P.R. Sarkar’s, The Law of Social Cycle. Batra summarizes there are “four possible sources of political power-the military, human intellect, organized laborer and, of course, money or wealth”(55). He also notes that religious societies are able to dominate with political
power through the use of scriptures. Therefore, according to Batra, they are using intellectual power to control the people.

Most importantly Batra notes, “Political power or societal dominance stems from four avenues—physical strength or skills, human intellect or analytical skills, businessman, acumen or acquisitive skills that arise from and lead to the hoarding of wealth, and labor organizations. As a result, throughout history we find that societies are sometimes dominated by warriors, sometimes by intellectuals (including priests), sometimes by the wealthy, and sometimes by a combination of the wealthy and laborers where the opulent reign supreme but workers also have some authority” (55).

Batra notes Sarkar’s innovative alternative method to categorizing social classes in society. Many consider class divisions to be wealth or occupation related but Sarkar’s perspective relates more to the general nature of people. He categorizes people as warriors, intellectuals, acquistors, and laborers. Each classification includes a list of techniques individuals use in order to develop their skills within these classifications. It is also important to note that these categories can sometimes be combined, where warriors can have acquisitive tendencies, etc.

Batra sums up the classifications for each category on a global level. “In every society warriors generally defend the nation against foreign attacks and maintain law and order. Intellectuals develop religion, ideas and inventions. Acquisitors manage farms, factories, financial institutions and retail stores. While laborers do routine work and perform low tech jobs” (59). Sarkar argues that while all of these classifications exist in all civilizations, only one of them is dominating at a particular point in time. According to Sarkar, no group is ever in a dominant position forever. (60)
Sarkar said, “The era of laborers is followed by the era of warriors, the era of warriors is followed by the era of intellectuals, and the era of intellectuals by the era of acquisitors, culminating in a social revolution—such a social evolution is an infallible law of nature” (60). This is a description of the evolution of social structures.

The Social Cycle as a Circular Pattern demonstrates the shift of paradigms. “As in any era, most of them do what comes naturally to them—that is they invent dogmas rationalizing the hegemony of the dominant class” (65). Batra believes that the age we are in now in the cycle is the acquisitors age or a combination of the intellectual and acquisitors age. He provides a list of components involved with this age.

“Salient Features of the era of acquisitors include the following:
1. Family ties loosening with the rise of individualism
2. Rising crime rates
3. Increasing prostitution and pornography
4. Growing aversion toward mental and physical discipline
5. Rising materialism and interests in money
6. Rising atheism and disrespect for religion
7. Continued low status of women
8. Highly decentralized government
9. The rise of reason, science, and technology
10. Rising standard of living and rising wealth concentration
11. Frequent warfare based on competition for resources and markets
12. At the end, acquisitors’ tyranny, poverty, general malaise and the near anarchy of the laborer age. (66)

Batra notes that with the changes in societies’ mentality, comes a change in the culture. He describes the Law of Social Cycle as being a pyramid, which begins with laborers and ends with acquisitors. He notes the possibility for this age to be a
combination because he claims that intellectuals realize that they have the ability to hoard money through business and social connections and can dominate government.

“This usually happens after the acquirers have caused a major economic crisis and then the baton of leadership passes into the hands of intellectual acquirers” (70).

“The salient feature of the era of intellectual acquirers is that the ruling elite amass wealth but make the people believe that such endeavors are good for society. There comes a point when intellectual acquirers are virtually unchallenged, that is when the process of wealth concentration runs full throttle, with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer at incredible speeds. The boundless greed and hypocrisy of acquisitive intellectuals ultimately torments the majority of people. Salaries go down, and the bulk of society is forced to devote much of its time to making money. Warriors and intellectuals then have to become laborers because they have little time left for the finer pursuits in life. They have to labor hard to support themselves and their children. The intellectual’s inherent love for art, music, painting and philosophy, gives way to routine work all day long to provide the means for family survival. The warriors’ predilection for adventure and sport is replaced by overtime work to make ends meet. The vast majority of society comes to adopt the laborers’ way of thinking” (70).

Another contemporary movement that has gained momentum in the present era is Environmentalism. In order to gain a further understanding of an ecological perspective on the environmental movement and the contemporary social problems that are found within this realm, I sat down for a discussion with Jared Deforest, a professor at Ohio University in the Department of Ecology. Ironically, Deforest specializes in forest ecology and preservation.
One primary factor and argument within the environmental movement that Deforest supports is the notion of sustainability. Deforest is interested in expanding the concept of sustainability to include, “Increasing productivity and increasing the quality of land because we have damaged it so much.” Many corporations such as the oil and gas industry have been major culprits for toxic waste and chemical spills throughout hundreds of ecosystems.

Deforest discusses the controversial process known as hydraulic fracturing or hydro-fracking as a major concern for him. “Fracking” is a large-scale natural gas extraction technique that utilizes a pressurized toxic chemical concoction to penetrate solid rock. This process is dangerous to both the environment and human health because of its likelihood to pollute and contaminate ground water, soil and air. Despite the evidence that suggests fracking is highly dangerous, limited knowledge and research among landowners has allowed the natural gas industry to acquire the rights to property for extraction purposes with a large monetary donation.

After being offered nearly $100,000 for permission to utilize his land for the hydro-fracking process, Pennsylvania property owner Josh Fox, began to document his investigation of the extraction process. This led to the production of the compelling documentary GasLand. This comprehensive documentary exposes the reality of ground water and soil contamination involved with the hydraulic fracturing process and the negative human health issues that have affected individuals in every region near drill sites.

Fox quickly learned that as many movements directed their attention to the oil and coal industry for their pollution to our environment, the public’s attention has been
diverted to the alleged, “clean burning transition fuel,” this is the extraction of natural gas. According to Fox, the Marcellus Shale, found under areas in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, and West Virginia, “Is the Saudi Arabia of natural gas.”

Fox’s major concern is the political corruption that has deterred the movement’s progression. He conducted research on a 2005 energy bill proposed by Dick Cheney exempting the oil and natural gas industries from The Safe Drinking Water Act, The Clean Air Act, The Clean Water Act, and numerous other environmental regulations. Immediately following the passing of this bill through congress, a multitude of companies started to use Halliburton technology and, “Began the largest and most extensive domestic gas drilling campaign in history. Now occupying 34 states” (GasLand).

Fox eloquently exposes the impact of fracking felt by local communities. He interviews landowners throughout the U.S. who have allowed the drilling to occur on their land. Shockingly, many individuals are able to ignite flames from their faucet due to the infusion of gaseous elements into their drinking water. Additionally, people living in the areas of drilling have experienced an array of health issues such as cancer and gastrointestinal viruses from consuming the contaminated water or breathing toxic fumes. The film essentially conveys the struggle for those affected by this process and the unethical attempts by executive corporate officials in the oil and natural gas industry to deem the negative environmental and human health effects as bogus or inadequately researched.

In order to gain first hand experience with social activism, I traveled to Washington D.C. to attend Powershift 2011. “The Power Shift is a new generation of
leaders coming to age, bridging social justice, environmental and clean energy movements” (We Are Power Shift). They demand that big polluters pay for the degradation of the environment and the atmosphere as well as justice for their criminal activity of avoiding taxes and receiving bailouts.

Powershift claims to be one of the largest grassroots organizing training programs for the Sustainability and Environmental movement in the United States. According to PowerShift.org, the conference launched its first campaign in 2007 with roughly 6,000 followers concentrated in the Washington D.C. area. A whopping 10,000 attendants showed up in 2011. This movement is dedicated to society’s transition from dirty nonrenewable energy sources like coal and fossil fuels, to the use of clean technology from renewable sources.

Contemporary environmental concerns such as mountain top removal and fracking were major topics discussed at the environmental action and energy conference. Powershift is an interdisciplinary education and networking tool for the modern day activist. It is both a grassroots social-movement training program and a protest demonstration.

As a movement building training program, Powershift offers both connections and techniques for individuals interested in the grassroots organization of social movements. The four-day event consisted of several movement building sessions designed to bring activists and researchers together from around the country. Attendees were strategically placed in regionally specific large ballroom halls of the convention center to connect the activists and organizers with others in their local area.
Throughout the weekend, a cornucopia of panel discussions, lectures, workshops and trainings took place to prepare the demonstrators for future campaign work and rallies. A job and organizational fair allowed other people to locate networks seeking volunteers to devote their time to environmental or sustainability issues with which they feel connected. Additionally, Powershift 2011 included conscious musical performances, and a film series of documentaries by Reel Power. The event concluded with a protest rally and march to Capitol Hill to express the demands of the movement. Please see appendix for video documentation of Powershift 2011, including keynote speakers such as Al Gore, Van Jones, and Bill McKibben.

This conference demonstrates how certain movements within the millennial generation have developed novel techniques and pioneering models for a new mode of social activism. They express the concerns of a particular movement through innovative language and utilize communication technologies to establish a longstanding connection with members. They recontextualize the framing of an argument to integrate other movements and enhance the total population of the movement. Moreover, they offer a detailed and multidisciplinary educational foundation for its members to effectively build and develop grassroots movements.

Social movements have been the driving force of change and transformation throughout history. Today, the transformative process of social movements occurs rapidly through Internet culture and affects the way in which people interact with one another. Additionally, social movements affect the way in which governments and political leaders interact with the people. As power and domination is often challenged by the masses, the typical response is to uphold those dominant structures and powerful
positions to whatever extent necessary. Usually through coercion, force, censorship, and manipulation, the dominant power structures supported by wealthy financial elite, to use our paradigm as an example, exercise their ability to perpetuate the system and their interests at all costs.

As the socio-political and economic problems escalate and the masses continue to recognize the corruption, many cultural practices will begin to change. These changes are visible today with the rapid acceleration of information about various movement ideologies and the expansion of movement population through the advancements in social media and communication technologies. Moreover, as alternative media sources use these technologies to provide truthful and researched information counter to the mainstream news sources, corporate and political officials who support and control the propaganda machine will retaliate with attempts to censor the information through legislative policies.

This information is significant because I suggest the fine arts culture will also see a shift in form. For-profit galleries have been morphing into non-profit arts organizations since the postmodern era of the 1960’s. New models of activism convey the use of creative and performative elements to enhance the accessibility and comprehension of the information.

Performance art activism demonstrates a shift of the paradigm in the mentality of artists. This art is not for profit but rather for the generation of awareness within the masses regarding the present situation of the human species and the planet. The use and experience of artistic expression, performance, and education is essential in providing a
solid basis for a new form of activism; an inner personal transformation and awakening for the outer collective transformation and awakening.
Chapter 3

Performance Art and Activism

So, what is performance art and how is it connected with activism? During the revolutionary 1960’s, America witnessed large-scale protest demonstrations led by civil rights movements, anti-war movements, and social justice movements. Simultaneously, many artists and activists were also challenging the structures and ideologies of their predecessors by redefining the performer and the performance space.

In order to illustrate the significance of utilizing performance art as an effective means for social activism, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the characteristics of this art form. Despite scholars’ continuous attempts to categorize performance art, the field remains ambiguous due to its all inclusive and multidisciplinary nature. It is an artistic medium of various performing arts genres, like dance, visual art, and music.

Described generally, this genre is a conceptual, multidisciplinary, and interactive art form that developed slowly during the rebellious post-modern era of the 1960’s. Performance art is experimental and can resemble aspects of postmodern dance or theatre. The form encourages audience participation and events frequently occur in non-traditional performance spaces like natural or urban settings. It can also incorporate elements from street art, conceptual art, and interventionist art, which I will discuss later.

These characteristics lend to its political nature causing performance art to also be labeled as political art. This art movement is innately political because performances happen within the public or private sectors of society and create issues of alleged
disruption. Some sub genres, like the interventionists, thrive on this disruption and employ it as a common strategy or method for compositions.

Performance activist and writer Guillermo Gomez Peña, offers a detailed description regarding the nature of performance art in his book entitled Ethno-Techno: Writings on performance, activism, and pedagogy. According to Peña, many scholars are often misinterpreted in their description of, what he considers, “A much broader field that encompasses all things performative, including anthropology, religious practice, pop culture, and sports and civic events” (Peña, 22). It is because of this multi-disciplinary inclusion, and the time period of development, that performance art tends to coincide or overlap with various other genres like street art, experimental theater, Guerilla Theater, postmodern dance, pranks, flash mobs, and installation art.

Peña defines performance art as “a conceptual “territory” with fluctuating weather and borders, a place where contradiction, ambiguity, and paradox are not only tolerated, but encouraged” (Peña, 22). This emphasis on the illogical and paradoxical endows this field with the ability to provide an alternate view of the present day reality. This can lead to a shift in one’s ideology perspective and worldview.

Performance artists and political activists crave this interaction with authority figures and the public because it breaks the spectator’s expectations. Performance art antics directly grab the public’s attention in both subtle and obvious ways. The continuous flow of the unchanging matrix of daily urban environments are disrupted when performance artists take to the streets with their daring and confrontational approaches to communicating political issues.
The art activist and political art culture has been redefining traditional modalities of activism in America since the 1960’s. They utilize innovative and creative methods to promote awareness and subsequent action about specific social issues. These rebel artists have tools and tactics to use in order to generate awareness and expose corruption.

*The Interventionists: A Users’ Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life*, discusses numerous genres of performance and political art found within the social sphere. Author, Nato Thopson believes this devious pack of protest artists are influenced by visual and cultural experiences. Thompson asserts, “They are a motley assemblage of methods for bringing political issues to an audience outside the insular art world’s doors. They appeal to a viewer who is confronted by an increasingly privatized and controlled visual world. Humor, sleight of hand and high design are used to interrupt this confrontation and bring socially imperative issues to the very feet of their audiences” (Thompson, 14). A confrontational approach directly addresses the viewer, which can elicit a strong reaction either externally towards the individuals involved, or internally as counter thinking or a different outlook on contemporary culture.

According to Thompson, the interventionists were greatly influenced by an earlier political art movement known as the situationists. The theories of founding member Guy Debord, “asserted that culture itself was fast becoming the ultimate commodity. Clothing, music, film, television, and even walking were all forms of commodification” (16). Debord claims our entire reality is a spectacle that diverts our attention away from capitalists who are systematically destroying human and planetary health. The spawn of the culture industry or the commercialization of culture was opposed by the situationists as early as the late 1950’s.
This is an example of a movement that utilized performance techniques in combination with political activism. The strategies and tactics used by the situationists and the interventionists involve two major classifications. The *detourné* is a technique used to insert innovative language into the public. This can range from changing the headlines of magazines to altering entire billboards in order to produce an alternative viewpoint on a particular subject. The other strategy is the *derivé*, which is an extended meandering or leisurely walk through any particular urban or natural area. This technique reveals the individual participation in the physical space of land and urban cities as a political act with specific rules and regulations. Trespassing is therefore a valued tactic for this art form because it illuminates the “nature of the built environment and how strongly it is developed around the public and private” (16).

Not all performance activists will use this tactic. Many artists, like Maggie Hutcheson, perform their art for the public and are often faced with political difficulties regarding the performance space as corporate private property. Hutcheson states, “no space is truly public in the ideal sense of the word” (Bardnt, 81). She asserts that the majority of public spaces within society are owned and controlled. This hierarchical ownership of public space causes problems for performance artists when an owner is intolerant to your public performance art project occurring on their property.

Authority, ownership, control, and power are central concepts challenged by both performance art and activism. Hutcheson references this when she says, “all street performances, to varying degrees, make visible both the issues they seek to raise awareness about and the well-concealed rules of public space and social conduct” (Bardnt, 32). Hutcheson believes in the importance of performance art methods used for
activism because of the potential to display not only the existence of our society as a social construction*, but also an alternate way of being within that social construction. She firmly declares that by generating awareness, performance art can be an effective application for altering the rigid confines of social constructions.

The works of an art activist can be performed independent of a social movement, or it can occur within a traditional protest or demonstration. Hutcheson believes performance is beneficial for “bringing social justice struggles into the public sphere” (Bardnt, 81). During a 2002 political demonstration in protest of the G8, Hutcheson began using puppets for the Toronto Mobilisation for Global Justice Organization. She constructed several massive puppets like Gaia, a 14-foot tall puppet that symbolized mother Earth. Hutcheson made appearances at multiple demonstrations as she traveled across the U.S. with her puppet Gaia.

Although many of Hutcheson’s creations were used within political rallies, Hutcheson prefers to perform independent of a demonstration in order to allow her art to exist outside the context of a political event. She claims that this creates certain problems because when the artist chooses to stage public performances on private property, without the support of a large-scale demonstration, security generally attempts to overpower the performance even if it is non-disruptive.

In retrospect, interventionist Alex Villar is an interesting example of a performance artist who views this not as problem, but rather a challenge. Villar directly confronts the notion of public versus private social space. His 2004 intervention entitled “Temporary Occupations,” utilizes the dérivé technique as he journeys through urban environments. He consciously disregards the signs and signals of designated private
space and trespasses into different areas in order to demonstrate forbidden zones the
difficultly that is often neglected to notice.

Since the introduction of performance techniques used as a form of activism, the
movement has only continued spreading. Greenpeace, the international environmental
activist organization concerned with the preservation of planet Earth, used performance
methods as early as 1984. Greenpeace focuses on toxic and nuclear issues within land
and ocean ecology.

Greenpeace member Robert Heid base-jumped from an 1100-foot smokestack at
the Gavin Power Plant near Gallipolis, Ohio in response to the power plants acid rain
causing emissions. “Acid Rain Protest, 1984” is part of a series of multiple performance
events related to this specific issue. (Raven, 33) The actions of this organization convey
how mass communication about environmental problems can be used effectively and
creatively to reach a larger audience.

Activism, education, and performance combine to create the ultimate genre,
which breaks down cultural barriers and exposes corruption directly. Performance art
challenges traditional aspects of performance and has inherently developed activist
tendencies by integrating contemporary social problems as content for artworks and
offering direct public access.

Performance art seeks to erase the distance between the viewer and performer,
allowing total access and participation. Unlike many mainstream art institutions,
galleries, and museums, performance art seldom degrades artistic endeavors for the
public’s consumption as undeserving of validity, credibility, and recognition. Many
events are often free of charge. This is because the artist is less interested in profit, and
more concerned with the transmission of their statement, illumination of a problem, or even a possible solution.

My research highlights numerous artists that are passionate about creative expression related to the obstacles we face in the modern age of technology, information, and war. In a world engrossed in so many tensions the intensification of large-scale protests and mass social demonstrations should come as no surprise. The expansion of social activism also indicates a gradual awakening from the slumber of preoccupation and distraction within the general American population. Despite this, individuals are desensitized regarding such matters and seemingly holding their breath waiting for the worst to come.

Activist art is notable for its ever-changing methodology for composition and performance. Many activist artists and choreographers are producing works with a literal or abstract representation accompanied by a clear statement regarding a contemporary issue. However, other artists are less concerned with the communication of a message and prefer to present an illumination of modern issues.

My first direct experience with performance used as means for activism occurred when I was invited to Basel, Switzerland in February of 2010 for a professional internship with the Cathy Sharp Dance Ensemble (CSDE). Founder and artistic director, Cathy Sharp hired an innovative Swiss choreographer for her 2010 spring performance season. Four months of intensive rehearsals with renowned Swiss choreographer, Félix Duméril, cultivated a dance entitled, “Mr. Budhoo Resigns,” which debuted at the Kaserne Basel Theater on May 25, 2010.

“Mr. Budhoo Resigns,” is related to a true story and centers on the perpetuation of
third world poverty through funding by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a social issue. Native Grenadian, Davison Budhoo was an economist with the IMF for twelve years. He submitted a powerful resignation letter, which was also used for activist purposes. “Budhoo was the first person to break the IMF’s code of silence regarding internal affairs by exposing extensive statistical fraud carried out by the fund in Trinidad and Tobago during 1985-1987” (Meeker-Lowry). Budhoo felt liberated because he had performed a selfless action for many struggling societies by exposing the IMF through a detailed resignation letter that documented the company’s fraudulent activity.

Duméril prepared for this project through an in-depth analysis of corresponding material about the political nature of financial systems and institutions. He studied the resignation letter of the former IMF employee, Mr. Budhoo, which documented the financial neglect and exploitation of impoverished societies. He later integrated phrases and paragraphs from the letter into the performance as textual support. This demonstrates how the creative process itself can be a form of activism through the integration of education.

Duméril examined the New York Stock Exchange by viewing images and video recordings of stockbrokers during their violent daily ritual of buying, selling, and trading stocks on Wall St. The video recordings displayed enraged stockbrokers standing in close proximity while spastically thrashing gestural symbols to indicate bids. This inspired Duméril to choreographically replicate and augment this type of behavior for the stage.

Duméril takes an explorative approach to his process. Many hours of rehearsals were spent researching movement invention through scores and improvisation. He developed numerous short independent events that accurately embodied identities like a
banker, politician, or stock trader. We explored a multitude of props like office chairs, computers, conference tables, and briefcases. These objects were later incorporated to reinforce the image of the modern day powerful and elite individual. Duméril organized various scenes and assembled transitions to thread each piece together.

This internship offered ample primary source material regarding the construction of activist artworks. Through participation, observation, and critical analysis of Duméril’s artistic process, my research results provided structural methodology involved in designing a dance that illuminates and protests contemporary societal problems through performance. Passionate about this issue, choreographer Duméril effectively produced a literal representation that captured the essence of the financial crisis through a dance theatre dramatization of corporate greed and financial market manipulation of the general public.

Performance art activism is a unique and multi-layered art based movement. When the hippies revolted against war, intolerance, and dominance during the 1960’s, the pioneers of postmodernism and performance art decisively joined the battle. They would articulate and perform their creative performance theories alongside the vast array of protestors. Depending on the size of the demonstration, some of these site-specific* events would reach a significantly larger population than that of a traditional concert in a typical theater setting.

Activist art is often combined with a level of communication regarding the purpose and intent of the work. In 1993, Peña co-founded a trans-disciplinary performance art non-profit organization in Los Angeles, known as “La Pocha Nostra.” This organization is a think tank for rebel artists to analyze and exchange ideas regarding
contemporary cultural and socio-political issues. Nostra believes, “consciousness is stimulated through non-traditional presentational formats” (Manifesto, 2004).

Committed to blurring the boundaries between art and politics, the group advocates and utilizes performance art as a tool to generate thought and discourse about serious current affairs. The work of La Pocha Nostra is extremely multi-disciplinary and ranges from performance or human sculpture installations, video work, audio, cyber art, etc. Complete audience interaction and participation is often more than encouraged.

“La Pocha Nostra,” translates to “the cartel of cultural bastards” (Manifesto, 2004). Artistic director Peña, and his colleagues of filmmakers, musicians, performance artists, and designers, enjoy the ambiguity of the title because it, “Reveals an attitude towards art and society: cross-racial, poly-gendered, experi-mental, y qué?” (Manifesto, 2004). These terms precisely describe the type of artistic works that the organization produces.

Nostra tours various cities and holds workshops in order to promote discussion and activism. The topics focus on issues such as globalization, marginalization, immigration, gender, inequality, and technology. The workshops consist of weeklong forums for community members to explore and debate specific social, cultural, or political topics. There is also a rehearsal process for anyone interested in performing in a three-day series of improvisational and interactive performance art installations, which are called “Living Museums” (Manifesto, 2004).

Nostra classifies their “Living Museum” installations as a hybrid of performance art and installation art. These site-specific events are designed to comically imitate “colonial practices of representation.” They also incorporate a unique yet distinctive
theme to each performance such as “an intelligent rave,” or a “Chicano cyber-punk religion” (Manifesto, 2004).

The objective of the “Living Museum” is to facilitate a spectacle where individuals can actively portray a character of another race, gender, class, or religion. Participants can physically manipulate the performers like dolls by changing their appearance. The audience is also given access to costumes, lights, props, and make-up in order to transform themselves into an alternate identity and join into the cultural misrepresentation. This experimental and interactive installation is a way to encourage tolerance by experiencing the fears and tensions felt by various social groups other than your own.

Sashar Zarif, founder of the Sashar Zarif Dance Theatre, is an internationally recognized multidisciplinary artist, educator, and researcher in the field of dance ethnology at Toronto’s York University. Zarif considers himself an activist who supports national peace and advocates multiculturalism and diversity through an underlying concept of cultural identity as subject matter. The goal of his company is to endorse dance as a device for raising global awareness and “promote dance through research, exploration, and new creations of traditional, ritualistic, and contemporary perspectives” (Zarif).

My research conveys several distinctive characteristics that exist between each activist artist I interviewed while in Toronto, such as passion and the influence of cultural environments and artistic exposure at a young age. Zarif comes from an Azerbaijani cultural heritage and his choreographic style is derived from his childhood exposure to music and dance. Intrigued by the meditative and healing philosophies of the Asian
culture, Zarif’s passion lies within his ethnographic research involving Sufi and Shamanic dance rituals from Central Asia. He spent several years conducting fieldwork and is now able to use his research findings as primary source material for his artistic process. I find this method of utilizing research to enhance global and cultural awareness to be enthralling and a pivotal and necessary asset for our present global society where prejudice of race, religion, and sexuality still exist.

Zarif values artistic collaboration in his creative process. The primary methodologies used by Zarif in the construction of his works are cross cultural collaboration and ethnographic research and fieldwork. When creating a new production, he uses metaphors and storytelling to convey his choreographic idea to his dancers. Then he surveys the reactions and responses from the dancers and generates a direction for the choreography.

One might say postmodernism, experimental dance/theatre, and socio-political activism, gave birth to performance art. In any case, the multidisciplinary field that creatively exposes societal issues will continue to ride the wave of expansion alongside the escalation of contemporary movements. The use of performance has been utilized effectively in the past to create change and will hopefully transcend all borders and cultivate a cultural and societal transformation to preserve the rights and safety of all planetary life.
Chapter 4

An Emerging Paradigm Shift

I observe that our contemporary global society, through all mediums of information, communication, and technology has reached a moment in history that is unlike any other previous era. Social movements are increasing size and momentum as the battle wages at warp speed for the dominant social power structure. More movements are converging and utilizing new tactics for activism like performance art, digital performance, and alternative media news. This is causing the current structures to implement new methods of heightened control and censorship on the population.

As the global disparities persist and the social media technologies expand, the general population is gradually catching on to the imperial tyranny occurring in our society. The corrupt relationship between sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and religious structures is a major topic of concern in the contemporary world. The methods of fear and manipulation through propaganda are becoming visible through mainstream outlets. Moreover, the strategies for maintaining power and control through crisis and war have helped illuminate the banksters’ agenda of a dysfunctional debt based monetary system that only benefits the elite and keeps the population in work overload and cyclical consumption for survival.

The rapid transformation and evolution of human culture towards an interconnected web of globally unified or collective consciousness* may seem inconceivable. However, I contend this is the single most obvious and necessary direction for the preservation of the human species and planet Earth. I believe the collective decisions made at this pivotal moment in history will determine the fate of future human
existence on this planet. A question worth asking might be, is it possible for humanity to take a collective evolutionary leap into a new world view that commits to supporting the well-being and sustainability of its entire population?

My research reveals the emergence of a new planetary culture with a distinguishable identity and characteristics. This emerging culture has been widely discussed in books, articles, and Internet forums. This has rapidly accelerated over the last few decades. The advancements in communication technology, as well as the social media phenomena, generate a vast body of information that confirms and stabilizes the values and characteristics of this planetary movement.

*The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* is a comprehensive report on the emergence of a new sub-cultural genre in America. The book was co-written in the year 2000 by sociologist Paul H. Ray, and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson. By utilizing numerous accounts of personal stories documented over several years of survey research, Ray and Anderson demonstrate the development and articulate the characteristics of this new culture.

*The Cultural Creatives* possess distinct beliefs and values concerning the rights and freedoms of the global planetary community. The belief systems held by this subculture are new and difficult to classify because the individuals affiliated do not support the left or right ideology. They hold alternative positions of thought compared to the mainstream because they understand how both political parties are ultimately upholding common systemic values and practices.

This text confirms the emergence of a planetary culture surfacing even before the start of the millennium. This supports my hypothesis regarding a paradigm shift or
awakening within the consciousness of the global population. This awakening is generated through various sources and modalities, but a primary justification found among numerous sources is the merging or unification between a multitude of social movements and their ideological foundations.

The research for this text consisted of in depth interviews, focus groups, and surveys in order to establish a thorough understanding of the values and characteristics of the culturally creative individual. Generally speaking, these individuals are interested in the global environment, human health, political reform or restructure, spirituality, love, and a conscious evolution towards the preservation and sustainability of our species and the planet.

**Consciousness Movements**

Various movements have influenced the cultural creative. Anderson and Ray propose the new culture as the catalyst for the global cultural awakening. The following quote demonstrates the convergence of movements.

“*This cultural awakening is the concern of a great heterogeneous mélange of movements, organizations, and trends. They include the human potential movement; psychedelic explorations; the so-called new spirituality, which is extensively based on quite ancient Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Native American traditions, Celtic practices, and mystical Judaism and Sufism and Christianity, as well as Wicca (which is very old or very new, or both); body work, yoga, and the various martial arts; healing practices including, acupuncture, therapeutic touch and laying on of hands; a wide spectrum of prayer and meditation. We call them “consciousness movements” because of their common intention to throw open the windows and doors of the musty old mind-sets we live in, shake the dust out of the covers we wrap around our bodies,*
and in a thousand old and new ways, guide whoever is willing to show up and pay attention to a fresh experience of being human” (171).

**Consciousness as New Spirituality**

My research suggests a convergence occurring between the Modern Western rational mind and the ancient wisdom teachings and traditions of the indigenous cultures from around the world. In the digital age, as the human species obtains and processes information through the Internet, more information has gradually been integrating itself into the minds of the global population regarding the practices and teachings of our ancient ancestors. Famous scholars, like Terrence Mckenna, believe tribal knowledge has been reintegrated into the psyche of the modern human.

Many contemporary authors discuss a fusion of diverse movements that integrate both Eastern and Western philosophies and practices for achieving health, vitality, and healing through a plethora of conscious mind-body-spirit* techniques. A consciousness convergence is occurring that re-validates ancient ancestral wisdom and practices for the modern day human. This re-emergence of archaic techniques is observed in various outlets and discussed in hundreds of books, including Deepak Chopra’s *The Book of Secrets: Unlocking the Hidden Dimensions of Your Life*, Daniel Pinchbeck’s *Breaking Open the Head: A Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism*, and Terrence McKenna’s *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge: A Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution*.

This emerging cultural movement, which is an extremely inclusive collective of individuals with contemporary worldviews that have collided with that of our distant
ancestors, has proven to generate a massive global reinvestigation of our cultural values and understanding of reality. McKenna calls this the Archaic Revival.

McKenna (1946-2000) played many roles in his lifetime, including author, speaker, scientist, philosopher, and psychedelic and spiritual explorer. McKenna’s multidisciplinary and influential theories, which he elegantly articulated with utmost precision, clarity, and compassion, permeate through the consciousness movements of our culture still today. McKenna serves as an invaluable resource for this study because he not only integrates multidisciplinary knowledge concerning contemporary social problems in the spiritual, cultural, and political sectors, but he also articulates the paradigmatic changes of contemporary culture as the next human evolutionary phase; a transition into a higher state of consciousness, as he might describe it.

McKenna was a respected researcher in the realms of Shamanism* and Ethnopharmacology*. In Food of the Gods, McKenna treks far beyond the discussion of the drug wars as a contemporary social problem in our society. He writes, “No light can penetrate the situation of pandemic drug use and abuse unless we undertake a hard eyed re-appraisal of our present situation and an examination of some old nearly forgotten patterns of drug related experiences and behavior” (McKenna, xiv). He argues that we, as a global species, are missing a truth about the evolution of our consciousness. This truth, for McKenna, is directly linked with the rapid evolution of the human brain and consciousness through the consumption of psychoactive plants during the earlier stages of our history of existence.

*Food of the Gods* is a profound multidisciplinary investigation of theories that pertain to the psychedelic experience, human history and evolution, social theory, and
environmentalism. He utilizes this interdisciplinary method with the intention to reinvestigate the way in which we accept the current power structures of contemporary Western society. The consumption of intoxicants of the early humans and the modern man are discussed intimately. This includes everything from psychoactive sacred plant medicines used in indigenous cultures to sugar and computer electronic devices for the techno-cyborgs* of our digital age.

The book ventures on a chronological journey through the historical development of the human biological system, highlighting the symbiotic relationships formed between humans and the ecosystems of planet Earth. According to McKenna’s Timewave Zero study, we are in the final minutes before this leap into a higher state of human consciousness for all humanity. The four main sections of the book are, *Paradise, Paradise Lost, Hell,* and *Paradise Regained,* the latter being our destination, post-transformation.

McKenna’s suggestion, to alter the perception of how the Western mind understands the term “drugs,” is one of the main objectives of the book. The problem being many in our culture, for various reasons like mainstream media propaganda or religious indoctrination, maintain an inherently negative view about all chemical substances that are not sanctioned by the U.S. government or the pharmaceutical industry. People are fearful to openly support the use of certain natural compounds and medicinal herbs due to dominant contemporary ideological positions and the war on drugs. I believe it is time for society to question the reason certain plants and substances are deemed illegal, while others, which are scientifically proven as harmful to human health continue to be accepted and regulated by the state.
The perception for many is a generalization about all drugs, which according to McKenna, is both a grave misunderstanding, and quite possibly, an intentional distortion of shamanic and other healing teachings. Essentially, people take drugs because a known and trusted physician, who is profiting from pharmaceutical companies, prescribes them for the patient’s temporary relief and perpetual benefit of the corporation.

**The Dominator Inheritance**

“Our culture, self toxified by the poisonous by-products of technology and egocentric ideology is the unhappy inheritor of the dominator attitude that alternation of consciousness by the use of plants or substances is somehow wrong, onanistic, and perversely anti-social. I will argue that suppression of Shamanic gnosis, with its reliance and insistence on ecstatic dissolution of the ego has robbed us of life’s meaning and made us enemies of the planet, of ourselves, and our grandchildren. We are killing the planet in order to keep intact the wrongheaded assumptions of the ego-dominator cultural style. It is time for change” (xxi).

According to McKenna, the Archaic Revival is upon us now. Our modern ego-dominated culture has robbed us of certain ancient experiences including shamanic healing techniques of boundary dissolution of the ego and ecstatic states of consciousness using psychoactive sacred plant medicines. This attempt to eradicate or prohibit knowledge concerning the symbiotic relationship of the “partnership society,” that is our relationship with nature and plants, has had devastating effects within the collective psyche. Subsequently the human species has fallen into a state of chaos and crisis, alienation and separation, competition and greed, which has led to a nearly total disharmonic state with Mother Nature and us.
McKenna’s philosophy, which has been adopted by many consciousness movements, is centered on the belief that we have yet to fully examine our reasons for perpetuating certain cultural values. Our convictions and ideologies only capture us like prisoners in a state of degenerative behavior. Therefore, we remain in crises. We endlessly clutch onto social constructions and sanctioned modes of behavior such as the consumption of material things and ordinary states of consciousness.

This text is a call for social action and self-transformation to reinvestigate the ideals held by the dominator culture. It offers a look into the history of the human species and our previous shamanic techniques used through psychedelic information for spiritual knowledge and consciousness expansion. Moreover, it offers the reader an alternative perspective regarding the contemporary criminalization in the West for use of plants and substances that are spiritual healing sacraments in other cultures.

“The Archaic Revival is a clarion call to recover our birthright, however uncomfortable that may make us. It is a call to realize that life lived in the absence of the psychedelic experience upon which primordial shamanism is based is life trivialized, life denied, life enslaved to the ego and its fear of dissolution in the mysterious matrix of feeling that is all around us. It is in the Archaic Revival that our transcendence of the historical dilemma actually lies” (252).

Due to this disharmony and deprivation, this emergent planetary dominated culture reintegrates tribal and shamanic elements into the movement’s ideology and practices. The modern culture and the planet need a type of healing for modern issues that modern medicine has been unable to successfully provide without an extensive list of side effects. Stress, anxiety, pollution and an array of physical, psychological, emotional,
and energetic problems plague the contemporary population. Modern medicine, although an extremely beneficial and advanced system, has failed us in many ways through its unhealthy connection with pharmaceutical giants.

Shamanic techniques have been used for centuries and are coming back to life in the global culture. *The Electronic Awakening* is a documentary film that explores the neo tribal electronic dance music culture as a new spiritual movement that utilizes shamanic practices. These practices involve vibrational healing through music, trance dance, drumming, unity, mystical experiences, altered states of consciousness, a sense of deep-felt communion, and a transformative or ecstatic healing experience. This is very similar to the ancient ceremonial rituals of many indigenous cultures.

**Transformative Festivals**

What is a transformative festival? When the hippies of the 1960’s meddled with altered states of consciousness at music festivals, the activists were busy protesting for their cause in the streets. These scenarios have the potential to catalyze both individual and collective transformations. What seems to be happening today is a collision between activism and consciousness expansion through the application of healing techniques, spirituality, dance, music, and performance art. This produces an entirely new approach for generating social change through transformative experiences at a music festival.

For those unfamiliar with the festival circuit, a live music festival is a large-scale extended concert series that can last anywhere from three to five days in length. A music festival features a multitude of musicians and bands and is typically held at an outdoor venue that offers on-site camping for the festival attendees. In just under 24 hours, an
entire tent city of 1,000-90,000 campsites is built up. This ephemeral music community sets up camp, and then usually heads toward the tunes to rage the music until the early morning hours.

The music festival has been a fundamental characteristic of the hippie counter-cultural movement since the 1960’s. The late 1960’s gave us bands like The Grateful Dead and The Rolling Stones. The rapid expansion of the hippie culture during this period quickly led to large-scale music festivals such as Woodstock. Despite the political issues of these early festivals, like the surge of drug use, psychedelic exploration, or property damage to the location, the music festival has remained a main element of the counter-culture today. The contemporary culture extends into various genres of the underground electronic dance music culture, Burning Man culture, and the Psytrance communities that were started at trance parties in Goa, India.

Surprisingly, many people in the “mainstream” are oblivious to the fact that these style festivals still occur today. Today, the festival scene has greatly expanded and evolved into a newer and more consciously transformative experience. Nearly year round a festival can be found somewhere in a nearby city throughout the U.S. The spring and summer months is considered prime festival season. During the fall and winter months, various bands go on tour and have single night performances in large-scale venues that combine a variety of artists into a weekend of music. This resembles the music festival with the only difference being the use of a hotel rather than a tent.

I suggest that the hippie counter-cultural movements and the underground electronic dance music festival circuit are merging with the social, spiritual, and political activists. This collaboration has manifested a contemporary neo-tribal music, arts, and
spirituality convergence that promotes a global awakening through individual transformation.

Contemporary hippies are digging much deeper into the tribal and spiritual theories of large gatherings of conscious dancers, musicians, and everything in between. They are actively communicating an alternative conscious model for society through interdisciplinary methods about various subjects of the coming age. Could this be the future framework for social activism?

Our society shows evidence of corruption from the top down, while we are simultaneously force-fed a perception of reality and ideological belief systems by their constituents. The modern and traditional belief systems are now becoming obsolete simply because they do not resonate with the emerging culture. Fusion is occurring within communities around the interconnected web of souls and likeminded people. Some of these people are at the forefront of the evolution of culture and the dissolving of boundaries between national borders and human beings.

I believe a new movement is beginning to establish an alternative view of reality in opposition to the dominant cultural paradigm. We are learning that in order to sustain our future species, and ourselves, cooperation is imperative. The countercultural movements of contemporary society are aware of the transformation and the evolution that is upon us. Many movements pursuing this unity consciousness component are rapidly growing like a virus spreading like wildfire.

The hippie counterculture of the millennial period is a hybrid between neo-grateful dead heads, candy ravers, tree thugs, guru’s, gypsies, yogi’s, and other hybrids of social movements. Although they have many differences most are concerned with
specific ideas about our current planetary dilemma. The environment, love, freedom, art, community, and sustainability are central concepts discussed within these communities.

This consciousness movement and the contemporary hippie scene are rooted in the Earth. They are openly devoted to the wisdom and knowledge embedded into our planet. By maintaining a cosmic outlook, this planetary culture educates and defends the Earth in all disciplines like a Gaian mafia. They generate awareness of consciousness through various outlets, like the use of organic food and materials sold by vendors at festivals, or the comprehensive recycling organizations that volunteer, and the workshops and classes that offer techniques for spiritual growth.

During the mid sixties, the well renowned and legendary American rock band known as the Grateful Dead came onto the scene and started a revolutionary music tradition that is still visible today. The Dead are most notable for their fusion of various musical genres, including folk, improvisational jazz, psychedelia, and bluegrass. The Dead would often use long improvisational musical sequences, which later became known as “jams.” This was the formation of the jam band festival scene, which includes large-scale music and arts festivals with hundreds of thousands of hippies, groupies, and live music lovers.

Over the last fifty years, the jam band festival scene has rapidly accelerated and expanded into a huge circuit of multi genre forms of music. The long improvisational guitar “jams,” merged with the electronic and synthesized sounds of the contemporary electronic music genre. Several sub genres have been emerging that fuse together various elements of music like rock, electronic, tribal, spiritual, world, funk, jazz, etc. The list of
these emerging music and culture sub genres is extremely extensive but some types, such as Jamtronica, have been rapidly establishing an enormous following.

The popularization and commercialization of the music industry has lead to a standardization and lack of awareness of various artists and music genres within the contemporary scene. An electronic music connoisseur can tell immediately if a person is aware of this culture by the use of certain key terms. The mainstream pop music followers often use the word “techno,” which for the underground electronic music and festival culture is so twenty years ago. Today, the extensive list of genres such as Psytrance, Psybient Dub, and Drum and Bass are examples of sub genres in the electronic music culture.

Papadosio is an ever-evolving group of talented musicians that have been unstoppably accelerating towards the forefront of the Jamtronica music scene over the last decade. Papadosio began their musical collaboration in Athens, Ohio and now reside in Asheville, North Carolina. The band members include, Mike Healy on drums, Anthony Thogmartin on keys, guitar, and lead vocals, Rob McConnell on bass and vocals, Billy Brouse, and his brother Sam Brouse on keys, percussion, and vocals.

Papadosio has a fresh sound, which integrates elements of deep electronic bass vibrations, improvisational jam interludes, and vocal harmonies. The energy sphere that surrounds Papadosio and their “festival family” creates a vortex of pure love during performances that is felt and exchanged between the artists and the participants. Their lyrics possess intention towards unity, love, and transcendence with a message of peace. These concepts are embedded in their music as well as in the minds of their fans and
followers, which ultimately manifests a cathartic and joyful experience through the co-creation of a compassionate community and artistic expression.

I had the pleasure and privilege to become friends with these talented artists during the earlier days as a group. I can remember being jam-packed at the Athens dive bar, Jackie O’s, formally known as O’Hooley’s, for a sold out Papadosio show for all of their closest friends and local fans. The friendships with the band members of Papadosio provide me with a first hand look at the immense love they have for all of their friends and fans.

In August of 2010, Papadosio hosted their first annual music festival at Kaeppners Woods in Logan, Ohio. Over the last two years, Rootwire Music and Arts Festival has proven to be an innovative and transformational musical experience that surpasses most other large-scale and intimate music festivals of its kind. In 2011, Rootwire had roughly twelve hundred enthusiastic attendants, and more than fifty exceptional musical acts like Emancipator, Bluetech, and Invisible Allies. Additionally, numerous key speakers, like Julie North and Michael Garfield, were featured at the festival to enhance spiritual growth and community awareness.

This festival experience is unique because of the wide variety of events and activities offered throughout the weekend. The festival includes 4-days of camping, live music, digital and visual art installations, live painting, sacred fire flow art performances, circus and aerial dance, and other artistic acts of all types. Moreover, the extensive workshops and lectures, featuring spiritual healers and researchers in the contemporary field of consciousness awakening, supports the notion of Rootwire as a completely new
form of performance art activism. It demonstrates an artistic model for the personal transformation and individual awakening through the use of performance, art, and dance.

Essentially, the Grateful Dead paved the way for an entirely new wave of live jam band music sub genres and festival circuits for the contemporary counter-cultural social scene. In a positive review about Rootwire, author James Prior writes,

_Today’s Jam Bands are three or four generations removed from the GD, and the music and audience expectations have changed to reflect the times as well. While there are certainly elements lingering from the days of the Grateful Dead: long mostly lyric-less songs, lots of extended, improv-oriented guitar riffs, sophisticated instrumentation based on the standard “rock” guitar, bass, drums, and keyboard set up, high quality sound system, trippy lighting, hippie philosophies, and high-flying audience enthusiasm._ (Prior)

While at _Rootwire_, Prior “realized that the Jam Band scene has evolved beyond Grateful Dead-style hippie-ness to embrace newer forms of music without negating a loving, creative lifestyle” (Prior). This demonstrates how the counter-cultural movement is changing and developing sub genres while holding onto the essence of the festival scene community.

_Rootwire_ can be viewed as a transformational experience because the participant has the opportunity to leave the festival with immense alternative education they might not have known before. This can be related to political corruption, holistic health, sustainable living, performance art, or the festival community itself. This festival successfully illuminates the spiritual nature of the current paradigm and the coming transformation. Papadosio exemplifies a clear understanding of how to allow people to
find freedom, compassion, and expression of the universe through a music and arts
convergence. I believe this type of festival needs further examination as a representation
for an eco-friendly sustainable music and arts community that generates awareness about
culture, politics, and spirituality while offering a safe forum for artistic expression.

James Prior’s review supports my notion of Rootwire being an example of a
transformational experience through the artistic expression of love and joy. Prior believes
that this festival was fundamentally about joy. He writes, “The Papadosio team really
created a joyful, soul-catching environment: they chose a beautiful location, pulled
together joy-minded, top level entertainment groups and artists, and cared enough to
design a playground filled with quality playground equipment” (Prior).

Rootwire is like a spiritual retreat for the creative rebel and jam band music lover.
Additionally it is a primary example of a newly developed model for performance used as
a means for social activism. I suggest this festival is a direct manifestation of the
paradigm shift. The various lectures, workshops, and performances that offer people an
alternative perspective about our socio-political power structures is an innovative
technique that can catalyze both a personal paradigm shift and a collective consciousness
paradigm shift.

Mckenna, who compares the structures and ideologies of all forms of culture to an
operating system of a computer, asserts our culture is actually not our friend because it is
downloaded and installed at an early age. He argues that these programs subliminally
condition individuals into the structures of our political, cultural, and spiritual systems.
Rootwire, in essence, is a networking mechanism used to deprogram individuals from the
daily grind of modern civilization through various shamanic techniques and in depth
workshops that illuminate the spiritual nature of the current paradigm and the coming transformation.

Transformational festivals serve as a sanctuary for artists to co-create a temporary community in order to evaluate a possible model for society as a whole. The subsequent understanding that this type of sustainable art and performance community is a possibility opens up new ideas and pathways for those previously unaware and for the rebel art activist of today. This new form of transformative activism can effectively create change as it utilizes the cultural ability to reframe and recontextualize the mission of a particular movement to fit within the framework of the contemporary era.

The authors of *The Cultural Creatives*, argue that by reframing arguments, activists and movements, “Expose a whole belief system for what it is—*a belief system*, not the natural order of things, not reality” (122). Once the belief systems of a specific paradigm are out dated, and the ideologies that do not resonate with the emerging movement are exposed, the general population begins to ask their own questions and alter their perspectives on the current era. This conveys the initial stages of an awakening or paradigm shift.

Julie North, a Columbus, Ohio based clairvoyant medium and well-respected spiritual teacher and speaker, was one of the numerous featured speakers at *Rootwire* 2011. “Julie’s heart is in the Cherokee tradition of medicine, integrating work with crystals, sound and vibration, animal totems and the plant kingdom; honoring the alignment between humanity and Mother Earth for The Greatest Good of All That Is” (http://rootwirefestival.com/transform/).
North held three workshops over the course of the weekend including, “2012: What the Shifting Energies Mean for You,” “Alignment and communication with your Higher Self” (Morning Meditation), and “Pick my Brain,” a Q & A session about anything physical, energetic, metaphysical, hyper-dimensional, psychic, or spiritual. She also had a booth set up in the Ceremonial Center of Rootwire with several informational packets regarding her work as a healer and medium as well as crystal wands and jewelry (www.julienorth.com).

During the first workshop, “Alignment and Communication with your Higher Self,” North spoke about the evolution and expansion of the dimensional plane* of our Earth, and how this shift is affecting the evolution of our consciousness as a species. According to North, the dimensional plane that exists on this planet has begun to expand in recent times due to a surge of energy resonating from the growing number of spiritually enlightened and awakened people. She used the example that everything in existence within our universe is ultimately made up of energy, sound, and vibration. All energy is merely vibrating at certain frequencies* and within certain dimensions, similar to a radio channel. She further discussed how our frequency is being lifted into a new dimensional plane as this consciousness awakening continues to occur.

She concluded the workshop with a guided meditation to align the spiritual bodies with the energetic bodies of those participating in the meditation in order to receive information from the higher self. She facilitated a visualization technique combined with deep breathing exercises and the conscious release of excess tension in the body. She successfully brought the group to a deep state of meditation.
She then asked those meditating to visualize what she called a “Hara line,” or a line of energy projecting through the center of the body encasing the spine and connecting the chakra* energy points. According to North, “the Hara line is the main energetic line coming down through your body through the Crown Chakra*, down through the main chakras and exiting through the Root Chakra*. This line goes on endlessly. It connects all of your Main Chakras with each other and is the main channel in which energy moves in the body” (www.julienorth.com). Several times she stated, “We are asking our higher self to receive any energy or communication that is in our greatest good at this moment.”

At the conclusion of the workshop, North showed her gratitude and love towards the group and thanked them for participating. Amazingly, the entire group was so engulfed with a new vibration and energy that they were compelled to pull everyone into a tight group hug. The sounds they made were cosmically beautiful, like that of a hundred cats purring simultaneously. People giggled, laughed, sighed, and cried. This was a momentous feeling for seemingly everyone involved and an authentic account of truly transformational behavior.

Numerous other conscious and informative workshops were held at Rootwire. “Surfing The Shift: 2012 & Beyond,” was a lecture given by the visionary artist, musician, and poet, Michael Garfield. He discussed the convergence of crisis and transformation occurring today as being a possible global rite of passage, which we must go through in order to determine if our species will continue to exist in the future. Garfield’s background in psychology and evolutionary ecology gives him an interesting
perspective concerning the current social dilemma as a global issue that requires individual change for transformation.

The community aspect built through the fabric of this festival offers a transformative experience and an alternative idea regarding the dominant power structures in our society. These structures are able to hold people in a state of being on this planet, which is ultimately in crisis, fear, and disharmony with nature and our own species. Rootwire connected the hearts and minds of every single participant, which generated a seed of transformation through love, joy, and compassion. Additionally, everyone involved gained insight into the problems that our global society faces and were shown a pathway of interconnected and unconditional love as a necessary and viable solution.

The visionary art culture is painting forms that illustrate other worlds of potentiality and existence. Many others illuminate the feeling of contemporary society and our downward spiral into unknown territory of environmental and social destruction. This culture is exposing the cultural manipulation, the spiritual indoctrinations, and the political and economic corruption that exists in our society. As these counter cultural communities converge, a larger movement is being formed and connected to several other movements. This new culture is spreading the messages of ancient wisdoms through shamanism, spirituality, and performance art as activism towards total transformation.

The symbiotic relationship between dance, music, and art, is an ancient tribal technique for experiencing mystical or ecstatic states of consciousness. Dance is one of the oldest and most powerful forms of expression that has the ability to induce heightened
awareness and a sense of communion with other individuals. The power of movement as a transformational experience is at the foundation of these music festivals. Sharing this power with a large group of people is effectively creating changes within the cultural mindset.

Is it possible that a new model for performance art, that is both conscious and socially active, will take the form of a transformative spiritual festival that sets individuals free from the constraints of mainstream society, thus, allowing the participant the direct experience of new ideas regarding social change? Is this performance art activism? Could Rootwire be an example of a new way of life for living in the coming age? If nothing else, I believe it offers a brighter perspective concerning a seemingly dark future.

Ehren Cruz, co-founder of “Sol Purpose,” was a key speaker at Rootwire. The following quote is an essay that Cruz wrote about Rootwire 2011. This exemplifies the mission of Rootwire as a transformational experience, which I believe was successfully achieved.

**Transformation Synopsis**

*Rootwire is a festival designed with the intention to transform all lives present for the better. Rootwire offers us an opportunity to learn new ways of honoring our bodies and Earth with conscious workshops and a 100% sustainable infrastructure, expand our minds with dynamic music and visionary art, and open our hearts through fostering a cocreative environment built upon higher principles of common-unity.*

*The fundamental purpose of Rootwire is to capture what fills us with a genuine sense of joy and inspiration and bring that vibration home to Mother Earth. Every note, every art installation, every workshop, presentation, and event is uniquely crafted to inspire a positive transformation we can take home and share with our families, friends, and communities.*

*Rootwire is also unique for its positioning of music, art, and spirit on a trifold pedestal as equals. As most festivals tend to splash in art and conscious culture as an afterthought to add some life and color to an already*
mapped out event, Rootwire is dedicated to the intimate integration of ascended living in all aspects of the event. From the installation of an enormous tent filled visionary art featuring artists from throughout the country, to interactive art installations seeded throughout both camping and staging areas, to a sacred ceremonial center where many tipi village and healing circle, to most importantly...an open hearted invitation for one and all to share what inspires YOU with us all. Bring your freshest most innovative and creative art to Rootwire Festival, and share your light with all.

We often search within ourselves for that sacred fountain of inspiration and strength to be who we truly are without limitation. Live the dream we were born to, free of judgment and ridicule. Have the freedom to explore all that we are capable of with brothers and sisters around us who support each exploratory step we make along the way. On August 4th through 7th, in the deep woods and upon the grassy hills in the heartland of Ohio, brothers and sisters from throughout the nation will join together to share in this dream. Reinforcing our right to just be our selves in the most expansive sense of the word.

Rootwire is the Papadosio family’s chance to give back to all those that had stood alongside them along the way. All paths and all ways of life are given equal space to shine. It is a place and time made possible by shared hands, intent on establishing a dream where we can all join together and cocreate all we are truly capable of together as one. So when you head to Rootwire this August, remember you aren’t just going to a festival...you ARE the festival, so get ready to get DEEP!

- Ehren Cruz of SolPurpose – (http://rootwirefestival.com/transform/)

Papadosio was successful at creating an environment of total love and appreciation of everyone and everything that is in existence. They are directly at the forefront of this new emerging culture. They are visionary artists. They inspire, transcend, and comprehend how to allow people to find freedom compassion and expression of the universe through a music, spirit, and arts convergence.

People have always felt connection to spirit through the art of dance and movement. In the past and even still today, hidden behind the veils of the mainstream society, which is still stuck in its traditional ways of performance, an ever-expanding culture is exploding, accelerating, and increasing in size and density at a rapid rate.
It will not be long until communities will be established that are a fusion of all of the aspects that are within this culture. I think of ecofriendly, art, spirituality, and performance based communities that live together and support each other in a sustainable fashion.
Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusion

My research demonstrates a shift in the power structures that dominate our society. I gained insight into the numerous flaws in various contemporary socio-political systems and ideological perspectives that use their political power and corporate influence to perpetuate their dominance. Our society has allowed social constructions like politics and economics to dominate us through an ideological perspective that only aid in the preservation of the structures that benefit the upper class. Due to the dysfunctional and unethical behavior within these dominant power structures, various social movements and scholars now challenge religion, politics, and economics more than ever.

This has led the global population into a state of degeneration as the dominant belief systems are exhausting human and planetary resources and causing damaging affects to the environment and our health. I argue the current model for society, dominated by capitalism and Western culture, is unsustainable and must ultimately be restructured or transformed into something harmonious with nature and human health.

Many multidisciplinary scholars, expert researchers, and activists are concerned with contemporary social problems. Each professor I met with at Ohio University had a particular concern and understood the severity of the collection of unresolved issues. Additionally, all the artists and creative individuals I interviewed while in Toronto also had a specific concern but took different approaches on how to articulate or illuminate the political content.

As the state of total crisis has intensified, the abundance of social movements has started using innovative methods of activism like performance, art, and shamanic or
spiritual practices. These tactics are causing a discernable impact on the mainstream culture as more and more people are waking up and developing their own creative projects to illuminate collective issues.

This intensification towards systemic collapse has affected the realms of art and culture and will continue to change the way performance is viewed and used throughout the global community. The total impact on the global culture has not yet reached its peak for a total transformation and the overall form and direction of art and performance is still inconclusive. However, I suggest this new culture can reshape the next era into a society dominated by acceptance, education, and cooperation through collective artistic expression. This may completely alter the fabric of the arts and of the performance, as it will be the vehicle for healing and transformation of corrupt and dysfunctional societies.

Dance, music, art, and other more contemporary forms of expression will be viewed once again as spiritual practices. They will use these spiritual methods to create an inner transformation, which will cause collective awakening and cultural reform towards an artistically expressive and sustainable future for humanity.

It is necessary to highlight the ever-growing expansion of social movements due to the escalation of social, cultural, political, spiritual, and economic problems. I speculate that the current severity of our situation as a global community has already established many global movements regarding the transformation of society as a whole. Various social movements have been gradually merging and utilizing methods like performance art and spirituality in order to increase the odds for global transformation.
The need to dissolve all forms of separation has never been so strong. The millennial generation will soon be the ones responsible for the corruption and crisis to which our prior leaders have led us. The lines drawn between us like money and power, prejudices and judgments, class and race, must all be eradicated. They are all losing their grip on the new age comers and new consciousness movements. These movements reject confrontation and pursue endeavors that lead to human and planetary prosperity. These movements are imperative for the collective benefit and preservation of humanity’s existence on this planet.
Glossary

Chakra
A term from Hindu and Buddhist traditions and yoga philosophies describing one of seven whirling spiritual energy centers in the body.

Crown Chakra
Sahasrara in Sanskrit is an energy center point found at the crown of the skull that is a medium for universal consciousness and a connection with the divine spirit.

Root Chakra
Muladhara in Sanskrit is an energy center point found at the base of the spine that connects Earth energies and relates to survival and sexuality.

Collective Consciousness
The Unification of a society’s goals, values, and belief systems. Other uses of the term suggest a state of consciousness that transcends the ego and even death as individuals merge into a form of unified consciousness.

Cyclical Consumption
A wasteful and dangerous system of consumption of goods, services, and material possessions that perpetuates our economic system. Without cyclical consumption our economy would fail. Planned and intrinsic obsolescence are consequences of the system that ensures the failure of a particular product in order to continue cyclical consumption. This accelerates pollution and advocates the consumption of resources used for war or crime as profitable and good for economic growth. Peter Joseph of the 2011 documentary known as Zeitgeist: Moving Forward

Dimensional plane
A term used to describe levels of existence and parallel universes ranging from material or physical to energetic and spiritual.

Dominator culture
Riane Eisler, in The Chalice and the Blade, explores anthropological writings concerning
two major types of societies, partnership or dominator. All people are equal and cooperative in partnership societies, while patriarchal dominator cultures were based on animal herding. The commodification of food with the emphasis on meat and the enslavement of animals is still a major worldview of contemporary society. Some of the first forms of capital were sheep and goats.

**Ethno-pharmacology**
A scientific field concerning the efficacy of traditional medicine and drug use within particular cultures.

**Fiat Currency**
Money supported by law or government but is not backed by a tangible or valuable good such as gold or silver.

**Frequencies**
Describes varying degrees of oscillating energies light and sounds that occurs within different dimensional planes.

**Mind-Body-Spirit**
A holistic approach to healthy living and spiritual healing.
Paradigm shift
A total change in the overall worldview including cultural values and dominant structures on a massive collective level.

Site-Specific
The predetermined use of a particular urban or natural space for a performance art event.

Shamanism
An ancient spiritual approach to healing and communication with the spirit world used by the medicine men of indigenous cultures.

Social construction
The process by which individuals assign meaning to the surrounding world. This is a sociological perspective that all knowledge is socially constructed by language.

Techno-cyborgs
A cyborg refers to a cybernetic organism or an extraordinary being with both biological and electronic or mechanical body parts. A techno-cyborg refers to the excessive dependence on technology in contemporary culture to aid the human species in daily routines, travel, communication, and information.
Appendix I

Interview Transcriptions

Susan Burgess – Political Science/ Women and Gender Studies
Thursday May 12, 2011
1:00pm

Middlebrooks: Ok, so my questions are pretty much geared towards political Science.

Burgess: That’s a plus since I’m political Science. (Laughter)

Middlebrooks: You are also Women and Gender studies correct?

Burgess: Yes I am. (humbly stated)

Middlebrooks: Ok. So, to let you know I’m going to fire away some pretty challenging questions I think.

Burgess: Ok, I'll try, fire away. (smile)

Middlebrooks: This is a broad question and is open to interpretation. How do you describe Politics?

Burgess: Well, um, Political Science is about the study of power. (Politics=Power) You know? So Political science studies the way that power manifests through political channels and one way that politics is traditionally thought of is from the top down. (Pyramid, hierarchy) Right? So, Governmental institutions and elites and so forth. More recently people have begun to think of politics also as bottom up. So part of my interest in Political Science is about pop culture and how different kinds of cultural forms that are more potentially populist in their generation can be thought of not just as supporting status quo norms but also sometimes as challenging them. Not all the time but sometimes. I’m particularly interested in how that might happen with respect to sex and gender norms. You know?

Middlebrooks: Great. Would you comment on a serious political problem today that you are concerned with, if any?

Burgess: Ok. So I just finished writing a book about the New York Times coverage of gay and lesbian, well actually LGBT issues. Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgendered people. (Correction/clarity and language) What I was looking at is how the coverage of LGBT people has changed over time in the New York Times. Um, The way the book is set up is in twelve different chapters, each one dealing with a different
theme. (contemporary issues) For example, gays in the military, same sex marriage, violence, religion, so on and so forth; All issues that have to do with LGBT identity over time. One of the things that I learned in doing that book was how policies have changed over time (evolution). So to take the most recent example is how now we are right on the verge of gays and lesbians and bisexuals being able to serve in the military. So I was sort of interested in how the frames of how those identities were understood changed over time (evolution). So in the beginning of the coverage of the issue of gay people serving in the military and in the government, gays were thought of and were talked about openly in the Times, the paper of record in the United States, as perverts and ferries (intolerance) and all kinds of derogative terms. People were thinking about… um Gays and lesbians were being purged from service in the Federal Government because the idea was that they were a threat to the state. You know? Like because their identities were hidden that they could be blackmailed and give away secrets of the United States like during the Cold War in the United States.

So what I was interested in is how that framing changed over time away from gays are a threat to the state to the idea that gays could actually be in service to the state and actually be thought of as heroes in some ways. Ok. So, that is an interesting policy change over time. But, on top of that, I realize that one also has to have as part of the discussion that, “Ok, that frame might have changed over time and it looks pretty good in a certain way, but it is within a sort of larger frame that is somehow serving the state as a good thing.” And that part needs to be questioned as well. So what I found in my work is that there’s always these sort of issues about how have things progressed over time but then there is sort of larger frame that these are more complicated questions that need to be interrogated at different levels (multidisciplinary discourse). Does that make sense?

**Middlebrooks:** It does. So in terms of our political system, do you think that it is functional, efficient, and effective?

**Burgess:** Wow, So those are all pretty bureaucratic words. Right? Functional, efficient and those type of things. I mean, I guess it depends upon what you mean as functional and efficient like for whom, or to whom. I think its probably pretty functional (chuckles) and efficient um to certain ends and for certain groups, (tone changes to more serious) but probably pretty inefficient for out groups. In this society, poor people (poverty) in
particular but also people in various different minority groups. Groups that were also not included in the original pact like women who are a majority but still are excluded and bare the scars of that in various different ways. Obviously, African Americans too. The original pact in this country is tinged, to use a word that is not even strong enough, by the compromise with slavery. That is somehow put into place from a willingness to compromise on issues of rights that continues to damage the political discourse. With respect to African Americans, but also with respect to everyone else in equality. So if you think like post 9/11, people are willing to say “Well, I have to trade away some of my rights to some extent for security.” I think that is all part of the original deal we had that somehow when push comes to shove in a crisis rights are maybe not as important as order or as security and that’s a problem.

Middlebrooks: So, is it possible then to have political systems without corruption? And I guess more specifically in a Capitalist society.

Burgess: Um, (sigh) Well its hard right? You know, your taking sociology, so you know that Sociology 101 is kind of like the way that you define groups is that the people who are “in” and “the other.” (separation and inferiority) So, if you look to the discipline of sociology the answer is no because as long as there are groups there are always others, and the others are always sort of implicated in differential power arrangements (control). So that provides a pretty dismal, not very hopeful vision. I guess, the vision that is more hopeful, which I also like to entertain, is that groups that are outside of the dominate power have always been able to, in one way or another, through arts and other cultural forms, pop culture, folklore and a variety of different forms, have always been able to undermine (activist art/ counterculture) the powers that be. Whether for themselves, to poke fun at people who are very self serious and think that they have more going on then they do. Or to undermine and get their fingers in the gears of what’s going on. So when those kinds of things occur, it doesn’t mean that suddenly the people are in power in some sort of absolute way. But what it does mean is that the picture of power is more complicated because the elite groups don’t control everything in some sort of total way. And that is important for people to see for themselves that people can do that. And for everyone else to see that that is possible. That is a slightly more hopeful picture. It
doesn’t mean that the sociological view is inaccurate, but it does mean that it is maybe 
more complicated then it looks at first glance.

**Middlebrooks:** So remaining on that subject for a moment, who is the Bilderberg group 
and do they have any influence on political or economic poison.

**Burgess:** Who is that what or who?

**Middlebrooks:** The Bilderberg group?

**Burgess:** I don’t know who that is.

**Middlebrooks:** So could you comment on your opinion or definition of globalization and 
the G20?

**Burgess:** (Sigh) Ok. So the place we’re at now in the development of capitalism is sort of 
something that people discuss as late capitalism or some variance of that. When people 
talk about globalism, they’re talking about global markets and so forth and that and trying 
to find different markets and different labor to exploit, to keep prices down (smile) and to 
continue to expand products, right, to different kinds of potential consumers. Globalism 
is happening at the same time that… (pause), you know, we’re undergoing a sort of 
epistemological transformation (paradigm shift) through the internet, and markets are 
being challenged by limitations, you know like maybe they’ve reached their limits in 
some ways both in terms of labor and in terms of consumerism. But also by this new way 
that we are processing information. Sometimes that is exploited by capital to try to 
进一步 the reach of capitalism. And you know, sometimes as we’ve seen in Arab spring 
and in other places sometimes the people again can use these new technologies as a tool 
to undermine power as we know it, including global capitalism. So, again, its 
complicated, you know? It’s not exactly clear what’s going to happen; Vis a vis those 
dominate 20 groups and the rest of the world which is more populace but perhaps not 
more powerful in terms of the kinds of indicators that aren’t typically relied upon.

**Middlebrooks:** So what are then the positive and negative aspects of the monetary 
market system in the United States?

**Burgess:** Well, that is a big question isn’t it? Um . . You know. . (Sigh) I think that part 
of the reason why the United States has become a dominate power, and the reason why 
capitalism has persisted as a dominate model in the world is partly because of its ability 
to, well it depends on the word you want to use, You could say co-opt, or you could say
include, ever increasing numbers of people into the middle class. Part of their crisis in Capitalism that is happening now globally has to do with the inability for capitalism to continue to do that. So again, reaching some of its limits.

**Middlebrooks:** So is Capitalism sustainable?

You know, I would say No. (Immediate response with a whole hearted smile) but we have yet to see. We’re in this really interesting time politically because all these epistemological changes are happening because of the Internet. The way that we process information is just changing you know? (Pause), and capitalism along with all other major institutions, including higher education for example, is also in the business of transforming itself. To take into account these sort of vast structural changes and part of what is so interesting about living in this time but also the same time terrifying is that we don’t really know what’s going to happen you know (uncertainty). So I would guess over the course of my lifetime, “Is Capitalism sustainable?” Probably, you know, like I’m fifty and probably in the course of my lifetime, Yeah. But I think it will have dips or ups and downs. (Burgess used a gesture with her index finger moving up and down like spikes and falls on a graph.) She said, that’s probably not going to get picked up on your audio recorder. She laughs, and then says dips or ups and downs.)

And when we are in periods of crisis like we are now people will say, “That’s not sustainable.” But I think it is inevitable, at least for a while. The economy improves itself and people will say, “Oh It was just a blip.” But I believe that over time, these will not be shown to be blips but part of a series of challenges that lead to capitalism transforming itself into something else. What that is. . we don’t know yet. As I was saying that is what is so interesting and exciting. When Capitalism first came into being, few people could imagine what it became and how it replaced feudalism and so forth. It’s possible that we are on that kind of precipice and we don’t know what is going to happen yet. So it’s interesting.

**Middlebrooks:** I agree. How does our society know when to choose to be involved with other Governments and countries? And what influences us to determine our intervention?

**Burgess:** That’s a good question. An example for right now would be what’s going on in Libya. You know that would be a great case study. How did we decide to get involved there? But not to get involved in some of the other areas where there is as significant
perhaps even more significant disruption among the populace and so forth. So yeah, that’s a good question; I don’t know what the answer to your question is. (Smile) You know what I mean? We’re finding that out too.

**Middlebrooks:** Can I ask you a question sort of off the record, or not on my list?

**Burgess:** Yeah!

**Middlebrooks:** How is it that we don’t seem to know that our political leaders are, for example for the death of Osama Bin Laden and how this assassination occurred in Pakistan, according to some of the readings I have done. So was the American population aware that we were involved or in the country of Pakistan?

**Burgess:** I think the people understand that there is a relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And somehow our involvement with Afghanistan has something to do with our relationship to Pakistan. Pakistan has long been supported by the United States financially and in other kinds of ways. So I think the people get that. But with respect to Osama Bin Laden, even the mainstream presses said or presented this as one of the great things that President Obama pulled off was keeping this under wraps. This intervention to what wound up to be the assassination of Osama Bin Laden was known for months and there were no leaks and it was kept secret. So, I think you are asking me that question because you regard it as a puzzle, or like it shouldn’t be that way. But I think that some people regard it as a great coo that the president pulled off by keeping it under wraps. You know? Why might they think that? Well, because they think that had it not been kept secret in that way, he wouldn’t have been able to take Osama Bin Laden.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you believe that our involvement in the Middle East is strictly related to terrorism or does it have other types of agendas?

**Burgess:** I think that we have seen that. Like during the Bush administration and the Weapons of Mass Destruction argument turned out to be false. I think we know that now. It certainly seems like there is some other indications that there are other kinds of agendas. (government crime)

**Middlebrooks:** Are corporate officials and political leaders penalized for criminal activity?

**Burgess:** It depends. Sometimes people can be held responsible for things in a variety of ways. Most visible the criminals are brought to trial and there are lesser ways in which
people are sanctioned and so forth. That doesn’t mean that those prohibitions are universally applied. It’s not clear to me at least, there are other people who study these kinds of things. I don’t but it’s not clear to me under what circumstances those would be applied.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you think that it is important for intellectuals and scholars outside of the political realm to communicate with those in the political realm about contemporary social, cultural, environmental problems and offer possible solutions is a need for intellectual multidisciplinary discourse outside of government concerning contemporary social and political problems that threaten our future existence?

**Burgess:** Yeah Absolutely! (Immediate response) I mean I think that’s part of what we’re doing here at the University is to try and generate knowledge. Both in terms of descriptively, but also in terms of trying to create new ways to think about the kinds of things we are talking about not just this but like power and its transformation and so forth. So, absolutely. Yeah.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you think that would be effective in generating reform?

**Burgess:** Um. Sometimes. I mean you know its kind of the same question in a way about elites and dominant and non-dominant discourses. So how effective and how clever are those who are not in the dominant discourse at getting their message visible understand heard without basically be quashed by power. So. . Yes! (smile) but its contingent right. Like it’s a complicated question. But again that’s why I think that cultural forms are so important because there. . Sometimes elites don’t understand what’s going on in them so well, but many people do. And so, to my mind there is more potential there for transformative performances. I really think even if people see, just for a moment, that other possibilities are there, that other imagination and other worlds are possible. That can sustain them over time.

We live in a very difficult political time. You know, it’s very challenging and its very stressful. So people need sustenance through that, and they need to see that power is not complete. It’s not total. You know. So, I think that pop culture and other high art forms as well give people the ability to see that. I’m sure this is true in other cultures too. But largely I’ve studied western political thought and since the beginning of Western political thought back in the times of Greece and stuff there was always satire. There was
always satire comedy and tragedy that was there to critique and undermine power, as we know it.

**Middlebrooks:** That was a really great interview I appreciated all of your responses.

**Burgess:** Well I agree with you that those are challenging questions sir. They are hard man.
**Connie Esmond-Kiger**
Business Accounting Professor
Ohio University

**Middlebrooks:** Could you tell me what your opinion is about the role of business in our society?

**Esmond-Kiger:** The role of business in general or do you want me to be more specific about accounting?

**Middlebrooks:** Please be more specific.

**Esmond-Kiger:** (Laughter) – Because I like um the idea of accounting makes me happier than the role of business but the role of accounting first of all is the language of business. And so, . . but accounting, I tell my students, is actually the, how do I want to put it. . the gatekeeper for society. In other words society depends on us to make sure that business is reporting everything as fairly and as accurately as they possibly can. In other words they’re not trying to cover things up they’re not trying to hide anything and it’s our job to go in and make sure that companies are doing the right thing and reporting things correctly so that the business world and society as a whole can depend on that information. So we are a kind of an ethical gatekeeper so to speak.

**Middlebrooks:** Ok. I like that. So then continuing with that, what values and practices does business accounting support and what does it deny?

**Esmond-Kiger:** I’m not sure what you mean by deny.

**Middlebrooks:** Well, are there practices that are frowned upon I guess in the accounting world in reference to the business world?

**Esmond-Kiger:** Yes there are. Ok so first of all what does it support? Accounting supports upholding ethical standards and supports the highest of integrity among its professionals and participants. Of course, that is the perfect world. Unfortunately lately there have been some imperfections in our perfect world and we’ve had some downfalls in terms of business and also in terms of accounting.

Um, but what we’re out there to uphold is you know to do the right thing, for companies to report things fairly. We have the U.S. GAPP, which is U.S. standards of accounting practices. Then we have International Financial Reporting Standards (IFERS). And those two things are supposed to converge, or the U.S. is supposed to adopt IFERS
in the near future. But these standards are set by standard setting bodies made up of seven independent people on each board and they also have huge research teams. They put out proposals before they make the standards, and they have a lot of feedback from government, from practice, from corporations on what they’re proposing and there is academics doing research on what they’re proposing to determine the affect on companies and taxes and revenues for the companies and for the nation in terms of taxes. What would be the affect of doing what we’re proposing to do? And is the affect in the best interest of society and things like that. So thats what we do as standard setters.

Then we rely on company management to follow those standards. Then we have auditors, external auditors, generally you would hear about the big four public accounting firms or other public accounting firms who come in and serve as external auditors to go through and you know I guess you would say test and spot check. Obviously you cant test every transaction that a company goes through because the transactions if you put them in a computer print out would pile up all six floors of this building for many of those corporations but we do checks and we try to figure out if what they’re doing, if for one thing if they have policies and procedures set up, are they actually following those policies and procedures because many times those are set up to keep, like to have or to provide internal controls and to keep fraud from happening. To keep their employees from doing things they shouldn’t do. And to make sure that you know all of these policies are being followed such that they know we can test and know that if it was followed these ten times then probably it was followed all of the time. Ok. So that is kind of what we support and uphold.

And then what we hope to deny is the breaking of those policies and procedures. Um, we hope to deny things like managing earnings. When I talk about managing earnings what I mean is, for instance the publicly traded firms that are on Wall Street, traded over the counter on Wall Street. Um… Those firms have quarterly reports and annual reports and they actually have financial analysts following them and predicting what they’re earnings will be at the end of any given quarter and if you miss those earning by even a penny, which seems like a very small amount. I mean you can pick up a penny on the sidewalk right? And feel not very rich these days. But if you miss those earnings even by a penny it can have really detrimental effect on
the company in terms of stock price in terms of keeping your shareholders happy, keeping your shareholders period. Keeping good employees things like that. And so what companies have been known to do unfortunately is manage earnings. Meaning that you know they may count a little more revenue this quarter than they should because they know it's coming in first thing next quarter you know so why not count it this quarter to get that share price or that earnings per share number up to what the analysts are predicting. So that we look good. (Phone rings, then cell phone rings) And then of course next quarter if they took some of that earnings in the current quarter then they wouldn’t have those earnings to count in the following quarter and the problem becomes that it just becomes kind of a never ending problem where “oh well we used some of our earnings this quarter for last quarter so now we need to pull back some of our earnings for next quarter” and so on and so forth.

You know it is a never-ending cycle. That’s where you end up with a lot of ethical problems and fraud. It kind of starts out somewhat innocently, well kind of like the grandmother taking the money to pay for the food to put on the kids table and thinking that well it's just temporary, I’ll be able to pay it back, but then she’s never able to pay it back. So it becomes a never-ending cycle. Next month she needs more food, so she steals a little more thinking “well someday I’ll pay it back.” So on and so forth. And it’s the same thing out in the corporate world, which has really kind of led to a lot of problems.

Middlebrooks: Yes. I guess along those lines I’m interested to learn more about, I mean if you would elaborate, you would classify that as criminal activity right?

Esmond- Kiger: Yes I would. (Laughter)

Middlebrooks: So how do you think then that criminal activity is being addressed in our society and currently in contemporary society?

Esmond- Kiger: Um, you know I don’t have a lot of experience with that. Only what I hear and see in the media, so

Middlebrooks: Mainstream media?

Esmond- Kiger: Yea mainstream media for the most part. TV, reading papers, and reading things on the web and things like that. But it seems to be, you know that’s white-collar crime, which seems to be treated a lot differently then (white vs blue collar crime-social problem) criminal activity on the street.
In other words robbing a bank versus you know managing millions or billions of dollars of earnings. Robbing a bank seems to have a more detrimental effect on somebody’s immediate future. In other words they go right to jail. Whereas white-collar criminals don’t necessarily go right to jail. They don’t go there for several years and they go through all sorts of court hearings and appeals and things like that. And sometimes they never end up going to jail. They’ll pay major fines they might loose their job their companies may pay major fines but very few of them compared to what I think actually goes on seem to end up in prison, which I think is a very sad state of affairs. (Stutter and lower tone) They deserve to be treated just like anybody else who is engaged in criminal activity.

**Middlebrooks:** In what ways then does business or business accounting benefit humanity as a whole and in what ways is it detrimental?

**Esmond-Kiger:** OK. Well accounting benefits humanity as a whole because we go in and we try to find any of those things that are going on that shouldn’t be going on. Ok? I mean our emphasis is not to go in and find the fraud. Our emphasis is to go in and find out if the procedures are being followed if the standards are being followed that are set out for companies to follow. And if the financial statements that the company is putting out there to their shareholders are actually, we call it fairly stated because we cant make it, we cant make sure that everything is absolutely accurate. The only way we could possibly do that would be to go through every single transaction, which would be virtually impossible, nobody could afford to pay us to do that.

So the idea is to make sure that the financial statements are fairly stated ok. And they don’t have any material misstatements. Materiality meaning it would change the decision made by an investor. So in other words if there is something that an investor needs to know we, the company, or the auditors are going to make sure that it gets put out there. That’s the idea. If it is something that is immaterial and wouldn’t change the decision of an investor or stakeholder, and when we say investor we also mean creditors, which would be a bank giving a loan. Ok they are virtually investing in the company by giving them credit.

Ok so you’ve got stockholders, you’ve got banks, you’ve got shareholders, creditors, and then you’ve got the public, the stakeholders. I mean the people who live
around a plant lets say that needs to be environmentally safe and things like that so and auditors are actually getting more involved in things like auditing sustainability and auditing environmental concerns and areas and rules. And so we call it assurance or attestation. In other words if we are experts in the regulatory issues concerning maybe a utility plant, then we would go in an assess or provide assurances on whether or not they are actually doing what they’re suppose to do.

So accountants don’t always just look at numbers they also look at other things. We do a lot of assurance in terms of health care and nursing homes. Things like that. We’re branching out. Its like we understand the language of business. We understand the numbers, but we also understand policies and procedures and we understand how to test those controls in those areas and how to determine if those things are being followed in the way they are supposed to be followed.

Middlebrooks: So how would you respond to, I have read into things that discuss the monetary market system as being the root cause for a lot of disparities in the world. Could you comment on that?

Esmond- Kiger: The monetary say that again.

Middlebrooks: The financial system or the monetary market system that we have in place. Money as being innately possessing qualities that separate society.

Esmond- Kiger: Your kind of delving into economics there and I’m not an expert in that area, and psychology and sociology and the hole bit. I think the idea your getting at is that um money kind of drives the world, either you have it or you don’t, and if you don’t your not able to do the things that you need to do to be able to get by and have success in terms of just having you know a comfortable place to live, um the ability to get around, the ability to take care of yourself, the ability to have health care, and the ability to live a comfortable life. Um so it kind of gets down to the haves and the have-nots.

So should we be distributing out wealth better in terms of the people who have it versus the people who don’t have the money? I mean society has evolved such that you really can’t get a long well without money. Whereas back in the day when you know people bartered with each other to trade commodities more or less like food items or items that they made for food you know so that everybody kind of worked together to get along. You know things just don’t work that way anymore at least in places like the
United States and most countries around the world. So in that way I guess yea money is kind of a downfall but I think it depends on the people who have the money and what they’re doing with it and their mindset.

Um there are a lot of very rich people in the world who do a lot of good things with their money. There are a lot of very rich people in the world who keep all their money for themselves. So it kind of comes down to personality or psychology or sociology issues in terms of what I think people do with their money and how they act with their money and things like that. So I think that for instance the people on Wall Street could take into consideration a lot more things than they do the government could take into consideration a lot more things than they do. You know to me the idea of not raising taxes is just absolutely ludicrous. Um I think if your going to have a society that you know takes care of its people you’ve got to tax the people. Especially the people who can afford it.

Middlebrooks: Would you be willing to speak about any contemporary social problems that you feel personally concerned with? Whether it be related to accounting or whether it be political, cultural, environmental, or a concern that resonates with you.

Esmond-Kiger: I have a couple of concerns that resonate with me and that would be that the whole global warming issue. The fact that, or the indication I see that people are very slow to move on accepting the fact that we have global warming and to do something about it.

And I think the other thing is healthcare. I think that healthcare is a real problem in our society. And we need to do something to provide health care to everybody no matter how much money they earn.

Middlebrooks: So then um it sounds like what I hear you saying is that there is uh concern about the swiftness of policy reform in that matter. So do you think that there is a need for multidisciplinary scholarly discourse regarding contemporary social issues outside of the realm of government?

Esmond-Kiger: Sure. Absolutely. (quick response)

Middlebrooks: Do you think that would be effective in generating reform.

Esmond-Kiger: I don’t know. I mean I have no idea. But I don’t think it would hurt.
Middlebrooks: Um. So do you think the identification with culture, whether it be the culture of an accountant or the culture of an ethnic group or sub or counter culture, would the identification of that and the ideology that goes along with that, would that be a positive or a negative?

Esmond-Kiger: Ok can you ask me that again?

Middlebrooks: Yea. The identification with culture, so maybe I am a Christian Republican Accountant, and my ideology is within those realms, is that a good thing or is that a bad thing?

Esmond-Kiger: You mean if I am using those things to make a determination of how I would approach my job as an accountant?

Middlebrooks: Yes.

Esmond-Kiger: That would be a bad thing. As an accountant or as a businessperson I think I should do what is best for all stakeholders concerned in terms of running my company or being an accounting professional regardless of what my culture or what my personal beliefs are.

Middlebrooks: So is there any sort of transformation occurring right now within your field or is it kind of in a fixed position?

Esmond-Kiger: Actually there is a lot of transformation. There is a lot of changes going on. The idea that we are changing from going from U.S. GAPP to International GAPP has to do with the hole globalization of business. But in a way its kind of interesting because the International Gapp is more principles based then rules based.

Middlebrooks: So this is the Generally Accepted. . . .

Esmond-Kiger: Generally Accepted Accounting Principles is what we mean by GAPP. OK. And so because business in the United States has gotten so complicated and the stock market has gotten so complicated in terms of derivatives and all of the new financial instruments that people have invented and put out there um we have come up with a lot of rules based standards.

The problem with rules based standards is that when somebody sees a rule that says ok if you have this you will do this. If they’re not being a person of high integrity and they are trying to get away with something they will say “oh well what I have hear is not exactly that so this rule must not apply to that.” Ok. And so they’re trying to find a
loophole or a way around the rule. But if you have principles based standards that say you know in the end what we’re trying to accomplish here is to get this information out there.

And so if your talking about derivatives, ok, we need to come up with fair value of those derivatives and report that fair value as closely as we possibly can. Ok. So in principle what we want to get out there is the best information possible. So if you look at that principle you say how can I make sure that what I’m doing here and how I’m reporting this gets the best and most meaningful information out there to my constituents. Ok. Versus following this little bitty rule right here. Or saying “oh I don’t really need to follow that rule because what I’m doing here doesn’t really apply to that.” They kind of missed something here so I’m going to take advantage of it.

So I think the whole idea, if we could get people to be thinking more in terms of principles and what am I actually trying to accomplish and what is the best and highest thing that I can accomplish here, and then make every attempt to do that I think the world would be a much better place. The financial markets would be a better place, Wall Street would be a better place, and business would be a better place. I think it would get people thinking in a better way. So I am kind of excited about it but it has been very slow to come. Its coming but it has been slow. Then the question is can we actually get people thinking that way? Can we turn people around and get them thinking in terms of the best for everybody versus the best just for their bottom line.

**Middlebrooks:** Is the U.S. dollar in a state of devaluation?

**Esmond-Kiger:** (Laughter) I don’t know for sure. I think so. (Bright smile and laughter) You need to ask your economic friends about that.

**Middlebrooks:** What forces perpetuate business and accounting currently and how do you potentially see those forces in the future.

**Esmond-Kiger:** Forces. . (says with question tone) I mean I think the major force is that people want to be successful. If you start a business the idea is that you want to keep the business lucrative. In other words you want the business to continue otherwise if it doesn’t continue you suffer personally and actually your customers can then suffer. I mean there is nothing worse than having your favorite coffee shop go out of business because you can no longer go there and you have to go somewhere else.
Middlebrooks: Right and my question concerns the capitalist economy and its method of perpetuating those types of business. Is it possible to do that in a capitalist society? Is it possible to keep those types of businesses going, you mean?

Middlebrooks: Yes.

Esmond-Kiger: Yes. (smile) As a business owner you have to be savvy and make good business decisions. You can't expect to run things in an unorganized way or in a way that are not going to provide you with a good strategy or good decisions. I mean you have to sit and plan and think about the numbers. We talked about money and obviously cash is king is what they say, and if you don't have cash you can't buy the inventory to sell, you can't get a loan at the bank and you don't have the cash to pay for something then your not likely to be able to continue on. So you do have to some business savvy about you or just some plain ol’ common sense so that you don’t you know go overboard from the beginning and get yourself into a situation that you can't get yourself out of. So you know you do have to take responsibility for what you start and how you run it and your ability to keep it going.

Now when the economy crashes down on you that's really tough because all of the sudden people have no money to spend and you know if you are depending on the local people to come in and buy your product and they all of the sudden have no money to spend the probability of your business going down is pretty high. So its tough. It’s a tough one. I’m not sure I answered your question.

Middlebrooks: No that’s fine. I’m just trying to get a sense of if the world of accounting and business is concerned with humanity, or if they are concerned with profit and if there is a place for both.

Esmond-Kiger: I think there is a place for both and I think that there should be a place for both. I think a lot of businesses they do consider both. There are some businesses who consider both much more than others. And you know its kind of the same thing looking at people. There are some people who would consider humanity over money much more than others and there are people who consider money over humanity much more then others and I don’t know that you will ever be able to change that. Sad, but true.

Middlebrooks: Well great. Thank you. I think we got some very good things.

Esmond-Kiger: Your very welcome. I enjoyed meeting you.
Marina Peterson  
Interdisciplinary Arts  
Assistant Professor, Performance Studies  

Middlebrooks: Do you have any contemporary concerns like within the art world or outside of the art world be it social, political, cultural, or environmental?  
Peterson: Um, Yes (laughter) probably. That’s very broad.  
Middlebrooks: That you would be willing to comment on?  
Peterson: Ah, let me think. Well ok so actually I think the status of public universities at the moment is probably a very pressing issue um that’s caught up in wider political and economic issues and class politics in the United States. Um yea, I don’t know that seems to be most close to home at the moment.  
Middlebrooks: Do you think that this problem is being adequately addressed?  
Peterson: Uh its being addressed but how its being addressed may be not (stutter) it opens other questions about what the implications are of the kinds of policies that are being made around that or the kinds of ways that it is being dealt with I guess. Um (more pronounced tone) I think it raises questions, I’ll be sort of blunt about it, my perspective on most of this is more analytical than as an activist per se. So I think, it is exposing I think a kind of (sigh) broader class dynamic and sort of kind of divergence of social class in the United States. The history of it is obviously complex but I think the questions that its really opening and raising that are not necessarily being addressed are questions of really what is education about? Um and those I don’t see really being taken on that sort of broad level. Or what kind of education do we want to have? You know really stepping back instead of retrenching into lets keep the status quo because its getting worse. Something like that, but maybe the status quo isn’t what we want either.  
Middlebrooks: So then would you say, because you mentioned your perspective is from a more analytical point of view rather than from an activist point of view. How would you say the field of interdisciplinary arts or the art world in general feels about using performance methods as a form of activism related to contemporary social problems?  
Peterson: Uh, ok so I am trained as an anthropologist so my work is actually in anthropology but on arts and on arts in cities mostly. Um and so and then I guess I’m also
a Cellist, which that kind of work that I do is very non political in fact though there is ways of spinning it or having it taken up in kind of political ways, which whether it is for a kind of meeting requirements of a funding agencies or what not. You know building things as cross cultural understanding or something like that or as a collaboration, tend to fit certain frameworks that exist now for funding without I think necessarily actually being about much or being about much that is different then what people just do. But it is interesting I think that is a longer shift in terms of arts funding. It was part of a de-politicization of NEA funding post the 80’s culture wars and the NEA 5.

Right, so when there was arts funding for individual artists. I mean you might want to look into this actually, I mean its kind of an interesting history. You know the NEA like always trying to tell a line of saying are you making your art safe. Initially, in the post 1950’s and in during the cold war, I think it was funded actually in 1963, um so sort of right at the really at the of the cold war is heated, um the understanding was that politics would come out of groups and out of a community and so funding artists was a way to depoliticize arts. Then it turned out in the 80’s that this was a very political or there was a political possibility that really pushed up against the limits of what the state would allow. Then there is a dramatic shift at that point to funding folk art or community groups or community arts around things like multi-culturalism and kind of things that appear or are kind of safe politics. So ok that’s in terms of my practice.

So last year, were you apart of John Malpeades visit?

Middlebrooks: No.

Peterson: So that was interesting and he did this project. I have a poster on my door. We brought him to do a project that he called bright futures and it was two texts drawn from experiences he had while at a residency at Princeton no MIT sorry. So he runs this group Los Angeles poverty department, which is a Theater group based on skid row in Los Angeles and he properly is a performance artist but runs this group that is kind of more like community theater. I mean sort of. Although I think its the ways in which it is powerful have to do with his framing coming from being a performance artist. Its not theater in a straightforward way. It’s a kind of process that you see and they engage with issues about skid row, from their experiences from doing research, and they present that in different kinds of frameworks. Its quite powerful.
He did this other project of his own and he came here. There are two texts one is from listening to a speech as a sort of a booster talk to um MIT undergraduates who are going to go into finance. This was like a pep talk and this is right after the crisis saying its not so bad you still get these big bonuses, there is still work here and its really not as bad, your going to be fine. Then another text from I think Atlantic monthly there was an article that I think was much more about the systemic crisis and how this is that we are seeing a shift now in North America to a kind of Latin Americanization of um politics and economics.

So he performed the person giving the pep talk with two other OU faculty who then was like a sort of panel mimicking a panel that was from MIT. Then audience members would stand up and read paragraphs um as purported questions interspersed with this other text and so it was breaking these two texts together. And I think quite effective in showing this divergence but also bringing these two texts together and making this or putting them in the same framework in fact and then it was followed Louis Shwartz who is in the school of film gave a short talk about the economy in crisis, and then in the middle a sociology professor talked about student loan debt and the sort of crisis of student loan debt and people left sort of upset, I mean students left crying.

So I don’t know in terms of in terms of I know you are interested in efficacy I’m not sure. That is an interesting question to ask about these sort of things but I think you know it’s a question of what does that mean? What does efficacy mean? Is it sort of opening somebody's understanding I don’t know if it changed anything it didn’t change anything systemically right I mean we had this in a classroom in Bentley. People remember it. It was I think also memorable as a genre I mean as a mode of performance that this is possible and I think its also quite effective for students in that way, and in some ways in opening peoples understanding or maybe awareness of these issues as they are playing out. They are visible although if your not paying attention to them you might not notice them. Yea..

Middlebrooks: Interesting. I’m sad I missed that. I think two quarters for me last quarter I was in Switzerland so that might be when that happened. So could you comment on what type of politics or values are currently in place within the art world in our culture?
Peterson: Neo liberal values. (Laughter) In both the art world and in our culture. (laughter) Highly intensely in the art world in fact. I mean, I guess well visual art is probably more than dance but I don’t know how trying to have a dance career what that is like at the moment but I think you know the kind of ways that in visual art you can get rich by being an artist and then everybody’s in some way kind of trying to get a piece of this pie now. There is an immense amount of money I mean especially when the economy is doing badly and now this kind of interestingly, I don’t know the wealthy are still wealthy and increasingly wealthy. They have the money to buy art and this becomes still a kind of market space thriving market space.

I don’t know, I really don’t see a lot of artists working against this to be honest, like in the way that the 1960’s and 1970’s artists really had a kind of both critical projects really actually directed toward economic issues and capitalism generally.

So somebody like Gordon Matta Clark is an interesting one. Um which these prints are from him but he bought and built on slivers of property in Manhattan then also he would do these deconstructing houses projects um but really with an effort of exposing property ownership and these kind of fundamental things about sort of social and economical dynamics, which I don’t see artists really taking on as a critical project right now. I mean especially I guess maybe in the research I do its interesting how urban or people doing projects in cities sort of more sustained community involvement projects buying buildings living in neighborhoods. At the same time as we see cities being developed around a kind of symbolic arts economy, loft developments, coffee shops and that this is all though it is obviously urban development and housing development for middle and wealthier class people it has an attachment to arts I mean they at least use the arts to sell it. Ostensibly its maybe for artists although everybody kind of knows its not or there are parts of it that are sort of like symbolic space for artists. Like high street or short north is like this, so there galleries and this is the draw. Um but the condos I don’t know who buys them there actually but most cities have this right now.

So the way that there is money going like into urban investment money or urban development money going into these projects whether it is either private or public money um, how these other kinds of projects now that are that the people doing them understand themselves as doing social projects or you know sort of reviving community projects in
sort of a different way then those loft developments are how they are attached or how those this is something that I would be interested in researching. You know economically how are they attached you know is there grant money that is actually going to these other kinds of projects I wouldn’t be surprised. They get attention from museums and galleries; parts of their projects get shown and displayed in galleries. So then are any of those critical of that relationship that does exist? Or are they happy to take the money? Then how do you negotiate having that relationship? I am not sure it is not bad per se but I don’t see things now that are engaged in a critique of the economy.

Middlebrooks: I hear kind of a battle between mainstream and you know social or community public art. Art for the public realm, which I also find fascinating because for me public art and free art is one of my interests.

Peterson: But everybody wants a little bit of money and everybody wants the NEA to keep being funded. I think, I mean it’s too expensive to live in cities now. I mean this is the difference that people could actually live, so something like Vito Acconci is an interesting case if you haven’t looked at his work. He, at that moment in the 60s and 70s of doing performance as an intentionally anti-market mode of art making, said that it cannot be captured it cannot be for sale. It’s not for sale. It is interesting now because he is in every article about Moreno Abromavich. He is quoted as saying you what she’s doing this is not what we were doing, she’s turned this into theater. This had this other intention you cannot restage this you cant sell it you cant have it in the museum. This is not a museum piece it is something that was made for that moment. It is intentionally not to be captured.

Middlebrooks: I find that fascinating. So do you think that the performance art world is in a state of transformation, in relation to that?

Peterson: The performance art world is a huge thing. . (laughter)

Middlebrooks: Well I guess more specifically the interest in more public art versus more mainstream art or art for sale or . .

Peterson: You see that there is more public art?

Middlebrooks: Well I’m wondering if you see a transformation occurring from more mainstream styles of art in galleries and museums to art that is for the public interest, or political art, or activist art?
**Peterson:** I think it always goes. I think there is always both. I guess I haven’t thought of it on that wide of a scale but I don’t see a dramatic shift per se.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you think that performance techniques used for activist purposes can be a vital tool for advocating counter thinking or social change?

**Peterson:** Yea. (Smile, then laughter) If it is all of those things. No I think that people do find these things I mean I think it is still the question of what is that? You know how is it being done, or what do you want to have come out of it? It opens up all of these questions about what does it mean to put art in the service of something? Um and you know that there I guess to kind of look at that really expansively I think is more interesting. Art that makes you look at things differently that is not ostensibly political, *is* political. Because it is really giving you, there is a politics to say that a simple gesture perhaps that is somehow not codified in a framework of art or so that actually makes you just see differently, there is something very political about that and perhaps more political in fact then these things that have political content and they are aiming to make social change and these kinds of things.

**Middlebrooks:** So then in that respect can art or does art benefit humanity as a whole?

**Peterson:** That’s a huge. . . (laughter) I’ll say yes.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you think that there is a need for a collective of intellectual multi disciplinary discourse outside of the realm of government to discuss contemporary socio political problems that threaten our future existence? Or is that already occurring?

**Peterson:** No, I think that should occur. Yea.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you think it would be effective in generating reform or policy?

**Peterson:** It depends, I mean things are structured in such a way right now that you can have these spaces where I mean here there is defend education Ohio there’s various groups. (Spoke with extreme speed) The provost says she listens um she goes to things and she hears and then there’s a wall and then she does whatever she wants. Or you know that’s my understanding I am not that hooked into this but I am using this example because I think this is a general dynamic actually of the way the politics works and the way that bureaucracies work now. It’s a question of what it means to be heard and make change and where is the space to do that? I mean its very hard in the current moment for
people to just let go of the systems that exist and say lets just go do our own thing. I mean the 70’s were the moment for that right?

We have this around here you know this sort of like collectives or various communes or something like that where people can go live outside of the state or outside of these kind of bureaucratic structures. I don’t see people being ready to do that right now. But it doesn’t seem. Though I don’t know the California protests had maybe had a miniscule effect in relation to the, then again that’s the question too is the question really about changing the structure of things or making ameliorating a kind of condition that is within kind of the structure that we have.

**Middlebrooks:** I am interested in you research interests, could you tell me what you have been researching related to globalization?

**Peterson:** Um I have mostly been working on globalization in the urban context. I am working on a book called *Global Downtown*. So actually this issue of these sort of gentrification around arts is one mode of that I think we see now globally. So that becomes both a global process and sort of helps turn downtowns into these sort of global spaces by being attached to these other global places. But also in having global finance move through them. Yea I would say globalization is probably an underpinning of my work on urbanism and cities. Isn’t always at the top but it is always an underpinning.

**Middlebrooks:** Interesting. Well great I think that pretty much answers all of my questions.

**Peterson:** They are good questions.

**Middlebrooks:** Thanks. I get similar responses, I mean they are all kind of different but depending on the discipline and some have a bit more of politics based behind it and inquiry into the political system that we are living in today. I mean that is ultimately my inquiry, I mean is this a sustainable structure, is this a sustainable system? Is it benefiting human health? And if it is or it isn’t, how can we communicate that to the general population? You know is our ways that we are doing it now and it is effective? Are people able to grasp the immense amounts of corruption and manipulation that they may experience but not be able to see.

**Peterson:** What do you see as the solution?
Middlebrooks: Well I don’t really see there necessarily being a solution. I guess my own personal opinion is that it is a form of evolution and transformation that is ultimately inevitable and that in order for a structure to transform itself into something new it has to reach its limits. It has to reach that point where people are forced to see, or it becomes increasingly visible as to the detrimental aspects of the system that we are perpetuating but I think that’s already quite visible but because of certain structures and powers that be they are really good at withholding that information or subduing the general population from locating that information or even skewing that type of information.

And so I am interested in finding something that might be a collective of individuals, interdisciplinary. I think specialization is extremely important but I think that having a more wide synoptic view of the current state of the world is necessary because all of our problems are extremely complicated so if you have artists or politicians or political science experts etc together to bring their opinions about their fields but then to understand the view of the collective that they could bring these issues to the table for generating possible solutions. Whether it actually generates reform or not, who knows? It’s a question between dominant and non-dominant discourse and whether it can generate that kind of awareness. But I just want to expose a lot of fucked up shit you know what I mean? I think there is a lot of it. So I really want to hear faculty expert opinions on that idea. Whether it is for activist purposes or not you know is not necessarily important. I think communicating what is going on is important whether those people who understand it decide to make change or not is up to them. But I do see art interdisciplinary art moving towards a state of curiosity. Like me for example I have a research interest in shamanic studies and indigenous culture of South America or of indigenous cultures in general and I think that is because in modern society we have kind of lost a connection to spirit or to spontaneous inquiry or our own pursuit of knowledge and of human health and well being and of artistic practices, but now its that we are captured almost in a structure that we have to be caught up in and perpetuate for other peoples gain and not our own gain. I think that once people start to wake up to that other paths open up to them. Me and two other people are planning to leave the country to do anthropological research on indigenous culture and dance but also just create art in that realm and see how it is different then creating art in the context of modern society.
Peterson: You should talk to Louis Shwartz in film.

Middlebrooks: Why?

Peterson: He is quite invested in these questions.

Middlebrooks: Awesome. Thank you so much Marina.

Peterson: Yea. Nice to meet you, I appreciate your thoughtfulness.
Middlebrooks: Are you concerned about contemporary social problems within or outside of your field? If so, what types of issues are you concerned with?

DeForest: I mean obviously the environment is of great concern to a lot of people, not only for issues of biology and biodiversity, but also for human health. The type of work that I personally do is to study the affects of acid rain on how our forests function. Eventually that is going to lead into compositional changes in species, which can affect economics and trees and things like that.

A lot of the other stuff with ecology is how we get our food. The whole idea a lot of times is people separate out ecology from agricultural systems but there is a lot of work. It is part of the environment whether we like it or not. And so what we have is maybe issues of how we can be sustainable. My research actually, some of it, focuses on organic farming and helping natural organic farmers make better decisions on how they treat their land. So it would not only maintain but also…

Sustainability I actually find unsatisfactory. It’s increasing productivity and increasing the quality of land because we have already damaged it so much. Is that what you talking about?

Middlebrooks: Yes!

DeForest: Ok. So, obviously, a lot of concerns you know? You could get into the big hot stuff now like global warming and things like that, which is this kind of general idea. You could get very specific in what’s going to be affecting us is fracking.

Hydraulic (stutters) fracturing or fractionation. I’m actually going to be giving a lecture on that. I teach a Plants and People type course and I always put in certain issues like the fact that our oil is going down that’s a problem. One of the solutions is fracking basically. But there are alternatives like biofuels and that’s how we get into the plants and things like that. Of course once that starts getting into the ground water, that has major implications obviously for human health and well-being, but also for the ecology of plants. I mean, there is a lot of compounds in there that I am kind of investigating that we just don’t understand very well whether or not that’s going to affect anything yet.
A lot of our tree species sort of tap into that ground water to survive. I have no idea what that is going to do, and I don’t think anyone really does. So a lot of these issues, a lot of them are related to I guess to get people interested in human health. You’ve got the ecosystem and our forests out there do provide a sort of service for us and it is easy to forget. If we change that a little too much, we might not like the outcome.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you think that today’s youth are concerned with these types of concerns? If not, what could be hindering them?

**DeForest:** I think a lot of them are concerned, but I think a lot of the concern is misplaced. I think with the Internet you can read about it. But, the back-story. . I don’t think that things are dire (sarcasm) as people believe they are. Or they might be going off on a direction and not really understanding. I’ve talked to a lot of people and a lot of students who are activists and they are very concerned about the environment? When I talk to them, their knowledge is kind of. . no offense but superficial, and I think it actually hurts the movement because then you get nay sayers or critics who go on like “Oh, I don’t know!” It’s just yelling. I think they can make a better argument of being better educated, and take more of these science classes. You know?

And understanding, well, one of the things that I check is the teaching. You know things aren’t black and white; there are always grey sides. When I teach to my class its always trying to understand the consequences. Sometimes you can’t win. It will never be a perfect world. What can you do?

The idea, of which is kind of gaining movement and is extremely controversial is using genetically modified organisms in organic food systems. It comes down to whether or not you care. You know, I mean “are you organic because you are interested in the chemistry; anti science type stuff, natural? The way we used to do things 100 years ago?” Or, “are you into organic because of the effect that agriculture has on the environment?” I mean if that’s the case, if that’s what you believe in, then genetically modified organisms in that type of system is a good thing because it can reduce our means for pesticides and this other kind of stuff. Again it’s very (chuckle) controversial. But there are actually two sides to the story depending on your belief system or viewpoint of why you go organic. If you want to minimize your impact on the landscape then that might be a version. So, I kind of went off a little bit on their (laughter) but. . I think they are concerned.
But then again, in my Plants and People course that I teach I always use a clicker for questions to gauge the opinion. And you do get about 10% – 15% of my class. . I have about 180 students who really care about these things, but you do get a majority of about 50% that don’t care. I think that the don’t care, is because they don’t understand that is a lot of yelling on both sides but they don’t understand how is this going to affect me. What’s the consequence of this? I think a lot of times “baby seals are going to die” (Sarcasm). That’s not very effective to get the mainstream. You have find ways to understand that this will effect your life. Everything is all connected, and a lot of times you have to do it economically. (laughter) Because that will get peoples attention. (Smile)

So, I guess yay, you’ve got people into it. But, nay because the scientific community have really been able to . . . . uh stress how this will effect your daily life, besides these abstract big picture tactics.

**Middlebrooks:** So, how would you describe our current ecosystems on Earth?

**DeForest:**

(Stutters and begins to say it’s a general question) It all depends on where you’re at. Like lets use global warming. In the tropics, not such a big deal. But in the arctic areas, where it is really cold, once you switch areas that are typically frozen to areas that become liquid. That’s a big deal! That changes everything, that switch between frozen to unfrozen. So I would say, Boreal forest, closer to the poles, speaking of global warming, is more critical. Temperate areas, yea it’s a big concern of what it can do to the environment. But again in the tropics. Obviously people along the coast, that’s a big concern because if oceans rise we could flood out. There are more areas that are more sensitive then others. A lot of it has to do with how close they are to human settlements. So yea. But it is hard for me to answer that question because a lot of it is eco specific.

**Middlebrooks:** Well concerning all of them, and in reference to global warming…

**DeForest:** Well here (interjected), to answer that, there is no ecosystem that’s not affected, either directly or indirectly, by human activity. I mean they’re all affected. We are starting to get into a system where just by us surviving. You know this didn’t just happen 100 years ago. There is actually research out there that suggests that at the dawn of agriculture we started changing it, especially in China. Once they started switching over for the patty system of producing rice, they started exhausting more methane into
the atmosphere. And that was the change. It’s just what we do to survive. (Tone increases). If you go back, there is a lot of species that have done that but we are changing things to a way that we may find unsatisfactory.

**Middlebrooks:** In response to that, do you think that it is possible to restructure our infrastructure in a way that is harmonious with our ecosystems?

**DeForest:** Yeah. I think that there is... well, we would have to change the paradigm. I think a lot of it is kind of like mitigation you know? What can you do?

Urban sprawl is a problem. You know if we spread out into the land, it’s not going to work. So one obvious thing is to have denser cities. Have more people in a smaller spot. If you’re going to damage the land, minimize your impact.

Like New York, its extremely efficient (exaggerates tone of voice)! You got so many people living in one spot. They reuse their resources. You can manage in per capita how much we spend on roads here vs New York, and its nothing because there is so many people there. A lot of is trying to find better ways to lessen our impact.

A lot of it is food production. Most of our land that we have is on food production. I know a lot of farmer who are trying to find better ways to minimize the impact. You know mill till, or sum till. But it gets very complicated.

So it’s obviously becoming more efficient, reducing our energy and trying to find alternative energy sources. But again that’s hard. A better thing, even though it’s not popular now is nuclear. (laughter) But of course what happened in Japan. That was an unusual circumstance. You have a pretty dang big earthquake. But that means that if you care, or if your main goal is to reduce our impact on global climates our main push of that is burning fossil fuels. You have to find an alternative energy source that doesn’t produce greenhouse gases. You get wind, you get solar, you get hydro. A lot of those are specific. Except for hydro, solar and wind don’t provide a constant, then you have nuclear there. But again you’ve got that toxic waste, and there is the balance. What are the consequences? What do we really care about? Would we rather have a radiation free environment that is very localized, or would we be spewing out, you know, basically Co2 in the atmosphere that affects everyone. I think that is what the public needs to understand. There is no silver bullets here, unless we get (coal fusion) (coal fetch?) and then we’re all fixed. (lowers tone to almost imperceptible of statement)
Middlebrooks: Helping or hindering the preservation of biodiversity?
DeForest: I think its just a lot of. I mean. I’m just a scientist, so what I watch in the news, I think there is a lot of politics in play. The democrats are trying to appease their constituents, which are pro environment. The republicans are appeasing their constituents that are can I say, anti-environment. Even though that individual that is a republican might want to say “I think this is great but that’s going to be too blue. are they blue? Yea too blue for that. I think we have a problem here. People wont just sit down because they think “Oh its just going to cost jobs. But I think that Obama is kind of on the right track. He is linking up green, with jobs. (excited tone) That is a good strategy to do. How can we use this technology that’s not just going create jobs, but also that’s going to improve our environment, provide a consistent energy source. It seems like that’s generally the way to go but there is where is gets kind of general. I think with time things kind of move more or less. And we’re cleaner then we’ve ever been (lowers tone to near whisper). I mean things are getting better. I mean of course there is setbacks like the whole fracking thing. (sounds as if unimportant, or minor). Which is going to influence local economies and things like that but … this is where there is kind of a balance of things. Again, I’m kind of looking on the outside. I read the news but I don’t study it. So it is difficult for me to provide you with a full answer.

Middlebrooks: Yes, I completely understand that. I really appreciate you still allowing me to hear your opinions about this though. Some people probably wouldn’t. So are you in support of Hydraulic Fracturing?
DeForest: Almost says no, but retracts – You know what it does. There are two sides to it. That’s where we get into the consequences. We need energy in the United States. Is it worth it? Do I think it’s worth it. No I don’t think it’s worth it. But for those individuals that have it on their land, it’s booming and there is a lot of money. I mean. I think it was in the New York Times they had this thing about the people who have it on their land and that lease out their land. They are all for it. And the people who aren’t, its like split towns and things like that in places like Pennsylvania and out west. It’s a hot question issue.

I think what it gets down to. This is where we talked about education, I mean on the surface it seems like, Oh its really bad. But then again, something just came out on the news that some of the groundwater has been contaminated. Science is out. This is
where you get into the fact that more study needs to be done. Is it a problem? It might not be a problem, ignoring the fact that you’re burning fossil fuels. But your putting all these chemicals in the ground. We really don’t know what happens. It might not do anything. I think it does, but as a scientist if you don’t have the proof … but then again if there is that potential of having it there. Once you contaminate ground water, you’re done! It’s not coming back. You’re not cleaning that up.

I was in Ann Arbor for a while where there was some dry-cleaner that dumped some of their toluene or something like that. Well, it got into the ground water and they have been trying to clean that up for the last fifteen years. This was almost ten years ago. Once it happens, your done and then boom, you’re just done. The time it takes for the microbes in there to clean it up is on time scales that we just don’t find very interesting.

As a scientist I’m just skeptical on both ends. I don’t like the idea of it personally. I’m a soil ecologist so I understand some of the stuff that gets deep, and it is risky. I think it is very very risky. And again, if this was something, that restoration ecologists would say, if it can be cleaned up eh um hm, . . Maybe, kind of, but I know from personal experience that once you contaminate ground water its done and there is no going back. It is very very difficult to clean it up and it is extremely expensive. It’s like when you burn fossil fuels or oil, its very cheap but there are those added costs that we just don’t talk about too much. Pollution and all the clean up and things like that, and if you could add that to a gallon of gasoline it gets really expensive.

Middlebrooks: Do you think that there is a need for a collective of intellectual multi-disciplinary discourse outside of the realm of government to discuss contemporary socio-political problems that threaten our future existence? Or is that already occurring?

DeForest: I think there is a need, whether I think it will be effective I am doubtful on that. I mean there has been, well I’ve been following like environmentalists for a long time, and you always get groups of people and they come and they talk and they discuss and they write reports and they make recommendations but whether or not anything gets done. It all depends on public opinion. It all depends on if you get people to back it up. I remember, this was a while ago you probably don’t remember this but the Alar scare. Do you know what that is?

Middlebrooks: No.
**DeForest**: Alar was this chemical that they found in apple juice and basically the public got on it and boom, there was this big concern. I think it’s ok to do something, but if it is not effective then why do it. You would have to find a means and it would be difficult to do that. I don’t have the capacity to think of it is to whether or not this could become an effective means. You’ve got the knowledge. We’ve got the scientists out there that have the knowledge. But how do you get that to the public? How do you inform them? You have to inform the public. What I try to do with my class is discuss the consequences and educating people. I think that is a lot of the problem there. You can have it but how are you going to disseminate that information to the public. Then if the public understands it, boom you’ve got the political will and then it happens. I mean you’d be surprised once people get on top of something you know it happens. What was it, one of the best most effective things that the government did was the Do Not Call list, you remember that?

BOOM! I mean everybody loved it, and it just went because everyone understood that telemarketers were an annoying type thing and people understood that. But understanding how to make that linkage, then of course you get all the skeptics sniping on the sides saying “ah this is gonna reduce jobs and then it becomes a political problem, then it becomes Republican vs. Democrat. I think at the end of the day that hampers this thing because once one party is on there they’d say “Oh I cant do that because that would be supporting the opposition.” And then vice versa depending on what the issue is. You know it works both ways. I’m just kind of skeptical of that. You know you can get people together you can get them to talk. I know that ESA Ecological Society of America does a lot of this stuff and whether or not they’re effective, I just don’t follow it. But I’ve read union of concerned scientists print out these publications. But does it lead to anything? I don’t think it does. Or at least if it’s effective it is very subtle.

This is where you almost need to get someone in marketing. How do you pitch your own idea? How do you sell your idea to people? That’s the business everything is commercialized. I mean if you take what Starbucks does or any of the successful companies that sell. Like Apple for example they’ve got a product that people want to buy because they know how to market it to you. …… I think that’s one of the things for the environmental movement, how do make them care about the environment without getting into these kind of abstracts. I think they have done other things with food security
and every once in a while you hear about these scares like when there is E. coli that comes through and creates these problems and then it kind of bumps out. I think soon the next big stink is going to be mercury. Here is another kind of consequence thing. We want energy efficiency right and one of the means that we have energy efficiency is the compact fluorescent light bulbs. Those are great right? But there is mercury in them and the problem is that people throw them away. Those are hazardous waste. Eventually someone is going to do a study on it. They’re going to find out that there are these plumes of mercury. Eventually they wear out and people dump them. We’re switching to that so there’s the consequences. When we had incandescent light bulbs yea they use more juice. But it was mercury free. Now we’ve switched to compact fluorescents but now we have increased the load of mercury, which we know is harmful to the health and things like that. Hopefully they get those led’s going and then we’ll be fine. But those are the things that I try to instruct my students on is the consequences. Yea we’re saving money. . Its so sad its almost like there is balance. Yea we can improve this. It’s kind of like some of the coal we use. Our coal here is high in sulfates, so we switch to the low sulfates of coal but it happens to have more mercury in it. And so it’s this balance. What do you pick what do you choose. I think its things like that. I think that scientists in my opinion at least most of them are not good at talking into the public because we talk about those balances, and then it confuses people. You have to have people who are charismatic. Like with marketing. What’s the important thing? Your getting into human psychology. What do they want? How do you use that to pitch your idea? I think that would be effective, but again that’s just my opinion and it could be the wrong approach. But it seems like if you follow what big business do to get people to do what they want to do. Use that technique for good. (pitch tone)

**DeForest:** So, Performance Art. I’m not sure what that is.

**Middlebrooks:**

**DeForest:** I’ve got a book that I would recommend. There is a couple of things. This is really good. “Everything I want to do is illegal” I don’t know if you have heard read that. This gets into. You know there is farming with ecology. But then how the government I stopped when he gets into zoning laws in Virginia. But it gets into how he wants to do the right thing, but because of the USDA and all these bureaucratic things he cant do it.
That’s why everything he wants to do is illegal. And this one I just read. I was very skeptical. I got this as a free book. Whether I want to look into it. He was very convincing. Its Whole Earth Discipline, I guess he is a big writer and does a lot of things. But he has this argument that if we want to save the Earth. Its very controversial type stuff. A lot of the science is backed up. The only thing I don’t agree with is his hole geo-engineering part. I think that is very dangerous. Modifying the climate by dumping iron Falines in the ocean, making algae. That gets real funny type stuff.

Middlebrooks: Do you think that type of technology is already occurring though?

DeForest: I think we do not understand how the world works. There is a lot of scientists that say that they know. But we don’t, and that’s kind of the hidden secret type thing. We understand fairly well how the Earth warms itself. But we don’t know very well how the Earth cools itself. We know it is the weather and hurricanes and things like that. But we cant predict the weather or hurricane. I mean did anybody predict all the rain that we’ve had. The one thing that you can tell is that if you have a lot of rain in the area the Earth is cooling itself. You know its like after Katrina. They thought “Oh, no we’re gonna have all these hurricanes the next year”. Uh uh (meaning no) because all that energy that was in the ocean at that thing went up because the ocean took it away. That’s why things were mild for a year so again because of warming we might have infrequent but more severe type things. But this was a very interesting. I thought this (trans gene cropic) area was very intriguing, because he basically said whats more important to you? We have to be pragmatic here. We have to find a way to fix these problems. What’s the biggest problem and then to try to fix it. You know I guess this guy was a big hippie (sarcasm) he was an environmental activist and still is. He is older now I think he is in He came to the realization that this isn’t effective. I want to help but what we’re doing is not. ..we need to take steps. We cant take it all. “Lets completely take out oil”. That’s never going to happen. (whispers) You know? But we can find ways to bit and piece and bit and piece. Then we’re gonna get to that ending point. He has some ideas and I thought those transgenic crops was very interesting and made a heck of a lot of sense I thought.

Middlebrooks: Thanks for the recommendations.

DeForest: Yeah, so Stewart Brand.

Middlebrooks: What was the other authors name?
Andrew Powers – Chief of Police  
Tuesday May 10, 2011  
Ohio University Police Department.

Middlebrooks: Are you concerned about contemporary socio-political problems within or outside of law enforcement?  
If so, what types of issues are you concerned with?  
Do you feel are we adequately addressing these concerns?  

Powers: Um. Sure there are lots of contemporary issues, social problems and things that concern me, but I don’t consider myself to have the luxury of making that an agenda within my job. So I keep very strict boundaries between what concerns Andrew, and what concerns “Chief Powers.” So my personal views aren’t something that I share at work. Basically my job is to be neutral. I may have very strong feelings about one issue or another but I don’t think that I should be espousing those views in my role as Police Chief because it affects the perceived objectivity of the Police in dealing with issues. The best example I can give you is that I wont allow officers to wear crucifixes on their uniform because that’s a personal matter that concerns them when they are off duty. When they are on duty, they’re objective and their job is not to be Christian, Jewish Muslim or anything else. Their job is to be the Police. I don’t think it would feel comfortable for a Muslim who calls the Police because he is having a roommate dispute with his Christian roommate, if the officer shows up and has a crucifix on his uniform. So I believe in keeping personal views strictly out of the workplace. It doesn’t mean that I don’t have them it just means that I don’t share them at work. Does that make sense?  

Middlebrooks: Yes. Would you share one with me?  

Powers: (He laughs) Well that depends. We are interviewing the Chief of Police here aren’t we? So, I don’t … I think that would be violating my boundary. Not to be difficult.  

Middlebrooks: No, that’s fine. Do you think that America’s youth is concerned with social problems?  

Powers: Probably not as much as they were thirty or forty years ago.  

Middlebrooks: Why do you think that is?  

(Sigh) Gosh I don’t know. I have a degree in sociology and I don’t have a theory on that. I probably should, shouldn’t I? I don’t know, I think you see things going in waves. Their
parents were very active during the sixties. This generation of kids, who were born of those parents or born after that, just don’t seem to be as engaged as they were. Maybe it is because the issues aren’t as pressing. Certainly back in the 1960’s, Civil Rights was at the forefront because it was a visible issue. Drinking fountains were labeled and people had to sit in the back of the bus and things like that. So it didn’t make a difference if you were personally affected by it if you were a minority yourself or not, you saw it everyday. I think that the contemporary issues that we are dealing with today are less obvious and more subtle. I think if you asked the average White person on campus if this is a racist campus, they’d say “No. Everything is fine. Everybody gets along well. There is a lot of diversity and I think its great.” But if you speak with minority students on campus they probably have a different perspective and feel marginalized in some ways. Or there aren’t services available to them that they would like to have available to them.

In Oxford, it was a minor thing. Not really a minor thing. But there was no ethnic hair care in the city of Oxford where I came from in Miami. Which was something that would never occur to White students, but for Black students that was an issue every time they needed to get their haircut. So I think its that sort of subtle thing. Its not as obvious and not as tangible as it was in the 1960’s. We had a draft in the 1960’s. We had people being shipped off to war. The people who ended up on college campuses in those days were, in many cases, were people who were politically and ideologically opposed to the war and they were going to college to avoid the draft. So you had a concentration of people on campuses who were very politically active. So it was sort of the perfect storm.

I think, for large scale activism. You also had a very repressive generation of people in power. If you listen to the rhetoric from the Govenor at the time. For example at Kent State, we just past the 41st anniversary of the Kent State shootings, if you listen to recordings of the Governors speeches up to and after Kent State, it was very, you know “We’re not gonna tolerate this. We’re gonna get these people. It was very confrontational and not at all the approach I would take as the Chief of Police today. So it was a very different time and very different period. But, I think the issues were probably more tangible and more pressing and urgent for the people who were engaged. Whereas here today, there a lot more subtle and perhaps less obvious.
Middlebrooks: Do you think these less obvious and subtle issues are equally as pressing?

Powers: I think they should be pressing but I think that because they are not so obvious, only the people who are affected by them feel pressed to act. You know what I mean? In the 1960’s the difference that you had back then, with civil rights for example, you had a lot of white people who were very much in support of the civil rights movement and moved it forward because they were seeing the effects of racism and segregation on a daily basis.

Middlebrooks: How do you identify our current political system? Is it a democracy or a variation? Functional or Flawed?

Powers: Your asking for personal opinions again. Um... Let’s just say that our form of government for our culture is probably the best we can do. It certainly has its shortcomings and has its problems but for the most part its probably the best we can do. That’s not to say that its perfect and that is doesn’t get used to the advantage of certain people. Certainly, you have to have money to get into any sort of influential position in government these days. So there is really a bias there. A socioeconomic bias in terms of representation within our system. But I don’t know how to fix that. But I would say that is probably a flaw.

Middlebrooks: How do you define the role of law enforcement in our culture? Powers: Our job at the end of the day is to keep the peace. To maintain order and to ensure everyone’s safety and to some extent civility. We’re sort of the buffer if you will. People have the right to engage in certain activities and people have the right to be free from being interfered with in certain cases and our job is to kind of be on that line between those two. A good example for right here in Athens is when you look at the fests. Students have a right to engage in parties on their private property. Not just students but anybody that wants to have a party on private property has the right to do that. But that right only extends as far as the point when it begins to interfere with other people’s rights to have a peaceful existence and live a quiet life and be able to carry on in their home. So the Police Department’s job is to be the buffer and the mediator between that. To tell the folks when they are complaining inappropriately that they are not doing anything wrong. “Get back to what your doing.” And also be there to say, “You guys
need to turn your stereo down or you need to tone your party down or else your going to get a citation because you are disrupting those peoples lives.” Setting fires in the street endangers everybody. So obviously our job is to keep that from happening and try and maintain order.

Middlebrooks: So do you feel that our society supports the existence of law enforcement, or does it work counter to the mandate for law enforcement?

Powers: The thing with this country is that Law Enforcement is very localized. This was something that happened in the 1960’s as well. You had local Law enforcement in the deep South that were not choosing to investigate and prosecute assaults, murders and things that involve racial bias because Law Enforcement was supportive of this racist policy and segregation. Then what happened is the federal government came in and began prosecuting these cases under violations of the civil rights act. I’d like to think that we’ve progressed beyond that to some extent.

There’s a fine balance to be struck. Law enforcement in its most ideal sense should represent the community we’re serving. So the priorities of the community in terms of safety and security should be the priorities of the Police Department. We’re not an army of occupation. We shouldn’t be here dictating to people. We are and should be part of the community. That doesn’t mean that if the community suddenly decides that it wants to dispense with the 21 year old drinking age, that as Law Enforcement we should say “Ok. We’re gonna stop enforcing it.” That’s not what I’m saying. But what I am saying is that we should be responsive to the community’s desires and priorities as we make our choices about control and things like that.

Is it possible for somebody to use the Police as a tool of repression or a tool for furthering their own political agendas and things? It certainly is possible. For the most part Police departments are structured to not be political, and hopefully not be holden to those kinds of pressures. We take great measures to try and ensure that we are somewhat independent and objective. But I certainly cannot sit here and say that there’s not some Police department somewhere that perhaps isn’t pursuing a personal agenda of their chief or elected lawmaker.

Middlebrooks: Do you believe our laws to be fair, just, and in support of human rights? Why or Why not?
Powers: I believe all laws *should* be fair and in support of human rights but the devil is in the deeds house. (didn’t understand this figure of speech). The problem with laws is there written by humans, enforced by humans and adjudicated by humans, which means that there is significant opportunity for margin of error. Sometimes that margin of error may be unintentional and sometimes it may be deliberate. How we choose to enforce laws can in themselves make an otherwise benign law bias motivated. If you understand what I’m saying. If we choose to enforce laws that disproportionately impact a particular ethnic group or socioeconomic class or something like that. I mean recently that argument has been made about drug enforcement. Its not really the case in our community but in big cities a lot of times drug enforcement disproportionately affects minorities communities. Hispanic or African American communities, or socioeconomic or of lower income areas. And yet there are probably lots of white-collar people who are doing drugs too yet enforcement efforts are not directed at that problem as much as they are at the low income problems or other traditionally ethnic neighborhoods and things like that. The law itself might be unbiased but how its discharged or enforced can make it a biased law. Does that make sense?

Middlebrooks: Can you elaborate on why you speculate that is the case in regards to drug enforcement laws?

Powers: Frankly, I think it goes back to a lot of what I mentioned in a different context about issues be obvious or visible. I think when you have neighborhoods that are run down, that have a lot of dilapidated homes, that are often lower income areas, drug abuse is more visible and more open and a lot of times more often associated with crime. So you have street muggings, you have robberies, you have burglaries to support drug habits. So that is what a lot of enforcement effort is directed toward. When you are talking about white-collar drug abuse that is going on in the board room or wherever the case may be for one thing it is less obvious. Its not going on at a street corner or somewhere that an officer on patrol can see it. Not always, but in a lot of cases, those people have the resources and the money to buy drugs so they are not engaging in the source of street crimes that are associated with drug abuse. So the argument could be made that the enforcement efforts are focused on the drug abusers who are harming non-abuser in support of their habit. But that disproportionately affects some classes of people.
Middlebrooks: What is law enforcements position on the use of medicinal mood and thought altering substances, such as psychoactive plant medicines used by indigenous cultures, within religious or spiritual institutions? And how does law enforcement in this country know when to pursue and prosecute illegal use of substances when it is in relationship to religious or spiritual purposes.

Powers: You know, this is going to sound like a bit of a cop out, no pun intended, but we have to rely on what the legislatures write in the law. The Police departments job is, a lot of cases, is to take what is black and white on a piece of paper and apply that to the real world which is not black and white. The law says that you will not exceed the speed limit. Or it says speed unreasonable for conditions, which is primeffacy determined to be whatever that posted speed limit is. The Police officer has to determine at what point that violation of the speed limit becomes something that deserves a ticket. One mile over, two miles over, three miles over, because the world is not black and white. The world is grey. The same is true when it comes to enforcement of drug laws and other things like that. We have to try to follow what the legislatures intent is. We use case law we use other decisions and adjudications and court decisions and things as guidance for trying to determine how the law should be enforced. That is what we have to fall back on. It goes back to that notion that as Police officers we may have personal opinions about medicinal drugs or drugs used in spiritual ceremonies and things like that, but we don’t have the privilege of being able to introduce….or shouldn’t have the privilege to introduce those personal biases or opinions to the discharge of our duties. We have to go by what the elected officials and the legislature have put in place as being kind of the will of the people, if you will. Does that make sense?

Middlebrooks: Do you think that there is a need for intellectual multidisciplinary discourse outside of government concerning contemporary social and political problems that threaten our future existence?

Powers: Well absolutely. I think there has to be a process that you follow. For one thing you cannot legislate morality. So there is a place for discourse about these issues and determination of what makes sense as a society and then you have to translate that into whether or not it is something that can be legislated. Gay marriage is a great example. That’s a matter in many cases as a religious belief. It is an issue that is viewed by many
as being moral. Well, you know, is that something that we should try and legislate? Or is that something that should be individual choice? I suppose the same could be said for drugs. There is more of an argument in drugs that there is harm to others. There is potential harm to others when people do start engaging in other criminal activities to support drug habits. It does affect people who are not abusing themselves. So there is more of an argument to be made there. But the real question has to be are we legislating these things to protect the good of the community? Are we legislating these things because we think its immoral and we’re trying to keep our community moral? You know what I mean? I mean its like not being allowed to buy alcohol before noon on Sunday or something. That is a law that was passed by the religious right because they don’t think that people should be drinking on Sunday because it’s the holy day. So they are going to make sure that everybody gets to heaven by passing a law that keeps them from breaking, you know, gods will or whatever you want to call it. Well, I don’t think that that is something that we should be legislating. But, I think that those conversations need to occur outside of the context of government, then some groups or think tanks or whatever need to pursue grassroots efforts to bring forward those ideas and translate them into meaningful law if that’s appropriate.

Middlebrooks: Do you think this would be effective in generating reform?

Powers: I think if you look historically at the significant reforms that have occurred over time that’s how they’ve started. They have started as sort of grassroots people standing up and saying, “This isn’t right and we need to fix it.” I think that Civil Rights Movement is a great example of that. Mass numbers of people said this is wrong. This is not a matter or morality or anything else but this is a matter of basic individual rights and rights to access services and things like that. It’s a human rights issue. And we should protect it. We should protect people. I think that is most effective. When you get a small minority of people that force a law through that protects or pursues their own interest, then I think you’ve got a problem because then you have one small minority legislating their views on the rest of society. And I don’t think that’s right.

Middlebrooks: Do you think that’s where we are?

Powers: Sometimes. I think it depends on the issue.

Middlebrooks: Thank you for the interview.
Powers: Society is hard to change it takes time and generations. I think that college campuses are a place where a lot of that discourse occurs and a lot of those new ideas come from. The new ideas always come from young people and the people that are in power are older people who (makes displeased and reluctant face) have a tendency to rear up at the idea of change. So it takes that generation working their way through to start effecting change at which point their kids are wanting to change things and they’re going “Em Not yet!”

Civil Rights for example. That was a pressing issue forty years ago. Its taken forty years to get where we are and we probably still aren’t where we need.
Laura Black  
Ohio University Communication Professor

Middlebrooks: Basically some of my questions are going to be related to the field of communication and some will just be more general questions that I am asking all faculty experts that I am interviewing. Since communication is such a large and all encompassing field, I was wondering if you could define any aspects or sections within the field that are concerned with activism?

Black: Sure. I think that um… communication studies is a really broad field as you said, but there are certain areas that are historically more focused on public discourse and those are pretty open for activism. Whereas we might teach public speaking in a kind of a skills class, the research in public advocacy really clearly teaches and advocates for social change and activism. Right, so if your learning how to analyze rhetorical messages then that helps you to craft messages that are persuasive and think about the values underlying what your saying and how to motivate people and persuade them to join up with your cause. Right. So I think that what we would call the rhetoric and public advocacy area is very focused in activism.

However there are others that, maybe within the last fifteen years or so other areas in communication studies have had a more activist bent. So for example, it might not seem like it at first but organizational communication has a lot of critical scholarship right now, by sort of unmasking power and domination, organizational settings are thinking about corporate social responsibility and ethics. Thinking about the quality of people’s work and family lives and what happens when you have a more flexible work arrangement. At what point does that become exploitive of employees because they’re expected to be working 24/7? So sort of that activism mentality comes in organizational contexts and I think you see that in other places too like health communication and environmental communication. So it is in pockets I would say throughout the discipline.

Middlebrooks: Could you talk then about your research interests? I was fascinated after reading about your interests because they sound similar to my own interests.

Black: Sure. The research that I do is mostly about public deliberation and dialogue, which I mean, those are really vague terms but the way that they get enacted in practice is
by trying to create spaces for people to talk about public issues that move away a little bit from politics as usual.

So typically when left to our own devices and we talk about politics we either talk to people who agree with us and we say “Whoa those other people are so terrible.” Or we argue and try to persuade somebody else about our position and why they’re wrong. Neither of those really lead to well reasoned conversation or to learning, or to kind of collective action or cross lines of difference. And so some of the research that I do is investigating settings and spaces and processes that help people speak across lines of difference in ways that are open to learning and open to working together even though you might come from different perspectives.

Middlebrooks: Ok so I’m just going to go off the record here and speak to you like a person and not like an interviewer ok?
Black: That’s an interesting distinction. (Laughter)

Middlebrooks: OK. Because what I am ultimately interested in understanding is specifically what you speak about, which makes me think I need to come and take a class. I am interested in a multidisciplinary scholarly group, or a think tank if you will, to discuss the severity of types of situations that we experience with the disparities that exist in our society.

Black: Like economic disparities?

Middlebrooks: Yes. All types, environmental, cultural, basically I would like to stress that outside the realm of government there is a need for this type of discourse, which would possible bring these ideas to the table of the government in hopes that it would generate policy reform. So I wonder if you could comment on your opinion on that type of idea?

Black: Yes. For sure. I think it is a fabulous idea and I think that you see it happening in pockets around different places. For example there is a group called the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation. That’s NCDD. Its people who are what I would call practitioners. They’re folks who work for non-profits or community organizations or something like this. Sometimes like grassroots activists, who have the goal to work on some kind of community issue, to engage people within a community about conversations like just what your talking about. Sometimes it has to do with a particular
issue like the achievement gap in schools or dealing with racial tension in a community or dealing with economic problems. A lot of times they coalesce around a particular issue. But the impedance for all of them is exactly what your talking about; to let real people whose lives are affected by complicated situations talk together and figure out what they want and what trade offs people are willing to make and try to help people understand other perspectives on something to be able to then eventually tell policy makers. Look this is actually what people want. Not what your lobbyists want or what you say you want and then don’t do.

So I think that there is a lot of that happening but I think it is scattered all over. There are some bigger organizations like this place called America Speaks. They hold town meetings of thousands of people using different sources of new media in order to compile and send information back and have people rank and vote and talk. So they’re pretty innovative and they’l partner with other organizations like um like the state of California Government and then have (phone rings) conversation about budget. That then supposedly directly influence policy makers. I’m just gonna ignore that phone because its too late. Does that make sense? So that’s an example of kind of a bigger scale operational go over a period of months and then have a real connection with policy makers with the direct goal to influence policy. But there are a lot of other smaller scale things that happen just in local communities. Right. Like the dialogue and diversity stuff that would be happening in Athens area. It might kind of these little pockets of people having these conversations.

**Middlebrooks:** Could you describe any political, economic, environmental, cultural, or social issues that you personally are concerned with?

**Black:** Sure. I mean I have a lot of sort of my own political values and beliefs and disparity concerns me a great deal. Right now I’ve been focusing on issues of environmental justice and trying to get a better understanding of some of the environmental communication issues in our region. Because I think there is a lot of potential for positive change here in terms of generating new forms of energy and having food that’s more locally produced and sustainable. And there’s also this incredible history of destruction and resource extraction and injustice and economic just awfulness that is
here in this region. I think it is just really “real” for many people here. Its something that having a long-standing interest in the environment as I’ve been drawn to.

But also I think pause. . I mean some of the larger issues that I care about I haven’t been as active about here um because I’m trying to think about what is something that would be doable and relevant to the local community if that makes sense. You know like I have strong opinions about gay marriage for example right? But that’s not really the issue here in Athens. Thinking about where I am and the difference I can make in the space of where I’m at. I think there is a lot of health related issues too especially like drug use and things that have to do with just the economic just the crazy poverty.

Middlebrooks: Do you think it is possible that our disparities have root causes that might be linked to or correlate to all of the disparities?

Black: Tell me what your thinking. .

Middlebrooks: Well I just think that there are certain things that perpetuate disparities that might be a root cause that could be investigated into all disparities rather than having specializations and having people look at one specific type of problem but analyzing the problems from an inter or multi disciplinary perspective. To see kind of what the similarities are for all of them.

Black: Sure. I think you would be asking a much deeper philosophical questions at that point about sort of the nature of human relations and are we able to. . or to what extent do we act out of empathy rather than just self interest. Questions like that are really ones that I think would be underlying.

I mean a lot of disparity is because people do what’s best for themselves and their family and they take advantage of the power that they have available to them, whatever that is. You know however limited or small it might be so you get this pecking order right? I can think about myself as having a place of privilege based on these things that I had no choice in right; my gender, my race, my economic the sort of where I was born. Right? I don’t have control over that but I benefit from them and I have prejudices against me for them and some reasons. Everyone, that is true of everyone right. So I think if your asking questions like what I think you are trying to get at, you move to a much deeper level then like why do we have environmental destruction in Athens? Right that’s a different kind of question.
**Middlebrooks**: So going back then to kind identity or the identification with religious or cultural ideology. Do you feel as though this is a positive or a negative or both in reference to public discourse?

**Black**: Well I think a lot of the public discourse is really ideological right now and people use this sort of ideological shortcuts instead of actually looking at information and thinking about people involved as other humans. So we tend to rely on sort of our party’s political party’s or what our church says or what our favorite blog says because that’s the . . you know that’s what we think we agree with without really thinking about it. I think that’s a big problem um but its hard to not do that with so much information that is available to people everyday.

We build our worldviews around these ideologies and its really hard to break out of it. So a lot of the things that I have looked at, a lot of these public dialogue programs try to help people understand their own ideological perspectives and standpoint I guess. And not to disregard it and throw it away and pretend like its not there but to recognize its limits right, and to try and really hang in there and hear people who are coming from different standpoints different perspectives and its not easy at all its difficult for everybody to do. I do think its possible in pockets but I don’t know on a large scale if we can do that. I ‘d like us to. Laughter I’m just not sure how capable we are of that.

**Middlebrooks**: Do you see any problems within mainstream communication media?

**Black**: That is a huge question. What do you mean by mainstream communication media?

**Middlebrooks**: Well I guess I mean. .

**Black**: You mean like TV media news?

**Middlebrooks**: Yes.

**Black**: I don’t really watch TV media news. Um I don’t know I think theres. . if we think about just news and journalism as a starting point for that question, then there are some conventions kind of in more traditional news casting for example that I think are actually kind of helpful and we have gotten away from them a lot in terms of having factual arguments and having trying to have this sense of neutrality in the writing. I think its useful right. Even though neutrality is kind of a myth right at least they tried to make an effort (laughter) at not saying “Ah there is all very terrible.” Um and as we move away
from that it becomes very difficult for people to judge um the quality of information and the quality of argument and the perspective being offered.

It is harder and harder for people to get good information about stuff. And I think that, as much as I love the Internet and new media and the social media and the ability for people to build information together. . I mean I think it is fabulous and amazing and it is totally transforming the way that people talk to each other and it actually makes us more aware of different perspectives than I think we would have been in the past. And I think those things are wonderful but I think that the downside of it is that its harder for people to a lot of people to sort of figure out what information to trust, what information to believe and then we end up kind of falling even more in these sort of ideological shortcuts.

So yea of course there is a lot of problems with sort of mainstream media and I haven’t watched TV news in years and I just don’t like it. It puts a bad taste in my mouth right. But the sort of cable news stuff, I mean I enjoy watching things that agree with me and I sort of laugh about it and I’m like “YEAH” but I don’t think that I am getting good information that way necessarily. You have to seek out information from sources that you don’t necessarily agree with in order to kind of hear their perspective but we don’t really want to do that most of the time.

Middlebrooks: Right. You mean mainstream society? Like in terms of seeking out alternative media sources that aren’t played on the TV everyday?

**Black:** Sure. Sure. Well and that gets at disparity too right? Like people who have a certain amount of disposable income and tech savvy are able to more easily access social media than people who don’t have much of an economic who don’t have a good economic situation. And they can afford a TV and they can afford a cable package but they don’t have a laptop and they don’t even really understand some of the social media stuff right so then it gets wider and wider this gap, and I think that causes problems too in terms of engaging the community whatever that is.

**Middlebrooks:** So when you say social media do you just mean like um any type of alternative media source that is providing information or is this kind of like a communication between people such as Facebook and Myspace etc.
Black: I mean it more in the second way. I think when scholars talk about social media it typically means like peer to peer collaboration in some way where its more interactive and its based on relationships.

Middlebrooks: So then is social media, in reference to its transforming the communications field as an academic discipline, is it being used for productive purposes or superficial purposes?

Black: I think both yea I think both. Like our website has a twitter feed. To announce “we have a speaker coming or congratulations to so and so who got an internship or check out this new video I mean we do a lot of that which is more like marketing right um. But I think that I mean you can see if you look at the uprising in Egypt and other kind of democratic movements that have been really transformed by peoples ability to use social media then I would call that a pretty productive purpose. And communication scholars are aware of that and excited about it and interested in learning more about how people use social media in order to transform their social interactions.

Middlebrooks: Do you think America’s youth today are concerned with contemporary social problems?

Black: I don’t know. I mean I’m not sure that its fair to characterize America’s youth in any one sweeping general way. I don’t know I mean I think the students that I interact with, some of them are and some of them aren’t at all and its hard for me to make some sort of generalization about sort of American youth at large.

Middlebrooks: Do you think that only governments and political leaders should be the ultimate public policy makers?

Black: No. No I don’t believe that. I think they have a role to play though. I mean you cant ignore them. But there is incredible abuses of power that are happening right now that need to be reigned in and the people are being ignored a lot of times and that’s a huge problem. I mean I think that that needs to be addressed.

Middlebrooks: Do you think it is possible to establish a multidisciplinary scholarly discourse that is related to contemporary social problems in search of root causes to a collective of the most pertinent grave issues that we face?

Black: I do. Yea. I definitely do. I think it’s a great idea and I think. I mean my undergraduate degree is an interdisciplinary studies degree. I think that the different ways
of thinking that are enabled by having people who are trained with different areas of expertise is really important because you bring different perspectives to the table.

As we were talking about before, you know if you’re talking about root causes I think you’re really getting at kind of deeper philosophical questions about the nature of human life and human connection with one another. Those are questions that no one discipline is able to answer, really fully I think.

Part of what I think communication would bring to the table in a kind of venture like your talking, would be a look at how these root causes are played out in everyday interaction.

**Middlebrooks**: Do you think that innovative and creative or more artistic forms of expression and communication is a vital tool for promoting or advocating change or counter thinking?

**Black**: Definitely yea. I think especially with folks who are more visually oriented having photos and kind of videos or interactive places online where people can make choices, I think those are really important in spreading messages. We are bombarded, as I said we get information all the time from all over the place and so we need something that really speaks to us in a way that can stir our compassion and help us think about issues that matter.

**Black**: What is your major again?

**Middlebrooks**: I am a dance major, but I have multidisciplinary interests like anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. I don’t really want to label myself into one category. I think that specialization is important, but I don’t think that it really gets to a well-rounded understanding of the world we live in if people don’t research various cultures, socio political or dominant power structures, and religious or spiritual theories.

**Black**: I’m a big advocate for that. I think specializing too early is in our culture something too soon is something that is pushed on people in our culture and I don’t think it is a good idea. I think it just leads to the narrowness of thinking. At the graduate level though I think specialization is necessary right because you have to become… If your trying to get a PHD you have to become a professor of something but it seems like its kind of this arc. Grad school you specialize and you become an expert then you get
tenure and then people get involved in these more interdisciplinary and creative projects which I think is fabulous.

But dance is interesting and you told me that and I forgotten. That’s really outside of my area of expertise you know. But my six year old loves dance and music. She lives in this sort of musical theatrical dancing sort of universe that she has all in her head. You know its all her, and its just sort of fabulous to her. So this sort of physical kinesthetic learning is just huge and is an important part of how she experiences the world. I think that is something that doesn’t get enough value in most learning environments.

**Middlebrooks:** I agree and sometimes I think people forget that their initial learning experiences are through kinesthetic learning or through movement.

**Black:** Some of the corporate work that I have done, I mean I did some stuff in organizations before going to grad school and some of the training programs that I participated in or witnessed would have toys and stuff like that on the table for people to be sort of playing with while they were talking as away to sort of engage a more kinesthetic and tactile kind of sense that I thought was sort of interesting. Even though your in this workshop where your sitting and watching powerpoint slides and talking to others for like 8 hours a day there is still these little koosh balls or things you can juggle or doodle pads. There is at least recognition of multiple ways and multiple levels of engaging in thoughts and process and learning, which I thought was cool.

**Middlebrooks:** I find non-verbal communication fascinating. I relate to your daughter because as a kid I didn’t pick up dance until I was in middle school but I was very movement oriented and I didn’t have very good communication skills. So once I found dance that was all that mattered. Now in college, I have been able to really appreciate the more academic perspectives that are a part dance as an academic discipline. I think right brain ways of thinking in our society is often left out or suppressed.

**Black:** Yea. Well the connection to public policy too is really tricky. Like a really mundane connection would be like policy related to the arts or whatever. . .but I think what would be more interesting is to think about ways people can engage in creative, visual, or artistic processes that can help them better understand social issues, that could then lead to, down the road something more policy oriented. Not only would that sort of tactile, physical process, if you were doing it with people in your community who you
hadn’t met. Right, like the act of doing that builds something together but also the product could be something that could be helpful for people thinking about murals in the community or what matters to your values here and what is at stake in the community. Again this is a little out of my particular area, but I think that stuff is really important.

**Middlebrooks:** Yea! For me too! I think, as another example, that literal representations of performance used for activism. . . like sometimes I envision 100 people walking down court street, covered in some type of syrup that looks like oil, or they are all dressed in business suits walking uniformly and carrying briefcases and stealing dollars from the person in front of them. You know what I mean?

**Black:** (Laughter) Sure.

**Middlebrooks:** But yet, despite that being a little bit literal, there is a lot of performance art activism that occurs that is so avant-garde that people aren’t able to understand what that message is, or what the artists are trying to communicate. So I think that communication is key for any type of artistic expression of socio-economic or political issues in our society. So that is what I am trying to look into to see if other people feel as though this could be a tool used for activism.

**Black:** I mean you see some environmental activists showing up to public meetings dressed as polar bears, you know, As an example of that kind of performative nature. Like polar bears can’t come to a meeting and speak and say you are melting our house so “I from the Sierra Club will come dressed as a polar bear.” It’s a noble cause but it is often very difficult for the institution of the public meeting to handle, and I think you get this collision of worlds there.

**Middlebrooks:** Well Thank you!

**Black:** Yea! Good stuff!
Appendix II
Toronto, Ontario, Canada Interviews

Sashar Zarif
Dir. of Sashar Zarif Dance Theatre/Joshgoon, The Canadian Academy of Azerbaijani Dance/ Dancers for Peace International Festival and Centre for Dance Studies
http://sashardance.com/

Sashar Zarif, BFA, MA, PhD Cand. Middle Sex University, UK. (those studies currently on hold) Artistic director of SasharZarifDanceTheatre/ Joshgoon, The Canadian Academy of Azerbaijani Dance/ Dancers for Peace International Festival and Centre for Dance Studies. Inspired by a strong artistic family background, recipient of numerous awards for his excellence in arts, Sashar Zarif is an internationally renowned multidisciplinary artist, educator, and researcher in the field of dance ethnology and ethnomusicology based in Toronto, Canada.

He received his formal academic training in performing arts at the Azerbaijan Conservatory of Music and Dance where he was awarded the honorary title of “Artist for People of Azerbaijan”. He continued his Bachelor (Fine Art, Bachelor of Science, and Bachelor of Performing Arts) and Master (Arts-Dance), degree at York University in Toronto. Zarif has studied various forms of dance and music including Uzbek, Tadjeek, Persian, Georgian, Chechen, Afghan, Middle Eastern, Flamenco, Bharatanatyam, and Lezginka. He is a part time faculty at the Dance Department teaching “Fundamentals of Dance Performance” and “Introduction to World Dance Practices: Dances of North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia” and Fine Arts Cultural Studies teaching “Performing Arts in Global Perspective” at York University.

Among many other fields, Sashar specializes in the filed of Sufi and Shamanic dance rituals of and near Central Asia. Through many years of fieldwork and study he has been able to share the result of his research and creativity internationally by teaching and performing across the globe. His accomplishment in this field has brought him golden opportunities such as his collaborative project/performance with internationally renowned, singer, Alim Qasimov from Azerbaijan and Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali, the prodigious nephews of legendary qawwali master, Nusret Fateh Ali Khan. He has collaborated with many well known artists such as Holly Small, Carol Anderson, Keiko
Kitano, Soheil Parsa, Terrill Maguire, Anne Bourn, Suba Shankaran to name a few. Sashar and Susan Cash have been collaborating on a number of cultural, global projects that are revealing intriguing creative results.

Sashar was a recipient of Toronto International Dance Festival’s Paula Citron Award in 2006 and the Chalmers Professional Development grant from the Ontario Arts Council in 2003. Sashar was recently named the 2008 recipient of the Skills for Change New Pioneer Award for the Arts for being an artistic ambassador for multiculturalism and diversity, and was nominated for a Dora Award for outstanding performance in 2008 alongside such dance luminaries as the artists of the National Ballet of Canada and contemporary dance icon Peggy Baker.

(Middlebrooks: Could you tell me about your artistic experiences prior to your formal performing arts training and how did that lead into the Azerbaijan Conservatory of Music and Dance?)

Zarif was born in an immigrant family in Iran and migrated from Azerbaijan after the Soviet revolution. “I was raised by my grandmother for the first nine years of my life,” he said. He understood life through her life. During these first nine years of his life his Grandmother told him the stories about his culture. Zarif’s grandmother “was a dancer and musician and she was 98 years old.” She would sit on a carpet and talk about cultural dances to him. Although she could no longer dance anymore, she would demonstrate certain dances with only her upper body. According to Zarif, he was his grandmother’s legs. His Grandmother was a great storyteller and he remembers that her visual memory was strong because of her background in drawing and imagery. Zarif’s entire family was involved in the arts.

Listening to his Grandmother’s stories about culture and dance was how Zarif was first introduced to art and performance. He would eventually learn how to use performance to transform the space. Additionally, the displacement he experienced by leaving Azerbaijan and traveling to Toronto was also a major element in his ability to transform the space.

During a two-year period, when Zarif lived in Turkey, he continued on the tradition by playing and singing the songs that his grandmother would sing to him. He
came to Canada to fulfill his parents’ wishes, which was to study engineering. Zarif returned to Azerbaijan in 1993.

Zarif was unable to continue with his pursuits in Engineering and decided to take some ballet and modern classes while at York University. He also began to learn various forms of cultural dances while at York, like Bharatanyam and Flamenco. During this time he started a group and a school known as the Sashar Zarif Dance Theatre.

In 2000, Zarif started intensively touring Europe. He traveled extensively holding workshops, performing, and teaching master classes around the world. He took the money from the workshops and classes and went to countries like Iran, Mongolia, Central Asia, and Uzbekistan. He also conducted countless hours of fieldwork over several months while traveling through these regions.

Over the course of four years, Zarif was creating and developing ideas for performance material, while simultaneously conducting Ethnographic fieldwork throughout a multitude of European and Asian countries. Through Ethnography and his European tour, he gradually developed his curriculum and repertoire for his company and school.

He has taught western Mongolian dance, and a lot of traditional dance combined with contemporary dance. At York University, after receiving his masters, he has taught courses such as Popular arts, globalization, introduction to world dance practices, and dance ethnography.

While touring Europe, he taught many things that he had learned about various cultural forms of dance in the years prior. “The benefit of teaching in Europe is that I had to make my culture understood. Not in way that eastern or western is understood through institutions but the way that it is.” He values his culture and had the urge to tell his story and be understood through performance.

After a long period of re-creating traditional performances, Zarif realized he wanted to be able to convey his story in a way that was accessible to his viewers. So he began to utilize contemporary and traditional performance techniques together in order to allow the audience to further understand the story he was telling.

“I wanted to make a connection between multiculturalism and authenticity.”
He moved more to contemporary dance because he wanted to deal with his own story.
“Traditional forms of dance are not really being practiced and performed here,” Zarif said. While studying in Toronto, he wanted to work on his understanding of where he was, and work with the idea of identity. He felt as though he moved on from indentifying with his tribal identity to bring the present and future elements of identity into his current life. He decided to work towards understanding his present and how he relates to the future. Zarif believes that “A healthy identity is when all these elements are there. Past, present, and future.”

Zarif thinks that cultural pride should be presented in a healthy way. He felt he needed to “claim what is mine and define it rather then someone else from a western culture trying to define it.” He spoke about Anti Islamic propaganda starting and stated that he is a part of Islamic culture and the Canadian culture. To better understand and represent himself he has to move on into the contemporary realms of performance.

Zarif briefly discussed Edward Said in reference to his theories of identity written in his book *Orientalism*, which evidently many people didn’t like at first. Another interesting book on identity that Zarif suggested was by Amin Maalouf, who is a Christian Lebanese author that talks about aspects of the Islamic culture.

**Middlebrooks:** So now as a contemporary artist, could you speak about your interest and past experiences with interdisciplinary work?

Zarif has been involved with numerous cross-cultural collaborations in order to bring himself and his art to an effective level of communication. He enjoys a diverse environment, and is easily able to find a place for himself during the process. He also enjoys doing workshops and conferences for fun, as opposed to having to do them as necessity or for commodity.

He discussed a collaboration he was involved with known as Dancers for Peace, which occurred in Toronto just one month after the September 11th attacks. “To create connection between culture and create peace” was the ultimate mission of the performance. Zarif confirms that he considers himself an activist because he attempts to “Give dance a voice through social issues.”

In Azerbaijan, performance is an integrated ensemble of dance, music, and poetry connected to the culture, which is based on Sufi and Shamanic beliefs. He has worked with a wide variety of musicians, visual artists, and poets.
Zarif felt as though he was on an honest quest to connect multiculturalism and authenticity but he didn’t want to create perfection. At the moment of transition, or “the rite of passage into contemporary,” as Zarif called it, he remembered something that his teacher would tell him. His teacher would ask him “What is beautiful? Other students would answer perfection, but my teacher said that reality is beautiful. He revisited this idea choreographically many years later.

He moved into contemporary dance and “it was not a great reality at first,” he said. He understood that he did not yet have great costumes and other performance elements that many artists did have at this time. He was not trying to please artists and he wasn’t trying to make himself accepted.

Public and critical reactions have been good but it has been a difficult road. It is challenging to find people to trust what is happening. “You have to find people that trust you. I am intuitive and that is coming from my roots,” he said.

Zarif stated that he has a problem within his own Azerbaijani culture because people are used to a story being told about who they are culturally. “They want a story,” he said. Despite the initial negative critical responses, Zarif has been more accepted as time progressed. After his last show he was very excited to receive positive feedback from the audience. He had a Q & A session after the performance “so that they could tell their own stories. That will make people start taking responsibility in telling their story.”

Middlebrooks: Can you tell me more about your studies in the field of Sufism and shamanic dance rituals of and near central Asia?

“Central Asia is heavily embedded in shamanic beliefs. They are connected to nature. Hell, heaven and a fear of god is not part of the culture.” Zarif stated when Islam, which is similar to Christianity in many ways, came to the area of Azerbaijani, the Shamanic people of the region survived by transforming themselves into the Sufi movement. Zarif believes this was a great occurrence because they were able to find a connection with the Islamic culture.

Zarif affirmed, “The Sufi is a way of life, against all things that is known about Sufis in the West. It is not a label. People will tell you that you are Sufi because you have a way of life, not attached to material things, promoting love, and you are not following any religion based on fear, then you are a Sufi.”
What Zarif finds most fascinating about Islamic Sufism is that it is one of the only religions that uses dance to pray. “Muslims pray five times a day, but they use movements to communicate with God, and that is dance,” he said. “That is why they are mostly hesitant to call that dance, because of how dance was redefined.”

Zarif discussed how he wanted to reconstruct a Persian dance that was connected to mysticism through poetry and music as part of his master’s research. He discovered a trio ensemble of poetry, music, and dance that existed at the heart of these shamanic style performance rituals. “They all have time involved,” he said. “They call it the Time Arts Trio and it was used by Sufis to educate, practice, and live what they believe in. The thoughts and beliefs came in word and then the words were given a heartbeat, 1, 2, 3.

Zarif claimed that musical scales do not exist in Sufism because, “It was easier to remember these oral traditions with known rhythms, then they give you a vision like loving or surrender through music and melody. They dance to give you an opportunity to exercise what they are preaching. They would let would let go of the knees as part of the surrender and inspiration to let go of any attachments. That is how Sufism, through dance, music, and poetry is very profound and functional. A lot of healing and meditative theories have been there for many years.”

Zarif researched Sufi and Shamanic poetry, music, and philosophy and constructed a dance because he believed that dance had disappeared from the Time Arts Trio. He used metaphors because words are not able to convey the philosophies. Since Sufis use metaphors, he decided to use metaphors in this dance.

Zarif then goes into a compelling story. He said that in Sufism, as well as other mystical traditions, wine is considered a form of knowledge. He further described wine houses that Sufis and mystics would sit at and debate, learn, and grow. “Sagli is the one who brought you the knowledge,” he said. “Spahi will know if you are ready for another cup of wine. Saghi will break your heart or make you fall in love with her to help you experience the love.

Zarif believed these to be merely mystical characters until 2007 when he began to believe otherwise.

“In 2007, I was doing film work in Azerbaijan. One day was particularly difficult because I visited a scientist, historian, and a prince with questions regarding Saghi and
Spahi. The Prince said that I looked very down and asked if there was anything that he could do for me. I said nothing at first. He asked, “What would you wish for now?” I told the Prince that I wanted to understand more about a Saghi.

“Surprisingly, the Prince made a call and arranged a meeting of sorts. After an eight and a half hour jeep ride in the pouring rain, I arrived to a small village high in the Caucasus Mountains where many Sufis lived. This was dangerous because much of these mountain regions were so isolated that Communists were not able to control people there. From 2:00 pm until 11:00pm different old men and women talked with me about what I was in search for. They emptied a small room and took furniture out, and told me they had accepted me because they will do wine house rituals for me.

They did rituals in the wine house. They made syrups and drinks and came with buckets and sat in the room with many different people. They started playing musical rhythms, singing ghazal poetry, and dancing. Then, a very old man and woman, who had escorted me inside earlier, told me that the Saghi was an 84 year old woman. She was the bearer of the wine in the house of knowledge. They told me she used to dance and sing the sacred song from 11:30pm until 4:00am.

I wanted to hear the sacred song and see the Saghi. The old man and woman told me to stay and wait until 7am and I would hear it. They told me she only sings at morning when milking the cows and everyone takes the milk as blessed milk.

I was told to sit far enough away so that I wouldn’t disturb the moment. To my amazement, there sat a very old woman with long white hair, milking a cow with a metal bucket. I was able to get a few moments of video footage of this but then I had to promise the old man and woman that I would never use the video. I was extremely excited by all of this. This was so interesting to me because something is not known that a Saghi character actually exists.”

Zarif also brings up Whirling dervishes, which is “one sect of Sufism started in Turkey by a Persian Afghani named Rumi. Walking in bazaar the goldsmith making rhythm of the hammers dance was the heart of self-discovery, sadness and happiness, and reality. Even though Sufism was always a threat to organized religion, they welcomed Sufism into the courts. Every movement of Sufis was a reaction to the movement of
governing bodies. “The Ottoman empire used Sufis in war lines and had dancers and musicians play and empower the whole army,” he said.

According to Zarif, “Sama” means whirling or active meditation in Sufism. “Mediation is not really relaxed but it is when you consider ordinary reality. Concentration, dedication, and intention is a meditation.”

Zarif asserts the displacement of many of the traditional ideas held by Whirling Dervishes was caused by tourism when they were forced to perform for people who were not of the culture. “Tanoura” is a form of whirling that has lost its essence because it became a performance. Authentic ritual is not happening onstage. It can be witnessed but it is not being performed,” he said. “Therefore it is inspired by unity and the search for connection to the spiritual world.”
Middlebrooks: Where did you grow up and what type of artistic experiences were you involved in?

Deveau grew up in Toronto and started dancing at the age of three. She joined the Canadian Children’s Dance Theatre (CCDT) when she was 8 years old. She stated that the CCDT has a company for young people between the ages of 12-19 years of age. Deveau performed and toured with the CCDT during her high school years. She trained primarily in modern, with a focus in Limón and ballet.

Deveau pursued her undergraduate degree in anthropology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver. During this time she became interested in writing about trans-cultural dance. This eventually led to her decision to quit dancing. However, she continued to take classes recreationally. Her interest in social work and anthropology was so strong and this became her main focus for a significant period of time.

While at UBC, Deveau worked extensively with the LGBT community. She also worked at the sexual assault center and did anti-violence work. She found this type of activist work to be extremely satisfying. She lost interest in pursuing her degree, and became more interested in the frontline work. This work took over her life and she no longer cared about going to class. She came back to Toronto to take class, and the company, CCDT invited her to perform again.

Deveau landed a job as a rehearsal director at a company known as Event Horizon Dance. She was now responsible for various tasks within the company such as supervising the rehearsals, directing, and coordinating the training, touring, and performing. During this time Deveau teamed up with Miranda Abbott, the director of Event Horizon Dance Company. Deveau and Abbott studied together at the Toronto Dance Theatre. “Abbott was B- girl and a strong social activist as well,” said Deveau.

Middlebrooks: Could you tell me more about your recent works and collaborations?
“Last year I teamed up with Jesse Dell and we created JD Dance,” Deveau said. She mentioned how “JD” represents both Deveaus initials and Dells. “It was pretty easy to name the company,” she admitted.

**Middlebrooks:** Could you tell me more about JD Dance?

According to Deveau, JD Dance integrates various activist elements within the content of the choreography. Much of the repertoire is oriented towards gender and sexuality but it also grounded in historical research. “We’re about wanting to say something or make statements to a broad audience,” she said.

Deveau mentions her interest and work with The Scandelles, which is a burlesque political theatre group that utilizes contemporary choreography into their theatrical productions. “They get an overwhelming response,” Deveau said.

Deveau stated that her “work is well received primarily among the queer crowd.” Recently the company has been using pop cultural references to connect with the audience. They have incorporated pop music within their choreography and the audience has responded positively. Deveau also confirms that the Company encompasses a lot of fusion between various genres, like modern dance, contemporary, and burlesque.

While discussing a piece entitled “Carnivale Cabaret,” Deveau stated she struggled to find dancers to work with her on this piece. This work “centered around the 19th century carnival sideshow and the acts of the carnival.” It is about bringing works to the stage that concern identity and sexuality. She wanted to start to open up the contemporary artist forum of social issues and dance.

Deveau talks about a new production known as “Ink to Flesh.” Deveau stated her and Dell expanded on an idea about the tattoo lady at the carnival. “Ink to Flesh” is an examination on the changes regarding the ideal physical body over time. There are three separate works in this production, “Tattwo,” “Army of Barbie,” and “A Mark.”

Jordana and Dell collaborated together for the first two sections. The final section was a work commissioned by Kate Franklin. “A Mark,” concerns the scars or marks that are left behind after relationships end. She explored the emotional and physical marks that can be left behind.
“Tattwo” was based around the character and the history of the sideshow and eroticization and how these carnival people were considered freaks. Additionally, the physical type of things done within this community of carnival sideshow artists was also part of the subject matter. A central idea in this piece is a question for the spectator concerning societal views on the beautiful and the grotesque.

Another section Deveau discussed was “Army of Barbie,” which is talking about costumes and looks at where we are in society today. This section also investigates the use of digitally augmented surgery and questions whether it is either positive and/or beautiful in our society.

Middlebrooks: What is the mission or intent for JD Dance?

“Essentially, JD Dance is about creating contemporary dance work that is rooted in social consciousness and awareness. We are committed to creative process research and creative discovery. We’ve also gotten a lot of funding and support even though we’re in the early stages of the company.”

Middlebrooks: How would you describe your creative process and the methodology that you use in creating works?

“Tattwo started with the idea of the freak show, like the bearded lady. We worked with a woman’s experience with this affliction that she has,” Deveau said. Deveau also admits there are aspects of politics around the characters at the carnival. “People pay money to see these “freaks” and the looking in on the perspective of their life and existence is political. However, the characters chose to be there. I find this type of research process fascinating.”

Deveau and Dell developed two different characters who had similar philosophies on life and what their individual image meant to them. Then they created images that represented them and designed a full body tattoo. This became the main idea for the show in the carnival. It was autobiographical in the sense that the dancers were characters expressing their own identity and life philosophies.

The opening of the piece was a dance with the artwork of images that represented the tattoo. A full body suit costume that had the tattoo design all over it was worn by the dancers and gave the appearance that the dancers were heavily tattooed. Mythological beings and various other symbols were depicted in the tattoos.
Prior to the rehearsals for this piece, Deveau and Dell conducted a lot of research about the written history of over 500 years of tattoos. Deveau believes “Tattoos have probably been around for hundreds of thousands of years.” We researched tattoos and markers of rites of passage from royalty to slavery. They found fascinating information about the branding and controlling of slaves by European explorers. They found people covered in tattoos and many thought that this type of work was of Satan or the Devil. People would show that they were better than the others because the tattooed people were devil worshippers.

Dell and Deveau worked with composer Jordan O’Conner, for this production. “He started laying notes on the piano and was really inspired. He had the idea of miniatures or segments,” she said. “So we created a series of miniatures in the performance.” The spotlight comes up throughout the piece illuminating moments of the characters lives. Deveau believes “Tattwo” is “now an abstract piece with a series of episodes that we drew from our research.”

Deveau said, “There was an erotic and religious connotation within the piece. Additionally, control and slavery were also elements found in the research that was integrated into the dance.”

Since the costumes have a lot going on and they didn’t want to over complicate things, the choreography was from a more minimal style. They utilized poses in order to represent the timeless ageless beauty that women are capable of possessing. Deveau demonstrated various poses with her upper body that were both symbols of contemporary beauty and grotesqueness. She used body positions that represented model poses with the hands on the hips and a sideward lean of the torso. Conversely, she demonstrated distorted body positions by contracting her abdominals creating a humpback with a sideward tilting head, and her hands and arms curled up tightly towards her squinted face to represent grotesque.

Middlebrooks: Do you feel as though you have been shaped or influenced by your culture?
Deveau believes that she has been significantly influenced by her culture and upbringing. She grew up with a lot of education and privileges. Her mother was a major influence for her as well. She taught her the importance of giving back to people.

In school, Deveau was involved with the environmental club and has always had a passion and interest in environmental activism. When she stopped dancing at the University, Deveau had more free time for her activist interests. She started hanging out with different student organizations for women’s rights, queer issues, and environmental awareness.

When Deveau began working with the sexual assault center, she realized her interest in coordinating things and trying to get other people involved and passionate about these ideas as well. Dance, artistry, and choreography ended up being the method in which she wanted to do that.

“The kids are really committed and dedicated to what they do in their training. Teenagers are so willing and have so much to offer. I can’t believe that I have been paid for doing this.” She was organizing and inspiring young people and she loved it.

Deveaus job is facilitating young artists. She firmly believes that dialogue and change does happen through art. She also sees the reality of pressures with body issues and sexuality and how they can contribute to various issues with young people. Dance and social activism is what brings them together.

Her and Dell have the same passion with Jesse and develop her own voice

**Middlebrooks:** Are there any artist that you are influenced by and why?

“Sharon B. Moore is one. I find her really exciting. I love to research into what she is doing. Danny Grossman is another. He has many important ideas. Deborah Lundmark, of course. They dream big and they want to focus on young people. Hopefully, I can take my work into high schools and in the educational system someday.

**Links to Video Interviews with Jesse Dell and Jordana Deveau Tattwo**
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDJCWs4_KFc&feature=player_embedded#)
**Army of Barbie**
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg1HsasjnVo&feature=player_embedded)
Malgorzata Nowacka  
Warsaw, Poland  
Choreographer and Contemporary Dance Artist in Toronto, ON, Canada. Founder of the Chimera Project  

Middlebrooks: Is there an underlying message involved in your choice to use dark thematic material as subject matter for your choreographic works?

Nowacka took a silent pause for a few moments and stated that she should have an answer. She says “what I am really saying is look at this. I am not saying anything profound just check this out.” Nowacka believes that if choreographers have an underlying message or statement to their work, then they must also have some type of answer or solution. She does not feel as though she has a solution to contemporary problems, therefore her work usually consists of posing questions regarding certain issues. “My work doesn’t say anything extremely concrete.”

Middlebrooks: How has your choreographic choices changed or evolved in comparison to your earlier works?

Nowacka stated that over time, she began to feel constricted and bound to technique. Once she began to shed her attachment to technique, her work gradually became increasingly dark and violent. “It has made it more difficult to sell,” she added.

Nowacka observes only a mere few major cities in Canada that are receptive to her work. She states that in many other places she finds it a difficult market for her darker and physically aggressive work.

Middlebrooks: Would you categorize yourself within a sub-cultural genre of performance such as Goth?

“I am not associated with any subculture,” Nowacka notes. In fact, she confirms her wishes to disassociate herself from subcultures altogether because according to her, they are limiting. “A subculture also carries specific messages with it, and if you bisect subcultures philosophies on one point or another, not everyone feels the same way. I just don’t want to be pigeonholed into that, or any one style or belief.”

Middlebrooks: What types of art were specific to your work while studying at the Ontario College of Art and Design?
Nowacka attributes some of her interest in the visual arts to her parents who were also artists. Nowacka focused on figure art and painting in the classical realm. She also spent time studying new media and performance art at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

Middlebrooks: Can you tell me a bit about the work you have done involving fusion of contemporary dance and hip-hop?

“Yes, I love popping and locking,” she says with excitement. Nowacka enjoys some qualitative elements involved in the hip-hop forms of pop and lock. She integrates these abrupt stops of the body and reverberations subtly into her movement style. “It’s not necessarily identifiable in every work, but it’s subtle and mixed in the choreography.” She states that one of her newer ballets was inspired by break dancing and its approach towards partnering.

Middlebrooks: Have you ever experimented with the fusion of any other styles of dance together?

Nowacka mentions her previous experience with the Northern Indian Classical dance form known as Kathak. Joanna De Souza, another Canadian Contemporary artist with whom I interviewed while in Toronto, has collaborated with Nowacka. She discusses how De Souza was able to bring her to an increased awareness and appreciation for Kathak. Nowacka was initially interested in the relationship between the sacred and the gesture. Additionally, the storytelling through the sacred gesture, which can be seen in Kathak, was also of great interest to Nowacka.

Middlebrooks: Does your Polish heritage or multi-cultural backgrounds influence any of your creations?

Nowacka affirms that her Polish background and cultural experiences of growing up in a third world country during a period of political unrest significantly impacted her view of the world and her choreographic style. She notes that the extra edge of darkness that is found in her work is specifically related to this. Nowacka says that the difference is, “Canadians are solid in how they view their presence here and their future. They are grounded and planning retirement. Whereas people who have come from a political state of unrest find this more challenging. You always know that in the back of your mind, it
is just temporary but there is a bit of you that is always ready for the hurricane or the plague because that is what you grew up with.”

According to Nowacka, this cultural situation she describes is probably where most of her dark thematic material comes from. Nowacka believes that her close friends, who are also Polish, “are simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic.” She claims they are “100% optimistic but counting on nothing and expecting nothing.” She asserts that this essentially brings more joy because then one never expects it to come true in the first place.

As for Nowacka’s Canadian cultural influence, she thinks that artists are “always referencing other cultures whether we are aware of it or not.” She mentions her development of a piece based on Kathak. “Every piece I have done has translated through my work, from the Classical Indian to Popping and Locking. Artists are exposed to culture all the time.”

Middlebrooks: In regards to the Chimera Project, how do you explore the paradoxes and underlying tensions of contemporary society? In what aspects do you explore this?

“I explore these ideas philosophically,” Nowacka answers. She was interested in performing in the type of choreographic works that she loved to watch. She was drawn to dances that incorporated a strong emphasis on the woman. In regards to the gender roles that Nowacka utilizes the men often possess a standard masculine quality and the women embody extremely powerful qualities. Nowacka equates the use of both power and masculinity in her works with a type of male energy. She is drawn to using five men and three women for choreographic pieces. She also notes her interest in the use of aggression and male energy as a major theme of her choreographic specifications.

“The mission is to reach broad audiences with the work and the work is aimed to connect audiences to themselves. So people go into the theatre and find a connection to themselves. If the subject matter is about faith, and the work is inherently posing questions, then its tapping into their own questions about faith. This makes us as performers more vibrant and alive as we question in that moment.”

Nowacka insists that as we become adults, we are swept up in our daily lives and forget to take the moment to be vibrant in the present. This is ultimately her mission, to feel and live vibrantly through art. To be jarring, compelling, and tapping into a visceral
language. She realized this during a live performance and felt so alive after seeing the performance that she knew then how to feel alive on the stage.

**Middlebrooks:** Are there any artists that you admire and why?

Damien Hirst is one artist that Nowacka admires because he is art about ideas. She believes Hurst to be the king of making art about ideas.

Matthew Barney, Amon Tobin, which Nowacka calls “a chameleon but his core element always remains the same.” Quentin Tarentino is the god of all things in Nowacka’s world.

**Middlebrooks:** Do you consistently utilize contemporary society as subject matter for choreography?

Nowacka states both yes and no. She aims to connect to things that are societal emergencies, but not large-scale issues like homelessness. Rather her interest is related to the individual. She uses the example of when people are haunted or plagued by certain things, which subsequently prevents them from living a better life. The concept of an individual who is living in a state of fear and is held down by this fear is of major interest to Nowacka as a conceptual basis for her choreography.

Another interest of hers, which is definitely related to contemporary society, is gender. Nowacka believes that she is re-examining the feminist through many of her projects. However, she admitted that she has been called misogynistic in the past. She describes how people are held down by structures or personal convictions and therefore turned into ghosts. She is fascinated how in some ways people are unaware of this burden that they carry that hold them down.

**Middlebrooks:** What is contemporary dance to you and how is it different from modern dance?

Immediately, Nowacka confirms that there *is* a difference between contemporary dance and modern dance. “Modern dance is a tradition that has evolved with specific forms and visionaries that in turn started specific creations and techniques. These forms and techniques are distinct and recognizable.” According to Nowacka, contemporary dance is the next step from modern dance but it cannot yet be exactly defined.
Nowacka admits that she is not much a fan of modern dance. Although she respects and honors its significance in the history of the art of dance, it is difficult for her to enjoy viewing modern because “its place in society now is contextual.”

Nowacka’s choreographic endeavors have always been of a contemporary nature. More recent projects Nowacka is producing, such as *The Calm Before*. . . concerns “the architecture of impending calamity.” She believes we have a huge environmental problem facing society, but we remain in the calm before the storm. She states, “We are holding our breath pretending that we know what will happen but we don’t.” She suggests that we are in the architecture of a grand event that is visible to society, and this is the basis for the generation of choreographic material for this piece. Nowacka even displays how she is guilty of the same idea that she is working with when she conveys her worry about the environment, but how she tries often not to think about it.

**Middlebrooks:** How do you think the general population view the possible environmental calamity that you discuss?

“Well, being from Poland, I think that people should be seeing what is going on. I am often surprised when people are not. I expect nothing to happen, but in the back of my mind the possibility exists for it all to burn down or us all to die. If we don’t it will be great. It is very dark, I know, but that is where I come from.”

Nowacka is a contemporary artist who embodies interdisciplinary methods. She collaborates with musicians, visual artists, video filmmakers, and dancers. She has a bold and shadowy style embedded into her work, which is derived from prior cultural experiences. She integrates various multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary elements into her contemporary art making. She has worked with Bravo!Fact and has done dance film work. She is also producing the annual Fresh Blood Festival in Toronto, which is a performance gathering to display cutting edge and emerging contemporary choreographers in the Toronto area.
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