



QUESTIONS OF PRACTICE

As Seen Through the Windshield (And Other Perspectives on Making Dance)

By Wendy Rogers

As Seen Through The Windshield (And Other Perspectives On Making Dances)

A PRESENTATION AND TOWN HALL DISCUSSION FOR DANCE MAKERS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS WITH CHOREOGRAPHER WENDY ROGERS. © 2007 WENDY ROGERS

A Dance Discursion sponsored by Dance Advance

Tuesday, 15 March 2005, 7.00pm | Meeting House Theater | Community Education Center | Philadelphia, PA

Introductory comments by Bill Bissell: I'm delighted to have Wendy Rogers here in Philadelphia tonight. Dance Advance has been conducting an informal series of "Dance Discursions" for the past two years, and tonight Wendy will provide us with a glimpse into her working process. Her presentation will serve, I hope, to stimulate conversation about making dance and the many different things that making dance means for each of us.



I'm very conscious of how much information we're bombarded with every day and how hard we work at trying to filter it, to make sense of it, and to continue to make work under very challenging circumstances. I feel it is important for us to take a moment, as difficult as that can be sometimes, to sit back collectively and talk about what we do.

We all come at our work from different viewpoints. Though we are constantly being asked for business plans, outlines of current projects, and productivity goals for our work, ultimately the art is in the dance itself. Wendy Rogers is someone that I've heard speak several times and in each instance I have felt moved and renewed and left with a feeling that the work we all do is so important within our culture.

Wendy Rogers is from California, where she's a choreographer and professor of dance at the University of California, Riverside. She's a voice in dance that is, while incredibly personal, also visionary in the way she is able to situate her individual viewpoint within the larger context of our discipline.



Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007, Marin County, CA, 1992; Wendy Rogers, dancer (portrait fragment)

Wendy Rogers, Dance Worker

Thank you all for this incredible honor to visit and be part of your conversation about dance-making. I can't think of anything I like better than making dances, except maybe hanging out with dancers and talking about making dances. I want to thank Lisa Kraus for driving me around—we invaded four dance studios with great pleasure, just to look in

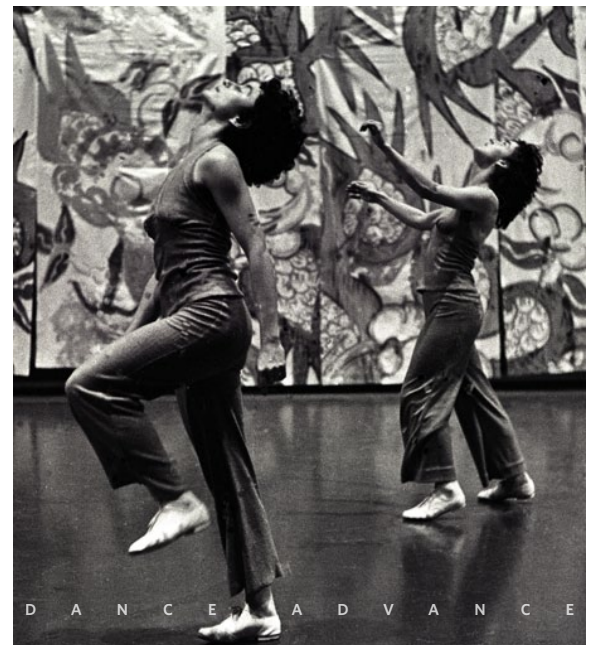
on what people are doing. I thank all the dancers who let us look in on their process for their generosity. It was really stimulating for me to see so many different versions of "the work," and that was great. "The work" keeps changing.

"The work." That's what we used to talk about in the seventies, "the work"; it was all about "the work." When I think of "the work", I think of dancing with Sara Rudner. What a glorious few years that was! We gave our whole lives to "the work" and hours and hours in the studio thinking of the hardest things we could do and then trying them out. Compensation for performances was rare; mostly it was hours in the studio. (Later I came to realize what a luxury that was—to have hours in the studio.)

One particular project I want to remember and start this conversation with is Sara's five-hour dance. In the spring of 1975 Sara, Risa Jaroslow, Wendy Perron, and I trained all season long, day after day, building up our stamina, building material, so that we could dance for five hours straight. Her agenda was not to choreograph; she just wanted people to come in directly on the dancing, for us to share with the viewers something that we as dancers were experiencing and loving. She didn't want to mediate—she didn't want to make a beginning and an ending. She wanted what we were doing to be "dancing on view" (which is what she named the piece). People would just come and go and map their own beginnings and endings to what they saw. This was the concept that started us out; and then we made all different kinds of material.

I think the running section was thirty minutes of running—clearly a long time. There was also a walking section; and all of these different sections were really rigorous and exciting. We had a very complicated score that enabled us to navigate our way through material and variations of material for five hours. And it all came down to one day in June in what was then called Saint Marks (now Danspace Project) in lower Manhattan. We—Sara and I—started our first move before the audience was allowed to enter because we didn't want them to see us starting. And then the doors were opened, the people came in, and we were already going. And we went, and we went, and we danced, and danced, and danced.

Well, what we didn't expect is that people would end up staying. We actually had viewers stay, a lot of them, for a long time, if not for the entire duration. We hadn't anticipated that. At the end there was a section where we went around a couple of times with each of us doing an improvised solo. And then in my last improvised solo, a giant hand came down, lifted me, moved me, carried me through the space, turned me around, and put me back down. I totally didn't expect that to happen.



dancing on view at Saint Marks Church, NYC, 1975; Photographer Johan Elbers © 2007; Choreographer Sara Rudner; Dancers Sara Rudner (L) and Wendy Rogers (R)



compass, Marin County, CA, 1992; Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007; Dancer/Choreographer Wendy Rogers

In the very last part of the dance, as we came into our final finish, came to a stillness—I guess there was an ending after all—I knew from that moment on that I would never be the same—that performance for me would never be the same, that dancing would never be the same. I was completely different than I was five hours earlier. What a crazy business we're in that you set out to make something and you don't even know what it is or what it will become! But that's what I love about dance, and I really cultivated this business of not knowing, and I cherish greatly getting into a place of not knowing—when something really amazing can come into your experience, so that you can also go to a place you didn't know you were going to.

Our audience was also amazed. I remember Peter Saul came up to me and said, "Wendy, I watched you dance for two hours, and then I did my laundry. Then I couldn't stand it. I threw my laundry in my bag, and ran back and you were all still dancing!" So it was a really transformative experience. I want to start with this—not so much out of nostalgia for the good old days (because there are plenty of good days that we are having right now), but simply because I came to a place after that time where the thing that I valued so much, especially this transformation business, this not knowing business—hours of processing and questioning—was pushed out of my life by other concerns.



This Is a Hard Hat Job, University of California, Riverside, CA, 2000; Photographer Steve Walag, UC Regents © 2007; Dancers Susan Rose (L) and Wendy Rogers (R)



This Is a Hard Hat Job, University of California, Riverside, CA, 2000; Photographer Steve Walag, UC Regents © 2007; Dancers Wendy Rogers (L) and Susan Rose (R)

Now I want to start and show you a piece on video called *This Is A Hard Hat Job* to give you a little insight about my work at the University of California, Riverside, where my partner in crime for many years has been my colleague Susan Rose. UC Riverside built a new arts building starting in 1999, and Susan and I began to plan a series of dance interventions to chart its progress. One of our agendas in this project was to dance in the dance studio *before* it was built. So we danced on the foundations of the dance studio just after they were laid, and taped the dance. We intervened in the construction for over two years. Initially, the construction supervisors tried to kick us out, but they failed.

I would like to talk about getting started because how you get started making a dance is such an interesting thing. In this project I was actually a bit intimidated and fearful about just barging onto this site where construction workers were working. But I actually didn't want Susan to know that I was kind of a wuss. So, I put on confidence and said, yes, we'll do it; we'll do it on Tuesday. Yes, Tuesday. Alright! So, I was doing that, and later I found out that she actually was relying on my bravado so that we were mutually generating bravado or something like that. We were, between us, creating a double dare to go and do this. In fact, that's another thing to be said for collaboration: I don't know if I would make dances if it weren't for other people (dancers) showing up and doing them with me.

Sometimes I can get focused on getting started in a very particular way. For example, I can have a problem with the concentration it takes and the kind of things I do to warm up my body for rehearsal, so that I end up turning into a choreographic idiot. I can't explain it. I've actually been together with my body, getting it going, doing things that turn out to be reliable, things that-knock on wood-have kept me dancing these many years. Yet by the time I've done my warm-up, it's almost as if I can't think of a single movement to do; I can't find a movement in my body and I don't know how to make that transition into making dancing.

Now that I'm in a more isolated place [Riverside, CA] and I don't always have the luxury of having somebody else show up and do my work, I've had to find ways to get started by myself. So I'll talk about one of my strategies that I worked out in the 1990s when I first plunged into working on solos.

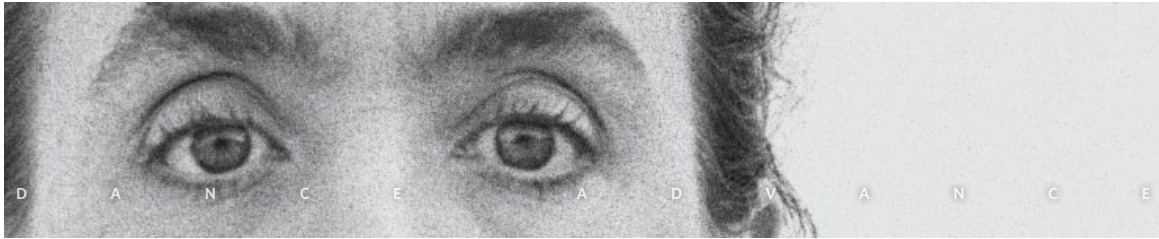


Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007, Marin County, CA, 1992; collage of Wendy Rogers, dancer

What I would do was this: after warming up I'd stand in one spot wherever I was in the room or the space, and just start running in place. And I would run in place for about ten or fifteen minutes and turn, very slowly, 360 degrees. As I ran in place, I would take in everything I possibly could. I would see everything in the space: feel the surface of the floor, hear things, and notice everything that was going on-my body temperature, the room temperature, anything and everything. Usually by the end of that circle I was ready to switch into invention and creativity. One day I was doing my running warm-up transition when, all of a sudden, my arms started moving. As they started moving it was as if I was watching them and my upper body move. This whole event happened; I filled one quadrant of the circle and said, "Wow!" and did it again, and then filled the next quadrant. And then I did it again. It was as if this dance, each quadrant of it, was right there from the start. I didn't try to make it up, I just did it. And that's the dance I call *compass*. Where the heck did that dance come from? And where was it going?

compass came to me in about 1991, during which I was in the midst of incredible personal upheavals and endings-the end of a marriage, of ten years of working and teaching dance at the University of California at Berkeley as a part-timer, and of living in a house that I loved in the Berkeley Hills, a residence close to where I had grown up, and near my family. This was also the end of my having a dance company. A lot of things were ending in a complex and layered slow-motion emergency.

During this time I was filled with questions about absolutely everything. Some of the questions I was asking myself and a lot of the questions people were asking me-and pieces of advice they offered-were really, quite frankly, economic. "Wendy, you can't keep on doing this. How will you provide for yourself? You can't make a living this



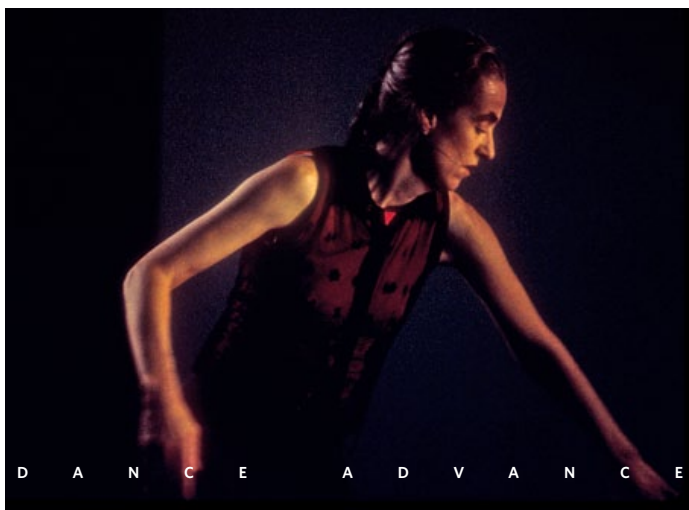
Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007, Marin County, CA, 1992; Wendy Rogers (portrait fragment)

way. You know, you could get a nursing degree in two years, and nurses make good money and . . .” I’d listen and go, Oh, no! Still, I would try on these various suggestions to all areas of my life. I even took one of those job aptitude tests, that didn’t have choreographer as a category – I think my result came out: “farmer/musician/teacher/architect.” Anyway, my life was in turmoil at the time.

During this period, I was also working on my California Arts Council application for the Wendy Rogers Dance Company. And suddenly, I saw its pages sliding down the wall where I realized I had thrown it. I asked “What!?” and then answered myself, “I can’t do this anymore.” I couldn’t talk about the Wendy Rogers Dance Company. I couldn’t tell the Council all about the people that made up ten years of my life. I couldn’t claim 10,000 people had seen my work. I had to represent myself so falsely. It wasn’t one of those “good, let’s think through this and see if it helps me think about my work in a new, wonderful way” moments. It was more sickening than that.

No To Commodity

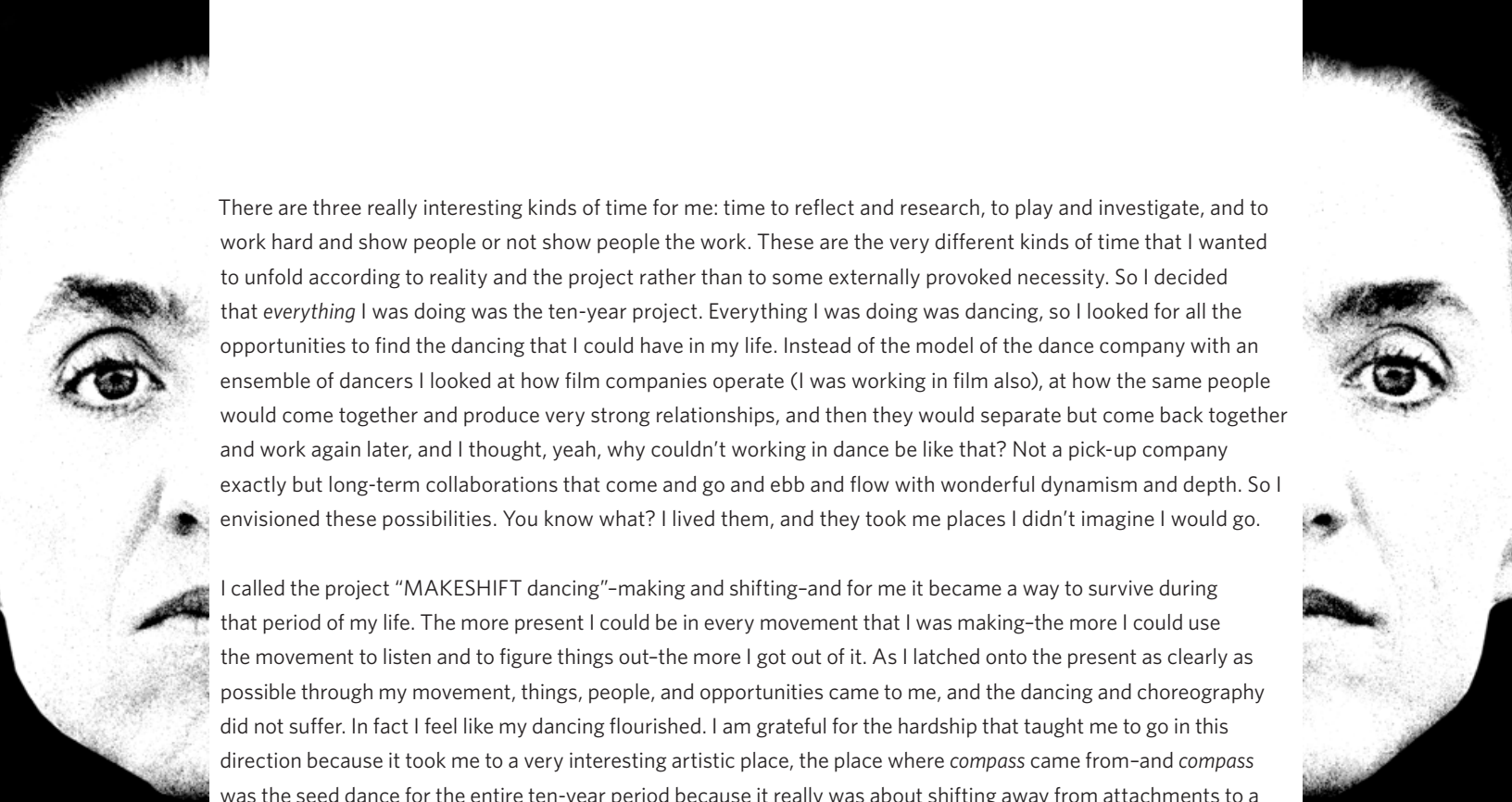
The work! What about the work? Just like Sara Rudner used to say when something seemed to come in and compromise it. What about the work? So I started a conversation with myself: “Wendy, what do you want?” “I want creative process and creative time.” “Then give yourself creative process and creative time.” “Well how much time do you want?” I said, “how about ten years?” And so I began my ten-year project.



prelude, Joyce SoHo, NYC, 2001; Photographer Beatriz Schiller © 2007; Dancer/Choreographer Wendy Rogers

Well I gave myself those ten years. I didn’t know what I was doing but I did let the Wendy Rogers Dance Company go. I didn’t fill out any more of the applications that I felt asked me to represent myself falsely—not that there weren’t people making good dances with the support of institutions. I am so grateful and I support my friends and colleagues who are making those dance institutions work, but they just weren’t working for me. My ten-year project marked a big shift in my thinking and I decided that I just didn’t want to think of what I was doing as a commodity. What is this constant output model? What is this fiscal-year model? I can’t make something happen in a year. I didn’t want to think in those terms, so I said to myself, “OK I am not going to think about my repertory anymore. I want a living and

evolving body of work that allows me to constantly respond as honestly as possible to the reality of my life so that I can let the dancing emerge. Of course I’ll plan and I’ll think about it but I want to have different kinds of time.”



There are three really interesting kinds of time for me: time to reflect and research, to play and investigate, and to work hard and show people or not show people the work. These are the very different kinds of time that I wanted to unfold according to reality and the project rather than to some externally provoked necessity. So I decided that *everything* I was doing was the ten-year project. Everything I was doing was dancing, so I looked for all the opportunities to find the dancing that I could have in my life. Instead of the model of the dance company with an ensemble of dancers I looked at how film companies operate (I was working in film also), at how the same people would come together and produce very strong relationships, and then they would separate but come back together and work again later, and I thought, yeah, why couldn't working in dance be like that? Not a pick-up company exactly but long-term collaborations that come and go and ebb and flow with wonderful dynamism and depth. So I envisioned these possibilities. You know what? I lived them, and they took me places I didn't imagine I would go.

I called the project "MAKESHIFT dancing"—making and shifting—and for me it became a way to survive during that period of my life. The more present I could be in every movement that I was making—the more I could use the movement to listen and to figure things out—the more I got out of it. As I latched onto the present as clearly as possible through my movement, things, people, and opportunities came to me, and the dancing and choreography did not suffer. In fact I feel like my dancing flourished. I am grateful for the hardship that taught me to go in this direction because it took me to a very interesting artistic place, the place where *compass* came from—and *compass* was the seed dance for the entire ten-year period because it really was about shifting away from attachments to a particular work and towards the concept of dancing as an ongoing way to orient oneself. I no longer suffered from the inevitable departures of dancers and other pressures that emanate from the activity of maintaining repertory. I had to change my perspective and my allegiance to the shifting process and the opportunities I found in moving with life as it unfolds. I *did* make dances and I gave them names (and even put dates on them sometimes) but I felt completely free from the whole novelty thing—if I wasn't done with something I just did it again in the next dance until I was done.

I came to think of performances as editions of a living body of work, as living occasions in which things could be remade or made different so brand new possibilities would emerge. In doing this I came up with all these interesting strategies to deal with the *intermittentness* of my situation and the scarcity of my resources since I immediately became unfundable. Yet it was kind of a relief—I didn't have to fill out applications except for the few fellowships in town—thank heavens for fellowships; it certainly is sad that the National Endowment for the Arts doesn't offer them any more, it's a huge resource lost. So let me give you some examples of how I've made strategies that I continue to use.



Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007, Marin County, CA, 1992; Wendy Rogers (portrait fragment)

The Discipline of Fragments

One of my strategies is what I call the discipline of fragments. Because my situation was fragmented and that was a problem, I said great let's have more of that problem. I would go into the studio and instead of making long phrases I would make fragments. I would try to make those fragments very exact and consistent, and I would practice this with dancers and have them try to execute them as precisely as possible.

I'd time the dancers with a stopwatch to keep the fragments the same. In a lot of instances I would not edit them, even in cases where a fragment was ugly or I wished I had developed it on the other leg or something else. I forced myself just to leave the fragment as it was—just to leave it alone until I got to a place where I actually had a sense of physical illness with these fragments. And, usually right around when I would get physically ill, the fragments started talking to me, started wanting to group together in a certain way; or some concept would emerge to help me see where the dance was going. The lesson I learned was that I needed to wait a long time because if I had jumped in earlier I would probably have simply created something I already knew. So that is the discipline of fragments.

There is another ten-year project strategy that I call "*del dia*"—the catch of the day. It originated from the problem of how to get started or how to get into a creative place. It grew out of the pleasure of just making something right away, the moment I walked into the studio—before I work out, before anything happens, before we review anything or talk about what we need to fix or anything. Make something right away: make it new, don't plan it. I love working dancers into this, too: I get to make the *del dia* and they get to remember what I did and together we work it out and make a little something that's right there in that moment. So we begin fragments that we can revisit after we warm up, fragments that have all the creativity, all the juice in them—they provide me with a doorway to go somewhere else creatively.



Work retreat for *Wild Life* in Missoula, MT, 2001; Photographer Bill Bevis © 2007; Talking after the 8 ft. circle; Dancers (L-R) Natalie Good, Michael Miller, Liv Isaacs-Nollet, Christopher Williams, Wendy Rogers (foreground), Jennifer Twilley, Monica Bill Barnes

Sometimes we'll make *del dias* every day right at the beginning and then arbitrarily string them together—it becomes a movement journal for the whole experience, a bank of movement that we all draw on. It provides a fascinating way by which dancers can pick up on my aesthetic and I can absorb theirs without being heavy-handed—that is, thinking of something and teaching it. It even sidesteps that familiar seventies gambit of coming up with a "construct" and solving "problems"—this is much less intentional and taps into the permeability dancers have with each other in a good way. So sometimes my *del dia* phrases end up being quite long, and sometimes they make it into the dance and sometimes they don't. They are just a process alongside of the process.

Through The Windshield

WILD LIFE / El Camino was an outdoor site-specific event at the Skirball Center in Los Angeles. I drove a car and tailed two dancers up the driveway of the Skirball. This whole project was full of wonderful mishaps. Originally I was going to do something else altogether but I hurt my calf and I didn't want to tell anybody that I was injured, so I came up with this idea about driving and no one questioned it. It was a bit humiliating because it was sort of an oldies but goodies concert featuring work by Simone Forti, Rudy Perez, and Doug Neilson, and I didn't want to be the one that couldn't move that day!

Part of the idea of this dance was to answer the question that my ten-year project kept asking: "how do we know where we are?" In this dance, I establish that we're in California, and we're going from south to north—up on the balcony the audience hears a description written by Mary Austin describing her trip on horseback in 1888 from south to north, not exactly where the 405 [a major highway in southern California] is but near enough—going from San Diego to El Cajon. So the audience is just considering the 1888 description of the El Camino Real and what's there now—Sepulveda Boulevard, Interstate 405, the Skirball Center's driveway, and layers and layers of traffic.

In this project I was enjoying using my experience of driving a car, an activity that defines life in Southern California. In order to rehearse, the dancers or I often travel 150 - 180 miles round trip, across the vast urban sprawl that separates us. I've had to make my peace with the car. I see a lot through the windshield. I would like to do more with the windshield as proscenium because I think this is how many people see the world. For me Los Angeles and Southern California constitute a very disjunctive environment. While on the freeway you move smoothly through it—it's your speed and sleekness of motion that connects all this disjunctivity and I would like to explore that idea more as well. Although the movement in this dance was raided from earlier work that had been made inside of the studio, it was interesting to see how vulnerable it looked out there on the road through my windshield, how vulnerable the dancers seemed compared to how strong they had looked in the studio.

We rehearsed it a lot without any problems; we made arrangements with the Director of the Skirball and the people there, but on the day of the performance the Director wasn't there and the people who made the arrangements weren't there and some of the security didn't show up, and so they didn't stop traffic. Not only did we have a problem at the base of the road, we also had a problem up the road: the guard was completely missing and so I was in the situation of being in the car with a cell phone, but there was no one to call; then a car came down the driveway and the old woman driving it saw me below in my own dance, stopping and watching the dancers; so she stopped *her* car and started watching them too. But she couldn't see the audience above her. She was clueless that this was a part of a performance and now *she* was a performer—it was the kind of thing you just can't pay to have happen. That was really fun. I did feel the vulnerability of the dancers moving out there—the tonnage of metal that a car represents compared to a dancer's body. Hearing their shoes on the asphalt was a different sensation. I called this dance work *WILD LIFE / El Camino*, and it was a stage in a series of works that culminated in *WILD LIFE / a movement refuge*.



compass, Marin County, CA, 1992; Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007; Dancer/Choreographer Wendy Rogers

WILD LIFE / A Movement Refuge

Prior to *El Camino*, the first version of *Wild Life* was created during a work retreat in Missoula, Montana. Bill Bevis and Juliette Crump generously shared their house, studio and river rafts with us. I participated in this retreat with a group of dancers from across the country. It was unusual for me to meet with dancers around the clock for a couple of weeks. I love them so much, and I felt like I was with a different species, the dancer species, and I thought: "this is my animal." Bill Bevis came up to photograph our run-through at the end of this work retreat and he said, "Wendy what do you want me to shoot?" And I said "I don't know...just look at whatever you are looking at and shoot it—just treat us like wildlife." I thought, yeah, like wildlife—that's where that came from.

I found it helpful that we were all away from home—this way I could get a lot done, in very small window of time and in a very deep way, by simply pulling myself out of fragmentation and distraction and really focusing on the work. The work from those two weeks became the basis of the longer extended project. My question of "How do you know where you are?" led me to ideas that come from architecture.

One example of this was the eight-foot circle. This comes from a book by architect Christopher Alexander, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (1977). Alexander, who claims that architecture has a vernacular "pattern language" which is created and spoken all over the world, cites research by Edward Hall that argues for the importance of keeping meetings small in order to be effective—about twelve people or fewer. Hall showed that in any group of twelve one person will never talk, and in a group of twenty-four six will never talk, and the ratio grows as the group expands. He also figured that the range for being heard when using a casual voice is eight feet, and that the range for seeing faces properly with twenty-twenty vision is twelve feet. And then there is also a spatial range for people—about eight to twelve feet apart—so seated people can pass an object if they both stretch. With these kinds of measurements in mind Alexander came up with the eight-foot circle as the optimum size and shape for a small group discussion. So we choreographed an eight-foot circle improvisation for ourselves. This is another example of a way that I work, this progression, this kind of natural unfolding in relation to different ways of dealing with space—the space where I live, the rehearsal spaces we work in, the spaces we might make.

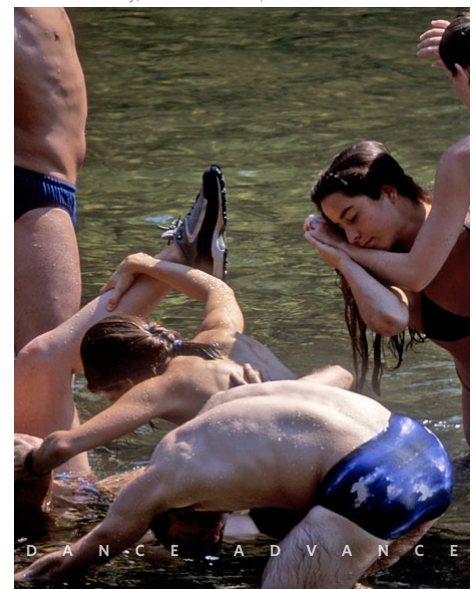
The two-week residency in Montana (August 2001) and then *El Camino* in LA (February 2002) allowed us to visit some of the ideas of Alexander and Hall. In May 2002 we had the opportunity to recast the work and make some new material for a performance in Tijuana. I felt no obligation to call it by the same title so I called it *Living Spaces*. In August 2003 I brought back four of the original cast members and some new people for a whole new agenda with *WILD LIFE / a movement refuge*. I wanted to know if there was some way that the audience could experience more of what we were enjoying, more than the audience typically gets from a performance. Was there some way that we could put across our own sense of discovery and reflection and ways of knowing, and somehow allow an audience access into that, without going the route of explaining what we were doing—without fundamentally altering this world of movement? I love movement, and I wanted to make a "movement refuge" that would include the audience.

The opportunity to work on this idea came about with the support of an Irvine Choreography Fellowship and took place at Margaret Jenkins' Dance Lab in San Francisco. I came up with the concept of a showing/dinner party/focus group. I got over my thing of "I'm in this stage where I don't really want to hear what people think"—I'm pretty thick-skinned right now so maybe I don't need to keep my process private. Even at a fragile part of the dance making we involved people—we invited them to come and see what we were doing. We fed them a fantastic dinner, and then turned on the tape recorders and asked them to tell us anything about the dance.

It was amazing and, actually, not easy. Somebody said, "I came in and everyone was moving in silence and I thought uh-oh, dutiful art—I am supposed to be looking and appreciating all the movement." I heard thoughts that I was grateful people shared with us, thoughts that I know are going on in audiences' heads but that I hadn't actually heard said directly to me about what we were doing. It wasn't that I was going to go out and make a committee piece that would please everybody, but through conversation, through more access to audience response and perceptions, I had a better sense of the difference between my choreographic intention and the



Work retreat for *Wild Life* in Missoula, MT, 2001; Photographer Bill Bevis © 2007; 8 Ft circle in the Blackfoot River; Dancers (L-R) Monica Bill Barnes, Natalie Good, Wendy Rogers, Christopher Williams, Jennifer Twilley, Michael Miller, Liv Isaacs-Nollet



Work retreat for *Wild Life* in Missoula, MT, 2001; Photographer Bill Bevis © 2007; 8 Ft circle in the Blackfoot River; Dancers (L-R) Michael Miller, Monica Bill Barnes, Christopher Williams, Natalie Good.

choreographic effects. I certainly have a lot of practice exploring the tension between the dancers' and my experience as insiders and viewers' experiences of dances over the years, but this was a whole new level of exchange and it stimulated me to be clearer about the project.

Something important to come out of this process was what I call the theatricality of intimacy. Intimacy is where so much can happen, and I wondered: if the dinner party was so much fun, maybe we didn't need to perform on stages anymore; maybe we could just do these events. The audience, by imagining and then realizing that they were going to change us and change the work, recognized that they could have a say in the choreography. It totally changed the way they related to the work in a wonderful way—it gave them an investment in it, and made our exchange with them very satisfying.

I completed the work with the dancers, who were incredible collaborators, for performances at Danspace Project in New York City. I came up with principles for rewarding viewers for noticing things—shifts of perceptions, for example. Artist / designer Sandra Woodall, lighting designer Carol Mullins and I played with “color distortion.” We designed the coloring of the lights and the coloring of the dancers' costumes to create as much distortion as possible. A dancer might be over here and the red in the costume looks black, and yet over there the red looks red—we were working in every way we could to stimulate the senses and reward people for noticing their own perceptual shifts.

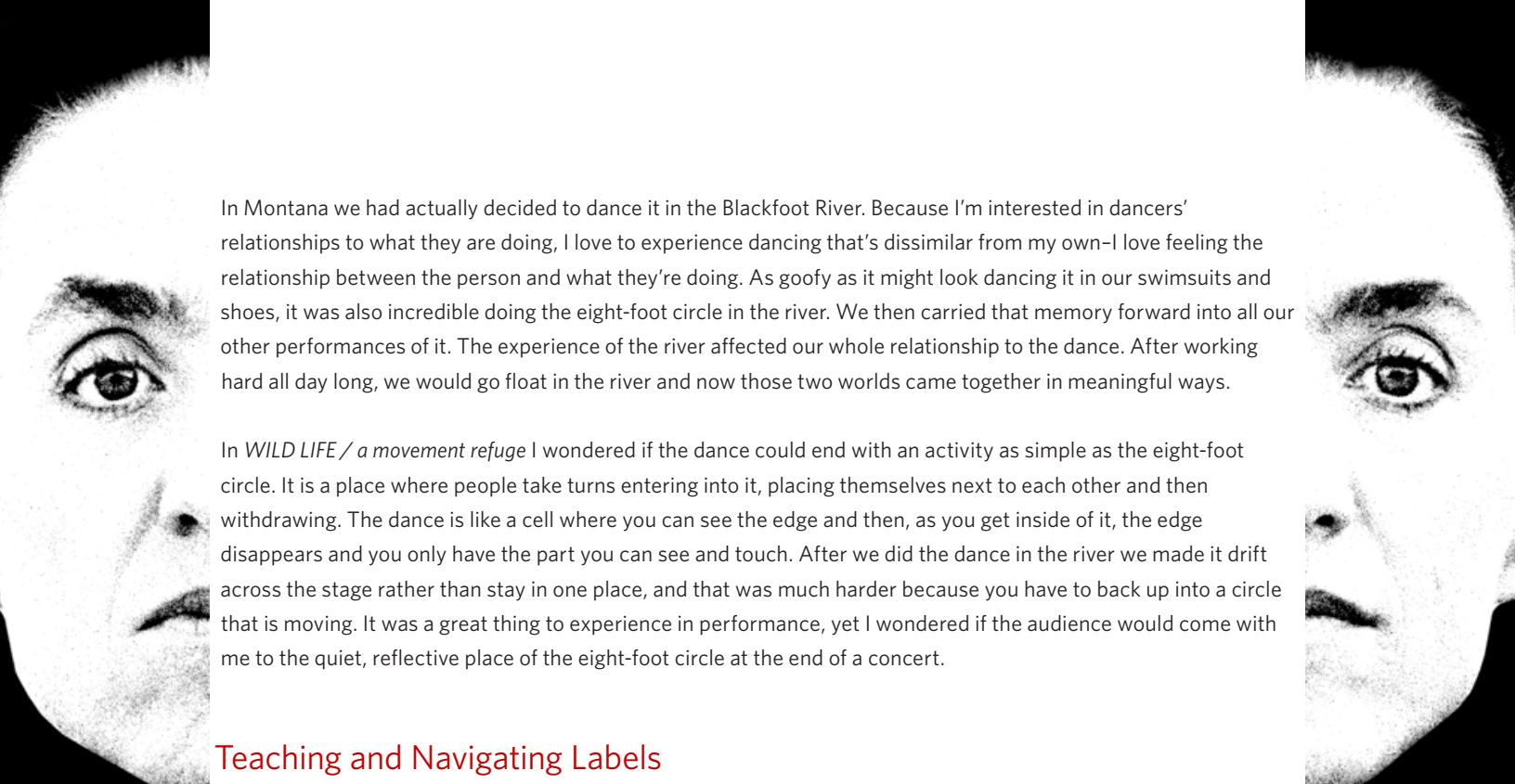


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Christopher Williams, Natalie Good, Liv Isaacs-Nollet

The main thing that came to me from the whole process, though—and I can't wait to do more of it—was an answer to my question about how to more deeply involve the audience: do it twice! Part of the reason dancers have an intense experience is because we do the dance again and again and it gets richer and deeper for us, but then the audiences come and see it only once. Who's going to go to the same dance concert two nights in a week? Nobody. I constructed the hour so that it would start out with twenty-three minutes of material that shifted into a solo (that I later came to imagine as a “drive-through”). As it ended, the dancers reentered and started doing the piece again, almost exactly the same, except we intensified the effects of the lighting and in one place I turned a section one-quarter turn. An artist friend of mine got it—he actually came up to me and said, “oh I loved it where you turned that one section a quarter turn”—and I thought, it's amazing how much people *can* see. It was so satisfying to our audiences—I received many reactions from both dancers and non-dancers about how much light it shined on their own perceptions, and I thought, great that's what we do, that's what makes it satisfying for us. At the end of the piece, when we arrive back at the place where the repeated section ends, that's when we go into the eight-foot circle.



In Montana we had actually decided to dance it in the Blackfoot River. Because I'm interested in dancers' relationships to what they are doing, I love to experience dancing that's dissimilar from my own—I love feeling the relationship between the person and what they're doing. As goofy as it might look dancing it in our swimsuits and shoes, it was also incredible doing the eight-foot circle in the river. We then carried that memory forward into all our other performances of it. The experience of the river affected our whole relationship to the dance. After working hard all day long, we would go float in the river and now those two worlds came together in meaningful ways.

In *WILD LIFE / a movement refuge* I wondered if the dance could end with an activity as simple as the eight-foot circle. It is a place where people take turns entering into it, placing themselves next to each other and then withdrawing. The dance is like a cell where you can see the edge and then, as you get inside of it, the edge disappears and you only have the part you can see and touch. After we did the dance in the river we made it drift across the stage rather than stay in one place, and that was much harder because you have to back up into a circle that is moving. It was a great thing to experience in performance, yet I wondered if the audience would come with me to the quiet, reflective place of the eight-foot circle at the end of a concert.

Teaching and Navigating Labels

I'm going to wrap up by talking about my teaching in the dance department at the [University of California, Riverside](#), an experience that's also informing my choreography—and my choreography speaks back to it as well. We have a Ph.D. program in dance history and theory, so we have amazing thinkers and dance scholars with cutting-edge approaches to their questioning and their interdisciplinary understanding of dance. We also have an MFA program that focuses on experimental dance, and a small undergraduate program. Our scholars move, our movers think and write; everyone is in touch with how theory and practice intersect in amazing ways. I'll give you just a sample of the kind of experiments we are doing to give the mind-body split a run for its money.

When we were designing the new MFA program in 2000, Susan and I didn't want the MFA to be a microwaved BA—we wanted to make it a useful experience for working artists. Susan and I often teach together. In teaching a course on collaboration we ask students to do things that we would love to do. For instance: pick two artists, living or dead, in any genre, and take whatever you know about them—however you know it—to make and perform a dance they might have made in collaboration with each other. Man was that fun: someone did Jackson Pollack collaborating with Judy Garland. The exciting thing was that it tapped into huge questions we have about our influences and how we acknowledge them—how do we even know who they are? Especially now that information and ideas move so quickly, we often don't even know the accurate histories of what we are doing.

The faculty has also revised the curriculum for undergraduates. We have always emphasized composition; we are not a conservatory. We have a lot of dancers who have never danced before coming to college, and the major emphasizes composition as a way to know dance. Currently there is this big effort in academia to understand dance outside the labels that previously governed a lot of our programs. It still bothers me to check those boxes that say “contemporary” or “modern” or “world” or “culturally specific” (well *who isn't?*). We're still revising the curriculum, but basically I feel affirmed everywhere I go that contemporary dance is a living, breathing, wonderful, changing form that is happening here and all over the world.

While I do feel that it is important to recognize contemporary dance as having substantial Euro-US influences, it is also important to understand that contributions are coming from many different directions today and they are ricocheting. We must see contemporary dance as the global activity that it is and reflect that in how we approach it with our

undergraduates. This approach was reinforced recently when I had the honor of going to Malaysia and experiencing the dance-makers there. They worked in very savvy and sophisticated ways from movement foundations that were not necessarily Western—these artists were fascinating to me and I would love to do more work with them. So this is another big project: working on thinking differently about how we label ourselves as we navigate issues of difference.

The Crazy Optimism of Dancing

I want to share with you one last bit of crazy optimism.

I think we are living in a horrific time—at least that is how I feel about the war and my nation's participation in behavior that I find very damaging. I am always noticing choreography and one of the choreographies that I particularly notice is the choreography of betrayal: I see it in the TV reality shows where it is a game, and no one really looks at who is making up the game. Why are they eating these horrible things and seeing if they can manage without throwing up? It is all about some sort of goal, usually a large bit of money or celebrity—discouraging goals that don't excite me terribly. Everyone knows it's a game and the games are set up so that in order to win you must betray, you must lie, you must vote the other out, you must get rid of people. You know your strategy; the game is always about the bottom line. I find it particularly sickening to see that's where our government politics are: you know there are lies, all kinds of lying going on and everyone knows it.



WILD LIFE / a movement refuge, work in progress in Riverside, CA, 2003; Photographer Peter Terezakis © 2007; Choreographer Wendy Rogers, Dancers Jennifer Twilley, Allyson Green

Somehow, though, this way of working is not just in our entertainment or just in government politics—I encounter it in our everyday workplaces and lives where there is a regular sacrificing of connecting the way we talk about something with a real effort towards honesty. You know what I'm saying—the objective somehow justifies representing something in any way you can to get it through. I think this is really dangerous.

This is not my crazy optimism by the way, I was just contextualizing—I didn't want you all to think I am out there in California not noticing that there are bad things going on in the world.

My crazy optimism comes from experiences like the ones I had today: to just walk in a studio door and see the intelligence of people dancing together in a room. Susan and I say this all the time: "a room with a boom box." When negativity sets in and all sorts of things go wrong, you know that, hey, if there's still a room and a boom box left, we can occupy ourselves for hours with great stuff called dance. Transformation through intimacy isn't often measured. Yet, it really does matter and affects what goes on out there in the world. Choreographers and dancers really are doing important work.

In terms of my ten-year project, the idea about creating space really came from my crazy optimism that through our movements we are creating social space. No matter how much we feel as though territory has been lost or inched upon, that land has been ruined or something has been taken away, we can still create space with our actions. We can create this incredible space around us, between us, with each other, and we can keep making this fantastic dance. That's my crazy optimism. And my other bit of crazy optimism is that there is an audience for what we do even though we sometimes don't experience it. So let it roll. *This Is A Hard Hat Job*: a last bit of crazy optimism! Here is what happens if you just keep going to a construction site. [Video of *Hard Hat Job* plays]

As Seen Through the Windshield (and other perspectives on making dances): This dance discursion with Wendy Rogers was sponsored by Dance Advance, an artistic initiative funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by The University of the Arts.

Biography of Wendy Rogers

Wendy Rogers has choreographed and performed dances for over thirty-five years, residing in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City and now in Riverside where she joined the University of California dance faculty in 1996. She produces work as the ongoing endeavor WENDY ROGERS dancing, and is currently choreographing 'a meeting place,' a multi-year project that generates dancing based on the architecture of Julia Morgan (1872-1957). In 2003 Rogers premiered the evening length dance: *WILD LIFE* / a movement refuge in the Fall series of the Danspace Project in New York City. She also taught and performed in Malaysia as part of a US State Department cultural exchange. The Wendy Rogers Dance Company (1977-90) and her ten-year project *MAKESHIFT* dancing (1991-2000) toured nationally and internationally. Rogers' work is rooted in her early years of study and performance with artists including Ruth Hatfield, David Wood, Margaret Jenkins, Carolyn Brown, Viola Farber and Sara Rudner. She has received Fellowships from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Irvine Fellowship in Dance, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Photographer Bonnie Kamin © 2007, Marin County, CA, 1992; Wendy Rogers

Dances Referenced In The Lecture:

dancing on view Quartet choreographed and performed by Sara Rudner with Risa Jaroslow, Wendy Perron, and Wendy Rogers. Sets painted by Robert Kushner. St. Mark's Church, New York City, NY. June 1975. 5 hours.

compass Solo choreographed and performed by Wendy Rogers. Music: *Apple Blossom* by Peter Garland. Part of the series *In The Works*, The Dance Gallery, Gascon Institute, Los Angeles, CA. February 1991. 11 minutes.

Wild Life Created in a project funded with a 1999 Irvine Fellowship in Dance. Choreographed by Wendy Rogers. Performed by Monica Bill Barnes, Natalie Good, Liv Isaacs-Nollet, Michael Miller, Wendy Rogers, Jennifer Twilley, and Christopher Williams. Performing Arts Radio/TV Building, University of Montana, Missoula, MT. August 2001. 27 minutes.

Living Spaces Choreographed by Wendy Rogers. Performed by John Diaz, Allyson Green, Liv Isaacs-Nollet, Rommel Salveron, and Jennifer Twilley. Music: excerpt from *Caught by the Sky with Wire* by Nick Didkovsky and *Apple Blossom* by Peter Garland. Presented in the curated series *Entre Lineas*, Casa de la Cultura, Tijuana, Mexico. May 2002. 30 minutes.

WILD LIFE / El Camino A site-specific dance choreographed by Wendy Rogers and performed by John Diaz, Jennifer Twilley, and a car driven by Wendy Rogers. Text: excerpt from *Earth Horizon* (1932), autobiography by Mary Hunter Austin, read by Shawn Womack. Presented in the series *Siteworks*, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA. February 2003. 8 minutes.

WILD LIFE / a movement refuge Evening-length work choreographed by Wendy Rogers and performed by Monica Bill Barnes, Allyson Green, Michael Miller, Wendy Rogers, Rommel Salveron, Jennifer Twilley, and Christopher Williams. Costumes and visual collaboration: Sandra Woodall. Lighting design: Carol Mullins. Sound engineering: Jay Cloidt. Music: excerpts from nocturne by Jay Cloidt; *Caught by the Sky with Wire* by Nick Didkovsky; *2 Trees from Brazil* by Laetitia Sonami; *breaks/motors* by Maggi Payne, and *Apple Blossom* by Peter Garland. Text: excerpts from *A Vanishing Land* by Hildegard Flanner, read and recorded by Susan Stone. Presented in the Danspace Project Series, St. Marks Church-in-the-Bowery, New York, NY. October 2003.

The creation of *WILD LIFE / a movement refuge* was made possible, in part, with funds from the Danspace Project's 2003-2004 Commissioning Initiative with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and by funding from the Irvine Fellowships in Dance, a program funded by the James Irvine Foundation and administered by Dance/USA. Stages of development and research were supported by a Space Grant from the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance center; a 2002 residency at the University of Montana in Missoula as part of the National College Choreography Initiative funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and Dance/USA; a 2001 summer workshop at Columbia College in Chicago; research grants from the Academic Senate of the University of California Riverside and UC MEXUS; and a 2000 Fellowship from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts.

Videos Referenced In The Lecture:

This Is A Hard Hat Job Video choreographed and directed by Wendy Rogers and Susan Rose, videography by Jim Brown. Edited by Rogers and Rose with postproduction by Jim Brown. Rogers, Rose, and Brown joined the construction of the ARTS Building at the University of California, Riverside on July 16, 1999 during the foundation-laying for the dance studio. During two years of subsequent dance interventions, Rogers and Rose infiltrated construction activities while workers gradually entered impromptu performances, blurring distinctions between performance and construction work. Music: Ray McNamara. "Year of the Arts - Opening of the ARTS Building," University of California, Riverside, Riverside, CA. May 2001. 17 minutes.

WILD LIFE / Blackfoot River Video/DVD montage from the documentation of *Wild Life* (2001) for seven dancers that juxtaposes dancing in the studio with footage of dancing in the Blackfoot River,

MT. Directed and edited by Wendy Rogers, camera by Jim Brown, and postproduction by Nicole Gonzales. Presented as part of Rogers's lecture, "As Seen Through the Windshield (and other perspectives on making dances)," presented by Dance Advance, Community Education Center, Philadelphia, PA. March 2005. 4 minutes.

WILD LIFE / El Camino Video/DVD documentation of *WILD LIFE / El Camino* performed in *Siteworks* at the Skirball Cultural Center (2003). Directed and edited by Wendy Rogers, camera by Fruto Corre and Patrick Alcedo, and postproduction by Nicole Gonzales. Presented as part of Rogers's lecture, "As Seen Through the Windshield (and other perspectives on making dances)," a lecture presented by Dance Advance, Community Education Center, Philadelphia, PA. March 2005. 10 minutes.

Book Referenced In The Lecture:

Cristopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein with Max Jacobson, Ingrid Fiksdahl-King, and Shlomo Angel, "Small Meeting Rooms," *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): pp. 712 - 716.



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