

*slut, angel, animal, vegetable, mineral, water, light, love,*  
*god, spirit, dust, beauty, universe:*  
an embodied inventory of elements at play in  
Deborah Hay's choreography

By

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## Table of Contents

### Introduction

#### 1. *SLUT*

##### 1.1 Feminist

##### 1.2 “Invite Being Seen”

#### 2. *ANGEL*

##### 2.1 Perception

##### 2.2 Obliteration

#### 3. *ANIMAL*

##### 3.1 Survival

##### 3.2 Archetypes

#### 4. *VEGETABLE*

##### 4.1 Cellular

##### 4.2 Surrender

#### 5. *MINERAL*

##### 5.1 Folk Dances

##### 5.2 Slack

### Conclusion

### Works Cited

### Appendix

## INTRODUCTION

I met the American choreographer Deborah Hay in Arnhem, the Netherlands, when I was a guest student at the European Dance Development Center in 1994. Deborah is one of the original founding members of Judson Dance Theater, the postmodern instigators from New York City in the 1960s. I was enrolled in a five-and-a-half-week composition workshop led by Deborah. One evening, I was waiting in line to get into the school's theater to see a student production and she was in front of me. As a Canadian in an international school and knowing Deborah lived in Austin, Texas, I mentioned that my parents, one from New York State and one from northern Québec, had met in an unlikely place, El Paso. At that time, my dad was in the army; after returning from Vietnam he was stationed in Texas. My mom worked as an au pair during the day and took modeling classes in the evenings while hoping that her older and married Mexican lover would rescue her and take her across the border. In turn, Deborah shared that she and an ex-husband had gotten a divorce by taking a limousine from El Paso into Mexico where, I am assuming, the legal fees were cheaper or the process faster than in the United States. On the ride back from Mexico, her former husband met the woman who would become his next wife and who also just happened to be recently divorced. Deborah and I both laughed. This is where we first overlapped. This is where my work analyzing her work began.

In class, each morning was dedicated to the practice of Playing Awake, the name and instruction for Deborah's workshop. We moved as we wished and drew inspiration from one another's impulses. She had several key phrases she repeated to keep us engaged in the practice. "Invite being seen" was a primary instruction. As modern dancers within a Western classical lineage, we are typically trained to look toward the audience in frontal stage choreography while using our peripheral vision to keep track of fellow performers in order to stay in unison and avoid collisions. Deborah's simple suggestions freed me of an acquired behavior and opened up my field of vision to

be useful as a source of material to play with inside of her specific approach to movement generation.

Another one of her verbal reminders compelled us to see the practice in each other. This removed doubt and self-consciousness from my movements. If I were seeing the practice in others and they in me, then we were together in our understanding and acceptance of the unconventional movements being offered. “The whole body, at once, the teacher,” she constantly said to the group as we played awake. This insistence reminded me to ground my thinking out of my head and into my body, learning and exploring through my corporeal intelligence and internal instincts. For me, this new awareness was critical. I was known, as one of my earlier teachers in Montréal remarked, to “avoid getting my hands dirty” and would talk or negotiate my way out of physically repeating, too often, movement combinations in rehearsal. Somewhere along the way during my formal training I got stuck in my head. In Deborah’s workshop, I didn’t need to be original; we could have fun being fanciful with one another, spontaneous, mirroring what someone else did without fear of being judged as copying. This experience felt like a rebirth for me. I felt more like myself than in previous dance training situations. It changed everything.

The politics in Deborah’s practice aligned with my sense of citizenry: acknowledging that originality was debilitating and overrated, so to remove originality as a goal is freeing; that being present conveyed intentions to an audience, connecting everyone together, with greater impact than simply performing set steps. In her sessions, we could find pleasure in our bodies and marvel at their limitless possibilities. This freedom meant the world to me. I had often considered quitting dance throughout my early formation in Montréal. I found the studio setting to be too isolated and self-indulgent, thinking that my time and body could be put to better use chained to a tree to protest deforestation or placed in front of a harpoon shielding a whale on the open sea. Greenpeace campaigns were very visible at that time in the 1980s and their messages pulled at me. I stayed

dedicated to dance over those formative years, but felt that I could be doing more. In Deborah's workshop in Arnhem, her words and encouragement disrupted the status quo and provided a lifeline for me to a socially aware responsibility within the art form I loved and believed in so much.

Afternoon classes took the practice and applied it to a form, set choreography. We all contributed to the final piece. Like an exquisite corpse compositional formula, we attached our sections one after the others without concern of maintaining a coherent style or consistent movement vocabulary. The sequence Deborah contributed was verbal instructions so we couldn't mimic her gestures verbatim. This technique was different from what each one of us did when teaching our sections to the group, demonstrating the shapes and execution of steps for everyone to repeat in a similar manner.

As a student previously trained in codified modern techniques stemming from ballet positions, I had been taught in typical fashion to replicate my teachers' physicality, shaping my body to mirror theirs, and to texture the execution of movements through repetition and by morphing into another's approach. Internal motivation and mechanics were abstractly mentioned as most teachers were trained to interpret dance, not to extrapolate movements through pedagogy or kinesiology. I was often left to figure out the inner logistics of executing a movement on my own. Deborah's scripted choreography terrified me as it left the entire interpretation up to me. Her dances are written as scores without movements to imitate, just words to instigate a movement reaction. My insecurities peaked at the thought of not only being judged for how I moved, but also by what I came up with based on her instructions. In contrast, my early memories were of dancing wildly to 1980s pop music in my living room, where I improvised with abandon and had no concerns about replication or physical alignment. I only wondered when Sinéad O'Connor or the members of Duran Duran would recognize my originality and invite me to choreograph their world

tour. Through my professional training, I had lost something inside of me that was deeply curious and confident.

Once we quickly learned the string of movements, we then performed<sup>1</sup> for one another in the studio, in large groups at first, then smaller increments of individuals until we all performed solos, including Deborah. Whenever we watched we wrote out our observations. When writing about a solo, we gave the performer our written notes. One afternoon, Deborah recalled an early memory as a Judson Dance Theater choreographer about feeling unsettled around leaving it up to dance critics to interpret her dances in words, so she began writing about her work herself. She implored us to write about our dances. By doing so, she dispelled the common myth that dancers become dancers because they cannot articulate themselves well verbally (i.e., “I don’t feel comfortable using words. That’s why I dance”). As Deborah’s choreographic works are based on written scores, the function of words is implicit in her artistic process. When she writes about her dancing and mandates that her students write about ours, it is a political action. Dancers claiming language as an extension of our expressive medium and articulating our visions in words break the silence and the myth. Our consumerist society cultivates a mistrust of our own bodies expressing needs and desires, and so dance can be alienated from common understanding. Language clarifies the wants and impulses of corporeal material, no longer easily dismissed as a fleeting moment of artistic expression. Deborah’s instigation has always stayed with me, yet it has taken me twenty years in this profession to prioritize writing over doing and letting the work speak for itself. In Deborah’s words, “What my body can do is limited. This is not a bad thing because how I choreograph frees me from those limitations. Writing is then how I reframe and understand the body through my choreography” (Hay, “About”).

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah never rehearses choreography or “marks” steps, a term that connotes going through the motions with less energy in order to set the movements to memory without exerting oneself.

The workshop in Arnhem all those years ago taught me that the embodiment of intention in performance is more satisfying to watch than a technically virtuosic choreographed movement sequence. I infused Deborah's teachings into my body and mind from that point forward. We stayed in touch, and in 2005 we began a working relationship that took us from teacher and student to artist and manager and now to curatorial collaborators.

I have observed Deborah over these years—side by side, off and on, watching her performances, taking her workshops, hearing her thoughts. In this thesis, I identify a new vocabulary to describe her strategies and movement choices in order to organize my understanding of her contributions to experimental dance; this vocabulary that does not always align with her writing. I also critique subjects that are controversial in her works. This is a labor of love and a difficult one. I hope this inventory of choreographic concepts is a service to dancers, choreographers, somatic practitioners, and dance curators who are as fascinated as I am with Deborah Hay: artist, feminist, activist, organizer, teacher, instigator, researcher, writer, mother and grandmother, director, composer, dancer, performer, and innovator.

Deborah has deviated off the course of Western postmodern dance and forever remains steadfast in her determination to escape the trappings of her own mind and to survive intellectually and spiritually in a capitalist society. Her work has never been trendy or available for reproduction. It takes a great deal of care to keep her practice on track: "Training oneself in a questioning process that counter-choreographs the learned body requires... devotion and constancy. Every dancer who learns one of my solo dances, signs a contract, committing to a minimum three months of practice [now nine months] before the first public performance of his/her solo adaptation" (Hay, "How").

As a result of her Solo Performance Commissioning Projects being conducted from 1998 to 2012, an annual choreographic intensive to teach performing choreographers her latest solo, hundreds of dancers possess her solo works and, based on their contractual agreement, can perform

them with no royalty fees in perpetuity. The written score and movement practice are the common threads between each adaptation,<sup>2</sup> which means that no two ever look alike. Understanding what makes a Hay choreography has led me to start this list of reoccurring elements. These essential strategies let Deborah unlock dancers' potential and build approaches to choreographing their perception, all of which are keys to entering her work. I isolate these pieces as a way to illustrate each aspect in the inventory through short chapters with some repetition between them.

This thesis defines the choreographic elements within some of Deborah's scores, performances, and books as the primary sources of her distinct artistic contributions. Through direct observation and interaction with Deborah over the last two-plus decades, I have been witness to and felt the effects of her artistic process and choreographic works. Her deliberate language and written scores have provided a rich resource for generations of dancers. Her devoted followers are instrumental in supporting the dissemination of her material. Since she rejects terminology such as "technique" and "improvisation" in relationship to her "practice" and "choreography" respectively, there is a larger conversation around her methodology (another term she rejects) that is stunted in terms of positioning her art works within the history of dance improvisation and technical approaches to contemporary Western concert dance-making. Deborah's generation of dance innovators such as Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, and Trisha Brown, all living in New York City during the 1960s, pushed against the narrative content and defined aesthetics of classical Western modern dance performances and training protocols. Today, to be able to position the experience of her work, I find it critical to place her aesthetic and training within the context of improvisational approaches and develop language to support reoccurring aspects of energetic material, its embodiment transmitted from stage to audience seats, and the revolution for which it has laid the foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah uses the word "adaptation" to explain the relationship between her score and the performance of it by a dancer, herself often included.

Over the years, I have experienced her work in action while managing projects, partaking in workshops, “feeling” the room during performances while on tour, and hearing audience reactions after the shows. Deborah’s consistency in language-based instructions has been vital to unlocking dancers’ perceptions and efficacy in performance. Meanwhile, since this language is rarely shared alongside performances, audiences are left out of the equation. My thesis takes the position of a highly sensitized and informed audience member, drawing from Deborah’s publications, scores, and reviews and supplementing the written word to include performed adaptations and interpretations of the content of group and solo choreographies.

In this thesis, I perform the essential part of my research through close readings of dance scores and Deborah’s books, as well as historical and current publications on Judson Dance Theater, where Deborah began her choreographic career and training. Until now, the majority of writing on Deborah’s work has concentrated on Susan Leigh Foster, Sally Banes, and Deborah herself. By bringing my own deep analysis of Deborah’s choreographic patterns and priorities, I establish comparisons between Foster’s, Banes’, and Hay’s observations, name reoccurring themes, and build definitions of terms introduced by Deborah and broadened by my contextual framework.

The title of my thesis, which is also its internal organizing system, is a program note for the solo *Fire* (1999) performed at New York City’s Danspace Project in 2001. It states, “Dancer and dance are alive with images ranging from slut to angel, animal, vegetable, mineral, water, light, love, god, spirit, dust, beauty, universe, etc.” Deborah continues, “It is nearly impossible to read the body without these psychological factors, in other words, not simply historical and cultural references but material imbedded in our psyches.” I anchor the thesis by adhering to the first five nouns in Deborah’s list as the categories and sequencing of the chapters, all the while expanding each one through subchapters of my own classification, shattering a unidirectional interpretation of each element. Deborah has deviated from the traditional route of a choreographer. In parallel, I use

choreographic logic to rhythmically layer information and overlapping notions—as repetition is a common choreographic strategy—to position aspects of Deborah’s contributions for greater identification.

I draw on personal experiences of observing the choreography live and from video as well as my recollections of past performances seen over the past two decades. I emphasize the use of an embodied vocabulary that is in concert with the intentions of the choreographic. By placing my perspective as audience member in the center, I allow for some measure of mirroring what was performed on stage when aligning my deductions with her art. My goal, however, is to demolish what can be viewed as obscure in Deborah’s choreography through revelatory and experiential language.

These are the dances I am proposing. Chapter 1 draws a straight line from *SLUT* to Feminist to Hay’s tactic of connecting with an audience as “Invite Being Seen.” Chapter 2 brings otherworldliness in *ANGEL* to explain the generous shift Hay contributes to traditional dance training, alleviating performance anxieties for many, using visualization to choreograph Perception, and heightening the experience of time and space to eradicate recognizable movement into Obliteration. Chapter 3 traces *ANIMAL* qualities through Hay’s choreographic scores, hones in on Survival as her artistic drive, and enumerates the dominant aesthetic Archetypes found in her works. Chapter 4 plays with the notion of *VEGETABLE*, a thriving living organism, aka the dancer, engaged in Hay’s choreographic questioning, and taps into the material of the dance on a Cellular level past the Surrender of self. Chapter 5 mines the hippie idealism from the 1960s in *MINERAL* to question the romanticizing and appropriation of Native American ceremonies in Folk Dances, and the wiggle room or Slack that lies in her work between improvisation and set choreography.

The accumulation of each chapter’s isolation of key terminology and concepts found in Deborah’s body of work is an essential guide to revealing the give and take within her choreographic

innovations. Deborah sidesteps Western dance improvisation as her choreography and instead corners the dancers into set situations without movements to copy. By illustrating several choreographic instructions and articulating how the elements play out in her work, audiences and curators can develop new understanding of what choreography and performance are in Western experimental dance. As the form of the thesis diverges from a linear explanation, the tension and space between congruous (cause and effect) and incongruous (leaps of faith) notions then play within the reader's experience to better sense the strategies at work.

## SLUT

Definition: A word that has served to label and harm independent women (i.e., slut-shaming). A word reclaimed by sex-positive activists (i.e., SlutWalk). Appetite and perseverance in sustaining artistic research and one's livelihood while remaining steadfast in a singular, uncompromising career trajectory inclusive of rejections and attractions (listed as "bold or impudent" according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*).

"Slut" is the first word in Hay's inventory of thirteen nouns deployed imagistically in support of her solo *Fire*. The choreography was created in 1999 in the thick of third-wave feminism's early expressions of individualization.<sup>3</sup> Women have historically been encouraged to appeal sexually to men, but have been ostracized when they have gone too far, crossing an invisible boundary into "slut" territory (Miriam 263). Regardless of trajectories, the slander is used as a weapon on assertive women who claim their sexuality publicly or not (Tanenbaum).

As one of the "pervasive pejorative words used for women globally" ("AF3IRM"), the use of the word slut has become a generation's "project of reclamation" (Snyder 179) meant to overcome patriarchal sexism (Reyes) and display playfulness through empowerment, though the initiative is critiqued for centering a predominantly white female perspective. While Hay would age within second-wave feminism, she embraced the tension the word slut carries as both potentially punitive and celebratory. When describing that other four-lettered slur aimed at female bodies, "cunt," author Inga Muscio recognized its potency: "Words outlive people, institutions, civilizations. Words spur images, associations, memories, and synapse pulsations. Words send off physical resonations of thought into the nethersphere. Words hurt, soothe, inspire, demean, demand, incite, pacify, teach, romance, pervert, unite, divide" (20). The controversial nature of some words, slut in

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<sup>3</sup> Born in the 1990s, and differentiating itself from second-wave feminism of the 1960s and '70s, third-wave feminism was a movement that propelled a new generation toward equity for all female gender identities over oppressive patriarchal systems.

this instance, does not escape Hay and she deliberately deploys them as triggers within her practice to bring about physical responses from performers.

One of many recognizable experiences associated with studying under Deborah Hay is how she exaggerates the volume of words forming in your mouth as choreographic texture. As a dancer experimenting with sound, you are encouraged to play with noises amplified through an admitting, intrusion of wet flesh (tongue and inner cheeks, gums and lips). We open our throats and hinge our jaws to surround audible airways before releasing them into the studio to be absorbed by others' senses. Hay positions the studio as a laboratory so that all the deliberation around phonetic expression can be factors for variable movement outcomes.

Hay's movement approach was defined early on by "her reductionism [which] led to simple, natural movements and the most basic steps" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 113). This approach included features as quotidian as sounds assembling in and protruding from one's mouth, as Hay's resourcefulness found useful material in the inescapability of the body. By removing the division between trained and untrained dancers, "perhaps her most radical act was to blur *subject* and *object*" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 113). In early dances, Hay's choreography reversed the traditional roles of performers and props. While in the *Circle Dances* and *The Grand Dance* from the mid-1970s, audience members were the ultimate performers in the works. "Hay's compositional methods and her materials articulate a consistent underlying concern: what is the nature of experience, perception, and attention in dance?" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 113).

Hay took a pause from being onstage between the ages of 28 and 36: "While not performing I begin to allow imagination to thoroughly penetrate the constituency of my flesh, muscle, and bone marrow by turning my body into an infinity of tiny organs of perception" (Hay, *Lamb* 18). During this pivotal period, her "curiosity about movement is not only aroused, it is mystified, broadened, and made acute" (Hay, *Lamb* 18).

Dancers who work with Hay today receive instructions towards cultivating infinite sensorial stimulation—from their heightened internal or perceptive frames of reference to outside data infiltrating their corporeal boundaries sensually—as a performative resource to engage audiences in an energetic call and response. As data is obtained visually from audience members seated in proximity to the performers, they in turn react to this varying landscape of figures as a result, looping cause and effect into perpetuity. While other artists challenge the gaze of the viewers—who is watching what and why?—Hay is concerned with the how. “As an experimental movement artist,” she explains, “there are few avenues of gratification other than the presence of an audience” (*Lamb* 97). The gaze as part of the external stimuli becomes circularly engaged through the choreography as an abundant resource to the performer. Using a reciprocal gaze as the choreographer sitting outside of a performing embodiment, she will identify “noting where I was aroused. Unlike sexual arousal, I am piqued by clumsy, bizarre, plain, and daring movements and relationships” (Hay, *Lamb* 57).

Bodies encountering one another onstage in Hay’s choreography would not be qualified as partnering but rather an unintended crossing of paths. More typical are side-by-side relationships of performers in action. In fact, a seldom-mentioned fact is that Hay dabbled in social dances, specifically merengue, cha-cha-cha, rumba, and samba with teacher Bill Frank at Henry Street Playhouse preceding her studies and involvement at the Merce Cunningham studios (Hay, *Lamb* 11). Hints of what later were to become Hay’s inimitable choreographic trademarks can be traced from the following period of development at Judson Dance Theater performances, such as *Concert #7*, where Hay’s *All Day Dance* “fell between theatrical dancing and free play”<sup>4</sup> (Banes, *Democracy’s* 145). “Playing matters,” Hay agreed, writing that “as adults dancing together, remembering to play matters” (*Lamb* 7). Finding pleasure through curiosity is at the base of her work.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Banes’ interpretation of Jill Johnston’s review *Judson Speedlimits* on July 25, 1963, in the *Village Voice*.

Hay's choreographic scores are based primarily in written questions, titillating once allowed to be unresolved. "To seek an answer is to narrow the immensity of the question" (Hay, *Using the Sky* 20). In May 2013 she explained, "You do not have to believe that there is a truth to the question. Just move the question from your head down through your whole body and notice how the sensual impact from the question alters you" (*Using the Sky* 125).

Stereotypically, a slut is not retained in monogamous possessivity, but rather values opportunistic transferences of stimuli from one person to another and back. Transposing that notion to Hay's perspective, her choreographic questions affect "instantaneously succinct, sensually insightful instances of how beauty might manifest if I do not hold on to what I think or want it to be" (Hay, *Using the Sky* 15).

## **Feminist**

Impatient with waiting for institutional validation, Hay centered herself throughout her entire career as the primary resource for experiencing her art. She has repeatedly subverted hierarchical systems and fashioned community organizing to pass along her knowledge and share her research with generations of dancers and movers. In her first book, *Moving Through the Universe in Bare Feet: Ten Circle Dances for Everybody* (1975), she provided readers all the tools necessary to carry out her choreography on their own. In line with second-wave feminism, she used self-producing and word-of-mouth promotions, both keys to her longevity.

Hay has consistently created unconventional administrative structures, being immensely resourceful and instinctively strategic through grassroots organizing. For instance, she created the Solo Performance Commissioning Project (SPCP), which ran from 1998 to 2012, as a vehicle to teach and license each of her newest solos to twenty to thirty international performers at the same time, thus maximizing the impact and profit. These structural designs for how she disseminated her

teachings and projects have carried her along with them. Once taught, each of these versions of her solo du jour were propagated when the dancers returned to their home communities, leveraging their individual networks for performances and building Hay's reputation as a choreographer and mentor to up-and-coming generations of choreographers (often female and white), translating to new opportunities for Hay.

Her integrity with dismantling the tyranny of dance while simultaneously holding dance completely sacred has earned her an unwaveringly loyal and trusting following. (Touring artists usually are invited back to a venue every three to five years, if lucky. Recognizing that I have left major performing arts institutions shortly after presenting Hay, I jokingly have said that I move on to new opportunities in order to keep expanding her reach, which isn't completely untrue.)

A scrappy diva, Hay has held true to a resolute vision of dance based in ongoing research. At the core of her practice is this richness that she mines and shares openly. As the form of her dances does not rely on external shapes or steps to imitate, language directs participants to move according to Hay's choreographic will. She states, "I am not served by the history of dance training and pedagogy. I was. It's part of my body, it is part of how I think but I feel that I am part of the tradition that wants to push the boundaries" ("Perception Unfolds" 07:55-08:11).

Hay has abandoned emblematic landmarks of classically informed dance throughout her career. By 1967, no longer attracted to technically skilled dancers, she decided "to choreograph exclusively for untrained dancers" (*Lamb* 64), resulting in inadvertently removing herself for a period from within her own choreographies. She continued to prioritize untrained dancers as "an aesthetic preference . . . through 1996" (Hay, "Deborah Hay & Ralph Lemon" 157). Democratizing the image of the dancer as any body, and proving that every body can dance, Hay enabled her research to thrive without the high cost of maintaining a company of professional dancers.

In New York in the late 1960s, Hay taught workshops to gather participants for her projects. As part of a barter system, she offered the warm-up classes for free in exchange for their involvement in rehearsals and performances. Later in Austin, Texas, between 1980 and 1996, she organized four-month-long large group workshops, which culminated in performances (Hay, *My Body* 105). Performers paid to participate in this mostly annual choreographic lab and Hay, in turn, found the participants affordable housing and part-time employment to sustain their stay in Austin throughout the process.

The resulting ensemble pieces from those large group workshops were further mulled and condensed by Hay alone as she transitioned them into the material for her personal solo dances. In essence, the large group residencies became the testing ground for Hay's elaborate, foolproof choreographic questions, resulting in the underlying substance for SPCP, her dance dissemination platform.

Having struggled to sustain a dance company, Hay vowed to simplify her life, art, and administration by stripping away infrastructure and letting go of company members in 1985 and staff by 1986. Today she relies on the grassroots structures she has built over time, through teaching and performing in community and drawing on the interest of international dancers.

For the fourteen years it ran, SPCP consisted of a two-week intensive where Hay would transmit her choreography verbally to a group of twenty or so dancers, all seeking new performance realms. Through the application of Hay's substantive questions and the dance's immersive and undergirding practice, each dancer developed throughout the process their own adaptation of Hay's solos. The layers of perceptual attention to detail are equally engaging and troubling to perform. The individualized solos were ultimately unique while, if adhering to the choreographic score, universally Hay.

Each SPCP dance artist signed a contract that laid out the parameters for eventually publicly presenting their versions beyond the initial residency. These parameters stipulated that the length of daily rehearsal periods before each public showing was three months (later revised to nine months). In addition, the contract outlined that credits for program notes should include all participants' funding sources as well as the rules for editing the piece and adding design elements, such as costumes and musical accompaniment. While there were no royalty fees returned to Hay, each participant raised funds for a higher commissioning rate in order to attend versus paying a more modest choreographic workshop fee. While many choreographers teach excerpts of their finished choreographies or pieces in development in workshop settings to create income streams for themselves or to train new dancers, interact with various communities, and test out new ideas, Hay commanded greater participation fees by offering each dancer the chance to perform her choreography in the future. This approach furthered her own reach and sustained her practice with more substantial financial earnings.

Throughout Hay's career, there has been this thread of teaching to sustain her practice and research while she disseminated her creations through an underground circuit of disciples located in their respective communities—one dancer at a time. This tactic has allowed for a proliferation of the aesthetics of a choreographer whose own community of dancers in the 1960s was “actively installing in dance new values of democracy, humanism, decentralization, and freedom” (Jill Johnston qtd. in Banes, *Democracy's* 33).

### **“Invite Being Seen”**

At a typical Hay performance, several deliberate elements make it possible for audience members and performers to see one another throughout the show. First, the performers will already be onstage or enter as the last few audience members take their seats. Second, the lights over the

audience will dim once the show officially begins, but never go out completely unless the whole stage goes dark in a designed blackout lighting effect. While the light is not quite bright enough for audiences to read their program notes, their faces are illuminated so that the performers can see the landscape of individuals present in the room. Third, performers often drift beyond the traditional sightlines of the theatrical space, avoiding center stage as the dominant focal point, and instead dwell along the edges when they feel compelled to, according to the score's parameters. This drifting includes spaces in the theater traditionally kept for the audience seating and not a formal performing area.

Within the score, the performers can refer to choreographic instructions and notes on individual moments, accompanied sometimes by warnings, within the sequencing to guide them throughout the dance. Early on in Hay's development as a choreographer, she began using language in the form of a reminder, akin to a mantra, for the performers. "Invite being seen" is a staple in her directing lexicon. By using this performance mantra, Hay acknowledged that her dancing felt "more intimate" (*My Body* 62). "Invite being seen" pulls attention to her body performing without being subjugated by the oppressive power dynamic of the "male" gaze.

"Invite being seen" can also become a choreographic tool to bridge components in a specific work. For example, the instruction is applied in Hay's 1987 solo *The Man Who Grew Common in Wisdom* in order for the performer to embody being seen "drawing wisdom from everything, remaining positionless about the nature of wisdom" when performing the dance (*Lamb* 55). Hay's resourcefulness in repurposing the dancer's surroundings as performance stimulation is honed by the direction's specificity of absorbing information without adding judgment. For example, in her group piece *Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb . . .*<sup>5</sup> from 1991, it is a situational direction amplifying how the performer invites being seen, "as if I were face to face with my beloved" (Hay, *Lamb* 85). That

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<sup>5</sup> Every time the piece *Lamb, lamb, lamb . . .* is referenced, according to Hay's wishes, it needs to be listed with a varying number of repetitions of the word "lamb." However, to save space, I will eventually list it only once.

interpretive moment as performed by the dancer results in further connecting everyone. As Hay noticed, it became an “experience of generosity” to which “movement loosens the boundaries between audience and performer” (*Lamb* 85).

*ANGEL*

In the 1960s, Deborah Hay leaned on the countercultural influences of the time to alleviate her personal performance anxieties. This formula resulted in performance strategies that cohere into a recognized methodology for combining vitality and courage with vulnerability and honesty for generations of dancers searching for training alternatives for dance and movement improvisation. For people with their own individual creative struggles, mental blocks, and/or complacency, Hay's contributions have increased and altered the available options for dancing without debilitating self-judgment and boredom.

Hay, along with the other founding members of the Judson Dance Theater, was initially involved in composer and teacher Robert Dunn's pivotal composition classes at the Merce Cunningham Dance Company studios.

Dunn's classes, both in their heritage from [John] Cage and in their eclectic assimilation of various cultural preoccupations of the 1960s—including Zen Buddhism, Taoism, existentialism, and scientism—were a microcosm of New York's avant-garde art world. It was an art world small enough for poets, painters, dancers, actors, and musicians to know each other and each other's work. (Banes, *Democracy's* 3)

Experimentation, commitment, community, and cross-pollination grew out of the weekly assignments Dunn gave and by extension, the postmodern dance movement initiated by Judson Dance Theater. Although most often historically aligned with choreographer Merce Cunningham, he himself would say that the choreographers in Judson “were John [Cage]’s children and not his” (“Talking Dance: Yvonne Rainer” 07:18-07:22).

Cage's imprint was critical for Hay's now-attuned performance instructions for dancers. She specifically referenced his innovations on the piano to explain the magnitude of difference before and after a dancer applied her choreographic questions:

My body is capable of so much more than what it can do. For example, the range of sound coming from the piano was more or less constant until John Cage created the prepared piano by introducing different objects that were placed between or on the strings, hammers or dampers. These outside components altered the piano's harmonics and added a whole new gestalt of sound to the world of music. In a similar way the dancer who performs my work has a prepared body although I do not mean movement training, physical strength or prowess. A question, crafted by me, is introduced and infiltrates every cell in the dancer's body. The attractiveness of the question redirects the dancer's attention away from her/his inherently choreographed body making room for a different mode of performance behavior to arise. The visibility of this altered behavior is experienced in direct proportion to the dancer's willingness, practice, and experience in investing the body with an intelligence that makes use of the question by constantly returning to it. The prepared body is necessary to my choreography and the performance of that choreography, even before my dances are made. (Hay, "A Continuity")

For Hay, the alterations that her questions inspire in a dancer's experience are able to replace other learned and cultured behaviors, overriding those preferences and patterns, and servicing Hay's desired choreographic goals. Acting as a filter, this redirection lays the foundation for choreographic instructions that then shape the trajectory of the dance piece itself. While Cage relied on chance to alleviate habitual patterns in performance, Hay crafted an intricate web of circumstances that can be open to chance influences, be it in spontaneously created movements or noticing audience attention, but is precisely guided by the choreographic language comprising her dance scores. This undoing of patterns is a heaven-sent sense of relief for dancers who had been previously bound by classical dance training techniques that mold/hold their bodies hostage and limit their movement possibilities.

In tandem with her early dance research, which ultimately developed into this notion of choreographing perception, Hay's live works evolved "from theatrical to social to almost sacred dancing" through the '60s into the '70s (Banes, *Terpsichore* 113). Her social dances of the '70s are filled with references from Tai Chi, specifically her *Ten Circle Dances for Everyone*, which was taught by listing the steps, sequences, and musical selections in their entirety in her first book, *Moving Through the Universe in Bare Feet*. Through guided visualizations, she addressed any potential hesitations the participants might experience, sharing the cues that had removed her own mental and physical blocks over time. She said it was by studying Tai Chi in New York in the late '60s that she "began to let go of all I had learned, and to trust a new thing called flow, or myself, or the universe" (Hay, *Moving Through* 4).

Altering dance aesthetics from the start, Hay's piece *All Day Dance for Two* (1964) was recognized as validating "the genesis of a movement or a movement relationship" as "an integral part of the act of seeing" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 116). Tying movement creation to perception is a through line in Hay's artistic evolution. For *The Grand Dance* (1977), Hay performs as the guide, leading and coaching the audience/participants in a group movement meditation, generously reassuring them that she "will enter in and out of our dance verbally, until [they] are all familiar with the material" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 128). In this guru-like role, Hay suggested the material of the dance for them to perform as well as what to imagine while doing so.

## **Perception**

The baseline in a Hay dance is how she choreographs the performers' perception. In all her books, teaching, written choreographic scores, and interviews, she is vigilant with the language she employs to trick one's mind and body in order to connect with a suspended state of belief.

Each of her scores lists guiding questions, unanswerable and seductive, to entertain as a source of movement impulses, as well as choreographic instructions and reminders for dancers to perform in order to fulfill the precise dance. The written choreography aspires to be a map through time and space, indicating navigational actions and circumstances with helpful tools to implement for attaining successful results.

As French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty pointed out in the 1960s, due to habitual patterns we have “privileged conducts and laws of internal equilibrium” that predispose us to certain behaviors within our surroundings (4). Hay’s choreographic scores act to disrupt a dancer’s pre-established “perceptual relationships” (Merleau-Ponty 4) in order for the richness of their environment, its perceptual potentials, and their bodies to animate as more than just bodies as vessels. For Merleau-Ponty noted that “our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space” (5). In line with Hay’s leading questions, which leverage one’s sensory capacities and the input embedded in space that then in turn affects the body, the philosopher acknowledged the importance of one’s proximities to objects in our spatial environment “to test, to solicit, and to vary our grasp on the world, our horizontal and vertical anchorage in a place and in a here-and-now” (5). The potency of our perceptual abilities and the richness of positionality in relationship to all around us are heightened in Hay’s provocative questioning, awakening even more external stimulation for a dancers’ performance.

For example, one of four guiding questions in Hay’s 2010 solo *No Time to Fly* is, “What if how I see while I am dancing is a means by which movement arises without looking for it?” (Hay, “Introduction to Concepts”), which relates to the arc of the entire evening-length performance. Encouraging embodiment, this question eliminates second-guessing and intellectual choice-making on the part of the performer, tapping into the quintessential spontaneity of Hay’s aesthetic reliance.

Some of her reminders are trickier. In *Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb* ... she instructed, “If I perceive this moment as nothing, I am correct. However, if I do not perceive this moment as everything, I am not correct” (*Lamb* 85). Emphasizing the limitlessness of one’s perception and the usefulness of a seemingly contradictory statement, her writing provided the puzzle to imagine the chewy possibility of an answer.

In one choreographic instruction in *1–2–1*, a group piece performed in 1996 in Melbourne, Hay informed the performers from Group A to repeat a sequence; however, in contrast to the first iteration, the arms should be “perceived astronomically” to take “a greater amount of time to cover the same amount of space without intentionally slowing the movement” (Hay, *My Body* 12). The variation is in the performers’ minds and inevitably translated to subtle external differences on their bodies.

Forever removing self-consciousness and any inhibitors of flow, Hay employs linguistics to unlock possibilities for the minds and bodies of dancers, herself included. It is through the precision of her language that she carves out the qualities in the dancing she is after: “When I *notice* my whole body there is a sense of weightlessness to my experience ... buoyancy.... In contrast, *focusing* on my body feels dense” (*Using the Sky* 29).

Choreographer Ros Warby, longtime Hay performer, explained the slippery nature of Hay’s choreography and how perception can trip one up. Moreover, in the section called Complexity in *No Time to Fly*, Warby recalled, “as soon as it becomes something that you’re playing out, it’s not Complexity after all. So the practice is just really keeping hold of your perception of where you are undone, or unresolved” (“Performer Insights”). Hay further challenged herself and her performers with “what is tricky is the simultaneous experience of seeing and dis-attaching from *what* you see. This, then, becomes how you see” (*Using the Sky* 121). Nuance in choreographing perception is possible when leveraging the chemistry carved into Hay’s experiential use of

language to perform such conundrums. One of her questions is, “What if how you see is the subject of your experience instead of what you see being an object in your experience?” (*Using the Sky* 122).

There is nothing vague about what a dancer experiences as choreographed perception within Hay’s universe. To insure that precision is reflected in the performance, Hay noted for *No Time to Fly* that “I remember to notice that my whole body is producing unimaginable instances of specificity” (*Using the Sky* 115). In Warby’s adaptation of *No Time to Fly*, she noticed the repetition of an earlier section the second time around. While not feeling attached to her original execution, she brought “subtlety” and felt “that the undoing of my idea of it is more available” as a result (“Performer Insights”).

### **Obliteration**

Judson Dance Theater’s association with Cage led the group to “constantly extending perceptive boundaries and contexts” (Banes, *Democracy’s* 5). At a performance of *Lamb, lamb ...* Hay thanked “composer John Cage for indirectly liberating me from taking myself too seriously” (*Lamb* 50).

Similar to her mentor Cage, Hay denied the presence of improvisation in her work. In a letter to Leonard Bernstein, Cage corrected the composer and assured him that never had he or Cunningham improvised, asserting that because people didn’t see “a beginning, a middle and an end,” audiences assumed it was improvisation (“Talking Dance: Suzanne Weil” 44:25-44:46).

True to her artistic lineage, Hay’s 1966 piece *Rise* was described as “nothing less than an act of erasing the entire code of classical dancing” (Banes, *Terpsichore* 116). Expanding dance as a form to the point of obliterating it, by 2011 Hay felt that “the dancers’ choice to perform much of the choreographic material ... requires catastrophic acts of perception. “Catastrophe” in this

sense refers to the magnitude of former behavior that the dancers need to dis-attach from in order to perform my choreographic directions. It represents a loss of tremendous proportion” (“Programme Note”).

In her 2008 group piece *If I Sing to You*, Hay reminded the dancers to perform “without hesitation, remove recognizable kinetic patterning, not by stopping or changing movement but by heightening your perception of time and space” (*Using the Sky* 97). This heightening has the capacity to evaporate any understanding of movement adherence. Another one of her notes read “this is nothing” (*Using the Sky* 98) in order to destroy any preciousness, so dancers can remain free of judgment and let their actions and experiences shatter upon impact.

Hay found satisfaction in resisting the seductive nature of unison in her dance *Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb . . .*: “What I see next are forty-two individual entities instead of a river” (*Lamb* 32). She ultimately said, “I am elated. There is a lot to look at and nothing to understand” after watching the evening-length performance in its entirety (*Lamb* 82). While her dances germinated from exacting language, the resulting performances can be evanescent. One dancer from her 1993 group piece (*inspired by Tower of Babel*) concluded that “it is difficult to describe her actions. It doesn’t seem to be necessary” (Hay, *My Body* 23). From my own experience of dancing Hay’s instructions and witnessing her choreographies, my body and mind have felt satiated, ebullient, and vacant all at once. Performer Jeanine Durning in her solo adaptation of *No Time to Fly* erased any hints of her intended destination: “I don’t want to give away that I’m travelling in this direction . . . I’m also constantly in negotiation with the audience . . . to maybe understand how they’re perceiving this pathway and trying to trick them to not see it any more” (“Performer Insights”).

Hay’s dances defy full comprehension: internally for the performers who are being in the moment; for the choreographer herself; and for audiences partaking in a dance form with its meandering and unresolved consistency that reminds them of improvisatory tasks.

*ANIMAL*

i dance for love  
 i dance for awareness  
 i dance for the moment  
 i dance to see  
 i dance like a deer  
 i dance to feel the ground  
 i dance to be free  
 i dance to grow  
 i dance to disappear  
 i dance for life  
 i am dancing breath

(Hay, "Dance Talks" qtd. in Banes, *Terpsichore* 126)

Somatic movement artist and Body-Mind Centering founder Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's research connected our growth and ability to thrive with our first sense, to move. "Movement *is* a perception ... the first perception to develop and therefore the most important for survival" (114). She described in her seminal book *Sensing, Feeling, and Action* that as one develops into a being, "movement helps to establish the process of how we perceive; and how we perceive movement becomes an integral part of how we perceive through other senses" (114).

Hay has an unmediated desire to move. For her, it is life and death. Her dancing body is an expression of community and sustenance. It is primal. Her dances travel through the subconscious. In performance, she "growls and groans" (Hay, *Lamb* 78); her dancers bark and bleat. They exhibit "animal patience" (Hay, *My Body* 92) and release "animal friction" (Hay, *My Body* 47) after completing a performance. Endless galloping and passages of winged flight are found in her

artworks. Increased sensitivity associated with animal awareness is accessed through Hay's choreographic scores. She "has placed dance at the boundary of the physical" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 127) by involving sensory material and invoking spiritual connections in her performances.

Animal behaviors surface in Hay's choreography and her written interpretations of her performance experiences. For example, in her *Circle Dances* from the 1970s, the instructions and repetitions were known to bring about a communally "felt understanding of interplay" between the participants (Banes, *Terpsichore* 123). As a group dance where no one is left out, Hay leveraged the energy of the pack by encouraging everyone to follow one another and be inspired to copy each other's movements.

## **Survival**

Hay's hunger for movements is her purpose for being. She claimed, "Because dance is where I live, I do not make things with it. I accumulate just enough structure to engage my curiosity and attention to continue to live" (*Lamb* 71). Both in terms of artistic and financial sustenance throughout her career, when she has described her motivation in the choices she has made, the reoccurring word Hay used is "survival." She acknowledged the adaptive qualities it takes to pursue a career as a dance artist in this country. She has had to "redefine home" as an experimental artist since "the compulsion to expose, renegotiate, or reinvent the strengths and weaknesses of dance tradition offers little in its final outcome to attract the average dance-goer" (Hay, *My Body* 78). Without financial security and on the verge of abandoning her life's work, Hay wrote a resignation letter in 2002 to explain that the exhaustion was too great "after forty years of living in a survival mode as an independent choreographer in the USA" (*Using the Sky* 28).

At that time, survival was also a driving force artistically. *O Beautiful*, Hay's solo that year, contained the guiding choreographic question "*What if your choice to perceive and surrender beauty*

as life unfolds each and every moment, whether you are on the path, or off the path, is your only means of survival?" (*Using the Sky* 22). The profound sense of abandoning one's very skin to avoid stagnation, molting without locating any creature comforts, made letting go a perpetual state of being for Hay and her work.

In a last-ditch effort, Hay did not go public with the letter or look for alternate employment. Instead, she reached out to four highly experienced Western postmodern and contemporary trained dancers she admired for her swan song. This farewell project, *The Match*, and its weekend of performances at New York City's Danspace Project in 2004 affirmed the course of her life from her years of research and choreographic development into the future. By deciding to set her choreography on technically skilled and acclaimed creative performers, she ended up making visible, without a doubt, the intricate intentions within her work.

*The Match* won her her first New York Dance and Performance (Bessie) Award in 2004 and the piece was immediately picked up for several European tours. Commissions and major acknowledgments followed. In April 2012, Hay received the unprecedented financial support of the Doris Duke Artist Award its inaugural year, and in 2015, she was given the distinction of *Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres* by France's Minister of Culture and Communication. After half a century of devotion to experimental dance creation, these recent awards and recognitions have removed "the struggle for survival that once shaped the course of every day" (Hay, *Using the Sky* xvi). However, she never reconciled the difficulties for artists in our society. In the choreographic score for her 2010 solo, *No Time to Fly*, she said a part of the piece called WORK "comes easily.... Maybe because of what is required to survive as a dancer in contemporary Western culture" (*Using the Sky* 112).

The urgency and impending threat to survival has steadied Hay's life and research. She knew that to keep her own attention and the attention of younger generations of movers, her choreographic materials needed to be enticing. She had to be her own test case while massaging

movement language and her choreographic structures to be impermeable to easy escape routes. What thrills dancers in Hay's approach is also what terrifies them. To invest one's whole self in performing perception when your survival depended on it has only one way to be successful and that is complete surrender. Survival has no margin for error.

## Archetypes

Poet Barry Goldensohn, Hay's brother, says that "her work brings to body a meeting of comedy and tragedy in absurd order of the unconscious mind where meaning is courted, suggested, betrayed, denied" (Hay, *My Body* 59). Hay instructed her performers to "explore the body as a window onto metaphysics, myth, pathos, humor, sound, history, horror, ordinariness, poetry, nature, and dance" (*My Body* 61). What we witness as audiences of Hay herself performing are, in scholar Susan Leigh Foster's words, "impulses that most vividly reflect and amplify her experience of working the image" (Hay, *My Body* ix).

To describe Hay's work is no small task. It leads to potent and vague dichotomies such as, in Goldensohn's words, "clarity and arbitrary meaninglessness" (Hay, *My Body* 59); in Hay's words, "cross-pollination of the collective unconscious" (*My Body* 28-9); and in Foster's words, "non sequiturs ... a space full of conjectures and conjurings" (*My Body* xvii). There is often little to compare it to in dance and little recognizable in life to hold onto. And yet it can appear so familiar.

Judson historian Sally Banes noticed that by the late '70s Hay's work revealed "a delicate balance between a profound experience with slight but concentrated movements that the viewer can enjoy empathetically and aesthetically and moments that remain cryptic, locked in Hay's private experience" (*Terpsichore* 126-127). Recognizing this dilemma, Hay has explained that the majority of classically informed dance training "assumes that there is a single coherent being who dances"; however, "my work succeeds when there is no one 'one,' no single moment, or meaning, movement,

image, character, emotion, that exists long enough for either the dancer or audience to identify an ‘is’ that is happening” (*Using the Sky* 10). This quality of having images surface but never for too long, and layering several elements to bombard and overwhelm the dancer’s capacity to illustrate any one at a time is essential to Hay’s choreographic aesthetic. The images add shape and texture to the instructions without revealing any narrative plot line.

For example, Hay informed dancers to be scientists in a laboratory rather than movers on an empty stage or in a practice studio. Differing from true scientists, Hay clarified, “As a dancer your methodologies do not require exactitude because your experimentation is deliberately measureless” (*Using the Sky* 19).

Not one to be boxed in by her prescriptive instructions or reminders, the language deliberately funnels dancers through choreographic experiences to shape the final performance architecture. For instance, as one performer recounted in *No Time to Fly*, “I depend on the image at first, and then I get rid of it” (Hay, *Using the Sky* 117). Hay also repeatedly acknowledged that performing her choreography lets any character traits slip away easily. In (*inspired by Tower of Babel*), she stated about the performers that “who they are is never certain” and that any recognizability will “come and go” (*My Body* 94).

Following is a categorical list that I created with contextual definitions based on their uses in Hay’s choreography. I compiled examples of these identifiable and reoccurring energetic and imagistic sources found in Hay’s choreography. Although momentary and obscured, these signature elements return historically from one piece to another. As stereotypes, they are potent cultural references; some situate her early influences from the ’60s while others are aesthetic interventions ahead of their time. They open up realms of possibilities to consciousness, connections, cosmic worlds, and fabricated mythologies all in the service of the dancer’s experience. While Hay does not

display images in her choreography to be literal, I am organizing them to make them apparent, even just for a flash.

### VOID

A metaphor for death. A warping of time and space, where the air is thick and has melted down action and thought process to a standstill. In *The Match*, the dancers are instructed to simply “fall into a void” (Hay, *Using the Sky* 38). From *Lamb*, *lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb . . .*, “Dying, as a movement practice, is a step toward a nonthinking process” (Hay, *Lamb* 54) and “has no frills” (Hay, *Lamb* 62). While in *If I Sing to You*, the instruction carries deviating and disparate information; however, the resulting situation resembles earlier choreographic instances “tossed here and there as if in a freefall” (Hay, *Using the Sky* 87). VOID can have an earthy groundedness to its performance as well as a suspended weightlessness.

### A PLACE (of business)

A location with competing and interconnecting agendas, like a laboratory or marketplace or mall. Its components articulate within the imagination of the performer producing industrious and disjointed movements, vying for your attention. Busy making/gears in a clock/workings/a system of logic not clearly demonstrated. In *No Time to Fly*, the choreography asks the performer to dance “a contemporary market,” and “without creating A MALL I notice it wherever I am” (Hay, *Using the Sky* 113). Similarly in the section WORK, dancer Jeanine Durning explained that “you have these really mundane actions that have to repeat themselves over and over again” (Durning, “Performer Insights”).

### TOY

In form and in spirit, the TOY is nostalgic and childlike. It has regular timing and a repetitive motion. It can have a surprise within its movement cycle. Stiffly articulated gestures in *Voilà* (1995) fragmented to become “one of [Hay’s] robot movement memories” (Hay, *My Body* 40).

In *The Match*, dancers are instructed to “enact a spunky child’s toy, i.e. jack-in-the-box, a theme and variation combining humor, joy, corn, idiocy, and even embarrassment” with the point of it being “a challenge to self-esteem” (Hay, *Using the Sky* 42). In *Lamb ...* she instructed dancers “to perform foolish movement because foolish is an idea” (Hay, *Lamb* 66). These are not played to the crowd. And by twisting stereotypes, Hay layered restrictions onto choreographic instructions, for example, challenging performers in *Lamb ...* as “mock robot ... to avoid becoming machine-like” (*Lamb* 75).

### CHARACTER

A shortcut using impersonations, to add pomp and circumstance with this quick character reference, and without literal imitations. For instance, in *No Time to Fly*, soloist Ros Warby warned that when embodying Fred & Ginger, performers should “not just to get hooked in on the movement or the idea, or your idea of what that should be” (“Performer Insights”).

Other examples:

“Vaudevillian”	<i>If I Sing to You</i> (2008) (Hay, <i>Using the Sky</i> 70)
“Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers”	<i>No Time to Fly</i> (2010) (Hay, <i>Using the Sky</i> 109)
	<i>Lamb ...</i> (1991) (Hay, <i>Lamb</i> 61)
“A cartoon, playing horse and rider”	<i>Voilà</i> (1995) (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 37)
“A dancing witch character”	( <i>inspired by Tower of Babel</i> ) (1993) (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 92)
“A diabolical scientist”	( <i>inspired by Tower of Babel</i> ) (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 88)

### VOCALS

Several different variations on verbal noises, audible interruptions, cartoony sound effects, made-up spoken languages listed along with some choreographic instructions:

“Speaking languages of instantaneous origin”	<i>1–2–1</i> (1996) (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 12)
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- “Ancient voices whisper” *If I Sing to You* (Hay, *Using the Sky* 71)
- “The ancient voice is me from 10,000 years ago or from 10,000 years in the future, bringing that possibility into the present.” *No Time to Fly* (Hay, *Using the Sky* 110)
- “The last two words were swallowed by the artist’s body.” *Voilà* (Hay, *My Body* 47)
- “A rapid, thick-tongued, gentle utterance created inside the mouth cavity. The word *lamb* does not drop or land.” *Lamb ...* (Hay, *Lamb* 1)
- “The sound of enthusiastic clapping cut short” *Lamb ...* (Hay, *Lamb* 63)
- “A golf crowd’s affirmation, as heard on tv: first the humming of group approval, followed by its applause recreated by smacking the tongue and lips together” *The Match* (2004) (Hay, *The Match*)
- “Blow the word *fleesch* from between the inside of the cheek lining and the outside of the molars, teeth clenched and bared.” *Lamb ...* (Hay, *Lamb* 81)
- “The sound *PANS* is shaped like petals of a flower in the mouth and similarly released into space” *Lamb ...* (Hay, *Lamb* 86)
- “Sniffling sobs are accented with short complaining outcries from the throat.” *Lamb ...* (Hay, *Lamb* 89)
- “Throw *he he he he he* from the chest into an *Lamb ...* (Hay, *Lamb* 91)

elliptical orbit that returns to the mouth.”

### OBSTRUCTION

A visual foil to other activities on stage, hovering around the action. *Lamb* ... section changes are directed through a series of choreographed upright scenery panels manipulated from behind the flat by the performers. In *If I Sing to You*, the dancers’ bodies are lined up as a curtain to flank the primary action (Hay, *Using the Sky* 76).

### DIVINE

From the heavens placed on earth, biblical references, idealism, overt language and subtle gestures symbolizing the purity of devotional beings and ceremonial rites. For while Hay recognized that her lack of interest in sacred dance classes over the years was factored by her “irreverence, cynicism, and snobbery,” she eventually realized that her resistance was in the name. In fact, for Hay “sacred dancing was redundant” (*My Body* 53).

Examples:

“An angel approached”	<i>Voilà</i> (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 44)
“The mystic interpretation of lamb in the Bible as the cosmic child within.”	<i>Lamb</i> ... (Hay, <i>Lamb</i> 1)
“A holy site”	<i>No Time to Fly</i> (Hay, <i>Using the Sky</i> 115)
“Fake falsetto liturgy”	<i>1–2–1</i> (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 12)
“Invite being seen realizing the sacred and profane at once”	<i>Lamb</i> ... (Hay, <i>Lamb</i> 80)

In *Lamb* ... when the dancers performed “invite being seen realizing the sacred and profane at once,” Hay noticed them as “archetypes” and “nothing less than deities” (*Lamb* 80). She summarized their performance to be that “the activity of faith becomes the substance of movement for the dancer” (*Lamb* 86).

## BLACKOUT

A theatrical removal of the lights. The stage blinks to signal the beginning of the piece that has already begun. A cue for the audience to start concretely paying attention. A jump cut or time travel within the structure of the dance. An anchor marking the arc of the choreography. A reminder that the blurriness of what is dance can be found all around and at any time.

## VEGETABLE

Within Deborah Hay's body of work, there is an investigation of the organic, a state of being, that is connected to the universe, a sense of wholeness in solidarity with all matter, inside and outside of one's peripheries, thin-skinned, tapping into a greater source of vitality, found in abundance in the atmosphere. A consistency reliant on dissolving the ego, the boundaries of self, a spiral of practical information acknowledging death as core to living.

As awareness that encompasses all surrounding molecules floods the self and creates a conscious feeling of oneness with our milieu, no one thing (in performance: wall, curtains, architectural detail, rigging, floor boards, lighting units, shoes, chairs, watching beings) can be disconnected. From a heightening and softening of focus, a widening from the back of your eyes, comes this propinquity to one another.

The universal is in all of us. Progressions from stillness to seed, tree to flourish, fruit to yield, decay to deposits for seed renewal, there are harvestable substances cultivated by abandoning cyclical end points. It is all movement and inter-reliant for "dying is movement in communion with all there is" (Hay, *Lamb* 2).

This groundswell of awareness and interconnectivity is illustrated in Hay's choreographic question from *Lamb* ... (1991) when she wrote, "What do I mean by *alignment is everywhere*? It is as though every cell in my body is hooked into a cosmic hose that grounds and elevates me simultaneously. [It] shifts my focus to include all of life intermeshing into one gigantic pattern of movement—and I merge in its dance" (*Lamb* 21).

By setting the tone, Hay positioned all matter as this nourishing perceptual space that is energetically permeable, performance fertilizer that extends into the audience's realm by piercing through to the interior landscapes of the dancers' sensed realities. Since the dances start well before the audience trickles in, the blurred opening infuses values sweeping over the viewers as they

become situated. In “A Lecture on the Performance of Beauty” (2002), Hay emphasized a silent mutual understanding in the process, for the “audience senses these shifting boundaries of your body” (*Using the Sky* 20). One can see/sense the labor involved in her dancing, as the setting established from her actions in relation to architecture and choreographic logistics is navigated by a cellular responsiveness.

### **Cellular**

Hay’s choreographic questions are based in a cellular exploration. The expanding potential of its fractal-like language is to be of service to a dancer’s perception in performance. Since her beginnings as a young dance-maker, she has ignited her cellular consciousness as a point of inspiration. For example, Hay instructed participants in *The Grand Dance* (1977) that “every cell is opened, vulnerable, trusting, exposed” (Banes, *Terpsichore* 129). She consistently has invested in this “cellular level of attention to the human body” and turned to it for guidance as her “miraculous windfall of interest” (Hay, *Lamb* 47).

The makeup of the questions all begin with “what if” and are immediately followed by “every cell in my body, at once, has the potential.” The end of the questions, the variations, stem from an unmanageable combination of activities for its culmination. This combination condenses a cacophony of cellular intelligence information into a synchronicity of multiplying movement impulses. Each impulse, individually focused, creates agency throughout the entire body as a complex unit to source from. The disclaimer early on in the structure of the question, “has the potential,” relieves the performer of accountability in perfecting or fully accomplishing this gargantuan feat. It is truly impossible to wholly achieve the instructions immersed inside the questions, which “relegated to the cellular body are akin to having millions of balls in the air at once” (Hay, *Using the Sky* 120). For Hay, the goal becomes “the perception of such infinitely small

movement” as her life’s work (*Lamb* 53). The dancers’ senses, in Hay’s work, are aroused, stimulated by all the instructional information shaping their experiences of the dance. The information inside each question is pointed and can fold in on itself to exponentially add more material for consideration within the choreography. The immediacy of responses by the cellular body is only “second to the microcosm discovered in overseeing the performance of it” (*Lamb* 80).

By disseminating these linguistic performance provocations directly through her scores, books, and videos, Hay removed herself as the singular authoritative conduit for its knowledge. Furthermore, she designed gauges built into the choreography in order for the performers to be self-reliant and provided them the tools to find the pleasure of sourcing their cellular selves throughout the dance. Hay has always stated, “I am not your teacher. Your fifty trillion cells at once are your teacher. It is inconceivable to imagine what over fifty trillion cells will reveal from one moment to the next, but why not listen to this potential unfolding?” (*Lamb* 58).

## Surrender

*The Grand Dance* is a group experience in surrendering. Explicitly stated during her forty-minute introduction, Hay led the audience of participants through the sections of the piece chronologically as “seven images of surrender

surrender of: focalization  
 form  
 “I am”  
 personal experience  
 light  
 will  
 stature” (Banes, *Terpsichore* 128).

Whereas in *Lamb* ..., surrender was critical for revealing the choreography, so Hay instructed the dancers to “refrain from decision-making, interpretation, point of view, or need to demonstrate” (*Lamb* 65). The work of the dancer was to be in the moment, in the material of the questions and choreographic instructions, and not to perform any of them.

It is this perceptual instruction and the “willingness to surrender linear and habitual patterning in movement and thought” that form the aesthetics and content of the dances (Hay, *Using the Sky* 105). They are tricks to avoiding judgment, second-guessing, and labeling. Since relieving herself of performance anxieties, Hay has found satisfaction within her dancing from “the rightness of nothing much, including absurdity and the choice to surrender anything that wants definition” (*My Body* 22).

In a pep talk, Hay reassured her dancers performing *Lamb* ... that while she was after “unafraid, unembarrassed, and undiluted performances” from them, her “choreographic demands are often ridiculous, illogical, and full of contradiction” (*Lamb* 48). Ultimately what Hay considered in *Lamb* ... as “this arduous unraveling” contributed, in her opinion, “humility, dignity, humor, and gratitude” in their performance of the material (*Lamb* 64).

This notion of the unreasonable as a vehicle for releasing long-held assumptions around dance and performance tactics has become a lifelong pursuit in Hay’s work. More recently, she has replaced the word “surrender” with “dis-attach,” to actively pull away from what limits a performer’s capacity to instead be fully embodying perception in dance. In Hay’s written score for *No Time to Fly* (2010), she suggested that the performer/herself consider this: “What if my choice to surrender the pattern, and it is just a pattern, of facing a single direction or fixing on a singularly coherent idea, feeling, or object when I am dancing is a way of remembering to see where I am in order to dis-attach where I am?” (Hay, “Introduction to Concepts”).

## MINERAL

It is no surprise that Deborah Hay's formative years as a choreographer took place in the 1960s, as the very core of her choreographic approaches and performance intentions have always exuded hippie utopian ideals.

Starting in a circle holding hands is the standard hippie gathering greeting. Her *Circle Dances* were created while Hay established and lived as part of a community land trust in Vermont named Mad Brook in the '70s. Being a resource for one another to improve conditions for the whole is central to finding a balance in cost-sharing, bartering, and thriving as a community living simply and as much as possible off the land. Absorbing these beneficial practices has always come naturally to Hay, and her resourcefulness is instinctual in every design aspect of her work.

She has mined her physical self for renewable resources (cellular consciousness) to share. She does so openly through writing out her scores, and although they are impossible to understand without her instructional deciphering available, her precise language is consistent from teaching to coaching to choreographing. "*Thankbeventz* is an earthly expression of gratitude for the choice to play" (Hay, *Lamb* 48). The texture and shape of the words incite activity from one's mouth into one's imagination. "*Thankbeventz* the three-dimensional body exists, whatever its limitations, because without it, the choice to play awake has nowhere to be" (Hay, *Lamb* 48). The dovetailing of the celestial and the terrestrial advances Hay's verbal effectiveness.

The instructions for her *Circle Dances* emphasize oneness within a group. While moving together and noticing the individuals that make up the whole, participants were reminded by being connected that "all the hands are the same hand" (Hay, *Moving Through* 80).

*The Grand Dance* (1977) is similar to the *Circle Dances* in that it is a group experience in which the audience members became the performers, thereby eliminating the audience and creating only participants. With the strength of group unity, those experiencing the piece "manipulate fields of

energy together by actions called Stepping on the Earth, Turning in Place as a Celestial Being, Star Walk, The Dance of Celestial Being, and Rock Dance” (Banes, *Terpsichore* 127).

More examples of utopian ideals impacting choreographic directions are in *Lamb ...* (1991). Throughout the various instructions are moments of simple collective integration as one entity by “holding everyone’s hand,” or almost hallucinogenic mind-warping toward expansiveness, “our circle is big, at other times small, despite the same number of people” (Hay, *Lamb* 9). While Hay encouraged a state of serendipitous marvel, nothing was ever coincidental. In her mind, “an ‘ah ha’ is a spontaneously inclusive cosmic shift in perception” (*Lamb* 86). She rejoiced that fate brought a sign aligning her name with one of her favorite mantras: Debor**AH HAY** (*Lamb* 86; emphasis added).

### **Folk Dances**

“In American Indian or East Indian dancing, Balinese performance, Noh theater, Aboriginal dances, I feel I am witnessing the materialization of divine wealth” (Hay, *Lamb* 69). Hay was not alone in this feeling. Since the inception of modern dance in the United States, non-Native American artists throughout time have found inspiration from indigenous cultures outside of their own ethnic heritage. They are attracted to a seeming return to a more holistic way of being that is inspired by Native American traditions and ceremonial dances in contrast to an American system of societal norms based in consumerism and overproductivity. Hay noted that not only has “history choreograph[ed] all of us, including dancers” (“How do I”), but that “everyone is consciously and unconsciously choreographed, by culture, gender, locale, politics, race, job, history, and so on” (*Using the Sky* 3).

Perhaps exaggerated by the 1960s flower-power, anti-violence countercultures of hippie ideologies, and influenced by the Vietnam war protests, young people searched for meaning through

borrowed rituals, spiritual journeys, connections to nature, purification, and/or by distancing themselves from the U.S. propaganda of the time. Whatever the context for its germination in Hay's lexicon of imagery, the concept of the folk dance—and often that of an American Indian stereotype portrayed on '50s television programs—reoccurs frequently in her choreography.

In structure, Sally Banes described Hay's *Circle Dances* as being “like folk dances, [which] are not ‘performed’ for an audience, but ‘done’ un-self-consciously” (*Terpsichore* 124)—naturalism, unpolished, abandon—romanticized notions within the '60s hippie aesthetic. Banes boiled down Hay's choreographies from the '70s to being “a hybrid of meditation, folk dance, ritual, Tai Chi Chuan, and American social dancing” (*Terpsichore* 114).

In her how-to book of choreographic instructions for experiencing the *Circle Dances*, Hay included as inspiration a section of Frank Waters' writing from *The Man Who Killed the Deer*: “To the Indian, breathing is an act of blessing; With his first breath, through the cosmic air which he inhales, he relates himself to the whole universe” (qtd. in Hay, *Moving Through* 32).

Hay has been publically criticized as intentionally naïve after presenting the dance experiment called *Blues* as part of choreographer's Ralph Lemon's commissioned performance series *Some Sweet Day* at New York's Museum of Modern Art in November 2012. Lemon himself stated that her “naïveté is not false” (qtd. in “Part 3” 01:23:37-01:23:39). The project, named after an old gospel song, took inspiration from blues music as the point of departure for establishing the blues as an American aesthetic (Lemon). In consultation with Lemon, Hay created a new piece for the occasion, motivated by his prompt. Since she had never worked with a black cast before, Lemon chose the performers on Hay's behalf while she—inspired by the participants at her concurrent workshop hosted by Movement Research in New York City—invited the group of predominantly white women to join in on the process, too.

As an aesthetic choice, Hay segregated her two casts by skin tone, one group the Blue Blacks, and the other the Blue Whites. In the public conversation at Danspace Project commenting on Lemon's program, when the subject of racial identity came up choreographer luciana achugar remarked, "There is no such thing as just an aesthetic. Aesthetics is ideology" (qtd. in "Part 3" 00:41:05-00:41:15). Further into the discourse, performance curator Thomas Lax asked why there is "fear of really addressing what race means?" He continued to press by asking, "What are the ways in which this was working on a representational level that made us feel uncomfortable?" (qtd. in "Part 3" 00:46:25-00:46:45).

Although not able to attend the culminating conversation herself, Hay contributed a letter, which Lemon read publically, saying that her work "continues to be about how we see, not what we are looking at, and that includes the same challenge for audience and performer" (qtd. in "Part 3" 01:23:44-01:23:55).

Below is a list of instances in scores when stereotypes of Native American powwow dances inform Hay's choreographic choices:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>"Performs faux-tribal rites"</p>   | <p><i>(inspired by Tower of Babel)</i> (1993) (Hay, <i>My Body</i> 86)</p> |
| <p>"Her movement and voice play on phony misplaced American Indian/Bedouin imagery. She rides atop irregularly produced ritual-like steps and hops, her arms and fingers spread and retract interruptedly."</p> | <p><i>If I Sing to You</i> (2008) (Hay, <i>Using the Sky</i> 81)</p>       |
| <p>"Resourcing whatever bits of prior exposure to a fake American Indian ritual dance, primarily Hollywood westerns, I discharge</p>  | <p><i>No Time to Fly</i> (2010) (Hay, <i>Using the Sky</i> 115-6)</p>      |

those bits as best I can while rhythmlessly  
 bouncing to beating drums that only I can  
 hear.”

From each of these, the performed movements produced are variations of the dancer with hunched shoulders, feet tapping the floor, bouncing by bending at the knees, with arms open and up to the sides. Appropriating a character from '50s Hollywood westerns that was an appropriation of an indigenous dancer in the first place, she acknowledged the intentionally superficial interpretation of this material. However, the sincerity and fascination with Native American culture in a white-dominant culture relates back to a search for communing with the Earth and finding reverence in honoring the wisdom inherent in one's body and spirit.

## **Slack**

My own default definition of choreography is putting steps or movements to memory, using motivations, sequences, speeds, spatial patterns, props and/or costume manipulations, narratives and text deliveries into a repeatable form. In my imagination, choreography could have all semblances of movement styles from quiet stillness to cacophonous chaos unfolding along a desired trajectory and timeline that explores the surrounding environment. Similarly, improvisation can have all those intents and elements but with a looser grip on physical outcomes, a more fluid expectation of creating fulfillment while encouraging surprise and spontaneous exploration.

Great choreography has room to breathe in its construction, allowing for surprise and discovery within even the most rigid of structures. That ability usually relies on the performer's skillful delivery of set dance movements to find the flexibility and humanity in its evolving configuration. Performers who have great mastery of their capabilities and emotional initiative to find play anywhere can let go or forget the material in order to inhabit it in the moment, providing

audiences the immediacy, intimacy, and thrill of live expression. Audiences accustomed to improvised movement compositions have, among other things, an eye for deviation, being highly attuned to what is offered and looking for their expectations to intersect with unexpected turns of events.

Hay's choreography is structured by a written score, which lists the order of actions in space and through time, all falling under the umbrella of her unanswerable questions. These create conundrums that are chewy enough for the performers to be completely involved in, starting with their perception of their dancing itself. In her choreography Hay says, "There are the movements, occurrences, tasks, tricks, and traps that constitute each dance. These actions take place in the experiential realm" (*My Body* 48). She further explained, "There is a substructure, an exercise not unlike a meditation, that is applied uninterrupted throughout the dance. The substructure is a set of conditions that exist in the imaginative realm. It unifies, through practice, the sequence and performance of the dance material. Without the substructure there is no dance" (*My Body* 48). However, by massaging language, she allows her dance practice to continue to be challenged by "less stable instances of being" within "the learning taking place in my spewing multi-dimensional reconfiguring non-linear embodiment of potentiality" (Hay, *Using the Sky* 1).

What remains unknown in Hay's choreography is the repeatability of the distinct gestures and exact shapes of the movements performed by the dancers. Her dances leverage sensory stimulations that naturally vary depending on the situational circumstances. Choreographic instructions are layered in order to funnel the performer through the dance. Although seemingly in control within the instructional forces pressing upon them, the dancers can appear to the audience as if, for this performance, they have willingly strapped themselves into a carnival ride that once begun cannot be stopped. Hay says the instructions are "tools that stimulate a meaningful engagement between the dancer and all there is" (*Using the Sky* 79).

Honed directive language guides as well as releases the performer, each and every moment, so that they don't need to anticipate the next action in the choreographic sequence or start to problem-solve prematurely before bringing the current situation to its fullest manifestation. To be clear, a full manifestation could be a blink of an eye, sleight of hand, or a sweep under the carpet. Hay asked herself, "If I turn from movement as a primary component in making dances, replacing it with how I perceive space and time, will this suffice as the two primary components in my choreography?" (*Using the Sky* 15).

The slack that is felt by audiences is the meeting point of the tightly organized set of circumstances in Hay's dances with an insistence on performers being present in each and every unfolding moment in relation to their perception of time and space. Aesthetically, the visual outcomes of her movements resemble those more likely arrived at within an improvised dance from a contemporary Western concert dance lineage. From inside the choreography, however, nothing is left to chance. The continuous nature of their attention and the activities the dancers display are akin to birdlike adjustments to maintaining alertness in an ever-changing perceptual environment. There is no nest—nothing shelters its inhabitants from the necessity to letting go of assumptions, habits, and patterns.

Using language to muddle any performed outcomes, Hay layered reoccurring strategies and temporal textures onto movement impulses without dictating their exact executions. Some examples within Hay's choreographic score directives are below:

"Fake stop ... run/floating ... freeze                      *Lamb* ... (1991) (*Lamb* 42)

without freezing"

"Brief flashes of movement sprang and were              *Voilà* (1995) (*My Body* 36)

retracted so quickly she appeared surprised

and wondered in their aftermath"

- “There was time to appreciate the absence of strain or design” *Voilà (My Body 42)*
- “It was more than the gallop; it was the spirit of the person dancing that gallop” *Voilà (My Body 58)*
- “The timing between changes is deliberately unpredictable” *(inspired by Tower of Babel) (1993) (My Body 84)*
- “Using a variety of unexplainable arm movements to augment the turn” *(inspired by Tower of Babel) (My Body 86)*
- “They instantly respond by filling the stage with large shattering movements” *(inspired by Tower of Babel) (My Body 87)*
- “Together they can start and stop a chorus of staccato barking sounds, without acting like dogs” *(inspired by Tower of Babel) (My Body 91)*
- “She bows her spine, drops her head, springs off the wall, and crosses the stage, a fast-forward cinematic image without a sure reference” *(inspired by Tower of Babel) (My Body 92)*
- “Cross stage turning without turning” *Beauty (2002) (Using the Sky 27)*
- “Follow a curved path upstage, pulled by unrecognizable magnetic forces” *The Match (2004) (Using the Sky 38)*
- “Speak and simultaneously retract unintelligible remarks” *The Match (Using the Sky 41)*
- “Curve begins as an unknown and yet I can” *If I Sing to You (2008) (Using the Sky 74)*

depend on it”

“Turns without turning” *If I Sing to You (Using the Sky 99)*

“I neither hurry nor linger” *No Time to Fly (2010) (Using the Sky 113)*

“My standard for ‘lower’ is my own” *No Time to Fly (Using the Sky 117)*

Ongoing questions magnify the awareness and attention the performers bring to the choreography, further breaking down any singularity within any of the choreographic instructions. For example, Hay’s research around April 2010 asked, “What if dance is how and where you practice relationship ... without looking for it?” (*Using the Sky 120*).

However impenetrable and unfamiliar Hay’s dances are visually, viewers sense a type of logic that is believable, though left on the tip of their tongues. This loose grip on understanding can be disorienting for audience members accustomed to ornamental or structural clues as guideposts in a dance work’s structure. Hay challenged conventional notions of dance, acknowledging “movement in my dances inclines toward what is believed to be undance-like” (*Lamb 34*). Politically, she proclaimed that “performance becomes an opportunity to air the rightness of all movement,” while for the dancer, the “challenge is to invite being seen perceiving no movement wrong, out of place, or out of character” (*Lamb 34*).

The slack also shows up as the performers interpret Hay’s instructions on an as-needed basis. She recognized that “the movement may change, but the choreography itself does not change” (*Using the Sky 115*). There is a range possible within Hay’s set choreography. She continued to explain that “no matter how detailed or broad my language, between the written directions and the dancer, unforeseen circumstances and interpretations emerge that cannot be accounted for because my choreographic language deliberately and often omits specifying movement or time and/or space” (*Using the Sky 126–7*).

During Hay's performative lecture on her solo *Beauty* (2002), she displayed two versions of her dance on video, side-by-side, one clothed in a postapocalyptic costume and the other in the nude. In viewing the two simultaneously, it is clear that they are the same piece and completely different performances of it. The harsh influence of the clothed costume added ferocity and frustration to the interpretation of the solo. The piece when performed naked was more serene throughout. Timing altered as a result of the attack in the movements. Freedom left within the latitude of the language in her choreographic score enabled the performance to expand and contract given the costumed circumstances. The split-screen watching of the archival videos demarcated the boundaries of the choreography and verified that simple costuming can add a layer of overt influence on a performance, welcome or not—it is the performer's choice.

As part of the research and data collection for Motion Bank (2012–13), a virtual library of aesthetics created by the Forsythe Company, twenty-one videotaped versions of the same solo by three different dancers were overlaid and synchronized. By matching internal cues, each version starts in unison but doesn't necessarily end at the same time ("Recordings & Overlays"). Unique movement tendencies and spatial patterns are revealed and the core choreographic direction is recognizable, but the inevitability of an exact duplication of the performance of a Hay solo is clearly established as impossible.

These discrepancies are not hair-thin differences between each performance and interpretation. There are widely flexible margins and, while the intent is solid, the trajectories are extremely varied. Conversely, the Motion Bank's website stated that their goals with the video overlays were "to explore how these patterns are visualized using the pathway and score sequencing data, and how a layer of abstraction not normally associated with Deborah Hay's practice can reveal unseen regularities in the work" ("Recordings & Overlays").

Performer Ros Warby explained, “Depending on how you play it and depending on your attention on where you direct it, the choice is really the choreographic tool that’s at your disposal” (“Performer Insights”). Also as part of the Motion Bank interviews, performer Jeanine Durning illustrated how an intent can be delicately played out in Hay’s choreography when “the directive is that you’re parting the space. It’s very deliberate, like your body’s affecting the space, but not disturbing the space at the same time, so it’s kind of a physical paradox” (“Performer Insights”).

Hay’s choreographic goals are clear; she does not want “to shape exploration with a pre-existing road.” For her “the body is a curiosity-seeker if given half a chance. An articulate consciousness combined with undecipherable movement greatly inspires me as a teacher, performer, choreographer, and audience member” (*Lamb* 81).

Hay’s tactics are not ever meant to be alienating for viewers. For example, in *If I Sing to You*, Hay’s generosity toward the audience is instilled in the score: “Like poetry, there is time for the audience to contemplate the many possible associations within any moment and to notice innuendo and phrasing” (*Using the Sky* 74).

For Warby in *No Time to Fly*, the implied spontaneity in the choreographic language contributed to the flexibility she found when performing. Warby explained that if she placed “too much attention on the movement” she would get stuck (“Performer Insights”). Her job was to remain attentive to her work within the parameters of the movements but not the shape or execution of any movements.

Despite all the opaqueness in Hay’s choreographic scores, she hesitated to make them readily available for audiences. While they have occasionally been found in printed program notes or self-published booklets, she struggled because on one hand the “dances would not exist without them”; however, she never wants “audiences to be looking for what might either satisfy or not satisfy their beliefs about what they are seeing” (*Using the Sky* 128).

## CONCLUSION

This inventory is meant to strike a balance between being able to recognize and let go of aspects of Deborah Hay's choreography. I have reorganized some of Hay's words, while concentrating on her four published books, and placed concepts together to provide tools for identifying strategies that mark her aesthetics and approaches. Juxtaposed with Hay's deliberate wordings are some leaps. In line with Hay's practice of not requiring exactitude but instead relying on deliberately measureless experimentation, I have included embodied wisdom into the reading of the thesis. The title is a quote about "material imbedded in our psyches" from the program copy for *Fire* (1999) and it determined the order and direction of these five chapters, each named for the first five elements in the list. The remaining eight elements from this quote will be further developed into a final collection. The thesis can serve as a companion to both reading Hay and/or watching her work. Each chapter and internal section can be understood as stand-alone texts; however, they layer sequentially to add understanding when compiled. The thesis can be a potential guide for deciphering Hay's choreographies; my intent was not to pull back the curtain on the magic but to make legible an inexplicable experience while keeping the work evanescent.

*Fin* (or Lights Fade Out)

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## Appendix

Hay's Choreographies Cited (in chronological order)

1963 *All Day Dance*

1964 *All Day Dance for Two*

1966 *Rise*

1970s *Circle Dances* (published in 1975 in *Moving Through the Universe in Bare Feet: Ten Circle Dances for Everyone*)

1977 *The Grand Dance*

1987 *The Man Who Grew Common in Wisdom*

1991 *Lamb, lamb, lamb ...*

1993 *(inspired by Tower of Babel)*

1995 *Voilà*

1996 *1-2-1*

1999 *Fire*

2002 *Beauty* (originally *O Beautiful*, later integrated into "A Lecture on the Performance of Beauty")

2004 *The Match*

2008 *If I Sing to You*

2010 *No Time to Fly*

2012 *Blues*