

### **Abstract**

In my thesis performance project, I explored how I can use my skills to create innovative work and inform and inspire social change as an aerial artist. *Plasticized: A Dance Film* is a project that reflects my viewpoint on the excessive usage of plastic in our society. I also have an artistic motivation for making this film. By exploring and utilizing the approach of Rudolf von Laban, I demonstrate how Aerial Dance can surpass the “wow factor” of the genre with thought-provoking and meaningful work. To raise awareness about global plastic pollution, my dance film brings Laban Movement Analysis to bear on my specialization, Aerial Circus and Dance. This written thesis reveals my research into Aerial Dance, Aerial Circus, Laban Movement Analysis, and Bartenieff Fundamentals as well as looking at key issues related to dance as protest, specifically environmental pollution. Finally, I trace my creative process and reflect on the resulting film.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

*Plasticized: A Dance Film*

by

Claudio Ribeiro da Silva

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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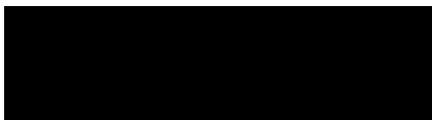
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A THESIS

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By

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

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## List of Photographs

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## Introduction

I have always been fascinated by the possibilities of movement and continuously look for new opportunities to express myself and expand my view of dance. This curiosity led me to Aerial Circus classes over twenty years ago. Initially, I trained in trapeze, silks, ropes, and worked with a harness in traditional circus techniques. After mastering those skills, I left to explore Aerial Dance, shifting away from a virtuosic approach, to move towards dance and what it could communicate. It was not easy to veer from this traditional method, but it led to a road of self-discovery. Slowly my aerial skills merged with my dance training in ballet, modern and contemporary dance.

Last year, I had the fantastic opportunity to discover Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis (L/BMA) as taught by Professor Claire Porter as part of the MFA dance program offered at Montclair State University. Through the lens of Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis (L/BMA), I reflected on, redefined, and renewed my approach to Aerial Dance, which often relies on visually complex and impressive skills to showcase virtuosity and inspire awe. Laban/Bartenieff Movement studies are based on the most fundamental aspects of human movement. I used it as a framework for understanding Aerial Dance. Colleen Wahl notes that “L/BMA reflects the vast range of its possibilities. Like a painter whose palette consists of a wide array of tones and hues that is made even vaster by mixing paints” (17). Throughout the process of creating my dance film, the application of L/BMA helped me generate movement material using a new creative palette.

To explore the potential for expressivity and meaning in Aerial Dance, I chose a theme close to my heart: human beings’ abuse of the environment through excessive use

of plastic. Plastic is the best and worst of technological and economic progress. Our culture has become dependent on single-use plastic, from disposable cups to life-saving medical devices. It is in our food, fields, forests, seas, and even blood. Dennis Thompson reveals that “Researchers found evidence of plastic contamination in tissue samples taken from the lungs, liver, spleen, and kidneys of donated human cadavers.” In my dance film *Plasticized*, I use Aerial Dance to emphasize what might happen if society does not take immediate action to create more effective policies, including, for example, recycling programs. As an artist, I feel compelled to express a strong viewpoint that serves as a channel for political activism. My art is a protest against plastic pollution, a problem that is affecting the entire world.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought much uncertainty regarding regulations for live performance, with all shows canceled for a time. This complicated situation compelled me to make a film, even though this was a new medium for me. I enjoyed the idea of a challenge, as well as the opportunity to explore my cinematic view. Thus, the path of this project encompasses three avenues: explorations in Laban Movement Analysis through Aerial Dance; protest against the use of plastic through visuals, set and imagery; and learning how to make a dance film, with Aerial Dance as my artistic vehicle.

## **Research**

My research for *Plasticized* is comprised of three strands, each of which have made an impact on my work in the creation of the film. The first part of my research examines the history of Aerial Circus and Dance, since that is the genre through which I express my creativity and viewpoint. The second part of my research encompasses the work of Rudolf von Laban and Irmgard Bartenieff, whose philosophies greatly influenced

my movement perspectives for this project, and the third part of my research discusses Dance as a vehicle for activism, which is the main focus of *Plasticized*.

### *Aerial Circus and Dance Past and Present*

#### **Aerial Circus**

The circus was a favored entertainment before the invention of film and cinema. It played with the human imagination and our desire to break the laws of gravity (Harskamp). In 1859, Jules Léotard, a French acrobat, devised the flying trapeze at the Cirque Napoléon in Paris. According to the historian Richard Cavendish, there was no safety net: "He performed above mattresses laid out on a raised runway beneath him." For training, he placed the trapeze above a pool. Crowds rushed to see him. He made his London debut in 1861 at the Alhambra Theater; guests ate their meals as he floated above their heads. Incidentally, Leotard's skintight costume was later incorporated into ballet: the leotard, the term first recorded in 1886 (Harskamp). Another Frenchman, Jean-François Gravelet, a.k.a. "Charles Blondin," crossed the Niagara Falls on a tightrope the same year (Abbott). These performances piqued public interest in aerial gymnasts and acrobats.

By the mid 1800s, physical expertise was increasingly valued in masculine ideals. Early trapeze artists were both entertainers and competitive gymnasts, emulating each other's feats while trying to surpass their sensational rivals. The muscular male bodies, precepts of masculinity, were contradicted by the appearance of weightlessness, the way they "flew through the air." In contrast, the female athletic body was not well appreciated due to social norms that painted women as petite and fragile, needing to be assisted and

protected by the males. Nevertheless, slowly by the latter part of the 19th century, women began to dominate the field. The human desire to fly grew more robust than ever, and in 1877, the first human cannonball Rosa Richter (stage name Zazel), was shot into the air at London's Royal Aquarium (Andrews). Tragically, in 1891, she broke her back when she overshot the net in New Mexico. This event ended her career (Andrews). Despite public criticism, female aerialists trained for all aspects of aerial work and continue to perform today.

The great popularity of the circus even got to Nazi Germany, where Hitler and his second-in-command, Hermann Göring, enjoyed circus entertainment tremendously (Harskamp). Ironically, some of the most loved and adored trapeze performers were Jews (Harskamp). However, attempts to "Aryanise" the circus were unavoidable (Harskamp). The Nazis would eventually dismantle the circus world in Germany because Jewish families owned many of the traveling companies (Harskamp). They had cleared most circuses of non-Aryan entertainers by the start of World War II (Harskamp).

The German Lillian Leitzel, "The Queen of Aerial Gymnasts," was the best-known aerialist in the Golden Era of the Circus, in the early 20th-century (Andrews). Her specialty was the Roman ring, similar to the rings used in male gymnastics today, and she mesmerized the audience with an acrobatic act of spectacular tricks and poses while hanging from fifty feet above the ground — without a safety net (Andrews). Evan Andrews writes that "For her grand finale, she would grasp the ring with one hand and flip head over heels so rapidly that her arm would dislocate and then snap back into place with each turn. The fascinating routine made Leitzel into an international diva." Leitzel continued to perform her physically demanding act well into her 30s, but disaster

eventually struck when a piece of metal on her rig cracked during a performance in Copenhagen in 1931, sending her tumbling to the floor (Andrews). She died two days later as a result of injuries (Andrews). This very real sense of danger creates excitement in the audience, and Aerialists were and are well-liked by audiences around the world.

In the early 20th century, the two leading American circuses were the Bailey Circus and the Ringling Bros. In 1919, they merged and flourished, but several other circuses struggled for survival, especially between the two World Wars (Britannica). Although variety show circuits (vaudeville) had also been popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and often included aerialists, by the second half of the twentieth century, vaudeville had ended and aerial performances became associated only with the circus (Britannica). The United States circuses transitioned their form of transportation from trains and horses to semi-trucks with trailers, as we see today (Britannica)..

In the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, organizations in Australia, Europe, and the western United States began to blend circus techniques with theater, resulting in the contemporary circus. For example, Lexi DeFilippo explains: "The Royal Lichtenstein Circus, formed in San Jose, California, by a Jesuit priest in 1971, is one of the first circus organizations to include theater in its performances. They were among the first groups to employ a one-ring format (as opposed to the three-ring format of the biggest circuses), which created an intimate atmosphere as they diverted from animal performances. With these settings, the artists had the opportunity to engage the audience." It was the beginning of the contemporary circus movement.

In 1984, Cirque du Soleil was founded and revolutionized how circus was presented, breaking the traditional circus format. Pascal Jacob, a French circus historian

explains: "Cirque du Soleil emerges from a virtual ahistorical land in terms of circus, yet a land capable of challenging the traditional forms where they had seemed indestructible" (Leroux and Batson 43). Emerging enterprises like the Cirque du Soleil (originally from Quebec), the Circo Zero in San Francisco, and Cirque Éloize in Quebec were perhaps the most inventive circuses at the turn of the twenty-first century. It was, according to Maura Keefe "magic performed with consummate skills that can take your breath away. That idea of spectacle gives circus its roots in the oldest performances known to humankind—rituals and dances...and magic."

The Animal Rights movement also affected the makeup of the 21st-century contemporary circus. In 2018, H.R.1759, the Traveling Exotic Animal and Public Safety Protection Act was signed ("H.R.1759 - Traveling Exotic Animal and Public Safety Protection Act"). This act restricted the use of animals in circuses which led to more focus on theatrical acts featuring people, not animals. Aerial stunts thus got a boost.

The newest genre of aerial acrobatics is Aerial Silks or Aerial Tissues. Although there are no registers that precisely indicate the exact date it emerged, there is evidence of its being used at a French circus school in 1959 ("Exploring the History Behind Aerial Silks"). Trainees were invited to make a statement by doing an acrobatic act. One student used a large piece of fabric to display her act ("Exploring the History Behind Aerial Silks"). However, there are reports of drawings of performances on silk (cloths) at festivities of Chinese emperors around 600 AD ("Conheça o Tecido Acrobático"). There are also reports in Germany, between the 1920s and 1930s of artists using cabaret curtains to perform ("Conheça o Tecido Acrobático"). The point is that these activities were being developed, constantly arising from one to another. It is said that the fabric

used today is a variation on Rope, also called *Corde Lisse*, a modality that used sisal rope (today, cotton) (“Conheça o Tecido Acrobático”). The silky string might have come from the trapeze or the strings used in the assembly (“Conheça o Tecido Acrobático”). Over time, the materials and how they are used improved. Aerial Silk was definitely recognized in 1998 when Isabelle Vaudelle and Isabelle Chassé presented their mesmerizing aerial silks performances in Cirque du Soleil’s show *Quidam* (“Exploring the History Behind Aerial Silks”).

### **Aerial Dance**

Aerial Dance history dates back to the late 1960s and unfolds within the realm of postmodern dance from the Judson Church investigation of new movement approaches to dance. However, the seeds of Aerial Dance were planted long before, with the desire to defy gravity manifest throughout dance history. For example, in the early days of pointe work, dancers were lifted by wires. In 1796, Charles Didelot created a spectacular method of rigging that allowed dancers to be carried aloft on wires in *Flore et Zéphyre*, his most famous ballet (Anderson 81). With wires, he was able to lower a dancer from the air to the ground, giving the impression that she was balancing on her toes (Anderson 81). With the invention of the pointe shoes, Marie Taglioni, a central figure in the history of European dance, was able to float, "barely skimming," across the stage (Bernasconi and Smith 24). As the structure of the pointe shoe became stiffer and sturdier, ballerinas eventually discovered how to balance for longer periods of time and even turn en pointe, leading to a new era in dance history, dramatically influencing the evolution of the art form (Anderson 81). The fascination with taking flight extended into partner work in

ballet, where a male dancer would lift a female ballerina into the air, imitating flight and evoking weightlessness.

In the early 1970s, Judson Church began to experiment with pedestrian movement and gestures. By exploring the space between two or more dancers who share weight and follow a line of touch between them, Steve Paxton challenged the dance world with “Contact Improvisation.” As Jayne C. Bernasconi and Nancy E. Smith explain: “Perhaps not coincidentally, the partnering aspect of Aerial Dance with the low-flying trapeze is very much like the concepts and experience of contact improvisation” (4).

Alwin Nikolais, a multi-faceted pioneer was also an innovator in Aerial Dance. He produced electronic music, costumes, scenic design, and lighting for his works. "Nikolais was a leader. He brought one to the doors of their imagination, to find their own way. Where this process led was not his concern, but to open their imagination was..." (“Kennedy Center Honors Alwin Nikolais (1987). American Choreographer.”). According to Bernasconi and Smith, Alwin Nikolais was the one that planted the seeds of aerial dance (4). His *Ceremony for Bird People* (1978) was performed in France's city streets by local gymnasts using ropes hung from the trees (Bernasconi and Smith 4). It is true that before that, in 1970, Trisha Brown had used ropes, harnesses, hoists, and straps to send a man down the side of a SoHo multistory building in *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (Bernasconi and Smith 4).. However, Nikolais’s more consistent investigation of vertical space and its imagistic potential led him to be credited for kickstarting Aerial Dance.

If Nikolais planted the seeds, Terry Sendgraff and Stephanie Evanitsky germinated them. They are considered to be the founders of Aerial Dance proper and are

widely recognized for dedicating their lives to the art form. Sendgraff, who lived in California, was highly influenced by the work of Alwin Nikolais through Joan Woodbury and Al Wunder, who had danced with Nikolais' company (Bernasconi and Smith 12). Sendgraff was a trampoline gymnast, and in the 1960s she explored high-flying trapeze in Denver, Colorado (Bernasconi and Smith 12). In addition, she studied human growth potential movement by studying gestalt therapy, Tai Chi, massage, meditation, and improvisation, along with the Feldenkrais method (Bernasconi and Smith 12). On her forty-fourth birthday, in 1976, she announced that she was developing a dance form and performed a solo trapeze lower to the ground with a two-point rope (swing-like) (Bernasconi and Smith 12). She kept developing its structure and later created the single-point trapeze. The two-point trapeze would allow only back and forth motion, while the single-point allows for circles (cone-shaped) where one can swing forward and back as well as rotate. This low-flying, single-point trapeze became the engine that propelled Aerial Dance (Bernasconi and Smith 12).

These investigations are examples of what Sendgraff called Motivity, an improvisation-based dance form and performance art (Bernasconi and Smith 12). It often includes using a suspended apparatus, in particular the single-point low flying trapeze, which Sendgraff designed in 1976 (Sendgraff). Later she experimented with other apparatuses such as bungee and harness, stilts, bicycle rims, and Lyra (hoop) (Bernasconi and Smith 12). Although now retired, she leaves an incredible legacy, impacting generations of aerialists in the United States.

At the same time in New York, Stephanie Evanitsky was exploring aerial possibilities using a variety of apparatuses. Interestingly, Evanitsky also was highly

influenced by Nikolais with whom she took class (Bernasconi and Smith 14). In his studio, she met Diane Van Burg, who had the same desire to explore Aerial Dance (Bernasconi and Smith 14). They became collaborators and worked with several of Nikolais' dancers. In the book *Aerial Dance*, by Bernasconi and Smith, Evanitsky comments: "Nikolais taught you how to acknowledge the space around you. When you walk on the street after class, you could feel the space around you" (14).

The Multigravitational Aerodance Group, Evanitsky's company, had its debut in 1969 at the O.K. Harris Gallery in New York (Bernasconi and Smith 14). Evanitsky would spend hours planning and drawing where she wanted to create her work and hang diverse apparatuses such as the inner tube of a tire with which to experiment (Bernasconi and Smith 14). *The New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff praised the work's "piercing imagery of pictorial, literary inspiration" (D14). Kisselgoff explains that although Evanitsky used some traditional dance movement, she was not using the ground in the same way (D14). Evanitsky has said, "When you are suspended above the ground, you don't have less ground, you have more ground.... You have ground all around you" (Bernasconi and Smith 15). Evanitsky received the Guggenheim Award in 1976 and toured successfully in Europe, however, after the European tour, she could not deal with the struggle to continue to create new works (Bernasconi and Smith 15). For the next ten years, Barb Salz, one of the company's dancers, led Multigravitational Aerodance Group, which she dissolved in 1986 (Bernasconi and Smith 14).

In 1985 Anne Bunker founded O-T-O Dance in Tucson. A few years later, she invited Robert Davidson, a disciple of Terry Sendgraff, to train the company in all facets of Aerial Dance (Bernasconi and Smith 16).

A student of Anne Bunker for six years (1979–1985), Nancy Smith founded Frequent Flyer Production in Boulder (Bernasconi and Smith 16). Several Bunker, Smith, and Sendgraff disciples spread Aerial Dance all over the U.S. In the San Francisco Bay Area, Joanna Haigood and Lydia Reiman's Zaccho Dance Theater became known for exploring architectural environments (Bernasconi and Smith 17). Zaccho's dancer Jo Kreiter left the company in 1995 to found Flyway Productions (Bernasconi and Smith 17). In 1991 Amelia Rudolph founded Project Bandaloop, a reference of architectural performance hung on the side of a building combining dance and rock climbing, a new variation on Aerial Dance (Bernasconi and Smith 56).

These curious movement innovators propelled Aerial Dance to what we know today, and they continue to work, investigate, create, and promote the form. This leads to higher education institutions adding Aerial Dance to their curricula as an elective and, in some cases, as a concentration. There is, however, some wariness toward Aerial Dance in post-secondary dance departments, "for both classification and liability reasons" (Hane and Stich). Nevertheless, Aerial Dance is progressively gaining acceptance in the college dance world. At Louisiana State University, the Aerial Practice program where I am an instructor is included as an elective for physical theater majors. It soon will also be included as an elective in the Dance Minor Program as I initiate the process of a curriculum change in the Dance department.

### **Comparing Aerial Circus to Aerial Dance**

Bernasconi and Smith quote Friedrich Nietzsche as saying, "He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly into flying" (4). This is an apt description of necessary steps toward safe practice in

Aerial Circus and Aerial Dance. Humans have always had the desire to fly. From Icarus' melted wings to a child's yell at the weightless moment at the climax of a swing's pendulum, the human fascination with escaping gravity survives as a visceral experience when watching aerial acrobatics. And, circuses have long employed the means to give the impression that performers can fly. But what are the differences between aerial dance and circus, given both tap into this human desire to transcend gravity? And where do the two art forms intersect?

Aerial Dance performers combine movements in the air and on the ground, thereby expanding the space and dimension in which the work is performed. Aerial Dance is not to be confused with Aerial Circus, in which performers stay on the apparatus during the entire performance. "Circus skills are physical actions performed to extremes of agility, velocity, and height, whereas aerialists perform gymnastic action on, and off apparatus suspended in the air" (Tait 13). Dance and circus intersect on many points: "The circus and choreography...roll their eyes at one another now, after having been one and the same show in the eighteenth century," said the famous French mime Marcel Marceau as quoted by Maura Keefe. While Marceau may have exaggerated, circuses *have* featured dance acts, equine ballets, and rope dancing since then. And power, elegance, vigor, and accuracy are required for such endeavors to appear in both circus and dance. The modern dance choreographer Martha Graham relied on our familiarity with circus themes in her 1939 piece *Every Soul is a Circus*, in which she cast herself in a love triangle with Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins ("Every Soul is a Circus"). *Every Soul is a Circus*, one of her few comedic works, combined ebullient physical exertions with melancholy clowning. Ballet master George Balanchine was

commissioned by Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus to create a dance featuring the circus's iconic elephant troop. *Circus Polka*, a 1942 piece with music by Stravinsky, was initially performed by elephants before being restaged for pupils at the School of American Ballet (Keefe). Balanchine remembers calling his longtime partner Stravinsky after he had received the commission. The discussion went somewhat like this: “I wonder if you’d like to do a little ballet with me.” Stravinsky: “For whom?” Balanchine: “For some elephants.” Stravinsky: “How old?” Balanchine: “Very young.” Stravinsky: “All right. If they are very young elephants, I will do it” (Keefe).

The relation of dance to acrobatics has long been close, with Charles Didelot's riggings, leading to the development of pointe shoes, and the leotard being named after Jules Leotard's costume, for example. Still, it is difficult to trace the exact line between aerial dance and circus. In France, a performance movement known as Nouveau Cirque (New Circus or Contemporary Circus) began in the 1960s in parallel to Aerial Dance development in the United States (Keefe). Nouveau Cirque incorporates classic circus abilities but may convey a story or theme. David Adams, a theater critic, describes Nouveau Cirque as “an uncategorizable mix of theatre, dance, mime, music, comedy—and circus techniques” (Keefe). Following its inception in France, Nouveau Cirque gained traction in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s, eventually spreading to the West Coast of the United States and the United Kingdom.

The contemporary circus movement focuses on theatrical acts incorporating dance and circus to achieve theatrical outcomes embracing the physical demands through repetition of the skills in the air—traditional methods of training. Perfecting each skill is essential to continue to impress the audience. Aerial Dance training embodies movement

analysis, ballet, modern, contemporary techniques, and somatic practices to amplify the performance qualities while observing the relationship between the performer and the apparatus. Both practices demand intensive training—Aerial Dance attempts to develop its creative character focusing on the process of creation rather than the trick and final product seen in the circus. Both practices demand intensive technical skill training and that is what generates the blurry line of definition among them.

Nevertheless, the two methods continue to evolve, and this is what motivated me to elevate my approach to Aerial Dance through analysis, reflection, and experimentation. They share core values of technicality, dedication, intense training, and passion. The two practices assist and support each other to generate works that convey messages and entertain.

### ***Laban Movement Analysis & Bartenieff Fundamentals***

Colleen Wahl relates an overview of Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis: “The main objective... is to suggest additional modes of perceiving yourself and the world around you, using your live body totally—body, mind, feeling—as a key to that perception” (3).

Through this project, my goal was to bring more meaning to movement in Aerial Dance. Even with the implied relationship between aerialists and silks, I have always felt that there was a missing link between meaning and movement. I continuously asked myself what the relationship is between the body and the space in Aerial Dance, and it was through the work of Rudolf von Laban and Irmgard Bartenieff that I answered this question, and found the missing link I was searching for. Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis (L/BMA) provided me with the tools to explore and respond to this question,

and to expand Aerial Dance's expressive possibilities. In researching the principles of Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis (L/BMA), I was particularly drawn to four primary categories: Body (who); Space (where); Shape (relationship to the environment); Effort (how & when, qualities and dynamics in time), which I will speak about in more detail in the Methods section.

### **Rudolf von Laban**

The Laban Institute of Movement Analysis website quotes James Davidson of *The Daily Telegraph* as saying: "Laban is the movement's greatest map-maker... Hodgson compares him to Stravinsky, Picasso, and Stanislavsky, and it wouldn't surprise me if he turned out to be more significant than all of these" ("Rudolf Laban"). Considered the "father of European modern dance," Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958), was a "visionary, humanist, teacher and theoretician, whose revolutionary ideas bridged the gap between the performing arts and science" ("Rudolf Laban"). He devised a system to describe human movement and laid out the basic philosophical ideas that gave rise to German Expressionist dance ("Rudolf Laban"). According to the Laban Institute in New York, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is "is a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting all varieties of human movement" ("Laban Movement Analysis"). Today what is recognized as Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis encompasses a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating anatomy, kinesiology, psychology, and many other fields.

### **Irmgard Bartenieff**

Irmgard Bartenieff (1900-1981), one of Laban's star pupils, was a cross-cultural movement researcher, dancer, physical therapist, and pioneer in dance therapy. Her studies were later incorporated into the Laban Movement Analysis, creating a strand of the method — the Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis. In her observations of body mobility, she divided the body into lower and upper “units” (Bartenieff and Lewis 19). The lower unit comprises the lower back, lower abdomen, pelvis, hip, thigh, lower leg, foot, and toes (Bartenieff and Lewis 19). It serves locomotor activity (weight transfer) and postural alterations as the activator of the center of weight (the support of body weight) (Bartenieff and Lewis 19). The upper unit comprises of the head, neck, chest, upper spine, shoulder joint, scapula arm, forearm, wrist, hand, and fingers (Bartenieff and Lewis 19). The upper unit is the stabilizer and mostly used for tasks such as investigating, manipulating, and gesturing (Bartenieff and Lewis 19). It begins and extends the reach in space, communicating through spatial gestures, body contact, grip, engulfing, dispersing, and interweaving. (Bartenieff and Lewis 19).

### *Dance and Activism*

#### **Dance as Protest**

Dance's physical and interpersonal character has the unique capacity to change people's perceptions of the world. “Dance, like activism, holds unique power by providing its agents with extra-verbal meaning” (Mills 3). In addition, it can lay the foundation for a sense of connection with the ground and, by extension, earth. This protest art will make people reflect and engage with the community, urging them to take action.

In addition to my research on Aerial Dance, I have investigated artists worldwide who are addressing the issue of climate change and the culture of waste in various kinds of choreography. Learning more about their environmental ideas sheds light on how I use Aerial Dance. Many choreographers, such as Lynn Neuman, Jody Sperling, and Jennifer Monson, are embracing these ideas to raise public awareness of these issues, hoping to make a difference.

I interviewed Lynn Neuman, a founder of Artichoke Dance, to inquire about her approach to environmental dance. Founded in 1995, Artichoke Dance is noted for combining environmental activism, education, community development, and civic involvement in unique and compelling performances. Plastic pollution mitigation on Coney Island, single-use plastic bags in New York, and river rehabilitation in Los Angeles have all been large-scale undertakings in the past. The company has held seventeen New York seasons and toured nationally and internationally. In our conversation, Neuman and I agree that “the media has done its job, and everyone knows what global warming is.” So now, what do we do? Neuman answered this question by saying: “In my own artistic practice, if we're doing an outdoor show, we distribute the call strips, and then we ask everybody to take out their phone and call their senator.” This line of action goes further than just protesting, and that is what I have been reflecting on during the creation of my dance film *Plasticized*. I am developing a project that emerged from this research called Dance Recycle Project—a multidisciplinary project with the intent to recycle material in dance production and produce workshops that engage with the community.

Among the many artists engaged in "Environmental Choreography" (a new term), Jennifer Monson, a professor at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign, has studied ecological phenomena, which she characterizes as a delicate movement of energy across hemispheres. "By dancing, not simply observing, I pay attention to those little movements" she explains (Loeffler-Gladstone). Monson thinks about climate change in terms of choreographic process and improvisation (Loeffler-Gladstone).

Currently, there are several Aerial Dance companies and solo artists doing activist work. One artist, Jo Kreiter, is a nationally recognized choreographer and site artist with a background in political science. Her work democratizes public space. According to her website, Kreiter has spent 25 years building coalitions with women marginalized by race, class, gender, and workplace inequities" ("About Flyaway Productions"). As I observed above, Kreiter is part of the lineage of Aerial Circus—influenced choreographers on the West Coast using meaningful ways to produce politically charged aerial work. Zaccho Dance Theatre and Bandaloop are others.

### **Plastic Pollution**

Plastic is utilized in everything, and it is the best and worst of technological and economic progress. Our culture has become dependent on single-use plastic, from disposable cups to life-saving medical devices. Every piece of plastic we have ever touched is still on the planet and will be here long after we have gone; new plastic is introduced into the environment every second. There is no such thing as throwing the trash out; we are throwing it on the planet, and the only one we know that can sustain life. Even out in space, the earth's orbit is full of obsolete satellites, as its residues contain plastic, "Space launch vehicles, satellites, and spacecraft instruments are all part of the

rapidly growing space technology industry. Plastics are essential for spacecraft, primarily because of the weight savings that can be achieved using these materials” (Spacecraft: Plastic Materials for Spacecraft & Satellite Applications”). “It’s estimated that every year the plastic waste alone from laboratories could cover an area twenty-three times the size of Manhattan ankle-deep. Although much of this waste is hazardous, a lot of it is not. Anything that can be thrown in the trash has the potential to have a different end of life” (“Waste”). Usually, it ends up killing flora and fauna. Plastic is a threat to wildlife and releases greenhouse gasses in every step of its decomposition. According to The Earth Day Organization, “this year, five trillion plastic bags will be used. That’s 160,000 every second!” (“Green Cities: Fact Sheet: How Much Disposable Plastic We Use”). Where will it end up?

Single plastic bag use, especially in the grocery stores is a huge problem and will evidently end up in the environment. Ironically, when grocery stores first started using plastic bags, they asked, “paper or plastic?” Back then, we all said plastic because we wanted to save the trees. Now we do not want plastic. We want to save the planet. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink, reuse, and recycle. As quoted on the Soleico Natural Farming website, Mahatma Gandhi said: “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, not every man's greed” (“Projects”). In other words, the earth's resources are sufficient to support the whole human race, however it will not be able to provide a rich lifestyle for all of us. If we want everyone to live, we must make sacrifices.

The plastic pollution crisis is at the forefront of the international agenda and can be considered a pandemic since it affects the entire world (Kantai). We are running out of

time. It is necessary to take radical and urgent measures to mitigate plastics' effect on the environment.

### **Methodology**

Aerial Dance is my specialty and although my experience in this genre is extensive, my familiarity in working with silks was both challenged and inspired by the work of Laban and Bartenieff. This new approach completely changed my view of aerial movement and what it can express. The Laban/ Bartenieff Movement Analysis method opened an array of movement possibilities for me in reference to effort, space and energy, expanding my personal artistic range and therefore, changing my expectations of what Aerial Dance could be.

### ***Approaches in Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis***

#### **Body (Who)**

Laban's body category refers to the actual physical body — "the tangible, graspable body you live in, complete with its muscles, bones, and sinew" (Wahl 30). The body is a place where movement happens, and it can be creative and expressive.

Looking into Irmgard Bartenieff's units, I experimented with locomotors (lower unit) and stabilizers (upper unit) and how they apply to Aerial Dance. Aerial Dancers (or aerialists) must interact with the silk, which is made up of two pieces of silk fabric hanging together from above. This allows for axial rotation, gripping, inverting, hooking, suspending, dropping, swinging, spiraling, and wrapping the body with the silk in different ways to create tension and to hold the body in poses and figures. (See Appendix A - Image 1.) The aerialist and silk create a similar experience to that of contact improvisation — a free-form investigation of the kinesthetic potential of two or more

bodies sharing body weight and their kinesphere (Olivari and Frost). I explored reversing the lower and upper units functions by tying a knot on the silk and placing the head in between the two sides. I made the head the locomotor and the legs the stabilizer, and this experiment generated one scene for the film (6:37 – 7:10 minutes). While the legs stabilized the movement, the locomotor (lower unit) gradually shifted from head to neck to torso. This experiment led me to the creation of Irina's solo in the film, which generated a blindfolded look. (See Appendix A - Image 2.) The upper and lower units are also observable in the silk-climbing sequences. I had legs and arms constantly switching between transport, supporting the weight, and stabilizing the body. This choice communicated contraction and expansion as they were trying to escape. (This can be seen in the dance film. (See scenes - Russian Climb -1:39 minutes and hung by the hands - 2:18.)

The silk wraparound of the aerialist's body creates patterns required for skills such as drops, rolls, and dives. When the two (performer and silk) are in sync, they become one, showing flawless movements. Unfortunately, in Aerial Dance the movement transitions are often inefficient; they only function to prepare for the performance of a skill. Bartenieff and Lewis explain, however that “In observing a movement, we must visualize all the intermediaries” (83), and the intermediaries are what link one movement to the other. As a way of observing the intermediaries, I explored diverse ways to perform the wraps. (Wraps are one of the principles of aerial silk. There are different wraps for each move.) I requested that the aerialists perform the wraps for the "Star Drop" skill (but not complete the skill). The body rolls down parallel to the floor in an X position like a yo-yo, ending in a dramatic position below resembling death. The distal

points of the letter X are the arms and legs spread apart, but the body is placed sideways resembling a star figure. Without the interaction of the aerialist, the silk is just a hanging object; likewise, the aerialist would not be able to perform without support from the silk. In some instances, the object (silk) and subject (aerialist) are exchanged. For example, in the same Star-Drop scene, the silk takes control (subject) as the body rolls down (object). These constant exchanges create a sense of partnership or symbiosis; it is what makes the poetics of Aerial Dance. However, it only happens when an intention accompanies the form and the function. Without it, the aerialist disconnects from the performance, focusing on the form and function of technique. The aerialist often goes for the final trick or the wow factor, forgetting the intermediaries, or how intentional the wraps need to be, since that is what leads to the skills (drops, rolls, etc.). Exploring this concept with my aerialists allowed them to recognize their flying body and the relationship with the silk, providing the effortless scenes performed for the film, therefore emphasizing the expressivity of this art form.

### **Space (Where)**

Karen Studd and Laura Cox quote Laban as saying: “Besides the motion of bodies in space, there exists motion of space in bodies.” According to L/BMA, space can be approached in terms of direction (front, back, side, diagonals), and it can be seen as direct or indirect, depending on the choreographer’s intention. From the ground up, the possibilities of spatial exploration in Aerial Dance are myriad and magical. Aerialists can navigate from the ground and in the air and within their personal and internal spaces. The silk allows for subversion of the space in which we move, and it supplies the support for the body to fly through space. For *Plasticized*, I experimented with the silk on the ground

and in the air. I identified the available space and how it might inform the aesthetic criteria and creative process.

For the ground, I had the aerialist improvise with the silk to support changing directions (front, back, diagonals) and levels (high, middle, and low). She had to find a way to stabilize the body to experiment with movement possibilities without climbing higher. This "low flight" appears in some of the solo scenes in the film. L/BMA allows access to inner-outer spaces and rhythms. For Aerial Dance in *Plasticized*, this meant changes in stability and mobility and directional movements such as gliding, sliding, and floating.

According to Laban's method, "Spatial tensions are the springboard for mobility." (Bartenieff and Lewis 103). They are the investments in space that the body makes and counter-tensions invested in the opposite direction (Wahl 129). Spatial intent is the attempt or plan to enter the space. It is about the mover's foray into space, and the aim of the mover in space clarifies the action. I utilized weight and flow combined with the aerialist and silk relationship, allowing the aerialist to experience freedom and restrictions. (See scene — star drop scene 10:17 - 10:19 minutes.)

The spatial tension, counter-tension and intent provided leverage to work out the spatial atmosphere for the film. The spatial tensions are seen in how the aerialists are investing in the space, combined with the running and directional changes with the intent to escape. In an improvisation exercise, the task was to climb slowly (spatial tension), not perform intricate moves. We were aiming for fluidity by combining it with weight. In Laban's Method, when weight and flow effort factors — main factors of movements — are combined, it contributes to our awareness of ourselves as independent beings capable

of action. The film's message implies spatial counter-tension — going in the opposite direction of how we have been treating the environment. In the film, flow connects us to universals as the aerialist climbs and disappears at the top of the screen.

Weight “is linked to ongoing progression of flow” (Cox and Studd 36). The aerialists move and occupy different spaces, but the space is never empty. “Space is not empty; it is an alive partner, a collaborator in movement. Space stabilizes and mobilizes your body” (Wahl 128). It is filled with air molecules; and when we move forward, we are pushing some space out to make room for our bodies (Newlove and Dalby 112). In connecting flow and weight, aerialists bring awareness to the aerial space in the film. In the Laban method, “Becoming aware of your space is the first step in clarifying movement—whether it is to perfect an athlete's jump shot, coach an actor in a specific character role, or movement goal” (Cox and Studd 95).

In *Aerial Dance*, being in the air does not necessarily imply groundlessness but only a different relationship with the ground. Stephanie Evanitsky—founder of Aerial Dance has said: “When you are suspended above the ground, you do not have less ground, you have more ground. You are always attached to a gripping point, and the audience sees it. You have ground all around you” (Bernasconi and Smith 15). The gripping point creates the all-around ground. “We create ourselves through our movement patterns” in the air and on the ground (Cox and Studd 36).

For *Plasticized*, I started to trace the spatial movement pattern vertically and horizontally. The horizontal pattern represented the earth, the aerialist emerging from the trash, walking, looking to fill the spaces knowing there is nowhere to go. The silk offers

the fake promise of escape (vertical pattern) that creates moments of falling and recovering in a vain attempt to survive.

Through spatial exploration, I expanded the notions of spatial intent in Aerial Dance with a clear aim of deviating from intricate skills, investigating movement simplicities and spatial tension and counter-tensions, to shape the environment for the film.

### **Shape (Relation to the Environment)**

Rudolf von Laban stated that “Forms are closely connected with movement. Each movement has its form, and forms are simultaneously created with and through movement.” (Cox and Studd 137). Laban's methods allow us to recognize that “The shape we inhabit is part of our Body Attitude, the home base to which we frequently return. In addition to the shape we adopt, Body Attitude also includes patterns of preferences in body organization, space and dynamic” (Cox and Studd 102). The body has a distinct form, a shape that we are self-conscious about and constantly checking on. Wide, skinny, tall, short. However, because we are in constant movement, the body shape is continuously changing, even though most people perceive the shape as a final form, fixed and stable. Laban's method recognizes that shape is constantly changing. We connect the meaning of movement to our own experiences with the form as well as how the mover transitions from one shape to another. It reaffirms that transitions are as important as the final shape and these transitions or “intermediaries,” (as previously mentioned) are the punctuation that gives meaning to the choreographic phrase. In Aerial Dance, shape is related to the interaction with silk. The wraps around the body create desired shapes and forms while the aerialist's body attitude is always in alert attention

mode due to the dangerousness of the practice. I related this attitude to the theme of the film and the danger the planet is in. The “home base” here is the transitional movement such as the Russian climb (See Appendix A- Image 4), which implies the readiness to climb or come down, to escape or die. The moving shape of the aerialist comes from the adaptability of the apparatus, and the home base is the transitional skill that leads to more elaborated forms (See Appendix A - Image 5). The simple shapes in *Plasticized* allowed me to convey the message and provoke emotional responses (see audience feedback). At the end of the film, the shape resembles death by gallows, as the aerialist is hanged handless or footless in the background (See Appendix A - Image 6), while the foreground dancers try to escape. (See film scene 10:33 minutes.)

### **Effort (How/When—Qualities/Dynamic/Time)**

Rudolf von Laban stated that “It is impossible, of course, to describe the essence of the movements. But sometimes one can experience the same sort of tremendous impulse to move, for example, in a fight, in a dancer, in ecstasy, and in passion...” (von Laban 51) Previously I spoke about shape (relation to the environment), which happens in space (where). Identifying the aerialists' flying bodies (who) and their constant shape changes led me to effort (how/when). “The ‘how’ of movement is its quality and dynamic — that which gives movement its color, tone and texture” (Cox and Studd 113).

The effort category is concerned with the quality of the energy investment, as shown by movement (Wahl 92) and is present in all areas of movement. According to L/BMA, the four effort factors, or motion factors, are Flow, Weight, Time and Space and each factor has two opposite elements as they offer a different quality of energetic

expression (Table 1). The energetic expression results from each opposing element giving an array of movement opportunities. “The flow of effort from the weightless, timeless, spaceless center to the matter shaped and moved around is the binding link which carries life” (Cox and Studd 113).

Effort Factor	Elements
Flow	Free - Bound
Weight	Light - Strong
Time	Sustained - Quick
Space	Indirect - Direct

Table 1: Four Effort Factors and related elements

These four factors of investigation allowed me to find the energetic expression, which created the sustained mood for the film. First, I experimented individually with each factor and later mixed them.

### **Flow**

“Space both contains and frees EveryBody” (Cox and Studd 96). In L/BMA this concept is called free flow (unimpeded), and bound flow (firm with boundaries). In Aerial Dance it is the aerialist’s partnership with the silk that determines free and bound flow and establishes the boundaries with gravity. The silk stabilizes the body and provides movement possibilities otherwise impossible in grounded dances. For example, an aerialist can hold a standing body inclination of 30 degrees (See Appendix A - Image 3), creating a sense of flowing by pivoting and rotating in a circle. Consequently, the

body often gets in a strong and yet vulnerable place. For this project, this investigation of flow represents the vulnerability of the planet and of humans.

Flow is the movement's starting point. When the movement flows freely it has the effortless feeling of continuity. When it is bound it has a restricting feeling. In the air, it is possible to recognize the climbing movements (See figure 5 - above) are usually in bound flow. There is more firm energy because of the gravity and the movement necessary to perform each climbing step, creating the bound flow sensation (feet and hands getting closer). Then, when the hands reach up from the feet (straight body position), it creates a short free flow. It continues until the feet are pulled up close to the hand again (bound flow). Climbing is a repetition of these movements—weight on the hands, switching to the feet, switching to the hands, which then propels the body up. The descending also can be free (uninterrupted) or bound flow (firm with boundaries) when it ends in drops or rolls. We are constantly fluctuating between the free and bound flow; it is "how to approach continuity and goings-on; it is about your feelings and how you relate to your doing" (Wahl 98). The effort of *Plasticized* is related to the imminent threat of the hazardous environment and the will to survive.

### **Weight**

I explored weight shifting with the light and strong elements and as the weight effort shifted constantly, it allowed for movement dynamic, texture and density. By sensing the body mass and sharing weight and gravity's center with the silk, the energy level was revealed. In one of the silhouette scenes (Paige's solo) the aerialist drags her body heavily through the floor to find support, shares the weight with the silk, and when

she performs a perfect rollup, it resembles a struggle. (See silhouette scene - 3:25 minutes and Paige solo scene -5:31 minutes.)

### **Time**

Time is the moment and a continuous process of adaptation, as we deal with one moment to the next. “You intuit the possibilities of the moment, making decisions as you process what is happening now and how you want to address what happens next” (Wahl 99). It can be linked to a personal urgency to act fast or slow down as the moment demands. The time effort can be seen in the film when aerialists desperately try to escape, emerging from the sea of plastic (quick), or in a Paige Jarreau solo when she slows down and disappears below the picture frame as a form of losing the battle to survive (sustained). (See Paige's Solo scene 6:00 minutes.)

In the Summer 2020 Creative Practice course with professor Claire Porter, we were given a repetition exercise with time. It consisted in generating a small choreographic phrase, starting slow and repeating it while increasing the speed (dynamic) of the movement to the point of losing control. Repeating a Time Effort phrase and going from one end of the spectrum to the other—from sustained to quick—produced a sense of desperation. I used the same strategy for the beginning of the film. The aerialists are buried underneath a sea of plastic. Their hands, arms, legs, and feet emerge as they move faster and faster, until they find themselves in a sitting position gasping for air.

### **Space**

The Space Effort is a notion of how attention and thought are ordered: "Space is about how you perceive and pay attention to the environment, and how this is manifested in movement behavior” (Wahl 97). How did I get to where I am and where do I go from

here? It can be approached in a direct and symmetric (going straight to the silk) or indirect and asymmetric (wandering around for a safe place) pathway. The Space Effort provided the right ingredients to finish the choreographic construction for the film. The aerialists' shifting from direct to indirect elements describes the impending crisis of plastic pollution, and it provided the mood and dramatic trajectory for the film. Cadence Whittier states in an article about Effort that, "When Laban writes about "mood... color...feeling...", he is writing about Effort. Expressively, Effort heightens the feeling, tone, and emotionality of a movement, and the Space Effort 'describes how a person attends to his/her environment'" (Whittier). *Plasticized* aims to raise awareness of precisely how negligently we humans have attended to our environment, this earth.

### *The Film*

#### **Concepts: Humanity/Tree of Life**

The concept for the film was to represent the path of humanity toward destruction and shooting with a chroma-key (green screen) was the starting point for the development of the film, by which I utilized images of garbage as a virtual background to evoke an emotional response. The film begins with a beautiful green forest traversed with bare feet. As the path continues, human actions gradually affect the environment, making the entire planet a landfill. The flying plastic represents the lack of environmental action and the fast spread of plastic worldwide. "By the year 2030, some 53 million tons of plastic will exist in our oceans, rivers, and lakes" ("7+ Revealing Plastic Waste Statistics"). The flying bodies are a metaphor for the global warming deniers that insist that this issue has been exaggerated. They watch from above, far removed from those gasping for air below.

The verticality of the silks suggests there is nowhere on earth to go. To try to escape is a vain action. The use of three dancers in braided silk represents the Tree of Life, to which the poem recited at the film's start alludes to.

An inspiration for this project, Fernando Pessoa's poem, "After Everything," suggests that we must continue despite interruptions, which can happen at any moment:

After Everything

There were three things left.

The certainty that we are always starting...

The certainty that it is necessary to continue...

The certainty that we can be interrupted...

Before finishing.

Let's make interruption a new path...

From the fall, a dance step...

From fear, a ladder...

From the dream, a bridge...

From the search, an encounter!

(translated by Claudio Ribeiro)

Humanity is currently in a moment of reflection that could direct us (or not) to interrupt our headlong destruction of the planet for a “new path”: a bridge that reconnects humans to the earth.

The choice of the trio in my choreography for *Plasticized* arose from the dynamic of the two words, *tree* in English and *tres* (three) in Portuguese, which sound similar, linking tree and the trinity. It is the Tree of Life that reflects our progress, originality, and beauty. And, as we become "stronger," craving for more information, wisdom, and new experiences, we are like the branches of a tree growing stronger and reaching higher into the sky. I imagined the aerialists are the Tree struggling to survive, to continue to grow even while obstructed by the plastic pollution. Trinity is founded in the Christian dogma that proclaims the union of three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forming one God: the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This symbolism is related to my most profound feeling of hope and optimism for the future of humanity. Still, God or any entity cannot proceed without human action, which culminates at the end of the film in the death image of humans in a cadaver bag and the image of a dead planet. Uncontained consumerism leads us to chaos, a state of “complete disorder and confusion” (“Chaos”). In physics, it designates behavior so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to great sensitivity to small changes in conditions (“Chaos”). Global warming potentially is causing chaos in the weather system, increasing the number of extreme weather and natural disasters, from wildfires to hurricanes. It affects all life on the planet. *Plasticized*, involves the body and plastic as well as the flying body and flying plastic. In the film, the silk becomes a flight response to the overwhelming amount of plastic contaminating the planet.

### **Process**

The first step in creating my dance work was visualization. I always start with a mental image and then develop the concept, the narrative, and the choreographic process. The first image I had was the hanging cadaver bag, which I feel, raised the question of how we got here. It led me to the film's narrative—the evolution of the human towards a path of destruction. Next, I implemented the L/BMA system in the creative and choreographic process. Then the camera was chosen, the scene shooting schedule developed, the location (LSU Movement Studio) was prepared, costumes were created, and the silk color was chosen.

### **Filming**

I shot the film with a portable phone device (iPhone 13) with a 4k capacity and used a gimbal (camera stabilizer). I chose to film it in High Definition at sixty frames per second (fps) — which is the preferred frame rate for live TV, particularly action-filled events such as dance and sports, and is smooth and sharp.

I created a detailed film structure sheet, with the scene name, actions, camera angles, and movements, following the film's narrative. I learned this method in Professor Kathleen Kelley's Montclair course Dance Technology, and it proved to be an efficient organizational tool. I divided the shooting into two days: six hours on the first day and three hours on the second. I served as film director, camera operator, and scene coordinator.

At first, I was uncertain which silk color to use; red, to signify blood, or white for plastic? I decided that white would blend in with the plastic set, and that it would become the ocean's garbage floor. The silks created an allusive "escape route" from plastic

pollution. And, I chose to dress the dancers in street clothes so that the audience could relate to them more easily.

I purchased sixteen 10x20 feet green screens and a green Marley floor. The LSU scenic design team sewed and hung them in the Movement Studio. One recurring issue was the different tones of green on the screen and the floor, which made it difficult to blend the images in the background. Chroma-key (green screen) editing combines two photo layers based on color. Every color has a "chroma" range, which is how the term was coined (Yeager). I was able to fix the issue using "masking" — "a feature in editing software that allows you to select a specific piece of a video or use video overlays to hide, duplicate, reveal, or modify your footage" (Miah).

### **Editing**

With all the technical elements under control, the time came to experiment with the editing process. I wanted the camera in the opening scene to follow bare feet walking in the woods. I had originally intended to film a green and beautiful landscape but because of the Fall season, it proved impossible. So, I had to purchase the footage in adobe stock footage. I did the same with the images of flying plastic: shooting in an actual landfill represented too many challenges, not to mention unsanitary conditions. Inserting scenes of flying plastics in the background caused the software to pixelate the aerialists' bodies in the foreground, especially their torsos. Rather than trying to fix it, I decided to leave it in some scenes to allude to the microplastic particles found in human tissue samples mentioned earlier in the thesis's introduction. I used reverse imagery (playing scenes backward) to suggest the possibility of reversing the effects of global warming. The scenes where dancers are seen in silhouettes are meant to represent the

bleak future we have ahead of us, with limited natural resources, while increasingly facing natural catastrophes. I combined these two editing tools to demonstrate that what we do today will lead to either a bright or dark future. I cropped the film on each side to create the sensation of a confined space, surrounded by darkness. My last editing intervention was to set an overlying grain effect over the entire length of the film, to give a cinematic texture effect, and allude yet again to the microplastic pollutants.

### **Soundtrack**

The soundtrack of the film begins with an original composition by Leigh A Robichaux created for a show called *Hot Air* that I produced with the LSU dance students in 2019, which also explored the theme of global warming. I needed something mysterious and pressing for the beginning, to give the sense that the clock was ticking. Reusing this score aligns with the film's message of reusing and recycling. It also blended perfectly with a piano composition titled "Juliana," composed by LSU MFA student Rodrigo A Camargo. "Juliana" creates a sad mood full of regrets, perfect for the image of a dry and dead planet that concludes the film. Fernando Pessoa's poem is used literally as an "interruption" in the course of destruction.

### **Results**

*Plasticized* was presented in the Acting Studio, Room 125 of Louisiana State University, Music and Dramatic Arts Building–School of Theatre at the Music and Dramatic Arts on April 26th, 2022, at 4 PM. The film was live streamed on Facebook and YouTube. With the intent to provoke a reaction and create a more immersive experience, I filled the studio up with plastic bags all over the floor and seats.

To get feedback from the audience, I organized a talkback after the premiere and handed attendees a five-question survey, asking them about their experience watching the film. I had eighteen responses. Overall, they affirmed my intention of conveying a clear message with aerial dance and film.

Here are the questions and some sample responses:

1. *Plasticized* is an experimental film that uses a virtual background and editing methods. What do you see? Could you follow it? Was there a clear message?

“The contrast between the landfill and plastic with the aesthetics of the dancers was very striking. Incorporating the plastic bags (scenes where the bags are over the heads) and also the black body bags at the end of the film really brought home the theme of how much plastic is a part of our daily lives and we cannot extricate ourselves from plastic due to consumer wants, material obsession and capitalism.”

“In the beginning it seemed there were some streaming issues, but I think that was related to the internet? I saw us walking on a pathway that became increasingly more polluted with plastics and dancers trying to escape on their silks. But in the end, there is no escaping the plastic that is taking over our planet and they ended up in cadaver bags failing to escape their fate. so sad...”

2. Have you watched Aerial Dance before? Is *Plasticized* different? How?

“I have watched aerial before due to past assignments of critiquing videos. *Plasticized* was different because the movements were simple and not about the big tricks that can be done on a silk. It was more about the simple movements and dance.”

“I have seen aerial as part of a circus performance (Cirque du Soleil, etc.) but not as a performing art. The blending of aerial silk acts with the visuals of the green screen background scenes was really unique.”

3. What do you expect when you attend an aerial performance? Is *Plasticized* a dance or a circus act? How do you see it?

“Dance is a bit out of my depth but when it comes to an aerial performance, I am really only expecting that it is being performed midair. I see *Plasticized* as a dance first and foremost, but I can see the circus aspect.”

“I never know what to expect. This was a dance because it conveys a message. A circus act is all about tricks.”

“This is a piece of art.”

4. What stood out to you from this film experience?

“How the movements of the performers convey immense emotion.”

“The scene where the silk was a black silhouette and there were three silks braided into one stood out to me the most. It was very mesmerizing to watch, and the conversation after the film about the tree of life gave it even more meaning. Also, the ending with the body bags was very impactful.”

5. To what extent did this film experience make you feel? Would you recommend it to a friend?

“This film experience made me reflect a lot on my life choices as a human and a consumer of many products. Sad to say, many of those products are wrapped or encased in plastic. I would definitely recommend this to a friend due to what the brevity of this film revealed to me.”

### **Impact & Future Direction**

L/BMA has influenced the way I see my aerial dance progressing. It has informed my choreographic and cinematic perspective, and allowed me to develop pedagogical approaches to teaching aerial dance.

This project also encouraged me to dive deep into the process of filming. From camera angles to editing software, I learned a great deal throughout the process. I even learned a more efficient way to export and share media to different social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. I discovered that the editing process is something that keeps me focused and is something I enjoy doing.

*Plasticized* did what I intended it to do: to raise the awareness of plastic pollution and protest the wanton use of plastics by humans. Making this film, propelled me to deepen my study and application of L/BMA methods in Aerial Dance in order to continue to evolve my practice. Therefore, I have already named my next project "Flying Laban." Through my experiences within this research, I revealed how Aerial Dance can surpass the "wow factor" by way of a thought-provoking and meaningful dance film.

As a natural progression from *Plasticized*, I am in the process of developing a new project that emerged from this research called The Dance Recycle Project. The Dance Recycle Project is a cross-disciplinary collaboration of Dance, Physical Theatre, Music, Visual Arts, and Environment Science utilizing recycled materials for the production I intend to develop at Louisiana State University, College of Music and Dramatic Arts. My intention is to create site-specific dances, which engage the community and culminate in a final dance performance.

Making *Plasticized*, affirms that I am an eco-artist, and that I must advocate for the environment. I want to continue to engage the community to give the earth a chance. This is the true calling for me and my art

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**Appendix A: Images**



Image 1. Russian Climb transition emphasized- Paige Jarreau



Image 2. Head solo. Irina Krushnina



Image 3. Low Flight - Paige Jarreau



Image 4. Russian Climb - Mya Orantes



Image 5. HipKey - Paige Jarreau



Image 6. Swan pose modified - Saida Joshua

## Appendix B: Film Structure

### Plasticized – Film Structure

#### SHOTS

- **EWS** – EXTREME WIDE SHOT
- **WS** – WIDE SHOT
- **MWS** – MEDIUM WIDE SHOT
- **MS** – MID SHOT
- **MCU** – MEDIUM CLOSE-UP
- **CU** – CLOSE-UP
- **BCU** – BIG CLOSE-UP

#### ANGLES

- **FV** – FRONT VIEW
- **BV** – BACK VIEW
- **WEV** – WORM’S EYE VIEW
- **BEV** – BIRD’S EYE VIEW
- **LA** – LOW ANGLE
- **HA** – HIGH ANGLE

\*\*\* DEPENDING ON THE DESIRE ANGLE - CHANGE ORIENTATION.

SCENE #	SHOT	DESCRIPTION
S – 1	FRONT ANGLE – MWS	STAGE FILL WITH PLASTIC BAGS - DANCERS HIDDEN UNDERNEATH
S – 2	SLOW TRANSITION – BCU -FRONT HIGH DIAGONAL – TILT TO FRONT ANGLE	ONE HAND STARTS TO MERGE – HORROR MOVING MOOD – STRUGGLING -

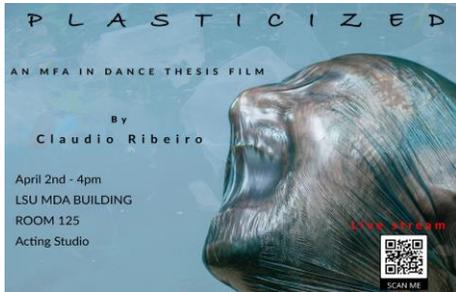
S – 3	FRONT ANGLE – CU - BIRD’S EYE VIEW	THE OTHER HAND START TO MERGE – SAME MOOD – STRUGGLING
S – 4	FRONT ANGLE – MS – PAN L AND R	MORE HANDS STARTING TO MERGE AND HARMS AND LEGS STARTING TO MERGE.
S -5	FRONT ANGLE – BCU - BIRD’S EYE VIEW	A DANCER EMERGES – SUFFOCATING – BCU ON THE HAND HOLDING THE THROAT.
S – 6	FRONT LOWER ANGLE – WS	AS DANCERS EMERGE - REPEAT THIS SHOT WITH ALL THE DANCERS.
S – 7	WORM’S EYE VIEW - MS	CAMERA PLACE UNDERNEATH THE BAGS EMERGING AND CARPUTER THE DANCE STRUGGLING AND WALKING AWAY
S – 8	WORM’S EYE VIEW – WS TO MS – MCU - CU - TO BIRD’S EYE VIEW	CLIMB THE SILKS– GROUP PHRASE – SHOOT SEVERAL ANGLES – CHECK BELOW TRANSITION TO CUBE
S -9	WEV -	FLOOR PHRASE WITH THE PPLASTIC – ADD THE PHRASE FROM HOT AIR SOPHIA AND CARLILE. SHOOT DEFFERENT ANGLES

S - 10	FRONT ANGLE – MWS – PAN R TO L – MCU – TILT -	CUBE – TORSO – CAMERA CHANGE ANGLES
S – 11	FRONT ANGLE – WS	CUBE CONTINUE
S – 12	PAN – TRANSITION START THE SCENE	IRINA’S SOLO
S – 13	WS – MS – MCU AND CU – UP	IRINA’S SOLO
S – 14	WS – MS – MCU – CU - BCU	TREE OF LIFE – CHANGE ANGLES – <b>HA,</b> <b>WEV</b>
S – 15	WS – MS – MCU – CU – BCU FILM THE GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL ONES	FINAL GROUP – RUNNING IN THE HAMMOCK REACHING OUT. CHANGE ANGLES – <b>HA, WEV</b>
S – 16	WS – MS – MCU – CU – BCU FILM THE GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL ONES	CLIMBING TO ESCAPE CHANGE ANGLES – <b>HA,</b> <b>WEV, BEV</b>
S – 17	WS – MS – MCU – CU – BCU	STAR DROP – SHOOT THE WRAPS AND THE POSITION. FILM THE GORUP AND INDIVIDUAL ONES
S – 18	WS – MS – MCU – CU – BCU	DOUBLE FOOT HANG FILM THE GORUP AND INDIVIDUAL ONES

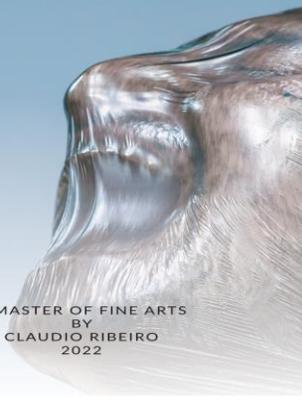
S – 19	WS – MS – MCU – CU – BCU	CADAVER BAGS CLOSING THE GORUP AND INDIVIDUAL ONES
S – 20	WS – MS – MCU – CU – BCU	FINAL SHOTS – CADAVER BAGS UPSIDEDOWN

## Appendix C: Poster and Program

### Poster



### Program

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PLASTICIZED</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">A MASTER OF FINE ARTS BY <b>CLAUDIO RIBEIRO</b> 2022</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ABOUT THE FILM</b></p> <p>Plasticized is my approach to Aerial Dance through the lens of Laban Movement Analysis. "Plasticized" (a dance film) stems from investigations in L/BMA to enrich my choreographic voice within this genre. My primary intention is to convey a strong message through an art form that depends on tricks and dangerous feats. With the experimental dance film "Plasticized," my viewpoint reflects the culture of waste and the over-use of plastic on our planet. This project partially fulfills the requirements for a Master of Fine Arts in Dance Degree.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MUSIC</b> Leigh A. Robichaux Rodrigo A Camargo</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>CAST</b> Ashlynn Gremillion Irina Kruchinina, Paige Jarreau, Mya Orantes Saida Joshua</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thank you all for your time, effort, love, and dedication to this project.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CLAUDIO RIBEIRO</b></p> <p>My journey with Aerial Dance started because of my fascination with the circus. As a young dancer, I was always looking at different forms of movements to enhance my dance. When I was a member of the Deborah Colker Dance Company, one of Brazil's most influential dance companies, I was introduced to a new way of moving acrobatically utilizing various scenic objects (props): performing dances on a wall, a ladder, and a wheel. Since then, my aerial dance practice has been evolving.</p> <p>In recent years, I have felt compelled to address our wasteful culture, "Plasticized" is a visual protest film. Humanity is facing a very dangerous threat, one that will make life on the planet unbearable. I feel compelled to address this issue. Plastic is everywhere. It is on our food, in our fields, in our forests, in the sea, and even in our blood. Plastic contamination has been found in tissue samples taken from donated human cadavers' lungs, liver, spleen, and kidneys. If we don't stop this behavior, we won't have a future. We are running out of time!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Acknowledgments</b></p> <p>I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the numerous people who helped produce my thesis, including:</p> <p>First and foremost, I would like to thank my lifetime partner Avery Bennet who always supported me unconditionally.</p> <p>The Head and Interim Dean of Louisiana State University School of Theatre, Kristin M Sosnowsky, allowed me to utilize school facilities.</p> <p>The LSU faculty, Nicholas Erickson and Susan Perlis for always incentivized me throughout the MFA program.</p> <p>To the LSU costume design professor Kyla Kazuschyk and the MFA candidate scenic design Kellie Murphy for helping sew the green screens.</p> <p>To James L Murphy, John Eddy, and Christopher W. Wood for helping set up the green screen.</p> <p>To the MFA Acting Candidates Carolina Queriroz Couto and Adam Seeholzer, to be prompted to help.</p> <p>The Dancers/Aerialists for donating their time, effort, love, and dedication to this project.</p> <p>The thesis committee's support and generosity guided me through this research process: Maxine Steinman, Emmanuelle Phoun, Apollinaire Scherr.</p> <p>To all the Montclair State University MFA in Dance program faculty, for the generosity to share their knowledge to support the necessary guidance to succeed.</p> <p>My family, which is miles away in Brazil, has always supported my career and my dance dreams.</p>