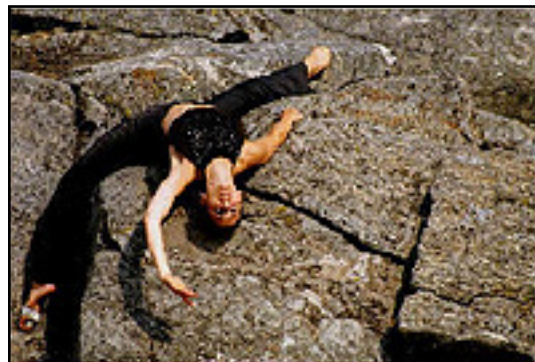


# Creative Explorations

Diane Eno, a Doctoral Candidate in the Environmental Studies Program at Antioch, blends her artistic dance work with thorough academic research, demonstrating how the arts can viably complement the sciences.

In 1984, Dianne Eno was sitting on the floor of her dance studio in Keene when an image of herself and her dance company dancing on the summit of Mt. Monadnock suddenly flashed across her mind. A year later, they performed the first annual Mt. Monadnock Celebration of Dance. For over twenty years, Eno has been creating site-specific environmental dance pieces staged with her dance company at the rocky summit of Monadnock. The group, Dianne Eno/ Fusion Danceworks, has attracted a steadily growing audience base: an interesting and eclectic blend of hikers, loyal supporters, dance enthusiasts, environmentalists, and curious observers that come from all over the United States and beyond.



Eno's annual performances on Mt. Monadnock have kept her closely tied to the mountain throughout her entire life, a relationship that has matured over the years. She has learned much about Monadnock and experienced phenomena that few mountain visitors have opportunity to take in. Eno describes Monadnock as "a magical place" and delights in her time there exploring caves, hearing the "roar of the mountain" with her own ears, and spending contemplative moments at the old campsites of Henry David Thoreau. From searing, one hundred degree heat or winds over sixty miles per hour at the summit to whiteouts on the trails, Eno has experienced the mountain during all seasons.

## In Thoreau's Footsteps

In the fall of 2006, Eno finished a research project for partial completion of her doctoral degree. In *Thoreau's Footsteps: A Comparative and Historical Survey of Plant Taxa on the Summit of Mount Monadnock (Fall 2006) as Guided by Henry David Thoreau's Journal Account of Summit and Southwestern Slope Vegetation Observed (August 1860)*, Eno searched for and identified the seventy-six (76) plant taxa, as observed and noted by Henry David Thoreau on his summer 1860 excursion to Mt. Monadnock. Using Thoreau's descriptive journal record as a guide, Eno historically retraced Thoreau's pathway up the south western slope of the mountain, focusing on the forested areas immediately below tree-line and around his campsite, in the search for the presence of single representatives of each plant. Eno found 96.05% of Thoreau's plants to be alive and well on Monadnock, nearly 150 years after his 1860 excursion to the mountain.

As a PhD. Student in Environmental Studies, Eno finds that her academic work naturally refers to her experiences on Monadnock and the mountain continues to be her mentor and laboratory, both artistically and academically. In the second year of her doctoral program, her artistic work blended into her scholarly work, and her academic papers and research projects often reflect a common theme: Monadnock. Eno is working on a new dance for next year's summit performance based on Galway Kinnell's "Flower Herding on Mt. Monadnock" and partially inspired by Eno's quantitative study for a Comparative Ecological Analysis course.

To see her Thoreau Presentation project slide show, go to [www.defdw.net/thoreauproject.htm](http://www.defdw.net/thoreauproject.htm) and click on Thoreau Presentation

## Dancing on the Mountain

Dancing On The Mountain Eno's dance style as an "environmental dancer" is a hybrid of many different dance genres that she has studied and will continue to study. Another integral part of her evolving environmental dance style, she infuses Native American Sign Language. This ancient form of inter-tribal communication reflects Eno's Native American ancestry. She researches signs and exercises them in her movement to interpret text and story and contribute to the narrative characteristics of the dance performance that tell the stories of the mountain.

To see more on Native American Sign Language or the Dianne Eno/ Fusion Danceworks dance company, see her website: [www.defdw.net](http://www.defdw.net).

As an environmental choreographer and dancer, Eno finds it critical to become fully and authentically embedded in the environment where the dance performance unfolds. This, she finds, requires a willingness and desire to find balance and harmony with the surrounding environment, the human body intentionally interfacing and engaging with uneven rocky or earthen surfaces instead of a flat theater stage floor. Wind, rain, sand and sun-along with any other animate or inanimate features of the natural world-become integral parts of her environmental dance pieces.



## Future Vision

Eno hopes that her work will inspire other environmental artists and educators to explore this new way to reconnect humans with the natural world, through the arts and a long-term involvement with a particular site. This, Eno feels, allows humans to develop a deep relationship with the site and bioregion, and she believes these humans will be more likely to engage with nature in positive ways. "We desperately need a new way to engage with nature, and the arts (for Eno, environmental dance) can accomplish this with amazing results." Eno is working to develop a project that links GEC with Monadnock's fragile ecology. She hopes that her work on Mt. Monadnock will help inspire continued protection of this special place. She also hopes that some of the preservation initiatives of natural places other than Monadnock will come from dedicated environmental artists, deeply committed to the places that inspire their art. Dianne Eno follows a long line of artists on Mt. Monadnock, including Abbot Thayer, Galway Kinnell, Thoreau, and Emerson, and she feels pride to be a part of Monadnock's artistic heritage.

Dancing Like a Mountain is a poem written by Dianne Eno for a Supervised Independent Study at Antioch as a CAP Ethnography exercise. It tells the experience of dancing on Mt. Monadnock.

## Dancing Like a Mountain

Dancing like a mountain!  
But "how does a mountain dance?" one may ask.  
With power!  
With mystery!  
With harmony!  
Beauty!  
Balance and strength.  
But "how does one know this is true?"  
Through quality-not quantity.  
These things cannot be counted.  
Power.

The mountain stands alone-  
Solid and strong.  
Unmoved in space and time.  
(At least this is how most humans perceive it)  
Like the power of the dancer's legs-watch.  
Heart, mind and spirit follow in a similar rhythm, pulse, pattern.  
But all things change over time-this is how it is.  
Mystery.  
What is the magnetizing force that draws us here?  
That sustains us?  
Inspires us?  
That allows us to feel the wisdom and the ancient knowledge held in these granite rocks? Time; years; patience;  
willingness!  
Less, fame and fortune; more of humbleness and awe.  
This experience of raw wonderment.  
Untainted by human ambition.  
Only honesty flows through the underground currents that feed and sustain the dance here.  
The belonging wholly/ holy to this place and vice versa.  
That is the gift.  
That is why we are here.  
Lesson learned.  
Now to share this "knowledge" with others.  
"What knowledge?"  
The dancer becomes more like the mountain and mountain is dancing, to be sure.  
You can see this with your own eyes, If you choose to see!  
If you choose to be with this reality!  
An alchemy of this rare circumstance-  
An extraordinary phenomenon opens new possibilities-  
Tangible ones, felt ones.  
No need to count this or account for this in some analytical way;  
Just take it all in through open eyes and heart!

Balance. You either have it or you don't. But it is necessary for the survival of the species! Another lesson of the mountain. Wise mountain, wise teacher! Wide base supports all effort; just being. A fundamental principal of the universe? The dancer's body answers this mystery with flowing affirmations of synchronicity. Balance on a single limb-solid, assured, immovable! In harmonious dialogue and response to the impetus of the raw elements that might envision a different reality.

These want to move the dancer, like wind! The wind- Blows through the impervious spirit dancing to mimic the mountain's strength. Dancer negotiates these forces that would move mountains! And they do-over time! But for now, stand solid in this place and time, And revel in this sacred opportunity. Feel the strength of the mountain take over, Surging and coursing through limbs and heart and veins. Dancer spirals, reaches for heaven in ways previously unimagined! She piously retreats, then tries again to do the impossible- Or is it possible?!

Spinning, stretching, extending, saying without speaking, seeking to "know" What the mountain is saying. The wind continues to blow.

From the west, then from the northwest, in a dynamic dance of its own. Dancer balances "mountain-ness" with her own human-ness, On one foot, other leg extended to the heavens. Buffeting the winds that cause the mountain to roar. But, curiously, there is no place to fall-the only option is transcendence and ascension here. Such is the nature of harmony, beauty, reciprocity (as the dancer's body humbly demonstrates). The mountain says so.

## Stories from the Mountain

Dianne Eno has written volumes of stories from her mountain research. Below is an excerpt from an academic paper that attempts to capture her experience of a traditional Native American vision quest at the summit of Mt. Monadnock. During this vision quest, Eno hiked to the summit in solitude and spent a twenty-six hour period there in intentional reflection.

*I sit huddled in my sleeping bag with only my eyes exposed to the landscape, my back against a sheltering ledge. An unrelenting wind from the northeast whips about Monadnock's summit. A half-hidden full moon occasionally reveals itself, as it silhouettes the phantom clouds that dance like whirling dervishes around and above me. The wind continues to howl (or is this, the ominous cry of the ghost wolves that once claimed this place as their own?). Oddly, there is no real, detectable sense of passing time; this is a strange yet pleasurable sensation and somewhat trance-inducing. From my alpine vantage point, I am grateful for this peaceful reprieve from the linearity of life that exists somewhere below me. I am caught in the spatial and temporal ecstasy of Monadnock's sublime timelessness. My thoughts dance with the wind.*

*Occasionally, the wind pauses long enough to enable me to venture out of my cocoon; I know from past experience here and from the wisdom of the mountain itself, that surprise wind gusts at 50 M.P.H. can easily knock me off my feet. I purposely keep my center of gravity low. Seemingly, the turbulence has passed and I stretch with renewed faith toward a starlit heaven. The clouds have vanished now, revealing the steady, but barely detectable rise of the full moon. It is surely nature's lesson on the virtue of patience that enables me to fully indulge in this silent, ancient, celestial ritual. As the moon reaches its zenith, the summit landscape becomes illuminated in a dazzling opalescence; the granite- schist rock sparkles around me like diamonds and I ceremoniously walk the sacred space where a new dance piece will unfold in the future. I note that the concept*

*of “future” seems peculiarly at odds with this place, an ultimate authority on timeless stillness. Solitude. Peace. Other-worldliness. Divinity. Rapture. Back in my sleeping bag, I sit for what seems like a passage of another lifetime. Thoughts of place, dance, time, space, circles, cycles, and lines occupy my mind as I silently observe everything, nothing. Gratefully. The spiraling nature of my thoughts, inevitably relinquish this “dreamtime” state, returning me to the here and the now.*

*The peaceful stillness of this nocturnal mountainscape is pierced by my own sudden awareness that I am not alone. With a surge of adrenaline, my senses detect a quick movement on a rocky outcrop in front of me. I sit in frozen amazement as a lone coyote saunters up the ridge of the rock that provides the stage space for my dances. One pass up and down this ridge (with a brief pause that nonchalantly acknowledges my presence) and he is gone. Did I really see that?*

## **Painting the Mountain Purple and Other Radical Ways to Embody and Embrace the Earth**

Excerpt from academic paper (Research Strategies II, Fall 2007)

Introduction I have dedicated the better part of my adult life to dancing for an often unwitting audience in very unlikely places throughout the physical dimension that some of us affectionately call wild nature. To those of you, who would tell me there is no such thing, I would emphatically say “poppycock!” it is only a difference in the way we perceive the world and make our realities. Anyway, this extraordinary occupation and passion of mine requires that I “teach” professionally trained dancers to join me in my dance on peaks and precipices, jumbles and boulders, on uneven granite surfaces that are, at first glance at best, impossibly sharp, rough and generally detrimental and flesh-tearing to even the toughest-skinned foot of the seasoned Modern dancer. Then there are the natural elements, themselves, that we humans at our most pompous moments would like to think we can master and tame-this delusion quickly departs from the thinking of the environmental dancer who is determined to stand upright and what’s more, dance her way, harmoniously (or at the very least, creating the illusion of harmony) through the blustering gales that can “seat” and simultaneously humble even the hardest mountain climber (I have not only seen this phenomenon on countless occasions but have also experienced it myself). Suffice it to say, I have been sufficiently humbled.

Lesson number one: Balancing on a rocky peak in 45 MPH winds can only be successfully and artistically done when we consciously open ourselves to the wisdom of the natural world and through a new kind of perception that opens our senses to a welcoming embrace of an animate universe. We must be willing to depart from the worn and tattered, olden philosophy of “divide and conquer” that encourages a disjointed and dysfunctional world of separateness (at the expense of unity), of mere and meaningless “pieces” (at a cost to the whole) and a mindless obsession with useless dualities that pit mind against body, us against them and ultimately, as we see today, humans against nature, herself. What is needed, more than ever, in all instances, it seems, is unity.

Teaching someone a necessary skill in order to master a given specialized task (here, again, how to show the trained dancer’s body how to “speak” the animate language of nature) implies that, at the very least, I know something of how this is to be done and better yet, that I am an expert at it. Arrogance aside, I will admit that this extraordinary form of dance befits me in ways far better than the conforming, controlling and paralyzing Pointe shoes of my former (and fondly fare-welled) days of classical ballet. On one fortunate and fateful day that mocks the “shifting paradigms”, those torturous toe shoes went out the window and I, into the woods and up the trail to the summit where I have been dancing ever since. Whew-close call! Lesson #2: Everything I “know” about environmental dance I learned from my mountain.

So, there I was on top of this mountain, in the company of adventurous, willing and rebellious dancers with only my humble yet “empirical” evidence of this newly emerging genre of dance. Such delightful experimentation and experience continued there in the form of swirling arabesques, jetes and full-bodied spirals on rock in and amongst the passing clouds at an elevation that is 3165’ above most of the local humanity and its usual tedious busy-ness, our creative laboratory and alpine theater for over two decades where the alchemy of dance and nature took deep root and blossomed before my very eyes. This was very necessary time spent in unearthing the ancient and sacred gateway buried under the dusty rubble of an overly technocratic world, that took us (and those who watched us there) on a magical journey inward toward where our own primitive hearts and primal psyches dwelled in an authentic yearning for a reunion with wild nature. The groundwork was thus laid. Lesson #3: This knowledge needs to be shared-now!

In order to share knowledge in a formal and “proper” way, I immediately recognized the need to muscle-up my empirical “environmental dance” evidence with some sort of theory. I could look to the great minds of past masters and scholars but what my (humble) intuition was telling me was that I needed to find my own theory, my own way-and it was “out there”-somewhere. So, off the mountain I went on a quest to find my elusive theory. Ivory tower jokes aside, this quest brought me face-to-face with my own nemesis and fiercest fire-breathing dragon-graduate school. During this time of accelerated “learning” I gathered a master’s degree (MA in environmental conservation education), some pretty purple honor society cords and other pomp and circumstance, ten extra pounds (maybe a few more) as well as a “working’ definition of environmental dance. In a chapter of my thesis I called “On Defining a New Discipline and the Environmental Dance Aesthetic” I (again, humbly) quote myself:

Simply put, it [environmental dance] is the expression of the reciprocal and fluid relationship of the human [dancer] to nature, and nature to human through the art of organized movement, motion and stillness in an abstract, often non-literal contemporary style, as it unfolds at once in time and space, in the theater of the natural environment (Eno, 11).

Those words! Sure they made grammatical sense and probably even “captured” (in arm and leg irons) a rough idea of what I had experienced magically atop the mighty mountain, but as it stood, passionate, earthy, value-laden environmental dance was surely dying a slow and painful death in this academic permutation. How could it be that the words of my own language could betray me so nonchalantly and so heartlessly-I was more than a bit disillusioned-and worried? Lesson #4: Don’t ever leave the thinking to your brain, alone! If you do, you will get fat, very fat. Always think with the body and the brain as a unified whole-you will burn more calories that way!

Back to the mountain for some serious reflection! A part of this personal reconnaissance project entailed a twenty-four hour vision quest (not kidding) which at once again served to settle my rattled nerves and weary, over-stuffed brain and returned me to my senses and the age-old wisdom and comforting ceremony of my own Native American ancestors. It was good to hear the song sparrows again, and to really listen to what they were saying. It was a full moon the night I arrived at the summit-the sun was setting in defiant display of orange, red and yellow while the rising, glowing moon offered a calming counterbalance to such a dramatic departure. Balance. There it was again, in full view. It makes such perfect sense-I understand this. I recognize this. It touches me and I can touch it back. This is the language I speak.

The inspiring results of my vision quest sent me back to graduate school-again-in search of a way that passionately wishes for a grand theory with which to “explain” what I “know” about environmental dance. And, to simply get on with it. A quickening sense of urgency and purpose now motivates me. Thus, the second leg of this journey of discovery brings me to this scintillating moment in the present and to my (yes, humble, very humble) term project. Lesson #5: (You know this one) Be careful what you wish for!