

Anna Halprin hits the main stage of the art world

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This year Anna Halprin, now aged 97 and still actively teaching, featured at both *documenta 14* in Kassel, Germany, and the *Venice Biennale*, two of the most prestigious art shows in the world. Anna has been renowned for many decades as an innovator in the field of the therapeutic application of movement-based expressive therapies. However, she has always clearly stated that she was never trained as a therapist, and sees herself primarily as an artist. It is therefore gratifying to see her honoured by the art world. As a performance artist and teacher she has radically reshaped dance, playing a major role in reclaiming it from the exclusive ranks of choreographed stage performances, and restoring it to the universal context of participatory dance as a healing art (Tamalpa Institute, 2017). Let me tell you the story of my journey with Anna, and how it was to see her work holding a vital place in the curated Arsenale exhibition at this year's *Biennale*.

I first studied with Anna in 1982–83, while on my big overseas experience as a young and disillusioned psychology honours graduate. After studying yoga in India, and while in Germany, I was invited to some 'movement' classes. The facilitator had studied with Anna at the Tamalpa Institute, the internationally recognised centre for movement, dance, and expressive arts therapy and education that Anna had founded with her daughter Daria. The experience of these classes helped pinpoint the intersection of what I had been seeking in both my psychology training and the yoga studies. I applied to train at the Tamalpa Institute, without consciously realising that this training would shape the journey of the rest of my life.

At one point in the Tamalpa program, some visiting teachers asked us what the training had given us, and I immediately replied: "It has given me back my body". This apparently simple statement carries a profound message about

the nature of learning and ways of knowing. This valuing of the integration of my body, my emotions and my imagination with my cognition has profoundly shaped my ongoing experience and my relationship with myself, with others, and with my personal and professional work. Anna's model of the life/art process – that our life experiences are the material of our creativity, and that our creative process is what shapes our life – has been a guiding principle for me (Halprin, 1995).

I travelled to Melbourne to work with Anna again in 1987, when she came to facilitate the workshop creation of a performance called *Circle the Earth*. This dance ritual grew out of a response to a series of murders in the late 1970s and early 1980s on Mt Tamalpais, near her home in California. At the time, Anna and her husband Lawrence were leading a community workshop called 'A Search for Living Myths and Rituals'. The participants collaborated to enact a reclaiming of the mountain. That ritual, called *In and On the Mountain*, was performed over several days, and included a walk along the trails where the killings occurred. A few days after the performance of the ritual, the killer was caught (Earth Alive, 2010).

Inspired by the coincidental capture of the killer, and mindful of a shaman's counsel that the mountain needed to be healed, the dance on the mountain was developed and enacted each year for five years. In 1985 Anna started travelling to offer other groups the chance to experience the resulting expanded dance ritual, *Circle the Earth*. The aim of the work was for it to act as an expression of intention for each participant, and for the group as a whole to encourage health and peace across the world (Earth Alive, 2010).

Circle the Earth consisted of a series of 'scores' that each participating group could develop in its own way. The term 'score' in the Halprin model of the creative process is borrowed from

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