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Welcome

by BHUMI PATEL, Guest Editor

“If not us, who? And if not now, when?”

I offered this as a provocation for the writers in this issue and I am awestruck by the beauty, grace, humility, thoughtfulness, humor, and care with which each of these writers has approached this appeal. In Summer 2020, during those still-beginning days of the pandemic, I saw an uprising for social justice at a scale I hadn’t experienced in my lifetime. That’s not to say that fights for liberation aren’t ongoing and continuously evolving, just that I haven’t seen that many people mobilize, take to the streets, and demand change and justice before. Thinkpieces have suggested that people had time to be involved in protests and phone banks and letter writing because of the pandemic, but still, I was moved by the galvanized efforts of so many people to talk about race and liberation in the US.

As vaccinations became available in the US in 2021, more people began gathering. As social creatures, gathering was needed. But there was a feeling in my gut that I kept returning to over this last year. I wondered how many people had read White Fragility, how many had picked up My Grandmother’s Hands and read one chapter and put it down, how many organizations hired someone to “train” them on how to be anti-racist? How many choreographies were made about interrogating one’s privilege? How many artists, philanthropists, administrators, performers in our field grew tired of doing “the work”?

As I wondered where we were going, I kept asking myself: What now? Where now? Who now? Breonna Taylor’s name isn’t trending anymore and her murderers are free, so what are we doing?

I set out with the goal of bringing together BIPOC artists in an effort of coalitional community building. We are who we have. The brilliance of this group of writers shows me how brilliantly each of them is enacting the change they want to see in the world.

One of my mentors talks about finding the shared genius in the room through collaboration and trust and the genius in this room gives me great hope for where our field, and the world we live in, can go.

I offered this provocation because we all hold so much power to create change in our communities and I know that we don’t need white artists continuing to make decisions for what BIPOC artists want and need while continuing to hold power. Here, we offer roadmaps, reflections, and vulnerable representations of our depths of desire. Words matter, and yet our words are not enough – I hope you feel invigorated to act, as I do. These writings invoke conversation with me, with each other, and with you, the readers who I hope will ask yourself the question too: If not me, who? If not now, when?

With love and gratitude,

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ENLIGHTENING MINDS AND HEARTS THROUGH THE ARTS

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N APRIL 2021, right after we’d both been vaccinated, I began to meet weekly with a dancer friend and collaborator. We met, keeping our masks on, in my living room, on my building roof, in the park. It was the first time either of us was making dance with another human in over a year and it was thrilling to simply move our bodies, in the same space and at the same time. Actually, forget about moving—it was profound simply to touch; I could count on one hand the number of people I had touched for a whole year.

We were both drawn to exploring the concept of care. Yes, that ol’ thing. Take care, we sign our emails. We care about you, companies tell me in their ads. Self-care, that luxury we can’t afford. But also no, not that ol’ thing. We were interested in real care: care that is powerful and radical, care that can uproot oppression and topple regimes.

In the pandemic, betrayed by those at the top, we did what we always did: we showed up for each other. Amidst catastrophic suffering flowered a beauty and depth of our care, community, and solidarity for each other. And yet, in the spring, as vaccines were opening us back up, all that started to crumble with the return of busy and FOMO and neverenoughness. Because that’s what normal translates to in our hyperindividuated, neoliberal society.

We wanted to understand care: how could we harness the deep practice we’d exercised at such great cost for a more caring future for the long run, not just in times of crisis. Real care — not marketing slogans and prosaic signoffs.

We structured our working sessions as a book club, grounding each session with a chapter from The Care Manifesto by The Care Collective. We invented exercises for ourselves, inspired by what we were reading: what might an infrastructure of care look like? How might we explore neither dependence nor independence but interdependence? Skipping any easy manifestations of care as either physical (caring for) or emotional labor (caring about), how might we embody the notion of feminist Joan Tronto’s caring with,1 where the care relationship is consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality, and freedom?
In our movement explorations, our limbs both separated (pushing away) and connected (bringing together). Our points of contact varied from slip ’n slide to deep pressure, localized to whole body. Rolling together on the ground necessitated full body intimacy and support of each other’s weight. Being on the ground versus standing each pre- scribed different constraints, but also opened different possi- bilities. We butted against power, when either of us would throw out a ‘bid’ that the other did or did not turn towards. We added successively more rules to our score, making it harder for us to maintain continuity of phrase given physical constraints — much like continuing to care amidst less resourcing and burnout. We dissolved any lead/ follow relationship, blurring our boundaries and engaging in a dynamic give and take: sometimes one of us needed more or less, sometimes one of us got to shine more or less; at no point was our relationship ever perfectly equal. Dance movement and social movement. The gesture and the rupture. For me, care is the bridge. And not only does it serve as the bridge between both, it contains the possi- bility and process of both — both the gesture and the ruptu- re, the moving towards (ourselves, others, The Other) and away (from oppression, isms). Care is not inherently “nice” — it is political (gendered/racialized/classed) and it is survival (both as caregiver and care-receiver). Care can be conceived as the mending, after the tear. But it can also be the tear itself: etymologically, care comes from the Old English cunnan, which means “burdens of the mind.”

What tear can then become the mending, unstitching what is an ongoing practice. He wondered if interdependency is in our DNA, what does it mean unlearning what we no longer need and revealing our inherent whole and free self. Care can be our practice of freedom.

What do I mean by that? The philosopher Michel Foucault distinguishes between liberation as a momentary act and freedom as an ongoing practice. He wondered what would happen the day after the Grand L. Turns out we’d still need to figure our shit out. “Liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be con- trolled by practices of freedom.” That work of freedom after the Grand L? It’s also the work we need to do today.

This essay is driven by these questions:

1. Why is care so hard?
2. How might we care more? How might we expand our caring imaginaries, our notions of kin, of who “deserves” our care?
3. Does care matter? I mean, is it really going to fix anything?

Care as an Individual Practice of Freedom

What can care free us from? Here are three ways that either giving or receiving care can be a practice of freedom.

First, each time we ask for care, we’re stepping away at the tentacles of neoliberalism that have ensnared us, often without our knowledge or informed consent. Asking for help strips down the neoliberal ideal of the self-made man: autonomous, resilient, and self-sufficient. It refuses the cultural value of independence as success, or even the possibility of any true “independence.” We’ve been brain- washed by the notion that we have to do it all alone or else we’re considered weak. Even Henry David Thoreau of Walden is a case study for interdependence: he visited his mother’s home several times a week to eat her food, give her his laundry, and see his friends.

Care can also become a practice of freedom by unhooking our worth from our productivity and believing in our inher- ent worth. Under neoliberalism, the individual is only valu- able as a “productive member of society” (read: engaged in wage labor, because value must be measured, and money is our only currency). But that’s just a story someone made up. We are worthy simply by virtue of being alive, full stop.

That’s unconnected to what or how much we can produce, what our minds or bodies can do. Our belief in our inherent worth gives us a sense of enoughness that enables us to both ask for and give care by giving us a greater capacity to con- front our human frailty.

Finally, care confronts vulnerability and depend- ence, sickness and death. We care for (and other) bod- ies and minds both because of and in spite of their perpet- ual imperfections, the ways in which they may not behave the way we might want them to, the ways in which we have to relinquish control. Care for (and other) mortal bod- ies can also be an unsettling memento mori when our soci- ety tries to ignore, ignore, and hide death. The funda- mental truth of death is a feature, not bug, of the human condition. Care can allow us to unlearn our shame around having needs and mitigate our fears of frailty and death, accepting all of them as part of the human condition.

Acknowledging our interdependence, inherent worth, and vulnerability — this is hard work that’s entangled in the already hard work of care, whether you’re a giver or receiver. When you’re really in the muck of it, care brings up a lot of feels: anxiety, fear, grief, anger, judg- ment, and more. But this is also the work of freedom, if we allow ourselves to open to the possibilities of liberation in the already hard work of care. In the words of meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hanh: no mud, no lotus. Let us feel the discomfort that care triggers for us, and begin to be in that discomfort so that the tightness might loosen, simply by virtue of our being with, our turning towards. If instead of fighting, we can dance with it: our shame, our fear, our anxiety. We can shift our weight, bend our knees, relax into the natural curve of our spine.

Care as a Collective Practice of Freedom

Care is not just my practice for my freedom, or your practice for your freedom. It’s our practice for our free- dom, together.

What can care free us from?

RECONFIGURING FAMILY

One answer is the scarcity mindset that rations the provi- sion and receipt of care to the family. In our neoliberal world, there is no collective responsibility for care; it is relegated to the family — and when they’re not available, outsourced to the market. This is both unrelentless and unjust: not everyone has available family or money. How might we extend our commitments of care beyond the traditional family? What would it look like to construct family through choice and consent instead of chance?

THE CARE WEB

Justice worker Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha describes the “care web,” which applies the principle of mutual aid—a collective coordination to meet each oth- er’s needs — in the spirit of interdependence and com- munity. It is from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.

A care web doesn’t mean that everyone has to do every- thing, but it means that everyone can give and every- one can receive: pooling both caring needs and caring resources. In this way, the care web is neither unidirec- tional nor hierarchical, unlike the standard healthcare-me- diated relationship of the binary caregiver and care receiver that is unequal and non-reciprocal. And unlike traditional models of care for, say, disabled people or char- ity recipients, the care web subverts the model that they can only passively receive care. Instead, a person receiving care can also direct or give care. Finally, care webs have no center, paralleling the way in which the normative, institu- tional centers of life have failed its members — say queer and trans communities harmed by their families.

Two things the care web is not: it’s not charity, and it’s not friendship. Members of a care web relate on equal ground instead of a hierarchical, moralistic, and often au- thoritative relationship that characterize charity. Care webs also don’t require friendship, generally characterized by reciprocity, which is not necessarily possible when people have different needs, capacities, and capabilities.

CARING FOR CARE

Returning to Thich Nhat Hanh’s no mud, no lotus, how might digging into the challenges of care inform the ways in which care is our practice of freedom?

One of the primary ways the care web is hard is the improbability of reciprocity, and the unequal distribution of caring needs and caring resources within that web at any given time.

romah pâdraig gallacher of the Radical Access Mapping Project writes about this eloquently:

If interdependency is in our DNA, what does it mean when we fall out of whack with it? How do we han-dle the realities of our bodies and minds that need what they need when they need it? What does it mean
when I can’t support you in the ways you’re supporting me? Does interdependence mean we do the same thing, as though there’s even such a thing as “the same” when it comes to this stuff? Is it a gentle ebb and flow? What if my ebb will never match your flow? What if it’s sometimes a torrential downpour and one of us is drowning? What do we do then?

This notion of needing interdependence to just “magically work out”—and expectations for reciprocity and equality—is, I believe, one of the main reasons care webs are hard. Not only do we have fluctuating needs and capacities across even a single day, so too will we across the course of our lifetime—if we have children, when we are sick or recovering, or as we age. And looking across a care web, different people will have different needs, capacities, and capabilities.

I don’t think our society gives us many models for, or opportunities to practice, engaging with others in ways that aren’t a transaction or equal trade; it’s how we are in so many domains of our life: commerce, employment, friendship. I think about the sticky challenges of shifting from what’s equal to what’s equitable. I think about choreographer Doris Humphrey, known by that very care too. To continue to nurture our care webs is to see it through loss, to embrace holes and patches, sutures and scar tissue. How might we meet this with compassion? Alongside all the discourse about queer grief or crippling crap, how might we care for care — our imperfect selves, our imperfect care webs, our imperfect fellow weavers, our imperfect weaving, our imperfect loom and thread and the space between those threads that are the very reason for their resilience and stretch?

Caring for care: this is, again, our practice of freedom.

I’m inspired by three case studies of residential, self-governed care webs that I call care neighborhoods: City Plaza, Occupy Wall Street, and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. They serve as models for reimagining our society as one that centers care at every level.

City Plaza, an abandoned hotel taken over by a self-governed squat of refugees from 2016 to 2019 in Athens, is an exemplar of both the physical caring for and affective/emotional caring about. Run like a cooperative, residents took up “weekly responsibilities based on their individual capacities, from cooking meals to cleaning, group child care, and basic maintenance.”

The Dakota Access Pipeline protest from 2016 through early 2017 involved its own concept of kinship. For the Dakota, kinship extends to the land, water, and animals on whom they depend. As such, at Standing Rock, the protestors were protecting their relative, Mni Soze (the Missouri River), from threat of an under-ground oil pipeline. The water protectors’ camp also used a “progressive stack” by prioritizing the voices and women of color before white men. Although—and because—the movement was leaderless, its decision-making process was “highly structured, technical, and often laborious,” striving to not reproduce society’s violent power relations.

Three these case studies inspire me because they bridge the care web with societal transformation. In each case, people learned skills and capacities such as collective problem-solving and governance, unlearned their conditioning, and literally manifested (not just imagined) a new society. They were empowered to take direct action rather than waiting for someone else to fix their problems and usher in the hypothetical liberation. This is, perhaps, what is most compelling to me of all, the ways in which we have been complicit in giving up our own power so that we can take it back. Realizing that change doesn’t come from the abstract “other,” some more knowledgeable or expert, but us. Realizing that we don’t need to be saved — we can step up ourselves. Likewise, we don’t need the government to “take care of us”; we have the capacity for collective governance, to be the government, to care for all of us.

Liberation Now

So, how might we get there? That beautiful land where we all live in an abundance of care. Where we engage the organizing principle instead of profit. Where we have nightly dance parties on the roof. Where we engage directly with our neighbors and fellow citizens so everyone’s needs can be met. That utopia that feels so different from our present reality. But in the spirit of queerness, that’s a false binary. Liberation can be available to us right now. I invoke the following as our guides for liberation: Buddhism on awakening, the Dakota on kinship, and anarchism on prefiguration — moving from individual to family to society. Buddhism teaches us that we all have the seeds of awakening (also called enlightenment or liberation) within us. We all possess—or rather, are—Buddhanature: the awakened heart/mind. Unlike Christianity’s doctrine of original sin, Buddhism believes that we are already awakened beings. However, our fundamental goodness is covered up by the three defilements of greed, hatred, and delusion. Becoming awake then is a subtractive process. Through practice, we may come to know and be who we already are.

Awakening can be accessed by the most ordinary of activities: breathing. Something as pedestrian as noticing that you’ve been caught in thought is considered a “lower-case” awakening by waking up to the present moment, gleaning a glimpse into the spaciousness of our Buddhannature. Buddhism teaches that liberation is available to us — all the time, because it is what we fundamentally are. Indigenous scholar Kim TallBear argues that in Dakota culture, “making kin is to make people into familiares in order to relate.”

The Dakota Access Pipeline protest from 2016 through early 2017 inspired with its capacity for concept of kinship. For the Dakota, kinship extends to the land, water, and animals on whom they depend. As such, at Standing Rock, the protestors were protecting their relative, Mni Soze (the Missouri River), from threat of an underground oil pipeline. The water protectors’ camp also used a “progressive stack” by prioritizing the voices and women of color before white men. Although—and because—the movement was leaderless, its decision-making process was “highly structured, technical, and often laborious,” striving to not reproduce society’s violent power relations.

Indigenous scholar Kim TallBear argues that in Dakota culture, “making kin is to make people into familiares in order to relate.”

— we can step up ourselves. Likewise, we don’t need the government to “take care of us”; we have the capacity for collective governance, to be the government, to care for all of us.
When I dance, I am making and inhabiting a world, however ephemeral, that is not this one—and I am inviting you to join it. Where I, and you, get to release from the rules and beliefs of this world, and perhaps even (or rather, therefore) the rules and beliefs that are knotted up within us. Where we get to be and move in a different time, released from the fascism of the clock. And in this different world and different time, we get to be a different nervous system, a different mind, a different body. We can relate differently. We can create something different.

When we change shape, we shape change. Dance is an act of prefiguration: creating the world we want, right now. This is our practice of freedom, together.

BELINDA JU (she/her) is a coach, writer, dancer, and convener of a meditation community. As a dancer, she has performed, including original work, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Judson Memorial Church, Dixon Place, and Bates Dance Festival. As a writer, she has shared her writing at readings around New York City, including at Carnegie Hall, and is currently completing her memoir. When not pursuing artistic endeavors, she coaches founders and leaders in tech and runs a meditation community she started in early 2020. You can learn more about her and say hello at belinda.io.


About me

I’m a 56-year-old queer, Black biracial woman. I grew up in a world where art, social justice, and everyday life were seamlessly intertwined. My mother is an African American arts educator, portrait painter and anti-racism activist. My father was a white professor of ethics and social justice movements. When I wasn’t in school, I was taking ballet classes, learning the lyrics to my favorite musical, or painting an abstract work on an easel that my mother had set up for me. I was also creating, directing, and starring in neighborhood dance productions (tutus and all).

I trained in ballet, modern, and jazz dance in my youth, and then performed for dance companies that resonated with my passion for social justice as a young adult. After dancing with the Performing Arts Ensemble and Impulse Jazz Dance Company in Boston, I moved to San Francisco to perform with the Dance Brigade, a feminist dance/theater troupe. I performed and toured with them for 8 years. I also co-directed and performed with a dance/theater company called i am! Productions that created work around multiracial identity through movement and storytelling.
I worked as a dance teacher, executive director, and artistic director at Destiny Arts Center (destinyarts.org) in Oakland for 30 years, where I essentially grew up. At Destiny, I learned the art of teaching, facilitating, community building, collaborative leadership, culture keeping, nonprofit fundraising and finance, advocacy for youth and the arts, and holding space for artists and artmakers to thrive. I also co-founded the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company at Destiny, a pre-professional dance/theater troupe for teens, which provides rigorous training in hip hop, modern and aerial dance, theater and scriptwriting, and gives youth a platform to tell compelling stories about personal and political issues.

I live in the Destiny neighborhood and have no doubt that I will continue to be part of the Destiny community for the rest of my life. I’m my mother’s daughter - someone who understands how to hold circles of humans in a tender, open-hearted way, and who knows the power of art and self-inquiry on the path to liberation. I’m my father’s daughter—someone who loved and honored the natural world, believed in the power of community activism, and loved family deeply. I’m a wife of an Indigenous woman, who is most certainly the love of my life. We understand how to laugh and cry together in equal measure. I’m a dog mom – we have two adorable Shibas, Inus, Mimi (12) and Mabel (6 months). I am a devotee of an Indian guru who lit up my life over 20 years ago and gave me access to my heart in ways that I could only have dreamed of.

About What Motivates My Work

“What is the greatest ill in the world?” a student asked her spiritual teacher. “Self-hatred” the teacher answered in a somber tone. I heard this conversation 25 years ago and it rang like a bell inside my chest. Immediately, I recognized the intention behind all of my work as a dancer, arts educator, and community leader. It was to embody and inspire self-love. It was to create exquisite art and beloved community, never sacrificing one for the other. It was to install the mantra that joy is an act of revolution, not to deny systemic injustices, but to remind us who we are at the essence of our beings and to use that understanding to co-create a destiny that honors and uplifts everyone.

My work unravels the causes of our collective self-hatred through somatic storytelling and personal narrative, examining racism, misogyny, heterosexism and all the systems that divide us. My work tells the story of the current time by exploring impact rather than giving opinions or casting judgment.

My work reimagines and reconstructs reality through the lens of self-love. Alicia Garza, co-founder of BLM says, “The task is to try and live our lives in the way that we envision freedom looking like and feeling like.” For me, this means working in authentic collaboration with performers of all ages and professional artists who believe in social transformation. My work constantly reinvents itself in order to be relevant by responding to the visions of artists in relationship to community.

When I performed with the Dance Brigade, themes of racial, gender, and environmental justice were central. When I created my own dance/theater company, we did work that explored the complexity of being biracial in America. When I co-created work at Destiny, every element of the creation and production of the performances moved through a social justice model. The work was collaborative, told stories with social justice themes, educated performers and audiences, challenged and dismantled systems of inequity, and inspired social change.

About the Letter

This article takes the form of a letter. The letter is written to me from a future ancestor – a young woman who lives five generations forward in time. She calls me Great Grandma (I would actually be her Great Great Grandma). The letter is written to me from the future could be the great grandchild of any one of hundreds of my students. She is the combination of the wild, audacious dreams of a whole community, and she comes to me through that dream. The idea for this letter from the future came from an exercise led by Mia Birdsong and Aisha Nyandoro in a session of the New Universal, a collective of women of color leaders from around the country led by Akaya Windwood. When I wrote my first letter to myself from a future ancestor, I could feel her very clearly. So much so that I wept the entire time I wrote the letter. She is my latest version written just for you with all my love.

Side note: It took me 15 years of teaching young people to accept the ‘Mom’ label, even though my young students called me Mom all the time. I’m stubborn that way. I used to tell them that ‘Uncle Mom’ might be a more appropriate title, because of my gender fluidity, but ‘Mom’ was what they wanted to call me, so I finally surrendered.

After 30 years of teaching, I have many children in my dance/theater family. The young woman who writes to me from the future could be the great grandchild of any one of hundreds of my students. She is the combination of the wild, audacious dreams of a whole community, and she comes to me through that dream. The idea for this letter from the future came from an exercise led by Mia Birdsong and Aisha Nyandoro in a session of the New Universal, a collective of women of color leaders from around the country led by Akaya Windwood. When I wrote my first letter to myself from a future ancestor, I could feel her very clearly. So much so that I wept the entire time I wrote the letter. She is my latest version written just for you with all my love.
THE LETTER

Dear Great Grandma Sarah,

I’ve been writing to you in my mind for as long as I can remember. So much so that this letter feels like the continuation of a lifelong conversation. It is truly an honor to spill my mind onto the page in this letter to you. Collapsing time so we can be together across time and space.

My name is Sarah. My mother named me after you. She wanted me to know you as if you were right here in my blood. That’s what it feels like. My mother told me that you loved me before I was born. She told me that you dedicated your life to working with young people who loved to dance and tell stories, and who were committed to creating a world where ALL people are free. She told me that you dedicated your life to the idea that I would exist, and that I would love myself without any limits.

I exist! I’m 14 years old now. I’m a dancer like you. And I love myself as if I were the sky or the ocean. I love myself like the color of fresh green after a spring rain. I love myself so fully that I see my beauty everywhere. And I revel in the beauty of everyone I see, as if I’m witnessing a glittering rainbow over a field of yellow flowers. I laugh big. I sing loud. And oh, I love to dance.

The elders say that people did not love themselves in this way when you were alive. They say that especially Black and Brown bodies were scorned and vilified. They say that round bodies were seen as ugly compared to slender bodies, and that people became more and more invisible in society as they got older. They say that female identified people were seen as ugly compared to slender bodies, and that people became more and more invisible in society as they got older. They say that people had to hold those burdens in your body and in your heart.

You taught young dancers of all shapes and sizes and colors and backgrounds, that they were worthy of love, that they were beautiful. You taught them that they could change the world by creating dance and theater pieces about the things that mattered to them and that mattered to their communities. You helped them challenge the status quo in order to envision something different. For me.

I am here and I am free to be who I am because of you and so many people who knew that being joyful, in spite of all the oppression that was happening in your time, was an act of revolution. My Mama told me that you were a beautiful dancer, that you looked 7 feet tall when you performed because you danced with a generous heart. I have a generous heart too. It’s easy for me to have a generous heart because of the hard work you and people like you did in your lifetime to dismantle systems of oppression from the inside out and the outside in. You helped young people value building community over competition. You helped young people see the value in their stories, their bodies, and their dreams while you pushed them to be disciplined in art and in life. You brought young people and elders together to create magical dance/theater pieces. We know that the connection between young ones and elders is sacred, but that was lost during your time.

You kept choosing love over fear, even though you must have been afraid a lot. You worked really hard to love your dancer body even when the dance world of your time said it wasn’t thin enough or flexible enough or white enough. And then you shared that love with your community.

Thank you. Every part of my being is grateful for who you were and what you did so that I could be who I am. You would be so proud of the seeds that you and so many others like you planted. They have borne the most delicious fruit. The world is a magical place now, my sweet Grandma.

The air and water are pristine after generations of working to reverse climate change. I can drink out of any lake or stream and the water is so healthy and so sweet. All our food is organic, as you would have said in your time, but that is just how it is now. We would never even dream of using poison to grow the food that we eat. We have amazing festivals and ceremonies to honor the seasons, the harvest time, the birth of a child, the death of an elder.

There are also ceremonies dedicated to love - cosmic love, friendship love, familial love, and romantic love. There is no fear or discrimination in love. We understand that now. Love is love was a powerful mantra of your time. Our mantra is simply everything is love.

All bodies are honored as sacred. Bodies of different sizes and shades. Bodies of different genders and sexual orientation. Human bodies are seen as vehicles for our souls, so of course we see each one as precious.

I’m part of a large group of dancers of all ages and genders who dance at the ceremonies. Some of our dances have intricate choreography that we create together. Other dances are completely spontaneous. When the dances erupt without any planning, we weave through and around each other in mysterious synchronicity. Those are my favorite times.

Oh my. I have so much to tell you that I could write to you forever. But I have to say goodbye for now. Before I go, I want to ask you for something: Please keep dreaming of a beautiful future. Please keep encouraging others to do the same. I know that there were people who did not believe that dreams could come true, so they became cynical and stagnated the evolution of humankind. But dreams matter. Your dreams, and the actions that blossom from those dreams, have literally made my world possible. And this is a world worth dreaming into being. I promise.

Yours in love throughout all time,
Sarah

SARAH CROWELL is a retired professional dancer who has taught dance, theater and violence prevention for over 30 years. She is the Artistic Director Emeritus at Destiny Arts Center in Oakland, where she served in different capacities from 1990-2020, including Executive Director. She founded and co-directed the award-winning Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company, which was the subject of two documentary films. Sarah facilitates arts integration, anti-racism and team building professional development sessions with artists and educators, both locally and nationally. She has received many awards, including the Bay Area Dance Week award, the Alameda County Arts Leadership award, and the National Guild for Community Arts Education milestone award. She is a four-time finalist for a Tony Award for Excellence in Theater Education. Sarah performed and toured with Impulse Jazz Dance Company in Boston and the Dance Brigade in San Francisco. She also co-directed the dance/theater company I am Productions!
Hi I'm spending over a hundred hours of unpaid time to hopefully make it into the three percent of people who actually get funded by your organization. This narrative, or, “the fucking Grant I have to write,” as I’ve come to call it to my friends, my family or any random idiot who I hijack into conversation about it, may come off a little disjointed. That's probably because I worked on it after rehearsal, exhausted, or on the subway as I headed to rehearsal, or during the afternoon I did this instead of rehearsal, or on a weekend night while looking out the window with all the longing of a melancholic woman in an 18th century British novel watching all the carefree 9 to 5’ers cavort through another fun-filled weekend.

My piece, um yeah, so my piece. I really don’t fucking know what it’s about or what it will look like. Probably it’s about how fucked up the world is and how I can’t really afford to live in it and how I still can’t believe that my ex ended up with that guy and now I stalk him on Instagram or how my parents just never really got me and my dad slowly died over the course of ten years while my mom’s world got tinier and tinier cuz Medicaid sucks and no it doesn’t matter if you were an immigrant and worked your ass your whole life to raise two kids and gave them an education you still end up watching your husband shit in diapers while you fight on the phone with some bitch who says she doesn’t understand what you’re saying.
of your Colombian accent while you argue for the hundredth time for more nursing hours on the weekends.

Maybe it’s about how when I walk downtown to the first stop on the 6 train, the bathroom at the bar below I see, as usual, a bunch of drunk, fashionable white people sitting at tables being attended to by people of color, who bring them their drinks and hold the elevator open for them and bus their food and clean their rooms at the adjoining hotel and basically spend their entire work shifts on their feet, and I feel a combination of disgust at the situation, a sigh of internal relief that I don’t have to be in that situation, and a bit of wonder and guilt that I spend my days in studios thinking about things like, “Should I reach for the mustard colored fabric with my foot or my hand?”

Perhaps you, or, really, the folks that are actually looking at this application - folks who’ve I seen when we go to each other’s shows, folks who wish I knew better (well some of them at least). I’m just wondering is there such a thing as granting a need or gig that the other one wanted, so she gets the next grant or award and I’m left wondering what the world deems to be acceptable behavior. You should be with me when an idea I’m excited about keeps me up at night, gets my heartbeat racing and I run to my notebook to write it down before I forget. You should be with me in the shower (sure, why not) when I let the water run as I stare into space, lost in the possibility of strange images and dreams that I’ll try to actualize the next day in rehearsal. You should be with me, you should be here when the clarity and the fear of the task at hand means I can’t escape the constant battle between self consciousness and authority. But no, instead you’re making me come to you and play by your rules. You’re probably an artist like me. You probably have at least the most honorable intentions, you have at least the most honest self consciousness and authority. But I’m trying to tell you that it is here, the contours of its fucked-up-ness helped shape a way of making art that is less pretentious and more emotionally direct than what I saw overseas. (Also, I low key hate Europe.) Now I’m pretty sure that wasn’t the smartest choice. But who really wants to start at square one in an entirely new country once they’ve reached middle age. So, again, here I am, writing you.

Incidentally, counter to what I wrote a few paragraphs ago, I would like to offer that maybe this life path hasn’t exactly been a “choice.”

Which is to say, I can’t really do anything else. I mean, I HAVE, I’ve been a striper, an escort, a bartending, an aerobics instructor, a substitute personal trainer, an academic research assistant, a babysitter, an usher, an elevator operator, a dance teacher, a workshop leader, and more recently, a guest professor. Some of those jobs I got fired from, some of them I left willingly, and some of them I do still because how else is there to survive if I don’t have something that is relatively consistent even though the only thing I really want to do is just make stuff. But what I mean to say is, and I know it sounds extreme, I can’t really do anything else for too long before I just want to die. Whenever I’d have a “regular” job for too long I feel the life force being sucked out of me like a Dementor’s kiss. So there it is. Making art is basically my ongoing anti-suicide program.

I’m not trying to emotionally blackmail you (or am I?) because I imagine, or I HOPE, that you walked into this arrangement with only the best intentions, all the love in the world, and because you’re there. You don’t abandon your mother just because she’s sick, right? I heard that on NPR once from someone who had AIDS. I know that I could have just followed the brain drain and moved to Western Europe like so many of my friends did to enjoy the life-saving benefits of a well funded social safety net and the artistically affirming benefits of an actual dance and performance market. I know I could poten- tially be nursing at the next site that doesn’t see art as frivolous or elitist. But instead, somewhere along the way I got it into my, I’m not sure how to say it, but I now have a love affair with the work, and not just the work I’m making. 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An invocation of integrity to Brother(hood)

BY ORLANDO ZANE HUNTER JR & RICARRDO VALENTINE

PHOTO BY RAMY MAM
Greetings! I am Orlando Zane Hunter Jr. and I’m Ricarrdo Valentine and together we are Brother(hood) Dance!

If it’s not going to be us, then it needs to be me. Or maybe a child, if we just listen to them.

If not us, I’ll just do it.

whole Fracture Fractured Fracture Healing Land tethering to our ancestral dreams.

We would like to take this time to address our concept of what Brotherhood Dance! means. We've been strategizing this shit for centuries. They’ve been hijacked, and stigmatized for social inadequacy under a hypocartic system. Moving through challenges like food insecurity, land rental, high health risks and public transportation, the Black communities we come from fight back with ingenuity, creativity, and innovation as community members we work to re-envision, reclaime, and restore our right to occupy this earth without harm to our body, mind, or spirit so that we may pass it onto the next group of humans better than we found it. D.A.T. is the dance we do in our hood. Oh yea. D.A.T is dance, agriculture and technology. Wink. Get into it.

We’re quiet. You get to listen to the natural sounds of the earth. If not us, Black women and they’re gonna do it now.

If not us, they have patience, but they ain’t waiting.

They’re cleansed.

Something about Sunday lets you start over from scratch. Sunday might be the day, if not today.

Are we gonna do it now? Are we gonna do it now?

If not us, what are/is us/we going to do?

Are we gonna do it now? Are we gonna do it now?

You know what, fuck it. Trans folks are doing it now.

If not us, what are/is us/we going to do?

We’re at the peak of mediocrity and it’s causing harm to everyone, everyone, everyone.

Who is us? Are we all agreeing on the us?

There is no room for doubting us ’cause we got work to do.

They have patience, but they ain’t waiting.

Brotherhood?

There is no room for doubting us ’cause we got work to do.

They’ve been strategizing this shit for centuries.

Look within the us.

I did not grow up with brothers however I had one sister in my household and a number of aunts and sister circles to witness practices of care, tenderness, and resilience through trials in relationship to their environment. It’s no secret that within male dominated spaces due to the construction of masculinity and hard posturing, there tends to be little value in emotional intelligence for it’s seen as feminine to be in touch with how a situation has impacted your emotional body. Let alone the care that comes after.

There is no room for doubting us ’cause we got work to do!

And if it’s not now, do it when you’re ready.

move with urgency.

If it is not us, it’s going to be them and they’re gonna do it now.

As we contemplated a space based on same-gender loving beings coming to build a space of liberation and equity through brotherhood, we could not envision a space where the softness and emotional intelligence imparted to us from Black women, our sister circles, our mothers, and our aunts was not at the center of how we function and create from these male bodies. Calling on deep Black womanist and same-gender loving notions of togetherness, there would be no brotherhood if it wasn’t for Black mothers, womxn, and females with deep love, integrity, accountability, forgiveness, and a commitment to growth. These are the fruits planted within us to move in intimate solidarity together.

Brother(hood)!

Growth in the spiritual for us has lived in our connection to the divine feminine, Yemaya, Oshun, Oya, Kali Ma, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Fannie Lou Hamer, Audry Lordie, Queen Amina. The truth is that these aren’t all soft, fuzzy, or comfortable spirits to embody or deal with; they are warriors!

There is no room for doubting us ’cause we got work to do.

The (hood) is where you come from.

They’ve been strategizing this shit for centuries.

hood.

These are treasures bestowed within us so that we create and curate spaces of care, strength, positivity, change, and resilience. We believe working in this way can be the space from which we work to ensure the least injury to communities, because let’s be honest our Black mothers were the first choreographers we’ve known.

These Mthrfckrs don’t wanna back down.

Death to the patriarchy

They are at the peak of mediocrity and it’s causing harm to everyone, everyone, everyone.

If not us, what are/is us/we going to do?

If we don’t, it’s going to be them and they’re gonna do it now.

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Brotherhood is an interdisciplinary duo that seeks to inform its audiences on the socio-political and environmental injustices from a global perspective, bringing clarity to the same-gender loving Black experiences in the 21st century.
Collective Matters on Dance and Other Body Modifications

WRITTEN BY MEMBERS OF DANCING AROUND RACE

Dancing Around Race (DAR) explores the socio-cultural dimensions of race within the interconnected fields of choreography, dance presentation, dance training, funding, curatorial practices, and dance criticism in U.S. contemporary and postmodern dance. Since 2018, DAR has been building momentum and relevance across the dance communities in the Bay Area as it grapples with systemic and institutional racism that require profound change. Looking closely at the Bay Area dance ecology and working with a systems thinking approach, inquiry examines how various elements contribute to or inhibit racially equitable distributions of power, access, and representation. We’re a collaborative of emerging and mid-career BIPOC choreographers working together to create platforms to explore racial justice and equity. Despite the pandemic, we continue to meet and assist the BIPOC community, finding reprieve while uplifting each other.

DEFAULT
BY GERALD CASEL

Reach to the high back diagonal, leading with distal fingertips and spoking my arms as I step forward with my right foot. Allowing the arms to drop, the knee swoops up in a counter thrust against the arms’ driving force. The right arm circles up above the head while the left arm slices across in front of the torso reaching toward the side low diagonal. There is a lot of weight sequencing through my bones and the resulting wave of motion ripples through my muscles and beyond my nervous system. The arm upwings and I turn on the ball of my left foot as the right leg falls up to the side high diagonal only to fold down allowing the left knee to flex with the foot and wrists also bending as in the weighted, crumpled, and genuflected figures in Nijinsky’s Le Sacre du Printemps.

These descriptive words don’t actually describe how I am feeling while performing these movements. I wonder if it’s because as I think about the gesture, I can visualize postmodernism’s lack of affect in the facial expression and in the absence of dynamic peaks and valleys. This insistence on not offering kinetic commentary gives rise to an embodied neutrality such that the body can/shall be read without any markings that would announce its race, ethnicity, gender, class, or any other intersectional identifiers. When performing these movements, I am imagining the impossible, that my body can be read as neutral and that the movements I make can be translated and read as universal, without meaning or intent. Following Claudia Rankine who says, “I myself am overdetermined by my race,” my dancing body is always/already/an already/only read and preconfigured in the viewer’s mind as a racialized subject.

Over the years, I have been improvising in a style that looks like a mix of Trisha Brown, Bebe Miller, and William Forsythe. Maybe these three are the ones I try to channel when conjuring movements that simultaneously reflect both my deepest somatic self and a nonchalant stream of consciousness that is at once self-conscious and carefree. I call this my default. For me, this term captures the moment-by-moment work of improvising that acknowledges my teachers while trying not to look like I give a shit. Honoring my teachers is unconscious and unavoidable, but not all of them exist within these categories. For some reason, my somatic teachers disappear in my mind’s eye since so much of that work integrated imagery into an applied practice so that my body became more efficient, discerning, and clear – free from adornment and embellishment. In a way, somatic practices ask us to be a body that is unperforming.

Lately, I’ve been bringing into practice the naming of people’s most influential teachers. I have also asked them to identify their teacher’s race or ethnicity, the form they taught, and the cultural tradition from which their practice comes. It has been interesting to see the various ways people have processed this request – with some totally unphased by the prompt – while others expressing how, just by being asked the question, were reliving a difficult experience from their past. It is never my intent to ask people to draw on past traumatic experiences and share them with the group, so I take it very seriously when someone taps me on the shoulder to say that this might not be a good question to bring up in a community gathering. How do we create clear boundaries of care when asking about histories of dance training that have been harmful and painful?

How do we create clear boundaries of care when asking about histories of dance training that have been harmful and painful?
was Japanese and she taught me Graham Technique at The Juilliard School. Martha Graham was a white woman and one could say that her movement practice, the Graham Technique, embodies a uniquely white-American aesthetic, which has become a quintessential U.S. modern dance form. I never thought about it while learning the technique from Kaz, but there may have been some other internalized tension imprinted in how she delivered her teaching since her approach was vastly different from the other Graham teachers I had including Ethel Winter, Jeanne Ruddy, and Christine Dakin. Kaz’s style was fast, brainy, and ferocious. She challenged me like no other teacher. When we danced poorly, she would tell jokes. I heard her once say, “If you dance like that, I have a comment—rather than shame and fear, we draw out joy and resilience. In essence, by breaking these harmful pedagogies, we challenge the default mode of teaching, learning, and being in our bodies while seeing and meeting our students as they are and giving support so that they can be where they need to be.”

HERALD CASEL (he/him/his) is a Bay Area-based dance artist, equity activist, and antiracist educator. As director of HERALD CASEL DANCE, his choreographic work complicates and provokes questions surrounding colonialism, collective cultural amnesia, whiteness and privilege, and the tensions between the invisible/perceived/obvious structures of power. CaseL is an Associate Professor of Dance and the Provost of Porter College at UC Santa Cruz. A graduate of The Juilliard School with an MFA from UW Milwaukee, they received a Bessie award for sustained achievement. CaseL founded Dancing Around Race, an ongoing community engaged-participatory process that interrogates systemic racial inequality in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond.

geraldcasel.com

WHEN HOUSEGUESTS BECOME SONGBIRDS

BY RAISSA SIMPSON

by you want to fly
Blackbird you ain’t ever gonna fly.
No place big enough for holding all the tears you’re gonna cry.

Calling on all culture bearers who pass down traditions, rituals and heritage through dance. The type of dance maker I’m referring to are choreographers of color whose works set out to preserve the transmission of culture through our movement lineage of historical, socio-political, and economic struggles. This art form of socially relevant dance transcends dance genres from folkloric to the stage and commercial forms while at the same time blending Western concert dance formalities of what is deemed professional. I usher in this article with the spirit of ancestral struggles while simultaneously carving a future pathway in what is a shifting paradigm for San Francisco Bay Area dance.

Dance writing is just as difficult as choreographing a new piece. From the onset of writing, you need something of an outline—or in my case an existential crisis—or in my case an existential crisis—in the studio you can start creating right away based on a feeling. I’m impartial to the plights of the choreographer of color who just creates a dance piece intentionally—but more often than not unintentionally—highlighting racism and the harm done by these well-worn techniques, I pose how dance writing, in particular dance criticism, is a gatekeeper to accessing opportunities like funding, presenting and touring. That said, I’m an unlikely antagonist of the journalistic community. I’m interested in ethnographic patterns of Power and following those phenomena which I feel have shaped daily life.

In this article, I will be referring to Black, Indigenous, People of Color as we, us, and our in an effort to combat referential terms such as they, them or other.

BIPOC is an imperfect acronym, however it does aim to encompass us into a group or identify ways in which we hold little to no proximity to whiteness. Throughout, I may use the monikers houseguests and songbirds to also describe choreographers of color. These monikers aim to dismantle or identify ways in which we hold little to no proximity to whiteness. Throughout, I may use the monikers houseguests and songbirds to also describe choreographers of color. These monikers aim to demonstrate how we play by a different set and rules—rather than shame and fear, we draw out joy and resilience. In essence, by breaking these harmful pedagogies, we challenge the default mode of teaching, learning, and being in our bodies while seeing and meeting our students as they are and giving support so that they can be where they need to be.

When a choreographer of color is on stage they know little about. Whether real or perceived, we are naively invited into white-led spaces as houseguests.

In the presence of an overlooked history, how does the houseguest remain invisible and invisible dance?

Dance criticism has an obvious role in connecting readers to choreographers, but at the same time, contributes to misconceptions, erasure and ostracization of these same artists. In favor of avoiding retaliation, we houseguests remain silent out of a basic human need for survival in the dance world. Considering some houseguests want to create “dances just for the sake of dancing” or postmodernism, we find our work is still superimposed against power and authority from white hegemonic notions of the white gaze. On the contrary, the unspoken rules of silence patterned the hallmarks of houseguest etiquette of not being fully human, human and autonomous. What type of authority of power is inescapable for the houseguest?
THE OLD PLAYBOOK

The most recent display of white fragility comes from an article that was lauded on social media by quite a few of my white peers. A high profile journalist (whose name I’ll refrain from using) discusses receiving a “transparent press policy” which in their mind makes demands on critics to “treat the art and artists with respect.” Referring to the routine and practices of dance writers using old racial tropes and linguistics to describe our work, the press release calls into questions the writer’s biases based on race and sexuality; and calls for acknowledging the basic human existence of transgender people.

Interestingly, the study of dance history across various cultures becomes the argument for why an antiracist message isn’t needed for this journalist at the receiving end of the press release. Despite the reappraise against such a stipulation, the message is much needed. Additionally, the initial defiance against the news release stems from it being an ask to acknowledge racial bias in reviews. The unwillingness to do some self-reflection and a little amount of work feels emblematic of dominant white society. Because the Writer becomes a Narrator, we often read the depiction of our dances through the lens of privilege and whiteness, making our lived experiences unrecognizable to us.

What did dance critics think racial reckoning would look like? Surely, they didn’t think the hollow words and actionless solidarity letters after the George Floyd Uprising would come without accountability. If changes to dance criticism like antiracism were part of news outlets’ policies but never implemented, then a small request such as treating artists with respect through a press release would certainly be necessary. Perhaps this particular critic is right in that dance reviews aren’t always spread en masse to large audiences, however they are studied in academia for their consistent patterns of racist depictions of us from primitivism to orientalism. The main reason why this journalist can’t abide by such a request, in their own words, is because they’re working under scarcity due to budget cuts. I’m sorry, what?

This example reminds me that like a houseguest, we play by a different set of rules in white spaces. The rules set forth before us ask houseguests to turn a blind eye to racial indignation in the white spaces and dance media. It is required of us to navigate these spaces with white hegemonic notions of civility and fairness warring around us despite regular microaggressions and sometimes blatant racism we face. Then, when we begin to sing our truths like an unrelenting songbird filled with color and without inhibition or despair, the retaliation is swift. At the heart of the matter is the complicit impulse for those with proximity to whiteness to confuse antiracism work as an economic class issue. I’m all for the opposition to fascist authoritarianism, but can you not throw us under the bus?

WHY DO WE WANT TO SING?

Like a canary in a minefield, our voices are heard only when we start to dance our work. When houseguests become songbirds, we sing our truth, speak out against racism, and start addressing the harm done by white dance critics’ inability to acknowledge our very humanity in their writing. The translation of our art hinges on the ability of white hegemonic dance criticism to concede its authoritative perspective on our lived experiences. Adding to the complexity of this relationship is how our identity is intertwined into what type of reception of the dance given. We welcome dutiful criticism from the needs of our communities. Many of us are positioned in the dance field as tokens of diversity, with the transmogrific fate of if we don’t succeed there won’t be another us to replace us. What we’ve realized during the pandemic is how we’ve been politely waiting for immediate action, but your fragility is preventing you from acting on anything. The dance writing industry is in a serious need of some diversity, inclusion, and equity but I don’t trust anything that could potentially spell out D.I.E., so let’s add access and learning. With IDEAL, we get what songbirds have been singing about for ages, access to opportunity and the ability for white writers to learn about our experiences. If dance writers are willing to learn more about race (not just culture) and how they’re positioned in the discussion, we will have access to equitable inclusion. I acknowledge that songbirds will be singing for more, but the urgency around getting reviewed is a step in the right direction. This might be an oversimplification to what is a long history of artist-observer relations.

From this perspective, I imagine the contention between critics and this newfound songbird status is the perfect harmony for a song.

RAISSA SIMPSON (she/her) is a performance studies scholar and artistic director of the San Francisco-based Push Dance Company. Her interdisciplinary dances are at the intersection of racial and cultural identities and center around discourse on the complex experiences of racialized bodies. Through her research she investigates how Race is performed in theatrical settings, the mass media, activism, and in daily life. Her interest lies in the body, as a site for racial discourse alongside new media and technology.

She is author of Writings On Dance: Artistic Reframing for Colonial Black Bodies (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), which offers considerations on how Afrofuturism is staged in contemporary theater.

(DANCE) FIELD OF DREAMS

BY DAVID HERRERA

live my life in a liminal space. This “in-betweenness” is more accurately depicted by the hyphen of Mexican-American rather than being American or my Mexican heritage; even as I recognize my privileges as a first generation U.S. citizen. I am Latinx, Latino, Mexican-American, and Chicano depending on cultural context. I am multilingual. I grew up in a low-income immigrant household in a vibrant multicultural community in Hollywood, CA. I am gay. I was the first to graduate college on both sides of my family. Ni de Aquí, Ni de Alla (neither from here nor there). Like most Latinx peoples in the U.S. my identity is an amalgamation of my current life and the history of my parents and ancestors with a mix of geographies, citizenship, languages, and cultures.

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I recognized that for real change to happen in the dance field, I had to stop thinking of myself as an individual artist and think more about my community of artists, specifically my Latinx colleagues. I made sure that burden was as minimal as possible on the centered family. We all mourned or celebrated simultaneously; no one was left behind.

I recognized that for real change to happen in the dance field, I had to stop thinking of myself as an individual artist and think more about my community of artists, specifically my Latinx colleagues. We have all the heard the saying, “If you build it, they will come.” This (mis)quote spoken by Ray Kinsella in the film Field of Dreams has been absorbed into the American psyche. This mentality puts the onus on one person to build something grand, build it alone, at any cost, with the promise of American greatness. This false prophesy often leads to fatigue and exhaustion. And even worse, it assumes that one person should be able to present a fully realized “product” without faults, loopholes, mistakes, or room for growth. If it does not, then we are considered failures. Is it of any surprise then that we see so many Latinx and BIPOC dance organizations and artists leave the field, stop dancing, or go under so quickly? This and the lack of support, access, and visibility.

(Side Note: As a type 1, I am juggling an upcoming production and its many needs, building two community programs, involved with 3 other dance organizations in member capacities, writing 3 grants, sitting on a residency panel, and still having to hold a part-time job outside of dance. The difference is that now I ask for help within my circles and larger community.)

Why are we pushed to “excel” as individuals in the dance field rather than taught to enter the field in pods or in community? By Yayo Kambara

Why are we pushed to “excel” as individuals in the dance field rather than taught to enter the field in pods or in community?

“Santa, tell me if you're really there
Don't make me fall in love again
If he won't be here next year”
Santa Tell Me — Ariana Grande

David Herrera Performance Company (DHPCo) 2007 with a mission to center Latinx experiences and communities in contemporary dance. In this time, I have explored immigrant histories, family separations at the U.S.-Mexican border, LGTQ+ identities, Catholicism, Day of the Dead, language, racism, colorism, cultural empathy, nationalism, mixed-race dynamics, cultural poverty, celebration of heritage, and decolonization of the Latinx body and aesthetic, and much more. While the dance company gave me a platform for artistic expression and representation, I began to realize that it was not enough to ensure field wide change, at least not for me. I felt a calling to do more, but what?

I dug back into my own upbringing. How had my own community persevered and even flourished in the face of erasure and assimilation? What was their secret? I reflected on the way that “la Razafla chusmaflas vecino/a comunidad,” always played a role in all major (and some minor) events throughout my childhood. If someone was celebrating a Quinceañera or mourning a death, la comunidad rallied. Perhaps they helped plan the party, some would become “Padrinos (god parents)” for the young lady’s dress, for the catering, for the church ceremony. In moments of sickness or sadness, the neighbors would offer to take care of the children while the parents dealt with the situation. If money was needed to return to a home country a collection was taken. You could count on the vecinos to stop by with a small amount of groceries to help through the week when someone fell ill. In sadness and in celebration, the community
and depleting. Looking around, most of the Bay Area’s institutional arts leadership positions are held by white artists who have deeper pockets of resources and I don’t have the same building blocks to lean on.

What I do have is overwhelming optimism. It turns some people off, but as a person of color, it’s my survival skill. I need to believe my glass is half full, or else I’d probably stop working as a choreographer. My tenacity is powered by the support I get from Dancing Around Race and the dancers and artists I collaborate with; whenever I come ‘home’ artistically, I feel nourished, and the stings of my disappointments feel a little less tender.

My creative appreciation and sustenance come from BIPOC artists who elevate stories not usually seen physically narrated in concert dance. My eyes well up, I laugh, and feelings of magical connectivity and psychic messaging feel alive in the bodies on stage, and I feel seen even though I am the one actively viewing. THANK YOU.

The directors, leaders, funders, and panelists who Secret Santa me with opportunities, jobs, and grants: THANK YOU. But optimism can have a double-edged sword. I can keep hoping and lying down with my palms up in a full pranam pose, waiting for the universal magic to deliver to me, but I know I am missing my reciprocal responsibility of our community agreement - we are in a perpetual group Secret Santa that functions outside of seasons. We don’t have to give each person a gift, but if we all give a gift to someone, someone marginalized or whose narrative isn’t seen regularly, then everyone gets lifted up - equity is elevated for our field, for the LOVE OF DANCE!

It’s less about everyone being uplifted, and more about generosity and working against the scarcity ingrained in our training. Our dances exist in a complex ecosystem and they need to be tended through multi-symbiotic relationships, not just binary ones.

So lately, I am swelling with the need to become the Santa our field needs. I’m saying yes to being a panelist at every opportunity and even joined the Izzies Committee. Being from our diverse dance community, I can explain why culturally specific dances produced for intentional audiences aren’t exclusive, gently push my equity agenda, and advocate for BIPOC artists whether they are working on owning their spaces, producing work/large festivals, or getting general operating funds! Sometimes I feel disheartened on a panel, like when my own child accuses me of being a ‘reverse racist’ but I also know people have my back. As my White Husbear ally gently reminds our daughter, I am correct in calling out Whiteness. Carrying that support, I quickly ease back into feeling believed. She doesn’t need to get canceled for challenging my opinion but we all need to work on being open to new points of view. As I write this and sip a holiday bevy, I’m growing my symbolic Santa momentum full of regenerative energy and immune health while hopefully keeping my dancerly shape getting ready for my next performance season center stage as dance Santa.

Santa has to be a simple pledge we take for one another, not just for a season. As Ariana Grande sings:

Oh, I wanna have him beside me like oh-oh-oh
On the 25th by the fireplace, oh-oh-oh
But I don’t want a new broken heart
This year I’ve got to be smart.

Let’s be smart, be there for each other and I promise this Santa, Yayoi Santa/aka Ms. Kambara-Claus, will be there for you after the holiday season. I’m ready to celebrate you and our community with sympathetic joy – always.

YAYOI KAMBARA (she/her) From 2003–15, she was a member with ODC/Dance and most recently performed with Dance Brigade. While occasionally still performing Kambara focuses on choreography and directing including movement direction for contemporary opera. In 2019/20 she led a Community Engagement Residency for HMO’s Bridge Project, Aesthetic Shift, an exchange between dance educators, social justice activists, and choreographers to interrogate the overlap between equity values, creative practices, and organization. Kambara was in the 4th Cohort of the A/HAPI Leadership Fellows Program and is a member of Dancing Around Race. Her project IKKAI means once; a transplant Pilgrim is commissioned by the San Jose Japanese American Citizens League and premieres in 2023.

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DEAR PROFESSOR,

Dancing in a professional dance company has always been a dream of mine. Ever since I was little, I would mimic what I would see on music videos played on MTV and CMC. When I first told my mother I wanted to switch my major to Dance from Pre-Nursing, I was met with “What kind of job will you get with that?” Upon becoming a dance major, I began to wonder “Why don’t the other students in my class have this same issue? How is it that their parents seemed to be supportive of their decision to pursue the arts?”

I am a child of immigrants. My parents arrived in the U.S. with little to no support on how to navigate this new world. Let alone how to raise a child in a world or system they knew nothing about. So many questions ran through my mind my senior year of college and even after I graduated.

Why is it a problem for people like me to pursue a career in the arts?
Can I make a living with a career in the arts?
Where is the money in the arts?
Why is it largely not accepted for people like me to want to pursue art, or dance, as a career?

Is this my mental health speaking? Or am I living within a system that does not adequately support and provide resources for “people like me.”

When I say “people like me,” I mean Filipinos who have come to the United States for a “better life.” And yes, there are opportunities in this country compared to life back on the islands where life is much slower, simpler, and serene. Until U.S. militarization decides to occupy the land. But that might be a topic for a different day…

Fast forward, I left the pre-nursing I’ve pursued for four years behind and I am now a dance major. Long amounts of time being spent on conditioning and training my body, being with my body, and recovering my body was a dream to me. The studies and rehearsals led to me excel at my craft of performance while continuing to develop my artistic voice and profile of choreographic experience. I have been awarded two of the Carol Haas Excellence in Performance Awards. I wanted to keep the momentum going. Months after graduation, I was invited to a
choreography and performers have long held the priority within university and concert dance spaces.

The comments made me feel undervalued. This is why I made the decision to pull the duet out of the show. I refuse to take part in something that has no commitment to uplifting the artistic healing of dancers of color. I wonder, who are these directors trying to appease? The donors? If so, who are the donors? Why would they not be interested in viewing street dance on stage? Any particular reason why? Were they trying to appease their own biases? I am too interested in artistic endeavors that continue to gate-keep dance spaces from folk or street dance and only hire “professional” dancers that are “classically trained.” Eurocentric dancers and performers have long held the priority within university and concert dance spaces. I am constantly pondering the reason why? Why is ballet and modern considered to be the most supreme dance form of all? And all folk dance or street style dances are considered to be second-class or less-than? It is clear that you do not value or put any value on the importance of culture folk and street dance forms uplift. For this reason, I am divorcing from your work and your community. I no longer wish to participate in your events, nor give you my energy, hard work, artistry, and talent.

There is so much more to say, but I will leave it at that for now.

Sincerely,
Delia Diwata

REMEMBERING DANCE

To the school that I trusted my mind and body to.

A trust that would dwindle down year after year. As a school, thousands of students, every year, trust you to provide for them, to nurture a space for us. Were you aware of what me and my peers went through during our time with you?

How useless sometimes it feels to try and guilt trip an establishment that only cares about money, but the feeling to do so is cathartic. I’ve always thought of dance as an art that frees the mind and body, and I still do, but the systems that help us navigate through dance seem to work in the opposite direction.

I remember my first quarter quite well. I remember being excited, in awe of the beautiful studio. I remember feeling grateful to finally be housed in a studio, with full mirrors built in the three walls, with a booming stereo system to match. I remember the padded floors that would protect our bodies. Little did I know that the quality of these materialistic things were not indicative of the quality of the teaching I would receive. I remember meeting everyone else, friends that I had ‘til this day, also excited to be dancing in the studio again, or even for the first time.

I also remember our professor coming into our Hip Hop I class and telling us he was a substitute and not the regular teacher for this class. I remember him telling us, “I don’t really know what I’m doing, but how hard is it to teach a Hip Hop class?”

To my professor, do you remember us? The students you neglected. The culture you co-opted for your own benefit. The professor who refused to acknowledge he didn’t know anything about a discipline but decided to assume the power of position anyways. The same power you used to impose Eurocentric ideas of beauty on us with? Do you remember how you told some of my friends that their bodies were too awkward to be dancers? Do you remember how you said one of our classmates should lose weight to be a better dancer? Do you remember saying that our final projects into groups of all males or all females? Do you remember when you told my friends to dress more Hip Hop for their final, telling them to wear hoodies and add accessories like chains and bandanas. Do you remember how there were dancers in the class way more capable of teaching a Hip Hop class, but because of the arbitrary way we legitimize dance educators, their expertise was seen as illegitimate? I remember this clearly, and I bet all of my classmates do, too. I’m sure that we’ll all carry that baggage into our careers, especially with dance. To our professors, you have the comfort of starting new every semester. You have the comfort of forgetting us, your impact on us, while we have to choose. We are left with the world of undoing the damage you caused.

This was my first inkling that something was wrong with our dance program, but I disregarded it. As a student who holds nearly no power in the system, dismantling the system seemed almost impossible. Guilt also followed me as I hid away from the world of undoing the damage you caused.

My next dance class was a student-run class called Workshop. I would come to love this class over the years, but this first year was absolute hell.

In my first quarter in this class, I clashed with my professor’s ideals of colonization and Eurocentric standards. In my second, I fought against my fellow peers and classmates. Workshop was a class in which students taught the curriculum. I was so shocked to see a class of students given that much freedom still conform to themselves to colonial expectations of what dancing should be. We had a whole studio to ourselves, and a class period from 2-6pm. It was four whole hours of dancing in a studio taught and ran by the students.

My disappointment in how little we differed from our professors that upheld such damaging ideas of dancing hit hard. That’s what we were generation after generation, receiving and handing down these colonized ideas without question or protest. Trauma teaches trauma.

To my professor, do you remember the environment you set up for us as we came in? Do you remember how competitive you made the class out to be? Do you remember how the culture you imposed on us to be non-intense did anything? Do you remember how much you overworked each of us for the sake of putting up a show to make money? Do you remember that one dancer that twisted her ankle due to the intense work environment? Do you remember how she was told she was no longer needed in the class and how she was excluded from returning? Do you remember cutting one of our best dancers out of a piece because she had gotten pregnant? Do you remember fighting each other, choreographer with choreographer, comparing who was better? Do you remember that we had no idea how to do things besides each other? Do you remember claiming that dancers who weren’t fluent in English were difficult to teach choreography too? Do you remember how
in the ancestral arts, and fine arts, Ting’s wants dance forms. With a long history of involvement instilling a holistic and spiritual approach to all art as visual/oral storytelling like their ancestors, uses their

I remember you. Ting has chosen to both utilize Eurocentric dance styles as core dance technique but has also made a clear delineation between “Folk Dance,” and “Classical Technique Courses.” I may be presumptuous but, it seems that even European folk dance is lifted to a higher platform than that of the Black and Brown Diaspora. H is that a conversation for another time.

As the caretakers of each individual within the college community, do you not feel you have an obligation to create open safe spaces for Black and Brown students of higher education through course curriculum and representation? While my current home college has made it a point to include Black and Brown representation in dance there is also the enormous task of decentralizing Eurocentric dance styles, along with American dance styles that were codified through the stealing and erasure of Black and Brown Indigenous cultures they often try to emulate, are favored over “Folk Dance.” The continued erasure of Black and Brown culture can be seen in the classroom when one notices that the majority of the bodies filling the space are White and it will not be accepted nor will I remain complacent. This open letter is not just that, it is a call to action and a demand that Higher Education as well as grade school make a conscious effort to create safe spaces for Black and Brown dancers through representation in the form of class options, professors, and performance opportunities.

Agymanan Unay, Agpalo Alongi Makinta

Shadow Dancer: Indigenous Dance in Higher Education

An Open Letter To Higher Education

My name is Agpalo Alongi Makinta, born Brandin Josue Alvarez, son of Tamika Henry and Christopher Alvarez, grandson of Joyce Henderson, Frank Henry, Floris Josue, and Celerrino Alvarez, great grandson of Teodoro Alvarez, Justina Devytaico, Perfecto Josue, Cergia Maquinta, Frank Henry Sr., Millie Daniels, Jethro Henderson, and Irene Oliphant. Through ancestral dance I have found strength. However, during my time both in grade school and higher education, I have seen very few of the caricatures that I have grown so familiar with, having grown up around peers who were culturebearers practicing cultural resistance. I have found myself disillusioned with a dance community and college system that

be acceptable forms of performance even when on the stage. The idea taught in higher education that staged performances must be codified in its entirety further distances the Black and Brown student and artist from the hopes of ever being able to share their works with the larger overlapping communities. As a student at San Francisco State University, I have been extremely humbled to find a dance department that embraces cultural diversity through amazing professors that find importance in centering Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer representations within dance but there is still so much work to do even at a school that is as progressive as San Francisco State. Below is a list of proposed classes for the Spring of 2022 at SFSU:

1. Dance 173 – Modern Dance I
2. Dance 208 – Cultural History of Dance
3. Dance 236 – Folklore of Dance: African-Haitian
4. Dance 261 – Ballet II
5. Dance 276 – Modern Jazz II
6. Dance 399 – University Dance Theatre
7. Dance 434 – Dance Composition: Choreography II
8. Dance 474 – Modern Dance IV

While other institutions that I have studied at are a far cry from the options given even within the span of just a semester at SFSU, it is clear that as a whole Eurocentric dance styles, along with American dance styles that were codified through the stealing and erasure of Black and Brown Indigenous cultures they often try to emulate, are favored over “Folk Dance.” The continued erasure of Black and Brown culture can be seen in the classroom when one notices that the majority of the bodies filling the space are White and it will not be accepted nor will I remain complacent. This open letter is not just that, it is a call to action and a demand that Higher Education as well as grade school make a conscious effort to create safe spaces for Black and Brown dancers through representation in the form of class options, professors, and performance opportunities.

Agymanan Unay, Agpalo Alongi Makinta

ARCHIE ARBOLEDA is a Young Adult fiction writer with the goal of adding more queer Asian narratives to the bookshelf. As a queer Pinoy voice, Arthur hopes to bridge the gaps in his culture with tradition and transformative action. In 2019, 2018 Arthur co-founded Agpalo Alongi Makinta’s Dance Department alongside Warren Lucas in hopes to create an equitable space for dancers. Archie created a non-profit dance organization to reach youth in need of accessibility in dance.
THE MAIN FORM OF DANCE | I practice as of late is Contact Improvisation (CI). The name tells you everything: you are improvising while in contact with another person or group. And in truth, by the very nature of the form, there is nothing more dangerous that could have been practiced in these past two years. To be in proximity to others is what creates the craft. To barrel into someone else’s limbs. To crumble your architecture next to another person’s collapsing structure. To reach out and add yourself to a friend with a hand that asks for nothing. All we do when we practice this form is focus on making a dance that can be found. How can I be approachable while maintaining my own agency, my own interest? How can I hold those two opposing centers of concern and balance them out equally in time to share my sense of control with the weight of a person I’m just meeting in the space?

It is by far the most improvisational, alive-ning form of movement I’ve ever met. I take it and use it to feed the other forms of dance I have to maintain to make a living – ballet, Yoga, experimental, teaching. I lean on it to make me feel special. Every so often it betrays me. It asks me at every moment to temper my ambition with curiosity. It moves into directions of safety, anxiety, and pleasure all at the same time. It helps me negotiate my surroundings. It forces me to be a better human. As I write this, I realize it is the relationship in my life I understand most, even when I am lost in it.

CI obliterates all expectations. Any moment you try to make something happen without considering your partner (or everyone in the room for that matter), you set yourself up for disaster. When you hold an expectation up against someone, you rob both of you of the present moment that could have been. That’s not to say that you can’t have ambitions, you can’t make attempts, you can’t really go for something and be satisfied. You just have to do it with your partner in mind.

Now the problem is that this form of dance needs us to be right next to each other. Leaning on each other. Sharing enough weight to say, “if you left, I’d fall.” Because this is what makes this kind of dance limitless as it dives into the unknown – you have to react to the reality of your instincts blended with everyone else’s instincts, and somehow survive in this new constantly shifting world. This alive, chaotic, fulfilling place was one of the first parts of my life to vanish during the pandemic. So what am I supposed to do when the one activity that grounds me is deleted? I’m not sure. I grieve it. Though I understand that to lose this is miniscule in comparison to losing a job, a home, a loved one. But this form is also my greatest teacher, and without it, I haven’t been able to accept the events that have shaped this country for the past 24 months.

My family is Indian. I am first generation. First one of my family born in the states. And try as I might to look like everyone else while passing through adolescence, the giveaway was always at the surface of my skin. I’ve learned to question my color, condemn it, resign to it,
and slowly accept it. Someday I hope to celebrate it. I am the son of immigrant parents. And so, I grew up with their wisdom in my ear. They could feel unrest before they had to see it splashed across a banner headline on the local news. They watched it happen in their home country, and so upon arriving here, could see it coming in a hazy premonition, like an unnerving crystal ball. I’ll never forget my mother’s words one evening after Obama was sworn in: “You wait and see. When he leaves office, you’ll see.”

It’s a tide that’s always just under the surface.” I didn’t really hear her in that moment until I saw it for myself 8 years later, her timing so precise it made me fully understand the doom of repeating ourselves.

CI has always kept me sane when sanity becomes a luxury instead of a fundamental component of our daily operating lives. I hide in it. And I escape in it. It allows me to pretend the bad isn’t happening, at least for a few brief hours in the week. It’s pure hypocrisy if I look at it objectively: a kind of dance I love that doesn’t love me back. As CI, I am full of white people dancing with me as the only outlier. “Do the work” I tell myself. It doesn’t matter if I’m queer, brown, cis-gendered, or small in size. Do the work. But as inclusive as CI is, it is never lost on me the differences I embody.

Can good dance come out of a body of color? Do people change the lens with which they watch brown skin moving? I am actually saying that I have to worry that Brown skin is a handicap. This scares me. It infuriates me. It also spurs me into action. So, CI is my way to take in and accept the nonsense that is this country. It is the way I learn to forgive, exist with the news reports, keep my instincts up around me when navigating NYC. And without it these last years, I have hardened.

It frustrates me that we, as artists, have to claim vulnerability as the way to being fully actualized. The super key to our superpower is the way to create connection to our inner selves and then share it with others. But to be vulnerable, to be in a state of emotional or physical exposure that comes with a certain degree of uncertainty, is hard enough in a studio. I can’t claim that vulnerability in the world around me, not in this current world. I don’t feel any permission to use that superpower right now. I don’t feel safe enough to be an ambassador of art. It is hard enough inherently being an ambassador of Brown.

Every generation has its marker, its reminder of racial tensions. For me, I can’t see past Ahmaud Arbery. I thought Sandra Bland would halt me. And then I thought Philando Castile would derail me. But it is Ahmaud that finds me on a couch late at night right before I realize I’m exhausted and need to go to bed. It’s then that I feel that rush of wet behind my eyes, that sting that overwhelms me because I can imagine being him. I can imagine being yelled at and chased and turned into prey just because I like to run but forgot that running is a privilege. That certain areas, neighborhoods, parts of this earth, are only meant for people that look a certain way. I sheltered in a rural, western, conservative part of a midwest state during the pandemic. Ahmaud was murdered during this time. I have to take the time to warm-up and get to know you, so that you can be added to a bigger whole. I want this deliberate attention when I live in the world. I want to enjoy and accept the nonsense that is this country. I want to see past Ahmaud. But it is Ahmaud that asks too much of it. So, what am I asking for? At the end of this day, today, Thanksgiving, I am asking for a deliberate kind of attention. It is what is necessary for CI as practice. When we are dancing in a room full of people, you have to manage your own ambitions and the expectations of your partners and the room as a whole. You have to look out for the room as a whole. You have to give, exist with the news reports, keep your instincts up around me when navigating NYC. And without it these last years, I have hardened.

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PAUL SINGH earned his BFA in Dance from the University of Illinois, USA. He has danced for Gerald Casel, Risa Jaroslow, Will Rawls, Phantoom Limb Company, Stephanie Batton Bland, Douglas Dunn, Christopher Williams, Kathy Westwater, Faye Driscoll, and was featured in the inaugural cast of Punchdrunk’s American debut of Sleep No More. While abroad, he was a dancer in Peter Sellers’ opera The Indian Queen (Madrid), as well as Peter Seller’s large-scale improvisation work Visibele Untercurve (Berlin). Paul has had his own work shown at multiple venues in NYC, Berlin, and in 2004 his solo piece Stutter was presented at the Kennedy Center. Paul has taught contact improvisation around the world, and currently teaches varied technique classes for Movement Research, Sarah Lawrence College, and The Juilliard School. In 2021, he began his role as Artistic Associate at Baryshnikov Arts Center.
THE FIRST THING you should know about our friendship is that when we are together, we get off-topic immediately. We are excellent at tangents. So, when Bhumi emailed us, we immediately were engaged by the idea to further develop and expand upon our already ongoing conversations that respond to the proposed questions: “if not us, who, if not now, when?” But between Veronica performing on her first national Broadway tour and Rebecca navigating her first semester of graduate school, our schedules rarely align and conversations often only occur via text. We tried twice to connect on Zoom to witness each other’s bleary eyes and that growl that is in our voices when we are hungry. Despite this, our text conversations have sprung forth from underneath my bangs. My English ancestors are showing up!

We thought about sharing our texts with In Dance, but this opportunity felt like a moment for growth. Veronica is interested in developing a podcast that addresses navigating otherness in predominantly white theater and dance spaces, and Rebecca is grateful for the opportunity to write outside of grad school.

**Should we start a podcast?**

What we conjured up for this issue of In Dance is a nonlinear conversation—part transcribed Zoom conversation (our third Zoom meeting was successful) and part pre-and-post-asynchronous text interventions into that dialogue. It is a nonsequential offering, it does not have a clear beginning nor a clear end. It goes off-topic. We experiment with how our contributions can reflect our current context and multi-cultural identities. We purposefully ask you to dance through our pause-filled messiness as a direct resistance to the linearity that whiteness demands. This conversation is a peek into our already ongoing conversations that are like, “You don’t want to talk about black liberation?” In my closest circle, I know my friends on an emotional level; knowing they are there, we didn’t even talk about that day that everyone was just half-energetically posting one-liners about the verdict.

Rebecca: One of the reasons Veronica and I are so close is because of our shared experience of anti-Asian racism during our undergraduate experience at Florida State University, a “land grant” university situated on the ancestral and traditional territory of the Apalachee Nation, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, the Miccosukee Tribe of Florida, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. The experience weighs heavy. We also acknowledge that as Asian Americans, we can only know so much and continue our self-education in solidarity and celebration with Black lives.

Veronica: Oh, I didn’t know we had started the “thing” yet and this was on record. Wig prep includes many hair pins, and after my last dance contract that included hair length stipulations, I’ve kept my hair at shoulder length to resist what that contract entailed. Before that contract I kept it butt-length, and it was a huge part of my identity. But now it’s at a weird length that’s becoming too difficult for wig prep because both sides of my family have very thick silky hair, what’s considered stereotypical “Asian hair.” The current contract I’m on does note that, contractually, we have to get approval to change our appearance, and we provide haircuts and our lead hair/makeup personnel seems very willing to give us fun styles if it doesn’t affect our wigs or look for the show.

Veronica: My roommate’s asleep so I didn’t want to bother her...

VJ: Yeah…. I’m wearing my hat.

RF: Your hair is getting long!

VJ: It’s getting super long. Very difficult to put in pin curls for wig prep…

RF: My computer is sitting on my washing machine.

VJ: That’s amazing.

VJ: What we conjured up for this issue of In Dance is a nonlinear conversation—part transcribed Zoom conversation (our third Zoom meeting was successful) and part pre-and-post-asynchronous text interventions into that dialogue. It is a nonsequential offering, it does not have a clear beginning nor a clear end. It goes off-topic. We experiment with how our contributions can reflect our current context and multi-cultural identities. We purposefully ask you to dance through our pause-filled messiness as a direct resistance to the linearity that whiteness demands. This conversation is a peek into our already ongoing conversations that are like, “You don’t want to talk about black liberation?” In my closest circle, I know my friends on an emotional level; knowing they are there, we didn’t even talk about that day that everyone was just half-energetically posting one-liners about the verdict.

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VJ: We’re supposed to have a “Breaking Bias” workshop soon and I’m already on high alert. Because the classism that exists within this context is ridiculous. Ri-dic-u-lous. And like it—It’s like, when we went to South Carolina, I had to put a chat like— I was like, “Don’t come for my state.” But I did it nicely. I was like, “Chadwick Boseman, Patina Miller, and Danielle Brooks are all from less than an hour outside of the city we’re going to; the arts are active here but
underfunded as is most of the city. So check your privilege before you decide to complain about something about the city." Because truly, every city we’ve gone to, someone has a problem with it. It’s just, it’s unnecessary. Like, we’re visitors. We are visitors to every body’s city.

Veronica: It took a lot of consideration of whether or not to include this, as there are these repackagings presenting the tour in this way. I am fully enjoying my time on tour, with the cast, traveling the country AND I recognize these issues within my cast and production company, issues which I plan to bring up at the aforementioned work shop. The public acknowledgment of this itself – the debate of “Should I redact this?” – speaks to, “if not us, who?” “If not now, when?” “Is the silencing fear of white supremacist structures at work,” “work” here the environment that allows me to live my dream of performing song and dance?

RF: Yeah. I think you’re like, also naming things that I’m feeling as well, which is one: the exhaustion of like, feeling like, we’re catching up or other people are still catching up. And also I’m still catching up and– and the world is moving.

We’re not post-pandemic in any way. But, like the pacing of just like that constant navigation of like, running and then slowing down, is exhausting. Yeah. And then also, both of us are in new communities right now—you’re on tour, and I’m in a new state in grad school. And that has been really difficult for me. And I’m sure like a transition for you as well that you’re talking about a little bit but—

Veronica: It’s been a while since I’ve been in a predominantly white work space surrounded by predominantly cis-white people. I don’t “want” to be the voice that is always holding folks accountable but not engaging with, and within the cast, I don’t feel that is my place, and oftentimes, I don’t bring things up in order to protect my peace, unless it affects or will affect me in the future in a person’s safety physically/mentally/emotionally. It has been exhausting navigating the nuances of being a non-black POC on a tour celebrating the first black actress in the field, in a white-run workplace. Here I acknowledge that not all BIPOC are involved in restorative justice or want to be for various valid reasons, especially in theater spaces. Everyone plays the system to bring it to the forefront of the aforementioned work shop. The public acknowledgment of this itself – the debate of “Should I redact this?” – speaks to, “if not us, who?” “If not now, when?” “Is the silencing fear of white supremacist structures at work,” “work” here the environment that allows me to live my dream of performing song and dance.

RF: You know, one of my favorite things about you is just like the whole-hearted, fully loving presence of gossip in your life. Yeah. That I just like so highly shy away from because I’m socialized differently.

VJ: I love gossip, and that is highly Filipino of me.

RF: I know it is.

VJ: I think like the presence of gossip, it’s like what we—we like setting up this conversation has been very hard for us because we mostly text right. But we have this whole thing about like, how are we archiving our own stories and oral history as archive and gossip as archive, or like archive building practice? And that’s maybe less related to systemic...Well, I guess it is related to this, because like, even having some of those like conversations on record, like, how will that change? And I don’t know where I’m going with that question.

Rebecca: When that was messy. The brain fog makes it hard to string coherent sentences together. What I am trying to wrap my mind around is how gossip and text, two informal conversation practices, can create an archive that is self-directed. For so long, the choice of whose experiences enter an archive and the prac tice of an archive being dominated by whiteness. Systemic inequity is perpetuated by a lack of diverse representation, but I am not looking for my representation to mirror what is currently the status quo. I want to contribute to the documentation of my experience. I think this article is a form of that resistance practice.

RF: You know, one of my favorite things about you is just like the whole-hearted, fully loving presence of gossip in your life. Yeah. That I just like so highly shy away from because I’m socialized differently.

VJ: We are proud of our naps and we also want to acknowledge the struggle to produce concrete deliverables right now! This piece was very difficult for us to co-write because of the aforementioned exhaustion and we knew each other’s emotional energy was being sapped by our respective environments. We really had to let go of the idea of a “polished look” and ask ourselves how whiteness was showing up even in this most intimate process between two friends. We almost backed out of publishing before realizing what we needed was to shape this offering through our feelings. The amount of times we say “messy,” and about this conversation served as our center. By living in the messiness and incompleteness of our offerings, we are actively working in our own offering; documenting ourselves in a way contrary to what whiteness demands. We show up here in draft-potentially nonlinear, unpredictable, unpolished, unrepeatable, and will continue to show up in that way for each other and our communities. This practice is what is so crucial to the process of undoing white supremacy as it shows up in our text messages, Zooms, hair, courtrooms, streets, friendships, gossip, institutions, and articles. In doing so, we commit to the gentleness and grace necessary to build community and a sense of belonging.

Rebecca Fitchon is from many places. She cultivates community through movement, food, and conversation. Her work in the dance field as an artist, researcher, administrator, and advocate focuses on arts and culture policy, labor practices, and community-led advocacy. Her practice takes shape in studios, basements, warehouses, bars, grocery stores, rooftops, gardens, sidewalks, and streets. She served on Dance/NYC’s Junior Committees from 2018–2020 and was selected to join Danc eUSA’s Institute of Leadership Training in 2021. She is an active member of the Bridge Collective and Dance Artists’ National Collective. Fitchon holds a BFA in Dance from Texas State University and is currently pursuing an MA in Performance Practices at the University of Texas at Austin.

VJ: It’s emotionally trying to be surrounded by this many white people at once and all the time.

RF: Yes. Oh it’s like archive building and working against the ways in which white supremacy tell us we should document our history.

VJ: Yes, that part. Yeah, also, because gossip is like, not all—again, not linear. And not—it doesn’t have to be chronological. Which is another forced way, or a way that is forced for us on doing documentation.

RF: I had this conversation with someone yesterday about being a mixed-race person. In what ways do I choose to be like, clear about my history and document? And in what ways do I choose not to document because being mixed race is really messy. And so the archive should be really messy. Yeah. And like messy in a delightful way and joyful way.

VJ: It’s emotionally trying to be surrounded by this many white people at once and all the time.

RF: Also sometimes painful, but like, even having some of those like conversations on record, like, how will that change? And I don’t know where I’m going with that question.

Rebecca: When that was messy. The brain fog makes it hard to string coherent sentences together. What I am trying to wrap my mind around is how gossip and text, two informal conversation practices, can create an archive that is self-directed. For so long, the choice of whose experiences enter an archive and the practice of an archive being dominated by whiteness. Systemic inequity is perpetuated by a lack of diverse representation, but I am not looking for my representation to mirror what is currently the status quo. I want to contribute to the documentation of my experience. I think this article is a form of that resistance practice.
COLLABORATIVE OPTIMISM

by iris yirei hu

A SCORE FOR A-SHIP

photo by chris ourr
I FOUND LOVE IN THE PALM OF MY HAND.

My fingers reach into a primordial, interconnected web of memory that manifests tangibly in the landscapes I have traversed. When I interact with the natural world, I notice the myriad of transformative relations that have consistently depended on one another season after season: the scrub jay who buries acorns to seed oak trees, the symbiosis between the chaparral yucca and their moth pollinator (Tegeticula maculata), and the common yarrow, whose tiny clouds of white flowers decorate the foothills and whose leaves can be chewed to make a poultice. The primordial is both abstract—far away and dispersed throughout multitudes of lifetimes—yet embodied and alive right in front of me. When I inhale, the sacred registers discernibly in my body. I feel it to be love.

When I use my hands to work with fibers, paint, or soil, I feel closest to my body. I feel it to be love. When I inhale, the sacred registers discernibly in my body. I feel it to be love. When I exhale, the sacred registers discernibly in my body. I feel it to be love.

For the last four years until her sudden passing, Tongva Elder Julia Bogany and I worked together to create intersecting spaces where Indigenous and immigrant peoples could explore possibilities of kinship. Elder Julia Bogany’s advocacy for visibility, much of our work together centered the question: How can we, as residents of and visitors to Los Angeles take care of the land upon which we walk while caring for one another in ways that uplift the Indigenous legacy of Southern California and honor the multilayered, complex and contradictory histories of immigration? Notable examples of our shared work include: Lessons from Wise Woman (Tongva Elder Julia Bogany), Grandmother Oak Tree, and Hands (2018), an installation inspired by Ms. Bogany’s tireless advocacy for the San Gabriel Mission to openly acknowledge the gravity of its crimes against Califor-nia’s Indigenous; a site-specific 47 ft. tall mural of Ms. Bogany at CSU Dominguez Hills (2020); and most recently in May 2021, Pakook koy Peshaax (The Sun Enters the Earth and Leaves the Earth), a human sundial made in collaboration with poet Megan Dorame (Tongva).

It is from working closely with Ms. Bogany, in heart and in hand, and from experiencing the natural world as a living body that I derive my method of practice called collaborative optimism. Grounded by the many histories and ongoing traumas faced by Indigenous, Black, and people of color, collaborative optimism aims to world joy, friendship, kinship, and gathering into our shared realities. The practice emerges from the care for and guidance from the historically dispossessed of the land upon which it is practiced. Its function is to create opportunities for intercultural relationship building in most embodied sense, and uplifts the various proximities and embodiments of class, education, racial, and gender privileges its practitioners have access to, to access to and be embedded in the nonverbal and intercultural communication and belonging that is required for BIPOC communities and urgent land-based issues. Because being in deep relationship requires time, reflection, and learning, the immediate politicization of difference in both culture and activism sectors, coupled with the pressures of visibility and speed to formulate a legible result under capitalist frameworks (i.e. social media, funding opportunities, and marketing campaigns), the nuanced practice of cultivating long-term and long-form collaboration is challenging. Collaborative optimism requires willing participants who value our connections across the world, and who understand that learning and unlearning are necessary steps towards the liberation of living beings and to whom we’re related. How can collaborative optimism shape land restitution and economic justice through artful stewardship and healing? Given each of our strengths, gifts, and pathways of access, how can we leverage our privileges to organize both local and international struggles so that each of us and those connected to us can access wellness, healing, beauty, and joy in ways that we determine?

The multitude of lines flow, cross, and split across my palms. Each year I’ve noticed new lines form and ceases deepen. I wonder what kind of map they form when placed next to another’s hand. I imagine that beauty, however self-determined or molded with collective agency, will journey alongside us in limning another atlas with grace.
HEALTH AND WELLNESS. These are no longer just trending topics on Twitter and Instagram. Wellness no longer means an image of a woman in athleisure wear in a yoga pose trying to sell us branded water. Wellness has taken on a more grounded and intimate meaning as we all continue to re-examine our physical and mental health this year.

In this edition of In Conversation I spoke with Olivia Eng about her holistic practices and processes that guide her as an artist and creator. After spinal surgery in 2012 she reconstructed her movement practices by healing and reconnecting with her herbalism and farming roots.

Olivia Eng is a multi-disciplinary artist, performer, teacher, and choreographer. She is passionate about creating art, photography, holistic practices, herbal medicine, traveling, and connecting with community. Eng graduated from UC Irvine focusing on Dance Performance and Sociology. She has traveled the world collaborating, performing, and studying with artists in traditional and contemporary forms of West African movement, Brazilian, Indian dance, and more. She began developing the S.C.A.R.S. (Strength, Courage, and Resilience of the Soul) Project, with a mission to foster healing through dance, story-telling, poetry, art, cross cultural exchange and holistic practices.

"Since I couldn’t dance [from my surgery] I was like I just need some kind of artistic outlet. Then the idea came of doing Kintsugi photography. It began as painting around the physical scar with gold makeup and honoring the scar."

— OLIVIA ENG

LISTEN HERE
COMMUNITY

Los Lupeños de San José
Dance company Los Lupeños de San José is one of five arts programs run by the non-profit Cashion Cultural Legacy. Aside from performance and education, the organization has a little-known publications project. Recently a new edition of founder Susan Cashion’s book, *Three Pioneers of Mexican Dance in California*, was released on Amazon in paperback & e-book formats with additional content. We believe that it’s important to document our artform and to recognize the movers and shakers that got us to this point.

Weaving Spirits

**Festival of Two-Spirit Performance**
**March 17–20, 2022, CounterPulse, SF**
Curated by an intergenerational team of Two-Spirit community leaders, Weaving Spirits features local and national Native American artists whose offerings range from traditional music to experimental performance and drag. Learn more about the upcoming festival and activities.

HOPE MOHR

*Shifting Cultural Power: Case Studies and Questions in Performance* is a reckoning with white cultural power and a call to action. The book locates the work of curating performance in conversations about social change, with a special focus on advancing racial equity in the live arts. Based on the author’s journey as a dancer, choreographer, and activist, as well as on her ten years of leading The Bridge Project, a performing arts presenting platform in the Bay Area. *Shifting Cultural Power* invites us to imagine new models of relationship among artists and within arts organizations—models that transform our approach, rather than simply re-cast who holds power. Published by The National Center for Choreography and the University of Akron Press.

DANCE-A-VISION

Dance-A-Vision Entertainment recently moved to their new home at Westfield San Francisco Centre! Under the Beautiful Historic Dome, Carla Service will continue to cultivate dancers by providing instruction in hip hop, jazz, African, contemporary, and more. Learn more about their upcoming classes, pop-ups, and performances.

Sharp & Fine

Co-founded in 2011 by sisters Megan and Shannon Kurashige, Sharp & Fine creates narrative performance work that brings together physically exuberant choreography, emotionally nuanced text, live music, and multi-disciplinary collaboration. Learn more about their upcoming projects as they transition to a nonprofit.

Duniya Dance and Drum Company

Founded in 2007, Duniya Dance and Drum Company is celebrating 15 years! They offer classes in San Francisco & Oakland: Bhangra with Joti Singh (Mondays), West African dance with Alhassane Da Camara (Wednesdays & Saturdays), and West African drumming with Bongo Sidibe (Saturdays). Learn more about their upcoming activities.

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENY

PHOTO BY SHEILA BANNON, PICTURED: RUBY AVERY

PHOTO BY RJ MUNA PHOTO BY CRYSTAL BIRNS

PHOTO BY BUGGSY MALONE

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENY

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENY
A History of African American Social Dances with Traci Bartlow

Traci Bartlow offers dance lectures and workshops based on her extensive research, cultural and performance experience with African American social dances. Her lively historic presentations are perfect for schools, universities, dance conferences, festivals, community, and corporate events.

B-Love’s Guesthouse

Established in 2008 and set in a Victorian house, B-Love’s Guesthouse located in West Oakland is a perfect stay for the visiting artist or business professional. B-Love’s is an extension of artist, activist, and owner Traci “B-Love” Bartlow’s lifestyle of wellness and creativity. This unique lodging experience reflects her background as an African American woman with roots in the Black farmers in Texas, social justice activism, and the cultural renaissance of the Bay Area.

Flux Vertical Theatre

Flux Vertical Theatre is a Bay Area dance company specializing in the art of pole, founded by Kirsten (aka Mz. K) and Leah Marie. For the past 6 years we have been dancing our way through the Bay Area and beyond with high quality shows featuring performers with backgrounds in classical and contemporary styles of dance, gymnastics, theater, and circus arts. Our mission is to inspire and entertain through our collaborative work, united by our love of Pole.

Flux Vertical Theatre is now an academy for future pole stars and a gorgeous performance space. Visit us at 811 University Ave in Berkeley.

Oakland Ballet Company

Dancing Moons Festival
March 24-26 at the Asian Cultural Center, Oakland
April 1-3 at the Bankhead Theater, Livermore

In response to the epidemic of violence aimed at Asian Americans in the Bay Area and across the country over the last two years, Oakland Ballet will present its first-ever showcase of Asian American choreographers with world premieres by Phil Chan, co-founder of Final Bow for Yellow-face; Michael Lowe, former Oakland Ballet principal dancer; Caili Quan, dancer with BalletX, Philadelphia’s leading contemporary ballet company; and more.

Kinetic Arts

Kinetic Arts, directed by Dianne Lopes da Silva and Weidong Yang, combines the work of dancers, scientists, and digital artists to create innovative and socially responsible performances. Their weekly meetup, Open Lab, brings together artists and scientists exploring the boundaries of technology and expression. Join them on Wednesdays at 7-8:15pm PST. Learn more

Rhythm & Motion

At Rhythm & Motion, they believe that anyone can dance and offer fun, high energy dance workout classes for everyone! They have in-person, outdoor, livestream, and pre-recorded classes. Sign up for their newsletter to receive updates.

Blackbox Studios

3483 School Street, Oakland
Blackbox Studios is home of the School at Blackbox Studios and Ballet22. Their mission is to provide high quality training in a safe and inclusive space. The studio is launching a schedule of dance classes for students ages 3-adult starting in Jan 2022. They also offer private lessons and studio rentals.

Kilandanda Dance Theater

Based in San Francisco, Kilandanda Dance Theater presents works between the USA, France and Congo. Artisticly directed by Byb Bibenne, the company produces performance projects, Mbongui Square Festival, and more.

Joe Landini Dance

Joe Landini Dance presents their 30th anniversary at the ODC Theater on March 18-20 (Fri-Sat @ 8pm / Sun @ 7pm), featuring the premier of City of Ghosts, a reflection on managing loss and grief. Guest includes A Pulso Dance Project, Francesca Cipponeri, Rebekah Enderle, Raven Malouf-Renning and Amy Lewis. Landini is also hosting a three-day intensive performance workshop at the ODC Theater with opportunities for participants to perform on March 20.

Monique Jenkinson/Fauxnique

Faux Queen: A Life in Drag, the memoir of performer, choreographer, and writer Monique Jenkinson (aka Fauxnique) will be published by Amble Press in January 2022.

A ballet-obsessed girl moves to San Francisco and finds her people at the drag club. Faux Queen joyously chronicles Jenkinson’s creation of her drag persona Fauxnique, her journey through one of the most experimental moments in queer cultural history and her rise through the nightlife underground to become the first cisgender woman crowned as a pageant-winning drag queen.

Faux Queen finds authenticity through the glee of drag artifice and articulation through the immediacy of performing bodies. She pens a valentine to gay men while relaying the making of an open-minded feminist.
DISCOVER MORE
about Dancers’ Group and past *In Dance* Articles

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