we done/come home

Baby Baby, Come on Home

Love letter for the heart
RECENTLY, I’VE BEEN OBSESSED WITH HOME. The obsession runs deep through my veins. In thinking about why I’ve come to this, I think about temporarily living in a new place away from my home of seven years; about the ways in which many of us are tentatively making our way back into the world after being home for two years; about my long standing interest in digging into the ongoing practice of making my body the home I have always looked for, connecting both with ancestors and futures. Finding and re-finding home in our disoriented states comes through in the articles for this issue.

In the “before times,” physical home was my soft landing place after a day of driving from gig to gig. It was the place where I made dinner and had tea parties with friends. It was somewhere that I spent little, but meaningful, time. This small, second-floor apartment in Oakland is the place I’ve lived the longest since childhood, and soon, it’ll be a place that I lived longer than the house in which I grew up.

As a queer person, I feel how fraught our relationships to home can be. For many of us, coming out led to questions about where home might be after that moment of potential rupture. Which is not to equate queerness to suffering, but rather to understand how challenging the dominant narrative can leave us with many questions. As a person who didn’t grow up in the Bay, I feel the deep connection that some of the writers in this issue express in their works about the Bay Area as home. As a person who didn’t grow up in the Bay, I feel the deep connection that some of the writers in this issue express in their works about the Bay Area as home. As a person who didn’t grow up in the Bay, I feel the deep connection that some of the writers in this issue express in their works about the Bay Area as home.

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PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

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we done/come home: a ritual prayer for belonging

by amara tabor-smith

dear reader,

throughout this writing i offer invitations and suggestions for how you might experience this offering beyond the page. it is intended to call the spirit of home close to you as you read. take the time to decide how you will read it, and i encourage you to stick to it. make space to move where you are invited to do so, and have a notebook/journal nearby to write when invited to do so or whenever you feel like it.

also, throughout this writing, i will be using the word family both as family in our broader understanding of the word, and family as a replacement for the word “community” which has been so heavily commodified that it has lost its meaning.

lastly, if you are able, play the suggested music track at the start of each section. if it ends before you finish the section, i encourage you to play it again or to choose any other music that feels right. (shout out to Bhumi for supporting this offering).

ready?
here we go.

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ready?
here we go.
get comfortable, if it is available to you, have something warm to drink. go get it now, you have time.

...any land loss is a cultural loss. Our lands hold our memories, our histories, our identities. When we visit our lands, our elders walk us through them, and they share oral stories that have been passed down to them. So when we’re experiencing land loss, we’re also experiencing the loss of stories, connections, and historical accounts...”

— DR. JESSICA HERNANDEZ, transnational Indigenous scholar, scientist, and community advocate

...it is no accident that this homepage, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people no longer have the space to construct homepage, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance.”

— BELL HOOKS

We laid side by side
Staring into the dark night
We had bundles
We had seeds
We had nothing
When we left home long ago

I’ve been engaged in a deep inquiry with the notion of “home” and place making since Ellen Sebastian Chang and I embarked on a creative journey almost 7 years ago with a group of black women in what became “House/Full of Blackwomen.” This project has been an episodic journey, a series of performance rituals in public and private sites and spaces throughout Oakland that have been propelled by the need to address the displacement, well being, and sex-trafficking of black women and girls in Oakland through collective rituals masking as performance.

director Ellen Sebastian Chang and I, along with a group of black women artists and abolitionists started this project in 2015 sitting around a table, guided by the question, “How do we as black women, girls, and gender fluid folks find space to breathe, rest and be well in a stable home?”

What is it bringing up for you right now?

Take a moment and move your body to the music in any kind of way that is available to you.

Go ahead now, stop reading for a moment and just move to the music.

Did you move? If so, take a moment to write anything that came up. No more than a page.

Then set it aside and take a few breaths. If the music is over, keep reading.

If not, don’t continue reading until the song is over. Just sip your warm drink.

What is it bringing up for you right now?

Do not hallucinate.

1

"...any land loss is a cultural loss. Our lands hold our memories, our histories, our identities. When we visit our lands, our elders walk us through them, and they share oral stories that have been passed down to them. So when we’re experiencing land loss, we’re also experiencing the loss of stories, connections, and historical accounts...”

— DR. JESSICA HERNANDEZ, transnational Indigenous scholar, scientist, and community advocate

Take a moment to remember/acknowledge the ancestors of the land that you call home in this moment, understanding that land acknowledgments can be problematic, they must be thought of as a means and not an end in our support of indigenous land rematriation. I invite you to treat this moment as your pledge to figure out what your role is in supporting the rematriation of colonized/stolen land back to indigenous people, perhaps start by donating to one of these indigenous orgs.

take a moment to acknowledge the ancestors and living BIPOC relatives whose unseen and unacknowledged love, labor, and stewardship of the land you are on made/makes it possible for you to be where you are right now. If this invitation feels any kind of ways complicated, uncomfortable or annoying, just stay with it for a moment.

SOUND DESCRIPTION: The instrumental music is warm and gentle, as if a stringed instrument and a steel drum are being played in a damp, lush rainforest.

SOUND DESCRIPTION: A 1970 R&B song whose lyrics and instruments encompass the openness and "free love" mantra of the time period. One could imagine resting or dancing in a field of flowers while listening.

INVITATION: When you finish reading this section, do a free write or poem on memories of growing up. It might bring up difficult feelings or fond memories. Stay with it for at least one page. Play this track on repeat or choose one that reminds you of your adolescent years.
cense, if it feels right, call the name of an ancestor (blood or chosen) who helped make your memory of home joyful or helped you survive it. Whis- per their name and thank them.

I was born and raised in San Francisco. The home I grew up in was complex. Throughout my teen years, following my parent’s divorce, I lived with my mother in a flat on Castro Street. It was a dysfunctional place of love, addiction, black feminist par- enting, depression, support, economic struggle as well as being a gathering point for family and family. It was a place of refuge, and also a place where I experienced emotional neglect, where my mother in regular fits of rage and despair would scream that at any point we could end up homeless and that she didn’t know if she wanted to live anymore. It was also a place where I knew my budding identity as an artist, as a queer teenager, was accepted lovingly and without hesitation.

Our home was shared at various times with cousins, relatives, friends of siblings, and where even my mother’s hairdresser and her boy- friend lived with us for a time. Our house was always full of music, loud conversations, arguments and potluck meals. This experience taught me how to live collectively with others. It shaped my value for fam- ily interdependence. It also taught me about the harm of codependency and codependent relationships and that is a story for another article.

Though I lived in New York on several different occasions through the years, I would always gravitate back home to the bay, when the assault of gentri- fication in the late 90s priced me and most of my family out of San Francisco, moved to Oakland where there was a thriving queer BIPOC family and no shortage of house parties, festivals, and underground spaces. Almost every night there were DJs spinning in clubs throughout the town where we were welcome. Oakland is where I found my spiritual family and came into my spiritual practice in the Yoruba Lukumi tradition. Many of us felt like Oakland would always be ours, that what happened to San Francisco could not hap- pen here. And then I noticed realtors starting to buy up property in the lower bottoms (west Oakland) and advertis- ing it as “east san francisco.” I watched friends, my own sister and many oak- land family members lose their homes, victims of predatory lending in the early and mid-2000s. We were always on the watch, many of us (myself included) were just too naive to see it, in denial or didn’t believe we had the power to do anything about it.

If you are encouraged to moan and/or help make your memory of home joyful or helped you survive it. Whisper their name and thank them.

In this place
Dispace
There is only the breath of the middle
In
Out
Motion
And stillness
Should we fight?
Or should we go?

House/Full of Blackwomen as a project will come to a close with a final episode titled, “This too shall pass” in February 2023. When we gathered around that table in 2015, all of us either lived in Oakland or in the surrounding bay area. Since that time, some of us no longer live here, some of us were displaced. Some got weary from the never-ending survival battle that it takes to stay here and move out of state.

Ellen, my collaborator and mentor, was the first to go. Priced out of the west Oakland home she shared with her husband and daughter, and then displaced from the West Oakland space where they had a family restau- rant that they created called, FuseBox which was a home joint for so many of our Oakland family.

since that first gathering, we have watched Oakland continue down the same path of violent gentrification that happened in San Francisco more than 20 years ago, creating a 47% rise in the unhoused population since 2017, many of whom were formerly housed folks born and raised in oak- land, those figures may be even higher due to the covit. This has weighed heavy on our hearts, especially during this never-ending pandemic, and we find ourselves even in this moment continuing to navigate tremendous loss: jobs, housing, and the deaths of family and family members.

When house/full member and Boom Shake co-founder Monica Hasting- smiths-mong from cancer last year, after being diagnosed a year earlier, we all went into survival mode. Taking pause and struggling to find each other during pandemic isola- tion, trying to move through grief in our own ways, trying to take pause to grieve while the grief continued roll- ing like a river.

Please stop reading and take a moment to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths before continuing. This would be a good time to rock and/or hum while you breathe. Again, take your sweet time with this before you continue reading.

House/Full of Blackwomen table gatherings over zoom trying to see each other through the blur of screen-warpy eyes our connection unstable no one to offer you water or sit next to you and hold your hand when you are sobbing.

There is only the breath of the middle in out in out... how do we recover place and belonging in this bewildered time? is it in out...... stillness

I will not end this on a note of pessimism. I cannot. I know better. Nothing is certain, especially not now. And that is nothing new. What I know is we must keep doing the collective work of repairing our relationship to each other and this earth called home. We must do this work not because we know we will survive displacement/climate catastrophe/race and gender violence/covid/the tyrannies of man’s war but because we don’t, we surely will not survive.

I have been rethinking home as not necessarily connected to a particular physical structure or place (though that too is important) but home as a spirit of belonging that holds us when- ever we are, a sense of being and being well. An interdependent web of family connections. Connections like under- ground tree root systems, connected systems that we can lean into, love in to, heal with, and transmute this hell of imperialist, white supremacist, cap- italist patriarchy andbeckon a black indigenous queer eco feminist NOW.

And how do we co-create communal safe spaces so our families have places to land on our nomadic journey? to do so we must engage in the emo- tional and ancestral healing work so that the unended wounds of natu- ralized racial superiority and racial inferiority that we all carry don’t create unnecessary drama and chaos that would undermine our efforts to steward home spaces together in ways that are collectively healing.

We need each other. We have always needed each other. And we need each other now more than ever. In activist and language, we talk about “struggling together” towards our liberation. But many of us don’t really know how to struggle together as a practice that is not harmful to others. It is critical that we learn to do this now, and in ways that do not negate our rest, our joy and our pleasure in the process.
and there can be no space for “cancel culture” in this collective home making. “Cancel culture” is the child of imperialism and dictatorship. we will have to be in deep evolving practices of recognizing where our racial, economic and/or gender privilege is causing harm, and then be regularly proactive in refusing such benefits or figuring out how to use these benefits to dismantle them.

paramount in this process are reparations for black and indigenous folks. we can expect that this work will not be quick, easy, nor comfortable. but it will ultimately be liberating and healing for us all.

though i feel a deep sense of belonging to the bay, it is a belonging that is not promised, and figuring out how or if i will continue to stay here is the ongoing question that i keep leaning into.

buddhism and yoruba ifaism teaches that the only constant is change. change refutes our notions of stability, leaning into the instability of change is crucial for us as queer BIPOC folks and white folks to consider in an age of an ongoing pandemic, climate catastrophe, and political and economic uncertainty. and it asks us to do this work together. we have to do this work together. we must utilize our collective “ashe” (yoruba word meaning, the power to make things happen) to plant the seeds for the harvest of our renewal.

we have to come home to each other. we are (re) members of a (new) ancient tribe nomadic in mad space wanderers in this space of now constantly moving being moved priests yeys survivors mambos of the avenues and boulevards side streets and freeway underpasses performing ceremony of discarded things talismans of remnant magic echoes of kitchens stories house parties and barber shop incantations bembes for eleggua to call the orisha who clears a way for divine and infinite possibility summon your ancestors your gods your inner spirit tell them you want to be made ready remember everywhere is a church everywhere is a temple everywhere is a ritual ground remember our wounds and scars be oracle and compass our feet and hands be bibles and song so whisper softly your jazz prayers as we jump this ship and return home again

**INVITATION OUTRO:**

**TRACK:** “Brilliant Mycelium”

**SOUND DESCRIPTION:** a gentle a cappella song passing through hums, whispers and soft singing of nourishment and wisdom.

**BEGIN**

- take a slow deep breaths as you listen to the above track
- close out this reading with movement
- with prayer in silence it is your choice
- take a moment and listen
- call one of your beloveds and arrange to meet them at a place where you can find your bare feet on some soil
- hold each other chanting softly, over and over “we will get through this together” and mean it.

amara tabor-smith was born in San Francisco and lives in Oakland. She is a choreographer/performance maker and the artistic director of Deep Waters Dance Theater. She describes her work as Afro futurist Conjure Art. Her interdisciplinary site-specific and community responsive performance works utilize Yoruba Lukumi spiritual technologies to address issues of social and environmental justice, race, gender identity, and belonging. amara’s work is rooted in black, queer, feminist principles, that insist on liberation, joy, pleasure and well-being. Her current multi year project HouseFULL of Blackwomen will conclude with the final episode, “This Too Shall Pass” in February 2023 on the streets of Oakland.
FAMILY IN SITE

UNEXPECTED INTERSECTIONS OF SITE SPECIFIC DANCE MAKING WITH MY FAMILY’S SAN FRANCISCO ROOTS.

I was born in San Francisco. My gigantic Filipinx family geography triangulates The Bay, Wine Country, and the Central Valley. Ohlone, Miwok, Southern Pomo, and Yokut Lands. Site specifically, I am Golden Gate fog, I am oak savannah with the stench of Petaluma fertilizer season, I am crates of asparagus and bing cherries in the matter-of-fact heat of Stockton. My friends Damara and Patricia at the Joe Goode Performance Group have been dance-talking with me about belonging lately. How do we belong to the body? How does the body belong to a place?

My first show with Joe Goode was in 2004 – “Hometown.” While having my shy, young dancer body tossed around by fellow JGPG members Liz Burritt, Felipe Barrueto-Cabello, Marit Brooke-Kothlow and Rachael Lincoln, Joe drew me out of myself and into myself at the same time – as Joe Goode does. He choreographed a palm sweaty moment for me to crawl into the orchestra pit of YBCA, alone out there to sing a song with a picket fence encircling my ribcage. Singing is a root in my family culture – my father is a singer, his mother was a singer, her mother…

BY MELECIO ESTRELLA | PHOTO BY JESSICA SWANSON
Now at YBCA my Auntie Linda was sitting in the front row, 4 feet away. I was behind her while I sing to her. When we were little, my dad used to have us sing for Auntie Linda in our living room. And now here I am in a Hometown park fence spotlight looking into her eyes while I sing...

“The only hometown I care about is hidden Away from the hard outside It’s soft, this hometown is soft Away from the hard outside…”

The Bay is my hometown, my refuge, my family, my body. The Fort Mason has a special sort of foggy ephemeralism. Dances articulate over tidal flows in historic military structures, fed by pricey marina food, artists buoyed by resident arts organizations. In 2013, Amelia Rudolph and Rachael Lincoln led our company, BANDALOOP, in “Harboring” in the Festival Pavilion there. “Harboring” is a vertical dance work that considers embarkation and movement at the threshold of land and sea. My mother and her 3 sisters volunteered to help at the show. They are all true San Franciscans, a complex and hilarious sisterhood of Filipina Americaness – honored elders who would stay up all night playing mah jong and smoking cigarettes together. As a child in the ’80s, I used to love watching Auntie Linda roll ladies’ hair up in curlers in her salon across the street from Fort Mason, the sharp smell of perm chemicals burning hair into new shapes. Auntie Gina lives in the Richmond in a house that has belonged to her husband’s parents since the 1920s. She is an oragami expert, and a die-hard Giants fan. Auntie Panching lived in Cole Valley, the kindest woman I know, deeply devoted to her catholic faith – she will pray with cloistered nuns for six hours straight. When they all showed up with my mom to volunteer at “Harboring,” Auntie Panching pointed to the dock next to the pavilion where we stood and said, “This is where our kids played.” My eyes widened as I learned, after months of rehearsal and preparation at that dock, that this was the very site of my mother’s immigration in 1948. Harboring, disembarkation, thresholds...How do we belong to a place, when we migrate, we move, when war tears through and sends us across an ocean? Harboring. My grandfather, Col. Melecio M. Santos rode a military vessel for 30 days with 8 kids to San Francisco after World War II. He was war rationed, decorated, a widower, and honored by the US Army. Upon immigration he was posted as Commanding Officer of Forts Baker, Kronkite, and Barry on the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge. The Headlands Center for the Arts occupies the historic buildings of Fort Barry, close enough to hear the waves hit shore in the distance. The headlands, Marine Life, and protected National Seashore Area, its longtime residents are Coyote, Owl, Hawk, Monterey Cypress, and Eucalyptus. In 2018, my husband Andy, a climate researcher at UC Berkeley, collaborated with Headlands to organize a thematic residency on climate change and equity. This residency brought together scientists, environmental justice workers, artists, and policy strategists working in the climate space to live together, share work, and seed collaborations. I was fortunate to be invited to share the work of Fog Beast. This led to a three-month residency for Fog Beast to create a shoreline-based work, “These Lines Are Living,” in collaboration with Andy and shoreline geologist Dave Reid. We made the work in a series of retreats dancing on the shore, and we brought our families with us in the hills and climbed on driftwood on the beach, conducting the most pure site specific research. I called my mom to chat and let her know what we were doing, and she said, “Oh Fort Barry... that was where our first house was after we got off the boat.” I didn’t realize that as the Colonel’s daughter, my mother’s family moved there before? As we were dreaming up the work, we walked around the neighborhood together to visit possible sites. One site we were considering that day was St. Agnes Church, and it ended up being there! The heart of Headlands Center for the Arts, and living in the house that is site specific installations bringing visibility to the ongoing struggle of marriage equality. I jumped at the chance to work with Erika and the big, colorful cast she brought together. The heart of “I Love Everywhere” was a big production in the Rotunda of SF City Hall. This majestic space was animated by a cast of about 40 of us, dancing, singing, performing to lyrics made from real folks’ wedding vows. My parents came to the event, and my mom said, “You know your dad’s dad (my grandfather) used to be a head janitor here? Your dad’s first job was helping him mop these floors.” I looked at my dad as he stood on the shiny marble floors with his head tilted in puzzlement as he nodded in affirmation. Since that moment, thanks to the Dancers’ Group Rotunda Series, I have been in the swirl of many dance artists at City Hall, the place my grandfather cared for as a Janitor until his retirement in 1983. Thirty years later in 2013, in the presence of my parents, we had our second wedding. My husband and I signed some papers, said some vows, and shed some tears on those floors. Those floors that held the rituals of performance, the rituals of marriage, and the rituals of labor of a working class Filipino family man. Love Everywhere. In 2021 Joe Goode invited me to co-direct “Time of Change” in the Haight, my mom’s neighborhood. Joe and I collaborated with Oyster Knife (Chibueze Crouch and Gabriele Christian) on the show. We were looking at the hippepe movement, asking “who was it really for?” And “what happened to the Black and Filipinos who were there before?” As we were dreaming up the work, we walked around the neighborhood together to visit possible sites. One site we were considering that day was St. Agnes Church, and it ended up being there! As we were dreaming up the work, we walked around the neighborhood together to visit possible sites. One site we were considering that day was St. Agnes Church, and it ended up being there! The heart of “I Love Everywhere” was a big production in the Rotunda of SF City Hall. 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One of the gifts I carry forward from the many years of working with Joe Goode is the embodied knowing that my artistic practice in the drama of show making exists in this landscape of impermanence. He was the uncle who lived in his VW bus and would show up at our house, help with landscaping, teach me guitar, laugh a lot, and then leave. We also made some dances in the sacred spaces of the AIDS Memorial Grove, the only place in San Francisco where it is legal to scatter ashes of loved ones. One of the gifts I carry forward from the many years of working with Joe Goode is the embodied knowing that my artistic practice in the drama of show making exists in this landscape of impermanence. Dances come and dances go. We are always in a Time of Change.

These intersections with my family pathway have brought magic and meaning to the dry words—“site-specific.” I wasn’t at all aiming to make dances at sites of familial resonance, they came through a happenstance ecology of collaborative artistic dreaming, venue seeking and availability, funding alignments, and mystery. I’m still puzzled by it, and probably always will be. I’m okay with not knowing—and I am okay to keep asking—How do I belong to this body? How does this body belong to a place? I give thanks to the land and collaborators that make these questions askable.

MELECIO ESTRELLA is a director, choreographer, educator and facilitator based in unceded Chechenyo Ohlone territory. He is artistic director of BANDALOOP, co-director of Fog Beast and longtime member of the Joe Goode Performance Group. He has had three premiers of full length work in 2021: LOOM FIELD in Atlanta, GA, Transpire in Boise, ID, and Time of Change in San Francisco. Upcoming 2022 engagements include BANDALOOP’s 30th Anniversary Home Season in Oakland, new work at The Virginia Arts Festival in Norfolk, VA, LAPublic Canvas at the Ford Theater in Los Angeles, and These Lines are Living at the Animate Dance Festival in Alameda. IG: @bandalooping @fogbeast
Root my body grew

Text, photos, and illustrations by Jasmine Hearn

This is an imagined and remembered illustrated poem that is composed of sketches and poetics from my recent process journals. The photo is from a recent flight into occupied lands now known as Houston, TX. Root my body grew is in conversation with the upcoming archival and performance project, Memory Fleet: A Return to Matr due to premiere in Houston, TX April 2024.

It references non-linear conversations I have had with Marjani Forte-Saunders, Marlies Yearby, Jo Stewart, Jennifer Harge, Byronné Hearn, Jenna Hearn, Myssi Robinson, Aliska B. Wormsley, Bennalldre Williams, FreWuhn, Victor Le Gisvila, Urban Bush Women, Li Harris, Lovie Olivia, Dani Terrell, Barbara Mahler, and Athena Ekorovis of Domestic Performance Agency.

Like a cliff that crumbled into the ocean a part of what is no longer held tectonics keep moving keep kept and then shaken/shared

I have been saying yes to the fear of an uterus the size of a hen full of inescapable fluid and a trail of migrating blood in between my feet while walking emptiness in-between bladder and colon in-between organs does that did that would that hopefully not will not the space collapse?

did the space collapse?
did the church close?
the coordinates empty?
a disappearance a missing and inevitably a forgetting
why do i forget almost every month since fourth grade the acute pain of the descending space too full for feeling the exact coordinates of (you) joy and grief

this is question of where the stars are over the church steeple church as mother building as mother structure as womb as cave as forever home

mother can rule her own

is this really a story about the difference between violence and care or reading tension or receiving the frequency of vulnerability and it is on all the time with every person energetic body i assumed you to have healed yourself even if its plugged with stagnant highly packed fluid stirring and pulling up towards the stars whined and unwind varying levels of intimacy with a distinct palate to what got calloused and what hurts and what tastes good.

JASMINE HEARN was born and raised on occupied lands now known as Houston, TX. They are an interdisciplinary artist, director, choreographer, organizer, teaching artist, and a 2017 and 2021 Bessie awarded performer. Jasmine’s commitment to dance is an expansive practice that includes performance, collaboration, and memory-keeping.
**I’ve been thinking a lot about the body.**

My body. Our body. The ways that we are a body together. We, the SF Bay dance community, and more broadly, as a human community. I’m interested in our bodiedness.

It’s interesting, right? We’re living through this time of radical wealth disparity, global pandemic, deep fissure between the right and the left and it all lives in our bodies. Our bodies are dynamically connected to each other and the ecosystem of which we are part. We are in relationship to each other. The needs, desires, rights, dignity of all of us is related to each of us.

I come from a lineage of Western contemporary dance, modern dance, and classical ballet. I love how I can feel in my own body to hold so much while raising kids and managing my own anxiety disorder and C-PTSD. Just being real.

I want to talk about the ways in which we are interconnected and how our health and wellness inside of our communities is in relationship to the health and wellness of all. We are a body. In this context, I do want to discuss the SF Bay area dance community as a body. The field of dance is in and of the work of the body. Dance emerges from the body. We possess quite a depth of knowledge about the body and even pathways of healing and repair with the body. How are we as a dance community accountable to one another?

I bring up community accountability because there is no overarching infrastructure in the field of dance, locally or globally, to which we are accountable. Being an accountable community means taking responsibility for our choices and the consequences of our choices. How can we be a more accountable community in the face of rampant dancer underemployment, job/financial instability, lack of access to adequate healthcare, and seeking justice when abuse is called out in our field?

The field of dance is in a period of much needed change. Dancers, who were trained to be obedient and unquestioning of authority, are starting to demand rights. Dance patterns the body. Western concert dance training, ballet in particular but extending into modern and contemporary dance, orient the body towards dominance. In the sense that there is a tradition of teaching and directing dance with required obedience to authority, use of negative reinforcement (i.e. verbal abuse, beratment, body shaming) as means of motivation, and relentless repetition of form. I keep thinking about the ways that the ballet and modern dance training that is patterned into my body, relate to my sense of agency. On a larger scale, I think about the ways this patterning relates to our bodiedness as a dance community.

When we train dancers to blindly obey their teachers/directors, we are not honoring the agency of our dancers. When we train dancers to expect to be touched without their consent, we are not honoring the agency of our dancers. When we train dancers to accept and to be grateful for any kind of dance work, regardless of the value of their labor, we create a body of dancers who do not understand their own worth or value and to accept poverty as a part of the gig. This is a problem because along with the internalized lack of agency and consent plus impoverishment, dancers also are hesitant to speak up when abuse happens in our field.

There was an allegation of abuse in the SF Bay dance community in the summer of 2020 that was handled very poorly, in my opinion. Rupture happened when no process of community accountability, conversation and healing tended to the wound. It felt like neither the dance organization where the alleged abuse occurred nor the SF Bay Area dance community at large was able to hold this rupture in our collective body with dignity. The dancer making the accusation is a beloved member of our community, an exquisite dancer, and a dynamic, thoughtful teacher. Now, they feel unsafe to be in SF dance spaces. This particular situation feels relevant to examine as we contemplate our bodies as a dance community. This is a wound in our body that has been left unhealed.

I am working with an injury in my own body right now. It’s my left knee. It’s been really emotional for me to sustain this injury. I can, however, listen to my body and change how I work. We can learn so much from our bodies.

We are a body. We are a body that can create great beauty, transeendence even. We are a body that can make change in this world. We are a body in full frailty, resilience, and vulnerability. We are a body that can change, adapt and heal. We know from experience with countless injuries in the body, that we cannot heal through bypassing and erasing harm. When parts of our body are in pain, do we not stop and tend to pain/injury/woundedness? I ask again, how are we as a dance community accountable to one another? How do we show up for the needs of the very real human dancers who embody our work?

I have my eye on the Dance Artist National Collective (DANC), a growing group of freelance dance artists organizing for action toward safe, equitable, and sustainable working conditions. As a dance teacher, I also research methods of reinforcing agency in the classroom through choice making and practicing verbal consent with touch in the studio. Likewise, I want to be available for taking responsibility for my choices and I want to trust that my community will hold me accountable for my choices. We can’t be a healthy body if we are not attuned to one another and accountable to one another. I wonder about what kinds of structures of accountability might be useful for the SF Bay dance community in holding the wellness of the body a priority?

We are a body. We are connected to one another. We are responsible for the impact of our choices and actions in relation to one another. There is a serious way that our collective body is out of balance. I’m curious about how we can do better, how we can support one another and address the needs of dancers with dignity. Let us center our bodiedness in our practices and take leadership in community accountability because of the wisdom and knowledge of the body that we already possess. I know my own particular body is asking me to slow down, reassign how I work and take time for healing. What is our collective Body asking of us?

**by KJ DAHLAW**

But, you know what’s hard on my body? Working as a dance artist in the Bay area. I’m a freelance dance artist, dancer/choreographer/teacher, living in the East Bay: Richmond, CA. My name is KJ Dahlaw and I’m a queer, non-binary trans dance artist and parent of 2. It should come as no surprise to read that it is hard to survive as a dance artist in the Bay area. Jobs in dance don’t often pay living wages, nor are they stable. Our field has been hit particularly hard by the limitations of the pandemic too, which results in less work. I currently have 7 jobs, a mixture of W2 employment and 1099 contract work. I recognize my privilege in having these jobs and it’s incredibly difficult for my own body to hold so much while raising kids and managing my own anxiety disorder and C-PTSD. Just being real.

I want to talk about the ways in which we are interconnected and how our health and wellness inside of our communities is in relationship to the health and wellness of all. We are a body. In this context, I do want to discuss the SF Bay area dance community as a body. The field of dance is in and of the work of the body. Dance emerges from the body. We possess quite a depth of knowledge about the body and our use of the body. Overuse. Overuse of my body. Huh. That tracks. My survival literally depends on my body and my ability to dance and teach dance. Learning to slow down and honor the limitations of my body is good work for me but not easy. My body is certainly my teacher in a new way. As much as I’d like to, I can’t muscle my way through this. I can’t ignore this injury. I can, however, listen to my body and change how I work. We can learn so much from our bodies.

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* I got this definition of community accountability from the *wounded elite* video from the Barnard Center for Research on Women, who named the source of this definition from the Northwest Network.

KJ DAHLAW is a bay area dance artist and makes work under the name of Unruly Body Tanztheater. They hold an MFA in Dance from Saint Mary’s College of California, and a BFA in Dance Performance from Northern Illinois University. KJ’s work examines unreliness, queer theology, the body, and practices of counter-hegemony in the dancing body. KJ is exploring the lineage of Tanztheater and has a background in ballet, modern dance, and improvisational practices.
MY MOM LIVES ALONE, about a thirty minute drive away, in the condo complex where my two sisters and I grew up. There’s a sprawling rosemary bush out front, planted the Easter after I turned two, kept neatly trimmed. When our phone calls started filling with concerns – about her computer’s anti-virus software update, changing the smoke alarm battery, the new electricity bill – I asked my mom if she might start keeping a list, so I could come spend a Sunday afternoon each month helping check everyone off. A promise I have kept, mostly.

On a recent visit, I idly asked her if she seemed taller. This was a silly question, given that I’m now in my thirties. Why did I test our conversation with a question about my body?

Of course, here, perhaps more than anywhere else, my senses are shaped by the imprint of memory. Sometimes, home feels like a place where I need to give in to bickering. But why did I test our conversation with a question about my body?

I want to learn to love this nearness, and all the things that it reveals. My older and younger sisters now both live on the east coast, and the last several months are the first time I’ve been the only one of us close to home. My mom is from Maryland, my stepmom is from Kansas, and my dad is from Okinawa, Japan. I grew up in Novato, sheltered by my parents’ choices to leave their childhood homes – steeped in the suggestion that the place where you grow up is not where you become who you are meant to be.

I suspect that my parents attach some prestige to my sisters being far away, even if (or perhaps because) it means shelving some fears about their own mortality. Fears I try to empathize with as I gingerly plumb the possibility of caring for them as they age: who will tend to me when my body starts to fail?

In Fog Beast’s The Big Reveal (2019) – a lush, playfully dystopian dance theater reimagining of the corporate conference vernacular, a tech company (with the motto “SYN-ER-GY: SYNERGY!”) reveals their latest innovation: The Wailana (performed by Wailana Simcock), an immortal android in the Companion Series, outfitted with ambiguous ethnicity, fluent in over one hundred languages, and programmed for perfect empathy. A more-than-human solution for all-too-human alienation.

Seeing that show was a gift of coincidence. I passed by the Asian Art Museum every day on my way home from work, and one Thursday I remembered that it was probably open late. Something felt fated when I arrived – just in time for the opening ritual, incantations echoing in the atrium, naming our ancestors and their places, knitting together eternal questions about human history, migration, and belonging.

I had recently moved back from a year in Colorado, tacking between heartbreaks and jobs. In that evening, so much of my inner searching was gently reflected, stilled. In Wailana Simcock’s talk about gender, language, and land. In dance and music giving form to the exquisite contradictions our bodies endure in modern work. It all suggested that there existed some forgiving, tender network undulating through this Bay Area home-place and beyond, a place I knew, but had not always felt known to.

Sometimes I wonder if I’ve lingered here as someone who feels they have something to prove. Have I come back because it’s easy? Because it’s hard? Sometimes home feels like a place where, despite my past efforts, I will always be a child. But if I remember the gifts of childhood – boundless play and curiosity, a way of teaching those tutored in disillusionment to see differently – this helps me weather those feelings of fraudulence, vulnerability, and those sometimes bigger emotions than a body can manage. I remember that growing up is not finding a way to outrun failure, but finding a home in one’s body.

In The Happiest Season (2020) a closeted lesbian (Harper, played by Mackenzie Davis) brings her girlfriend (Abby, Kristen Stewart) home for Christmas, but insists on keeping their relationship a secret. (Harper is Abigail Horatio; their secret gets out; Abby stays with her in the end). The film didn’t garner much critical praise, and earned especially literal criticism from viewers yearning for the promised feel-good queer holiday classic. I wondered if the screenplay – conceived by Clea DuVall, based on her own life’s events – was suggesting that to be queer is to be intrinsically disinherited in things being easy. Or perhaps the movie was quietly encouraging viewers to finally break up with whatever version of Harper had been lingering in their own lives.

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MY MOM LIVES ALONE, about a thirty minute drive away, in the condo complex where my two sisters and I grew up. There’s a sprawling rosemary bush out front, planted the Easter after I turned two, kept neatly trimmed where it meets the sidewalk.

Easter after I turned two, kept neatly trimmed where it meets the sidewalk.

Emma Tome

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Randee Paufve

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Randee Paufve
I wish that my own “coming out” didn’t so much resemble Harper’s. At 22, I kissed my first to-be-girlfriend one summer night, sitting on the sidewalk in front of my mom’s house, in front of that sprawling rosemary bush. I was staying with my mom as she was recovering from surgery (which didn’t stop her from coming out to check up on us). Not long after I tried to be back inside than I was peppered with questions, admonitions, warnings. I don’t know why I tried to be honest with her then, when I could barely be so with myself. Whatever process I had was circumstantial, held in that container of relationship but never presented as an absolute fact. Later that summer, I moved to Okinawa, not far from where my father grew up. I never introduced my visiting girlfriend as such to anyone apart from my close friends, and eventually some trusted co-workers. I unapologetically assumed that to make home here, to find closeness with my relatives, meant that it was essential to obscure this one vital truth.

Yet this young woman found quiet shelter in Okinawa, too. My first “butch” haircut was a signal hidden in plain sight among all the high school girls I taught who had the same one. My work wardrobe slowly filled with colorful men’s karayushi shirts. I grew devoted to Gu Ju Ryu karate, joined my neighborhood triathlon team. Movement was my way of finding home as I learned Japanese. I smiled when one of my obsasen joked over how much more sense it would make if I were a man (or at least that’s what I thought she said).

After moving back home, moving away, moving back again, seeing The Big Reveal marked a new kind of homecoming.

After moving back home, moving away, moving back again, seeing The Big Reveal marked a new kind of homecoming.
I skillfully steward the pleasure that movement provides? How can I let be a path into wisdom, rather than a way to paper over discomfort? I ask this in part because my gratitude for dancing again is laced with grief – over not seeing the staff who welcomed me so fully at the Center anymore, over what I know, and don’t know, about how this institution has weathered the pandemic, and the longstanding issues that it threw into sharp relief.

In December 2020, Piper Thomsen wrote an open letter, “White Supremacy Culture at Shawl-Anderson Dance Center.” In it, she describes a harmful pattern of unfulfilled promises, opaque decision-making, and the nascent equity practice that she helmed before her Equity Practice Advisor role was not reinstated. It is a generous and beautiful message, encouraging the Shawl-Anderson community to hold our space accountable to its radically inclusive vision. I believe this is possible because I’ve already sensed it. Not long after I started dancing, I came to a Queer Partnering workshop taught by Andrew Merrell and Rogelio Lopez during the first Queer Dance Festival. I was partnered with Leneka Siu, who kindly guided me through the sweet phrases, more advanced choreography than I had ever tried. We shared weight, giggles, delighted in the moment more than I had ever tried. We shared weight, giggles, delighted in the moment more than I had ever tried. We shared weight, giggles, delighted in the moment more than I had ever tried.

Every dance teacher at least grazes against this subtext of our coming together to move, the unanswerable ways we are nourished by it and one another, but Randee Pauwve openly encodes it in ritual. At the end of class, Shanna Vella invites us into a circle to exchange quiet eye contact with one another. Rogelio Lopez thanks each of us with a small bow, tells us to “Let our family, friends and pets know that he’s here at the Center, every Monday night.” There is a tacit message in all of this: I want you to be at home here.

As we return to in person dancing, I savor the ways we can turn toward each other in shared space. After her warmup, Dana Lawton breaks for hellos and hugs. Nol Simonde offers “modern dance moments”: paired tactile feedback to refine alignment. At the end of class, Shanna Vella invites us into a circle to exchange quiet eye contact with one another. Rogelio Lopez thanks each of us with a small bow, tells us to “Let our family, friends and pets know that he’s here at the Center, every Monday night.” There is a tacit message in all of this: I want you to be at home here.

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When I was a freshman in college, in the massive experience of culture shock, I made a short dance video for a class final about home. I shot the video with my phone leaned against a makeshift tripod of books and chairs. The frame captures a dance studio with mirrors, wood floors, and a ballet barre and 18-year-old me using the barre to dance from the left (west) to the right (east) side of the screen. It was a (not-so-discreet) metaphor for my journey from California to Washington DC and my confused feeling of displacement in trying to transition my sense of home from my upbringing placed entirely in Oakland, CA to a DC dorm room with a nice midwestern roommate who wanted me to coordinate with her nautical design preferences. To spoil the ending of this distraught dance from left to right of the studio, I ended up freezing myself from the ballet barre (which represented being stuck on the idea of home as material/tangible/physical place), moving to the center of the room, and finding the knowledge that through dance and embodiment practices I have come to understand that home is...get ready... ‘My Body.’

While that dance piece errored on overly simplistic, it reflected a central truth that I was touching then and has come into greater clarity in adulthood: home is a feeling more than it is a place. Home is what community feels like. Home is what familiar tastes, sights, smells, and sounds feel like. Home, like all sensations, really does exist in the body.

If we understand home as a place, I am still technically “home.” I am in the same place I lived when I was born. I still live in the East Bay. I am renting my aunt’s house in Berkeley but this isn’t the home I grew up visiting her in. It doesn’t register as the home I feel nostalgic for. It doesn’t register in my body. When I moved back to the Bay after college, I went through the time warp of gentrification. I wanted to find an adult life, a life tapped into the art scene, a queer life somehow or another. There, I found myself surrounded by no one who felt like “Home Oakland.” I’m still looking, I’m still playing early 2000s hits when I’m homesick.

For my 27th birthday party, I had a kickball game. We drank capri-suns. We wore pennies over our shirts and someone brought McDonalds. We were ponnies over our shirts that were good as “handies” or “you” or “juries About me.”

We were ponnies over our shirts that we picked from a bag at random to unlearn all the small and large shames grown out of picking teams. We had a referee with red and yellow cards but she never pulled one because no one really knew if there were rules or what they were or if we were following them. We went back to my house for Zachary’s Deep Dish pizza and I played the playlist I had prepared titled “PUBERTY!!!” that started with “Me & U” by Cassie (my 7th grade ringtone) and was full of the East Bay rappers from when everyone still thought of Oakland as “the hood” - Too Short, The Pack, E-40.

I guess what I’m trying to say is that the Bay Area— and even more specifically, Oakland— has transformed so drastically since my childhood that when I think about home, I think about adolescence. A time when this place really felt like home. The sense of belonging I felt. I think about the Bay Area I knew when my friends and I spent every free hour together. We didn’t talk about belonging then as much as we do now on our group chat. We didn’t yet realize there was anything to say about our life experiences. We didn’t yet need to define the comfort we felt in community. It felt inevitable then.

1. Dance has always been this shining cold lake youth as getting sucked into your vision. Which is like your body is going to come back online or revived because it is busy trying to figure out where in and what this one piece. This one genre are. Shock as everything you learned about how to relate to people as a child was dropped working and people laugh at you rather than with you. I know what I’m talking about and we don’t always stick with this one really well, you actually thing to never get home but you never actually imagined what home would feel like and you did not know it would be so different why didn’t anyone tell you.

2. Shock like jumping into a freezing cold lake and the air getting sucked from your lungs. Shock like your brain is not going to come back on— technological design preferences. To spoil the ending of this distraught dance from left to right of the studio, I ended up freezing myself from the ballet barre.

3. “Yooouu’ve been waiting so long, I’m here to Answer. Your Call.”

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adolescence on a collective scale.

Discomfit is necessary for growth but it passes, it always passes. Like adulthood, we are in a collective adolescence at the moment. An inherent part of puberty is that discomfort is necessary for growth. That's a lesson from adolescence I am holding on to in order to survive transformation.

Dance taught me these lessons through embodiment and the ephemeral nature of performance and the near impossibility of asking and receiving presence presence presence.

Dance community is a foil for whatever it needs to be at the time. Dance community as a place where we meet with our bodies, speaking in expansion and contraction, in energy and force, softness and articulation. Screaming on the sidelines during practice to give the team energy or pressing your thumb into a stranger's psoas because we are learning to release tension together. Laying our bodies down together or letting our bodies be alone. Learning to ask "what does my body need in this moment" over and over and over again and knowing that the answer will be different over and over and over again.

Something about how people who find themselves in dance spaces and each other relationally, physically, empathetically.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that if home is just that, a sense of belonging, then dance helped me learn to belong in my own body. What I am trying to say is: thank you to the teachers who brought me that gift, offered that to me as I was growing into myself, the ones who affirmed my voice and my grounding in my body. Thank you Pope Flyne. Thank you Day1st. Thank you Zafira Miriam. Thank you Dawn James. Thank you Capital Funk. Thank you Oakland even though you've changed. Thank you body even though I've changed.

Dance community was the kids everyone wanted to be in high school.

Dance community was the pre-show announcement not to scream the dancers' names during the performance because it was distracting and then everyone doing it anyway.

Dance community was the familiarity of home through the Hip Hop team in college. A respite from the courses that counted as college credit and brought a realization that dance could also be cerebral. A reminder that my first entry point to dance was music, was a drum, a mirror for the heartbeat.

Dance community was discovering and living into my queerness as a young adult. Looking around and seeing that the people who could imagine taking on the choreography of their own time, their own life, were the peers that kept dancing and brought a realization that dance could also be cerebral. A reminder that dance could also be cerebral. A reminder that dance could also be cerebral.

Dance community as a foil for whatever it needs to be at the time. Dance community because it was distracting and started dancing after unmooring from the institution of school. Then even within the widening world of dance and art-making on our own terms, the people who reflected my own experience were all queer.

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In Conversation, a series of interviews exploring exchanges about dance and different folks’ relationship to dance.

AS WE EXAMINE HOME and place and what community means, these questions presented themselves. “How is the dance community a home?”, “How does one bring their personal history to this larger ecosystem?”, “How do we sustain the community connections so that home never disappears?”

In this edition of In Conversation I was able to speak with Melecio Estrella, the dynamic Artistic Director of BANDALOOP and Co-Director of Fog Beast, about his journey to making a home for dance making in San Francisco.

Melecio Estrella is a director, choreographer, educator and facilitator based in unceded Chechenyo Ohlone territory. He is artistic director of BANDALOOP, co-director of Fog Beast and longtime member of the Joe Goode Performance Group. He has had three premiers of full length work in 2021: LOOM:FIELD in Atlanta, GA, Transpire in Boise, ID, and Time of Change in San Francisco. Upcoming 2022 engagements include BANDALOOP’s 30th Anniversary Home Season in Oakland, new work at The Virginia Arts Festival in Norfolk VA, LAPublicCanvas at the Ford Theater in Los Angeles, and These Lines are Living at the Animate Dance Festival in Alameda.

IG: @bandalooping @fogbeast

“Dance Mission, ODC, and YBCA. Those are my top 3 that gave me my chance and believed in me. Especially during this pandemic, they said ‘hey we still want you to make art. How can we help you? How can we assist you?’ There’s people that care about the arts still.”

Sir JoQ Recommends:
- Kindness
- Intricate all black costumes
- And the Powerhouse Bar!

“‘What would we call this?’ Both of us grew up in the Bay, both of us have an affinity for fog. Fog being this thing that can obscure and reveal, and can condense and then disappear. Then the beast being us, our bodies. We’re gentle beasts.”

— MELECIO ESTRELLA

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ROWING UP IN ORANGE COUNTY for the first 18 years of my life was an emotional and challenging experience. I grew up in Santa Ana, which is an impoverished small city mostly made up of Latine-Americans. At that time, most residents of the city were struggling to make ends meet, losing family members to gang violence, and hiding away from immigration services. I, like most of them, had much in common. My single father is undocumented which meant my sibling, father, and I struggled day to day. My sibling and I grew up moving from garage, to small bedrooms, to basement, so discussing the concept of home is a very emotional one for me. Mostly because, for the majority of my life, I felt like I did not have a home. Sometimes, I still question if I do. Santa Ana never felt like home to me. It was dysfunctional at best and
abusive at worst. It definitely was not the ideal white picket fence home built for a nuclear family and I was not part of a privileged family that got everything handed to us. Santa Ana felt like a prison to me and I always knew I was meant for so much more than it. It is so many ways was holding me back from being able to be my authentic queer and artistic self. So, I ventured into a city I had visited once and instantly fell in love with: San Francisco.

Over the past 7 years of being a San Francisco resident I have seen and experienced quite a bit. I have had my fair share of highs and lows in this city and felt truly came of age here. Moving to San Francisco was my beacon of hope, my light at the end of the tunnel, and my escape. I moved to San Francisco at 18 to pursue my BA in Sociology and Dance at San Francisco State University. Coming here would not only challenge me but also answer a long awaited question: what is home?

Finding home within San Francisco would not come easy, there was no magic, nothing ever really is. The next 7 years of my life would be filled with quintessential moments of joy and love, as well as some of the lowest moments I have experienced. Facing my journey, I equally found and lost myself while also finding some pretty great people to get lost with along the way. San Francisco has been my greatest teacher, my best friend, my sanctuary, and my home.

I remember the drive into the city so vividly. I remember the feeling of the wind blowing in the car as I peeked my head out the window as I looked at the various signs indicating I was in San Francisco. I remember my dad dropping me off in my dorm and helping me unpack. We explored the campus and met my roommates. We grabbed lunch on the quad, and with me being new, nothing ever really is. This is where I lost myself as a dancer and lost my hope for San Francisco. I was verbally abused by a professor who shamed my body by calling me “too slim”, “too weak”, and “needing to go to the gym.” She even forced me once to do push-ups in front of the class to try and prove that I could not do them. I remember going home and crying for hours in the shower that day. This would continue for 3 of the 4 years of my education. My self-esteem was the lowest it had ever been and my body felt foreign. San Francisco, a place of hopes and dreams, had lost its magic to me.

Alienated from my community and from myself, I decided my journey in San Francisco was to come to an end. I applied for a program in Social Work Program at University of Toronto, my dream school at the time. After a rigorous application process, I was accepted. I was beyond ready to leave San Francisco behind. I was ready to start a new life and meet new people. Let’s be real, the universe had other things in mind for me.

After I graduated from San Francisco, much of my life changed. I found a queer community that celebrated my brown skin, my femininity, and my art. I found pockets of dancers and choreographers who believed in me and invested in me. I found the magic that was once stripped away from me. Every color felt vibrant, every scent was fresh, and every feeling was warm. I was home again.

Unfortunately, home was being stripped away from me once again. I was still slightly committed to the University of Toronto, but my heart was no longer in it, but had given up everything to make this dream happen. I told everyone about it. How could I not go? My heart and head were torn in two different directions and I didn’t know what was the right choice anymore. I followed the road I thought was right for me and went to Toronto for the audition. When I fell all I knew I made the wrong choice. So, I went back. With no money, no job, no place to live, and no planned future, it was all used for my move to Toronto back in 2015.

This began one of the darkest periods of my life. I was in the city of my dreams and I made the choice to come back, but I lost everything in the process. I was houseless for 5 months and oftentimes would not know where I would be sleeping that day. I coughed surfed and stayed with friends. I picked up whatever jobs I could find. But my spirit was broken. Once again, the magic in San Francisco was gone.

Committed to a better future, I invested all my energy into creating the life I wanted. I decided to apply to the University of California, Berkeley to pursue a master’s degree in Social Work. I applied for a program in Social Work Program at University of Toronto, my dream school at the time. After a rigorous application process, I was accepted. I was

There have been periods where I became disillusioned with this place and it felt so foreign to me and other periods where I recognized it more than I recognized myself.
Home is sunshine, warm humid air that feels like a hug, and salt water.

Home is sunshine, and the skin that gets to feel it - the face, midriff, naval, shoulders, elbow pits, arm pits, the forearms that want it a little bit more, tops of the feet, ankles, calves, knee pits, and as much of your legs as your shorts will allow.

I've always been shocked at the prospect that there are people who will go their entire lives with areas of their skin never feeling the hot touch of sun (with the exception of those who are photoallergic). I think about the handful of minutes, or sometimes seconds, of a person's entire life that the skin of their chest, their nipples, or the skin between where their legs meet might have seen the sun. Or maybe never? And why is it these patches of skin? The depravity and denial of the sun on this skin feels like another oppressive act of prudence, sex, and gender.

I take every moment I can to nourish this skin, so it, too, can feel the bright heat of fire light. I've collected and curated the pockets of places and strategies where I know I can bare that skin, and that is largely thanks to the place that is northern California and its micro-cultures. The right summertime swimming holes if you walk a hundred steps around the bend. The clothing-optional enclaves. If a trail is empty enough, I can squeeze my bra down to my waist like a belt. The skin of my breasts and nipples become awake and energized. I like to think that the sun is also happy to rest on this rare skin. I lament and apologize to this skin that this doesn't happen more often. I hike like this until I hear voices around the corner. I can easily shimmy the bra back up in a second and we're back to sad, dehydrated skin.

Home is all of the skin, in the sun.

I never understood the aisles of lotion designated in grocery stores until I moved away a few states north and finally understood what humidity even was. You mean you don't need to scrape away at your sugar and spices because they've been moistened and crystallized by the air? The soft firm embrace of her hug that I can barely hold the idea that the waves keep crashing against the shores, that the waterfall continues to cascade, this anticipated magic. I was exuberant to be finally realizing this year I finally understood humidity and lotion's purpose, fulfilling my namesake and birthright. Standing outside this anticipated magic, I was exuberant to be finally realizing this year I finally understood humidity and lotion's purpose, fulfilling my namesake and birthright. Standing outside this anticipated magic, I was exuberant to be finally realizing this year I finally understood humidity and lotion's purpose, fulfilling my namesake and birthright.

Sitting outside the air conditioning in my window, I'mדוג 70 degrees outside. I'd long for the traditional white Christmas, the miracle of snow, the excitement of falling snowflakes - their size, mass, density, frequency, the physics of snow and what it meant for snow to "stick." For all the snowflakes I drew and cut out of paper growing up, I never imagined those crystalline structures would be so delightfully tiny. I also didn't realize how fleeting they were. Snowballs sometimes hurt! You could also only pack a few before your hands were too numb and wet. The monotonous gray in the skies told me it would never be sunny and snowing. The sooty piles of week-old snow coupled with the salty slush that had no chance of evaporating was never part of the White Winter propaganda. By my fourth snowfall, I was over it. Snow's alright, but take me back to where it can rain while the sun is out, where the puddles would dry out by tomorrow, and lotion is irrelevant because your skin is moisturized by the air itself.

I grew up on a diet of suburbia in an immigrant household, learning how to be American.

For breakfast, I'd start with fish eyes as the cherished delicacy, the romantic crooning of Teresa Teng, the pride of Chinese pro-paganda music, and the endless saga of Dragonball Z. Don't forget to greet aunts and uncles with "Ayi hao. Shu shu hao," sort out everyone's ages to determine if they're a "jie jie/ge ge" or "mei mei/di di" or better yet, flatter a guest by undercutting their age by having the kids greet them as "jie jie/ge ge".

For lunch, I'd scarf down Lunchables, the power ballads of Celine Dion, every memorized lyric and who sang it of the Spice Girls, same for Backstreet Boys, Lisa Frank stickers, the sublime queerness in Sabrina the Teenage Witch, and so much MTV.

Parsing out the embodied etiquette of each culture was switching back and forth between the sweet saltines of brunch or dim sum. Elbowos on the table were fine at breakfast, rude at lunch. Speaking with your mouth full is a no-no? But my family does that at home all the time. Why would I ask for someone to "pass the mashed potatoes" if I could just reach over and get it myself?

For dinner, I'd answer my parents in English when they spoke to me in Chinese, forge their signatures on my permission slips in lieu of trying to translate and explain to them what was going on at school, then I'd log onto AIM to learn the dialect of suburban Floridian tween.

Asian Fusion cuisine at its finest.
Going to any Chinatown, I know the smells, the etiquette, the mannerisms, the pace - like factory settings built into me. I can navigate the storefronts as fluently as the aisles of an American grocery store - understanding this store sells the dried things, the booth next to it has the produce, followed by the butcher, then the bakery. Each one has its own scent profile, not all of them pleasant, but it smells real and unadulterated. It doesn’t appear as clean as a Safeway, but at least I know they don’t track the filth of the world into their homes by their shoes. Being able to parse out the different affects in yelling, I know that Chinese people aren’t just mad all the time.

There’s the warm greeting and friendly banter yelling, “the I don’t understand, can you clarify” yell, the bargaining yell, the “I’m just making myself heard so you don’t have to yell back for clarification” yell. I can’t say I embrace all of these cultural norms, but they are familiar, so it’s a home I have access to.

I may not understand the language fully, but it doesn’t sound foreign. I’ve never been able to explain it. It’s some in-between literacy that maybe only the children of immigrants can understand. It’s certainly not comfortable - to not know what’s going on and to not have the tools to decode and start making meaning of anything. But it’s also not jarring like going to a foreign place where you don’t know the language and alarms are going off in your head that you really don’t understand anything you hear. Like everything else that is part of this Asian-American experience, it’s something in between. The not-quite-fully-belonging, not-quite-fully-understanding, not-quite-fully-being able to communicate is familiar.

And sometimes, what isn’t home can inform what is home.

The day after the 2016 election, I sought home, somewhere to land and be held. The scrolling of Twitter feeds didn’t make me feel connected to anyone. The blank pages of my journal couldn’t help me sort out my incoherent thoughts. Music couldn’t drown the dismay in my spirit. What could I possibly draw or paint that wasn’t just a smear of feces? My appetite didn’t crave anything for me to focus on and make. Waking up, I didn’t know what to do with myself.

But my body knew. As if on auto-pilot, my body took me to a dance class - the first, closest one I could find. (Thank goodness it was Nina Haft’s.) Emotions and thoughts that could only be processed body first, before they could be turned into words, conversation, analysis, reflection, and action, were released - kneading the knot from my gut, sending through my spine, squeezing through the tubes of my limbs, out through my fingertips and toes, roof of my mouth, evaporating through the crown of my head, absorbed by the floor. We found home in community and together, we exorcised our turmoil to create a slimeball of grief that became our new dance partner. Few words were exchanged, but the sharing and collective processing was a potent release. The way dance is a conduit for a synergy that can only be unlocked through a collective practice, make it the balm and homecoming needed for that day.

To be cut off from this synergistic exchange of energy made the loss of dance class during the pandemic feel so much more tangible. I missed bumping into sweaty bodies, seeing the nuanced choices of other dancers to inform my own, feeling inspired and driven - all of this information that could only be gleaned from sharing a space and practice with others. I’ve taken four online dance classes during the pandemic, and cried during two of them. For this time and circumstance, it was not the home I sought. But if this wasn’t home, where else could I find it?

You can sometimes outgrow home.

Like a favorite garment you could never imagine outgrowing, it gradually makes its way out of rotation, until one day it ends up in the donate pile. How did that happen? When? What replaced it? How many of those will we go through? I hope the next person finds joy, comfort, and solace in it like I did.

That means home can also grow with you. A notion, a resting place, that gets renovated a couple times. Or maybe you move to a new spot. Then you make it home again. And like the water in our bodies and bodies of water, we’re perpetually in process, for the duration of our lives, of finding, making, re-making, resting, and finding again, home.

And sometimes, what isn’t home can inform what is home.

If a lifetime is a home, they are the plumbing and electrical that will make this house livable. If a lifetime is a home, he is the poured foundation, the drywall, you think of labor, love, and sacrifice. The cycles of growth and decay that create the soil, fertile with hopeful dreams ready to nourish any seeds planted, held together by the deep root systems of labor, love, and sacrifice.

If a lifetime is a home, they are the things that don’t quite work or belong in this house as you figure out your aesthetic and lifestyle - not quite the right paint color, the cheap piece of furniture, the hand-me-down things you never would have chosen for yourself, the kitchen appliance you’ve only used a couple of times despite swearing you would use it “all the time if you had it.”

If a lifetime is a home, she is the plans, projects, and dreams of what you want to do with it, the drywall. You think those walls are set, permanent fixtures of the house, but they can be removed, edited. Maybe you want more of an open floor plan.

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BABY BABY, COME ON HOME

by Zoe Camille Huey

I was once a liaison with the fairies, a builder of fairy houses, and a culinary mastermind who created nasturtium wraps in my very own backyard restaurant. I was once best friends with a hermit crab named Bob and heartbroken when I had to say goodbye to the little creature. I was once an archaeologist who dug ginormous holes in the backyard. I was a sculptor, who shaped the clay I found in the earth into animals that were part dog, part bird, part fish.

I was once a kid who played dress up. I was once a kid who began to lose myself and reality and imagination became more and more separated from one another. I was once a kid who played dress up. What makes my grown-up suit a grown-up suit, isn’t the color or fabric or cost or brand. It isn’t the size or washing instructions. My grown-up suit has been slowly growing with me for years now, like a second skin. In my grown-up suit I feel disconnected from my sense of bodily time, my needs, and my wants. I am more rigid. I find less fascination with the small things around me. I discover less. I am in awe, less. There are times when I manage to sort of step out of my grown-up suit - when holes emerge in the fabric like portals, reminding me of who I am. In these moments I don’t feel like a kid again but instead I feel the kid inside of me. These moments happen when I am playing with my dog and together we howl. Or when the toddler I care for and I attentively watch and roll-y poll-y bug crawl through the playground sand. Or when I am in the garden with dirt under my nails, pulling weeds, and I come across a salamander who has made a home in the earth under the bag of mulch. I return to myself when there is nowhere else I have to be.

In thinking about how queerness, home, and creative practice all intersect, I return again and again to ideas of childhood. “Home” can feel like a stillness, but it is not stagnant. Instead, home changes and grows with me, as I search for my way home within my own body. Home is a grounding root and the branches who spiral upwards and out. The word home and the word return feel deeply related, with return referencing a movement both backwards and forwards in time. As I grow older I grow closer to the child within me, so that I can hold my small self again, nurture her, and learn from her. My childhood was not black or white but rather gray- I was safe and loved, and also very anxious. Sometimes, on a whim, I wish I could go back in time, with what I know now, and encourage little me to be more silly and care less about grades and fitting in. But the real desire lies in learning to offer myself now the breath and space and time to play.

MY MOM WAS WHITE. She grew up in Southern California, with a mom whose lineage traces back to Britain. Her dad was Jewish, probably from Poland, but was never a practicing Jew. My dad is Chinese, born to immigrant parents from a farming region in Southern China in 1952 San Francisco. With two older sisters, he was the first born son of the family (a position of high responsibility).

I am someone who experiences whiteness as both a twisted blessing and a curse. In classic racist fashion, I get the “what are you” question alongside the myriad of guesses about just who exactly I might be. I get the back-wards compliment that praises mixed-people being so beautifully unique. I have been called white. I have been told I am lucky to look so white. I have the privilege, safety, and access of being half-white. At the same time, I have been called beautiful. I have been admired, less and less, that I was all these things, because I am someone who experiences whiteness as both a twisted blessing and a curse. In classic racist fashion, I get the “what are you” question alongside the myriad of guesses about just who exactly I might be. I get the back-wards compliment that praises mixed-people being so beautifully unique. I have been called white. I have been told I am lucky to look so white. I have the privilege, safety, and access of being half-white. At the same time, I have the privilege, safety, and access of being half-white. At the same time, I have been called beautiful. I have been admired, less and less, that I was all these things, because
a blue-lined hardcover notebook, taller than it was wide, with slightly faded yellow pages. I liked how all the numbers in the world were based on ten different characters - ten building blocks to count with infinitely. 

Other than the numbers, I didn’t learn much Cantonese from my dad. He never felt confident in his understanding of the language, having grown up in a society consumed with pressures to assimilate. English was the language he learned and American comic book superheroes were the men he idolized. But on Lunar New Year, he says, his mom would cook a feast. When I hear him share his stories of food from his culture, I feel something in him soften and light up.

When my dad and I share treats from Chinatown or bake Ling Go for New Years together, I feel close to him. And I feel close to a part of myself that hasn’t always felt like it belongs to me. A part I feel like I don’t know much about. I am both Chinese and not Chinese. Both white and not white. Both and neither. Like so many people, I straddle multiple categories, looking for a balancing point in the middle of them. Finding home feels like a practice of trying to describe this space of specific ambiguity, of in-betweeness, of undefined-ness – and honoring, maybe even celebrating, the void from which we feel.

I FEEL AT HOME IN MY BODY only to the extent that I feel myself searching for home. I am learning my self worth, locating myself within my lineage and wondering if in my body, my ancestors can meet. I am learning to welcome the wisdom of my body’s temporal pacing.

Recently, I’ve been feeling ghostlike in my body. I have a wispy, foggy sense of myself. I do the tasks I need to do but I am rigid and held and clunky when I move. In a dance class taught by Ainsley Tharp I was offered the practice of speaking the words aloud “I am powerful,” while a partner whispered from the sidelines, “You are powerful.” In the one tiny and fleeting moment of speaking the words aloud “I am powerful,” while a partner whispered from the sidelines, “You are powerful.” In the one tiny and fleeting moment of speaking the words aloud “I am powerful,” while a partner whispered from the sidelines, “You are powerful.” In the one tiny and fleeting moment of speaking the words aloud “I am powerful,” while a partner whispered from the sidelines, “You are powerful.”

I hold the question of what happened in the transmission of movement from the white bodies who taught me to my body. For a long time this question has felt very focused). I can welcome the embodiment of the question, things going a certain way. N is just a kid, and what joyousness to live a life where you can spontaneously throw oatmeal into the air to see how it will splatter on the floor (not to neglect the importance of teaching N about responsibility and gratitude). What strong will and a heart N has - what fierce independence she displays as she tries to put on her own shoes, I feel a sense of purpose. Yes, my body is in relation to hers, and yes, we are both offering one another a gift of and in our own making.

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DANCE HAS FELT LIKE both something I am putting onto my body, and something I am birthing from my body. My dance education includes the white dance lineage of modern and post-modern dance. In college I was, for the most part, taught by white professors. I lived in a world of whiteness. I lived, as whiteness, a feeling I can only describe as a wash of white paint over an already painted image - a sort of masking of the self. It’s as if I gave all my energy toward holding up and sustaining the white half of myself in order to be successful, as if I could be separated from myself. And in this loss, so too, was the loss of play. My perfectionism, the wanting to please, the feeling that my art could be good or bad all took me away from myself. I looked so intensely outward and worried so much about what I should be making. So of course, making from my heart was confusing. I craved a relationship of trust with dance and with my dancing body so we could all play together. Yet when the making becomes tense with linearity and endpoints, and tied up with self-worth and image, the messy scribble of a process has a hard time being free to wander.

I hold the question of what happened in the transmission of movement from the white bodies who taught me to my body. For a long time this question has felt very serious to me. I am waiting for the world of white dance lineage and the world of my body to arrive at a settled and peaceful coexistence. I’m realizing that this both isn’t the point, and isn’t going to happen, especially if I’m trying to make it happen. The two worlds must instead live in play with one another. The tension itself can be playful (which doesn’t make it less serious or rigorous or focused). I can welcome the embodiment of the question, allow it to move and morph with me and within me, and let go of trying to solve anything. The answer is in the day
to day. The answer is in the queerness of living as a million possibilities, of finding wholeness in all the moving parts.

I AM WRITING FROM WITHIN my very own fort. This fort is made of draped and hung pieces of tracing paper, which have been cut through with an x-acto knife, dunked into a pot of leftover beet juice, sprayed with water, crumpled up again and again, colored upon with oil pastel, sewn together, glued together, and splattered with black ink.

This visual art/performance piece I am currently in conversation with—this fort (which has yet to have the right title)—has been slowly finding form in my imagination for a long while now. On nights when I can’t fall asleep I lay in bed, close my eyes, and let by bit compose ideas in my mind. I see a dark theater space, with tracing paper drawings hanging in different formations. I see lights creating shadows on the walls. I see lights layered upon other lights to create double images with differing foci. I sometimes see myself in a red suit in a corner, either installing the work or laying down

The answer is in the queerness of living as a million possibilities, of finding wholeness in all the moving parts.

within its nest. There is never an image of me performing. I started to hang up these drawings in my apartment (in a room partially designated as empty “making” space). I hung the drawings from the ceiling with tiny nails and pour like a thick slow river from the mouth of the sea. I am still in the process of hanging this installation on the wall and the space is still getting to know me. I sometimes see myself in a red suit in a corner, either installing the work or laying down

I REPEAT TO MYSELF, My feet are standing on the floor. My feet are standing on the floor. My feet are standing on the floor. Which is to say, I am a part of this earth and the earth a part of me. I am real. I am taking up space in this room. I am in relationship with the world around me.

IT IS MORNING AND I GO INTO THE KITCHEN. Mom is done meditating and she comes outside to sit with the dogs and me. We chat about this or that. A part of me wishes that this moment of morning—of skin soaking up the bright, hot heat—heat that seems to melt the paper as something born from a liminal space. In cutting out shapes from the thin paper I designed a map of the world a part of me. I am real. I am taking up space in this room. I am in relationship with the world around me.

IT IS MORNING AND I SIT ON THE DECK. outside of my mom’s studio in the backyard. The dogs lay on blankets-soaking up the bright, hot heat—heat that seems to melt and pour like a thick slow river from the mouth of the sun. Mom is meditating inside her studio. Around her shoulders is a worn red and orange cloth that my sister bought years ago from a vendor at the Telegraph Avenue Winter Street Fair. She is done meditating and she comes outside to sit with the dogs and me. We chat about this or that. A part of me

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ZOE HUEY is a queer interdisciplinary artist born, raised and currently residing on unceded Ohlone Ohlone territory, also known as Oakland, CA. Through painting, drawing, movement, and multi-media experimentation, she weaves together curiosities around mixed race and non-binary embodiment. Their making is propelled through work with children, a deep love of dogs, and abundant gratitude for the ocean, redwood forests, collaboration, and friendship.
to remain empty at all times, an effervescent palimpsest (or love letter) for the heart

by ESTRELLX SUPERNOVA

I.

Where is home?
Home is where the heart is.
And where is the heart?
At the center of the Earth.

Core.
Core.
Center.
Core.
Center.
Core.

Suddenly, a channel appears. A channel with several nodes and receptors located within and outside of the body.
You have to make a choice on how you’d like to enter the space.

Go with your gut. Always.

Our bodies are mirroring the body of the Earth and the Earth in turn mirrors the pathways and forces of the Universe. Each cell of our bodies is a minuscule fractal of this much larger picture, containing within its structures a reflection of the macro ecosystems that make our lives on this planet possible. We are interminably moving within a series of spirals and concentric circles whether we can tune into these perceptual shifts and movements or not. What happens in one part of the system (or body), directly impacts another aspect of that same system (or body). What are the implications of being so deeply entangled with one another? What does this mean about boundaries? How can we use this quantum understanding to leverage the power of our differences instead of using them to become more polarized? And yet even polarization is necessary in the process of evolution we find ourselves in. What benefits does polarization provide? I believe in ______. My voice matters. I matter. In order to understand our limitations, sometimes we must drift into and out of extremes. And extreme pressure is what precious stones need in order to step more fully into their true form, shape, and nature. Each one of us, a unique vessel, a unique stone, vibrating at a unique frequency, imprinted with a divine purpose to breathe and be. Be in joy, in pleasure, in love.

What if? What if? What if I just spent time strengthening my imagination and my relationship to my inner child?

Thank You:
Water.
Air.
Animal & Plant Beings.
Gravity.
Celestial Bodies.
My Constellation of Care.
Our Ancestors and ourselves as Future Ancestors.

Without their effort, I would not be here today writing these words or perhaps I would be, but in a different form, language, tone.

II.

“To be islanded” are lyrics that stand out from a recent Moses Sumney track I was listening to, where Sumney’s guest, Tayie Selasi, speaks about the experience of growing up feeling islanded. This resonates with my nomadic spirit that has been in search of a new home base for a while. It’s funny the way being in the thick of the search creates blindspots to what has been right in front of me the whole time. I was talking with a friend, Alexis, at the beginning of the pandemic and we both shared that shifting into an even more isolated state due to the pandemic actually felt like the rest of the world was catching up to where we had already been. I was in awe and struck by the unified choreography of the entire globe shutting down, slowing down, and moving into becoming islanded. Islands of grief, loss, transmutation, surrender, mutual care, heart break, being mirrored room by room, country by country. We are and will continue to mirror one another. What are the through-lines and unifying forces at play? In Lak’ech. Birth. Death. Rebirth.

In conversation with another friend, day, they mentioned that the apocalypse we are facing now has been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years. I agree. Those of us with bloodlines that extend into multiple diasporas continue shadow dancing and tender wrestling with our various selves. How do we bring and invite these disparate parts home and into a cohesive whole? Our people have already been through this before so how do we source into their wisdom and resilience? Why does this pattern of oppression continue to repeat itself? What has not yet been integrated from this pattern? What core wound lies at the root? What need remains unmet? And are we ready, individually and collectively, to divest from these patterns and give them the space that they need to transmute? Are you ready to let go of the identities you hold so dearly and close to your heart as a gateway for remembering who you really are?

How did our people not see this coming and how were our own people involved in perpetuating the cycle of trauma, violence, and oppression? What function, desire, and need is served/met by those oppressing? Are we subconsciously agreeing to being oppressed? How do we rupture the systemic infrastructures that are in place tying the bow of Manifest Destiny together? And how can we conjure another way, the old way, the way of pre-colonial magic (without romanticizing this time) and knowing that this magic is right here in front of all of us, and within us, hidden in plain sight?
And as we know there were always beings, human and non-human, who were stewards of these lands before colonial forces came to lay claim over a place, disrupting these ecosystems vibrationally by giving them a new name. What we name anything matters. What is your preferred name? What are your preferred pronouns?


What happened to you that your prime directive has become to consume even to your own detriment? “More,” they said, “I want more. What I have isn’t enough. And therefore, I am not enough and I won’t be enough until I have everything. Give me everything so that I can hoard and fill the void of my existence with distractions that buy me time so I don’t have to feel my pain.” I’ve been guilty of this too though. Of piling on the workload as a way of running away from myself. Of hyperproductivity that gets in the way of calling in the kind of intimacy I desire. The beauty has been that the kind of intimacy I desire. The beauty has been that I've been guilty of this too though. Of piling on the workload as a way of running away from myself. Of hyperproductivity that gets in the way of calling in the kind of intimacy I desire. The beauty has been that I've been guilty of this too though. Of piling on the workload as a way of running away from myself. Of hyperproductivity that gets in the way of calling in the kind of intimacy I desire. The beauty has been that

no matter where in the world I have gone, my wounds were there to welcome me, asking me to attend to them. To hold them with reverence and acknowledge how they have shaped me. Even the darkest of shadows need love too and often contain the medicine you need and are meant to share with the world.

III.

It was 6:05am when the phone rang and my dad’s voice, full of terror, said “Go wake up your mom and your mom’s gentle voice whispering to the ICE officers in Spanish.

I’ve been thinking about this moment and my parents’ migration to the United States recently and how this has afforded me the privilege of and access to U.S. citizenship. It took them 10+ years to go through their process of naturalization that unfortunately involved this incident of deportation. Deportations often happen in broad daylight and at wee hours of the morning so as to be discreet and not sound the alarm within the respective neighborhoods. In essence, there is a system in place that grants humans with the authority to disappear and move bodies. Lies Desparecidos. This event created a series of ghosts within the family that haunted us, in addition to the phenomenon of feeling isolated for being queer within this same family. What do you do with the presence of someone you love who is still alive yet no longer around? Does this qualify as a kind of death?

This deportation happened during Obama’s tenure as president leaving my family bitter, torn, economically in debt, and stoking anti-Black sentiments. In 2021, I found out that I have roots connecting me to Angola, further complicating these anti-Black, anti-Indigenous sentiments that have been expressed within the bloodline. How do you love someone even when their views do not align with your own? How do I account for the gaps in information I have been able to access and theirs? Intergenerational collaboration takes work.

My mother eventually followed my sister’s journey back to Guatemala because if she didn’t, it would have delayed the process of either of them obtaining U.S. citizenship and potentially not being able to return at all. I couldn’t believe it. How could this be happening for a f***** piece of paper? How many people are waiting and continuing to wait? Waiting for the facade of a fractured American Dream?

And as we know there were always beings, human and non-human, who were stewards of these lands before colonial forces came to lay claim over a place, disrupting these ecosystems vibrationally by giving them a new name.

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IV.

Let’s be real:

There is no level playing field here. We have to co-create it and turn to nature and AfroIndigenous stewards.

There are several businesses in the form of industrial complexes with legislation that keeps the system well oiled and moving forward. There is a scarcity mindset that needs to be attended to coming from inherited and experienced trauma, and all of the systems need to be radically redesigned without perpetuating the same colonialist patterns, and people need to be compassionately held accountable without being discarded or executed.

How do we move and create within a frequency of abundance when so much of our education and infrastructural systems are drilling into our subconscious that we are marginal, marginalized, working-class bodies, never going to amount to anything except the pipeline? I genuinely rebuke this on the daily.

So… how do we do this?

Follow your pleasure.

Ask your heart.

Take some time to listen to the frequency and tone of your Spirit.

Together we can come up with a myriad of approaches.

I don’t think the U.S. ever really felt like home until this last year when I was forced to stay and examine my American-ness.

What makes me American?

What makes me cringe?

What can I not say?

What ancestral lineages claim me?

Turn-ons:

When I think about my American identity, I immediately think of the movie Mean Girls. There is something so iconic and poignant about how this film represents everything beautiful and terrible about this country through narratives centering high school coming-of-age motifs (and the lack of any BIQTPOC/BIPOC lead roles in the film…surprise surprise). I’m obsessed with Regina George. I’m obsessed with “on Wednesdays we wear pink.” I’m obsessed with the cheesy Christmas dance routine they do, especially when the CD player gets kicked into the mom’s face accidentally. I’m definitely into morbid humor.

I LOVE a good burger with fries. I LOVE chicken tenders and mozzarella sticks and slushies on a hot summer night on the East Coast. I LOVE(D) smoking blunts. I LOVE brunch after a night out with the homies. I LOVE Whole Foods. I LOVE my BIQTPOC+++ lovers, cuties, who are my ride or die
An inherent part of being in a human body means wrestling with limitations, boundaries, and imposed definitions.

school saga is an entirely different story for another day, but what I will say is that those Berkshire moun-
tains became a nest, home, resting ground where I started dancing.
2003 - 2006: I was selected to be the morning announcements, birthday roll-call person and this in-
volved reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, every day, for three years. I was always late and subconsciously, prob-
able on purpose because I hated doing this. The begin-
ning of healing my relationship to my own voice.
TURN-OFFS: small talk especially the kind during intro-
ductions where people really just care about the insti-
tutions you’ve attended and the networks you’re a part of and then ask, “No, but where are you really from?... If you’re from Africa, why are you white? OMG Karen, you can’t just ask people why they’re white.”
I have a strong distaste of the holidays as faux rea-
tions you’ve attended and the networks you’re a part

Since high school, I’ve been blessed with the opportu-
nity to study abroad through varying dance and cho-
ograhic contexts. What I’ve loved about my journeys is that each place brings out hidden energies within my genetic code; a zodiacal alchemy is allowed to come for-
ward and express itself in ways that aren’t always pos-
sible within the United States. Something I’ve noticed is that the older I get, the more protective, sensitive, and tender I become with respect to my gender expression. I genuinely feel so weighed down by conditioning that my next area of compassionate examination is unpack-
ing this thread by thread. In undergrad, I definitely felt more connected to my femininity and now my mas-
sculinity feels more present like an amulet, a protective mechanism. I know there are no rules here, but I silently

whisper to myself that I’m non-binary, Two-Spirit, yet
again what words, sounds did my peoples use for these expressions? What words, sounds, movements do I wish to create?

So what do binaries allow for? What is important to
acknowledge about dichotomous thinking and how easy is it to trip into divided ways of thinking? What I recognize and define as the color blue was taught to me so now the work becomes seeing that color for the first time over and over again until it defines itself to me without any external imposition. This is what I want for myself. A fresh start. A new point of departure.
An inherent part of being in a human body means wrest-
ling with limitations, boundaries, and imposed defini-
tions. Yes, our Spirit is infinite, but our body needs food, rest, touch, companionship, motivation. These energies, like the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine, are con-
stantly in an improvisatory dance where through our choices we get to gift ourselves what we need moment to moment. And sometimes we slip beyond our edges. And this is often necessary too so that we understand what our limits are. The skin becomes a direct expres-
sion of this, both sheltering us from the external world yet soft and porous, allowing what we need to feel fully nourished in, inside out / outside in, in.
Yet even the skin cracks and tears. Nothing lasts forever. Not even the flesh on these bones will. The flesh will ultimately return and feed the Earth in an infinite cycle, spiral, and loop.
Fractals on fractals on fractals.
So what is a boundary?
An invocation?
A prayer?
A request for space and time to discern what one’s true
needs and desires are?
A boundary allows me to fill up the well of my capac-
ity first and foremost, and from this place of abundance extend my energy out into the world. A boundary can also change with time.
How much time?
As much time as you need, Queridx, Dear One.
There are no timelines or due dates for your healing process.

VI.
On an application I was writing one of the questions asked me, “When have you felt the most free?”
I replied:
• The House party I stumbled upon a pier in Jer-
sery City that was happening along the Hudson
River, a celebration of multi-generational Black
life;
• Spending time with loved ones where the conver-
sation flows and the energy around us becomes light and sweet like honey;
• Where there is space to dance, feast, make love, move and become bodies of waters, becoming mountainous bodies;
• The sensation of performing and communing with my Cosmic Self, with all of me, a site where I am able to create a new positionalty, where I get to shift my perspective, which is a gift because it means I am training myself to see the world differ-
ently. And from this place of softened awareness, I become more available to receive unconditional love and compassion. This doesn’t always feel like a walk in the park though. There is also space for grief, rage, sadness, and disorientation too.

A boundary of sifting through the mud and doing my best to
discern what is my own, what is collective, what is ancestral, what is not my own. There is no
right or wrong here, Queridx. There are just expe-
riences and emotions that yearn to channel through us, through you. Experiences and emotions that yearn to be acknowledged by our own presence. Through this witnessing, they are granted permis-
sion to pass through our vessels and into the Earth. We must give ourselves permission to move on;

• The spaces and places where I don’t have to com-
partmentalize or hide any part of me, especially the parts of me that are spiritual, that have experi-
enced harm, that are weird, witchy, ritualistic, into erotic excavation; spaces and places where ALL of me is welcome exactly the way that I am. Nothing to fix, nothing to do, no need to perform here. This is the space I am busy cultivating. Simply being and basking in the presence of others who are committed to doing the same;
VII.

I’ve been taking a class called Living Systems with an instructor named Leah Garza who offers many spiritual support systems including Akashic Readings. The course is about examining one’s conditioning, unpacking universal laws, and pulling apart the systemic oppressive layers that bind us to this reality and one another. As part of the course, Leah integrates guest speakers and one of them was a Central American curanderx named Koyote the Blind. Toward the end of his lecture, Koyote asked our class to introduce ourselves without any of the accolades or identity markers we would usually include.

[So my initial response was going to be, “Hi, my name is Estrellx Supernova, I prefer the/Them pronouns and these pronouns are non-negotiable. I’m currently living on unceded Tongva territories aka Los Angeles. I am the Cosmic Energy Orchestrator / Founder of an ecosystem called The Cosmic Angels / The School(s) of Tenderness and am also a choreographer, writer, performer, healer, curator. Most recently, I was awarded a 2020 Creative Capital Grant for a project titled EncuentrX 33: Queer Neurocognitive Architectures Hidden in Plain Site(s) whose timeline I will be stepping into soon. A challenge I have been facing lately has been the perpetual feeling of exhaustion coming from the collective energy along with the puzzle I’ve been trying to crack around my material health and abundance. Something I want to celebrate is having pulled the best IRL healing-based art/ist residencies I designed called Residencias Rhiomat-ica (w/ the support of many thought partners including Tossie Long, Megan Kendzior, and Marya Wethers amongst others) in LA this past January/February. I trusted my gut to follow-through with the IRL vision even in the midst of COVID-19 and trusted the cohort and I would be protected. The cohort who gathered around and felt called in by the theme of inhabiting paradox have become a new expression of home for me. Because of them, I feel more empowered to open my heart, heal my relationship to collaboration, and trust in my capacity to facilitate, communicate, and hold space. The feedback I’ve been receiving has left me feeling in awe, with a heart full of gratitude, that the medicine of my Ancestors, their presence, blessings, magic is in my DNA, bones, imprinted into me through each inhale and exhale I make therefore I am never disconnected. Even if they kill me, this wisdom and medicinal pattern will move forward into my next manifestation. My Spirit remains untouchable. I am understanding more and more that there are multiple Diasporic lipograms that weave through me and I can tap into this multiplicity and create home anywhere I go, anywhere I am called to. Everywhere I go I thrive. Home is emergent, nomadic, effervescent and I experience it in the smiles of strangers, in colors and lighting, in the way food is made with love.”]

When I arrived on Tongva territory for the first time, I was immediately energetically embraced by the land.

When I was in Amsterdam this past fall, I asked the Universe for guidance on whether I was meant to stay in the EU or shift elsewhere and like a bolt of lightening Tongva/Los Angeles came through...again. What is it about this landmass that calls me back? What needs to complete itself here in the state of Californi-a? Is it my process of rebirth? The West is the site of Death, where the sun sets.

I bring my body to a stillness, with my ear to the ground, listening to what the land has to share with me.

The Earth whispers, “Each of us is specifically designed to activate specific places on the planet. Your mission is to carry forward the frequency of the new paradigm through everything that you do, which is rooted in unconditional love. Your purpose is to be and be free and feel free to move as often as you need. To play, surrender, and move towards your full body YES.”

We are either gently moved towards or forced to shift into these locations. The Tower Card is always designed to activate specific places on the planet. Your purpose is to be ever so swiftly towards Death and The Star combined. What needs to die in order for you to be reborn? Name it. And let it go. No matter what, we are imbued with agency and power to make choices that bring us into and out of states of align-ment, disorientation, and timelines. Getting lost and delayed are inherent to the process and master plan. Choices that bend possibilities and potentialities in and out of focus.

So how do we create home and stability in the midst of so much catalycsmic transformation? How do we create stability when climate crisis, multiple pandemics, and an impending war continue to threaten any notion of stability? What is the direction I / we can always move towards that will never lead me / us astray? How can we think short- and long-term at the same time?
Inward. Turn to your practices. Turn to what brings you joy and what makes you feel DELICIOUS. Turn and face inwards, they say. WE HAVE TO GO NOW! MOVE!Move and surrender into the depths of yourself until you are born anew, molded through the power of your vision, distilled into the finest elixir that flows and flows and flows.

Home is a nest that has all of the things I have ever owned, including journal after journal after journal of notes, feelings, emotions that I’ve carried since 2004. Truly, my most prized possessions, some of which I'll offer to the medicine of the fire.

The Redwoods are the place where I want my ashes laid to rest and isn’t death just another beginning? An energetic exchange between this plane and where we originally come from?

No, but “Where are you really from?”

It was a healing retreat that first brought me out to California, to the Santa Cruz mountains back in 2016, via an organization called Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!). My life was forever changed, imprinted, awakened. I also fell in love. It’s almost mental Sanity (YES!). My life was forever changed, 2016, via an organization called Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!). My life was forever changed, imprinted, awakened. I also fell in love. It’s almost mental Sanity (YES!). My life was forever changed, 2016, via an organization called Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!). My life was forever changed, imprinted, awakened. I also fell in love. It’s almost mental Sanity (YES!).

I continue to be with and integrate movement, choreographing into everything that I do moving forward. Out of my body during this retreat is one that I'll love. The sensation and feeling of exorcizing trauma of myself that I had banned and deemed unworthy of beginning of my turning inwards and facing the parts as if the Redwood grove had been waiting for me to lay down and isn’t death just another beginning? An energetic exchange between this plane and where we originally come from?

A fractal within a fractal within a fractal. An embodied tessellation. When are we ever not time traveling?

Therefore, I am never alone. We are never alone.

The Quantum Field embraces, moves through, and witnesses / archives everything. I’ve been there though. Sunken into the belief that I was destined to be alone. Sinking into that dark abyss where the only person I could scream out for was my mother who was thousands of miles away. I’m certain now that she could hear my cries and was moved to pray for me.

The darkness. This is home too. Because it is through fecundity, that growth makes its way towards the light.

Exchanging Exchanges Exchange

The exchange of fluids, of energy, of glances, of the gays and the gaze.

I am at home within my own definition of what it means to be queer, of what it means to be neither from here nor from there, but from BOTH, from the heavens, born out of celestial bodies, because this question of home is like any other question: not meant to be answered immediately. No need to create a chasm where there doesn’t need to be one. No need to buy into the illusion of separation.

Move slowly. Chop it out. Spit it out. Let the pieces dry out in the sun and see what new messages arise for you.

What if…

There is nothing to solve. There is nothing to fix.

It is through compassionate awareness that the patterns and wounds shift.

What makes you angry? What if anger becomes home? What if any emotion makes its inside of you for longer than it needs?

Move slowly. Move slowly. What have you created an identity around and where is it located in your body? Who are you when you let those identities and narratives go? Who taught you to be afraid of your gifts?

Move slowly. Move slowly. It is time to source the courage and become the person who fully and unapologetically embodies the energy you have been afraid of your entire life.

Move slowly. Home is created in the moment by those who choose to show up for one another and who decide to use whatever is available to them to create a support system that can withstand any storm.

No need to give any explanation. You are welcome to come exactly as you are.

To come through and luxuriate in the power of presence, in the power of the breath of life that pulses through each one of us, through the drum beats of the heart.

Thank you, heart. Thank you, heart. Thank you, heart. Thank you, body. Thank you to all of the trillions of cells that comprise my body. Thank you to all of the microorganisms within my microbiome that comprise and inform my intuition, perception, consciousness.

I create a home where it is safe and possible to speak my truth, where it is safe and possible to make love again, where it is safe and possible to dream bigger and bigger knowing, where it is safe and possible to dissent, ask questions, say NO, ask for more time, ask for space, trusting that we all have equal access to this spaciousness.

Space, more space…there is more space in this body. Space, more space…there is more space in this body. Space, more space…there is more space in this body.

Let those around you surprise you. Surprise yourself. Spit it out?

Choose to react and respond differently. Take your time.

Let the noise settle. Let the silence rattle you from within and allow its presence to give way to clarity of direction illuminating where you need to be.

Home is within you.

Home is in the choices you make or don’t make. Home is the things you didn’t get to say. Home is wherever you decide to go. Home is now. You are never disconnected.

On my 30th birthday, I called my parents and my dad said, “Remember that the only one imposing limitations on you and what you think is possible for your life is you.” My heart cracked open and I have not been the same ever since.

— Estrellx Supernova

[they/them] is a queer, non-binary Afro-Indigenous choreographer, performer, and healer whose roots extend into Guatemala/Bolivian, Angolan, Portuguese/Iranian and other diasporas. Estrellx is the founder of an entrepreneurial and emergent ecosystem called Estrellx Supernova & The Cosmic Angels / The School(s) of Tenderness. Estrellx integrates club spaces as sites of generative dissonance and implements [talk as meditation, dissonant simultaneity, Qi/Energetics, devotion, and sonic work] into their inclusive performative language. Estrellx frames choreography as embodied excavation and asks, “What do you really want and how exactly do you want it? Are we celebrating or mourning or both? How do we work with what we have to redesign how we do everything? How do we prepare for the not yet seen?” (IG: @corporealidades.sutil).
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TRADITIONAL & INNOVATIVE PERFORMANCES

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N O O R A N I D A N C E . C O M
COMMUNITY

MEGAN LOWE DANCES
June 3, 2022 at ODC Theater, SF
Piece of Peace is a dance theater creation that explores mixed-race AAPI experiences. Through thoughtful text, sensual song, and dynamic dancing, the collaborators of Megan Lowe Dances are sharing stories of fractured selves and longings to belong, and co-creating a supportive environment for connection amongst each other that radiates out into our communities. The first part of this project will premiere as part of Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center’s United States of Asian American Festival and ODC’s State of May Festival. Performing are josi e. abad, Melissa Lewis Wong, and Megan Lowe.

FLAYAWAY PRODUCTIONS

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

THE DIVINE COLORING BOOK
Created, authored, and designed by Christine Joy Amagan Ferrer (a.k.a. Tine), The Divine is a multicultural 100-page coloring book for people of all ages inspired by folklore and spirituality from the Philippines (Diwatas), Haiti (Lwas of Vodou) and Brazil (Orishas of Candambule and deities of the Indigenous Brazilian Tupi Tribe). Thirteen deities from each culture are represented, along with the folklore and symbolism associated with each of the deities. Hardcover and PDF versions available. Special 10% off hardcover! Enter coupon code: eyeamthatiam. Learn more
Save the Date for The Divine Experience on Sep 10 at Kapwa Gardens in SF.

TOUCH BASS
Sep 10-11, 2022 at Berkeley Art Museum Pacific Film Archive
Risa Jaroslow & Dancers’ Touch Bass premiered at ODC Theater in 2017. It will be remounted for the spectacular space at BAMPFA. An ensemble of nine, including three dancers, three musicians, and three double basses, all move and make music. The bass score is by bassist/composer Lisa Mezzacappa.

WIRED
May 2022, Chicago
Kinetic Light will premiere an aerial performance that explores the race, gender, and disability stories of barbed wire. Free livestream at mcachicago.org

REBECCA FEDER FLAMENCO
Clases en Flamenco danza at Shermie’s Dance Studio, El Sobrante.

ISABEL UMALI
Dance artist Isabel Umali was a resident with Deborah Slater Dance Theater in early 2022. Her resulting piece Shift/Loss explores the internal journey of change and discovery through the lens of myth, archetype and image as a way to access the subconscious. Danced by Umali with music by Dustin Carlson, we dive into one woman’s internal world as she integrates her disparate parts. Isabel has also been teaching “The Hotspot” classes at ODC for professional dancers, and “Sensorial Dancing” for all levels at Shawl-Anderson. Learn about Isabel’s practice.

Kinetic Light
Founded by Alice Sheppard, Kinetic Light is a disability arts ensemble, working at the intersections of disability, dance, design, identity, and technology. They promote intersectional disability as a creative force and access as an aesthetic critical to creating transformative art and advancing the disability arts movement.
COMMUNITY

RISA JAROSLOW & DANCERS

Talking Circle
May 12-23, 2022 at CounterPulse, SF
Six people gather to make a difficult decision that will affect all of their lives. Their dilemma raises the question: What is the freedom you long for and what will you risk to get it? The cast includes six movement collaborators ages 26-78. The score is by Amy X Neuburg.

THE KENDRA KIMBROUGH DANCE ENSEMBLE

Our studio has recently launched a line up of 12 classes and workshops offered both in-person and online! For pre-registration, please check out our website. If sales have ended online, feel free to drop into class the day of, or email us for virtual access. Stay tuned for more events and productions this year as we honor our 25th Anniversary season!

KKDE Promotional Compilation
Review of 2021 courtesy of KKDE Videographer

MOVEMENT LIBERATION

Dance and Rest Retreat for People of African Descent
June 17-19, 2022, River’s Bend Retreat Center, Philo CA
Spend Juneteenth with facilitators Dominique Cowling, Valerie Chaflagrck, and Sarah Crowell for a weekend of conscious dance, yoga asana, rest, and connection. Supported by the wisdom and purity of the natural world, this in-person retreat invites us all into a state of rejuvenation and nourishment. We have 20 full scholarships and sliding scale tuition available. If you can pay full price, please do so in order to support those who cannot at this time. Register here.

GUO PEI: COUTURE FANTASY

April 16, 2022 at Legion of Honor, SF
Megan Lowe Dances will be performing for the opening day of Guo Pei: Couture Fantasy, which celebrates the extraordinary designs of Guo Pei. Through exquisite craftsmanship, lavish embroidery, and unconventional dressmaking techniques, Guo Pei creates a fantasy that fuses the influences of China’s imperial past, decorative arts, European architecture, and the botanical world. Performing with Megan will be Sonsherée Giles, Frances Sedayo, and Shira Yaziv.

STUDIO 210

studio 210 is available to rent for performances, classes, and rehearsals, along with hosting the Summer Residency Program. Two artists will be in residence from June-July, with a culminating performance on July 29 & 30.

Polarity Wellness
Tarot in Motion
Create cathartic movement pieces from pulled Tarot cards.

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DISCOVER MORE
about Dancers’ Group and past In Dance Articles

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