SUMMER 2022

indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY

MEMBERSHIP

Dancers' Group – publisher of *In Dance* – provides resources to artists, the dance community, and audiences through programs and services that are as collaborative and innovative as the creative process.

Dancers' Group has evolved the paid tiered membership program to a fee-free model. If you're interested in becoming a new member, consider joining at our free Community level.

Visit dancersgroup.org for more information and resources.

JOIN
dancersgroup.org

SUBMIT

Performances to the Community Calendar

Dancers' Group promotes performance listings in our online performance calendar and our emails to over 1,700 members.

Resources and Opportunities

Dancers' Group sends its members a variety of emails that include recent community notices, artistic opportunities, grant deadlines, local news, and more.

Cover photo courtesy of Vanessa Hernández Cruz

WELCOME

by ROWENA RICHIE, Guest Editor

FOR YEARS DANCERS' GROUP has invested in me. They've cared for my health artistically. They've championed my dance theater projects, published personal essays in these pages, even supported a video collaboration about weaving in Peru.

Weaving feels like an apt metaphor for guest-editing this issue.

What a gift, tapping the intelligence and wisdom of old friends and new who have contributed writing to this issue. Thank you for trusting me, divulging vulnerabilities and sharing expertise. Thank you, Dancers' Group!

The theme of health and wellness has been a major focus of mine over the past decade, first as a cancer survivor and then as a fellow at the Global Brain Health Institute.

The resulting collection is "Not Your Typical Dance Wellness Issue."

You'll hear from folks from around the globe and from a variety of professional backgrounds, ages and identities. Threads emerge: healing trauma, bridging difference and the sheer joy of movement, and watching others move, is woven through.

I think you'll see the connection between dance, on the one hand, and wellness, on the other, is essential to supporting our fragile but resilient humanity.

These pieces have touched me, transported me, given me hope and reaffirmed my commitment to making dance healthy.

Welcome to our tapestry!

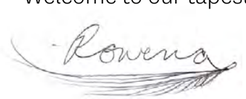


PHOTO BY ERIKA CHONG SHUCH

CONTENTS

Dancers' Group gratefully acknowledges the support of Bernard Osher Foundation, California Arts Council, Fleishhacker Foundation, Grants for the Arts, JB Berland Foundation, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Koret Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation and generous individuals.

CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL

ART WORKS. arts.gov

FROM ONE TO MANY: Dance is the Bridge

By Christopher “Mad Dog” Thomas and Brenda Butler

STILL FROM “THE LIGHTHOUSE,” FILMED BY OZLAMONT MEDIA SOLUTIONS

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Brenda Butler and Christopher "Mad Dog" Thomas first met in 2020 through For You's A Bridge, A Gift, a project that paired artists and elders with ties to Chicago's Southside neighborhood and offered them creative prompts for their exchange. For this In Dance issue I invited them to reconnect. The following linked reflections were written in response to their recent conversation.*

[by Mad Dog]

To me dance is how I get free. Growing up in Altgeld Gardens housing project, urban dance was something that was part of our culture.

The death of disco at Chicago's Comiskey Park in 1979 inspired the Chicago House scene, which grew into the Chicago Juke/Footwork community, which is centered around House/Juke music. In Juke/footwork there's a constant syncing up of the movement and the music, a constant rapid-fire exchange.

Juke music and movement is a direct reaction to violent and under-resourced living conditions. The Chicago footwork cypher allows dancers to express their traumas, and communicate their stories through movement. This dance movement allowed youth to build community and challenge the negative narrative about young black and brown youth in the city of Chicago.

Footwork means the world to me! This art form has allowed me to be in places that I couldn't believe I would be. In 2016, I took an internship with

Chicago Public Allies where I had an opportunity to work and develop skills in the corporate not-for-profit field. My dance background and years of youth advocacy really helped me navigate the space. During my two year internship, I became a board member of the Chicago SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) History Project. Led by Dr. Fannie Rushing, the project really believed self education works best when you work in an intergenerational setting. Here I learned so much about my history and the elders who were on the front lines of the civil rights movement, like Willie Ricks and Fannie Lou Hamer. This opened a new scope of work for me that is centered in liberation and reimagining a world without police and systems of oppression.

Dance has always allowed me to bridge the gap between any form of adversity that I have ever faced. I'm dyslexic and struggled academically, but because of my ability to dance people were willing to invest in me and wanted to see me succeed academically and artistically.

[by Brenda]

I wish I could dance better. I wish I could dance well.

But that is not/was not my profession. Nor my inclination. Though I was a disco queen.

Growing up I never saw my parents, a schoolteacher and postal worker, dance. They worked a lot.

In high school and college, the Twist, the Boogaloo, the Monkey, the Twine were easy to approximate.

And my homies Archie Bell and the Drells of Houston, Texas ("we dance just as good as we walk") were so smooth that the Tighten Up could be danced standing in place.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAD DOG

PHOTOS BY: (LEFT) VALINCIA SAULSBERRY, (RIGHT) BLAKE MARTIN

Easy.

Disco era was a matter of doing your thing but you had to learn certain dances to choreograph with your dance partner. Hey, stepping, Chicago-style, bring it on.

The dance floor was the stage. It was electrifying. It was a ball far beyond that disco ball.

I despise the anti-disco movement that originated in Chicago. I wonder now what that was a precursor to? Slamming the music and clubs that brought all kinds of people together. Sound familiar? After the so-called death of disco, dancing as a release and a fun time migrated to the neighborhood clubs or private dance sets. And slowly, the clubs fell away.
Now, I feel the urge to dance again. To explore.

I watch other dancers: Like you, Mad Dog of Kuumba Lynx.

And the Alvin Ailey dancers, the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Michael Jackson, Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, Janet Jackson, Broadway musical theater, The Temptations, J-Lo. En Vogue. Give me Beyoncé. And Bruno Mars.

Through memories of late-night old movies in elementary school and junior high: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor. Eleanor Powell. Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. The Nicholas Brothers. Those splits.

And most recently correcting history or embracing it, we are learning of the influencers and trendsetters like John "Bubbles" Sublett and Katherine Dunham.

To move like all that.

Simply watching is cathartic, a release, pure enjoyment. This must be a kind of

wellness because I feel so full and elated after the dancer takes a bow. I never thought that just seeing the movements of a dancer could provide a connection. But that is what dance is about. Movement. Expression. Performance.

A catharsis for the dancer. A revelation to the watcher. Even though you the seer are not physically dancing, you are indeed a partner.

So now. I am retired and I want to dance. Gotta dance. Oh, I'll do my thing in the living room to my Pandora music or my retro CDs.

But I want to take a class. No ballroom for me. Maybe a few steps like Mad Dog but I'd prefer to slow it down, to channel Judith Jamison in one moment or Janet Jackson and Beyoncé in another. Just to start. To enroll and engage. For relaxation, for expression, for purpose, power and pleasure toward a commitment to explore something new.

To my health, to our health. Be well.

[by Mad Dog]

My mother used to take me to house parties and have me dance for her friends. A lot of them were also dancers who would teach me moves. In Chicago, during the '90s, there were dance groups everywhere. We had "dance downs" every Saturday at different parks across the city. This is how youth from all over the city were able to build community and establish healthy relationships.

Boogie Wonderland is my favorite song from the disco era, and the name of my current dance film project. The video will not only showcase my love for the era and highlight the moment when footwork/urban dance met disco. But also allow me to highlight some of Chicago's black women and LGBTQ dance choreographers who are overlooked. The footwork dance battle scene is dominated by straight men. This leaves little room for women and LGBTQ folks. My hope is that *Boogie Wonderland* will lead to some healthy conversations within Chicago dance communities about the need for inclusive safe space for dance regardless race, sexual orientation, gender, and age.
Today we have a new wave of simple dances that are similar to some of the dances Brenda spoke about. TikTok has created a space for everyone to participate in dance and urban culture. What's funny is that I have a very hard time learning the simple TikTok dances, but my son Travon is killing it!

And yet, the TikTok space isn't enough. How do you get your spiritual healing, your wellness–with your community and people who are outside of your community–when there's no equitable space to be well?

I feel the fight for equity has to come from us. My Juke For Liberation Project is centered around educating dance and DJ leaders to use movement and music to create social change. In Chicago we are going through a lot of redevelopment that is having a major impact on black and brown dance communities. We all need a safe space to dance and express ourselves. But are we as a community willing to fight to provide dance and wellness for those black and brown youth who don't have a space to get free?

COLLAGE BY BRENDA BUTLER

BRENDA BUTLER is a three-term president of NABJ (National Association of Black Journalists)-Chicago and an experienced journalist with 35+ years in newspapers and magazines. At the Chicago Tribune she was involved in the conception and development of newspaper sections and magazines and co-managed a staff of over 100 reporters, editors and support staff. In the late 1990s, Butler also wrote, produced and moderated a series for Chicago cable TV titled "Playback: Views from an African-American Perspective." For 7 ½ years, she was executive director and a high school journalism educator for the Columbia Links program at Columbia College Chicago.

For the past 17 years **CHRISTOPHER "MAD DOG" THOMAS** has been the program manager and creative director for Kuumba Lynx, a Hip Hop and performing arts organization. His artistic inquiry is deeply rooted in social liberation through artistic expression, and footwork is his primary dance form to convey that message. He is KL's head dance choreographer, and he creates theater productions with youth from across Chicago covering social and economic issues in the city and around the world. Mad Dog received a 2020 Chicago Dancemaker award and a 2022 Johnson Fellows for Artists Transforming Communities award from Americans For the Arts.

MOVING ACROSS CULTURES

Transmitting cultural knowledge through movement language

by **SHAHRZAD KHORSANDI**
photo by MICHAEL MARES

The effects of dance on the brain have been studied using Western dance forms like ballet, but not with less known forms like Persian/Iranian dance. Until now. When I was contacted by Dr. Julia F. Christensen, a neuroscientist at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics and former professional ballet dancer, I got very excited. Julia was interested in the work I was doing on codifying Persian/Iranian dance movement and wanted to collaborate on an experiment involving a Persian movement library. At first, I was intrigued by the idea of using Iranian dance as the movement form to study the effects of dance on the brain. But in the process of our experiments, I also became enthralled with the idea that transmission of cultural knowledge through the movement language specific to that culture may also affect the brain.

As dance practitioners and educators, we know intuitively that dance is beneficial for both physical and emotional health. It also makes sense to assume that emotional balance leads to better social behavior. There is a connection between our brain and our emotions[1], as well as between our emotions and behavior. Since dancing directly influences our emotions, it becomes a fourth component in this dance between biology and psychology.

What is Persian/Iranian dance?

The terms "Persian" and "Iranian" are often used synonymously and there is some confusion and much discourse around the appropriate term for this dance genre. In Iran the term "Iranian dance" is used. There are various genres within Iranian dance, including numerous dances belonging to tribes from around the country. These tribes speak their own dialect and follow their own customs. Much like the language, the dances of each region, in addition to the music and traditional attire, are distinct and part of the tribes' identity. However, there is a common movement language that all Iranians share. This movement style carries a natural flow that is a major part of the aesthetic identity of Iranian art and culture, and is practiced both as a social activity by Iranians with no formal dance training, and as an artistic expression by contemporary dancers and choreographers.

1 According to a study published by Behavioral Brain Research , "...emotion regulation relies on a cognitive control system involving inhibition-related prefrontal regions to dampen activation in emotion-associated structures, such as the amygdala, insula and anterior cingulate cortex." (Restoring Emotional Stability: Cortisol Effects on the Neural Network of Cognitive Emotion Regulation- Jentsch, Merz, and Wolf Volume 374, 18 November 2019, 111880).

Dance, music and food are a big part of Iranian culture. Families and friends gather often to enjoy each other's company, prepare feasts, play both traditional and modern music, sing old and new songs, and dance in traditional and contemporary ways. These events are multigenerational, and therefore the dances are passed on from one generation to the next. Iranian dance artists often choreograph dances which are founded in and stem from these family and communtity dances. This dance language embodies the aesthetics of Iranian culture in such a detailed and intricate way that learning it as a dancer who has not been raised in the culture requires some analysis and introspection.

The art of Persian dance

Persian dance technique involves layers of subtle movement coordinated in very specific ways to express emotions and mannerisms that are not common in Western culture. Systematic learning of the technique is required to achieve the necessary coordination, and understanding of cultural nuances is essential for culturally contextual meaningful expression. I also believe that in order to expand one's movement vocabulary and ways of expression, even those fully fluent in the social movement language can benefit from pedagogy and formal training.

There is no evidence of any recorded system of codified movements in Iranian dance. Nor is there any accessible archive of ancient choreographed dances and pedagogy that would be treated as an established and formal method for teaching and performing Iranian dance. There are a handful of Iranian dance artists who have developed their own formats for teaching, but most do not have a published codified system. As intuitively based as it may be for Iranians, this dance form is composed of a movement vocabulary and has the potential for codification. Dance historian Anthony Shay suggests, "The performance of this dance tradition does not derive from a formless, meaningless collection of movements, but rather forms a coherent movement system…like Persian classical music, dance is capable of being systematized, a prerequisite for the creation of an aesthetic system."[2]

AS AN ARTIST I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN CREATING NEW WORK, BUT CREATING A PEDAGOGY WAS A NEW WAY TO USE MY IMAGINATION.

I agree with Shay and have spent the greater part of three decades exploring, analyzing, and processing this movement language. I published my format, Shahrzad Technique, in my book, *The Art of Persian Dance* in 2015. A number of Iranian dance instructors inside and outside of Iran now use this book as a reference guide for teaching.

2 (Shay, *Choreophobia*, 1999, 177)

Persian dance and neuroscience

As an artist I have always been interested in creating new work, but creating a pedagogy was a new way to use my imagination. It was shortly after my book was published that I was contacted by then London-based neuroscientist Dr. Julia F. Christensen, who was working on the effects of dance on the brain. She proposed to collaborate on a dance-neuroscience project involving a movement library. Julia had worked with ballet dancers on a similar project and was interested in exploring other dance forms. I found the proposal very enticing and was excited to begin working with her and the team of researchers, some of whom were Iranian.

My part of the project began with the choreography of 120 short movement sequences, danced with a variety of emotions. These 120 sequences were later filmed with no sound/music, and my image was made into a silhouette so no facial expression could be seen. Put briefly, the experiment consisted of participants of various backgrounds watching the sequences and answering questions such as: 1) Into what category of emotion would you place each sequence? 2) How strongly is the emotion being expressed by the dancer in each sequence? and 3) How would you rate the sequences in terms of beauty?

The preparation and implementation of the experiment took many months. The analysis and resulting paper illustrates the data in several charts and diagrams and discusses the results. The paper is still under review and not yet published. This collaboration was so intriguing for all of us that we decided to continue working together on other projects.

Introducing Persian dance at the British Science Festival

We also partook in fun, thought-provoking public engagement activities in a few popular science events that triggered scientific questions, but were not formal scientific studies. One such event was The British Science Festival held in Coventry, UK in September of 2019. There, Dr. Christensen gave a lecture based on her book, *Dance Is The Best Medicine*, and I taught a Persian dance workshop titled, "Get Up and Dance." An article was published based on this event, titled *Seven Reasons Why You Should Dance*[3].

We had multiple goals for this workshop. One goal was to promote the idea that dancing – in any style – is a healthy activity physically, mentally, and emotionally. Another goal was to introduce the public to a dance form and a movement language they most likely had never seen, Persian dance, with music they had never heard.

There was an initial sense of nervousness in the group, due to unfamiliarity with the movement and music. It took a little while for the participants to get over the awkwardness of feeling clumsy as they attempted to move in a whole new way. But before long we could see them let go and allow their bodies to move in this new way. I could sense that it was liberating for them.

The workshop was designed to foster a sense of community – an integral component of Iranian social and tribal dances – which helped the participants with their initial discomfort. One thing Dr. Christensen and I both noticed was that at the beginning of the class the students stood farther away from each other, but at the end, the personal space between them had shrunk, and almost all of them had smiles on their faces. I also noticed that their bodies looked more relaxed.

Another goal of the workshop was to teach about a different culture through the embodiment of its movement language, much like we learn about a culture through its verbal language. I taught specific Iranian movement vocabulary that expresses distinct cultural nuances. And I described how certain body lines and angles allude to specific social mannerisms, so the participants could understand these subtleties in Iranian culture.

3 https://www.britishscienceassociation.org/blogs/bsa-blog/7-ways-dancing-can-improve-your-life

PHOTO BY DANA DAVIS

Introducing Persian dance at the Max Planck Institute

The most recent experiment Dr. Christensen and I collaborated on was an 8-week study conducted at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt, Germany. This experiment consisted of 16 Iranian dance classes (two classes a week) taught to German female students with little or no dance training and no familiarity with Iranian culture. The goal of the experiment was to see whether a dance class is an effective tool for transmitting cultural knowledge, as well as improving the student's physical and emotional health.

These classes were carefully designed to teach Iranian culture through Iranian dance technique, including showing some paintings and discussing common aesthetics between Iranian visual art and dance. There is a theme of curvilinear lines with dynamic but graceful brush strokes in Iranian paintings and calligraphy. Compositions often consist of circular patterns, smooth transitions between images, and distinct and dynamic juxtaposition of imagery. There are also geometric design elements in Persian architecture that carry similar visual motifs to the painting and calligraphy. The same dynamic nuances translate into Iranian musical compositions and rhythmic structures. All of these aesthetics and dynamics are reflected in the dance form.

The participants in this experiment were required to answer weekly questionnaires throughout the experiment. The data from this study is in the process of being analyzed.

The potential of dance to bridge cultural differences

Let us assume that the transmission of cultural knowledge through the movement language specific to that cutlture affects the brain. In other words, this process influences the brain's neural pathways by introducing new ways to think and move, and affects brain function by triggering certain hormones. As evidenced by the Behavioral Brain Research study I cited at the beginning of this article, we know that the brain can regulate emotions and thus social behavior. Can we therefore deduce that understanding a different culture through the embodiment of its movement language ultimately affects our social behavior and thus our relationships? If this assumption is correct, an effective tool for improving relations between people of different cultures is through their dances!

It is exciting to have scientific evidence to corroborate our intuitive understanding of the effects of dance on our emotions and behavior. But as dance artists and educators, we experience this phenomenon through our senses every day. Connections are made between people, cultural gaps are bridged, and relationships are fortified through the language of dance. For us, these sensual experiences form our reality and our truths.

Video links:
Dance Your Emotion Project Presentation:
youtu.be/zXM2NpfbS0s
MPIEA experiment- 2021:
drive.google.com/file/d/1ZpUgyKGU_D39ILXvQcfxyVM80EDOYsuc/view?usp=sharing
MPIEA website:
www.aesthetics.mpg.de/dance

SHAHRZAD KHORSANDI is an Iranian-born dancer and choreographer residing in California. She has always been passionate about dance, studied Modern Dance and Performance Art at CalArts, and holds a BA in Dance, and an MA in Creative Arts from SFSU. Shahrzad has drawn upon her experience in Iranian culture, and her formal dance training, to create a dance vocabulary and pedagogy for Iranian dance. She is the artistic director of Shahrzad Dance Company, the author of the book, *The Art of Persian Dance*, and a member of an international research team, studying the effects of dance on the brain.

PHOTO BY JASON BOWMAN

INSIDE OUT

by JASON BOWMAN

I TOOK A SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE TEST on the internet recently. The test consisted of a few dozen pictures of eyes, and alongside each were four choices to describe the emotion portrayed in the picture—surprise, pensiveness, suspicion, anger, flirtation, alertness, joy, amusement. Everything but the eyes was cropped out, so I couldn't rely on foreheads or mouths to differentiate between emotions. The eyes are the window to the soul, they say, which makes a certain kind of sense, but nevertheless, I was surprised by what happened. In trying to arrive at the correct answer, the first thing I did was mimic the pictures. It was a thoughtless instinct. Even before reading the multiple choice options, my eyes tried to take the shape of the ones I was witnessing on my screen. If I could mirror what I was seeing, I could identify the essence of the emotion, inside of myself, and that helped me to answer correctly. The implication of this is simple, but profound: I answered the questions not with my mind, but with my body.

I learned about the test in Barbara Tversky's book, The Mind in Motion, a book, I admit, I haven't finished because the first fifty pages offered so much to think about. Tversky begins with an exploration of motor resonance—it's an uncanny thing: when you watch someone move, the brain's motor neurons light up as if you were making the same movement, sometimes even triggering the associated muscles to come to life. So it's not just in the eyes; we're constantly trying on other people's gestures, with our whole body. And in turn, our bodies broadcast whatever happens within them. It's a type of dance, really. Even—especially—in conversation, we rely on a high-resolution perception of each other's physicality. We subconsciously coordinate our movements with those of our interlocutor; we alter the speed and intonation of our speech, our eye contact and hand gestures, our posture and level of energy, all in order to better connect with the people with whom we interact.

> The better we can feel inside ourselves, the clearer we can sense the state changes of the people around us, the better we relate to them.

One of the hardest truths is that we don't have access to the interiority of anyone but ourselves. We flail for decades to understand even the people closest to us, and at times language seems wholly inadequate to convey the depth of feeling in our own experience. But perhaps the greatest boon in understanding motor resonance is the way it orients us to a different quality of communication. If it's true that we perceive the states of others by feeling their gestures in our own bodies, then it stands to reason that the detail of our own personal embodiment correlates to our ability to empathize with other people. The better we can feel inside ourselves, the clearer we can sense the state changes of the people around us, the better we relate to them.

I've thought about this often within the context of my job as a yoga teacher. Yoga is, of course, a series of refined gestures undertaken with the entire body, gestures that stack on each other to ostensibly clean a diversity of the body's structures. And motor resonance is a vital part of practicing yoga in a room full of other bodies. When dozens of people synchronize, making the same shapes at the same time, it creates a shared attention that's literally mind altering. It's this that makes walking into a yoga room so different than, say, walking into a grocery store. Focus is palpable, and contagious.

I've found a natural motivation over the years to investigate what makes a yoga class good, and while a large portion of that has to do with me—my mood, my lucidity, my momentary ability to observe and react—there's also a mysterious and emergent essence that depends only on the way we exist, collectively, in the physical space. Sometimes it simply feels like we're all there together, sharing each other's space rather than bumping into each other's space. In part, this comes through proprioception, through an ability to hold awareness of the room as if it were a part of the body. I often instruct this in something like the triangle pose: imagine what it's like to wave at your friend across the way, but now instead of the gesture of waving, undertake the gesture of the triangle pose, and instead of directing it at your friend, direct it at the whole room. It's certainly abstract, maybe even imaginary, but something special happens when we succeed at expressing the poses in a gestural way. The boundary of self widens to include more; we add to and find support in each other's awakeness.

As a teacher I have a unique perspective on the unfolding of this phenomenon. I've seen thousands of people do the triangle pose in yoga rooms on several continents. Over the years my eyes have become highly sensitive to the way my words have millimeters of impact on other people's bodies, and my perception of those movements can sometimes help me speak to what's actually happening in the moment, instead of just regurgitating memorized sentences, which, honestly, I also do a lot. But if I attune to motor resonance, I can actually feel myself doing the triangle pose just by paying close attention to other people doing it, and in that way the act of teaching becomes surprisingly conversational, even though I'm just sitting there delivering a monologue.

One night I looked at a woman's pose and was able to see—feel—a vivid correlation between her neck and waist; both needed to lengthen and turn. My observation of her experience combined with an understanding of the mechanics of the position, combined with a felt familiarity in my own body. And then the best possible thing happened: I spontaneously said something I'd never said before—"if you lengthen and turn the neck, the waist will follow". It was a simple statement, but it became like a lightning bolt that surged through the room, and everyone made the same adjustment at the same time. I've used the same instruction ever since.

In classical yoga there's a fundamental axiom: the mind and body only move in relationship to each other. This is why we get hangry—angry when we're hungry. The physical state defines the mental state. The opposite is also true, and this is why we fidget around when thinking about something we don't want to think about. The mental state defines the physical state. This is especially fascinating during the few minutes at the beginning and ending of a yoga class, minutes in which, every day, I ask people to sit still. Sitting still is one of the hardest things you can do with a body. From my perch at the front of the room, I've found one thing to be true: there's never only one person who itches their face, or reaches for their water bottle, and the ones that do so are always in proximity to each other. Someone thinks about something uncomfortable, fidgets, and because of motor resonance, the people around them absorb and express the same state, and movement. Most often it's not because they have an itch or are thirsty.

...I spontaneously said something I'd never said before—"If you lengthen and turn the neck, the waist will follow." It was a simple statement, but it became like a lightning bolt that surged through the room, and everyone made the same adjustment at the same time.

While this highlights the precious fickleness of our humanity, it also opens a wholehearted opportunity to truly be there for others. As we move around physical spaces, picking up on and mirroring each other's internal state, the simplest gift we can offer each other is a sort of personal, gestural poise. With practice, we can observe agitation in others, and instead of being immediately swayed by it, hence perpetuating its spread across space, we can instead, on lucky days, maintain our own sovereign composure as a gesture to the people in our vicinity. We broadcast the peace we learn to create. This is what we mean when we talk about holding space. Gestures can be far more accurate than words, and when we learn to refine our own internal clarity, we can feel the people around us, within us—we communicate with them, without language, through our minds, through our eyes, through our bodies, and maybe that's the true measure of social intelligence.

JASON BOWMAN is a writer and yoga teacher in San Francisco. He's currently finishing an MFA through Warren Wilson College and working on a debut novel. Find him online at thewanderhome.com

by MAGDA KACZMARKSA

stories IN THE moment

Creating shared spaces of belonging for and with people living with dementia

"That which cannot be spoken can be sung. That which cannot be sung can be danced."

— OLD FRENCH SAYING

On a Thursday afternoon, a group of 17 people log into a Zoom room from across the United States. As the windows burst onto the screen, we begin to fill the space with hellos and welcomes.

"Shalom aleichem."
"Shalom" – others repeat and wave back.
(Shalom aleichem is a spoken greeting in Hebrew, meaning "peace be upon you".)
"Hello! Shalom Shalom, pretty soon you'll be home."

Barb wiggles her fingers. Her husband, Bob, sitting next to her adds his wiggling breath. Together, our fingertips and breaths ripple through the crowd.

"Bubble off" says Marv, waving his arms open and closed, making a bubble with his hands.
"Bubble off" we all repeat.
"Oh, it's a double bubble!" "A double bubble!"

Another day, Marv introduced the "hello-copter" – a swirl of air with one arm, whirring over our heads, beckoning in a "come hither" action as we say hello – at once a hello and a welcome.

We are gathering for a program called *Stories in the Moment*.

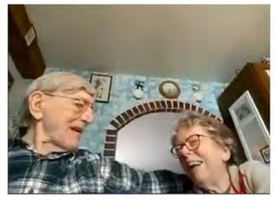
Stories in the Moment is a co-creative dance, movement, and storytelling program for and with people living with dementia. Almost everyone in the room, except for myself and 1 or 2 care partners, are living with dementia. I created *Stories in the Moment* out of a desire to extend the resource of dance as a tool for expression to communities of people living with dementia and to ally with them to support their creative voice.

I identify as a dance artist with a background in science. Due to my science background and interests, I acknowledge and am very aware of the potential therapeutic effects of the programs I facilitate for communities. But therapy is not the main point of my work. It's about amplifying other ways of knowing, listening, and speaking. Through *Stories in the Moment*, we speak not just with our words, but with our sounds, with our body positions, and with our movements. *Stories in the Moment* is inherently shaped by the people in the space – same as we co-create each of our stories together, the program has been co-created as a community.

Creative community in response to COVID-19

The space we are gathering in today to join in *Stories in the Moment*, is an online space created through the Dementia Action Alliance's Virtual Engagement program. The Dementia Action Alliance (DAA) is a non-profit organization that has been supporting and amplifying the voice of people living with dementia in the United States for 25 years. Among other actions, DAA offers peer mentorship for people newly diagnosed with dementia, support groups for people living with dementia led by people living with dementia, podcasts, resources, and an annual conference.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DAA mobilized to create a virtual engagement platform to offer access every weekday to social, creative, and spiritual engagement and connection for people living with dementia all across the US. Barb and Bob, who have been joining *Stories in the Moment* regularly share, "We found you and wow, what a difference you have made. What a difference each of the people in DAA have made for us. I just can't say it enough, it has opened up our world again."



Participants in *Stories in the Moment* comment on how much has shifted for them during the pandemic and how its impact continues to influence how they engage and interact with the world around them. "I honestly don't think I could have survived the pandemic without the online programming. Marv isn't willing to travel anymore. It's sad as it's a big change for us but he is fearful, and, frankly, getting him places is not easy. I sincerely feel that continuing online programming is essential for both partners," shares Sheila, wife and care partner to Marv, a participant in *Stories in the Moment*.

For many people living with dementia, the COVID-19 pandemic is still very much active and impacting their lives. Barb comments on her husband, Bob, who is now nine years into his journey with Alzheimer's: "He's been very weak, compared to before. Before November, we did two mile walks every day. And now it's hard for him to get from the living room to the kitchen. He has some days when he kind of just sits at the kitchen table and isn't doing much of anything. And I'll put on some music, but he'll just kind of sit there. And then it'll be time for our DAA Zoom. And he brightens up and he'll smile. And when you're doing *Stories in the Moment*, he's doing his arm things and everything is so amazing. And so yes, you have been a big help in that." She goes on to say, "DAA … through the Zooms and through the community and getting to know other people, have helped me keep [Bob] here at home where he does have the love and the affection and the freedom to do some activities when he wants to do them."

Over two years later, DAA's online engagements are still going strong. *Stories in the Moment* is one of those programs.

Stories in the Moment is grounded on the understanding that dance is a universal language. We all have stories to tell, and we all have the means to tell our stories. *Stories in the Moment* taps into the library of stories we have in our bodies that we have accumulated over a lifetime and invites us to share this movement choreography with one another. We discover, expand upon, connect and build these dance stories together, in the moment, inspired by who is in the room.

"In the moment" is a key factor. Dance is an ephemeral art form. Dementia also navigates the ephemeral. When we focus on one another in the moment and create opportunities to connect and create together, we amplify and celebrate the voices, bodies, and minds of each person who is there. And although the stories we create are not being recorded in a material way, they continue to exist in the energy and feeling of community that persists from class to class, from week to week, month to month. These individuals are a community. *"I consider them our dear friends. I mean, you're a part of our lives, and so are so many people from DAA. You're family almost to us now." – Barb and Bob*

Shared rituals facilitate grounding and belonging

We begin each *Stories in the Moment* class with our ritual Hello Body Dance, by saying hello and welcoming one another into this shared virtual space. By engaging in this way, we are setting the container for our practice. Each time we repeat this practice, we anchor ourselves into a shared space of belonging and we build, moment by moment, movement by movement, the foundation of our community.

Grounded in the individuals, in stories, in movement and in voice, all modes of communication and connection are welcome and celebrated. They inspire, give permission to and invoke the voices and expression of others. Together we weave a tapestry of connection, appreciation, and love.

"This is supposed to be for love. You should love your bluv. Love your bluv. That's it!" – Marv

Jan Bays, DAA Board Chair and Director of Program Development and Education at Jill's House Assisted Living & Memory Care in Bloomington, Indiana reflects on this ritual which grounds the group together in our shared community and opens the space for co-creation. "This is something that is very important. People feel that it is something they expect and look forward to. It makes them feel safe."

Participants from Jill's House have been joining *Stories in the Moment* from its inception. Whereas many other participants join from their individual homes, Jill's House participants join from their community room as a group. Jan reflects on how despite the difficulty of joining a program on Zoom, where I, as the facilitator, am on a large screen along with half a dozen other participants joining from their individual homes, "you notice how well everyone is participating."

The key behind *Stories in the Moment* is the community and the relationality. Rather than being delivered at or to participants, every session of *Stories in the Moment* exists because of the participants. We do everything **with** one another. Jan reflects on this: "I love the way you can get people to move. However, I think it is the personalization that makes the experience extra special. I see them light up when you speak to them individually."

"You relate to each single person in the group, even the people at Jill's house, you relate to each of those individuals. I can barely even see them. But you find a way to let them know that you are connecting with them", reflects Barb. "It's not like we're just a whole group of people and you're just staring at a whole group. You talk to us individually. And we're able to comment back and do things in relationship to what you're saying and doing. And it's just been heavenly."

Each individual deserves to be seen, heard and supported in joining a shared space. Living with a chronic disease like dementia, one that is fraught with stigma and misunderstanding, results in people feeling as if they are becoming invisible. People begin to speak on their behalf and their contributions are written off. But people living with dementia have a desire to contribute, to have purpose, and deserve to recognize that their contributions are meaningful.

Environments are invigorated by the people and actions that take place within them. We have to work together to reinforce and support the diverse ways we communicate and expand our tools of listening and speaking. *Stories in the Moment* seeks to expand and amplify these tools.

Dance belongs to everyone, but it begins with you

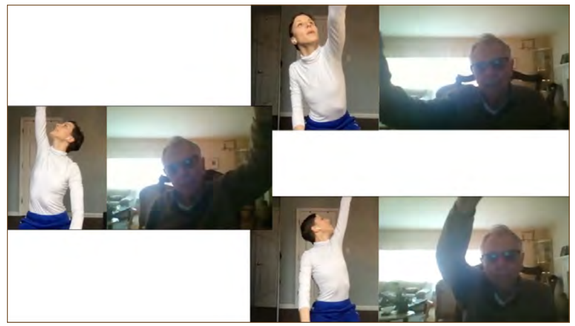
I have been allying with diverse communities to facilitate experiences of dance and movement for 18 years, with over 10 years specifically with communities of older adults and people living with chronic conditions like Parkinson's Disease and dementia. My practice is grounded in the concept of creative aging, the idea that "the golden age" of life is a time of rich experience and celebration of life, rather than a time of restriction and retreat.

Creative aging in itself is a radical act which counters ageism and ableism. It invites us to recognize the beauty in all types of bodies and amplify our experiences and voices over our life course through creative expression. Dance and storytelling helps us develop those tools and encourage spaces where the voices they empower, thrive. I see dance as a practice that doesn't just take place on stages by "trained professionals" but in our homes and our communities. A practice that is accessible – to all bodies, all ages, all abilities. A practice everybody contributes to, participates in, and receives something from.

Thanks to persistent leaders, many of whom have been my mentors either in person or by inspiration, this view of dance is becoming more widely embraced. More of us recognize that dance is something that is inherent in all of us. And it is something that belongs to us, that we have agency in. Famous American choreographer, Alvin Ailey, stated that, "I believe dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people." I believe dance and movement expression is our human right. It belongs to everyone. We deserve opportunities to explore and discover our own movement voices in places where we are seen, valued, where we feel we belong.

After we greet each other, in *Stories in the Moment*, we take some time to turn our attention to our individual bodies through a gradual tuning in and progressive warm up. Self-agency and trust are key underlying principles of a co-creative practice, but it takes time to listen to our bodies, especially as most of us don't often get enough time to do so. As a result, hearing and feeling our bodies takes more time. So, we begin by slowing down, meditatively, taking time to check into how our bodies are today before we extend our focus to one another and the group. If we wish to extend a kinesthetic awareness to others, we must first receive space to find that connection within ourselves. This allows for kinesthetic awareness, the sentient and tacit forms of our knowledge and expression, our movement awareness, to take hold and take space.

After taking time to tune in and warm up, we begin to extend our focus from individual kinesthetic approaches to a sense of a group body through a dance called Signature Moves. This approach is founded on the idea that if we trust our bodies, they naturally respond to music with movement.



We all have our "signature move" when music that we enjoy comes on. Some of us bob, some of us snap, some of us clap, some of us push back or lean away but still join in the dance and tap our toes, and some of us jump straight into the disco. Signature Moves invites us to just get moving and take turns to share our movement with one another. This is pivotal for all of us, but especially for people living with dementia. This simple act of Signature Moves begins to create a space where they are the experts, and their voices are the center of attention.

"[Bob] has lost so much control over his life. And I hate that for him. And so when we do dancing in the kitchen, we'll do movements like you do with us. And he'll start a movement and I will follow his movement. And so he's in charge. And then he'll have this big smile on his face. Because, you know, he came up with the movement, and I'm doing the movement with him."

Creating our own movement and sharing it with one another adds a safe challenge which also sets the stage for the approach we use in our co-creative storytelling, where each individual's voice is seen, heard, and felt in movement. Together, we assemble them to make our own dance stories.

Dance supports an egalitarian space nourishing dignity and value

Meaningful connection is paramount for maintaining dignity. But too often for people living with dementia, access to this basic human right is characterized by a profound paucity. Relationality is key to meaningful citizenship and people living with dementia are not exempt from the right to it nor are they immune to its benefits.

For the 50 million people living with dementia globally, this lack of meaningful connection is compounded by the detrimental effects of a progressive disease which can impact affective states, mobility and spatial relationships, and ability to communicate or follow conversations. As a result, people living with dementia inevitably experience shifts in their modes of and capacities for expression, which influence their ability to express and feel connected to the communities around them. Reportedly, persons living with dementia and their care partners often experience a reduction in size of their social networks and loss of connection with others as the disease progresses.

A core practice behind *Stories in the Moment* is the idea of interdependence. We all have a responsibility to care for one another. And that care, support, and expression can look different in various spaces. This is the power of co-creative practice. It amplifies our humanity and opens up opportunities for each of us to enter in and see how our contribution has meaning.

As public health and ethics researcher Pia Kontos writes: "In the context of cognitive impairment, dance takes on even greater significance given that corporeality becomes the primary means of engaging with the world and with others. Dance provides a unique medium for non-verbal communication, affect and reciprocal engagement which profoundly enables the relational citizenship of persons living with dementia."[1]

This underlines the demand for programs that engage with people living with dementia as opposed to only delivering programs at or to them. As highlighted by Dr. Gill Livingston in the pivotal 2017 Lancet Commission article, "Engaging in meaningful and pleasurable activities is hypothesized to improve health and wellbeing". The benefits of these social engagements include "reconnecting individuals to their physical and social environment, supporting self-esteem, building neural connections through complex interactions and promoting a sense of role continuity, purpose, or personhood, self-identity, and meaning."[2]

This perspective has powerful ramifications for the challenges we face as a society around how we view people living with dementia and aging in the United States. We are in desperate need of rewriting social narratives to person-centered systems, which view people not through the metric of what they can produce, but who they are, uniquely and holistically. If we shift the way we attribute value to actions and to individuals, we can go a long way to extending the collective feelings of belonging and community. Through *Stories in the Moment*, I am inviting us to see value in the voices of these individuals and communities who are experts in their lived experience.

A care partner and wife of one of the *Stories in the Moment* participants reflects on this, "What you do and your attitude and acceptance is invaluable. Most of the participants are extremely well educated and many held important positions. Sadly, they feel their losses every bit as much as their partners do. Since they can still think they can still appreciate the arts, music, dance, paintings and sculpture....the arts enrich their days, dementia or not." In our conversations, she shares how joining in *Stories in the Moment*, her husband, Marv, feels engaged and that his unique voice matters. "He adores you. He loves to make jokes, even though some of them miss the mark. And he feels valued, which is super important to him." In fact, Marv's participation and jokes, often in the forms of brilliant puns or poems, contribute to the atmosphere of each class, mirroring and amplifying the themes we explore. They highlight how one individual's words join with another's movements or sounds to collectively create a multi-sensory dance story, which would be merely two dimensional with one voice.

A theme and variation – group improvisation and co-creation of a dance story

Each class of *Stories in the Moment* is centered around a theme that guides our creative explorations and drives our collective storytelling. Recently, one of our themes was Sports.

"*We can be par-ticular*" (Marv on the theme of sports.)

We begin this exploration by seeding ideas inspired by some form of multimedia. Sometimes these are videos compiled around movements and ideas that can guide our exploration. Other times, these seeds are inspired by images that invite deeper conversation in movement, sound and words.

Inspired by these media, we explore these ideas in more depth. During our exploration of Sports, I began by guiding us in a discussion of three sports that use a ball: baseball, bowling and basketball.

Together we explored the movements we make when we play baseball – setting up to bat, hitting the ball, winding up and releasing the ball during a pitch, diving to catch

the ball. Then we explored the movement language of basketball – dribbling the ball, aiming and shooting the ball in the basket.

Phil, one of the participants at Jill's House, offered to share the proper form and process of bowling – how to hold the ball, set up and release the ball which either rolls to strike the pins down or rolls into the gutter. "And then you sit down in disappointment."

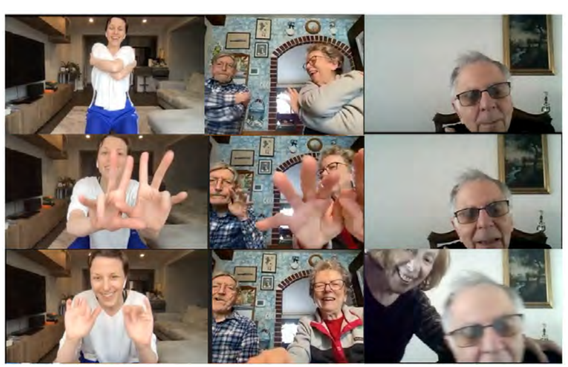
All of these movements connect to make our first dance story.

Oftentimes, other stories will appear during this discussion. We learn that one participant grew up less than a mile away from Yankee Stadium. Another participant was a pitcher in his youth. And another participant played baseball in her front yard with all the neighborhood kids when she was a child in Tucson, Arizona.

Our exploration of Sports at the Queens Community House in Forest Hills brought in some unexpected ideas. Our dance story included every imaginable tennis swing – the "high throw and swing", the "side to side", the gentle "bounce" and the "SLAM!"; a refreshing dive into the swimming pool– or a lake – "I prefer fresh water," one participant stated – with free-style and breast and back strokes; and finished with a surprising foray into fencing, where in the manner of Zorro, we signed the initials of every participant in the space around us.

Each time we connect, we assemble and perform our dance story together. A 2-3 minute moment in time. The focus in *Stories in the Moment* is on the shared process and the experience rather than the end product. There is no single author – this story was created in unity with shared ownership – and it is unique to this moment. The same group, another day would make another dance story. It is ephemeral and like all dance, lives in the moment.

Barb, a lifelong educator, reflects on the co-creative dance and storytelling experience in *Stories in the Moment*: "… The whole community together creating something more than 100%. The learners are totally involved in the learning process. But that's what teaching is all about – a facilitator, not somebody who lectures at you."



We finish each class with once again returning to our bodies and taking a moment for gratitude for ourselves, for one another and for the creativity and stories that we shared with one another. Before we part ways, we complete the ritual of a shared thank you and goodbye.

Disappearing dementia

At a recent event of *Stories in the Moment* in partnership with the Mindful Connections program at The Rubin Museum of Art, an in-person program for people living with dementia and their care partners, we were exploring the Mandala Lab, an interactive exhibit designed for socio-emotional learning. This session, we were exploring the Gong Orchestra quadrant of the exhibit: multiple metal gongs suspended over a pool of water inviting us to explore channeling anger and releasing it, transforming it into mirror-like wisdom. Together with museum docents, experts in Himalayan art and Buddhist practices, we explored these concepts in discussion and in embodied experiences.

Two younger visitors joined our group of 6 – three people with dementia and three care partners. We shared stories of when we were angry, created movement stories to reflect them, and joined together in collectively transforming them in co-created movements of release, reflection, rippling – waves, gurgles, ebbs and flows. It was a beautiful, shared moment of intergenerational mirror-like wisdom – each of us reflecting the best of one another, together.

Later as we were leaving, we discovered that the younger participants who had joined us, were not aware that they were joining a program for people living with dementia. They shared how fortunate they felt for having joined.

Dear reader, can you imagine if more people could learn about new meaningful content **together** with people living with dementia? I think we'd go a long way in releasing harmful narratives and stigmas. We can learn a lot from this community and from these individuals. As one of the participants stated at the end of our DAA *Stories in the Moment* class: **"All along we can make it. All of us together."**

MAGDA KACZMARSKA is a dancer, creative aging teaching artist and Atlantic Fellow for Equity in Brain Health. Magda received her MFA in Dance Performance & Choreography and BS in Biochemistry & Molecular Biophysics from the University of Arizona. She founded DanceStream Projects, a community arts and health organization, with a mission to spark brain health and build creative community through dance and movement. Magda created *Stories in the Moment,* which combines dance, movement and storytelling, out of a desire to ally with and amplify the creative voices of people living with dementia. magdakaczmarska.com.

References:

1. Kontos P, Grigorovich A. Integrating Citizenship, Embodiment, and Relationality: Towards a Reconceptualization of Dance and Dementia in Long-Term Care. J Law Med Ethics. Sept 2018;46(3):717-723.
2. Livingston G, Sommerlad A, Orgeta V, Costafreda SG, Huntley J, Ames D, Ballard C, Banerjee S, Burns A, Cohen-Mansfield J, Cooper C, Fox N, Gitlin LN, Howard R, Kales HC, Larson EB, Ritchie K, Rockwood K, Sampson EL, Samus Q, Schneider LS, Selbæk G, Teri L, Mukadam N. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care. Lancet. Dec 2017 ;390(10113):2673-2734.

It’s–Still–Hard to Say

UNWRITTEN by Joyce Calvert[1]

1 I invited writer and dementia caregiver Joyce Calvert to follow up on our previous article, “It’s Hard to Say.” It was written last spring when Joyce felt like she was drowning in caregiving for her wife Jane, who is living with Alzheimer’s disease. After two years of a dementia-centric pandemic, Joyce made the hard decision to move Jane into residential care. Earlier this month Jane moved out of the home they shared. Joyce was finally coming up for air. But after a few nights at the care facility Joyce found out that Jane was being manhandled into bed. Jane is back home, safe. Joyce called to tell me she could no longer write the essay and agreed to me footnoting this unwritten space. “The caregiver sinkhole leaves a blank page. And the barren expanse is filled with the echoes of lost creativity and the richness of life,” she told me. A prayer for Joyce and Jane. This happens to dementia caregivers all the time: a plan is upset; something doesn’t happen because of the unpredictable, relentless nature of caregiving. What if we thought of those first nights in memory care as sacred? Would we still push people to the brink trying to keep their loved ones at home as long as possible? May this blank page bring visibility to an elder care system that inadequately educates, compensates and supports professional and family caregivers. That all too often prioritizes convenience over compassion, efficiency over dignity. Let’s rewrite the narrative starting here.

PHOTOS BY ALEX KORNHUBER

WEAVING WISDOM IN THE ANDES

Documentary explores the relationship between an ancient craft and brain health

BY ROWENA RICHIE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Weaving in the Andes is a kind of dance.

From the finger choreography of belt weaving, to the sophisticated mechanics of building a loom, textile traditions express the importance of the villagers' culture while exercising their creativity and concentration. Weaving is a full-bodied experience. It is a community choreography that capitalizes on strong bonds between generations and connections with nature.

In this article, (first published in Global Brain Health Perspectives), I discuss a video documentary I co-created about weaving in Andean villages. I explore the links between this ancient practice and brain health, and discuss the way weaving in the Peruvian mountains is at risk of dying out. The forces of poverty and modernization have been pushing the next generation of weavers into cities. Just as the grind of eking out a living and the cost of living in the Bay Area has been pushing dancers out.

My interest in weaving is an extension of my work in the creative aging arena. I'm a senior fellow at the Global Brain Health Institute, a movement and self-expression facilitator for older people and people living with dementia, and a co-producer of Artists & Elders. A common thread in my work is curiosity about how the arts can support wellbeing across lifecourse.

Dotted with sheep and the ruins of ancient Incan civilization, our short film *Wisdom Weavers* revolves around the practice of weaving in rural communities in the Peruvian Andes. This project focuses on an art form that is still part of the fabric of daily life in these remote areas–at once integral for its utilitarian function and a central part of people's aesthetic.

Wisdom Weavers began as a collaboration between a Peruvian photographer, Alex Kornhuber; a neurologist who grew up in rural Peru, Maritza Pintado Caipa; and myself, an interdisciplinary artist in San Francisco, California. We met as Atlantic Fellows for Equity in Brain Health at the Global Brain Health Institute in 2018. Maritza acted as our health expert and cultural consultant. Alex was our photographer, community liaison and local historian. Johnny Miller, photojournalist and Atlantic Fellow for Social and Economic Equity, joined us as lead videographer. We wanted to document the process of weaving and what it represents. We could see that it has loads of cultural value, but could we see connections between weaving and brain health?

To get at the question about weaving's connection to brain health, we used a combination of interviews and observations. We spent a week driving from community to community in the Urubamba Valley, bringing bags of specialty goods as offerings, and gathered documentary, interview and drone footage.

To be clear, this wasn't a formal investigation but a field study. One observation that we made repeatedly: multitasking while spinning wool on a spindle is second nature to Andean villagers. Spinning while talking, walking, or shepherding livestock appeared to be a routine task for experienced weavers.

We were curious about this spinning habit and other aspects of weaving: How much concentration is needed? How long does it take you to complete a geometric-patterned cloth six meters long? Do you plan ahead or design as you go? We heard from one veteran weaver that when you first start a weaving project, it requires "total silencio," but once the pattern is established you get into a flow. Patterns are memorized. A weaver may have more than one hundred patterns stored in their memory. We also learned that weavers improvise, adding personal touches. For instance, the size of a frog's eyes or the direction of a parrot's beak can reflect an individual style.

The physical demands of weaving require agility, dexterity, adaptability, and strength. The weaving process encompasses raising sheep, shearing, washing the wool, spinning it into yarn, dying the yarn from homegrown plants, building the loom and weaving "from the waist" – a portable practice of anchoring one end of the yarn to your body and weaving from the waist out. The people we engaged with are very hardworking, very resilient. And take a lot of pride in their work.

But weaving for hours on end and often earning very little income from it may amount to a level of adversity that is likely bad for brain health. One man told us about how hard weaving is on his body. His eyes are tired. His back hurts. And no one is buying. Some indigenous youth have decided there are better ways to live. They don't wear the traditional dress and are looking for opportunities to go to university, move out of the community and into cities where they can earn more money at desk jobs. Stress, income, education, occupation, and other social determinants all affect brain health.

Our main intent was to capture the possible connections between an ongoing creative practice and healthy aging in these communities. Given this focus, Wisdom Weavers sidesteps a number of other brain health matters, such as the lack of access to health and mental health services in rural Peru. These inequities need to be considered when exploring weaving's relationship to brain health.

In the end we can't definitively claim weaving helps or hurts brain health. But the weavings spoke for themselves, expressing the weavers' strong family ties and connection to nature – known assets for good brain health. "I especially loved that water, air, and sun are in the weavings as beings – equals with the tigers, birds, and flowers," friend and Atlantic Fellow Dana Walrath wrote after watching *Wisdom Weavers*.

I am reminded of an epiphany of writer Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book Braiding Sweetgrass. She realized how a reciprocal, caring relationship between humans and the earth allows not just humans but also the earth to survive and thrive. The wisdom in that is clear as day.

ROWENA RICHIE is a San Francisco-based dancer, writer, movement facilitator, Senior Atlantic Fellow for Equity in Brain Health and member of the For You performance group. *Wisdom Weavers* is her second video collaboration with Alex Kornhuber. Their first video, Gertrude and Virginia in San Francisco, features longtime Bay Area dancer Virginia Matthews.

GRAVITATING TOWARDS ELDERS THROUGH SOMATIC EDUCATION

BY DIANA LARA

I LIVED

my first three years of life in Tegucigalpa, Honduras with my maternal grandmother. She raised my sister and I while my parents lived in another city raising my other three siblings. Parenting of grandchildren is one of the many situations older adults face. It demands multiple skills and staying on top of their physical and mental health. Access to community resources and support is more needed than ever, and some seniors are lucky to find that at On Lok 30th Street Senior Center.

I am also lucky to work there because I get to lead movement and somatic classes for older adults from underserved communities. The center was created 43 years ago by a group of Nicaraguan seniors in the Mission District (225 30th Street) in San Francisco. In 1995 30th Street became part of On Lok, a full-service healthcare program. The center serves around 7000 older adults, and offers meals, informational resources, activities, and movement classes to a vibrant, racially and culturally diverse community.

Incorporating somatics into the senior center

On Lok 30th Street Senior Center offers a variety of movement programs:

- A multi-component exercise drop-in class from Monday to Friday, 10:00-11:00 am. This class has been offered since 2007 at multiple sites in San Francisco, and it is focused on cardio-respiratory endurance, muscle strengthening, balance, and flexibility.
- A 12-week fall prevention program, to help reduce fall risk among older adults.
- A 10-week tai chi for arthritis program that we started offering last year. The program is based on tai chi Sun style. It is an evidence-based program created by the Tai Chi for Health Institute.
- And a new 10-week somatic movement for spine mobility and posture program that I designed and I am teaching and evaluating at this time.

In March 2020, we moved our programs to an online format to comply with the mandated shelter-in-place. We were happily surprised by how our participants continued attending the movement classes and programs in the new online format.

During the last two years we have expanded the movement offerings by adding approaches to movement that emphasize breathing, alignment, and sensory awareness. As a registered somatic movement educator with a certification in developmental movement from The School of Body-Mind Centering®, I noticed that some participants were putting a lot of emphasis on developing leg and arm strength and mobility, but very low attention to the alignment, posture, and movement of their torso. I wanted to fill that gap by offering the somatic movement program with emphasis on the movement of the spine and posture. I was motivated to launch this program in order to bring somatic education to older adults who have not been exposed to it and/or face barriers to access it.

Why somatics matter

Research shows that we lose spine mobility as we age, and this impacts activities of daily living such as sitting to standing, getting in and out of the car, climbing stairs, lifting objects and driving, among others[1]. Also, the lack of spine, shoulder, and hip flexibility impairs posture and balance, increasing risk of falling.[2] Although the aging process reduces mobility, somatic education brings awareness of posture and maladaptive movement patterns and therefore leads to a more functional and expressive body.

1 Araújo, C. G. S. D. (2008). Flexibility assessment: normative values for flexitest from 5 to 91 years of age. Arquivos brasileiros de cardiologia, 90, 280-287.

2 Bergström, G., Aniansson, A., Bjelle, A., Grimby, G., Lundgren-Lindquist, B., & Svanborg, A. (1985). Functional consequences of joint impairment at age 79. *Scandinavian journal of rehabilitation medicine*.

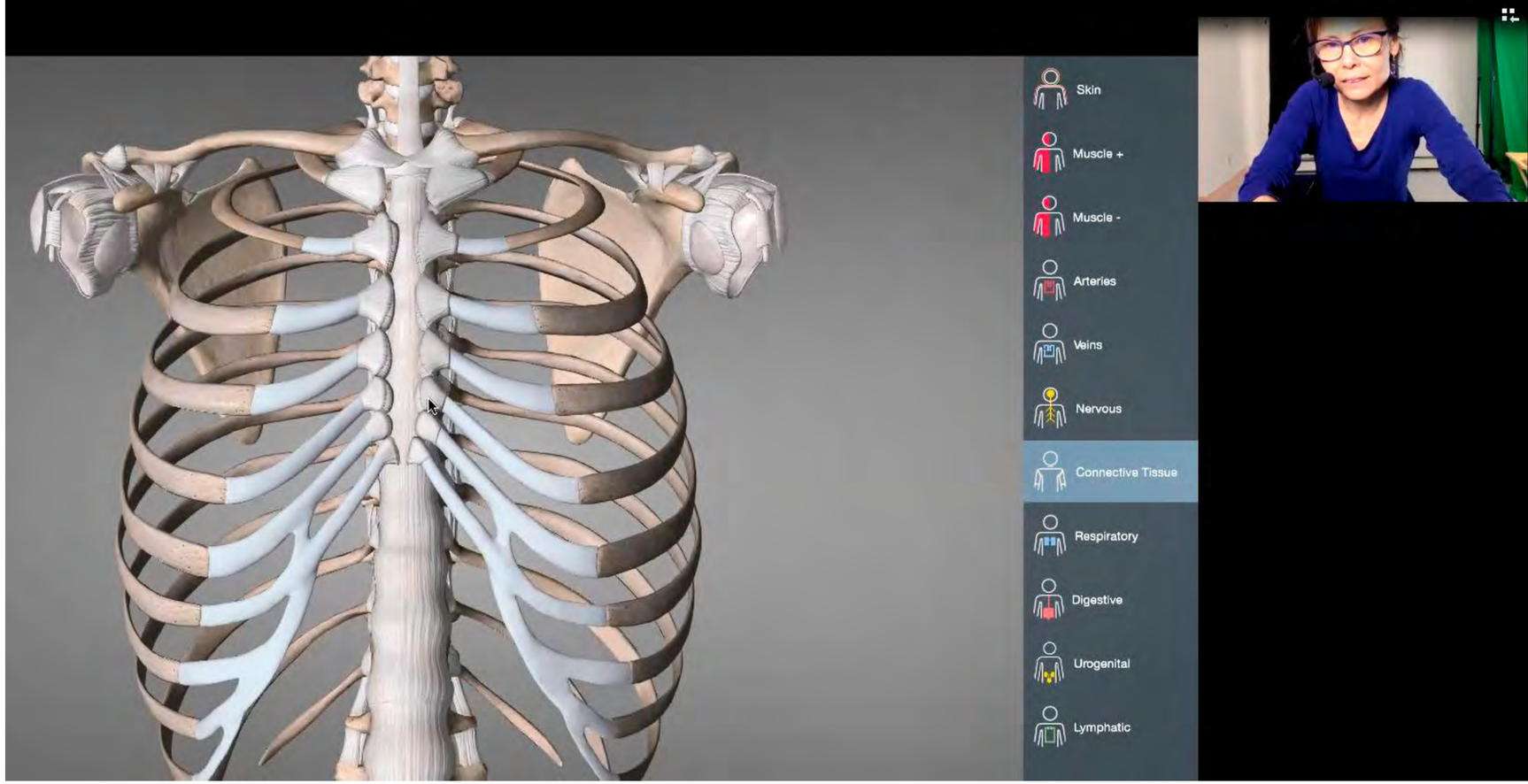


PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA LARA

Soma was defined by Thomas Hanna in the 1960s as the living body that perceives from within by first-person perception, and regulates itself in relationship with the physical and social environment.[3] There are many somatic education methods that have been developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century. One of them is Body-Mind Centering® (BMC).

BMC uses guided imagery based on anatomical and physiological properties of the body systems: skeleton, ligaments, muscles, fascia, fat, skin, organs, endocrine glands, nerves, and fluids[4]. The information is delivered by different channels including a) visual images such as drawings, anatomical software, and models, b) auditory information through guided journeys, sounds and music, and c) self-touch or touch by another person using hands or props such as balls, bands, fabrics.[5] The information is processed and/or expressed by the participant in stillness, movement, breath patterns, vocal sounds, and self-touch or touch to other participants. Some practitioners include other types of processing and expression such as writing or drawing.

Filling the somatics gap

There are some exercise programs for seniors that specifically target spine mobility delivered by physical therapists in clinics and hospitals. But there are no group programs offered in San Francisco at the community level that target spine mobility and posture for seniors based on somatic techniques.

I started offering the somatic movement program during the summer of 2020 when we transitioned all our programs to an online format. I had already designed the curriculum to offer in person. At the beginning I was hesitant to offer the program online. I thought it would be too difficult to foster body awareness and repatterning while you are watching a screen or listening to the words of an instructor who is not in the same room.

On the other hand, the pandemic provided an opportunity for us movement facilitators to reach out to older adults who have transportation or other logistical barriers to come to the center. Plus, I was eager

3 Hanna, T. (1986). What is somatics? Somatics: Magazine-journal of the bodily arts and sciences, 5(4), 4-8.

4 Cohen, B. B., Nelson, L., & Smith, N. S. (1993). Sensing, feeling, and action: The experiential anatomy of Body-Mind Centering®. Contact Editions.

5 Caetano, P. D. L. (2015). For an Aesthetics of Sensations: intense body of Bartenieff Fundamentals and Body-Mind Centering. Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença, 5, 206-232.

to share the BMC-based curriculum that I had developed. So, I decided to launch the Somatic Movement for Spine Mobility and Posture online pilot program, with the support of On Lok 30th Street Senior Center.

Multiple components of BMC practice could impact spinal mobility such as developmental patterns. For example, one of these patterns is the spinal yield-push and spinal reach initiated from the head and from the coccyx. The visualization, embodiment, and practice of the spinal pattern, creates a sensation of elongation and strength in the spine. Moreover, BMC brings attention to the vertebras of the spine as well as other tissues in proximity with the bones, such as organs, vertebral discs, ligaments, and the spinal cord. Metaphorical and anatomical images, and awareness of different types of tissues, could facilitate mobility of the spine in the three planes of motion.

BMC exercises conducted slowly and with attention to sensory information could provide the necessary body awareness to repattern maladaptive movements that lead to spine rigidity, pain, and reinforce bad posture. Moreover, slow movement could improve the activation of Type I fiber muscles, or "slow twitch" muscles, that are associated with maintaining posture.

Positive feedback

I offered two pilot programs, one in the summer of 2020, and another in the winter of 2021. Each of them followed the same curriculum and had a duration of six weeks. I was very surprised by the number of seniors desiring to register for the program. I had an average of 36 participants in each of the 12 classes. I invited participants to share their opinions at the end of each program. Here is one of their testimonials:

> *"This is my first experience in somatic movement… It is educational in understanding the anatomy and spinal structure and the engagement of the body and mind as I move through the motion. It is also relaxing."*

For me, it was very rewarding to share this information with people who have never been exposed to somatics and who were interested in learning more about how to be aware of their posture and movement. Participants wanted to talk about their experiences with somatics and their self-discoveries through explorations. Giving them the space and time to reflect on it was necessary and important.

Benefits of moving online

And guess what…despite my reservations I discovered some positive aspects of teaching somatics online.

First, it creates a private environment for participants to follow their somatic explorations. By allowing them to be more focused on internal motivation rather than external motivations, you discourage competing or comparing their abilities with others. Internal motivation is more beneficial to experience somatics, and the online format might provide support for it.

Second, the online format allowed me to share my screen and show tridimensional anatomy images using the Essential Anatomy app, as well as the spine model. These support materials were one of the features that participants liked most about the class.

Third, the online format might allow frail or house-bound older people to participate in somatics. This population is more likely to be interested in somatics than in more vigorous exercise classes.

At this time, I am offering a 10-week online program at the 30th Street Senior Center. I am delighted to see the participants' engagement with the material and their willingness to follow somatic explorations, reflect, and share their experience. My gravitation towards seniors, rooted in my grandmother raising me, inspires me to create more opportunities for seniors to practice somatics. I hope to obtain more funding and motivate other somatic educators and dancers to lead older people in transformative experiences and healing processes through movement.

DIANA LARA is a professional dancer and a registered somatic movement educator. She graduated from the choreography program of the Center for Research and Choreography at the Mexican National Institute of Fine Arts and from the Somatic Research and Participatory Arts program at Moving-on-Center in Oakland. In 2011, she graduated from the Body-Mind Centering® certification program on Developmental Movement. Diana has taught dance and somatic classes for 25 years in North and Central America, to older adults, professional dancers, and women recovering from domestic violence and trauma. Currently, Diana teaches at On Lok 30th Street Senior Center.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA LARA

RECONNECTING WITH YOUR BODY

‘STATUE OF STRENGTH’ AND OTHER TRAUMA-INFORMED TOOLS EMPOWER REFUGEES

BY MARIANNA FIOTAKI AND GABRIELLA BRENT

WE ARE BORN TO MOVE. Every heartbeat and every breath we take from the moment we enter the world activates and settles our bodies. In trauma-informed practice, including somatic body work and dance and movement therapy, we learn how to awaken our bodies and emotions when they've become shut down, and how to settle our system when it has become overwhelmed. We're born to move, but how we move is dependent on us as individuals and our circumstances.

War is dislocating

Amna is an organization dedicated to supporting the psychosocial wellbeing of refugees and other displaced communities. Our story began in 2016 on the border of Greece and North Macedonia where thousands of refugees had become stranded. We set up a tent and started providing therapeutic group sessions for men, women and children who experienced violence, displacement and torture. As refugees continued to arrive, we grew to meet the need of displaced communities in Greece. We worked in camps and community centres with refugees and psychosocial experts to develop our current programming – nonclinical community-based interventions that help people who have experienced violence and forced displacement feel safer again.

100 million people are forcibly displaced around the world[1], a new and grim record. Those who are forcibly displaced are more likely to suffer from PTSD, depression and anxiety symptoms.[2] Throughout their displacement and journeys to safety, refugees are repeatedly traumatised and retraumatised. The compounding layers of stress experienced through living in a war zone, having to make the decision to leave your home, country and loved ones, unknown perilous journeys and hostile experiences in transit and host countries, can result in trauma responses that leave refugees feeling unsafe in their own bodies.

Trauma can impact our ability to cope with daily life even when in a relatively safe environment. This is because, unless it's released, trauma can continue to live on in our bodies following a traumatic event, causing a part of us to remain in the past, reliving fear and our trauma response. Without the right support, refugees can live with unprocessed trauma throughout their lives. Joy, playfulness, creativity and confidence can become casualties to trauma. People may feel an injured version of themselves even after they've arrived in a place of relative safety. We saw this clearly through the stories told in our SADA storytelling project – the emotional impact of displacement is huge and so often misunderstood.

Reconnecting and releasing through movement

At Amna, dance, movement and working with rhythm are some of the psychosocial tools we use, and train others to use, to promote healing from trauma. Marianna is a freelance Dance Movement Therapist and former Amna facilitator and Gabriella is Head of Programmes at Amna. Together, we've seen the dislocating impact that war and displacement can have on people's bodies. Many of the communities we've worked with describe pains in their bodies, a somatisation of the grief and loss they continue to experience. The field of epi-genetics research shows that our memories and experiences are stored in every cell of our body and can be passed across generations.

Movement practices have long been recommended to help deal with psychological challenges. Exercise can release serotonin, a mood 'stabiliser' or so-called 'happy chemical'. Moving in communities – whether dancing, drumming, or group bonding activities involving movement in a collective – are practices that promote expression, connection, release and often processing. In many parts of the world, movement, music and rhythm are a part of celebration and grief rituals in births, weddings and funerals.

Movement therapy can help people connect to, make sense of, and express memories and experiences held in their bodies, helping the body release what is no longer useful. It can help us regain a sense of control, feel seen and recognised, relax, have fun, play and practice ways to ground ourselves when we feel overwhelmed or triggered. All of these experiences can help the mind and body to heal.

While movement of all forms can help people, Dance Movement Therapy is a specific form of movement therapy that is often used at Amna. We work with groups including teenagers, women, men and children, for short or long term interventions, creating a safe space where people can communicate, express themselves and heal. The precise tools and ways practices are engaged with is unique in response to the group's needs, abilities and desires, and how they shape the process and respond to the medium. Dance Movement Therapy is a practice that is built around each participant/client and/or group, with respect to each person's individuality and the collective.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMNA

1 https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/5/628a389e4/unhcr-ukraine-other-conflicts-push-forcibly-displaced-total-100-million.html

2 https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement

Building trust through shared power

Dance Movement Therapy has no end goal in terms of learning steps or improving technique. It is very much guided by the group with a big focus on building trust and a safe environment. A therapeutic contract and guiding rules for the space are agreed on from the beginning by the whole group, including the therapist. These are not static but change as the group evolves. There is no classic hierarchy of the teacher and their students, everyone is equal including the therapist. Power dynamics are a particularly important aspect of Amna's identity-informed approach which underpins all our work.

All sessions begin with a check in to see what energy, feelings and emotions participants are bringing to the space. It can be verbal or use movement as well. Then, depending on the responses, the therapist invites engagement through movement activities. Group members always have a choice about how and if they participate. The group also has freedom to use the space with little intervention from the therapist and are invited to improvise, play, dance, move together and explore how and what they need, being led by their bodies. The sessions close with a check out, an opportunity to reflect and give meaning to what happened during the session, verbally, through art or through movement again. The therapist is there to support without making their own interpretations or judgements.

Recovering confidence and reshaping lives

Dance Movement Therapy can be a powerful tool for healing. Our bodies are affected by our experiences even if we are not conscious of it. In our experiences running Dance Movement Therapy groups, we've seen groups have moments of intense expression emotionally, mentally and physically as they process emotions that were hidden deep inside themselves. When these experiences can be safely held by the group with the support of the therapist, group members often leave the session feeling a sense of release, reporting feeling lighter emotionally and physically, with more clarity of mind and openness in their bodies.

In one session we used movement to explore strength and vulnerability. Together we connected with each part of our body to understand what it means to be strong in our legs, our feet, our hands and so on. We ended in a pose that we called our 'statue of strength'. It was a breakthrough session for one of our group members who began to find clarity in the different meanings of strength and the expectations that she had attached to strength. She shared that she felt she had lost her confidence and through this exercise was able to start reconnecting with her body and mind. We continued working with her to explore how to incorporate this in her everyday life, through 'confident' poses and other ways she can bring this sensation into her body.

Everything in life is movement. Our bodies are always moving, even when we think we are still, our organs and breath continue moving and keep us alive. We're born to move but how and where is dependent on each person and community. That's why Dance Movement Therapy must also be used with respect to the uniqueness of each person's pace, particular needs and circumstances. Amna means "safe and caring" in Arabic. We believe, when worked with in a safe and caring, trauma-sensitive and identity-informed way, the impact of Dance Movement Therapy can be life-changing.

GABRIELLA BRENT is Amna's Head of Programmes and a transpersonal counsellor and psychotherapist. She oversees Amna's training and capacity strengthening programmes; Baytna, Dinami, therapeutic work with men and women and Amna's humanitarian wellbeing capacity-building work - providing training and wellbeing support to other humanitarian organisations working with refugees. Before working with Amna, Gabriella worked across the UK piloting and implementing more humane and trauma-informed models of care.

MARIANNA FIOTAKI is a freelance Dance and Movement Therapist. She runs psychosocial and healing groups for youth and women and is passionate about developing psychosocial support spaces in respectful, equitable contexts, where the community is the central agent and holds the power. She has worked with groups at risk of social exclusion in various settings, from daycare centres to hospitals. Marianna is currently studying Existential Psychotherapy and has a Master´s degree in Dance Movement Therapy.

CRACKED OPEN

REFLECTIONS ON MOVING THE BODY-BRAIN, MOVING THE BRAIN-BODY —A DANCED LECTURE

BY FEARGHUS Ó CONCHÚIR AND PAUL MODJADJI

PHOTO BY NICK BILLINGTON

FOR THE INAUGURAL Creative Brain Week at Trinity College Dublin, curator Dominic Campbell introduced me to choreographer, activist and scholar Paul Modjadji. Typical of Dominic's sensitive and inspired relationship building, he used the structures of Creative Brain Week and its focus on creativity and brain science as a way to introduce two dance artists that he suspected might have something in common. This article provides a brief account of the encounter between Paul and me, Fearghus Ó Conchúir. The relationship is still fresh but its impact, as we hope this article conveys, is nonetheless significant enough to want to communicate.

Prompted by Dominic's creative matchmaking, Paul and I had a conversation via Zoom that allowed us to speak about our dance-making as a way of engaging with and transforming difficult legacies that are invariably written on and encoded in our bodies. This is not to think of our bodies as material without agency, merely molded by external "forces" (as misconceptions of Foucault might suggest).[1] A combination of Foucault, Butler and Barad helps us to recognise embodiment as material and discursive.[2] Dance is a form of knowledge that understands and practices the making of individual and collective bodies. To the extent that it challenges or re-choreographs the pathways of a status quo or proposes alternatives to hegemonic formations of individual and collective bodies, dance is a political activity.

Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination.[3]

Within that context I shared with Paul how I have worked with dancers to take on and shift particular corporeal legacies in Ireland, a culture shaped by colonialism, Catholicism and nationalism as well as political and economic neo-liberalism and globalisation. When Dominic invited us to present a session in Creative Brain Week based on these initial conversations, I suggested that we exchange choreography from our archives and see how it might resonate and be rearticulated in our differently acculturated, trained and racialised bodies – bodies that nonetheless could acknowledge in one another a queer kinship. We called our session *Moving the Body-Brain, Moving the Brain-Body – a danced lecture*.

This approach of asking someone else to take on, or embody a troubling legacy was a strategy I have recognised in operation in my own work. I've used it as a way of externalising, examining and ultimately altering through transmission something that I would have struggled to gain perspective on exclusively from an individual subject position. Paul agreed to the offer, perhaps with questions, as his reflections below detail, that he withheld in a spirit of generosity. Our intention was to exchange choreographies, however my testing positive for Covid the week before the event meant I couldn't attend in person. Consequently we focused on Paul's embodying of my work: that's not to say that there wasn't an exchange in the process. To witness Paul take on and transform a solo that was made through me was already to learn about the structures in my body that produced the work, and it revealed potential in the movement that wasn't evident to me before. Exchange doesn't necessarily require the same or even similar input to be mutually rewarding.

The work I offered him was a solo from a dance film commissioned for national television in Ireland in 2010. The work is called *Mo Mhórchoir Féin: A Prayer*. The Irish language title (I grew up in an Irish-speaking area) refers to the Confiteor, a prayer in the Catholic mass which has the words: 'Trí mo choir féin, trí mo choir féin, trí mo mhórchoir féin', 'Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.' The lines in the prayer are traditionally accompanied by the gesture of beating one's chest in confession of sin, though the choreography queers the gesture with ripples through the spine that connects the ground to a free pelvis and the weight of my elbow as it beats against my ribcage, mixing mortification and pleasure.

As someone who started my dance-training at the age of 23 – relatively late – I am aware that my body was nonetheless trained. One of the most powerful agents of that training was the Catholic Church where as a member of the congregation and as an altar boy, I learnt an aesthetics of worship and a choreography of when to sit, stand, and how to move with decorous elegance from place to place with just the right bowing of the head – an arrangement no less precise, if less articulated, than the conventions of épaulement in classical ballet.

The film was shot in a Catholic church in Dublin chosen because it resembled the kind of country churches familiar from my childhood. I knew that activating my personal stake in this work would contribute to its authenticity and to its actual rather than represented transformation of legacy. And so I dance between the sanctuary and the pews, while an altar boy prepares to leave after Mass. The altar boy and I are watched by an older woman. The context of creation was also the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan and Murphy Reports into abuse perpetrated, concealed and consequently facilitated in Catholic institutions. I was aware that much had been written and spoken about in relation to this abuse and that words were important after generations of disabling silence. But I was also aware that much of this abuse was perpetrated and suffered bodily and that the full expression of embodiment had not been included in the responses to that abuse.

Though I had not experienced abuse myself, I knew that my body had been shaped by the religious culture that allowed abuse to happen. As a gay man, I might have readily identified myself as a victim of religious exclusion in a state where the legacies of Catholicism and colonialism conspired to keep homosexuality criminalised until 1993. Yet, I felt it was also important to acknowledge my complicity in carrying and thereby carrying on the influences of a Catholic upbringing that I inevitably perpetuate.

In making *Mo Mhórchoir Féin*, I also wanted to challenge the easy conception of Catholicism as anti-corporeal. The very fact of the church's perennial anxiety about controlling bodies signals the persistence of bodies in spilling beyond the strictures that nonetheless help constitute them. For the more theologically-minded, the church's historical emphasis on the mortification of the flesh is also in tension with the religion's central articles of faith that insist on the incarnation – making flesh – of God in the human form of Jesus: no birth, no bodily suffering on the cross to expiate the sins of humanity, no death, then no redemption and no Catholicism. On a practical level, often forgotten is that the figure of an unclothed man, the crucified Jesus, dominates the church space. So when the commissioners queried my choice to wear only underwear in the film as potentially provocative, I could draw attention to the sanctioned precedent on the cross. While that presiding body is still, mine moved vigorously and joyfully, as I recognised how I'd managed to make it possible for my queer body to express itself in a space it might not be expected to occupy. It is not a body raging outside the church but one staking a claim inside the church, asserting its always already valid place there. It is important for me to acknowledge this corporeal agency and the responsibility that goes with it rather than only think of myself as a victim of institutional power. As Foucault reminds us, we are all implicated in networks of power:

POWER IS EXERCISED THROUGH NETWORKS, AND INDIVIDUALS DO NOT SIMPLY CIRCULATE IN THOSE NETWORKS; THEY ARE IN A POSITION TO BOTH SUBMIT TO AND EXERCISE THIS POWER ...

Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power [...]. We can also say, 'We all have some element of power in our bodies.' And power does—at least to some extent—pass or migrate through our bodies.[4]

This was the complex solo I wanted to share with Paul.

1 See for example Nigel Thrift, 'Entanglements of Power: Shadows?' in Joanne P. Sharp, Paul Routledge, Chris Philo and Ronan Paddison (eds.), *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 269-278, p. 269.

2 Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol. 28, no. 3 (2003), pp. 801-831
Materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production: matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries), just as discursive practices are always already material (i.e., they are ongoing material (re)configurings of the world). p. 822

3 Rancière, Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy, p.162.

4 Michel Foucault, Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976, Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (eds.), David Macey (trans.) (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 29-30.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CREATIVE BRAIN WEEK

Reflecting on embodying an excerpt from Fearghus Ó Conchúir's dance work Mo Mhórchoir Féin – A Prayer.

It was Fearghus' idea to exchange dance excerpts from our existing vocabulary of works as an entry point to a lecture on "The legacies of trauma carried in our bodies", a dialogue session we were invited to co-facilitate for the Creative Brain Week conference. I must admit that I initially met the suggestion with much trepidation and conflicting emotions. The idea itself sounded tempting, even though my internal compass screamed, "Obstacles and complexities ahead!" Even with our shared commitment to the art of physical expression, I was mindful of my own internal battle to rectify parts of my inherent guilt, which rendered the suggestion a tall order to co-sign on, particularly at this point in my sojourn.

As I fast approached the fourth decade of existence in this sometimes awfully convoluted world, I had arrived at a point in my artist journey where I was in search of my own truth. Which could also be translated as dealing with a masked identity crisis, informed by a heavily loaded past.

I grew up in what could be considered a "Westernized African" setting. I attended what was termed "Model C" or "white" schools in South Africa. I learned from a very young age to accept the white gaze and Eurocentric standards as markers of success and propriety. It is within this predisposition that my development as a young adult, and later, my training as a classical dance student and dancer shaped and primed my identity and work.

Dr. Khanyisile Litchfield Tshabalala, a Pan Africanist and an African spirituality scholar, asserts that, due to our complex exposure to colonization and Islam Christianity, most Africans exist in a perpetual state of cognitive dissonance. Where our very existence is governed by two opposing ideas that are both true to us, yet stand in total contradiction to each other.[5]

The ambiguity I initially felt at the idea of taking on Fearghus' piece was underpinned by a rejection to the tempting and strong pull towards returning to that shadow. As I raged through the many reasons why this idea could prove to be retrogressive, and at best only re-traumatize me, I felt from my body, an urge, a pleading, a gentle sway to lean in, and open myself up to it. Yet another classic moment of common cognitive dissonance, where the brain and the body are in conflict.

What most people are likely to notice at face value when they see me are the obvious social constructs: my race, possibly my age, (to those well-versed in queer culture), perhaps my queerness, and my inclination towards dance and the artistic community in general. What many barely perceive fully are the complexities of not only being black, but also African, specifically *Molobedu* of the *Balobedu* tribe, a revered matriarchal tribe from Southern Africa that is renowned for its dynasty of queens who conjure up rain.[6] My grandmother, Queen Mokope, and after her, my cousin, Queen Makobo, are some of the queens who have ruled over the Balobedu tribe. My niece, Mosalanabo, is a queen in waiting. When she turns 21 she too, will ascend the throne and rule over our people and continue on her calling as the queen of rain, Queen Modjadji the seventh. This is my heritage and ancestral lineage. For me, the two identities "black" and "African" hold two different afflictions.

Add on to that, just like Fearghus, I come from a complex history that is troubled and marred by colonial

5 Dr. Dr. KL Tshabalala "They are here to kill you" YouTube, upload by Thando "Moziah" Sipuye 14 June 2018 https://youtu.be/FP3h31ofuoQ

6 The Modjadji: South Africa's Rain queen. https://hadithi.africa/the-modjadji-south-africas-rain-queen/

oppression, patriarchy and the enforcement of western religion. A history that informs me to this day. It is in this background that I learned to perform the *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* ballets before I had the chance to learn my own traditional dances and cultural songs, never mind immerse myself in our customs and language. Psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon put it eloquently, "To speak a language, is to take on a world, a culture."[7] This is a fracture that I am presently toiling to make up for with the same fragile fervor and stern commitment I showed the ballet barre all those years as a young dancer.

Accepting the call to receive Fearghus' transformative work *Mo Mhórchor Féin – A Prayer* was a moment of deep internal clash and turmoil. An opportunity that sparked a commitment to dedicate my work moving forward to righting what has been diminished, rebuffed, and erased, whilst relearning what was inheritably mine.

Experiencing Fearghus' work, firstly online, I was immediately struck by the intent of the artist to go only where very few have been brave enough to go. Historically, the church is an unchallenged institution. Understanding the delicate history of Ireland and the many years of fighting for its independence and soul, I instantly felt a sense of connection and perhaps even empathy for a people who knew something about the scathing hand of oppression, division and colonization.

As a queer body, the work invited me to also consider our shared trauma, inherited shame and conflicting relationship with our spirituality. These factors cracked open a window for me to understand with my mind, what my body sensed straight from the beginning. But when I did eventually meet up with Fearghus for our first and only walk-through of the piece he was not concerned with theorizing the piece. He had no fascination with breaking it apart and going into its hidden nuances and artistic subtexts. He welcomed me to a space where we would speak through our bodies. And in so doing, revealed right before me a piece of work that speaks beyond he and I as individuals, but calls us to a conversation about us as a collective. A collision of all that is yesterday, today and the future. As two bodies in a space, and not two brains attempting to philosophize the experience of trauma, we were able to instantly find mutual points of connection and recognize our shared humanity.

Yet, we may have our differences, and that's okay too. This moment, this piece, is an invitation to look deeper and gaze beyond traditions and norms. For me, in its purest form, the piece challenged the structural pedagogies of our religions at the same time as it challenged me to think about what it means to conform, and about how I define morality, spirituality, sexuality, bodies, power, binaries, oppression, control and essentially freedom.

AS TWO BODIES IN A SPACE, AND NOT TWO BRAINS ATTEMPTING TO PHILOSOPHIZE THE EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA, WE WERE ABLE TO INSTANTLY FIND MUTUAL POINTS OF CONNECTION AND RECOGNIZE OUR SHARED HUMANITY.

Embodying Fearghus' *Mo Mhórchor Féin* first in a quiet rehearsal room in Cork–a vibrant town in southwest Ireland whose name I have always found amusing, and later in front of an audience in Dublin left me bare open, transformed. In it, I felt my own pain, struggles and a lot of stuff too intricate to articulate through words. The rigidity of the piece, and the soul's instinct to push against that force, immediately connected itself to a familial old struggle and my life's current pull towards freedom, purity and truth. The silences and still moments in the piece beaconed the spirits within me to whisper in my ears, and gently acknowledge all that I was feeling and experiencing in that moment, without judgment or denial.

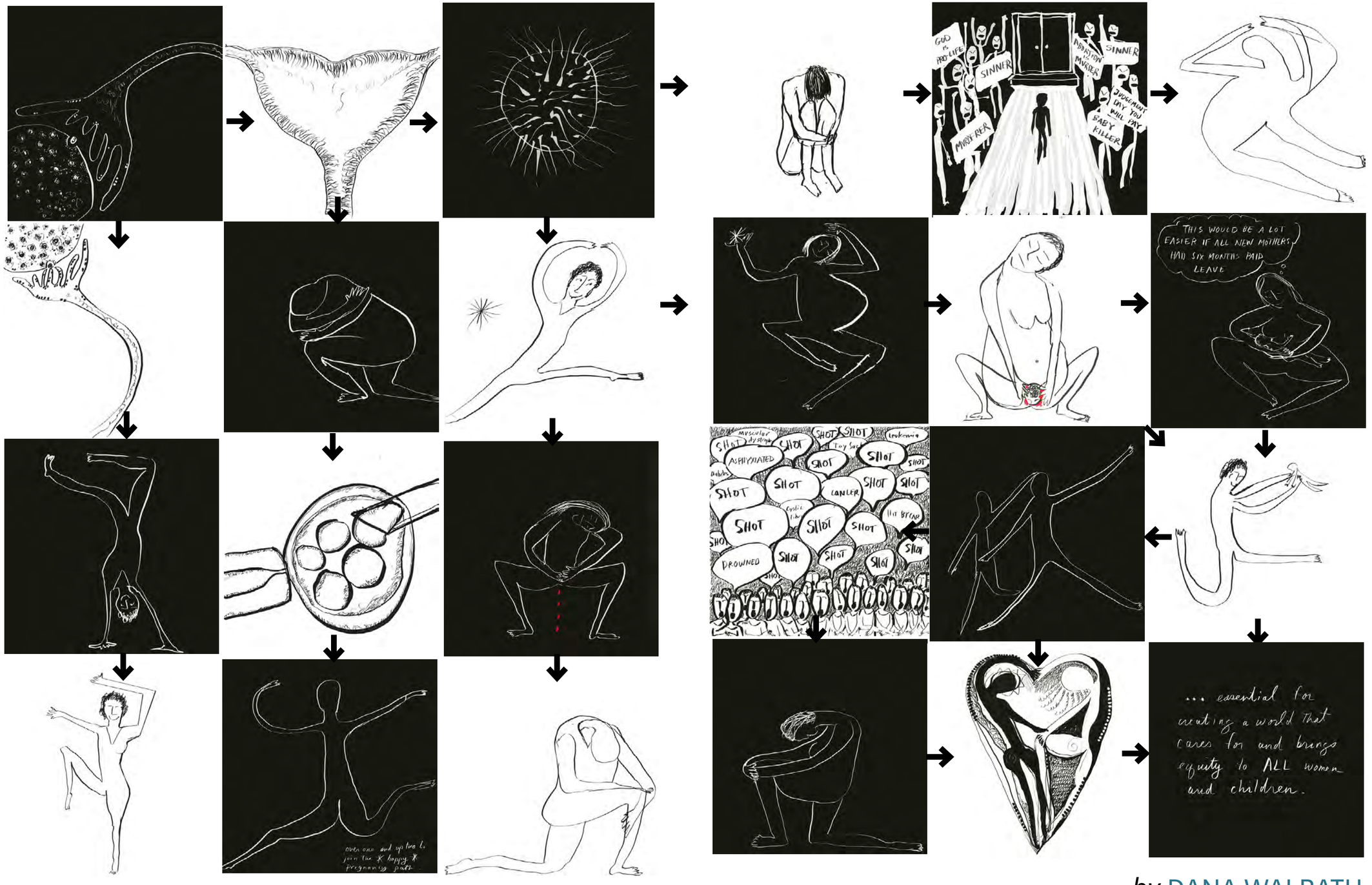
At the end of the piece, I found myself seeking a corner to weep. To release. To shake it off. Overcome with emotions. Immersed in a trance, a passageway, a channel of sorts. Cracked open. A feeling of linking to a pathway of healing. A remembering of a deeply seeded truth that is often forgotten: We are all human, everything else is a construct. "Ah… transcendence".

FEARGHUS Ó CONCHÚIR is a choreographer and dance artist. He makes film and live performances that create frameworks for audiences and artists to build communities together. His multi-platform work, The Casement Project, was one of the Arts Council's National Projects for Ireland 2016. He's co-leading a dance programme with Micro Rainbow International as part of The Casement Project to support LGBT refugees and asylum seekers. From 2018-2020, he was Artistic Director of National Dance Company Wales. He was appointed to the Arts Council of Ireland in 2018 and became Deputy Chair in 2019. He is Chair of the UK Dance Network.

PAUL MODJADJI is a multi-disciplinary artist and community organizer from South Africa. He uses dance, theater and filmmaking as a form of both art and activism. He is the founder of production house Imvula Pula and the Chair of non-for-profit organization Leaders Who Dare To Dream Foundation. Modjadji is a current Atlantic Fellow for Equity in Brain Health with the Global Brain Health Institute, at Trinity College, University of Dublin, in Ireland.

7 Black Skin, White Masks by Frantz Fanon: published in 1986 by Pluto Press. Originally published in France as Peau Noire, Masques Blanc Copyright © 1952

ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF REPRODUCTIVE CHOICES IS...

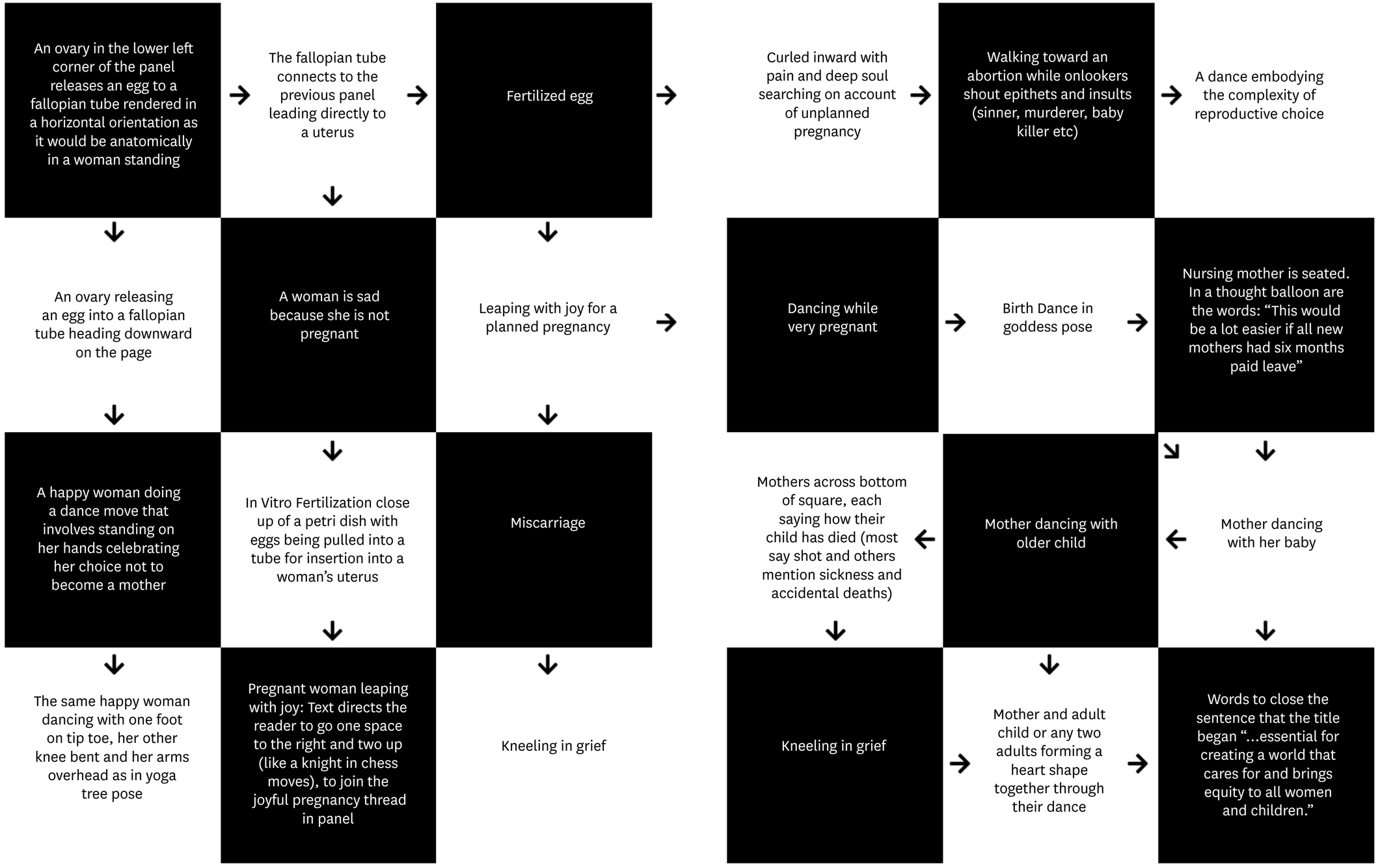


This comic was set into motion, after the SCOTUS leak, when guest editor Rowena Richie sent Dana this quotation from Sima Belmar: *"Miscarriage, abortion, fertility treatments, birth, motherhood, losing a child–we dance through all these experiences."*

by DANA WALRATH

ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF REPRODUCTIVE CHOICES IS...

Presented as a two-page spread that resembles a board game—a combination of chess, with alternating black and white squares, and a choose your own adventure map—with arrows that direct the reader down or across from a given square.



This comic was set into motion, after the SCOTUS leak, when guest editor Rowena Richie sent Dana this quotation from Sima Belmar: *“Miscarriage, abortion, fertility treatments, birth, motherhood, losing a child–we dance through all these experiences.”*

by DANA WALRATH

A LETTER TO OUR MULTI-MARGINALIZED DISABLED DANCERS

by VANESSA HERNÁNDEZ CRUZ

PHOTOS BY PAULA KILEY

***While this letter is for our disabled dancers,**
I welcome all who wish to create equitable changes in our dance field.

My beloved disabled dancers,

I am gazing at the shadows of trees dancing upon
gravel walls as the golden hour sun joins in.
It's beautiful isn't it?
There is this longing that tugs at my heart
to have all the answers for you.
How much can I change the world for
our liberation?
I know that our bodies clash with
what society carves out for us.

For my multi-marginalized disabled dancers
future, present & past:
You are a dancer despite being told no.
You are a dancer despite all the rejection placed
upon you.
Your artistry is there even if they say it's not.
You are a dancer even if you had to stop
or were told to stop.
You are still a dancer even if you feel alone &
unsupported.

You are skilled beyond measure.
The way you caress your wheels as you glide
across the floor.
The strength of how you slow down and
shape trembling spirals
with your unique disabled body.
This makes you a fierce and graceful dancer.

"If I wasn't disabled…."
haunts our minds,
I know, breathe.
I know.
It's okay,
I know. It hurts.
I know, beautiful. It'll be okay.
Because it's not your fault.
It never was.
Your body, mind & spirit are not to blame.
We push these dark thoughts aside
but it's there every single time
when we are told no.
When we are placed in the back of dance class.
When we struggling to keep up.
When opportunities are robbed from us.
When spaces are inaccessible.
When we are ignored.
When we are left to advocate for ourselves.
When we audition knowing that our bodies will be
used against us.
When we are infantilized.
When we are villainized for asking for our basic
human rights.
When microaggressions put us down.

It's okay to grieve but know that your ancestors
are embracing you
when no one is there at your lowest.

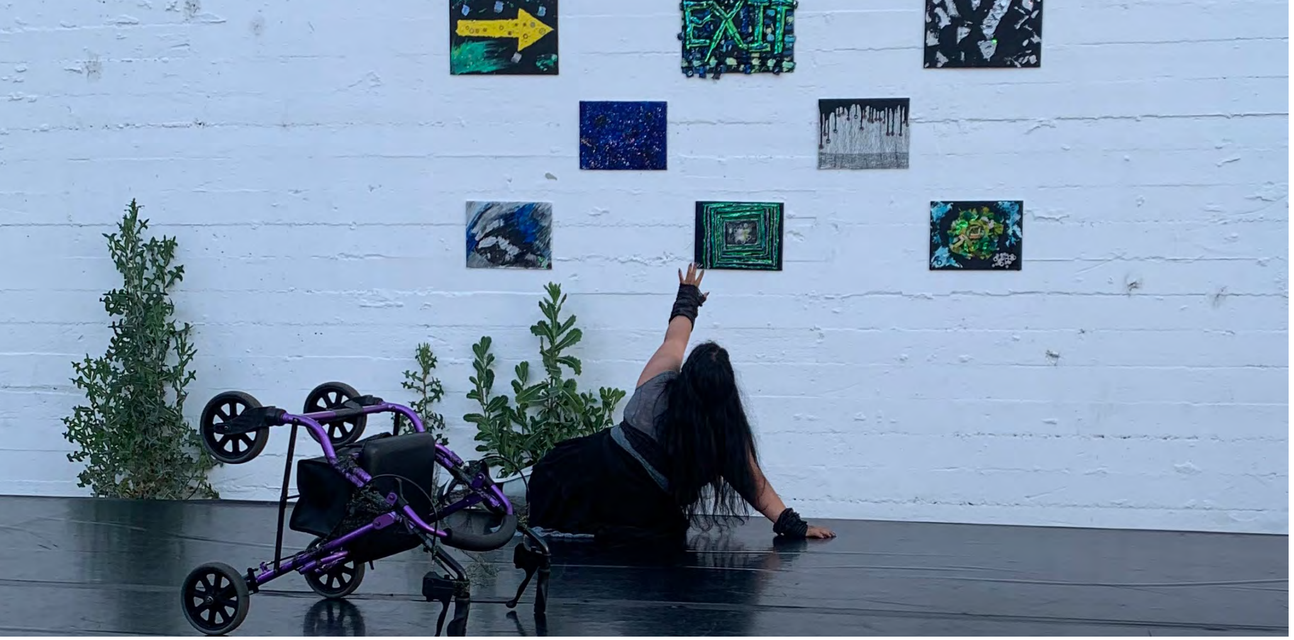
We may never get an apology from the ableism we
have had to endure.
They may never know how deep our wounds go
or how deep they have hurt us.

But I want to say I am sorry.
I am sorry that you have to cry yourself to sleep.
I am sorry that our depression is ignored.
I am sorry that our tears fall on empty grounds
instead of warm hugs.
I am sorry you have to mask your needs in order
to survive.
I am sorry that our negative experiences make
it that much harder to reach out.
I am sorry that this journey can feel lonely.
I am sorry that the dance field makes us
feel unworthy.
I am sorry that you have to have your guard up
at all times.
I am sorry that you are exhausted from
fighting the good fight.
I am sorry that you feel isolated.

Even though our society has reminded us time
and time again
that we are to them unloved & unworthy
that is deeply false.

Your disability makes you the incredible dancer
that you are.
Your disabled body ignites innovation & creativity.

You are the life force of what community care
can look like in dance.
You have so much light to give to this world.
You matter.
Your dance work is vital.



It is vital because you exist!
The countless stories and interests you have
give us a glimpse of possibilities and what utopia
could be.

I cannot take your pain away.
I cannot even take my own pain away.
But know that you are not alone, darling.
You carry the wisdom of our disabled ancestors.
The time capsule of what dance will be.

I do not have all the answers.
But I do know that
we must continue to create at whatever pace our
bodies allow us.
It's okay to slow down for a second or 2.
It's valid and it will always be.
It's okay to rest.
That is our power.
It's okay to let go for a while.
But please come back with your beautiful disabled self.

Even though we are far apart
we are still tethered to each other.

Most importantly, create for yourself.
You no longer need to prove to the dance world
that we can dance.

We are the future of dance.

It's going to be okay.

And if it isn't I am here fighting for us.
For our liberation.
One moment at a time.

We have each other.

Gazing upon the night sky
filled with ever glistening stars
our ancestors are smiling at us
because we are their wildest dream.

With so much love,
Your Chicana Disabled dance friend,
Vanessa Cruz

VANESSA HERNÁNDEZ CRUZ (she, her, hers) is an interdependent Chicana disabled dance artist & Disability Justice activist. She is from the unceded lands of the Tongva & Kizh lands colonially known as Los Angeles, California. She graduated from California State University Long Beach with her Bachelor of Arts in Dance Science.

Through her dance films, written work and choreographic work, Vanessa presents the audience with thought-provoking pieces that ignite the imagination and explores disability aesthetics in contemporary forms and experimentation. She is shifting the dance field away from the inspirational-porn perspective of disability and moving it into a humanistic perspective.

WAYS TO CONNECT & SUPPORT:
IG: https://www.instagram.com/galaxiesdance/
Website: https://www.galaxiesdance.info
Email: galaxiesdance@gmail.com
Support: https://venmo.com/u/galaxiesdance

PHOTO COURTESY OF PIETER PERFORMANCE SPACE

WALKING BACKWARDS

BY CHRIS BLACK

PHOTO BY LYDIA DANILLER

The day Donald Trump was inaugurated, a man spat on me as I walked to CounterPulse to see the Meg Stuart show. I spotted him walking towards me about a half a block away. He looked harmless. When he got closer, he looked around briefly. There was no one else within a block of us. And then he spat on me. My reaction was the closest I've ever come to physically assaulting someone. Screaming, I followed him up Potrero Ave, swinging my backpack, looking at the back of his head. But at 5'1" and maybe 105 pounds, even in that moment, I knew that I'd only be setting myself up for worse. So I turned around and went to the show.

I love dancers. More than actually dancing or dance itself, I love dancers. I love the way we think. I love the way we can relate to one another in a purely physical way, how we can have deep relationships that don't look anything like regular friendships or romances. Dancers have been my favorite people since I was a teenager, even when my closest friends were not dancers.

Watching Meg Stuart dance on that teeny stage, watching that body five years older than my own, in a space filled with collective sadness and private rage, I could calm down. Surprisingly, briefly, I could calm down.

For years I have said the saddest words in the English language are *I used to be a dancer.*

I am wondering if I used to be a dancer.

THE BEST DANCE TEACHER I ever had was Woody McGriff. SO MUCH JOY. He would stand in the back of the theater where class was being held at the American Dance Festival in Durham, North Carolina, and he would yell: *Good Chris! Goooooooooooooood!*

My teachers in SF:

Ellie Klopp could be mean but her technical instruction was unparalleled. She gave me a note about the placement of my coupé: *I can't tell if you're in passé or coupé. Pick one.* Months later she walked past me in a class of at least thirty dancers and muttered, *Better*.

Joe Goode taught me to do inversions by grabbing my pelvis and holding it above my shoulders. I always got the giggles.

Lizz Roman made me strong.

I CAME TO SAN FRANCISCO IN 1992. I lived in the Castro, up the hill on 17th Street. I was often the only woman on the MUNI platform in the morning when I went to work. I took nothing but ballet that first summer because I could walk to The Academy of Ballet without worrying about getting lost. I knew to simply point myself toward Sutro Tower to get home. I had those pendulum swings of emotion that came from experiencing so much for the first time and dancing, dancing, dancing — so much physical joy! — and the gut punch of running into neighbors I hadn't seen in a few weeks to find them thinner, frailer, walking with a new cane. These men were incredibly sweet to young, lucky me. I don't remember their names.

I showed up at Dancers' Group (then known as Footwork) because someone back east had told me that's how I could meet people. Wayne Hazzard gave me a little smile when I wandered in one day and he looped me into what would be my life. I was so shy back then. How I would have managed that first year without his welcome I don't know.

Soon after I got here I read a review of a piece choreographed by Tracy Rhoades. His company was called Exploding Roses! It sounded incredible! I never saw his work live because nine months later he was dead at 31.

Woody McGriff died in 1994. He was 36.

One opening night in the mid-'90s I got called to the box office phone at the New Performance Gallery (now ODC Theater). *I can't let him come*, said the partner of one of the dancers. *He's too sick*. The rest of us reworked the quartet choreography in the loft studio during intermission. We didn't talk about anything else. The piece stayed a trio for all the years it was performed. That dancer, Jesselito Bie, is thankfully still here.

AT A VERY SPECIFIC MOMENT in my career, someone with some power and access in the American dance scene tried to give me a boost. They really tried. They got me invited to a gathering of presenters in another city, the idea being I would meet people who could also give me a boost. I met some lovely people. I saw some good work. But it felt like being in high school and I didn't belong to that clique. I didn't schmooze the right people and I couldn't bring myself to network in the right ways. All those things that I was supposed to do… that weren't dancing. And I found myself at show after show, wondering about these states performers entered, the entropy being explored, the pettiness of the presenters when they thought I wasn't listening, and I texted my then-girlfriend-now-wife, *WHERE'S THE JOY MOTHERFUCKERS???*

I GOT FUNDED IN THE EARLY YEARS of my career because the people who held the purse strings looked at me and could see themselves. I got to make what I wanted to make: personal, thoughtful dances; abstract, technical dances; fluffy, entertaining dances. This was my privilege as a white, cis woman in the dance world.

Around 2016 I stopped applying for funding. I couldn't rally to do all the non-dance things anymore. The writing, the video editing, the justifying. And I'd been gifted my funding in those early years. Not large sums of money, but money nonetheless. I also found myself feeling defeated by the capitalist structure that artists have somehow been convinced to buy into, where someone else gets to dictate what is worth making and seeing. The few panels I sat on myself were deeply upsetting. What gave any of us the right to decide who "deserved" to be supported? It was all profoundly unhealthy.

I want everyone to get to make what they want to make. For no other reason than that they want to. Dances about history and trauma and politics and yes, joy and love and fluff. I want that for you, young choreographers. So much.

THE MOST RECENT PERSON to ask me if I support myself solely through dance was an orthopedic surgeon who was looking at an MRI of my "good" knee. I used to get defensive and self-conscious when people asked me that. Now I just laugh.

DURING ONE OF THE DARKEST TIMES of my life I made a show about love. Ken James and I had been dancing in one another's work for a decade when we took critic Rita Felciano's advice that we "should do more together" and made *The Adventures of Cunning & Guile*. People told us it was romantic (we were invited to do part of it at a wedding!), and grouchy critic Allan Ulrich thought we were married… but it wasn't even vaguely a show about romance. It was about friendship. Dancer friendship.

I have never had another relationship like the friendship I have with Ken James. It has persisted despite the fact that Ken left San Francisco 14 years ago. We can go into a studio and lie on the floor and drink coffee and eat chocolate and somehow emerge a few hours later having choreographed a series of physical interactions that feel organic and fun and magically appear to the audience that way as well. I've never had those kinds of physical conversations with anyone else. Non-dancers have looked at me funny when I've tried to explain it, assuming it's got to be sexual but that's not what I'm talking about. Dancing with Ken has been one of the most soul-sustaining, joyous experiences of my life. We're not doing anything traditionally virtuosic or flashy but we're communicating — with each other and the audience. I keep writing and writing, trying to capture what that connection truly is but I can't. Part of what is so precious about it is that it's not something that exists in words.

THE LAST TIME I PERFORMED was in February, 2020, a month after my father died. This is the longest I've been offstage since my first school play at age 6.

HOW YOU KNOW YOU'RE ONTO SOMETHING choreographically: when suddenly seemingly every child in the California Academy of Sciences is leaning over your shoulder: *What are you doing? Are you being a bird? I can be a dog! Watch! Mom! I want to do this!*

In 2011 I was an artist in residence at the Academy. For five months we rehearsed on the floor of the museum, moving around the kids and tourists. I had an incredible group of collaborators: composer Erik Pearson; performers Rowena Richie, Jennifer Chien, Sophia Chudacoff, Juan De La Rosa; and my extraordinary principal collaborator on the project, Kevin Clarke. A few weeks into the process, I started to panic. I didn't want to make a finished piece. This was the art, right here, this was the dance: noodling around on the floor of a museum with books filled with pictures of extinct animals, trying to recapture some physical essence of long-gone bodies different from our own and letting people see us figure it out, answer their questions, and yes, even let them laugh at us.

Five years later, I made a self-funded piece called *there's nothing wrong with beauty* with another spectacular group of collaborators: Xochitl Colmenarez, Kim Ip, Courtney Moreno, Alicia Ruth, and Sienna Willams. I wanted us to embrace things we loved. There was no tech. I played the score — Bowie and Prince, the ocean and Maryam Mirzakhani talking about math — off my phone and an iPad, both visible on the edge of the space. I would wander over to press play. I sang "Landslide" unironically and asked the audience to close its eyes at the end since we couldn't have a blackout. It was bits and pieces strung together, snapshots and moments, and I loved it and the women in it so much. An elder of the dance community asked me later if I was going to finish it. I simply said *no*. But in my head I said, *It is finished. This is the dance. This rawness, this seeing of the people behind and in it. Dancers.*

I DIDN'T SCHMOOZE THE RIGHT PEOPLE AND I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO NETWORK IN THE RIGHT WAYS. ALL THOSE THINGS THAT I WAS SUPPOSED TO DO… THAT WEREN'T DANCING.

WHEN I MADE MY SOLO SHOW *TOUGH*, I asked several people I respected, admired and trusted to give me input and guidance. Amara Tabor-Smith was the first person I approached. Her generosity and wisdom in those weeks of work had a profound impact, not only on that piece but on my sense of myself. She led me backwards on long walks through the Mission, and as I watched the sidewalks and buildings and people recede from my view, it felt like I was literally looking into the past and watching it slip away. I punched the pads she held up for me until my knuckles bled like the bareknuckle boxer who had inspired the project. I danced in dark rooms where she helped me conjure that fighter, John L. Sullivan, and my grandmother, Catherine Egan. And finally, we went to China Beach and in a blindfold I fought the sea like the mythic Irish warrior Cú Chulainn. When I had waded out of the waves and could see again, she told me a pod of dolphins had swum by, and she had been tempted to let me stop so I could watch. At the time it was the right choice, to stay in the cold water in my own head with John L. and my grandmother and Cú Chulainn. But today when I wrote this out, I realized that now I would choose the dolphins.

You don't get to hate it unless you love it.
—Jimmie Fails, *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*

I AM LEAVING. After thirty years, I am leaving San Francisco. If I leave, am I still a dancer? This city has been one of the great loves of my life. And my life here grew around dance like a tree grows around a rock. My life bent around dancing: how I spent my time, how I paid my bills, how I raised my kid, all fit around this central thing of dancing. And the soil it grew in was San Francisco. I don't know what will survive when I pull up those roots.

10/23/17

Some mornings you walk down the hill, barely have to pause before sliding up the stairs of the 22, slip off at 16th St, skim across two crosswalks, don't break stride and glide up the steps of the 14R, completing the choreography of some anonymous urban planner who once took a dance class in college.

The city has changed and so have I.

The abandoned dance I grieve the most was called *The Murmurations Project: an impossible, decades-long project about artistic transmission, place history, and chaos theory*. It was to be a rolling installation that traveled across the city from the ocean to the bay. It was going to be non-linear; no section was to depend on what had happened before. I wanted to commission groups with history in different neighborhoods and areas to make sections: indigenous dancers, immigrant communities, displaced residents. I wanted to name the ghosts of San Francisco artists who influence us all, whether we know it or not: Isadora Duncan, Anna Halprin, Ed Mock, Remy Charlip, Chitresh Das, Keriac, Della Davidson, Augusta Moore, Terry Sendgraff, Kathleen Hermesdorf… The list will never end.

To everyone who loves this art form and this city—enough that they sometimes also hate them—I wish you joy.

CHRIS BLACK has been living and dancing in San Francisco for thirty years. In August she and her wife Courtney Moreno are moving to upstate New York.

COMMUNITY

COURTESY OF ENSAMBLE FOLCLÓRICO COLIBRÍ

[Ensamble Folclórico Colibrí](#) (EFC) is a Mexican folklore dance group. Under the artistic directorship of Arturo Magaña, EFC has the mission to promote the pride of identifying as an LGBTQ+ Latinx through the art of Mexican Folklórico dance. Their mission also seeks to preserve costumes and traditions through cultural and educational projects, lectures as well as staged performances. Their Summer Academy classes have just begun. Registration remains open. Please [contact](#) them to register. Visit them at the Pride Festivities throughout the Bay Area.

PHOTO BY MARGO MORITZ

Risa Jaroslow & Dancers

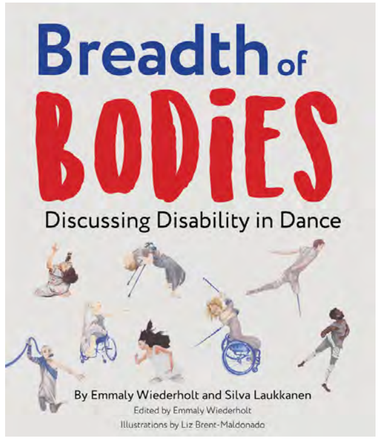
Touch Bass

Sep 10-11, 2022 at Berkeley Art Museum Pacific Film Archive

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.

CHEZA NAMI FOUNDATION

With support from the California Arts Council, Cheza Nami, in partnership with Las Positas College, brings another installation of "*Moving Together*" community engagement dance and drumming workshops. The goal of this program is to enable cross-cultural engagement between the community and local African and diaspora cultural artists. The workshops will be followed by a post-workshop performance by the Cheza Nami Ensemble and other Guest artists and their students.



DESIGN BY CHRISTELLE DREYER

BREADTH OF BODIES

Breadth of Bodies: Discussing Disability in Dance, published and authored by Stance on Dance director/editor Emmaly Wiederholt, and contributor Silva Laukkanen, seeks to investigate stereotypes often used to describe professional dancers with disabilities. Augmented with beautiful illustrations by Liz Brent-Maldonado, the team interviewed 35 professional dance artists with disabilities around the country and world, asking about training, access, and press, as well as looking at the state of the field. The book is available in print, as well as an e-book and audiobook version.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VAROL OZKANER

Farima Berenji and the Simorgh Dance Collective

Discover the power and mystery of sacred dance and whirling as a gateway for self-growth and spiritual enlightenment through movement, music, and meditation. Online and in-person classes this summer in San Jose for Beginning Persian Mystical Dance and Sufi Whirling, Persian Classical Dance, and Sacred Music.

PHOTO BY EARL BICKMAN

Dimensions Dance Theater

Dimensions Dance Theater will celebrate its 50th anniversary season Oct 22-23, at Mills College's Lisser Hall, featuring world premieres by laura elaine ellis and Nimely Napla, film screenings, panel discussions, and community classes centering some of the company's profound works of artistic excellence, cultural representation and social impact.

DISCOVER MORE

about Dancers' Group and past *In Dance* Articles

FOLLOW US