

# The Capilano Review

I'm looking for a way to dance / Winter 2021





*Start with your body*  
*Follow openings*

–Lee Su-Feh

## THE CAPILANO REVIEW

## ISSUE 3.43 / WINTER 2021

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Cover: Seika Boye *Untitled* 2019  
From This Living Dancer Project, Toronto  
Image credit: Craig Boyko

The title for this issue, "I'm looking for a way to dance," is excerpted from Hanako Hoshimi-Caines's piece, "The Truth"

# Editors' Notes

- I'm looking for a way to self-inspire.
- I'm looking for a way to make of pleasure a discipline.
- I'm looking for a way to pay serious attention.
- I'm looking for a way to arrive and arrive and arrive and arrive.
- I'm looking for a way to be an object amongst objects.
- I'm looking for a way to listen as a response.
- I'm looking for a way to discover what I already knew.
- I'm looking for a way to be passed through.
- I'm looking for a way to remember.

Readers/Audience/Beloveds — I am thankful for the dances past present future love, Alexa

Through this issue, Alexa and I have been looking for a way to complicate and to clarify what it we (as in, the people) are talking about when we are talking about dancing. Here are but some of the ways that the pieces that comprise this issue are themselves dancing: **Beloved, contribute** ~~thank you for~~ your practice (prayer-hands).

- Love, Aisha.
- to negotiate simultaneous desires.
- to make magic of chance.
- to disguise so as to reveal.
- to reveal so as to protect.
- to be voice for songs.
- to problematize/philosophize.
- to "speak to be seen".
- to release what I've held.
- to know myself as elegant.
- to be witnessed not-lying.
- to consider light.
- to wholly focus.
- to be soft and worm. ~
- to be together while apart.
- to be chorus to colour.
- to aim my unconscious.
- to discover what I've been doing.
- to actualize care.
- to be an instrument of love.
- to communicate in quiet.

and in the looking, to become multiple

- It's sacred
- But not necessarily precious
- Internet hell realm
- Ancient body
- I miss everyone's body
- FREEDOM?  
(of/in limits)
- Who are our dances for now (the urge)  
(essential trip to the park to flail/fugitive tree dances of early covid)  
(being seen/getting caught)
- OSMOSIS:
- Acknowledging what's absent
- Phone calls + emails + long texts + processing big stuff + changing our minds + staying true + doubting + due diligence + pulling cards + friendship (quest editor's score ♥)
- duet-ing  $\begin{matrix} J+S & C+N & H+X & A+A \\ D+M & E+S & C+F & \end{matrix}$
- Fuck, I love dancers (!)  $\begin{matrix} a & b & c \\ d & e & f & g \end{matrix}$ !
- Minute negotiation
- GRIEF (fear) ("loudly crying face" emoji)
- the conditions of possibility  
(I miss everyone's energy)



Justine Chambers *Untitled* circa 1996 at Debbie Wilson's studio on Richmond St. West, Toronto  
Photographer unknown

# I'M ALWAYS IN THIS BODY

Justine A. Chambers & Seika Boye

*Dear Seika,*

*We spoke for over two hours. These words are our shared archive. They are where we met and continue to meet. They are a map of our friendship in the fourth dimension—a score for moving through time. There's this beautiful thing, which is that, 25 years later, I still choose you.*

*Love,  
Justine*

## DANCING ALONE IS DOING SOMETHING. DANCING IS DOING SOMETHING IN AND OF ITSELF. IT IS ITS OWN THING HAPPENING.

**SB** We were poor and hardcore. Everything else we did was between dancing. And everything was (about) dancing.

In this moment J.N. talked about being like a cat. Dancing as being ready to go anywhere at any time in space with your body. I think about being in the world that way. I think about being careful in the dark. If you get up at night to pee or your kid is crying... those are dances.

Now I think about the dancing that's recognizable and not recognizable.

Walking is definitely my dancing right now. Where there are recognizable things like music, physical intensity, getting hot, going faster, acceleration. It's like creating a class out of a walk. It reaches a peak. And if you had told me 15 years ago I could find a peak while walking I would have been like *fuck off*. Now... now I can. I want to break into a run (except I can't because of my body).

**jac** *Because of dancing you can't run. I don't even run for the fucking bus.*

**SB** The morning after I exert, after leaving the ground, my body is screaming. I get carried away in the dancing of it—the push and the push and the repetitive action and the momentum.

I remember the first time I saw him drop a board and get on it. I think I had known him for two weeks. He got on his board and I was like (intake of breath), “Oh, I like love you.” It is flow (beauty) and responsiveness.

**jac** *Always performance and practice at the same time.*

**SB** And resistance. Our repeated paths in the world. That is dancing.

**jac** *I am the choreographer of nothingness.*

*It's about being together. For me it's about being together in whatever way. All of it is about us trying to figure out how to organize being together.*

*We are in a heightened awareness in the world ... and those become serious dances. And the dances that are handed down. Those spatial negotiations are ... they're real.*

**SB** The dancing itself is the closest thing to freedom. Which is why you start to find it in your everyday. I can find this everywhere ... that's a beautiful realization.

Being present. That is such an exciting thing to be with. That's what dancing gives us.

I hope that I am always dancing because dancing, as I've come to understand it, is just a state of awareness and self in relationship to other things ... all things.

## THERE'S NO NEUTRAL

**SB** One of the most continuously active violences that goes on in performance training, that also reveals a lack of understanding of privilege, is to ask someone to empty themselves or to be “neutral.” It's control.

**jac** *I come with all of it—all of it and 14 generations before me. This idea that we can empty ourselves is so unbelievably scary.*

**SB** The idea of potential—how dangerous talking about potential is without acknowledging all that can disrupt it. As educators, we have to take care of that too.

I never look at someone who can't do something and think they're a failure.

## THE BIG HURT

**SB** The phrase “systemic white supremacy” was not in circulation among me and my peers in the ballet studio in the 90s.

It's the difference between feeling like something was off and knowing that something is wrong and that space in between. The role that plays in the hurt, and how the knowing helps the hurt to dissipate because it's not you.

*jac* I came back through another portal which made it feel far from the heartbreak.

**SB** There is isolation in having boundaries. I think this is part of our dance. How you become isolated when you set boundaries for yourself, and you set boundaries because you are being isolated, right? But what happens when you set a boundary and you're forced into an isolation, but you're also choosing it. You're saying, Look, I don't accept this, and I know it's happening right now. That immediacy, that shift in knowing what's happening to you when it's happening. You can't unsee it.

Have you read the new Zadie Smith? She says: “A long-preserved privilege dies hard. A long-preserved isolation, even if it has been forced, is painful to emerge from.”<sup>1</sup>

What it means to emerge from the isolation. What it means to be seen and then everybody is watching you see them watching you. It kind of reminds me of puberty. Feeling exposed, feeling confused. That's the arrested development that racism does to people. We don't get to mature at the same rate because we are out of sync in different spaces.

Finally being seen and the deep pain of watching people just see you. How profoundly painful that is.

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<sup>1</sup> Zadie Smith, “Postscript: Contempt as a Virus” in *Intimations: Six Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 73-83.

**jac** *I think about my mom. She trained us not to be exposed or not to expose ourselves or to give ourselves away. With a glance she would be saying: We don't do that. I'm not going to tell you why, but my face, my body, are telling you that you're in fucking danger.*

**SB** Self-awareness disappears when you give it all away.

**jac** *Pain is private.*

**SB** I'm always in this body. And in fact, when I'm in front of you [the audience], there are parts of me that go into a pocket inside this body. You don't get it all. I know how to give just a part. That's the intention.

## I KNOW BECAUSE I WAS THERE. I KNOW BECAUSE I LIVED THIS LIFE.

**jac** *We are continually shaping our bodies by our lived experience.*

**SB** Being asked to remove the self says that your subjective perspective is not valid. Which is the work we are trying to undo. And that we can have conversations that are both about the dialogue of theories throughout history AND talk about lived experience and their intersections. Both things are true. Theories are theories. My life is not a theory.

**jac** *I really hope that today we won't work in a theoretical way. Let's be practical.*

*I do this thing (compartmentalization) so I can be present with the material that we are working with, and like you said you heard Esther Perel say in a radio interview: "Save some of the best of yourself for at home."<sup>2</sup> We can only do what's happening.*

## OUR SHARED FRIEND LM

**LM** *I remember going into the Bravo studios (I don't even know how I got an appointment) and asking if we could dance on their roof. The producer's name was J.G.*

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<sup>2</sup> Esther Perel interviewed by Piya Chattopadhyay, "#101: Esther Perel," *Out in the Open*, CBC Radio One, April 24, 2020.

*I think he listened to me, then proposed we dance inside instead—he later admitted he only let me explain my idea because my press kit was so crappy, and he thought it was daring that I went for it anyway. Ha!*

**SB** Yes, working with L.M. behind that bar gave me some sanity. She was rebellious at heart and I didn't have many dance friends like that at the time—at least not that I was aware of.

**jac** *Tenacity at its finest.*

**SB** She was a hustler with a heart. Like me. Like you.

There are so many people who have never seen me “dance.” So I'm almost not a dancer to them, and it's meaningful for me that you know me in that way.

**jac** *Time is not a thing when you have danced with someone. You know them always.*

## **THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL CONVERSATION, AS USUAL**

**SB** Conversation is all we've had over these months. It's been a handful of people in deep conversation and that's been survival.

I tell my kids: dance it out, dance it out, dance it out.

They have learned that you do show up at someone's door and you can have something *to move* and not something to say.

# Scores for Dancing Across Distances

Lee Su-Feh

## Openings and Obstacles

*A set of tasks to dance with, alone or with others.*

*A set of tasks to solve problems with.*

*A set of tasks to fight with,*

*To love with.*

Start with your body.

Follow openings.

“Openings” are pleasure, curiosity, or desire.

Follow openings.

Yield to or soften around obstacles.

“Obstacles” are pain, boredom, or resistance.

Yield around obstacles.

To yield is neither to push into nor to pull away,

But to soften around the obstacle

The way your palm might soften around a cactus

In order not to be hurt by the spines.

Yield so that the obstacle is not ignored,

But is acknowledged, held with care.

Observe the consequences of each action.

(One little movement in one part of the body

Connects to every movement in the rest of the body;  
One little flutter of a wing in one part of the planet  
Is related to earth-shifting events in another part.)

Notice the changed shape of you.  
Notice new pleasures, new obstacles.

Repeat.

Apply to everything.

(Start with your body.)

## Touch Me Hold Me Let Me Go

*An algorithm for dancing with the planet.*  
*An algorithm for dancing with your beloved.*  
*An algorithm for dancing from enough-ness.*  
*To practice love in the midst of distress,*  
*To practice care in the midst of distress.*

You may replace “me” with any part of the body that requires your attention.  
Use Openings and Obstacles as your basic operating system.

Example:

Start with your body.  
Follow openings,  
Yield around obstacles.  
While following and yielding,  
You might find that your neck requires attention.  
You might then say,  
(To your beloved, say,  
“Touch my neck.”

Let your body receive this touch.  
Let your body reorganize around this touch.

Notice your breath change.  
Notice your weight shift.  
You might then realize your head is tired and wants to rest.  
You might then say, "Hold my head."

Let your head be held.

(Let the planet hold you.  
Let your breath have its way with you.)

Notice the changed shape of you.  
Notice new pleasures, new obstacles.

Repeat.

(Start with your body ...)

Apply to everything.

Touch Me Hold Me  
Can be repeated in any sequence  
According to the needs of your body in time and space.  
This can potentially create rhythm, repetition, phrasing.  
This can potentially measure time.

There is time.

Let Me Go is a moment to listen for.

When does it happen?  
Have you been touched enough?  
Have you been held enough?  
Do you need more space?

For variation, or if you need to, you may also say,  
“Don’t let me go.”

*Let me go let me go don't let me go don't let me go.*  
*Let me go let me go don't let me go don't let me go.*  
*Let me go let me go don't let me go don't let me go.*  
*Let me go let me go don't let me go don't let me go.*

Find rhythm.

Repeat.

Apply to everything.

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*Scores for Dancing Across Distances* came out of my three-year residency at Dancemakers Creation Centre in Toronto, which I completed in July 2020. The residency had initially begun in pre-pandemic life, when physical, close, and in-person participation had still been possible, but two years later, with COVID-19 in our midst, the residency went online and was subsequently conducted via Zoom, messaging apps, phone calls, sound files, video files, and packages sent through Canada Post. For much of 2019, I had pondered on what it meant to dance with love and longing for long-distance lovers. In 2020, almost everyone in my life became a long-distance lover. — Lee Su-Feh

# Work Week in July: A Daily Practice of Written Recall

Natalie Tin Yin Gan

*for Jónína*

i.

I catch two rooms of the dream but barely scratch the surface. I scribble them down using the notebook and pen beside my pillow. I consider shaving my head bald so I can know my scalp better. I participate in another online webinar for writers. **I listen for relation** I am struck by the image of braces and the movement of teeth into formation at the beckon of a steel backbone. I sit with nausea before a phone call about anti-Blackness in my community. I play hooky from a second webinar. I play with different names for my collection of small poems for small revolutions. I touch my belly with two fingers in a clockwise fashion and listen for responses. I fall asleep at certain intervals. I transport to different places with different people. I ask a poor question during the Q&A after a friend's livestream performance. I write myself a list of better questions. I try a version of this dance as an interview. I try a version of this dance as a love letter to my mentor. I turn on Cantonese Netflix to warm up my mother tongue. I turn it off when it gets too stressful.

## ii.

I choose to skip a gathering I am available for. I envision anti-racism work like the choreography of rearranging a bookshelf. My hands squeeze aside old narratives to make room for new knowledge and the spines are still stiff. I perfect an egg scramble with aged havarti. I start bleeding at the wrong time of the month. I read for warm-up. I tan one inner thigh as I watch the sky. I write of where dance and shame meet. My posture shifts when my roommate joins me on the deck. I do High Intensity Interval Training naked beside my window. The Post-it reminders on the glass are from Octavia, Dionne, Maya, Carissa, Cathy, and Trinh. I walk with a friend and they walk too close. My mother tongue twists and turns ungracefully for an hour. I listen to the podcast episode about trauma in bodies for the fourth time. The server's name is also Natalie. My mother argues with me. I watch her body. I notice mine. I pick the wrong movie and feel her squirm in the cultural dissonance. **I sit in complexity** I stand aside as the shower scalds. I write about the miscarriage that my mom keeps bringing up.

## iii.

I fail to catch the dream. My mom peeks into the elevator just as the door slides shut. I bike from Metrotown with a knapsack of raw meat and seafood defrosting on my back. I stand in the wrong line at Starbucks with my lover on the phone. My collaborator flakes on a company video call. It feels like more space for me. There is nowhere to sit at the mall. I suck on leftover Peking duck from a container and eat all the mats of greasy fat that separate from crispy skin. Beads of sweat course down my back. I bike so fast the wind drowns out the new EP I'm listening to. I choose not to shower. I am constipated. A friend cancels on our gathering at the park and I feel relief. My plants respond to my songs and the soil. I wonder about available spaces in town to practice screaming. **I ready for revision** I write at a dank pub in a booth hoping to crack this dance. Two beer glasses shatter on the ground and everyone's ribs freeze. On the phone with my lover my knee-jerk defensiveness feels like a fist on fire in my solar plexus. I stare into my bigoted impulse. I wake up ten minutes after falling asleep to respond to my editor.

#### iv.

I fail to catch the dream. The freewrite is brief and humid. I sweep religiously and leave the pile in the corner. My friend and I head to the mountains. Orange diamonds guide us the entire way. Whisky Jack claws clutch at my index fingers. On three separate occasions we think we have made it to the top. **A tree cradles me** We bring each other snacks. There is no echo up on the peak when I laugh hard and cry loud. I don't look at the scenery much for fear of tripping. Thrice I trip anyway. I play hooky from Somatics class. I momentarily forget why voice and why breath. I rewatch the video of the birds landing on me. I revise micro-poems on race, class, and dreaming. I eat slowly without facing my phone. I envision the spine as a whip. I am struck, mid-dance, by the possibility that ocean waves are caused by the whipping motion of serpents the size of the universe. I wait up all night for inspiration. I forget to change the ancestral water.

#### v.

I jot down a list of residual scars from a past creative experience. I feel residual gin in my system. I fix my hair up to feel emboldened at my desk. Sweat collects from my temples, moves sideways across my forehead, and then drops to the mat. I shadowbox. I read up on how to care for my new hanging Pilea Crinkle. Its draping skeleton changes the architecture of my entire bedroom. The cat's nails rip through the yoga mat. I ask to speak first during an online dance rehearsal to avoid self-censorship or diluting my no. My mom's chicken brines and bakes during the three digital hours of negotiating boundaries and desires. The squash on the kitchen table is the same colour as the tablecloth. I cancel on a friend in order to meditate on a new approach for this dance. On the pub patio I wave to the same man I waved to last time. With a ballpoint pen I draw my pelvic bowl. **The bowl is full of diamonds** The oven dings. My voice on the recording sounds metallic and constricted. The wine makes it easier to practice stubborn loving conflict with a best friend. The cat drinks from the ancestral water. Over and over into the phone I sing yoo-hoo.

## vi.

I worry about why the dreams have been absent. I roll a lacrosse ball along my tightened jaw. The summer hotboxes my room. Google tells me I need to defrost my mom's prawns. I watch my skin and flesh fold up against itself as I exercise. I try this dance as a set of lists. The toaster emits smoke. I reheat the coffee in the microwave. I notice immediate resistance in my viscera when we are asked to introduce ourselves. I water each plant and touch the leaves one at a time. The cat cleans herself while laying on top of me. A fly bounces along the surface of the ancestral water. I am quiet and focused. I kill a spider on my desk and watch the birds outside my window with the cat in my arms. I type a thousand-word course reflection and avoid asking exactly where does our money go? I press my finger into the soil. I trip over the cat. I finish a draft of this dance and it feels bad. **I start over again** The woman outside my window laughing through the night irritates me. The tub of ice cream reveals its bottom. I hang up the video call with my lover once he is asleep so that I can dream-focus.

## vii.

I catch the dream but only after I fall back asleep. I scribble it down with one eye open. I watch bad news on the news. I sit still by my bedside thinking of the floor. My roommate's bedding waltzes along the clothesline in the backyard. My face feels different to my fingertips. I put on the same summer dress and fix my hair to feel a sense of arrival. I long to pick blueberries. Tea is prepared for the ancestors because I have time to go the extra mile. **A form for this dance finally lands in my bones** I forget if I have rotated Pilea Crinkle. I sit on different benches around the neighbourhood and stand still in an alleyway. I am trying too hard so I take a five-hour break. I follow my mom's orders: butter and garlic at high heat. I mistake the tea leaves in the ancestral water for flies. The cat does figure eights around my ankles and crawls under me during Cat-Cow. The moon sits directly above the middle of the road while the sun sets. A short stint of rain surprises my skin. I ask to meet my mentor in person for the first time. I watch myself think in the mirror. I spend hours splitting my split ends. I hide them in books. I scold the cat and roll up the yoga mat. I avoid sleep. I still set up the pen and notebook by the pillow in case I catch them in the morning.

# THE SCREEN AND THE WIND OUTSIDE

B. Solomon

I am an artist,  
a storyteller.

I am a proud member  
of the community who creates live art  
live spaces  
live gatherings.

We've not been able to gather for months—  
everything we know as people comes from gathering:  
science, technology, culture  
teachings, music, dances, and stories  
that help our minds and hearts understand  
who we are and where we've come from—

how we can be  
how we make sense  
of this wild existence

the continued resistance to oppressive  
colonial forces: past  
present.

Every movement that has ever been  
has come from people coming together:

pro-peace movements  
civil rights movements

civil rights

amplifying voices that must be heard.

Amplifying voices of those  
that don't speak people:  
the animals, waters, lands.

Everything we are  
comes from gathering together.

It might do us some good  
to reflect on all those times we're not permitted to gather.

Who has not been permitted to gather  
in our various histories  
and our various present realities?

Maybe now a more privileged person  
can feel a fraction  
of what others who have been shut down and shut up feel—  
people who've been able to walk in any direction.

So the loss of the power of gathering frightens me.  
I think we can all feel that most people in the world  
have not been hugged enough over the past months.

Our sense of touch  
and feelings and  
connection  
have not been fed.

I wonder what hurt this has caused  
what scar will this leave?

I'm proud of the work I've made  
at times, though I wonder:  
was that just part of the great distraction? That's led  
to so much ignoring of our mother's biggest problems  
Turtle Island's biggest issues?

I hear much talk of artists feeling  
as though their work is not a priority at this time,  
their work and art is diminished. Irrelevant.

We understand who we are through art and culture.  
If you're diving into it, now it will be revelatory.

How to know what is what, when all there is, is media in all its forms.

My fatigue from the screen  
doesn't outweigh  
my need for understanding of who I am and what's happening  
and how I fit into place and being

so I continue to speak screen language

which is not good or bad.

It just is.

I don't think it's alive though  
I don't think it's dead.  
It's neutral.  
Like a story that keeps moving about  
in different directions in your mind.

It's not a live space for me though.  
Not alive  
like a body of water or a cup of water  
not really moving  
like a great fire or a candle.

I was a media form  
before this.  
I am a media.

Art is birthed from community  
the village, the tribe, the family.  
Art feeds the community, feeds your family in whatever form that takes  
in all of our histories, that's how it works.

It exists because it's intergenerational,  
you want to learn those songs or stories,  
you go start hanging around the keepers  
of those things.

At a certain point, it feels unnatural to me  
to always be presented  
and collaborating with other  
so-called professionals.

It feels unnatural to me what art has become:  
many others are not included in that circle.  
Where are the young ones? Old ones?  
Where is the natural world we come from

we come from

we come from homes with families, maybe,

maybe our family is just a little patch of earth  
where we're growing something.  
People come from nature. That's our family.  
Maybe we'd be better off  
if we relearned to be in communication with that family again.

If you're locked in, I think that truth is there with you.

How do I art with my grandmother?

How do I art with the birds flying past my window  
the ants crawling across the floor.

How do I art with my past?  
How do I art with my ancestors?  
How do I art with my body?

My greatest privilege is my body.  
My ancient body  
that's been reinventing itself over and over since time immemorial.

If I rest with those things  
then take what I am back to the screen  
maybe the screen will change.

For me, the art world lost its spirit.  
It hasn't been there for a long time.

There's too much high art.  
There's too much  
high art.

Art is of the people.  
Art is of the village. As we begin to reintegrate  
I hear the old systems talk about art and culture as economy.

Art and culture as economy is completely missing the point.  
As we move through this, trying to get back to normal  
is a missed opportunity.

---

*THE SCREEN AND THE WIND OUTSIDE* was originally commissioned as a video work for FOLDA  
(Festival of Live Digital Art) in the spring of 2020.



Seika Boye *Untitled* circa 2000, Vancouver

Image credit: Derek D. Dunlop

Next page: Justine Chambers *ten thousand times and one hundred more* 2018 performance  
From *Unwilling: Exercises in Melancholy* at Haverford College, curated by Vanessa Kwan and Kimberly Phillips

Image credit: Ryan M. Collard



HAVERFORD





Seika Boye *Untitled* 2019  
From This Living Dancer Project, Toronto  
Image credit: Craig Boyko



Above: All Bodies Dance Project *It's Enough (for a rooftop)* ongoing dance research  
Image credit: Gemma Crowe

Next page: Image credit: Naomi Brand

Image descriptions for *It's Enough (for a rooftop)* available on page 120









Dana Michel *Yellow Towel* 2017 performance  
Image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia  
Image credit: Andrea Avezù





Dana Michel *Yellow Towel* 2013 promo shot  
Image credit: Maxyme G. Delisle



Dana Michel ***So So Silky Silky Silk: Scoring Yellow Towel*** 2018  
From a performance writing residency in collaboration with Michael Nardone, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montréal  
Image credit: Clara Lacasse

# NO FIXED POSITIONS: A Dialogue on *Yellow Towel*

Dana Michel & Michael Nardone

During the performance writing residency *So So Silky Silky Silk* at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montréal, choreographer and live artist Dana Michel joined poet and editor Michael Nardone in order to create a score of Michel's iterative, improvisational choreographic work *Yellow Towel*. This solo piece – which Michel has performed over the past seven years and which was awarded the Silver Lion for innovation in dance at the 2017 Venice Biennale – is exceptional for its excavation of a range of subjectivities and embodiments.

“I am always trying to run away from any pinning down of what I am trying to do or say,” Michel states of the work. In scoring *Yellow Towel*, Michel and Nardone began with a series of questions to address the itinerant and obscure aspects of the work: What is legible in the moment of performance? What are the techniques and technologies that mediate performance? How might a score function as a vital element of a work without fixing in place its desired fugitivity?

The following dialogue took place during the first days of their residency at SBC Gallery – in the midst of an array of documents, objects, and materials used in the research and performance phases of *Yellow Towel*, including Michel's personal diaries, documentary videos, and iterations of her original score – as Michel and Nardone began to imagine how they might translate the performance into the shape of a book.

**Michael Nardone** I thought I might begin by asking some basic questions about *Yellow Towel*. I saw one performance of it here in Montréal and immediately had this sense of how exciting it could be as a textual work. Yet there is so much I don't know about the piece. When did you begin to compose it?

**Dana Michel** I can think of several points at once. My nephew had a big afro. My brother is, um, a black person. [*Laughs*] And his wife is a blonde person. Their two children are fair-skinned and have various degrees of curly hair. And this nephew had an afro on top of this skin, this history. So, I became curious about how he was finding his way in the world and how he identified, and I wondered: What's it like when you don't have such clear indicators? Obviously, we have words like mixed race to describe this situation, but what does it feel like? That question was one starting point. And then, somewhere around that time, I was still working at the hospital...

**MN** Here in Montréal?

**DM** Yeah, I was at the Royal Victoria Hospital in the maternity ward. It was my solid "I'm not letting go of this job" job, but I started thinking I needed to let go of the job. So, I was wondering what I was going to do if I let go of this job. My thought was: I am going to make a kids' show. I thought I could make a good one, and one that made money, and I like kids, so I was going to make a kids' show. My first concept for this show was that it would focus on the experience of being mixed race.

**MN** It's interesting because I can absolutely imagine a universe where *Yellow Towel* is a performance for children, while at the same time I know it is anything but that.

**DM** Yes, it is at the roots of work, and I let the idea sort of spin out.

**MN** Can you describe your initial sense of it? Was it a character that you had in mind? What kind of performance did you imagine?

**DM** I wanted to make a one-hour-long, multimedia, fancy pants but very simple easy-to-eat kids' show kind of thingy that I would perform live. I pictured myself with a very large afro in front of a stark black and white graphic novel-like scenario coming to life in performance. So, the kids' show remained an idea for a while. Then, for the Festival Trans-Amériques edition of *Short & Sweet* one year—have you ever been to one of those?

**MN** Yes! They're the short format performances that Sasha Kleinplatz and Andrew Tay curate. I love them.

**DM** They are my favourite things to do. As I was preparing to do it, I was like, Oh, I'm going to test out this idea. I got my hands on a big, reddish-brownish afro, and I wore this long, colourful overcoat and had a giant umbrella I found at Village des Valeurs. The coat somehow spun me into this Jean-Michel Basquiat train of thought—I had been watching all of these interviews with Basquiat and began to think I would do something in conversation with those.

At another point I thought I'd try out some kind of Butoh-esque white powder on my face, and I ended up getting this cheap compact from the Dollar Store—it was foundation or pressed powder—and it was absolutely *not* for black people. So, I was playing around with that. Around that same time, there had been a spread with Beyoncé in *Vanity Fair* or *Vogue* where the stylist got criticized for doing blackface because they darkened her complexion with foundation and kinked up her hair in some of the photos. I was thinking about this, too—playing around with it inside the Basquiat interviews and the coat and the umbrella.

Anyway, I ended up doing a piece where I gyrated for three minutes, with my tits out, in my underwear, wearing a pair of creepers and the overcoat. In that instant, I was like: This is not going to be a kids' show!

**MN** This would have been when?

**DM** 2011. Things were really shifting in my life at that time. I left my job and I was wandering a lot more, doing what I like to do, spending a lot of time in grocery stores and pharmacies and any store actually, allowing myself the time to think about all of the possibilities of all the different objects and textures and colours I would see there. I had taken a huge leap and I didn't necessarily know I was going to make a big piece. I went from this kids' show to the *Short & Sweet* piece to getting a scholarship that brought me to Vienna for five weeks.

**MN** I believe this was for a residency at ImPulsTanz?

**DM** That's right. I honestly never would have considered applying to do it because I just didn't think I was fancy enough. A friend convinced me to do it. And I had discovered an artist who was teaching there, Ivo Dimchev, who was doing things that I hadn't realized existed in my desires to do. When I saw the works he was making, I was like: Oh, exactly! That is exactly what I care about—what he is doing, it's possible.

**MN** What was it about his work that spoke to you, to the works you imagined making?

**DM** Oh, Ivo... He is doing comedy and it's clearly some next-level schtick—a bit of “I'm doing whatever the fuck I want.” Yet it has this incredible abstraction to it, this deep conceptualization and awareness. It's very pointed, while also being meandering, open.

**MN** That is something that attracted me absolutely to *Yellow Towel* when I saw it, its clarity and abstraction. The way these various, semi-obscure yet exceptionally particular acts are taking place, and in their accumulation over time create this abstract ambiance that is so enthralling to be in with you.

**DM** With Ivo, it's super rigorous, and it's total jackass too. It's both, and it is beautiful.

**MN** So, you went from abandoning this kids' piece to being in residence in Vienna...

**DM** And during that time, I had my brains blown. I saw fifty shows in the span of five weeks. All of this information, all of these ways of thinking. It was a big thing. It's when I officially started working on *Yellow Towel*, or, perhaps I should say it's when the words “Yellow Towel” first appeared to me.

**MN** And did you do a performance there?

**DM** I did a thing, yes. I took a workshop with Ivo and he had us make solos over a week. On the first day of the workshop, Ivo had us do a writing exercise. We had to make a list of ten things we were thinking about, then narrow it down to five, then choose one from that five and write a poem about it, and this poem would be a starting point for the solo. The word that made the cut was “hair,” and I called the solo “Yellow Towel” because I would play this game when I was a kid—it seems like everything I do leads back to childhood games—I would drape a towel on my head and pretend like I had flowy, bouncy hair à la 1980s Head & Shoulders commercials. This was the first official nugget of *Yellow Towel*. It had morphed from the kids' show idea to a performance about my hair.

**MN** How did the piece evolve from that point?

**DM** When I left Vienna, Ivo said: “You should keep working on this. It's great what you are doing. You should keep going.” At that point, I think I applied for a grant to work on it some more. Now, I realize I'm saying a lot of things at once but



Dana Michel *Yellow Towel* 2013 performance  
Image credit: Maya Fuhr

they are all tied together. What I was trying to say earlier was that this was really the first time I was wandering about without a specific direction in mind. In fact, what I did know is what I *didn't* want to do: I didn't want to tour, I didn't want to court producers, I didn't want to have to sell a thing. Honestly, I just wanted to fuck around and work on this thing.

**MN** It's interesting to hear you cite wandering through grocery stores and pharmacies and engaging with the things in these kinds of places as you were starting to compose the work. Yesterday, I realized—as I watched you organize all the performance materials—that just about everything you use is a banal object from such quotidian commercial spaces—a roll of paper towels, a container of cream cheese, vacuum cleaner attachments, hair care products... It struck me because in *Yellow Towel* all of these things are charged with a wild oddness, with a kind of supernatural power. I also noticed that maybe you were a bit shy or hesitant about bringing them out of their suitcases—

**DM** For sure.

**MN** Why was that?

**DM** Well, I've spent five years being so particular about how these things are seen. I've been keeping the secret of these things. Like this, for instance! [*Picks up a felt hat that has the face of a frog*] I have this frog in my pockets, holding all of the rubber bands, throughout the show. And nobody knows! [*Laughs*] Does everyone get this kind of pleasure? I know it's always been there for me for as long as I've been alive. When I was a kid, I would hide two of my McDonald's fries under a napkin and, when everyone thought I was done, I'd be like, Nope! And I'd sneak those two little fries back out. [*Laughs*] I can't believe how satisfying that was. I don't know why. Perhaps it gives you something extra to bend around in the tedium of living? Anyway, I take so much pleasure in objects, in organizing them and thinking about them and dealing with them. Especially this set of objects. I've been allowed to fully express my desire to hide them and care for them over these years.

**MN** This hiding you speak of relates to the choreography of *Yellow Towel* in an interesting way. There's this thing where you hide your own virtuosity in the piece. Or, to put it in perhaps a better way: you hide your capability to do stunning and incredible bodily movements throughout the work. And then, in the moment it explodes out into the piece, you often cover it again, hide it.

**DM** I am often faced with this question from other people: Is it dance or is it not dance? Or: Is she an amazing performer or is she crazy? While I am hiding this and hiding that, I can't say the same for my person. I perform well under pressure, and my intuition is sharp—I know that much. I know I can react well to a thing. And I know that I like jokes. It's embarrassing to say it, but listen, I like to be funny. I like it a lot. It's very important to me.

**MN** I mean, *Yellow Towel* is absolutely hilarious at moments!

**DM** I know those things are there for me and that I can rely on them. What happens with my body comes as a shock to me too.

**MN** How do you mean?

**DM** I think of it through the frame of raves and Caribana. They are places where my body moves and does things, and I don't know how it does them. I realize: Cool, so I have some kind of natural ability thing happening but it's not to a point where I'm like, "Oh, I am an amazing dancer." In performance, I don't often know what my body is doing. When I look at documentation after a show, I may realize that a certain turn, for instance, makes a good photo—and I'm not talking about this ego-wise, I'm talking about my choreographic analysis of what my body is doing in the work—but it's not a situation where I'm doing all these moves and I've written them for my skill to appear at specific moments, no.

People can talk about it from the outside however they want to talk about it. All I can say from the inside is that I am working in a joke space and in a what's-happening-with-my-body space. If something hurts, for instance, that's going to affect the way I am going to do something. I don't shut that down. I let that talk to the work. I let all of the things talk to the work and it produces something. People seem to express to me that it works. More importantly, though, I register from the inside that something intuitively makes sense about this manner of writing movement.

**MN** What struck me so deeply in seeing your work is the fact that it's as if every movement and every utterance is constructed from layers and layers of history, histories. They are always partially obscured or in the process of becoming legible, and they are charged with new valences of meaning as you embody and intone them. How do you do that?

**DM** For me, it's a matter of putting the body in at the very last second. When I was preparing the work, I was giving it lots of time, doing all kinds of thinking, and, as I said, spending a lot of time wandering. And when I'm doing research, I'm cloaked in an invisible velcro suit. Or a magnet suit. I'm in constant osmosis mode.

**MN** Osmosis and velcro!

**DM** You see where I'm going. I'm soaking everything up like a goddamn Christmas fruitcake. Soaking it all up. I'm touching materials, talking, thinking, getting super swollen with all the information. Then the emergency of the performance wrings out from me what is necessary. I set up very specific tasks for myself, paths, timings based on music. I know I work well under pressure—it's when I have the most clarity.

What came out of *Yellow Towel*, out of my body, was exciting to discover because I knew I was increasingly interested in what came out of improvisation. But "improvisation" is still not good enough of a word. I knew I was most interested in how a body reacted in the time of performance after having worn this soaked fruitcake suit.

**MN** How does this differ from the way you thought about composing choreography prior to *Yellow Towel*?

**DM** The way I was working before—I would go into the studio and I would improvise, and then I would watch videos of it. I would find interesting things, but, overall, it was boring. It's now embarrassing to me this conception of dance where I work my moves and find cooler ways of doing them. It has nothing to do with anything I care about anymore. I don't mind seeing certain people do it, but there was definitely a moment when I recognized it didn't fit with what I wanted to do.

**MN** There is a productive problem here that's interesting to think about as we begin to arrange the score for the work. On one hand, you're saying that the way that you like to work is by absorbing things—absorbing and having lots of information enter you, pass through you—and then using this to respond in some kind of way in performance. On the other hand, at some point you have to organize the information and all that you've absorbed and some aspect of your response to it. How does structuring come into play? I'm curious if there has been a shift in how you think of the way *Yellow Towel* is organized and the way that you have composed your solo works after it?

**DM** I feel like I found a kind of organizing principle with *Yellow Towel* and I'm feeling it. It's still there in *Mercurial George*, but what has shifted is time. I've become more reckless. The soaking period is the same, but that moment when I initiate running the mop through the squeezer is happening later and later. That's what I've noticed. I'm constantly upping the ante. And then sometimes I find out, Wow, okay, yep, the ante was too high! That was way too close!

**MN** Does that shut you down or does that intrigue you?

**DM** It never shuts me down. I'll keep taking the joke further and further. What I've found out is that I have a great time in this space, but in terms of a research practice, I realize, um, I could be a little less ridiculous. I could be a little more productive if I was a little less ridiculous.

**MN** I imagine that you have to push through some far-flung boundaries in performance to realize perhaps you need to take it back a step or two.

**DM** Exactly! As you're talking about choreography, I'm picturing now a pinball machine. Maybe my work is a pinball machine. (And maybe a pinball machine is not like this at all. I am often confounded by contraptions.) The machine is the text score, the objects, the music choices, the light, and I'm the ball. But my ball is a thick sponge ball sloshing through the system. Whereas for most choreographers I talk to the choreography applies only to the sponge passing through the pinball machine, for me, the whole pinball machine is choreography, and the machine is for me more important than the sponge, or, it's where I spend the most time.

**MN** In the work, there is an array of embodiments and accents that come through you. I'm curious if, in developing the work, you saw these various embodiments as characters?

**DM** I don't think of them as characters. I think about it as me reacting to different circumstances. In the most basic way that is what's happening. What's happening is that I'm embodying a mental state that is mine. I'm letting it communicate to the rest of me. I am physicalizing what is actually fucking happening, and normally we need to contain these things. I've allowed performance to be a place where I don't have to contain these things. I think the reason why it looks real is because it is real. It's not mimicry. It's been difficult. I've had some hard questions come up when I've performed it.



Dana Michel *Yellow Towel* 2017 performance  
Image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia  
Image credit: Andrea Avezù

[*While talking, they drift over to a screen playing various years' performances of Yellow Towel*]

As time went on, I realized I had to be more careful about the language I used around the work. The kind of casual way that I could talk about what I was doing to myself or to people who know me was and could and did get used as weaponry in the mouths of other people when they deployed the language. It shaped the work in a way that I didn't anticipate, and once those words were out there, it was immediately too late. I still don't know how to handle what I triggered and where to place it, because I also find it all very fascinating. In a way, I'm content with the language that was used because it ricocheted the work exactly where I was trying to get away from, and that was interesting to watch happen.

**MN** Can you give an example?

**DM** For instance, my big thing was: This is my "black piece." This is very true for me, but when I say it, I know exactly what I mean.

**MN** And that's a huge space for other people to infer into—

**DM** And that's exactly what happened. In a way, it's good that I left it that way. I opened the door, and it was wide open for exactly the opposite of what I meant... For instance, this situation right here. [*Refers to a video of a Yellow Towel performance that is playing on a screen in the gallery*] I can tell you exactly what's happening from the inside, where the clothing came from, what I'm doing. But this person, this shape, this character thing, when people talk about it, it's a crack addict. It's a homeless person on crack. I opened the door for that by calling it my "black piece," apparently.

**MN** I'm curious, though, as to whether you mean for that to be one of the valences—or do you not have that in mind at all? And by valence, I mean the different resonations that echo out of the work, as in this being one of the embodiments that is intoned, but just one of them.

**DM** Well, yes, that's why I still have a confusing time with all of this—because of what we discussed earlier regarding the sponge suit. I can't deny any of these things.

**MN** So, is the problem, then, the fixing of the embodiment of it being your "black piece"—the fixing of it to only that one valence?

**DM** Yeah, and the sadness I have around that is that I was never trying to prove a point, but it proved all kinds of points front and centre, up, down, and around. Just the fact that the word “black” was used and I do some of the things I do in the work... Had I not said anything about *Yellow Towel* being a “black piece,” I wonder how it would have been read. It’s not that I wasn’t being careful, I was being generous. Also, naïve.

*[They begin watching the initial moments of a Yellow Towel performance]*

**MN** If you were to describe this section of the work and this embodiment, what are the ways you would think about it?

**DM** Well, I’ll begin with the jogging suit... Wait, to go back to what we were just talking about, I want to say I also think it’s important that what is happening here telescopes, that people bring in information to me based on what they are seeing. That is super important.

**MN** It is, in a way, that next level of steeping that you talked about earlier, which you get to play with and within.

**DM** Yes, it’s really important. I don’t want to turn that off. But the jogging suit. I bought it many years ago for a different project. It was for a musician to wear so they could disappear, but I never ended up using it for that after all. Then, a couple of years later, I was doing a work-in-progress thingy and was three months pregnant. I was still a high-risk pregnancy so I think I wasn’t ready to share the information yet with people. So, I was digging through my stuff and I was like, I need the biggest clothes I own. I felt like I needed to hide, so I busted this jogging suit out.

**MN** It’s totally a disappearing suit.

**DM** It’s perfect. As for the NY hat, I bought it years ago at Village des Valeurs because I thought it was hot, and I added it to the disappearing suit.

*[Continues watching video of performance]*

Okay, there is stuff that happens on the inside of the clothes, but I won’t talk about that. But on the outside of the clothes, in this particular section, I wrote a short score. There is a path, a diagonal, and at the far end of the diagonal there is an inflatable toilet. I have this text about house music—which pulls up all kinds

of memories as I have a deep history with this song from my rave days—and the point is to get from one corner to the toilet while saying the text. Except I haven't memorized the text, so part of it is about seeing how I remember the text while doing the diagonal. So: I gotta say the text, I gotta make it to the toilet, I'm doing it with this kind of accent or affected way of speaking, that's it. The body that comes out of it is a body that is dealing with serious memory challenges and dealing with having people watch those memory challenges. That's kind of a skeleton of what's happening there. This is all very far away from a person who has no home and who is on crack.

**MN** For someone to see that into what you are doing is to see only one of the vectors that intersects with that diagonal.

**DM** Exactly. I see what the intersection is, but that intersection is not made up in my mind for the same reasons it's made up in other people's minds.

**MN** It's an important aspect of the composition, its aboutness. What this section is about is someone walking from offstage, across the stage, to a toilet—

**DM** While trying to remember something, with a bunch of strangers watching.

**MN** In that sense, it's exceptionally literal. However, in that movement, there are all of the valences, all of the things that you have soaked into this procession, into this diagonal, and they of course resonate, but they are a tangent outward from the score of the crossing and the remembering.

**DM** And, also, the way I work is—was it with you that I was talking about memory holes this morning?

**MN** I don't remember! [*Laughs*] But what about memory holes?

**DM** It's about the way that information serves me or comes to me, the tie-dye effect of it all. The timing is not linear. The first thing that someone wrote about this work when it was still in progress was that it's about Trayvon Martin. His shooting had just happened. I didn't know about it yet, but then I looked into it and obviously followed the story. But I don't know, I can't discount butterfly effects.

**MN** It is a resonance because you create a space where such things can be read and interpreted into the work in so many ways.

**DM** But with the memory hole, sometimes I'm soaking information in and I don't know exactly when it comes out. So, I feel I'm not one hundred percent in control of my output.

**MN** It relates to this work in that, along with all of the embodiments, movements, and gestures—and how one might project onto them all different forms of age and abilities, from child-like to elderly—there is also this protean thing that happens—

**DM** “Protean,” what is this word?

**MN** The word has many associations or connotations but, in this sense, I mean it specifically with regard to Proteus, who was a shapeshifter. I mean it in regard to all of the different transforming bodily instantiations that are brought together through *Yellow Towel*. I think of the protean in *Yellow Towel* on several levels—race, age, ability, as I mention—and also with regard to gender performance and representations of sexuality across a wide spectrum. Throughout the work, you do these things that are explicit in a certain way, and yet you somehow extract out of them the sexuality in a certain way. It's both overt and also diminishing at the same time, if that makes sense. Is that something that you think about in terms of the performance?

**DM** Yes, of course. This is something people have asked me about and that people have written about the work. Sometimes they discuss “androgyny,” and some people have described my “lack of fear to be ugly.” But that's not how I conceive of it. I'm definitely not aiming for any kind of anything. Definitely not androgyny. I'm attempting to hold all of the things that are in here, and let them exist. People have asked me: How can you allow yourself to be seen in such an ugly way? As a black woman, especially, it's so brave that you ...

**MN** That language feels quite off, no?

**DM** “Ugly,” yes. “Not sexy,” yes. Whatever. I'm not shocked. From the inside, in terms of how it feels, I can say I felt powerful and exploded in those moments they are citing. I felt fucking gorgeous. I felt extremely sexy. I was all the things, all the moods. I'm not trying to seduce anyone, so that means I can exist in a way that is attractive to me.

**MN** I'm curious how that bleeds into life outside of the performance.

**DM** As in, why can't that sensibility exist for me all of the time?

**MN** Yes, that's it.

**DM** I've watched myself have the courage to morph into someone that feels closer to what's happening in here. [*Places hand across chest*] And I don't know how this person inscribes itself in the world. It's not so neat.

**MN** What's it like for you to continue to perform a piece like this? I imagine it being complex, because on one hand repeating the work seems to go against all of the exploration that you have written into its score, but on the other hand you have composed a choreography that is a structure you get to play within and, perhaps, explore the (possibly minute) differences you come up against from iteration to iteration.

**DM** That's it. When I premiered the piece at the Festival Trans-Amériques, I thought of it as a one-shot deal. I like to work in this way, and formats like *Short & Sweet* are perfect for me because that's how they work—you try something out and then move on to something else. This is something I admire about the visual art performance world: there's a thing, it happens, and then that's it. At the same time, maybe this doesn't make total sense for me because I do love repetition and I like things to live for a long time.

When I started to be invited to tour *Yellow Towel*, I thought, This does not make sense at all. The whole question was: How can I react to something I've already reacted to? I wondered if all the subsequent moments then would be fake, wouldn't feel right. I thought, I don't get why, but I guess I'm going to do this thing. There were seven months between the premiere and the next run, and before that second run, I did a one-week residency with Peter James and did a showing of the work, and I was like, Oh, nope, it's new again, I'm definitely experiencing this thing again for the first time. My experience of the work went in and out of that feeling. Especially if there were several months in between performances, it came in and out of making sense. In fact, last year I really got into a place of feeling, and thought, Oh, this is a whole new situation. I'm probably going to stop touring *Yellow Towel* now, but it's like brand fucking new again.

**MN** What was it that made it feel that way? Was it a personal thing?

**DM** Yeah, I'm a different person. Things have really shifted in my mind and I've

made all kinds of new learnings. That's one thing. And on a smaller scale, I'm so sensitive. Every floor in all the theatres is different. There's different dust. The light. Everything is different. The energy in the room is different. The country I'm in, what languages they understand. Everything is different all the time. Because I'm a person who is so sensitive, I can be affected by such small things.

**MN** Are there specific shifts or moments that stick out for you in the strings of performances of the work? For example, "In this one particular performance, I got this one segment right," or "What happened in this other performance was really unexpected and it really worked." Or is it that such analysis doesn't register because you're so in the thing that the comparisons from one iteration or context to the next don't really map against one another?

**DM** It's both. This is what I love about getting to do this stuff. It's so living. There are so many negotiations. Sometimes I'll think it feels really good to say this in one particular way, and then I do that same thing another time and I am hit by the fact that I am breaking cardinal rule number one, which is: No Fixed Positions. Don't hold on to anything. I stole that from Bruce Lee, I believe, and I've adopted it hardcore.

*[They begin to watch the beginning moments of two different performances to compare them: one from the US premiere at American Realness in January 2014, the second from the performance at the Venice Biennale in June 2017]*

**MN** Do I remember correctly that you told me the show begins offstage?

**DM** Yes.

**MN** How deep or far back does it go?

**DM** Generally, I am in the changing room, and the stage manager says, "They are ready for you"—that's when it starts.

**MN** Can you describe where that is in relation to the stage?

**DM** It depends. In the performance we're watching, it's just at the back of the stage and a little bit off to the side. At other times, I have to come down some stairs. When there's a ways to go and I've started the show offstage, sometimes the stage manager isn't quite sure how to deal with me because I don't say to anyone that I'm starting. In starting, it means I stop being polite, basically. By that I mean I'm not

going to say all of the things you need me to say so you feel like you're okay, you know what I mean?

**MN** Is there a way you like to allow yourself to become visible to the audience?

**DM** Hmmmm.

**MN** Because in the two videos I watched yesterday, you definitely lurk a little offstage for a bit.

**DM** You can see me lurking?

**MN** Yes!

**DM** Dammit!

**MN** But I'm looking for it, I'm watching exactly for those details. I don't recall seeing or recognizing that when I saw it in person. But I do remember thinking: Is this starting? Has this started? Does this performer know where they are? Do they know the performance has started? [*Laughs*]

**DM** Are you asking me those questions now? [*Laughs*]

**MN** No! But I am curious about how you choreograph the start.

**DM** Well, they say, "Are you ready?" and I follow them, and I take my time to make it around to the stage. I take my time to hug that corner, basically. It depends on how I'm feeling that day. Sometimes I can just walk around that corner onto the stage, and other times I'm like, Oh, wait, there are all kinds of systems. It depends! It depends on how noisy the public is. I generally like to come on while everyone is still talking, and I can kind of slip in. So, I'm listening for the right moment, when I feel like maybe no one is looking or I can slip in amongst the chatter. Sometimes it's dead silent in there because they are very polite or because the usher has made some kind of gesture that tells people the show is starting. In that case, it will take me longer, because I have to find a way to make myself feel like I am slipping in unnoticed. I guess I'm always trying to slip in naturally, casually.

**MN** I've now watched four recordings of *Yellow Towel*, and the length of time from you slipping in and being visible to the audience until the time you make a first utterance—it varies greatly. I'm curious if there is something scorable there?

**DM** There definitely is. When I come around the corner, I know that the curtain tends to be very soothing. So, I allow myself to be soothed by the curtain. Generally, I'm negotiating my proximity to the curtain and, depending on where people are sitting, I'm negotiating that sensation — trying to gauge what's happening in this space while being comforted by the curtain. Also, I'm negotiating my feet — but, wait, this maybe sounds ...

**MN** Please go on! This is the choreography.

**DM** Okay, so, I'm negotiating the curtain. I'm finding a way to make it from behind the curtain to inside of the curtain, and I'm trying to do all of this without anyone noticing. Except the whole room is looking at me! That's a big ass negotiation, right? And, I'm thinking: How do I feel about all of this? How close is this person? Is it a smooth curtain? Sometimes the curtain texture can make me feel comfortable, or not at all. And then there are all the other things I'm factoring in: Am I hungry? Am I tired? All of this affects how long it takes me. Sometimes, my foot might get caught. Sometimes there is another curtain that I am trying to close behind me so no one sees backstage. I'm negotiating the aesthetic space.

**MN** That's it, you're engaging the material aesthetic space, right down to its most quotidian elements.

**DM** Exactly. And also, there's a writing in how I am trying to deal with my feet and my knees, in the bending and opening of the legs and knees, how I'm trying to blur it so it's not too sharp. I've spent a lot of time at the curtain, and sometimes when I'm there I can see my shadow, and I spend some time looking at my shadow. It depends on how tight my hood is tied. Also, the number of nails I've glued on will affect the pacing, as I allow myself to be soothed by the sounds of the nails on the curtain's fabric. So, I go from hugging the curtain to working from the curtain down to myself. Then I try again to make it away from the curtain without anyone noticing that I am moving my feet.

**MN** The term you are using — “negotiation” — seems like a key term for your sense of choreography. If the main plotline of these initial moments in *Yellow Towel* is to enter and move diagonally across the stage from curtain to toilet, then, in this instance, the negotiations are each obstacle and information point you confront along that line.

**DM** It bounces between “the choreographic” and what I need to do this job I’m trying to do.

**MN** And here, at the start of *Yellow Towel*, what I sense you’re performing or relaying is something cosmogenic. You seem to be initiating an entire universe of movement and sound.

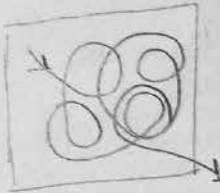
**DM** When I’m in and away from the curtain, I am working myself up to a place where I can feel like I can make a sound. I’m saying, *Ummmmm, ubbbbbbb*. I’m thinking, and I’m playing. Then it’s choreographic. I’m writing. I’ve been warming up a little — *so, ummmm, so* — I’m working my way up to saying, *Hello*.

TBTWOA -



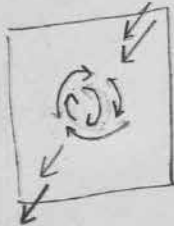
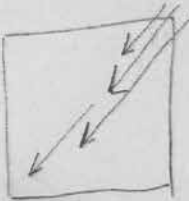
THOUGHTS 1/22/2012

I



Silence: one by one enter regular run. From different sides into stag run. / own timing  
I, II, III, IIII, IIII, IIII  
exit. in darkness? Hear first b/4 see

II.



The wonder of Dreams undreamt

Dancy section.  
Steady flow. river of wonder.  
Brief moments of partnering -> suspensions in time.  
missed opportunities?  
Hope. Promise. crossroads (?) X  
Time flow in one direction.

Images of flying.

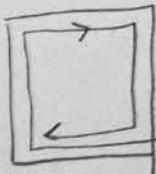
Partnering = disconnect. Inability to communicate  
riff on Virginia Reel?

III.

REAL LIBERTY

- music interlude  
clapping at end.

IV.



These Are The Times That Try Men's Soul

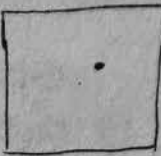
Running. falling.  
Relentless.

Mixed in weight of struggle. bitter. Angry  
unemployment / 2 wars / debt / health.

TEXT: Winter Soldier  
OWS  
Tea Party.

First half.  
dancers end on ground  
singers enter + lift them up.  
2nd half. Singers on stage and  
dancers move around them?  
End?

Knows the point in the show where  
"You get to select your democracy."



person who does Solo changes with each show - Roll dice & randomly select?

V.



Have Audience decide who soloist is?

Dancers make a <sup>movement</sup> statement about what they believe  
Audience votes <sup>by level of applause</sup> on who they want to do the solo?

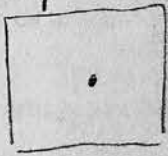
Like a Presidential debate? Candidate selection.  
Audience gets to ask questions of dancers?

democracy is.

VI Reel Democracy.

? discordant / screaming?

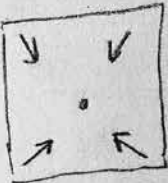
Solo / birthing / growing Pains.



A body of men holding themselves accountable to Nobody, ought not be trusted by anybody.  
Mischief is Easier Begun than Ended.

VII

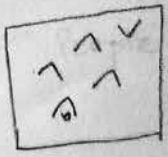
THE Age of Reason? / The Rights of Man?



soloist pushed around  
tries to escape / stopped.  
go into audience? carried back into space?  
Stripped to underwear?

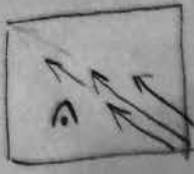


dollar bill across mouth.  
"Rag doll." Limp / manipulated + Abandoned.



as "manipulated"  
other people enter with bills across mouth and do same moves

OR



as manipulated ragdolloed  
Reprise movement



# INCENDIARY CHXNXMXN

Michael Chang

XN  
XNGLXSH-CHXNXSX  
PHRXSXBXXK (1875)

&

X CXMPLXTX LXST XF WXLLS, FXRGX & CX'S  
CXLXFXRNXX, NXVXDX, XTC.

CXMPXLXD BY WXNG SXM XND XSSXSTXNTS  
SXM FRXNCXSCX  
414 MXRKXT STRXXT (BXLXW SXNSXMX)

WHXT GXXDS HXVX YXX FXR SXLX?

I HXVX XLL KXNDS

I WXNT TX GXT X PXXR XF YXXR BXST PXNTS

WHXT DX YXX XSK FXR THXM?

& CXN YXX TXKX LXSS FXR THXM?

X CXNNXT, SXR

WXLL YXX SXLL XN CRXDXT?

XNLY CXSH, SXR

WX PXV VXYR HXXVY DXTY XN XXR BXST GXXDS

SXMX MXN LXSX CXPXTXL

& SXMX MXN GXT PRXFXTS

BXY XS MXNY XS YXX LXKX

CXN YXX LXT MX SXX XT?

YXXR CXCK, X MXXN

# Good Things Come to Those Who Have a Bad Attitude

Malik Nashad Sharpe

Note to self

I can't write a note to self

If I have no self

*The only thing that quells this visceral and constant shaking in my organs is a half-here half-not approach*

My grandmother told me the story of how I came out of my Mother with both hands shielding my face. I didn't cry. I tell her, I've been studying astral projection with a "perfecting disassociation" glint in my eyes. And it is formed as a teardrop.

A side-eye and gnashing of teeth

Shows a history of dealing with ridiculous shit constantly

And she's looking at me like I did and said something ridiculous

Because speech is an action

She's looking to the side and looking at me, a grandeur gesture shows the tongue and a language. Lashing without feeling. Eyes that tell you that there is something over there, imperceptible until you look.

*Take account well of what is over there*

## *1. You are never expecting to get this call and then you get this call*

The words being said to me on the phone are suspended in thin air

Flailing with its rough edges, it's a tool that can cut. Grabbing at the air, gasping for breath, I cannot catch these words in my hands.

u cannot jump or perform miracles, u cannot part the sea or grow grass, u cannot Eat, Pray, Love, u cannot let this affect u, touch u, consume u, u cannot become an incoherence, an aberration, suspended, dead, hung, no roots.

we grow where air meets sea

Peace be motherfucking upon this volcano because she will blow the fuck up at any mention of this moment called Life. This worst moment on the phone.

2. *A sing-songy cadence of the throat will eventually get me killed*

I vow to that shit anyway  
But how could I vow if I cannot find "I"

Well, whippersnapper  
You little whippersnapper  
A baby comes out of the wound  
With X hands in front of X face  
And even though I cannot see X anywhere

I know that those hands be cutting bitches up right now if they try and mess  
This particular one  
Has no heart

No.  
Heart.

"Hibernating until further notice..." a scrawled note on crumpled lined paper,  
saltfish grease on the corners, taped haphazardly reads

"Be back in 20"

And this might mean exactly that or that we are never coming back  
And this sun in my heart will rise again  
And again and again

But not today.

And this volcano that has burst inside of my intestine, an organ underneath distress,  
in its best moment created a new arrangement of my insides, of the earth of my body

Nothing Truly Ever Dies

3. *This should make you afraid*

“Do reiki on me. Fuck my mouth over the Internet. Let me fuck yours?”

How could I sin if I cannot “I”?

4. *Burnt out/takin' Xans every day which I bought on the GODTDAMN Black Market/Dark web drug doin to stay alive maaaaaaayyyyyynnnnnnnnnnnneeeee/ that's that shit I don't like!!// Depression is really reaaaaalllly political/ Really really real// Politically connected to some fucking oligarch/ where I am “consumer” but there really aint shit to buy and yet I still ... I still do not have choice but I think that I do, I believe that I do, I pray that I do, so do I? No. I become a seller of my “Self” but how could I sell my “Self” if I cannot, If I cannot “Self” “Sell” or “I”? How do I pray? but G, lemme be really really really real witchu I been soldt that shit too, so crumbly bramley apple ass bitches don't bother, cus I'm checked tf out, burnt out, every. thing. soldt. ROCKING TF OUT, soldt, crying, cock in the mouth, soldt, crying, tryna bareback, crying, brokeback, crying, This Bridge Called My Back, crying, broken backs, crying, what about the fucking mouth? Crying. The broken in two equal, shark-tooth-edged heart pieces, crying. So I suggest you backing THE FUCK up out of my face, crying. Or cum onto my face, crying. I love you, crying. You don't ever come to me crying. But that's manipulative crying. I've been studying at LSE, crying. Master of Astral Projection, crying, let's meet somewhere, crying. Getting on the Honour Roll for being an absolute fuck, crying...*

5. *You will never be the same, but you could get yourself back if you wanna*

Buildings are going up everywhere

Constantly

All the time

24/7 Construction Company

The United Kingdom of Construction!

Get a structure, find a structure, live in a structure, breathe in a structure, find your voice in a structure, live, fuck, die, in a structure

Buildings going up everywhere  
All of the time  
Can't get no peace  
Can't get none mine

Pessimism isn't the disaster that we should be looking at. It's optimism, it's this cruel motherfucker dressed in White and Floral and Sequins and yet is nothing but Dagger and Sword. Fire that scorches. Fist and pummeling. Hope is important but it is also destructive. Assume that pessimism leads to nothingness, to helplessness, at your own peril. All of these terms can be made deadnames to the things that they've been assigned, the things we understand to describe, names that do not fit the bodies of these texts, these texts that are our bodies, My Body.

Anything can be equipped with a motor for an action, an actioning away from this or an actioning towards a disaster. And we look towards this insatiable capitalism to prove that we vermin can make and exact and continue and maintain such a ruthless economic system of frank exploitation, exploitation out and of every single damn thing we name. Thinkers living in mansions in Bloomsbury thinking on million-pound chairs. Aestheticians performing melancholia on *The Real Housewives*. Suburban boredom and depletion.

They said, "In the future, there will be no money."

Well I hope you are fucking happy  
We ain't got no more money and instead we got  
A Hope that can be employed to do dastardly things.  
A Hope that can be twisted and made into weapons of mass destruction.  
Hope that can be warfare.  
Hope that could be thinking this world is over right now, Hope that can take away someone else's breath. My breath.  
A Hope that kills.  
A Hope that creates a new world order.  
Hope that can serve a look, a function, turn it into money in no money land.

I'm just speaking from a dissonance  
From this harmful state of affairs  
Is all.

\*Hope is also an essential part of comprehension. We shall not get rid of something we have all deemed so necessary.

\*\*My entire existence is spent disassociated so don't believe anything I say.

\*\*\*I am not a stable narrator, I am not a stable wreck.

\*\*\*\*There is nothing you would see that will show you that any of this is real.

6. *My therapist demanded that I be there on time and I felt what it might be like to have a Father*

My therapist asked, "What are you responsible for?"

And I burst into tears

Confused, my therapist questions, "Why are you crying?"

I say, "I don't fucking know"

Sobbing in front of this White man

Hoping that he fucks me in my face

How can I be responsible, if I cannot respond? If I cannot be? If I cannot? If there is no "I"?

I sit there with a naughty smirk on my face and a sinister pledge

A teardrop in the eye. I spit onto the floor unashamedly

And say, "Listen nigga, I'm the one asking the questions here igght?"

And walk out of my own life.

Every. Single. Time.

7. *Nigga With an Attitude*

"And I'll shoot a nigga with an AK

If he talk shit he gon' get hit

Believe it

I love the feeling"—The Police

I arrive at the board meeting with a Black eye, dirt on my face, shirt torn and hanging, sweat turns into matted dirt, gravel, must, one gold crown, kissing my teeth, rolling my eyes like a lil' reckless motherfucker, crashing my fists into my hand, one fist after the next, after the next, after the next.

Playing them this one James Baldwin interview clip where he asks, "How much time do you need for your progress?" Looped, on repeat, an eternity of repetition of this one moment

This best moment

And all whilst I fight this battle everyday

Erstwhile projections everywhere nigga

Projections away!

Mashallah

# The Truth

Hanako Hoshimi-Caines

*“. . .knowledge births (precedes) understanding.”*

— *Audre Lorde, Poetry is not a Luxury*

*“What does the one who seeks the truth want?*

*What is [their] type? What is [their] will to power?”*

— *Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy*

## 1.

I've been looking for a way to dance and a new way of thinking my way into dancing. I've tried not thinking as a way to get free in dance. For me, working on dancing seems to involve working toward and through degrees of freedom, which comes hand in hand with power and the unconscious. But this not thinking has only led me to representations of freedom. I am looking for a sledgehammer to break through the veneer of fake representation and allow representation to become representation — or a ridiculous way of saying “good art.”

The frame, the thinking or the sledgehammer, is the process of entry into what I'd call a “real dance,” and what I mean is a dance that dissolves and creates at the same time. So I am testing out the truth to see if it might be a temporary pass to a break/make dance.

## 2.

Here's how to dance the truth:

Dance all the weird shapes you enjoy, plus dance normal shapes, plus Make Big Symbols (like be a hawk). The truth passes through transmutations of sense: to be with what is familiar, made unfamiliar, then remade familiar. It is about attitude: nothing is weird and nothing is different because sometimes you are an authority.

Dance a series of actualized forms and actualized meanings. They are the truth. These forms have forgotten what would constitute “good” or “bad” (this is “the how”). Take time. It is not only a flow: everything takes form, is repeatable, is as if repeated but isn't, and is transmittable. You want everything to be visible. You are already there. The truth is accomplished with sensation but not inflated emotion, unless the inflation is deflated. Make spontaneous choices. These happen out of the necessity of chance and the chance of necessity. You are active, never reactive.

Think of what you have left out: intensities, in-between spots, distances, etc. Do them. The truth will lead you to the unified field. Here there are no surprises and no failures. The truth is cool because it's not surprised at being everything and it's hot because it's activated.

## 3.

Preacher's words to repeat: You are the truth.

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I write and dance at the same time because I gain insight. I've shared “The Truth” as a performance and as a workshop. The text was performed in the context of ATTABLER, a research-practice performance and co-creation with Nadège Grebmeier Forget, Emma-Kate Guimond, Véronique Hudon, and Katya Montagnac; it was also activated as a workshop for the schizo-somatic series organized by Diego Gil and Csenge Kolozsvári at the SenseLab, Concordia University. In both situations the “how to” portion of the text guided people and myself into dancing. — Hanako Hoshimi-Caines

# Each day when he wakes up he wants to fill the bedroom with a tone

Adam Kinner

It is raining outside his open window and he is explaining to someone about the tone. The tone contains its own negation. He says this to the person and tries to determine what he means by it. The preposterous sentence hangs in the air and threatens to open a crack between them. They are rocking forward and backward in rhythmic unison and sitting at an oblique angle. They have decided to do this tacitly. He waits until he rocks to the front again and adds that negation in this instance has something to do with the ability to hear the tone. If you want to be in the tone you have to know that it actually orients you to the silence out of which the tone emerges. He is slowly making his way to the back again. He has just realized something. He says: The tone leaves you. That's what it does. The tone leaves you where you are in silence and you might wonder what has happened. Rest assured this is the tone in its choreographic virtuosity. He is rocking to the front again and becomes aware of the sound of rain enveloping the room. His guest is silent. He is silent. They rock in silence. He continues. The tone contains its negation but it denies it too. Again the crack opens. It is the negation that the tone keeps on denying that gives the tone its momentum. That is why one must have an infinitely generous relationship to the tone. He doesn't say this but thinks it. It seems to be a private thought that cannot be shared. He cannot tell his guest that one must be generous with the tone true as that might be. Suddenly the idea of negation seems wrong. It is that the tone denies what it simultaneously devours. The word for this is not negation but a certain hunger. To be with the tone we must be hungry for what is beyond it in the silence that it keeps on obscuring in order to reveal. He says this last idea only to himself. It is impossible to say out loud. They rock quietly and look at the crack between them. No one remarks on it but they listen to the rain that seems at certain times inaudible and at others deafening.

It is Tuesday and he is in a room with white walls and a white floor. The summer is making everyone tired and restless simultaneously. There are four dancers trying to find the tone. Five including him. The tone doesn't come. It is very complex to make the tone appear in this room. First of all everyone is being paid so how are you supposed to hear the tone. Money is loud. And second no one has prepared the light that would make the tone easier to find. They have to do it all themselves. This is how dance is. They spend some minutes talking. These minutes turn to hours. It is easier to talk than to try to play the tone. But they are not avoiding playing the tone. Talking is all the tone they have. More directly approaching it is daunting. Almost embarrassing. Someone lies down on the floor. And breathes out. This seems to signify the end of the talking. So they all begin moving their languid bodies. They are sighing here and there. A leg extends. Their positions elaborate a blurred line between lying down and standing up. He sees an elbow. He sees weight transferring from the knee to the foot. He sees flesh. Tannish-brown. Pale. The inside of an upper arm. The side-back of a neck. Yellow shorts. The bodies move purposefully. So that they may stretch and feel good. So that they may stretch and feel good *amen*. A calf muscle elongates. A yawn. Ever since he introduced the idea of playing the tone to the gathered dancers there has been a general confusion. This confusion has almost been a tone but a tone that no one can hear. Silently they agree to start again from the beginning. But he can tell that the silence in the room has changed. Everyone moves to their positions. There is suspension in the moment before they all start. The light changes in the stillness. Someone starts to move in the way that has been agreed upon. This gives everyone the feeling of having been here before. But then someone else starts to move in a way that has not been agreed upon. No one has yet seen this movement in this light. The movement continues and the others must navigate the distance between what they agreed upon and what they have not yet agreed upon. He anticipates that later they will talk and agree on different movements. It dawns on him that their agreements are getting in the way. The tone does not require agreement. The tone that is barely audible in the white room with the people moving in ways that they agree and disagree on.

It is Wednesday and the air is heavy and hot. He has become unsure where his body ends and the tone begins. He waits a moment and listens to the trees and the neighbours yell. The heaviness is making him tired. He adjusts position. The instrument is heavy on his neck. The strap digs into his skin. He keeps listening. Waiting for a layer to open up so he can slide a note in. A high A arrives. It is flimsy like paper. A car drives by fast and loud. The note has ended. No luck there. He closes his eyes. The instrument is a large curved shape that coincides perfectly with the abrupt curve of his throat. From his lungs into the room. From the room into his lungs. Where the instrument begins and his body ends. The instrument is partly inside his mouth. He has a sudden desire to swallow the instrument. To make his voice the voice of the instrument that speaks from inside his body. He finds a layer and plays another note. High C. The wall vibrates. Where is the tone. Someone walks by and looks in the window. They don't know either. Sometimes he waits all day for the tone. He tries to find it in the belly. Or in the paint on the walls. Sometimes he sits and stares at the light hitting his chair and wonders if that is the tone. Sometimes his phone rings and someone has something to say about the tone. Or he gets an email. Sometimes he has to take a nap when the tone doesn't come and he dreams about it. There are weeks that go by like this. The tone being dispersed in the soft material of the bedroom. Under the floorboards. Deep in the closet. So that he must remove his clothing or select a book to search through. Or he must lie down to feign sleep and forget his task. The tone which is inseparable from his body. Inseparable from the folds of the clothing that he drapes over his torso. Inseparable from the walls of the room that vibrate with a high C. Inseparable from the sense of weight in the air. The waiting stillness. The understanding that what is air is also the material of tone and life. Which is expanding now. Expanding in the unbearable heat.

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This piece is the second in a series about the tone. The first part appeared in *Fence* 36 (Winter 2020).

# Do

Eden Solomon

write about

the proof ethos of dancing online  
the practical advantage of self-video  
the zoom connection

write about

private pleasure  
shared pleasure  
pleasure guilt  
guilt guilt

write about the absurdity of routine, beyond belief, and listening

write about belief

write about listening

write about how many tabs you have open

& the mountain of words you've put aside  
& the laundry waiting

write about how you are making a list to avoid pressure

make a list to tackle this pressure

write about futility

## SPINE DANCES AUGUST 19-2019

I saw metamorphosis from old men into ground belly serpents. A continual arcing spirals up and over the corner - a repetition of pedestrian movements that lead to voluminous arcing and repetition of craning through the space off the center of the body. A lying down and a protection of the head curling the body in, lifting the pelvis - images of ejaculating poison - of side eye glances blocky robotic gazes with the block spines. I saw whipping help spines - hurtling the body through space - the tail bone wagging and pulling the heels off the ground as the body lurches forward. Small licks of the spine, gentle baby licks to bighorns of it over the edge. Hunch backs rounding around the corners of the sagittal plane and we hand holders hooking into the ceiling like a bus stop while the body dangled, falling down. Floor bodies - crustations being shored by the water.

### The power of the spine -

**Eric** - disoriented, creepy, monster - at the same time relatable,

textures of fluidity and of blockiness  
→ returning to simplicity - fetus - being a baby  
just me trying to be / fit something - feeling the pressure to become this monster / creature

- gorge - warpy - trying to appear as creepy - strong intention to do something / intense.

**Sophia** - rollercoaster - red car scream at the PNE  
- slinky, one goes down, the other goes up  
pendulum - surrendering - no edge, trying not to

November 2-2019 -

The feeling of emergence, one thing becoming the next becoming the next and next. Things are not as they seem, but always surprisingly evolving in fantastical ways. I offer my body as an event horizon to become you - a potentiality for growth + another world that evolves from the breath of an idea, a gaze, a touch, a color. forms to flux, boomer in between identities, half one, half the other. Sophia exploding into herself and getting into another self - Julien playing the part digging in, and Eric being absorbed by the space time rhythms.

Can we use diagonal material in tighter group  
group metamorphosis - → can play in intentions

work on incremental morphing

Choose images / tableaux to become

Cats / Licking, crane, self (frightened / in love?)

Details of images -

Setting morphing ...

Carrying, kissing, bridging

oo    oo    oo    oo    oo

- inappropriate body dance in club - group club  
dance - becoming more in relationship  
breaking down to become something else

Invisible body / inappropriate body -



Allah set these brown chairs up for us on the side of a road at night in hopes we would consider the multiple knowledge-making organs of the body for a sec. I sit beside myself, oppressor in one chair, oppressed in the other, we get really quiet.

Zahra Shahab *Chair and Water* 2020 digital collage



Zahra Shahab *Grapefruit Altar* 2020 digital collage



Chenise Mitchell and Francesca Chudhoff *I know you've got some sweet memories. But like a window, you ain't got nothin' to say* 2018 digital photograph





Francesca Chudnoff, Justin de Luna, Nyda Kwasowsky, Margarita Peggy Soria, Omar David Rivero, Danah Rosales, and Chenise Mitchell *after 12 hours in blue* 2019 performance *Halcyon*, Nuit Blanche, Toronto

Image credit: Deborah O'Connor

do you  
trust me.?



Francesca Chudnoff *do you trust me?* 2020 digital collage  
From *FACERIDER*, Gallery TPW, Toronto  
Image credit: Krista Newey



Julie Mills *Feu D'été, Contredanse for 1* 2020 digital collage

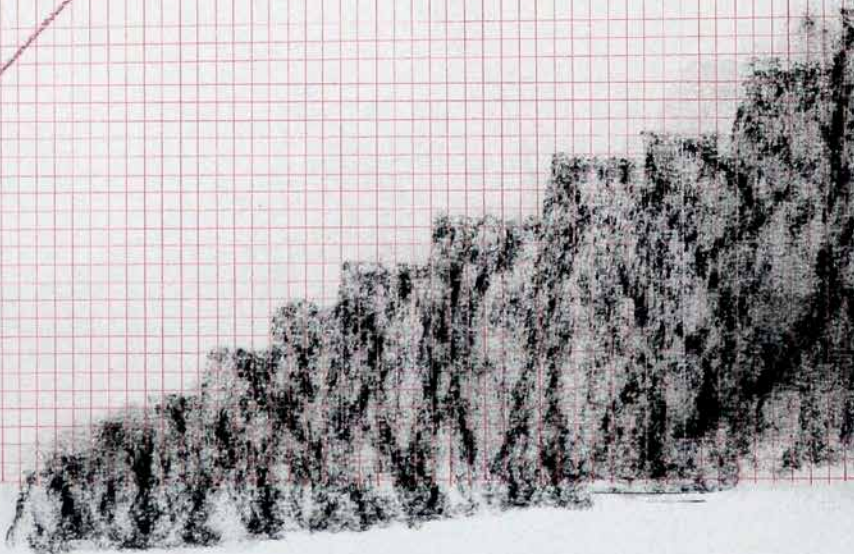
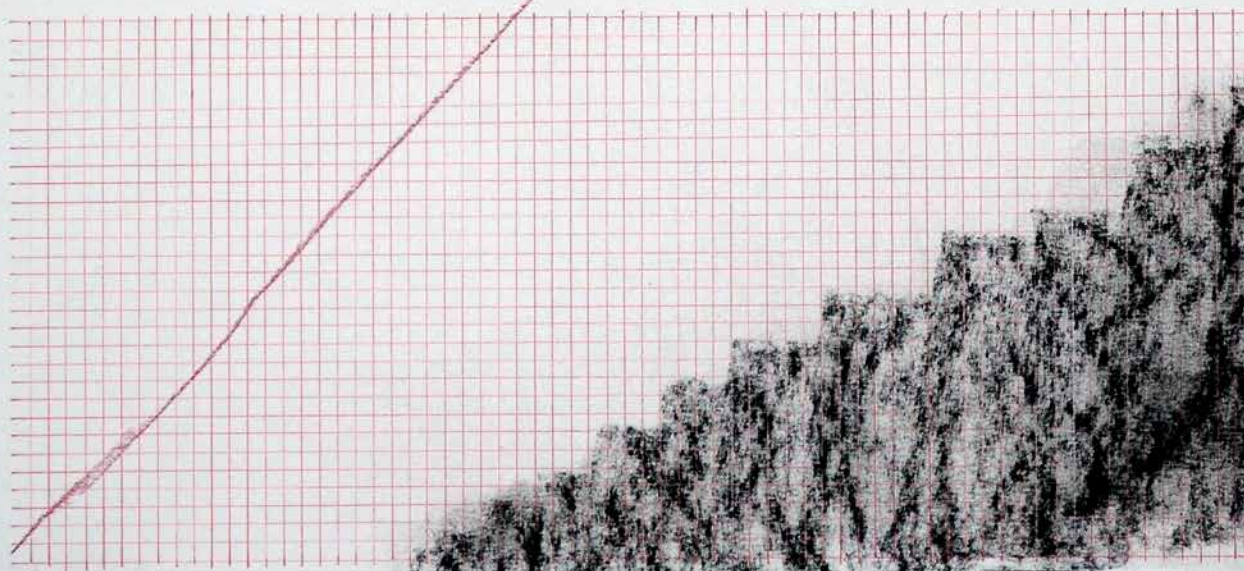


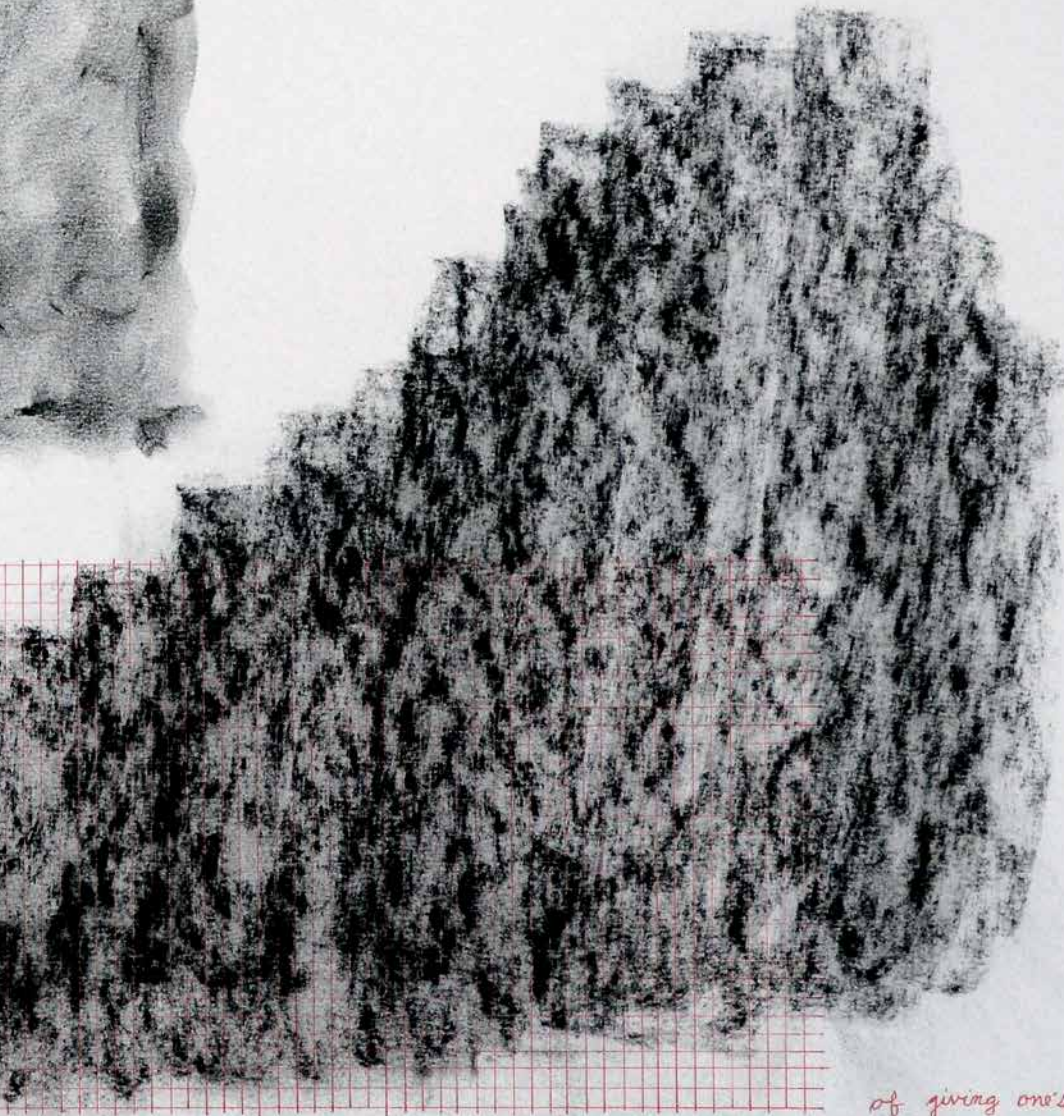
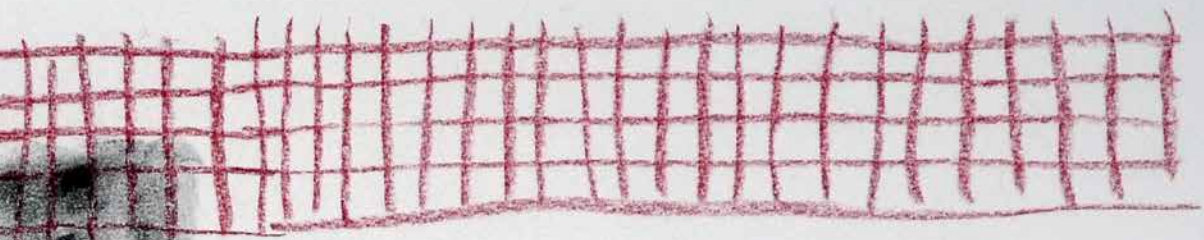
Xinyue Liu (刘新悦) *Growing Pain* 2020 digital photograph



Hannah Campbell *Ocean Night* 2020 digital photograph

of giving  
one's voice





*of giving one's voice  
to language*

Adam Kinner *Of giving one's voice to language* 2020  
charcoal, ink, and pastel on paper 56 cm x 76 cm



Jessica Cook **Seed Scores** 2020 watercolour and pencil on paper 20 cm x 28 cm

# DANCING – WRITING – DRAWING

Coman Poon & Naishi Wang



"Thinking of April – June 2003"

**“In separateness, lies the world’s great suffering.  
In unity, lies the world’s true strength.”**

**—Heart of a Buddha**

from January 2020 the declaration of coronavirus wildly spread out in mainland China and beyond. In the beginning, western media and think that it is similar to SARS in 2003 but it is a far more complicated newly discovered disaster. It quickly a pandemic worldwide, challenging the way we socialize and interact with each other. Face masks and other protections became essential, creating ongoing demand on the international market. As workers in the cultural sector, practicing has many challenges; Naishi and Coman propose to come together to digest and forecast what be the “future/dance” for the performing arts.

(CBC News reported on July 31st here that Canada’s GDP after the shut down of March and April. The article reveals that “the only parts of the economy that shrank again were management, public administration and the arts and entertainment sector.”

██████████, three days in advance of a digital Town Hall organized and hosted by the ██████████ Arts Council\*, ██████████ submitted a question that was judiciously edited before it was offered for public consumption by moderator and former ██████████ Board Chair ██████████.

We offer the full text here as a starting point for our artful “prognostications”:

Hi ██████████,

*I am sending you a fuller follow up email ██████████ as the dialogue box provided in the webinar registration ██████████ had character limits ██████████ me to ██████████ my thoughts into ██████████ sentence.*

*In this geopolitically, economically ██████████ and ██████████ volatile and uncertain period, the traditional role and function of the arts (in the globalized and localized sense) ██████████ be assumed.*

*Elsewhere in the global ██████████, artists are celebrated and supported as workers. This has its upsides (increased income security, access to health benefits and/or pensions) and downsides ( ██████████ undervaluing of non-traditional ██████████ art forms ██████████ leaving out those not working ██████████ within ██████████).*

*The global art system is a child of the global ██████████ system ██████████ Euro- ██████████ American ██████████ centric notions of art and culture as consumables ██████████ debases the human impulse for expression.*

*Now that ██████████ live art practice ██████████ shutter ██████████ into digital ██████████, points to the fallacy of a ██████████ aspiration to repair, ameliorate or ██████████ manifest ██████████ a ██████████ return to t ██████████ normal ██████████*

*██████████ normal ██████████ is the problem ██████████ entrenched in racism, inequality, and politically correct posturing.*

*We have before us an opportunity to reinvent ██████████ innovate, and lead in a new way ██████████ that celebrates human expression.*

*How ██████████ we begin to re-imagine this potential future? How ██████████ we build a different set of*

values and conditions for the creation and propagation of [redacted] arts [redacted] that is not driven by municipal, provincial, and national priorities-of-the-day [redacted]?

I don't know the answers [redacted] nor do I expect the panelists to offer [redacted]. But I want [redacted] to share this [redacted] with everyone present because I think the future is all of ours to remake.

[redacted]

\* [redacted]

Thank you for registering for "Digital Update - City of [redacted]'s Arts and Culture Services, [redacted] Arts Council".

Please submit any questions to: [redacted]

Date Time: [redacted] Eastern Time ([redacted])

Join from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device:  
[Click Here to Join](#)

Note: This link should not be shared with others; it is unique to you.

Password: T0update

[Add to Calendar](#) [Add to Google Calendar](#) [Add to Yahoo Calendar](#)

Description [redacted] along with our partners at the City of [redacted]'s Arts and Culture Services, invite you to join a conversation with Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of [redacted] Heritage [redacted] ([redacted]), [redacted] Budget Chief [redacted], Director Arts and Culture Services, City of [redacted] and Director and CEO, [redacted] Arts Council [redacted] to update you on issues relating to arts and culture in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The toilet is sweating. Beads of water covering every surface like a pubescent outbreak of acne.

坐便正在出汗。水珠挤出整个表面好像在经历着青春痘的爆发。

There is a small pool of water just below the front right corner of the white toilet tank.

白色马桶的水箱右下方有一各小水潭。

Drip. Drip. 滴。

The sound is imagined because the leakage from the caulking in the ceiling is slow and almost [redacted] and full of pregnant pauses.

声音是想象出来的，因为天花板的裂缝中产生了慢节奏的冥想。[redacted]的奇想好像孕味的停顿。

Drip. 滴。

I [redacted] into the washroom to look at [redacted] even when I am not needing to use it. It intrigues me. [redacted] I poke at the caulking with a bamboo stick and feel its pliancy between concrete slabs painted white.

我进入到卫生间去寻找在我不需要方便的时候。这让我产生了兴趣 - 我用竹棒子戳着裂缝，感觉到被刷成白色的混凝土之间的柔软。

[redacted] There is a lot of whiteness in this room. [redacted] e walls are white. [redacted] he bathtub is white, surrounded by white tiles, held together by white caulking. How did it get to be like this?

这里很白。墙是白的；浴缸是白的，围绕着白色的马桶，被白色的裂缝支撑着。这里的颜色是怎么回事呢？

I look up and stare at the spot where I think the water is dripping from. Is it [redacted] leak from [redacted] washroom [redacted] above me? [redacted] someone is passed out and their floor is flooded. Should I go up and knock on their door? I don't know her [redacted] en told she is an older Black lady. I don't want to scare her, especially [redacted] this time when we are [redacted] separated from one another "for our own safety." [redacted] maybe [redacted] I imagin[redacted].

我向上看，一直盯着一个点想着水是从哪里滴下来的。是不是从我楼上的马桶漏水流下来的呢？会不会是某人晕倒在地然后水流满地都没有意识。我是不是应该去敲门问候一下？我不认识她。听说她是一个黑人妇人。不想去突然拜访而吓到她，特别是现在，这个种族分裂的时刻“为我们的安全”不过好像是我想多了。

Maybe it's something else that is leaking.

可能就是漏水，没别原因了。

I take some toilet paper [redacted]. I wipe down [redacted] the toilet and sop up the small puddle [redacted] white flush down the toilet.

**In the aftermath of the furor that catalyzed global responses to systemic Anti-Black Racism, we ask ourselves, what can one's gaze evoke? How is this problematic when the subject of one's avoidance/gaze is also racialized?**



Farewell to free souls,  
All the sea is your monument,  
I want to ask where you are going, you point towards the sea

別了自由的靈魂，  
所有的大海都是你的紀念碑，  
我要問你去何方，你指着大海的方向。

安靜，  
靜止產生呼吸，  
隨心動，  
向前一步，  
暫停，  
向後退一步。



# Meanwhile, Back on Zoom

Sarah Pritchard

I got back on Facebook at the beginning of the pandemic to promote the mutual aid society I'd started with some friends in the neighbourhood and the prison ministry to which God has called me. I prayed about it first. And then discerned that it was part of my obedience to participate in the platforms so often used by the devil to thoroughly subsume the social in the logic of capital.

After about a month of pandemic lockdown without weekly letter-writing meetups, the mail from incarcerated people was really starting to pile up. So I turned to the internet—Zoom first, followed by social media—to expand the network of solidarity with incarcerated people through Abolition Apostles.

Of course, that was before five months of working from home and the zooming of the world and adjusting the screen of my laptop so no one will see my nipple while I breastfeed and the endless scroll of Black death, fascism, and advertisements for maternity clothes and baby food.

Five months of internet life and my attention span for reading has already significantly diminished, consuming headlines like so many empty calories that leave me malnourished and without anything meaningful to say at the end of each day.

The privacy and intimacy of my home has been destroyed. I sit in the same chair at my kitchen table for hours of Google Hangouts. The dishes pile up and disappear, and the dirt accumulates beneath my feet, but I remain seated because the background of the kitchen door with its window onto our backyard projects an image of normalcy, professionalism, even “having it together” in the midst of a global pandemic. I forget that I still have my camera on while drafting an email in another window and listening to the Zoom call on my headphones when David walks into the kitchen shirtless to kiss the baby.

There are days when I don't leave the house at all.

I've started a Twitter account for my book about white women, but even my ability to form cogent and punchy observations about white womanhood is deadened by the internet. I can't make art on the internet because ... *the internet*.

I logged on briefly to a dance class my friend Rashad was teaching on Zoom to see what it was like. Watching him shuffle and step inside the tiny box with other tiny boxes on top of him made me too depressed. I paid him my fifteen dollars but I couldn't stay. The most successful dancers in our culture make one-minute videos for other fifteen-year-olds to replicate. The fetishistic cannibalism of Blackness that is at the rotten heart of American culture finds its most fertile breeding ground on TikTok.

When I finally was exposed to TikTok, it was while visiting the home of a single mom and her fourteen-year-old daughter who we helped with grocery deliveries while they were recovering from coronavirus. The daughter synced her phone with their huge TV and scrolled through the blackface porn, blocking dance steps while telling me about the forty-year-old guy she met in the French Quarter on Mardi Gras. Watching this white girl imitate pale imitations of hip hop and the stripper pole, I realized—this is a hell realm.

Meanwhile, back on Zoom, I scroll through *The Guardian* articles about Portland while the virtual summit on racial justice takes a mindfulness break. The presenter reminds us of our ocean breaths as I read about moms and dads and vets getting teargassed by federal agents.

What has more viral spread in the US: videos of dying Black men pleading “I can't breathe” or the coronavirus?

White people across the country return to their breath.

I haven't really danced since before the pandemic. I gave birth on February 10, and while I recovered the world changed. I wore David's jeans for four months of hauling and delivering bulk beans and rice until I finally broke down and bought some new clothes on the internet. Most of my clothes are still ill-fitting. Other than learning the choreography of breastfeeding and rocking the baby, I don't know how this new body of mine wants to move.

In June, I joined the collective break from the internet and marched through the streets of New Orleans. Following its pattern as a relatively depoliticized city, the action here was mostly calm and symbolic and has now retreated altogether to Zoom calls about city budgets. Despite our new facial coverings, we haven't discovered how our new bodies want to move.

Choreographies of care emerge and persist in our homes, in our mutual aid networks, in hospitals and nursing homes, but we haven't found our way into radically new public choreographies now that our bodies have changed. Well, except maybe when the fire met that police station.

The only time I've cried during the past five months has been while preaching on Revelation. In the church that David and I co-pastor (now on Zoom, of course), we've undertaken a months-long study of Revelation in order to answer our incarcerated pen pals when they ask us what we think about it. That, and David and I have found that preaching on Revelation provides a good introduction to our anti-imperial reading of the scripture, including our understanding of empire as the body of sin. The week of the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery, I cried while preaching about God's judgement and the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.

Corporate singing on Zoom reveals the lie of immediacy; even with the fastest internet, there is still a slight time lag. Our church sings together despite the awkwardness of ten people sitting alone in separate rooms on three coasts singing the same notes at slightly different times. Our discordant choir is a vehicle for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hallelujah.

# Space for Dreams

Alexa Solveig Mardon & Aisha Sasha John

*In September 2020, I invited ten dance artists, some of whom are close friends and some of whom have never met one another, to participate in an ongoing daily-ish dream recording practice with no specific goal other than to see what would happen. Four months in, it has become clear that this fifty-page-and-counting document is a dance process. The intimacy of dancing together is present: by way of sharing things whose impact is still unknown, knowing each other not through facts but through witnessing. We show up in each other's dreams more often than not and, sometimes, in each other's movement or studio practices. The dreams recounted here are from Aisha's and my archive during this time.*

– Alexa Solveig Mardon

## October 6, Aisha

I am given an assignment or the task of creating the billboard for some sort of spectacle—some ring—that my mom is going to be competing in (and winning?). The task is given to me by a Hollywood actress I admire. What is both difficult and rewarding about the task is that I have to use the force of my creative will to conjure the images. So there are like four panels. And I stare at the panel until the right image just materializes itself into being. The first panel I get at the first go. It has gold shimmering tassels and includes the word “compelling”? But then I struggle for a while to get the numbers right for the prize amounts. Like you can win between \$5 and \$30 for this particular ringed event, but there’s another event whose prize is \$30 (that’s the one my mom has been slated to get). And anyway it’s my task to express the difference between the two events and to conjure the right-sized, -shaped, and -coloured numbers to advertise these prizes. I remember choosing between displaying \$15, \$25, \$30 or starting lower and including \$5 and \$10 as well. My choice is a marketing decision as well as a function of the amount of panel space I have given the size of the text I am generating. At some point the woman who gave me the assignment notices I’m ending in \$25 rather than \$30 and is like, *You want them to know how high they can win*, which I of course know—but I’m more interested in the numbers themselves and getting to express them, and I’ve already done 30 in another panel and don’t want to repeat it for my own, like, sensual reasons. I remember how at one successful point the numbers were shaped like the block letters I doodle—sort of machete-shaped—and were pewter (metallicness was an important design element) and how the panels that I’d conjured right away were gold, yes, and maybe included a woman with tasseled epaulets, like musical theatre-esque sexy military costume...? Think cigarette ad from the 50s/60s.

## October 9, Alexa

My right arm has fallen off or has been cut or torn off. I’m in a truck bed that is going somewhere fast. It’s from a scene in a Raymond Carver story or maybe a Steinbeck story, green hills and a lot of salt of the earth Americana white men vibes. Someone, maybe Rhye, is trying to sew my arm back on and it’s pretty normal until the actual puncture of the needle in my skin hurts and I realize it’s going to be quite painful. I ask for an injection of local anaesthetic; no one knows where the

med tent is. Me and the person who is trying to sew my arm back on realize that the skin itself will probably rot and then the arm will fall back off again because I'm not a starfish and it won't grow back. I realize that even if the arm is sewn back on expertly I will have to keep the arm hanging down by my side and not raise it above my head for a long time while it fuses itself to my shoulder. My first thought is that I have a lot of grants to write and that this will be really inconvenient and so I had better just leave it, I'm left-handed anyway. Then some kind of music video where S and I and E and their whole very hot very young dance company rent a float plane and a drone and shoot a very complex dance film/video where S is a hot robot flight attendant with her boobs out (the editing is super pro) and they manage to have the drone fly alongside the plane so there is a very beautiful aerial shot and I wonder where they got the funding to do this and why they chose to use it on this. It's a sort of screening but the screening is just for my parents and I feel embarrassed that it's not my work that they are watching but this very flashy and a bit risqué video. Then some big ocean waves. More travelling, flying over the water even. A different time where there are big castles overlooking a loch.

## October 18, Aisha

A door flashes open: radiant black and white cat sits atop a dusty mess.

## November 14, Aisha

I'm an actress in a business suit on a film set playing against a woman who is like a B version of Julia's mom. Apparently she'd worked with Hanako on the same set days before, and Hanako was *very good*. And as we're both complementing Hanako's acting chops, I have this image of Hanako dressed in a lawyer lady suit similar to the one I'm in but with a face more angular and terse than Hanako's actual face. I am showing off my knowledge of Hanako to the lady like yah she brings snacks to rehearsals in reusable bags. Then there are a bunch of extras in ill-fitting blue and white striped shirts who are all those dudes I went to U of T with and who I basically resent. Imara is there with these yellow contact lenses which look ridiculous and he asks me how I've been in a competitive is-your-life-as-good-as-mine kinda way and I respond that it's been good and also terrible. Then I go to

the bathroom to pee and when I come back to the courtroom I break out into a tap dance. I'm wearing ugly red loafers, the kind I try on all the time at Value Village, like Naturalizer brand, but my dancing is terrific and I leave the people around me and tap jazz swing all the way through the aisles and I'm feeling finally vindicated like I get to show off.

## November 15, Alexa

1. Watching swallows dive into a pool of small fish and try to spear them with their beaks. I am either a crow or my cat Linden or both and I try to catch the fish too but my body isn't right.
2. Erika is presenting a new work maybe at Dance in Vancouver (I'm panicking because I thought it was an off year and I'm not presenting anything) and there is a FB post about her work and I know nothing about it. I'm a bad friend. She quotes Donna Haraway in the promo for it and I'm excited but also a little possessive like we had just decided to co-read Haraway in relation to our project but she's using it for something else. How did she read it so fast? Francesca's mom Maureen comments on the post saying that Elisa is working with the text *In the Wake* by Christina Sharpe and that the two of them should talk. I'm not a part of the social media network so I can see the posts but not comment. Again I'm jealous cause this seems like a great conversation that I want to be a part of. Francesca and I get ready to go to the show at the Dance Centre—we arrive and it's sort of like SFU Woodward's and also a giant industrial building like a movie set. We go to the bathroom to pee. We're really cold, there is some confusion about gender and the bathrooms, and I feel scared of being kicked out of it.
3. I teach a really really really bad dance class. My students are sweet but everything goes wrong: my mask keeps falling off and I'm coughing and sneezing a lot. I realize I've been teaching ballet: chasse pas de boure into pirouettes particularly, for almost an hour. I give what I think is a nice image of allowing the pelvis to move with you (not leaving it behind like I did when I was carrying a backpack of heavy groceries the other day) and opening the arms into space like bat wings starting from the middle of the spine to propel you. But then the class is almost over and I haven't given any floorwork. I quickly make a phrase but can't remember it or teach it and all of a sudden I'm wearing a bodysuit and tights and

I don't feel like my sequencing is smooth or fluid and like everyone can see my awkward dancing and the fact that I've lost weight/muscle mass since not dancing during the pandemic. I keep my spirits up and encourage everyone to just "give it a try" and go to play a great song that will save the day—my iPhone screen is fucked. A student who I don't know in real life who is glamorous and Russian with long nails magically fixes my phone but it's too late. I just play the last song I was playing which was a kind of mellow one. The class that's in next is lined up outside. Antonio gives me an apologetic smile and I know we have to end the class.

## December 30, Aisha

A plump, raccoon-like fox in a tree amongst squirrels. Very auburn.

# Speaking to be Seen

Chenise Mitchell

I wrote the following speech in a communal document that was read to the Member of Parliament in my Toronto ward. It was read in the summer during a time when anti-Black racism in the dance community was being illuminated.

Before writing the speech, I was invited to a community meeting with established local artists and dancers where a question was asked about what each of us, who live in this ward, needed to succeed. I had a hard time answering and nervously spoke about wanting to be considered when the city creates outdoor/public spaces. After the meeting I realized that I hadn't been able to find any answers because I had no idea how, where, or with whom I was meant to succeed, or what success even looked like for a mixed-race/Black artist like me. Why, with a university degree and thousands of hours of training and performing, did I not know how to triumph in this community? I emailed the organizers to explain my hesitation in answering their question. This is when I was invited to join a meeting with our MP to share my experiences.

I am a mixed-race artist who grew up in mainly White spaces. I learned how to navigate the dance world in a grateful, polite, and even meek way, which allowed my voice to sometimes be heard more clearly around White people. I seemed just White enough to be palatable, and yet I was aware that some folks still saw me as Black and thus "other." This is a mixed kid's social balancing act. I felt I was constantly under a watchful eye, going from a dancer to "a Black dancer" and back to a dancer when it suited the system. It's somehow hard to understand the effect of assimilation even when it is on your rubric. Experiencing the erasure of my Blackness led to hiding it often, even from myself.

During lockdown, I was finally coming to terms with my position as a mixed-race/Black woman and artist and with the state of my community; a community that has helped me become the artist I am today, but that has also consistently let me know when I was a little too much. My Blackness hadn't had the chance to shine without being policed externally or internally. I had learned to prevent myself from becoming a threat. This speech captures the moment I overcame my fear of becoming "An Angry Black Woman" and let my voice be heard.

Hi.

*I'm Chenise, a professional performance artist who uses dance as the basis of all the art that I create. I have travelled coast to coast in Canada for professional dance training and performance. I also love teaching, mostly jazz dance, to those new and old to dance as a way of exchange, to uplift and empower.*

*I cannot speak for all people/dancers in the margins who have not been seen or heard in this community. I am speaking from my perspective, as someone who has been dancing professionally for over ten years but yet has not had many chances of success in my career in this community.*

*I know that my presence in creation spaces with other professional dance artists or companies would only make their life easier and support my success. It's a win-win, but I have to be invited, I have to be accepted, as well as physically and psychologically safe in the spaces where creation happens. I am not personally concerned with percentages of representation because they are not a true representation of what is happening. My QTBIPOC peers and artists and I are not heard, even though we have the skills, we have the training, we have the talent. We are here and have been here telling the community what we need, but as independent artists we don't even get the privileges that come from having the jobs, which is what the numbers show. For me and others like me, this is a request for the most basic of needs for success in our sector.*

*I am doing well. I am doing well during a pandemic. I am doing well during a pandemic when (because) the whole world has stopped. What does that mean?*

*As someone who does not feel successful, I have questioned whether I belong in these meetings. Will I be heard? Will I get credit for my ideas or will they be stolen? Do I deserve to have the floor?*

*I am not falling through the cracks because I didn't have anything to stand on with the struggle of working and living in Toronto. I was burnt out. I am healthier since receiving CERB. That's good for right now but also highlights how dire my situation was before. I'm speaking up about it because now I know that I'm not the only one.*

*My dance career has gained momentum as the world has shut down because I didn't have the space to succeed in the parts of the dance community I am actually trained to succeed in.*

*I am fortunate to have what little resources are needed to succeed in this current environment: the internet, a small space, and a bank account. Dancers are extremely adaptable, we don't even ask for much, but somehow we struggle to get access to basic*

*standards for working conditions. These issues face the Toronto dance community as a whole, but wouldn't it be amazing if this ward could be an example, or even a catalyst, for change in the city?*

*The need for recognition, space, and resources for QTBIPOC dancers is a request long overdue for fulfillment. With these requests in mind, I would ask you to consider your position of power in reimagining our lives in this ward during this unpredictable time. Your position allows you to make positive impacts in this community right now. This is the perfect time to reassess why we have heard the same voices and to remedy the situation by finding a new way for marginalized folks to have space. As you venture to fulfill these requests, the first questions you ask should include: How will you make community spaces an equitable endeavour? Who will you enlist and pay to achieve results that help ALL members in your community succeed?*

Individual and cultural identity are so mixed and yet so at odds for many QTBIPOC. The connections made through community can be incredibly supportive and valuable for these artists. Unfortunately, those with a cultural upper hand use their advantage to profit on community, stripping these connections away from community. So, who and what are we forgetting in this term *community*?

I included Queer and Trans peoples in my speech to my Member of Parliament because I am aware of these voices of my peers that are not amplified. I can only speak to my experience as a dancer who is part of the BIPOC community.

Dance doesn't have to conform to colonization; dance was here before Canadian dance institutions were founded. Like most art institutions in Canada, dance institutions seek to preserve a hierarchy in which Whiteness is at the top. Because of this hierarchy, contemporary dance and ballet continue to be the ultimate styles for a dancer to achieve success. The journey to "making it" as a Canadian dancer is a colonial experience. Indigenous and syncretized dance forms face erasure here; competition and classism turn art into a business where community, expression, and healing are less valued, and the essence of the art forms are lost. It feels like my practice is dragged into politics and dance's hierarchy whenever I seek to create, which prevents me from expressing myself fully and connecting to people who need dance.

Dance is at its best when certain rules are bent, when people are able to better their community through art. Unfortunately, oppressive dance institutions still hold much influence and socialize us to contribute to their sustained power.

Although the colonization of dance has deemed certain dance traditions more worthy than others, those values comment more on the oppressors than they do on those they marginalize.

It is interesting to feel accomplished as an artist and connected to my community during a time when the world is experiencing a crisis, but trauma can bring people together, and my vision of dance is to uplift based on what connects us. The lockdown has allowed me to begin the process of decolonizing my dancing. Without gatekeepers, my art reaches people quickly, and I am beginning to realize that my lack of access to space, funds, and opportunities wasn't imagined. There had been many things in the way, including people who saw my White peers as more worthy of positions based on criteria other than merit. The feeling of unworthiness was an external burden that was quieted when we were all forced inside by the pandemic. I finally had the opportunity to understand that the voices telling me that I wasn't enough were not mine, but authority figures of institutions who kept hierarchies intact.

In times of crisis, healing and connection are invaluable. Though BIPOC dancers have proven their worthiness, we are still not seen. We watch our culture being appropriated, an appropriation we are then asked to pay to see performed in public, on stolen land. Meanwhile, we struggle to be recognized as accomplished artists. Then we are called bitter, jaded, sassy, or even angry, as if these feelings aren't justified. The work we do to "make it" in this "community" does not yield the same fruits as our White peers. This is my experience with over ten years dancing professionally in Canada. The mental and emotional work that I have to do before considering a job, going to a dance meeting, or taking a class is debilitating and goes unacknowledged. Though BIPOC continue to do a lot of the heavy lifting, I know that dance is my purpose, my input is needed, and my voice will reclaim the yesterdays to create tomorrows.

# Giraffes

Andrea Nunes

Early in my working life, I was employed in an unusual factory. It is hard to describe what the factory made. It was a kind of collectible art that was already old.

It was through this physical labour on a production line that my understanding of labour and production took form, and I have often felt this to be a strange distinction in my subsequent work in places where my body hasn't mattered but where the physicality of the idea of labour has operated a metaphor without which my exertion wouldn't have existed. It was through this physical irrelevance that I began to wonder if it was on the production line that I came to be in a body at all. This took many years to synthesize as a conscious question, at the gym, around a gesture I made with a paper towel.

I had produced this towel from a dispenser and spritzed it in a deliberate, even pattern with a cleaner from an adjacent bracket in order to wipe down some equipment I had been using.

The wet drape of it summoned something that had lain dormant in my body's memory, and as I turned back towards the equipment, I laterally flipped the towel in half around my two opposing, extended index fingers. This was meaningful as an end in itself—though in this specific moment, my flip-fold was also the expression of wanting to have sex with another person in the facility, in whom I sensed the capacity to value and desire the confidence and skill with which I pivoted my body one hundred and eighty degrees while flipping a wet rag end onto end, perfectly, in a decisive movement.

In the factory a rag had been a vital tool, and its handling had the potential to define a person. Years later I was still defining myself through that movement.

My childhood had produced someone who was at odds with a body. Exchanging what it could do, for a wage, was an experiment through which I reproduced myself in a mold that helped me to understand the people who produced my childhood—people who were perhaps who they were because they had been less in control of these exchanges.

I studied art, but the factory job was *real* work, and I wasn't not making art. This was a joke I thought I was in on—because I made it—and yet I soon felt

productive in the way one can only feel productive from making a *product*. And I felt satisfied in the way one can feel satisfied to overwrite a complicated thing with something simple.

I had never felt much extrinsic pressure to stand out, but I had always hoped that there would eventually be something at which I would be naturally virtuosic, perhaps some sort of instrument or set of tools I could pick up that would animate me, that would extend my body beyond what it was and make sense of it. Making art was what I did most competently, but I would seize with the dread of exposing what it was I wanted to express. On the production line, I moved freely with the tools I used best to a rhythmic ongoingness that was intoxicating to someone with my inherited desire for stability. A non-threatening horizon formed from a vague notion of how long it would take, at my wage, to pay off my student debt, delimiting a before and an after in which I found possibility.

The pieces we manufactured were collectible and therefore equal in uniqueness. Their sameness came from a dimensionality in which they were each situated somewhere between a small pet and a trade paperback, from a proportionality to each other that enabled their arrangement in a grid in a foyer or wall niche, and—perhaps most importantly—from an overall aesthetic that denied their production in a contemporary factory. If they had ever belonged to a commodity circuit, all participants in the circuit were long dead. Like real antiques, they only became themselves when you saved them. Through this purchase, something essential and unique to you was expressed. They were only there because of you.

Only—they were only there because of *us*. That *we* brought them into being and *we* made them already-old charged the space where we did this with what didn't reconcile. It afforded us a dignity of common sense that came at the expense of our sense of time and place, a disorientation that was magnified by how unusual it was that the factory existed then and there, at a point in history when products like the ones we made were usually made elsewhere. Still, producing a thing that negated me was an absurdity in which I could live comfortably, by being simply conductive—the *how* freed from the *why*. I had wanted to extend beyond my body, and I did this as the extension and expression of the body of the factory.

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Our production began in the dusty precinct of the factory's pouring department, where objects were cast out of plaster by a cohort of sturdy workers that were never

not in motion doing heavy and resistant tasks, one after the other. After setting, the objects were sprayed with an acrylic coating, to make them resemble porcelain, by a single worker in a special booth. This person had to have a long, strong, and perfectly regulated arm. Some of the objects would then be detailed with paint, decals, or metallic leaves by groups of specialized workers who worked under severe lights in tight, controlled positions that made them appear small—an appearance that had created a preference for hiring small people into those roles.

A stamper worked in isolation with a very toxic ink, in a tent that had the presence of a doghouse when it was not forgotten altogether. An imprecise stamp could not be corrected, so this task produced more spoilage than any other. The context never didn't provide a cause for dismissal, and as such it was a penal one—and yet the stamper was the only worker who determined their own breaks.

After detailing, the product came to the finishing department where I worked. It was the work of finishing to make the objects timeworn. Because we did not have time itself, we ravaged the objects with other tools and materials to impart on them their characteristic stains, fades, and corruptions, and their appearance of having been pieced back together or riddled with fine fissures as though liable to shatter. We did our work on large, wheeled tables—on which we conveyed the product to different facilities designed both for the application of our various treatments and for compliance with the regulations protecting us from the effects of those treatments on our bodies.

No one kind of body distinguished finishers, but it was a common aspect of our bodies that they were generally outsized and outweighed by everything in the environment, as though we had inherited the space from another type of worker whose disappearance went unexplained. Sufficient force required us to build up steam, to be spring-loaded, or to already be in motion.

The focal length of the body's movements was alternately widening and narrowing. Broad, sweeping gestures gave way to brisk, impatient agitations with a rag or a brush, intersewn with more delicate, focused movements—small, accented gestures and flicks of the wrist. Loud interludes occurred as objects were flipped onto their other sides. Then there was a defiant thrusting or a defeated lurching or a sometimes-possible joyous abandonment with which a table would be conveyed to the next specialized workstation, or away to the shipping department. Tables were difficult to move without some kind of emotional impetus.

We sometimes talked. This required us to pull down the respirators we wore to protect us from the organic vapour of the finishes we used. We talked about what

we were reading and watching and cooking and what we were planning to do after work that day, and when we quit. We talked about where we were at in life and in our relationships. We also browbeat each other's techniques, gossiped about workers who were not present, derided management, and argued savagely about what music to play on a small, pointless stereo. But our deepest awareness of each other was through movement.

Who people were could be sensed in the carefulness or the insouciance with which they handled what they were making, which would emerge against a secondary axis of ease and unease. Movement was intrinsic to any feeling one felt about a coworker, because it was their movement that signaled their presence in the far reaches of the room, through spattered panels, or in the sensitive interstices around a set of uncomfortable goggles.

How someone flip-folded their rag with a wet snap, or daubed their work carefully and earnestly, or held an object like it was a baby animal while fixing a flaw, or scowled above a mist conjured from a vigorous set of gestures with a spray can, or shifted their weight to a compelling time signature as they operated the paint sprayer, or tore open a set of curtains melodramatically, or oversteered and released their three-hundred-pound table so it curved—as though of its own volition—around the tent that the *homo sacer*-like figure of the stamper resided within, or balletically side-stepped that oversteered table, could be extremely erotic or repulsive.

A coworker came over to my house to have sex. We had shared some ideas verbally, but their allure was a loose, painterly confidence and a characteristic way they had of flipping the objects around to work on their other sides: two at a time, and with air. I was doing my best work in the vicinity of this person, losing myself but also feeling entirely self-possessed in the rhythm with which I did the things I knew how to do—like stepping around a table and delivering just the right amount of stain to each part of it, in perfectly landed spiral flicks with a brush that I held by the very end of its handle. It felt only natural that this feeling would translate to a more improvisatory setting.

What instead came naturally was something that I was unable to accept was only the result of my limited knowledge of the conventions of sexuality between adults. It would take time to come to terms with the abrupt ending I imposed on our encounter, and to understand that what had attracted me to this person was in fact the obstacle: their ease. What came easily, and had never not come easily, to this person stood in the way of a shared understanding of what doing a thing, of *being able* to do that thing, and being able *to decide* to do that thing, could mean.

I coopted my coworker's air-flip even after they were promoted and suggested I quit because it was too awkward then sanctioned me to my least favourite work when I didn't quit. I had already worked at the factory long enough to recognize the kind of ambition that I had only to outlast. Until then I would enjoy what could please me in itself, like this style of flip, which allowed me to let the thing I was responsible for out of my grip for just a moment.

Some bodies were less at ease, and I began to notice those bodies more. Our sick days were unpaid, so all of us at one time or another would come to work sick and try to assume the presence of a dead plant or something else natural to that setting that was stationary. Other bodies moved slowly, unevenly, or in a stiff, incremental way that evoked an exoskeleton; the inability to move the top and bottom of the body independently of one another without pain was a common side effect of steering heavy, rolling things. Braces proliferated—around the waist and knees and especially on the wrists, and what had been flicks of those wrists had to now be interpreted through larger movements of the arm and shoulder. My joints made new, unnerving noises I couldn't unhear. This was a job that, when you did it for a long time, could change the body permanently.

There was a discredited theory of evolution, predating the theory of natural selection, that I had learned about in high school Biology, that I preferred for the possibility I felt from its wrongheadedness. It was illustrated in my textbook with a figure of giraffes who, in two panes—a before and an after—strained their necks towards the high foliage of an acacia tree. The *before* giraffes had short, thick necks, and the *after* giraffes had necks attenuated to reach leaves with more ease. They were the same giraffes. They had evolved within the span of their own lifetimes and would pass their differences on.

The giraffes had the unreadable expression of an animal that is not at the top of the food chain—an animal that, when it observes you directly, does not face you—an expression that asked questions. What was an adaptation and what was an injury? On what did that depend? And aren't there so many things in life to which we are drawn, that we think we need to live, that actually *prevent* our thriving? In a world that doesn't just take or leave us, what is our responsibility as bodies? What is sovereignty, and what is sacrifice?

These were questions that pain had the potential to answer, if only what pain was didn't hang in the balance of what the answers were. Still, that a being as beautiful and odd as a giraffe might not necessarily have evolved in its own best interests, but might instead be the expression of an inheritance of best guesses, was stirring.

I would think of the giraffes as the weight of my respirator bent my gaze down towards my work. Familiarity and agitation constantly duelled in my cervical spine, each holding the other to blame, and I would wonder if what I was feeling wasn't pain so much as irreconcilability. My rhomboid muscles contracted into a more acute form of this paradox when I would reach for the objects that were furthest away on my table.

I found myself in an odd position in the spray booth one day. Some of my fingers could no longer operate of their own accord, and I had to use my non-dominant hand to hold down a finger from my dominant hand onto the nozzle of a spray can in order to deploy a mist of Varathane. A coworker happened upon me and laughed. I too laughed when I imagined myself in their eyes. But I also felt, about my body, what one feels when they see an ant carrying a dead ant.

Having never gotten worse at doing anything I had gotten good at, I was constitutionally confused. I only knew how to try harder, and this made my problems worsen. Then, an inducement came from a two-part spray treatment that was introduced to treat a new series of pieces in the collection. I wasn't sure which part I reacted to: the solution that contained a latent heavy metal or the catalyst that brought its metallic properties forth. I became immobilized by the concentration required to overcome the desire to tear myself out of my histamine-engorged skin. In the end, it was the body of the factory from which I emerged.

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I took a job that had been described to me as “answering a phone,” but I was pleasantly surprised that it entailed relating to people and judging complex situations to coordinate the solutions to problems. To be gainfully employed making something—problems—go away felt restorative, *magical* even, and drew upon a body of ideas and values that was desperate to be called to action. Still, I developed a recurring nightmare about the phone that I now had to answer. This phone would appear, its *bold* light blinking brightly, and I would realize with horror that I had left someone hanging, waiting for an answer. With each recurrence, the horror amplified on itself—because it was still the same person left hanging. I was somehow on both ends of this line. The dreams slowly subsided in the time it took to process that I would not return to the factory. I paid off my student debt, which concurred with an increase in my rent.

A truck collided with my bicycle, which I was riding home from an overtime shift. The person driving the truck was on the job, delivering pallets, and turning a corner that I was not turning. The pallets—which were not all contained by the same restraint but tied together as groups, one group to another, with an unobvious arrangement of bungee cords—loomed over my body as I lay in it on the curb, as if considering me, before settling back into their intended configuration. The driver was standing beside their truck with fearful eyes: “This is exactly why I waited till now, because I didn’t want this to happen!” I did not immediately realize this referred to the late hour and did not need to be a riddle.

The driver’s insurance paid for a physiotherapist who, with each visit, would add more exercises to a list of therapeutic exercises that I had to do for the rest of my life. The exercises had names like *Dead Bug*, *Happy Baby*, and *Idiot’s Shoe-Tie* that lent them a kind of collectability.

I became a member of a community centre gym, and this restored to me a predictable setting where my body would do the thinking and would know what to do. I *paid* to do this labour, and I did it for my own purposes. The execution of my *Dead Bugs* felt full of a value that could accumulate.

The gym was a space full of people who were all in some kind of dialogue with themselves about their bodies, each propelled by a unique set of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to interact with objects and equipment that stood in for other things, individuals, and relativities in the world outside of the gym. Looking around, it seemed probable that some of these dialogues were not healthy—inasmuch as one can judge a maladaptation from an adaptation when someone only becomes who they are through it. There is a suspension of judgement one can enter into that provides a natural indemnity against other judgement, and I entered into it. I found a profound sense of communion—even with the gymgoers who were annoying.

It was in fact the most annoying gymgoers who I found the most fascinating—those whose approaches were expressed through the extremes of exertion and endurance as a kind of loud factory production in which the equipment they operated was manufacturing their own exceptional bodies. This seemed to both conquer and reproduce something at the same time, and that we might *all* have a freedom that hung in the balance of figuring out what that was made them impossible to ignore. That they performed made them seem the most different from me, but then—there was my flip-fold of my paper towel.

My flip-fold was masterful on a different register, and it was performed for a select audience—that other gymgoer. We encountered each other constantly in the

same set of spaces, and a comedy was developing between us that had the potential to span many genres of comedy. Its premise was that we had all of the same injuries, and that we were likely receiving treatment from the same physiotherapist.

Without dialogue, we established sequences of moving around one another so as not to collide or crush parts of each other underfoot, and we began to furnish each other with foam rollers and stability balls at the moments we knew the other needed them. We developed a range of acknowledging looks with which we identified each other's exercises and agreed not to say their names aloud, as though in reference to a silent conversation we were having about the hilarious relentlessness of the forces that hold human dignity under siege. Inevitably I began imagining hot sex with this person in the lateral coital alignment position and in other positions recommended and developed by sex researchers for injured people. We would choose them without having to explain their purpose or how to get into them and would choose them by preference when we no longer needed them. This part of the relationship remained speculative in order to preserve the assurance of a space that made it possible.

I had thought this was a space where a person came to do one of two things: to change one's body or to protect that body against change. But there was something else that was possible—which was to find the body's terms with which it could accept what can't be helped. These movements were the least easy, and I knew I had the most to learn from the gymgoers who made them. They were not all older than me.

I now knew more about how—through the constant reminder of most of the things in the world—the possibility of an other less painful or more compliant body can reside within your current body, and how what you feel can be in suspension between the two. This made possible the body from which I would remember this one, a body that would come to be in an increasing agonism with its surroundings as it fell out of the fit it had fallen into by default. These shifts were already underway in my temperament, and the potential for a perverse kind of thriving had begun to be revealed. It seemed that the trick was to be at odds with the world, but not to be at odds with the body. I felt drawn towards the people who could teach me.

I asked the gym staff to take down a poster that said *You Earn Your Body*, and they agreed with me its message was not right. Another poster that said *You Deserve Your Body* was more elusive to us in the expanded economy of what is deserved versus what is earned. To what body did the eyes of this voice that knows what you deserve belong?

Indebted as it was to so much untraceable production, this poster accumulated the work of *many* bodies—ending with the community centre worker who found

its image online and brought it forth from an office inkjet. I found my coexistence with this second poster by deciding its words were most compelling when they came from no body at all.

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I learned through former coworkers about a number of complaints against my former employer. Pieces in customers' collections had been shattering in the hotter climates of the southern United States, where they are popular home decor. Pourers working under the factory's quota system had been adding excess water to their plaster, which made it set faster but also made it brittle. This had perhaps gone on for years.

I now work in an office, in a school—the same school where I studied art—which recently relocated to the district where the factory still is. Developers have secured the surrounding area as investment property. What beneath us feels like solid ground was once a tidal flat sustaining another kind of life, including the lives of people from whom the land was stolen. This was not so long ago as to precede the history of the bodies of everyone we have known. What that theft made happen is still in motion all around us, creating an always-new landscape in which we wonder what thriving is. Thriving is what it is my job to help the people who study at the school do. We can only make our best guesses at what that looks like. Rents and tuition are rising, and the work that is available to them to pay these costs is always asking for more risks—asking on the premise of the capacity of bodies to regenerate, whether or not those bodies are theirs.

I feel for them a fury that is perhaps also a correct response, delayed and displaced, about a place of work for which I still feel an affection, having found my own body there. Wherever the truth of my feeling lies, it does satisfy me that the things we made, that—wherever they are—are only there because of us, are going to explode.

# I think I'm able to listen and tend to her body

Erin Poole & Johnny Mrym Spence



*This conversation took place in June 2020 while driving in Scarborough, Ontario.*

**Erin**

I was just thinking about—you know when people talk about choreography being everywhere and not just about movement in a dance piece? Obviously that's basic, but also it's not. I've been thinking about the movement I'm doing with my grandma right now and the movement that she has.

Yesterday, in order to help my grandma lie down, I changed the system of how I've been helping her. I don't know why I've been so timid about using this kind of careful...careful care that I have to give to her body. I'm trying to figure out what movement I have to offer her.

I was thinking about *that* choreography and how it's really so intricate and complex and tender. In a lot of ways it feels opposite to how I experience choreography in a dance piece, or at least lately. Like, performing Vena Cava, or dancing at TDT, feels a lot more violent. More harsh. Like, it's just really harsh.

**Johnny**

You mean it feels violent in comparison to the choreography of you and your grandmother doing the task of living?

**Erin**

Yeah, living and helping someone be comfortable living, be comfortable dying. And how that is a form of choreography—I hate to keep saying that.

**Johnny**

You hate calling it a choreography?

**Erin**

Yeah, it just sounds a bit pretentious. Oh well. I'm having a hard time joining the two. But it started with thinking about the things that we value so much in dance, the choreography and the aesthetic, wondering: "What is the aesthetic of this choreography happening between me and my grandma?"

I started considering all the textures of her life right now. For instance, her soft cream-coloured blanket is so important to her. And the position of a pillow and how that affects her body. How the brilliance of a yellow flower lifts her spirits. How all these moments keep getting more condensed.

**Johnny**

The way her body is kind of shutting down and becoming less and less functional...is that making her more heightened, or perhaps, more aware of her body and its surroundings? Perhaps she's more aware because she needs her surroundings to support her, whereas people who are more so-called "able bodied" can function in more varied surroundings.

*[A huge truck carrying four giant cement cylinders drives by]*

**Both**

Woah...

**Erin**

Those are cool.

**Johnny**

Those are very cool.

**Erin**

Where do you think those are going?

**Johnny**

I have no idea.

*[Pause]*



**Erin**

I guess it's like, as her body is shutting down, or as she becomes less able, her way of moving is becoming more complex as it gets more concentrated. I have so much range, ability, and strength, but I regret that I haven't spent very much time thinking about it as an offering of care. In the way that movement can be and is caring. I've spent so much time thinking about movement in relation to the way my own body feels or looks in dance choreography. Which is linked, often, to the way someone else may see it.

**Johnny**

Oh, so you mean often when you're in a performance setting you don't think about the movement as care in the same way? And this time with your grandma is making you think about movement as not only functionality or beauty, but also as care? Making you challenge the way that it's perceived? Who is perceiving it?



**Erin**

Yes, all those things. [*Laughs*]

It's not that I haven't moved with care before. There is something I do for a piece of choreography which is caring. The big difference I'm feeling right now is that I'm not moving performatively but purely for the sake of care. And I really feel how the way I've been trained and the way I move in some ways contributes to a colonial/settler way of being. Reinforces that I'm dancing for someone else, for capital or consumption. And my body feels less like mine and more like the instrument of someone else. I've thought a lot about this before ...

Right now I'm thinking about the real purpose of moving, of my body's movement, and how there are so many different ways to move. It can be expanded out in many directions, but right now the way I'm moving is in relation to death. To my grandma and my grandma's death (and life) in particular.

And I've also realized that I'm usually always performing. Not being at TDT right now, not being in a rehearsal process or performing due to the pandemic, is making me realize how I'm pretty much always using my body to perform in some way. I suppose in some ways I'm performing for my grandmother to offer ease or grace, but it's all coming from a place of comfort. Care. Tenderness. It's meant for feeling, not seeing.

[*Pause*]

'Cause I often think about grief and performing grief. How performative it is in a lot of ways. Often how we externalize our grief can feel like a performance, and



that's necessary at times. I've definitely got really wrapped up in my head thinking, "Am I performing an anger or a sadness?"

And I'm already thinking about setting up an end of life ritual or ceremony for my grandma. How is that going to look and feel? What do I want there? What will other people want there? What place does aesthetic beauty, beautiful flowers or spacing, have in this performance of saying goodbye? I don't mean just performing, but it is a spectacle. So I don't know, I'm trying to link all of that somehow.

### **Johnny**

It just struck me that with this future burial or commemorative moment you're choreographing stillness. Whereas the care between you and your grandma right now is a lot of choreographing movement. I guess now has more movement because it's life, right?

### **Erin**

Mmm, yeah. Well, *she* will be still ... eventually.

**Johnny**

But you're also making room for people to pause. Often at a burial it's moments of stillness with actions happening around that. And right now it's a lot of... well, I suppose there's a lot of your grandma sleeping, but when you're interacting with her it's always a movement.

**Erin**

Yeah, even when she's sleeping I'm still watching her chest, her breath, watching for the smallest of movements. And any small movement still means *Life*. Her life doesn't feel like a flame slowly going out.

Even though her movement is becoming restricted it isn't any less movement or less meaningful. And this is something that is talked about in dance practice, how we're never actually still. You're always in motion even when you're standing seemingly still. And some of those dancing ideas, I'm really thinking of them and experiencing them now in relation to death. Which I know lots of folks do in dance.

**Johnny**

Do you think being someone who works in movement makes you a better caregiver? Maybe "better" isn't the right word—but how does dance change the kind of care you can give? You've talked in the past about feeling grateful that you've looked after your body and made it flexible and strong. So that now you're able to lift your grandma and do these things that other people in your family can't do. Are there other ways which your movement practice has influenced the kind of care you offer?

**Erin**

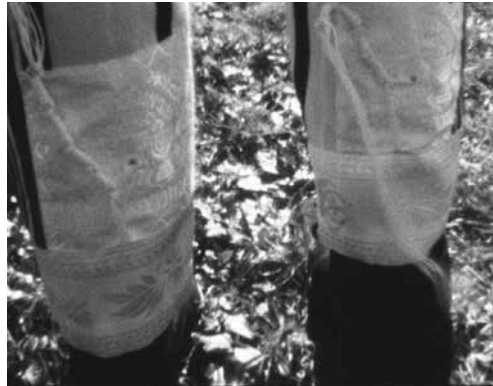
I think I'm able to listen and tend to her body in a certain way and without needing words. I can support her physically in the right places, which means that she has energy left over for something else to happen. I think that improves my grandma's experience because it means that she is in less pain. If I can help her do something with ease then possibly she'll have energy to eat something or drink something or have a conversation or think or feel.

It also has a profound effect on me because I notice what's going on in her body and it reminds me to be in my own. I don't know... it's empathy and listening. I also make mistakes. I don't really know what I'm trying to say, but it feels important.



אל מלא רחמים. שוכן במרומים. המצא מנוחה  
נכונה תחת כנפי השכינה.  
עם קדושים וטהורים כזהר הרקיע מזהירים.  
לנשמות קירנו שהלכו לעולמם.  
בעל הרחמים יסתירם בסתר כנפיו לעולמים.  
ויצרך בצרור החיים את-נשמתם.  
יהיה הוא נחלתם.  
וינחה בשלום על-משכבם.  
ונאמר אמן :

God, filled with compassion  
Grant complete repose to the souls  
Of all those we are remembering today  
Sheltered by Your divine wings  
May they join the company  
Of the holy and pure  
Who shine as bright as heaven  
Bring their souls  
Into the bond of life that  
With You as their portion  
They may rest in peace  
Amen



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El Male Rachamim is a Jewish prayer for the soul of a person who has died, often recited during burial and memorial services. The images accompanying this conversation are stills from the video work *El Male Rachamim / All Our Departed*. The video was choreographed by Erin Poole, directed/edited by Johnny Spence, and filmed by Caitlin Woelfe-O'Brien in collaboration with LA-based composer/cantor Daniela Gesundheit. The video premiered in December 2020 in the cultural and political journal *PROTOCOLS*.

# *It's Enough (for a rooftop)*

## Image Descriptions

### All Bodies Dance Project



**Page 29:** A photograph taken on top of an empty rooftop parkade. Downtown Vancouver highrises span the background of the image and the sky is grey and cloudy behind three dancers. They are moving near the corner of the parkade, each of them wearing different colours and types of warm clothing. The standing dancer on the left has their arms raised to the sides, the right arm bent upwards and the left arm bent downwards. They seem to be mid-step, dancing towards the centre of the frame. The middle dancer is seated in a manual wheelchair, their right arm outstretched as if passing or reaching towards the third dancer to the right. The third dancer is sitting on a railing that runs along the edge of the parkade with their left arm stretched upwards towards the sky. Their right arm seems loose, hanging by the side of their body.



**Page 29:** A photograph taken on top of an empty rooftop parkade surrounded by the glass and concrete buildings of Vancouver's downtown. The sky is grey and cloudy behind three dancers who are wearing different types, colours, and styles of warm clothing. The image foreground on the right is blurry, as if the image was taken from afar and a wall is blocking the view. The first and closest dancer is seated in a motorized wheelchair facing the other two dancers near the image centre. The second dancer is standing with their legs straight, their torso bent downwards, and their arms hanging towards the ground. The third dancer is draped across the second, holding on by the second dancer's waist with their feet off the ground. A puddle near the centre of the frame reflects the two entangled dancers.



**Page 30-31:** A bright image of an empty Vancouver rooftop parkade with seven dancers spread across the scene. It is a sunny day and the coastal mountain range runs along the horizon with the Vancouver skyline in front. A telephone wire decorated with lanterns runs horizontally along the centre of the image, nearly parallel to the mountains visible in the background. Many of the dancers, each wearing different colours and types of clothing, are in various extended poses. Two dancers are seated in manual wheelchairs and doing wheelies with their front wheels in the air. Another dancer is seated in a motorized wheelchair, leaning back with both arms reaching to the right. There is a dancer balancing on a solid office chair, both arms stretched out to the side, toes touching the ground. Another dancer is tipped to one side, balancing on one foot while the other leg hovers above a short stool. Two other dancers stand beside a railing at the back, one seeming to be jumping mid-air, and the other's arms spread wide.

# Contributors

**All Bodies Dance Project (ABDP)** is an inclusive dance company located on unceded Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xwməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam) territories (Vancouver, BC), founded in 2014. Their work brings together artists with and without disabilities to explore the endless creative possibilities in difference. The company's work straddles labels of community-engaged and professional practice. They aim to dismantle assumptions, biases, and default notions around contemporary dance, theatre, and the dancing body.

**Dr. Seika Boye** is a scholar, writer, educator, and artist whose practices revolve around dance and movement. She is Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream at the University of Toronto and also works as a movement dramaturg and consultant. Boye curated the archival exhibition *It's About Time: Dancing Black in Canada 1900-1970*.

**Hannah Campbell** is a photographer who focuses on themes of shared experience, collective memories, and storytelling. Campbell is based in Vancouver, the unceded territories of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam peoples. She seeks to explore the possibilities of the everyday.

**Justine A. Chambers** is a dance artist living and working on unceded Coast Salish territories. Her practice considers how choreography can be an empathic practice rooted in collaborative creation, close observation, and the body as a site of a cumulative embodied archive. She is Max Tyler-Hite's mother.

A Lambda Literary fellow, **Michael Chang** (they/them) was awarded the Kundiman Scholarship at the Miami Writers Institute. A finalist in contests at the *Iowa Review*, *BOMB*, *NightBlock*, and many others, their poems have been nominated for Best of the Net. Their manuscript *<big shot manifesto>* was selected by Rae Armantrout as a finalist for the Fonograf Editions Open Genre Book Prize and another was a finalist in the Diode Editions Book Contest.

**Francesca Chudnoff** is a Toronto-based millennial with a BFA in performance paying rent as a multidisciplinary artist. She is a dancemaker, filmmaker, and photographer. She is currently reworking her first solo, “FACERIDER,” into a dance film that will premiere whenever Miss Rona lets her.

**Jessica Cook** is a choreographer living in NYC since 2005. She has shown her work and collaborations in venues such as Roulette Intermedium, Judson Memorial Church, MoMA PS1, Pieter Performance Space LA, AUNTS at Mana Contemporary, and LmAK Gallery. She is currently a Movement Research Artist-in-Residence and a 2020 Foundation for Contemporary Art grant recipient.

**Natalie Tin Yin Gan (顏婷妍)** is a choreographer working at the intersections of food, race, and body on the unceded ancestral lands of the Coast Salish. She is a late sleeper, a late riser, a late bloomer, a latecomer, and a late-night snacker. [nataliegan.com](http://nataliegan.com)

**Hanako Hoshimi-Caines** is a mother, dancer, and performance-maker based in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal. Her practice explores performance as something that is both mystical and a skill to be learned. She is currently the guest co-curator at the Centre de Création O Vertigo.

**Aisha Sasha John** choreographs performances – on stage and as poems – that are the occasion for real and multitudinous actions of love. As Dancemakers’s 2019-2022 Resident Artist, Aisha will commence research on the ensemble project DIANA ROSS DREAM in May 2022. Also forthcoming is Aisha’s chapbook, *TO STAND AT THE PRECIPICE ALONE AND REPEAT WHAT IS WHISPERED* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021).

**Adam Kinner** is a performance-maker, musician, and artist living in Montréal. He works provisionally and across forms, taking a research-based, improvisatory, and collaborative approach, often working with artists from dance and music. His writing has been published by *Fence*.

**Lee Su-Feh’s** work encompasses choreography, performance, teaching, dramaturgy, and writing. Since arriving in Vancouver in 1988 from Malaysia where she was born and raised, Lee has created a body of work that interrogates the contemporary body as a site of intersecting and displaced histories and habits.

**Xinyue Liu** is a found-material artist who recycles and reuses objects as placeholders for unresolved memories. In weaving together still and moving images, Liu's practice investigates issues of displacement, intimacy, migration, and diaspora. In contemplating the meaning of being far away from one's roots, she utilizes fiction as a method for reconciliation.

**Alexa Solveig Mardon** is a queer dance artist and settler of mixed Finnish and British Isles ancestry, raised and living on illegally occupied Coast Salish lands. Mardon's practice includes making dances, dancing, writing, frontline support work, performance, ritual, teaching, and community actions, often blurring together and called "choreography."

**Dana Michel** is a choreographer and live artist. Her works interact with the expanded fields of improvisation, sculpture, hip-hop, comedy, cinematography, dub, and social commentary to create a centrifuge of experience. Michel is currently touring three solo performance works: *Yellow Towel*, *Mercurial George*, and *CUTLASS SPRING*.

**Julie D. Mills** (they/she) is a Saskatchewan-born, interdisciplinary artist and curator currently living and practicing in Vancouver. Mills holds a BFA from Emily Carr University and is a co-founder of Number 3 Gallery. They were a 2019 artist in residence at the Banff Centre and recently featured work in the Shooting Gallery Performance Series.

Born in Toronto, **Chenise Mitchell** has been performing professionally for over ten years. Mitchell considers herself a Jazzer, which means she is an all-round performing artist connected to rhythm and humanity. For her, jazz is a versatile genre that allows for honest expression and personal style; dance is a means for support and expression, a language of connection to be shared.

**Michael Nardone** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Université de Montréal and an affiliated faculty member at the Centre for Expanded Poetics, Concordia University. Co-editor of the *Documents* book series and the critical journal *Amodern*, he is the author of two books of poetry: *The Ritualites* (2018) and *Transaction Record* (2014).

**Andrea Nunes** is able-bodied, cis-gender, and born to European settlers on traditional Snuneymuxw territories. Now living on unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh lands, she advises undergraduate students at Emily Carr University. Her work is concerned with everyday relations and relationalities, and the ways in which these are inflected through the local past.

**Erin Poole** is a dance artist of settler ancestry in Tkaronto. She is in her fourth season as a company dancer with Toronto Dance Theatre and has contributed to and performed in works by many esteemed choreographers. Erin's choreographic research in memory, movement, and embodied empathy have taken place at The School of Making Thinking (New York), grüntaler 9 (Berlin), her grandmother Sandra's house, and in the short film *All Our Departed/El Male Rachamim* by Alphabet of Wrongdoing.

**Coman Poon | 潘灝文** is a Tkaronto-based interdisciplinary artist, activist, curator, and producer working within the context of decolonization and intercultural exchange. He is a bilingual (English, Cantonese), community-centred Torontonion of Hong Kong and Canadian upbringing. Inspired by a maternal ancestral lineage in Feng Shui | 風水 (Chinese geomancy), his performance and visual art practice currently explores the "ritual body" in relationship to Land. *Be(com)ing ten thousand things* is his collaboration with artist Naishi Wang.

**Sarah Pritchard** is a pastor, dancer, and choreographer based in New Orleans, LA. She is the co-founder of Abolition Apostles ([abolitionapostles.org](http://abolitionapostles.org)), a national jail and prison ministry, and co-pastor of Apostles Fellowship Church.

**Zahra Shahab** is an independent artist living on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people. She is a graduate of the University of Calgary as well as the Modus Operandi Training Program. She is interested in the word *fantasy* and the prophetic power of coaxing our imaginations beyond the confines of white supremacy. [shahabibi.com](http://shahabibi.com)

**Malik Nashad Sharpe** (b. 1992, New York) is a choreographer, dancer, and movement director whose work looks at the production of ontology, affect, and subjectivity from the perspective of marginalization. Often working with the undercurrent, underneath, subversive, and ulterior aspects of what it means to be both a human, and dehumanised, their work has often topically explored themes around sexual assault, melancholia and melancholic subjectivity, nationalism, authoritarianism, the spectacle around Black death, figuring solidarity across borders and identity markers, the protestation latent in joyousness, and Tupac's depression, amongst many other topics. Creating under their prolific alias *marikiscrycrycry*, their performance practice has a cult following in London's underground performance scene.

A multi-award-nominated winner and loser, creator **B. Solomon** is of Anishinaabe and Irish heritage, born in Shebahonaning. Solomon has presented his multidisciplinary works across Turtle Island and abroad. He is passionate about helping people relearn about their forgotten bodies and take back the space those bodies occupy. [electricmoose.ca](http://electricmoose.ca)

Canadian-Eritrean artist **Eden Solomon** grew up in Montréal, where she has recently moved back after living in Vancouver for six years. Solomon's practice includes dance, choreography, writing, drawing, and poetic translation.

**Johnny Mrym Spence** is an artist of Jewish/European Settler ancestry who loves and creates in Tkaronto. His maternal great-grandmother was Sara, his paternal grandmother was Joan, his maternal grandmother is Judy, and his mother is Annie. He owes whatever compassion and creativity he has to them, and thanks them for the gifts of story and song. Some recurring themes in Johnny's work are: Judaism, ritual, semantics, playfulness, orientation, collaboration. He works across many mediums including: sound, movement, storytelling, installation, performance, video.

Born in Changchun, China, **Naishi Wang** | 王乃石 began Chinese folk dance training at Jilin College of Art in 1997. In 2004, he moved to Canada and joined Toronto Dance Theatre, where he was active for nine years. Since 2015, the award-winning performer has worked as an independent choreographer. Wang shares in the belief that performing arts create imaginary perspectives that expand what dance can be in the 21st century. [www.naishi.dance](http://www.naishi.dance)

**Edisa Weeks** is a Brooklyn-based choreographer, educator, curator, and founder of DELIRIOUS Dances. She creates interdisciplinary site-specific works that explore our deepest desires, darkest fears, and sweetest dreams. [deliriousdances.com](http://deliriousdances.com)



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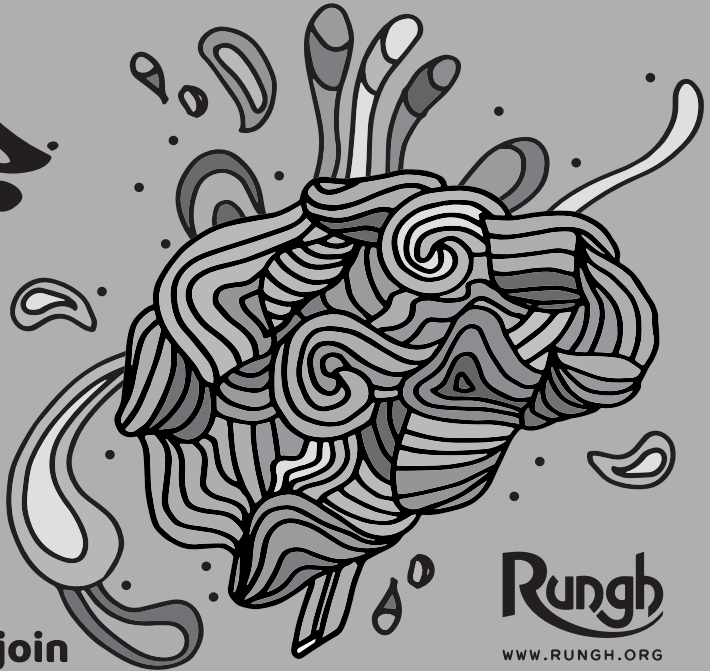
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IMAGE: New Red Order,  
Never Settle: Calling In  
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Courtesy the artists.

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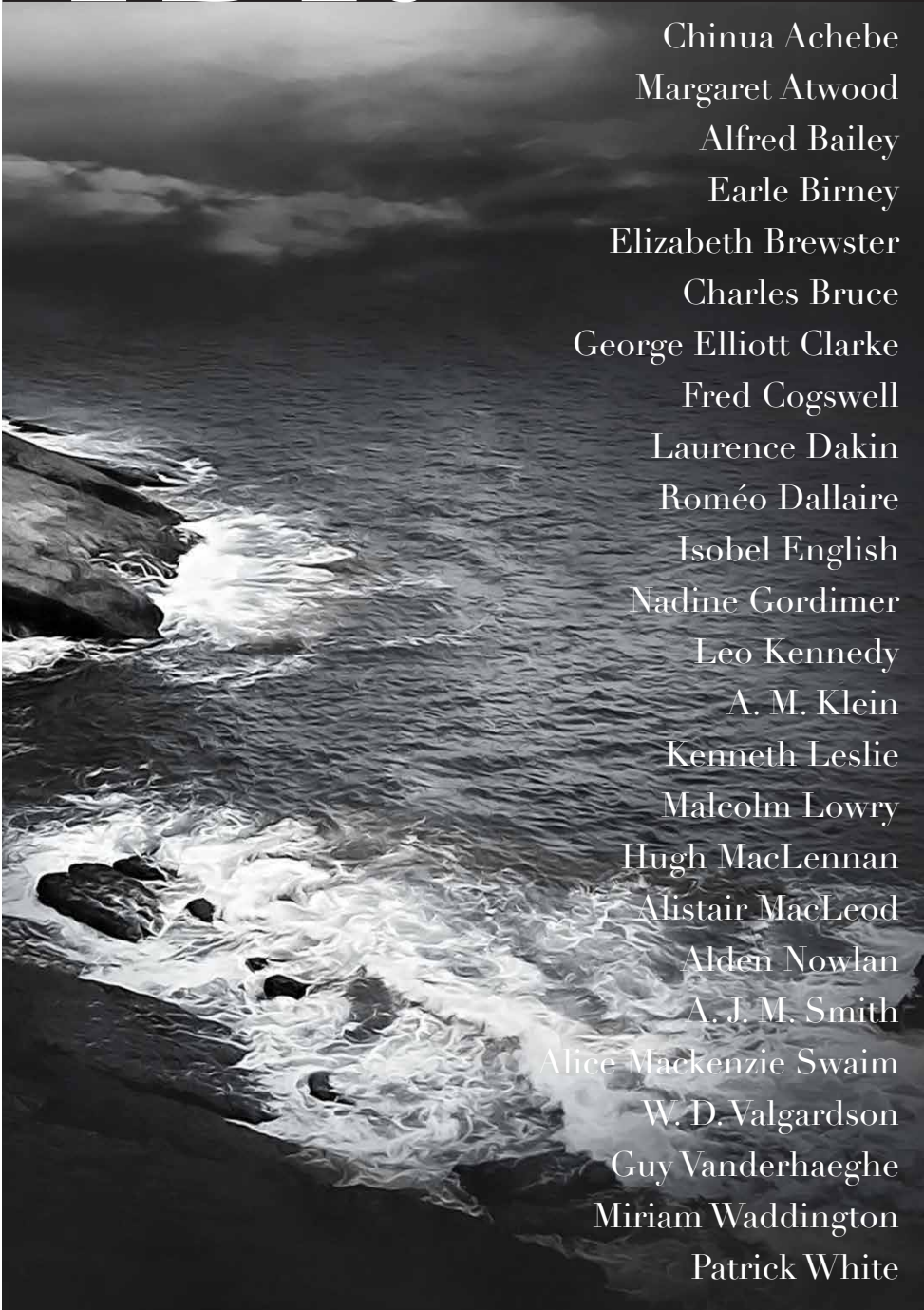
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**SPROING!** 1999 performance poster 22 cm x 28 cm  
Image courtesy of Justine A. Chambers and Seika Boye



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Francesca Chudnoff, Jessica Cook, Natalie Tin Yin Gan,  
Hanako Hoshimi-Caines, Aisha Sasha John &  
Alexa Solveig Mardon, Adam Kinner, Lee Su-Feh,  
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