RECIPRO CITIES SUSTAINING DANCE ACROSS AN OCEAN

Edited by

Noémie Solomon

Villa Albertine

RECIPROCITIES:
Sustaining Dance Across an Ocean

Edited by Noémie Solomon
Villa Albertine, 2025

After the professional symposium “RECIPROCITIES: Making and Supporting Dance Between France and the U.S.” held at Villa Albertine on October 26 and 27, 2023, curated with Noémie Solomon.

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Villa Albertine's mission is to create lasting connections between France and the United States by fostering cultural, educational, and academic exchanges. Dance, an embodied language, occupies a special place within this mission. The exchanges are especially intense and fruitful, backed by years of collaboration between artists, curators, scholars, and sponsors on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thanks to major initiatives such as the FUSED program (France-US Exchange in Dance) and the research residency program launched in 2021, Villa Albertine actively supports the development of contemporary work and encourages the emergence of a new generation of artists hailing from all over the world.

2023 was marked by The Albertine Dance Season, a high point celebrating dance in all its forms through eight residencies for choreographers, dancers, and performers across the American territory; tours of several shows; and a public conversation series, Dance Assembly.

The professional symposium RECIPROCITIES: Making and Supporting Dance between France and the U.S. was the culmination of these exchanges, gathering experts from both sides of the Atlantic to reflect and converse on the specific issues and challenges in the contemporary dance field, particularly as impacted by the pandemic. Guided by the idea of reciprocity, this symposium explored new approaches to artistic collaboration, addressing subjects such as artist residencies, curation, pedagogy, and the transmission of knowledge.

This publication reflects the richness of these exchanges and also benefits from new perspectives and contributions. It highlights the necessity for all participants in the world of dance to imagine collective responses, rethink established practices, and invent new horizons. We hope it will spark collaborations and unprecedented projects between our two countries, projects made possible by the generous support of our sponsors, to whom we offer our sincere gratitude.

Mohamed Bouabdallah
Cultural Counselor of France and Director of Villa Albertine

Judith Roze
Deputy Director

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TO DANCE AN OCEAN AS A RECIPROCAL ACT

Noémie Solomon

"How can we reduce the distance between us?"

—Dorothée Munyaneza, 2023

Reciprocity: from the Latin *reciprocus*, "rise and fall; move back and forth." The movement of breath coming in and out, the ebb and flow of a sea, a gesture that dissipates on stage before morphing into social movement, bodies that test out their relational agency, a dancer buried in compost who surrenders to the weight of soil and of time. Reciprocity: an embodied practice, one that is attuned to the various movements—sensorial and political, organic and inorganic—that travel across and compose us. Reciprocity: a score for a dance of relations, responsive and capacious, that accounts for diverse forms of living and moving together in anticipation of the next steps.

This publication begins with a twofold premise: that reciprocity matters in the context of cultural exchange and global politics in 2025, and that dance constitutes a privileged site for studying—learning with—reciprocal practices. What if reducing the distance between us, in the words of artist Dorothée Munyaneza, was a choreographic problem? What if dance, with its various techniques in, and deep knowledge of, all things movement, including disequilibrium, stillness, and transformation, could teach us precisely *how* to bridge the social and political gaps that urgently need bridging?

Part of the answer, one might suggest, lies in renewing our attention to dance—the myriad of somatic and choreographic practices it studies, rehearses, embodies—through questions of interdependence and solidarity. To move resolutely away from a long-standing perception of dance as that which is limited to the realms of the stage and of metaphor, and whose language is deemed "universal" because it is relegated to a baseline of undifferentiated embodiment. Instead, how can we tune in to dance across vast areas of cultural production, through the multiple alliances it weaves with forms of life—including the more-than-human—and the way it manifests across social movements and histories—affirming alternative lineages?[1] What teachings does it offer for inhabiting the earth in common; for flying from and landing on shifting grounds? Bruno Latour suggested that "the new universality consists in feeling that the ground is in the process of giving way."[2] This is what now brings us together: the sense that the earth cannot cope with the violent effects of globalization; with the migrations, explosions of inequalities, and "New Climatic Regime" which are all "one and the same threat."[3] As the mirage of a common culture dissolves on the horizon, and the stable ground from which one would act gives way beneath our feet, the parameters once guiding cultural exchange are not only shifting but imploding. In the wake, new somatic modes and political paradigms are emerging: a field is in the making. Away from globalization's promise of interconnectedness, we face the necessity of knowing and feeling each other otherwise. One way to reduce the distance that has amplified between us, then, might be to rehearse, alongside dance practices, a somatics of generosity, care, and indeed reciprocity.

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RECIPROCITIES: Sustaining Dance Across an Ocean follows the 2023 Villa Albertine Dance Season and most particularly

the Dance Assembly series, which took place across panel discussions, post-performance conversations, and a symposium. The yearlong series took the dance figure of the *assemblé*—in which the feet meet in the air before landing together on the ground—as a prompt. In the *assemblé*, physical limits are tested for bodies and gestures to come together. A critical mode of gathering, the assembly calls attention to the role of dance and choreography in storing collective knowledge, anticipating social formations and sensorial revolutions. Conversations ranged from choreographies of social protests and somatic agitation in May 1968 up to today; the transmission and transformation of forms across three generations of Hip Hop dancers working in France and the U.S.; Monique Wittig's revolutionary language in denaturalizing gender and the body; to afrofuturism and ecological justice in France's West Indies.[4] The exchanges centered on choreographic experiments, their inventive, sensitive, and at times disobedient movements across disciplinary forms, generational divides, and geopolitical borders.

The series culminated with the symposium, RECIPROCITIES: Making and Supporting Dance between France and the U.S. held in New York City in late October of 2023. The symposium gathered over 25 participants to discuss a range of themes and methodologies organized around four key themes: Pedagogy as Performance, Choreographing Residencies, Acts of Transmission, and Curatorial Ecologies. Each session consisted of a roundtable with four presenters, a moderator, and a respondent, as well as distinct one-on-one dialogues—or "artists provocations"—pairing choreographers from different contexts of making. Presentations were followed by passionate exchanges with the audience, highlighting the necessity of and potential for live assembly in the wake of the COVID pandemic and the sheer inequalities heightened by a profound climate and funding crisis. A "poly-crisis" which, in retrospect, has not only been exacerbated over time, but has morphed into a new unruly order. Adverse climate events are now violent "everyday" occurrences creating continuous societal and environmental disruptions. Several dance funding initiatives have folded in the U.S. over the last year, with a harsh impact on all actors across the field. In France, despite a robust state-funded infrastructure, the dance sector is facing unprecedented cuts. These new realities certainly add pressure to the very possibility of transnational exchange. How can we, with "reciprocities" as a prompt, confront the singularities, commonalities, parallels, gaps, and discrepancies that inform and

guide our respective practices amidst a catastrophically shifting landscape? In the resurgence of nationalism and authoritarian regimes worldwide, how do we insist on the necessity of empathetic exchanges, encounters, and interpersonal hybridity? What are the privileges and abundances, the tools and creative resources that can be shared and imagined in common?

The current publication reframes and extends some of the key exchanges that animated the symposium, through edited versions of each roundtable.[5] It also features eight newly commissioned texts and two interviews, mapping the ways these questions continue to inform the field through other trajectories and urgencies. Together, the texts foreground the experiences of dance artists, advocates, teachers, dramaturges, scholars, curators, and directors to speculate on the role of choreographic imagination and infrastructure; on the ecological and ethical matters that can sustain dance across an ocean.

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The four sections that structure the publication feed into each other and overlap in a myriad of ways. One thread guiding the different contributions might be the question of sustainability at the intersection of dance practices. What are the vital conditions—the forms of sustenance—for dance practices to be known and taught; for dancers to meet and experiment; for dances to coalesce and be presented, passed on, reimagined? How can we rehearse and embody sustainable processes and futures for the field? How can we reconcile the imperatives to come together, to share works across distances (and across borders) given the bureaucratic, economic, and ecological burdens at stake? The challenges and propositions brought forth by the contributors emerge as many “reciprocities”: sustainable yet partial practices that form a composite field.

In **Pedagogy as Performance**, participants share pedagogical approaches and models ranging from the conservatory to the liberal arts institution and its “creative campus,” including experimental programs. The value of particular methods and ideologies are debated, as well as the demands put forth on choreographic artists to teach or innovate across disciplines. How can dance’s ethos of collaboration, its insistence on process, and its singular temporality—the time it takes for bodies to learn techniques and works—seed methodologies beyond the choreographic field? Donna Faye Burchfield mobilizes “Dance as

a Classroom," reminding us how dance and its study are caught up in a loop that can open worlds. She ponders, "What if we call this moment—in which we close the gap between who we are and who we might be, between the world we inhabit and the world we dream of—a dance?" For Ana Pi, "the reflection around 'Performance as Pedagogy' is an atomic power." It "performs tenacity," intensifies questions, and invites us to rehearse collectively. Pi, an "extemporary" artist and pedagogue, situates her practice alongside the Black diaspora and its "peripheral knowledge." Seen through the prism of performance, pedagogy becomes that which dwells on generosity, continuity, and the ancestral to tend to the relationships we "urgently have to rebalance and regenerate."

Choreographing Residencies outlines various strategies and possibilities across scales, roles, and organizations to rethink dance residencies. The conversation foregrounds issues of space, time, financial resources, but also the many relationships and friendships that constitute the fabric of dance. Participants insist on the necessity to support artists over time, moving away from a production economy to instead consider dance (and performance) through the lens of research, process, and experimentation.
For instance, Edgar Miramontes offers the cooperative model to reimagine relations between a space and the artists it "programs" in collaboration with other national and international institutions. In the coop, artists all have a share and a say in the way a space is governed and inhabited. Marcela Corvalán Santander's "Gestures of Hosting" recounts a particular "teaching residency" at Bard College to extend the reflection on dance pedagogy to a practice of hospitality. For Moriah Evans, her "job as a choreographer [is] to create spaces for others to feel themselves, be they dancers, collaborators, or members of the public."
By thinking choreography through and as social infrastructure, Evans reminds us how dances always present their own combination of structure and exchange: "These are real bodies doing things in real time inside of lived experiences and conditions. Issues of power, agency, sameness, difference, and judgment abound."

In the opening of **Acts of Transmission**, André Lepecki suggests that the word "transmission" holds an affective charge. When thinking about different activities or missions such as curating, collecting, or archiving through the prism of transmission, "something else happens": "something that is linked directly to the question of life and death, which might be the question that

really matters when thinking and practicing ‘transmission’ across generations—as so often is the case in dance.” The conversation follows a line in which transmission “acts” through issues of preservation and archiving, emancipation and appropriation, all the way to what David Thomson names “the scent”: “How do we sometimes think about preserving the flower but losing the scent?” Nicole Birmann Bloom’s “Letter to a Young Dancer of the Future” ponders on the imprint of dance over time; how a singular history of performances and exchanges might find its way (or not) to future generations and in the dances that are yet to come. Seta Morton foregrounds the role of spirit and that of breath in the way dance is remembered, “tried on,” and archived. She describes the movement of dancing, living, and aging bodies as the “only accurate archive there is,” thus making manifest Octavia Butler’s prophecy: “All that you touch, You Change.”

Curatorial Ecologies foregrounds interdependence and entanglement at this critical juncture of planetary life: in this new order that is as much climatic as it is economic and choreographic, affecting how populations can move and subsist. How can curatorial practices account for and respond to the sweeping challenges we face? What can we do with and for each other? Participants call attention to issues of ethics and integrity, while insisting on the specificity of context and the need for expansive collaborations. For Rachid Ouramdane, the role of curators is “to create possibilities for the choreographic art to exist in a wider scale, across different domains; to use all the potential of the discipline to emphasize, absorb, amplify dance.” Megan Kiskaddon’s writing celebrates “mid-sized arts organizations as spaces where the strength of structure meets the freedom of artistic risk.” Those spaces, she argues, are “the glue” to the broader arts ecology. Lou Forster analyzes the historical and critical emergence of the “dance curator” through the work of Harvey Lichtenstein in the presentation and canonisation of American Postmodern dance. Forster sheds light on the role of curation through concerns of space and visibility, but also the careful handling of “stardom” and hierarchy as well as community-related issues as it builds a transatlantic network. As we take account of these histories and reroute them, how can we distribute the function of curation across a field, heightening a sense of solidarity between its actors, environments, and movements?

In the coda, two dance artists discuss the role of ecology in their creative practices. Jérôme Bel recounts the reasons behind a decision to stop traveling by plane to create and present dance

works as well as a recent work, *Non human dances*, which attends to other ways of being alive. mayfield brooks retraces their journey with "more than human" partners and how they manifest in choreographies, such as the burying of their body in live compost over extended durations in *Viewing Hours*, or *Whale Falls*, a project that attends to the whale fall phenomenon in which the corpse of a whale mimics compost as it reaches the ocean bed. These dances are tangled with Improvising While Black, brooks' ongoing practice that follows a cyclical path: it emerges from the "underwater abyss" where the bones of their ancestors live, and returns to "the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and start to unpack the decomposed matter of Black life." Here, we move resolutely away from the firm land beneath our feet as we venture into the ocean and its layered histories, political asymmetries, and nurturing ecosystems. The ocean between us is a border. It is also that which can connect and engulf us. To dance this ocean is a way to hone a sense of reciprocity.

1. See Emma Bigé's notion of "mouvementements": "Those movements in me that are not of me, those movements through which my interdependences with other planetary creatures come to my consciousness." Emma Bigé, *Mouvementements. Écopolitiques de la danse* (Paris: La Découverte, 2023).
2. Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (London: Polity, 2018), 9.
3. *Idem*.
4. See a full listing of the Dance Assembly series with all the contributors: https://villa-albertine.org/va/events/dance-assembly-conversation-series/
5. A full caption of the symposium is available on Howlround's website: https://howlround.com/happenings/reciprocities-making-and-supporting-dance-between-france-and-united-states

PEDAGOGY AS PERFOR-MANCE

Conversation with
Raphaëlle Delaunay, Ashley DeHoyos Sauder, Joshua Lubin-Levy, Julia M. Ritter, Noé Soulier, Tara Aisha Willis

A Curriculum's Pedagogical Horizons:
Dance as a Classroom
Donna Faye Burchfield

Notes on "Choreographing Transmission"
Ana Pi

Roundtable with **Raphaëlle Delaunay, Joshua Lubin-Levy, Julia M. Ritter, Noé Soulier**
Moderated by **Tara Aisha Willis**
Response by **Ashley DeHoyos Sauder**

Tara Aisha Willis

This first panel addresses the way education and pedagogy filter through every single aspect of the scene that we're all part of—or the many scenes of practice that we all take part in. It seems perfect that it comes first because education is the place a lot of artists begin and a lot of people outside of artistic practice (who are doing curatorial practice, administration, and scholarship around dance) also begin. Here are some of the questions we worked with in preparation for the panel: *What can hybrid spaces of learning where pedagogy meets performance and vice versa teach curatorial practices? What are the educational and experimental models that drive the development of creative campuses and dance programs on both sides of the Atlantic?* We had a lovely and complex Zoom conversation with this group beforehand, and I just want to name two things that surfaced as guiding intentions or ways that this set of questions often emerge. The first is around the logistics of bringing pedagogy and performance together. How do curatorial and artistic goals end up in alignment—or not—with pedagogical ones, within institutions, curricula, and programming? How do we think logistically about how pedagogy and performance come into practical alignment with each other? The second is around practices and the mutual influence of pedagogy and performance. Not necessarily in terms of actual events, but the ways practices for making and presenting dance and practices for teaching students end up influencing each other. How do we learn from one another, even if we don't actually create a program that does both at once?

Joshua Lubin-Levy

I have been Director of the Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University for a little over a year now. We're in a transitional moment, thinking about how an art center at a liberal arts college can be centering arts across the curriculum, without taxing an already spread-thin technical staff who's also supporting student and faculty productions. And wanting artists to have meaningful engagements with our campus: not just dropping in for the weekend to perform but be present to work with students and develop their practice. I wanted to offer a few thoughts on the "creative campus" phrase, thinking specifically about the history of the idea of creativity entering campuses in the early 2000s through grant funding, where artists would bring creativity in interdisciplinary spaces by collaborating with faculty and researchers outside of the arts. And Wesleyan is a space that is very proud of being one of the early recipients of these "creative campus" funds and continues to run creative campus programming. Yet I do think we need to shift away from that model.

As a point of entry, perhaps we can oversimplify the question of performance and pedagogy by suggesting that there are essentially two models of performance pedagogy. There is the model of the conservatory, wherein the conservation of a specific discipline is fundamental to the training of students or disciples in a prescribed mode of practice. Conservatories are often protective of both the practice that they impart and the students that they train. Conservatories are often thought of as rigid, methodical, narrowly focused, exclusionary, and even ideological spaces of teaching and training. By contrast, the educational institution I work in, the liberal arts university, presents a performance pedagogy that defines itself in opposition to the conservativeness of the conservatory. If the liberal arts university could speak, it would say, "I am multidisciplinary, I am innovative, I am against all disciplinary boundaries. I am driven by the notion that to be creative means to be inventive, to invent newness. I have a political belief that creative solutions are what the world needs today. I believe that the arts should be integrated with other modes of study. I prioritize process over product. I am both more in touch with the world and more independent from the necessity of living in it because my value is irreducible to the commercial demands of ticket sales and audience approval."

I hear these refrains over and over at the college campus and I've found that, despite sounding liberatory, they also create specific demands of artists when they come to our campus. They create an expectation that art must be multidisciplinary to be meaningful, and that artists must aspire to work outside of the discipline that they're often trained in. They suggest that innovation in the arts is only relevant when it is "world-changing." It's not enough for artists to make the small, minute observations of the scientists: art and artists have to transform the world we live in. Their transformations have to deal with all of the crises the world is facing, and the larger the crises are, the more justified the artistic practices.

One thing I'm trying to do at Wesleyan is to get the University to listen to artists, to be guided by where artists want to go. We're thinking less about artists in residence and more about artists as partners in leading the direction of the CFA, marshaling the resources of Wesleyan to help them develop a research curriculum around artistic needs, and letting that reorganization transform the pedagogy and method and impact of existing courses of study. Most importantly, we're not requiring artists to come in knowing the value of their work—we're working with them to understand the resonance and kinds of impact that art can make.

And I think this is fundamental to the way Wesleyan has operated as a school. What I think is unique about Wesleyan is that the arts practice has always been prioritized in the artistic spaces. It's been the case in the theater department for instance: rather than focusing on plays as texts, it has brought, over the years, many practitioners to give students the opportunity to put plays on their feet every semester. It is also the case in dance. In 1978, when the university was making austerity cuts—as many universities were—there was a huge student movement to protect the Dance department and Cheryl Cutler, who had been brought in at 21 years old to start that department. I'd like to end by reading an anonymous statement by a student given to a student newspaper in 1978. "There is a classroom on the Wesleyan campus, which functions on the basis of cooperation and mutual effort. Each member of the class knows that she is an important element of the group and that the responsibility for making the class work is shared equally among all participants. Students are aware of each other's abilities and needs and are conscious of the importance of interacting thoughtfully. The classroom I am describing is the dance studio." I think that's a beautiful statement from a student about the value of being inside the dance space. And so, I'm trying

to find ways back into that kind of mode of practice, as a way of guiding us toward other pedagogical outputs, rather than asking artists to come in and “innovate.”

Noé Soulier

I direct the National Center for Contemporary Dance in Angers in France, which is quite a special institution. It’s inside a theater, and we are responsible for the dance programming of this theater, which has three performing halls—one of 900 seats, one of 400 seats, and one of 100 seats. We also have a festival. The CNDC is also a choreographic center, which has for most of its history been directed by choreographers, including Emmanuelle Huynh. It was funded in 1978 by Alwin Nikolais, and it has supported American dance in very successful ways over the years with premieres of seminal works by Trisha Brown—for instance *Newark* was rehearsed and premiered in Angers—by Merce Cunningham, and by other important figures of American dance as well as French and international dance. The center is also where I am developing my own work, and there is a team helping me for that. It’s also a residency center where we invite many choreographers to rehearse, to make work, and we often co-produce this work.

The CNDC is also a school. We offer a Bachelor in contemporary dance to a cohort of 20 students. It’s a small-scale program, but a lot of important figures in France have gone through it—such as Alain Buffard, Jérôme Bel, and Philippe Decouflé, to name a few different examples. One specificity is that we do not have permanent teachers. Our faculty is made up of artists or practitioners or dramaturges who are active in the field and who we invite for a duration from one day to one month or more. And this allows us to invite the same person sometimes or often; they can come to teach, to create works over different times, then to present their works. To give you an example: now, we opened the season with a piece by Lia Rodrigues. She came for one month to teach to the students in September from Brazil. The students went to the school she created in the Maré favela in Rio in July. And we are working on finding the funds for students from that school to come to Angers next year. This has been an incredibly rich exchange with Lia. I think the CNDC is a very special place because we are not a conservatory—like the one in which I trained. And we’re not a university either. It’s a school inside a theater.

When it comes to the question of curating and pedagogy, I wanted to share with you a few problems that I encountered since I started directing the center in 2020. I think curating in choreographic centers is radically different from curating in museums because works are not "available." You cannot build a season by saying, "I'm going to take that work and put it in relationship with that other work." Imagine you would like that Martha Graham piece, but no one is dancing it at that moment. How do you bring the company? And what if the company is not having this work as part of their touring repertory anymore? Dance works are not readily available. Also, about teaching, there has been this huge expansion of what we call "choreography" and which choreographic techniques are important today, which is amazing and mind blowing, but it takes time to enter any dance practice. The body takes time. So, you just cannot cover that, there is no way to. You have to make choices and these choices are extremely problematic. So, at the CNDC, we try to broaden the Western classical dance cannon, which means we will never be able to go as deep as you can go into this technique–or any others. The body takes time, and you just cannot teach everything.

One thing that has been at the core of dance teaching for decades, which I think doesn't happen so much in the visual arts, is that we often learn how to dance in the way of an artist. No one will do a Jackson Pollock workshop, for instance learning dripping. But people will do a Trisha Brown, a William Forsythe, a Lia Rodrigues workshop, entering these practices. This is such a rich way of sharing artistic experiences which I don't think happens in the same way in other fields and other art schools. This way takes time, but it creates deep connections. And I think that's maybe one place where dance can be creative, where it can offer labs and ways of learning in which things can occur. But the fruits are not immediate. It is about digesting what has been made and experienced by other people and then seeing how that transforms what you do. And that takes time; it can only manifest over time. I think there is something about availability and time which operates radically differently in dance.

Raphaëlle Delaunay

I am director of ÉLAN—which means momentum in French and carries an idea of daring, of taking a risk, of movement. ÉLAN was created in 2021 by the Centre National de la Danse, after

an idea of Catherine Tsekenis. It's an *"École de l'égalité des chances"* meant to open some opportunities to young dancers, to give them a chance in the dance field—or not. And this "or not" is very important to us. ÉLAN is a space for inventiveness, experimentation, research, and curiosity to allow young dancers to make discoveries and explore new paths, to dare the impossible. This program is free, fully funded by the Fondation Hermès. The apprentices—and I don't call them "students" on purpose because they don't think of themselves as students and we don't see them as such—are very conscious of the "chance" that is given to them. Perhaps especially because this program came up right after Covid. The program is tailored for young people who are still in collège or lycée—meaning they're about 14, 15, up to 19 years old. This was the initial idea, but of course we had to extend it to slightly older people. It was also designed for the youth of Seine-Saint-Denis, a department that has the specificity of having an incredibly mixed population and the highest concentration of immigration. A specificity that has also stigmatized it. We say that it's the poorest department in France, but we forget to say this is the department that has more youth, more schools, more resources, more associations, and more talent. But we also had to extend its reach geographically, so now we welcome young dancers from Paris and beyond. Working from this specific context, we begin by asking a question to the apprentice: What do you need to think of yourself as an "upcoming artist"? Élan is designed to allow them to take that step. We are there to lead them beyond their limitations, whatever they are—economic, social, mental, or else. We are there to surprise them, to help them discover what they already know without knowing it, to tickle their vocation. And also, to authorize them to think the impossible. How can a program make a revolution in their way of thinking?

We choose apprentices as much as they choose us. We work with different conservatories to identify the young dancers who might be a good fit for this program. It's important for us that the future candidates are already engaged in a regular practice. The auditions are more like workshops that play with inventiveness and creativity. Technique is not for us a selection criterion. And in fact, throughout the program, technique is never a refuge. We observe the candidates' relationship to others, to the space, to the artist who is giving the workshop. And we try to imagine what this program can bring them as much as what they can bring to it, in a dynamic and fair relationship. ÉLAN is free and there's no "return on investment." But we need to feel that they are engaged, committed. It's important for us to

set up a contract that fosters autonomy and responsibility. We study the resources—the economic resources of the parents—but we're also aware of other indicators. For example, a desire for some to explore other techniques—beyond what has been taught at a conservatory—or a lack of confidence for others. In these cases, we feel we need to work with them, whatever their "resources" are. We try to be as much aware of a young dancer who shows a lot of potential as another whose potential might not yet show. Importantly, the apprentices are coming from different cultures of dance—classical, contemporary, jazz, hip hop. And even if the training in the program has a distinct orientation—which is "contemporary"—aesthetic boundaries are very quickly blurred. In the audition, what they know isn't so important to us, because the program is a matter of forgetting what they know, or rediscovering what they think they know. With ÉLAN, we don't give ourselves a goal. We don't worry about efficacity, we don't follow predetermined learning objectives. The fact that there is no evaluation process makes the learning more peaceful, more joyful. The program allows the apprentices to lose themselves, to follow their own rhythms, to try many things, to take what's good for them, to define their own stakes. There will be a time for everyone, a chance for everyone to find their way. It can be meeting an artist, attending a lecture, a performance, etc.

I wanted this program to be as eclectic as possible. When I was invited to take the leadership, I had to reaffirm my convictions as an artist, so that it could become a path for others, especially for young people. I had to reconnect with the student I once was and still am, somehow. I wouldn't invite an artist or suggest a workshop I wouldn't want to take. And in fact, I'm taking the workshops along with the apprentices. This program that I dreamed of for them, I want to follow it myself. I'm learning with them. So, it is not starting from a place of knowledge, but rather from my own curiosity of learning.

Julia M. Ritter

I am the Dean of the Glorya Kaufman School at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, which was founded in 2012 with a transformative gift by Glorya Kaufman, a tremendous supporter of dance. The establishment of this school was a game changer in the U.S. The school admitted its first cohort in 2015.

We have thus far graduated five cohorts of students. I want to credit Jodie Gates as the founding director and William Forsythe who was the first endowed professor. They were both incredibly involved in establishing the school as a conservatoire within this research university. The school was founded with the intention of bringing different forms of dance together—Hip Hop, Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Bollywood, Contemporary, and many that I'm not mentioning—and that has continued to this day. With the faculty, we are digging down even deeper into what it means for those dance forms to be in conversation with one another.

Each year, we receive hundreds of applications from prospective students. It's a very selective audition process. We are not looking for a "standard," as it is often the case in conservatories—a base level of ballet or a base level of modern technique. We review every single application we receive and invite about 120 candidates to campus. We want to create a cohort of between 25 to 30 students who excel in what they do and are ready to open new doors through what we offer them, to gain experience in other forms. That means we might bring in a dancer who excels in waacking or voguing and has less experience studying ballet. We aim to create a diverse group of students who then go through creative processes together and get to learn through experiences of different pedagogies. All the students take all these forms. They may start to specialize in certain forms in the second year, but they are required to study multiple forms. There can be tensions and difficulties, of course, as some forms tend to be more hierarchical in the way they are taught, and some are more community-based. But students begin to learn different pedagogical approaches to these forms. How do they understand them? How does that also relate to the performances that they create with the artists? The school's Assistant Dean of Programming & Special Projects works with an Artistic Advisory Committee—comprised of faculty—to select guest artists. We bring about four guest artists every semester to work with the students, alongside four faculty artists who also make their own works. And it's a very short process, anywhere from two to five weeks to make new works. We are not a presenting institution, but we do work very closely with the staff of the provost's arts and humanities initiative on campus, called Visions and Voices, to bring guest companies to campus.

We are in such a unique place right now, as artists and educators. This generation of students, this Gen Z, there are so many ways in which they are finding challenges and I think what's top of

my mind as a leader, artist, educator is how do I help students who are in a conservatory, who are very interested in becoming performers, navigate the incongruence that they're finding in the spaces where they're learning? They have certain expectations in terms of the spaces in which they're engaging in pedagogy and performance; sometimes these expectations are not being met by the guest artists or by the faculty. How do we help students reconcile their anxiety about gaining employment upon graduation with being able to be in a project that is more about process than product? How can we help them navigate working with an artist who doesn't share their value system around pronoun use, for instance? These are some of the things I think can derail both performance processes and learning experiences. I don't have answers, I just bring them up as things to consider when we're bringing pedagogy and performance together. And I will say, something resonates for me about what you brought up, Josh, in sharing the student's quote about the dance studio and the importance of the social and emotional learning that takes place there. What else can we do to ensure all dancers, all students are experiencing this sense of creativity, collaboration, and safety in our spaces? The pandemic has impacted all of us, particularly this generation of students moving through higher education. We must be very intentional about how we establish our communities of practice and how we create spaces for learning where actual relationships with other students, other people, are more profound than parasocial relationships.

Tara Aisha Willis

Thank you, each of you, for bringing such distinct and connected perspectives to the table and representing your institutions so beautifully. I'm really struck by the "how" of all your work and the programs you're building, including where the problems and uncertainties lie. Noé, for instance, you brought up the question of whether students can actually learn all the techniques that exist. How can they inhabit these pre-existing dances? I was thinking, maybe the question is about teaching students *how* to learn, rather than the thing itself that they're learning? And Josh, you spoke about working with artists in "partnership" rather than through other terms that are used a lot on college campuses. I was thinking how that shift in method—following *how* artists are working—raises complexities around adapting to every single artist.

How does that fit in with student expectations and faculty's ongoing day-to-day activity? And Raphaëlle, this question of "it's not about the goal, it is about being in the process and in the soup," in the mess together—I think that's beautiful. And Julia, the question of how to navigate with students the discrepancies between their expectations and the spaces in which they are learning and performing. I am wondering, what world are students being prepared for by moving through that *how*? What is the world we imagine students are entering? What are we preparing them for? And how do they get there or how do we hope they might get there in the future?

Ashley DeHoyos Sauder

Many of you highlighted different aspects of what I would understand as acts of care for artists: emphasizing their lived experience, their time, their body in relation to building a practice. It's exciting to see everyone thinking about how art is never made in a vacuum and that the work is always related to life, culture, people, and places. It feels like there is a pedagogy practice that is allowing students to learn how to cultivate their own vocabulary in their work by being empowered to be who they are and where they come from.

A Curriculum's Pedagogical Horizons: Dance as a Classroom

Donna Faye Burchfield

"You understand who you are.
You understand who you could be.
You understand the gap
between the two.
Sometimes, you close the gap.
You become who you might be.
You experience this for a moment.
What if we call that moment:
the classroom?"

—Goat Island, "Letter to a Young Practitioner"[1]

What if we call this moment—in which we close the gap between who we are and who we might be, between the world we inhabit and the world we dream of—a dance? A dance at the threshold, a becoming, which holds open the possibilities of knowing oneself and the world otherwise. Pedagogies hold the potential to shed light on these conditions.

In 2010, with the responsibility of re-writing the dance curriculum at the former University of the Arts in Philadelphia,* I thought a lot about how a curriculum could shape new directions for a school and its inhabitants. The same curriculum had been in place for over three decades. I knew that focusing on new syllabi—the way they are arranged, the pedagogies they foreground—would be central to the process. How could a curriculum and the act of studying help students to re-discover and remain interested in the things they care about? Which new critical pedagogies could emerge through the task of restructuring? But also, what do we unknowingly reproduce in an effort to build structures toward new and more adaptable futurities for dance? I was incredibly focused on the way we picked language to describe what we

were doing. Words like “practice,” “pedagogy,” “research,” “body pathways,” “expanded field,” “making,” “coaching,” “reflection,” “performance,” “project,” “lab,” and “studio practice” were discussed extensively. How could we come to know dance differently? Could a school and its pedagogies model the movement of its students by being itself in motion? What could give the study a sense of liveness? Could this study or, after Irit Rogoff, “the academy,” “a moment of learning within the safe space of an academic institution” be a “metaphor for a moment of speculation, expansion, and reflexivity without the constant demand for proven results”? And if the curriculum offered a “space of experimentation and exploration” then how could we “extract these vital principles and apply them to the rest of our lives?”[2]

I worked closely with colleagues to design the curricular frames for the four years of study: “studio practice,” “thinking/making/doing,” “body pathways,” “performance pedagogies,” “critical dance studies,” “capstone experiences,” and a “Knowing Dance More” (KDM) series. During the first two years of studio practice, students changed teachers every five weeks of each fifteen-week fall and spring terms. These five-week study cycles gave students the responsibility to consider the expansive range of movement techniques and styles. The arrangement of the cycles mattered and faculty were tasked to discuss their cycle approaches with each other. A knowledge sharing circuitry was formed between the teachers during the year. At the end of every five-week cycle, the students would gather for reflections. Without the presence of teachers, students shared concerns, questions, and discoveries. These sessions were recorded anonymously and shared back with the faculty. This gave us multiple ways to reconsider what we were all learning and what needed to be redirected or shifted as we looked toward the following year. In the final two years of the curriculum, the “research years,” students were given space to strategize and imagine their own studio practice directions by combining practice hours with teachers of their choosing. Rather than being assigned a cycle rotation for every five weeks, the study pathways lasted for the entire fifteen weeks and students could select different ways to combine and overlap their practice hours. There was still a pause after five weeks for reflections. This slowing down and opening of space for discussion was a constant reminder that the learning was happening collectively.

We worked from a course previously known as Dance Ensemble and renamed it Performance Pedagogies of Dance—or POD.

Alongside every POD, we conceived the POD labs. Using the word lab in this instance was a reminder of the spirit of experimentation at work within the arrangement of courses. Rather than auditions, we would hold POD workshops. Choreographers came together and discussed their intentions with students. The workshops also included dancing and improvising. After the workshops, students would make their list of dances they wanted to join and the choreographers turned over their list of students they were interested in collaborating with. We then spent hours and hours building the casts for the PODs by combining the interests of the students with that of the choreographers. It felt urgent to allow students to have a voice in the works they wanted to learn. It was not a perfect system, but it moved closer to a composite and shared needs and desires.

The POD labs, which were imagined as more intimate thinking groups, fostered pedagogical discussions. These sites of emergent learning would take shape through researching the various connections between the ideas and thoughts of the choreographers whose works were being rehearsed and presented that term. Who were the choreographers? What were their inspirations and motivations? The labs and the work within them were framed by the titles “Documentation,” “Ethics & Politics,” “Mediated Forms,” “Visualities and Hybrid (X) Lab.” The labs sought to distribute the learning experiences and allow spaces for questions to arise when rehearsals felt directed toward the exchange of movement material. Each POD would have a specific cast of dancers. However, the labs were made up of members from the different casts. This curricular system helped to initiate ways for the performances to become pedagogical tools beyond their life on the stage or in rehearsals. If we thought of the PODs, the dances being rehearsed, as the texts, then the POD labs could be described after Gérard Genette as the “paratexts”: liminal devices of interpretation and experience within and outside the main dances-as-texts, on their threshold. A different set of critical tools emerged that could shift perspectives and open up pathways of reception. Through this alliance between the performance offerings and the studying in the labs, a vital pedagogical civic exercise was enacted each year across the entire school.

Knowing Dance More (KDM) was composed of a series of lectures, conversations, and informal showings led by visiting artists and scholars. Growing out of the POD labs, the KDM series allowed us to continue to illuminate and elaborate the edges of study and

of dance. The curated series sought to bring into focus current issues within the production, performance, and practice of dance and performance works and to foster ongoing conversations about the ways in which dance moves knowledges. Overlapping approaches and evolving landscapes of thinking took shape as the series created a space for collective thinking and the cultivating of self-knowledge. It was attended by a student population of over a hundred and further included faculty and guests. Following each semester's series and inspired by Hannah Hurtzig's *Mobile Academy*, a civic study hall took place with students switching off between the roles of teacher, student, and witness. Highlights of these study halls included the moments a microphone was passed from student to student as they responded to prompts that emerged from the semester's framing research questions. Lauren Bakst, the series long-standing curator and faculty member, invited a range of artists each year including nora chipaumire, Thomas DeFrantz, Maria Hassabi, Jasmine Johnson, Jenn Joy, jaamil olawale kosoko, Faustin Linyekula, Dana Michel, Dorothée Munyaneza, Xavier Le Roy, Isabel Lewis, Wilmer Wilson IV, and others. These sessions introduced the entire school to the idea of thinking critically and to the values of studying together.

Over time, our curriculum became a manifesto. It empowered graduates of the school to think imaginatively and radically about navigating their futures. Faculty and student research overlapped and expanded into the city of Philadelphia and beyond in projects that included "Re-Placing Philadelphia" and "The School for Temporary Liveness."[3] We adopted the phrases "*know to dance*" and "*dance to know*" as outward expressions of the school's inner thinkings. Looking back, I am left considering the work that a curriculum can and must do in supporting and bringing attention to the shifting relations students face in their efforts to know dance and know themselves more and differently. Dance and its study are caught up in a loop. Dancers return to ways of moving, return to the same dance, to the same phrase over and over again. There is a weight to carry when performing dances that have been performed by other dancers. The challenges are caught up in the repetition, the recognition, and the faulty expectations of same-ness. Yet, I am reminded what dance teaches us in the classroom and beyond, insisting on becoming, poeisis, and reflection. The process of making and performing dances opens up worlds. Overlapping and adjacent pedagogical practices can break open even more spaces for unpredictable and transformative thinking.

* On May 31, 2024 the University of the Arts announced its abrupt closure due to financial issues giving students, faculty, and staff an unprecedented one-week notice.

1. Goat Island, “Letter to a Young Practitioner,” (2000): www.goatislandperformance.org/writing_L2YP.htm
2. Irit Rogoff, “Turning,” in *e-flux Journal* (2008): www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/
3. *C.f.* Re-PLACE-ing Philadelphia and temporaryliveness.org

Notes on "Choreographing Transmission"

Ana Pi

At 7:00 pm on October 17, 2024, in New York City, I opened the very first rehearsal of a new choreographic work to the public.[1] The word rehearsal—or even repetition, essay—allows me to intentionally and extravagantly link “performance” and “pedagogy,” offering mystery and movement to everyone present that evening, myself included, in this first gesture toward a new creation.

A rehearsal can have multiple intentions depending on the language we’re navigating. To try, to experiment, to specify, the act of practicing or redoing, and so on. Over the course of centuries, from the hegemonic perspective of artistic production, the word rehearsal has been able to represent the time-space of the genius’ absolute individuation. The sublime silent moment when, faced with his greatest solitude, he says, “Eureka!” The spectator is then left with a predictable: “Wow!”

Between eureka and wow, there would only be an immense abyss, instead of an exuberant dialogue.

The context of the generalized crisis confronting us today prompts the following question to arise: which relationships do we urgently have to rebalance and regenerate?

Far, far away, in a parallel economy-ecology, on another timeline that simultaneously moves backward and forward, my artistic contribution aligns itself with formalities and vibrations grounded from the periphery. Amidst constant urgency, peripheral knowledge always counterbalances political asymmetries; generosity is our poetical and fertile terrain. We groove so we don’t break. We cite our sources and preserve them. We’ve been working on the notion of continuity from a perspective of permanent ancestrality.

On the other side of romanticism, with the rigor of vitality, our bodies have always embraced a transversal performance behavior with love. Here, in this conversation we’re having, I must situate myself facing you who are reading me, since we’re also speaking about pedagogy, right?

I, Ana Pi, come from a creative lineage that strictly produces tradition and improvisation from the Black Diaspora’s vast dance and imaginative repertories. I position myself as an “extemporary” artist of choreography and imagery. What about you?

- ...

- A pleasure to meet you!

In situating ourselves, we sincerely establish the reasons for what we contain and our contents appear. Between pedagogy and performance, the aura of the exact data we have chosen will undoubtedly find its place within the work; this aura will make it a home. This information poses the question of whether what we decide to promote through our professions is healthy or cynical, inaccessible or permeable, moving or intransigent, and so on. Undoubtedly, numerous questions exist between pedagogy and performance, and multiple are the pathways made manifest.

Every work of art teaches us to know itself gradually, as it implements its singular materiality inside of us.

Atomic Joy, my new piece, will premiere in June 2025 at the Rencontres chorégraphiques Festival in Seine-Saint-Denis, and will assemble eight young dancers who possess a dense and versatile repertoire of street dances. Eight people on stage; yes, this decision in this economy—on the brink of precarity—performs tenacity, collective pedagogies as power and currency. Of course, it is also a dramaturgical structure, but above all it is about relearning and deploying a certain perseverance on stage: rehearsing it, repairing it, resowing it. If we do not pay attention to the choreographic landscape, it will no longer be a forest and will become a minimalist garden inhabited by plastic plants.

The number eight is a formality throughout *Atomic Joy*, allowing the gaze to travel to at least nine points of view within the same scene. Infinitesimal joy, which is its title, is already vibrating through the new work that is being raised. This joy cultivates a playfulness. Despite our hardships, it always pushes us to play. Interaction and enchantment celebrate the mutual learning relationships in our dance, which in its dynamic equilibrium repels epistemic and symbolic violence far from the circle.

I am now 38 years old, while Noel Olson, Morgan Gregory, and Sarah Boyd, with whom I have created this first New York version, are between 19 and 23 years old. I was born in the age of VHS, while these three dancers came into a world with smartphone touch screens and fiber optics. Technology aside, time itself is a great performer, or rather a brilliant choreographer whose writing defies our bodies and our spirits with its friction of events and stories that ultimately shape us. If we experience these events, facts, and stories independently, in isolation, they can generate manifold ruptures in our communication as a human collective.

In the direction my circle turns, in order to pursue our conversation and, moreover, create the best possibilities of confluence and relationship between pedagogy and performance, it is necessary to direct our attention to the generational transmission of knowledge. The contact relationship between the histories of people to come, as well as all the presences which, in previous times, contributed to what we can do and think today. Constantly summoning different generations means having the humility to learn what time transmits.

Let's take a moment to breathe.

So, from my practice as a choreographer, sensitive in equal proportions to performance and pedagogy, the fundamental reflections I raise for us here are:

- situated knowledge
- generational transmission
- poetical honesty
- nature of materials

In analyzing this list, I know we immediately evoke the word "autonomy" in all its complexity. When we reflect on "Performance as Pedagogy," and precisely because we find ourselves at this intersection, we should also know that in no case do we determine the purpose or ethics of an artistic work, and even less its aesthetic qualities. We are, effectively, absolutely autonomous in our stories and our frictions, we are responsible for our intentions.

Above all else, the reflection around "Performance as Pedagogy" is an atomic power. The energy where the work's most infinitesimal core will be precisely at its most expansive: where a work truly begins and where this same work will go, including its unfolding.

Let's keep rehearsing.

Choreographic work, which powerfully writes space with its own body and spirit, which is attentive to the relationship between performance and pedagogy, begins its process by posing lively and autonomous questions. Pedagogy and performance tend to find more beautiful rhymes in questions, that's my belief. I find this sublime; it moves me to realize how infinite the verses are. That is probably where the word "versatility" comes from, where tradition and improvisation live together in my lineage.

By contrast, on a parallel route, there are choreographic works that do not seem to engage internally with transversal questions, yet still steep in the relationship between performance and pedagogy. Upon investigation, these works end up revealing their structural situation, what they want to transmit and to whom, what poetry and, moreover, what honesty.

Toute œuvre ouvre le jeu.

"Performance as Pedagogy" asks us here if we still feel a lively curiosity and, moreover, if we feel joy in continuing to plant seeds of vitality. A confluence that is above all else an invitation to the rehearsal, the repetition, the essay—another chance.

1. Ana Pi presented "Choreographing Transmission" as part of a research residency at Amant in Brooklyn in autumn 2024, as a first step towards her next work, *Atomic Joy. C.f.* https://www.amant.org/programs/425-choreographing-transmission

CHOREGRA-PHING RESIDENCIES

Conversation with
Edgar Miramontes, Ashley Ferro-Murray, Judy Hussie-Taylor, Elsa Sarfati, Catherine Tsekenis, Marýa Wethers

Gestures of Hosting:
A Pedagogy of Imagination and Relations
Marcela Santander Corvalán

The Choreographic as Infrastructure
Moriah Evans

Roundtable with **Edgar Miramontes, Elsa Sarfati, Catherine Tsekenis, Marýa Wethers**
Moderated by **Judy Hussie-Taylor**
Response by **Ashley Ferro-Murray**

Judy Hussie-Taylor

In this panel we'll hear from four distinguished leaders—directors, curators, independent producers—with extensive experience working with artists in various contexts, ranging from large dance centers to universities to small arts organizations. Some work collaboratively, some work independently. I'd like to keep in mind that we're talking about very different scales, all very important because they feed and talk to one another. We'll have very large organizations that have their own challenges, small organizations that have beautiful opportunities. As we met in preparation for today's conversation, I was thinking about the different kinds of residencies at play. There are those residencies that offer time, space, resources—often financial resources—focused on creating new work. Then there are community-focused residencies, which shift the emphasis toward education, public engagement, and workshops. They offer a shift or different emphasis from residencies concerned solely with the creation of new work. This form of cultural exchange focuses more on networks of relationships and connections between artists, between cultures, between aesthetics, between different kinds of institutions. As we listen today, remember that each of these cultural workers and organizations have different intentions for the residency work that they do.

Catherine Tsekenis

I am the Executive Director of the Centre National de la Danse, the CN D. We have different missions and one of them is to support creation. I will start with a short overview of the residencies' organization in France, and then focus on some of the different stakes for those residencies. In France, dance has

developed greatly since the eighties, thanks to a very strong artistic creativity on the one hand, and a proactive policy of the state and the public authorities in general on the other. As a result, we have a robust network of choreographic institutions (National Choreographic Centers run by choreographers) and a sharp increase in the number of companies.

What about dance residencies? Normally residencies provide artists with a workspace and financial support for creation and can take different forms. Access to these spaces is a real challenge in France because there is an imbalance between the number of companies and the number of workspaces. In 2022, there were around 667 dance companies in France, including 315 supported by the state. I don't have the figures for additional support from the cities and from the regions, but as you see, it's a rich and dynamic scene. What are the spaces to which artists have access? Firstly, a lot of residencies are organized by dance structures, but there are only 19 CCN and 13 CDCN (*Centres Chorégraphique Nationaux* and *Centres de développement chorégraphique nationaux*). We have two very important theaters in France entirely dedicated to dance: Chaillot – Théâtre National de la Danse (Paris) and Maison de la danse (Lyon), but they don't have a lot of rehearsal spaces. Recently, the state has gradually granted new resources to these institutions in order to welcome more and more artists for residency seasons. But often, these institutions don't have a stage on which to present performances and their budgets remain modest. Another residency option is through multi-disciplinary theaters. In France, there are many, supported by the state and by local authorities. However, they don't have a lot of rehearsal spaces because they were designed mainly for the presentation of performances. Some of them also receive subsidies because they are very committed to the dance field and can organize residencies. It is the case of my colleague Elsa and she will explain her activities afterward. There is no regulation. The potential for residencies is considerably lower than the number of requests from companies. As a result, it's mainly the choreographic structures with limited resources that produce the dance performances and less the multidisciplinary theaters that have more important budgets. At the same time, this effervescence means there is a strong creativity and a large audience. In some cases, compagnies can be hosted for 1, 2, 3 years and the theater becomes their home. But it's very rare. A lot of residencies are for much shorter periods. And to rehearse a new piece, many independent companies have to find at least five residencies to be able to complete the production.

Yet the impact of residencies is much broader. Apart from providing a workplace and financial resources, there are many other parameters at work. The context in which a work is developed is never neutral and often has a significant impact on the artistic project. These residencies are also important for the team of an institution because the presence of other creators nourishes their overall project and above all contributes to their work with an audience. This creates an important dynamic in which the companies are never disconnected from the local context. Which is even more important when there is a geographic displacement at stake. And here, I am also thinking of residencies taking place internationally, especially when it's associated with a specific project of research or experimentation as it is the case with Villa Albertine: this kind of residency also offers the opportunity for all partners to share and open networks.

Finally, a few words about the CN D. We have two locations: one in Pantin, nearby Paris, and another in Lyon, which is the second largest city in France. In total, we have 17 workspaces. This allows us to imagine very different kinds of residencies. We invite artists for a two-year period as associate artists—it was Gisèle Vienne last year and Jérôme Bel currently—who have Carte Blanche. We also invite French and foreign companies to develop their work and after, we present their performances in our small theater. We also have a loan system of studios that is free. For instance, in 2022 we welcomed 360 companies, which means there are always a lot of dancers who work at the CN D; a lot of possible encounters. In conclusion, the main challenges we face today are how to attract additional funding for creation, but also how we can reclaim time. This is a real question.

Elsa Sarfati

I am the Director of Espace 1789. To excuse its unpronounceable name, I should say it was built in 1989, the bicentenary of the French Revolution. It's located in Saint-Ouen, a multi-ethnic and popular suburb nearby Paris. We have two spaces: one with 400 seats, which is used both for performing arts and cinema; and another with 200 seats where we only screen movies. Each year we program about 40 different shows. We focus on dance, even though we also present theater, music, and circus. We present well-known, but also emerging artists. And we have an artist-in-residence program for two choreographers—at this moment

we have Smaïl Kanouté and Leila Ka who are also supported by Villa Albertine—and one theater director for three years each. But we don't have proper rehearsal studios. So, what we mean by residency is very specific. Sometimes people ask me, are the artists sleeping in the theater? No, they don't even have space to rehearse! Yet we are trying to turn our weaknesses into strengths. We approach new partners on behalf of the companies, for instance we might ask partners like the CN D to lend studios. What we call a residency at Espace 1789 is a kind of program. We give an amount of funding to the artist to co-produce or commission their new work, an amount to present the performances on stage, and an amount to organize with them a large program of community engagement. I will give you a few examples of what we call community engagement—something that in French we refer to as cultural and artistic education.

For instance, we organize a 30-hour program over one year for a group of young students in which teenagers engage with an artist every week, attend at least 3 performances at Espace 1789, and visit a museum if there is an exhibition on a theme that resonates with what the artist is exploring at the time. We have also organized a workshop during one whole week for women who never go to the theater. They danced with the artist every morning for 3 hours, then we shared lunch, and, in the afternoon, we went to the cinema or to the library. We also organize workshops that are open to everybody or devised for people who are over 60 years old, and this for a few days before and after a show. It makes people watch the performance in a very different way—in a sensitive, or physical way. They can recognize in the piece a choreographic movement that they tried out the week before. That really makes them open-minded and "open-bodied" if I may say. We also often propose to the artists in residency to create a piece with amateurs from local communities. They might rehearse on weekends and after about 20 or 30 hours, they present a short piece. That's an unforgettable experience for most of them. All these projects weave a relationship between artists and local communities and creates a community between people who practice together. They sometimes meet at Espace 1789 to see a show together or just have a coffee. Friendships are formed and even love relationships—better than Tinder! You can see the fruit of these engagements, how they nurture relationships across the community. People come to the space to have coffee or see a show together, or they recognize artists in the streets: an emerging artist can become a local star! After three years of residency, they become well-known, and their performances are sold out.

Reflecting on one of the questions we were invited to think about: “how, drawing on artistic needs, can we design malleable infrastructures”? I believe it is key to propose to artists projects that are in connection with or embedded in their own creative process. For example, when Joanne Leighton was in residency with us, she was working on a piece around protest gestures with six professional dancers. We discussed working on the same material with local communities to create a short piece with that movement as a basis. I do think this kind of project can nourish artists’ own work because it is a way for them to reclaim time. We give money for the creation process, for them to develop their new work, for their performances. But in return the artists give a lot of their time. It is imperative for the work to be nourishing for them too.

Edgar Miramontes

I am the new Executive and Artistic Director for the Center of the Art of Performance at University of California, Los Angeles. I was formerly at REDCAT, the Roy and Edna Disney Calarts Theater, a center for experimentation related to the California Institute of the Arts, also known as Cal Arts. So, my ethos is really thinking about experimentation as part of my platform. At REDCAT, we did not necessarily have a residency space. We had a technical residency for projects that were just about to launch. So, it would generally last about one week and all of it had to be thrown in there. Very often the time it took to get there—to come to that point of the creative process—remained invisible. So now at the Center for the Art of Performance, I have the ability to think about residencies. UCLA is a public university and it has three spaces that I oversee. There are three venues: one is a 1600-seat theater, the other one is an 1800-seat theater, and the most recently opened theater, the Nimoy, is 299 seats, which is off campus, near the Hammer Museum. This particular space is really exciting to me. I’m thinking quite a bit about what else we can do, besides presenting, as it faces, for instance, a community of Iranian Americans and a really bustling food and restaurant area.

I am bringing a proposal to the table today. As this role is still very new to me, I am interested in sharing this with you, to discuss together and see if this is even viable. I am borrowing from the co-op model, in which a group of people come together to pool resources, share in decision making and governance, and to spread out financial risk. Co-ops operate from the knowledge

that collectivity lets you accomplish more and that the people who create value for an institution should also be able to make decisions about how it operates. As I am now working within a public institution, there is already bureaucracy that I'm sure I'm going to run into. But I'd like to think about the Nimoy as a space where artists can come together with foundations and other folks who are invested in creating and supporting artistic work. I imagine working with three to five local, national, and international artists' collectives supported by the resources for a period of two to three years, in which a new cohort of artists' collectives would rotate out and then another in, to support the ecology of LA artists. I would lean toward supporting three LA artists, one national and one international, and would provide secured and consistent access to the Nimoy, a space that may host rehearsal space, talks, conversations, invited research space, showings where process is the performance. And of course, as designed by artists' needs, financial resources would be provided by all partners, working with—as a basis but not limited to—a sliding scale. That's my proposal to think about as I share it with you all now.

I am just coming from Johannesburg, which means I'm a little bit jet lagged and privileged to have been there. I was at the Center for the Less Good Idea, which is a fairly new space celebrating their 10th season. It's an incubator space which thinks of performance—the process of making work—as the performance itself. It's a space which really innovates and allows for emergence to happen. And I've been thinking quite a bit about what it means to innovate, how we move into these new times, how to be responsive to the moment. We've been talking earlier about "rewiring the way in which we think." I've been looking to a design studio space called Ideas, Arrangements, and Effects based out of Boston that really thinks about how ideas are embedded in social arrangements, and how the exercise of rearranging things we are so used to doing can be a potent way to approach change. How, then, putting a different arrangement in the mix of things, including this co-op potential idea, might be a way to change how we think about community, and how we think about art and artists as creative leaders, as change makers—which I believe is what they are and certainly the reason why I'm still in this field after such a troubled time.

Marýa Wethers

I'm a contemporary dancer, that's what brought me into being on the other side: the administrative, producing, managerial side, being a creative producer and independent curator working with BIPOC performing artists and director of the GPS/Global Practice Sharing program at Movement Research in New York City. I've managed different residency programs through the years for different organizations, most extensively at the former Dance Theater Workshop now New York Live Arts. And I've played many roles in the ecology of this field. Thinking about the prompt for this conversation around choreographing residencies, I thought it was most relevant to share what I'm working on now. So, I'll start by introducing Movement Research, the organization that houses the GPS program. Movement Research is a creative services organization founded by and for artists in 1978. We're celebrating our 45th anniversary this year and moved into our own space with office space and two studios. Movement Research offers programs such as the Movement Research at the Judson Church work-in-progress performance series, a variety of artist residency opportunities, professional level movement classes and workshops for adults, two publications—the *Movement Research Performance Journal* in print and *Critical Correspondence* online—the Movement Research Festival, Studies Project, and other discursive programs.

My contribution to this panel feels a bit different than my co-panelists. Rather than looking at creative residencies that support the development of new choreographic projects that will eventually have a live premiere, the GPS program supports durational artist-to-artist exchanges with an international artist-in-residence in a community from one and a half to four weeks at a time. The GPS/Global Practice Sharing program is a reincarnation of the former Suitcase Fund program created in 1985 at Dance Theater Workshop. It essentially functions as a re-granting program in support of international cultural exchange projects. Currently GPS works with an informal network of partner organizations based across 10 countries in Eastern and central Europe, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and previously Romania and Russia. The partners propose projects for their community of artists through an annual RFP process or

request for proposals and GPS grants funds to the partners for their projects in the region. GPS also hosts one to two multi-week residencies for an international artist in New York City each year. The artist has the opportunity to make an informal presentation about their choreographic work, their creative practice, and provide important contextual information about the conditions of the arts and culture in their home city, in their home context. GPS Residency artists also receive MR classes and workshops, rehearsal space in the MR Studios, and perform up to 15 minutes on the Movement Research at the Judson Church series. Starting in 2019, GPS supported exchanges with artists and cultural producers from the Middle East and North Africa region, providing multi-week residencies in New York City for Palestinian artist, Sahar Damoni, Yassmine Benchrifa and Mohamed Lamqayssi from Morocco in partnership with Company Anania in Marrakesh, a virtual residency for an Iranian artist during our virtual MELT summer workshop intensive series, the duo Nasa4Nasa, Salma AbdelSalam and Noura Seif Hassanein from Egypt and Romy Assouad from Yaraqa cultural organization in Beirut, Lebanon. After the pandemic pause, reciprocal projects in the region were able to resume and included teaching residencies by Ishmael Houston Jones and jose e. abad at Sareyyet Ramallah in Palestine and by Makini, also known as jumatatu m. poe, at the 2023 edition of On Marche Festival in Morocco. In April of this year, GPS partnered with the 2023 New York Arab Festival to host two GPS Chats on the topics: Arab American Choreography Today featuring Nora Alami, Jadd Tank, and Leyya Mona Tawil and Contemporary Performance and Creative Production in Beirut with Romy Assouad. I'm very excited to announce that after a pandemical-induced hiatus, the Movement Research Festival is returning in spring 2024 with a focus on the artists and partnerships developed through the GPS MENA Exchange program. GPS will host artists from Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine for two weeks in February and March 2024. Please stay tuned for the official announcement in December. In the meantime, we can continue to support efforts toward a ceasefire, stop the genocide, and end the occupation. Thank you.

Judy Hussie-Taylor

Thank you, Marýa, for reminding us of the importance of artists at the center of crises and how we should support them in times like this. Thank you all for sharing your work, which is so rich and so

difficult in the best of times, let alone the times that we are in which are filled with challenges—politically, economically, emotionally.

Something you all touched on is time. This brings back one of the questions that oriented the panel: how can we foreground "research and deceleration in a product-oriented economy"? My concern is, how do we make a case for time and for slowness? For artists, for communities, for us—the culture workers who work with artists—to have time to be together, to do the work that needs to be done in a given space and community? How does that fit with what we are expected to do and what we love to do, which is produce work, support work, create work, and witness artists' work?

Ashley Ferro-Murray

As I hear you all talk about different approaches, different temporalities and what they entail, I'm thinking about dynamic ecosystems of residency engagement and the different aspects of those. I'll share with you just a few of them—not an exhaustive list by any means: financial systems, space and place, temporality, format, staff support, technical support, documentation and archiving, community placeness, engagement exchange, being-in. I'm thinking about iterative work and what it means for each residency encounter to be distinct from the last and from the next within one artist's practice and across artistic work. How can artists benefit from different contexts where we have an ecosystem of each institution, program, person, producer, serving a different niche role and really focusing on the dynamism and pluralism of that role, while also recognizing that having to be "chameleonic"—to borrow jaamil olawale kosoko's word—can also place a deep amount of, not burden, but weight on a practice? In other words, where are we now that we are outside of a touring model—in which artists were going to very similar venues night after night, city after city? It seems to me that artists who are moving across international lines but also within states are having to be in different territories with each institution that they enter, different modes of operation, being with staff cultures or outside of them. I love this idea that it doesn't have to be a product in the end or a performance. What does it mean to have the creation be the thing that we're making? And I think that we're seeing that in many artists' works. I'm curious about the specificity of artist, the specificity of site, and the specificity of project within buckets of residency engagement.

Having worked very deeply in media infrastructures and technological approaches, I was struck to hear about virtual residency work. And I've been thinking about that very much, especially with relation to the difficulties of moving across borders. In 2017, I had the honor of working with Ali Moini and we went through the visa process right at the very moment when border restrictions were placed by the Trump administration and we had an interesting, long-term conversation around what a virtual residency within our space would look like. It wasn't what we had intended, it didn't serve what we set out to serve and yet we found so much in the process of moving through that space together. It's all part of being in this ecosystem. How can we, as a group, continue to think through the specificity of different encounters, what it might bring about for us in what is clearly a changing landscape for the residency model?

Gestures of Hosting: A Pedagogy of Imagination and Relations

Marcela Santander Corvalán

In September 2023, I had two books with me that I had long been obsessed with when I arrived at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson in New York state.[1] I had a feeling they could be my guides: *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs and *Light in the Dark* by Gloria Anzaldúa. I arrived with the knowledge that I was beginning a much longer teaching job than usual. I am used to condensed, one- to two-week periods of teaching, going from one program to another, which means that I am constantly traveling from town to town. The opportunity offered by Bard's "teaching residency" program to stay in the same place for a long time (two months to a whole semester) with the same students was an exceptional experience for me. Volmir Cordeiro and I shared the semester. Our goal was to relay material in such a way that our pedagogic process would be continuous and conversational. I thus arrived accompanied by a multitude of beings and realities. I was inhabited by these two books, as well as dance archives, pieces, and histories, including some of Valeska Gert's poems, Gina Pane's scores, and even dances by Josephine Baker and Tatsumi Hijikata. Images of pre-Columbian sculptures from the Andes and ancient stones also swirled inside of me with press clippings from the 2019 revolt in Chile.

For two months, I taught three classes: Technique and Repertory, based on my choreographic works, as well as Dance-Workshop, a class in which students and teachers worked together non-hierarchically, in a collective space. The idea of these sessions was to share the research process while discussing critical reception to develop analysis and composition tools in real time. This was a very rich and unique space, where the responsibility for and the method of sharing reflections was quite constructive and discerning. I learned a tremendous amount in this environment, thanks to the students and the pedagogical team who brought very diverse perspectives and techniques. These multiple aesthetics converse within the student body and are one of the great assets of this dance school.

Located an hour and a half by train from New York City, near the Hudson River, Bard College is a campus surrounded by calm, by forests and a waterfall. I had the sensation of being in another space-time, where we could dive deep into learning without constantly moving around. I felt an internal shift, a different type of presence with the students and how we experienced classes. It was almost the opposite of my life as an artist, always rushing around, with time flying by and spaces inhabited by complexities and sounds.

The first day of class, I got on my bike and crossed the very green campus with lots of trees. When I arrived at the main theater, the Fisher Center, I was very warmly welcomed by the faculty and staff. I had an uncanny feeling of being at home. I took a deep breath, and Alexis' words crossed my mind. Arriving in a place where one feels welcome and hosted is, to my eyes, already the first act of teaching.

What would it mean to go deep with each other? What are the scales of intimacy and the actual practices that would teach us how to care for each other beyond obligation or imaginary duties. Striped dolphins eat fish with luminous organs that live in the deep scattering layer of the sea. What nourishes them is literally what lights them up inside! Could we be like that? I am wondering if we could trade the image of "family" for the practice of school, a unit of care where we are learning and re-learning how to honor each other, how to go deep, how to take turns, how to find nourishing light again and again.[2]

In that moment, I knew the foundation of these two months teaching at Bard would be my desire to host these students, to take care of them and listen attentively to their questions, doubts, gestures; their energy and desire to become artists.
Every two weeks, I offered a theme rooted in my choreographic repertoire and the sensory techniques I have developed. Like certain pre-Columbian cultures in the Andes, I chose to begin with my latest work and progress backward through time. The weeks were organized around a series of goals and actions:

Transformation
How to build a group that works together to create a process of transformation? The dance school is understood as a space where the diversity of bodies and skills is valuable as a collective.
One doesn't come to study alone, one comes to advance with a community, to create connections and care for our group.
Over the course of these first two weeks, we devoted most of the classes to training, expanding and sharpening our senses.
In the first sessions, students were a little perplexed, because although it was a technique class, there was no mirror, no frontality, very few choreographic phrases, and we did not take ourselves very seriously. We created an atmosphere that diverged from conventional dance classes. We put on club music and explored questions of consent to learn how to work on touch, as a technology for meeting each other through other senses.

We learned to state our limits and ask ourselves questions before letting ourselves be touched. Hands that see and listen. Dances and bodies set themselves into motion from this exercise, giving and receiving information. The most important thing in this technical course was to learn to develop a space of trust. Allowing the other person to close their eyes and understand movement from a sensation, in an imaginary cartography that went beyond classical anatomy. Inventing and developing images in bodies and across space.

Listening
How to train a group in gestures of listening outside the dance studio? During the following two weeks, we took the technique class outside, in the forest close to the school. We went for a walk. The students laughed, yet we shared a very powerful experience. We went into the forest which, although located next to the building, was unknown to the majority of the group. They discovered it with their eyes closed, through sounds and lights, textures, hands, and temperature. I had a feeling that sometimes they did not quite understand what we were doing, but they followed me, and I could already see them widening their perception of dance. After these two weeks of practicing listening, I felt us entering another perceptive space where the question of form emerged secondarily, after a sensorial experience.

Otherness in Ourselves
How can a face carry the face of another? We are multitudes, we can transform ourselves and seek otherness in ourselves. The face can be perceived as a surface for dance and choreography, while also representing a wide field of study on empathy. Everything that happens to someone else's face happens to me. The face as an infinite landscape of emotions and encounters. The face as a tool to create otherness and find more strange, surprising, and festive bodily states. Thinking of the face as a tool to develop attention skills, to imagine that our dances can converse with the memories and entities that inhabit us.

Dance Archives, Histories of Gestures
How is personal, intimate memory integrated into a history of gestures? The idea was to expand the history of dance to other less official stories, through more sinuous pathways. We had learned to speak, listen, and touch our bodies' memories. We had studied bodies, like layers of memories. How to create a physical and perceptive technique to converse with these memories? We spent time exploring these ancient memories, working with our

bodies as a moving archive. Which are our memories, those of our ancestors, and those of our land? What happened in our history, and also in this history we are in the process of writing together? Who and what type of dance are in the history of dance? In what way is our body the carrier of physical and poetic memories? We finished this period of study by using dance and fiction as means to reinvent stories and histories, imbued with the responsibility to rewrite realities with bodies that dream.

Throughout this unit, I emphasized Gloria Anzaldúa's words, which approach spiritual activism as a combination of contemplative practices and political activist strategies, whether pertaining to street actions or protests. Like an activist, an artist must see each of their gestures intertwined with structural realities, which in turn become a transformation of reality through gestures. Making a network with others, not working in isolation, and developing a technique to grow together and recognize the impact of structural problems on our bodies in daily life also allows us to take better care of ourselves and fight more efficiently. Spiritual activists work as much in the material world as in the spiritual world. How can we engage daily with these seemingly innocuous gestures? How can we develop a training to transform ourselves and the context that surrounds us?

These questions nourished my time at Bard with the students and the faculty. Connections were woven through invented languages, looks, and laughter. I observed students transform from my offerings, and I felt a great satisfaction in accompanying them on their creative journey as young artists. I saw dances emerge from places of depth, vulnerability, and strength. I learned as much from them as from this forest surrounded by the river.[3]

1. I taught in the Dance Department at Bard College from September to November 2023, as part of the Dance Program in partnership with Villa Albertine/FACE Foundation (French-American Cultural Exchange).

2. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (Chico: AK Press, 2020).

3. I'd like to name those who supported me and made this stay possible, because the artistic and pedagogic work in a school happens through a group's collective discussion and friction. My deepest thanks to Tara Lorenzen for her trust and the tremendous space for pedagogical freedom, as well as the whole Bard team: Maria Simpson, Souleymane Badolo, Yebel Gallegos, Jennifer Lown, and Sabrina Miller. Thanks to Nicole Birmann Bloom and Louise Dodet at Villa Albertine. I'd also like to thank Gérald Kurdian, Volmir Cordeiro, Virginie Dupray, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Emma Bigé.

The Choreographic as Infrastructure

Moriah Evans

What are we all coming to do together?
Why do people dance in front of others?
Say, instead of dancing with each other?
How do I sustain other people's creative practices in the structures I create?
Why would I try?
If dance is a space for research of self, body, and flesh, then why not frame it as such?
Are there other spaces for research of self, body, and flesh?
Yes. How do we differentiate those spaces?
How do we bring people together in a sustained and committed manner?
What is to be done?

Remains Persist (2022) proposes performance as a site for social inquiry and surveillance.[1] It uses interviews, interrogations, and the question-and-answer format as a known frame of scientific and social inquiry. Asking and answering questions with honesty became one of the conceits underpinning the creation of the work. *Remains Persist* holds sincerity, brutality, and absurdity through its choreographic composition, a tangible system of endless relational exchange. The tension between what something looks like and feels like, between representation and lived experience has long motivated my work. How socio-political infrastructures condition choreographic possibilities is also key.

A primary proposal within the work was to rethink everyday dance language to include social processes through which we perceive, are perceived, and come to embody ourselves. Questions and responses, tasks of embodiment, prescriptive scripts, and choreographic frameworks prompt bodies into certain states. *Remains Persist* references various social infrastructures that categorize bodies, so the public can listen and observe the work through them. A four-hour situation with eight performers, the stage recalls the school, clinic, hospital, courtroom, reality television, and more. Such sites of quotidian performances are part of the infrastructure of *Remains Persist*, which intentionally references biopolitical regimes of social organization and control foundational to Western democracies through the figures of the teacher, the psychoanalyst, the social worker, the judge, etc. The performers mess with these roles.

The multiple stages/rooms, and layered yet simple set design allowed the public to decide who they pay attention to, why, and when. The gaze of social space, and by extension that of the theatrical machine, can be quite violent. Such instances of violence are not only relegated to how a body might dance, but also to the tools (corporeal, symbolic, and discursive) through which the public apprehends bodies. In the work, the rational and irrational, anecdotal and epic are splattered all about and beyond an extremely precise four-hour structure of specific tasks. Beyond the structure of tasks, the performance is not scripted. So, the audience and the performers make the logic between disjointed yet connected content.

We introduced layers of being—*subject, self, body, flesh,* and *stuff*—as a dramaturgical means to expand how we think of the body while watching dance. Stuff here refers to one's epigenetic situation, psychological baggage, the literal and even immaterial things one carries. Structuring the format of the work through these layers of being enhanced the public's awareness of what bodies might be and contain. Adjacent participatory formats of the Resignation Clinic and the Organ Work Class were also important to the totality of the work's format and reality—not only what the work was about, but also what it was doing. Rather than the post-show talk or the pre-show master class that uphold the theater as a space of illusion, these elements were infrastructural: nodes of access to the performers' practices and what they do inside the piece.

I have always been interested in energetic states, rawness, vulnerability, and dance as confession. In *Remains Persist* I aimed to access special states of embodiment not by exhausting the body or pushing past its limits, but instead through a kind of extreme relaxation. One question throughout the process was: what is the role of resignation and the politics of refusal? How can we reimagine institutions, through infrastructures, in ways that actually serve the multiplicity of needs in the 21st century, while attempting to reconcile violent regimes and epistemes of the modernist project? Imagining singular formats or infrastructures that could invent and sustain—choreograph—relations between bodies was key to the project.

Sometimes I think it is my job as a choreographer to create spaces for others to feel themselves, be they dancers, collaborators, or members of the public. This happens in various ways. First, it transpires in the process of inviting people to be in a dance. I theorize, create, and choreograph a process. Secondly, it happens in the creation of the choreography itself—through the process as well as in the presentation. Infrastructure is at play: the underlying foundation or basic framework (as a system or organization). Choreographing a process has a lot to do with infrastructure and the "means of production." In addition to determining what the work will "be" and "look like," the process determines much of what the work will "do": what effect it has on the world, or the larger social space it addresses.

I try to make containers in which performance happens, in which performers work with their own agency. I rehearse a lot, a baseline for creating an artistic practice worth sharing. Yet, the conditions of life in late-capitalist culture work against meeting, experimenting, organizing; against doing much else beyond inscribing labor in service for those controlling capital.

As an artist, I feel, daily, a hefty amount of impossibility. Sustainability seems out of reach. How much privilege, agency, and advocacy are necessary to hit a bare minimum of sustenance? And what about a bare minimum of artistic quality? Making good work can be as simple as providing people with the means to meet, work, dance, talk, day in and day out. Even though sustainability in the arts is discussed everywhere—in symposia and publications—there never seems to be so much money for labor, for development before showtime. The means of production, the infrastructures in the dance field often do not seem to benefit artists nor the art form. Yes, artists will make work to varying

degrees of success in an array of conditions. These issues mirror society. And yet, can we start with admitting systemic failure? It is very disappointing when infrastructural circumstances do not actually change; yet when organizations and people employ rhetorics of change, it can seem like actual infrastructural shifts are transpiring—even if they are not.

Life, in general, is interdependent and relational. *Dance is even more this way than life*. This interdependence is so basic that it can be forgotten, going unnoticed while it is happening. Choreographing infrastructure doesn't allow forgetting or dismissing relationality, interdependence, co-dependence. It's about bringing care to all of it and everyone—even in cases of exigent sadism, described by Avgi Saketopoulou as a risk worth taking if done with care.[2]

If we think of dance and choreography as a site of social infrastructure, and take it seriously as such, then we deal with exchanges that have more serious ramifications than theatrical illusions or tableaux. These are real bodies doing things in real time inside of lived experiences and conditions. Issues of power, agency, sameness, difference, and judgment abound. Dance can also be a study in how to work and be together as a group: how to orchestrate movement, individually and collectively.

Dance both breaks barriers in the social field while knitting social cohesion. In part because dancing doesn't lie. If we are really observing dance, with the full capacity of sympathetic and autonomic nervous systems, the body in motion is too vulnerable, too direct in its communication across various space-time-social-linguistic-ideological resonances. Even while dance relies upon language, it defies and undoes it. I've long been interested in dance as a form of confession, of sharing, of unburdening. I prefer honesty and its occasional brutality over sensitive strategic euphemisms. Maybe this is what drives me to invite others to dance with me and/or within my choreographies. *Finally!* a space dealing with some register of truth, honesty, sincerity, humility, in a world governed by a mirage of ideologies often purporting to do one thing and in fact doing another.

And yet, I can grow tired of the presentational nature of dance: why are they dancing and who cares and what does this really have to do with life, with the world? If this is not answered by the choreography—by its infrastructure—a pointless dance ensues. Dance can and should be a refuge from the violence of the world and all of its injustices—a site of refusal and resistance.

Dance is a generosity-based art form. Dance composes a set of relations: not merely of forms but as a host of complex aspects of life. Asking other people to do things with their bodies is a provocative proposition, whether in the context of sex work or when performing “in front of” a consuming class. Yet, we still need unprecedented inhabitations of theater’s frame and the processes that make and sustain dance performances. The intimacy of dance comes with a serious social responsibility.

What is to be done?!

It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing.[3]

I want to call out an alarm... If we do not provide infrastructures that are actually supporting the development of ideologies into physical dancing manifestations, it’s all empty gestures.

1. *Remains Persist* premiered at Performance Space New York in December 2022. Choreography: Moriah Evans; performers: Cyril Baldy, Malcolm-x Betts, Lizzie Feidelson, Kris Lee, João dos Santos Martins, Sarah Beth Percival, Varinia Canto Vila, Anh Vo; lighting: Madeleine Best; scenography: Doris Dziersk; sound: Ian Douglas-Moore; dramaturgy: Joshua Lubin-Levy; studio management and performer: Lydia Okrent; intern: Antonia Harke.
2. *C.f.* Avgi Saketopoulou, *Sexuality Beyond Consent: Risk, Race, Traumatophilia* (New York: NYU Press, 2023).
3. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1st Folio, 1623), Scene 5, Act 5, line 26-28.

ACTS OF TRANS-MISSION

Conversation with **Anne Collod, Ruth Estévez, André Lepecki, Linda Murray, David Thomson**

Note to a Young Dancer of the Future
Nicole Birmann Bloom

Breathing Spirit, Dancing Archive
Seta Morton

Roundtable with **Anne Collod, Linda Murray, David Thomson**
Moderated by **André Lepecki**
Response by **Ruth Estévez**

André Lepecki

In this conversation on transmission, we will be talking with our esteemed panelists about different practices or activities such as curation, collection, documenting, archiving, reenacting, reviving. Yet, I find it intriguing that when thinking these practices through the word "transmission" something else happens, which is a kind of affective charge pressed on all those activities, those *missions*. With the word transmission, those dry terms—like collecting, like preserving, like archiving, etc.—become charged with something else. Something that is linked directly to the question of life and death, which might be the question that really matters when thinking and practicing "transmission" across generations—as so often is the case in dance. I have the impression that if there's an art that deals directly with questions of life, death, and transmission it's dance. Perhaps dance's "acts of transmission" can help us think through that.

Linda Murray

I am the curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library. When I think about transmission—to echo the life and death question—I'm dealing with archives of people who have left us: bodies which held repositories of dance which are no longer here. How can we carry that history forward, how to connect it with dance making that's happening now? Archives are traditionally places where we store dance films, but also things like choreographic notation, correspondence between artists, photographs, costumes, ephemera. If there's anything that's vaguely related to the field of dance, there's probably some representation of it in the archive. Since 1967, the division has also been filming dance. This means we send video crews out all

over the city—and in fact across the country—to make recordings that we can add to the archive as well as the films we receive directly from artists. In 1974, the division began an oral history project which is ongoing, and which acknowledged an important "act of transmission." As much as the moving image is necessary, all of us who have danced know that so much information in the studio is transmitted orally. There's an entire history of intent and meaning in work, the social underpinning and the "why" of the work, which is communicated to us through stories. Dancers have long been denied their voice, so the oral history has been an important way to give dance artists agency over telling the stories of their careers, their lives, and how this intersects with their work.

I absolutely agree that when we talk about the act of transmission, there's the collecting—the gathering things in—but there is also the work of curation. When you manage an archive, you are thinking through ways in which to make transmission happen. A lot of my work is spent thinking about ways to activate the archive, to bring artists in, and to get them to experience the archive as a catalyst and a tool for the work that they make. One of our projects is the Dance Research Fellowship, which is both for academics and practitioners. It seeks to bring dance artists in and get them to think differently about dance making; to give them space and time to be in an archive and see where that might lead them. For instance, Pam Tanowitz started working on *Song of Songs* through this fellowship during the pandemic. Another thing that we've been reflecting on is giving artists power in how the archive gets shaped, while thinking through the archive's absences and gaps. In our particular archive, that gap is in social dance. We did a very good job in our 80-year history of gathering information about concert dance, but when it came to American social dance styles, which have been incredibly influential to what we end up seeing on the stage today, we did not have much representation. There are understandable reasons behind that. When dance is commodified and commercialized, there are often ephemera around it. Social dance happens in a community setting, and there isn't the same need to advertise, which also means that it leaves very little trace behind.

We've been inviting guest artists from communities where we have identified gaps and asking them to gather elders as well as young dancers from their communities. For instance, we worked with Maria Torres on the Hustle and Sekou McMiller on Mambo. We have a dance studio that goes into one of our exhibition spaces for a couple of months a year, and we invite artists in for

two-week residencies. We set up a camera crew and we ask the elders–or "innovators"–to set dances that are lost from within their community on the young dancers. We film the whole process, then we do oral histories. That's been a beautiful and meaningful process in building an intergenerational sense of community. But it is also an important means for us to expand the archive in a way where the artist feels they have control over the boundaries of the project and the terms of engagement with the archive.

Anne Collod

I am a choreographer based in Paris. The question at the core of my work as a choreographer and pedagogue is, how to make transmission an act of emancipation? A significant part of my work is devoted to the recreation and reinterpretation of dance works from the 20th century, and most of them are from North American modern or postmodern dance—as it seems I have a never-ending interest and curiosity for it. How do dance works survive, travel through space and time, and how can they be recreated? That's a big question and, of course, the archives are an important part of it. In dance, there is this strong tradition of oral transmission from choreographers to performers, from teachers to students with all its richness and limitations. Perhaps what is special about my relation to transmission is that it's based on texts, scores, archives. I often work through Laban Kinetography, an abstract system for writing and analyzing movement that I studied at Conservatoire de Paris. It was around that tool that we formed a collective with three other dancers in the early '90s, the Quatuor Albrecht Knust. Laban notation enabled us to recreate, for example, dances by Doris Humphrey or by Vaslav Nijinsky in the early 2000s. More recently, I proposed a critical reinterpretation of *Soli* by Ruth St. Denis for the piece *Moving Alternatives* (2019) with a fantastic team of performers, including Calixto Neto, Sherwood Chen, Pol Pi, Ghyslaine Gau, Nitsan Margaliot, and Shantala Shivalingappa. I also work with different scores, action programs, in particular those created by Anna Halprin, who enabled me to reinterpret *Parades and Changes*, her landmark 1965 piece in dialogue with her.

What about emancipation? Thinking of transmission through the written document has been for me profoundly emancipating. It allowed a "direct" access to the history of dance in movement:

it allowed me to situate myself in my practice and to avoid reproduction. There is an emancipation from mimicry and from the authority figures—very often a dancer is subjected to the choreographer and the teacher—and an emancipation from imposed lineages and heritages. Working with scores makes you aware of the fact that there are always many versions of a work, many translations that you are constantly dealing with and transmitting, rather than thinking of *the* original work, which then is constantly slipping away. It offered me the possibility to undo—and this is very important for me—the "sacralization" of the work and of the past; to avoid freezing the work in its patrimonial dimension. For me, it's important to always question the modes of transmission and their effects. And maybe it's just through a series of questions: what is transmitted; which works are available and have left traces; which bodies and gesture are in the archives; who makes history; who is transmitting—choreographers, dancers, AI—; to what audience; what are the modes of transmission—through direct transmission scores, constraints, games; what is the intention? I always wonder how transmission can be an encounter, a dialogue, a co-creation of new links between a work and its many recipients. How can we facilitate the critical elaboration of a situated viewpoint or a plurality of viewpoints? How can we make people aware of the gaps, the disappearances, the absences, the distances, either by remaining as close as possible to the score, or through speculation that might bring out new potentialities in the work? What is constitutive of the work? Is it the creative process, is it the choreographic writing or structure? And what is it that continues to act today and might still be a fertile resource?

I will end with a few words on my current project, *Sourcières*. The title plays with the proximity between sorceress and sourceress while imagining a creative methodology for "sourcing" dances in and with natural environments along a specific lineage. The project weaves a site-specific performance and a documentation center that trace an environmental and feminist history of dance focusing on North American postmodern female choreographers Anna Halprin, Trisha Brown, and Simone Forti. Instead of recreating their dances, I'm more interested in the processes and sensitive knowledges they have created thanks to their relationship with specific natural environments and how these can become partners of creation. How these entanglements with nature have changed the way of dancing for these choreographers, but also for many contemporary artists across geographical and disciplinary boundaries.

David Thomson

My modes of transmission are as a performer, creator, advocate, and instigator. My practice centers around the interrogation of presence and absence in the performance of identity. I create performance works and installations in various temporal forms, from short works to durational tasks. With each work, I want to reconsider the relational container for participants and performers and how this relationship can trigger shifts in sensorial perception and imagination. From *Venus Knot* (2015), involving intimate conversations regarding the source of one's identity that became a confessional booth, to *The Voyeurs* (2016), where the public eavesdrops via their phones into an intimate conversation in a park between two individuals discussing race, violence, and intimacy. I feel that the different structures or containers become forms of transmission. How we transmit something—whether it's live or digital, distant or up close—matters when you're thinking about what a work is, what the engagement is, and what's important about sharing.

In certain ways, I am a structuralist, looking at how things connect and how they are transmitted. I also think about the body itself being an archive. How, over the course of the last 40 or some odd years, I've been watching bodies change and how work changes because of these bodies. I remember the first time I saw the Trisha Brown Company, and I saw Irene Hultman dancing: she just blew me away. Understanding that Irene is such a unique and brilliant mover who is not replicable. You can't teach that. You can share ideas about it, but the essence of, and the scent of, the way she moves and how she negotiates the choreography is something unique, something that's locked in history. It's locked in her body. The identities within the creation process of a work are locked in that moment. They can never be done again. So, when you reconstruct a piece, what are you reconstructing, what are you sharing? How do we sometimes think about preserving the flower but losing the scent? What do we think about when we archive in this new age? And what information do we have that we're actually passing along? How does that get translated through the new contextual shape of the political or the physical? All this while knowing that bodies are recreating work, but are they recreating *the* work? I always remember this line from Diane Madden: "every time you go on stage, you're recreating this work." It doesn't

exist unless you do it. We have documentation, but that's only a form of remembrance.

I spent 10 years working with Cori Olinghouse, building an archive database for Trisha Brown's work. Because I had worked with the company, I had an intimate knowledge of how she worked and how the work was connected. It was important for me to structure this database in a way that would reveal and parallel the underpinnings of the construction, the conceptual work, the structural relationship of the material, the range of collaborators, and how they were integrated within the history of her work. This goes down to a very granular moment of looking at the building materials and knowing that from this moment to this moment, a person is doing named material that you can source as well as understand the relationships of the building material to the sections within a piece, and how a particular section of material may appear in other works. It's a transmission of structure: it's a transmission of the conceptual nature that one might not readily see when you witness the work, especially if you're not seeing the range of works over the course of time. Yet, it's also a limited idea. One of the questions I feel is crucial right now is, how do we define the legacy of a choreographer? Is it the work itself, or is it the three-dimensional aspects of who they are, who they were, and how they thought on so many different levels? What were their writings? What were the accidents that happened? What are the stories that reveal who choreographers are? Secondly, dance history is not just the making of the work, but the setting and the landscape in which the work was made. What were the economic or political environments these works were made within, and why did they become this way? That's another integral part of creation, its "acts of transmission," working within these strictures and other fields of influence.

I feel the idea of transmission is almost quantum in how the multiplicities of actions and nodes are connected to each piece of work or body of work. When looking at legacy, I am thinking of moving forward: how can we fracture the archive? How is the mode of preservation connected to modes of dialogue? How do we bring people in to have dialogues, not just in relation to the work itself, but with the conceptual and historical nature of the individual or the institution so that these smaller stories get daylight? I think transmission becomes much more three-dimensional when we look beyond the work. Because it involves the people behind the work, the actions, the accidents, and the places that give shape and form.

It's like when you're cooking. Are you cooking with gas? Are you cooking with electricity? Is it a campfire? What kind of herbs do you use? All those things. You pick one herb or another, and it changes the work. I feel transmission is a scent. It's something that you remember, but it's also very tactile—and it has to remain tactile. And that's the question: how do you keep it alive, and how do you reinvigorate it? How do you keep adding to the stew as it slowly cooks a meal that will feed a village? And so, you're constantly cooking this pot, it's always cooking, and people are always eating from it. And while you're using the same base, it continues to grow.

André Lepecki

This is incredible, how the conversation just went down the line. There is a kind of transmission line going on here with several things. And perhaps even coming from the first panel on pedagogy: how can we teach the scent—if that is what transmission might very well be, as David just remarked? How do acts of transmission move from teaching to cooking, which I take it to be another way to say "alchemy," an elemental transformation but along a line of transgression, of emancipation, revealing the intimate sociality with the incorporeal that dance always already establishes? Along with the question of "scent" as aura, as atmosphere, and its transmissibility, it seems to me that the question of form is also an important one here.

In thinking about how it is that one transmits, I cannot help but to think about the difference between document and scent, the latter maybe suggesting the work's own desire to emancipate, or even to transgress the authoritarian authority of the author. How can we start thinking, perhaps, through the irreverent quality (or atmosphere, or scent) of a work? A work sometimes wants things that even its author may be afraid of. So, when thinking about a collection, how is it that one collects those intangibles? Knowing how to answer that question implies deciding what it is that one deems acceptable, relevant to collect. Of course, one must collect. Every dance scholar is hyper grateful to the existence of the New York Public Library dance collection—we revere it, we need it. We need it to be there, and we need to be in its archive. Yet, and at the same time, I'm thinking about how is it that the spirit of something (the spirit of a dance, the spirit

of a dancer; call it scent or atmosphere or whatever else) lingers in a document? We can make a parallel here in terms of law, the difference between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law, and how sometimes you need to go from one to the other? When you're transmitting, how much do you transgress up to a certain point where the form (the letter, to continue the analogy) is no longer there and, therefore, the formal work is no longer there—but perhaps its spirit is present?

Anne Collod

This makes me think about how you can prepare the context and the terrain for transmission so that you're not presenting people with an empty object or form, but you invite them to be aware of these shapes, these gestures so that the project can become a conversation. To me there is something interesting in the fact that the document or the score doesn't have the flavor or the scent of the dance. In a sense, it is already a transgression to recreate a dance piece, to make a dance out of something that is totally "dead." A text is nothing but lines, symbols, etc. To interpret this text is already an act of creation: to go from the form, from the shapes written on the page to the living body and inner sensations; to continue this back and forth between the page and your own movement. To identify what is the path or the spine of a score is I think a very powerful question, one that might allow a part of freedom. Of course, it's also very rich when one is trying to imitate or catch the style of a dancer or choreographer. There is no right or wrong way for transmission. But there is for me something in the disappearance of the movement itself that opens a whole field of creation—of translation, reinvention, transgression of certain rules.

David Thomson

I am thinking of the ideas of appropriation, of ownership, of reinvigorating or killing something. I think there's a beauty in decay and in how decay feeds the growth of something else. But a question which then arises is, are there rights and wrongs, are there legal issues? Somebody takes your work, and they do something with it without your permission, what do you do?

Thinking of acts of transmission, I am reminded of the work of Jackson Mac Low, a poet who in the ‘60s created a series of 40 poems called “40 Pronoun Dances.” Working through a series of chance operations with language, he created 40 poems that are also dance scores. He originally created them for Simone Forti, then Trisha took some of the cards and started working with them. With those scores, I think the act of transmission lies in the body, in the spirit of the translation. When a score is made for an individual to find themselves within it, the finding is going to be different in the ‘60s than in the 2000s because of how those words are interpreted now. The score creates a freedom in recreation. During my time with Trisha’s company, we recreated *Set and Reset* three times. We’d go back and say, “no, it’s not this way, it’s that way,” through very particular and long processes. What we were really asking was, what was being lost? What did she see or not see? What do you gain from the process? I would say historically many choreographers start a company with people around their age. There’s a distinct individuality that creates the work, and then, as time goes on, the work becomes codified to hold the form. And yet they’re trying to preserve the work as much as they’re trying to hold onto an idea of something, because they might not know how to allow freedom within that space and still retain what they feel are the parameters of existence.

Linda Murray

I think part of that is because when originally created, the work is “bespoke.” A choreographer is probably thinking, “I have those different performers, they have these strengths, these weaknesses,” then can work to these specific bodies and how they move. In subsequent generations, you’re placing what is a highly individual experience on a different body, and that’s why it gets codified, because it doesn’t necessarily fit, and you’re trying to adapt and conform in the hope to “hold it” across history.
We often gather multiple generations of dancers to talk about particularly iconic roles in dance history. They never agree on how the role was performed, and often will say, “no, but I was in the room with the choreographer, I know.” And the thing is, they were all in the room with the choreographer at different moments in time. As long as the choreographer is living, we can find ways through. Yet the burden of history hits us when the choreographer dies. Then we have to think through how to navigate that.

For me, interacting with archives is an incredibly intimate experience, and I think there is a capacity to be in dialogue with people who are gone which is quite magical. Going back to your question, André, I believe the role of a curator in collecting is to try and ensure that a collection captures the totality of who the person was, not just who they were as an artist, but also the motivations for how they chose to live their life, and how that is all part of a whole. I'm thinking of Gus Solomons Jr. who placed his archives with the dance division before his death. Some of you may know Gus used to have puppets of Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, along with a little Gus puppet. Martha and Merce weren't always kind to little Gus, and Gus wanted to make sure that those puppets came into the dance division after he died. Those puppets say so much about him; an object that reveals something about him and his place in the world that is at once separate but also deeply connected to his work.

André Lepecki

Yes, often when we speak about archives, it's about how it has become a holy thing for certain people, a static monument rather than a growing dynamic. The fact that you are holding the range of paraphernalia or artifacts that are related to individuals, that's really essential. Those artifacts however, are filled with movement, they emit the sort of shimmering refractions that I think really matter when we think about transmission. How their light breaks out from the archive into so many different rays.

Ruth Estévez

As I hear the different speakers think about the question of transmission across different forms and ways, it reminds me how those "acts of transmission" challenge the very idea of collecting and preserving performance. To me, this questions how we transmit ideas, knowledge, movement, but also trauma and memory through body practices. I am thinking from a particular field, as I have been working all my life in museums and contemporary art centers; museums that are somehow interested in collecting and preserving performance. And I say "somehow" because they never seem completely committed to that. In my curatorial work, it has been really interesting and generative to

develop methodologies coming from performative works in order to exhibit performance's archives. Those methodologies go beyond the document, they emphasize process, they foster multiple references and encounters. Performance for me is always a kind of response to a political or a social moment. And so, I wonder if performance in museums could be a method of healing? Could we work with performance on new methodologies for museums to rethink history, to advocate for alternative narratives through embodiment and storytelling? In other words, is performance the only way of healing or giving a history a second chance?

Note to a Young Dancer of the Future

Nicole Birmann Bloom

As I am writing these words, in December 2024, I imagine you, in the future. You are 20 years old. I hope life is not too hard where you are, and that you are dancing.

The role of performing arts in our societies and the trace they leave through history fascinate and guide me in my daily practice. It translates into a particular attention paid to sources, to historical and political contexts, to the journeys of an artist or a collective, and to the body's memory, in order to understand a choice, a direction, or a movement. This practice is vital for me to comprehend the present and imagine the future.

Over the years, I've accumulated bookshelves full of folders packed with articles, photos, notes, and books connected to dance, theater, and movement practices. These are the "archives"—my library—that allow me to continue to move forward, to live.

A few reference points that inform my reading of the world:

1973 – Françoise and Dominique Dupuy's studio, Paris: a class with Jérôme Andrews. The pleasure of dancing with immense fabrics; movement gains a new magnitude.

1974 – Dance studio, Geneva: workshops with choreographer Ze'eva Cohen and musician Gwendoline Watson. Through improvisation, emotions are released in movement.

1976 – Festival d'Avignon: *Events* by Merce Cunningham's company on the Cour d'honneur stage. John Cage on the piano, several dancers on stage, movements in the present moment multiply themselves to infinity. An awakening of all the senses.

1989 – Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris: *Impressing the Czar* by William Forysthe. Imbalance or distortion, speed, extremes.

1995 – The Kitchen, NYC: solos by Steve Paxton and Simone Forti. A flow of movements, a world of endless imagination.

2004 – Théâtre de la Ville, Paris: *Umwelt* by Maguy Marin. A depiction of our merciless world.

2008 – Danspace Project, NYC: *Le cri* by Nacera Belaza. A movement, a song with multiple resonances that shatter space and time.

2008 – Chez Bushwick – Center for Performance Research, NYC: *100% polyester, objet dansant no. (à définir)* by Christian Rizzo. Dancing dresses, from the inanimate to the animate.

2009 – Dance Theater Workshop, NYC: *Last Meadow* by Miguel Gutierrez. Denunciation of a repressive America with humor, charisma, and magic.

2009-12 – The Kitchen, New York Live Arts, Danspace Project, NYC: the series *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church* by Trajal Harrell. A reinterpretation of history with its tragedies, passions, and transformations.

2016 – Gibney Arts Center, NYC: *Étroits sont les Vaisseaux* by Kimberly Bartosik. Two bodies facing each other, emotions on edge.

2023 – New York Live Arts, NYC: *Weathering* by Faye Driscoll. The movement of the body's fibers, from the most visible to the most intimate. An allegory of the world and an overwhelming process of transformation.

2024 – BAM, NYC: *Still/Here* by Bill T. Jones. The histories of those deceased, the dancers' lyrical movements, Odetta's song; an emotional assembly that continues to resonate 30 years after its premiere...

Hundreds of performances and encounters have accumulated over time. They remain etched within me and give shape to the world. I continually ponder their connections, influences, and engagements.

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When I arrived in 1995 to work for the Cultural Services of the French embassy in New York, the dance field had benefitted from a tremendous fluidity in its exchanges between France and America over the past several years.[1] These exchanges were more dynamic in one direction. American artists' significant presence in France, and subsequently in Europe, was noticeable thanks to Bénédicte Pesle's efforts since the 1970s and the subsequent invitations from the Festival d'Automne in Paris. These artists—Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown, Robert Wilson, and Steve Paxton, to name a few—had an important impact on two to three generations with their revolutionary approaches to space, time, and movement.

Conversely, choreographers who emerged in the 1980s in France were practically unknown in the United States, with the exception of Maguy Marin. The following generation was yet to be discovered.

Working closely on artistic exchanges between the two countries, I discovered a particularly rich and rebellious alternative scene beginning in the late 1990s, and it seemed important to share those works beyond America's borders. This scene especially developed in response to a growing, increasingly extreme conservativism in the United States. Artists such as Miguel Gutierrez, Trajal Harrell, Okwui Okpokwasili, Keith Hennessy, Ralph Lemon, Kimberly Bartosik, Wally Cardona, Ronald K. Brown, then Faye Driscoll, Camille A. Brown, Kyle Abraham, and Shamel Pitts—among many others—were groundbreaking in their activism and lucidity. In an increasingly precarious socio-economic context, their sometimes-provocative works overflowed with poetry. Sold-out theaters were a testament to their capacity to allow us to experience and imagine.

This period of abundance eventually died out. The COVID pandemic, the proliferation of armed conflicts, the reassessment of the performing arts ecosystem, and the uncontrollable global warming profoundly affected the movement of artists and ideas.

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The performing arts are often described as temporary and ephemeral. However, they exist, live, and survive in the memory of those who experience them. I have the intuition these intersecting dance memories allow us to better understand this world, live together, and overcome our differences.

How do we share this personal and collective memory? Will future generations take hold of it? What histories can be invented using these stories?

The question of the trace, how we keep memories of different encounters, seems essential to me.[2] Today, I am increasingly intrigued by the history and journeys of the artists and choreographers I've met. I like to reassemble the notes I've taken on their works over time, describing them, analyzing them, teasing out the connections between their processes and the rest of the world.

Commenting, testifying, discussing, writing, drawing, and developing are actions that allow a multiple trace to be created, while researching an expression of all these events, these movements from one country to another. The essays that compose this publication are proof of this.

I hope this history in movement will find its way to you, so it may nourish your dreams and help you imagine all the encounters and dances yet to come.

1. During my years spent at the cultural services of the French embassy in New York as coordinator then program officer of the performing arts department, numerous events nourished the choreographic exchanges between the two countries: France Moves (2001); DANSE: A Festival of Performances and Ideas (2014); and the Villa Albertine Dance Season (2023). In 2005, the FUSED program (French U.S. Exchange in Dance) was founded in partnership with the New England Foundation for the Arts-National Dance Project. Finally, a series of initiatives that developed in connection to the question of memory and the trace in dance, notably a short book of conversations between artists (*Dance Dialogues*, 2010), the publications *DANSE: An Anthology* and *DANSE: A Catalogue* (Presses du réel, 2014-15), a catalogue of dance films, and the symposium RECIPROCITIES: Making and Supporting Dance between France and the United States (2023).

2. Numerous people's work on dance archives deserves to be mentioned here. In New York, that of Wendy Perron, Eva Yaa Asantewaa, Cathy Weiss, Cory Olinghouse with *The Portal Project* and Linda Murray, at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In France, see the documentary series *Ce que l'âge apporte à la danse* (2021-) by Cécile Proust, and the media library's array of activities at the Centre National de la Danse (CN D).

Breathing Spirit, Dancing Archive

Seta Morton

Internationally renowned choreographer and African American dance icon, Judith Jamison, passed away on the 9th of November 2024 which sparked an outpouring of love and heart-felt tributes. Her inspirational dancing and words, as well as reflections on her impact have risen to the fore of the collective consciousness of the dance world which surrounds me. In one video that has been circulating, Jamison speaks to the magical moment when a child experiences dance in a theater for the first time and makes a connection to it. She describes this phenomenon as "live people trying to convey spiritual art to you—dance."

Spiritual: relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things; a Latin derivative of *spir-* or *spirare* "to breathe"; compare inspire (to breathe into), expire (to breathe out), conspire (to breathe together).

Dance is a spiritual artform and it begins with breath. Dance is a feeling that happens simultaneously within and without; inside and outside of the people that enact it and the people that experience it. Dance operates through bodies which are changing: temporal and temporary. Visionary Black American artist, Ralph Lemon, remarks on the ephemerality of dance: "When I first discovered dance as a sort of art practice, the thing that was so wondrous to me was its ephemeral nature. Then I'm moving around, and I'm thinking of all this stuff, and I'm learning all this stuff—but then I do it and then it's gone."[1] Both material and immaterial, dance is a conspiracy of life and death—inspiration (inhale) and expiration (exhale). Dance appears suddenly. Dance disappears instantly. It ghosts itself as soon as it happens, slipping through our grasp so consistently that one could argue that dance *only* exists in memory, faulty and already fading. In this way, dance attends so precisely to the reality of our experience as living and dying things.

I work in dance and performance as a curator, collaborator, maker, performer, and administrator. I am the Program Director and Associate Curator at Danspace Project, which has had its rented home within the St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, in the East Village of Manhattan, for exactly 50 years. The church itself has an over 350-year history. Spirit and the spiritual are undeniable in that storied space. Growing up, I also danced in rented church basements and halls, fashioned into makeshift and temporary dance studios that appeared and disappeared within leased hours, wedged between church services, school activities, and AA meetings. This is a common condition for many of our dance spaces: even the physical architectures and containers

that hold our dance histories are overwhelmingly multipurpose, limited, liminal, and impermanent. The precarity of dance-making is overcome only by the devotion of the people who make dance. The enduring spirit of dancers—their efforting, making, and moving across lifetimes and generations—holds an undying faith in that which is ultimately unknowable and uncontainable.

The fleeting yet revelatory moment that Jamison named—a child who makes a connection in a theater—is the transmission that one hopes for as a facilitator of dance. I hope that dance is witnessed and that spirit jumps.

For Danspace's 50th Anniversary year, we are celebrating the present and future of dance in the 2024 Fall season, focusing on new works made by young artists. A 50th Festival in the spring of 2025 will include remounts, revisitations, and reimaginings of past works from the previous four decades. Another Black American contemporary and prolific artist, Bebe Miller, will be featured in the festival. Bebe's *Vespers* (1982), originally a solo work, will be performed by a cast of five young dance artists.

In November 2024, while Bebe and her cast were in residence, we held an open rehearsal for the public. The audience piled into the sanctuary as the dancers continued into hour three of what was only their seventh rehearsal together. At one point in the afternoon, watching, I was struck by the layers of artistic transmission and intergenerational exchange that were unfolding in real time. The dancers had been learning the piece from a video of the '82 solo. Bebe decided to project that video onto the wall behind the audience; the dancers' focus and gaze had to reach beyond their viewers to see the archival object of their study. The dancers watched the video and, in their own time, mirrored the movements they observed. Behind them, Bebe herself practiced as well. I wondered if she was also emulating the movements of her younger self or responding to the movements of these young dancers before her, as they were trying *her* on?

I was moved by the unveiling pedagogy and something beyond research: the artist watching and moving with the dancers; the dancers watching and moving with the artist from 43 years past; the audience sandwiched in the middle of it all—some who had been there in '82 and some meeting this work for the first time. All the while, Bebe and the dancers were being recorded in the here and now, the camera still rolling.

Looking at “the archive” as an ephemeral and living entity, to be engaged over time, Bebe and her dancers become both the archive and the archivists; the keepers of memory and the memory itself. The body is perhaps the only accurate archive there is: a record, both living and dying; a vessel of constant instability, friction, and change. Nothing is preserved. Everything is disturbed. Everything is changed.

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
is Change.

God
is Change.

—Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

Octavia Butler’s prophetic and dystopian speculative fiction, *Parable of the Sower*, was written in 1993 yet the story is set in a post-apocalyptic 2025—a world deeply changed by climate crisis, mass violence, and social inequity. In our 2025 reality, where the omnipresence of genocide, climate change denial, fascism, and other violences haunt our everyday, this passage for change has become a common prayer for many of us who follow the guidance of Black feminist thought as a path to spiritual and social liberation.

In the process of remembering the past and imagining a future, there is a friction between what was, what can now be and

what cannot: a tension between new growth and what still needs pruning. What is re-configured? What is duplicated? Beyond dichotomies of life and death, generation and erosion, permanence and ephemerality, what other possibilities emerge? If our changing and aging bodies are the archive, then what do we produce and reproduce when we attempt preservation across generations?

In the politics and choreography of remembrance, possibly the only thing that remains unscathed is our faith in dance and our need for one another. In the unseen spirit of our indelible connections, we inherit the urgency to save something, to pass it along, to hold onto something, while simultaneously letting it go and transform.

1. Ralph Lemon, Choreographer Who Redefines the Conventions of Dance - Heinz Awardee." The 23rd Heinz Awards for Arts and Humanities: Ralph Lemon (Choreographer and Interdisciplinary Artist), posted on 29 October, 2018: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLK6yz73Q14

CURATORIAL ECOLOGIES

Roundtable with **Tanguy Accart, Rachid Ouramdane, Janet Wong**
Moderated by **Angela Mattox**
Response by **Ali Rosa-Salas**
Addendum by **Philip Bither**

Angela Mattox

I hope we can continue with the sense of urgency that has been a thread so far, and maybe with the themes of hope, of aspiration, of the future. For this conversation on Curatorial Ecologies, we were asked to think about our accountability to artists and to audiences locally and globally. About the responsibility of the presenting field, considering the ecological challenges we face, while continuing to nurture exchanges. Additional questions I posed to these wonderful colleagues: "Why do we do this work?" And I mean this with humor, but also with love, life, and loss. I do it because I love it and the care around it—the relationships, the people. What is the imperative? What's at stake if we don't continue? What's at stake if global exchange goes away? Something that Dorothée Munyaneza mentioned earlier which really stuck with me, "How do we reduce the distance between us"? How do we face the complexities? How do we adapt the models, the infrastructures, the institutions? Maybe this is a conversation about what we—all three-dimensional beings—are doing within institutions. Where are you at? Give us some insights about what you're doing and where we can go.

Janet Wong

I've been working with the Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Company since 1996. Thinking back to the conversation on archive and transmission, I feel like I'm a walking archive myself. A constantly evolving archive—we are constantly evolving; organizations are in perpetual evolution. I was a ballet dancer, joined the company, and became the rehearsal director. We took the word "dance" out of the company, to say we can do anything inside a performance space. I became the Associate Artistic Director in 2006.

In the 2011-12 season, New York Live Arts was born out of the merger between the Bill T. Jones Arnie Zane Company and this historical, very important organization called Dance Theater Workshop, which was formed in 1965. And at that time, we were quite separate, the company and New York Live Arts. Then, in the 2016-17 season, I also became the associate artistic director of New York Live Arts. I started to co-curate the programming at Live Arts with Bill T. Jones with literally no experience. Had I applied for the job, I would not have gotten it. And I am still learning; it's ongoing. We are a very small organization and we present movement-based and body-based performance work. Most of the work we present goes through our residency commissioning program. We work with US-based as well as international artists, and hoping to do more of that. Oftentimes these international presentations happen through partnerships with Villa Albertine and other organizations.

I'd like to linger on the idea of international exchange and the fact that I'm sitting here in a symposium that is part of the Villa Albertine Dance Season and concurrently the Van Cleef & Arpels Dance Reflections Festival. And I'm thinking, where are the Americans? Where is the American equivalent to this? Why are we not putting out? Where's Tiffany's, for instance? I think there is a lack of visibility and opportunities for American artists now. There were very few American artists featured in summer festivals this year. There are certainly a few exceptions—Trajal Harrell, the Trisha Brown Dance Company, Faye Driscoll. But overall, there is a very poor representation of American artists on the European and international scene.

In my capacity at NYLA, we create a platform for artists to share their work, especially during the January conferences, at APAP and ISPA, the international version. In "Live Artery," the whole building is taken over by artists. We have studio showings, we do fully produced performances in the theater, and even started a salon in the lobby. This is an opportunity to see American—and also international—artists. We have limitations: in terms of space, time, and money. Yet for the coming edition, we will expand outside our walls and partner with different organizations to create more opportunities for artists. I think there are striking discrepancies when you look at the way other countries support cultural exports. Take France, but also Canada, Germany, Korea, Taiwan, Finland, etc. Often when I go abroad, presenters running large dance festivals will say, "What is happening in the United States?" I feel it is my duty to bring attention to this. I tried to

invite the National Endowment for the Arts to this symposium. I also reached out to people from the Mellon Foundation. I think Americans should step up. Because cultural exchange is more important than ever. Look at the lack of diplomacy, look at the lack of exchange. Meanwhile, we are sitting here watching things unfold in Gaza.

Another obsession of mine is the environment, which I think matters even more when we are talking about international exchange. One question that arises is, do we just stop exchanging, traveling internationally? I don't think that's the way to go. I know some artists are saying, "I'm going to stop touring work. I'm going to find another way. I'm going to send concepts across the pond and then they can make it up." That's great; that's another way, but not everyone can do it. Not everyone has the luxury of doing it. Also, there's something about face-to-face, about being present in the same room together. Look at all of us here today. Look at what we talked about during lunch. That's important. This is part of what performance can do. Yet, I believe we need to act about the environment, and I think the U.S., again, is lagging behind Europe. With some of my colleagues at Live Arts, we started a Green Initiative. We're doing little things here and there, slowly changing some of our habits and making small actions that might impact the broader economy. Take the set for Gisèle Vienne's latest piece, *L'Étang*. The walls for the North American version were built at the Festival TransAmériques in Montréal, then were transported to Chatham for the Performance at PS21, then were cut down in size for the performance at Live Arts. After, these big white walls and carpeting were going to go into the trash. And I thought, I'm the head of the Green Initiative, I can do something. I emailed a bunch of theaters in New York, and guess what? The next day, the NYU Theater Department said, "We'll take it all." You never know the impact of those little acts we do every day. As we've heard earlier, "if you don't know it's impossible, just go ahead and do it." We have to do our thing. It is a matter of ethics.

The last thing I want to bring up is that I oscillate between forgetting what's going on in Gaza and suddenly remembering it, my body going into this traumatic state. I wrote to the White House four times, the last one in all-caps: CEASEFIRE, CEASEFIRE, CEASEFIRE! It's probably just for my own sanity but I think we—as curators—need to say it and write it and spread it. I will end by paraphrasing Judith Butler, "What lives are worth saving? And whose deaths are worth mourning?"

Tanguy Accart

I'm the Deputy Director and Director of Development at Maison de la Danse and Biennale de la Danse in Lyon, where I arrived in 2021 along with Tiago Guedes, director of both institutions. Before I spent 4 years in Chicago as cultural attaché. Maison de la Danse and Biennale de la Danse are distinct yet complementary institutions with a common leadership team. Their principal mission is to promote access to culture and to dance especially; to support and make visible the work of artists. Maison de la Danse offers a large diversity of dances and aesthetics, from ballet, neo-classical, contemporary, hip-hop, cabaret to circus; it presents both very established and emerging artists. We have one 1100-seat theater and one 100-seat studio. The Biennale de la Danse focusses on local audiences, as well as professionals, to explore the actuality of dance internationally. The last edition took place in September 2023 and featured performances from 15 countries of which 40% were new creations and French premieres. At Maison de la Danse, we program about 50 shows during the season across 140 representations, for a total of 100,000 spectators. For La Biennale, we presented 48 shows in Lyon and elsewhere in the region across 50 different venues and sold around 50,000 tickets. I mention ticket numbers because, contrary to received ideas, box office is a crucial factor in France. It takes a lot of communication and outreach work to bring in audiences. As an example, the financial equilibrium at Maison de la Danse is based on 40% of public subsidies, 40% from the box office, and 20% from other resources. We also need to raise money. For instance, we are currently hoping to raise about 1.5 million euros of private funds in total for both institutions to finance our ongoing activities and new projects. Yet we do receive tremendous support from our public partners nationally and locally; we are in a constant and constructive dialogue. We work with nine associated artists: three local, three national, and three international. Part of our mission is to support creation through co-productions, different kind of mentoring—especially with local artists—and a residency program. We work a lot on community outreach and engagement programs. In this global environment, our work moves constantly between the local and the international.

Our practice is immersed in collaboration, whether with theaters, artists, local and national agencies around a series of cultural but also social, economic, and ecological issues. We take the question of mobility seriously—mobility of artists, but also of audiences and professionals—to reduce our carbon footprint. We organize and take part in many working groups to think about how to decarbonize culture in France at the level of the city. We organize “green tours” with partners to reduce travel. International projects are only invited if they have a minimum of three or four partners in France. It might also be interesting to mention the role of the ministry of culture, who recently published a priority statement which might translate as: “producing better and touring or disseminating better.” We might hear, “better integrate production and touring to respond to the problem of overproduction and extend the life of performances.” There are a lot of companies in France, but many creations have a very short life. We are very active in supporting artists in touring as much as possible. France has a strong dance structure and ecosystem, but we need to be very proactive, not remain focused on our own organization, and work collaboratively with other colleagues. We are committed to fostering exchange, increase the visibility of artworks to the professional sector, and facilitate a dialogue between artists and presenters. During the Biennale, we organize Focus—in partnership with Onda, the Institut français, and different cultural services of French embassies worldwide—where we welcome professionals from across the world. I’d like to mention one panel that took place this year, “Building together: what forms of cultural cooperation can address societal change.” This meeting was led by Milica Ilic, an expert in international cultural cooperation, who started by highlighting a contradiction. On the one hand, the art and performance world is immersed in international collaborations. On the other hand, those collaborations are deeply influenced by neoliberal market logics: most models of exchange are still based on production and extraction. She also noted that questions of visibility and access to mobility and resources often depend on where the artists are based. We then discussed how we can collaborate across different contexts considering the specificities of those contexts—the history, culture, social realities, working conditions. Three keywords emerged out of the discussions: care, solidarity, and context. I believe this issue of context is very important when working on collaboration and artistic exchange internationally. As creators and cultural workers, it is our responsibility to understand and dig into the context in which artists are working and developing their practice, especially if we aim for reciprocity.

As part of La Biennale's project, we created Forum, a space for international gathering that focusses on dance practices. The idea is to develop a relation of trust with curators from different parts of the world with whom we share values; to learn about different contexts of creation without having to travel constantly. This program is co-created with five non-European curators from five different regions of the world: the United States (with Angela Mattox), Taiwan, Australia, Brazil, and Mozambique. We asked each curator to initiate a conversation with a local artist on what such a project or practice can be. We are meeting online, in person in the five continents, while working on documentation. The artistic projects resulting from this initiative will be presented at the Biennale 2025. It's a long-term process. We believe it's important for organizations that are deeply rooted in international exchanges to experiment with new ways of cooperation.

To conclude, I think our main responsibility is to create a positive environment to engage a dialogue between artists, between artists and professionals, between artists and the audience. I end with this quote from Qudus Onikeku: "It's not about giving opportunity but creating a space where community opportunities can happen." I like this distinction about not extracting a project to "give" it the opportunity to be presented in another context—a "gift" you would give to an artist. But rather work collaboratively on creating a context where things can happen.

Rachid Ouramdane

I work as Director of Chaillot – Théâtre National de la Danse. Perhaps I can start with a few words on why I think when you come to this theater you don't arrive only with an artistic project, or even as an individual. You are facing 100 years of democratization of art and culture. This institution was built at a moment where people believed scientific and artistic knowledge could be the basis for a common culture. From the beginning, the purpose of that structure was to gather the city, different fields of knowledge, different actions. It was built by figures such as Jean Vilar who created a "national popular theater," or a "people's theater"—today's term might be "inclusive." The "popular" practices of the '20s are different from those of the '60s, the '80s, and so forth, because since then we have received a wealth of multicultural knowledges, and knowledges around gender that

have changed how we understand bodies. We have integrated the digital revolution. What is popular and what federates today is totally different. I say this because for me leading Chaillot means trying to federate all those fields and to amplify a broad and inclusive idea of culture. It is not about making people come to "culture." I believe it is important to go against a vertical approach that would bring light onto things that have been invisibilized—in a kind of messianic approach. Instead, at Chaillot we aim for a theater of diversity and hospitality. And I like to remind myself that we are here in a mission of "public service." Our work is in service.

At Chaillot, we act on the scale of the city and not only on the scale of the art world. We aim to create a network of relations across the city, to show that dance practices can have value beyond the art world. And in fact, when you meet artists, often they don't speak about the art piece itself, but about the dialogues they invent with different communities—how they go beyond the art world. For instance, one of the nine associated artists at Chaillot is Faustin Linyekula, from Democratic Republic of Congo. Currently, he is not so interested in creating projects for the stage or the museum, but more involved in the question of identity in DRC and how that relates to cultural practice. Of course, a lot of what he has been able to do relies on the fact that he is well-known in many countries and so able to travel, perform, make money and bring the money back in DRC. But Faustin is very critical of this model and said from the beginning, "I need something else from Chaillot, besides performing in the theater. I need you to help me produce drinkable water in DRC." Water there has been polluted for many years, then international firms started selling water at a very high price. Faustin wanted to create a sustainable project to help communities gain access to drinkable water at a lower cost and then, with the small benefits, develop educational and cultural programs for kids. As a national theater, this is one of Chaillot's responsibilities with many countries, especially given our post-colonial heritage. This is one way not to reproduce the same model: rather than producing the next Faustin Linyekula show, we plant seeds for alternative ways in which art is relevant globally across the social and medical fields, across research and education.

When it comes to international collaboration, first, we try not to fly people from all over the world: we have to optimize economically and ecologically. Every month we have a "Chaillot Experience," a kind of mini-festival or mini-focus, in which we share the scene or make an invitation to a territory. The next "Experience" will

feature Algeria, and include Algerian choreographers, but also concerts, debates, film and documentary programs, workshops, UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage, initiatives from Algerian and Algerian diaspora associations, etc. We imagine those moments as the sharing of popular practices. I think it is very important to not only show an art piece, but try to bring fragments of an ecosystem, of an environment in which these pieces are created. Later this season, we are planning one about Rwanda which will be co-curated with Dorothée Munyaneza, also an associated artist. We'll work with local artists from Rwanda, but also use all the relations that already exist between the countries. The partners are different each time: there might be a cultural institute for a given country, you might have to find partners in totally different sectors for another one, there might be a culture of fundraising in yet another country, etc. Every time we have to invent a new economic model. We know international cooperation is necessary, we know what it looks like and feels like in the absence of intercultural practices. And so while we all have to think how to reduce our carbon footprint, many diverse approaches are needed. We should never consider the cultural object as a manufactured object—like the latest Nike shoes or a car. It's important for cultural objects to travel because they foster a certain tolerance and knowledge all over the world.

I think we have to use all ways and popular keys to access dance. Dance is everywhere: in fashion, sport, cinema, social media, wellbeing, research, the music industry, etc. Part of our work is to open doors across domains to create citizens who have a taste for art and cultural practices. Though acting on a small-scale can be important, I believe we have to use all the tools we can to develop a wide art practice. If we just focus on the economical aspect of our current model—which was relevant for a moment—we will hit a wall. In France, when a dancer has no job, the only way they can go on is to create their own company. This has saturated the structure. Today, there is a national program that aims to "produce better to disseminate better." But what this means is to give more resources to certain people and show them longer, which limits the number of people you support. This is a complex equation because if you help some artists "more and better," this happens at the expense of others. I believe our role is to find all the alternatives and allow artists to deploy their artistic knowledge in all possible areas—not only in the production of performances. To create possibilities for the choreographic art to exist in a wider scale, across different domains; to use all the potential of the discipline to emphasize, absorb, amplify dance.

Angela Mattox

I am grateful for the expansiveness of each of your comments. Thinking back about Curatorial Ecologies and the notion of service that was mentioned, I wonder, who are we serving? How are institutions changing and adapting to be in service? How are we serving audiences? How are we serving artists? How are we meeting them? How can we talk about abundance and possibility?

Ali Rosa Salas

Thank you all. One question that's been in the tumbler cycle of my brain, perhaps since I've started curatorial work, is around institutionality and the fact that institutions are people. I think perhaps the more one ascends in their professional trajectory, the more dehumanizing because you become more like a building and less like a person. But I always try to hold on to the fact that institutions are people and subjectivities that are defined by lived experience and which shape values. Because people make up institutions, they're making decisions that are value-driven, they are distributing resources and making decisions based on those values. One of the many things that keeps me up at night is, how does this conversation around values and subjectivity relate to curatorial practice? What is at stake in the depersonalization of the curator, especially if curators do this work because of their singular point of view that is deeply political and is deeply context-driven, rooted in time, place, and identity—all the things we need to be talking about?

Angela, to your point, why I do this work is because I deeply believe that arts and culture shift the paradigm. And that the capacity to think creatively is what will save us. But I think about integrity, as it relates to curatorial practice, as it relates to values, as it relates to subjectivity, especially in a time like this. What is the role of cultural institutions in this historic moment in Gaza that we're all facing in horror? How does integrity in curatorial practice factor in? How is that word, integrity, sitting with each of us as we navigate this moment, and the future of what it is that we're endeavoring to do in this work?

Philip Bither

Effective dance curation combines deep knowledge of the practice and the historical lineage of any artist one is presenting combined with having a full, trusting relationship with the communities one is programming in and for. Serving as a knowledgeable and empathetic translator between artist and audience, dance curators create effective context, interpretation and connection points that enable any dance experience to have the greatest resonance possible. Strong curation ensures an artist feels fully understood and that they have what they need—artistically, technically, emotionally, financially—to offer their best work. Building environments for indelible time-based experiences is part of the necessary skill set that separates performance from visual art curation.

This fraught global moment desperately calls out for greater international exchange, for *more* opportunities for people to build transnational and cross-cultural understanding. Yet, today in the U.S., international presenting faces unprecedented challenges. Tension between the local and global, rising social inequities, and perhaps, most urgent of all, the catastrophic climate crisis, raise existential questions for global exchange and arts touring.

Yet, hope lies in new models that are emerging; in longer, deeper residencies; in multiple modes of new digital exchange; in collaborative and diversified curation systems; in local-global exchange rooted in the specifics of distinct localities; in ecologically minded re-invention of touring; and in new global alliances and shared research systems. Building greater trust between artists and curators, audiences and organizations, funders and institutions, and between diverse global partners, will help point the way forward. Finding new ways to sustain the power of the collective live art experience is the essential work of our time.

In Defense of Middling

Megan Kiskaddon

This is a love letter. A valentine to the US mid-sized arts organization and to the idea of being in-between—between scales, genres, mediums, and approaches. I've long feared that I am someone with too many interests and not enough specialized focus. My curiosities and passions are broad: visual art, experimental performance, music, science fiction novels, art house film, trashy TV, postmodern dance, devised theater, hikes with views, gossip podcasts, and the list could go on. But today, I'm writing to embrace that breadth and make a case for resisting specificity—for loving the middle.

To ground us, I am Executive Director of On the Boards, Seattle's home for contemporary performance. I helm the organization as well as curate its season of performances. For 45 years, this organization has provided a platform for boundary-pushing artists. We own a theater in Lower Queen Anne in Seattle, Washington, with a 300-seat auditorium and an 85-seat black box. With a full-time staff of 11 and an annual budget of under $2 million, we're considered mid-sized. At 45 years old, in human terms, this also means we are middle-aged.

Here's where the confession of love begins: On the Boards, and organizations like it, occupy an important space in the American cultural landscape. In *Prescription for a Healthy Art Scene*,[1] Renny Pritikin describes the arts as an interconnected system where each part supports the whole. Mid-sized organizations are the glue. We are big enough to offer meaningful support—for example, OtB provides residencies, equitable artist fees, commissions, and touring support for artists each year—but small enough to be responsive—for example, when Seattle artists were struggling to find outlets for their work, I brought back a local festival for new works that quadrupled the previous artist fees. We can weather some strains, such as shifts in funding and audience behaviors—we endured the pandemic and decreases in public funding. And yet nimble enough to be responsive to artists' ideas—we staged a drag show in a Queer auto repair shop last year. In other words, we are stable enough but not stuck, safe-ish but not stagnant.

Another thing we are in the middle of is a political landscape that may push the arts ecosystem in the US into further precarity. In 2022, the arts contributed 1.1 trillion dollars, making up 4.3% of the American gross domestic product. That's more than the transportation and agriculture industries.[2] In my experience, public funding has not kept pace and private foundations and individuals have, for understandable reasons, shifted their funding

priorities to address environmental and social justice endeavors. I think a big question I find myself wrestling with is: will mid-sized American arts organizations be able to sustain through such economic tumult?

What gives me energy in the face of such challenges is artistic dynamism. I avoid having a singular focus, and so does On the Boards. We present dance, theater, experimental music, and performance art—though this language hardly captures the manifold work we do. For 45 years, OtB has resisted narrowing its focus and I take that resistance seriously.

I often look to artistic practice for inspiration. The idea of *site specificity* feels essential. On the Boards is located on the west coast, a location considered a frontier in the American history books. As problematic as that history is, I find the conceptual area of the frontier to be productive in that it is "located between a more densely settled and a practically empty region."[3] My experience of Seattle is that audiences are open-minded, artists lean toward the collaborative, and the boundaries of genre are more like a suggestion. In spatial terms, though, we are very far from New York and Europe. Touring is challenging, and the financial infrastructure is not as robust.

I think of On the Boards as an improvisational work with a score. The score is our building: grounded, safe, enduring, known, but with distinct limitations. We work within the size stage we have, the theater we have, and the technical equipment we have. This metaphorical score is also composed of the financial resources available, staff capacities, and realities of time. From this score we improvise. We riff on our abilities to problem solve, meet the ideas of artists, and navigate the shifting needs of the field. For example, when our project budget ran out, we figured out how to blackout the theater for a 4,000 LED starscape, borrowed the required equipment, and the entire staff joined the tech crew for deinstallation. Running an organization like On the Boards is a practice in formalizing the core and strengthening the muscles of infrastructure so that the art can take risks. Much like how a dancer might strengthen their core so that they have the capacity to pivot and the freedom to move their body from a strong middle.

It's a generative line to walk. The tension between openness and improvisation in the art, alongside structure and discipline in operations, is a constant negotiation. It's a simultaneous devotion and surrender to the dual faces of precarity and structure—not in opposition but as partners in a productive push-pull.

That's what I mean when I say mid-sized organizations are important. Because they operate from a place of organization, a foundation, and allow artists to take risks. It's also what I mean by fostering and cultivating a commitment to middling: resisting specificity and definition, and instead delighting in the push-pull tension of it all. The more mid-sized arts organizations there are, the stronger the overall arts ecology will be, for artists and audiences.

This love letter celebrates mid-sized arts organizations as spaces where the strength of structure meets the freedom of artistic risk. In a world driven by extremes and specialization, we choose to embrace the middle as an act of resistance rather than a vulnerability. It is here, in this dynamic balance, that mid-sized organizations with broad focus can support artists and adapt to new ideas, fueling the larger arts ecology.

1. Renny Pritikin, *Prescription for a Healthy Art Scene*, Open Space SFMOMA (San Francisco: SFMOMA, 2010).
2. National Endowment for the Arts, *The U.S. Arts Economy in 2022: A National Summary Brief* (2022).
3. Murray Melbin, "Night as Frontier," in *American Sociological Review* 43: 1 (1978), 3-22.

Curating the Alternative: A Historical Perspective on Dance

Lou Forster

The emergence of curatorial studies is inextricably linked to the transformation of this function in the 1970s. In the visual arts, the pioneering work of Harald Szeemann (1933-2005), the so-called “first” independent curator who did not hold the title of museum curator, first brought the role of this artistic agent into consideration. A careful reflection on curatorial practices does not lead to the creation of a new auctorial figure, but to a nuanced and complex description of the social and historical realities that shape artworks’ production and life. This makes it possible to understand how art is integrated into society and participates in its transformation.

It is remarkable that there is no figure comparable to Szeemann in the dance world. The absence of a canonical reference is not problematic in and of itself, but it leads to two important peculiarities that surfaced in conversations at the “Reciprocities” symposium. Before asking what a dance curator can do to respond to the ecological and social challenges of today, it seems important to know what they actually do. Do they act as a cultural agent, a “competent and empathetic translator,” as Philip Bither suggests, or rather as an economic agent who gathers financial, technical, and human resources for redistribution through a variety of methods (co-production, residencies, mentorship)?[1] Is their role significantly different from that of their counterparts in the visual arts? And, finally, is the presentation of artworks determined by this unique curator-artist relationship, or are there other actors whose impact should be considered?

To briefly respond to these questions, I will sketch here a broad portrait of Harvey Lichtenstein (1929-2017), who is, among others, a strong candidate to embody the role of reference dance curator. I will focus on the way in which he contributed to the construction of American (post)modern dance as a canonic genre at the end of the 20th century. I will present the strategies implemented and some of their induced effects. Then, I will evoke the little-known roles played by other contemporaries, who positioned themselves as alternative curatorial figures.

From the Academy to BAM

Harvey Lichtenstein was born into a Jewish family in Brooklyn in 1929. In the 1940s and 1950s, he trained in modern and classical dance with Sophie Maslow and Pearl Lang. In the summers, he attended the American Dance Festival at Bennington College and workshops at Black Mountain College, where he met John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg.

After a year dancing in the City Opera's ballet company, he decided to become an art administrator. He completed the Ford Foundation's new training program and joined the production and fundraising department of the New York City Ballet, followed by the City Opera. In 1966, the Brooklyn Academy of Music's executive committee was looking to revitalize the theater's direction. It found that the institution had failed to find its place in a New York cultural landscape redesigned by the creation of the Lincoln Center in 1962. Lichtenstein appeared to be the best candidate to implement this renewal.

When Lichtenstein became director of the Academy at age 37, he drew on the artistic field he knew best, dance, to transform an institution threatened with bankruptcy. In the 1960s and 1970s, he introduced the residency model, generally reserved for ballets, to invite three successive companies: Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, and Twyla Tharp. This partnership allowed him to develop close, long-term relationships with these choreographers while helping to establish them in the city's cultural landscape. Although these companies had rarely been able to present their work in New York, now they were invited to perform consecutively for one or two weeks at a time. Their performances were accompanied by workshops for amateurs and semi-professionals. The choreographers shared their techniques, as well as their daily training and the dancers' way of life. Lichtenstein thus adopted a truly curatorial approach consisting of exposing what was then a niche, confidential artistic practice, anticipating musicals like *Flashdance* (1983). Though the Howard Gilman Opera House's 2,100 seats were not yet selling out, patient programming work allowed for these new dances and choreographic practices to be known, appreciated, and understood.

Beginning in 1975, Lichtenstein expanded the Academy's programming to include Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, and Laura Dean's work. This turning point introduced a new generation of choreographers whose pieces were performed in alternative spaces downtown. To see this project through, he provided the Academy with a new performance venue, the Lepercq Space, recreating within the institution an attentional space comparable to alternative downtown spaces. The Lepercq Space, which can accommodate three hundred audience members, has no stage, and its risers are modular and mobile. It can be adapted to a variety of performance configurations, such as those taking place in churches and loft spaces. In this way, Lichtenstein did not simply introduce pieces from a new generation of choreographers

into his programming, but he permanently embedded this alternative configuration for performance within the theater.

Finally, the theater, then referred to as the Academy, changed its name to adopt the acronym by which it is still known today, BAM. These three letters convey the institute's transformation from an academy—a sacrosanct setting for canonical works—to a place likely to welcome new performance practices.

Mutual Aid or Hierarchy

Lichtenstein saw the residencies of companies at the Academy/BAM as a means of supporting their development and establishing a foothold in the city. Though the theater did not coproduce shows in the 1960s and 1970s, it assisted with application processes for companies to obtain public grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York City Council. The residency also offered in-kind services, such as providing space for the dance companies' offices. Despite running an institution in crisis, Lichtenstein helped with the administrative processes necessary to support the companies.

However, although they collaborated in a mutual-aid style, the relationship between the companies and BAM was also commercial and hierarchical. The theater clearly distinguished itself from alternative spaces such as Danspace Project or The Kitchen, which were run by dancers themselves. When a piece was presented at BAM, the two parties drew up a contract for all costs associated with the show, and the theater administration ensured that the contract's clauses were honored.

BAM's positioning between commercial theaters and alternative spaces in the New York art scene was progressively established through controversies. One of the most revealing was Lichtenstein's confrontation with companies in residence regarding complimentary tickets. Contractually, BAM granted a certain number of free tickets (between 2 and 5% of the theater's total tickets). The rest of the tickets for sale became the object of another negotiation to determine the share of the professionals who could not be denied a free seat and the seats the theater charged to the companies. In 1969, Tharp challenged this system. The choreographer demanded that an additional hundred tickets be made available free of charge "to anyone who wishes to identify himself as part of the dance community."[2] For Tharp, the allocation of these tickets should not be based on the validation of some sort of status. Disputing the hierarchical principle that

allowed the theater to decide who can be invited, Tharp thought community support should be demonstrated with a gift. This form of unconditional exchange was then standard practice in alternative spaces. In the end, Lichtenstein refused to change BAM's policy and only offered reduced price tickets to students upon presentation of an ID.

This controversy defined the theater's operational position. Unlike alternative spaces, the relationship with the audience remained a commercial one, even though Lichtenstein was careful to keep ticket prices far below those of Broadway theaters. BAM functioned in the realm of "non-commercial exchange,"[3] as defined by the anthropologist Alain Testart, where personal relationships of friendship prevailed.

Stardom

BAM's integration of postmodern pieces and downtown's alternatives to the proscenium had important implications for the critical reception of dance. At the time, the critical landscape in New York was defined by the press and critics who reviewed dance on a daily basis in detailed, rigorous, and polemical articles. The unprecedented visibility of Brown, Childs, and Dean's performances put the critics who followed and promoted American postmodern dance (Sally Banes, Wendy Perron) on par with the conservative critics (Clive Barnes, Deborah Jowitt) who had hitherto ignored this downtown scene. Thanks to the new institutional framework Lichtenstein created, these different voices were now obliged to discuss the same works.

Thanks to this powerful dance press, Lichtenstein created a star system that promoted these three choreographers. The aim of this strategy was to build an audience large enough to fill the Howard Gilman Opera House when he commissioned works for this massive stage. He believed that only the extra visibility the stage conferred could ensure the cultural impact of dance in the increasingly competitive world of mass media. He shared this conviction with Brown and Childs, who developed a critical reflection on dance's transposition into images in *Glacial Decoy* (1979) and *Dance* (1979). This curatorial approach was met with tremendous success in the United States and in Europe.

The promotion of a new generation of choreographers also took place through a transatlantic network. The renewal of BAM took place in parallel to the transformation of the institutional landscape in Europe. In France, the Festival d'Automne in

Paris, founded in 1971 by Michel Guy (1927-1990) under Georges Pompidou's initiative, played a leading role in the canonization of American dance. Although he belonged to the same generation as Lichtenstein, Guy's knowledge of modern dance in the United States and in Europe was very limited. While on one side of the Atlantic, Brown, Childs, and Dean's pieces had been analyzed as postmodern since the early 1980s, he approached them through the lens of neoclassical ballet (Serge Lifar and the Ballets Russes) and contemporary French ballet (Françoise Ardet, Maurice Béjart, Roland Petit, and Pierre Lacotte), which he knew from his work at the Festival international de la danse (FID), an event devoted to this genre in Paris.[4] He thus supported Cunningham by commissioning a ballet piece for the Paris Opera, *Un jour ou deux* (1973), saw a renewed form of *ballet blanc* ("white ballet") in *Dance* (1979), and understood collaborations between these choreographers and artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Sol LeWitt in relation to the Ballets Russes. Throughout his tenure as director, he continually decontextualized downtown dance practices to fit them into the mold of an abstract choreographic modernity.

Community

Neither the star system nor the turn away from the proscenium that Lichtenstein introduced worked without questioning the sustainability, structures, and conventions of the downtown scene from which these choreographers came. Judy Padow and Cynthia Hedstrom, two historic dancers from Childs' company, were running Danspace Project, one of the most important alternative spaces in New York, and called out the necessity of developing structural support:

"In the last fifteen years [...] a whole new dance community has evolved creating a boom of activity, which is now in urgent need of money and space to sustain and support it. It is not a question of the success of isolated individuals, but the body of work of a large and growing community [...] whose very life is threatened."[5]

While Lichtenstein built a massive audience, Padow and Hedstrom endeavored to represent a community. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981, however, the possibility of structural support definitively receded.

In this unfavorable context, Cynthia Hedstrom contributed to the development of Danspace Project. Between 1978 and 1982, St. Mark's Church, where the dance concerts took place, was renovated.

Subsequently, all shows were presented on a wood floor with professional sound and lighting equipment. The organization's budget grew substantially, allowing them to offer better fees to choreographers and develop much more expansive programming. By the mid-1980s, Danspace Project had become an institution in its own right, halfway between alternative spaces (gymnasiums, churches) and BAM.

This evolution is comparable to what was happening in the visual arts at the time. In New York, P.S.1 created by Alanna Heiss in 1975, and the New Museum, founded by Marcia Trucker in 1977, created a new type of organization that partially reimagined the museum. The institutionalization of the alternative in meta-theatrical or meta-museum spaces motivated visual arts curators and Hedstrom alike. Continuing her career at The Kitchen in 1985, Hedstrom focused on fostering relationships with artists within a community of movers. She was met with remarkable success: landmark works like Steve Paxton's *Goldberg Variation* (1986) and Ishmael Houston-Jones' *Prologue to the End of Everything* (1988) were created within this context.[6] In the absence of an equivalent curatorial approach in Europe, and more particularly in France before the mid-1990s,[7] these important works barely traveled and remained relatively unknown. The construction of an alternative curatorial approach in dance remained uncertain.

1. On this, read the conversation that opens the Curatorial Ecologies section in this publication.

2. Twyla Tharp, "Dear Lew," 27 December 1969, manuscript, Harvey Lichtenstein President's Records, BAM Hamm Archive, Brooklyn, New York.

3. Alain Testart, "Échange marchand, échange non-marchand," in *Revue française de sociologie* 42: 4 (2001), p. 719-748. On this subject, also read Patrick Germain-Thomas, *Politique et marché de la danse contemporaine en France (1975-2009)*, PhD in sociology, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2010.

4. On the subject of contemporary French ballet and the FID, read Mélanie Papin, 1968-1981 : *Construction et identités du champ chorégraphique contemporain en France*, PhD in art aesthetics, science, and technology, Université Paris VIII, Vincennes-Saint-Denis, 2017, and Patrick Germain-Thomas, *ibid*.

5. Judy Padow and Cynthia Hedstrom, "Space and Support," *Dance Scope* 4: 14 (1980), p. 8.

6. On this subject, read Tere O'Connor, "Oral History: Cynthia Hedstrom," *The Kitchen OnScreen*: https://onscreen.thekitchen.org/media/oral-history-cynthia-hedstrom (accessed 25 November 2024).

7. Starting in 1995, pioneering organizations comparable in certain ways to Danspace Project or The Kitchen appeared in France, such as Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, founded by François Verret, Yvanne Chapuis, François Pirron and Loïc Touzé; the Centre de développement chorégraphique de Toulouse, founded by Annie Bozzini; the Biennale de Val-de-Marne became the Briqueterie, founded by Michel Caserta; Les Hivernales, founded by Amélie Grand; Danse à Lille became Le Gymnase, founded by Catherine Dunoyer de Segonzac and Eliane Dheygère. A decade earlier, in 1983, Marie-Thérèse Allier founded La Ménagerie de verre in Paris.

CODA: TOWARD AN ECOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Non human dances:
The Choreographic Put to the Test
of the Ecological Crisis
Jérôme Bel

Musings on (De)composing Dance
mayfield brooks

Non human dances: The Choreographic Put to the Test of the Ecological Crisis

Jérôme Bel

Noémie Solomon: *In 2019, you stopped traveling by plane to develop and present your works. Could you share the reasons that motivated that decision?*

Jérôme Bel: There are multiple reasons behind that decision. It is the result of intellectual and moral developments over several years. Of course, there are the increasingly alarming newspaper articles and scientists' and activists' remarks from recent years. And then there's also the physical experience. I'm lucky to have lived in Paris for many years, and lately, I've experienced temperatures I've never felt before with my own body. I started to ask myself questions regarding my own impact on climate change, as a citizen and as an artist. Discussing it with the people around me, my friends would tell me we need to wait for a political decision; that alone, we can't do anything. But my worry grew, and I decided to take action, even by myself—and moreover, maybe even just for myself—to be able to look at myself in the mirror. It was clear my company's carbon footprint was essentially due to airplane trips for international tours. And so, in March 2019, I made the abrupt, radical decision to no longer take airplanes. The only way I could make this decision was because one of my friends, the artist Tino Sehgal, no longer traveled on airplanes. Without his example, I don't think I would have been able to imagine making such a decision. And if Tino influenced me, then maybe I would be able to influence someone else. It became political.

Upon reflection, I discovered my decision was tied to a historic fact that was foundational for me. One of the myths in French history that symbolizes the separation between good and evil comes from the period of German occupation during World War II. The dividing line was drawn between collaboration with the German occupier, Evil, and resistance against this same occupier, Good. This symbolic representation is deeply rooted within me, and it allowed me to situate myself in regard to the ecological crisis: either I was collaborating by continuing to pollute, or I was resisting by making the decision to pollute less.

I knew this decision would fundamentally change my work and, undoubtedly, that I was going to lose a lot from it, including the possibility of no longer being able to work, given that my company's profits essentially came from international tours. But maintaining my job as a choreographer wasn't worth anything when faced with the impending catastrophe.

NS: *What other tactics have you deployed to pursue your work as a choreographer, locally and internationally?*

JB: At that same time, I was working with a dancer in Paris on a piece based on Isadora Duncan's autobiography and dances, and I was disappointed not to be able to present this piece in the United States. That's what gave me the idea to make another version of the piece with a Duncanian dancer living in New York, Catherine Gallant. It was a piece we would rehearse virtually. I was overwhelmed by the idea of doubling my work but resolved to try to avoid air travel. So, in the afternoons I would work with Elisabeth Schwartz, the dancer in Paris, in a rehearsal studio, and at home in the evenings, I would meet Catherine Gallant via videoconference in a dance studio in New York. Working on the same piece with two different performers was one of the most enriching experiences of my career. As it turned out, each dancer allowed me to see different things about Duncan's dances, through their subjectivities. I thus was able to deepen my understanding of Duncan's oeuvre, and dance in general, thanks to these double rehearsals!

But I could still feel the limits my decision not to fly was imposing on touring. And so, I resigned myself to the fact that the Duncan piece would be my last, and that I would have to abandon my career as a choreographer.

And then I received an interview request from a *New York Times* dance critic, Roslyn Sulcas, who wanted to understand how I was able to develop a piece without being present at rehearsals. She wrote an article that had an unexpected impact. It was picked up all over the world, even in the Philippines where I've never set foot, with sensational titles like, "The French star choreographer stops flying to save the planet..." That was wild. After that, I received interview requests from other outlets, appearing not just in the dance section like usual, but in the current events section. The news spread everywhere... And then the pandemic happened. The borders were closed, and this time I received offers from around the world asking me to make pieces over videoconference. So, I spent my time in quarantine working from my computer in Paris: mornings in Asia, afternoons in Europe, and evenings in America.

When I had time to spare, I wrote an auto-bio-choreo-graphical piece, which would be performed by me in France and could be performed by anybody in the world, in their local language. The producers, the curators, or the performers would receive a guide

that would allow them to restage and perform the show. The piece was performed in Paris, Aubervilliers, Lausanne, Philadelphia, Liège, Mexico City, Berlin, Nice, Buenos Aires, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Brest, Amsterdam, Athens, Vienna, Montevideo, Geneva, Recife, Lima, Teresina, Bucharest, Seoul, Zagreb, Budapest, Antofagasta, Concepción, Santiago de Chile, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Bobigny, Los Angeles, Fort-de-France, Milano, Florence, Maribor, Jersey, New York City, Porto... all without a single flight!

Today, I am continuing to reflect on the processes that allow my work to travel without polluting.

NS: *In your latest piece, Non human dances (2023), you collaborated with the art historian Estelle Zhong Mengual to explore the* "non-human" through a lineage of Western dance. *What does this alternative perspective emphasize for you? What do you think choreography can do to undo anthropocentrism?*

JB: I had a lot of trouble finding a way to artistically formulate the ecological crisis. As is often the case when we find ourselves helpless in the present, the past can assist us. I decided to study how choreographers who preceded me had represented nature and the non-human. I started studying history, and I asked art historian Estelle Zhong Mengual to collaborate with me. I had very much liked her book, *Apprendre à voir*,[1] which examines these questions of artistic representations of the non-human. We were analyzing how choreographers (from Baroque through contemporary dance) had produced representations of the non-human. We decided to work on academic dances from the European tradition—those I knew the best and which I've inherited—and the strategies these choreographers invented over the course of history. Their dances showed us how artistic production often instrumentalized nature for human expression. This work brought to light how dance based in Europe made very little of the non-human, as is the case in all of Western culture. This was all the more evident because the show was first presented at the Louvre, where we were confronted by the dominant culture. Happily, several choreographers—for different and varied reasons—were genuinely interested in alterity, thus producing several non-human dances, which did justice to the existence of "other ways of being alive,"[2] to cite the philosopher Baptiste Morizot.

As for the question of anthropomorphism, which is the subject of some debate: one must accept it, because we can't escape it.

We're humans! We can't do anything about it other than being very aware of it. We must *as humans* take the non-human into account.

1. Estelle Zhong Mengual, *Apprendre à voir. Le point de vue du vivant* (Actes Sud, 2021).
2. Baptiste Morizot, *Manières d'être vivant. Enquêtes sur la vie à travers nous* (Actes Sud, 2020).

Musings on (De)composing Dance

mayfield brooks

Noémie Solomon: *Your work has long sustained dialogues with a range of living, "more-than-human" partners: with compost and their extended temporality, mycelia's rhizomes, whales and their infinite wisdom, plants as teachers.[1] Can you share some of the foundational encounters or "dances" that have shaped the role of ecology in your practice?*

mayfield brooks: After working for many years as a dancer and urban farmer, I decided to focus on my work as an artist. I took time off from urban farming to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in dance at the University of California in Davis. UC Davis is a school with a focus on agriculture, so it was an apt choice. I lived in a semi-intentional community of undergraduate and graduate students where we tended gardens, trees, and bees and hosted daily potlucks in a community yurt. We lived in an assortment of rounded dome dwellings that were white and resembled half-moons and we focused on how to live sustainably as a collective. This shift from urban living to a simulated rural life on a college campus allowed me to expand my vision of dance, ecology, and improvisation through research and practice. During this time, I developed my practice of Improvising While Black or IWB.

Improvising While Black sprouted from an episode of driving while black in San Francisco, California where I experienced what I believed was an incident of racial profiling after a police officer stopped me for a minor traffic violation. Instead of simply issuing a ticket for the traffic violation, he proceeded to do an arbitrary background check and then arrested me based on faulty information. I was arrested in an abandoned park in the middle of the night. Even though I was alone and extremely vulnerable, he called on four back-up police officers for help. They arrived in two cars, handcuffed, detained, and proceeded to harass me until they admitted me to the local jail at 850 Bryant Street in San Francisco. Later I found out that the officer was probably fulfilling his quotas for the evening. This incident occurred twenty years ago, and although traumatic, it inspired my master's thesis *Improvising While Black (IWB): The Wreck Part 2* which was a riff off the idiom "driving while black." I wrote this thesis ten years ago.

The practice of Improvising While Black is a decades-long culmination of my love for the earth intertwined with my love for dance—a thread that I have woven into my work and life as an artist for as long as I can remember. In my thesis I write, "the central question driving my master's thesis performance project, *Improvising While Black*, emerges from the underwater

abyss where my ancestors' bones live. *IWB* asks over and over again: What makes the Black body sensorially discernible and grammatically legible when the whole of modernity is established on its complete fungibility? In other words, is it possible to perceive the Black body as a complete entity when it is continually reproduced as a type of currency mediated by a history that relegated it to property—parceled out, harvested, and left fallow when no longer useful?"[2] This inquiry has been the primary field of research for my work where I insert the practice of IWB in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and start to unpack the decomposed matter of Black life.

For my master's thesis performance project, I worked with seaweed from a local shoreline. The seaweed became my dance partner. The seaweed's slimy, soft texture, potent fishy smell, and deep green color awakened my senses. I envisioned my enslaved ancestors' bones shapeshifting into marine life. The ocean abyss became a refuge for my imagination and a place of solace from the harsh reality of anti-Black violence and racism. In a zine that accompanied the performance I wrote,

"i am investigating the 'afterlife of slavery' (see front page quote from Saidiya Hartman) and being in 'the wreck' of societal and environmental degradation. since i am working with bodies-human and non human, i assert that: SHAPESHIFTING IMPROVISATION defines contemporary dance... seaweed from ohlone land, my ancestor seaweed, my ancestor ocean, how many waters, how many tears, my ancestors in the abyss, how many bodies, how much flesh, green, black, brown. contaminated bodies, bodies of water, bodies of knowledge, no body."[3]

The seaweed became my teacher and guide as I choreographed my MFA thesis performance. I worked with a marine biology graduate student who had grown up around seaweed. The student taught me how to harvest the seaweed without harming its habitat and I learned the anatomy of the seaweed. I hung the seaweed from the ceiling at the entrance of the theater so that when the audience arrived, their first encounter was with the seaweed. Over the three evenings that I performed, the seaweed began to decay. I was delighted by the process and this is how I began adopting decay as a primary methodology for my choreographic work. The seaweed taught me interspecies relationality and reverence. When I finished the project, I performed a ritual of composting and burying the seaweed in a place where other life could grow.

Three years after I graduated from UC Davis, I started an urban farm in the South Bronx that served four schools in one building. The schools agreed to move forward with the project after a former principal from one of the schools proposed her vision of creating a garden in an abandoned racquetball court on the schools' campus. They hired me to lead the project. With the help of students, teachers, and community members, I turned the barren lot into a thriving raised-bed urban farm with an herb garden, compost area, and space for propagation in six months. We called it Morris Campus Farm and I stayed with the project for two years. In 2019, as I was wrapping up my time at the farm, I started to investigate compost as a medium for dance. Up to that point I had been an urban farmer/gardener for 24 years, but I kept my day job separate from my creative work. However, in 2019 a shift occurred, and I decided to see what it would feel like to bury my body in live compost.

NS: *How did you proceed to make creative works with compost? You have spoken of your practice through the process of "surrendering to decomposition." What is at stake for you in approaching choreography through the lens of decomposition?*

ms: What emerged from the act of burying myself in compost was my project, *Viewing Hours* (2019). Through *Viewing Hours*, my body became an extension of land teeming with life, death, decay, and regeneration. Memories of seaweed and the abyss came back into my body. I was living, breathing, and dying at the same time. My ancestors whispered into my ear as I lay in repose under over forty pounds of compost and decaying flowers. They told me that I was decomposing dance and choreographing breath. I surrendered to the weight of their stories and struggles under

the weight of the compost. I surrendered to their songs and sighs of relief. Sometimes with death comes relief. I became one with the earth and invited others into the sensory realm of my body melded with decomposed matter.

Over the past four years I've been inspired by the whale fall. After the Black Lives Matter uprisings in 2020, I learned that a whale fall is a decomposing whale's body falling to the bottom of the ocean and mimicking compost when it reaches the ocean floor. Once the massive whale corpse (or what is left of it) settles into the bottom of the sea, it creates vital and essential abyssal ecosystems. The whale's body and bones regenerate and become compost for the ocean. *Whale Fall* is the title of my current project. I continue to be inspired by all forms of decomposition. Perhaps this approach to dance research can be a kind of mycelial networking of embodied histories, methodologies, and practices. Improvising While Black shapeshifts, festers, and rots in the most generative ways. It's a practice that thrives on decay and dissolution. My hope is that IWB can be a liberatory practice of surrender and vibrant curiosity for all who encounter it.

1. See, for instance, mayfield brooks, "What Came before the Heartbreak, a fable," in *Dance History(s): Imagination as a Form of Study*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Annie-B Parson (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2024).
2. mayfield brooks, "Improvising While Black (IWB): The Wreck Part 2." MFA Thesis, UC Davis, Department of Theater and Dance, May 2014.
3. mayfield brooks, *Improvising While Black: the wreck part 2. guidebook & zine*, 2014: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5daca0df0b551621e232d6d6/t/63b9e4a3937ac41ea49b5531/1673127092916/IWB-ZINE+2014.pdf

Biographies

TANGUY ACCART
Deputy Director, Maison de la Danse and Director of Dance Projects, Biennale de Lyon. Accart was previously Cultural Attaché for the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in Chicago, USA (2017-2021).

JÉRÔME BEL
Dancer and choreographer based in Paris. His work is presented worldwide despite his decision in 2019 to stop traveling by air for ecological reasons. His latest piece, *Non human dances*, created with art historian Estelle Zhong Mengual, analyses the relationship between the Western dance and the non-human in order to enrich our understanding of it.

NICOLE BIRMANN BLOOM
Independent Performing Arts Consultant. She worked at the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States for nearly three decades, playing a key role as performing arts officer in promoting artistic exchanges between France and the United States, particularly through the FUSED program (French U.S. Exchange in Dance).

PHILIP BITHER
Walker Art Center's Senior Curator for Performing Arts. Prior to this, Bither served as Artistic Director for Vermont's Flynn Center (1990-97) and was Associate Director/Music Curator at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM)'s Next Wave Festival (1982-89). He sits on numerous federal, state, local, and national foundation arts panels.

MAYFIELD BROOKS
Movement-based performance artist, vocalist, urban farmer, writer, and wanderer. brooks teaches and performs practices that arise from Improvising While Black (IWB), their interdisciplinary dance methodology which explores the decomposed matter of Black life and engages in dance improvisation, disorientation, dissent, and ancestral healing.

DONNA FAYE BURCHFIELD
Executive Director of the BFA & Low Residency MFA programs at Bennington College. Burchfield served as Dean of the School of Dance at University of the Arts in Philadelphia and Dean of the American Dance Festival in North Carolina. She has been an active member of major international dance platforms for decades.

ANNE COLLOD
A contemporary dancer and choreographer, Collod co-founded the Quatuor Albrecht Knust (1993-2001), a collective working with Labanotation to recreate 20th century choreographic works. In 2004, she created her own company through which she dedicates her work to the utopias of the collective. She collaborated extensively with Anna Halprin and recreated her major work *Parades & Changes* (Bessie Award winning project in 2009), as well as *Blank Placard Dance*.

ASHLEY DEHOYOS SAUDER
Cultural producer and educator, DeHoyos works as curator at DiverseWorks in Houston, TX, where they organize a full range of visual, performing, and public arts programming, and teach in the Arts Leadership program at University of Houston.

RAPHAËLLE DELAUNAY
Director of *Élan*, a school for equal opportunities in dance launched in 2021 by the CN D (Centre National de la Danse). Delaunay danced with several influential choreographers including Pina Bausch, Alain Buffard, Boris Charmatz, Jiri Kylian and Alain Platel. She created her own company *Traces* in 2005.

RUTH ESTÉVEZ
Curator, writer, and stage designer, Estévez co-directs the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. Previously, she served as artistic director at Amant in Brooklyn, directed and curated REDCAT/CalArts in Los Angeles (2012-18), and was chief curator at the Carrillo Gil Museum in Mexico City (2006-12).

MORIAH EVANS
Dancer, choreographer, and curator based in New York. Her work explores choreography as an expansive social process and insists on the value of bodies in motion and relation. Recent works have been presented at Museion, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, Performance Space New York, NYU Skirball, The Kitchen, SculptureCenter. Evans was Editor-in-Chief of Movement Research Performance Journal (2013-2022).

ASHLEY FERRO-MURRAY
Program director for the arts at the Doris Duke Foundation, where she drives and oversees grantmaking and other efforts to advance the foundation's support for performing artists. She is also a frequent public speaker whose research has been published most recently in The Drama Review and in collections published by Bloomsbury Press and Duke University Press (forthcoming).

LOU FORSTER
Curator, dramaturge, and art historian, Forster wrote his doctoral dissertation at EHESS Paris on the work of Lucinda Childs. He has participated in the "Choreographies" research program at the National Institute of Art History and co-founded, alongside choreographer Lenio Kaklea, abd, a platform that bridges dance and critical theory.

JUDY HUSSIE-TAYLOR
Danspace Project's Executive Director & Chief Curator. Hussie-Taylor was a co-founder of the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance (ICPP) at Wesleyan University. She is the founder of Danspace's Center for Dialogue & Exchange in the Arts and its critically-acclaimed Platform performance & publication series conceived as "performance exhibitions that unfold over time."

MEGAN KISKADDON
Executive Director, *On the Boards* since 2023, Kiskaddon is a Seattle Arts Commission appointee and NDP Advisor. She previously led the Education and Community Engagement division at SFMOMA and organized the Anna Halprin exhibition for the 2017 Venice Biennale.

ANDRÉ LEPECKI
Professor in the Department of Performance Studies and Associate Dean, Center for Research & Study at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Lepecki works at the intersection of critical dance studies, curatorial practice, and performance theory. His books include *Exhausting Dance* (Routledge 2006, translated in 13 languages) and *Singularities* (Routledge 2016).

JOSHUA LUBIN-LEVY
Director, Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University. Lubin-Levy also works as a scholar, dramaturg, and performance curator, and is Editor-in-Chief of the *Movement Research Performance Journal*.

ANGELA MATTOX
Mattox is a curator, festival programmer, and a funder for over 20 years, and has programmed for the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna, Austria), PICA's TBA Festival (Portland, Oregon), and YBCA (San Francisco, California). Mattox is currently a guest curator with the "Forum" project for the Biennale de la Danse 2025 edition (Lyon). She is based in NYC and is the Director of Artist Initiatives at Creative Capital.

EDGAR MIRAMONTES
Executive and Artistic Director, Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA (CAP UCLA). Miramontes is an arts leader with broad experience as a curator of contemporary performance, producer, lecturer, administrator, fundraiser, and festival organizer. He previously served as the Deputy Executive Director and Curator of REDCAT.

SETA MORTON
Program Director and Associate Curator, Danspace Project as well as Managing Editor of Danspace's digital and print publications. Morton's curatorial practice is grounded in questions of embodiment, collaboration, open-ended inquiry, grace, and Black feminist thought.

LINDA MURRAY
Curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division and manager of its collections and public service. Murray previously worked with the dance collections at the Library of Congress and ran the multi-disciplinary arts organization Solas Nua in Washington, DC for seven years.

RACHID OURAMDANE
Director, Chaillot - Théâtre national de la Danse in Paris. Ouramdane graduated from the Centre national de danse contemporaine (Cndc) in Angers and has since worked as a dancer and choreographer. From 2016 to 2021, he directed the Centre chorégraphique national (CCN) in Grenoble.

ANA PI
Choreographer, imagery artist, pedagogue, "extemporary" dancer, researcher of urban and African Diasporic dances. Her practices are woven through the act of traveling, her transdisciplinarity is situated between notions of transit, displacement and belonging. MoMA, Centre Pompidou, Museo Reina Sofia, 35th São Paulo Biennial, Lá da Favelinha and RAW Material are some of the many institutions she navigates through works that articulate choreography, discourse, installation and radical imagination.

JULIA M. RITTER
Dean, Glorya Kaufman School of Dance at the University of Southern California since 2022. Ritter is an award-winning dance artist and scholar who was previously a Professor and Chair of the Dance Department at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

ALI ROSA-SALAS
Vice President, Visual and Performing Arts at Abrons Arts Center/ Henry Street Settlement, Rosa-Salas began her tenure at the organization in 2017 as Director of Performance Programs.

MARCELA SANTANDER CORVALÁN
Co-director, Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. Santander works as a performer, choreographer and teacher. The creation of her company Mano Azul in 2021 is driven by the desire to deepen this axis of transmission by proposing and deploying community projects and itinerant schools, in close collaboration with different artists, communities and institutions.

ELSA SARFATI
Director, Espace 1789 in Saint-Ouen, which offers artists residencies, supports new creations, and presents multidisciplinary performances with a focus on dance.

NOÉMIE SOLOMON
Curator, teacher, dramaturge, and consultant. She edited the collections DANSE (an anthology and a catalogue published by Presses du réel, 2014 and 2015) that translate and present key texts on the somatic and linguistic trades between French and North American choreographic cultures. Her performance programs have been presented internationally, including at Istanbul Modern, MoMA PS1, and Gropius Bau in Berlin.

NOÉ SOULIER
Director, Centre national de danse contemporaine (Cndc) in Angers. Soulier studied philosophy at La Sorbonne and trained in dance at the Paris Conservatory (CNSMD), Canada's National Ballet School and PARTS in Brussels. In 2010, he won the 'Danse Élargie' competition, organized by the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and the Musée de la danse.

DAVID HAMILTON THOMSON
Interdisciplinary performing artist and creator, a "Bessie" awardee who has worked extensively across the fields of dance, music, performance, and theater. Thomson developed the Trisha Brown

Archive Database in collaboration with Cori Olinghouse and initiated The Artists Sustainability Project to expand the discourse and practice of financial, artistic, and personal empowerment within the arts community.

CATHERINE TSEKENIS
Executive Director, Centre National de la Danse in Paris. Tsekenis began her career as a dancer before accompanying the productions of several choreographers. She later worked for the French Ministry of Culture and served as Director of Cultural and Solidarity Action at the Hermès Corporate Foundation.

MARÝA WETHERS
Director, Artist Programs and GPS/Global Practice Sharing program at Movement Research. Wethers has worked extensively as a Creative Producer & Independent Curator as well as a contemporary dancer. She received a 2017 NY Dance & Performance (“Bessie”) Award for Outstanding Performance with the Skeleton Architecture collective.

TARA AISHA WILLIS
Dancer, scholar, and dramaturg, Willis is a 2024-2025 Getty Research Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in African American Art History and Curator-in-Residence for Dance at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC). She was previously Curator of Performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

JANET WONG
Associate Artistic Director, New York Live Arts and the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company. Wong trained in dance in Hong Kong and London and danced with the Berlin Ballet. Wong co-curates the performance, humanities, and residency programs as well as the Live Ideas Festival.

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Contacts

Diane Josse, Cultural Attaché
Music, Performing & Visual Arts
diane.josse@villa-albertine.org

Louise Dodet, Program Officer
Performing Arts
louise.dodet@villa-albertine.org

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