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Evolving Selves:
Movement as the Consideration of Embodied Difference

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of Smith College in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Candice Salyers, Faculty Adviser

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Introduction

As a choreographer, I am interested in the question of how to mobilize and exchange embodied information. I observe that this is not a default condition of dance practice and performance. Rather, it is a condition that must be deliberately cultivated. Even in dance, embodied capacities for information processing can remain in the background, obscured by representational cues. I am especially concerned with the problem of conformity, as it operates in limiting identity tropes or in the supposedly neutral idealizations of performing bodies. Reified manners of performing a Self\(^1\) hold alternative futures hostage. This includes an evolution of the Self as an independent category as well as in relationship to Others. Embodied practice holds out the opportunity to unpack and rework these relationships. If cultivated, embodied practice can facilitate a movement of information \textit{within and among supposedly discrete body-selves}. I perceive this movement as a critical tool for appreciating, and deliberately engendering, the presence of the Self in the Other and visa versa. I am taken with this possibility as a method for future choreographic work, and also as a rich contribution to existing tools for inter and intra group conflict reduction.

Choreographing Selves: A Question of Value

As choreographers and dancers we engage power at the intimate site of the body, as felt and deeply integrated in our actions and interactions. As such, our work directly participates in creating or closing possibilities for human behavior. I have become increasingly fixated on questioning the use of the self in performance. I experience great difficulty considering the self

\(^1\) Although there is some elision in my thinking I generally refer to “Self” and “Other” as categories, diametrically opposed positions based in ethno-racial or cultural difference. Self and Other as reified categorical positions interface with the lived experience of one’s individual “self” in relation to everyday “others” as one skillfully navigates a shifting relationship to difference, belonging and exclusion. For me self/ Self and others/Others are inextricably paired, providing a means through which to consider micro-social interactions and identifications in relationship to macro-social positionings and power alignments.
either as an additive quantifiable (commodifiable) substance, or as a universal soul-stuff into which the audience dissolves via the alchemical influence of true artistic performance. At their worst these notions not only support a dualistic view of body/mind or body/soul but also enact the dramatic erasure of significant human differences and the hierarchical arrangement of those differences. Self is fundamentally embodied. Further, the embodied self is always specifically structured based on the kind of body it *is* and the context in which it is embedded. The embodied self comes into meaningful social life through an ongoing and inescapable process of interacting with, and being acted upon by, the representational systems governing its lived context.

Representational meaning systems\(^2\) not only structure the embodied self and its reflexive understanding of its locatedness, but also intimately condition the set of possible relationships to other body selves. I prefer to consider the self as a weft of relationships rather than an *additive* substance or a *bodiless* substance. Each body-self is a particular intersection of relationships in which corporeality and meaningfulness are intimately *interwoven*. In this way, the use of the self in performance contains more possibility than represented by the self-as-additive or bodiless transcendent-universalist approaches. These approaches obscure the specific positioning of body-selves relative to systems of power, eliding over the impact of these differences on actual lived experience. In contrast acknowledging the highly specific positioning of the embodied self— and representation as an intimately structuring force — foregrounds the ways in which the self is imbricated in the other and the other with the self. Performance which allows the self to point to these real and specific relationships remains engaged with present social realities, refusing the ease of universalist platitudes. Given my background in social science and my personal investment in sustaining communities across difference, I observe significant potential here for

\(^2\) I refer to categories of human persons organized by cultural or assumedly biological differences, and the related systems of meaning which become attached to the condition of inhabiting those specific bodies and behaviors.
reconfiguring existing webs of relationships. In such a process, specific kinds of bodies may be repositioned relative to one another in an increasingly just distribution of human value.

The work of meaning-making that occurs in pedestrian contexts is brought into focus in performance contexts. Bodies marked by race and gender already endure a certain degree of heightened visibility. On the one hand there is the visibility which is structured by policing and circumscription, which maintains the categorical distance between Self and Other. On the other hand there is the visibility which is structured by a desire for access and intimacy which lends itself to invasive relationships, and to the commodification of Other bodies. Bodies marked by difference may alternately, or simultaneously, be treated as inscrutable and dangerous or enticing and inviting. In addition to an overarching or monolithic treatment, marked bodies will also elicit responses based on the specific social and political intersections in which they fall. As these representations are either confirmed or subverted to various degrees, one relates to other bodies accordingly. A potential for subversion rests on one’s physical, performative, and attitudinal conformity to the corresponding expectations for one’s body in relationship to others and Others.

I have been deeply influenced by intersectionalist theories of oppression and resulting critiques of cultural production as fundamentally enmeshed in the operation of power. As an “alien” and as a woman of color I feel compelled towards an increasingly honest examination of my relationship to whiteness, especially to white femininity. This relationship, my own subjective processing in conjunction with my being enmeshed in broader network of representations, informs my sense of the social value of my body and bodies like mine. The creative process for my recent works has been just such a navigation of value. Rather than a

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sudden realization, this has been an ongoing navigation that I have brought forward from previous projects. I examine my casting choices in relation to my own body and my understanding of its social value or lack thereof according to the existing field of representations and real power relations in which it is embedded. Inevitably, my body-self occupies a specific set of relationships relative to my cast and visa versa. An Afro-Caribbean female choreographer working with white American women is significant in itself, and has bearing on the kind of work produced. The character of the emergent relationships in the creative process shows up in the work as subterranean content, and informs the meaningfulness of the overall composition.

The repeated iteration of normative white femininity through “high art” dance performances in the ballet, modern, and contemporary “genres” creates an accumulation of representational power which structures the experience of meaning-making. This conditions the meanings and relationships we have available to make sense of new work, new information, and the specific bodies in view. Although marked by gender and therefore visible as women in pedestrian contexts, a certain level of invisibility befalls white women in the performance arena, especially the proscenium theater. There is no question of the beautiful white woman's belonging in view in the proscenium context. However, the beautiful white woman is a trope that erases the specific bodies, identities and personal trajectories of actual dancer(s). In this way, the pool of representations works to reduce real, distinct body-selves to mere instantiations of a normative image. The privileged status of belonging then goes hand in hand with dehumanizing forces which render white female bodies interchangeable. One iteration of the normative ideal is as good as the next; and either will occupy and preserve the necessary space in the web of relationships between kinds of bodies and their allotted social value. I aim to resist this kind of reductionism in my work and to observe the impact of hegemonic norms on my own embodied
experience, my cast and our relationship to one another. The method however is one that permits an acknowledgement of complicity with prevailing normative ideals and structures. However, the process does not stop at acknowledgement but moves towards a reconfiguration of the relationship between respective positionalities.

In my casting, I am interested in interrogating my acceptance of a particular distribution of human value, according to degrees of conformity with hegemonic femininities. I did not make the choice to take a direct oppositional stance, in which I might have actively recruited and cast women of color. I did however choose to interrogate the (in)visibility of my own body in my work, as well the framework of conformity and non-conformity through which I regard and position myself in relation to my cast. I do not intend to rank these choices as being more or less appropriate or radical. Each presents particular opportunities and attacks the issue of representation, visibility, and value from different strategic vantage points. Reflexively observing my experience making work at the undergraduate level, and in my two graduate works prior to saudade, I notice the growing impact of my physical absence and the significance of its implications for myself as well as in a broader representational politics. I understand my own body as fundamentally lacking according the logic of hegemonic femininity in general; and at the point where this rubric meets the accumulated weight of the idealized performing body on the Western proscenium stage. Given this understanding I had previously taken the conscious step of removing myself from performance, and relying on “avatars” in my own choreographic work. I was operating with the message that my body specifically, and by extension bodies like mine, did not belong in view.

I observe that while there is an established interest in identity and autobiography, the bodies, lives and histories of people of color continue to bear the burden of radical difference.
Although these stories may garner genuine interest they remain a specialized “genre” of sorts onto themselves, preserving a distinction between “pure” dance and “cultural” dance. Why is it that Kyle Abraham can be referred to as a “dancing Negro” in 2013? These distinctions may not be overtly declared or embraced, especially considering that the terms “Black dance” and “World dance” continue to inspire fiery debate. Yet these distinctions, however labelled, remain salient reminders of the inescapable political context in which danceworks are produced. They raise questions about the conditions for acceptance, belonging, and approval across still meaningful (albeit destabilized) lines of social-embodied differences. Each category of identity broadly speaking, as well as each sub-community in the dance field, maintains its sometimes tacit, sometimes overt conditions of acceptance. A fundamental question of safety emerges around the threat of expulsion for non-conformity.

Conformity forms a huge component of acceptability, constituting in my perception the right to safely occupy space and not have one’s presence or belonging in question. Conformity according to racial or cultural divides is impossible for me based on the body I have and the trajectories it has taken thus far. I am not only marked in my features but read as unstable or inconsistent in my behaviors and movement tendencies, both as a dancer and in the pedestrian contexts through which I move. Not only must I stand in relation to representations of normative white femininity that render my body unacceptable; but I also inevitably stand in relation to hegemonic representations of “Black” women which are shot through with dehumanizing messages and assumptions. The combined fetishization of race, gender, and size that regards ‘Black’ female bodies as excessively sexual—and the special brand of disciplining this entails—is particularly potent for me. As such, visibility in the performance arena is a situation of high stakes, tantamount to a symbolic minefield. If one is not unfavorably compared to normative
standards then one falls in with the very same tropes that, in pedestrian contexts, often inform persistent devaluation and violence against one’s body.

I newly find myself insisting on and drawing attention towards my own physical values and specificities as I interrogate my complicity with these processes. I deliberately include and offer my own accumulated physical information, which includes not only the “vocabulary” I personally create but specific ways of inhabiting that vocabulary. The significance of this shift is firstly the mental adjustment necessary to value my own knowledge. This marks a shift in my assumptions of where knowledge resides and that, at my particular intersection, there is information not only worth knowing but worth sharing. The impact of my prior processes was an imbalanced location of knowledge; wherein knowledge always resided in bodies that were not my own. “Knowledge” here is not reducible to dance technique, where “technique” signifies the capacity to “execute” a required repertory of movement-gestures. Recuperating the impact or presence of my own body, despite my physical absence in the final work, becomes an insistence on the validity of my position in the broader contexts through which I move. My position in the world generates a particular synthesis of information as a result of the webs of meaning and power it activates. This process of recuperation uses self as a site of navigation, acknowledging the everyday responsiveness to a wide array of inputs and interactions, which are exertions of power and discipline as well as resistances. In this way, the reflexive process of my embodied practice points beyond the discrete boundaries of my individual self towards a greater network of bodies-in-relationship, illuminating not only the character of those relationships but the impact.

At this point the work of movement generation still involves a careful looking on my part to consider the tendencies and acknowledge the offerings of each collaborator, but it is more shared. This as opposed to my previous processes where I removed my physical body early on in
favor of observing and guiding dancers into movement which demonstrated their likes, strengths and sense of facility. I inhabited the role of a sensitive observer and organizer, but my physical signature was less a part of my compositions. By physical signature I do not mean that the dancers should move as I move, but rather the felt presence of my body and its trajectories as an integral part of the movement emphases. My previous processes reflected as well as reinforced the message that I had to be necessarily invisible; that my own body was somehow either inappropriate or incapable of achieving what other bodies in a higher degree of conformity could. Locating the rationale for my self-exclusion in perceived lesser ability firstly masked my actual knowledge acquisition, personal synthesis and point of view. Secondly, this assumption stood in the way of a deliberate engagement with this question of value, and the impact of working with others whom I recognize as more socially worthy than myself. While not reducible to these terms, I find it important to consider my work in terms of my participation in and endorsement of normative ideals of acceptability and therefore value. Rather than continue to replicate this relationship, I have invested in unpacking it. The work of unpacking is different than the work of outright refusal, which jumps ahead to a radical solution but does not allow for the messy process of reworking and reframing the prior relationship.

Simplistic representations of non-normative, marginalized people (those with a lesser degree of conformity and therefore a smaller allotment of real human value) risk a different yet no less troublesome challenge than that of invisibility. The how of (re)presentation, the placement of emphases, and the navigation of existing frameworks (rather than mere restating) strike me as critical components for success. By success I mean the problem solving potential for reworking how embodied identities and relationships are structured. Such a reworking is no guarantee of other criteria for success, and I have observed and continue to observe many
problematic representations thrive due to continued audience consumption and support. I choose to examine my own complicity, the complexity of my relationship to conformity, and the potential of generative choreographic processes and embodied methods to work through some of these (misguided and) ill perceived investments in an everyday process of dehumanization. Writing on Bill T. Jones, Ananya Chatterjea states “[Jones’s body of work and stance as a political artist reminds us that] representation by itself is not enough of a move towards equity, rather it is in how that visibility is marked, that the possibility of change lies.”⁴ I experience particular resonance with Jones’s so-called return to formalism; a supposedly de-politicized approach to dance making.⁵ Such an assessment may be understandable given the overtly political and often biting nature of his earlier works, which position audience members squarely in their raced and gendered specificity. But the contrast is a superficial and ultimately false one. I understand Jones as navigating the hypervisibility of his body (at his intersection of race, gender, and sexuality) in context of broader systemic and ideological devaluation. This context continues to be thrown into sharp relief by his involvement in largely white (or coded as white) artistic communities and spaces. Jones’s turn to formalism, exemplified for me by The Breathing Show, challenges the perception of how identity functions in performance, which is political action.

Rather than an essentialist or reductionist depiction of social selfhood, or an absolute identification with a reified racial archetype, Jones’s work invites multiple ways of seeing marked bodies and of inhabiting the condition of being seen. As a consummate performer (and something of a celebrity) Jones has acquired an aura or character. Yet his performances evidence an awareness and active navigation (subversion, interruption, confrontation, elision) of his social

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⁵ Danielle Goldman, I Want To Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), chap. 4.
locatedness, the meanings set in motion by his specific body in motion, and the condition of being on display. In this way, his work speaks to possibilities within the fact of dancing that reach beyond a depiction of the real or an imaginative recasting of the real. Instead, Jones’s (solo) work points towards the specific relationships in which his body is embedded and in doing so mobilizes a complex network of meanings and questions surrounding those relationships. I am interested in the mobilization of meanings which avoids a neat or comfortable affirmation of identities and relationships both within and between social groupings.

I am all the time enmeshed in complex relationships of resistance and complicity. In my position, I cannot claim the kind of purity which a culturalist or strategic essentialist perspective makes available. Although complicated by syncretic approaches, the local or “yard” cultural signature lies in an oppositional relationship to what is “foreign,” “American” or “white.” As a foreign educated, English-speaking Jamaican practiced in “white” movement vocabularies, my status as an authentic bearer of Jamaican culture (in its commoditized or mythologized sense) is highly compromised. My capacity to generate and participate in this kind of cultural production is compromised by my proximity to and engagement with whiteness. Not only is that door closed to me, but the choice to present in such a manner and to create work with these frames does not reflect my lived experience of the trajectories I move in or the relationships in which I am enmeshed. Pure opposition, one without an acknowledgement of mutual imbrication, does not strike me as an appropriate option. In one sense my concern with appropriateness can be read as acquiescence to a particular set of normative rules, and an unwillingness to jeopardize relationships and therefore make myself both isolated and unsafe. In another sense it reflects a concern for a specifically located and responsive strategic approach—one that is other-centric and which focusses on a reworking of inter-group and inter-personal relationships across lines of
meaningful social difference. I choose this as opposed to a more representational approach, which I observe focusing on often monolithic stories about the Self.

Space, place, personal history, and collective history all come to bear on how body-selves are physically structured and how they move in their specific social worlds. Such an approach invites the presence of the macro in the micro, but does not overdetermine how specific bodies should move given their locatedness in power and culture. The prescriptions and proscriptions for how bodies of a kind should move places undue limitation on their ranges of experiences, relationships, and knowledge. This process not only effects enormous silences, but stifles the capacity to move towards alternative futures. I observe such approaches in my “home” context i.e. the artistic community in Kingston Jamaica which is highly concerned with lineage, African retentions, and cultural authenticity through the lens of mythologized “blackness.” I exist in a tense relationship with these depictions because of how closely they resemble, and how easily they fall into, seemingly un-interrogated racist/supremacist tropes. Often the source of “purity” lies in the appeal to a mythologized past, one which is informed by a collective inheritance of colonial white supremacist perspectives. These images go hand in hand with an idealization of the primitive and an idealized notion of the authentic and virtuous (rural) poor. Alternatively the source for purity is tied to socioeconomic status. The underlying equation is that true authenticity resides with the (urban) poor as primary culture makers and arbiters of “real” blackness, and therefore “real” Jamaicanness. I am unwilling to participate in this kind of image production because of its limiting and exclusionary politics, as well as the high level of commoditization which accompanies these versions of the “authentic”. Simultaneously, Jamaica’s global positioning as economically vulnerable but culturally potent (as a recognizable commodity
“brand” or signature) further contributes to the reified and monolithic nature of dominant cultural representations.

Racial and gendered trope-ing recur as primary red flags in my process since both are heavy structuring influences on my daily lived experience. However they are not the only dangers raised by the problem of representation. Representational politics have direct consequences for non-normative bodies, impacting the kinds of controls laid against them (legally, materially, and ideologically) as well as their ability to lay claim to and experience a sense of real human value. More generally, the finished-ness or closed-ness of representational images lends them a false sense of stability or inevitability. The approach I am describing is concerned with the demarcation of borders and firm declarations on who belongs inside those borders. As such it is often reductive, seeking agreement in the form a lowest common denominator, an appeal to common sense or a shared mythological interpretation of reality. My approach to dancemaking, and my engagement with representation, is informed by both my sense of imbrication with my own Others as well as my adamant refusal to engage simplistic or strategic essentialist notions regarding my s/Self. One obvious result is my resistance to traditional narrative work or staple culturalist themes. Instead, I have fixated on the process of movement generation as based in observable physical tendencies. This approach places me in the borderlands between “pure” movement and representational approaches. I attempt to access the specificity of lived social experience, the impact of space and place on identity and relationships, through a process of supposedly abstract movement exploration. In doing so I challenge the purity or assumed naturalness of somatics-based or anatomically-based dancing; and

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6 Repertory companies in Kingston will usually include an “urban” or dancehall ensemble work, a folk work derived from local hybrid religious dances, and a work affirming African retentions in Jamaica or across the African diaspora in the Western hemisphere. These form predictable staples of their yearly programming.
simultaneously refuse the limitations imposed by dogged adherence to culturalist and nationalist tropes. In creating movement on my own body and with o/Others, my starting point is that the web of relationships in addition to our individual histories and trajectories are embedded in our bodies.

Our bodies have been made by the contexts in which we move, and continue to be open and evolving systems. The shared process of movement generation, observation, and attention to physical specificity comprises an attempt at problem solving—a working through or physical turning over (ourselves) in an attempt to access and bring the information of our individual trajectories into contact with one another. The aim is to conduct a genuinely open-ended process. While my social science background provides the scaffolding of this process, this information goes largely unspoken in the actual process of rehearsing. My silence has been another means of resisting “aboutness” in the work in favor of a practical, doing-oriented process which resists the determinism of representation in both its neutralizing and stereotyping forms. Embracing the work of just physically doing the material steers away from the tropes which I find imprisoning, while leaving room for the specificity of each of our bodies to inform the emphases and emergent content of the work. As new information becomes available, potential emerges to rework our relationship to Other bodies and the information embedded in their physicality.

**Cultivating Diffuse Selves: Circulating Embodied Information**

As a living dynamic (processing) system I am in a(n all the time) state of openness to new information by virtue of a constant, inescapable and necessary engagement with the world and with others. The same responsive body which operates in daily pedestrian contexts, which moves in highly specific and individualized yet socially contextualized and limited trajectories through the world is the same body responding and processing information in a contemporary
dance situation. However I also understand that this quality, while operating in pedestrian contexts, is deliberately cultivated and brought into my awareness through the specific physical, perceptual and compositional training I have been involved with. The deliberate recruitment of, and attending to, embodied perception is distinct from its all the time operation as the background of daily interactions.

If I am all the time synthesizing information from my surroundings, and if this then becomes the basis of how I understand and approach reality then surely I want to know the details! The practice of technical and compositional training necessitates an expanded capacity for reflection and identification of what it is I do—what the character of my movement is and what facets constitute my physical attitude towards gravity, space, and other bodies. However, the entirety of those facets, in their intimate details, is not necessarily known to me at either the removed “higher” cognitive levels or the embodied or experiential levels at the time of doing. As such, I am motivated to know these facets more deeply. I am interested in their details, and in bringing them to a greater level of realization allowing for a more fully three dimensional and independent expression. By “expression”, I mean achieving visibility and coherence. In my dancing some facets may be embedded inside of or occluded by dominant, gross, or global features. My attention and experience may also be dominated by these more global facets. However I may attain glimpses of nascent, more locally specific facets in the process of repeated doing. This forms the basis of my fixation on the mobility at the top of my legs, the resistance across my collar bones and into tissues spanning my shoulder joints, the recurring sensation through the front of my throat and breastbone as I approach the floor. More than any action, which may be treated as a two-dimensional image, there is the life of the action—how it is experienced, and what information is called upon or made known via the practice of doing. I am
interested in investigating this ongoing life and its potential for deliberately (re)informing how I “do” reality.

In my creative process I place my emphasis less on imaginative associations and more towards what information is mobilized and how that impacts the character of the (performance/rehearsal) space. I want to turn the volume way down on “imagination” as an abstract, associative activity and instead point to the activity of embodied consideration. To physically consider movement is firstly to meet its embedded information, allowing intimate contact with one’s own specifically formed and located body-system. To engage this movement, to physically investigate and invest oneself in its details, literally moves its embedded information in cycles through one’s own body system. In this process, because each system/self is not only specifically formed but specifically tuned as a result, certain facets come forward in particular bodies. This variance is evidence of points of resonance between differently formed body-selves. This supports intersectionality as a phenomenological experience rather than merely a theoretical lens. Through this lens I might be able to organize identities as abstract points, plotted on a grid of possible identities and relationships to power. However, in doing so, I exclude the lived experience and navigation of those relationships at the intimate processing site of individual body-selves. What surprising points of resonance occur between bodies located at far flung points on the grid of possible identities? What points of connection or empathy can be deliberately cultivated at an embodied level, and how does that counter the poverty of abstract universalist (or narrow multiculturalist) approaches to human difference? I am not arguing for

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7 I am drawn to what I perceive as the intimate scale of intersectionalist theory and its potential to foreground real, individual bodies. However, there is still a gap between identifying how bodies are organized in relationship to power and the felt experience of being such a body. In my dancemaking practice I am after this felt sense, which is in relationship to but distinct from a psychological or analytical awareness.
mythic or mystical connections, but rather am interested in navigating salient differences. I am also fundamentally interested in fostering these resonances deliberately.

Embodied consideration applies the skill of how to inhabit movement—how to inquire after its embedded point of view—without putting one’s own embodied knowledge aside. Embodied consideration brings specific sets of lived information into contact. In my most recent process this required an increased level of honesty on my part; and is the reason it was so critically important to offer movement out of my body and to keep my body directly involved in the process for as long as possible. While I do not believe in arbitrary or cultureless movement, I do acknowledge that there can be less of a personal presence in the movement one produces. I was, and continue to be, deeply driven to know the contents of my own body-system and the particular syntheses it carries. Because of this it fell to me to carve out material that actually had my “presence” in it. What I ended up with was not an arbitrary sequence of gestures but a compressed excerpt of a broader ongoing physical synthesis. The radical intimacy of this embodied consideration forms the basis for dialogue, bringing forward an intersection and elaboration of worldview. Synthesis is a possibility. However, more exciting perhaps is the capacity of bodies to hold both convergences and divergences simultaneously. Self and Other can coexist within supposedly discrete bodies without necessarily or seamlessly fusing, and without arriving at the lowest common denominator. Rather, allowing coexistence with constant consideration and engagement facilitates a transformation of the relationship between Self and Other. Bringing one’s own embodied information, the synthesis which forms one’s orientation to the world, to a sensitive engagement with others/Others invites surprising points of resonance which mutate on contact. Self and Other coexist in the same place in these moments, resonating together and mutually informing their individual stances towards the world, including their prior
stance in relation to each other. The transformational potential for reworking relationships across supposedly inscrutable difference and symbolic hierarchy is evident here. I want to emphasize that this is physical work, which takes advantage of the focused situation of dance practice and performance.

If choreography is an informational tool, what are dance phrases? Phrases are repeatable instantiations of an ongoing dynamic synthesis. Because of their repeatability they provide an opportunity to both visually and experientially (re)consider their embedded information. As instantiations of individual trajectories and a host of previous interactions, phrases contain our past bodies. However, because they provide an opportunity for continued experiential investigation, phrases also contain (the beginnings of) our future bodies. The information embedded in this material is not all accessible or perceivable at a first pass. Previous information does not necessarily fall away. Rather, different facets become perceivable, some receding and others increasing in emphasis, upon further repetitions. Repeating in order to investigate, in order to know more about the material, holds out the possibility of continual transformation. Not only does the initial material itself continue to evolve, as well as accumulate, the experience of doing the material also continues to evolve. Applying our capacity for embodied reflexive consideration puts us in dialogue with our past bodies—with the synthesis of our trajectories and interactions thus far. Through the process of doing, through repetition and elaboration, we reach towards and deliberately evolve our future body-selves. Deliberately engaging my individual capacity for embodied consideration evolves material to a degree. However, interaction is fundamental to the illumination and productive transformation of the material. I am not primarily interested in movement innovation, but in knowing the content of my own contextually enmeshed system in relation to others.
How does one accurately depict (copy) a system in fluxus? I am already a syncretic body of information. My own movement material, although known to me, is not completely known and also constantly in process. This creates a sense of dynamism as well as a sense of my own embodied knowledge as elusive and shifting. Rather than label this as an unstable or unreliable system, because of its constant adaptation to new (as well as prior) information. I have chosen to know my system through continual interaction with others. This is my way of accepting that the nature of my and other body-systems is dynamic, and that instability may just be a productive and generative state rather than a state of loss—a constant grieving for an imagined but unrealizable condition of concreteness. As such, I do not have an interest in my cast duplicating my movement exactly. While I have a sense of what I physically value, source, or emphasize in my own movement, I am interested in how or whether this comes across to others who engage with it. The application of other body-selves to my work reveals more critical information about the nature of that work. Its most salient qualities are highlighted differently in contact with the trajectories, histories and otherwise embedded information in other body selves. Each dancer may bring forward the same core facets, but highlight different nuanced information. This provides a critical level of elaboration.

Although primed by engagement with my specific movement to locate themselves in a particular “world”, each dancer also brings a specific world of information to that engagement. The information embedded in my body travels through their individual systems, contacting their own embodied syntheses up to that point. As such my information itself is not so much irrevocably changed as refracted through so many prisms. More information is brought forward both qualitatively, and quantitatively in the generation of related movement material. The engagement of o/Others brings forward more information about myself, about my own embodied
perception of and navigation in the world. Processing information through multiple systems allows the many compressed facets to be somewhat unraveled. These compressed embedded details are also revealed as so many points of entry for other bodies, with their specific histories, trajectories and the information they carry. These factors inform not only what their individual systems will hold on to, but how they apply themselves to the material. Each body-self perceives, holds and gravitates to particular facets of the material based on resonances within their own system. These reactions are points of entry into further transformational research. Variance is a potential already embedded in my own embodied information. Insisting on uniformity in my position would be a missed opportunity to elaborate the information. Variance in the revealed information is not the same as the core propositions being discarded. Rather, variance is evidence of the richness of the information—its embedded opportunities for multiple points of connection. Variance makes evident the subtleties I do not yet perceive.

It is important that the elaboration of my specific material is not narrowly about me. It is reflective of my particular location in the social and cultural worlds I inhabit, and the combination of freedoms and strictures accorded to my body and bodies like mine. However, this is not equivalent to “speaking for” all others in a comparable social location, more akin to “speaking with”. This experience comes forward, inevitably, in the way I physically inhabit these contexts and is therefore an inextricable part of my embodied synthesis which comes forward in my art making. As this information is refracted through the body-systems of my cast, of my peers, it brings our divergent experiences into physical dialogue. Importantly, I am not merely reflected. Rather, there is the potential of embodied consideration to not only reveal different facets of my embodied information but to effect change in all our participating body-systems through a multidirectional movement of information. The practice is fundamentally relational. In
pedestrian life, and via my training history, I already carry a relationship to the position of white femininity, as well as close personal relationships with collaborators and colleagues. The invitation of embodied consideration is to work through the complications of these relationships, which are structured hierarchically according to still pertinent ideological systems and broader trends in the politicized movement of peoples across real and imagined borders. *I am an open system. I am an already contaminated system. My movement is contaminated with the presence of Others, and is the result of my “alien” presence in spaces that “should” not belong to me and where bodies like mine should not inhabit. What is productive about this state? How do I, we, process these contradictions?* Embodied consideration provides a tool for acknowledging an already contaminated self, one that cannot but hold the presence and impact of its Others. It then deliberately cultivates this presence and its impact through noticing where it lives in the body, how it activates or recruits the body-system to move, and what the sensations of moving in this way actually are. This deliberate contact, and deliberate movement of information through our individual systems (and the broader body-system of the group) is a technique for noticing and cultivating change based on the acknowledgement that we already contain our Others within us.

My own movement is a specific point of focusing the research and allows the illumination of the broader relationships I bring, thus giving more information back to me about their impact on my person as well as valuing the impact of my presence in the microcosmic community of this cast.

Back to phrases: I created what would become the Ur-material\(^8\) and brought that to our first rehearsal. This compressed excerpt of my ongoing embodied work provided the point of entry for our group process. We took perhaps the first full hour, or bulk thereof, to learn that

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\(^8\) I use the prefix “Ur” as an encapsulation of my attitude towards movement phrases as compressed excerpts of ongoing embodied syntheses. The Ur-material, literally the first phrase of this process, contained the preliminary attributes of the final work as well as the underlying logic or grammar for how the accumulated segments eventually related to one another in sequence.
material. Introducing material, extending an invitation to investigate, harvesting and collecting new material all together set in motion an immediate circuit of information. This circuit effectively brought all our bodies—our embedded and embodied realities—into conversation. This first circuit of information laid the basic structure for the remainder of our process together: a constant cycling, harvesting, splintering, and recycling of information through our individual body systems and through the (emergent) collective or organismal system of the entire cast. The process of elaboration was not simply a process of arbitrary addition, or of making movement similar to the existing material at an external global level. The routes forward lay in the combination of the embedded seeds as illuminated by each cast member. In evolving the material, each dancer not only magnified already existing information but created a particular synthesis based on her own prior embodied information. In this way, the process of elaboration was fundamentally inclusive of other body-selves even as it remained specifically tied to the initial propositions.

During the first rehearsal I also offered that we all improvise together, based on that same material. This is a variant of a score I worked on with students in Kingston, sometimes using the metaphor of a well worn path (known material) and smaller connecting trails, offshoots of that path. As a score, students repeat known material as much as they like within a specified time frame, gradually honing in on specific smaller sections or even specific gestures. Repeating these smaller sections, students then explore movement which branches off from those gestures. When that exploration finds a close, or when students feel lost, they are welcome to return to the main path for reorientation. In a similar vein, meeting new material and then delving into an improvised exploration provided an entry point into the world of the initial material for saudade. The improvisation score, in both instances, provides a way to know the material deeper through
delving into specific segments and their facets. In this way we established the groundwork of both a method and an attitude for engaging with the material beyond mere execution or duplication. I actively recruited the dancers’ abilities to expand and illuminate the material. In addition to the practical agenda of expanding the material towards something that might be considered a complete dance, this process is in keeping with my interest in expansion as a continued revelation of integral qualities and embodied knowledge.

As we continued to work, it became evident that we were dealing with a layered system of information. There is the intrapersonal level, the interpersonal, and the transpersonal⁹ level. Each represents a particular scale of information processing. However each level is intimately related to the others, and information circulates continually between them. As mentioned earlier, it is my belief and observation that the use of embodied information is a daily mundane occurrence. However, dance as I understand it is a special situation in which this movement of information can be not only observed but deliberately cultivated. The structure of our rehearsal process for *saudade* observed the active movement of information at and between all of these levels. At the intrapersonal level, attention centers on the reflexive experience of one’s body moving. This is not to be equated with mere absorption in sensation, but rather a focused engagement with one’s dynamic processing system. Investigating material at the intrapersonal level in my own body-self, I brought my initial findings and propositions to my cast and we engaged with this information at an interpersonal level. I think of teaching and learning material as the interpersonal level. Despite the number of persons engaged there is a clear element of addressing information directly towards others. Although each person necessarily also applies

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⁹ I use the term “transpersonal” to indicate the movement of information in the space between bodies. At the transpersonal level, one does not demonstrate the direct address of one subject to another. Rather, each subject is permeable to the immediate shared context in which information is mobilized.
their attention to their own body, the directedness of their attention is primarily focused on active information exchange with others. This mode is what we might typically consider “interaction.” However I am interested in the interaction of systems in a more diffuse sense as they perceive information from, and transmit information into, our shared surroundings. At first glance, interaction does not figure largely in the overall composition. But because I am interested in the movement of the whole that is not to say that I’m uninterested in who the dancers are to each other. Relationship signifiers such as touch and direct eye contact are largely absent from the final work. However, the humanity and lived history of each of my cast members form the ground from which we work. Their three dimensionality and embodied perspectives are nothing short of necessary for kind of elaboration I am interested in. Rather than depict relationships on stage, I see interaction operating in this work as the movement of information through smaller circuits as well as the overarching group system. Each dancer navigates the embodied information of the others at all three levels. Directly relating as individual agents is less prioritized in favor of cultivating a state in which each body is open to and impacted by information mobilized by the others. The interpersonal level then differs from the transpersonal level, at which attention is not directed pointedly towards other dancers but there is a clear movement of information among bodies. As such, at the transpersonal level there can emerge an organismal sense of the group and their work as a whole. Despite this distinction, the transpersonal level is a crucial zone of interaction between intelligent and responsive body-systems, selves.

The three levels of information are open and mutually informing. Information at the transpersonal level is processed at the intrapersonal level, and visa versa in constant feedback. The interpersonal level necessarily calls upon the intrapersonal level as the constant point of
reference for communication. Work at the lower two levels is amplified at the third. In addition to these three levels there are many overlapping circuits of information, which conduct embodied information throughout the whole of the group organism. Information transforms as it is conducted through different circuits. “Circuit” signifies 1) an exchange of information between specific dancers, and 2) formal structures organizing and re-conducting information throughout the actual composition. Smaller circuits (solos, duets and trios) focus and clarify specific emergent propositions, or emphases. These emphases may then be thrown into relief against the background of the whole ensemble composition, or deliberately re-conducted through the collective body-system of the entire cast. We created many such circuits, all of which developed a particular identity. However these continued to be intimately related to the Ur-material. Instead of simply imposing a standard and putting new material on the chopping block if it didn’t immediately match, the relationship between the beginning propositions and the evolving material was more complex. Through the development of smaller circuits, closely noticing and cultivating specific emphases, deliberately bringing smaller circuits together and sometimes re-conducting focused information through the entire global system we facilitated a constant movement of embodied information. This constant movement allowed for the smaller circuits to continually re-inform the character of the whole. However, the distinctness of the individual focused emphases remained. In this way, the overall composition contained a multiplicity of evolving facets. Instead of arriving at a single common denominator, the composition cohered around its internal structure of conduits. Cohesion did not require homogenization or total agreement among its various components but rather required that its components continue to speak to one another.
From this first improvisation session I requested that the dancers “harvest” several movement-gestures. We then linked these together in a group accumulation. This accumulation then fell under the primary ownership of one dancer. From the beginning she was processing movement created by the entire cast. She continued to expand this material in context of our group improvisational structures. We essentially repeated the first global circuit of information with which we began the process, with this dancer eventually teaching the accumulation back to the group after evolving it as her own personal synthesis. In that process, more information about her approach, her points of resonance, was refracted through the group system. I was able to notice her particularities in relation to the initial material, including the possible direction(s) for developing the whole based on her input. I only requested that one other dancer retain the accumulation material in her body. These two dancers continued to work together, forming a smaller circuit of information where that specific phrase continued to develop.

However, the qualities of that phrase continued to percolate through and inform the collective body-system because of the others’ focused engagement. Those qualities kept evolving through each dancer’s continued embodied (intrapersonal) processing. Although no longer involved with that specific phrase, or generating movement overtly connected with its dominant qualities, dancers held traces of that engagement in their bodies.

Having a focused engagement with specific material, even for one rehearsal, afforded resonances with existing and later material. The involvement re-informed each dancer’s barometer for identifying significant qualities and movement events. In this way, our material consistently revealed the evolving nature and underlying logic of the work as it simultaneously cohered around that very logic. The revelation of the character and logic of the composition alongside the gradual cohering of specific qualities and sequences suggests a relationship of
coevo
tion. At the same time, this material continued to develop in its specific, smaller circuit, maintaining a focused presence in the work as other qualities and set movement sequences also found their identity. This continued presence in the system, as an independent element in its own circuit and as a more subtle remembrance or trace in the collective body-system, informed the dancers’ engagement with all subsequent material. Maintaining such specificity and also cultivating these traces allowed the emergence of complex relationships and resonances among the group. These resonances at the transpersonal level would guide the emerging logic of the composition and my formal choices, as well as lend themselves to further organic outgrowths of material. As we continued to create material, each dancer at some point inhabited the role of teaching their evolving material to the whole ensemble or to smaller sub-groups. However, there continued to be spaciousness around each dancer’s individual investigation. In this way, information from specific phrases stayed mobile as it was re-conducted through the group system, never arriving at a static point of realization but continuing to evolve at a subtle level. Further, information from each small circuit stayed potent at the transpersonal level because of the simultaneous activation of distinct material in close spatial proximity.

I would ask dancers to work in specific duets, trios or solos in order to further their distinct material, but we would work in our smaller circuits while sharing the same room. I would ask them to show their solo material in close proximity to one or two others. Dancers would create new material in the presence of other dancers rehearsing known material. In the course of a single rehearsal, dancers might shuffle between learning, teaching, and developing material. In this way dancers would circulate among several smaller circuits, each with their emergent identities at different stages of realization. We would shuffle either before or after coming together as a whole group to make contact with the latest instantiation of the Ur-material,
which we all continued to hold in common. While focused on their distinct research emphases, dancers were kinesthetically and proprioceptively subject to the information mobilized in the room at the transpersonal level. Reciprocally, each circuit also mobilized embedded information and impacted the shared space. In our cultivated state of attention, sensitivity and openness to embodied information, we furthered the distinct research of particular (sub)qualities, emphases, emerging movement sequences, and our manner of coordinating with one another in close proximity and across the room. Simultaneously, this state of shared overlapping activity contributed to a common world of information, the accumulation of which continued to recalibrate our individual barometer for what belonged in the developing identity of that world.

Since dancers were all involved in multiple circuits, traces from the distinct research emphases were carried as threads, as resonances, in their bodies from circuit to circuit. The distinctness and focus of each circuit remained but was informed by the movement of information and the resultant evolving sensitivities in each body-system involved. This resistance to dissolution into a lowest common denominator, to a flattening or erasure of variance, produced a collective system which not only tolerated but nurtured multiplicity and seemingly oppositional elements. Within these seemingly abstract or “pure” movement principles we continued to investigate our personal resonances without removing to a place of association or narrative autobiography. We, I, remained adamantly invested in the emergence of resonance from the ground of the embodied work.

Repetition figured significantly as an investigative tool early on in the process. Repetition, rather than a rote or drill oriented approach, became a tool through which to attend to particular moments and qualities in these beginning core phrases. The condensed information embedded in and underneath the larger global movement could be revisited and slowly brought
into focus. Repetition uncovered overlooked details, which we developed into independent yet intimately related movement ideas. In general, when I begin creating material I experience the sensation of something more, something missing, or something skimmed over. This sensation often persists through much of the creative process for a particular piece, even after the phrase material has seemingly solidified in its gross or global shape. Returning to the same movement over and over again does not equate to executing it in the same manner. Each repetition is an opportunity to attend to the same global event differently, in finer detail, and with varying emphasis. Not only can I place my attention on different sub-events in the movement, or on sensations occurring in different locations in my body, but I can alter the how of my movement in order to magnify, elaborate and interrogate its specifics. My valuing of big, kinetic, spatially assertive, momentum-driven movement lends itself to a consistent speed and a consistent rate of surrender to gravity. Interrupting these habitual patterns allows the emphasis to shift away from the drive alone, and produces points of entry for further elaboration. In my thesis process, deliberately inviting the cast to resist this drive brought the experiential impact of the more gross movement gradually to the fore of our collective attention. Information was not only in the details of the material but also in the sensation of the overall experience and effort of doing. Selective resistance to this drive not only revealed further content, but became content in our experience of (sense) making and performance.

We (collectively) applied our (individual) capacities for embodied perception, processing and synthesis—generating movement which elucidated particular facets of the core material; I would alternate between engaging with the prompt as part of the group and observing. In these sessions we cultivated a shared state of engagement, as well as a frame in which to identify what of the emerging material was resonant with the nature and values of the Ur-material. There was
an all the time embodied dialogue at the individual level of engagement, with each dancer bringing a different facet of information forward through the *interaction with their particular system*. The individual syntheses were thrown into relief by the ongoing collective engagement. Each dancer immersed in an individual process of active information seeking, contributed to an environment of focused attention. Further, these individual instances of embodied information processes contributed to the mobilization of information in the rehearsal space. The features of the Ur-material and subsequent variants, outgrowths and mutations, were perceivable as belonging to one another against this broader environmental movement of information.

The collective application of individual embodied intelligence contributes to an emergent organismal situation. “Organismal” is my attempt to describe a quality of relating that recruits and embraces individual personhood but does not demonstrate or perform it. Organismal interaction is a condition of mutual involvement and complex coordination, based in an openness to the information mobilized in shared space. It is a condition of shared, focused engagement and responsive activity that does not fixate on the other dancers as discrete individual subjects. The number of dancers is less relevant than the tenor of their engagement. As opposed to a more conversational and interpersonal modality, organismal interaction relies on the cycling of information primarily between the intra personal and transpersonal levels. Although the “language” may be movement, interpersonal interaction as I characterize it here mirrors verbal exchange in how subjects regard one another. Since dancers’ attention is filtered through a conversational frame in which their actual embodiment usually forms the background, interpersonal interaction does not recruit embodied information with the same emphasis. Further, the verbal-conversational mode allows the dancers’ interactions to be coded within recognizable pedestrian or narrative frames. This distracts both dancers and audience-participants from
engaging a more diffuse sense of body; again obscuring the information from other body-selves that might otherwise be potent at the kinesthetic and spatial levels.\textsuperscript{10}

Though engaged fully at the intrapersonal level, dancers are not lost in self-absorption. Engagement at this level is an active project, seeking points of convergence or potential dialogue between body-selves which may be far flung on the grid of possible identities. While the intrapersonal relies on felt experience, it is not merely swimming in indulgent sensation. At this level we are intimately, and radically, engaged with interaction. We cultivate an awareness of, and a capacity to track and dig into mo(ve)ments of resonance. Importantly, such mo(ve)ments do not appear as if by magic, but are the work of embodied consideration and the deliberate contact between the multiple knowledges present in any one body-system. Further there is a cultivated awareness of and openness to the shared rehearsal context. As dancers deliberately engage their own embodied intelligence, they create a situation in which multiple bodies are in a state of openness to and dialogue with a specific world of information. As each participant in the research situation considers, processes, and synthesizes new information, their work is not only visible but palpable in the space. This state of engagement, as well as the movement and transformation of information elicited by this state, is perceivable at an embodied level by the other engaged and open body systems present. Each body system individually mobilizes information which is visually, kinesthetically and proprioceptively perceivable by others who are similarly engaged. The immersal in the work creates a state in which each body system, each body self, is not only generating information but impacted by the collective mobilization of

\textsuperscript{10} I am interested in the distinctions between kinesthesia and proprioception, and between proprioception and what I might term spatial impact. With my current understanding I associate kinesthesia with the assumed interior experience of another body, and proprioception with both the sense of form of my own body and the felt perception of distance and proximity. Both are distinct from spatial impact, which expresses changes in the shared space as the form and force of a dancer’s action meets the membrane of the room. Her action not only changes the negative space around her form, but gives a density, texture, and directional movement to the space. My response is not cued by imagining her internal movement, but by the impact of her action as an external, tactile influence in the space.
information. The simultaneous application of each individual body-system to specific movement explorations and inquiry also produced a certain level of cohesion, resonance or agreement. Common points of engagement did not exclude or minimize the specificity each dancer brought to the process of elaboration. There is a qualitative difference in the character of a room when the points of engagement are either arbitrary or radically individuated. The shared “what” provided by the Ur-material and my subsequent propositions impacted the space, priming us for (and repeatedly re-grounding us in) a common research process. While the precise outcome remained indeterminate, and fundamentally contingent upon the particular body-systems/body-selves present, the common grounding and cultivated state enabled a consistency and a specificity in the resultant pool of information.

Each body, with its specific trajectories, is primed to perceive particular information and emphases. *I mean information pick-up in phrase material, and I also mean the kinds of information one is able to perceive from one’s environment broadly speaking.* As dancers, however, we have the perceptual toolkit to deliberately apply our individual embodied processing systems to a great diversity of physical-kinesthetic information. The desirable result in my estimation is not to minimize variance, or to require that each dancer value the same physical information with the same degree of emphasis. Rather, it is to use a shared toolkit of frameworks and practices to bring diverse, specific body-selves into common purpose—into deliberate and conscious-reflective application towards specific data. The underlying purpose is the illumination of this data through a process of circulation and refraction. Each dancer enriches the original proposition because of the particular resonances and emphases the information finds within her body-system based on her history as an intelligent, sensitive agent in the word. The result is not only the elaboration but the *transformation* of the initial information through
continued interaction with other systems, and the deliberate evolution of the dancer’s relationship to that information.

Again, interaction figures as an engagement with mutually informing activity. However, this does not necessarily mirror typical pedestrian or conversational interactions. For my purposes, interaction is primarily about the circulation and refraction of information. Occasionally, this process entails a larger element of witnessing and enabling. In one instance, I invited one cast member to act as my witness while I continued generating material. This would form one of the three core phrases that represent my direct embodied involvement in *saudade*. It would also form the basis of three focused circuits of information. The collective refraction of the Ur-material during our first group rehearsals cycled through my system, forming a supporting background layer of information. As I moved with the recent memory of this group reflection, I requested that this dancer not only observe but “catch” what I produced. This mini-circuit allowed me to almost simultaneously create, observe and edit. That is to say I had immediate feedback from not only my system but from another dancer already well-tuned to logic and values of the pre-existing material. The immediate refraction and clarification of the new material produced a phrase—a further synthesis—which shifted the character of the initial material.

The circuits of information on which *saudade* was built were multi-directional. This was critical in terms of acknowledging, harvesting and continuing to illuminate the accruing information of our group process. Specific syntheses from each of our body-systems could continually come forward and re-inform our shared work. As I observed the emerging material and qualities, I began to select and organize material to create more circuits of information to allow the group system to continually re-inform itself. I decided that I would not distribute or
assign material evenly throughout the cast. This meant that, while we all had movement material in common and shared points of engagement, individual dancers became responsible for processing specific brackets of information. There were no arbitrary choices. Rather, I “assigned” material or tasks to specific dancers based on my observation of their emergent syntheses—the investigations they were conducting and *the resultant emphases they brought forward*. I identified these emphases, selected specific movement from the accumulating repertory, and requested that individual dancers focus their embodied processing on that specific movement information. This helped to clarify when a dancer was “on to something”—when they had landed on information that was resonant for them, and which illuminated our shared research. My implicit request was that each dancer further their findings, allowing the diversity of viewpoints to come more into independent identity. However, while I was interested in distinctness I did not take steps to keep the emergent information in discrete boundaries. I am interested in the interaction of dynamic open systems, and in the *transformation* of information possible in through *interaction*. For this reason I created deliberate opportunities for specific emphases to circulate back from individual dancers back through the group system. In some cases, I asked dancers to teach the entire group their accumulated material. In others I would limit the circuit to two or three dancers. This established a scenario in which there were multiple loops of information operating simultaneously, each devoted to specific research emphases but open to and in a mutually informing relationship with the overarching system. (Re)circulating information in this way continually re-engaged each dancer’s embodied investigation, and allowed the information accrued to stay mobile instead of arriving at a point of feeling completely known. In this way information was continually transformed and elaborated even as global movement sequences and formal structures became increasingly set.
Evolving Future States

A powerful possibility in dance is ignored when the work is reduced to a mere telling function as opposed to a doing function. Representation, as a mode of telling, suggests a foregone conclusion and understanding of reality rather than 1) an openness to the possibility that reality be otherwise and 2) a that this possibility be furthered (but not concluded) through the process of dancing. “Dance” increasingly constitutes a lens or framework through which materials or events may be received and analyzed. This openness, though exciting, is unwieldy and unfulfilling for my purposes. Instead I offer the following: dance is a situation in which the facets and tendencies of the human body-subject may be brought into focus. Some of these facets include: change, instability, and a constant dialogic engagement between the symbolic and the material. It is important to say again that “the human body” is less an objective anatomical reality and more of a specific point in a broader situational context. This is the intersection of body-subject-relationship(s). In this light, dance provides a situation to observe more than technical mastery over a physical system (body). Because dance inevitably calls upon this broader contextual embeddedness in the process of sense-making, it provides a problem solving opportunity. However, I observe that some of the maneuverability that dance in this definition affords us is lost when the representing or telling function takes over. Dance provides ample opportunity for activating information in our own bodies and the bodies of others, and for observing the effect. Dance therefore quite literally mobilizes meaning as it mobilizes mass. Rather than an additive component, meaning is embedded in bodies and bodies are enmeshed in a web of relationships which is structured always according to the distribution of power and value. Dance not only activates this web but has the potential to enact deliberate influence upon it.
Choreographic process allows routes of meaning-making and unmaking which are unavailable in other forms of knowledge production and analysis. Elements in choreography do not have to be in agreement to stand together and mutually inform one another. Choreographies do not necessarily abide by the rules of logic or organization prevalent in other mediums, but this makes them neither illogical nor disorganized. Rather, they present the opportunity to engage information differently as well as question one’s investment in specific knowledge arrangements and fundamental assumptions of the real. Tere O Connor writes:

Anytime I attempt to privilege a subject matter in my work I am shown through the process that the experience of perception in dance is defined by …multiple points of view. The possibility of moving towards a singularity of meaning resides more in the purview of language… there is no denotative potential in a choreographic endeavor. This form …disengages from the rules of language and simultaneously resituates them as reference.11

The situation of the human body-subject moving offers a particular opportunity for adjusting one’s mode of thinking. Dance works can be made to function like novels, or linear persuasive essays, but that misses the potential of dance to hold, for instance, both multiplicity and contradiction. Asking dance to function in a similar manner as other modes of presentation will also render the dance less potent in comparison. O’Connor suggests that dance which tries to duplicate a novel, for instance, will be a lesser instantiation of the novel, unable to come into the fullness of its own propositions. In other words, O’Connor points out that thinking with dance promotes elasticity in our manner of perceiving the world, revealing our attachments to prevailing structures of time, space, logical continuity and causality. These attachments may also

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be revealed as hindrances to complex problem solving, especially where strong convictions or opinions are concerned. When I express resistance to representation, I also mean to express resistance to 1) the presentation of reality as static, predetermined and unchangeable, 2) the closed-ness or finality of a given opinion or worldview. One’s problem solving capacity is grossly compromised by adherence to discreteness and finality as qualifiers for good reasoning and good art-making. The presentation of discrete categories also exerts a persuasive force which interferes with our capacity for nuanced embodied perception. When the “denotative” approach dominates the foreground of our attention, it interferes with our capacity to perceive the mobilization of information in the actual embodied work. As audience members we find ourselves in less of a position to activate, or attend to, our kinesthetic and proprioceptive capabilities as points of engagement with the work. The dominance of this approach also impacts dancers’ capacity to deliberately attend to the movement of information in their bodies. For my purposes, this limitation directly relates to a decreased capacity for engaging with others across meaningful social and cultural difference. If our view of reality supports closed categories then it is difficult to imagine, and to perceive, the presence of the s/Self in the o/Other and vice versa. Such approaches simultaneously preserve boundaries, which are often more fluid than presented, and reduce complex identities to two-dimensional monoliths. These choices feed into representational politics which maintain an unjust distribution of real human value through facilitating notions of purity and hierarchy.

O’Connor continues: “I am not trying to make the dances good or to create a choreographic pronouncement of something I know. It has become much more interesting for me to make work as a method for processing a constellation of ideas and to create a rigorous
choreographic rendering of their particular coexistence.”¹² In this way, O Connor makes a stand for dance as knowledge production. However the process is an open ended one. Not only can multiple and seemingly contradictory elements coexist and mutually (re)inform one another but the process never has to arrive at a final, stable synthesis. Rather, the process furthers or brings information continuously forward. This is not the same as equivocation, or the absence of a point of view. I offer “point of view” not as opinion, but a specific location from which to engage the world.

There is a way in which dance may be used to create conclusive or dramatic statements “about” identity or world affairs or the “nature of things” as the artist perceives them. These dances have an overt persuasive function, or distinct illustrative function. While I do not want to belittle using dance as these artists see fit, I do argue that they miss the potential of dance to think through rather than depict issues or conflicts. These works are iterative of conditions that already exist, and rely on a closed set of predetermined information. The subject matter, line of “argument,” and ultimate conclusion have already been decided and are not open (or less open) to information revealed by the actual process of embodied knowledge production. And so the manner in which dance allows us to handle information remains largely untapped—not absent perhaps, but surely occluded. Dancing and dance making as open processes offer that both the data and the conclusion(s) can be made evident through the process of doing. Importantly, the data is necessarily incomplete and the “end” moments of the dance do not offer an ultimate arrival point. My works are less focused on the description, illustration or interpretation of some pre-conceived argument or depiction of a future state. Instead I am interested in the information generated by the process of actually doing. Rather than decide what content the work should

have, I begin to generate material and come to know its embedded content through a process of repetition and observation. This is not a process of learning by rote, but one that allows the embodied information to clarify and to undergo change. New information is mobilized in the feedback loop of movement generation, noticing details, physically valuing and attending to those details, and allowing their embedded information to impact the overall emergent content as well as the working space. As opposed to mimetic approaches, the generation of meaning and the process of tracking, commenting, and synthesizing a changed point of view remain fundamentally embodied. As a knowledge making process, dance enables deliberate and productive non-resolution. Because the process of embodied doing is open to new information, thinking with dance has the potential to point continually beyond the boundaries of one’s current knowledge. The specific social locatedness of bodies prevents this process from being arbitrary, providing a particular ground from which to know and engage the world. Importantly, locatedness does not predetermine the conclusion or necessarily demand an articulation of a specific agenda. Deliberate non-resolution allows the emergent context to continually evolve, and allows seemingly contradictory or incompatible points of view to reconfigure their positioning one to the other. The doing of dance is thinking towards an as yet undisclosed location.

The specificity of the proposed material, and resultant points of engagement given our trajectories and histories of interaction, provide the bridge between this process and its relevance for how we “do” identity outside of performance situations. This work impacts how we might manage and transform relationships to o/Others at supposedly far flung points on the grid, all of which are deeply structured in relationship to power. This remains true given the adaptability and mutations of power as its meets highly specific micro-social scenarios as well as macro-social
and geographically separate contexts. The specificity and intimacy of my/our creative process for saudade stands in relation to tracking the broader movement of power on and through body-selves, and the conflicts and frictions its impact creates in community spaces. This friction, the conflicting information of belonging and not belonging for instance, is physically embedded in each body-self and manifests as accessible information to one’s embodied intelligences.

I am interested in suspending the codes for how one understands both marked and normative bodies, and in subverting the rules which govern those categorizations. I am interested in promoting relationships to salient socio-cultural differences that go beyond mere acceptance (or commodification) of “diversity”. I do not promote the erasure of history or specific locatedness within networks of power, as uncomfortable as those implications may be. Because of these commitments, and not least of all because of my own position as perpetual insider-outsider, I am resistant to simplistic distinctions between “us” and “them.” Transformational potential lies in the capacity of embodied work to hold both multiplicity and contradiction, and to mobilize information in the direction of a future state without suggesting a premature arrival point. In saudade, we do not declare or model a final resolution to our engagement with one another. We do not land on a final answer for the ways in which Self and Other can coexist in a single “discrete” body. Rather, we cultivate a practice of continually and repeatedly engaging with difference, complexity and a multiplicity of information, activating those presences at the intimate site of our bodies and the shared space between.

As a choreographer and teacher I am interested in the potential of embodied processes to resist the flattening and invisibilizing influence of normative representations, even for those who visibly conform. I am also interested in how these same practices can subvert established tropes for understanding and inhabiting marked bodies. For me, these two categories can be subsumed
under the umbrella of representation as a structure for thinking which is categorized by concreteness and finality. The stakes involved are around holding other possible futures hostage. I observe that in the context of dance performance, declaring one’s political message or vision of the future does not usually stretch beyond the limits of the present conditions. Actual progression towards that future is halted by the very declaration, since it provides a false sense of arrival or dissipates into confusion due to the absence of details. Instead, one can attend to the actual knowledge making processes of embodied intelligences as they are activated in the special situation of dance. Under these conditions, one can cultivate states in which information remains in motion. Embodied consideration literally keeps information in motion beyond the scope of one’s current imaginative powers. The process can mobilize supposedly contradictory elements without prescribing the way in which they should fit together ultimately. Representation, with its preference for concreteness and providing resolution, either buttresses a set of already existing ways of being, or offers a limited vision of possible alternatives. Movement, as a method, mobilizes information and has the potential to evolve both the content and the structures for understanding, experiencing and “doing” reality. Thinking with embodied processes questions the attachment to linear and goal oriented progression, replacing the desire for arrival with an increased tolerance for productive instability. In this way one might facilitate a disinvestment in hard and fast categories which organize humans beings as more or less worthy—and complicate the attachment to such discrete categories in the first instance. I am personally invested in this process not least of all because my own body is a site of such instability.

13 In my evolving understand of movement as a structuring influence for thought I draw heavily on Brian Massumi’s “Introduction” to Parables for the Virtual, and Randy Martin’s “Between Intervention and Utopia: Dance Politics.” Reading these works I experience a conflation between literal movement and movement as metaphor. For my purposes I am interested in the literal movement of dancing as well as the also literal movement of information within and between bodies.
Works Cited


