



Porous Inhabitant

Can Wang | 王璨

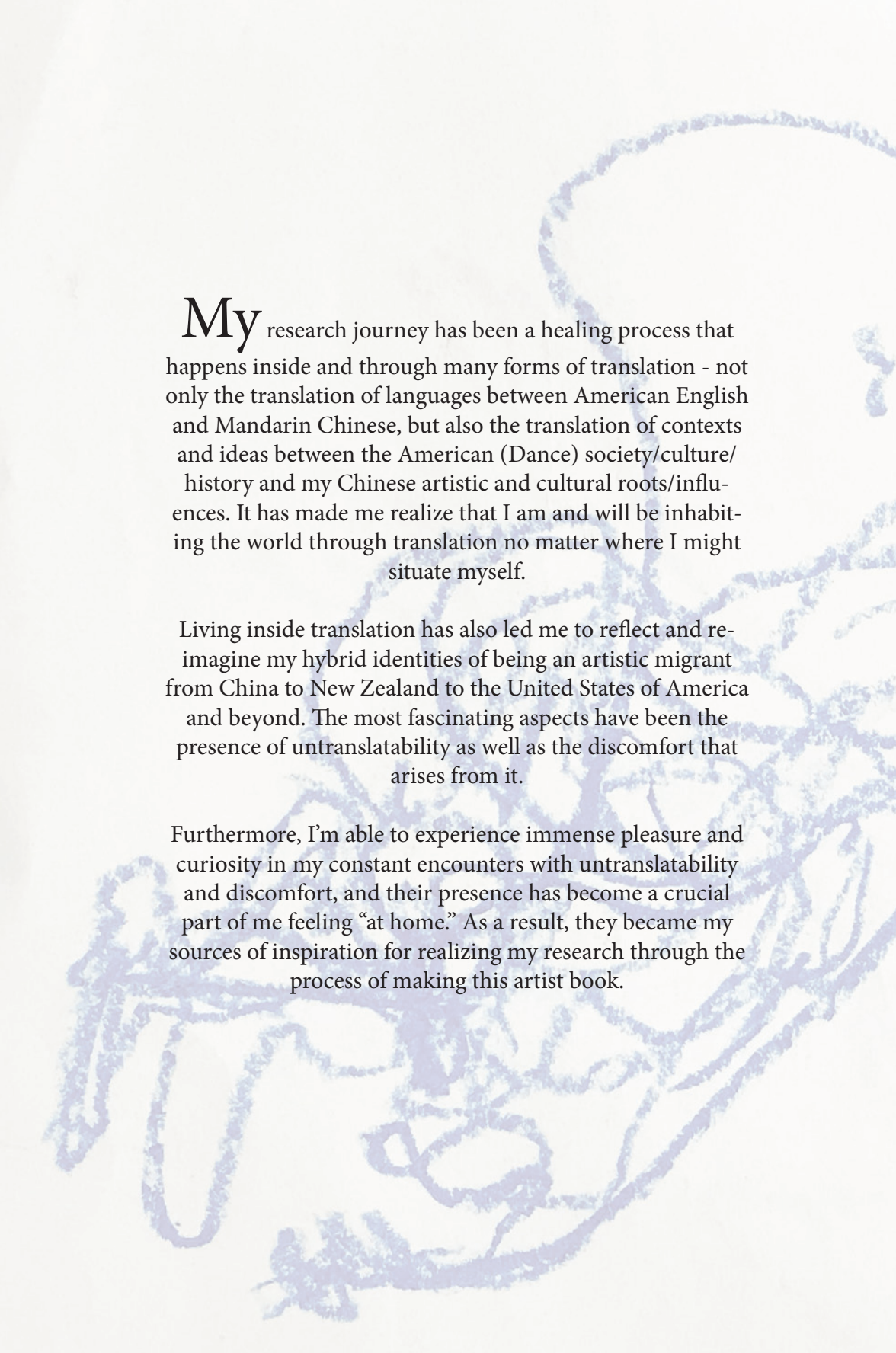
Thinking Partner:
VK Preston

Research Mentor:
He Jin Jang

With special thanks to Jesse Zaritt and Ben Pranger

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Fine Arts, Dance

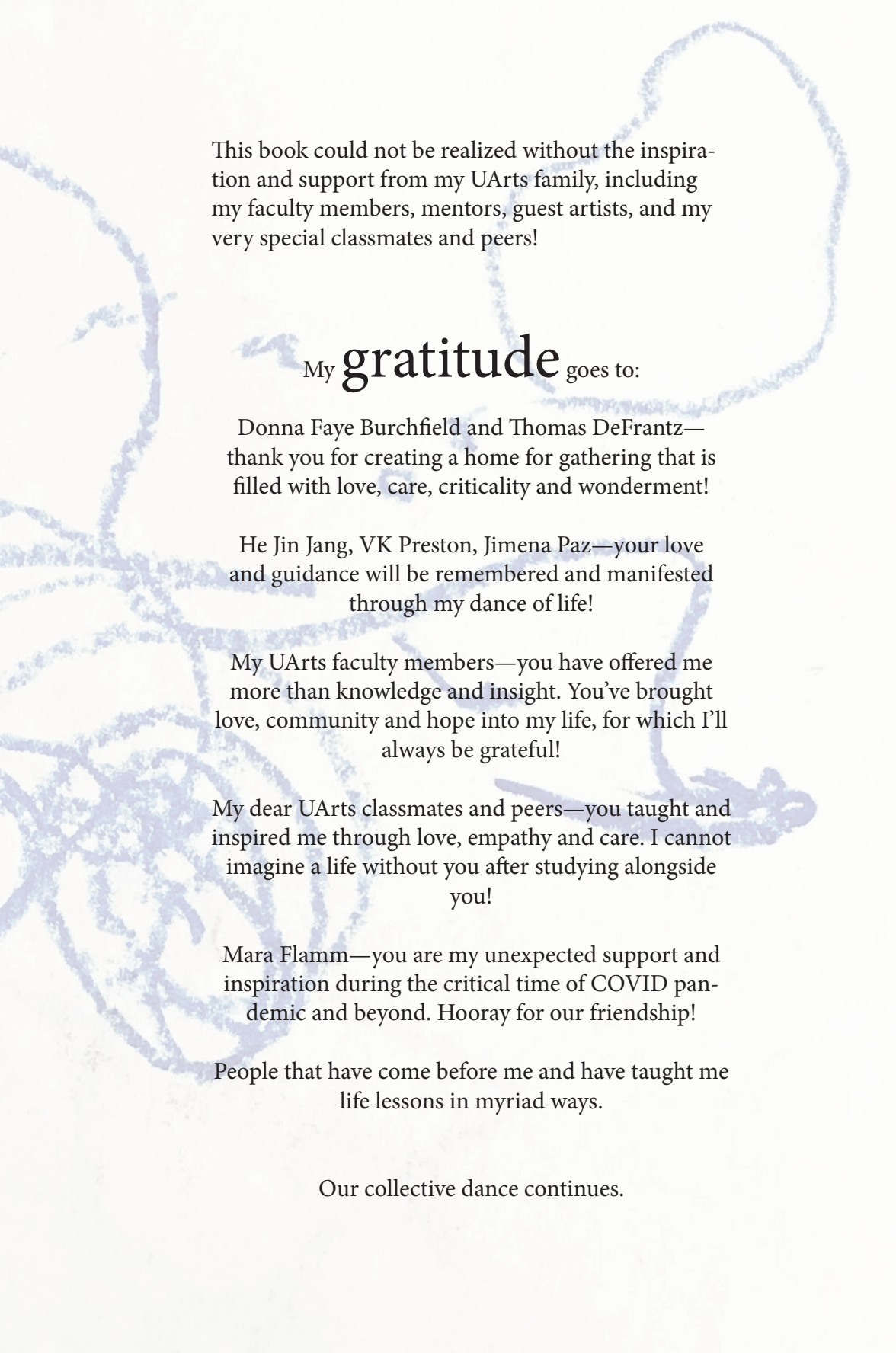
2021
The University of the Arts



My research journey has been a healing process that happens inside and through many forms of translation - not only the translation of languages between American English and Mandarin Chinese, but also the translation of contexts and ideas between the American (Dance) society/culture/history and my Chinese artistic and cultural roots/influences. It has made me realize that I am and will be inhabiting the world through translation no matter where I might situate myself.

Living inside translation has also led me to reflect and re-imagine my hybrid identities of being an artistic migrant from China to New Zealand to the United States of America and beyond. The most fascinating aspects have been the presence of untranslatability as well as the discomfort that arises from it.

Furthermore, I'm able to experience immense pleasure and curiosity in my constant encounters with untranslatability and discomfort, and their presence has become a crucial part of me feeling "at home." As a result, they became my sources of inspiration for realizing my research through the process of making this artist book.



This book could not be realized without the inspiration and support from my UArts family, including my faculty members, mentors, guest artists, and my very special classmates and peers!

My **gratitude** goes to:

Donna Faye Burchfield and Thomas DeFrantz—
thank you for creating a home for gathering that is
filled with love, care, criticality and wonderment!

He Jin Jang, VK Preston, Jimena Paz—your love
and guidance will be remembered and manifested
through my dance of life!

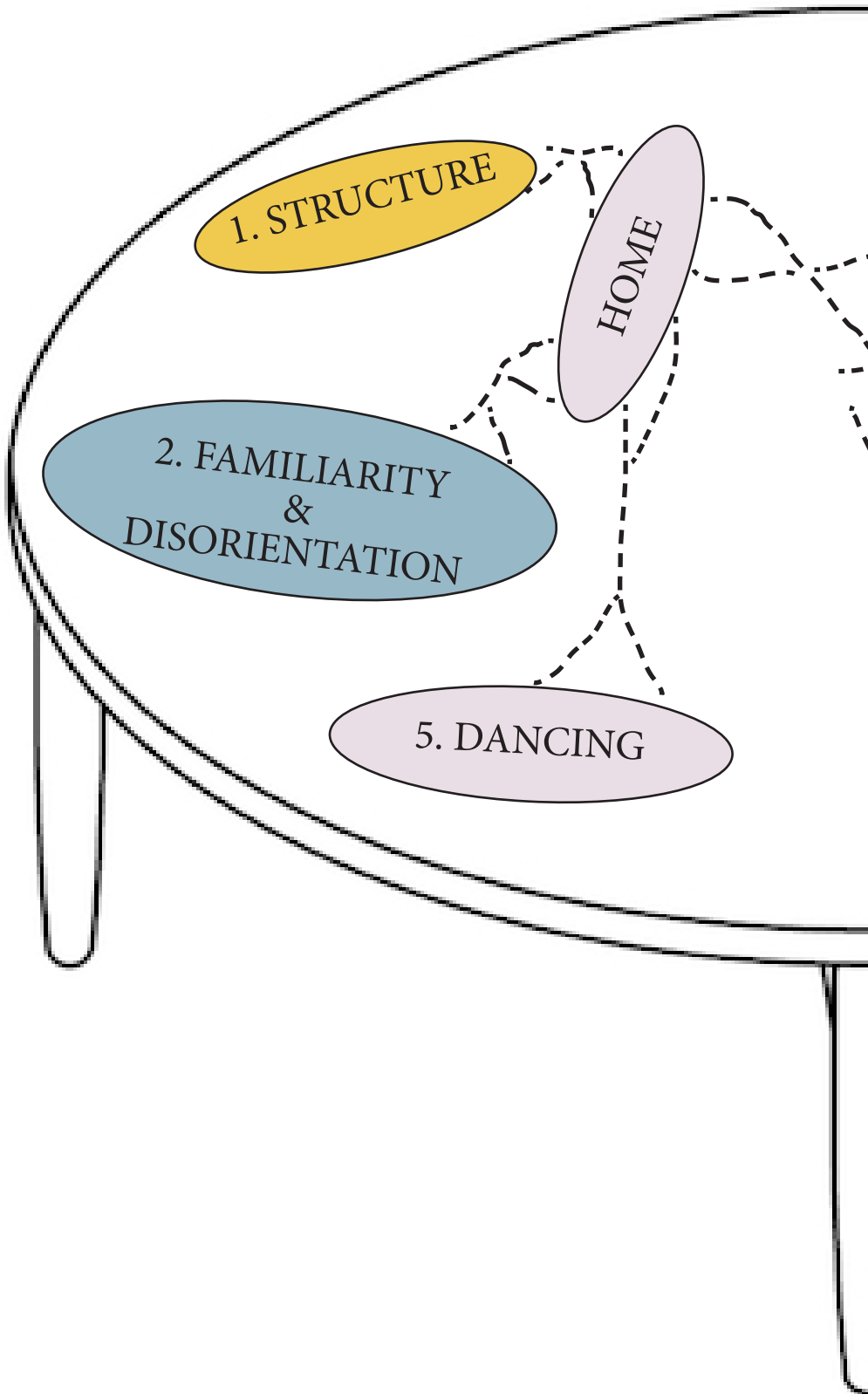
My UArts faculty members—you have offered me
more than knowledge and insight. You've brought
love, community and hope into my life, for which I'll
always be grateful!

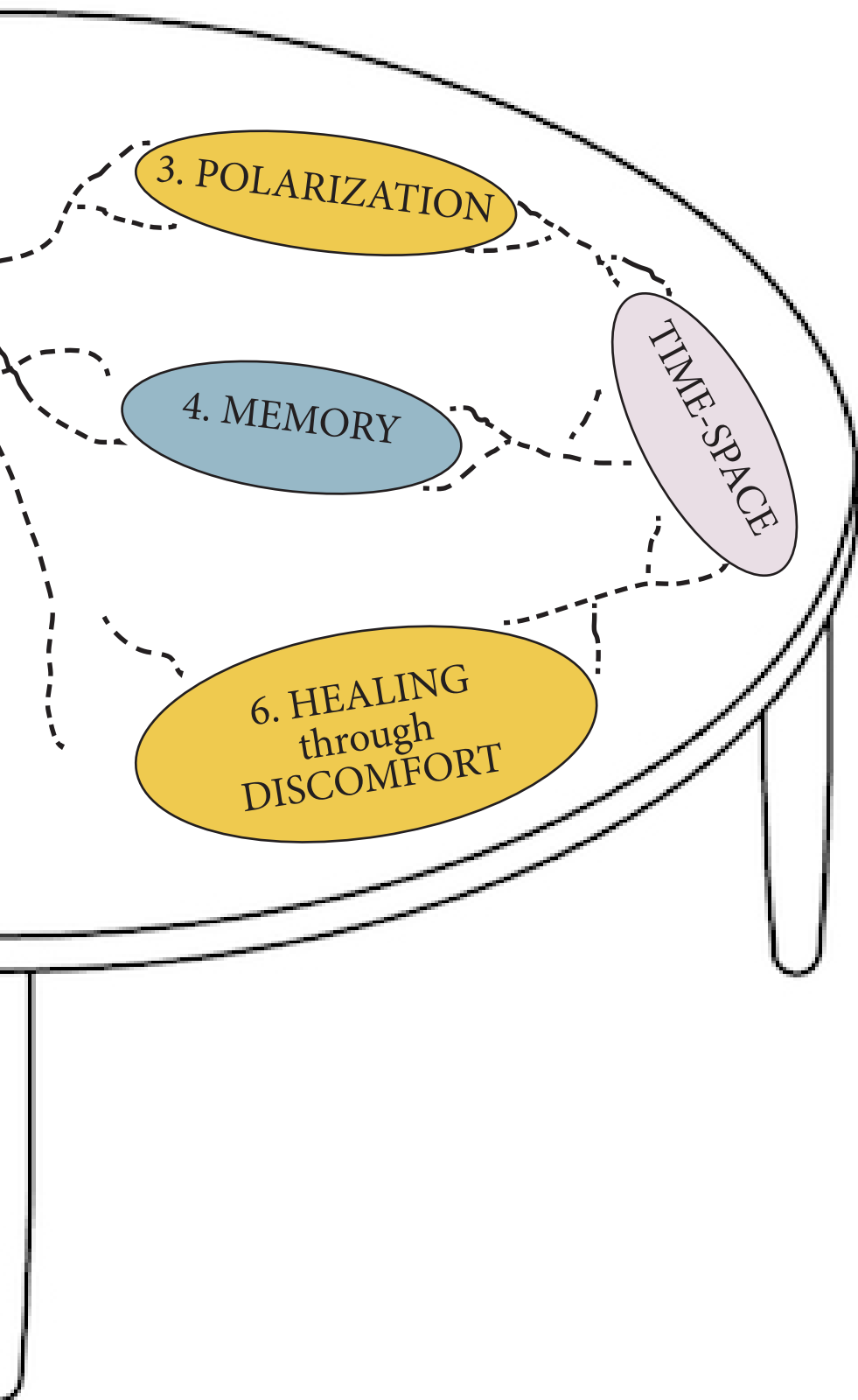
My dear UArts classmates and peers—you taught and
inspired me through love, empathy and care. I cannot
imagine a life without you after studying alongside
you!

Mara Flamm—you are my unexpected support and
inspiration during the critical time of COVID pan-
demic and beyond. Hooray for our friendship!

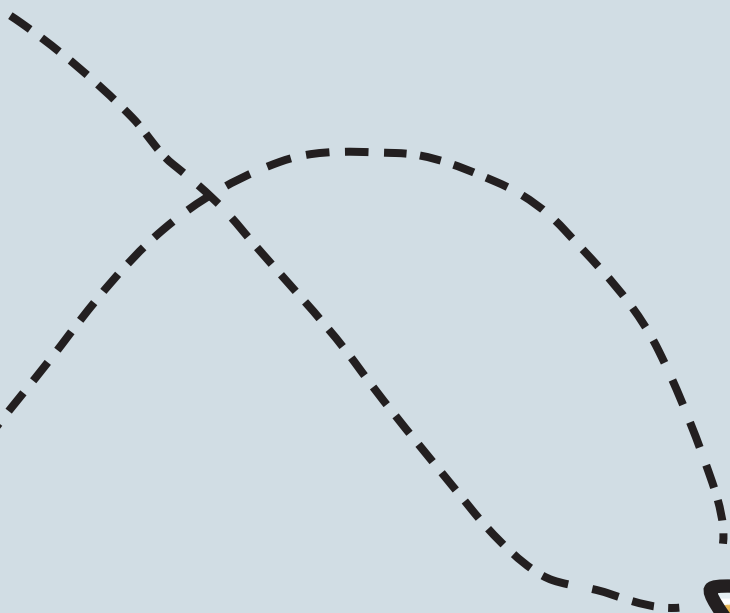
People that have come before me and have taught me
life lessons in myriad ways.

Our collective dance continues.









家

Dear Reader,

Let me introduce you to my new home!
Before we leave where we are to go to my new home, let's
take a moment to recognize that both of us are present in
this moment. As soon as you hold this book in your hand,
my thoughts have traveled through time and space to meet
you here and now. From now on, we are going to travel to-
ward my new home together with our thoughts and imagi-
nations through **T**ime-**S**pace. Grateful to be with you!

Let's also take a moment to notice the space where we co-
inhabit at this moment—I'm curious to know what's the
structure of this space? What's the material of the structure?
Is the structure solid or soft? How does the structure of
the inhabitation make you feel? As we gradually turn our
attention toward observing our **B**odies and our **E**nvi-
ronment, we inevitably notice that the voice of our senses is
being amplified:

Light,
shadow, moving colors
tasting bitterness sweetly, warmth
freshly cold
swiftly brushed by the wind

Scents sneak into the body with oxygen
time to exhale and inhale
deep and shallow into the geography of
the body's internal landscape
Autonomic collaborations are being generated among the
organs
and the mind, together,
they compose an ongoing rhythm of life

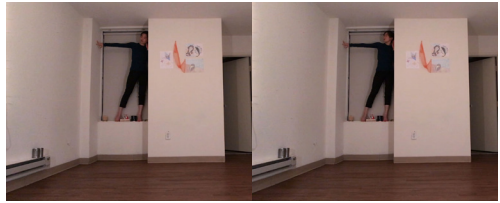
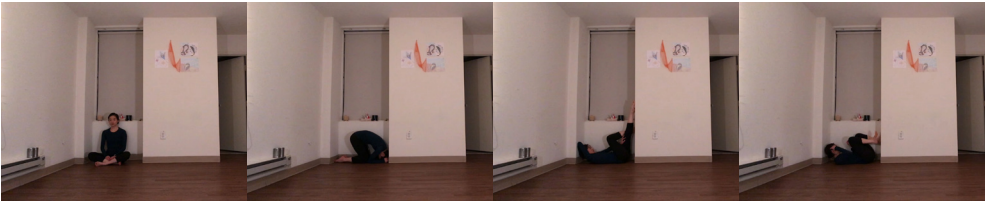
The skin is the secret portal, through which
autonomic collaborations meet environmental structure
Through porosity, they manifest and
translate (in)tangibilities
The body is an emergent field of multiplicity-in-
becoming
With and between (un)consciousness

we ARE our **B**ody

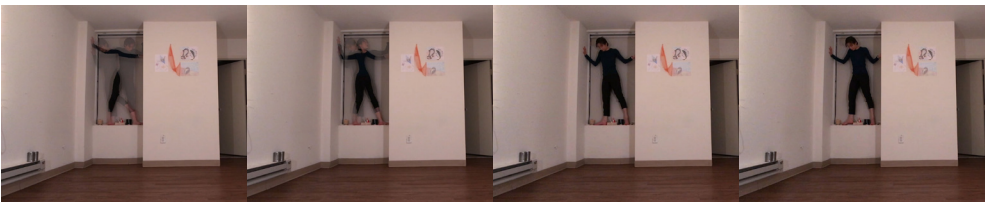
Would you like to draw how you feel at the moment in the box below?

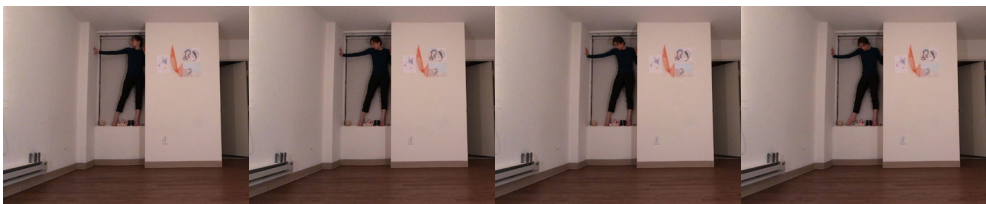
A large, empty rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for drawing. The box is oriented vertically and occupies most of the page below the text prompt.

Personally,

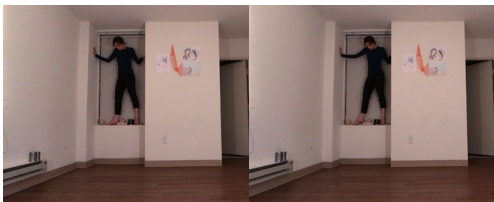


When I think of a structure of inhabitation, I think of solidity and concrete. I think of the flat surfaces on and under which we can sit, lay, and walk—these structures protect us from the rain, the wind, the blizzard, the cold, the hot, from danger, uncertainty, the unknown, and any change that might happen on the outside of the structure. I sense the feeling of solid ground supporting the weight of my body—when I walk, I trust that the ground will sustain me; when I lay down, I comfortably rest my flesh and bones. The predictability of the foundation of a concrete structure seems to assure me that I’m safe and protected.





However,

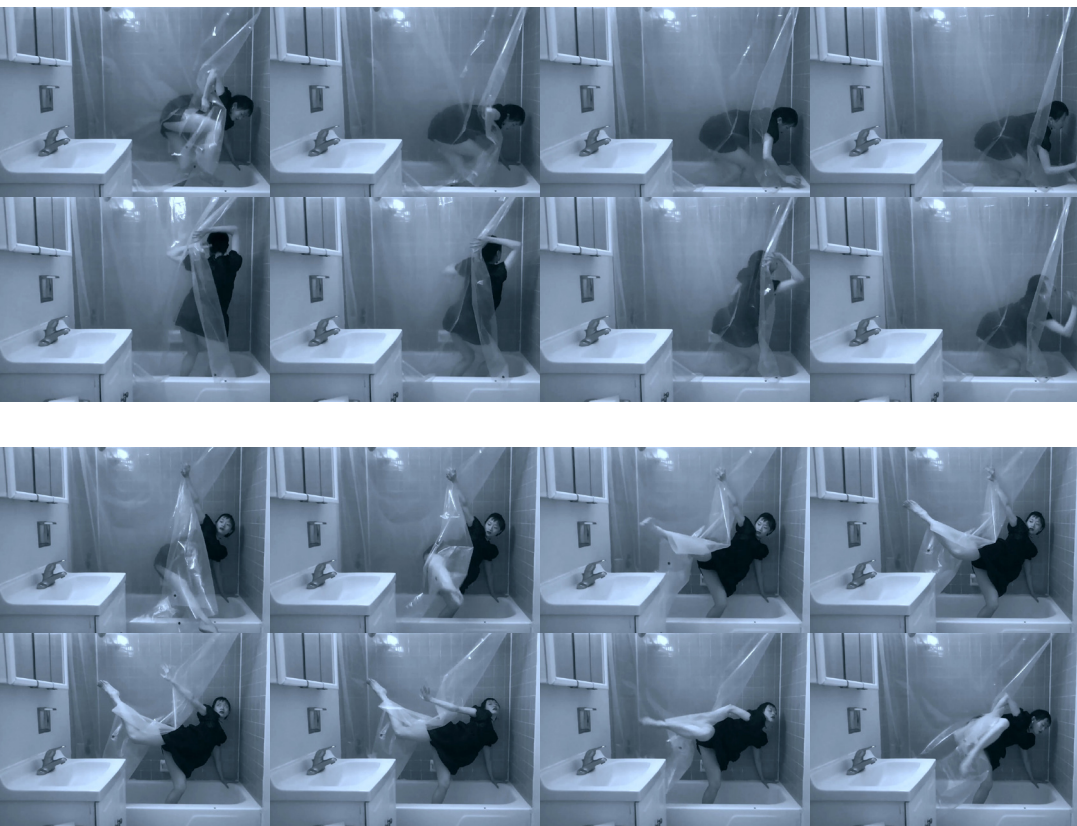


the verticality, horizontality as well as the negative spaces that are created by the intersections of these concrete structures imply rules, and these rules offer both freedom and constraint. In the example of walls, they are erected from the ground towards the sky, introducing edges and compartments to a vast and previously unregulated space. They direct my attention by selectively covering up certain areas and revealing others. When doors and windows emerge from them, they regulate my movements and tell me where I should and should not go, what I can and cannot see, and should not utilize the space. If I follow these proposals, these negative spaces, the structure of doors and within these negative spaces, the structure will make travel easy, make me feel safe. However, when I disobey the hurt myself by stubbing my toe on the corner of a piece of furniture or on a flat surface around me. Over time, I internalized these regulations and developed my senses around structures that pre-exist and outlive me—the kitchen is just for cleaning the dishes and cooking food; the bathroom is just for cleansing the body; the desk is just for writing and studying, etc. Well, how about the possibility of reading in the bathtub, studying on the kitchen counter, sleeping on the ground and eating with a non-dominant hand? And how about taking time to enjoy observing these awkward and humorous actions unfold: when I eat with my non-dominant hand, the food doesn't always arrive in my mouth easily and it makes me giggle. I slowly got tired of mobilizing myself around the edges that might hurt me and seeing my stacked books only from one possible angle. Until recently, I oriented my body in relation to the structure of inhabitation only for practicality, but now I have decided to move away from the concrete and the practical, to seek the "awe" that resides in the malleable and the poetic. As Jamaica Kincaid wrote, "I know the practical, it will keep you breathing; awe, on the other hand, is what makes you (me) want to keep living."¹

1 Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden*(New York; Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 14

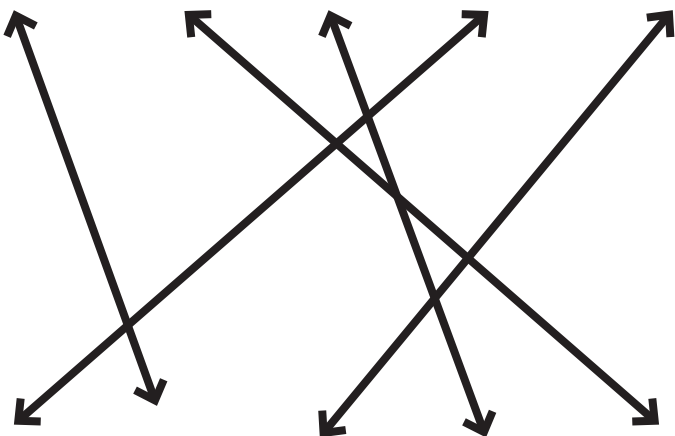


“the bathroom is just for cleansing the body”?



If you want, feel free to
participate in a playful
practice on the next page:

Write down a list of routine activities and a list of places, and pair them together in unusual ways:





When you are ready,
let's start migrating to my
new home. - - - - ➔



Leaving



a familiar place is
never easy,



especially

when it is entangled with memories and love that spans through time and space, but can I propose an experience of migration that is sensorial, playful, and emotional altogether? When we look out into the horizon from where we are, we might see an emerging border revealing itself between the land of familiarity and the land of the unknown.

**Familiarity
and the unknown are not very far
from each other. In fact, after years of living with-
in the familiar, our bodies remember how familiarity
feels, and are capable of returning to it.**

As Michelle M. Wright said in her lecture at BAMPFA “to misquote William Faulkner, the past is not past, it’s all around us. All the people have lived before, the building, the clothing, what-have-you. Some of it is most certainly orbiting the Earth as space junk, but the rest is all here...In other words, all the things that have existed on this planet before, are still here simply in changed form.” We might have left familiarity as a structure, but we are certainly living with it as a sensation. As we breathe and focus on our senses, we are opening our bodies to an organicity of motion, allowing our bodies to autonomously initiate and continue a series of movement improvisations without judgement, planning or tension:

Anchoring

Present
in the sensations of the
wondering what's appearing, disappearing
rising up, sinking down
entering and exiting our consciousness,
making explicit the movements in the moving and the life
in the becoming, in the words of Erin Manning --
"moving the you you are now becoming"¹

Having arrived is never an arrival

we continue the process of arriving through questioning and being questioned about
our beliefs, perspectives, ambivalences, contradictions, and inevitably,

Polarizations—they flow in our bodies in liquid forms
shifting and making shifts
in multiple directions

disorientations

1 Erin Manning, *Always More Than One* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2013), 79

Perhaps we can use the movement example of rising up and sinking down to think through polarization:



Let's start by thinking about polarization from the perspectives of:

CONTRAST
&
CATEGORIZATION

Contrast and Categorization—there's no lightness without darkness, and there's no white without black. A

movement of Sinking resides on the polarizing side of the movement of rising—I rise on my toes before I bend my knees to sink myself closer to the Earth, and once I am closest to the Earth, I initiate the act of rising again to bring myself back to standing on my toes. There is a tendency to categorize contrasting ideas into a contained state or a fixity, and expect them to stay in separation from each other. Through the lenses of contrast and categorization, the process of transferring myself from one idea to its polarizing idea—from Rising to Sinking to Rising again,

offers a belief that polarization lives in separation, and that the movement between polarizing ideas is uni-directional.

However,
I would like to propose another possibility for sensing movement of polarization, which is through the lenses of :



DEGREE

&

MULTI-DIRECTIONALITY

The movement of rising up on my toes cannot be achieved without simultaneously pressing my toes down into the Earth, and the movement of slowly sinking down toward the Earth cannot be made possible without sending my energy up to the sky. In this case, the two seemingly polarizing ideas—Sinking and Rising, are in fact, co-existing all along in order to sustain the lifespan of the movement and to negotiate with Duration/Time. Rising and Sinking merge into one composite idea as well as one continuing process without the necessity to define a point of beginning or ending. The movement can be initiated and stopped anywhere in the moving process, and the forces of Rising and Sinking would stay equally activated and be in company with each other. As in *The Kybalion & The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*,

**“The
change is not in the nature of
transmutation of one thing into another thing
entirely different — but is merely a change of degree in
the same thing...”¹**

**1 The Three Initiates and Anonymous, *The Kybalion & The
Emerald Tablet of Hermes* (London; Aziloth
Books; 2017), 66**

In this case, polarizing ideas aren’t separate or
at odds with each other. They become composite
with two or more divergent qualities that are al-
ready in activation and building up to a multiplic-
ity of forces. “What do you mean?” you might ask.
Well, as we start walking toward my new home, let me
show you:

Think walking and
allowing us to wonder:
How does a walk happen?

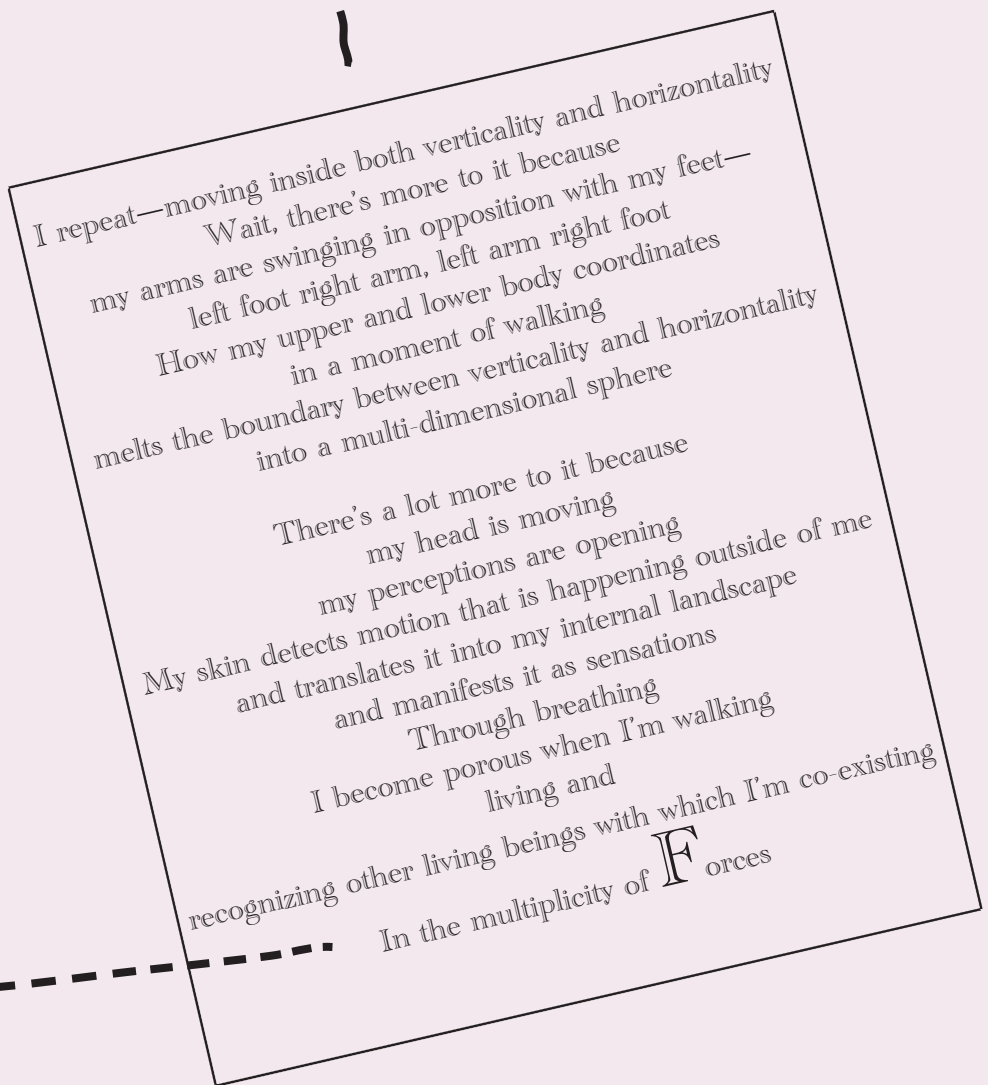
I put down one heel while lifting up the other
I push off of one sole before I press down the other
I repeat

the up-down motion between my feet
inside verticality offered by
Gravity—is generous

It enables other dimensionalities to participate in walking

I repeat—putting down one heel while lifting up the
other
pushing off of one sole before pressing down the other

I also shift my weight forward and backward
experiencing horizontality
I'm leaving something behind while meeting something
else



I repeat—moving inside both verticality and horizontality

Wait, there's more to it because
my arms are swinging in opposition with my feet—
left foot right arm, left arm right foot

How my upper and lower body coordinates
in a moment of walking
melts the boundary between verticality and horizontality
into a multi-dimensional sphere

There's a lot more to it because
my head is moving

My skin detects motion that is happening outside of me
and translates it into my internal landscape
and manifests it as sensations

Through breathing
I become porous when I'm walking
living and

recognizing other living beings with which I'm co-existing
In the multiplicity of **F**orces



Here , we

have arrived at my new home. My home is built upon my ancestral lineage which includes farmers, teachers, doctors and engineers, as well as an artistic lineage that contains Ballet, American Modern Dance, Chinese Ethnic and Classical Dance and Tai Chi. My lineages intersect, sometimes run parallel, and contradict each other through Time-Space in my cross-cultural experiences. My home is not a concrete place. It's intangible and does not exist in a physical form. You might see it with your imagination and feel it with your senses; it might be visualized and amplified within you. As you are coming inside, you might notice that my home is furnished with symbols that reflect my lineages. You might hear music playing softly in the background which comes from a mixed playlist of songs from artists I grew up listening to and was influenced by; you might smell burning incense, and watch smoke escaping to the air. Looking up, the vast universe is where the roof used to be. The walls are no longer around us, only living beings that have been here before us. What furnishes the home is my memory. It brings up sensations and narratives that are associated with specific nodes in Time and Space, with people and relationships.

Here is a piece of “furniture” that I would like to introduce to you—it is a song named “Before You Go” by the Kpop band named Tong Vfang Xien Qi / TVXXQ.

It reminds me of the time when I was studying at a boarding school for dance in Beijing as a teenager. I moved out of my home in Shandong, China when I was 10 years old, and was living with kids of similar ages in the school dorms. Most of us were away from our parents throughout our entire study at the dance school which lasted for 7 years. Around the age of 15, many of my classmates started to become fans of KPop boy bands, and one of the bands I personally loved was TVXXQ. Around the same time, TVXXQ got into a lawsuit with their management company, which resulted in their split into two separate bands operating in two different countries. As teenagers, we empathized with them because we were also experiencing challenges from negotiating our wild nature inside the strict school regulations. The friction that we felt in the process of negotiation could not be understood by us intellectually at the time, as we had not developed the emotional maturity and skills to articulate our feelings, and we assumed that the confusion we experienced at the time was normal.



“Before You Go” evoked a strong emotional response among my classmates when we heard it for the first time. It came out after TVXQ’s lawsuit and was featured in their first album “Keep Your Head Down” after they became a duo. Seeing TVXQ’s transformation through the lawsuit was incredibly inspiring to us at the time, as we felt their artistic presence had become stronger than ever before. TVXQ’s transformation and return empowered us and brought hope to our spirits. Moreover, whenever our class played this song, we immediately forgot about our hardships and bonded with each other, as if there was nothing more important than indulging ourselves in the beauty of the songs and people who inspired us. To this day, I still return to this song when I’m cooking and biking to school. I cannot articulate scientifically why my blood flows in a different frequency when I listen to this song, or why I can feel my soul dancing with the melody even though I do not fully understand the lyrics. But I’m certain that this song has become a tunnel that connects me to a particular moment and place that has conditioned me to become who I am today. These soft sensations remain in my body and become an

important element to make me feel like I am
“home.”



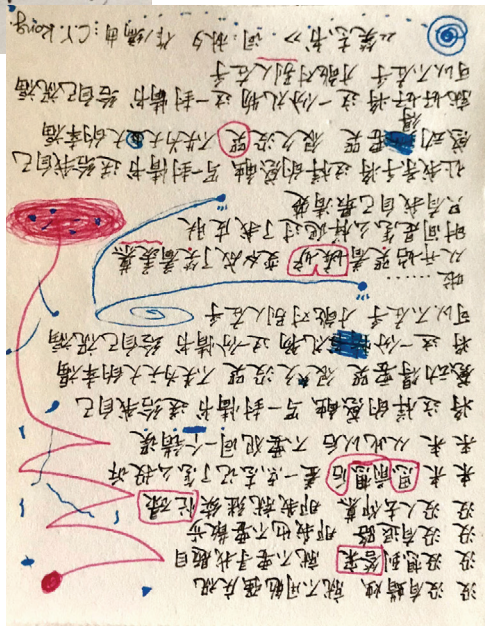
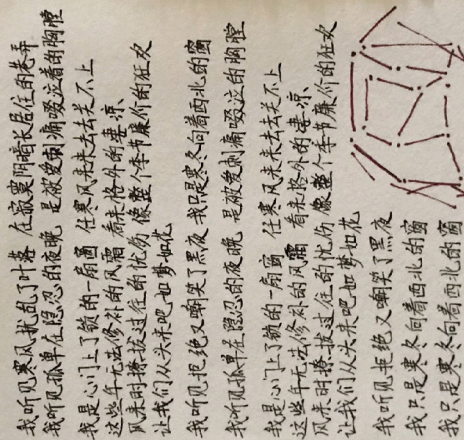
my drawings layered on the lyrics of my favorite songs

作词 / 作曲 / 演唱：陈绮贞

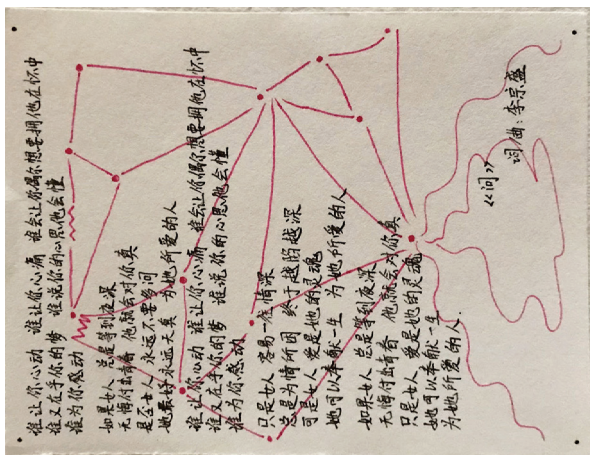
呵天晓得 既然说 你快乐 于是我快乐
玫瑰都开了 我还想怎么呢
求之不得 求不得 天造地设一样的难得
喜怒和哀乐 有我来重蹈你覆辙

《你快乐所以我快乐》 词：林夕 曲：张亚东





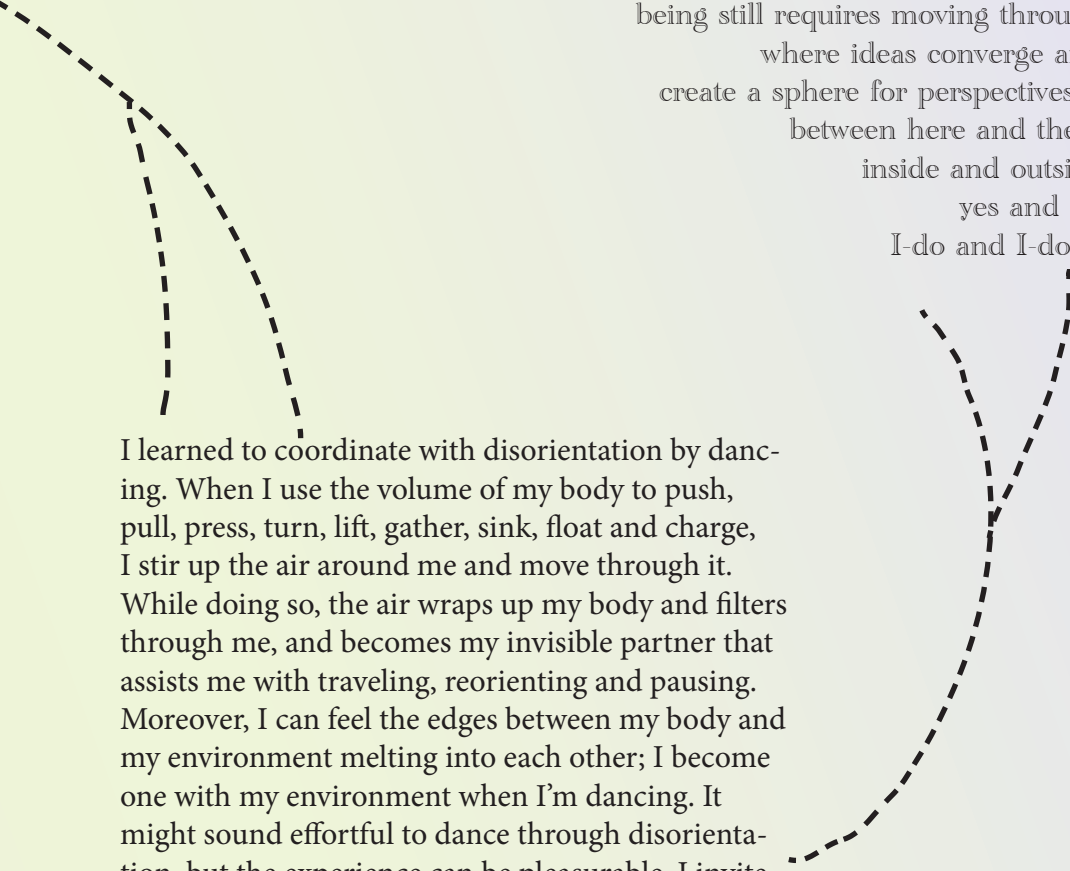
feel free to check out other furnitures during the rest of your tour



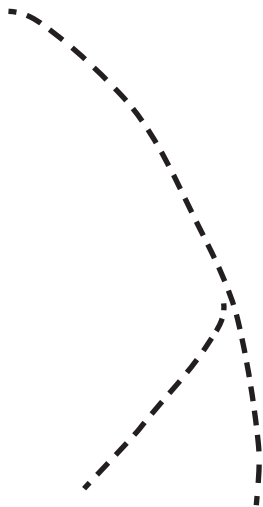
Now, let me show you how to mobilize your body inside my home. My home is anti-gravitational. My home might activate unfamiliar sensations while you tour the interior because everything shifts and floats constantly, including you. As you transition into the interior space from the edges, you might notice that you are slowly losing the support underneath your feet. The further you move away from where you came from, the more slippery and supple the support underneath becomes. Eventually, you might find yourself activating your entire body to attune to the constant shifts and disorientations. It reminds me of the confusion I felt when I could not understand certain body language and social gestures when I first arrived in the US. I had believed that the language of the body was supposed to be the most predictable, but when I arrived in the US, I realized otherwise.

Starting with a soft gaze
sensing through the pores of your skin
internalize and manifest sensations through
inhaling and exhaling
Repeat

A micro shift just happened underneath your body
A crack, perhaps
Gradually, the shift underneath you begins to grow
in volume
away from you
It's making you lose your sense of balance and stability
Disorientation arises—everything around you starts to
float and morph
Including you
You slip into the malleable space of unpredictability
where
remembering means forgetting
being still requires moving through
where ideas converge and
create a sphere for perspectives—
between here and there
inside and outside
yes and no
I-do and I-don't



I learned to coordinate with disorientation by dancing. When I use the volume of my body to push, pull, press, turn, lift, gather, sink, float and charge, I stir up the air around me and move through it. While doing so, the air wraps up my body and filters through me, and becomes my invisible partner that assists me with traveling, reorienting and pausing. Moreover, I can feel the edges between my body and my environment melting into each other; I become one with my environment when I'm dancing. It might sound effortful to dance through disorientation, but the experience can be pleasurable. I invite you to try it—



Unpredictability asks to redirect the weight of
your body
and the pathways of getting around
It states that dancing is the best approach to
redirect and relearn—
Shake your shoulders to move your pelvis
Pelvic change makes you rotate
a few times, now
you are sensing something different
Tilting your head to mobilize your ribcage
Ribcage expands to move your arms
Swing your arms in multiple directions
and observe how your legs react
Letting air flow with you
and through you
Repeat



我就是这样告别山下的家 我实在不想轻易让眼泪流下
我以为我并不差 不会害怕

我就是这样自己照顾自己长大 我不想因为现实把头低下
我以为我并不差 能学会虚假

怎样才能够看穿面具里的谎话
别让我的真心散的像沙
如果有一天我变得更复杂
还能不能唱出歌声里的那幅画

我就是这样告别山下的家 我实在不想轻易让眼泪流下
我以为我并不差 能学会虚假

怎样才能够看穿面具里的谎话
别让我的真心散的像沙
如果有一天我变得更复杂
还能不能唱出歌声里的那幅画

《巴东流浪记》
词/曲：巴东

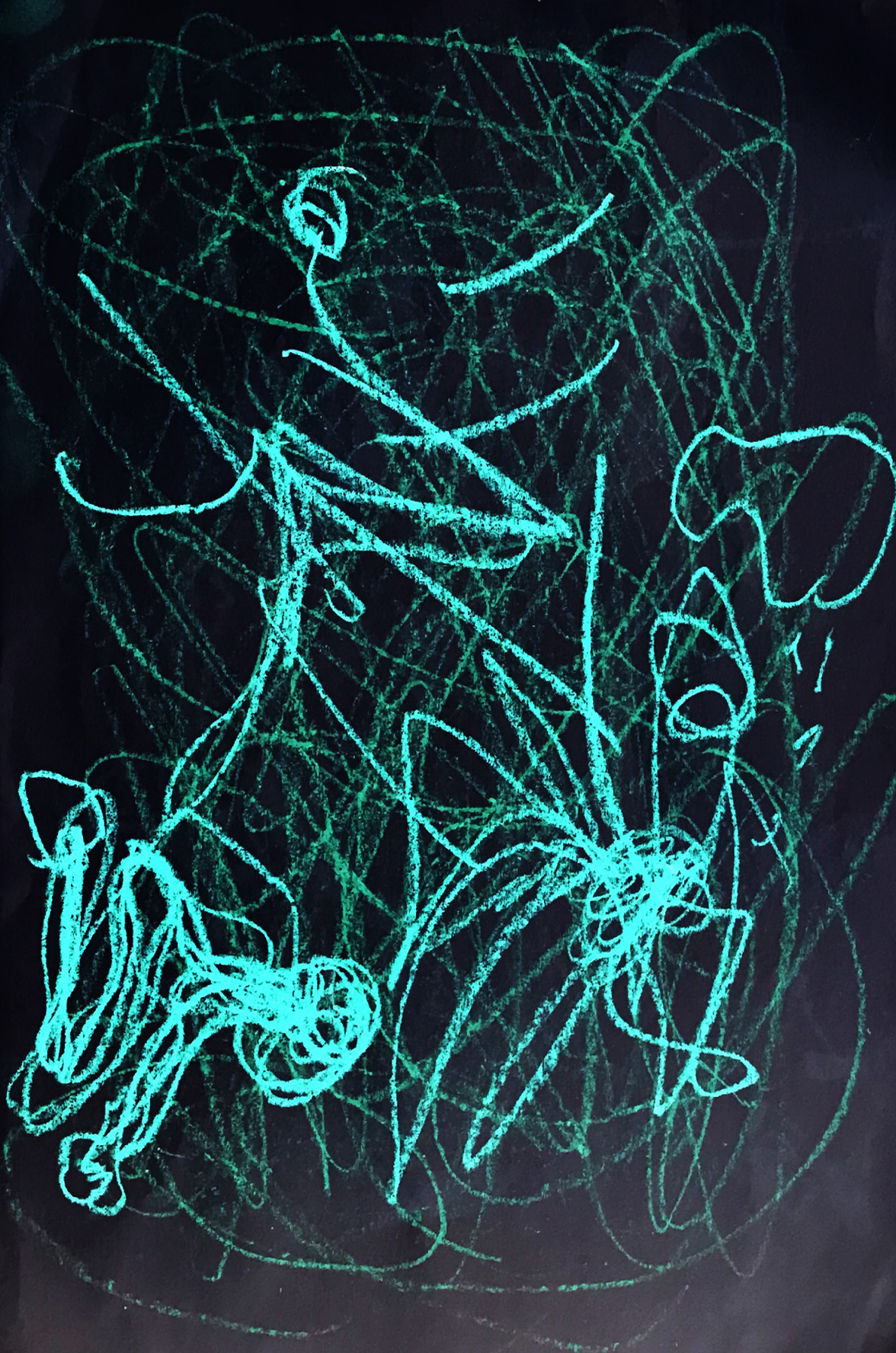


When I travel between locations, I measure the level of airflow and friction around my body and check my surroundings for blockages before I dance off in a specific direction. Sometimes when I miscalculate, I miss my arrival point and have to reorient myself to start the calculation process all over again, which causes me moments of discomfort. Although restarts and errors can be irritating, the detours as a result of my miscalculations can invite opportunities to refresh my perspectives about my home. I also seek out detours sometimes because they offer a surplus of Time and Space, and I can be curious and playful in the environment that I inhabit but am not yet familiar with. While in the detours, discomfort transforms itself into pleasure, which reminds me of Jamaica Kincaid's garden. Kincaid describes how agitated she is when she is in the garden, and how happy she is to be so agitated; how vexed she often is when she is in the garden, and how happy she is to be so vexed. She also mentioned that "the irritation to be found in the garden will not lead to any loss of face; it will only lead to this question: What to do?"¹ She keeps asking what to do because nothing works just the way she thought it would, nothing looks just the way she had imagined it, and when sometimes it does look like what she had imagined (which is rare), she is startled that her imagination is so ordinary.² Similar to Kincaid, errors and miscalculations happen regularly as I have chosen to live in a home that is unconventional and intangible. Through constant encounters with errors and miscalculations, I no longer consider them as failures that I need to avoid. They have become my close friends. They open up spaces for curiosity, play, and pleasure, which eventually lead to reexaminations of my beliefs and the conditions that created my beliefs.

1 Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden*, 26

2 Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden*, 14



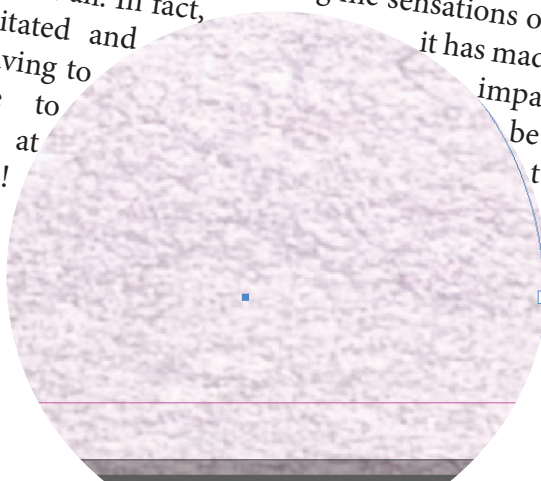


Through errors and miscalculations, I come to wonder about how my beliefs are moving, morphing, and drifting in relation to the movement of Time and Space. For instance, my recent accident has made me reexamine

my beliefs about “healing.”

Before the accident, I believed that the process of healing

is associated with sensations of ease and relief, and it should be conducted through comfort. However, my beliefs about healing have changed after I fell off my bike on the first day of school this summer, because I was not familiar with the city’s bike route. The accident left a wound on the top of my foot, and the wound asked for some time to heal. Because of the summer heat, I could not wear shoes that covered up the top of my foot as the wound needed to stay dry and friction-free. When I came back home after classes at night, I needed to cover up the wound with a bandaid before I showered. After the shower, I had to clean the wound with antiseptic, which caused sharp pain and brought tears to my eyes. Then I would apply ointment to the wound and wait for the ointment to dry off a bit before going to bed. Healing a wound was exhausting! It needs lots of attention, and it requires many changes in my daily habits to keep the wound clean and protected. For the past two weeks, healing did not bring me sensations of ease and relief at all. In fact, it has made me feel irritated and impatient from having to be so attentive to the wound at all times!





...Until this week, when I was looking at the wound in the morning one day and noticed that the top layer of the skin has hardened, which means the soft flesh underneath is growing and being healed. The change on my skin makes me so happy because it validates my labor of care for the past two weeks. I feel hopeful because the hardened skin can now provide better protection for the soft growing flesh underneath, and can share my burden of care for the rest of the healing process. After seeing this change, I have acquired a strong sense of gratitude toward my body because I sense its resiliency and determination in protecting and healing me from now on. My wound says to my body, of which it is a part, “I appreciate you caring for me for the past two week. You can now direct your attention to somewhere else.”

Instead of support and comfort, my healing process has been conducted through confrontation and discomfort. The process has taught me that healing doesn't lead to a conclusion on which I will rest. In fact, it leads me to gratitude that will keep me moving through life. Healing has been a detour for me to realize that discomfort is a necessary element for making me feel at home, and for keeping me in motion. Through discomfort, healing has opened up a Space and Time for observation and reflection, and has offered an opening to recognize the multiplicity of possibilities in getting to know the world.



Dear Reader,

as you have toured the interior of my home, would you consider living somewhere closer to me? If you don't feel comfortable moving away from where you live now, would you be interested in imagining a different structure for your home? Perhaps making the ground supple or demolishing the walls? If you don't feel like demolishing the walls, would you repaint your walls in the color of curiosity and possibility? Would you invite elements of discomfort into your home? Where would you like to locate your home?

Let's keep Wondering together!

Sincerely,
Can | 璨





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巴奈 - Topic, “Pauai流浪記”, 06:24. April 13, 2020.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhmVpEMKWVE>

風中雲. “王菲 《笑忘書》 (原曲: 給自己的情書) 國語版”, 04:25.
January 30, 2017.
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