UArts SCHOOL OF DANCE

Something that will outlive me

Michael Sheridan

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

2020
The University of the Arts

For Tony

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Précis

My thesis research is an examination of care through the lens of my twenty-eight years of experience with Shut Up & Dance, an annual AIDS benefit I co-founded for MANNA (Metropolitan Area Neighborhood Nutrition Alliance) presented by the Dancers of Pennsylvania Ballet.

What is it to research care and the role of art in surviving the AIDS epidemic? My research led me to archive and record my history; an examination of care moves through and beyond these documents. In this work of gathering and assembling, I recognize that care has to do with these very intimate instances of life with my partner, my parents, and my colleagues. It also has to do with my activism, volunteerism, teaching and curation. It has to do with acquiring artwork and caring for those pieces because they hold my history.

I want to be an archivist and historian for this forgotten moment. I want this history to be available for future generations. And I want to look at how art is integral to survival. I've lived through this.

I want to continue unfolding a life in care.

Intro

After years of researching ways dance can impact conversation in the world of socio-politics and advocacy, in 1993, I co-founded Shut Up & Dance, an annual AIDS benefit for MANNA (Metropolitan Area Neighborhood Nutrition Alliance) presented by the Dancers of Pennsylvania Ballet. This program was created to help feed homebound HIV/AIDS patients. The event has grown over the past 28 years, raising millions of dollars, allowing MANNA to expand its mission. MANNA now helps to feed anyone with a life-threatening illness, as well as their families.

FOR
PRESENTED BY DANCERS OF PENNSYLVANIA BALLET
SHUT UP &
Benefits MANNA DELIVERING NOURISH

REST
DANCE
HMENT IMPROVING HEALTH
Saturday
APRIL
9
MANNAPA.O

PRESENTED BY DANCERS OF PENNSYLVANIA BALLET
SHUT UP &
Benefits MANNA DELIVERING NOURISH

A History

In 1990 I had a partner, Tony Sparacino. Early in our relationship, he tested positive for HIV and was given a life expectancy of only five years. Tony was a quiet force, always trying to push me to be more generous. Shut Up & Dance was my own personal journey through my relationship with illness and the person I loved.

In the early days, a friend's mother was involved with the MANNA organization as a volunteer. Shortly after their first year in existence, MANNA hosted a fundraising event and art auction, "A Show of Hands." Since we were artists (Tony was a well-known clothing designer in Philadelphia) and openly gay, our friend's mother invited us to the event, hoping to spark our interest in the organization. We immediately fell in love with their mission and began to volunteer. Tony felt we should always be giving back to the community; he was my motivator and inspiration, and so began my association with MANNA that continues to this day.

Shut Up & Dance's first performance honored Edward Myers, a former principal dancer with Pennsylvania Ballet, who died of AIDS. In addition to fellow artists, we were losing several close friends from our inner circle. It felt like we were going to a funeral every other week. It's like you hang up your suit, and you're taking it back out; you have a ring around the collar because there's just no time in between. I think about all these incredible people here in Philadelphia during this time, some extraordinarily beautiful souls. In an interview with Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Joan Myers Brown (founder/Artistic Director, Philadanco) said, "It was as though somebody came in here with a broom and just swept everybody away." She lost a host of incredible Black male dancers, including Kevin Brown and Carlos Shorty, key soloists in her ensemble.[1]

Feeling powerless and deeply affected by the AIDS epidemic, we wanted to give back to the community. We knew we had to do something, and what we did was form Shut Up & Dance.

Shut Up & Dance, an AIDS benefit for MANNA presented by the Dancers of Pennsylvania Ballet, premiered on May 15, 1993, at Club Trocadero in Philadelphia.

Founded by Nick Stuccio, Leslie Carothers, Kelly Moriarty, and Michael Sheridan, the event was in direct response not only to the AIDS epidemic, but to the understanding that while many shunned those affected by the plague, there were, in fact, many who were willing to go above and beyond.

In the beginning, we really didn't know how we were going to make it work. But we knew that with whatever money was donated, we were helping MANNA provide a meal to someone who needed it. We did our research; we looked at several different organizations in Philadelphia. We decided on MANNA because we could relate to their "hands-on" approach to AIDS services. At the time, MANNA operated out of a kitchen in the basement of a church; they didn't have beautifully decorated spacious offices like some other non-profit organizations. You knew that for every five dollars raised, you were providing a meal for someone homebound with AIDS; it was tangible evidence that we could relate to as artists. Co-founder Leslie Carothers recalls, "My fellow founders and I chose MANNA to be the recipient of this fundraiser for several reasons. The first is because the devastation AIDS had on our profession made us feel helpless, and this was a concrete way of fighting back. Secondly, we felt MANNA is a similarly committed small group of individuals doing heroic things, and we felt the funds could make a great difference to such an organization. Dance feeds the soul and MANNA feeds the body – a truly meaningful collaboration."[2]

The first program featured an eclectic mix of classical and contemporary works choreographed especially for this event by five of the Ballet's members: Meredith Rainey, Tamara Hadley, Jeffrey Gribler, Roy Kaiser, and Michael Sheridan, along with what would become Shut Up & Dance's signature piece *The Dying Swan*, a haunting remembrance of those we've lost to AIDS. Fellow company members performed all works. We dedicated the entire evening to the memory of Eddie Myers, a well-loved friend and member of the Philadelphia dance community for many years.

The Trocadero was a historic burlesque theater in Philadelphia that also operated as a night club, which provided a venue for the post-performance celebration dance party. The audience was primarily made up of a lot of friends and family. The first DJ at the dance party ended up being one of the dancer's boyfriends. It was funny that you could hear the cash registers ringing and the bartenders opening beer bottles during the performance. It was very gritty and raw—it was pretty awful actually—but it had the right kind of vibe for the event.

Everyone volunteered their time; the dancers were in season on a very tight schedule with the company. We rehearsed on days off, during lunch, and stayed late

nights to create original works for the one-night-only performance. The production was a real labor of love.

At the original benefit, I choreographed my first piece, *Shall Not Want*, as a farewell to a friend who died of AIDS, someone to whom I didn't get a chance to say goodbye. It was a way for me to reach some sort of closure. I was extremely fortunate to create the work with such exceptionally gifted artists from the company. These dancers were instrumental in helping me find the courage to be true to myself, creating something of more profound significance and impact. My parents came from Florida for the premiere. After the performance, I remember seeing my father crying. He told me how proud he was of me. I had never seen my father cry before. I've always felt Shut Up & Dance was the most important thing I've done in my career.

Another now-legendary moment in history was Shut Up & Dance's sophomore event. We held the benefit the following year on a bitterly cold night in late January. The frigid temperatures caused the Trocadero's pipes to freeze and burst; there was no heat onstage or in the dressing room area. All the toilets had frozen over. Some suggested canceling the event, but we knew the MANNA clients were counting on us.

The program's final piece was an excerpt from *Dig*, a modern work created by choreographer Terry Beck for our experimental wing, Off-Center Ballet. I performed the work along with fellow dancers Christine Cox and Nick Stuccio. We loved this piece; however, we never considered that we would be dancing half-naked onstage in mounds of dirt in the freezing cold—and with no running water to get cleaned up with after the performance. There was also this 5-foot drop-off on one side of the stage that I managed to fall off at the end of the performance. Not only was I covered in dirt; I was also now bleeding. We felt like it was a complete disaster, but we had fun anyway. It was all for a good cause.

All the original dancers have long been retired. What's refreshing is that subsequent generations of Pennsylvania Ballet dancers have carried on the tradition of giving back to the community, picking up the event and moving forward with it, making it their own. To me, that's the most profound aspect.

I am still very much involved with MANNA and Shut Up & Dance. Throughout the years, I have served as a producer, choreographer, curator, and artistic advisor. This platform has afforded me the unique opportunity to present commissioned works choreographed by emerging makers, exposing their research to a broader audience

while at the same time profoundly enriching the scope of diverse offerings.

Over the years, Shut Up & Dance has served as a launching pad for several well-known choreographers; the event has fostered a space for makers to spread their wings creatively, free from critical judgment. Renowned choreographer Matthew Neenan premiered his first original work, *Judith*, at Shut Up & Dance in 1995. Neenan fondly recalls, "Shut Up & Dance was the springboard for my career in choreography. It was a place where I could risk failure and conquer my inhibitions as a burgeoning choreographer."[3] In addition to Neenan, the list of noted choreographers includes Christine Cox, Jodie Gates, Meredith Rainey, Durante Verzola, and Thom White, among others.

My work as a teacher at the University of the Arts has allowed me to mentor students with aspirations of professional careers in choreography. Within my role as artistic advisor for Shut Up & Dance, I have also been able to present student work, providing students with the opportunity to establish their careers as the next generation of makers.

Lewis Whittington writes, "Next, jolting everyone out of their seats was Destino by Shelby Paige Glidden, with a troupe of eleven men from the University of the Arts. Glidden's lucid choreography kept blooming with theatricality in a symbolic narrative about unity, support and challenging times. The razor-sharp unison work is laced with lyricism and athletic beauty throughout. The students are under the dance tutelage of former Pennsylvania Ballet dancer Michael Sheridan…"[4]

The magical brilliance of such unique voices. These offerings represent who I am today.

Shut Up & Dance's first event, occurring on a small stage in a night club, raised $2,500. "Inspiring" doesn't quite describe the feeling of understanding that last year's event alone raised $165,000. The gratification in knowing that so many people work hard to continue Shut Up & Dance's impact of millions of dollars since 1993.

REST
DANCE
HMENT IMPROVING HEALTH
Saturday
APRIL
9
MANNAPA.O

MANNA
Celebrating 30 Years
Delivering Nourishment.
Improving Health.

MANNA

MANNA is a leader in evidence-based nutrition services. Founded in 1990 by seven members of the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, the organization provided comfort to those dying of AIDS. Often shunned and isolated from family and friends, people diagnosed with AIDS found MANNA to be the only source of love and care they knew...as well as the only source of nourishment and nutritional support they had during their time of medical crisis. Today, having acquired a team of dietitians, chefs, drivers, and thousands of volunteers who cook and deliver nutritious, medically appropriate meals, MANNA provides nourishment to neighbors battling life-threatening illnesses such as cancer, renal disease, and HIV/AIDS. From hands-on cooking classes and nutrition counseling to the delivery of 3 meals a day, 7 days a week, MANNA bestows nourishment, hope, and healing to the greater Philadelphia area, southern New Jersey, and beyond. Food is Medicine.[5]

ww

David Kirby on his deathbed, Ohio, 1990.
Photo: Therese Frare

The Photo That Changed the Face of AIDS

In November 1990, *LIFE* magazine published a photograph of a young man named David Kirby—his body wasted by AIDS, his gaze locked on something beyond this world—surrounded by anguished family members as he took his last breaths. The haunting image of Kirby on his death bed, taken by a journalism student named Therese Frare, quickly became the one photograph most powerfully identified with the HIV/AIDS epidemic that, by then, had infected millions of people (many of them unknowingly) around the globe.

It is estimated that as many as one billion people have seen the now-iconic Frare photograph that appeared in *LIFE* in 1990 and again in 2010; it has been reproduced in hundreds of newspapers, magazines, and TV stories worldwide. The original black-and-white photograph won the World Press Photo Award. Frare never made a cent from the image, donating all the proceeds back to AIDS research. In 1992, under the guise of activist advertising, Benetton colorized the photo in a controversial advertising campaign. The use of the shocking imagery raised social awareness for AIDS while at the same time improving brand awareness. David Kirby's mother, Kay Kirby, told LIFE.com, "We never had any reservations about allowing Benetton to use Therese's photograph in that ad...we just felt it was time that people saw the truth about AIDS, and if Benetton could help in that effort, fine. That ad was the last chance for people to see David—a marker, to show that he was once here, among us."[6]

On a personal note, I found it imperative to include this image in my research catalogue. It's a painful reminder of what AIDS looked like when we founded Shut Up & Dance. This is what we were living with. AIDS was a death sentence. We still need to look at this image because it reminds us of the depth of struggle, how isolated we were, and how much resistance there was to any kind of advocacy or activism, even something like holding this benefit. And so it reminds us of that struggle; it also reminds us of the toll this virus continues to take.

The Dying Swan

Pause/Reflect/Remember. Mikhail Fokine's *The Dying Swan,* with the haunting score by Camille Saint-Saëns, was first danced by prima ballerina Anna Pavlova. For me, the work has become a memoriam dedicated to those we've lost to AIDS. Every year at Shut Up & Dance, the piece has been performed as an homage to an art world ravaged and silenced—and a celebration of lives still living vigorously.

The breathtaking solo, *The Dying Swan*, echoes an absence that haunts the physical space: An entire generation of artists and activists lost to the AIDS crisis. An erasure of Queer mentors. An illumination of the generous spirit of Tony Sparacino. We need to be reminded of why we're here and what we're doing this for. Former Pennsylvania Ballet principal dancer Arantxa Ochoa spoke about it being one of her most cherished stage moments. "I want to say the first time was 2004, as the most memorable for me, because it was such a different evening... the moment I stepped onstage, you could hear a raindrop it was so silent. Then when I finished, it was like a rock concert. Also, it was the first time I ever danced it. Going through the emotions, you know the audience is there for a special reason, and for me, it was very special. It has an energy like no other performance," Ochoa recalls. "It's symbolic of the last moments of a swan's life, and I dance it in memory of the people that we have lost. For this evening, this cause."[7]

MANNA CEO Sue Daugherty asserts, "When they perform that piece, it brings everybody back and reminds us of what MANNA's roots were and where we came from during the HIV/AIDS crisis, and thankfully how we evolved." Daugherty notes how MANNA started as an HIV/AIDS organization, "[MANNA was originally] founded to help people die, and now MANNA is here to help people live. And I think Shut Up & Dance is a reminder for everyone that night that that's where we came from, and [that makes us] thankful for where we are today."[8]

'Shut Up And Dance'

A Benefit Performance For MANNA
Presented by Dancers of the Pennsylvania Ballet

Saturday, May 15 9:00pm Club Trocadero 10th & Arch

Post Performance Dance Party

Tickets $15 at the door

Advance Tickets: Giovanni's Room /Afterwords /Trocadero

Photo: James B. Abbott

Shut Up & Dance Inaugural Poster

In the '90s, cis, White, gay men were most commonly associated with the AIDS epidemic. The very first Shut Up & Dance poster appeared in 1993. It featured a black man and white woman embracing each other, enveloped in a red ribbon. POC affected by the plague struggled to find not only resources but acknowledgment, and it was integral that the first Shut Up & Dance poster featured those unmentioned by too many. Ishmael Houston-Jones asserts that "though gay, white, males of a particular class have never been the sole face of HIV/AIDS, they have been, for more than three decades, the group most associated with the disease in most public discourse in the United States. This has been the pervasive public perception not only of those infected with HIV, but also of activists, caregivers, service providers, and cultural responders."[9]

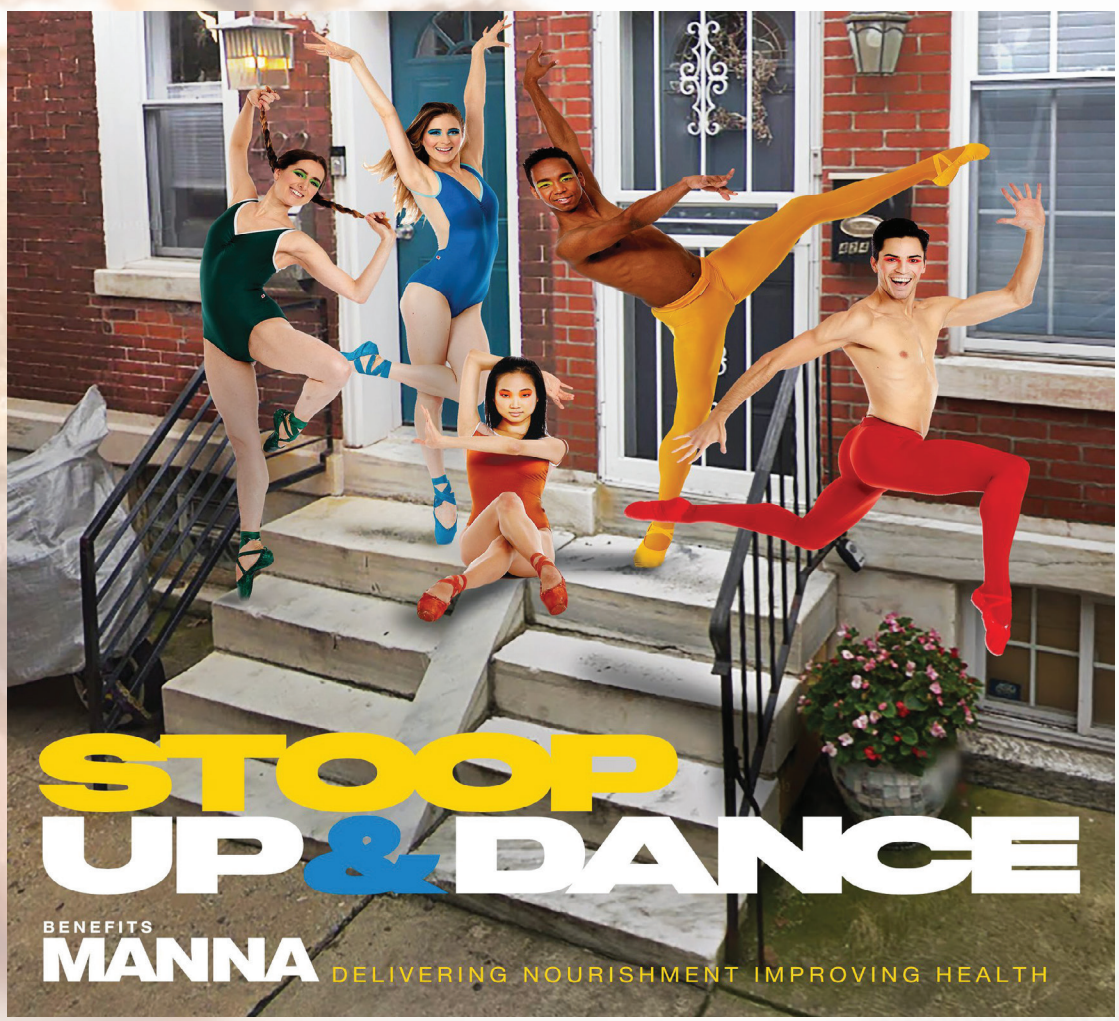
Stoop Up & Dance

I'm very much about what's happening now. Thinking about the dancers of Pennsylvania Ballet, I'm so proud and appreciative. They still find the relevance of artist activism by raising awareness through Shut Up & Dance, continuing MANNA's mission to feed anyone with a life-threatening illness at nutritional risk. The act of *doing*. An act of care.

There's no reason Shut Up & Dance had to survive all these years, for 28 years, but the dancers recognize the importance of the work. It's always the young ones; the young dancers are the first to volunteer. They affirm, "Yes, I'll do the performance; I'll create this; I'll make that." The moment when the pandemic forced the cancellation of the event and people should have been taking care of themselves and their families, the dancers rallied to figure something out and flip this thing around. For them to devise this new kind of transmission, to reimagine Shut Up & Dance in an online platform, was extraordinary.

"We may not have been able to Shut Up & Dance due to COVID-19, but the Dancers of Pennsylvania Ballet are ready to support MANNA through Stoop Up & Dance! We challenge YOU to join us and post a video of yourself dancing on your stoop or around the house. Make sure to tag @mannanourishes and use the hashtag #stoopupanddance. Additionally, we're asking for donations to help us support MANNA. We know these are troubling times, but if you are able to donate through the link in my bio, any amount helps! So put on your dancing shoes and Stoop Up & Dance! I challenge all my tagged friends to participate, and help us help MANNA!"[10]

Having the confidence the next generation will continue to do the work and that it connects with them, for me, that's so beautiful. It's reassuring to know you can step away, remove yourself, and things will go on. People will continue to help each other and make a difference. It's a new beginning; the history is about to come.


STOOP
UP & DANCE
BENEFITS
MANNA
DELIVERING NOURISHMENT IMPROVING HEALTH

Dominique Hernandez's rainbow-coloured fist
Vigil for the victims of the Orlando Massacre
Los Angeles City Hall, June 13, 2016
Photo: Frederic J. Brown

observe
Listen / watch
Action - reaction

- love is simple
- love is kind
- love is needed

ways to...

CA

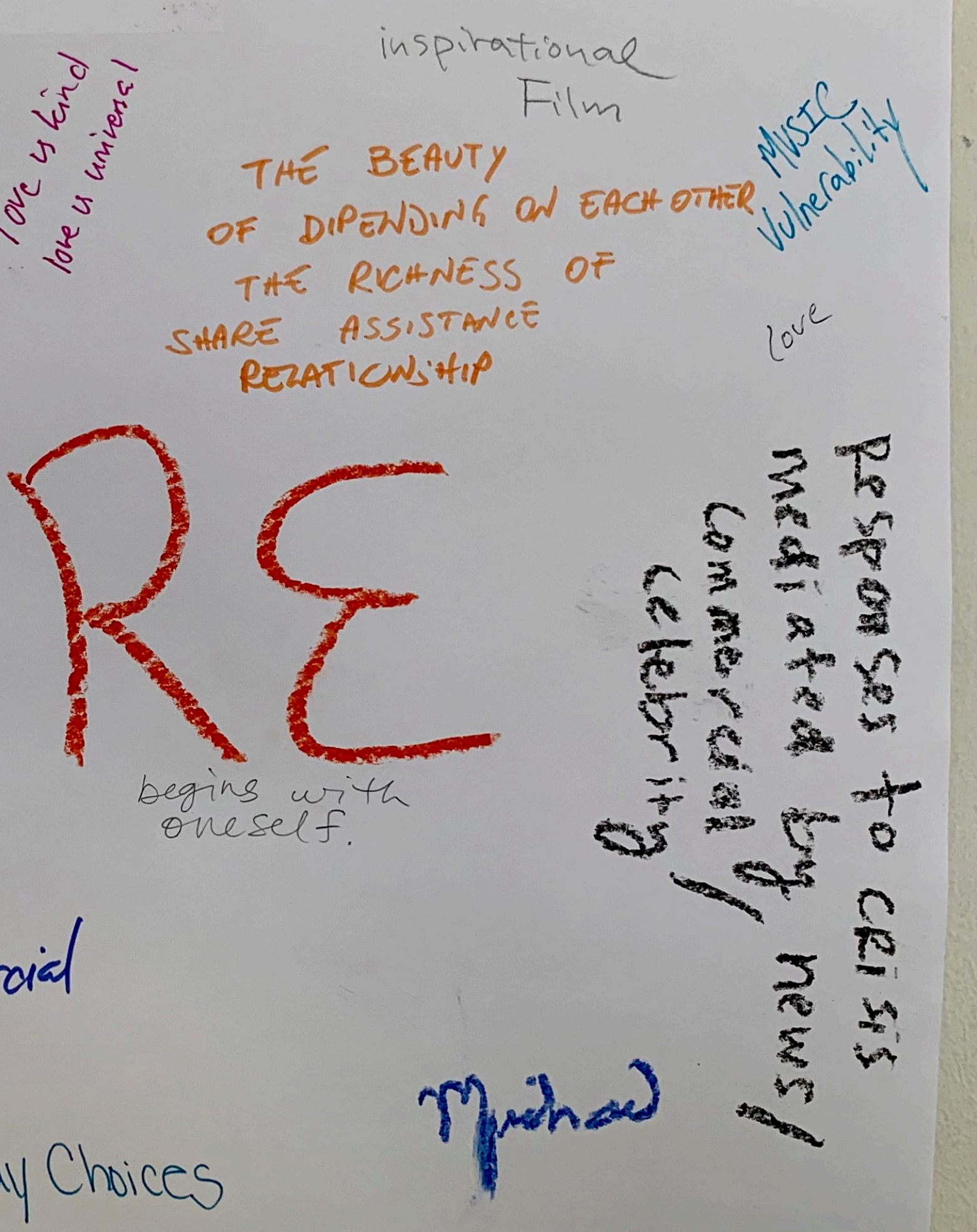
Devotion
consistency
generosity
no gloves

Broadway

Commer

Our 'Small' Everyda

Love is the practice.
Love is the affect + effect.


inspirational
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THE BEAUTY
OF DIPENDING ON EACH OTHER
THE RICHNESS OF
SHARE ASSISTANCE
RELATIONSHIP
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Vulnerability
Love
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begins with
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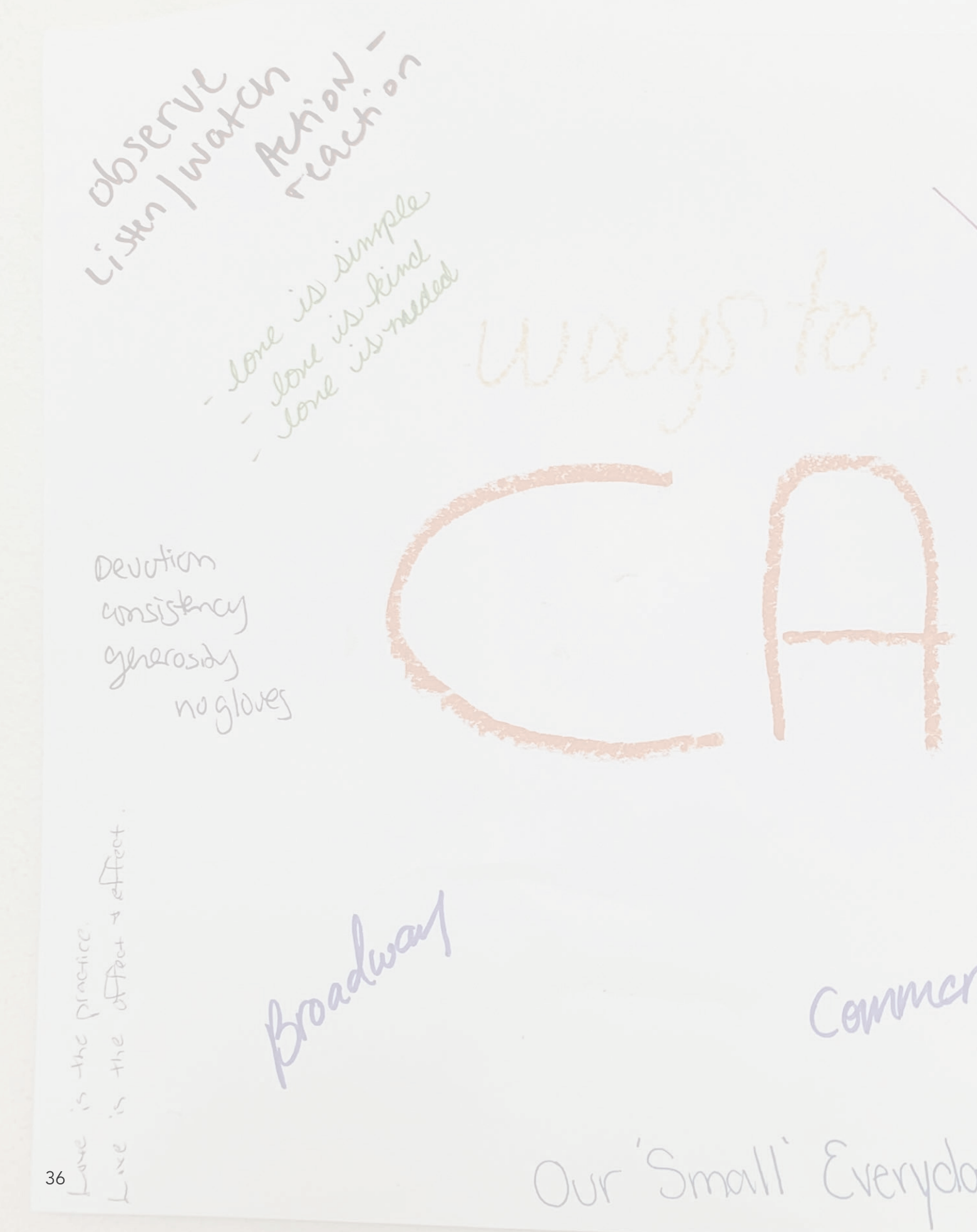
Mutual
Choices


observe
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Love is the practice
Love is the effect + affect.
Our 'Small' Everyda

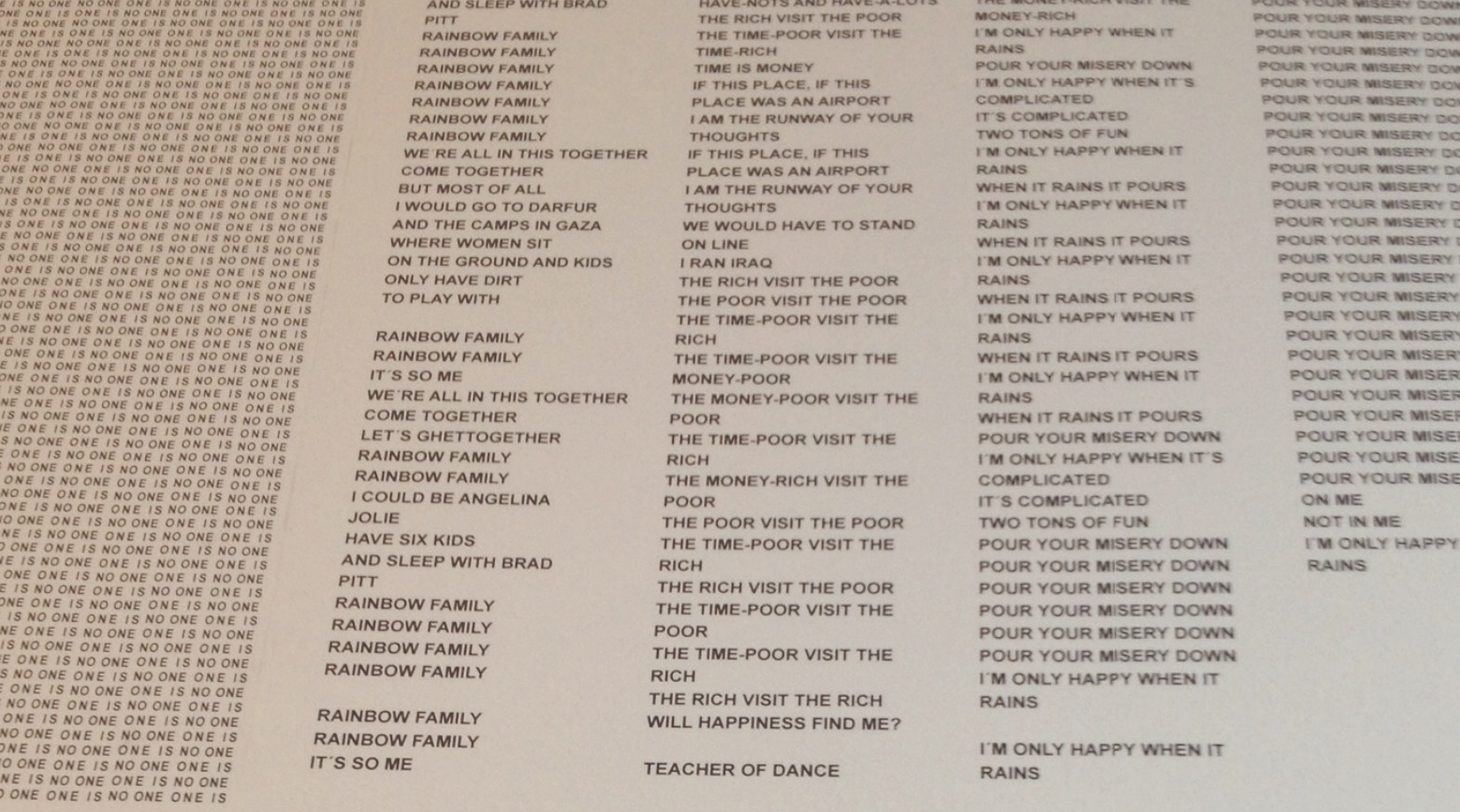
Reflections on Care Work

My research led me to Yasmin Gunaratnam's thought-provoking article "Morbid mixtures: Hybridity, pain and transnational dying."[11] As my work revolves around the notion of care and care work, I have witnessed first-hand the concept of liminality in palliative care with my parents' and my partner's passing. Gunaratnam's research has provoked reexamination of many painful aspects of my personal life that have remained dormant; the grief has never been completely alleviated.

I am most intrigued by the concept of thematic hybridity in the contemporary hospice movement and its philosophy of "total pain" developed by Cicely Saunders. Contemplating the idea of pain as physical, spiritual, psychological, and social, I reflect on the story of the terminal cancer patient who simply asked "for someone to look as if they were trying to understand me." The work of simply trying. What is our responsibility? How do we do the work? How do we reconstruct ways in which we connect to one another, particularly during this state of liminality, with compassion?

Through my research, I am interested in creating a living archive of Shut Up & Dance. As part of my research, I was interested in collecting the oral histories of other participants involved with the event and MANNA. Unfortunately, I came to realize through my research that many of the oral histories of the clients MANNA served during the AIDS crisis's height will be missing because they've passed away. There is no way to bring these oral histories back. I can only speak from my own experience, however rich it may be, yet limited. Reflecting on Gunaratnam's article and exploring her research, I am now beginning to consider the kind of palliative care these clients received. Was it culturally competent? Did someone try to understand them? How do I bridge this gap?

I have much work to do and am only at the beginning of my exploration. I am still trying to crack the surface. The key is trying.


AND SLEEP WITH BRAD
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WE´RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER
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AND THE CAMPS IN GAZA
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THOUGHTS
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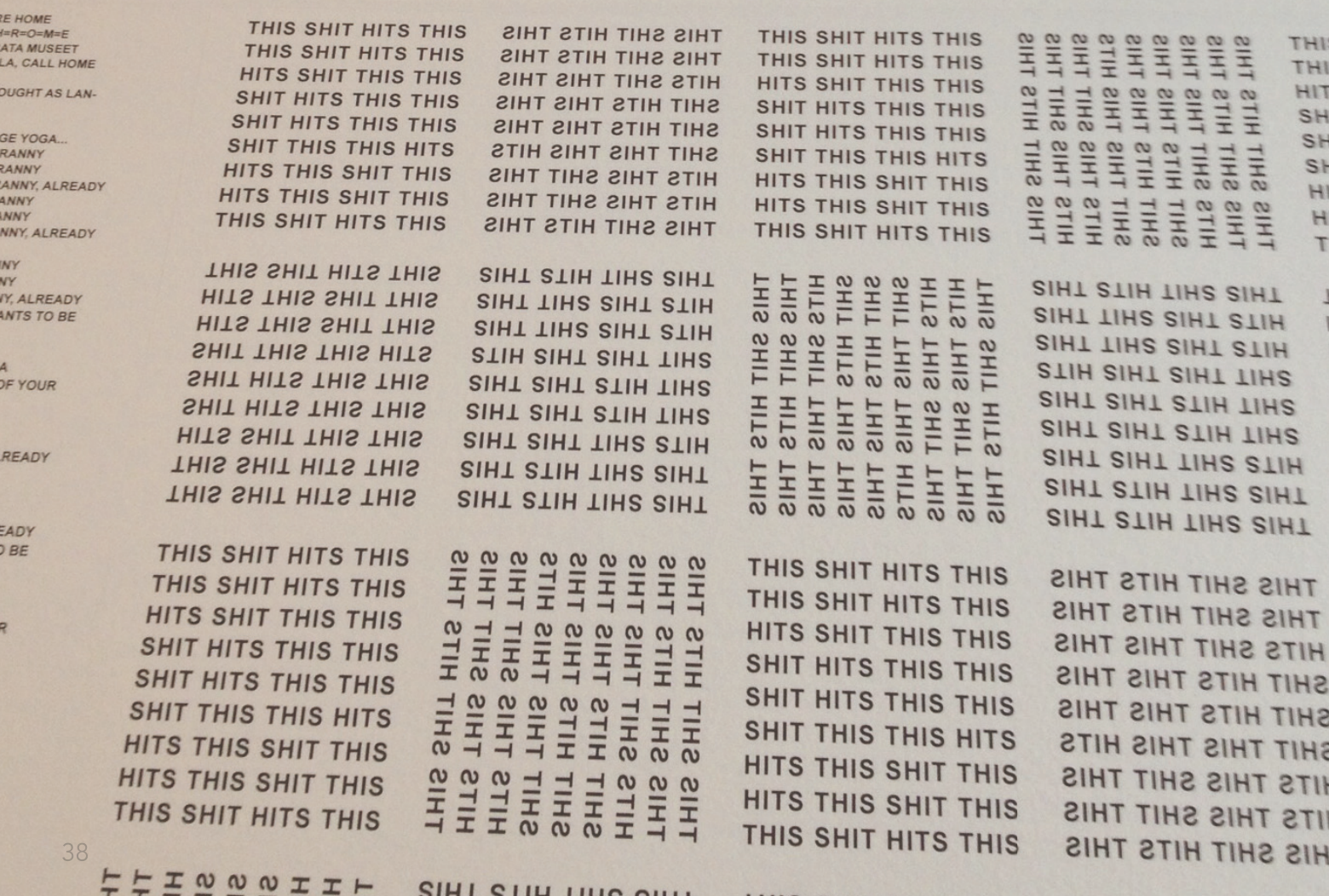
NOT IN ME
I´M ONLY HAPPY
RAINS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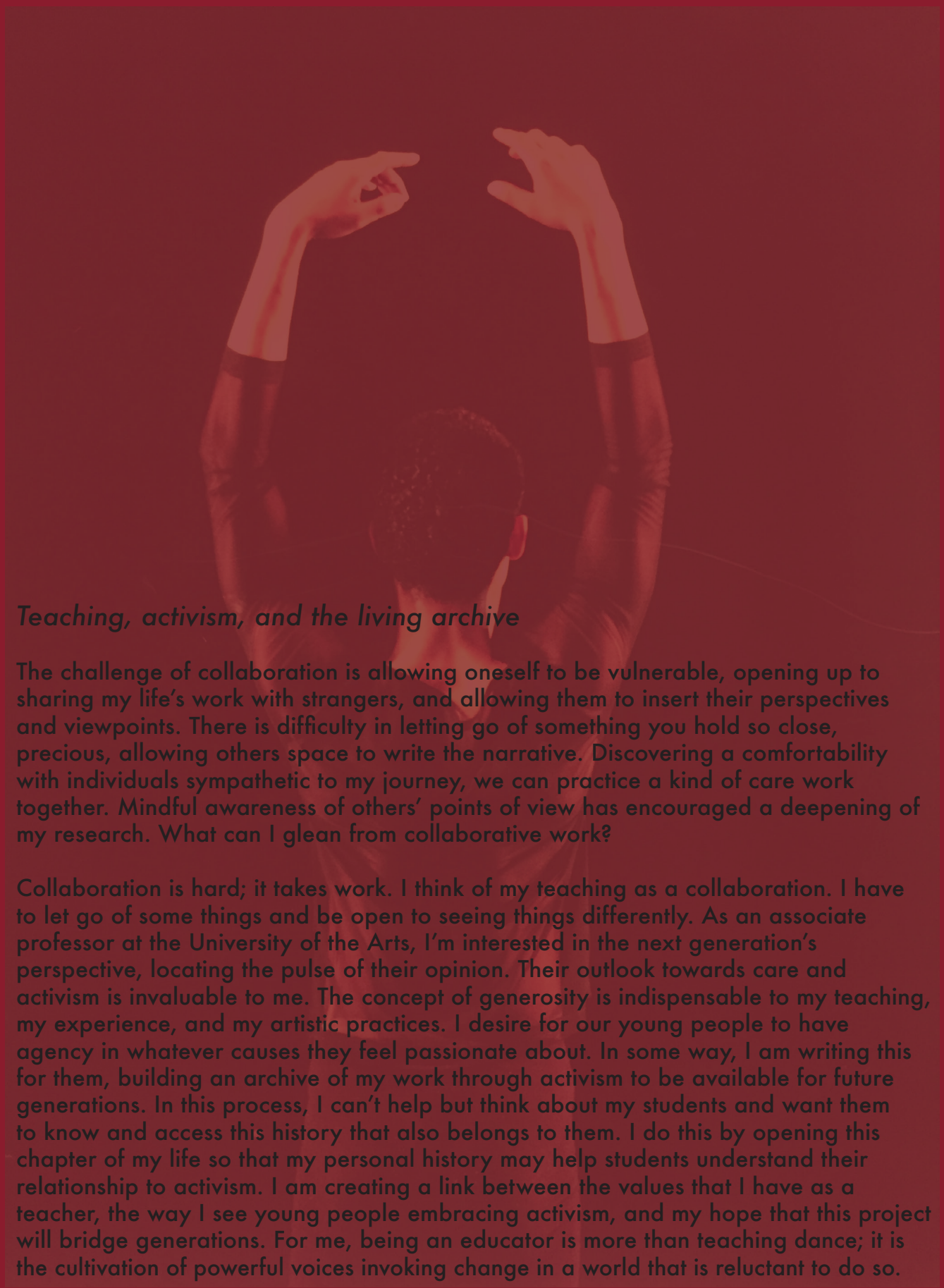


Teaching, activism, and the living archive

The challenge of collaboration is allowing oneself to be vulnerable, opening up to sharing my life's work with strangers, and allowing them to insert their perspectives and viewpoints. There is difficulty in letting go of something you hold so close, precious, allowing others space to write the narrative. Discovering a comfortability with individuals sympathetic to my journey, we can practice a kind of care work together. Mindful awareness of others' points of view has encouraged a deepening of my research. What can I glean from collaborative work?

Collaboration is hard; it takes work. I think of my teaching as a collaboration. I have to let go of some things and be open to seeing things differently. As an associate professor at the University of the Arts, I'm interested in the next generation's perspective, locating the pulse of their opinion. Their outlook towards care and activism is invaluable to me. The concept of generosity is indispensable to my teaching, my experience, and my artistic practices. I desire for our young people to have agency in whatever causes they feel passionate about. In some way, I am writing this for them, building an archive of my work through activism to be available for future generations. In this process, I can't help but think about my students and want them to know and access this history that also belongs to them. I do this by opening this chapter of my life so that my personal history may help students understand their relationship to activism. I am creating a link between the values that I have as a teacher, the way I see young people embracing activism, and my hope that this project will bridge generations. For me, being an educator is more than teaching dance; it is the cultivation of powerful voices invoking change in a world that is reluctant to do so.

George Floyd protest, Houston, TX, June 3, 2020
Photo: Cressandra Thibodeaux

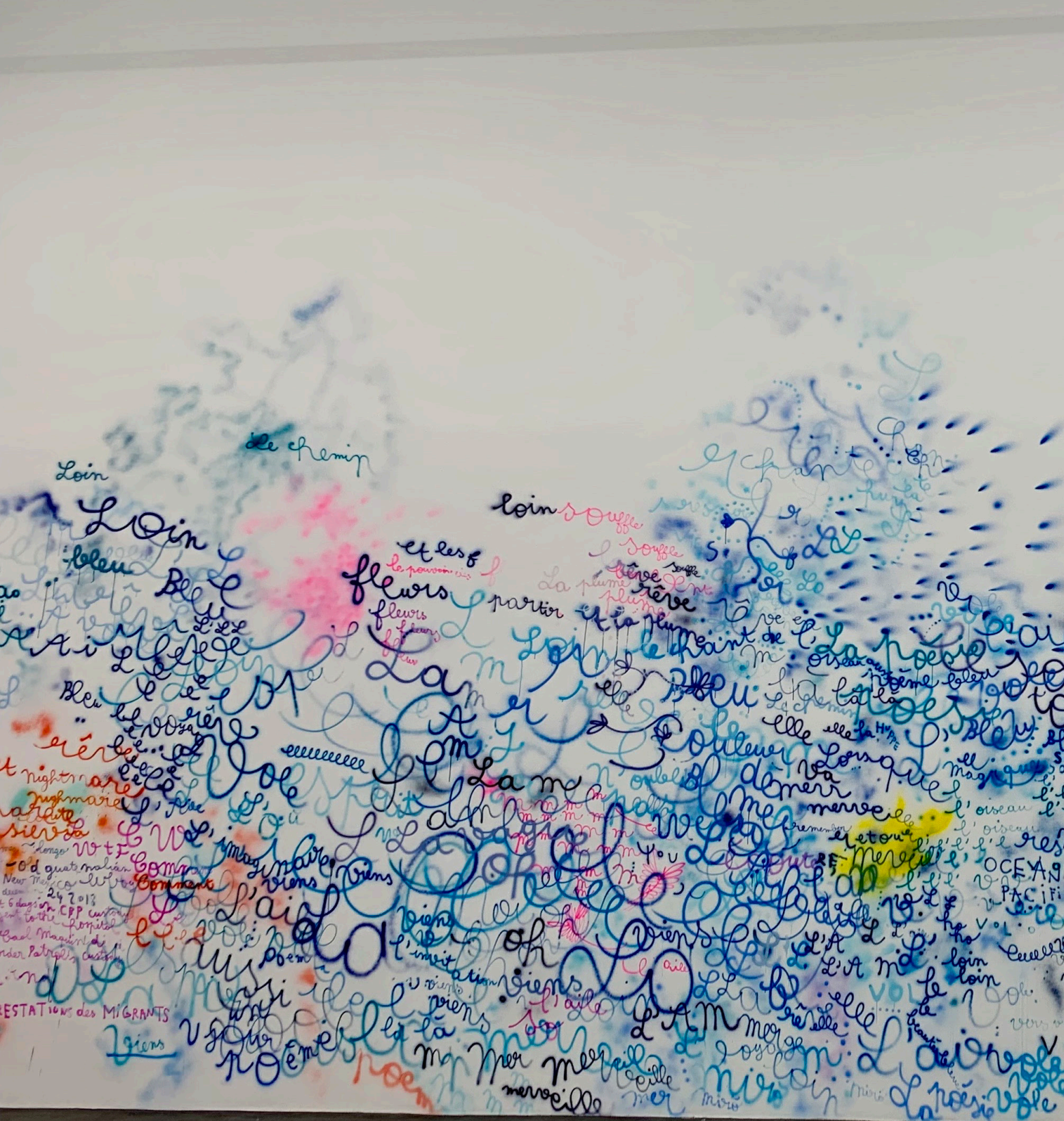
Collage Dance Collective Conservatory, Memphis, TN

HIV prevention and advocacy

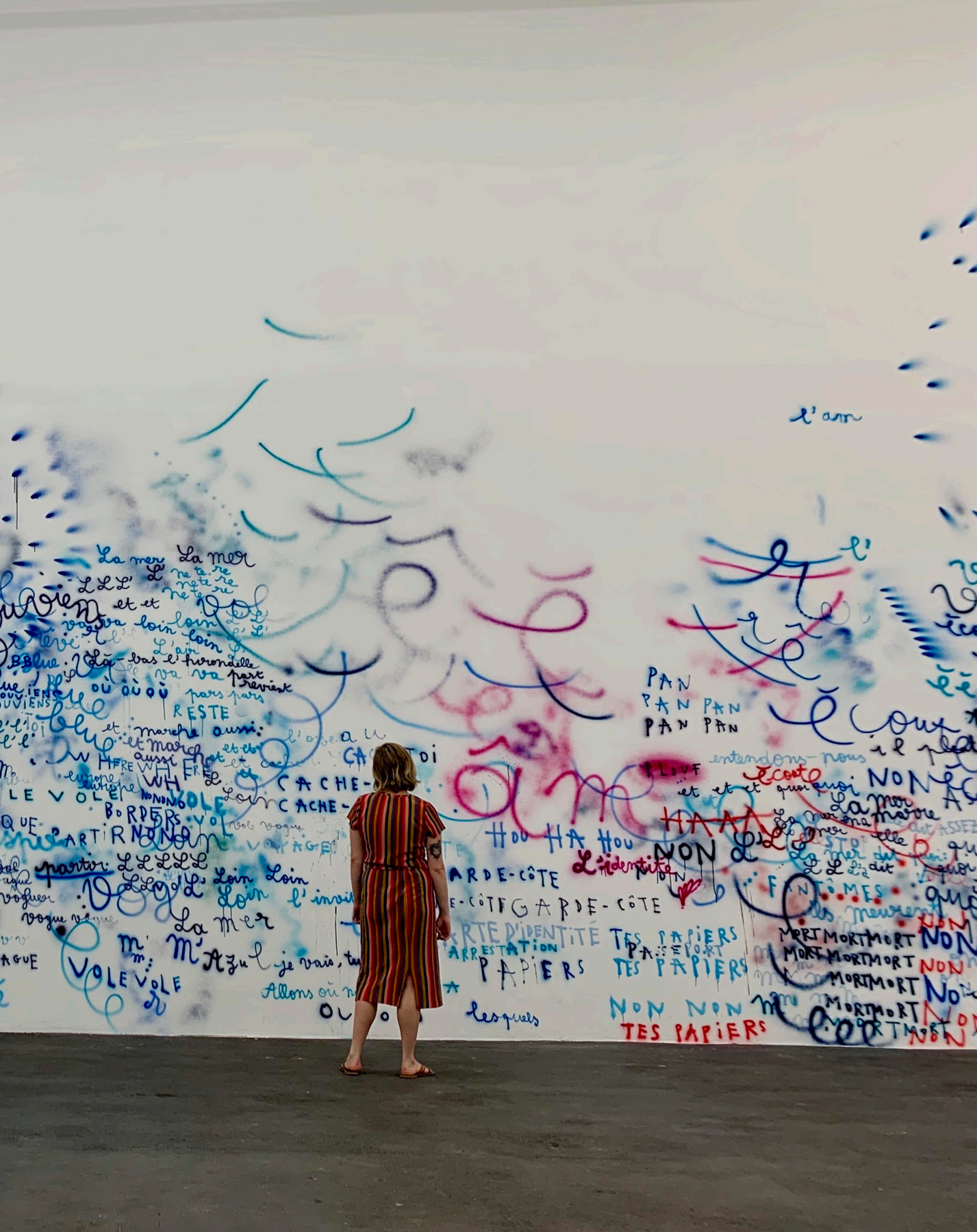
Even with all the advances in medicine, the fact still remains that you can die from AIDS in 2020. Young people continue to become infected at alarming rates, particularly in the Black and Latino communities. We must continue to advocate to bring these conversations out from behind closed doors into the light of our communities. Much work has been done, but the need for advocacy remains. The stigma associated with HIV/AIDS still exists. Young people continue to be shunned and ostracized by their peers after divulging their HIV status. I've advocated for safer sex initiatives and resources in institutions of learning for more than a decade. Condoms were the safer sex practice of my generation, and they are still recommended today. With significant advances in medicine, much of the risk of HIV infection can be alleviated for this generation by something as simple as Pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP).

> Truvada and Descovy are approved for daily use as PrEP to help prevent a person without HIV from getting the virus from sex or injection drug use. Studies have shown that PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99% when taken consistently. Among people who inject drugs, PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV by at least 74% when taken consistently. PrEP does not protect against other STDs; condom use is recommended. Most insurance plans and state Medicaid programs cover PrEP. There are medication assistance programs that provide free PrEP medications to people with no insurance to cover PrEP care. Drug manufacturer Gilead provides a co-pay assistance program; income is not a factor in eligibility.[12]

For years at the University of the Arts, students have confided in me their need for direction to resources that treat HIV. I've continuously advocated for the university to provide more programs giving immediate access to PrEP, condoms, and other resources at no cost to our students. More must be done to educate our students, raise awareness, and increase accessibility of resources that strike pre-emptively against sex-related, lifelong illnesses. I am dedicated to continuing to advocate for access to these preventative measures.



Anne-Lise Coste, *La vie en Rose*
Centre régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon
Sète, France, July 10, 2019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A Collection

I was introduced initially to MANNA through their annual art auction and fundraiser, A Show of Hands. I have been fortunate to acquire a significant collection of artwork from various AIDS charitable events throughout the years. These works are of immense importance to me; they serve as markers on the timeline of my life's journey and as reminders of how far we've come in the battle against HIV/AIDS.

I live with these art objects. I live with my memories. I live with my experiences. Artifacts serve as tangible reminders; they hold a history; they hold secrets; they hold personal stories that will never be told. Forgotten narratives haunt me from the past.

They speak to me, but often, it's too painful to listen. Some things I acquired and then had to put away; some things I didn't look at for a very long time. And somehow they've come back out; they've found their place again. They call me to listen with my eyes, a kind of deep listening. What is lingering in the unsaid?

The circumstances surrounding the acquisition of these works during the height of the AIDS epidemic were horrific, but I find this all very comforting now. I feel a sense of ease within my home, surrounded by my artwork. The transformative power of art has made these works essential to my survival over time. These artifacts remain purposeful; they continue to invoke a sense of urgency, a call to action. They're relentless gentle reminders that there's still more work to be done.

Above all, they recall a time when I knew great love.

In December 1993, Philadelphia's first Paper Prayers exhibition occurred on First Friday in the Old City Arts District in conjunction with World AIDS Day and Day With(out) Art. Proceeds from the exhibit benefitted MANNA. Paper Prayers is derived from the Japanese practice of offering colorfully decorated strips of paper as a prayer for good health and well-being. They are a compassionate gesture, given anonymously to those who are less fortunate. One hundred artists from all over the tri-state area created 4-inch x 12-inch works of art utilizing multiple mediums to remember people who had died of AIDS and to inspire positive action.

Untitled (Larry McLaughlin, 1993)

A gift from Tony Sparacino
Christmas, 1993

WAITING
JUST
WAITING

Waiting Just Waiting (Alan M. Olswing, 1994)

Waiting, the purity and innocence of a child, hopelessly optimistic, just waiting. One cannot help but feel a deep sense of melancholy and profound heartache. Navigating the painful terrain of memory's past encounters, seeking refuge in the haunting reflection of multiple layers of reality. How does one locate a connection when it is not physically present? Nostalgia for re-creating a feeling in the now.

Untitled (Michael Willse, 1995)

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance
is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
where past and future are gathered. Neither movement
from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still
point,

T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton"

Self-Portrait (Karen Fiorito, 1996)

Innocence submissively bound to the earth in surrender. A thousand marginalized lives enveloped in a vessel of the flesh. Outstretched glistening palms painfully retract into tightly clasped fists. A pleading in prayer. Longing for redemption.

The haunting echoes of an organ strain to recall dark incense-filled cathedrals. The sacred spaces that emptily promise the hope of salvation. Threading the arm through the eye of the needle reminiscent of crucifixion. The ravished body's pelvis ascends upward, legs opening as if to give birth, yet revealed in the slow writhe is the menstruation of violence.

The erasure of the oppressed continues. Nevertheless, as the oppressed, we remember ourselves and carry on to tell our story.

uld be more than a year before the Reagan
istration's health leadership would accept the idea that
AIDS in Africa was primarily heterosexual. The
administration would never fully acknowledge that the virus
might also be heterosexually transmitted in the United
States. Indeed, disputes over the heterosexual
transmissibility of the virus, and the applicability of the
African (read: black) experience to the Euro-American
(read: white) context would rage within the upper echelon
of the eight-year-long Reagan administration and well into
the term of his successor, George Bush.

-Laurie Garrett, *The Coming Plague*, 1994, page 34

In northern Europe, however, traditional guidelines for behavior in time of epidemiological crisis were less well defined. To be sure, chronic tensions between social classes tended to find overt and even ritualized expression in places as diverse as St. Petersburg and Paris[52]; but such symptoms of social strain did not easily convert into concrete and definite programs of action. People therefore had to improvise, argue, and flee, as well as plead, threaten, and pray. In other words, there was a wide spectrum of behavior from which to choose the most effective way to cope with what everyone agreed was a real and present threat to life and society.

betrayal (C Larson, 1997)

the agent that caused the body's betrayal of itself
the agent that caused a government's betrayal of its people

"It would be more than a year before the Reagan administration's health leadership would accept the idea that AIDS in Africa was primarily heterosexual. The administration would never fully acknowledge that the virus might also be heterosexually transmitted in the United States. Indeed, disputes over heterosexual transmissibility of the virus and the applicability of the African (read: black) experience to the Euro-American (read: white) context would rage within the upper echelons of the U.S. government throughout the eight-year-long Reagan administration and well into the term of his successor, George Bush."[13]

SILVA

Demand and Writhe (Pedro Silva, 2000)

The male body stripped naked, subconsciously raw in the erotic gaze—bone on bone, skin on flesh, an act of refusal in fluid time. Caught in the current of the riptide violently thrashing in the stillness—moment by moment, suspended, muscle frozen in trauma.

Volatile rapture.

In motion

My thesis research examining care through the lens of my experience with Shut Up & Dance has reaffirmed my confidence in the next generation's commitment to working as activist artists. People will continue to help each other and make a difference. It's always a new beginning.

I still have much work to do and am only at the dawn of my exploration. I want to end this book by showing you where I am now, the things I am engaged in, that I'm paying attention to. This is not the endpoint. This research is driving the unfolding future of my activism.

The key is trying.

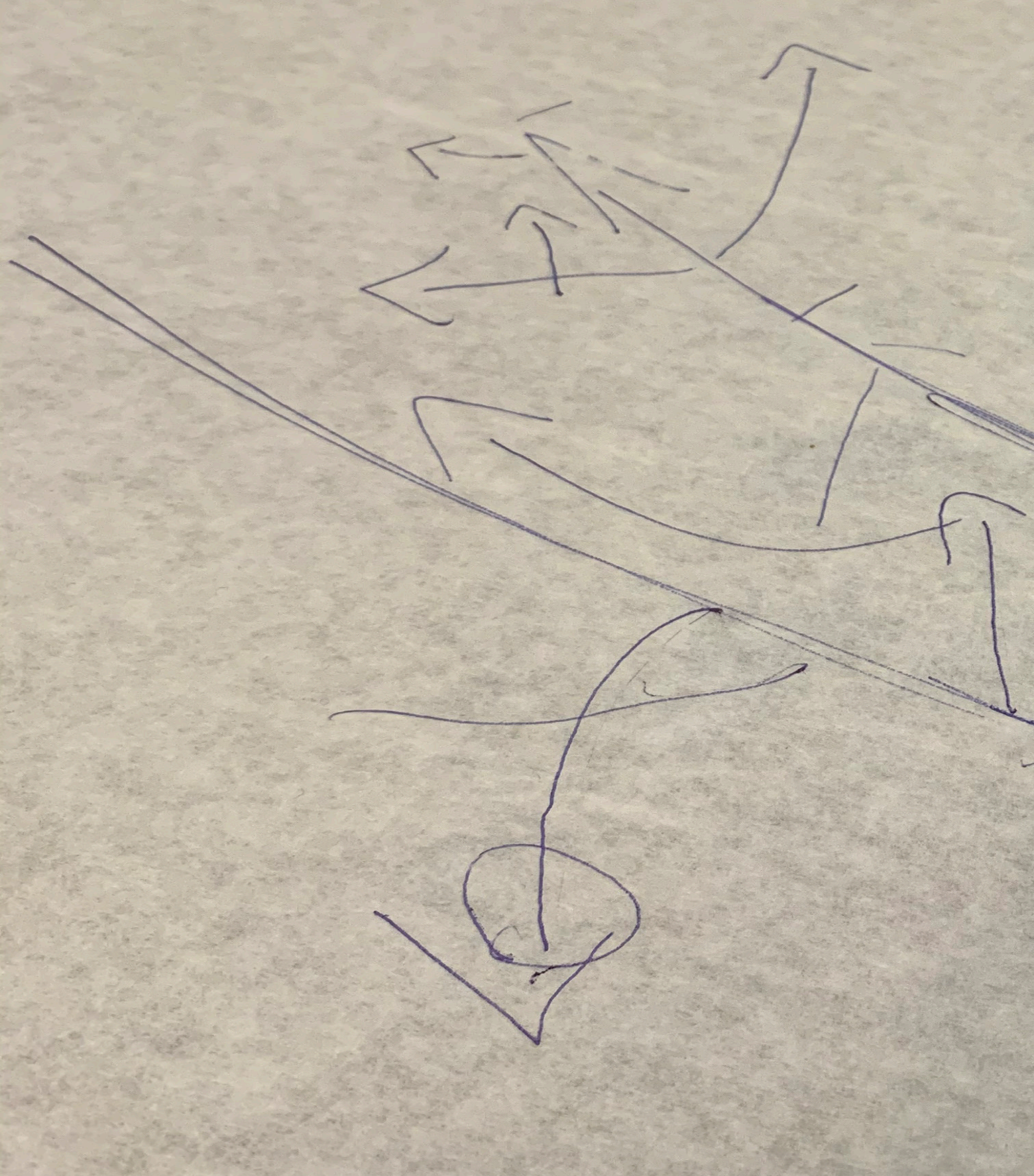
Wilmer Wilson IV, *Concrete Public*
University of the Arts, School of Dance
Performance Pedagogies of Dance 2015

Wilmer Wilson IV, *Material Narratives*
University of the Arts, School of Dance
Performance Pedagogies of Dance 2014

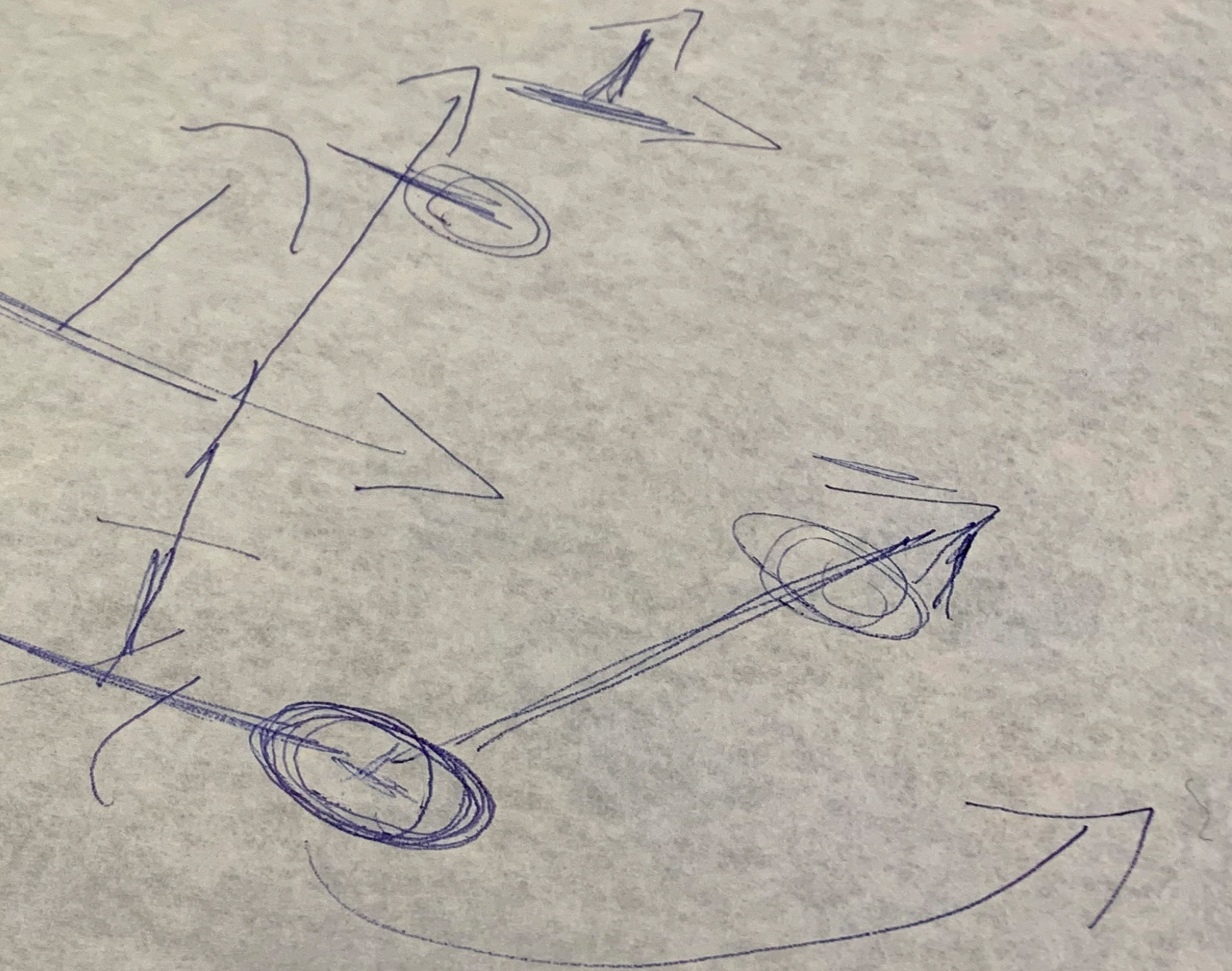
George Floyd protest, Houston, TX, June 3, 2020
Photo: Cressandra Thibodeaux

George Floyd protest, Philadelphia, PA, June 4, 2020
Photo: Miles Yeung-Tieu

some are posting on social media
some are protesting in the streets
some are donating silently
some are educating themselves
some are having tough conversations with friends & family
a revolution has many lanes — be kind to yourself and to others who are traveling in the same direction
just keep your foot on the gas



Dr. Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Thesis project*
January 19, 2020



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3. MANNA, *Shut Up* (printed by the author, 2007).

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