



# What Dance Affords Us

an artists book by  
Yayoi Kambara





# What Dance Affords Us: Imagine expansive assemblies

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In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
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## Instructions:

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✂ cut





## **Acknowledgments:**

**I'm truly grateful to dance mentally and physically in this UArts Dance MFA.**

**Thank you, Donna Faye Burchfield, for creating this container for learning. My brain's permeability has changed. Through reading, and writing, I've created space for curiosity and risk. Thank you for guiding me towards many new books.**

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**Thank you to all the cohorts for questioning, thinking, and suggesting throughout my studies. I hope we continue to move together for many more years.**



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foam  
white spot  
rich in small  
clinging to the walls  
a refusal to slide down  
this cup cannot be emptied out  
notes upon books letters through lenses  
stains from coffee circles left behind  
clips pens nestled fitting fine  
hair bandaid plug settle  
topography of things  
opened box  
penned





Fold here along this line



Sound Score

Start here:

bells toll evenly calling towards collection  
constants Constant CONSTANT cONstant closing continuing

what happens next?

where do we begin? start again. move forward.

the underground crawl  
lowering to sense, we move along the base.

fully embracing the gravel where the skins meet, gravel pushes  
with weight

around the gap.

towards skin, the lightness shifts

disruption of ground

sound strike

auto ripples  
tram  
vrrrrrrrr.....  
light  
wind  
fords  
thru  
pushes against  
weightful movements  
tolls  
  
exit.

What is this place?  
run always crossing waltzing  
in search of balances and whispers  
beats  
strive



## WHAT DANCE AFFORDS US: IMAGINING EXPANSIVE ASSEMBLIES

I assert that dance behaves similarly to language. Following the theoretical frameworks of French-Caribbean writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant, phenomenologists Sarah Ahmed and Erin Manning, and feminist philosophers Julietta Singh and Anne Anlin Cheng, I address how the phenomenon of Whiteness shapes dance practice. I wonder how dance can be imagined outside the habitus shaped by history and architecture in performance practices of Western concert dance. This synopsis shares examples of choreographers working to diverge from normative models of dance and concludes by demonstrating how dance can sustain our humanities amongst emerging technologies.













Artists in contemporary Western concert dance may refer to their performances as an approach to transmitting emotion. The articulation, positioning, and coordination of bodies perform social status and cultural social orders to audiences. While the audience looks for information from the dancers, for the dancers, the choreographies of dance “verb-ing”<sup>1</sup> produce a theoretical framework. Communication involves interpretation, and verbal language can be more fixed than dance. Dance attempts to hold the human experience and account for intersectional identities of personhood. For example, two people can simultaneously perform the same movements but internally narrate their experiences differently. As dancers gather for concert stage performances in diverse casts, circumstances of colonial modernity appear. Cheng reminds us that diasporic people are often “made stranger to oneself by unimaginable brutality”<sup>2</sup>, resulting in subjects having to “reapproach the self as a stranger.”<sup>3</sup> When attending to our complexities of experience in the U.S., dance artists must account for this location of self and contend with its violences. We work to create decolonized practices for a postcolonial world. We dance artists can make worlds, imagining expansive assemblies.

The embodiment of non-verbal frameworks offers us collaborative thinking in the negotiation of metaphors between dancer and choreographer, dancer to dancer, and finally, dancer to the audience. In the classroom hierarchy of dance training, the teacher or ‘master’ of dance instructs a group of students to move their bodies in alignment with the dance genre. The teacher then corrects and applauds individuals for their successful execution of dance steps and phrases. The teacher becomes the practice choreographer, and the student relies on teacher feedback, learning a process of subjectivity that develops a student to become a muse. In Western concert dance tradition, dancers negotiate the choreographer’s intention for movement while concurrently interjecting their artistry for the audience. Dancers with choreographers sharing corporeal autographs: oneselves on stage. Dance shares information and lives in the emotional realm of human experience. The physical skill of embodiment

becomes a useful form of dance commerce.

Techniques and vocabularies of postmodern and contemporary involve another consideration of communication: the body in performance is racialized, and this kind of racism is largely unacknowledged in the histories of these genres. Artists of color working to decolonize Western concert dance negotiate an inequitable landscape and create strategies to resist hierarchical power dynamics. In examining Whiteness in dance, the repetition of particular movement techniques can be considered as a form of vehicular language. Artists are forced to contend with the ontology and cultural valuing of these movement vocabularies. Glissant’s theories of the colonial and decolonization will help us here. Glissant’s articulation of French usage, *la francophonie*, reveals “the French language as the a priori bearer of values that could help remedy the anarchistic tendencies of the various cultures that are, completely or partially, a product of its expression.”<sup>4</sup> Glissant relates that vehicular languages are subsumed by multiplicity. This multiplicity is apparent in Gerald Casel’s *Not About Race Dance*, a choreographic *coup d’état* to the unacknowledged racial politics of U.S. post-modern dance. Within the framing of postmodern technique and choreographic devices, Casel articulates a physical renunciation of Whiteness and declares liberatory theory by revealing the forces that shape the experience of dancers of color. Casel, a Filipinx- American immigrant, challenges the exclusivity of aesthetic and institutional Whiteness they endure as a Brown queer dancer through writing and performance.

*Not About Race Dance* archives a “continuum of embodied dance history and its associated hierarchies”<sup>5</sup> and moves audiences to consider beyond it. Casel’s choreographic criticism of postmodern Whiteness demonstrates a refusal of the predictive algorithm of reproduction. Casel activates the possibility for interpreters to become authors. In Casel’s accumulated opening solo to TLC’s *Waterfalls*, he pairs projections describing their movements and the white cube they are dancing in. Referencing Trisha Brown, this acknowledgment of lineage demonstrated by



pedestrian aesthetics with little gestural ornamentation, Casel offers critique of the Whiteness embedded in postmodern dance and invites audiences to challenge them throughout.

Historically, white artists are not held accountable for citational acknowledgment of their movement's inspiration. Within this strategy, white artists gain individual recognition growing social and financial capital. Contemporary choreographer and eco-feminist scholar Bhumi Patel labors to exact a citational practice countering the extractivist practice of appropriation. The result of her citational practice enriches meaning in her choreography. In *fault lines*, she acknowledges the construction of U.S. history, beginning with stolen lands of Indigenous and stolen people, African Americans. Patel's citation practice for performance effectively renders Gee Wesley's ideas on site, cite, and sight.<sup>6</sup> The site-specific performance is filled with partnering and group work, performing a requirement for collective movement. In the final chapter of *fault lines*, dancers begin to wail, and the audience feels relief. This solace is made possible by Patel's efforts in recognition so audiences contemplate migration and settler living in San Francisco.

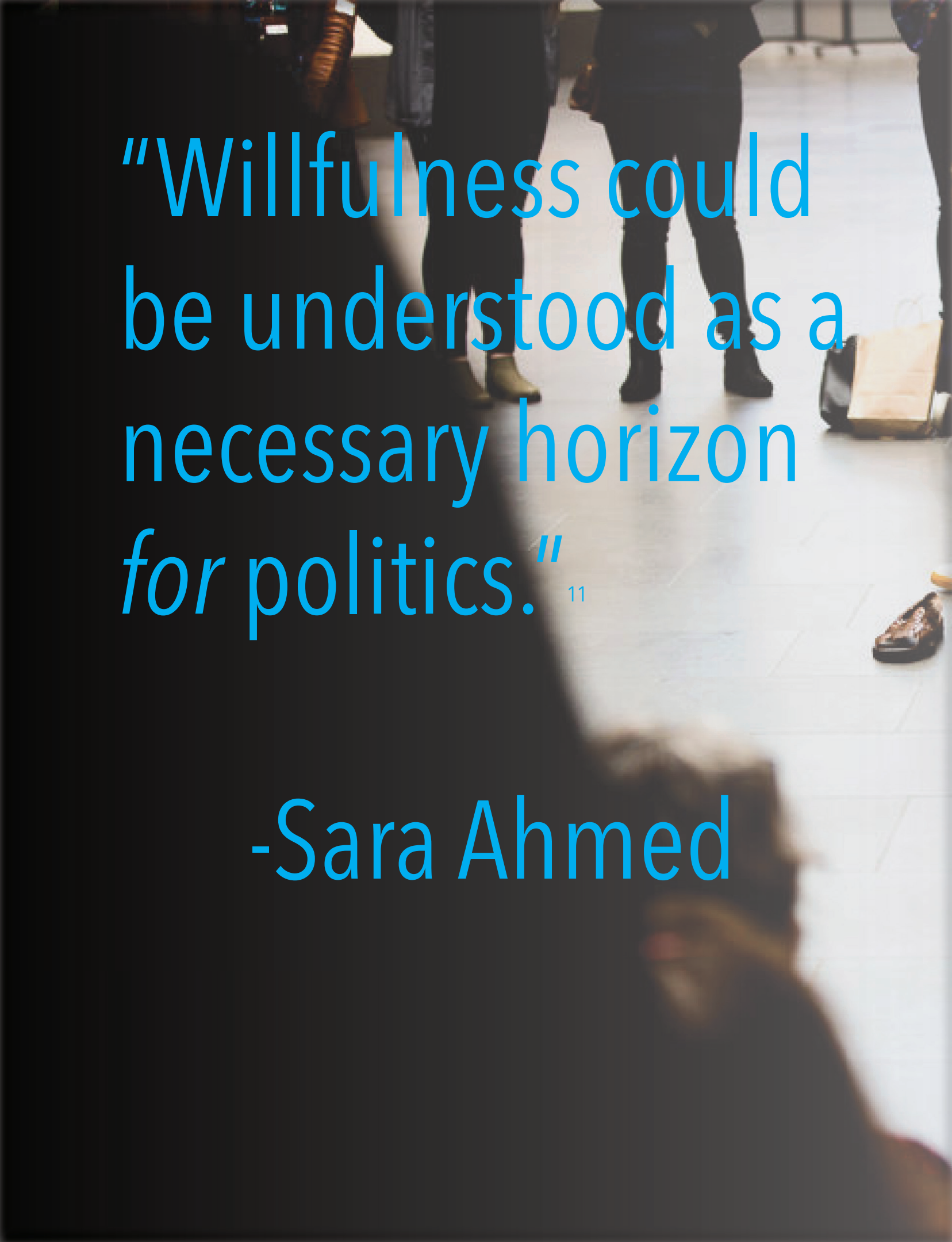
Dance artists grapple simultaneously with the embodiment and citational lack of Native American culture in Graham and Horton techniques. Martha Graham and Lester Horton created personal capital through this appropriation.<sup>7</sup> In applying Glissant's language framework defending these languages from a monolingual point of view would be pointless, as it would enclose them in an ideology and a practice already out of date.<sup>8</sup> The practice of modern dance without cultural citation reflects Glissant's concerns with monolingualism. Considering Manning's theorizing of technicity, the retooling of technique beyond its function,<sup>9</sup> alongside Glissant's ideas of composite language frameworks, reveals dancers must move techniques out of a single origin. Thinking alongside Glissant and Manning exhibits dance's reliance on artists to subvert technique. The inevitable trail of Whiteness in modern and postmodern dance are points

of research for Casel and Patel, who deploy queer phenomenological theorizing to find urgent pedagogical practice and choreographic journey. Their dances that imagine otherwise fissure the architectures of colonial structures of performance.

In the creative process, the director or choreographer urges dance artists to make meaning of the movement. A strategy emerges through rhythmic articulation. Suppose the beat is imagined as a half dome; in that case, the dancer can challenge the idea of being on time by reflexively working on the bright side, not squarely in the center of the beat or on the back half of the beat, evincing their body into being in time versus on time. These renderings of dance steps are communicative, translated by the dancer to offer audiences aesthetic parameters articulated by the choreographer. One way to consider this articulation strategy could push a dancer to be seen as a soloist or a master over the other dancers. By being brighter on the beat and the other dancers being in the belly, a dancer would be singular, almost an image. Dance artists contemplate and actively challenge notions of mastery to offer another form beyond the normative structuring of time and refute the colonial remnants of globalization and multiculturalism.

Applying a non-linear articulation of time, dancers embody the desire Singh articulates in *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements*, "the will toward language mastery begins to dissipate and is replaced by the possibilities that languages embody - or can be crafted to embody - through the pens of colonized writers."<sup>10</sup> Co-interrogators of Dancing Around Race (DAR) collectively examine how racialized bodies are canonized in Western art forms. The will of dancers shapes new kinds of capital and creates alternative institutions. Dance artist Raissa Simpson, a collective member of DAR and PUSH Company Founding Director, manifests Ahmed's considerations, "willfulness could be understood as a necessary horizon for politics."<sup>11</sup> She diverges from current Bay Area normativity as PUSH Dance company opens their doors to the BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) in the Fall of 2023 in San Francisco, California.





"Willfulness could  
be understood as a  
necessary horizon  
*for politics.*"<sup>11</sup>

-Sara Ahmed







Simpson's sustained practice of decolonizing her imagination activates sustainable futures for other BIPOC dancers. Stemming from Afro-pessimism, her Afro-futuristic dance work *Codelining* expresses research countering assimilation of place and body, blooming the theoretical framework of refusal in performance. Her work illuminates benevolent racism and its predecessor, benevolent colonialism. Using motion capture and wireless sensory technology, *Codelining* performs the digital divide, the real and perceived barriers affecting communities of color, including gentrification and redlining.

Dancers' communications already exist at a point where language mastery is purposefully blunted and enacts physical organization responding to environment. Dance erupts spontaneously, answering the call of a D.J., as dance emerges when movement is required. Dance can illuminate decolonial imagining by performing narratives refusing colonial states of power, as seen in Nadia Buegré's *Prophetique (on est déjà nè.es)*. Buegré's ode celebrates the transgender Abidjan community in the Côte d'Ivoire. In collaboration with transgender performers, Buegré's *Prophetique (on est déjà nè.es)*, meaning *Prophetic (we were already born)*, demands that transgender people and genius be witnessed through Vogue Femme movements and *coupé-décalé* musical style, which speaks to the immigrant, racial and queer experience of the performers. Recovering the lost recognition in colonial regime, I interpret Buegré's work as a performance of the "in-between" theorized by Legacy Russell in *Glitch Feminism: a Manifesto*, where Buegré engages with "the in-between as a core component of survival — neither masculine nor feminine, neither male nor female, but a spectrum across which way we may be empowered to choose and define ourselves for ourselves."<sup>12</sup> *Prophetique* ends with a song, an optimistic chorus for butterflies to fly freely. As Buegré carefully constructs the endearing ending, there is still a possibility to queer further this queer performance. The dancers' party volume and exuberance return loudly in bows, dancing exactly how they want to be seen. The liberation onstage imagines a more just world for transgender people.

In my personal experience with dance companies, relationships grew through partnering. While partnering with a taller male made some lifts work easier in classical partnering, there was always another way. Dancers perform for choreographic narrative, but a desire between partners can simultaneously emerge. Corey Brady, Daniel Santos, and Jeremy Smith were all caring partners when I was a company member with ODC/Dance Company in San Francisco. We engaged our senses of proprioception and worked in possibility. In failure, we apologized and practiced again. On a stressful day, our partnering was a place we could hide from our directors' pressures, creating opacity as we built refuge from their ambition. Partnering is a place to share secrets, find voice, and thrive the rest of the day.

Dancers can challenge their orientation toward performance when engaging Manning's question, "What else can artistic practice become when the object is not the goal, but the activator, the conduit toward new modes of existence?"<sup>13</sup> In this thinking, dancers emerge as activators, challenging neo-liberal notions of personhood, which place people into classifications such as race, gender, ability, ethnicity, and age. Choreographers determine aesthetic values and can emerge the possibilities of personhood in ontological indeterminacy. By reorienting bodies from categorization, dance resists reification. Can curling the spine be an act of new possibility, emerging affirmations, moving us past the rigidity of the neo-liberal body? Yes. Can this happen with a choreographer in the room? Maybe. If choreographers can orient beyond pre-existing aesthetic bias, the body's need to articulate the spine opens to emergent shaping. AXIS Dance Company Director Emerita Judith Smith has practiced this process with her integrated dance company since 1987 in Oakland, California. Disabled and non-disabled dancers have specific, individual movement vocabularies, necessarily incorporating wheelchairs, prostheses, and crutches, that become part of the translation process for movement and partnering. Choreographers working with AXIS Dance Company open a mode of choreographic process for multiple translations.



Unison, as a choreographic device, creates cohesion on stage. As a college student in the mid-90s, I've seen dance companies since deploy unison to enact neoliberal ideology. The bodies on stage were interchangeable. My training emphasized this as we commanded our bodies to achieve the same lines and angles on time. If unable to execute or if injured, dancers were replaced. My experiences at ODC/Dance continued the performance of neo-liberal theory. The oppressive narratives of misogyny experienced by white female directors manifested in performances by a diverse cast where women were flung in partnering and triumphed in lifting men. Simultaneously, this neoliberalism equated misogyny to racial inequity, inadvertently reproducing a culture and aesthetic of institutional Whiteness.

Full disclosure: I'm one of the co-interrogators of DAR. I was invited to this assembly instigated by Gerald Casel's community engagement residency with Bridge Live Arts in 2018. At the time, I didn't have the language or frame to name the conditions of Whiteness in dance. I've mainly trained in European dance forms and was ushered along in my dance training and career because I had a particular body: thin, athletic, and able-bodied. Growing up as a third-culture kid, I assumed my upbringing within neoliberal ideologies and global citizenship would erase discrimination. There were plenty of diverse dance companies, so I signed contracts. Still, nothing prepared me for the physical and aesthetic colonization of white concert dance.

In 2019, our DAR cohort met with several Bay Area funders: Margot Melcon from the Zellerbach Family Foundation, Ted Russell from the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, and Barbara Mumby-Huerta from the San Francisco Arts Commission. We asked each of them how their organizations addressed equity. Russell candidly discussed the role of white patriarchy at the root of inequity and how in the U.S., racism is built into the systemic infrastructure of the U.S. He commented, "If you can move the needle on race, you move the needle on everything else. If you don't mention race, it's easy to leave it out because of the deep discomfort around the issue."<sup>14</sup> When arts organizations make sweeping

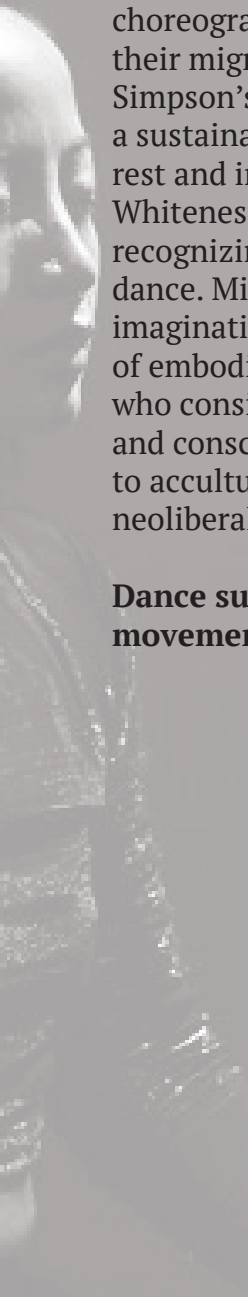
statements on diversity and inclusion without recognizing the white patriarchy embedded in their systems, it slows meaningful action toward equity. Habitus keeps us from staying in the discomfort of these conversations, so we must remember our dance practice. Dancers can integrate this thinking by moving beyond the need to dance big, eating space for individual catharsis and trust our ability to focus as we demonstrate in the practice balances and turns.

Japanese American dancer Nobuko Miyamoto was discovered as a child ingénu by choreographers Jerome Robbins and Jack Cole in the 1950s. She recalls her first memories of dancing after relocating from her Los Angeles neighborhood, part of President Roosevelt's 1942 Executive Order 9066, which removed 120,000 Japanese Americans from their homes. While her childhood memories hold mixed nostalgia, "Dancing gave me a sense of place, a way to be in the world. It was a way to express my feelings. Dance was my first language, my first voice."<sup>15</sup> As an artist of mixed Japanese ancestry, Miyamoto's paternal grandparents being an interracial couple, she endured racism as a child of Japanese descent while concurrently contending with Japanese prejudice towards non-Japanese. She muses, "Where else could a Japanese kid play a French can-can girl or a white swan?"<sup>16</sup> Returning to the estranged body described by Anne Anlin Cheng, we remember to attend and partner our bodies, which colonial modernity threatens to violate. In her analysis of the body, particularly female and gendered minorities of the Asiatic diaspora, she articulates the constructs of Ornamentalism stemming from the aesthetics of Orientalism, which produces a devalued inanimate body and overvaluing of animate objects.<sup>17</sup> Dance affords an opportunity, a restoring of the body, as movement grounds us. Miyamoto's career from Broadway dancer to cultural bearer attests to the expanse in operating dance logic. Dance enabled Miyamoto to imagine outside prejudice which follows her career trajectory from a Broadway dancer to her current path as a cultural bearer of Japanese American dance and musical arts.









My earliest memories of sound come from the busy train stations in Tokyo, the sounds of rushing shoes, and the clicks of the hole puncher as he processed tickets. Since the early 90s, machines have processed tickets in Tokyo, eliminating the menial labor of the ticket puncher. In this desire for automation, it's crucial to stay in the study of Cheng's theorizing of personhood "the interface between ontology and objectness, animated by the ornament, that we are most compelled to confront the horizons and the limits of the politics of personhood."<sup>18</sup> Dance artists can work with new technologies to limit technology's potential occupation. Examples in this research synopsis highlight artists who create practices for our contemporaneity embedded within colonial and capitalist architecture—Casel insights authorship in motion through criticism of postmodern whiteness in dance. Patel's citational practice and choreography demand that audiences consider their migrations with the ontologies of land. Simpson's requirement for placemaking worlds a sustainable future for other artists of color to rest and imagine outside the institutional walls of Whiteness. Beugré develops a new performance recognizing transgender people thriving in concert dance. Miyamoto's dance practice leads her imagination to consider the lasting possibilities of embodiment and sustained practice. Dancers who consider their conditions, consternations, and consciousness create worlding, performing to acculturate and transcend the remnants of neoliberal ideology.

**Dance sustains our humanity in motion, our movements refuse to be fixed.**







Forest (a) Bathing is an fantastical immersive dance film where viewers control the narrative between urban gardens and national forests to create a dialogue about thriving in colonial modernity. The film explores how the benevolent emotions from the awe and wonder of being in the forest, a protected space, seemingly available to everyone carry lessons.

Japanese forest bathing (shinrin-yoku) is a practice of relaxation to de-stress in a natural way. This experimental, 7 minute film flashes between forest and urban garden depending on the audience's movement in and out of the space as the environment uses motion capture on the audience. If an audience member moves quickly, the visuals glitches into fantastical forest version of the film. Collective movement - a necessary desire for elsewhere.

Forest (a) Bathing creates an alternative universe set in the woods, with a cast of 5 BIPOC dance theater artists. Together, a world that imagines the interior lives of a community full of wonder and awe in the forest and alternative narratives in their gardens. Gardens are designed, coerced to behave in a certain way while also being a place for futuring. Breaching time within the urban/natural world, characters enact the strategies of thriving in nature and urban/suburban environments. This film shares embodied vernaculars of survival and is held in the genre of science fiction, framing fantasy alongside a natural world where characters are enacting forces on their environments and one another.



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a lush garden. In the foreground, there are various green plants and flowers. In the middle ground, a stone archway is visible, leading to a path. The archway is made of grey stone and has a small white plaque on its right side. The garden is filled with a variety of plants, including some with small white flowers and others with larger green leaves. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

## YES!

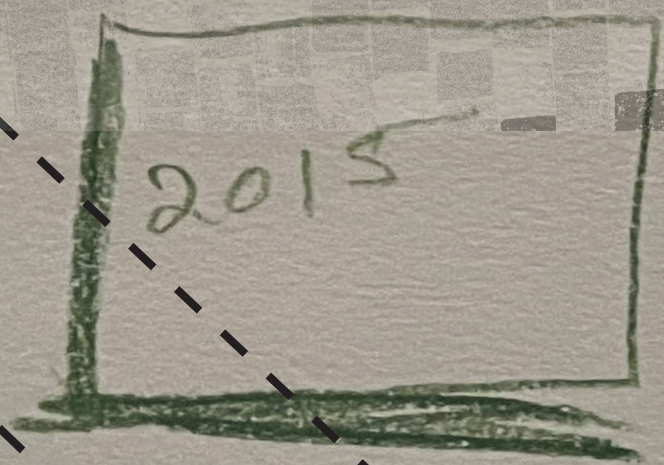
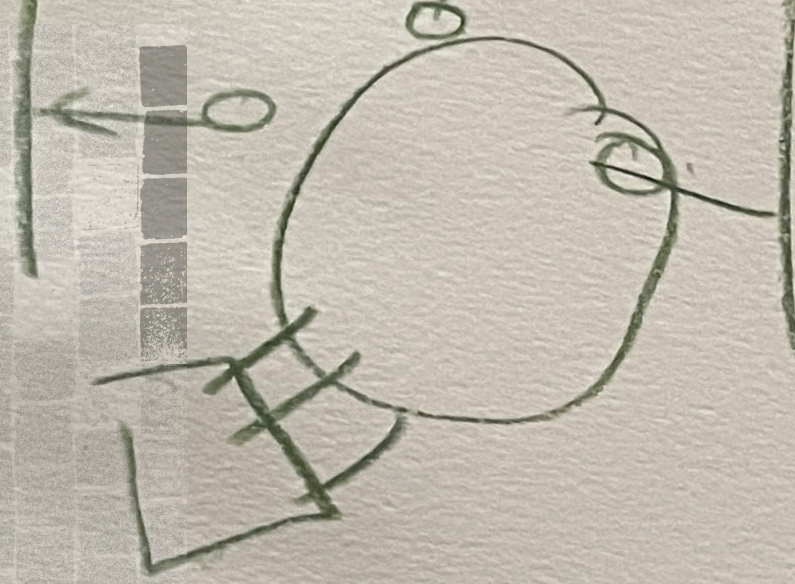
I'm in the beginning stages of producing a new project about consent titled YES! My research is partnered with Dance Mission Theater's Grrrl Brigade - directed by Fredrika Keefer, and Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts (SoTA), to create a performance experience for teens and young adults about navigating consent and learning embodied skills through the creative process and performance. Narrated and guided live by drag queen Black Benetar (aka Mx. Beatrice Thomas), this choose-your-own-adventure performance explores consent by framing various relationships students encounter. The movement vocabulary is built on these questions: what is the anatomy of a yes, and what is the anatomy of a no? Crossing midlines would be a no. What possibilities exist out this binary, and how can physical and verbal language navigate permission and consent?







TRAITÉS  
SUR 3  
DES FEMMES



itation / Commerce



data driven ballet  
proof of concept

why generalists rule the world.

Letters Begin.

Soft much much won solos

bridging next to contest sisters against wings.

Pocus pocus enter second dancers, get low.

Honk into the undergrowth where Penny and Dot view the new.

Halloween hocus and stir my bunk. Another stop.

Bunk and Japanese travel the picks of feet.

Soon puller needs, soon to the Yanno,

love past the obstacle,

Goose.

70% away  
white artists

100,000  
900  
1031

Mutual  
Aid



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In Tertext  
In Tramascular  
In Trouble  
In Terpellation  
In Tertext  
In Tersect  
In Terrupt





3D → system. one thing

specialized 3D work

→ cinematrics.

→ game engine

create film

unity game engine

- cutting back on budget

unity work -

Research

as

Action:

Can collective movement bring us together in time so we disrupt the notion that to fully audience dance we must view from beginning to end?

instafuf: 106 bulko





hair capture

family

what segn



Internal External colonies  
heterogeneous population  
diasporas.

Citizen  
subject.

internal colonialism

Colonial

3pm

mission  
nations  
borders



coherent account for oneself.

when  
are

richness of community.

richness is catastrophically

affinity - perception or disintegration







## Endnotes

- 1 Robert Moses, in conversation with the author on April 15, 2023, on how dance is the continued 'verb-ing' of personhood.
- 2 Cheng, Anne. 2018. "Ornamentation: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman." *Critical Inquiry* 44 (3): 415–46. <https://doi.org/10.1086/696921>.
- 3 Cheng (2018) p.446
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- 10 Singh, Julietta. 2018. *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements*. Duke University Press Books. p.83
- 11 Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *Willful Subjects*. Duke University Press EBooks. p.165
- 12 Russell, Legacy Artist. 2020. *Glitch Feminism : A Manifesto* p.8
- 13 Manning, Erin. *Minor Gestures* 2016 p.46 Duke University Press
- 14 Russell, Ted. In conversation with Dancing Around Race May 2018, San Francisco, California.
- 15 Miyamoto, Nobuko. 2021. *Not Yo' Butterfly: My Long Song of Relocation, Race, Love, and Revolution*. Univ of California Press p.24
- 16 Miyamoto 2021 p. 26
- 17 Cheng 2018
- 18 Cheng 2018 p. 446

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