

IMAGINING

A GIBNEY JOURNAL

ISSUE **1**

WRITINGS BY

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IMAGINING IS RIGOROUS WORK.

It is building with the evidence of things not seen, with some tools and resources not yet firmly in hand. A cardio workout for a curious mind. A hawk-eyed observing of what is and what must change. A magical invocation of what could be and must be. An act of will.

Because words on a page are not moving targets—not fleeting things—imagining in the medium of written words is, for artists of dance and live performance, an act of especially courageous vulnerability. It's an indelible mark. A revelation shared from the shelter of the inside to the hurly burly of the outside. Imagining takes a risk.

With this journal, *Imagining*, we create new dimensions of space for artists and others exploring dance and performance to observe, question, report, process, experiment, invoke, reveal and risk. The world of the arts has been rocked by pandemic and economic crises as well as widespread revolt against white supremacy and the anti-Black brutality of police forces. To a greater or lesser degree, workers and institutions in the arts have begun to confront the role we play in shielding white supremacist systems from essential critique and dismantling.

In this first issue of *Imagining*, **Ogemdi Ude** examines how casually we sling the word “care” and urges us to approach care as an anti-racist practice requiring mindful, respectful attention to difference and detail. **Maura Nguyen Donohue**'s stack of receipts offers unwavering testimony about racism and power imbalance in the halls

of dance academia. And, in the Age of Zoom, **Aynsley Vandenbroucke** helps us reclaim our vital, creative experience as human bodies in space and in relation to one another.

I am grateful to my colleague and assistant **Dani Cole** for her ideas, labor and support through the exciting process of taking *Imagining* from concept to publication. My thanks, as well, to **Gina Gibney** who set all of this in motion through her longing for a place to support more quality writing about New York dance and performance.

Please know that, at Gibney, we are pressing forward with re-imagining who we are, what we do and why we do it. We hope *Imagining* will inspire urgent, rigorous and gracious imagining of your own.

Eva Yaa Asantewaa
Senior Director of Artist Development & Curation
Editorial Director, *Imagining: A Gibney Journal*

WITH INTENT

BY OGEMDI UDE

At the end of Disney Pixar's *Incredibles 2* (don't worry, no spoilers) Elastigirl is hugging her kids in the midst of a fight scene. Violet and Dash wrap their arms around her torso, while the youngest, Jack-Jack, is lifted up into her arms. The embrace is full and sweet. There's a moment, minute enough to miss it, in which Jack-Jack pats his mom's back twice with one of his small hands. It is both insignificant and conspicuously human.

It is perhaps easy to overlook the layers of labor that went into that brief action: the illustration and animation expertise that resulted in two simple pats on the back in the midst of an already intimate hug. But this was intentional. This is care.

As a Black femme artist, educator, and doula, I have come to recognize care as a practice: it requires specialization and absolute attention to detail. Every step must be considered: from preparation to execution; witnessing to impact. And for all of this input, this labor, practicing care often results in a fleeting moment of levity and breath.

Many of my most recent encounters with care have come from my immersion in our current peak of the Black Lives Matter movement. Texts from well meaning non-black friends. Renamed buildings and dismantled statues. Anti-racism statements from non-profit organizations and for-profit corporations. Free and discounted goods and services. Instagram takeovers. One-time donations. Fearful apologies.

Embedded in each of these has been some form of: "I care about you." And to that I ask: **Why now?**

Care is active.

Care is long term.

Care is an intentional process.

And it is anti-racist work.

"I care about you" must become "I am caring about you."

The labor necessary to care, should not fall upon the recipient of care. Upon receiving this most recent influx of offers of care, I was jarred by how performative it felt. I felt pushed to say "Thank you" (despite the giver insisting that a response wasn't necessary).

How could that care manifest in my life? I could not imagine what there was to receive. I felt slowly swarmed by anti-Black interactions I had faced in relationships with these "caring" entities. And now, here I was thanking them.

I write this to amend that thanks: You must recognize the difference between intention and impact when working through your perpetuations of anti-Blackness.

You must account for the violence you have previously enacted, and might continue to enact, upon me. You must rigorously shape your tools for caring.

1. Analyze the differences in identity, personal and ancestral histories, and lived experiences between yourself and the intended recipient of care. Succinctly acknowledge these differences in your offer of care.

2. Identify and explicitly state the tangible resources of care you will provide (should the person accept the offer). For example: a sound meditation, bodywork, grocery delivery, money, a phone call, a hug.

3. Should the person accept the offer, be prepared to share the logistics of when and how you can execute this act of care. Allow the recipient flexibility, but check your own bandwidth.

4. Abandon any expectations regarding outcome. Your care will not eradicate white supremacy nor the recipient's experience of it.

As in a dance between partners, intentional care requires specific and coordinated movements and momentum. You and your partner move in an embrace; you do not clench each other. Recognizing the context in which you move, you give attention to the space around you. You welcome resistance, but you don't stop breathing together.

Are you ready to care for a person in their full humanity?

I honor and celebrate those whose practices are, and have been, based in care: primary care providers, nurses, midwives, doulas, herbalists, therapists, psychiatrists, physical therapists, massage therapists, personal trainers, astrologers, first responders, educators, community-engaged artists and administrators, guardians, chosen family. These folks approach a person as a whole being while focusing on specific, even idiosyncratic, needs. What a gift it is to see and take in so much

while humbly recognizing and meeting even a mere fraction of that need.

I like cold foods when I am sad: popsicles or chilled applesauce with frozen fruit. I like warm foods when I am not. When I cry, I need people to sit next to me, but I don't want them to hug me. When I am angry, I like to rant and have others interrupt with exclamations of empathy. I am comforted by Prince Street Pizza, my memory foam bed, YouTube videos of live gospel music, podcasts hosted by Black Queer folks, and Bed Bath & Beyond. There is a diverse yet specific vibrancy to my needs.

I offer these thoughts as someone often confused when I don't feel the care that others have intended for me. And because I use the term "care" in the various facets of my professional practice, I find I must engage with the multiplicity of its meanings. I have learned from many caregivers to honor this word. And I know that we must reckon with what we don't care about if we're ever to truly express what we do. It's human to want to offer care, to want to eradicate pain. How devastating it is to be wrong; but how dangerous it is to be unintentional. Therein lies the violence of thoughtless care.

I hold the image of Jack-Jack's hand, the delicate touch - so fleeting. Perhaps its warmth lifted quickly, as soon as it came. But its impact on me, the witness, lay in the clarity of the animator's (and character's) intention. As I recall this moment, I revel in the magnanimity of the care it offered.



Photo of Ogemdi Ude by Sydney King

Ogemdi Ude is a Nigerian-American dance artist, educator, and doula based in New York City. She creates performances that investigate how Black folks' cultural, familial, and personal histories are embedded in their bodies and influence their everyday and performative movement. She aims to incite critical engagement with embodied Black history as a means to imagine Black futurity. Her work has been presented in New York, Melbourne, and Berlin at Brooklyn Arts Exchange, Danspace Project, Gibney, Center for Performance Research, Movement Research at the Judson Church, Streb Lab for Action Mechanics, Lewis Center for the Arts, La Mama Courthouse, and for BAM's DanceAfrica festival. She currently serves as Head of Movement for Drama at Professional Performing Arts School in Manhattan and is adjunct faculty in the Dance MFA at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She is a Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Creative Engagement Grantee, a member of Gibney's 2020 Moving Toward Justice Cohort, and a 2019-2020 Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU Resident Fellow. She graduated Magna Cum Laude with a degree in English, Dance, and Theater from Princeton University.

WHITE- LASHING

WHITE FRAGILITY IN THE IVORY TOWER

BY MAURA NGUYEN DONOHUE

A conversation:

CisHetOlderWhiteGuy (CHOWG): *You said to me, two things: "You don't get the last word on this"... And you also said to me, "take your white fragility and leave."*

Younger-but-not-young-woman-of-color, aka She/Her: *And what else did I offer to you?*

CHOWG: *You offered, you told me to read some articles on Slack, right?*

She/Her: *I asked you to please do some work, educating yourself about the history of white supremacy.*

CHOWG: *Okay. You know what I... This is it. Get off your soapbox and teach the class you were hired to teach.*

She/Her: *I am teaching that class. I believe, I believe the students in that class ... what you don't understand is that students have been coming to me. With concern. And that (it was actually expressed publicly in a forum) that there needs to be work done at the level of people—who the students believe are our faculty—who are expressing racist opinions in class, in front of them.*

CHOWG: *I'm done with it.*

She/Her: *Well, if you don't want to do the work at this moment, I understand, but I need to be clear that what is happening is that you were*

challenged and you are not responding with consciousness.

CHOWG: *I'm being bulldozed by the tyranny of the minority. I will not stand for that.*

I need to up my ginkgo.

I can't remember as many textbook examples of white fragility as those I have tallied since late May. Male fragility more than my beloved queer therapist cares to caringly listen to, I'm sure. The above conversation is actual. And, in truth, goes to a worse place regarding slaveholder legacies and CHOWG's immediate response of being offended at the mention of white fragility without knowing what white fragility encompasses (despite a [NYT Bestselling book](#) by the same name).

But, I am not writing this as a call out. The specific examples of attempted lashings in this piece serve as primary source evidence. I am writing my way through my let down. I expected to be surrounded by awakened peers who wanted to play the part of activated ally (or [White Shield](#)) for the sake of our shared community, which is as colorful as [Daniel Quasar's Rainbow flag](#) reboot. I am writing to reckon. I was surprised by immediate vitriolic responses from colleagues at a public City University of New York dance department. This surprise has caused some pause. I realized I had been compromised in my undercover work in the Ivory Tower.

I mean, let's face it, any diversity hire, honorary-white (yes, that is an actual apartheid designation for certain kinds of Asians), woman of color who manages to secure tenure and promotion in academia in a neo-liberal, I-voted-for-Obama America has worked pretty hard to be 'agreeable.' But, apparently I've blown my cover. No yellow kkkianswoman biopic, directed by Justin Lin, for me. Despite a leftover 90s-style designation (by others) as "angry feminist" -- which, in and of itself, was a blatant disregard for my undergrad "womanist" self-identifier, I have, until recently, worked pretty well with my colleagues.

As I learned at more than one "Junior Faculty of Color" brown bag lunch, the adamant hierarchy of academia leaves little room for "difficult" women and none for those of color. We represent less than 20% of the full-time female faculty in college settings. And, it is vital to note that Asian (not necessarily Asian Pacific Islander Americans, a conversation for another day) women have built up more acreage than our Black, Brown and Indigenous colleagues. From 1993-2013, Asian women held 5.3% of the tenure-track positions (3.5% tenured) compared to Black women's 3.8% tenure-track (2.3% tenured). In fact, Asian women only fare lower in the low-ranked instructor category, clocking in at 3.3% compared to Black Women's 4.8%. And, all genders (I will recognize this research existed in a binary) accounted for, we can see that academia has 'diversified' with a 230% growth rate in part-time positions for people of color during that time, compared to 30% growth rate in full-time tenure-track positions.

I understand there's a bit o' academic jargon in there. The point is, when I look around for some kin at work, or at my alma mater, or almost any academic conference the kinfolk tend towards students or junior faculty, not protected (aka tenured) peers. The public colleges of CUNY are saturated with the beauty of many diasporic blossoms, but those are mainly students, staff and contingent faculty. It is very hard to find each other on the new plantation, and that isn't just because my kind know rice paddies better. The mythical land of intellectual pursuit unhindered by quotidian realities is in fact replicating white supremacist power structures. It is another system working by its own design. There was never an actual Ivory Tower. But, there has been plenty of poaching.

As I do the work I was called to do by a mother who escaped enslavement after being sold by a mother who had herself been simultaneously widowed and orphaned, I'm going to follow Dr. Bettina Love's examples of abolitionist teaching. In addition to flooding my classrooms with love (and Love), I'm calling out the inequities as I see them. I test the protections of tenure, which can be defined as *a right, term or mode of holding or occupying something of value for a period of time* and academically can be understood by the Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure by the American Association of University Professors as inherently linking controversy as "at the heart of the free academic inquiry."

I recognize there may be controversy, but I am clear that there needn't be. I aim to exemplify how epigenetic resiliency can allow us to seed a better future once white backlash is held accountable so

that what is truly precious about a fragile organism can soften into the compost pile for the hard soil we must all toil in. There are simple, sustainable actions that any conscious colleague could be taking. And, many are. Some are very late, some are very scared, but a few are in constant contact and willingly doing deep listening to transformative justice, white allyship, de-colonizing and anti-racist oracles. As Dr. Love states, abolitionist teaching applies protest and calling out, it centers Black joy and challenges mythologies of grit, it does not avoid talking about racism and homophobia. It shifts from ally to co-conspirator. It takes the model of James Tyson **working with** Bree Newsome who Dr. Love cites as saving his pole-climbing, Confederate Flag removing fellow activist from getting tased by the cops, by placing his hand on the pole, like a White Shield.

I do not identify as white. My Irish Catholic father's grandparents "became white" upon arrival to America, but I identify my work on behalf of my students as occupying that space. Since college I have identified as a woman of color and before that I was Other, literally checking that box over and over. Undoing Racism workshops with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond teach race as construction and as historically fluid. But, for the purposes of this work, I know whiteness. (My younger son likes to call me 'gwai lo' (ghost person, aka a Cantonese version of 'whitey') these days to keep me in check. I remind him that his father's people oppressed mine for a millenia in Vietnam. Yellow Peril household jokes. I was raised in and among whiteness. I was taught in its schools and studied in its dance studios. I know I have stood

upon the backs, not the shoulders, of those who fought for interracial love and immigration rights. I know my work, I expect more colleagues to know theirs. And, I have faith many will dig deep instead of entrench.

Eva Yaa Asantewaa and I began a conversation about writing on racism in academia prior to the recent protests. Having already addressed cultural equity in the professional field several times for Culturebot, I offered to look even closer to home, or at least at the hand that was feeding my family. At our initial meeting, prior to the murder of George Floyd and just before the Ahmaud Arbery story had mainstreamed, I detailed conversations with many students of color, in particular, three different Black students in our fledgling MFA program.

This story is not new. The fragility isn't a new strain of blossom. I know it isn't just one or two bad apples, but the entire orchard that needs tending. And, I knew, but now... I know. I was trying to weed, but it's clear, we need to pull this out by the roots.

The thing is, we were once so close. I understood the privilege of full-time employment (and healthcare for my bio-kin) came with a responsibility to bring a program established in a pre-civil rights era consciousness into the century I was living in and to ask it to reflect the city in which it inhabits. At a faculty lunch, a former director proudly noted how diverse a group we were. I pointedly replied that none of those other faculty of color were full-time, nor did they teach courses required for the major. But she, as I deeply appreciated, was willing to listen.

Even though what was being asked defied previous aesthetics and value sets, we managed to crack the door open and, during what I now I see was our brief near-utopia, we had Nia Love, Marjani Forté-Saunders, Charmaine Warren, Ni'Ja Whitson, Patricia Hoffbauer, Wendell Mx Oops Cooper, MiRi Park, Joya Powell, Maria Bauman-Morales, Raja Feather Kelly, and Donna Uchizono setting repertory or teaching contemporary technique, history and composition.

With Africanist and hip-hop scholars teaching our history courses, we started dismantling the white supremacist narratives that had dominated dance in the academy. With house flows and ring shouts, we started dissolving Eurocentric concepts around technique. We had post-colonial theory in our gateway courses and postmodern wake workers testing the mettle of our majors. I mean we were almost past tokenism, we were almost past diversity, or inclusivity and were almost passing as community. But, with or without a paper bag, we didn't pass the test of timing. Power doesn't yield, if it can't wield.

In the span of four years, we went through four heads of the program. Someone decided that striving towards conservatory thinking would put us on the map. Along the way, we became a self-standing department instead of a program in the music department. The former director left. An external chair (yes, an outsider) was searched and hired. She left within a year. Chair Two wasn't invited back after her year. The administration then picked and placed an acting chair who has now remained for three years. I consider myself to blame as I had

suggested to the Dean that perhaps Bebe Miller might come out of retirement to serve as an interim chair.

I have stories to tell, but most of those are not my own. I am recognizing where I was complicit. I am working to repair incredible damages done to many students, but I see that power places itself over people and protects that position. Those most eager to ascend the tower or maintain their titled positions are defending the keep, because keeping is all there is.

I had expected to list the complaints and detail the events, but let's SparkNotes this because you know the story. Harassment was allowed to run unchecked until someone's dad threatened legal action, microaggressions and supremacist thinking were allowed to run unchecked until... mmmm... until... okay... we'll get back to you on that one... 1 Black female MFA quit, 1 Black female MFA applied to another program, and 1 Black female MFA shucked and jived her way through classic gaslight defenses of racist grading practices.

***She/Her:
I came to you with multiple
complaints from students this
semester and I just heard that
some Black students wrote a
letter about this class last year.***

***Defense:
I went to observe her class, and
all the black girls were sitting
together in the corner in their
hoodies.***

***She/Her:
stopstopstopstopstopstopstop.
You need to stop talking right
now. You need to stop saying
what you are saying, because you
and I have to continue working
together right now and what you
are saying is making me very
uncomfortable.***

See? See the compromised agent. Trayvon, pictures with kids in our hoodies and the chance to explain. But, by this point, I had already witnessed and mediated meetings between one of the previously mentioned MFA's and Acting Chair Three. I had already dropped a chapter of Nyama McCarthy-Brown's Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World into Acting Chair Three's mailbox. I had already brought numerous complaints from multiple students about the class being discussed above. I had used phrases such as "shifting away from Eurocentric aesthetics" and "embracing more contemporary practices" to try to ease the arrogance over into relevance. None of that gentle (complicit) labor was affecting systemic or sustainable change.

But, only a few short weeks later, came Amy Cooper calling the police on a Black birder in Central Park; Nana Chinara's Open Letter to Arts Organizations Rampant with White Supremacy detailing encounters at Gibney, and George Floyd's murder by cop. Time: Sunday night

Location: WhatsApp Faculty Group Chat, A message from a colleague

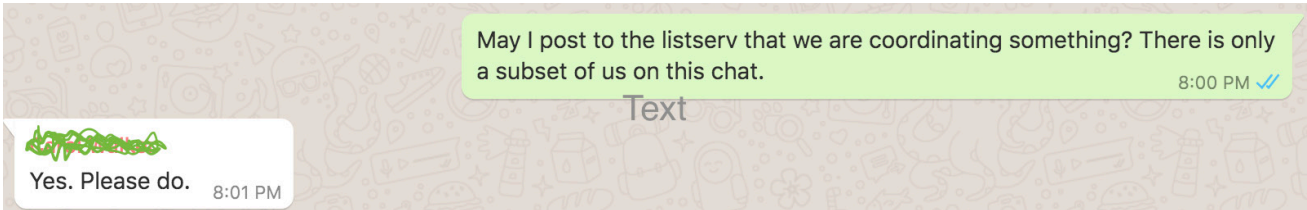
Hey y'all, peace to each of you. I want to validate the movement in these protests/riots to our Hunter dance community. Afro-Americans are being murdered by cops all around our country. Justice is not being served to these cops because of our white supremacist system. Many are angry and many are our students. This is their way to express their voice.

I want to acknowledge that we, as faculty members in a college founded through a white supremacist system, have responsibility to be leaders in this moment. That may not look like rioting/protesting, but I challenge us to consider what it does look like. Our students are watching us in these critical moments to see how the value systems we teach hold up in real life situations.

Love and light 🙏

7:15 PM

Time: 45 minutes later | Location: The same WhatsApp Faculty Chat, after we have decided Afro-American colleague and I will co-host a community forum



Time: 2 hours later | Location: Department Faculty Listserv

Subject: Invitation to Hunter Dance Community Forum Tuesday 4pm

Please join a community forum in the spirit of Undoing Racism on Tuesday 4pm.

As my dear colleague [REDACTED] stated “we, as faculty members in a college founded through a white supremacist system, have responsibility to be leaders in this moment.”

We stand together as faculty, staff, students and humans enduring the news, yet again, of multiple killings of African Americans at the hands of the police.

While we know the virus has made all New Yorkers wary for our safety, we know as members of the City University of New York that economic justice and racial equity are not distributed equally and commit to offering support and shelter in any ways available to us.

The gathering will offer space for grief, rage, fear, hope, trauma, confusion, resources and questions.

Various actions and links will be made available during the meeting, as well. There is much you can do with a tweet, a phone call, an email, or, if you have the resources, well-directed donations.

I appreciate all who have put your bodies on the line in the streets and honor all black and African American members of our community who, rightly, are taking deep care of yourselves.

When I was graduating from college, we had just marched in the streets of our little town because 4 LAPD officers had just been acquitted in the videotaped beating of Rodney King. That was 1992. We are doing a better job at organizing decades later, but there is still tragically and infuriatingly so much to do. Staying healthy is the most important thing you can do and finding a supportive and inspiring community can feed your spirit, so please feel welcomed and supported.

Time: Monday morning early | Location: The inbox

To: [Maura Donohue](#)

Monday, June 01, 2020 8:05 AM

- You forwarded this message on 6/3/2020 10:53 AM.

Maura,
Why did you have to be negative about Hunter on the list serve? You should have run it by me first.

Hunter is not responsible for this.

It's not wise to use the Hunter communication system and then imply negative things about Hunter. Can you temper this please? Immediately?

Why create more unrest? Poor judgement.
CW

Sent from my iPhone

Time: 2 hours later Monday morning | Location: The phone, text msg

Dear Maura,
Please take out [redacted]'s quote. Hunter was founded for poor immigrant children - not White supremists. That is an untrue statement.

Please also cut "as members of the City University of New York". The rest of that sentence is ok.

Please post the rewritten letter and say that "this is what I intended to say".

Time: Tuesday evening | Location: Department faculty and majors/minors listservs
My updated invitation

[redacted] and I wished to honor the Dance and Music Industry BlackOut Tuesday (initiated by Jamila Thomas & Brianna Agyemang) and have rescheduled the forum to 4pm Friday. We are so moved by and grateful for your willingness to join us in a dialogue about working to undo racism in our community.

[redacted] held an invigorating breakout session during The Dance Union's Town Hall to end White Supremacy on race in academia. Please feel encouraged to be in dialogue with either of us directly while respecting that [redacted] (or any black and African American colleague, student, friend, or family) is not responsible to be your individual teacher or caregiver. We remain grateful for how he honors the work his ancestors call upon him to do.

Both PSC CUNY and President Jennifer Raab have published fantastic statements. In the meantime, I appreciate and lift up Hunter's School for Social Work. Replace Social work/ers with Dance/ers and I see the base for our future work. Stay safe.

Social workers must speak out against injustice and at the same time be self-aware to ensure that residuals of systemic racism as well as other 'isms' that live in all of us are identified and addressed.

We commit to ensure that our social work curriculum and practices as a school community prepares social workers to bring a critical analysis to a society that has produced race as a category for human identity, and to dismantle institutionalized policies and practices that have placed the lives of Black and other people of color in jeopardy.

We further commit ourselves to be ever mindful of this important teaching from Michelle Alexander:

"The rules and reasons the political system employs to enforce status relations of any kind, including racial hierarchy, evolve and change as they are challenged."

Time: Wednesday morning | Location: The inbox

To: Maura Donohue

Wednesday, June 03, 2020 9:25 AM

- You forwarded this message on 6/3/2020 10:52 AM.

What is that about? Why is that on the Dance list serve? I don't understand .
Please explain.
CW

I am not responding. Even when I simply want to say “Did you actually read the words, like the actual words?” each time acting Chair Three comes spewing. I am checking in with union reps and fellow CUNY faculty, First Amendment champion George Emilio Sanchez. I’m attending to the nervous system and teaching my class. I’m co-hosting the forum and citing the magic of Harriet Tubman and a lot of other Black, Queer and Latinx artists, organizations and activists in resource documents I share. I schedule follow-up meetings for the community. I just do the work and do not take the bait.

We meet for my annual review. I request a white male colleague attend the meeting as a witness. It ends quickly when I tell her I am not reducing my anger, nor was I interested in speaking with her until she had done the level of reflection she told our community she was doing at our forum. That she was, in fact, part of The Problem. She ended the call.

And now, *now*, we watch the performative gestures. We see the angling for optics and the effort to control the narrative. We watch the dutiful dances of those for whom their standing matters more than who they stand with. I’m still organizing decolonizing forums, urging on the work of a white affinity group, and coalition-building across the college and the university with fellow faculty of color and allies. There is talk of funding for outside facilitators to work with our department. I and one of the previously mentioned MFA students (who we almost lost to another institution because of Chair Three) strongly suggest PISAB and Artists Co-

Creating Real Equity as resources. I expect a live dance version of “Me: *Defund The Police*... Them: *We changed a syrup bottle*” memes.

But, we’ll see. Maybe the White Shields will do their work (five years after they were nationally called out to do so). I am looking for the White Shields. I am listening to CodeSwitch’s “Why Now, White People?” and the *It’s Been a Minute* interview with Chelsea Handler. I know, I know the community I am rooted in is/has been hard at work. I am looking to see if the awakening white folx are understanding their responsibility. And, I am seeing it in students. I stepped back and watched two white students try to explain systemic racism and lived poverty to CHOWG. I have seen a white student respond to insipid messaging from acting Chair Three. White Shields expose the reality. They uncover the seemingly invisible lines of privilege for some. And, White Shields are necessary because the phrase white fragility implies a crumbling, but in actuality linguistically softens what is so often a violent response. White fragility does not equal white collapse, as Amy Cooper so explicitly modeled for us, it weaponizes apparent fragility into aggression. This is white backlash or whitelashing. Even right here at Gibney, righteous folk believe they walk their talk without stopping to reflect. Individuals and the institutions protecting them lash back and those responses intend to strike hard.

This lashing out. This immediate reactivity. There will be more. No longer to wield ancestral whips, white supremacists rankle in the face of generational rage and challenges to their accumulated wealth. But, when white supremacists strike or frailly crumble into a puddle of nuclear tears, I know we will still be here. We will continue doing The Work even if callout culture, which I am not a native speaker of, is what it will take to bring conscious, but unexamined folks, to the proverbial lotus pond.

It will take coalitions, divestments, relational organizing, de-colonizing our curriculums, abolitionism and lots of ego management, reflection and renewed self education. But, I know it is within the capacity of all sentient beings to evolve. It is in humanity's own self interest to attend to inequities instead of denying one's part. Let us attend. Let us be attentive. Let us carry one another beyond the coma, remove the scales from our eyes, and get to work.

I leave an action item from inspiring fellow CUNY folx at Queens College, where I spent a year as Assistant Professor a decade ago. From the Queens College Black/Latinx Faculty and Staff Against Anti-Blackness and for Systemic Change Statement:

As members of the BLFSA and representatives of the CUNY community, we are ready to experience solidarity. As MLK, Jr stated, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Please read the entire statement and feel deeply encouraged to sign, co-sign and share generously.

Peace.



Maura Nguyen Donohue is Associate Professor of Dance and Faculty Associate for Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College/CUNY. She very recently joined Hunter College's newly formed Presidential Task Force for Advancing Racial Equity and became Chair of the Humanities & Arts Curriculum Committee. She served on the Boards for Movement Research, the Congress on Research in Dance and Dance Theater Workshop and as Co-Chair of both the Small Capacity and the Breaking Boundaries subcommittees of The New York Dance and Performance Awards (The Bessies) Committee. She has written for *Culturebot*, *American Theater Journal*, *Dance Magazine*, *the Dance Insider*, Movement Research's *Performance Journal* and was guest editor for *Critical Correspondence's* "University Project." She has published academically in the collection *Contemporary Directions in Asian American Dance* and for the *Women and Performance Journal*. She has curated for the Estrogenius Festival, La MaMa and Danspace Project. She holds both a BA in Anthropology and Dance ('92) and an MFA in Dance ('08) from Smith College. With La MaMa's Great Jones Repertory Company since 1997, she has toured the US, Europe and Asia in productions by Italian directors Motus, Croatian director Ivica Buljic, Ping Chong and Andrei Serbhan/Elizabeth Swados. Since 1995, her company MND/inmixedcompany was produced regularly in NYC and toured extensively across the US and to Canada, Europe and Asia. She thanks the ancestors and the offspring for keeping the path clearly lit.

MEDITATIONS
ON
COMPUTERS
AND
PRESENCE
IN THE
AGE OF
DISTANCE

BY AYSLEY VANDENBROUCKE

I'm dreaming that I'm
dancing in a big room
on 6th Avenue filled
with people I love.

We're swirling so close we can smell each other.
We're sweating. We're making eye contact and
inventing new ways to connect our hips and hearts.
We're remembering forgotten and frozen parts of
ourselves as the music changes. We're showing off
and turning on and delighting and surprising each
other. We're circling close together in an electric
soup of energy and personality and community and
potential.

I'm reading. I'm worrying. I'm waking up and not
traveling anywhere. I'm speaking in meetings
and planning classes and teaching classes from
the living room. I'm trying to feel my weight and
rhythm and flow without making the neighbor in the
apartment below me angry.

I'm sitting at tables, and desks, and on the couch.
I'm standing while looking at the computer. I'm lying
down. I'm Facetiming my mother. I'm Zooming
my friends. I'm thinking about space and bodies
and movement within computer screens. I'm
thinking about spaces between human bodies
and computer screens. I'm thinking about space
around human bodies that has nothing to do with
computer screens.

I'm reading Sara Ahmed¹ talking about space and
orientation and the fact that when we face one
thing it necessarily means we are not facing others.
I'm sitting at a table facing a computer, reading
her words about the background existing because
of what we've chosen to face instead. I'm reading
her talking about all of the necessary – essential
— work that needs to be done in order for some
“bodies [to] arrive at the table.”

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 31-32.

...

When dance classes (all classes) at my university moved online in mid-March, it became a study in how bodies arrive at an online class. How communities find a way to glue together and also dissipate, how students and faculty members grapple with different backgrounds (the frilly curtains of a childhood bedroom, the siblings who need to be taught while a parent works, grandparents fed, the teacher hiding in a bathroom to lead class while a partner hosts an important meeting in the other room).

I'm thinking about how in this Zoom world, we are simultaneously more one-dimensional or two-dimensional (staring straight forward, appearing flat on a screen) and also less able to hide many of the other dimensions, orientations of our lives.

I'm thinking about the dances happening in our own bodies while we watch or read or listen to something on a computer. I'm thinking about the daily dances happening around us even in the call to pause the relentless forward motions of non-pandemic New York City.

...

I'm remembering dancing with my community in a graveyard last fall. I'm remembering the weight of my feet on the earth and breathing so hard while dancing with the reminder of how precious it is to be able to dance.

I'm remembering one of my teachers² in the midst of a sixth hour of ecstatic dancing saying that the breath is a promiscuous lover.

I'm dreaming there's something akin to the morning-after pill for moments in which someone breathes on you. I'm dreaming up new courses for a fall online. I'm reading and underlining. I'm reading about grounding and histories in our bodies. The ways our history is never really behind us.

...

Where are you sitting or standing or lying down right now? Who or what is around you? What are you noticing about your body right now? Can you make yourself more comfortable? Can you feel your feet? What are they touching? Feel your sitting bones. Feel your belly. Can you let your belly take up as much space as it needs?

Can you feel your spine right now? Your ribs and lungs? Let your lungs take up as much space as they need. Feel your heart and the back of your heart. Maybe even imagine someone is lovingly holding the back of your heart. Feel your shoulders and upper arms. Elbows and hands. How soft can your hands be as you interact with the device upon which this essay appears?

...

Two dear friends and I regularly meet for dinner and always notice the rich and roundabout nature of our conversations. Our three-ness means that, in non-shelter-in-place-time, we feel a circle and a

2 Gabrielle Roth

horizontal plane as we talk. Ideas and words move toward one another and side to side; they flow associatively, without any one person ahead or behind, on top or below.

My friends and I met on Zoom for the first time recently. I tried Speaker View so that when one of them spoke their face was almost life-size. But, when I did this, it was as if only the two of us were present—I didn't feel my other friend. I tried Gallery View and hid myself. But, when I looked at the screen, it was the two of them lined up next to one another and, again, I couldn't feel the circular quality of the three of us.

Finally, I chose Gallery View with all three of us on the screen. It was the closest I could get to the feeling of three of us together. But, of course, I was a solitary person at a table in her living room imagining that I was in a circle with them online.

When I teach in person, I spend a lot of time making sure we sit in the kinds of circles where you can actually see everyone. This circle-forming also becomes a litmus test. In a course that's going well, I'm always entering the room to find students already gathered in a circle chatting. As the term progresses, that circle becomes tighter and smaller.

In online classes this term, the onscreen automated distance between the little boxes of student faces gave me no spatial or energetic information about how things were going.

...

I'm reading and underlining and conversing with favorite books. I'm sitting on the couch with favorite written words and missing sitting (in person) with favorite people.

When students in a good course are already chatting in a tight circle before I get there, they are teaching each other in ways far richer than I can. In an interview within *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney speak about the traditional pedagogical structure of a teacher calling a class to order as violent, as not seeing what is already happening.³ They speak of not wanting to interrupt what is already happening. Moten says, "What if I just say, 'Well, we're here. Here we are now.' Instead of announcing that class has begun, just acknowledge that class began."

During the quick moves around me to assume that distance learning, and much of distance performing, meant that activities were online -- and, specifically, on Zoom -- I've had the inclination to go the opposite direction. Instead of moving further forward into our screens, I've wanted to turn around, to reorient toward the dances and body experiences that are always already happening in our daily lives. In early April, I was part of a small university gathering about the particular challenges of, "teaching embodied courses online." The first thing I said in the meeting was that every single course, across fields, online or not, is embodied. The question is whether people give consideration

3 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, "The General Antagonism: An Interview with Stevphen Shukaitis," in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe/ New York/ Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 126.

to this, have time and space to give consideration to this. Our bodies are always already happening.

...

Can you feel your neck and jaw, your throat, your mouth? Your eyes. The back of your head, your whole back, even as you look forward? If you are listening to a transcription of this essay, can your ears soften as you hear? What is the balance between reaching out with your eyes and ears and softening to just let the words arrive?

Feel the top of your head. Feel your brain. Soften your brain.

Can you twist toward what is behind you? Spiral. Make diagonals. Bring your arms over your head. Feel what is above you. Perhaps change your level in some way? What does it mean to feel a three-dimensional world even while at your computer or phone? What does it mean to turn around in this moment? How do you turn the tables, turn over an argument, turn toward what matters?

...

Bodies and spirits move more slowly than our minds and computers. They require time to slow down and sense three-dimensionally, sense the things that are not visual or verbal.

Bodies also need time for transitions. When a class or a performance can begin just by turning on a

computer, what are we missing? In the absence of subway rides and walks to work or performances, in the absence of daily hangouts in between classes or just after performances, how do we give our bodies, and communities, time to integrate and question and explore?

...

I'm dreaming that I'm in a large room. A friend is performing. It is exquisite but no one is paying attention. I'm screaming and moving person-to-person asking them to pay attention. At the end of my dream a woman in the corner is saying, "we don't need to pay attention, this is being recorded."

Two of my colleagues are talking about the heat that is missing when we dance alone in our rooms accompanied by small Zoom boxes of other dancers.

My friend is talking about how he's more satisfied dancing with his refrigerator than he is dancing with a Zoom class. He's sharing his weight with it. He's slinking around it. It is three-dimensional and in the room with him.

I'm reading articles about "Zoom fatigue" but none about the specific quality of Zoom for people who are used to professionally noticing details of whole bodies all the time.

...

Do you have nice-enough neighbors below you that you can stomp a bit on the floor right now? Feel your strength. Feel the weight of your bones. Feel the movements that say I am here. I am here in a room with a background and a foreground. What do you want to put your weight into right now? Stand up for right now? Put your foot down about right now?

When you are reading or writing or Zooming or chatting, how do you reach from yourself to the computer, to the people on the other side of the computer? Can you feel your full three-dimensional self, every muscle and ligament and tendon, all your fascia and breath?

As you connect with people via the computer, how do you like to move through ideas and feelings together? From a distance, how do you share your weight with other people? Move in unison? Move in ways you couldn't without the others? Listen while still feeling yourself? Speak while still feeling yourself? Speak while feeling someone else?

How do you feel online? How do you feel with other people online?

...

Before us—behind us—inside us—around us is a challenge and an opportunity, a lot of challenges and a lot of opportunities. In this moment, there is a screen, yes. But there is also the whole three-dimensional world, asking for our spirit. Our heat. Our grief. Our imaginations and creativity. Our new ways of connecting.

May we feel our bodies even now.

May we love. And feel our bodies are loved.

May we know and help change what keeps our friends from feeling their bodies are loved.

May we question the structures we support and build together.

May we get to know what is behind us, and above us, below us, and to the sides of us.

May we face realities in front of us.

May we know new forms of community.

May we dance now.

May we dream.

May we know and honor the transitions in our lives.

May we turn the computers on with attention.

May we turn them off with intention.

May we remain curious about each new moment.

In other words, "Well, we're here. Here we are now."



Photo of Aynsley Vandenbroucke by Ian Douglas

Aynsley Vandenbroucke is obsessed with the movement of ideas, the choreography of language and experiences. A Certified Movement Analyst, she is passionate about the role of the body in every aspect of life. She sees dance as a way to explore fundamental human questions and find new perspectives at the unlikely intersections of different fields and modes of thought.

Abrons Arts Center, Danspace Project, and The Chocolate Factory, among others, have presented her work. Her writing has been published by PAJ- A Journal of Performance and Art, Seneca Review, and The Brooklyn Rail, among others. Her work has been supported by grants and fellowships from The MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, The Jerome Foundation, The Mertz Gilmore Foundation, The Foundation for Contemporary Arts' Emergency Grant, The Manhattan Community Arts Fund, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Aynsley teaches in the dance program at Princeton University where she's developed interdisciplinary courses with titles such as: Body and Language; Uncertainty; Power, Structure, and the Human Body; and Stillness. At Princeton she's also part of a group of engineers, scientists, and artists who meet and imagine together, speaking of their work not as interdisciplinary but, rather, undisciplined. She co-founded Mount Tremper Arts in the Catskill Mountains and was co-curator there until 2014. She was awarded a Summer 2020 Narrative Arts residency at Pioneer Works; it has now been moved to Summer 2021.

www.movementgroup.org

<https://arts.princeton.edu/people/profiles/aynsleyv>

EDITORIAL TEAM



Eva Yaa Asantewaa (pronouns: she/her) is Gibney's Senior Director of Artist Development and Curation as well as Editorial Director for *Imagining: A Gibney Journal*. She won the 2017 Bessie Award for Outstanding Service to the Field of Dance as a veteran writer, curator and community educator. Since 1976, she has contributed writing on dance to *Dance Magazine*, *The Village Voice*, *SoHo Weekly News*, *Gay City News*, *The Dance Enthusiast*, *Time Out New York* and other publications and interviewed dance artists and advocates as host of two podcasts, *Body and Soul* and *Serious Moonlight*. She blogs on the arts, with dance as a specialty, for *InfiniteBody*.

Ms. Yaa Asantewaa joined the curatorial team for Danspace Project's Platform 2016: Lost and Found and created the *skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds*, an evening of group improvisation featuring 21 Black women and gender-nonconforming performers. Her cast was awarded a 2017 Bessie for Outstanding Performer. In 2018, Queer|Art named one of its awards in her honor, and Detroit-based choreographer Jennifer Harge won the first Eva Yaa Asantewaa Grant for Queer Women(+) Dance Artists. In 2019, Yaa Asantewaa was a recipient of a BAX Arts & Artists in Progress Award.

A native New Yorker of Black Caribbean heritage, Eva makes her home in the East Village with her wife, Deborah, and cat, Crystal.



Dani Cole, she/her, is a Lenapehoking-based (what is known today as NYC) Japanese-American movement artist, educator, writer, activist, and arts administrator. She founded the collective Mobilized Voices/MO B I V in 2018 and is a collaborator with jill sigman/thinkdance and ECHOensemble. Currently, Dani is the Curatorial Associate & Artist Coordinator at Gibney, and more recently, serves as the Editorial Associate for *Imagining: A Gibney Journal* with Editorial Director, Eva Yaa Asantewaa. Dani has traveled to South Africa to meet with fellow student activists in advocacy for the decolonization of education and has been an ambassador for the Foundation for Holocaust Education Projects since 2009.

Dani's work centers body politics and the interdisciplinary. With the body as a three dimensional sphere — movement, text, and sonic vibration weave together into reflections on what was, what is now, and what is imagined in process. Navigating 15 years of dance training based on western white-supremacist, ableist thought — that the classical ballet and hypermobile body

is the "Dance" body — Dani is in the process of dismantling her role in perpetuating self and systematic harm to her body and collaborator's bodies. Access is her process, the language she is moving in and towards — listening, dimensional knowledge, trust. She is in the process of authoring her first poetry zine and is Gibney's in-house writer, creating digital articles and interviews about presented and community artists.

In the past, Dani's interdisciplinary works have been shared through the 92Y, TADA! Theater, Mana Contemporary, Actor's Fund Arts Center, Bridge for Dance, Access Theatre, and the Emelin Theatre. Dani was part of the 92Y's Dance Up! next generation of young choreographers. She has been commissioned by and held residencies at The Steffi Nossen School of Dance, Mana Contemporary, the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance, and Chen Dance Center.

Recently, Dani has shifted away from choreographic orientations to focus on facilitation, shared spaces with co-determination, and a focus on access in process — with her collaborators in M O B I V and the public. She is often teaching — embodied writing workshops, yoga for disabled and non-disabled bodies, and is an educator on guest faculty at various schools.

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