

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: ST(ILL) SOUNDS: WAVES OF SOUND, HEALTH, AND THE CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Britney Falcon, Master of Fine Arts, 2024

Thesis directed by: Sound and Media Technologies in Performance, Samuel Crawford, School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

*st(ill) sounds: waves of sound, health, and the choreographic process*, explores the intersections of sound, healthcare, choreography, and dance performance. The research draws upon psychology, physical and cognitive science, visual art, technology, linguistics, and cripistemologies. Central to the research is the concept of the body as a conduit for the construction of sonic material and states of being. Through critical listening, investigations of the visual, aural, and sensorial, are ways to frame embodied consciousness, identity forming, and cultural exchange. Guided by inquiries into modes of listening and desired modes of being heard, the research unravels the interconnectedness of sound's affect. The work of Pauline Oliveros, Nina Sun Eidsheim, Nancy Stark Smith, Stanley Keleman, and Cymatic Technology ground this research. The choreographic process is discussed through diverse frameworks and practices which include the exploration of fluid dynamics, wave phenomena, bodily landscapes, vibratory practices, and the co-emergent properties of echo as a feminist force. The research culminates in the creation of a transformative sonic experience through its contributions to performance, process, and relationality, underscored by access.

ST(ILL) SOUNDS: WAVES OF SOUND, HEALTH, AND THE CHOREOGRAPHIC  
PROCESS

by

Britney Elizabeth Falcon

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
2024

Advisory Committee:  
Samuel Crawford, Co-chair  
Maura Keefe, Co-chair  
Kendra Portier  
Patrik Widrig

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
List of Figures	iii
List of Illustrations	iv
Introduction	1
Prologue: re: track	4
interlude	10
Chapter 1: belonging & liveness	16
Chapter 2: a crip process	22
Chapter 3: a rigorous act of listening	28
Chapter 4: the wall	32
Chapter 5: (echo)logical events	41
Chapter 6: cell songs	46
Chapter 7: breath sounds	51
Chapter 8: the gap	55
Chapter 9: plasticity of dissonance or the trouble with romanticizing harmony	59
Chapter 10: cartographies of sensation	67
Epilogue: antemortem	70
Bibliography	74

## List of Figures

- Figure 1: Photo by David Andrews featuring performers Emilia Bruno, Christina Collins, Mary Kate Ford, and Javier Padilla\_\_\_\_\_9
- Figure 2: CARE Map designed and created by Brit Falcon\_\_\_\_\_31
- Figure 3: Photo by Brit Falcon featuring Christina Collins, Emilia Bruno, Zoe Cushman Walders, and Javier Padilla seen in rehearsal \_\_\_\_\_34
- Figure 4: A live design of Spangler’s music in a subwoofer stereo that I waterproofed and turned into a piece of Cymatic equipment.\_\_\_\_\_36
- Figure 5: An experiment between Garcia and myself to determine how visible the media content would be on the spandex material itself.\_\_\_\_\_36
- Figure 6: Photo of Cymatic technology in performance by David Andrews featuring performers Emilia Bruno, Christina Collins, Mary Kate Ford, and Javier Padilla\_\_\_37
- Figure 7: Photos taken by Brit Falcon of *Earthtime 1.8* at the Renwick Museum\_\_41
- Figure 8 & 9: Photos taken by Ron Blunt of *Earthtime 1.8* at the Renwick Museum  
43
- Figure 10: Photo by David Andrews featuring performers Emilia Bruno, Christina Collins, Mary Kate Ford, and Javier Padilla\_\_\_\_\_58
- Figure 11: Photo by David Andrews featuring performers Emilia Bruno, Christina Collins, Mary Kate Ford, and Javier Padilla\_\_\_\_\_73

## List of Illustrations

Illustration 1: Sketch with pen and paper by Brit Falcon_____	28
Illustration 2: Sketch with pen and colored pencil by Brit Falcon of an Echo wall_	40
Illustration 3: Sketch of cellular pulsation by Stanley Keleman_____	48
Illustration 4: Drawing by Vincent Perez for <i>Emotional Anatomy</i> _____	49
Illustration 5: Drawing by Vincent Perez for <i>Emotional Anatomy</i> _____	50
Illustration 6: “brain water” by Brit Falcon in Pen, ink, pastel, and acrylic_____	50
Illustration 7: Glyphs from the Underscore by Nancy Stark Smith_____	57

## introduction

*st(ill) sounds: waves of sound, health, and the choreographic process*, is my archive of research which bridges sound studies, healthcare, choreography, and dance performance. This research is in conversation with psychology, physical and cognitive science, visual art, technology, linguistics and cripistemologies (an approach that centers disabled ways of knowing). My interest in sound came after reflecting on feedback, regarding the rhythmic nature of my work and my use of time as an object. This interest deepened for me, both by choice and necessity, when my body demanded that I simply listen amidst the onset of a serious illness. And through this process I learned that listening is anything but simple.

It started with the idea of a body as a conduit for sound(s) construction. For me this is a play on the word sound to represent both sonic material and a state of being. My intention for the work is focused on critical listening, specifically from a visual, aural, and felt sense. I seek to understand how these acts collide, entwine, repel, and conflate embodied consciousness, identity forming, and cultural exchange. I also seek to begin understanding sound as it relates to the construction of healthcare, illness, disease. With these intentions in mind, the performers and I began to frame our approach by asking questions like, how do we listen? And how do we want to be listened to? These questions led us to discover that listening through the relationship to our ears and our sense of hearing, is inextricably woven to ways of seeing or visualizing, as well as feeling the body move in space and feelings that arise in the body. In other words, how we interpret images, shapes, objects, and material, and how we feel the dynamic motion of our form is never separate from sound and its influential nature. Our subjectivity, or sense of personal understanding, is the gap between sound's affect, which moves in visible and invisible vibratory wave frequencies, and learned behavior from development and sociocultural experience.

Since I was embarking on this research in listening for essentially the first time, I felt that I needed guides as a way into physical practice. It began with Pauline Oliveros and her embodied and meditative work called Deep Listening. This work distinguishes between hearing as an objective act and listening as a subjective experience, which helped me to frame the oscillation and graduated bodily tone between awareness and attention.<sup>1</sup> My excitement for studying anatomy and kinesiology led me to also discover, Stanley Keleman and his work *Emotional Anatomy* which explores somatic psychology. He believed that “feeling follows form” and that aliveness comes from the pulsatory action of cells surviving against gravity.<sup>2</sup> Or rather, a respiration of the cells. I also began reading the work of Nina Sun Eidsheim and her concepts of inter-material vibration & music as transferable energy.<sup>3</sup> Eidsheim puts forward a theory of music as vibrational practice to demonstrate sounds complex relationality. She expresses that one’s interpretation of music is dependent upon the medium through which sound waves travel or energy is transferred.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, my experience as a bodyworker with a love for contact improvisation and partnering work, led me to revisit Nancy Stark Smith’s Underscore. Smith herself spent time working with Oliveros, Deep Listening, and listening through touch. In revisiting her Underscore, the concept of the gap stood out for me. The gap is essentially the space between stimulus and response.<sup>5</sup> It is the moment between what is heard and the choice to move forward. And finally, I began looking at Cymatic technology. This is the measurement of vibrational sound frequencies interacting with matter, created by Hans Jenny<sup>6</sup>, a physician and natural scientist. I was most interested in waves expressed in water and how this is a window into

---

<sup>1</sup> Oliveros 2015

<sup>2</sup> Keleman 1986

<sup>3</sup> Eidsheim 2015

<sup>4</sup> Eidsheim 2015

<sup>5</sup> Koteen and Stark Smith 2021

<sup>6</sup> Hans Jenny was a natural scientist and physician who coined the term cymatics to explain the acoustic impacts of sound wave phenomena.

cells of the body, how cells are moved by sound, and how cells individually sing. Jenny deduced regarding wave phenomena that "This is not an unregulated chaos; it is a dynamic but ordered pattern."<sup>7</sup>

All these concepts swimming together gave me several lenses through which to approach movement in the dance studio. Some somatic, improvisational, and contact based exercises that the dancers and I explore in this research include:

- Fluids and fluid systems of the body.
- Bodily topography, landscapes, and the space between bodies - the gap.
- Vibratory practices with and without speaking.
- Cycles of moving, writing/drawing, speaking, & witnessing.
- Moving from sound frequencies.
- Moving from visual images (waves).

These tuning practices led to the creation of *track*.

---

<sup>7</sup> Roibu 2021



## re: track

1. : archived evidence of process, thoughts, epiphanies, growth, and sounds
2. : evidence that something or someone passed through and left a mark
3. : grooves on a record or the consecutive song on a cassette or CD (for those that remember)
4. : a path carved out through use and overuse rather than construction, worn down into
5. : to search for and to follow something/someone
6. : to carry on one's body from location to location; dirt, soil, soot, remnants, materials, fibers, etc.
7. : seeds of influence and trajectory that lead/pave a direction
8. : archived collection of artifacts
9. : written and visual documentation
10. : an oval shaped rubberized surface that one can run around in a continuous loop
11. : a marker for growth and progression; a timeline

*track* is the title for the live dance experiment that resulted from my efforts to bring together several layers and lenses of thought. For the purposes of this thesis, I frame my research through this personal living list of tracks' definitions. It is a list that helps me to organize, as a method of understanding; a method of processing. The formation of language, sounds, and rhythmically satisfying syntax are what help me to make sense of this journey. It is my choreography in listening.

The physical deliverable of *track* is a contemporary dance performance experiment, a physical archive, which flowed from a process with a diverse group of artists who all have a remarkably diverse approach to learning, communicating, caring for, enacting their craft, and listening. Engaged in the practice of tuning bodies to self, space, and other, the group examined both shared and individual experiences in sound as it relates to their own identity. The work featured Cymatic technology as media, a large moving spandex wall, and a live musician. My goal through tracking this research in listening through a multi-sensorial lens, as framed by artistic mediation, is to take steps toward expanding the conceptions of active bodies.

In this document I track the moving parts which surrounded me through this journey in listening. The subtle and almost indiscernible and the ones so gut punching that they have reverberated in my tissue for years, just now revealing themselves to me. *track* is a consideration for my creative process and my writing. A consideration for my past, present and future, to track where I have been, where I am going, and the interrogation of tracks of colonized normalcy, prediction, and expectation I encountered along the way. What does it mean to be on track as a body? What does it mean to track my thoughts? Tracking is my gateway to listening and reading between the lines to see what there is not, to see what I may have missed, to hear what's underneath language's failures of, on, and for bodies, and my body's deeper connection to the inside out world. My curiosity for this research lies in sonic material and the ways in which its vibrations are felt, seen, and heard, and how they impact bodies in large, small, and nuanced ways. It is material that moves and is always moving. It is a material force that locates and dislocates a body; in itself, in a space, in relation to, and in the shifting landscapes that propel, retrograde, and rearrange knowledge. It is an object of perpetual motion that becomes a force of agency in an interdependent world. Every entity, regardless of its form, carries the potential to be sonorous, participating in a continuous act of fleeting formations, re-composition, and transition.

My interest in sound began after receiving the feedback that my work and movement was very rhythmically unexpected and that I used time as if it were putty in my hands. Having heard this before, I decided to look at it a bit more to understand why this part of my moving voice continues to demand I listen. I also found that after a year in isolation through the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to lean into something new, something different, and something light. My work up until the start of graduate school carried a heavy "need to be greater than its parts" energy, which no longer felt sustainable and worthwhile, while digging through the thickness of

the pandemic's lessons. I desired a process where I could lean into sensation and dissect something I knew little about, yet ironically, I fell into what I know all too well, and found renewed confidence in bodily habits as a pattern toward brilliance rather than limitation. I began leaning into sound more after reflecting on the prompt, "What is the first thing you do when you enter a rehearsal space?" asked to my cohort by Kendra Portier.<sup>8</sup> My answer to this was slippery and I think it changes from day to day, but what I did discover is that I am sensitive to the tone of a room, ways of setting tone in a room, and finding where my body's tone can meet and tune to the room's tone fascinates me. What I mean by tone is not just the pitch, quality, and strength of a sound and its intention, but the pitch, quality, and strength of my body's flesh. Entering a space for me is like a first touch, or a handshake. The rigidity that I carry in my muscles, sinews, and organs cannot properly listen to the space and the objects contained inside. I noticed that the soundscape of a space and the soundscape of my body needed attending to like tuning an instrument before I began to move. Or rather, that the two are extremely influential to one another and thus dictate how the working choreographic process proceeds.

I have learned, and unsurprisingly, that sound has both positive and negative influences on the human brain. Yet, even deeper to that, the sounds, and frequencies we cannot hear move below the water's surface impacting our every move, while words often get in the way. Sound influences emotion, decision making, comprehension, and connection. It is a phenomenon which forms communication and breeds ideation, creation, knowledge, and compassionate empathy.

---

<sup>8</sup> Kendra Portier is an Assistant professor (Maya Brin Endowed Professor in Dance), Co-Director of the Maya Brin Institute for New Performance, Dance Performance and Scholarship, and Head of MFA Dance Program, School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies at The University of Maryland. She is also the artistic director of BAND/Portier.

Sound, music, or a musical idea, according to philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>9</sup>, is a presentation of what lies beneath our vision and is never able to be fully grasped in the moment that it occurs. It is fleeting and slippery. It is in a “transcendental structure of time-consciousness” where temporality of experience frees us from possession of that musical idea, thus sparking the very essence of affect and creative expression.<sup>10</sup> We continuously try to catch this idea yet are eternally one beat behind its existence. Like the act of choreographing. The influence of sound from natural, to electronic, to electrical, to mechanical, to human and even biological imprints on all bodies. It shapes human action and emotionality as it reciprocally follows action and emotionality. In Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* he looks at subjective experience with a goal of looking deeper at the “structures that lie behind and inform that experience” therefore sound on the body does not just transcribe or describe experience, but rather it re-composes the phenomena of time-consciousness, felt experiences, and affectation.<sup>11</sup> If all matter vibrates and is acted upon through vibratory forces, and all movement has a sound, then sound as vibratory waves could serve as the basis of understanding all human and non-human phenomena.<sup>12</sup> Silence is an illusion and stillness is a trick. We constantly tune and re-tune within the landscape of sound environments. Internal and external. I engage with sound in this work by the sounds of my thoughts, the space, and the gaps between bodies, the culture of sound composing me and being composed by me. I track sound’s afterbeat.

---

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work is commonly associated with the philosophical movement called existentialism and its intention to begin with an analysis of the concrete experiences, perceptions, and difficulties, of human existence. He was a pivotal figure in twentieth century French philosophy. He was responsible for bringing the phenomenological methods of the German philosophers - Husserl and Heidegger - to France and instigated a new wave of interest in this approach.

<sup>10</sup> Wiskus 2021, 263

<sup>11</sup> Wiskus 2021, 264

<sup>12</sup> Jenny 2001, 6

Fascinated by the complex act of listening in relation to healing, and the contribution to affect theory by Melissa Gregg<sup>13</sup>, a professor of gender and cultural studies, and Gregory J Seigworth<sup>14</sup>, a professor of communication and theater, as a “gradient of bodily capacity” which lives in the “...interstices of the inorganic and non-living, the intracellular divulgements of sinews, tissue, and gut economies, and the vaporous evanescence's of the incorporeal (events, atmospheres, feelings-tones)”, I place sounds tangible and intangible, ephemeral and resounding, conscious and unconscious as the co-dependent dynamic pulses of liveness and belonging and thus wellness.<sup>15</sup> My research investigates the multi-sensorial experience of sound through what I start to view as resonant bodies and the plasticity of dissonance within the circumstance of the lived body. Taking an auto-theoretical approach, as interpreted by author, researcher, and Professor Lauren Fournier<sup>16</sup>, I position sound as a conflicting evolutionary phenomenon and ‘the body’ as a conduit for sound(s) construction.

*track* is more than a pathway or list of self-defining principles and metaphors: it is an ongoing practice of discernment, reflection, and depth. The sonic material we investigated is a tangible trace of exploration, encapsulating our journey in listening. How does sound construct us? How do we construct sound? How do we employ new tools in listening to reimagine dance spaces of embodied healing, relational reverence, and joy? How can we answer the current and urgent call to lead, teach, and construct processes, from a place of healing?

---

<sup>13</sup> Melissa Gregg is Principal Engineer and Research Director, Client Computing Group, Intel; coeditor of *The Affect Theory Reader*, also published by Duke University Press; and author of *Work's Intimacy*.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Gregory J. Seigworth is Professor of Communication Studies in the Department of Communication and Theatre. He has published widely in journals such as *Cultural Studies*, *Architectural Design*, *Culture Machine*, and *m/c*. Greg has contributed chapters to various books, including *Deleuze: Key Concepts*, *Animations of Deleuze and Guattari*, and *New Cultural Studies*.

<sup>15</sup> Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2

<sup>16</sup> Lauren Fournier is a writer, independent curator, and artist, teaches critical theory, art history, and artists' writing at the University of Toronto, where she is a postdoctoral fellow in visual studies. She coined the term auto-theory.

Figure 1



## interlude

*A soft babbling fountain speaks firmly and continuously for attention in the foreground of my perception, while the pulsating sounds of what I deduce as a grunge-rock band, reminiscent of my childhood, are muffled somewhere in the distance. There's a fleeting scurry of rustled leaves, a pigeon calling out, and the erratic thud of my heart in my chest playing a tune I once knew.*

*The almost silent sloshing of standing water offers a low drone and the prickle of warmth traversing and saturating my skin sends me into a spiral...I feel simultaneously the possibility to get up, to act, to start again...and the possibility to slip away and be carried by this bath of sonic material, to lose all sense of structure and finality. The musical players bring me ease. They release me, however temporarily, from the distress of my mind and the rigidity of my tissue. I am malleable, both porous and refractive, finding my tone within the symphony of sounds.*

*"It is important to keep in mind that humor and seriousness are not mutually exclusive."<sup>17</sup>*

*As I open my eyes I am reluctantly thrust back in my meager and unimposing bathroom in Silver Spring, MD. I soak in a bathtub filled with lukewarm water, a scene that falls short of my imagination, as I hear the bubbling of the dog fountain coming from the hallway telling me that the water level is low, and it is time for a refill. My cat, Luke, tackles a plastic bag which rustles past the doorway as he yells for help. I am reminded of the TV I left on in the living room which suddenly sounds like an old VHS special on a band who faced fame and public destruction in the '90's. "It is important to keep in mind that humor and seriousness are not mutually exclusive."*

*The words of Stuart Dempster<sup>18</sup>, echo in my mind. - October 23rd, 2022*

These days I cling to humor more than ever. I cling to levity. It is not just because life is too short, as they say, but because by focusing on levity I am willing my body to thwart gravity's inevitability. At age thirty-six, I never imagined the words heart failure, sudden cardiac arrest, and defibrillator as common conversation about my own physical body. Yet here we are. I imagined my deep dive into sound studies as my graduate thesis project would not be so existential to say the least. While my first attempt at Deep Listening is not exactly life altering, I am struck by my body's leftover sensibility and curiosity about the potential within this practice. I want to tune into myself further, my form, my edges, and the world around me to better understand these relationships, without being consumed by the labor and gravity of

---

<sup>17</sup>Oliveros 2005, xi

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Dempster, sound gatherer: trombonist, composer, didjeriduist, et al., and Professor Emeritus at University of Washington, has recorded for numerous labels including Columbia, Nonesuch, and New Albion. His is a founding member of Deep Listening Band.

preciousness. There is an interplay between what I know, or what I thought I knew, and the momentary experience of aural and sensorial perception. My brain begins the unraveling and raveling of ‘choreographic’ sense making; to interpret and make meaning from sounds colliding.

I was introduced to Pauline Olivero’s<sup>19</sup> practice of Deep Listening by my teacher and thesis chair Sam Crawford.<sup>20</sup> Deep Listening was built to expand one’s boundaries of perception and is a practice which sits to situate the human body’s ecology in grounded material stability. It is a practice in attention, in expanding awareness, enhancing embodiment, inducing empathy, and making space for healing. It is investigating the “difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the voluntary, selective nature of listening” to everything that is possible to hear including language, intent, nature, thoughts, technology, imagination, and music.<sup>21</sup> Attuning our bodies to sound, music, and the landscape of listening presents an opportunity to expand our attention into intention; to change. This trickles down to the processes of feedback, acknowledgement, encouragement, and critical thought. To spaces that champion, support, and enliven diverse bodies. To the aesthetics of a space and a training platform that feeds health, wellness, and possibility across disciplines. I see Olivero’s Deep Listening practice as a map to building awareness, and thus change in dance, by attending to the often forgotten, auditory influence. This influence of sound shapes our movement development and behavior, molds our cognition, and sculpts our social agreements, and has been playing from embryological development to adulthood. Deep Listening is an influential method, practice and reference point for reimagining dance and dance spaces that takes time and much care.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Pauline Oliveros was a composer, performer and humanitarian, a distinguished Research Professor of Music at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, and Darius Milhaud Artist-in-Residence at Mills College. She founded "Deep Listening®."

<sup>20</sup> Sam Crawford is a Sound & Media Technologist and the Co-Director of the Maya Brin Institute of New Performance at the School of Theatre, Dance, & Performance Studies, University of Maryland

<sup>21</sup> Oliveros 2021

<sup>22</sup> Oliveros 2021



I am an artist, (dis)abled person, crafter, maker, animal lover, healthcare worker, nature enthusiast, DJ in training (or so I tell myself), and a strong advocate for lighting candles in every room. I am also an educator, performer, choreographer, and collaborator who finds excitement within the sciences and escapism through merging interdisciplinary research, psychology, and visual art, into practices of physical embodiment. I have been living with a rare and complicated autoimmune disease for the last six years, which has thrust me into the practice of listening and learning to converse with my body. I am far more aware now of my (dis)abilities that often remain invisible, thwarting any linear experience of my body in space and time, and pushing up against societal systems that uphold ableist structures. Listening to the differing abrupt, incongruent, and seemingly broken rhythms of my body's language has further opened my fascination with sound. This past year, the conversation with my body grew into a loud argument. Having experienced a true shift in priorities after an ambulance ride and a period in the hospital, while simultaneously trying to land on a damn thesis statement, I emerged or am emerging from great introspection around practice, process, and pedagogy. I now see practice and process as pedagogy. While recovering from surgery in November of 2022, struggling to accept that my dance career might soon be a thing of the past, all I could do was sit, listen, and wait. Yet, in listening, I started to become much more selective in what I listened to and how I chose to let that information reverberate in my body. I started listening to simple sound frequencies as a method of reducing stress and trying to heal my body through less invasive treatments than the doctors were prescribing me. This practice opened a can of worms, while shifting back into movement and the dance studio again. For now, I will share some of my brief history in gleaning some ways that my voice has formed today.

Born in the eighties as a wild white haired white girl of Italian and French-Canadian descent, into a family of artists and professional athletes, I spent my youth dreaming up fantastical worlds and physically running away from my mother on a frequent basis. I remember falling in love with the idea of being a savior and ‘a good girl’ who stretched the rules. I remember moving homes twice between the ages of eight and ten, filling our quirky ranch home with candlelight during the standard winter storms and long power outages, and witnessing my parents struggle to find ways to put food on the table while I selfishly took expensive dance classes. I endured abuse and later perpetuated abuse. I watched as they carried my brother’s body away, the exact moment when my innocence was torn from me and my anger against authoritarian injustice ignited. I drove myself into severe injury and chronic illness because the competitive athlete I was told to be had no place for pain, failure, or loss. And I remained optimistic as I listened to the news that a family member was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. These experiences early in life are what I feel led me to finding escapism, and later truth, in performance and choreography and an honest platform for empathy. A perpetual cheerleader for the underdog, it is in struggle and tests of character all identities are found. This is not to say that one must endure trauma or struggle on a scale to be ‘found,’ but merely to say that time can make all human and non-human endurance a conditioning of the soul. I am a weathered artist and therein lies my beauty. The great period of existentialism that is our twenties occurred for me while simultaneously navigating the NYC dance scene. For a stubborn achievement driven do-gooder with a flair for rebellion and daydreaming, this world was a soup for my insecurities to grow. Coming from the quiet farmlands of upstate NY, I struggled with the harsh reality of rejection and acceptance in an unrelenting city. In willing opportunities my way, I drove myself into debt producing my own work, led a company with grace and at times disgrace, and crashed

headfirst into the realization that even the most sought-after jobs are not what I always expected. It is not surprising to look back at the number of times I have abandoned an unfinished script, put a partially digested book back on its shelf, and let the half-painted painting collect dust. Today, my moral compass might be pointing in a different direction and my creative process might not hold space for fallibility, had I not gone through these experiences. Even in writing this, I am not finite. Now as both an artist, and I dare say writer, I find myself just wanting to sit and wait for the work to find me, no matter how long it takes. I have no more interest in quick processes, and I want to prioritize the self, relationships, and characters above the product. This is easy to say and hard to implement consistently, but it is in the trying that I continue to learn. I want to live the honest history I leave behind in my writing, my history. I want to get lost in a project for so long that it becomes a mirror to my life and those that write it with me, to the life of our audience, and when the time comes, I want to set it free. In simple terms, I am the neighborhood hero, the redeemable villain, and the second point of view narrator. In simpler terms, I am unfinished. To speak to my voice is to speak to my continuous artistic desire to be found and undefined all at once. I want to keep shedding layers of myself and exposing new skin, but avoidance is an all too familiar friend. I share Stephen Nachmanovitch's<sup>23</sup> words from *Free Play; Improvisation in Life and Art* that have always echoed in my mind.

Each piece of music we play, each dance, each drawing, each episode of life, reflects our own mind back at us, complete with all its imperfections, exactly as it is. In improvisation, we are especially aware of this reflective quality: Since we cannot go back in time, there is no crossing out, editing, fixing, retouching, or regretting.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Nachmanovitch is an improvisational violinist who performs and teaches internationally at the intersections of multimedia, performing arts, ecology, and philosophy. He is the author of two books on the creative process, *Free Play* (1990) and *The Art of Is* (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Bayles and Orlando, Ted 1993

Nowadays my work swims through restoration and athleticism in attempting to reimagine my own body's potential to adapt. This ongoing research informs long-term, reach for the stars goals to reframe dance as a healthcare system and provide actual support for freelance artists to grow and thrive. I see the future of my research to be in establishing myself further as a somatic choreographer. What I explicitly mean by this is making work led by the body and bodily 'meaning making' that demands attentiveness, a collaboration with self and multimodal ways of processing, and listening to the gap. I seek to let the body and bodies in conversation, lead the choreographic process, and the intersectional research that emerges out of practice.

## belonging & liveness

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight. - John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*<sup>25</sup>

*Soft. Blurry and slowly morphing. Turning and coiling, coiling and returning in suspense and suspension. What am I seeing? A sound begins to brew. Soft waves sopping up the shore or is that static and just my own imagination? A hand, still blurred, comes to my recognition and the sound settles in deeper. Milky white sheets of cloth ripple up, down, and across the screen as my body sinks into a welcomed numbness, a paralysis of meditation and serenity. I'm reminded of David George Haskell<sup>26</sup>, author of *Sounds Wild and Broken: Sonic Marvels, Evolution's Creativity, and The Crisis of Sensory Extinction*, and his description of the evolution of the human voice through milk. Haskell shares that human vocal chords, formed from the mammary glands of our ancient ancestors<sup>27</sup>. A single extended tone, a violin, rings out in reverberance until it cuts away and I am left in a state of curious auditory hallucinations. Skin folds, elbow creases, cliffs, and bellies. An exposed chest. Then suddenly more hands grasping and growing, yearning without apology. I am dropped into darkness and a single masc body, face beige and pondering stands in a somber place dressed in black amidst a dark backdrop. A deep cavernous*

---

<sup>25</sup> Berger 2008

<sup>26</sup> David Haskell's work integrates scientific, literary, and contemplative studies of the natural world. He is a professor of biology and environmental studies at the University of the South and a Guggenheim Fellow. His 2017 book *The Songs of Trees* won the John Burroughs Medal for Distinguished Natural History Writing. His 2012 book *The Forest Unseen* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/E.O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award, and won the 2013 Best Book Award from the National Academies, the National Outdoor Book Award, and the Reed Environmental Writing Award. His new book, *Sounds Wild and Broken: Sonic Marvels, Evolution's Creativity, and the Crisis of Sensory Extinction*, will be published in March of 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Haskell 2022

*tone that rumbles in my core demands my undivided attention as the images shift quickly from face to face. Black, brown, and beige, trembling heads and a tilting gaze. A thousand words spoken across a face in mere seconds, a bare back and the rippling of arms and spine, the blurry hands return and the drone hits deeper until I am an immovable rock, enthralled by the beauty of every evolving bodily configuration I could ever dream into existence. The camera is a dance of possession, in that I am possessed by its pull yet hold no ownership over its contents. There is more carving, reaching, and diving until single bodies become two, wrapping in an embrace of urgency. Their movement cuts sharply through space in rhythm with a sharpness edited into the narrative until a single eye fills the screen. Soft greens, yellows, and blues of the iris blend and ripple out from the dark center but I feel an oceanic pull, like I am watching the tide roll in and out, painting the shoreline in pastel. This momentary meditation, an invitation to “see”, is once again interrupted by sharp cuts, both fabric and hair, being vigorously tossed through the air as if the dancers are willing their body to follow desire – to stop, to move — to lose complete control and control that which evades. Silence. A fluttering of violin and strings begins to build as they are met with quick gestures as if each dancer is a conductor, instructing me to see and play the music as they need and want me to play. Then the camera snaps to full body images; a pregnant person, an amputee, an older artist leaning on a cane, femme and masc bodies of various shapes and colors stand still, waiting to be witnessed, allowing me to witness them with oceanic eyes. Eyes that acknowledge the ever evolving, shifting, living breathing landscape of the human body. The musical pitch climbs higher and higher, and I fear to look away until it pierces through the air and rings in my ears. The hands return; hands that are weathered, delicate, wise, yet wear the lines of work, of time, and of a lifetime of contact. The milky white fabric ripples across the screen again and wraps around a dancer's arms as they press their*

*torso, legless, upside down with a strength I can only wish to harness. I can only describe my feelings as ones of gratitude and admiration. Heidi Latsky's<sup>28</sup> Soliloquy hits me hard with the unexplainable weight of artwork that not only gives me pause but shifts my insides and how I thus move forward.<sup>29</sup>*

Latsky describes her *Soliloquy* as “a magnifying glass, an entree into the internal worlds of everyone in it.” and “addresses our propensity to judge people by their physical appearance and defies our preconceptions about dance, revealing virtuosity and beauty in unexpected ways.”<sup>30</sup> I agree with her description and find familiarity in its queries. I have known about Heidi Latsky’s work for many years now, but I had not had the opportunity to see her work performed live while living in NYC. However, in the spring of 2022, I was given the opportunity to witness her work at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, while attending the International Workshop on the Neural and Social Basis of Creative Movement. During this four-day workshop, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, I had the opportunity to witness several presentations and performances by artists, scientists, psychologists, and educators, focusing on work that pertains to the themes of creative movement and the brain. On one of the final days of the workshop, Latsky shared her work *On Display* as a live performance enacted by several students and faculty members from the University of Maryland. *On Display* feels like it is in conversation with *Soliloquy*, where all bodies are viewed intimately and placed under

---

<sup>28</sup> Heidi Latsky, originally from Montreal, began her dance career as a principal dancer for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company (1987-1993). She holds a BA in Psychology with Honors. One of her recent achievements includes receiving the *Martha Hill Dance Fund Mid Career Artist Award*. She also received the *Moving Our World Award for Social Justice Advocacy* by The IDEAL School of Manhattan.

<sup>29</sup> Latsky, n.d.

<sup>30</sup> Latsky, n.d.

durational constraints. The performers positioned themselves throughout the pavilion at Wolf Trap, dressed in white clothing. They proceeded to move through shapes so slowly that I could have mistaken them for statues. This practice went on for an hour. Every inch of their bodies was exposed to be witnessed and taken in, and through this witnessing I noticed that the performance was a critique of my practice in listening and witnessing. It was more of a self-reflection, where the performers were displayed, but the audience were under constraint. I became intensely aware of being seen.

In the spring of 2023, artists and contact improvisation collaborators Lilianna Kane<sup>31</sup> and Jungwoong Kim<sup>32</sup> visited Maryland to lead several classes in contact. A practice that Kane and Kim took us through in order to introduce touch was a practice I call framing kinespheres. It started as a simple task where one person moved until they found a shape in space. Their partner witnessed their movement, with love, and when they stopped moving, their partner entered their kinesphere to create a frame around their body. There was no touch involved at first, just contact with our energetic skeletons. In my mind, when handled with care, this was not just a simple warm up to contact, but a foundational practice for building trust. It introduced me to new ways of seeing, and new ways of hearing like Latsky. The framing created a cushioning between our bodies that felt both intimate and safe. After collectively settling into this frame, both of us would sit and wait in the moment until the person being framed felt the impetus to leave. They would then slowly start to move away but in an indirect way through this framed place. They

---

<sup>31</sup> Lilianna Kane is an improviser, primarily working through dancing and cooking. Their mission: to nourish people through the practices of collective improvisation, collaboration, and care. Their food is inspired by a plethora of cooks, books, recipes, artists, experiences and memories. They are the Kitchen Manager/Head Chef at The Field Center in Bellow Falls, VT.

<sup>32</sup> Jungwoong Kim, born and raised in South Korea, embodies aesthetic traditions of Korean Shamanism, as well as Deep Listening studies with musician/composer Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016), immersive strategies of visual artists such as Ann Hamilton and William Kentridge, and lessons from his collaborations with site-specific and post-modern choreographers.



bloomed themselves, as if they were expanding the container of themselves and their skin into their partners, without touching. Kim encouraged us to let ourselves experience the three-dimensional reality of this frame in this container and the possibilities of directionality, so that we were not quick to run away from the exchange, but we were living in it and through it. After the person being framed departed from their partner, the partner left behind was to begin moving in improvisation, informed by the afterthought of the interaction. This second person would then find their way into a new shape and settle, all while being witnessed by the first person. Then they would wait to have their body framed in the same manner as before. This practice went on for a long time, and I remember feeling like it was so simple yet so transformative.

As the practice went on, I felt myself become more vulnerable, braver, and exposed in a way that I do not often show. I felt myself begin to understand my partner on a deeper level, as if I were seeing this person who I had known for years, for the very first time. I took this practice into the studio with several of my collaborators, of various levels of experience around contact improvisation and partnering and witnessed a beautiful deepening of connection and communication. This practice became one that we returned to repeatedly throughout the process as a way of warming up touch, our sense of listening, giving love, and to investigate material. It brought curiosity about the ways bodies collide, bloom and decay around one another. In relating this to sound, I began to think of the reflective, refractory, and diffractive effect that objects and material have on the physics of a soundwave. What I mean by this is the direction of sound and how it can shape around us to shape our attention. Some of the moments in the final performance of *track* displayed repeated shapes that the dancers would arrive at, frame, slip out of, slip into, and replace. These shape variations were an effort to explore the iterative nature of relationality as one of multitudes, and to unstick what I saw with what I expected or knew. The work also

leaned into durational witnessing inspired by Latsky, with slow and subtle stirrings, both internally within the body and externally through pathways in space. The audience was asked to sit with themselves, however reluctantly, in these moments.

## a crip process

The heart, of all organs in the body, epitomizes belonging...Beyond metaphors, the heart is actually an organ where the belonging and citizenship among cells is of crucial importance...The heart is a model of cellular cooperation, citizenship, and belonging. - Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The Song of the Cell: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human*<sup>33</sup>

*track* is devised and directed by a disabled artist, me, but it is not a work performed by artists who necessarily identify as such. Therefore, I am not claiming the work to represent a disability identity or an all-encompassing disabled culture, but rather to consider ways in which the ubiquitousness of ableism is illuminated. I think, like Lastsky, I am curious about the ways that bodies on display and in constraint, are an inference into the audience's gaze and methods of meaning making through listening. Those methods being sound and noise, language, and communication, and visuality influenced by sociocultural constructs.

Early into my time as a graduate student, I realized that I think and process information much differently than my peers; however, I struggled to understand what caused this difference. I assumed that I was less intelligent, less creative, or merely just less than. That my years of experience and ways of working were no longer relevant, needed, or “correct.” Yet, now knowing what I know about crip art and neurodivergence, I realize that it was the structure and system that also struggled to bend for me. I am unsurprised that my body's main internal beat, my heart, became erratic, disrupted, and damaged; developing a “love sickness.”<sup>34</sup> I admit that crip was a term I had not encountered prior to being diagnosed and beginning to identify as disabled. Even as a medical health practitioner with disabled clients over the years, the term never showed up. Or, and reluctantly I admit, I was not looking for it like I am now. Today, I see

---

<sup>33</sup> Mukherjee 2022, 262

<sup>34</sup> Mukherjee 2022, 262

this term everywhere and believe that in many ways humans are all crip. Crip, from the slang word “cripple” became popularized by disability justice advocates seeking to reclaim power over their bodies, the governance of their bodies, and the sociopolitical ignorance that hangs like a dark cloud over disabled bodies.<sup>35</sup> While, like most things, the crip movement is not all encompassing and not without its faults, what it does do is serve as a platform for people engaged in disability justice work to interrogate ableist systems and structures, including those commonly found in higher education. Even at the most progressive institutions, the long held academic relationship with abilities prioritizes and privileges merit, excellence, rigor, achievement, and productivity.<sup>36</sup> According to Mel Y. Chen, Alison Kafer, Eunjung Kim, Julie Avril Minich, editors of *Crip Genealogies*, “Ableism dictates the very conditions under which diversity and inclusion are allowed into the university, with both increasingly framed and justified in terms of how they boost “performance” and increase “capacity.”<sup>37</sup>

In recent years, I have only come across performing artists who either have an invisible disability or do not outwardly identify as disabled, so naturally all bodies I see fall into my visual assumption of abled, or what I have been programmed to expect when I hear the term. Having an invisible disability has made me more mindful and far more able to listen to others having similar experiences in dance spaces, where showing oneself is at times quite difficult. For myself, what I am discovering is not just a lack of knowledge on the best ways to support diverse ways of learning, creating, and synthesizing, but a lack of knowledge on how to build a world that prioritizes both care and rigor simultaneously. How can we lead a space under the assumption that everyone there is crip? Rather than viewing access as a point of separation,

---

<sup>35</sup> Chen et al. 2023

<sup>36</sup> Chen et al. 2023, 4

<sup>37</sup> Chen et al. 2023, 4

modification, or simplification out of need, can we view it as a gift and a point of education out of need? When one cannot associate with the prescribed systems of knowing, there is an experience of non-generative dissonance that creates a sense of nonbelonging.<sup>38</sup> Below is a free writing exercise taken from a practice in rehearsal where the dancers and I explored songs/sounds that held significant memories.

September 25th, 2023 - Listen / Move / Write / Speak - An Exercise Our Rehearsal Process

*Softly stirring and floating in space*

*Thick viscosity, swells, tensile bonds melting*

*Falling suspended and suspending*

*Back to my past, my mom, a time of youth and innocence*

*A fairy tale of peaceful journey's, journeying through fields of tall grass and weeds of endless coils*

*Like I am carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, like the air thickens and is held up by me but perhaps I am holding it up or hanging from it*

*Hanging from the rafter and swaying swiftly, softly, surrendering to the ambivalence and the buoyancy of times ride*

*A bouncing and babbling babbling brook a fun house a house of cotton candy a circle of care a contained fabric of comfort*

*Tension and feathering*

*Gentle and stiff, contoured and rustled, brittle, breaks, bend, bent, been bent before*

As an entry point into sound and to establish a space of belonging, I invited my collaborators to share with myself and collaborating musician for *track*, Erik Spangler<sup>39</sup>, a song that reminded them of who they were. The prompt was to find a song or sound that held

---

<sup>38</sup> Words can cut deep but they also are empty vowels and consonants arranged in repeated patterns that are made significant through arbitrary agreements and the forming of hierarchies and commonalities. They hold such power because of the merit humans assign to them and un-attaching those labels is damn near impossible. They are how we communicate achievements, success, agreements, disagreements, our needs, and our wants, yet they fail us time and time again. They fail those who struggle to work within their systems that ask a body to fit into their design rather than finding the flexibility to support all bodies. Culturally words are a marker of belonging; positive and negative sounds of meaning and association to the world being built. Words and people often fail me and I find solace in nature. I think this is why so many crip artists/humans engage with poetry, prose, and the environment.

<sup>39</sup> Erik Spangler is a Baltimore-based composer and electronic musician bridging ensemble improvisation, live electronics and notated music. Spangler's compositions have been performed by ensembles including Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Atlantic Brass Quintet, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and International Contemporary Ensemble. Co-curator of Baltimore Boom Bap Society improvised hip hop series (2011-present). He has taught at Maryland Institute College of Art, Towson University, Ithaca College, and K-12 schools in Baltimore.

something deeper for them. This could be one that sparks a memory, a sensation, or a reference to the essence of them, or a sound that has played a role in shaping their sense of self. The sounds and songs we received were quite different from the Coqui frogs of Puerto Rico to Neil Young's "Harvest Moon", to Enya, Mariah Carey's "Always be My Baby", a deep meditation song, Remi Wolf's "Pink + White", and a recording of a Tap dance performed by an influential teacher and mentor. Spangler was tasked with making sense of the collective integration and use of these tracks within the sound score for the piece. Each dancer was given a solo in the piece based on their sounds that reminded them of who they were. I had one-on-one or small group rehearsals, due to scheduling conflicts and dancer availability, where I guided them through listening, writing, speaking, and moving over two hours. While we went through this process, I had them listening to their song or their sound on repeat with headphones on for a more intimate experience. After the final round of this practice, each dancer and I were able to get to a deeper level of investigation in our writing and our speaking, where we felt more abandonment and less preplanned exchange. After the final practice, I played one dancer's song on the main stereo for everyone to hear. I asked that dancer to move in an open improvisational score. Under the mantra of "I love to you"<sup>40</sup> as a way of giving love to someone that is not an object and is not a possession, and to give love without expecting anything in return, we witnessed them. Witnesses were tasked with pulling out three moments of resonance from what they saw at the end of the practice. At the same time, I asked the dancer to rest after moving and replay three moments that had just occurred in their minds. We shared these three moments with one another, and this material became the foundation for a section in the piece titled Echo. In Echo, the dancers learned a sequence of resonant memories about their movement practice from their peers. These

---

<sup>40</sup> Irigaray 1996

echoic gestures were also sequenced together by me, and the dancers to create solos of remembrance. The material that was performed was deepened, expanded, stretched, and manipulated by my choreographic play and our collaborative conversations, but they were born from the initial practice of listening to their song in intimacy and community.

Another way that we created a sense of belonging in the rehearsal space, and in the work, was through an improvisational exercise that I inherited from Mona Thompson<sup>41</sup>, Senior Education Development Specialist. I adapted this exercise to incorporate a movement component to create composition material. I asked the dancers to divide up into partners and take three minutes to give a guided tour of a place that they recall vividly in their memory. The place was supposed to be one that stuck in their memory and had significance in their life. It was a place that brought them a lot of joy and happiness. It was a place where a significant event occurred, but whatever the case may be, it was a place they found themselves returning to repeatedly in their minds' eyes. As they gave their guided tour of the space to their partner, the partner listened intimately without taking notes. This listener then repeated back to the tour guide all the things that they could remember from what they heard. They tried to give as much detail and description as possible, and during this time the tour guide was allowed to take notes on what was relayed back to them. After both partners gave their tours, they listened and reflected. I had them pull out three words from what they wrote down about their place and enact them physically in their body. Their prompt was to let the words inform their movement. Abstractly, literally, or through some other metaphorical impetus to move. These short and mostly stationary reenactments of places of significance, became known adoringly by the dancers as Whale

---

<sup>41</sup> Mona Thompson, Teaching and Learning Transformation Center at the University of Maryland, develops and manages programs for undergraduate peer mentors and graduate student instructors. She runs the Academic Peer Mentoring Program (AMP), University Teaching & Learning Program (UTLP), and Graduate Student Teaching Orientations.

Sounds, because we were listening to sounds made by whales in nature, during the time of creation. These whale sound solos were sprinkled throughout the work at different moments, creating a sense of personal connection to the journey.



## a rigorous act of listening

*it's like looking out the only window, of my cold concrete and seemingly soundproof  
office to see the sun glisten across the emerald, green leaves and crisp  
branches that bounce in some tune at times in disagreement but otherwise  
complimenting one another's currents  
the heavy silence of the space I occupy inside subsumes me  
and the world briefly encloses  
my sight narrows to a pin prick and all I can feel is the reality of my body's aliveness  
in a dark shrinking container  
the branches bouncing to a song I can't hear while basking in the comfortable  
warmth of light I can't feel. two opposites.  
i begin to imagine what the song sounds like, its shape, its color...the sun  
warming my back a quick transcription...  
for a moment time clarifies, suspending me from life's contextual noise  
i press the heavy window open  
a gentle symphony suddenly fills the space until I am submerged. Snap.  
I am lost again. - July 19th, 2023*

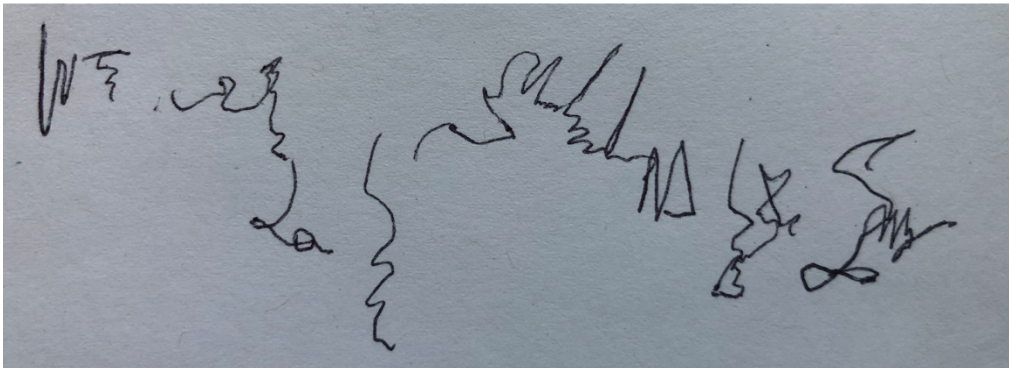


Illustration 1

All bodies resonate. All bodies are in resonance, with themselves, with others, with space, and material “reflection.” All bodies are resonant. They can endure with reverberatory depth. They can cause lasting effects, vibrate, repeat, reiterate, and iterate with sticky images. They linger and hold potential. They echo. All bodies are used, recycled, and reused. Sound's materiality is resounding; it resonates “what already exists within the system, waiting to be

triggered.”<sup>42</sup> It is a phenomenon that is not entirely tangible in its full spectrum. When one object vibrates at a similar frequency as another, it causes the other to vibrate in tandem, amplifying the shared message. This can be heard, seen, and felt as perhaps an illusion of an elongated tone, an image or color made vivid, or a sense of belonging. Often used in social justice circles, it represents a method of space making, of expansion. Julie Beth Napolin<sup>43</sup>, is a scholar, musician, radio producer, and author of *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* shares her stance on resonance as a sympathetic vibration, wrapped up in language, imagination, and ethics.<sup>44</sup> In conversation with Kim Adams, of the High Theory podcast, Napolin expresses that “In order to consider it (resonance), you are always considering what is more than one, what is more than itself.”<sup>45</sup> She states that resonance is how we feel the “fundamental facts of being” and that we are “not one but two” in relational vibration.<sup>46</sup> While I agree fully with this argument, I see bodies as multitudes beyond the dualistic binary. Sympathetic vibration is a momentary agreement between reciprocal bodies, or bodies that engage in exchange and occur within the conversations of cells, the conversations of humans, and the conversations of trees. The multitudes of self-possibilities and composites are vast, wrapped in ambiguity and the chance alignment of resonant frequencies.

In thinking about the resonance of all bodies and voices in choreographic world building, I began to think about care mapping. Care mapping became my attempt to integrate access, resource networks from disability justice work, and visual learning into the rehearsal studio. I

---

<sup>42</sup> Pinchevski 2022, 47

<sup>43</sup> Julie Beth Napolin is a scholar, musician, and radio producer. She is the co-Editor of the William Faulkner Journal, a member of the editorial board of *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, a member of the MLA Sound Forum executive committee, and the former President of the New School chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

<sup>44</sup> Napolin 2024

<sup>45</sup> Adams, n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Adams, n.d.

am still trying to fully understand how it can be utilized and upheld. What I found in this process was that, even though the practice got off track (my own fault for letting it drift to the back burner) and I was not asking the dancers to continuously “check-in” on our collective space, the intentions we set still made their way into the fabric of the work. Having limited time in space together made it hard for me to know how to keep this practice in play without it taking up most of our rehearsal time, which would have meant that we might never get a twenty-minute dance done. The balance between my desire for leading intentional processes versus achievement and the need to create a product, was in conflict. Looking back, I might have focused on a performance of process rather than compositional ingenuity, knowing the ingenuity would come in time with future development of the work and our focused intentional investigations.

The CARE map shown below is my first attempt to synthesize what I have learned through the thesis project process. It is inspired by the work of Sins Invalid, “a disability justice-based performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and LGBTQ / gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized.”<sup>47</sup> The tenants of their principles of disability justice include Intersectionality, Leadership of Those Most Impacted, Anti-capitalist Politics, Cross-movement Solidarity, Recognizing Wholeness, Sustainability, Commitment to Cross-disability Solidarity, Interdependence, Collective Access, and Collective Liberation.<sup>48</sup> It is my intuition that the act of collective mapping tries to create a horizontality amongst all bodies in a room. It is an actionable method of listening and building sympathetic resonance.

---

<sup>47</sup> “Sins Invalid,” n.d.

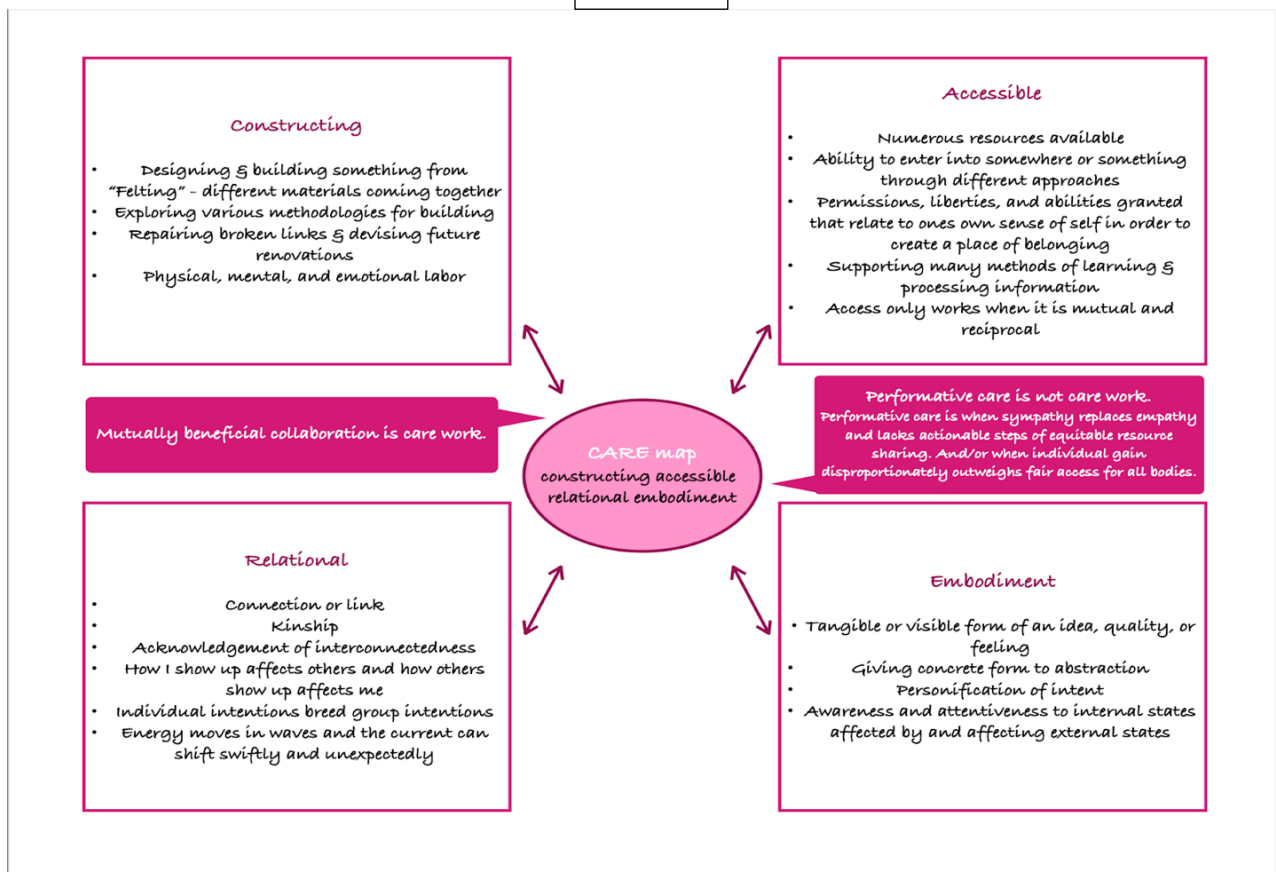
<sup>48</sup> “Sins Invalid,” n.d.

The four pillars of the CARE map I propose are Constructing, Access, Relational, and Embodiment.

- Constructing - To dream up a world in community, is to be an active architect and designer building through conversation, not speech.
- Access - Allowing all bodies to enter and thrive in a space and allowing space to bend.
- Relational - An understanding that we are all connected; influencing and influenced.
- Embodiment - How we show up, listen, and tune our bodily tissue, to self and to others is a continuous practice and process.

What I struggle with and am looking to continue understanding is how to maintain a space of CARE and uphold CARE while in the choreographic process when there is an agenda. I wonder how we maintain access while pushed up against timelines, expectations, and rigor? I also struggled with creating a space of CARE while establishing boundaries as a leader, director, and choreographer who is asking for their needs to be met, while meeting the needs of the dancers.

Figure 2



## the wall

The cost of failure is education.  
Devin Carraway<sup>49</sup>

The wall. Or should I say the big bad wall that almost was not built. From a simple, innocent, and ordinary idea, in my first semester of graduate school choreography class, the idea of the wall was born. It was sparked by my desire to dance alone no longer as a solo body in the void of space for my peers. Looking back at this post covid (still covid) world, I was craving contact and relationships, and wanted to see my work thrust up against a new surface, on another plane, and within new parameters. I wanted to crack open the monotony of my process to better understand my motivations and disrupt the crutch of habit. Yet, feeling unsafe to expose my whole self and my work for my new peers, I chose an exposure with a backdrop, an anchoring in structure to seemingly “protect me.”

The exploration of the wall began with an improvisational score that dove into the tactility of my body, structure, and their intersecting relations. Cyclical themes of leaving and returning, being cast out, being pulled back, and the impetus to churn on oneself, began to emerge. This created a sense of continuous exploration within the ebb and flow of life’s daily experiences. As I played in these cyclical washes, I started to embody the cold hard thickly painted cement. In true artistic abstraction, the wall animated under control of metaphorical sense-making. The wall became a picture frame and a window into a slippery memory. It became the door of a washing machine where wet clothes slapped against the glass in new configurations, and it became a canvas that allowed for all of myself to be exposed and revealed. It allowed me to be seen and thus to be a scene. A scene in which all that can be cast upon me,

---

<sup>49</sup> Lunney and Lueder, n.d.

will be. The choreographic material that began to take shape from this improvisation played with coyness, awkward desire, presentation, and the complexity of one's gaze on my moving, breathing, shifting body. The wall became a medium through which I grappled with the complexities of my own body, its history, its memories, its statements. Yet there was also a far-reaching cloud of influence that hung over this new wall dance, which was my multi-year exploratory solo project, *I don't own the rights to this autobiography*.

The dance that has been made, remade, and might never get made has lived in my psyche as *I don't own the rights to this autobiography*. It was at first a quest to tackle my much-needed journey of appreciating bodily wealth and adaptation through living with illness and chronic pain. It began selfishly as I tried to understand how life has 'marked' my body from the traumatic loss of family and friends, the diagnosis of an incurable autoimmune disease, and the never-ending slew of tests, meds, and mind-bending trips to the hospital. This work slowly became a self-prescribed remedy to the short and long term, shifts in my body, to channeling my anger and pain into something creative, and for connecting to others who might also be masking discomfort like me. As I experimented with this solo in live concerts on a proscenium stage, in intimate studio performance parties, and finally digitally through film, I started archiving conversations with my clients. As a Massage Therapist focused on rehabilitative care, I worked with a diverse clientele in age, race, sex, economic status, and ability. Clients with acute injury to chronic illnesses visited me weekly. In our conversations on pain and life, I asked clients to give their discomfort color, texture, and shape. I asked them to track its movement and log the experiences that alleviated discomfort. This act of asking clients to give their discomfort vibrancy and form, began to transform their narratives into a tangible and shared expression of pain and resilience. Their symptoms and locations for pain in their bodies began to shift. Some

experienced catharsis through tears, laughter, and anger that led to breakthroughs in their treatment. It is here that I saw language and sound as vital to the healing process. My hope in revisiting the work I made each time and in new ways, was to go beyond mere movement and allow it to become a therapeutic and cathartic process for both myself and those who engaged with it.

The wall that is used in the performance of *track* began as a continuance of the *idotrtta* idea. My initial pitch for the wall was one that was a simple structure on wheels. I was curious about it moving freely through the space so that the performers could engage with it on both sides, turning it, pushing it, pulling it and balancing opposing forces simultaneously like sound waves moving against it. I visualized that this wall would have had solid surfaces, windows, and mirrors.



Figure 3

However, through the collaborative process, our work began to circle around a stationary wall that could bear more weight and accommodate our media design. Margarita Syrocheva<sup>50</sup>, the project's scenic designer, created a beautiful sculptural wall that felt deeply embodied, organic, and in conversation with the costumes by costume designer Bailey Hammet<sup>51</sup>. Aesthetically within the metal framework of this wall, Syrocheva captured the visual transcription of the actual sound waves from the music being used in the performance by Spangler. Between two hard wall panels was a large stretch of spandex, four layers thick. The reasoning for this spandex came from the project's media designer Luis Garcia<sup>52</sup>. Garcia pitched an innovative idea to use spandex which allowed for images to be projected onto the back of its surface from upstage, and for the performers to physically manipulate the media and imagery being shown throughout the performance. The reasoning behind all of this was the idea to use Cymatic technology as the main media content.

Cymatics, which is the study of wave phenomena, has been revolutionary in understanding vibration on and within matter. Cymatics makes sound visible causing it to bend, fold, and ripple in patterns and designs that speak to the visual representation of sound's affective influence. Entering the rehearsal space again for this project, after illness and a suspended recovery time, I began by exploring the fluids of the body and ways of moving from fluid intention. This focus came from Cymatic technology. Water: an efficient conductor of sound,

---

<sup>50</sup> Margarita Syrocheva, M.F.A. in design candidate, is a young Russian designer who strives to be a multidisciplinary artist pursuing the expression of emotions in her work. Her credentials include theatre and film work in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and international theatre projects for the European Union of Theater Academies. Her recent work was on the world premiere of *My Mama & The Full-Scale Invasion* at Woolly Mammoth Theater as an Assistant Scenic Designer.

<sup>51</sup> Bailey Hammett is a second year M.F.A. costume design candidate. Her past works at the University of Maryland include *The Late Wedding* and *The Prom*. She has also worked with many theaters in the DC area.

<sup>52</sup> Luis Garcia is a Peruvian-American lighting and media designer. Luis is in his third and final year as an M.F.A. lighting and media candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. Some of his selected media works include *It Happened in Key West* at Fulton Theatre, *A Bicycle Country* at UMD, *Espejos:Clean* at Studio Theatre, *Out of the Vineyard* at Joe's Movement Emporium, *The Book Club Play* at UMD.



comprises nearly 60% of our bodies, and is often the medium through which cymatics is explored. I began to become curious about the impact of sound on a cellular level. Does Cymatics show us the music of our cells?

Figure 4



Figure 5

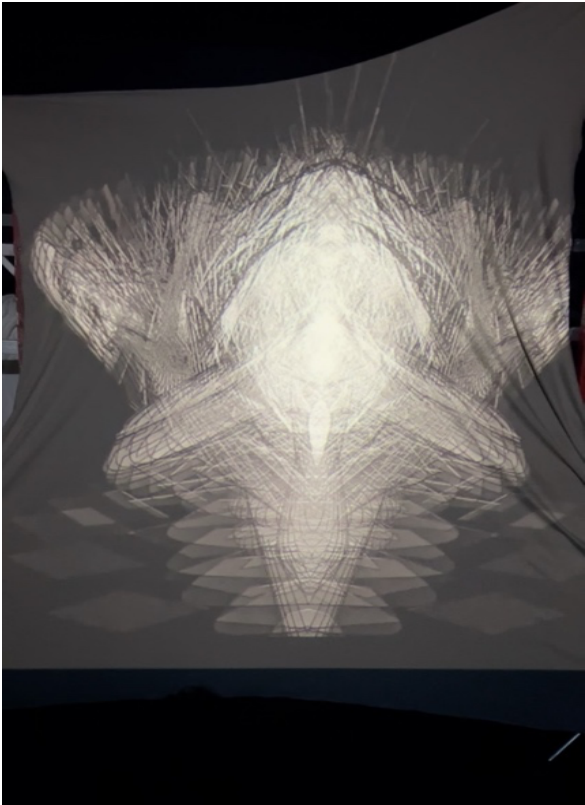




Figure 6

The visuality of *track's* sound score in fluids, provided the opportunity to see how the sounds that came together, including those that were contributed by the dancers, animated in another form of co-emerging communication. I was interested in seeing how the imagery created on the spandex impacted the narrative around, and the context of, the moving bodies. In what ways were the two in reflection? Where were the gaps in repercussion? How did sound and image reverberate in space together? These questions caused me to think more about echo and how its presence could be a tool to make sense of the world we were building together, as seen in the drawing.

Echo is a sound wave that bounces back as a reflection, from a material it cannot pass through. Echo exists because of matter. It exists because of substance; because of the contents, contaminants, and confines vibrating a space. It defines space; mediates its liveness and the

edges of material design.<sup>53</sup> For me, this drawing represents a few different ideas around the concept of echo. When a sound wave hits a firm surface like the wall, it rebounds back to the source of sound, but moves at a slightly different angle. When it hits a mirror, it reflects back directly to the source as a self-reflection, yet the image is backwards, incomplete, and askew. When a sound wave travels through a window, information is received from the outside, but there is a filter. The glass absorbs the sound, refracts it and alters its intention by the time it hits the body. In this drawing, sound's echo is never a direct replica, but rather a mixture of sound's subjective experience; an altered afterbeat of generative feminist creation. Echo is a feminist whose cunning and clever adaptability shows resilience. Tricking the masculine Narcissus into hearing his own words repeated back to him, with delayed gaps, different tones, and in pieces. The egotism that once fueled Narcissus is replaced with a forced "sitting with" of self, doomed to live in isolation with the reality of his ways.<sup>54</sup> Echo's delay is self-reflection. She gives you time to sit with yourself, as well as an offering to change. Echo asks us to pay attention, to listen. According to Amit Pinchevski<sup>55</sup>, "Echo makes a world." but "Has the power to destroy a world."<sup>56</sup> It is both a phenomenon for affirmation and relationality as well as a tool of political rhetoric. Through the choreographic process, I began exploring Echo as a co-dependent and co-emerging phenomenon. I wanted to understand how its iterative characteristics can mediate a body as a place, or location, of multitudes, inextricably woven into the fabric of our environment. The spandex surface became both a point of play in unpredictability, but also a visual tool to show how echo evolves as an unfixed state of self-reflection and re-composition. It

---

<sup>53</sup> Pinchevski 2022

<sup>54</sup> Pinchevski 2022

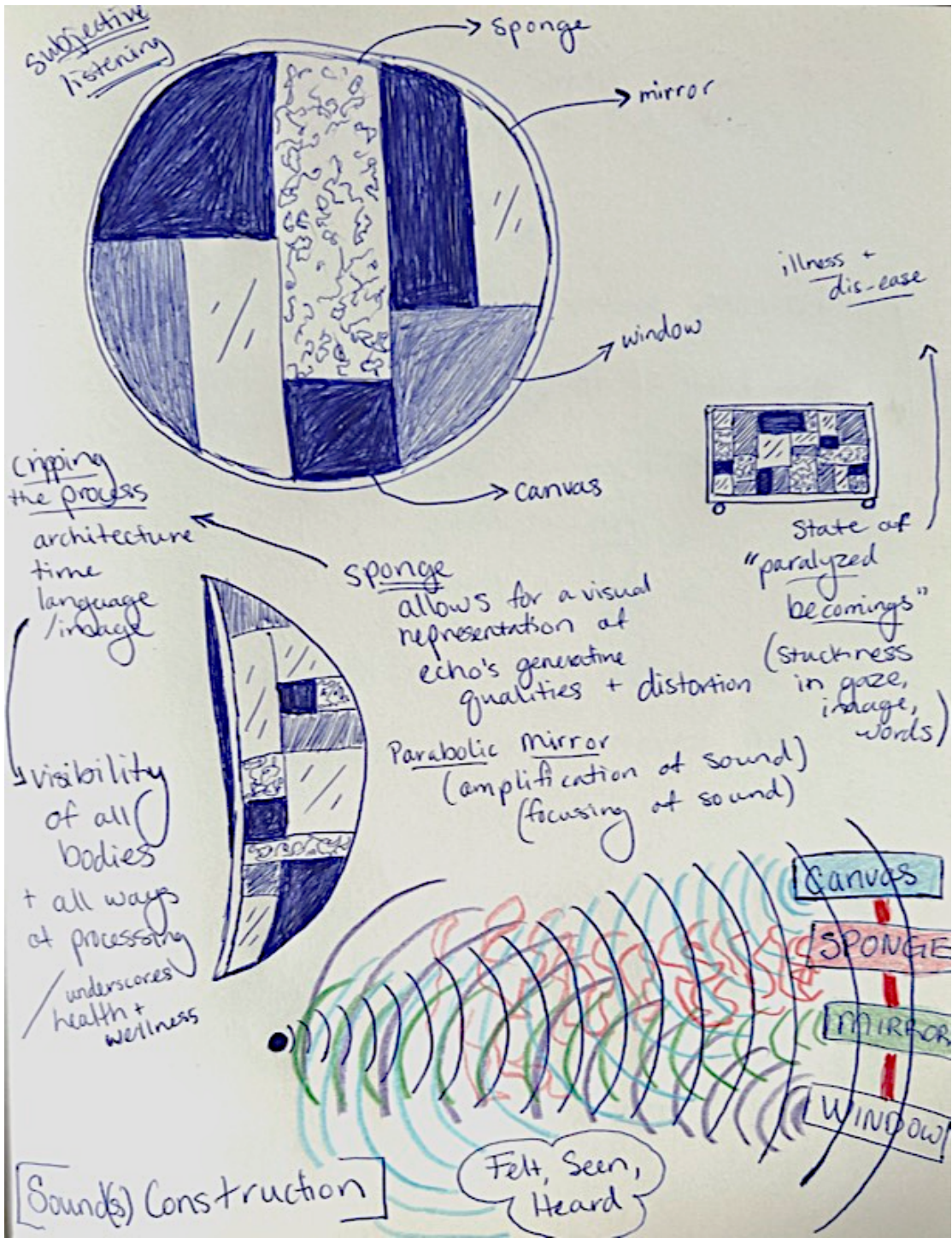
<sup>55</sup> Amit Pinchevski is a Full Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, since 2004. His research interests are in theory and philosophy of communication and media, focusing specifically on the ethical aspects of the limits of communication.

<sup>56</sup> Pinchevski 2022

is a way to show how echo is always iterative and thus vibratory bodies are always in a constant state of becoming; never finished. The spandex is a pliable and permeable material, reminiscent of cellular structures. It can absorb, spring back, distort, refract, and diffract images and bodies. The spandex became a way of ‘cripping’ the world, a form of crip architecture that interrogates ableist expectations and views on stability and structure. The images being projected on the spandex were being physically manipulated by bodies interacting with the material. As the dancers pressed into the material the images went from blurry to clear and vivid, to stretched and warped. It is as if the dancers dictated how media and gaze narrates their identities, rather than media and gaze being imposed upon their bodies without their ability to object.

Over time the entire wall structure became a place to convene. It became a place for us to throw ideas at and watch them bounce back. We felt the rebound, the absorption, and the redirect in endless loops. In utilizing a wall as a pliable spandex surface, our ideas were no longer met with a list of predictable behaviors, but with unexpected bends and folds. Unstable bodies were met with an equally unstable surface, yet they thrive in concert, in negotiation, in a dialogue that always remains curious and alert. There is a necessity to adapt.

Illustration 2



## (echo)logical events

*As I sit beneath the canopy of mesh, dark purple, deep orange, and red scalloped fabric strung across the vaulted ceiling on the top floor of the Renwick Museum, I am both comforted and overwhelmed, disarmed and softened. The folds in the fabric are lit by lights above which gradually and methodically change color. The scene cascading over my head across the vast space looks at one moment like a breathtaking sunset, a fantastical utopia, and in the next like a colorless cave, a dark chasm that*



Figure 7

*consumes me in shadow. All the images, real and surreal, that flood my mind live in-between these extremes. I wait. After some time, my eyes begin to give up their fight and I feel my body shift into, alongside, and with the light's gaze. Sitting on a dark gray (or perhaps it's black) carpet I feel painted lines beneath my fingertips where the velvet carpet is interrupted. When I sit back and take in the entirety of the ground space, I see lines like rings on a tree trunk or topographic tracings on a map, flooding the base of this breathing sculpture. It looks as if the fabric hanging above were lowered down to momentarily kiss the ground and leave a mark of its unique design below. Or perhaps the two ends, the top and bottom of this rippled wave, once fit neatly together before being slowly peeled apart to reveal the delicate sinews of connective tissue that tether them. The painted lines bleed and feather at the curves to give the illusion of depth and I imagine myself falling between the rings into a pool of darkness. Suddenly I realize that I am sitting in the gap. This space that lives between what I see and what I feel, this "in-*

*between-ness” is a place where the container of my body brews with potential. It is where I await, I prepare, and I accumulate. I look around and see other bodies in various states of rest and accumulation across the carpet. Some people sit alone, but most congregate in groups and the gap within this work Earthtime 1.8 by Janet Echelman, begins to resemble mountains, rolling hills, or islands as bodies slow down for brief moments of assembly, only to erupt again with chatter as they tumble, re-organize, and re-form.*

*I am amazed by this improvisational dance of bodies meeting before me. I wonder, how are these moments of consensus and action triggered? Which light combination invokes a bodily shift? Do the shadows on the wall coincide with verbal or non-verbal listening? If one were to film this room over the course of an extended timeline, would we see repeating patterns of arrival and formation on the map below? And simply, what starts me? For me the genius behind Echelman’s work is in the activation of these questions. She positions humans as an experiment, as indeterminate players of difference and surprise. Her work enlivens, achieving what I believe all artwork strives to do on some level. It is a co-emergent tuning or act of becoming. Pauline Oliveros once wrote that “listening happens in a nonlinear way in improvisation” and the current moment where my attention bounces from my skin, to my eyes, to my ears and my guts is exactly what I imagine she meant. The space, this gap, this in-between, is filled by echo. I see the material above echoed below in image. It is a replica; an imitated response that is distorted and delayed. I feel the gaps in sinews and bodies re-formed by echo, and I see her breathing environment revealed at each arrival of time's inevitable lag. I hear sounding bodies. Sounds*

*that aren't quite discernible in language, but in familiar and unfamiliar mutterings and tones. The voice is a vibratory bridge that emerges between two planes, accessing both the*



*internal bodily environment with the external environment. Echelman's work creates enough control within what I view as an improvisatory experiment without dictating free will. I relate to this use of improvisation in performance.*

For *track*, much of the choreographic material and map through the work was set. However, I gave the performers tremendous agency with transitory improvisational scores to encourage their own choice making. Getting from point A to point B in their own way became just as vital to me as the rehearsed steps. I encouraged this so much that over time I saw the



performers find a way of living in the rehearsed steps as if they were also new each time. Often the work varied in tempo and confused time, due to the immense presence of listening the dancers maintained in their performative commitments.



There was a thickness in the air that was intimate and powerful. Sadly, this sensation became lost for me when the work moved into a proscenium space with the audience on the outside of the work, rather than within its fibers.

Unlike *track*, *Earthtime 1.8*'s immersivity fills the 4,000 square-foot Grand Salon at the Renwick Museum in Washington D.C. and utilizes 51 miles of twine. The flooring is composed of regenerated nylon fibers repurposed from discarded fishing nets. Echelman states that, "this sculpture installation examines the complex interconnections between human beings and our physical world and reveals the artist's fascination with the measurement of time." and it "...concerns of our daily existence within the larger cycles of time."<sup>57</sup> The work was conceived following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan in March of 2011. A devastating event that became the world's third-largest earthquake and took the lives of over 18,000. Waves reaching a height of forty feet hit the main island of Honshu and the ripple effects were felt and seen globally. This event caused a shift in the earth's axis and shortened the length of day by 1.8 millionths of a second.<sup>58</sup>

In the weeks and months after leaving the Renwick Museum in Washington D.C., Echelman's living and breathing sculpture continues to linger in my psyche. It left me with a curiosity hard to grasp in words. What was it about that space that changed me? What am I carrying forward as a memory and a state of 'nowness'? I reflect on the way in which my sense of understanding, my sense of belonging in those moments under the canopy, was driven by the contextual 'felting' of bodies, voices, images, and structure spun through time. I felt that I lived a full day in a matter of minutes and the inanimate objects in the room became the subjects of fiction. The sculpture, the room, and the carpet below remained unaltered during my entire

---

<sup>57</sup> Echelman 2015

<sup>58</sup> "On This Day: 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami" 2021

experience, and yet the world kept changing through light, color, and the way bodies were moved to move through space. The way they vibrated in conversation without saying any words I understood; I understood.

## cell songs

Organ derives from the Latin organum, which means instrument, and which comes from the Greek word that means musical instrument or organ of the body. – Bonnie Gordon, *Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*<sup>59</sup>

*My connection to processing thought through movement is unrelentingly strong. Sitting in class, inundated with information, culture and counterculture, I feel both destabilized in my own position and lost in my mad dash to digest, to synthesize, and to comprehend. I am gratefully being undone and swimming in the messiness of transformation, yet the doer in me pushes my brain to catch up to my body. I leave class and several hours later, when the burn of my lungs, the pounding of my heart, and the ache in my legs during a long rehearsal have set in, I finally find clarity. I am grateful to feel this momentary relief of thinking without thought; the deeply empowered confidence of finally finding my idea, my understanding, my position. For now. It feels so good not to just be mentally clear, but to feel my body meet my mind, to embody my cognition and feel whole.*

Dance has always held for me, the ability to move further into epiphanic moments of embodiment like this one. It carries the heightened ability to listen inwardly in order to autonomously reflect outward and to listen outward to contextualize what is felt inward. It deals with emotional creativity. This phenomenon fascinates me and grows deep roots in building identity. I use the term phenomena, not to preach my agenda as an esoteric experience, but to speak to the beautifully intangible slipperiness of dance as a conduit for both individual and communal processing of the senses. How do we physically process what we see and feel, what we perceive, in conversation with what we already know? How do we situate action in actuality?

---

<sup>59</sup> Eidsheim 2015

In truth? In fantasy? In our bodies? How is sensation curated for the viewer to read, and ultimately read themselves? And how is meaning made, for those embodying the form, through the streamlined process of shaping agreements, negotiations, memories, and beliefs in the creative process? I argue that dancers are true philosophers of enactment by their ability to creatively synthesize sensation within their perceived realities of the social landscape in which they are situated. As a longtime student and teacher of anatomy, I am fascinated by the intricate endless system of maps that traverse through the body and the immense ability to adapt.

During the initial days of my research and recovery, I stumbled upon the work of Stanley Keleman<sup>60</sup>. Keleman, a writer and therapist, created an approach to somatic psychotherapy known as Formative Psychology which carries the belief that “feeling follows form.”<sup>61</sup> Although dated in 1985, his work currently holds truths for me in discovering a way of contextualizing bodily affect, sonically, environmentally, and in an ethical lens. He believed all life stemmed from pulsation, a vibratory expansion and contraction of cellular fluid. From this pulsation grew cellular pockets, planes, and spaces or cavities for fluids to fill, clear, nourish and exchange. A watery highway of nourishment and ease, that has built bridges upon bridges and layers upon layers. This fluid design paved the way for organ formation and has given shape and purpose to fluid exchange.<sup>62</sup> Organs have socialized fluid around their mountains, peaks, valleys, and houses. Keleman believed that organs grow, and continue moving, from a remembering of biological design, perhaps a blueprint of design passed down from the cellular memory in our DNA. This song of pulsation forming our body’s orchestra gives rise to our consciousness, to our emotionality, and to our use of imagery as metaphorical descriptors.

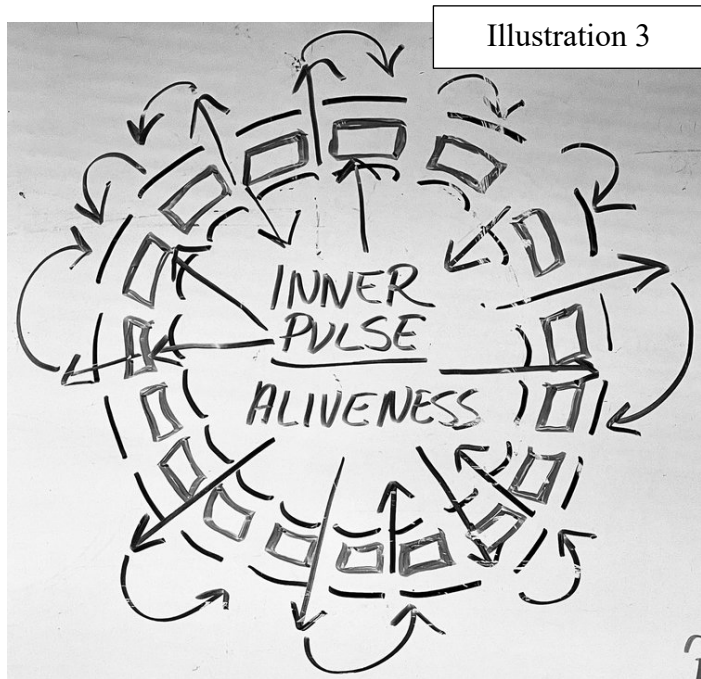
---

<sup>60</sup> Stanley Keleman is the founder of Formative Psychology™: a methodology and conceptual framework in which changing anatomical shapes define human existence.

<sup>61</sup> Keleman 1986

<sup>62</sup> Keleman 1986

In addition to discovering Keleman's work, I came upon the work *Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*, by Nina Sun Eidsheim.<sup>63</sup> Eidsheim writes about organological research and inter-material vibration. She believes that our bones and flesh participate in the formation of music in that they are the "material that vibrates" and that "vibration does not exist prior to a specific material realization."<sup>64</sup> Essentially



this means that sound vibrations can never be disentangled with material experience. Eidsheim's perspective made me begin to think of how our organs could be holding us up and carrying us, rather than being contained and held within our musculoskeletal frame. Perhaps this perspective can start to expand the purpose of organ motility beyond biological function. Similarly to Keleman and his point of view, this made me ponder on the internal landscape of bodies, the structural frame of organs, and the way this births an infrastructure which accommodates growth vertically and horizontally away from gravity. This becomes a perpetual dance with death. Organ pulsation and motility, the motility of bodies, is constant and only can be silenced in death. It isn't always harmonious but rather a sonic landscape of disordered sounds catching resonance, adjusting to dissonance, and offering rhythmic potential.

---

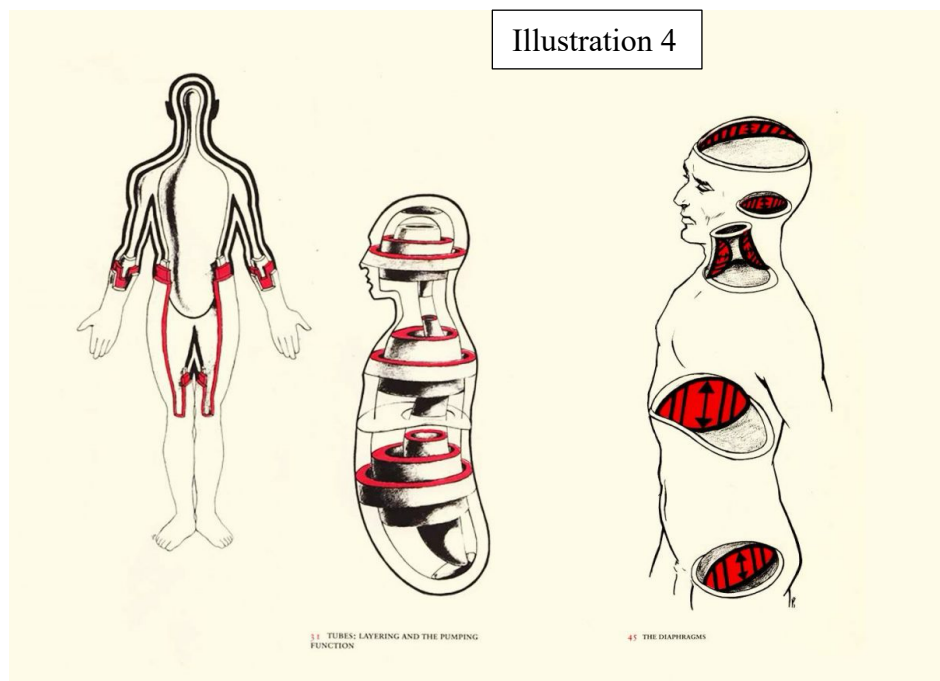
<sup>63</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim is a Professor of Musicology and Humanities Founder and Director of UCLA Peer Lab, Musicology

<sup>64</sup> Eidsheim 2015, 161

With Eidsheim's research and Keleman's imagery in my mind, my collaborators and I began to explore the fluids and fluid systems of our bodies in rehearsal, through somatic exercises, improvisational scores, touch, and listening to different sound frequencies that are known to resonate with different body parts and organs. These practices led to feelings of stability, ease, and clarity in our movement, while also causing me to feel less sick in my body. The rehearsal space soon became the one place where my symptoms such as dizziness, shortness of breath, shakiness, and heart palpitations significantly reduced. The combination of these practices started to help me feel dramatically better, if even only for a few hours, and was reported to have a similar effect on my collaborators. Through this continued exploration of the fluids, vibration, and the witnessing of Cymatic design in water, I found curiosity in the cyclical recycling nature of waves and thus the cyclical recycling nature of bodies as a method of renewal.

I explored this curiosity at first by simply observing waves. I physicalized their motion and shape, the forward and back current, before tapping into the emotional sensations that

arrived from these actions. I started to think about waves inside the body, specifically the motion of the cerebral spinal fluid. This fluid runs up the back of the spine, circles the



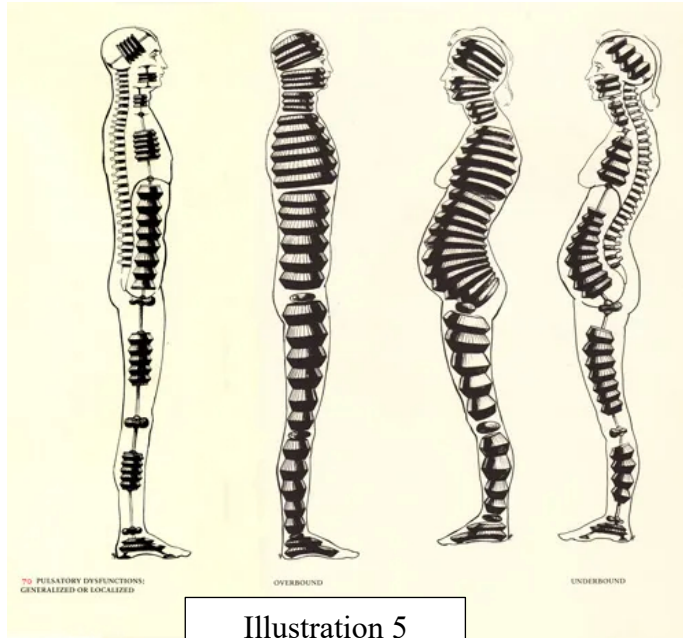


Illustration 5

sleep cycles. I cued Bruno to go through the material while speaking aloud, describing sensation as they moved. This led to a fascinating discovery. Not only did the speaking cause them to feel a stronger connection to the content being performed, but we learned that vocalization, or the vibration of breath and internal structure helps one tap into the rhythmic organization of movement material.

brain, and then pours down the front of the spine in a large figure eight fashion. It affects the wake and sleep cycles of the body. The creation of solo material for Emilia Bruno<sup>65</sup>, emerged from this exploration. Together we built movement that derived from this figure eight and the anterior and posterior surfaces of the body, in conversation with the wake and

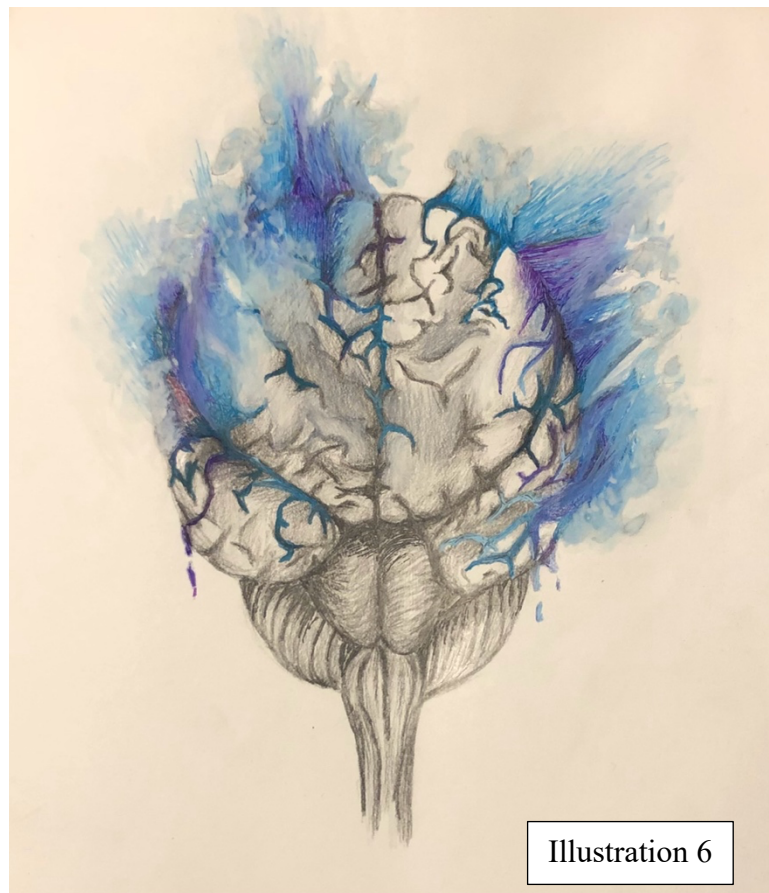


Illustration 6

<sup>65</sup> Originally from Lake Zurich, IL, Emilia Bruno is an Italian American, queer movement artist currently based in College Park, MD. They received their B.F.A. in dance and BS in kinesiology from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Through a long-standing relationship to the Bates Dance Festival, Emilia is deeply dedicated to working in non-competitive, supportive learning environments for aspiring artists.

*breath sounds*

People crave objectivity because to be subjective is to be embodied, to be a body, vulnerable, violable. - Ursula K Le Guin, *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices; Toward an Inclusive Somatics*<sup>66</sup>

Vibratory waves of respiration are waves of sound. All movement has a sound and stillness is an illusion. When we stop moving, we stop. We are stopped. Standing still and muted. Without motion we stop perceiving, stop changing, stop growing. We first move from a watery womb of rhythmic aliveness; an asynchronous growth of sounds. Over time these sounds become familiar, reliable, defined, habituated and under-examined as they move with us into adulthood. A heartbeat, a digestive gurgle, the song of muffled voices are what makes up the score to our first soundscape. We breathe in a watery soundscape and our cells work to remember where they came from and then re-member us. To experience bodies, embodied, we must accept the simultaneous communication of our past selves and ancestral tracings, with future anticipations. We are pieced together and formed by fluid vibratory matter; a construction from sound waves. The endless oscillation of growth born from our cellular mapping tethers us between past and future in a perpetual dance of recomposing our psychophysical form. All matter, and all the material seeds of our bodies, contain the potential of vibratory aliveness, a cellular aliveness or motility that moves inward and outward. It pulsates in a social act of co-reliant respiration. As respiration emerges, it grows in scale systematically throughout our bodies until it is realized and aesthetically mediated by the visibility of our lungs. The rise and fall of our chest, the coolness of air entering our throats and the heat and steam of air exiting our mouths, the strength of our voice, and the speed with which we fill and deplete. When we breathe it is in fluid tones of both

---

<sup>66</sup> Johnson 2018



saturated and evaporated moisture in a suspended act engaged in a tuning of our bodies and minds from the social feeding of tones, notes, melodies, and maladies.

Inspired by the work of Environmental Humanities professor at York University, Jean-Thomas Tremblay<sup>67</sup>, I muse over respiration.

Respiration is vibratory.

Respiration is sonic.

Respiration is sharing you and discovering you simultaneously, sharing you and discovering another.

Respiration is consciousness in flux.

Respiration is relational.

Respiration is both nutritive and toxic.

Respiration is a dance with death, vitality and depletion, states of being hypertonic and hypotonic.

Respiration is inequitable.

Respiration assumes capacity and demonstrates adaptability.

Respiration is resilient and resiliently deceiving.

Respiration is wet waves in the air constantly recomposing our reality.

Respiration is...

Respiration is...

The cavities and fluid transportation of breath in the body, are stretched, pressed, shrunken, and born from embodied sonic affect, from emotion designing anatomy and disproportionate instances of subjectivity. In Tremblay's *Breathing Aesthetics* they speak about the idea of respiration as a mutual exchange or a shared activity between bodies and within bodies.<sup>68</sup> We breathe out ourselves with simultaneous breathing in ourselves, learning ourselves and breathing in others. Tremblay discusses breathing for others and being breathed for by others. Our breath is both figurative and literal nourishment but has been polluted, weaponized, and monetized by climate change and environmental toxicity.<sup>69</sup> As we breathe in, we breathe

---

<sup>67</sup> Jean-Thomas Tremblay is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Humanities and hold graduate appointments in Humanities, English, Social and Political Thought, and Science and Technology Studies. Their interdisciplinary research and teaching span the environmental humanities, sexuality studies, literary studies, and film studies, and concentrate on the overlapping environmental, economic, and political crises of the 1970s to the present while recovering the longer histories of nature writing and the life sciences.

<sup>68</sup> Tremblay, 2022

<sup>69</sup> Tremblay, 2022

toxin and a replenishment, the noise cannot be separated from tone. As we breathe out, we fuel the earth while contributing to pollution, our noise cannot be separated from our tone. We are in a perpetual cycle of risk & life. As Tremblay states the crisis of breathing, breathing in crisis, is a part of life's systemic asphyxiation.<sup>70</sup>

Through the choreographic process, I started to question how the environment of a space impacted the strength of my breath and subsequently the strength of my voice and other collaborative voices in the room. During my internship at the Climate Institute hosted by Dance Exchange, located in Takoma Park, MD, in the summer of 2023, I learned about the ways in which the climate crisis is affecting bodily health. Access to adequate health care for low-income families in this country is hard enough, but I learned of the vicious cycle where affordable housing options are often situated in the most toxic environments. These environments, caused by humans, create more sickness and a much greater need for affordable quality healthcare, thus the cycle goes on. While this news was sadly unsurprising, it still filled me with rage, pain, and a sliver of hope all at the same time. Hope for change. It also caused my own experience with a respiratory illness to come into full picture.

In thinking about environmental breath as a shared medium of support, strength, and fertilization, I began leading the group through breathing exercises and silent reflections, adapted from Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations* at the beginning of each rehearsal. The silent reflection took the form of resting, writing, or drawing under Oliveros' categories of Sensation, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling.<sup>71</sup> We also discussed our relationships to our voice. These continued practices led us to see respiration as a tool for grounding, for physical assessment, and for clearing our minds and bodies. It helped us to work within any emotional hesitations that showed

---

<sup>70</sup> Tremblay, 2022

<sup>71</sup> Oliveros 1974

up each day and are inherent in the intimacy of breathwork, especially navigating this post/still COVID world.

Some ways that respiration became part of the track's choreographic material were added to Spangler's sound score. I, Christina Collins<sup>72</sup>, and Javier Padilla<sup>73</sup> spent one rehearsal building sounds with Spangler, using a hydrophone and a stethoscope. The hydrophone is a microphone designed to capture underwater sounds and the stethoscope is a device used by doctors to capture internal sounds like the heartbeat or the sound of the lungs. With the hydrophone, Padilla tried both breathing and speaking underwater which created a beautifully rich intoxicating sound and served as a lower register layer within the sound score. Spangler recorded our breath using the stethoscope, in addition to snippets of us talking. This process not only added an auditory layer to the performance but also added depth to the sonic atmosphere. It cultivated a space of embodied immersive exchange for both performer and audience members.

---

<sup>72</sup> Christina Collins is a M.F.A. dance candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her current research includes Afrofuturism and reimagining the Black future in different eras and points of view.

<sup>73</sup> Javier Padilla is a contemporary movement artist originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico. Training under Waldo Gonzalez and Olaya Muentes, Javi continued to pursue his dance education at Rutgers University completing his B.F.A. in dance. Javi's choreographic work presented under The Movement Playground has been presented at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, The Theater at Gibney Dance, Peridance Capezio Center, Dixon Place, The Jack Crystal Theater at NYU Tisch Dance, and the Inside/Out Stage at Jacob's Pillow.

## the gap

At the start of each project, I find myself in the gap. A term borrowed from Nancy Stark Smith<sup>74</sup> and her Underscore. Smith was a dance goddess. She stood at just over five feet, with poise and confidence that cast an eight-foot shadow. Her signature braid, a single braid of black (silver in later years), fell back to her hips. She moved with the athleticism of a gymnast and the knowingness of a sage. While my time studying with her was too short during the summer of 2017 at The Bates Dance Festival, it was filled with ideas that bled into my artistic curiosities. The gap, according to Smith is a space “in the improvisation where you experience a temporary absence of reference, a feeling of being between two forms and not sure what’s happening or what to do.”<sup>75</sup> I relate it to the moments when my head swirls with ideas but can’t land on a directional pull. It is often where I either fall into habit, repeating practice, movements, or ways of interacting, or it is where I sit with myself long enough to dive into the unknown, the weird, the funny, and the deeply difficult. What I am beginning to discover is that the gap is a lifelong journey in listening. Listening that is intimate, felt, playful and transformative.

This concept of the gap became an idea that circled our work in rehearsal quite a bit and came into play while building moments of contact. Some of the sections we built were cleverly titled undersurfaces, egg roll, nachos, and wall nachos. Undersurfaces was a prompt that came from the idea of playing with the undersurfaces of the body in conversation with currents, tides, and an undertow. In this prompt, performers Javier Padilla and Emilia Bruno were tasked with instructing one another to move “under” a surface of their body, causing the entire relationship to

---

<sup>74</sup> Nancy Stark Smith first trained as an athlete and gymnast, leading her to study and perform modern and postmodern dance in the early 1970s, greatly influenced by the dance/theater improvisation group the Grand Union and the Judson Dance Theater breakthroughs of the 1960s in NYC. She graduated from Oberlin College with a degree in dance and writing.

<sup>75</sup> Koteen and Stark Smith 2021

shift and adapt. For example, Bruno cued Padilla to move their left hand under their chin. Padilla's job was to move their left hand under Bruno's chin while making contact, but the way in which they moved was entirely their choice. Padilla was given an agency to move with quickness, sustainment, directness, indirectness, or in a configuration of their own choosing. Bruno's job was to receive the contact and allow their body to move in response until that initiation point trailed off. Both Padilla and Bruno went back and forth instructing one another with this undersurface game until they had built a long phrase of partnering material. I then directed and facilitated the construction of the duet further by adding specific connection points, playing with time and weight more deliberately in context with the work, and seeing where to clarify the conversation between these two dancing bodies swept up in a current together.

Another partnering section, that the dancers called nachos, came from a choreographic device I inherited from Doug Varone<sup>76</sup> and his DEVICES workshop. This particular Varone device was pulled from a practice that I learned in 2016. The choreographer moves objects around on the floor while the dancers "act out" the movement of the objects. Each dancer follows one object, such as a marker, a dry eraser, a tube of Chapstick and a keychain. As I created a dance with the items in front of me, processing through my visual field, the dancers made choices based on how they were interpreting the movements, mimicking the pathways, speed, and direction. After a while, we set the items aside, and I watched what the dancers interpreted. From there we spent time deepening and crafting by making intentional changes to the timing, sense of weight and momentum, and quality of touch. As we saw opportunities for integration with the overall aesthetic of the work, this section of partnering started to feel both like waves

---

<sup>76</sup> Award-winning choreographer and director, Doug Varone works in dance, theater, opera, film, and fashion. He is a passionate educator and articulate advocate for dance. By any measure, his work is extraordinary for its emotional range, kinetic breadth and the many arenas in which he works. His New York City-based Doug Varone and Dancers has been commissioned and presented to critical acclaim by leading international venues for close to three decades.

churning on one another and a kaleidoscope unfolding and folding, much like the Cymatic imagery. We then took this partnering section, flipped it upright and put it against the wall. This mirrored the floor images and created a new relationship to gravity. The dancers had to make sense of the material from a standing place while moving on and into the wall. This created new moments of necessity in support. My idea in showing these two moments in the work was to play with echo's iterative nature and ability to shift a perspective. I was curious how cycling through the same material in a new way could offer a shift in thought and bodily relationships to listening and care.

Another way that we built partnering material in conversation with visual transcription was through the interpretation of several of Nancy Stark Smith's glyphs from her Underscore. I asked the dancers to pull out five images from Nancy's Underscore that resonated with them

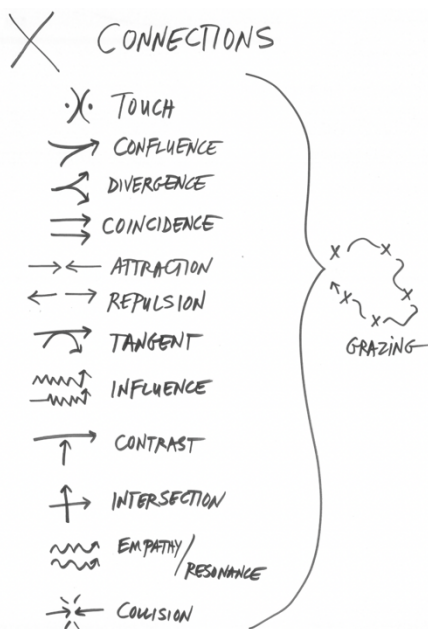


Illustration 7

without knowing their names or their definitions. In partners, the dancers put their ten images in an agreed upon order that they used as a map. I asked them to recreate the pathways on the floor in space, making choices about directions and transitions. I deliberately stayed on the outskirts and let them interpret this information in their own way. Once they had created their initial pathways, I stepped in and started molding and crafting phrase work, gesture, and partnering around these tracks in space.

Once we had created two duets, we overlaid the two to make one quartet. Bringing these two duets together, brought yet another layer for us to investigate finding chance connections,

leaning into similar weight shifts, leaning into similar references of gesture and focal points, until we built a kaleidoscope of folding, morphing, recycling near misses, and interactions, moments of resonance, moments of dissonance.

These moments of connection, inspired by Stark's work, led to exciting interpretations from diverse audience members. The response to *track* at both the university of Maryland and our follow-up performance in New York, NY at Arts On Site, circled around themes of care. It was shared with me that the dancers' deep presence and the richness of the choreographic structures held care as an embodied form rather than a performed act. The work was interpreted as having a sense of authentic listening where attentiveness became a necessity for adjusting to real life stakes. The rigor and intricacy of the work led to unexpected shifts in time and space that kept the reaction of the dancers alive. I see this attentiveness and embodiment of care through structured choreography, as the dancers embracing the unpredictability and beauty of the gap.

Figure 10



## plasticity of dissonance or the trouble with romanticizing harmony

Life organizes bodily form only from experiencing the vibration of material for without vibration we do not understand the particular edges of an object. Experience is a process of understanding form in tones and shapes with a self-propelled urge toward wholeness. Yet wholeness is form disassembled, if we are to be in fluid play with an organism's disparate noise. Romanticizing a body in harmony is ignoring the dissonance of sound inherent in anatomical autopoiesis. The affect loop of the psych soma is a symphony of pulsation, growth and movement from cellular motility and a history of seeking fluid integration. The geometry of our consciousness is most revolutionary when we listen to the tonality of form as waves of noise. Unsettled and communicating. I prefer the term vibratory integration as this allows for difference, for fallibility, and for messiness, while wholeness might assume an achievable hierarchal form that promotes the only understanding of self as one of being whole or completely finished and does not account for the "noise" of bodies sounding and the "chatter" of our nervous system inherent in sense making.

Henry Cowell<sup>77</sup>, an American composer and music theorist wrote in *The Joy of Noise* that rhythm is a human made consideration, discovered by the possibilities of stress, rate, direction and interval of sound. Rhythm is an impulse. On a sound's journey to melody, it breaks up into periodic tone and non-periodic noise by vibration. Noise is an irregularity to vibrations intention and is dislocated in time and space. It is the mutterings and musing of expression and experience that influences newness and demands attention yet might also serve as pollution. According to

---

<sup>77</sup> Henry Dixon Cowell was an American composer, music theorist, pianist, teacher, publisher, and impresario.



Murray Schafer<sup>78</sup>, Canadian composer, writer and acoustic ecologist who popularized the term "soundscape," in *The Music of the Environment* a noise pollution occurs when we (individually and collectively) do not listen, meaning how do we discern noise around sounds which we encourage, multiply, and preserve.<sup>79</sup> How do bodies adapt to both the good germs and pollution of noise? The sympathetic vibrations of our bodies internal acoustic environment must adapt to the humanized treatment to our external environment and an embracing of synthetic design. Schafer states that ecological "harmony" is restored through the rediscovery of silence, which I equate to listening for the potentiality of rhythm and preserving the good noise germs.<sup>80</sup>

*"The thickness of who you are" I hear Bebe Miller's words echo in my ears, "The thickness of who you are."<sup>81</sup> It feels so simple, but I know as soon as I step out of this small, little known studio in Columbus, Ohio, my sense of who I am tricks me. I write these words down as I reflect on the first day of the Solo/Duo Dancing: A Choreographic Practice. Tomorrow eight dancers, including myself, will meet again with Bebe Miller<sup>82</sup> and Angie Hauser<sup>83</sup> at the Flux+Flow Dance and Movement Studio. Other than meeting Hauser, from an admiring distance, I have never met any of these dancers before but somehow, they all live in my body as familiar memories I can't quite put my finger on. Our time together is brief and already after day*

---

<sup>78</sup> Raymond Murray Schafer was a Canadian composer, writer, music educator, and environmentalist perhaps best known for his World Soundscape Project, concern for acoustic ecology, and his book *The Tuning of the World*.

<sup>79</sup> Cox and Warner 2004, 30

<sup>80</sup> Cox and Warner 2004, 30

<sup>81</sup> Miller and Hauser 2022

<sup>82</sup> Bebe Miller's vision of dance and performance resides in her faith in the moving body as a record of thought, experience, and beauty. Her aesthetic relies on the interplay of a work's idea, its physicality, and the contributions of company members to fashion its singular voice. She has collaborated with artists, composers, writers and designers along with the dancers who share her studio practice and from whom she has learned what dancing can reveal. Seeking to expand the language of dance, Bebe Miller Company's work encompasses choreography, writing, film, video and digital media.

<sup>83</sup> Angie Hauser is a BESSIE award-winning performer, choreographer, and director with training in modern and postmodern dance, ballet, and contact improvisation. Angie Hauser's research focuses on the creation and performance of dances for the stage, and it is grounded in the interrogation and practice of movement, improvisation, and collaboration.

*one, I feel the traces of what we found, conjured, and collected are floating away. I was suspicious about how we were supposed to learn and understand their devices for making dances in a mere eight hours. After just one day though, as I gratefully rest my body, I see that the devices lie in the process of ongoingness; work that is never finalized. I appreciate Miller and Hauser's patience against the rub of my impatience. I have always viewed Miller's work as being the work of a somatic choreographer. One who concertizes sensation in a globally reflexive and culturally responsible way. I call her a somatic choreographer in that she uses somatic inquiries and practices to directly prepare for and dive into the making process. Her devices are scores, experiences, and tones, in a juggling act of choreographic perceptions. She repeats that we are finding our bodies lexicon and "not doing what you want to do, but what are you doing?"<sup>84</sup> When you are in a new space, with new bodies, in a new score with dance giants, it becomes extremely hard to do just exactly what you are doing. I felt deeply aware of myself, watching myself, judging myself, and being watched by others. It was hard to shake, but Hauser's words that judgement cripples creative play and can take you out of engaging into the unknown, helped to take the edge off.<sup>85</sup> I notice my gaze oscillating between outwardly watching in order to take stock of the bodies/ideas/sensations around me, and an inward vision that feeds desire.*

When I have seen Miller's work, I recognize the way she carves space for her collaborators to enact this oscillating somatic experience in the performance. By oscillating somatic experiences, what I mean is the way her work is not always static or fixed to form. There is fluidity between unified work, design and structure, and improvised states of sense making which are relationally intentional, yet individualized by each performer. For her work "Going to

---

<sup>84</sup> Miller and Hauser 2022

<sup>85</sup> Miller and Hauser 2022

the Wall,” Miller brought in somatic practitioner Andrea Olsen<sup>86</sup> in order to guide the company through somatic investigations as made important by the questions which arose in the discovery of their work. In her words, this was her “identity piece.” She says,

I thought, “Okay, now we’re going to talk about race.” And we ended up, yes, addressing race, but also gender, class, who are we, and what can we reveal to each other. It seems that, both in the making of the piece and the performing of the piece, there was an opportunity for all of us to change. In the process of actually performing it, you allow yourself to be transformed. And if you’re transparent enough in the process, that allows an audience to also access their own transparency or their own potential to come with you on a journey. With that particular piece, it was like a discovery moment that our form could allow that. - Miller in an interview with Rachel T. Cole, 2018<sup>87</sup>

Today Miller emphasized that we are never watching just a body or just a person, but we are watching a body in action. I interpret this as a body constantly becoming, molding, morphing, and rearranging like a wave. As each person in the room works to find their lexicon and the rubbings of colliding lexicons, I begin to think about the construction of aesthetic identities. In this intimate space we are all working to build our own identities. However, I think about the privilege of this position. There is no one watching to transcribe my movement and give it a name. There is no one seeking to stake claim in my identifying voice. French philosopher Jacques Rancière<sup>88</sup> defines aesthetic as things that are “perceptible” or rather “sensible,” meaning things that make sense.<sup>89</sup> Their belief is that the construction (and categorization) of aesthetics as a philosophical term, is in fact an action of organizing society through division, and thus organizing identities through division. In Rancière’s words it is a “primary means or medium through which relations of privilege and oppression are maintained and/or changed.”<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Andrea Olsen, performer, writer, educator, is Professor of Dance Emerita and has held the John C. Elder Professorship in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, in Middlebury, Vermont, USA.

<sup>87</sup> Olsen, 2013, 92

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Rancière is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII

<sup>89</sup> James, 2013, 104

<sup>90</sup> James, 2013, 104

Therefore, it has historically come into conversation for use in the manufacturing and maintaining of power by white heteropatriarchy. However, it has also been used by society to enact change, to disorganize, and to protest against these narratives.<sup>91</sup> I think about how so many people have had their aesthetic identity defined for them without consideration for their moving-thinking body. I think about the many lexicons that have been erased, overshadowed, and renamed in an urgency to read others. Hauser talks about the amount of time it takes to read something and let something show up. This timeline is always shifting and differs from person to person in a game of constructing and deconstructing bloom and decay.<sup>92</sup> What one person reads in a matter of seconds about a situation may take days for another person to see, so the quickness with which a person, a group, and a society can be categorized is in and of itself a disruption to the natural occurrence of selfhood. And as Hauser states, it's in the perpendicularity of two energies, the conflict and un-naming, where innovative ideas arise. In the dissonance. As Don Hanlon Johnson<sup>93</sup> wrote "How do we create a community that not only tolerates the inevitable crossings of so-called secure borders, but welcomes the ever-fluctuating tides of people moving here and there, while feeling the enormous creative possibilities of joining with those with radically different perspectives to create a more intricate and interesting social order?"<sup>94</sup> Being in the studio with Miller, she talks about this apprehension of crossing over a threshold and into a way of being, a way of being that's on the other side of change.

*As I come back into my body and back into the room with Miller and Hauser, I remember a discussion which surrounded the themes of reasonable versus unreasonable responses. What is*

---

<sup>91</sup> James, 2013, 106

<sup>92</sup> Miller and Hauser 2022

<sup>93</sup> Don Hanlon Johnson spent nearly half a century studying how transformative body practices can enhance personal and social change, and how they can impair it.

<sup>94</sup> Johnson, 2018, 2

*a reasonable response to someone's movement? What are the rules of the game and how are we reading others while reading ourselves? When I think about reasonable responses I begin to think about politeness or as Rancière said, what is sensible. In the creative process there is often a rub between what is a polite and reasonable response to something or someone, and what will be seen as unreasonable or unaccepted. Who determines this? When we stand along the edge of the room, I feel my sense of self shift between patience and action along with my internal sensation shifting from my back body to my front body. It is the forward motion which comes from within. Miller shares that our states of being are not merely applied to our bodies but are generative forces which cannot occur without seeing.<sup>95</sup> Seeing makes us care for the task we all collectively build. When we engage, we are in a relationship that is not linear and is driven by the unknown. We have a personal responsibility to carry all of ourselves into space; our bodies, our culture, our knowledge, and our technique. Hauser says something that resonates with me, "the work is technical because it is building the technique of how you move."<sup>96</sup> I feel enlivened by this statement and wish I had heard it ten years ago. As someone who battles the desire to achieve physical feats, my technique has been both a point of pride and a hindrance of creativity. I seek to loosen, but not let go of, my grip on my capital "T" technique body to embrace the technique of me which includes my history, memories, scars, and psyche. How do I bring this into the creative process? Into my training body?*

As I mull over the ways that we bring the thickness of who we are into a room or a space, I think about the work these artists are doing to understand their past selves, the ancestral markings on their bodily tissue, the memories that have shaped their belief systems. I am

---

<sup>95</sup> Miller and Hauser 2022

<sup>96</sup> Miller and Hauser 2022

reminded that the way we often conceptualize abstraction is through body metaphor.<sup>97</sup> We seek to understand how something looks and feels by imagining it moving through the body. This imagination is not static, it is an action that occurs on a wide spectrum of physicality. The more we imagine something, the more it becomes woven into how we become ourselves.

Dancers are philosophers of enactment because of their ability to reconcile sensation and perception within the ongoingness of action. The mind is a body moving, just as “ideas are locations”, “reason is a force”, “thinking about x is moving in the area around x.”<sup>98</sup> The mind is never separate from the body and humans learn through the act of doing in tandem with expectation and surprise. My research with Bebe Miller and Angie Hauser supports this claim as I witness the mental reasonings, curiosities, and self-truths driving their making process. The understanding of themselves in what they feel is rooted in how they listen, leading and directing their creative acts. Their work is explicitly charged by a somatic lens where imagery and deep listening, listening to the fluids of the body as Hauser says, is the verbal language to create their lexicon. However, whether explicitly researched and spoken or implicitly processed, dancers everywhere physically process what they hear, what they perceive, in conversation with what they already know. They situate action in actuality, in truth, and in fantasy. They make meaning out of shaping agreements, negotiations, memories, and beliefs in their creative process of constructing their lexicon and their vocabulary.

What I have learned is that the choreographic process is not a one size fits all model. It is different for every artist and every project's track of integration. The difficulty with having an invisible disability is that governance over one's own body is lost. There are assumptions made about the body and decisions made on one's behalf, and help is often granted under conditional

---

<sup>97</sup> Gibbs, Jr. 2006, 122

<sup>98</sup> Gibbs, Jr. 2006, 96

terms set by the systems in place. Yet, whether a body identifies as disabled or not, all bodies process information differently. All bodies learn in uniquely individual ways, building their lexicon, and moving at a pace that feels natural for them. Through the examination of sounds material instability, our relationship to our material body and time is “crippled.” Ellen Samuels<sup>99</sup>, author, professor, and founding member of UW Disability Studies Initiative wrote, “Crip time means listening to the broken languages of our bodies, translating them, honoring their words.”<sup>100</sup> For me, crip time is a nonlinear experience of time. Sometimes I want to move fast but my body won’t let me. Sometimes it takes me weeks to process a single idea after translating it, drawing it, speaking it in a messy way, and pulling it completely apart. It takes me time to really live in the idea before I understand it. Having a crip body sometimes feels like living in limbo, the in between, in the gap. I am waiting. Waiting on doctors, waiting on medicine, waiting on my body to cooperate, waiting on my mind to show up, and waiting on the world to understand that access isn’t a lack of structure or rigorous discipline. So much of learning is cyclical and patterns of habit are actually compensatory patterns out of a necessity for the body to find comfort through change; through learning. While building the movement for *track*, we discussed that there are times where dissonance shows up by way of each person's unique approach to listening, seeing, and finding cadence. These moments were opportunities for us to teach one another, to explore ideas collectively, and to preserve and perpetuate the noises of individuality. It takes time to break down walls and build up new habits in response to lessons of dissonance, and I feel that we just started to scratch the surface in this social experiment.

---

<sup>99</sup> Ellen Samuels is an associate professor and a founding member of the UW Disability Studies Initiative. She is the author of *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (NYU, 2014) and her critical work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Signs*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Feminist Disability Studies*, *GLQ*, *MELUS*, *The Disability Studies Reader*, and *Amerasia*.

<sup>100</sup> Samuels 2017

## *cartographies of sensation*

I began to think about cartographies within this project because of the way sounding bodies are a landscape that shifts and are shifted by the moving landscapes around them. But also, to lean into visibility and visuality that made its way into my way of thinking and processing information. As shown, I have tracked my research not just through dance, sound, and writing, but through visuals as well. *Cartographies of Sensation* is the title for the installation piece that was supposed to be a precursor to the live thesis performance. It was never made for reasons I will not share in this paper. It will be made soon. But what I had imagined it to be was a spark in conversation around the invisible yet potent, political, institutional, and medical systems of value that center material stability and coherence in “bodies.” A centering which rigidly defines ‘fitness’ and casts that which is deteriorating as disposable or dead. The Americans with Disability Act marks a body disabled if they have mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. However, what the ADA fails to reflect in their definition, is the spectrum through which disabled bodies and truly all bodies experience illness, pain, disease, and discomfort. They fail to see that ability is not a binary and that illness and discomfort are socially designed. According to Jessica A. Cooley<sup>101</sup>, scholar-curator and author of *Crip Materiality: Disability, Plasticity, and the Art Institution after the Americans with Disabilities Act*, crip materiality is a methodology for studying crip art history, objects and architecture amongst institutional needs to “maintain a level of fitness that adheres to ableist

---

<sup>101</sup> Jessica A. Cooley (she/her/hers) is a scholar-curator with a PhD in art history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her first book project centers on what she calls “crip materiality” and will forward a new methodology to address how ableism affects the understanding and valuation of the very fibers of art materials within curatorial and conservation discourses.



standards of stability, strength, and rationality.”<sup>102</sup> I sought to, and seek to in furthering, apply this methodology to studying bodies and framing the performing body as one that is always inherently and beautifully crip, within this installation.

Cartographies combine the science and art of mapping to reveal terrain, territory, and space. They also have been used to show the movement of people from one location to another over time. They are tied to both long durational shifts in climate and traumatic acts of disruption to the land. They are a narrative, a guess, a biased perspective with historical links to power and control, but they are also an act of conservation, beauty, and subversion. The cartographic installation titled, *cartographies of sensation*, that I dreamt up was supposed to be a precursor to the project's live performance *track*, and it emerged from my desire for subversion and the visibility of all bodies. It also emerged from my desire to further my education in disability studies by connecting to those who identified as such around campus. It was to be an exploration in community mapping that worked to build and make visible the real, the imagined and the desirable in real time. Karla FC Holloway<sup>103</sup>, English professor at Duke University, frames cartographies as an “expression of longing” and “ways of seeing and understanding” where both location and place are woven with external bodily desire.<sup>104</sup> In embarking on this installation, I longed to see a landscape of bodies that challenge institutional models of ability and achievement, and sparked dialogue around “the way that some bodies make other bodies feel.”<sup>105</sup> I longed to broaden my own disabled persons community, my access map, to understand access

---

<sup>102</sup> Cooley 2022

<sup>103</sup> Karla FC Holloway is James B. Duke Emerita Professor of English, African-American Studies, and Professor of Law at Duke University. Her classrooms and scholarship focused on literature, law, and bioethics.

<sup>104</sup> Holloway 2011

<sup>105</sup> Holloway 2011

needs within communities, and to shed light upon the ways access can often get swept up in acts of performative care.

In the interactive installation I planned to use cartography and sound as a form of mapping the physical experience of underrepresented bodies and their voices, with a specific focus on bodies that identify as disabled. Images are tangible and concrete forces of meaning making, while sound has the ability to move imagery in such a way that learned, defined, and habitual ways of knowing are interrogated. Through displacing sound and words from their visual narratives, displaced bodies are located and revealed within the landscape that they actively co-create. A co-creation that is constructed and deconstructed in liveness.

The building of the installation would have consisted of copper tape strips and wires connecting the strips into 2 microcontrollers, underneath a layer of Velostat, on a medium size round table. The Velostat would be covered by a top layer of material like paper or canvas. Interactive topography pre-built by using Touch Designer, would have been projected onto the top layer of the material. Audience members would have had the ability to touch the table, causing the underlying sensors to trigger both the visual landscape to shift and sound to be emitted. The sound would also be created and programmed using Ableton and pulled from conversations with the disabled student community.

## antemortem

There's something about endings that makes me feel lonely. Even if it's an ending I look forward to reaching, I can't help but look back and feel nostalgia for what was, what could have been, and what is still being dreamt up. I see it as a positive thing and it further supports my belief that endings and beginnings are just visual markers on a timeline, when the experience is more like the slow churning of soup or the brief settling of sand before the wind picks up again. At the end of each choreographic process, I find myself looking back and dreaming up "what if" scenarios. What if I had more time? What if I made simpler choices? What if the work were flipped upside down? What if the music played in reverse? What if I were always able to accommodate everyone in the room at all times? I hunger for more, for re-dos, and the "what could have been." Yet, as I reflect back on this particular process, I desire to face forward and set my sights on what's to come with refinement and depth. This particular thesis project started as a rather ambitious personal research challenge, which still has so much life in which to continue expanding. Personal, academic, institutional and social sounds all came together to impact this choreographic work for better or for worse. But for me the work was merely an experiment, or a sample, of one of the many ways to synthesize my research. One way in an endless sea of possibilities. What it did do however, was lead me to see new discoveries in the way that sound can both make sense of a situation and a relation, or in a split second create destabilizing broken connections. The way that care, underscores listening and collaborative spaces but can only work when it is mutually enacted, respected, and checked-in on, became an unintended fascinating point of research. Visuality and its vital role in sound's construction and neurodivergent spaces took center stage while I began to recognize ableist mindsets and systems that permeate the inception of institutional art making. This mindset bled into all aspects of production through the

material design, structural development, and creative support in ways that have me dreaming up “what if” solutions and alternatives for all bodies.

In the arts community, the concept of a post-mortem has become a natural title to the practice of discussing an event or performance after it has finished its run. Somewhere between a funeral and a memorial, that discussion serves as an archive that also assesses the performance in order to learn from its hiccups and “failures.” However, a post-mortem is an examination of a body after death. A rather depressing and intense way of analyzing artistic work as if ideas die as soon as they hit the stage, paper, canvas, or kiln, and an audience stands in front of them. For me, the tangible artifacts of artists are just markers on a timeline that capture conversations, moments, and feelings that pass-through bodies, all bodies. At least this is what I work to continue telling my perfectionist self. If I were to see the “deliverables” of art as a death, then my relationship with art making and its rigor, begins to slide into the slippery slope of mortis. Rigor without care. A stiffening and an immobilization where my blood stops moving, stops sounding, stops carrying sounds, stops conversing. But a post-mortem discussion is anything but a cease in conversation. In fact, it is quite the opposite. It is an antemortem. It is rich soil, when handled with care, with new seeds to plant and grow. For me, sense-making is a social act and this antemortem is where the impact of an artist's rigor and brilliance is felt, heard, and seen. Yet, just as Ocean Vuong<sup>106</sup> tells us, we are a culture programmed to use language in extremes as a reference to life and death.

As a species, as life on Earth, we've been dying for millennia, but I don't think energy dies. It's transformed. And when you're using language, you can create it, use it to divide people and build walls, or you can turn it into something where we can see each other more clearly,

---

<sup>106</sup> Ocean Vuong is a writer, professor, and photographer. He is the author of *The New York Times* bestselling poetry collection, *Time is a mother*, and *The New York Times* bestselling novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, which won the American Book Award, The Mark Twain Award, The New England Book Award, and has been translated into 39 languages.

as a bridge. And that notion that you are a participant in the future of language is something I think our American education failed us.<sup>107</sup>

Vuong shares with Krista Tippett<sup>108</sup> from the *On Being* podcast, that the use of language in American culture is still very primitive with phrases like “You’re killing it.” or “Slay.” or my favorite “Crush it!”<sup>109</sup> Vuong’s concern in the way language is used stems from his question, “What happens to our imagination, when we can only celebrate ourselves through our very vanishing?”<sup>110</sup> A celebration through vanishing, programs us to privilege accomplishments and achievements of the highest standard. The way sound has evolved into socially agreed upon language is vividly felt in America and more specifically, American healthcare systems.

Even I have a history of making work that deals with the extremes of life and death; of being alive and the mysteries of the afterlife. The value of words synonymous with life and death, and my own dealings with death have furthered my fascination with human made sounds, their socially constructed meanings, and the impact of sonic vibration on and in bodies. For me sound is more than just a stationary entity—it’s a dynamic force that has the power to both anchor and unsettle the body. It is an agent in a web of interconnected fluid landscapes, that leads to fleeting creation, transformation, and renewal. I view sound as the vibratory matter of liveness, as waves of codependency and tides of influence. In listening, we hear what demands attention.

---

<sup>107</sup> Tippett 2020

<sup>108</sup> Krista Tippett is a Peabody Award-winning broadcaster, a National Humanities Medalist, and a *New York Times* bestselling author. She grew up in a small town in Oklahoma, attended Brown University, and became a journalist and diplomat in Cold War Berlin.

<sup>109</sup> Tippett 2020

<sup>110</sup> Tippett 2020



Figure 11

## Bibliography

- Adams, Kim. n.d. "Resonance." High Theory. <https://hightheory.net/2021/06/21/resonance/>.
- Aho, James, and Kevin Aho. 2009. *Body Matters: A Phenomenology of Sickness, Disease, and Illness*. 1st ed. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Bayles, David, Orlando, Ted. 1993. *Art & Fear; Observations On The Perils (and Rewards) of ARTMAKING*. 7th Printing. Image Continuum Press.
- Berger, John. *Ways of seeing*. Penguin Classics, 2008.
- Buzzarté, Monique, and Tom Bickley. 2012. *Anthology of Essays on Deep Listening*. Kingston, NY: Deep Listening Institute, Ltd.
- Cohen, Ed. 2009. *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cooley, Jessica A. 2022. "Introducing Crip Materiality: Mad Objects and Soft Screw." In *The Routledge Companion to Art and Disability*, 385–400. Online: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003009986-25>.  
<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003009986-25>.
- Cox Christoph and Daniel Warner. 2004. *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. New York: Continuum.
- Chen, Mel Y, Alison Kafer, Eunjung Kim, and Julie Avril Minich, eds. 2023. *Crip Genealogies*.
- Deeepp LLiisstteniing Deeepp - Agosto Foundation*, [https://agosto-foundation.org/sites/default/files/upload/oliveros\\_pauline\\_deep\\_listening\\_a\\_composers\\_sound\\_practice\\_2005.pdf](https://agosto-foundation.org/sites/default/files/upload/oliveros_pauline_deep_listening_a_composers_sound_practice_2005.pdf).
- Echelman, Janet. 2015. "Janet Echelman." 2015. <https://www.echelman.com/#/project/smithsonian/>.
- Eidsheim, Nina Sun. 2015. *Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- George, Doran. 2020. *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training*. Edited by Susan Leigh Foster. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gibbs, Jr., Raymond W. 2006. *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Hagood, Mack. n.d. "A Philosophy of Echoes with Amit Pinchevski." Phantom Power. <https://phantompod.org/echoes-amit-pinchevski/>.

Haskell, David George. 2022. *Sounds Wild and Broken: Sonic Marvels, Evolution's Creativity, and the Crisis of Sensory Extinction*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Heidi Fast. "An Emergent Tuning as an Organizational Molecular Mode." *Inflexions* 4, "Transversal Fields of Experience" (October 2010) [www.inflexions.org](http://www.inflexions.org)

Hendren, Sara. 2020. *What Can a Body Do? How We Meet the Built World*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Holloway, Karla FC. 2011. *Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender, and a Cultural Bioethics*. Duke University Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1996. *I Love to You*. Routledge.

James, Robin. 2013. "Oppression, Privilege, & Aesthetics: The Use of the Aesthetic in Theories of Race, Gender, and Sexuality, and the Role of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Philosophical Aesthetics." *Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Philosophy Compass*, 8 (2): 101–16.

Johnson, Don Hanlon. 2018. *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices; Toward an Inclusive Somatics*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Kafer, Alison. 2013. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Keleman, Stanley. 1986. *Emotional Anatomy: The Structure of Experience*. Center Press.

Koteen, David, and Nancy Stark Smith. 2021. *Caught Falling: The Confluence of Contact Improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith, and Other Moving Ideas*.

Kuppers, Petra. 2022. *Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters*. Art After Nature 1. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Latsky, Heidi, dir. n.d. *Soliloquy*. Montclair State University. <https://heidilatskydance.org/soliloquy>.

Lunney, John, and Sue Lueder. n.d. "Postmortem Culture: Learning from Failure." Edited by Gary O'Connor. *O'Reilly Media, Inc.* Chapter 15. <https://sre.google/sre-book/postmortem-culture/>.

Miller, Bebe. 2018. On allowing your creative process to age along with you. <https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/choreographer-bebe-miller-on-allowing-your-creative-process-to-age-along-with-you/>.



- Miller, Bebe, and Angie Hauser. 2022. "Solo/Duo Dancing: A Choreographic Practice." Flux+Flow Dance and Movement Studio, Columbus, Ohio, May 14.
- Mukherjee, Siddhartha. 2022. *The Song of The Cell: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human*. First Scribner hardcover edition. New York: Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster.
- NAPOLIN, JULIE BETH. *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form*. 1st ed., Fordham University Press, 2020. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1199169>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2024.
- Oliveros, Pauline. 2021. "The Center for Deep Listening." The Center for Deep Listening. 2021. <https://www.deeplisting.rpi.edu>.
- Oliveros, Pauline. 2015. "The Difference between Hearing and Listening." Presented at the TEDx Talks, TEDxIndianapolis, November 12. [https://youtu.be/\\_QHfOuRrJB8](https://youtu.be/_QHfOuRrJB8).
- "On This Day: 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami." 2021. National Centers for Environmental Information: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (blog). March 11, 2021. <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/day-2011-japan-earthquake-and-tsunami#:~:text=The%202011%20Tohoku%20Earthquake%20and,victims%20who%20were%20never%20recovered>.
- Pinchevski, Amit. 2022. *Echo*. The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Samuels, Ellen. 2017. "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time." *Ohio State University Libraries in Partnership with the Society for Disability Studies*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 37 (3): 4. <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5824>.
- Siddall, Gillian, and Ellen Waterman, eds. 2016. *Negotiated Moments: Improvisation, Sound, and Subjectivity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Silva, M. T. (2019). "Body Landscapes: Moving Images and Performing Narratives. *Space and Culture*", 22(1), 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331218775326>
- "Sins Invalid." n.d. <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/about-us>.
- Springgay, Stephanie. 2022. *Feltness; Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art & Affect Pedagogies*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Tippett, Krista, dir. 2020. "A Life Worthy of Our Breath." *On Being with Krista Tippett*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The On Being Project. <https://onbeing.org/programs/ocean-vuong-a-life-worthy-of-our-breath-2022/>.
- Tremblay, Jean-Thomas. 2022. *Breathing Aesthetics*. Duke University Press.

Wiskus, Jessica. 2021. "Merleau-Ponty on Consciousness and Affect through the Temporal Movement of Music." *University of Chicago Press*, 253–67.