

# PENNSYLVANIA COMMUNICATION ANNUAL

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**Journal of the  
Pennsylvania Communication Association**  
*Special Online Issue:  
Performance Studies*

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*The Pennsylvania Communication Annual, 79.2, 2024*

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Some important details to follow when submitting your manuscripts, if you use footnotes or endnotes: Endnotes only and without formatting, no footnotes.; no superscript font to indicate an endnote, just regular numbers and we will superscript upon editing; insert tables and illustrations as images only or send separate PDF files of these portions of the documents; formatted hanging indents only on references or no formatting at all; no "return" and "tab" to create the look of a hanging indent.

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- Attending to and caring for the student inside and outside of the communication classroom

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- Promoting communication scholarship within the Keystone State
- Providing a disciplinary commitment to Pennsylvania scholars, reaching out to the larger discipline
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## **From the Guest Editor**

Marquita De Jesus  
University of Texas at Dallas

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I welcome you to this special edition of the Pennsylvania Communication Annual dedicated to exploring the significance of performance as communication. As both a practicing artist and performance scholar, I am honored to be guest editor and provide a glimpse into the rich perspectives on performance that await you within the pages of this edition.

Performance has the extraordinary ability to transcend boundaries, cultures, and languages. It speaks to the human experience in a way that is both profound and universal. In this special edition, we delve into the intricacies of this multidisciplinary form, exploring the nuanced expressions of the body, the choreographic innovations shaping the cultural landscapes, and the historical influences that continue to demonstrate the ways in which marginalized communities somatically (re)claim their own bodies through performance.

Our collection of articles, essays, and reviews showcases the diversity of perspectives on the communicative virtue of performance. From modern dance to avant-garde experimentation to mythology, each piece contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding performance as a critical agent in the way we re-imagine and reconstruct shared notions of community. As we navigate through the theoretical landscapes presented by our contributors, you are invited to join us on a journey of discovery and appreciation.

Within these pages, you will find insightful analyses, thought-provoking critiques, and reflections on the ever-evolving nature of how performance provides forms of communication, re-interpretation, representation, and advocacy of both the individual and collective. We aim to push boundaries and engage bold conversations that ignite new insights and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations in disciplines such as dance, theater, poetry, music, and art history.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the talented contributors who have shared their expertise and perspectives, contributing to the



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intellectual tapestry of this special edition. Their dedication to the exploration of these topics is truly commendable. May this special edition inspire, challenge, and ignite a renewed appreciation for the transformative nature of performance.

Warm regards,

Marquita De Jesus

*Performance Scholar & Guest Editor  
Visual and Performing Arts Division*



**Just Keep Dancing: Reclaiming African American Identity through Dance Performance**

Marquita De Jesus  
University of Texas at Dallas

*Dance as a form of communication in marginalized communities recognizes the degree to which the body is both implicated in the reproduction of trauma and also a meaningful site for embodied activism. While dance is both art and rigorous physical activity, it also develops psychological reasoning abilities that allow the dancer to use performance opportunities to internally and externally reason, express, and transmute marginalizing experiences. Dance as a form of embodied activism works to support change in the relational fabric of experiences so that structural shifts correspond with authentic transformations in attitude that allow for self-definition and somatic reclamation. This paper explores the ways in which African Americans have and continue to creatively use embodied practices to reclaim identity, re-imagine body stories, and access to new futures through dance performance.*

**Keywords:** Embodiment, trauma, reclamation, self-definition, marginalized

Existing models of social justice activism have not been particularly attentive to the body's role in responding to oppression. Our understanding of social progress prioritizes the importance of legislation, policy, and social transformation at the macro level. However, approaches that specialize in working with the felt sense of the body at the individual level offer an inclusive understanding of how the body in motion is a necessary instrument in the fight for social justice (Johnson, 2018).

In Ruth Frankenburg's book *White Women Race Matters*, she states that "...whiteness has a set of linked dimensions. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg, 1993).

African-American historian and scholar Jessica Marie Johnson calls attention to the "devastating *thingification* of Black women,

children, and men “that deeply entrenches identities already often quantified and categorized (Bench & Elswitt, 2020).” Black feminist Anna Julia Cooper articulated the unique position of African American women in her analysis of the confluence of racism and sexism that shaped and continues to impact the unique position of Black women today. Cooper states that African American women specifically confront “both a woman question and a race problem.”

Embodied experiences are critical agents in the reconstruction of our bodies and the re-imagining of body stories associated with marginalized communities. Embodied practices respond to persistent questions: How do marginalized bodies reclaim somatic agency? What is my community’s attitude towards my/our marginalized body(ies)? What does it look like to publicly perform identity in a marginalized body?

Embodied practices, namely dance and performance, offer insight and methods of somatically reclaiming identity for othered bodies pushed into margins. Theories based in communicative semiotics underscore that communication relies on a code, which at times include signs that appear to evade a definition of terms typically used as traditional communication. Dance performance reflects behaviors, actions, and a communicative vocabulary externalized by the sender that exists in a sphere of communication, where ideas are translated into movement and amplified in the inter-semiotic relationship of the dancer to the performance itself. The functions of and need for both dance and performance are not unique to professional performing artists, but are also a central piece of communicating one’s humanity.

This review draws from the work of authors and researchers in the fields of somatic theory, dance, trauma, and embodiment and frames dance as a form of publicly practicing somatic reclamation. Through dance and embodied performance, the performer is able to translate somatic experiences into a framework that allow for the transmutation of embodied oppression.

### **Dance as Self-Definition**

Dance and embodied experiences, when applied to our understanding of how humans communicate and publicly practice identity, play an important role as a signifier of social and cognitive experiences. The practice of dance helps to interpret and create meaning of our individual and shared experiences. Dancing

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prompts the individual to think critically about their somatic and cognitive identity, and offers opportunities to re-interpret internalized data from marginalizing experiences. Dance scholarship confirms that dance induces benefits in physiological and psycho-social functioning for individuals who suffer from traumatic experiences (Martinec, 2018).

In her classic study *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins pinpoints intellectual activism as a key process in developing Black feminist thought. She articulates reclamation as one of the most important pillars of activism. Collins' discussion of impact of "controlling images" is an important component of the movement towards reclamation. Controlling images communicate negative stereotypical representations and images of the Black body. These representations continue to oppress Black people as they perpetuate the dominant subject's definition of the object, i.e. the Black body (Collins, 2002). The pervasiveness of the images aid in sustaining intersecting forms of oppression for Black people in that they maintain the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black subordination (Collins, 2002). The lasting impact of these images is one of control in that they make Black oppression seem natural and normal.



*Jim Crow Museum of History, Ferris State University  
"The Mammy Caricature" Exhibit (2023)*

Collins' critique on controlling images includes an analysis of images of 'the mammy' caricature. Collins explains that images of the mammy constitute different types of oppression simultaneously. Images of the mammy de-feminize the Black woman and regards her body as a site for labor and subordination. The impact of these images make all oppressive factors against her body and identity seem natural and normal (Collins, 2002). In addition to controlling images, Collins argues that the target of this type of oppression is often to communicate a limit to *self-definition*.

According to Collins, the term self-definition is defined as the "power to name one's own reality" and Collins articulates Black resistance against controlling images is an important step towards reclamation. The rejection of the dominant group's definition of the Black body as a site for labor and Black imposition of their own self-definition indicates a collective consciousness (Collins, 2002)". Collins describes the process of self-definition as a "journey from internalized oppression to the 'free mind' (Collins, 2002).

Practices in embodied activism like dance and performance support changes in the relational fabric of our lives so that structural shifts correspond with authentic transformations in attitude; where legal rights and freedoms are experienced at the core of our beings and manifested in our everyday interactions with others (Johnson, 2018). When the impact of internalized marginalization is ignored, a misaligned narrative forms that reinforces in cultural memory that embodied experiences, body stories, and somatic identity are defined outside of the Black body.

However, embodied experiences recognize the degree to which our bodies are implicated in the reproduction of trauma. The practice of dance as an identity reconstruction agent acknowledges the body as a meaning-making force, tool for communication, and site for reclamation. Dance, when de-colonized and deconstructed, stresses individuality and the diversity of interpretive processes. This in turn allows for the cultivation of cognitive skills necessary for effective interpretation and communication.

Nonverbal communication plays an important role in our interactions. Research suggests that approximately 60-65% of social meaning is derived from nonverbal behaviors (DeVito, Guerrero & Hecht, 1999). Various nonverbal communication codes are used in dance which underscore the value of viewing dance as the translation of ideas through coded non verbal movement vocabu-

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lary. Dancers make use of kinesthetic, cognitive, musical, and artistic expression to interpret and translate ideas, concepts, and themes into non verbal codes that create meaning for the performer and the audience. As marginalized bodies dance, somatically, psychological visual outcomes are imagined and anatomical creative responses that ultimately affect decision-making processes are enabled (Stinson 1990). When this experience is embodied and processed, we engage in the development of an embodied *consciousness* (Johnson, 2018).

### ***Now and Then: Dance Performance as Somatic Reclamation in Ailey's Revelations***

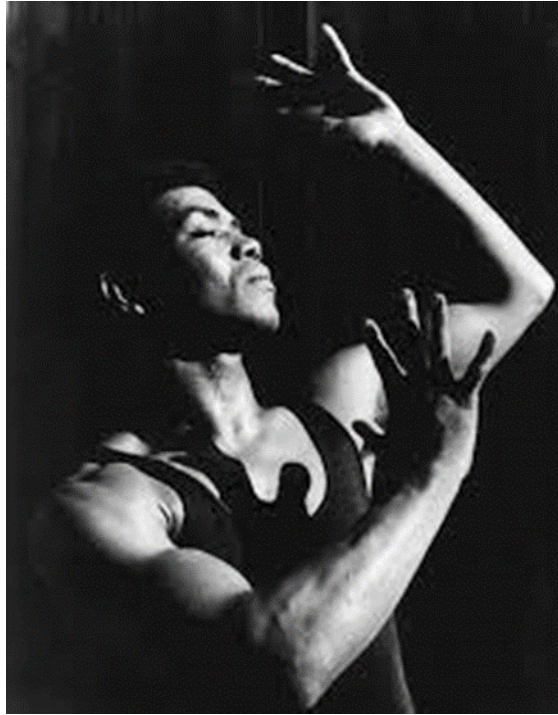
Restrictions enforced by the Covid-19 global pandemic created countless challenges to marginalized communities. Within the first few months of the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that ethnic minorities experience higher rates of morbidity and mortality than White, non-Hispanic communities (Lowery, 2020). After the murders of Breonna Taylor, Armaud Arbery, and George Floyd, organizations and protests brought attention to the fault lines of inequality that divide the world between and within nations, calling into question how established systems reinforce oppression, doctrines of white supremacy, patriarchy and fragility (Maxwell & Miller 2020).

As we uncover methods of navigating interpersonal relationships and recover from the effects of the pandemic, our bodies continue to help create and frame our experiences and the narratives we construct about ourselves and others. Our nonverbal communication patterns, beliefs about body norms, feelings of connection and identification with our bodies are all deeply affected by our assigned membership in distinct social groups and the privileges associated with that membership (Johnson 2017). The movement to reconstruct our societies and bodies in the anticipated wake of Covid-19 and the world that emerges *after* continues to feel palpable.

Much like the pandemic in 2020, America in the 1960s was in the midst of a social, racial, and political transformation. Propelled by the momentum of the early days of the Civil Rights movement, Alvin Ailey, a gay African-American choreographer, created an ode to the resilience of the human spirit in his infamous show *Revelations*. In what would become a global phenomenon, *Revelations* is an hour-long series of dances about the African-American experience. Set to negro spirituals, blues and gospel,

*Just Keep Dancing*

Ailey's work was intended to be 'sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, always hopeful' (Morini, 2017, para. 6).



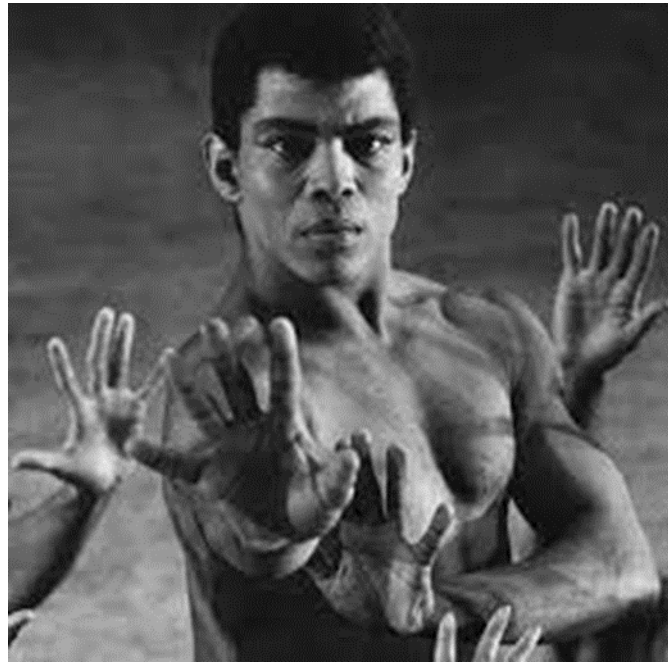
*Figure 2.1 Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.  
Photo Credit: John Lindquist*

Ailey described the choreography in *Revelations* as “blood memories”, a reality so embodied, choreographing it was as natural as blood running through his veins (Revelations, 2022). The movement vocabulary is a combination of modern, ballet, and African diasporic dance with great attention to the dancers' relationship to each other, their lines (both angular and curved) and how dancers engage with the space they encompass. Specifically, *Sinner Man* exhibits the artfully powerful work of *Revelations* as it demonstrates raw physicality juxtaposed with formal dance technique, authentic emotional expression and Black male vulnerability (Ailey, :23-:38). Although this piece is less than three minutes long, it shows how the Black male body is viewed as *criminal* with *nowhere to run*. The piece begins with a Black male soloist who is later joined onstage by two additional Black male dancers who move with a sense of urgency. Their swift movement demonstrates their need to reclaim their bodies, experiences, and



*De Jesus*

narratives. This trio performance reflects both a private and collective struggle, along with the cumulative sum of falsely projected failures, making it possible for non-Black people to relate to the somatic experience of African Americans.



*Pictured Alvin Ailey of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater via Associated Press, Alvin Ailey dance troupe Marks 60 years by looking back at its founder (Press, 2022)*

Understanding the value of dance can be an essential contribution to the interdisciplinary communication scholarship. *Revelations* serves as a wonderful application of the reclamation of Black body stories and identity. Rhythm and dance in this work are taken seriously as a forms of communication and a performance of particular meanings, sensibilities, epistemologies, and social relations. Ailey died in 1989 from AIDS related complications at the height of the AIDS epidemic. Just as Martin Luther King used the power of speech, Alvin Ailey used the power of dance to express the experience of African-Americans. Judith Jamison, featured *Revelations* soloist and Ailey's predecessor, said of this work, "We've done that piece all over the world, and everyone understands exactly what it's about — it's humanity, it's triumph, and what it is to be human" (Morini, 2017, para. 9). Today, *Reve-*

*lations* presents a compelling plea for society through its renderings of the highs and lows of our human condition.



*The Smithsonian's Jack Mitchell Photography of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Collection (Above: Detail of Judith Jamison in "Revelations," 1967)*

### **Conclusion**

Studying the production of a *self* requires a consideration of the social, historical, and cultural aspects of somatic agency. While dance is celebrated as a rich, cultural movement, it is also important to consider how dance impacts identity narratives for marginalized communities (Walker, 2019). Education researchers have mostly relied on language (oral and written) for the creation of historical narratives in contemporary understandings of historical activism; however, the profundity of dance as a living archive of history is an essential element of communication for cultural memory.

There exists a tremendous opportunity to explore embodied practices like dance as a core research practice in the field of communication. Understanding dance in relationship with other systems that construct interpretations of somatic identity strengthens contemporary interpretations of history, cultural memory, and studies in communication.

Dance scholarships continue to expand as a result of its intersection with other disciplines, including but not limited to psychology, sociology, anthropology, communication, and healthcare. Active scholarship continues to underscore the crucial role of the body in navigating experiences of oppression and trauma, offering an important interdisciplinary component to traditional forms of research. However, the exploration of Black dance in relationship with other systems that construct historical narratives deeply impacts how ideas and images from the past are interpreted in cultural memory.

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**Close Encounters of the Third Gender:  
*Hermaphroditus, the Welcomed Guest of the Cult of Dionysus***

Nicholas Brady-Garnand  
University of Texas at Dallas

*This paper aims to take a new look at the role of the Greco-Roman god of gender nonconformity Hermaphroditus and their role as the 'welcomed guest' in the garden parties, theatrical performances, and ritualistic dances performed by the members of Dionysus' cult centered in Pompeii during the Hellenistic period and beyond. It will analyze the ways in which people who did not conform to our modern understanding of the gender binary were viewed in these gatherings, if these cult rituals and activities provided a safe space for them, and how we would view the positive inclusion of Hermaphroditus' presence in the cult's activities today considering the turbulent history that has plagued depictions of the god in recent times.*

*Keywords:* Gender, sexually, art history, mythology, gender fluidity

The story of Hermaphroditus, the Greek and Roman god of effeminate men, masculine women, and all those operating outside a traditional gender binary, has always been one of transformation, though as time progressed, this was not always for the better. As attitudes changed, so did our handling of a unique example from Classical mythology who stood as the perfect embodiment of the fluid nature of gender. For a considerable amount of time, artworks depicting the god were buried away in museum storage, or in some cases even vandalized and maimed to the point of near unrecognition. False interpretations and poorly constructed narratives trying to undermine Hermaphroditus' presence as one who stood against the grain were created to further bury their message of inclusivity as a symbol of a broader understanding of gender. The issue here is far greater than simply misrepresenting an old mythological figure or losing these important relics, however. If we are unable to truly understand how Hermaphroditus functioned within the scope of the mythology of their time and how such a figure would have been perceived within their respective society, we will never be able to fully interpret the values and stories these cultures were trying to communicate, and how these examples relate to our modern values today. An excellent example of how these works and stories should be treated can be found in Hermaphroditus' inclusion

*Brady-Garnand*

amongst the Cult of Dionysus' ritualistic dances and theatrical performances taking place around the fourth century B.C.E. (DeMone and Hughes, 2021).

Before we begin to examine Hermaphroditus' role in these rituals, however, it would be good to provide some insight into their background since they are not one of the major Olympian gods and their story may not be familiar to all. It would also help to clarify how these figures will be referred to throughout the course of this paper, and how the use of certain terminology reflects the relationships between their bodies and more modern concepts of gender identity.

Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite (which is how he got his name) and, as a child of the gods, was renowned for his beauty. After being raised by naiads, freshwater spirits, near Mount Ida, Hermaphroditus set out to see the world. During his travels, Hermaphroditus encountered the vain naiad Salmacis as he stopped to rest at a spring feeding into the sparkling pool that she called home. She instantly fell madly in love with him. Never had she seen such beauty in a man that could even rival her own, and, rising from the waters of her spring, Salmacis attempted to seduce Hermaphroditus.

However, Hermaphroditus was shy, and the naiad's advances made him uncomfortable, so he yelled at her to go away and leave him alone. Crushed and humiliated, Salmacis retreated into her waters and watched Hermaphroditus from the safety of the reeds. The afternoon was hot, and Hermaphroditus had been travelling for hours under the beating sun, so, thinking the woman gone, he disrobed and waded into the waters to cool off.

As soon as Hermaphroditus had left the safety of the shore, Salmacis burst from the surface of the water, grappling the naked man and holding tight to his body. As Hermaphroditus thrashed and tried to throw the naiad off of him, Salmacis prayed to the gods, 'Please, never let us part! Help us be together forever!' And, in the round-about way of gods and genies, Salmacis' wish was technically granted. The wrestling pair were fused into one body; their new form embodying aspects of both male and female as the two became one. From this day forward, Hermaphroditus joined the ranks of the Erotes (minor deities of love and sex who served his mother, Aphrodite) as the god of effeminate men, masculine women, and all others who identified as a gender outside the traditional binary of male and female. While the Greeks were

more receptive to the image of Hermaphroditus and the fluidity of gender, some Romans considered the god to be a sign of chaos and disorder, thus planting the seeds for the tradition of museums and collections choosing not to display works featuring Hermaphroditus and instead relegating them to storage, a habit that has only recently begun to be broken (Fry, 2017).

For clarification, because Hermaphroditus' name does not change post transformation which can lead to some confusion, whenever this paper refers to Hermaphroditus using he/him masculine pronouns, it is talking about the pre-transformation version when he is still just the son of Aphrodite and Hermes. If Hermaphroditus is referred to with they/them neutral pronouns, then it is discussing the post-transformation, divine combination of the original Hermaphroditus and Salmacis. In a similar vein, the use of genderfluid with a lowercase 'g' or otherly-gendered is talking about the general concept that gender identity is a malleable facet of our understanding of ourselves, and that it is a spectrum not constrained by a limited idea of how individuals under the classifications associated with such a system should or would act. Conversely, whenever Genderfluid is capitalized, this is referring specifically to the group of people who identify as such and see themselves as not being confined to a single, fixed expression of their gender identity (Davis, 2021).

Judith Butler argues that “because there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (1988, p. 522). As we will see, this connection between the idea of gender and an association of acting or performing will have strong ties to the activities of the Cult of Dionysus and the inclusion of Hermaphroditus within their circle. Butler's statement that gender would also not exist without these perceived acts of gender will also play an important role as we see how the complex systems of gender and sexuality operating within Ancient Greece and Rome functioned quite differently from those we use today, which could be seen as supporting this argument that there is no real gender. It is not only the accounts of the Cult's actions, however, but the iconography presents within the art and imagery that has come down to us that will shed additional light on how gender was interpreted in relation to Hermaphroditus.

Understanding the importance of the iconography being used to



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depict Hermaphroditus will be a key component to deciphering the cult's attitudes towards these otherly-gendered bodies. Iconography simply refers to the visual symbols and images used in art. In a time where not everyone could read or write, iconography held a great importance as a form of communication in passing on stories to both the common populace and later generations. A regular farmer living in Ancient Greece may not be able to read the priest's writings on Hermaphroditus and how their body was interpreted but would be able to recognize them when portrayed visually in statues, paintings, and frescoes. This is still important to us today as well since it similarly allows us to understand how these civilizations were interacting with their respective myths, and which stories were important enough to copy down in paint or marble.

Now it is time to turn to the other major player of importance: the Cult of Dionysus. When the cult initially made its way to Pompeii in the fourth century, it was at the height of its popularity, and would remain so for a few centuries to come until Rome began its rise to power (DeMone and Hughes, 2021). During this time, the cult would manage to spread as far south as Egypt, with Dionysian elements and iconography being found in Egyptian textiles depicting revelers participating in Bacchic dances (*Garment Decoration*, 2022). However, back in Italy, the presence of the Roman Empire would force the cult's members to practice in smaller, more intimate groups rather than the more public performances they had grown accustomed to during the Hellenistic period. The rites and rituals performed by the cult focused on themes of fertility, mystery, and a sort of drunken friendship that probably facilitated a good amount of the dancing and partying associated with Dionysus and his retinue in general. Men, women, and sometimes even children would all participate in these rites (DeMone and Hughes, 2021), which could be an early sign of the cult's inclusiveness. Their welcoming attitude will play an important role concerning Hermaphroditus' presence in the gardens where these rituals were performed and the iconography they left behind later.

This sense of inclusiveness is even more interesting when we compare the cult's original treatment of a figure like Hermaphroditus to the later, more modern approaches to their story that attempt to remove the themes of acceptance and positive diversity we see present initially. For a time, the modern narrative claimed that statues like the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* would have been used by their original Greek and Roman collectors as an enter-

taining prank for their guests at parties (Von Stackelberg, 2014). The host would boast about their newly acquired marble, lead the guests into a back room, and as they entered the group would see the statue from behind, and find the slender figure and ample curves of what appeared to be a naked woman enticing. However, as the group made their way around the statue, they would be met with the shocking realization that they had been tricked into lusting after a man once the exposed penis came into view (Trimble, 2018). Everyone would have a good laugh, and then return to their festivities.

While a good prank at a party doesn't seem too out of place for a cult focused on drinking and general merriment, it does seem strange that such an important figure would be solely there just to be the butt of the joke, and in such a way that ignores the complex structure of gender and sexuality in Greece and Rome at the time (Ormand, 2009). It seems more fitting instead that Hermaphroditus would have been seen more as a welcomed guest to the party than as a simple caricature meant to poke fun at homosexuality. Hermaphroditus was one of the Erotes, the minor gods and goddesses embodying the different aspects of love and sex who functioned as Aphrodite's closest attendants (Fry, 2017) and as such we could expect them to be viewed with more respect than the anecdotal example given above. In fact, if we look at iconography of Hermaphroditus alongside some of Dionysus' most famous followers, the satyrs, we see quite a different narrative emerge around the treatment and perception of the Gender-fluid god and their body.

Multiple frescoes found at Pompeii depict the satyr god Pan, typically accompanied by a gaggle of other satyrs, spying on nymphs and human women as they undress or bathe. Across these images, we see Pan and the satyrs holding their hands up, in what has been deemed as a 'voyeuristic wave' of sorts, a gesture denoting the 'aha!' moment of seeing the bather naked. However, when these scenes feature Hermaphroditus as the object of interest instead of a young woman, the interpretation inexplicably changes. The raised hand goes from representing a moment of triumph, to a shielding motion of protection or recoil. Upon seeing the penis, it was believed that Pan and the satyrs would have feared the possibility of being penetrated, and instead viewed Hermaphroditus as an object of disgust and disappointment. However, there are no visible differences present between the nymph/Hermaphroditus fresco scenes that support this shift in interpretation, and the satyrs' expressions never change, suggesting that

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these should instead be viewed as the same reaction; one of lust and desire (Ashede, 2020).

It's important to keep in mind that, for the Greeks and Romans, sexuality and gender were not necessarily separate entities, and their systems of identity differed from our own. For example, various classes existed within the spectrum of the male identity depending on levels of masculinity or sexual roles. Younger and more effeminate men would have been perceived practically on the same level as women and existed within their own space separate from the men viewing them as sexual conquests. This dichotomy is perhaps best reflected in a kind of old, Roman slang where anal sex, regardless of the gender of the recipient, was referred to as "that boyish thing." (Ashede, 2020) In fact, records show that when writing or speaking about a woman's ass, Roman men would compare them favorably to those of young, beautiful men. Another term of importance here comes from Athens, where they referred to some men as *kinaidoi*, a sort of blanket term for effeminate men, or men who desired to be penetrated by other men. The term possibly originates from the verb *kineo* "to move" which could loosely have the same context as "to screw". (Ormand, 2009).

This connects back to the misinterpreted voyeuristic wave seen with Pan and his satyrs. The fear present in those images was that sleeping with a male lover intrinsically means you will be penetrated, which is something men are supposed to be against. However, the role of the *kinaidoi* shows otherwise. Even if it was considered separate from the role of other men, there was a place for men expressing what would have been perceived as more effeminate behaviors in their society, and the existence of this role further suggests that just because two men are sleeping together does not necessarily mean both will be penetrated.

So, if some of Dionysus' closest followers in mythology were accepting of Hermaphroditus' place amongst their group despite them not being the paragon of traditional manliness, then how did the actual followers of the Dionysian cult view these otherly-gendered bodies?

Due to the cult's focus on fertility rites and matters more emotional than concrete, there has always been a very strong female presence identified within the Dionysian cult, though in the past these interpretations were used more to write off the importance of female involvement by generalizing and stereotyping

(Kraemer, 1979). We know too that the gardens where these parties and theatrical performances took place have long been linked to a blurring of the lines between gender and sexuality, and have featured many depictions of Hermaphroditus taking part in Dionysus' entourage (Von Stackelberg, 2014), so it would seem safe to say that the members of the Cult had a rather open minded approach to sexuality and gender, understanding the fluid nature of identity as it was most prominently portrayed by Hermaphroditus.

It is no secret that crossdressing and gender pantomime were common in Greek theatre performance (DeMone and Hughes, 2021), and we know that dance in Ancient Greece was not merely just physical expression but served a much greater purpose even outside of the Dionysian cult. It could be a means of warding off evil, worshipping the divine, and sometimes even considered a direct method of communication between mortals and the gods (Papaioannou and Lykesas 2012). Within the cult this only took on a more extreme nature. For the members of the Cult of Dionysus, dance was, "...an explosion of mental impulses..." (Papaioannou and Lykesas 2012, p. 68) that would allow the dancers to gain healing powers and achieve an enlightened state of divinity by opening their minds and embracing their wildest emotions (Papaioannou and Lykesas 2012).

If we consider for a moment a later attempt made at reaching the divine that is quite similar to the Dionysian cult's attempts, we should be able to better understand why Hermaphroditus' involvement in the cult's activities was so poignant. In some schools of alchemy, the final state of being desired to be reached by the practicing alchemists is known as the Rebis; a perfect fusion of humankind embodying aspects of both the male and female in one body. In some alchemical beliefs, God created mankind as a bisexual, intersex being, that unfortunately forgot their origins over the course of human history. These 'unaware' men and women cannot reach the level of divinity, nor achieve immortality or God-like status, without embracing and understanding the need to return to our androgenous, bisexual roots (Schwarz, 57-59).

The Rebis proves to be a perfect comparison for Hermaphroditus if we consider the roles at play within their respective mythologies. The Rebis was a state of being held up as the final, perfect version of the human body that could be achieved; combining the male and female aspects into one form that returned us to our

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origin point. Similarly, Hermaphroditus also embodied both the male and female, and took on the role as god and protector of anyone who felt similar. Both figures were revered for their placement outside the traditional gender binary, instead of being hated or vilified for these qualities, showing a great deal of respect not found in later historical accounts. They both held great power as well, considering Hermaphroditus' status as a god and the Rebis' role as the perfected human form. These bodies that blurred the lines between the masculine and feminine were idolized rather than torn down, showing a very different narrative than the one that has recently been passed down to us. Focusing on Hermaphroditus, we find that their role as god rather than monster is rare for those who undergo transformation in Greek and Roman myths, as figures like Scylla, Charybdis, and Medusa can attest (Fry, 63, 245).

Returning to the role of dance as a means to reach this form of emotional divinity within the Dionysian cult, the similarities between the alchemical Rebis and Hermaphroditus would suggest that Hermaphroditus' prolific inclusion within the gardens where these dances and parties took place would make sense if they were to be understood as this catalyst of the cult's desires. Hermaphroditus could have been the ideal example of the balanced or emotionally attuned form the dancers were attempting to achieve. In the environment they created that blurred the lines between gender and sexuality, Hermaphroditus stood as the perfect example of those who did not conform to a rigid gender binary and may have been considered closer to this state of perfect being the performers strived to achieve. Perhaps Hermaphroditus was much more than just a welcome guest at these parties, but instead served as a sort of role model to inspire greater intensity within the cult's performances as they had a visual representation of their goals. Either way, the function of these dances and the proclivity of iconographical representations of Hermaphroditus in these scenes suggests a very open approach to gender nonconformity within the Cult of Dionysus.

In fact, we really only see opposition to the inclusion of otherly-gendered bodies when we turn towards more recent interactions with these works. One of the most heinous examples is that of the British art collector Henry Blundell. Operating during the eighteenth century, Blundell was famous for having gathered the largest collection of antiquities in Britain. Included in these works was a *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, which Blundell took immediate offense to after purchasing the statue when he claimed

that the figure was unnatural and very disgusting to the sight (Blundell, 1809). The statue in question depicted a common scene of Hermaphroditus lounging on a bed, draped in a loose-fitting sheet or blanket. However, also present in this version were three little children, one of which was being breastfed by Hermaphroditus. This, with the combination of the exposed penis, is what Blundell took most offense to, indicated by his ‘renovations’ of the work. After purchasing the statue, Blundell had all three of the children removed, and sanded down Hermaphroditus’ penis, transforming the work into a *Reclining Venus*. (Chaliakopoulos, 2020).

While the desecration of this object resolutely highlights the hatred and fear surrounding themes of homosexuality and gender-nonconformity in art after the time of the Dionysian cult, the original scene also introduces a new avenue of interpretation into Hermaphroditus’ iconography seldom seen elsewhere. The imagery of nursing a child, or in this case three, would have been strongly connected with the role of women in ancient Greek and Roman society, which shows that the original creators were not simply thinking of Hermaphroditus solely as an effeminate man. The tradition of viewing the penis as a final gender-determinant came later, as we see here with a rare showcase of Hermaphroditus depicted as something more than just a sexual object. Not only does this diverge from the interpretation of Hermaphroditus’ boyish allure preventing a female reading, but also completely shifts their role as object of desire to a possible maternal figure, or at least a surrogate caregiver of sorts. This is not to say that motherhood or caring for children is the only way to identify women in art nor that it should be solely relegated to women, rather that this particular scene with ties to expected roles for women at the time is a perfect example of how the Greeks and Romans viewed Hermaphroditus within the context of their genderfluidity as something more than just a man or woman.

How does this new interpretation affect the role Hermaphroditus and those like them played in the Dionysian Cult’s rituals aiming to achieve divinity? Knowing that one of the main focuses of these dances and rituals was an emphasis on fertility rites (DeMone and Hughes, 2021), the easiest assumption, and perhaps the most detrimental, would be that because Hermaphroditus is always shown with a penis then they must have been viewed alongside the men involved. However, with the new insight gained from the original depiction of the Hermaphroditus statue Blundell maimed, we see the emergence of this motherly

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interpretation of Hermaphroditus. Perhaps then it would be better to assume that the role of otherly-gendered bodies in these dances and rituals would have been viewed in align with how they wished to participate in these ceremonies. It does not seem to be too far of a stretch to imagine that within the wild, drunken partying taking place during these gatherings that gender lines and roles began to blur, and that any of the cult members who were still skeptical about such things may have been more willing to open their minds to more than just the hopes of achieving divinity and be able to see each other as people who were more than just their body's flesh.

On this theme of acceptance, we should also stop to consider an element of Hermaphroditus' story that seems to be largely overlooked. Most accounts are mainly focused on the actual transformation of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus and pay little attention to their place in Aphrodite's retinue thereafter. However, as these myths were an integral part of Greek and Roman society, the relationships and interactions found therein should prove to be very telling of how similar situations in everyday life may have been perceived.

What is most important here is Hermaphroditus' role as one of Aphrodite's Erotes as mentioned earlier. Specifically, Hermaphroditus is the god of effeminate men, masculine women, intersex people, and anyone classified as a third gender outside the typical male/female system as we understand it today (Fry, 2017). Aphrodite was Hermaphroditus' mother, as well as their boss in a sort of divine sense, but it would have been Aphrodite who elevated her child to their current position as one of her Erotes. This gesture of inclusion amongst Aphrodite's most inner circle functions as a sign of her acceptance of her child's unique identity, which is made even more powerful by the fact that she is Hermaphroditus' mother. It's not hard to say that there are few, if any, more important relationships to be given validation from than by your own mother.

By including her intersex child into her inner fold, Aphrodite's actions show both her support and acceptance of Hermaphroditus' new identity. Of course, the situation here is not perfectly comparable to real-life examples considering Hermaphroditus was unwilling and the forced transformation was spurred by Salmacis' prayers, but it's also hard to expect everything to be perfectly realistic when dealing in the realm of gods, monsters, and magic. Hopefully this example of acceptance by a parent of their

otherly-gendered child found in the Greek and Roman pantheon serves as a signifier of how members of their societies would have acted as well, though of course this may be wishful thinking as they may have possessed a different interpretation to this relationship than the one provided here.

If we turn to a collection of red Attic cups and vases we can see where some of the difficulty in discerning the original intentions of iconography dealing with behaviors outside the traditional gender norm are found. The scenes depicted on this group of pottery show bearded figures wearing what has in some interpretations been identified as feminine attire proudly displaying themselves in scenes of gathering and revelry. While there is some debate over whether these are meant to represent men dressed as women or women wearing false beards for some sort of religious or occult significance (Miller, 1999), we may have once again overlooked another possible interpretation. Considering the strongly suggested ties to Dionysian influence that has been attributed to these images (Miller, 1999) and what we know of Hermaphroditus' acceptance within the Cult of Dionysus, it does not seem to be a stretch for us to consider that if these scenes are not depicting some performative ritual put on by the cult, or even if it is, these figures could be interpreted as either transgender or Genderfluid.

Perhaps the difficulty in identifying whether these are meant to be men or women is purposeful. These figures may be similar to Hermaphroditus, existing in a space between the masculine and feminine, with the mixture of beards and feminine dress serving as a signifier of this. Alternatively, if these truly are fake beards, these could be transmen who are using the fake beards to present as masculine, or perhaps transwomen using the clothing for the same purpose; though the inclusion of both masculine and feminine characteristics seems odd in this scenario. It is possible this is just how the artist would have differentiated amongst cis and trans subjects, but again, in knowing the importance and proclivity of Hermaphroditus' role within the Dionysian cult, an interpretation of these figures as existing somewhere between masculine and feminine does not seem far-fetched.

If we return to Butler's argument on gender and acts of gender, this could serve as an excellent explanation for why the identity of those figures depicted in the Cult's bowls are so ambiguous. When we see multiple acts within a figure that conflict, we are unable to form a cohesive gender identity within our understand-



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ing of such a thing, and the result is a sort of gendered floundering as we try to attribute weight to one side more than the other based on whatever context clues we resonate with most. Some may see the beards and claim those are the greatest form of identification, while others may turn to the feminine clothes and write the beards off as stage props and makeup with ritualistic purpose, even though the same could be said of costumes.

How then, do we deal with a figure such as Hermaphroditus who simultaneously embodies both the masculine and feminine? In looking for these acts of gender determination, we could say the nursing and childcare portrayed in Blundell's statue before it was altered would lead to a feminine reading; however, we could also turn to the frescoes depicting Hermaphroditus' presence amongst the satyrs, creatures embodying the extremes of masculine desire, and assume that Hermaphroditus is taking part in their obsessions either as a voyeur as well, or as a lesser man, the *kinadoi*, who acts as the object of such desires but still remains outside of the feminine spectrum. The very existence of the *kinadoi* further complicates the classifications of such acts. How do we know when an act is not manly enough to be truly masculine, but is still too masculine to be feminine? If the only act that can be linked to a *kinadoi* is the desire to be penetrated, then would that not belong more to the realm of sexual preference than gender determination?

Enrique Moral offers a solution from the realm of archaeological studies concerning this mess of gender. Moral states that, "...the trouble with sex and gender as binary notions is not that there are only two, instead of three, four, or more; on the contrary, the problem is that it limits both sex and gender to normative and stagnated categories that are conceived as universal, ahistorical, and invariable" (Moral, 2016, p.789). Change is constant, and so it is crucial to accept that acts or characteristics we attribute to one gender today may not have held the same implications in ages past. Typically, when we consider the traditional binary of male and female, we think of these as opposite ends of a spectrum; like the end points on a line with all other genders falling somewhere in between as if they were a mixture with different levels stemming from these two concrete standards.

Hermaphroditus, however, should stand as an example to show the ridiculousness in this sort of conceptualization. Gender is not like baking. You cannot measure where on the line an individual would fall in terms of what ratio they are of male and female.

Hermaphroditus is physically equal parts male and female, resulting in our inability to place them within our binary understanding of gender. Because Hermaphroditus was described in the myth as "...a single form that could not be called girl or boy and appeared at the same time neither one, but both" (Lenardon and Morford, 1971, p. 217), with no further explanation of their place within the complex structure of Greek and Roman gender identities, one could assume that this would belong then to a common understanding. Perhaps Hermaphroditus is really an example of one who has freed themselves from this sort of internal tug-of-war. Operating within a rigid binary system creates this pressure of having to attribute everything to one side or the other. This sort of constant monitoring to try and understand how your actions and feelings fit into this divided structure feels ineffective as the rules and interpretations for this system constantly change.

Building of this idea of freeing oneself from the gender binary instead of trying to adhere to one side or the other, we can find another aspect of Hermaphroditus' journey that has been seemingly overlooked. There has been a proclivity of attention in scholarship spent on the role of their penis and their connections to effeminate men, even though in following the original myth, Hermaphroditus in their final form was not a man. Assuming that the penis alone defines Hermaphroditus' gender completely ignores the original context of their story. Hermaphroditus was not simply a man who took on aspects of a feminine body, but was two distinct people, Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, who were fused as one. Despite this, discussions concerning Hermaphroditus, or works depicting them, always focus on their womanly figure: the delicately curled hair, their chest (sometimes flat, other times amply curved), the smoothness of their skin, and the soft beauty of their features; only to have these characteristics immediately contrasted with the presence of the penis.

Even though a majority of Hermaphroditus' appearance tends to align with a typically female presentation, the sole inclusion of the penis completely overrides this and takes center stage, completely disregarding and discarding two-thirds of the people Hermaphroditus serves as the god of: masculine women and those existing outside of a gender binary. It's ridiculous; Hermaphroditus is never considered as a woman with a penis, practically erasing Salmacis from the equation, and is only ever viewed as a man with a woman's body. But as we've seen, there was no one, singular identity encompassing all men in Greek and Roman society, so how can we be so bold as to ignore the possibility of

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Hermaphroditus not identifying as a man, and instead belonging to a space completely removed from the gender binary of male and female coinciding with their existence as two people of different genders fused into one body?

Hermaphroditus seems to have been able to rise above the need to focus on the acts of gender to place themselves within a concrete category, and instead has managed to embrace themselves and stay true to their understanding of their new body with no need to care about how they will be perceived by others. There is no sense of conformity in Hermaphroditus' actions or appearance, and yet we still try to pin them down to a simplified understanding of gender by attempting to assign them a gender classification.

As we have seen, Hermaphroditus' journey through history has not been an easy one, though they still stand as an important symbol of gender diversity from a time relatively far removed from our own. Today, Hermaphroditus should stand as a figure of inclusion, historical evidence of acceptance, or at the very least the existence, of those who do not conform within our understanding of a traditional gender binary. This does not mean that we have finished the job by any means. Trying to decipher the role and importance of Hermaphroditus and other figures like them will continue to be difficult, but the work is necessary. Without a comprehensive understanding of how these figures functioned within their respective times and societies, we will forever be missing a critical component of history, and one that is made even more important by its depiction of those belonging to a select minority. Historical representation is important for all groups, which is why this cannot be the end of the discussion. Everyone deserves to have figures from the past that they can relate to and see themselves represented in. Hopefully this paper is simply an addition to a growing move towards deciphering iconography with the intent of truly understanding how it functioned and what it was trying to communicate.

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**Freedom Within Shackles: The Phenomenology of Somatic Movement in Alokanda Roy's Culture Therapy in Kolkata Correction Home**

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*The phenomenology of somatic movement releases energy that interrupts trauma and creates a starting point for survival and vitality. Both phenomenology and somatic theory experience the body through the mind. Somatic practices also create a sense of "lived body" experience through the awareness of the body in motion and rest. Built on the chief example of Touch World, a non-profit organization led by Alokanda Roy's culture therapy that restore and integrate the lives of inmates in the Correctional Homes in West-Bengal India, I argue that Roy's dance drama creates a bodily awareness in these inmates that lead to changes in the self-construction of their identity.*

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, somatic agency, oppressive-cultures, embodiment, marginalization, dance drama, identity

**Introduction**

The phenomenology of somatic movement releases energy that interrupts trauma and creates a starting point for survival and vitality. Both phenomenology and somatic theory experience the body through the mind. Somatic practices also create a sense of "lived body" experience through the awareness of the body in motion and rest. Built on the chief example of Touch World, a non-profit organization led by Alokanda Roy's culture therapy that restore and integrate the lives of inmates in the Correctional Homes in West-Bengal India, I argue that Roy's dance drama creates a bodily awareness in these inmates that lead to changes in the self-construction of their identity.

Roy chooses provincial mythical stories of marginalization through the intersections of caste, class and gender portrayed in the selected dance dramas of Rabindranath Tagore. Mythical power is located in these stories about body deformities, untouchability, and gender norms. For instance, the dance drama *Balmiki Pratibha* is a provincial mythical story that shows the possibility and the power of transformation. In this article, I will first provide a discussion of the phenomenological process, as the first step toward understanding the power of somatic agency. A phenomenological analysis drawing upon the work of Edmund Hus-

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serl and Martin Heidegger will be discussed. Second, this paper will discuss the philosophy of Michel Foucault, and Paulo Freire and their work in understanding how power is situated in oppressive cultures. Third, this paper will interpret the somatic agency in the performative act of marginalized bodies immersed in provincial mythological stories.

Prison reformation in India, is an aftermath of the dehumanizing practices of colonial Prisons Act of 1894. Prison management, rather than reformation was the focus of the prison system in India. There was a need to conform the prisoners to maintain social equilibrium, and fear-based strategies such as torture and humiliation took precedence. The word "Prison" changed its meaning to "Correctional Home", and the process was initiated by the Prison committee who revised the penal code. In 1951, a rehabilitation of offenders was initiated. Dr. Walter C. Reckless, UN expert on correctional Homes provided a report in the *Jail Administration of India*. He emphasized the need for shifting from a punitive prison to a correctional home. Based on Reckless' report of 1951, the All India Jail Reform Committee under the leadership of Justice Anand Narain Nulla established the Prison Act. The guiding principle of this reform is instilling transformative changes in the lives of those in incarcerated. The effect of this act, gradually led to the formation of West-Bengal Correctional Services Act of 1992. One of the strong pioneers of this Act was the Inspector General of West Bengal Correctional Services, B.D. Sharma. Sharma initiated transformation towards reformation through performative arts, and for this purpose he invited Alokanda Roy, a classical Odissi dancer, to be a part of the reform initiatives (Mukherjee and Manna 529-530).

Roy's entrance into the Correctional Home was on the occasion of International Women's Day, a visit that led B.D Sharma to collaborate with her to develop cultural activities in the Correctional home. Roy terms this program as "culture therapy". The precept of culture therapy rests in somatic agency of the performative act of marginalized bodies in provincial mythological stories. The site of correction home as it appeared to Roy, was in contrast to what she had imagined in her childhood:

As I walked through the gates, I recalled what in my childhood; I had imagined the place to be. A martyr, head held high, walking to the gallows; men in striped shirts and shorts breaking stones; convicts sinister in appearance. But what I found was very different normal human beings, their

present trapped in their little past. Little did I realize I would be chained for life with love from human beings considered 'different' from society in general. Behind the impenetrable walls, beyond huge iron gates, I found real people without the hypocritical facade of goodness. The boys and girls exuded youthful vibrations and energy and yet were loitering around aimlessly. Mr. Sharma asked me if I could do something as a part of culture therapy to relieve their mundane existence. The proposition sounded challenging and I agreed immediately and wholeheartedly. (qtd in Mukherjee and Manna 2021)

Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, 1977 argued that the reformed punishment through new and "humane" (57) practices of "discipline" (138) and "surveillance" (77) used in reformatory practices in institutions such as prisons, mental asylums, schools, workhouses and factories led to obedience from individuals to comply with social norms, not so much in fear of torture, but more to assimilate dominant beliefs and values. Reformation of the inmates based on the underpinning of acceptable norms of a society, would create "docile bodies" ideal for the new economics. But to, deconstruct identities, and pave the path for new beliefs in these bodies that were being controlled by bureaucracy was a challenge. This unique program led by Roy, attempted to tap into the somatic agency within performative acts to create new beliefs within sites of resistance. Roy did not have preconceived notions about how to engage them in this program, let alone any plan for reformation. She observed that the inmates had an untapped raw energy, that seemed stuck in their past trauma. For Roy, this energy could be unleashed in the joy of rhythm through music and movement (Mukherjee and Manna 530).

### **Phenomenology of Somatic Movement: Mind-Body Integration**

Phenomenology as a study of consciousness pivots on the congruence of mind and body, a departure from the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Pure consciousness, for Edmund Husserl is an act of reduction. The reduction or *epoche* is a suspension, or bracketing from preconceived beliefs, judgments and biases. Husserl emphasized the intertwining of the lived animate body (*Leib*) and consciousness (*Geist*) in an act of embodiment. The phenomenological reduction of the consciousness as "absolute" and "pure" (70) is distinct from Cartesian Dualism of Descartes that



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considers the mind and the body as two separate entities independent of each other.

Departing from the ontological dualism of Descartes, Husserl's intense discussion of the *Body* appears in "Ideas II" that was posthumously published. The body and the bodily self-experience create space for different forms of intentionality regarding the objective world. The objects may be material or spatiotemporal such as rocks, trees, table, and chairs. To have an experience with spatiomaterial object, one must experience embodiment. In "Ideas II" the body is described as "the medium of all perception, it is the organ of all perception, and it is necessary involved in all perception" (Husserl 1981, pg 61). Husserl creates the body as the space for perception, thereby integrating the mind in the body, as one space. To understand pure consciousness, the body-mind brackets itself from everyday reality, almost like a meditative stance (Moran 285).

Martin Heidegger intentionality presupposes the entire phenomenon of being-in-the-world to achieve consciousness. The path to Heideggerian intentionality cannot be considered as a method of reduction leading to a form of pure consciousness, but a method that finds its way in the midst of anxiety, death, joy, struggle, desperation of being-in-the-world. This is a break from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, and introduces us to existential phenomenology of Heidegger. Existential phenomenology presupposes the *dasein* as dispersed in the world, and in this chaos finds meaning. For Heidegger, the transcendental *I* cannot understand the possibility of intentionality, though intersubjectivity plays an integral role in the understanding of intentionality. The intersubjectivity for Heidegger has been in contest with the reality of everyday life. The *Dasein* is not the authentic self, the *Dasein* emerges as the *They-self*. As the *they-self*, the *Dasein* is dispersed in the *they* and must find itself (Heidegger 107). I argue that both transcendental and existential phenomenology is integral to the somatic movement.

Somatic movement presupposes the body-mind integration. I argue that rhythmic physical movement enables suspension and leads to reduction or *epoche* of pure consciousness. It creates a pure consciousness, by bracketing the world of biases, prejudices, and beliefs. Husserl's phenomenon of the "transcendental I" emerges as one loses a strong sense of self or ego in the rhythm of movement and music. Something that we can recall in "trance". There is no sense of time passing, as one is transported

in to quotidian space. This sense of syncope, a lapse, an absence, a cerebral eclipse happens with dissociation or bracketing. The rhythmic movement with music creates a transcendental self. However, to understand pure consciousness, through movement the individual has to understand, what was seen, what was felt and the life source of this observation is from the being embedded in-the-every-day-world. The pure consciousness that evolves is not representative but is constitutive. With the integration of the body and mind, there is an observation that everything is interconnected, with a sense of cosmic unity, and of oneness with everything. With this there is a release, a feeling of gratitude and a sense of inter-connection with the universe.

The power of the mind-body integration is at the core of somatic work. Essentially, somatic work is often referred to the history of a person's changes in the body over a length of time. It includes bodywork, body therapies, hands-on work, body-mind integration, body-mind disciplines, movement therapy, somatic therapy, movement awareness, movement education, and/or somatic education (Eddy 47). Currently, somatic disciplines that feature movement is now a part of somatic movement education and therapy (International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association 2002).

Thomas Hanna the father of somatics focused the attention on "soma" by its distinct alive and changing status, filled with cellular intelligence, and capable of perceiving itself. Hanna is the father of the term "somatics," (2) and brought attention to the "soma" (2) by emphasizing the soma's alive and changing status, replete with cellular intelligence and capability of perceiving itself. For Hanna, this awareness creates a life-force in a person from within. All living organisms are embodied elements that cannot be separated from the past or the future. Somatic awareness allows a person to look within (Hanna 1985-86): Living organisms are somas: that is, they are an integral and ordered process of embodied elements which cannot be separated either from their evolved past or their adaptive future. A soma is an embodied element that lives in the life-world and dies only when the separation between the mind and the body happens. A soma is any individual embodiment of a process, which endures and adapts through time, and it remains a soma. The moment that it ceases to be a soma, the soma becomes a body. Interestingly, Hanna points out that it is imperative that somatic perspective is separate from social analysis. The lived world for Hanna thus does not exist, and so Soma is not connected to social, relational,

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cultural or the emotional context.

In his book *Bodies in Revolt* (Hanna), he argues for the need to keep a somatic perspective separate from social analysis. Why? One of the features of his somatic discourse can be interpreted as aspiring to be purely of the mind and body. This view is devoid of social, relational, cultural, and emotional context or correlates. Somatic psychology on the other hand focuses on the synergy between mind and the body, drawing on socio-psychological processes to understand the trauma, and stress through the interruption within the mind-body connection. The birth of somatic psychology is an early twentieth century phenomenon. William Reich's work on character structures and the connection between physical tension and emotions, in addition to Carl Jung's theory of the body and the unconscious was the starting point of somatic psychology. Alexander Lowen influenced by Reich's thesis developed Bioenergetics a somatic process that understands bodily processes and energy flow, and releases physical tension to address emotional and psychological issues. Following this the Hakomi method was developed by Ron Kurtz who integrates mindfulness, body sensations, and emotional experience for healing.

The work of Peter Levine is influential in the field of somatic psychology, and specifically trauma therapy. Through somatic experiencing, Levine points out that the body has an intrinsic ability to heal with gradual and mindful engagements with physical sensations, emotions, and behaviors. With trauma the normal flow of energy gets interrupted. Somatic healing focuses on releasing this trapped energy and restoring the flow in a safe and controlled manner. This process helps an individual to be aware of their physical sensations, and thereby have a stronger agency over their physical responses. While Peter Levine's work is within therapeutic and clinical contexts, the strong connections between somatic experience, and trauma healing with dance and movement practices is evident. Dance as a form of embodied expression creates a total awareness of physical sensation, emotions and movement. Movement could create a deeper connection with bodies as it creates an awareness of the "here and now" (Levine 25).

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Emilie Conrad made significant mark in the somatic community through stories of shame, isolation, and anger. Cohen the founder of Body-Mind Centering (BMC) created an approach to developmental movement, anatomo-

my, and experiential anatomy. BMC based its function on understanding body's systems, tissues, movement patterns to enhance body awareness, leading to transformation. Additionally, Conrad's Continuum movement explores the fluid nature of the body and its connection to the cosmic universe. With Cohen and Conrad as leaders in the 1960s somatic movement, the emotional and expressive aspect of the body gained prominence (Eddy 49).

As I work through this terrain of dance as an embodied performance, I address culture therapy in Alokanda Roy's approach to creating a new consciousness in the inmates as a call to the transcendental *I*. However, as pointed previously in the article, the authentic self emerges from being dispersed in the every-day-world. This was a challenge for Roy, as the confine in the limited space of the correction home did not provide space to tap into the unknown territories of their existence, that would create new experiences and new beliefs (Luft 6-7). Old beliefs in the inmates were based on biases, stereotypes, and unproductive prejudices. This was a barrier to create pure consciousness, by bracketing old unproductive beliefs. Not only did they lose their self in the rhythm of music and dance, but they had to hold that new space, and make space for new beliefs.

### **Somatic Agency Reclaiming the Broken Body-Mind in Oppressive Cultures**

The perception of marginalized bodies in reclaiming somatic agency can be framed in the way identities are systematically created in "cultures of oppression". To understand the power of somatic agency in the performative acts, Foucault's argument on prison, power and resistance shows how the inner workings of power distorts the sense of self of marginalized communities. For Foucault body is the locus of power, punishment and resistance. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault points out that torture of the body is no longer prevalent as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century France. The advent of a new economy and politics of the body took "the art of punishing" (105) to a new level. Reformists of the penal system believed that the main goal should not be to take revenge on the criminal, but to prevent future crime. The state would now focus on controlling the potential consequences of a crime, making the punishment less violent on the bodies of the criminals, while ensuring a stronger effect on their minds. This shift led to the proliferation of prisons and the emergence of correctional facilities for criminals. However, now the prisoners have lost the agency of their bodies. Correction now becomes the loss of

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agency of the body. Power in the form of bureaucratic gaze now takes the charge of these lives (Foucault 33-40). Roy's culture therapy did not presuppose that the participants came from a place of deficit. Deficit in the form of lack of morals, greed, and violence. Her approach did not differentiate the inmates from a free citizen. For her the sense of self-identity needed to be recreated on their terms, on the way they find their purpose in life.

The control of the body and thus the mind is seen in cultures of oppression. Paulo Freire in the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" discusses about the role of *conscientization* (Freire, *Pedagogy* 36) that creates a truly liberating experience by creating agency in the bodies. Ironically, there is a "fear of freedom" in people who see a truly liberating education. For some critical consciousness is disruptive, it questions the status quo, it calls the power in question, and hence it is "anarchic" (Freire, *Pedagogy* 36).

In this situation conscientization becomes operative. Conscientization presupposes that bodies are politicized, and through conscientization bodies are able to see the social, political, economic contradictions against them. Freire stated that the "act of learning to read and write has to start from a very comprehensive understanding of the act of reading the world, something which human beings do before reading the words" (*Literacy* xiii). This is again existential in nature, as true consciousness emerges in the embodied presence of the body within the complexities of the oppressive culture.

For Freire, the *a priori* for conscientization is understanding the world. To explain, Freire presents a situation that portrays peasants viewing a picture of hunters hunting wild animals. The interpretation that ensues, after the picture is viewed, is "immediate, natural, continuous, similar, and relational" (63). Empowering the peasants means that they create meaning by themselves. This underscores the ineffectiveness of using symbols of communication that are "arbitrary" (*Education* 63) in nature. Here somatic agency has unique power as the arbitrariness of the spoken word or the written word would make the communication enforced, strained, unnatural, imposed, and obligatory. A performative act does not have his barrier, as it based on raw emotions.

The dialogue between the picture and the peasant creates a safe place, through which the meaning of the picture emerges. In this conversation, the picture and the peasant pose questions to each

other. To illustrate further, Paulo Freire shows a group of peasants a picture of a person holding a spade in the midst of a well and a house with his wife and child. This enables the peasants to ask questions: “Who made the well?”, “Why did he do it?”, “When?” (Freire, *Education* 63). Freire points out that as the peasant reads the picture, he or she moves from the part to the whole. The peasant now recognizes himself as the subject (the man in the picture). The man in the picture, along with other subjects, creates a sense of reality. At this stage the peasant is now able to see the man in picture “as a creative and a re-creative being who through work, constantly alters reality” (Freire, *Education* 63). Such an encounter puts the interpreter’s/peasant’s opinions into question. The peasant now does not see the man in the picture as a helpless automaton, but rather as a subject who is submitted to a world and to a process of transformation. In Gadamerian terms, such a hermeneutic dialogue, in which the interpreter/peasant suspends her or his unproductive prejudices and successfully arrives at an authentic understanding of the picture, constitutes a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer 273) and conscientization for Freire. Somatic agency locates and re-locates critical consciousness. The participants in this program are able to view their previous lives embedded within different stories. Stories of their childhood, stories of their first crime, stories about their first love, stories of their loss. The performative act creates a safe space to question some of the “who, what, why, when and how” that have not been explored in years.

### **Bringing *Balmiki* through Somatic Movement**

The performative act is *noesis*; it is an active, intentional process, directed towards understanding. Here performative arts are an integral part of Indian culture – music, theatre, dance, recitation, painting, sculpture and sports through artist led production - oriented workshops. To unmask the various strata of domination in the prison system, Freirean critical pedagogy necessitates embedding inmates in music, art, theater workshops in West-Bengal.

The first step in starting the journey towards self-transformation process entails a change in the way society perceives prisoners, as pointed by B.D. Sharma. According to him the world outside believed that criminals are like *rakshasha* (demons) and, very little was known about the inner transformative potential of these criminals. Roy’s project was fluid and adaptive for the participants of this project. Roy, a hugely successful *Odissi* dancer did not stress on teaching the participants classical dance form. Her

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objective was to direct a movement that would let inmates understand the synergy between their body, mind and soul. She recognized the raw energy, and channelized this energy through music and dance.

Nevertheless, from the inception, Roy struggled against Indian society's stigma regarding male dancers, as the bias was framed with the narrative that the male dancer needs to be entwined with the feminine and masculine sides that is broadly insular in a patriarchal society like India. Men are stigmatized as "queer" if they are seen performing with *ghungroos* (anklets with bells), dance costume and makeup. About eighty-percent of the inmates were male in the prison, and the idea of teaching them dance was met with resistance (Mukherjee and Manna 533). Roy points out that Indian construction of particularly masculine sense of power excluded a feminine form of dance, and *Kalaripayattu*, one of the most ancient form of martial art in Kerala, became a more acceptable dance form to break this stereotype. The dance *Kalaripayattu* encodes a complex Brahmanic (Hindu) system of correspondences between religious narratives, cosmological beliefs, cultural epistemologies, and social systems, which are experienced in a detailed transformative bodily practice emphasizing coordination between breath, mind, and movement. The practice is intended to change the participant's somatic, emotional, and mental state as well as to instruct on relationships in the universe. Roy shows that that because toxic masculinity lives off its media constructions, other less one-dimensional and more self-reflexive representations of what it means to be a man could be seen in her dance drama (George 2904).

The flowing movements knocking, kicking, grappling preset forms released a form of raw resistance against societal forms. Roy stresses dance evolves as a theater of raw energy, a gender-neutral space where violence and aggression are acted out with movement. The relationship of *Kalaripayattu* to masculinity is Roy's entrance into teaching a predominantly male dominated participant in the Kolkata Correctional Home. *Kalaripayattu*, is a very significant martial art that has existed in Kerala for centuries. During the feudal times, rulers maintained martial warriors who often had to give up their lives in honor of their masters. Besides self-defense, it preaches that participants should be capable of winning over the enemy without weapons. This is very rigorous, unlike other martial arts, one can become a master of it, only after many years of training (George 2905).

*Kalaripayattu* creates a pathway to the meaning of embodiment. In *Brahmanic* cosmology, the universe is created and destroyed through dance, Shiva's dance. The conceptual mode that would presuppose that the physical world is created by dance, and is supported *Brahmanic* cosmology would create not only the ability to see how matter unfolds, but it would also give meaning to the sensations of movement, the rhythm, muscular movement, weight, degree of force. This is no less semiotic than creation in words and letters, and the performance now has a life of its own.

In addition to *Kalaripayattu* the performative acts also included various folk and traditional dances of India such as *Chhau* dance, *Baul* songs of Bengal, *Bhangra* of Punjab, *Dandiya* of Gujarat, *Kathkali* of Kerala, folk dances of Uttar Pradesh and other traditional dances from different corners of the country. After an 8-month long workshop, the participants started to develop a sense of purpose, and their collective effort led to their first production called "Brotherhood Beyond Boundaries". The production focuses on the unity of diverse cultures, religion and communities. (Mukherjee 18).

The next set of dance dramas were provincial mythical stories of marginalization. Rabindranath Tagore's musical drama *Balmiki Pratibha*, which traces the transformation of Ratnakar from a dacoit to one of the most revered sage in Hinduism, *Balmiki*, the creator of Ramayana, the Hindu religious epic. The story of *Balmiki* symbolizes the existence of the good and evil in human beings, and the tremendous power of the human spirit to crush evil. Provincial spiritual symbols foster a standard of primitive literary/historical power and authenticity, and thereby the transformation of *Ratankar*, the dacoit into the sage *Balmiki* creates an authentic connection with the inmates (Mukherjee 19)..

*Balmiki Pratibha* was composed in 1881, by Rabindranath Tagore. It was staged in front of eminent literary personalities like Bamkin Chandra Chatterjee, Gooroodas Banerjee and Hariprasad Shastri. Alokana Roy chose Tagore's dance drama to show the barriers and restraints of the marginalized. Ratankar, the dacoit was ostracized by the society, living on the fringes of society. Ratankar, the notorious dacoit was a devotee of Goddess *Kali* (symbol of power). In order to appease Goddess *Kali*, Ratankar would sacrifice a life to be blessed with absolute power and strength. *Saraswati*, the Goddess of true knowledge, wisdom and creativity was pained with his arrogance and ignorance. To teach Ratnakar a lesson she takes the form of a little girl and pretends



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to be lost in the forest. Subsequently, the dacoits prey on the little girl and takes her hostage, to be sacrificed by Ratnakar. The helplessness and innocent plea of the little girl moves Ratnakar. Overcome by emotions, he sets the girl free from his captivity and aborts his sacrifice of human life. Having committed an act of kindness, a virtue unknown to him, he starts to dwell in this new found feeling (Mukherjee 20).

Eventually he loses interest in hunting forest animals and merciless killings, he comes across tribal bird-hunters, who were about to hunt down a pair of birds perched on a branch. He tries to persuade them not to kill the pair of innocent birds in love, but fails. The birds are hunted down, in a fit of desperate anguish he curses the bird-hunters in Sanskrit, the language of the Gods, unknown to him till then. The eternal Goddess pleased with his absolute surrender blesses him with the knowledge and power to create music and literature. He transforms into sage *Balmiki*, the legendary author of the epic Ramayana.

*Balmiki Pratibha* is a unique endeavor not merely for as a symbol of the participant's journey but it is a symbol of culture therapy itself, a movement that has been embraced by the participants as a means of salvation. It emphasizes on the complete self-reconstruction of their identities.

Roy used the *chhau* dance form. This dance form is a semi-classical Indian dance with martial and folk traditions. The dance is traditionally an all males troupe, regionally celebrated particularly during spring of every year, and may be a syncretic dance form that emerged from a fusion of classical Hindu dances and the traditions of ancient regional tribes. The stories enacted by Chhau dancers include those from the Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. This dance brings together people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in a festive and religious spirit. Roy experimented with colloquial rustic vocals and cast the participants, as well as the staff in the correctional home in lead roles (Sarkar 171).

*Mokshagati* is a unique experimental presentation of a film that runs in the background, and the stage performance happens in the foreground. The story is inspired by the transformation of Emperor Asoka, from a merciless conqueror to an ambassador of peace and benefactor of humanity. The story of a merciless warrior king is narrated by Bharati Amma who is mother to all Indians. The king's mindless wars to satiate his greed for conquest, cost count-

less lives. Bharati Amma's repeated pleas to win hearts rather than win battles, meets unacceptance by the adamant and insensitive king. On one such conquest he wages war on the peace-loving son of Bharati Amma, Kalinga. Unaware of the king's advances Kalinga and his small hamlet is lost in the confines of nature and music, creating a serene picture of an undiluted tribal life. None the less they being fierce tribal fighters, put up a bold resistance to the sudden attack. However, they succumb to the massive impact of power and manslaughter. Bharati Amma is aggrieved by the loss of her other son and condemns the king's conquest. Seeing the plight of his mother, the king for the first time notices the colossal destruction and losses suffered due to war. He realizes his mistake that cannot be undone. Overcome with guilt and shame his heart longs for redemption. He releases the prisoner of war, allows all religion and communal co-existence, and reconstructs the destroyed. But in vain his heart does not feel at peace and he turns to self-confinement. Seeing the agony of guilt and repentance, Bharati Amma in her incarnation as Mokshada leads him to salvation. She brings the dead Kalinga back to life and asks him to forgive the king as well as release himself from the hurt. Kalinga complies to Mokshada's request and appears to the king in confinement, to forgive and offer the saffron robe of peace. The moment of forgiveness by the wronged erased the guilt and ego of the king, surrendering him to Mokshada and embracing renunciation. The mindless turbulence of power humbles into the rhythm of life and peace (Mukherjee 22).

*Dhrubajyoti Tumi Jishu* is based on the life of the Son of God – Jesus, the script is entirely composed of songs by Tagore, which narrates the biblical story and becomes the lyrical dialogues as well. Originally created for the Bible Society of India, this production is an attempt to infuse the lives of the participants as well as that of the audience with the message of love and forgiveness by Jesus Christ. The dance-drama highlights the pivotal incidents in the life of Jesus Christ (Mukherjee 23).

A complex web of embedded meaning underly the simple mythological tales. The provincial mythological stories reinvent the concept of sin, greed, pride, mercy, forgiveness and solace. The somatic movement in these narratives empowers them from docile to empowered existence. The moral frailties are seen as an existential crisis, embarking them on a journey towards self-transformation. The etymological meaning of transcendence is derived from the Latin words for 'climb' (ascend) and

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'beyond' (trans), meaning the act of acknowledging and going beyond the norms (Transcendence n.d). The suspension of disbelief and identifying oneself as existential beings within the web and flow of life, creates a space understanding old beliefs and paving the path for new beliefs. Roy's Culture Therapy creates that space that move participants from a space of unproductive prejudices, to a place of awareness and transformation.

### Conclusion

"Brotherhood beyond Boundaries" has been staged four times, *Balmiki Pratibha* has been performed sixty-six times, *Mokshagati* has been staged fourteen times, and *Dhrubojyoti Tumi Jishu* has been staged five times. In each of these dance dramas, *conscientization* has been achieved. This is power of a performance. The provincial rituals, music, symbols evoke the emotions of the inmates. Somatic agency is created by the power of provincial symbols in the dance-drama of Roy. These symbols do not just "stand for" for representative meaning. The dance form, the music, the themes creates a sense of agency in the inmates. The meaning is constitutive, as it goes beyond the referential power of words. Somatic agency does not need words or language to create transformation, it is intrinsic to human existence. Roy chose stories that were relevant historically and culturally enabling marginalized bodies to (re)claim their bodies from politics of bureaucracy. Roy's effort has sensitized society towards these hitherto neglected, marginalized inmates residing in correctional homes and ostracized by the society at large.

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**Body Love Stories: Creating Transformation and Sustainability Through Embodied Storytelling**

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*Body Love Stories: Creating Transformation and Sustainability Through Embodied Storytelling is a contemporary dance film project that investigates the relationship one has to one's body through the body's response to texts.*

*Keywords:* Embodied storytelling, dance, transformation, sustainability

This project is a continuation of my dance research in generating movement from text as a means of storytelling. I developed a method of generating movement from text through movement improvisation rounds inspired by Okwui Okpokwasili, a multidisciplinary performer and choreographer who uses dance, spoken word, song, text, and film to convey ideas of culture and body politics by using methods of extracting text from interviews and durational movement practices to generate language. Okpokwasili's interest in how "the body is a site where we can imagine differently... moving forward differently" and using durational practices and performances to initiate transformation (Okpokwasili, 2021) align with my own research interest in embodied storytelling as a means of activism.

For this project, seven dancers created and recorded text through conversations about body image, which they then improvised to in multiple rounds to generate movement and develop a range of text interpretations through the body.

As we watch the film, I would like to invite you to think about themes that arise for you.

What is the dancing/movement communicating? What is the film communicating, and what is the spoken word communicating? Is there anything you can relate to? Are there instances, memories, feelings that are coming up? Is it shifting, opening, or changing any of your perspectives?

Please watch the movie here:

[https://youtu.be/VfS\\_wDvR4gg?si=FIMJvZKGAVcgevzm](https://youtu.be/VfS_wDvR4gg?si=FIMJvZKGAVcgevzm)

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### Body Love Stories: Film Transcript

*“My relationship is in flux. [It] has always been in flux. It’s a journey, ever-changing and in influx... from day to day, and [it] has its ups and downs... Depending on if I am able to take care of my body in ways that help it to feel good. I’m still getting to know my body and how to take care of it. I’m still on that journey. As I’ve gotten older, my relationship has become more positive. I’ve become more in tune with my body. I am more grateful for my body.*

*At times, my perception doesn’t match what my body is. It’s directly tied to my mental state for that day, for that moment. My body reflects when I don’t feel mentally strong; I see the weakness of it all. And I question if I’ll ever grow out of the negative relationship I have with my body. I feel like I need to be productive to be of value, to be worth something. What do I have left if I don’t have my strength?*

*Raised in denial of the body for women... I feel like I still need breasts. These features that are read as woman; I’m still wanting to read as a woman. Soft, curvy, but not too curvy... I’m supposed to have a big butt and boobs, childbearing hip. Expectations of what it means to be a woman, and how a woman should look, and how a woman should act... Being a woman, being a woman of color, the way my body looks in these spaces, therefore shifts the way I move.*

*I don’t fully trust my body in a lot of ways. It seemed like my body had betrayed me; the more it changed, the less connected I felt. I was very aware of my body shape and how different it was. I was always taller and thicker, so it was hard growing up. Because of my skin color, because of how I look... Plus size, diverse body... 53% of American girls say they are unhappy with their bodies. 78%, by the time they reach 17... Looking in the mirror and realizing I had a tummy, I would suck it in. And I would think, I don’t look like them. I’m not tall, slender, [or] thin. What is the perfect weight I have to be to be normal? And who defines who is plus size? People of all sizes tend to report dissatisfaction with their bodies.*

*Instead of trying to make my body fit a certain mold, I felt like I could create a different mold. This is my body. This is the only one I have, so love yourself... I chose to work with what I have and honor what I have. I’m not defined by a body type. My body*

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*is only one thing of me. I'm more than what I look like physically. A real woman, complete with stretch marks...*

*I had notions of having to look a certain way to be healthy, but that's not true. Weight and size are independent of health. People come in all shapes and sizes, and nobody can tell by looking at another person whether that person is a good, trustworthy, compassionate being. A shape is simply a shape. I feel lucky to have been thin all my life, so then I question: why does this feel like luck? A shape is simply a shape.*

*The idea of being grounded in who you are as a person. Finding the comfort in the discomfort of 'this is it, this is my body...'*



*Dancer Barbara McAlister, MFA.  
Image from the final round of filming.*

*Constantly shedding skin, to not care about what people see, think, or assume about me. I don't give a fuck! This is what I have, and if it's not for you, that's fine.*

*It is ingrained in us to have expectations on what we should look like. But you have to tell yourself societal views of perfection are a lie. Realizing the expectations [that] you put on yourself, or*



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*that society puts on you, are a lie as well... Your body is yours to love, and your place in this world is not dependent on fitting into any unrealistic ideal. I think it suppresses the potential of who we can be. And maybe the problem isn't Me. Maybe the problem is the culture. So, I will not have my body policed and controlled by other people, and in that way, by all means, let me be selfish. So the next time you look in the mirror and have the impulse to judge your body, or you look at another person and have the impulse to judge their body, remember that childlike sense of wonder. After all, you have nothing to lose but your shame.*

*I seek those in my life that accept me for me. A community of people to get through life with... People who say, you don't have to worry about your body, you're beautiful, [and] I love you the way you are. Find a good support system; find someone who appreciates you, your personality, soul, and mind. But know that you can also be your own support system.*

*The physicality of joy! I exist through moving, and moving is how I experience being within my body. When I move, I move from different places. Shaking my waistline, shaking my butt, wiggling hips, really digging into the Earth and grooving... I can do all of this with my body. Power, strength, endurance.*



*Dancer Annalise Boydston, MFA.  
Image from the final round of filming.*

*Accepting yourself, as long as you look a certain way, is not self-love. It's self-destruction. I'm free at last. I do not have to apologize for the way that I look. Power! Accepting as is ... To actually see it all without judgment ... To see it as one good body. I am grateful for this body and all of its scars, and all the ways it continues to support me. It is my home, and it deserves love. It's constantly telling yourself you are beautiful, you are worthy, you are magnificent. What my body is able to do, what it's able to handle, is really extraordinary, and I can't take that for granted. Find what nourishes you, what fills your cup, what makes you feel good, so your body feels good, and mentally you feel good. What nourishes you?*

*It was a breakdown for a breakthrough. You is you, no matter if you're black, white, brown; no matter if you're gay, straight, lesbian, fat, skinny. Just don't care! Don't care about what others have to say or think because, at the end of the day, the only one that should really care is you. That is the power that we have, and we sabotage ourselves when we decide to give that power to others. The time has come for us to reclaim our bodies. Shift the way we see ourselves, and that's when we can turn to others and see the light in everyone else."*

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As a dance maker, I strive to develop relatable art that has the potential for the audiences to see themselves in the work. I believe dance making and dance viewing are ways to make sense of the world, are ways of seeing ourselves in the world, and are ways to create a sense of meaning from our experiences in the world. With this in mind, I created the original dance film entitled Body Love Stories.

As I mentioned before, Body Love Stories is a continuation of my dance research in generating movement from text as a means of storytelling. Through the medium of dance film, a hybrid art form that combines movement with film, I further investigated this method of storytelling specifically as it relates to individuals telling the stories of their relationships with their bodies through movement.

My intention was to create an artistic process and film that could help us better understand our relationships with our bodies through movement and text. And this is because during the pandemic and entering graduate school, I gained a lot of weight, weight that I still carry today. I was in a place where I didn't rec-

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ognize my body, and because I didn't recognize my body, I didn't always recognize myself. I felt a loss of myself, and it reminded me of my pregnancy and the feeling of losing autonomy over my body. I didn't like that place or feeling, so I thought that if I forced myself to talk about my body in a positive way, jumping headfirst, somehow, I would create an acceptance of my body.

So, I proposed a method of storytelling developed through my bodily responses to body-positive texts in a choreography course in 2021. I researched sources to pull body-positive texts that included podcasts, interviews, Facebook posts, and articles and extracted the words and phrases that most stood out to me and compiled them together. I then recorded myself reciting the body-positive texts. I played the recording as I improvised movement to the text following my first impulses and reactions and videoed the process to see those reactions. I did this for 10 rounds, and after each round, I noticed patterns and movements that I would go back to for specific phrases or words.

My final embodied outcome was the recording of that 10th round, and this is a short excerpt from that final round.

(Short film transcript)

*I wanted to learn how to be vulnerable in a healthy way and be naked in life, literally and figuratively.*

*To actually see it all at once without judgment. To see it as a good body, I dance and have sex and do yoga and all the things I was convinced my body could not do.*

*I'm grateful for this body and all of its scars and all the ways that it continues to support me despite years of abuse. It is my home, and it deserves love.*

Of course, forcing myself into accepting my body didn't quite work. I'm still not at a place where I entirely love my body. I still miss my former body, but what I did discover was a dance-making method of generating movement from text through the body's response in rounds.

The rounds allowed me to get comfortable with the process, space, and text, and I could quickly anticipate what text was coming next as the rounds progressed while still allowing my body to respond spontaneously to what I was hearing as opposed to setting the movement. This method of the body responding to text in

rounds created a spectrum of literal to abstract interpretations of the text. I believe that this spectrum of interpretation could allow space for the viewers to relate and respond to the movement and the texts in different ways, therefore becoming more accessible and meaningful for the individual.

Learning from this previous research, I brought in seven dancers to participate in the creative process of generating movement from text, this time based on their relationship to their bodies. Instead of finding text from outside sources, they generated the text themselves through recorded conversations with me. In the first session, coming in one at a time, the dancers were asked to talk about their relationship with their bodies, how this relationship had changed over time, how society and media influenced their relationship, and how they viewed and valued this relationship and any other relatable factors. These conversations were recorded and replayed for the dancers.

In the second session, the dancers improvised movements while their conversations were being played in the background. Their text was edited down from a one-hour conversation to 20 minutes. The dancers were encouraged to follow their first impulses and reactions to generate the movement. The movement improvisation process was videoed to see those reactions. This process of improvisation to their texts went on for two rounds, which, at that point, was too long. The purpose of the rounds was for the dancers to have multiple opportunities to interpret the text, get comfortable with the process, and start developing patterns in their movements. Therefore, the text had to be edited down again.

In the third session, the text was edited down to six minutes, and the dancers improvised for five rounds. At this point, I started to see patterns emerging and the interpretations of the text starting to have layers. It was going where I wanted the process to go, but it still wasn't quite there yet.

So, we had a fourth session where the text was cut down to four minutes, and the dancers improvised for nine rounds. On the ninth round, I recorded their embodiment, and this became the final footage for the dance film. So, in my findings, I found that shorter responses to the text in multiple rounds were more successful than longer interpretations of the text with not as many rounds.

I chose to film from four different angles and layer the footage to

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give a sense of complexity and highlight the ever-changing feelings one can have toward body image. To create the soundscape, I extracted the text from the video from the voice recordings of our conversations and compiled a non-linear narrative, a poem of sorts.

I printed the script (narrative) and divided it into 160 different lines. The dancers then drew 23 lines each out of a box at random. Those became the lines that they would recite in the film. The underlying music composition for the film and recording of the texts was done by Brittany Padilla, a musician from Texas Woman's University.

After completing this project, I don't completely accept my body as it is today. My relationship with my body changes day to day, moment to moment. At times, I love it, and other times, I resent it. But what this project did do for me once I brought in other people was it made me feel like I was not alone in my struggles. For all seven dancers, similar themes kept coming up.

Some ideas were even expressed verbatim by different dancers, such as "My relationship with my body is in flux." Common themes such as *your relationship with your body is a journey*, *good support systems are important for how you view yourself* and *your body*, *social gender norms and how they appear in the body*, *clothes*, *the body is political*, kept coming up between all seven dancers.

Finding these commonalities, recurring themes, and acknowledgments that we all have bodies and we are all dealing with them through the context of our society brought both me and the dancers comfort. The process itself created empathy, understanding, support, and, ultimately, community between myself and the other dancers through this transformative experience. I believe that this is the beauty of storytelling through dance. It has the potential to bring the overwhelming aspects of life into conceivable notions. It can render both the conscious and subconscious parts of life's experiences into coherent symbology. Using dance as a shaping and symbol-making tool, this artistic process and dance film strives to better understand our surroundings and experiences, and in this case, our experiences with our bodies.

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ISSN 2372-6350