

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Ryan Collerd

How is Safety Felt in the Body

by Kalila Kingsford Smith

Darcy Lyons, director and producer of *Proceed With Caution*, introduces the work with a trigger warning, specifically that they will show news footage from 9/11. With dancers Emma Elsmo, Gabi Montoya, Olivia Naegele, and Sammi Rosenfeld, Lyons combines projections and spoken word, recorded and live, with sophisticated choreography. Weaving definitions of trust and global security with personal stories about safety breaches, *Proceed With Caution* offers multiple angles on what it means to feel secure in your body and in society.

The four dancers, wearing grey shirts and pants accented with neon orange and green (costumes designed by Cybele Moon), dart through each other. I think of personal space; what is a safe distance from another person? “These are the perimeters of our safe spaces.” The recorded words occasionally describe how we are supposed to read the dancers’ movements; in these moments, I wish the dance alone would speak.

Soothing jazz plays as the dancers link hands and thread their heads and legs through spaces created by their closeness. “The foundation of security is both global trust and personal trust.” There is nothing ominous in the tone, except the expectation that soon my comfort will be breached.

The lights shift. Stark. Elsmo says, “Welcome aboard flight 382 to Atlanta...” She speaks the flight attendant script while the others dance behind. If you blink, you might miss their gestural references to flight-attendant-choreography: swiping hands over legs to “secure the seatbelt across your lap;” easeful undulations of the spine to “breathe normally” in the oxygen mask. A clip plays from [Virgin Airline’s pre-flight music video](#), lightening the mood before the arrival of the next section.

The dancers slowly turn around and lay on the ground as actual news footage from 9/11 flashes on the scrim. Soon after, the still image

of [the falling man](#) is displayed and each dancer takes a turn as soloist, twisting in and out of the floor, accompanied by what sound like journal entries describing the image. The spoken material is trivial against the singular gravity of the image. Again, I wish their bodies could speak without these words.

The text and dance are more richly tied when we hear Lyons interviewing each dancer about their experience of personal and global safety. Particularly salient is Rosenfeld's story about being an elementary school counselor having to practice active shooter drills for fourth graders. In preparation for the real threat, she attends school thinking, "Is this the day that I protect my students with my own body?" This phrase repeats; the dancers, in a row, lock arms, pivot, and release.

I trust my body will carry me through my day without a security breach. *Proceed With Caution* reminds me that bodies are soft, mortal.

[Proceed With Caution](#), Lyons and Tigers, Performance Garage, 2019 Fringe Festival, September 20-22.

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