

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Nicole Bindler

In This Moment, 'Rich with Terror and Vitality'

by Nicole Bindler

As unprepared as many of us feel for the upheaval caused by the global pandemic and the uncertainty that lies ahead, those of us who have been engaged in embodied and performance practices have unique skills and opportunities to share in this moment. These notes from three weeks of my dancing, crying, and dreaming at home are snapshots of the wisdom several movement-based artists, healers, and activists are harnessing in this strange new world.

In an online conversation that they've titled, *Radical Reimaginings*, [Jaamil Olawale Kosoko](#) (NY/NJ/PA) says, "We have been training for this moment." This moment, rich with "terror and vitality," asks us to "reimagine the future together." Jaamil calls on each artist by name to share their feelings and ideas. They greet everyone affectionately as "dear one." Many of the participants contemplate the flimsiness of the preexisting structures for artists, and the ease and speed with which everything fell apart. One person asks, "Why would we want things to go back to the way they were?"

These days I dance and cry in my South Philadelphia home office. I spend hours watching the afternoon light slide across the wall and see aspects of the room from previously unmapped vantage points, such as the view from the floor of the dark underside of my mother's antique chair. My skin slides and catches on the uneven, broken grains of 100-year-old pine floor. I climb out my office window onto the roof where I take calls in the sunshine. Neighbors across the alley wave to me as they take out their trash.

My office is full with the voices of class facilitators, their music, and the din from their houses. Each square on my laptop screen offers a window into a participant's home with its own dance of light, laundry, and animals. One teacher gets knocked off of a call. Another's mic gets lost in her shirt. Music unexpectedly cuts off. Someone calls in on two devices, forgets to mute, and the double sound from their home pulses and echoes. I see some of the same faces from across the world in various classes on different days.

Deirdre Morris, Vivek Patel, and I grapple with transitioning the [Consent Culture in Contact Improvisation Symposium](#) scheduled for April 18-19 to an online format. While working on the project I find myself staring out the window for many minutes at a time. Then I come back to myself having forgotten what I had set out to do.

[Elissa Weinzimmer](#) (New York City) offers us a lesson on how to cultivate a silent, effortless inhale in her *Release Your Voice* course that I've been enrolled in for a couple of months. She also explains to us why we can't get our work done right now, referencing [polyvagal theory](#). The most advantageous state for brain function is in the ventral vagal, or "stay and play" state, which involves a calm, focused attention that requires a sense of safety and connectedness. In the current heightened, sympathetic nervous system, "fight or flight" state, and/or dorsal vagal "freeze" state that many of us experience now, it is difficult to think clearly or complete tasks. She implores us to consider that our primary job right now is to self- and co-regulate our nervous systems by finding comfort and connection with others. Otherwise, we won't be mentally equipped to handle the challenges that await us.

I hear news of the first [death of a friend](#) related to this crisis and the first permanent closing of a dance space, Meg Wolfe's Los Angeles-based [we live in space](#). This is just the beginning.

I notice among some people in the somatics scene a tendency to jump to gratitude without acknowledging the existence of grief. I contemplate this phenomenon of [spiritual bypassing](#) through a [performance video](#) in which I animate my belly button who gives voice to ideas I might not otherwise be able to say.

In her *BodyMind Dancing* class, [Martha Eddy](#) (New York City) leads us through developmental movement patterns including a homologous, symmetrical pushing sequence in which we rhythmically undulate between standing and plank. Through the muscularity of the activity, I notice myself returning to my body from a dissociated state.

[Diana Thielen](#) (Berlin) teaches yoga from their home with a languid cat in the frame. They guide us in and out of various lunges with anatomical precision, and they remind us that although we're all moving together in unison some of us are beginning our days and others are winding down.

In her class, [Relational Intelligence](#), Nita Little (Everett, WA) invites us to dance in the unused spaces of our room. I feel my senses sharpen. She asks us, "Where are the places in my being that I do not enter? What's within that I'm not noticing?" Live voice, guitar, and percussion played by Nico Tower unifies the participants across great distances.

[Tada Hozumi](#) (Montreal) leads a session on [Cultural Somatics](#) in which they invite us to draw circles in the spaces in front of and behind our tailbone, belly, diaphragm, heart, throat, third eye, and crown. They remind us that we are the descendants of survivors of plagues and the memory of that resides in our ancestral bodies.

[Ryuta Iwashita](#) (New Orleans) leads a [Contemplative Dance Practice](#). They ask us to unmute ourselves so that we can hear each other move: footsteps, voices, babies, sliding bodies against floors and carpets, open windows with wind and birdsong outside. Someone is crying. They heave and sniffle as they watch others dance. They don't look away from the camera. Their tears stream down their face without apology.

The highlight of my days are when comedic performer, [Morgan Bassichis](#) (New York City), posts a sparkly quarantine on their [Instagram account](#) featuring lyrics such as:

"I know it's weird to go to bed now."

"I don't know how this day will be different from yesterday."

"Who ate all my cornichons?"

“I’ll tell you the secret. Take a shower. Everything changes in the shower.” “I know we’re all telling each other tips, what to do, you should get outta bed, you should put your food on a plate, you should change your outfit.”

“I really wanted to share something special for the special ones of you who are the ones who are really orchestrating our collective murder... Our grandmothers will eat you alive.”

“One, two, three, clemency, everyone free. Four, five, six that the fix that we demand. Seven, eight, nine now, now, now, now, now is the time.”

Protesting during a time of physical distancing occurs as I attend an action organized by [#No215Jail Coalition](#) that [disrupts one of Mayor Kenney's press conferences](#) to “demand immediate decarceration of those held in PA and Philadelphia jails, prisons, and immigrant detention centers, a moral imperative given the widespread and lethal damage that COVID-19 will inflict due to inaction.” Over 100 people, safely quarantined in their honking cars encircle City Hall with signs taped to their roofs that read #FreeOurPeople. After ninety minutes of swirling and blaring I receive text messages that some people’s car horns have broken. The organizers play Beyonce’s *Freedom* on a loudspeaker as disoriented police officers issue tickets for double parking.

The words from Jaamil’s *Radical Reimaginings* are present with me as I witness my colleagues and comrades invent new ways of being alive together, “We have been training for this moment.” This moment, rich with “terror and vitality,” asks us to “reimagine the future together.”

By Nicole Bindler
April 9, 2020