

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: riffnote on Tenor

16 GIFs Experienced in the Break/Room

by Ellen Chenoweth

The Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP) hosted four free panels entitled “BREAK/ROOM Conversations.” Originally scheduled for June 9 and 10, the June 9 panels were rescheduled for June 11 to give time and space for George Floyd’s memorial services and to honor “the movement his death has ignited.” Each panel, hosted on Zoom and also streamed live on Facebook, included four speakers and a moderator. Framed around “Recovery/Transformation” on the first day and “Here/Now” on the second, the discussion topics included stabilization strategies, funding, and future visioning for arts organizations.

I appreciate that APAP is offering free programming alive to the current contexts. As much of our professional lives in the performing arts are currently experienced online, responding to the conversations with an abundance of two-dimensional GIFs seems fitting. I offer this non-comprehensive, light-hearted coverage of the discussions in a spirit of love for my colleagues in this amazing field and in homage to the two cultural critics, Chris Cloud and Lea Devon Sorrentino, who responded in [this format](#) to a conference held at the Walker Art Museum in 2015.

- That time Christopher K. Morgan gave introductory remarks that included an acknowledgement that we were in our homes, a deep land acknowledgement, a call for equity, a shout-out to front-line workers of all kinds, a statement of BLM solidarity, and a moment of silence for those who have died in the pandemic, and it was so gracious and holistic, and you felt how much everyone was holding in that moment:



- When you see your friends in the chat box of a big zoom:



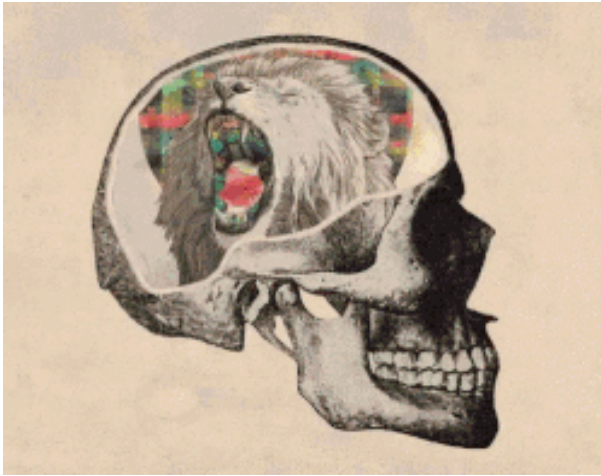
- When Tara Aisha Willis said we're all late to the party. "Welcome, if you haven't been [here]. What do we do next now that we're in the door is the thing that matters" and everyone brings their own tools to the dismantling party:



- When Maurine Knighton told us we must reject “the idea of the exceptionalism of the arts” and instead break out of our bubble and move towards others with shared concerns about “low pay, affordable housing, portability of benefits”:



- When the backdrop for the conversation is that your imagination has been expanding exponentially over the past two weeks:



- That time Maurine Knighton reminded the audience that we don't have to be comfortable all the time. "We're in an interesting moment where we're broken open and can embrace the discomfort. The pandemic got us nice and ready.... We have learned to be in the liminal space. We have that opportunity as well with discussions around race. Some white colleagues tell me they don't feel comfortable talking about race. Just be uncomfortable, it's ok, we're adults. We can afford to be uncomfortable":



- When Liz Lerman called for us to "move the white money" and brought up the idea of independent reparations:



- That moment when Marc Bamuthi Joseph had a James Baldwin candle by his side and talked about “the level of quiet that the nation had to endure in order to hear the cries coming from Minneapolis, in order to hear the cries coming from Georgia, to hear the cries coming out of Central Park.... No sports, no vacations, no distractions, lots of people not working. It took stillness and silence in the last three months to make the last two weeks possible”:



- When some of the white panelists were asked to name their privilege and just couldn't quite do it (yet! I think we white people can and must strengthen this muscle):



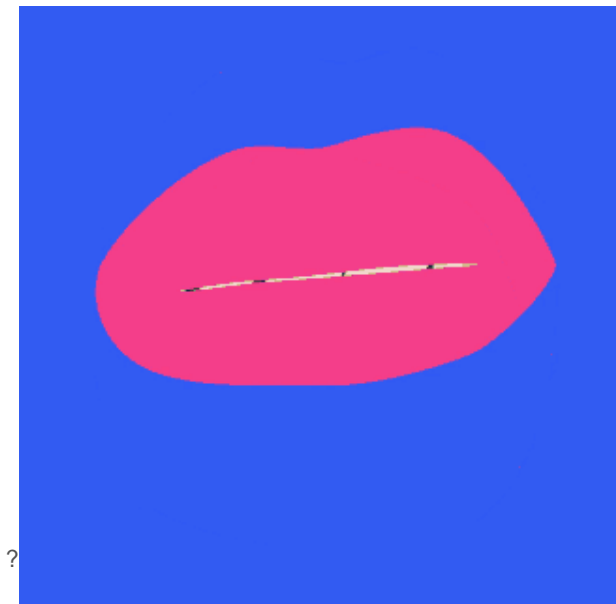
- That mic drop when Ronee Penoi offered these final thoughts as principles for moving forward: “decolonized leadership, publicly transparent budgeting, community accountability, divesting from fossil fuels, right relationship to land, and history”:



- That time when a number of your brilliant, admired colleagues and friends are sharing so much wisdom and are also on similar panels next week at other national convenings, when your field has a deep bench of incredible thinkers and the current circumstances require as much collective brain-power as we can muster:

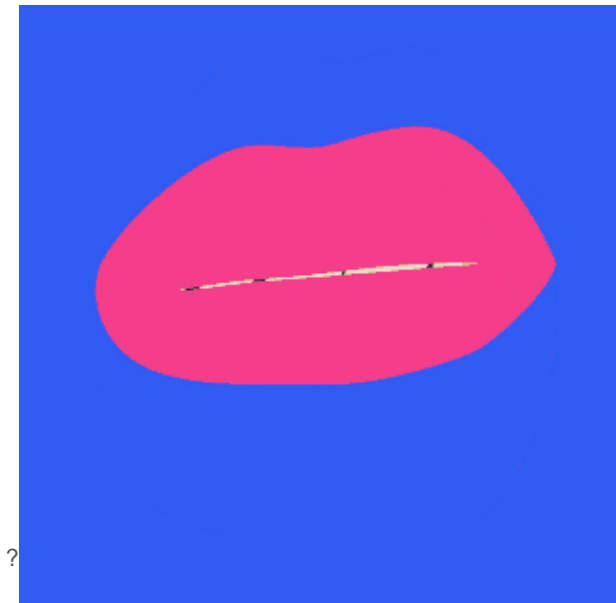


- When you wondered if, while we're all thinking about radical innovation, new structures, different metrics of success, and reimagining our fields, we should include some voices who haven't been part of the old failures or structures or ways of thinking:

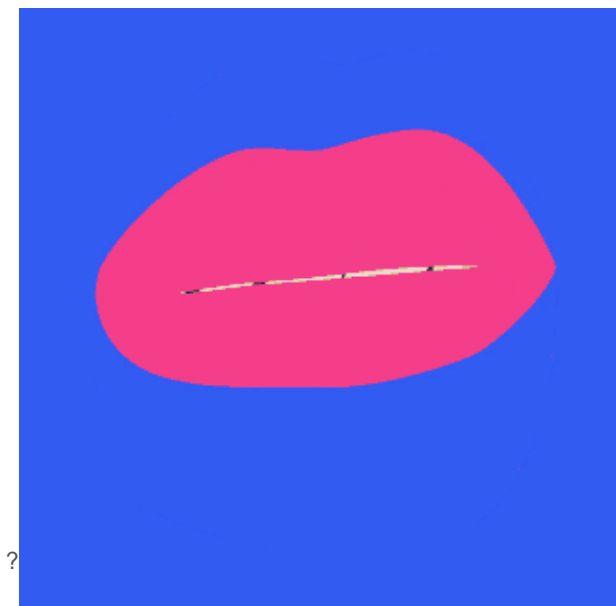


Their imaginations may have an advantage on those of us who have built lives within the previous patterns.

- When you remembered another recent Zoom, the [Dance Union Town Hall](#), and you missed the passion, energy, and freshness you felt and heard from recent graduate Christine Wyatt:



- When the revolution in the streets is being led by young people, and you think your field might take a note from that:



- When the chat is so hot you can't keep up with it and the main discussion at the same time:



- That time Jawole Willa Jo Zollar encouraged white people fighting systemic racism and less accustomed to doing the emotional labor, “don't jump out when it gets hot, stay in there, stay in the frying pan”:



She then compared anti-racist work to the work of being a dancer, just like you can't take one workshop or read one book: “I can't just take a workshop on pliés and think oh, done with pliés! It's foundational. I have to build the muscles that will sustain me to do this work and build the community that we will sustain together to do this work.”

*I avoided using any [digital blackface](#) in the making of this list.

Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP), in partnership with Sozo Creative, [BREAK/ROOM Conversations](#), Zoom and Facebook, June 10-11.

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