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PAR and Embodiment: Dance, Corporeality, and the Body in Research

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Corporeality implies something real, something firm, something imbued with animation, something that can resonate and interact with its environment ... even in stillness.

The unusually long gestation of this issue begs for some public disclosures. The call for papers about movement, dance, corporeality, and the body in research yielded a record number of initial submissions. It seems many in our academic communities craved a shared venue to discuss this topic! Through this call, we affirmed that there are as many ways to frame embodiment as there are bodies. In my role as guest curator of this issue, I prioritized some crucial qualifying attributes.

My primary guiding qualifier: *the works and their creators were reflexive about their positionality, potential ethnocentricity, cosmology, ontology, and embodiment paradigm.* This meant that the work conducted analysis from a personal perspective, not attempting to draw with broad strokes in speaking for all bodies, or even the art world specifically. A work could certainly reference a specific cannon or genre of artmaking, but not generalize claims on behalf of others exploring the same topic. In discussion with the editorial team at *PARTake*, we desired to pointedly challenge Eurocentric conventions and assumptions about how the body is defined, situated, interrogated, and discussed—in relationship with all variables and other bodies. I believe that it's time to stop awarding ourselves agency over the embodied experience of others in academia. In other words, how might we shift our pedagogical and research methods in order to offer explorational guidance that is imbued with humility and regard for the insights of experienced devotees of movement within all cultures? Please indulge me by considering this set of expanded definitions:

A New Definition of Dance:

Meaningful patterned movement, as defined by the practitioner.

A New Definition of Movement Technique:

The ability to replicate movement with increasing ease, efficiency and proficiency.

In discussing performance as research in this issue, I have chosen to define “performance” also as the intentional display of meaningful patterned movement—and within a *global* context. It is not enough to assume that the stage (particularly the traditional proscenium stage) is the most relevant container for these experiments in performance. The social and performance application of dance and movement is utilized in multiple, and

ever-expanding ways: sacred and secular rituals, therapeutic practices, military exercise, reconciliation in quarrels, marking of important life events, personal and communal healing, and mental escapism. And these are only some examples. Such performances serve to affirm or subvert cultural signifiers. Performances can fortify or defy hegemonic instruments of dominance. They may reclaim practices and values that have been rendered in a disparaging way, perhaps suppressed and oppressed in an effort to invalidate and demean cultural values or groups. Dance and movement as performance also play a crucial role in preserving valued traditions. When the full potency of the body in performance is galvanized and unleashed, movement influences, innovates, and transforms social and cultural norms. But before we can fully analyze the impact of our performances, it becomes necessary to first embrace an understanding of our environment, social indoctrination, personal identity, and eco-context. To do this, there must be an effort to reach far beyond any tendency to myopically view performance art from the exclusive gaze of Western traditions

My next priority was *to ensure the body was welcomed as a contributor to the analytical framework, and not simply a blank slate upon which projections and unexamined assumptions could be imposed*. How has the body added new information to the study? What filters of awareness were rendered visible by a prioritization of sensation and feedback from the instrument? What is the inherent or acquired canon of knowledge our bodies bring to our intellectual and artistic efforts? In what ways does embodiment impact individual and collective identity formation? What is learned when we distance or “avatar” ourselves from the body as a witness to it? What arises when we submerge ourselves in sensation and movement?

The highly subjective experience of consciousness is filtered through the parameters and capacities of our individual bodies. Neurologists and psychologists are good to frequently remind us that so much of what we perceive to be “real” or true about our bodies may transform over time under the weight of our changing brain capacities. For this reason, movement as research is no small undertaking. It requires the practitioner to toggle rapidly between observing the instrument of expression or action (the body), and monitor thought-streams. The perspectives of practitioners/performers, image producers, and visual culture consumers are all critical contributors to this kind of analysis. Yet underneath all of these subjective experiences, what is enduring about the ways we

dialogue with our bodies? What consistencies and commonalities could we explore through performance, and what distinctive viewpoints might startle us to a new calibration point of learning?

Beyond these two priorities, I and the editorial board sincerely remained open to new perspectives and inspirations. A common thread between *all* submissions (whether chosen for publication or not) was the frequent concession by authors that the act of explaining bodily experience and somatic intelligence seemed inadequate and even reductionist. Yes, we agree. Yet we also posit that the expanse of sensation and awareness can be meaningfully shared through language. It may be challenging to be both poets and scholars in our efforts to communicate the non-verbal treasures of physicality, but it is a worthy effort. To elucidate the nuanced perceptions of embodiment, we must conjure equal portions of bravery and curiosity: bravery to defy the conventions of bodily presentation and definition, and abundant curiosity to suspend our perceptual filters long enough to truly ascertain what the body has to offer us. Our bodies seemingly have their own stories to tell, and studying movement as performance seems to require truckloads of humility.

I am excited to bring you the next node of forward-thinking conversation here. Future issues of *PARtake* will occasionally revive this theme, and I am honored to play this part in offering testimony to the brilliant breadth of thematic research being conducted in our hub of artistic, scientific, technological, anthropological, sociological, therapeutic, and entertainment communities. Beyond the clinical and scripted execution of movement, there is ample evidence that our academic world is ready to slide into a zone of sumptuous, unapologetic acknowledgement of an inherent somatic intelligence. We cheer this loudly, and *PARtake* is proud to offer a venue for these explorations.

Thank you for expanding our own views of embodiment, and thank you for your patience with this issue's manifestation.

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