



The Dance Centre

Lessons from this
edge of the world

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This text is no certain indication of what has transpired in the Vancouver dance community since my arrival in 2006. This, like all archives, is subjective. This is a capture of time and pseudo-proof of the existence of multiple dances actualized in community. What is held in these words indicates only the interests and relations of this archivist.

If I begin with the notion of “relating as a unit of time”- a phrase gifted to me from the notebook of my friend [Rianne Švelnis](#) - I can track what I have learned from and about being here, in this place, where the mountains meet the sea. There is a complexity and deep tension in writing about one’s own community. What holds me to this task is that our trajectory as artists is entirely cobbled together by relationships. There are no lone wolves, no islands, no singular masterminds. There is no work, in fact, without being in and with relation. I am reminded of a text-based work by visual artist and curator, [Kristina Lee Podesva](#), that listed every person she felt impacted her practice and life. Letters in vinyl on the surface of a wall. I was struck by how I immediately went looking for my name. Not unlike how many of us have been known to comb the internet for reviews or mentions of our work - validation of existence or perhaps more accurately, an externally bestowed importance. While this search for self can be perceived as narcissistic (at worst) and myopic (at best), I’d like to imagine it can also be a desire for confirmation of kinship. *Am I your kin? Am I included here? Am I part of this?*

While there are groupings of dance artists in Vancouver who are held in generational casings of friendship, shared interests, training and experiences, there is also overlap between these clusters of kin. Many multi-generational Venn diagrams of dance lives shared, telescopically expanding and contracting through time.

I can feel my way through my community with a kind of emotional accuracy when I track and prioritize acts of kinship, over acts of the art market. We all give and receive acts of kinship. We, as artists, are tethered to a gift economy as a matter of survival. It is the soft underbelly of our work. This notion is defined by [Ashon](#)

[Crawley](#) as *The Otherwise*: “The Otherwise, the elaboration of the alternative, presumes that radically different relations have and do already exist.” This begs the question, what is already happening that remains at the periphery? What are we doing as a community to relocate our centres? [Lee Su-Feh](#), in their installation *Dance Machine* offers us these instructions:

Occupy Centre
Relinquish Centre
Value the Margins.

It was in the company of a group of choreographers from across Canada and someone said “dancing is a world-making project”. I can’t remember who said it, but it references Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons*. I scribbled it in a notebook in 2013, and it still holds importance for me. It is how I would describe the work we are doing in this community, and I do not believe we are unique at this edge of the world. It is necessarily happening everywhere. I wouldn’t say our world-building projects are at all utopic in nature here in Vancouver, but joy is a material for making. Kindness is included, and it is a kindness that can chafe. I have learned most from the rooms where we actively work with and acknowledge that the disappointments of relating can be generative if we don’t untether ourselves from the relating itself. Where can we go or what can we do together if we hold these worlds seriously, lightly and loosely for the duration?

In 1989, Robert Fulghum wrote *All I Ever Needed to Learn I Learned in Kindergarten*. It was a sensation, pop morality, faintly smelling of Sunday school, definitely reductive and simplistic, but resonant because it contained instructions and rules for relating - which we crave. How do we continue to work on being together? How can we allow for dissensus and continue to work and play? How do we rest with our differences instead of insisting on agreement? How do we deal with what is happening *right now*? This is the work of dance. All I ever needed to learn, I learned trying to dance with people.

Our work is body-centred and we often work with words to capture fragments of what has happened in and with our bodies. We create new language out of

existing language to hold on to bits of the work. During Ligia [Lewis's Breathing Room](#) talks at the Or Gallery in 2019, dance scholar [Tina Post](#) spoke to a packed room about the work of language-ing dance within practice. Something she could identify as a collective act, devised in the moment to name what is happening and speaks to what is understood about the work between bodies. Cryptic phrases like, *semaphore into pantyhose spirals while holding down the stealth relocation project with an option for rage hands and the dodge followed by bitch, please* are logical instructions to those embedded in the work. The words are small openings into vast corporeal worlds. They are practical, they are poetry, they are comedy, they are directives and they are scores.

Here are more words gifted to me for this text. They are part of a comprehensive yet incomplete archive - the pseudo-proof of the existence of multiple dances actualized in community. Sometimes hastily typed by thumbs on public transit and other times sedulously constructed. They are the words buried in journals, MacBook notes, voice memos and text messages to oneself.

These are the echoes of our relations. They are aesthetics, imagined anatomies, values, and some of what is happening out here on this edge of the world.

The anchors of [Justine A. Chambers'](#) movement based practice are found in collaborative creation, close observation, and the idea of choreography as a living archive. She is concerned with choreography of the everyday; with the unintentional dances, as she describes them "that are already there."
Chambers is Max Tyler-Hite's mother.

From [Kate Franklin](#):

When you encounter someone, slow down.

From [Lisa Mariko Gelley-Martin and Josh Martin of Company 605](#):
Oscillating between when you are insisting and when you are accommodating.

From [Kelly McInnes](#):

wild fingertips brush the fur of the earth my heart melts i wonder how the tree feels its okay to not know to lose the words to struggle to be human.

From [Aryo Khakpour](#):
In your resistance lies all your material.

Words by [Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen](#), recorded by [Jennifer Mascal](#):

The mind is like the wind and the body like the sand: if you want to see how the wind is blowing you can look at the sand.

From [Antonio Somera](#):
*Slip @ slide around my jelly thighs,
hold me up high until you cry
The weight of this chubby mind, rewind @ unwind
because life isn't kind.
The balls in your life jiggle with might.*

From [Steph Cyr](#):

lying on my back: i imagine/replace all my organs with sleeping kittens.

ABOUT THE DANCE CENTRE

Established in 1986 as a resource centre for dance professionals and the public in British Columbia, The Dance Centre is a multifaceted organization offering a range of activities unparalleled in Canadian dance.

Our goal is to support the development of a vibrant dance scene in BC and increase the profile of dance, by providing resources and services for the dance profession; presenting public performances and events; operating Scotiabank Dance Centre, one of Canada's flagship dance facilities; and promoting BC dance.

We are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xwməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl'ílwəta?/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. It is an honour and a privilege for us to be guests in their lands.







The Dance Centre

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