

DEVELOPING SOMATIC AWARENESS IN CREATIVE PRACTICE THROUGH WRITING
AND MOVEMENT

by

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Abstract

This manuscript reflects upon the experience of developing a creative practice using a somatic awareness of the body in moving and in writing. Moving and writing are often perceived as expressions of the dualistic body and mind framework inherited from a Cartesian society, each aspect having little to do with the other, and the body subordinate to the mind. However, reflective language can be a powerful tool towards gaining new bodily insights, and moving can be a tool in finding one's own authentic voice in writing. Over the course of four months, a creative studio practice was developed to find a way to integrate moving and writing from a felt sense of the body and the emotions residing therein. Through the use of somatic awareness, internal and external sensory information was collected and then expressed through the body and through writing. By creating a practice that alternated between moving and writing continuously, language was allowed to inform movement, and movement was allowed to inform language. While this practice physically manifested through dance and poetry, integrating the Cartesian conception of body and mind, it also helped the practitioner integrate the body and mind in an internal and personal manner, allowing the practice to have therapeutic effects. Finally, the practitioner choreographed a dance, using the research process as a score to explore the interaction of writing and dancing in front of an audience during a performance, as well as using movement vocabulary developed from the creative practice in ways that felt pleasurable and expressive for the body.

Introduction

What does a synthesis of writing and poetry with gesture and dance look like? That's the question I set out to answer when I began this thesis. Our American society has a history of making a distinction between the mind and the body, going back to our very beginnings as a Western society, and exemplified by Rene Descartes' statement "I think, therefore I am." Epictetus wrote, "You are a little soul carrying around a corpse" (Jamison, 114). From its very beginning our society has valued the mind over the body, and vilified the body as something dirty and impure. This is our cultural heritage.

Within this conception, we perceive writing as an extension of language that comes from our ethereal, higher selves. We imagine our thoughts floating in space, detached from our body. However, the very acts of thinking, writing, and speaking are physical. The body collects information through the senses and sends it to the brain for interpretation and response, in the form of electrical signals. Speaking and writing engage the whole body, our posture and breath, our motor coordination, the position of our tongue against our teeth, and the way our arms rest against tables, couches or floors. The brain is part of the body, and without the body moving and gathering information the brain would not even be able to develop. As dancers and movers it is part of our work to help ourselves and others understand how the mind and body are always integrated.

Our Cartesian legacy leads us to an 'other-ing' of the body, a dualistic framework that sees the body as outside of the mind. Even invoking 'the body' sets it apart and separate from the whole of our self so that we can speak about the body in detached and objective terms. Leslie Jamison, author of *The Empathy Exams*, writes, "[t]he body' turns embodiment into something abstract—grounds for metaphor or figuration—rather than a set of particular

moments contained in particular flesh: *this body*” (“The Uses and Abuses of the Human Body”). ‘The body’ might belong to us, and it might carry our brain around, but we do not have to engage with it as essential to our nature and our experience. ‘This body’ is something we have to seek to truly inhabit everyday, as we shape it at the same time it shapes us.

Dancers, seeking to reclaim and rehabilitate their bodies, created movement practices to integrate the body and mind, which they came to collectively call ‘somatics.’ Somatics, as a discipline, seeks to bring the idea of the flesh of ‘this body’ back into our lives. ‘Soma’ comes from the Greek word, meaning ‘the whole body.’ Eleni Stecopoulos, a poet influential in the emerging somatic poetry movement, is quoted by Thom Donovan, “[s]oma as a Greek word has been in my ear my whole life, and it carries a potency and warmth that “body” does not for me. And this is despite the fact that English is my first language” (“Eleni Stecopoulos”). The soma is this body, all of its organs and tissues and electrical transmissions, in concrete and visceral terms, versus the abstract terms typically used in Western society.

The routine disembodiment that is unavoidable in our culture is not the case in other cultures. The Vijnana Bhairava Tantra in the Hindu tradition was recently translated by Lorin Roche in his book *The Radiance Sutras*. Framed as a conversation between Shakti and Shiva, two central deities in the Hindu faith, Shakti asks Shiva “What is this power we call Life,/Appearing as the play of flesh and breath?/How may I know this mystery and enter it more deeply?” (Roche 19). Already we see the key difference between this philosophy and the philosophy of Descartes. I am, not because I think, but because I have flesh and I breathe. I physically exist. In verse 77, one of Shiva’s many answers to Shakti in how to delve deeper into the experience of life is “The soul reveals itself to itself/Through movement” (Roche

89). It is important to note, as we try to reconcile our cultural heritage of disembodiment, that this disembodiment is not a universal human experience. Many, if not most, of the original and current somatic practitioners were influenced by Eastern traditions and philosophy. We should continue to recognize this influence and let it inspire us towards integration.

We may never be able to break away entirely from this inherited dualism; as we will see, the discourse surrounding the divide between language and gesture in the somatic and art-making worlds is sometimes contradictory. In an attempt to reclaim the body, language is sometimes denigrated, and placed as secondary as if to make up for the body being secondary in the rest of life. This is not entirely negative. When one part of the body has been neglected it can easily become injured. To heal, extra attention and care to the injury is needed to rebuild strength and bring the affected area (perhaps for the first time) into balance with the rest of the body. So too, perhaps, with healing the divide between the mind and the body; the act of reclamation may mean extra time with the body is necessary to learn its language and its desires, impetuses, and impulses. However, it should be recognized that language, verbal and written, has an important role to play in this process if it is disassociated from its historically imperialistic and dominating role in Western culture. Instead, focusing on reflective language that responds to and interprets bodily experiences, new insights may be gained, which bring a deeper awareness of and connection with the body. Through a true integration and synthesis of language and the body, we can become agents in embodying ourselves, returning to our home in our mind, our flesh, our breath, and our spirit.

That, ultimately, is what this project became about for me. Instead of creating a final collection of poems that corresponded somehow to a dance, I developed a creative practice to

bring me back to myself and my *soma* through rounds of movement and writing. Then I used arts based research methods to develop my personal practice into a dance for others.

What is Somatics?

Somatic practices have been used in the United States by dancers since the 1930s as therapeutic methods of working with the body. Pioneers such as Mabel Todd and Moshé Feldenkrais developed methods of rehabilitation that included the client as an active participant in their healing. By actively thinking about changes happening in their body, and maintaining a mindful awareness of body experience, or felt sense, clients gained ease and efficiency in movement patterning. Somatics, at its core function, is moving from an awareness of internal sensation.

The name “somatics” was created in the 1970s by one of Feldenkrais’ students, Thomas Hanna (Batson, 1). Hanna writes

[S]omatics is the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception. When a human being is observed from the outside – i.e., from a third-person viewpoint – the phenomenon of a human *body is* perceived. But, when this same human being is observed from the first-person viewpoint of his own proprioceptive sense, a categorically different phenomenon is perceived: the human soma.

The goal of these modalities is a restructuring of the body, which was very appealing to dancers and then athletes who constantly used their bodies and suffered more physical injuries than the average population. The fact that many practitioners, including Mabel Todd, were originally dancers themselves who suffered injuries and rehabilitated themselves also established the mind/body connection among these practices early on. Practitioners realized that the re-patterning of the body they were looking for is only possible through the consideration of the whole body working together through the integration of thought and movement.

The relationship between movement and thought in somatic practices cannot be overstated and it is key to the success of somatic methods as healing practices. The original innovators stressed the importance of thought in the process of working with the body. Feldenkrais believed that the relationship between movement and thought was that “increased mental awareness and creativity accompany physical improvements” (Donovan, “Somatic Poetics”). Ideokinesis (literally, the idea of movement), created by Mabel Todd and so named by her student Lulu Sweigard, uses passive imagery of motor functions to alter physical habits over time. The practitioner imagines their body in correct alignment without applying muscular effort. In this manner one can actually re-pattern their body through their thoughts to fall naturally into this alignment, without creating new muscular imbalances by trying to force it. Lulu Sweigard developed her method by creating the “nine lines of movement,” which can be used while lying in the Constructive Rest Position to bring the body back into an easeful alignment (Batson).

In Body-Mind Centering®, created by Bonnie-Bainbridge Cohen, all the major anatomical systems (skeletal, muscular, organs, endocrinal, nervous, etc.), as well as evolutionary developmental movement patterns, are explored. The goal is to re-educate the body on how to move and “understand how the mind is expressed through the body and the body through the mind” (Batson 4). In these modalities body knowledge is just as relevant, primary, and authentic as knowledge created through mental processes alone. While the intrinsic value of body knowledge is a relatively new concept and application of theory for the Western world, steeped as it is in Enlightenment tradition and the Cartesian duality of mind and body, this knowledge has been practiced by Eastern traditions for much longer, in methods such as yoga and Tai Chi Chaun, acupuncture, and other energetic systems. Many

practitioners and dancers, including Hanna, Feldenkrais, and Bainbridge-Cohen, acknowledge the influence on Eastern philosophies on their own thoughts (Batson 4). In ancient Eastern traditions and more modern Western techniques, messages and information received from the body and the mind work together in the somatics field.

Somatics has always rejected the notion of a true Cartesian duality between the mind and the body, with the mind reigning superior. The knowledge received from an awareness of the body is recognized as just as “scientific” and valid as knowledge presented by the mind; as Hanna says, “first-person observation of soma is immediately factual.” However some modalities privilege thought as shaping body (as in Ideokinesis), and some modalities begin to privilege knowledge received through the senses as shaping our identities and language. In these modalities language is not inherently secondary in terms of value to self-expression and self-knowledge and awareness, but it is secondary in terms of its order. Our body and brain experience the world first and foremost through sensory and motor actions. Bonnie-Bainbridge Cohen reminds us that we evolved from the very first cell and that all of our movement and intrinsic knowledge has its origins in the movement and development of that cell (to fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals). All of this knowledge and these ways of receiving knowledge developed before language. Because our society focuses so unilaterally on the mind and empirical knowledge, somatic modalities are often a way of reclaiming the body and the sensory knowledge it provides.

Because of the work being done to reclaim the importance of experience, the dance and somatics world is experiencing a backlash against language. Meehan, in her paper about crafting a dance from her Authentic Movement practice writes:

A resistance to language could be seen as part of a backlash against Cartesian dualism, where Descartes has been interpreted as placing value on mental and

thought based activity over bodily experience...The perceived Cartesian disregard of embodied response over intellectual enquiry can be considered to filter down as a converse distrust for 'thinking'. Within a dualistic frame, then, thinking could be assumed to cut the body off from the experience, and language to come from a rationalization following the experience that might take away from the intrinsic value of bodily phenomena...However, such a position could reinforce the body-mind divide which somatic work often challenges (2).

This reveals some of the language shift that is occurring around somatic art-making processes versus 'pure' somatic modalities of working with the body. Andrea Olsen, dancer, somatic educator, and writer states, "kinesthetic intelligence forms before language and informs our individual humanity...touch and movement underlie all other sense and support healthy development of brain and body" (219). For Olsen, anatomy is key to dance, and dance is key to living healthfully and honestly. Winton-Henry, author of *Dance, the Sacred Art: The Joy of Movement as Spiritual Practice*, writes "what if we let our body wisdom guide us through every part of our day? It turns out that it is much easier to find integration by starting with our body and including our mind than it is to start with our mind and attempt to include our body" (53). In each of these practitioner's conception of art-making, deep listening to the body and following its impulses and desires are the initiation and creative starting ground for movement and dance. In this conceptualization dance is both art and a space for healing.

Somatics in Contemporary Poetry

The emerging field of somatic poetry is very recent, and there are only a few poets who label themselves as such or identify themselves with the movement. While it is beyond the scope of this project to explore the form and content of these poets, I want to give a small overview of the major currents linking the field together.

Bringing the body into poetry is obviously one of the main goals of this movement, but the poets approach this in a way that is perhaps not entirely obvious to a dancer or someone who is used to thinking about the body in purely movement and anatomical terms. Thom Donovan, one of the most active thinkers and critics within somatic poetry writes, “Any notion of “somatics” — a term coined in the 1970s around contemporary dance circles alluding to various movement-based healing techniques and techniques for exploring the body’s physical processes — cannot be divorced from environment” (“Somatic Poetics”). Many somatic poets working right now are very concerned with the sociopolitical environment that the body exists within, as well as environmentalist concerns regarding what it means to live in a natural environment that humans have poisoned and heated past a healthy level. In this way, somatic poetics attempt to take on not only “the body foregrounded by the poem’s content...[and] form,” and “the body as a site of ‘material,’ or content for the making of the poem,” but also making visible “the body as a place where cultural, political, social, moral, and economic forces converge and convolute,” muses Donovan, (“Somatic Poetics”).

In somatic poetry the body is approached as something undergoing a process, the process of being shaped by its environment, and as something transient, constantly undergoing change. Poetry is an effective medium to approach the process of being a body because the poem is also a transient place that is constantly becoming. Donovan writes: “The poem is a site of undergoing, the body undergoing something, a process internally or externally mediated by language, a process that extends from environment, from language use in the (built) environment” (“Somatic Poetics”). The structure of poetry lends itself well to an exploration that does not find an ultimate conclusion. We are able to undergo an

experience both in writing and reading a poem that often stays open ended, just like the experience of being, and of having a body. Eleni Stecopoulos, a preeminent somatic poet, quotes John Tercier in an interview with Thom Donovan, on another resonance between poetry and the body: “Poetry is language made strange, language that draws attention to itself. In illness the body is made strange. One of the things that privileges poetry [as therapeutic] is that there’s a certain relationship between the body made strange and language made strange” (Donovan, “Eleni Stecopoulos”). I am particularly drawn to this quote because one of the things I find most healing and attracting about both poetry and dance is their ability to surpass the realities of daily life. Alys Longley, dancer and choreographer of the *Insomnia Poems*, quotes Bernstein:

I prefer to imagine poems as spatilizations and interiorizations – blueprints of a world I live near to but have yet to occupy fully. Building impossible spaces in which to roam...poems...eclipse stasis in their insatiable desire to dwell inside the pleats and folds of language (37).

A new space is created where it is safe to be larger than life, to be strange, to express an anger or a freedom or a wildness that is usually unacceptable to the social mores that dictate most expression in society. In somatic dance it is safe to explore the body in ways beyond the socially acceptable modes of expression. These art forms resonate with each other because of their openness to process and constant change.

Somatic poets and poetry also seek to bridge the divide between the body and the mind in our society, although they recognize their incapacity to perfectly heal it. Talking about ‘the body’ sets the body up as something other and outside of us, even when we are trying to avoid this.

Jean-Luc Nancy writes that the Western quest for embodiment only “expel[s] the thing we desired...That’s why the body, bodily, *never happens, least of all*

when it's named and convoked...What enables contemplation...inherently renders the object exterior to "me" (Donovan, "Eleni Stecopoulos").

Somatics can be a new way to approach the 'other-ing' of the body, because "*soma* opens up this energy, life force, poetic agency—an agency of no subject and without object... For body to have agency, to be recognized as intelligence, to be identified as "me," it may have to be called *the body*, at least heuristically" (Donovan, "Eleni Stecopoulos"). But through taking care of the body, whether it be in dance or in poetry or in therapy, we can begin to end the objectification of the body and reclaim it as an integrated part of our self.

Both dance and poetry take on questions of process and of becoming. When these art forms take on our questions and our multiple 'becomings' they have therapeutic effects for the artist, and potentially (and perhaps hopefully) for society as well. Somatic poet Bhanu Kapil decided to continue exploring one of her books by acting out the position of Ban, her main character, in public performance pieces. She lay down nude on the sidewalk next to ivy and mirrors and gathered "witness notes. Nervous system notes" (Brown). She says of the experience "it was embodied, but it was also functional" (Brown). The body and the poem combine to make a new site of exploration that has far reaching implications for healing through art, in turn creating new creative possibilities for art-making.

Somatics in Contemporary Dance Making

Many dance artists who are working right now are using somatic processes to facilitate their art making. One of the most prominent of these artists is Andrea Olsen, a professor at Middlebury College, and author of three books: *BodyStories: A Guide to Experiential Anatomy*; *Body and Earth: An Experiential Guide*; and *The Place of Dance: A Somatic Guide to Dancing and Dance Making*. Her work is directly in the lineage of Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, and Janet Adler, who helped develop Authentic Movement. Using the

body's impulses to move first and shape dance second is central to her work. She's also an environmentalist, and all of these influences come to play in her work to create dances that explore the intersection of personal intrinsic bodily knowledge, and universal experiences that connect us as dancers and humans.

One of her most recent pieces "Our Body Remembers," was presented at Middlebury College in a concert celebrating the release of *The Place of Dance*. During the eight minute long piece, she works her way through a monologue that is both a scientific and anecdotal account of seaweed as she dances. She focuses on our bodily connection to the movements found underwater and in nature. At one point in the dance, she and the flutist stop. "Language is powerful," she asserts, and then the music and movement begin again, and she never returns to this statement (Olsen, "Placeofdance"). She doesn't need to; in that playful pause she stays honest to her intent and the purpose of her dance. It speaks for itself. In a TED talk for TEDxMonterey "From Fear to the Sublime: Art Making and the Environment" she states "I dance while I speak so I feel what I'm saying, say less, edit more, requiring a kind of truthfulness, while staying open to what might happen between us." For Olsen, environment, developmental anatomy, language, and movement all come together to create dance.

The project *Speak*, by Emma Meehan, explores how the dance community is currently trying to engage language and writing alongside dance in a performance context. In it, Meehan uses an Authentic Movement practice including language-based reflection on her experience, as well as performance as research, to "investigate ideas of division and integration between movement and language," (1). Her project brings up the difficulties in

taking a personal practice into a public performance and how to create a dance that the audience can read and enjoy while still communicating the essence of the process.

In her paper about the project *Speak*, Meehan explains that in her academic, dance, and somatic training environments, she has encountered a division in the way people think about language in relation to movement. Some in the somatic world consider language as “at times interrupting or erasing bodily experience” and others see it as a “productive and generative...aspect of body-mind experience” (1). Meehan’s personal conclusion is that “identities...are never stable but emerge from evolving personal and environmental relationships,” and that movement, writing, and language are equal ways of accessing changing identities, particularly when used in combination, and language as a part of thoughtful reflection.

For this project Meehan worked “to find forms of language that might speak to, respond to, enunciate, and reflect on experience” (4). To that end, she developed a practice underpinned by Authentic Movement. Janet Adler developed the concept of the role of language in witnessing in Authentic Movement, and how it should neither judge nor interpret, but rather return to the physical and emotional memory of the movement. Adler notes,

[A]s people explore writing the embodied experience rather than writing about it, they can discover new ways of knowing the distance between experience and word, as well as the absence of such distance. The writing process brings a heightened awareness of words that emanate directly from the body (Meehan 6).

Words and writing, then, are not divided from the body but part of the learning experience of gathering information about oneself through the body. Writing returns to the body as it engages with the movement, but it also breaks apart what happened and creates

new forms to bring clarity and new insights. “Writing may alter experience but is also a means for experiencing” (6). As language informs movement and movement informs language we are, as Adler says, “encouraged to explore a reentering or an entering for the first time in a new way...because of the developing inner witness, we are arriving in a new place” (Meehan 7). We come back to the practice as space for negotiating our changing identities. Using written reflection alongside movement helps us go even deeper into our bodily knowledge.

Finally, the collaborative project *skript* by Bacon and Midgelow is an attempt to find new ways of engaging with writing about dance, and writing with an embodied and felt sense of performing dance or witnessing dance performance. Created by dancers, the project does not actually involve creating choreography or dance movement. Rather, it was set up as a micro-installation outside of dance performances to engage others in writing about dance. A small white square table, two folding white chairs, two small keyboards, and an overhead projector were set up in the lobbies of dance performances. Anyone was invited to come sit with one of the hosts, Jane Bacon or Vida Midgelow, and write about the experience of watching dance in a dialogue as what they wrote appeared over the overhead projector onto the table. They found that the language that emerged was just as important as the moment or context when the language was found and articulated. The writing was done with the intent of bringing the collaborators closer to the body and to elaborate body sensation. Similar to Meehan’s findings, writing an experience as it is felt, sensed, and imagined, moves beyond memory of the movement to create a generative space where new possibilities open up.

In a second stage of the project, they had dance artists write about their experience performing one of their dances, and then reflect on the experience of writing about that performance. Guy Dartnell reflects on his experience with *skript*,

“It is interesting to write about [*Inward Out*] because it felt close to the experience that I have when I am doing *Inward Out* – the thought process...As we were writing I remembered the light in the space in the Drill Hall Lincoln and that space became really really present for me in the moment of writing...What is difficult still is trying to use the words to illuminate the experience on a felt level...How do you write or try and give the essence of what I was experiencing other than what I was thinking?” (Bacon and Midgelow, 20-21).

The question of how to write how you feel and not what you were thinking about while you were feeling is something important to grapple with in this process of moving from dancing to writing. Rosalind Crisp reflects on her engagement with *skript*, “I am wondering about words and writing too as a way to follow and come to know bodies...I think when I write, label, find words, change words, what I am doing, how I am sensing and understanding what I do, who I am changes too” (Bacon and Midgelow, 30). Again we see the notion of a constantly evolving identity come into play, looking for a way to be expressed since it cannot be resolved. Crisp also reflects that it is easy for her to talk about her dancing “because I feel I am doing it [dancing] when I talk and the ‘word[s]’ come from the doing. I suppose it’s the same organization in my brain body system as when I am doing the dance...I like reaching for the words” (Bacon and Midgelow, 31). Crisp here has found one solution to Dartnell’s question of how to give the essence of what one is experiencing by letting go of the need to communicate directly and exactly what was happening. Instead, she enjoys the process of language and the search for the right words. Meehan writes, “loosening the form of the written response acknowledges the loss inherent in writing...the inscription has a life of its own, and...there is the possibility to relish the generative opportunities” (6). While we

will always struggle with Dartnell's question of how to reconcile our felt experience with our thoughts, we can find a real sense of joy and fun in diving into the space between movement and language as a place to navigate and explore our changing sensations and identities.

Methods and Data

I spent almost half a year reading the works of poets such as Eleni Stecopoulos, Bhanu Kapil, and CA Conrad and researching the somatic methods of dancers such as Andrea Olsen, and many other artists who are not otherwise mentioned in this paper. They are all contemporary artists doing exciting work in the new field of somatic art making.

Andrea Olsen, in her book *The Place of Dance*, explores many aspects of dancing and dance making that have been very influential in the evolution of my creative process. In the section "Healthy Dancing" she explains that we dance through the perceptual system. Perception has three parts, sensing, interpretation, and response, and through our perceptual system we construct our worldview. Paying close attention allows us to sense broad patterns and eventually "encourage new pathways of response" (194). This is why dancing became primary to this project. I had to dig deeper into paying attention to my sensory world and how that affected my body before I could begin to articulate it. Olsen states, "to broaden creative options, we can spend longer interpreting incoming sensory signals before response. One of the gifts of improvising and learning new choreography is that this encourages fresh, thoughtful response to stimuli, moving past perceptual habits" (194). I learned that I needed to spend more time with my body sensing and perceiving before I could begin to find a voice that felt authentic. Writing in a reflective manner helped me through this process, but I found I had to let go of writing as a goal or product of this project. I also discovered that it didn't work to write first and move second. I always had to begin my practice with moving and

dancing before I could get to meaningful reflection that would then feed back into my movement vocabulary.

In the section, “Healing Dancing,” Olsen touches on how art-making and therapy overlap, even if that isn’t the goal of the art-making. Making art engages the nervous system, which coordinates body functioning. Dancing and art-making give us agency by creating and coordinating a response to situations, allowing us to stay present with emotions. It is important that this method of art-making come from the wisdom of the body: “Trusting the inherent wisdom of the body allows new pathways to open. Moving beyond stereotypes, dancing does not have to be painful – ease is inherent. We are born to dance, to run, and to be physical; recovery involves waking up” (203). This statement is particularly powerful in its implication that to dance with ease is to wake up: wake up to your body, your senses, and the present moment, and the emotions that arise therein. We also have to recognize that while emotion is part of the dance, not all of the emotions that come up need to be part of the final product. “Significantly, we recognize the distinction between what’s emerging from the body for personal healing and what’s ready to be shared through art. Choices are to be made” (203). The development of this project came to be a very healing process for me. Some of what has arisen I have chosen not to share due to its personal nature. However, all of it was essential to the process and to my own healing, and ultimately my art making.

Olsen’s approach to improvisation as a means of self-expression has also been influential. Improvising is different from improv, she states. Dancers commonly use improv as a term to refer to any unstructured movement inquiries and explorations. But improvising, Olsen states, is a primary mode of creating and/or performing, a complex investigation that “presumes dancing is a thinking process: you are committing to creating the dance, staying

honest, not dodging the contradictions, expanding to include complicated truths – holding uncertainty. Attention is central,” (67). Oslen’s framework for this kind of improvising is Authentic Movement and moving “while being moved,” deeply listening to what the body initiates. And extended experience in this practice “gives access to deep intelligence of the body” (68). I found this to be very accurate; by following an extended practice of improvisation and letting my body move me, I was able to find an authentic movement vocabulary and voice for myself, and a deep confidence and trust in my body and its ability to carry me.

CAC Conrad, somatic poet, speaks to the experience of being a queer person in America, including having one of his lovers killed for being queer. His book *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tic Exercises for the Future Wilderness* influenced the way I initially approached the project, not in content but in method. CAC Conrad set up “experiments” for himself, wild situations that he would construct and put himself in, and take notes during the experience. Afterwards he would turn these notes into poems. This was something I initially set about to do, using my studio notes to create poems later in the process. Although I did not reach this point in my project, CAC Conrad was one of my initial inspirational influences.

I was also influenced by the writings of CD Wright, who is a poet of the generation before the somatic poets. Her book *Cooling Time* is a collection of essays, memories, and poems that acts as a love-letter of sorts to poetry. She is also aware of the functional use of poetry as a place of navigating one’s identity. In *Cooling Time* she writes

I admire poetry that confutes its own formal conditions – poetry that due to the exigence of its own matter exceeds its own limits. Some of us do not read nor write particularly for pleasure or instruction, but to be changed, healed, charged. Therefore, the poet’s amplitude may take precedence over her strategies. When aiming for a language nearer one’s own ideals and

principles, a tongue wherein everything is at risk – there are no certainties (55).

I wrote this quote in one of my journals as a guiding principle and to introduce its energy in the pages of the journal, and to perhaps resonate throughout. I believe that it did because looking back I find it even more appropriate to the project than I realized when I wrote it down. The ideas of letting go of formal considerations to find an authentic voice, and writing to be charged and healed, are ones that stayed very present with me throughout the process.

When I began this process I had the idea that I would create a body of poems or a body of work, ‘translate’ them into a dance or dances, and then ‘translate’ those dances back into poems. To that end, when I began trying to shape an actual generative process I took some poems I had already written, read them over, and then tried to improv based on that feeling, and then rewrote the poem. While ultimately I really loved the poem I created, the whole process felt very forced and uncomfortable. My thesis advisor encouraged and pushed me in the direction of letting go of my notion of what the final product would look like, and simply to develop a creative process that would serve me. So I set about to trying different methods of recording what I ended up calling ‘collected awarenesses.’ I would jot notes about my body and any sensations or awarenesses I had of it, for example, sitting at a coffee shop, after walking across campus, after dance rehearsal, a long drive, or lying in Constructive Rest Position. This is very similar to Longely’s idea mentioned earlier of a ‘kinaesthetic archive” (Meehan 7). An example of an observation that arose is

“been noticing that as I walk around, if I’m nervous or thinking about something that makes me uncomfortable I flutter my fingers, or pull them in and flick them out over and over...I imagine the shape of the heart.”

I continued to journal and free write in the same journal as my ‘collected awarenesses’ and notes from studio time. Observations that arose from that sometimes took a more poetic language form, and often had a big picture kind of awareness and reflection to them lacking in the collected awarenesses and studio notes. This was usually a space in which I reflected on the nature of this work as a whole and the direction it was going, as well as discussing my life with myself:

“maybe sometimes you reach a satisfactory ending to a write like this, make some interesting poem. maybe you don’t. maybe you just listen.”

I knew that I needed time in the studio moving, but I didn’t know how to best use this time. My thesis advisor again encouraged me to not let myself go for too long or I would get overwhelmed with trying to force something to happen. So I set up a structure for myself that I could reasonably work within, which was to spend two minutes ‘moving’ and two minutes writing, and I would move continuously back and forth between them. I use the word moving here, and not improvising or dancing, because I am drawing from the tradition of Authentic Movement and moving based on bodily impulses and initiations, and actively avoiding trying to shape something that looks like ‘dance.’ This turned out to be a very generative structure for me and it was really the only structure I kept; eventually I stopped keeping a record of my

‘collected awarenesses’ and only focused on studio time and increased the amount of time I was spending in the studio.

There was a general flow to each studio session. One to two rounds would be spent warming up and orienting to the space, the next two to four rounds would suddenly take off in spontaneous and wild, large movement, and finally there would be one to two rounds that slowed down and were more reflective, integrating the new knowledge generated by the earlier rounds. Despite keeping the structure, my way of approaching it changed over time. When I first began, my observations were very literal and tried to record what had happened. From the very first session:

“jump! run! slide – feet slippery on floor, still just getting used to this much space”

My reaction to this kind of movement was very positive:

“I feel good – more open à ... it’s like being empty and the emptiness being completely filling. I get that same feeling after being outside for a long time.”

But there was one session where I made a very significant shift in how I was approaching my reflections. I decided to intentionally let the written reflections and movement rounds communicate and reflect on one another. Instead of just moving and then writing about what I had been feeling physically and emotionally during that movement round, on that particular night I knew something was upsetting me that I was writing about but wasn’t accessing yet through my movement. So I made the conscious decision to try and

move with the emotions that I was writing about and not just how I felt like my body wanted to move. The two consecutive entries from this realization are:

“5. If I try to dance w/ this feeling of anxiety not dance really, just move I can’t – I don’t know how to say it I don’t know what it is other than a scream maybe and it’s really more of a collapse on the floor and writing what is it trying to come out of me...what if I actually try to make a sequence out of it a tiny composition next time and give it a little more structure...

6. Then it becomes contract and expand and contract and expand a cell breathing an ache- there’s a sense of [circled] loss what I’m feeling isn’t anger isn’t frustration running won’t cure it that’s only running away. It’s loss but what have I lost?...

This was a huge revelation to me, that I could really actively take charge of taking care of my mental health and myself. And it was through a true integration of the moving and the writing that made this possible, not one simply reflecting on the other, but both shaping each other and, as Adler talks about, exploring a “reentering” into language/writing and gesture/body in a new way and in a new place (Meehan, 7). After this my entries still describe the physicality of the movement, but sometimes they barely touched on it and reflected on the experiences of my day, and sometimes they were centered on the movement itself if it was a particularly charged or exciting round.

“Okay that was something. just had to start walking to get my internal awareness landscape visible. And then frantic elbows everywhere to jerk and almost convulse, strong whirling circles feel good right now as well, the air pulling on my fingertips”

“Apparently I am wanting today. Big strong grasping movement which happens a lot when I move how I think my body wants”

Once I became comfortable with this structure I began to play with it in new ways. One way I did this was starting off with one of Andrea Olsen’s *Body and Earth* guided videos. For example, the first video of a seven part series, is about locating yourself and arriving in a space by orienting yourself to your ‘tonic’ system, that is, your feet and palms, your head and tail, and the eyes and the inner ear, as they navigate you in relation to gravity. Some observations that arose from this day:

“it’s interesting when I don’t choose to make myself [move] more fast or hard how it arises on its own. and what is my attraction to moving backwards anyways?”

Other ways of playing within this structure included extending the length of time to five minutes back and forth, or not setting any time at all but moving until I felt a genuine impulse to stop and writing until I felt a genuine impulse to stop. I also began to bring a focus on poetic language back into the process. All of these yielded interesting results.

There were some movements that recurred throughout each session. The ones that really stand out in my memory (with an eye to the earlier discussion of the loss inherent in

memory and writing) are running backwards, grasping with my hands and pulling my limbs into my core, spatial patterns that included lots of ‘ping-ponging’ back and forth, and frantic turning. Watching the few videos I took of myself in this process, it’s incredibly difficult to track both where the movement is going and where it has been as it constantly twists and turns over itself and has no particular orientation in space or no sense of ‘front.’ That being said, I was able to track a thread through my journals that sometimes I realized wild movement would not help me find relief or release that day, and that sometimes moving slow or moving only on the ground or moving with my eyes closed was the kind of movement I needed to care for myself that day. My practice truly relied on listening.

Only once did I try writing first and moving second, and I hated it. I felt uncomfortable and self-conscious the whole time and unable to really focus or commit myself to the movement. This reinforced for me the idea that the body is primary because our bodies perceive through the senses before they can interpret and respond. My process was manifesting the physiological process of perception, with movement and dance as the perception and language and writing as the response.

Results

Writing

Three distinct types of observations and language came out of this practice that I find interesting and generative. The first and most obvious is descriptive language that works towards capturing the kinesthetic feeling of the movement. I’m interested in this language because of its possibilities for bringing a kinesthetic feeling into poetry without describing the body or movement from an external point of view. I don’t want the language to try and embody movement or fall into the trap of merely talking about “the body” and its

movements. Instead I'm interested in finding a way to write about the body from a felt sense, or the language being crafted from inside the body. In this way the poem or poetic language might even have its own proprioception, or internal sensing of its movements and limits and feelings. Two proprioceptive excerpts from my journals are:

“twisting and rocking and seed position and holding need to hold in and also spill out need to take care of James need to take care of myself need to move felt good stay low keep eyes closed just feel the rock...I don't know if I can do this can I do this?”

“frantic elbows everywhere to jerk and almost convulse, strong whirling circles feel good right now as well, the air pulling on my fingertips”

I find these compelling because in reading them I feel my body respond kinesthetically. I don't remember the specific days or sessions they were created from, so I know this feeling does not come from a memory of a moment in time. Rather, the response comes from a bodily memory of accumulated movements and responses to situations. If I were to have written “having a rough day with James today because he's feeling bad and I worked through this feeling by rocking on the floor” or “rocking on the floor thinking about what I can and cannot accomplish,” it would not be nearly as effective at communicating a visceral and universal sense of movement and how the movement expressed my emotions.

That being said, some of my observations do describe literally what just happened or what I just experimented with and experienced. This is still generative in cases where I had ‘A-ha!’ moments and recorded them so that I could hold on to them and explore them in the

future to continue developing my process. The first big a-ha moment, which I mentioned earlier in my methods section because it really changed the direction of my process, was when I really started to understand how to truly integrate the movement and the writing to productively channel my emotions and consciously move into a new space than I had been in before I went to the studio. In other words, I began to learn how to engage with the multiple identities I was exploring, to re-enter each round of movement and writing in a new way as a new person. My observation from the ninth round of moving and writing of that particular session was:

Beginning to feel like I'm combining elements of all the previous sections [rounds] and now I'm doing it somewhat consciously, like if I can use them deliberately to tell the story of what is happening right now I can use them productively to heal."

This is where I really started to understand how I could shape this process and help and heal myself.

Sometimes new ideas for generating movement presented themselves to me in the moment:

“ WOOOOWWW

I discovered something super fun à put a new or specific breath to each movement you do. give it some sound. Is it long or frantic or a sigh or a building towards a scream?...I'm not even sure what to write à what else is there? I feel almost cleansed."

This was a very fun and exciting round of movement, and the idea for adding the breath and vocalizations arose spontaneously during it. I returned to this idea in other sessions with varying results. I found that on other days it wasn't as authentic and therefore didn't feel very fun or natural at all, which was an important observation and realization on its own. I think it is important for me to keep writing down these kinds of new explorations and continuing to explore them on other days to see what else the practice is capable of.

Finally, the last kind of language that came out of this process was more directly poetic language. I make the distinction between this language and the language introduced earlier that attempts to communicate a kinesthetic sense of music. When I wrote these observations I was more interested in playing with the words and the form and how they looked on the page than I was in exploring the movement. They are more often observations of emotions that arose during moving versus how the emotions moved my body. Their connection to the movement is that by moving through the emotions and finding where in my body they resonated, I was able to more clearly understand and "see" the emotion. That led me to being more able to write about them and explore them through language as well. In the next two observations this exploration also leads me to playing more with the form of the words and line breaks, rather than just describing emotion:

"to-day to-day to-day to-day to-day to-day my hair smells like tiger balm it is hard to stay present there are challenging feelings in the air challenging months ahead so ready for the exposed terrain of the west and red rocks"

"covered in water"

*to shine to watch
unfold
to promise you anything
would be to write this poem
for another person
so for you I think!
cool air through the kitchen
window over the cactus,
yours alone among the
other bromeliads, a blue
floor &
scratching across a
scratchy carpet”*

This exploration of emotions and concepts in poetic language also came out often in my journals when I spent time free-writing and simply journaling. So far all of the observations included came out of my studio sessions because I think that is where the most interesting language was generated, but I wanted to include an example of something that came out of these more general free writing times. The excerpt below lacks a sense of coming from a space of movement, it still shows how my studies and readings on how the body physically operates, and my sense that emotions occur on a deeply physical level influenced my writing at all times:

*“we = me and my electrons vibrating on a certain level that includes you and yet you have
not been invited in yet
but that’s the way fields work
they expand, even around the things that may not have been invited into them”*

What unites all of these observations is the intention of digging deeper - deeper into the body and the mind – to explore the emotions physically manifesting therein. The goal of this exploration is not to simply understand and label these emotions, but to be able to integrate them into my sense of self and body. This allows me to feel more stable and grounded and confident in myself and it also allows for a richer vocabulary with which to make art, whether dance, poetry, or both. I can be more productive in all areas because I have more energy, more confidence, and more material to create with. As Bhanu Kapil said “it was embodied, but it was also functional” (Brown). The functionality doesn’t cheapen the emotional or personality quality of the work; instead, in its ability to help healing and creativity occur, it enriches the work.

Crafting Choreography from Process

The choreography I created was vastly different from my original concept for the final choreography. The original concept involved me performing a solo, or series of small solos, that I created by “translating” some of my poems into a dance or dances. However, to delve deeper into my practice I had to let go all notions of product for several months, and when I returned to the idea of crafting a choreography I knew I needed something vastly different from that original idea. When I first approached my choreography all I knew was that I wanted my movement to come out of the movement vocabulary I had built for myself

during all of my sessions improvising. I wanted it to come out of my own kinetic sense of movement in a way that would resonate with the audience; that the audience would watch and feel that, yes, that does look like it feels good to dance, and maybe even would like to move that way as well.

To begin creating phrase work that I could use as a starting point for the choreography, I tried to access my kinetic memories to call back movements that had felt particularly good during my sessions. I did not record any of these sessions so I had to rely on what stood out to me in my memory. It was important to me that I also stayed authentic to the process by creating something that felt good to my body in the moment that I created it. So I began by starting to move how I felt like my body wanted to move, and then continued to build movement using my memories of what had felt good for my body and interesting in my practice. However, the key difference between improvising for the sake of exploring something and improvising to create a dance is that you have to remember what you have done and you have to be able to do it again. So another important consideration in creating the foundational movement for the choreography was making conscious decisions about where I thought the movement should go next so that it flowed and could be taught to others, and not just letting my body carry me from one movement into the next without thinking.

I knew that my movement would never feel as kinetically pleasing for my dancers as it did for me, and I felt that it was important to my concept for the dancers to be able to connect to the movement in a way that was natural for them. I had them manipulate the original movement I had created however they wanted so that they had a version that felt like theirs and fit their body's proclivities for movement. Their versions instantly looked more natural on them than my original movement phrase had.

As I continued working on it and had discussions with some professors about the direction I was trying to head in, I realized that the piece needed to reflect my creative process throughout this project, and not just turn into some finished concert dance piece. In order to do this I needed to do two things – have the dancers experience the process for themselves, and also use some sort of process-oriented approach to creating the choreography.

I had the dancers try on my process in our rehearsals a couple of times. I timed them for two minutes while they got up and danced and wrote. I knew it wouldn't be exactly the same for them as it had been for me because I was watching and there were other people dancing at the same time, but I encouraged them to free write anything and to not focus on 'dancing' as much as 'moving.' Afterwards they all said that it felt good to engage with that process, and that they noticed the writing and the dancing affecting one another. After the second rehearsal in which we worked with this, I had them use what they had written and the movement vocabulary they had just generated as a score to create a short movement phrase that told some sort of story.

To have the piece as a whole reflect the process, I began to use improvisational structures to create the dance. We laid butcher paper out on the floor in front of our imagined stage with the intent of moving back and forth from writing and dancing. To decide when and how this would happen, I directed them to use a game; at first only one person at a time could be writing and the other two would dance. It was entirely up to them when and who would switch – either the person writing could get up, or one of the dancers could move to the paper and begin writing, and the other dancers had to respond. Then I had them switch so that two people had to be writing at all times and only one person dancing.

While this created interesting interactions between the dancers from my perspective, from an audience perspective that didn't know the improvisational structure, the motivations for moving from paper to movement were unclear. I realized that one of the things I found the most interesting in the dance was watching the choices they made about when to transition and how they were interacting with each other and forcing each other to do certain things, but that no one in the audience would understand this because they wouldn't know the structure and game the dancers were playing with. To preserve these interactions I chose to set the movement and choreograph these interactions into the dance instead of letting them be improvisational.

To craft a beginning, climax, and end to the dance, I turned to the solos the dancers had created for themselves. One of my dancer's solo was the perfect starting place because it told a story about what space she was in and how she was feeling, and because it started from a clearly introspective place, but turned into movement that was direct and directed outwards. In my sessions I would always start out slowly and totally tuned into my own senses, and then I would suddenly find this wild and large movement after a few rounds, before coming back to a quieter place. The way her solo took her from a small and sort of still place to very forceful direct energy really captured that. I then had my other dancers move into one of my original dance phrases, but asked them to find a loose, breathy, and relaxed quality to it. For the climax I wanted to start with another of my dancer's solos, because it was so forceful and dynamic. I had her repeat the movement because it helped capture the charged quality of the movement, and accentuated it by the direct repetition. The repetition tied into my theme because sometimes I would find movements that were particularly interesting or felt particularly good and I would try them over and over in my sessions. Then I had the third

dancer move back into the original movement material, dancing her manipulated version of it. This time I asked her to find a wild and fast energy. I told all of them in this section that the dancing should feel something like when you're outside with your friends, and maybe you're hiking and you find a big field, or maybe you're just being really silly, but you suddenly feel like you just have to take off running or do cartwheels or even just laugh, and if you didn't you'd explode. At the end they all danced their manipulated movement phrases, but slowed them down, returning to an introspective place. They gradually peeled off and moved to writing. I wanted to end with them all just writing on the floor and moving back into an internal space. At the end I gave it the title *My Body Caught Me* from a phrase I lifted from one of my sessions journaling. I felt that it captured something about both the sentiment of the dance, and the quality of the movement and the way it rose and fell.

I decided against having any kind of projection of what was being written on the paper during the performance. I didn't feel like that was the right decision for this piece because I didn't want the audience reading the writing to distract from the physicality of the dancers writing on the floor. The interactions between the dancers and going from writing to dancing that were more important to convey. However, I knew it was important for the audience to see what was written at some point so I hung the entire piece of butcher paper on the wall in the hallway for people to read as they walked out. I also displayed the paper that we used during multiple practices that was completely full with writings and doodles and colors. Both of these papers are beautiful and full of interesting observations. The three the dancers would interact with each other on the page, circling each other's observations and responding to each other or complementing whoever was dancing as they watched them.

Some of the observations they made on the practice sheet (in the color of the pastel they used) are:

“nice job showing intention”

“I ended that wrong”

“this feels like a ..(?).. Friendship”

“this color is calmer than I have been in my entire life”

“go Sarah!”

“notes

STRONGER”

Observations from the final performance sheet include:

“Remember to Breathe” (written multiple times, sometimes overlapping)

“hello”

“how am I this nervous”

“Well this is it for real”

Ultimately I really liked the piece and I’m proud of how it turned out and how much I was able to accomplish in such a short period of time. Because it was so rooted in process oriented structures, it was easy to make quick decisions at the end to shape it into a piece that worked dynamically and came together looking like a finished piece. I’m also interested in exploring how to push the concept farther, and I might try to incorporate elements of this piece into future projects. I think it could be interesting to find a way to project what they are writing as they are writing it, or have some kind of audience interaction, or a way that the audience would walk right up and see what they were writing. No matter what, I’ve been so engaged with the process for a year now that whatever I do in the future I know the process

and my initial attempt to choreograph a dance out of it will be a major influence. I have included a DVD video of the performance in Appendix A.

Conclusion

Through this process I have come vastly more comfortable with myself in many aspects. I am more comfortable as a dancer, both in technique class and while improvising. I feel rooted in my own body and in my own movement, and I'm more practiced in not worrying about how I look while I'm improvising. I can move so much less self-consciously than I have ever been able to before. This has become particularly apparent to me in classes where I am asked to improvise constantly as part of dances created to scores in just a few minutes, or dances created on the spot in places like the library, outside, or the Turchin Center for the Arts. It also allows me to feel more grounded in my own body in technique class so that I can pick up the movements being taught in a more productive manner.

It has also had a significant impact on my mental health and how I take care of myself, and how I conceive of taking care of myself. As I mentioned earlier, this process gave me a sense of agency that I can actively take part in my own healing and in managing my mental health. It has given me an outlet to channel my emotions and energies in a creative and productive manner, instead of taking them out on people in my close relationships, or on myself. Although I have not discussed this in depth in other sections of the paper because it is deeply personal, this is one of the most significant outcomes to me. That I could find a space and a process that allows me to take care of myself as a person as well as be a generative space for art making is very significant.

One of the most obvious outcomes of this project, and perhaps for that reason one of the easiest to overlook, is that I have generated a creative process for myself that sustainable

to pursue in the future. As a person who always been interested in the arts but only just started making a strong concerted effort to participate in art making in the last couple years, it's really important to have a creative practice and process that is consistent. However, it has always been very difficult for me to establish one for myself. Because this practice has a dual function of having therapeutic effects for me as well as offering a method to generate creative material, it is all the more powerful and easy to integrate into my life as a consistent practice.

The effect of this project is that I have much more confidence in myself in a holistic way. I am more confident in myself as a dancer, as an artist, and in who I am and how I conceive of myself. That allows me to be more confident in how I move out into the world in my interactions and pursuits. I think this is no small part due to the fact that this process has been so physical, and developed a relationship between the physical and the 'mental' or verbal modes of expression. For the first time in my life I don't feel so much like there's this one part of my personality that's expressing myself outwardly in my interactions with other people, and one part of my personality that no one can see because it's all just "in my head." While we obviously are always going to have internal and external expressions of ourselves, I feel more connected to both of those modes of expression, and I feel that they are connected to one another. I believe this is directly related to the integration of writing and moving in the practice. In finding a way to begin integrating the mind and body duality in my expression, I have been able to start integrating them in my internal sensation as well. I feel more of a stable observer of both of those modes of expressions as they constantly change identity based on context, movement round to writing round, day-to-day, and context-to-context.

Although I did not create a body of poems as was my original intent, writing and poetic language were integral parts of the creative process and I could not have achieved the same depth of movement experience without also writing. But I decided that to try and create a collection of poems is outside the scope of this project. I had to spend more time with my body to find an authentic manner of expressing myself, and I am still searching for how that translates into an authentic poetic voice. While I have certainly gotten closer to it, I think that this project and its corresponding choreography speak to the exploratory nature of the process, and that the writing and poems that have come out of it are part of that process. To create a finished body of poems would feel antithetical to these aims. I am still interested in trying to do so, but that is something for another project.

All that somatics really requires is a willingness to listen – listen to the heart, the brain, the gut, the arm, the foot, the quality of the breath moving in and out of the lungs. Once the artist begins to listen in this way, it is hard not to bring this visceral awareness into their art.

Using somatic processes to create art is both therapeutic and generative. Paying attention to body knowledge and information, and then addressing it in the context of creating art, allows the creator to integrate this information into their conception of their self. This helps with mental, emotional, and physical health. Furthermore, this body knowledge and information is new material for the creator or artist to use in their work. Many possibilities for healing and for creation are opened up through this work.

Using writing and movement together to develop a creative practice with an emphasis on somatic awareness offers a unique technique to find integration of the body and mind. This is because writing is seen as a direct expression of language and the mind, and

movement and dance are seen as a direct expression of the body. Often, in our society, we don't even consider that writing may express the desires of the body, or that dance may express the workings of the mind. Integrating them into a single repeated daily or weekly creative practice also helps the practitioner integrate their own conceptions of their body and mind in their daily life. It can also give new insights into the forms and limits of expression in each medium, and help the practitioner find new opportunities for creation in each.

When I moved my creative practice into crafting a choreography, it was important to me that I preserve the process of it, rather than being product-oriented. I had my dancers experience my creative practice so they could access the feeling of how movement and writing inform one another for themselves. I structured my dance from the structure of my process, using my process as a score for the dance. It was also important that I preserve the kinetic nature of the movement that felt authentic to my body, while allowing the dancers to create movement that felt authentic to their bodies as well. Ultimately I was very pleased with the final dance, and I am also excited to continue exploring how writing and dancing can be integrated in process oriented dance pieces in the future.

However, what I think is the most significant outcome of this project is the development of my own personal creative practice. I spent several months searching for the appropriate way to approach a practice that incorporated movement and writing. Once I settled on my final form – spending two minutes moving and two minutes writing, alternating continuously for twenty to forty minutes – I found it easy to continue working within the form. This was a very transformative practice for me. I learned a lot about myself, as well as how to have agency in taking care of myself. And I gained what is potentially a lifelong practice for helping me stay creative and creating art.

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