

EMBODIED DIALOGUES



LCDS X DAI RESLAB 2025

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LETTER FROM THE STUDENT EDITORS

Dear reader,

We are proud to present to you a special collaboration between dance art journal (DAJ) and the emerging dance artists in their final year at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS).

As a community, we have been individually investigating topics that vary from dance and baking, to explorations into identity and inclusivity. The outcomes of these research projects were shared on the 'ResLAB' sharing day, which was attended by students, staff and DAJ writers. The research took many forms: immersive experiences, performance pieces, films, workshops and written dissertations.

The broad range of work reflects the span of the academic and physical teaching and student interests here at LCDS. It forecasts a promising future for this cohort and the impact they will have on the progression of the contemporary dance industry.

Heading into our careers, we aim to carve space for continued dialogues that question and rethink the larger systems that inform our current dance practices. The values that we embody shine through within the following articles and abstracts: curiosity, care, advocacy and expression. Engaging with practice-based research has been nourishing for the development of our identities and careers, and we hope that future generations will benefit from this engagement with dance.

We're sure that these Embodied Dialogues will open your enquiry into the importance of dance research. This magazine could not have been possible without the support of the DAJ team - lead by Katie Hagan, the BA3 curators of ResLAB Day including the continuous support of dissertation tutors, led by Unit Leader Thea Stanton, and lastly all who helped support or participate in studies, research, workshops and focus groups!

- Elfin Bonome, Lucy Coleman, Becca Dodd,
Isabella Gaynor, Alma Kremnitzer, Rosie Robertson,
Annalia Sparks, Anneli Tan and Katrin Tani

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ECOLOGY AND ACTIVISM

BY GEORGIA HOWLETT

Today, ecology and activism feel irrevocably connected. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to create a piece of art on nature without commentary on the change our planet so direly needs to survive. And yet, several of the explicitly eco-themed dance works I observed as part of LCDS ResLAB chose an aesthetical, even nostalgic approach to ecology, drawing on the alchemy of nature, its ability to enchant regardless of its perilous state. Activism was present in other contexts across the programme, such as identity, with all its complex facets, as well as the social functions of dance across cultures.

Rosie Robertson's drop-in installation, *Jinkin' You: Dance in the Byres, Ballrooms and Bars of Scotland*, highlights dance's capacity to respond to and activate change. In a cosy window alcove is a tartan blanket, two handmade zines and a selection of poetry books. The zines revealed a patchwork history of Scottish Dance, from her National Medal Test marking slip, listing performance ratings of lalts and laddies, to typewriter style text on how ballroom dance primarily facilitated courtship. Dance steps themselves had polemical roots; a certain shaking of the leg was apparently a response of highlanders forced to wear English trousers when an act of parliament made kilts a penal offence in the 1700s. *Jinkin' You* is a humble space rich with history; squeezing into the nook behind a stranger is the only way to experience the work, itself an invitation to intimate encounters. Meanwhile, the enchanting melodies of Scottish music, from folk to rock, dance up and down the stairwell as if to lure you in.

Annalia Spark's installation incited a nostalgia of its own kind. We are warmly welcomed to her "*Hearth*", *Ara Focis – Mind Over 'Mater'*, exploring themes of lineage, language and crucially, the right of blood versus the right of tongue. As an Italian who

does not speak the language and is often told she does not look like where she comes from, Spark's heartfelt motivation to create a work that defends her ethnicity is evident. In the centre of the room, the heart of the hearth, is a cloth ring upon which red roses are scattered; Spark stands in the middle, stepping out of it only to sing. Hard facts (ethnicity statistics, maps) emotive imagery (familial photos in sepia tones), quintessentially Italian objects (little espresso cups and Limencello) and a philosophical dialogue text are all combined to offer a proud ode to Italian heritage that simultaneously interrogates ethnicity. The use of barcodes offer a way to relive the Ara later, and much care is taken in contextualising the visuals of the installation. Spark's four walls of friezes transcend the white box of a studio, and leave us with many layers to unpick, like identity itself, I suppose.

Ara Focis uses ethnicity surveys as a way to demonstrate that with identification comes stereotypes, something that Noor Darwish also explores. *Memories From Home* is a two-part presentation of research on Darwish's identity as a Muslim, Egyptian woman living in the UK. One half is performance while the other is interactive; the former effectively sets the tone of a work the audience then feels comfortable enough to enter. Three dancers, including Darwish herself, are grounded in a line with forearms laid down; they hum and sway to majestic, mysterious trumpet melodies. As they rise, the bewitchingly delicate phrase quietly erupts into more weighted physicality. The movement summons, shunts and punches in soothing patterns along diagonal channels of space. After the performance, Darwish invites the audience to play with instruments and watch video clips of traditional Egyptian dances. A text tacked to the studio walls reveals her journey in addressing the trauma of living

in the UK, surrounded by prejudice towards Arabs and Muslims. Actively engaging with her religion and sharing Egyptian culture with her dancers has led to a vulnerable, somatic sharing of her journey in fully embracing identity, a process unfinished as yet, but enchanting all the same.

Carys Thomas's research is durational, a curated space in the centre of which movement flourishes. Described as an embodied empathy with nature, *Between the Bark* explores the sentimental, childlike relationships nature has to offer. A projection on one wall reveals fingertips emerging from earth and footsteps sauntering along forest paths. An acoustic guitar and vocals set an immensely therapeutic tone. Rugs scattered with pressed flowers and letters and lit by warm lamplight complete the haven. The dancers use breath to conjure sounds of breeze, or maybe rushing water. Caught by a gust of wind, they resemble embers of a fire or seeds scattered into spirals, first evoking cyclical life, and then giddy children skipping and giggling. Though the aesthetics are maturely bohemian, even witchy, the improvisation and loosely threaded structure feels like a pining for a return to innocence, to experience nature through the eyes of a child. To witness this makes blatant the absence of these interactions in adulthood, when in reality, nature always invites us back to play.

Benjo Aptroot's film is a reminder that activism does not need to be loud to be heard. *Dancing in Utopia: The River Dart* quietly reimagines and defends said river. About 10 minutes long, the film combines stable, still shots of a river and its surrounds, with hand-held video of two dancers moving beside and within the water. The camera tracks along their bodies in curving lines, water pools in the hands and trickles off fingertips. A background voice speaks with an

“... the students slowed down to contemplate rich cultures and heritages behind them and the likely future ahead.”

automated tone in jarring contrast with the purity of the imagery. And yet, it is not pure. The film aims to raise awareness of The River Dart, its subjection to neglect and pollution. To dance in water alludes to a sense of liberation, its ever-running stream a comfort in that nothing is permanent, we can start again. Pollution not only harms our rivers and makes us ill, as Aptroot shares with statistics in the credits, it also compromises those precious utopias, the places we feel most free slipping through our fingers. The River Dart therefore provokes reflection of the wider scale of man-made damage on once untouched natural worlds, far beyond the screen.

Human presence in the natural environment is felt keenly in Dulcie Gilbertson’s *Dart Scud*, a dance performance of earth-bound energy that unfolds before a projection of woodland visuals. The dancers are piled in the centre, their legs resembling the tangled roots of a tree; a sense of connectivity is palpable. Moving in a circle, they shunt with shoulders hunched over, and then open their chests to the sky with ritualistic repetition. Gilbertson’s work ultimately subverts the audience-performance dichotomy when the dancers lure audience members into the space, lay them down, and then exit: the once observers are now the show. I can’t help but think of how easily we, as humans, can see

the damage we have had on nature, and how we carry on anyway. Links can also be made to the blurb of this piece, which describes the human, and the more than human world, the spiritual essence of objects, places and creatures. By the end of *Dart Scud*, the cast, who initially appeared as victims to the movement, gains a new autonomy. If the dancers represent nature itself, then this reversal of power is a reminder that the natural world will always be bigger than us.

Alma Kremnitzer’s research dissertation is a reminder of dance’s capacity for bringing about political and social change, whether environmental or not. In discussing how dance can be mobilised for anti-capitalist resistance movements, Kremnitzer points out that “dance practises have operated as pockets of resistance” and, as seen in *Jinkin’ You’s* examination of Highland dance, that it can be “a political tool within protest contexts.” Dance is also capable of generating “transient liberatory spaces”, as witnessed in *The River Dart’s* flowing utopia, or *Between the Bark’s* haven, which could be described, in Kremnitzer’s words, as an “emotional refuge from capitalist alienation.” As the abstract continues, it explores improvisation as a “means of rehearsing non-hierarchical collaboration”, a togetherness that holds *Dart Scud* together.

Seen through the lens of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (T.A.Z), a book by anarchist thinker Hakim Bey, Kremnitzer states that improvising together “can instill collective somatic understanding of alternative ways of relating, caring, and deciding. These insights are essential preparation for building anti-capitalist futures, especially as we approach climate collapse and socio-political rupture.” In light of experiencing ResLAB, Kremnitzer’s abstract reinforces the fact that empathy and collaboration, as seen across several works, are as important in activism as persistence and rebellion.

To quote the spoken word piece ‘I love my language’ featured in *Ara Focis*, ResLAB offered

many opportunities “to sit and be part of a landscape”. Installation works were favoured over performative, at least in what I saw. Be it a natural landscape conjured within artificial walls, or a landscape of culture shared generously between peers as in *Memories From Home*, the students slowed down to contemplate rich cultures and heritages behind them, and the likely future ahead. Perhaps it is a sign of a collective longing for more kindness, presence, and authentic connection, with ourselves, our natural world and those we share it with.



“Jinkin’ You: Dance in the Byres, Ballrooms and Bars of Scotland”

by [Rosie Robertson](#)

Social dance has many functions, from community building to self expression, and even courtship. In Scotland, social dance has a long and rich history, however, over the past decade there has been an apparent move away from partner dancing towards movement focused on the individual. This has happened as the needs of Scottish society have shifted, due to political changes, technological advancements and changing social identities. This project aims to trace the journey of Scottish history in relation to social dance, while questioning how nostalgia can skew our perceptions of the past and present. The project culminates in an installation, encouraging the audience members to sit together, read aloud and connect on a personal level.

“Ara Focis: Mind Over ‘Mater’. Staging Cultural Memory: Intergenerational Transmission of Italian Heritage through Identity, Gender, and Embodied Practice in the Diaspora”

by [Annalia Sparks](#)

My cultural identity has been shaped via subtle yet persistent rhythms of Italy, imparted by my mother’s gendered knowledge. Home life is continuously saturated with characteristics of Italian heritage, passionate rituals around food and faded cadences of my mother’s hybrid speech. My lived experience inside this diaspora centers my research. Though geographically distant from Angri, my family have maintained a cultural closeness through the ‘Provincia di Salerno’ regional traditions. Italian identity is not merely inherited through traditions or language. I owe it to my mother for imprinting my respect for others’ diasporic rearing. This is

reflected upon in devised philosophical dialogues which present how belonging is intertwined with preservation of legacies, and when outside of your ancestral origin, is overlooked by the strength and love of maternal familial figures. Knowledge is transferred along generations by everyday forms of care, language and tradition: I focus on my patterns of diasporic memory in a gallery, honouring my materfamilias.

“Dancing in Utopia: The River Dart. Understanding the Power of Dance in Protest: An analysis of Choreopolitics within Direct Action”

by [Benjo Aptroot](#)

This dissertation investigates the role of dance in protest through an analysis of choreopolitics and choreopolice in specific case studies, including the 1995 Reclaim the Streets Camden High Street lockdown and the en Violador en tu Camino performance. By examining these instances, the study highlights how choreographic practices in protest can challenge power dynamics and foster political resistance. The research further explores how the insights drawn from the analysis of these case studies can inform the creation of activist art. Specifically, it demonstrates how the principles of choreopolitics were applied in the development of a personal Screendance project, which addresses the issue of river pollution. This dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of how dance can be used as a dynamic and transformative tool for political expression, offering new pathways for activism through embodied art forms.

“Memories Of Home”

by [Noor Darwish](#)

This research explores how, as an Egyptian-born dancer living in the UK, I reclaim and integrate my Arab cultural identity into my contemporary dance practice within predominantly white,

Western spaces. Confronting my internalised bias and external marginalisation, I reflect on how colonial legacies, orientalism and Zionist influences in society and the contemporary dance sector, have shaped my disconnection to my heritage in dance. Through body-centred practices, diasporic spidering and improvisation rooted in personal memory, I begin to decolonise my practice, challenge aesthetic norms and reclaim pride in my Arab identity. My movement research focuses not on replicating traditional Egyptian dance but on embodying the emotions and memories tied to my culture. Collaborating with dancers unfamiliar with my heritage, I found meaningful ways to share cultural context and evoke emotional resonance. This process became both a personal and political act of healing, allowing myself to create space for Arab representation in dance while building a practice that honours my multifaceted identity.

“Dart Scud. Entangled and Enchanted: Altering nature perception through performance”

by [Dulcie Gilbertson](#)

Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans are separate from nature and, therefore, superior to it – that ‘human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world’. This belief is used to justify the exploitation of the natural world because it is thought only human life has intrinsic value. This mindset is highly damaging because it perpetuates damage to the environment. In *Staying With The Trouble*; *Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway describes a multi-species approach as ‘tying together human and nonhuman ecologies, evolution, development, history, affects, performances, technologies, and more’. This outlook shows a desire to connect to all aspects of life, recognising the complexity of living on a planet inhabited by multiple species. The multi-species approach is an ontological belief dismantling anthropocentrism, entanglement is

a phrase used to express the interconnectedness of living things. In this dissertation, I am unpacking concepts that contribute to creating life-centred dance with the aim to alter people’s perception of nature through performance.

How can Dance Facilitate the Creation of Temporary Autonomous Zones and in what ways is this Beneficial for Mobilising Anti-Capitalist Resistance Movements?

by [Alma Kremnitzer](#)

The capitalist system works hard to divide us. In response, we need to find ways of being together that call attention to our ‘shared humanity’. Though popular dance practices tend to adhere to a capitalist logic, there is radical potential for dance to be a way to generate interembodied, anti-capitalist knowledge and create liberatory spaces. Such liberatory spaces can be viewed through the lens of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (T.A.Z), a term coined by Hakim Bey, which refers to an impermanent, liberated area ‘of land, of time, of imagination’, that exists within our current system and counters the oppressive power of the state by providing an alternative way of being. The ‘interembodied’ knowledge generated by the dancing T.A.Z is a way to prepare for a non-capitalist/fascist future, collectively educating ourselves on non-hierarchical methods of collaboration and mutual-aid. Through analysing examples of countercultural dance and dance in protest movements, we can see that dance, as a social language, affords certain possibilities for radical meeting between different people, creating common ground through wordlessness and ambiguity. Its ‘carnavalesque’ nature allows it to subvert space, emboldening people to resist capitalism through the guise of play. Dance can both somatically prepare for an anti-capitalist future and mobilise for anti-capitalist resistance movements in the present.

IMPROVISATIONAL AND EMBODIED APPROACHES

BY FLORENCE NICHOLLS

Often, we describe what it feels like to improvise with language that relates to the body. Phrases like ‘I was thinking on my feet’ or ‘off the top of my head’ offer some examples. We speak in poetically somatic idioms when we attempt to describe the ineffable sensation of subconscious action before conscious thought. Writing this, I notice the irony in calling improvisation both somatic and subconscious, as really, these terms belong to two entirely different systems: the body and the mind. I felt prompted to think closely about such contradictions after watching student works at ResLAB, wondering where to draw the line between thought and feeling, sensing and doing.

Many emerging practices that I experienced at ResLAB are setting out to disrupt the binary between the somatic and the subconscious, drawing deep sensorial inquisition in line with contemporary technique. I wonder if we are still talking, writing and thinking about ‘contemporary dance’ in the many ways it has been imagined by our predecessors. ResLAB felt both retrospective and forward-thinking, stitching together – sometimes literally – a nurturing, holistic future for dance making and embodied practices.

Follow Your Nose, Follow Your Toes was a workshop held by Isabella Gaynor. Using somatic tools like body-scanning and grounding, Gaynor facilitated a journey of embodied autonomy, asking thoughtful questions to bring attention to where tension is held and to respond to these sensations led by desire. Gaynor asked her workshop participants, as they lay on the floor in The Place’s studio 4, “How do your toes feel today?” Hot,

uncomfortable and crunched up in my shoes. I was perched in the corner, scribbling down observations in a notebook, when I felt inclined to join the exercise. From this moment onward, developed a collage of self-directed improvisations that embedded positions from Graham technique, exploring how we can continue to move as embodied individuals in and outside of technical training. Gaynor’s workshop reminded me that the body knows how to respond, sometimes more eloquently than what the mind can muster.

But, what does it really mean to be ‘embodied’? The word floats around the dance sector as part of the air. I ask myself if I will ever come to fully understand the term, or more significantly, to feel it. From time to time, something washes over me when I dance, a shift to complete presence, a ‘flow state’. Louise Lawson explored this theory in *I Like What You’ve Done With The Place*, an investigative performance. As Steve Paxton put it, catching yourself in the act of moving is like “self hacking”, as if noticing a rupture in continuity and becoming conscious of the body dancing below you. All of a sudden, continuing to move is nonsensical. “I was spying on myself”, Paxton said.

In these moments, Lawson’s dancers took the opportunity to reflect on their pathways by making experimental scores, diagrams and writing on the studio walls. Sound and space shifted throughout the performance. The blinds were drawn, shrouding the studio in shady intimacy. Then, mirrors were exposed from behind a draped curtain, revealing the next dimension. Occasionally, solos collided into duets and caused a dynamic shift. A dancer plucked the air from the negative space surrounding their partner and dusted it away. I could feel myself becoming lighter. I turned to look out the window for a moment and imagined

the studio separating itself from the building and floating off into the distance. Lawson explored embodiment through the channels of space and sound, shifting awareness from how we inhabit a space, to then, how a space can inhabit us.

Daphne Wright took over The Place’s Founders’ studio, adorning the walls with drawings of still life and moving bodies for *Sketches and Pockets*. A film was playing of Wright, back at home, going about daily life. On the floor in the centre of the studio, three or four friends were fixing together the panels of a crochet blanket and to one side there were materials left out for drawing with. I decided to make my own. Under the sun streaming in from the tall Founders’ windows, I think I could’ve stayed there all day, rapidly colouring in the blank corners of a sheet of paper whilst a sunburn developed on my back.

I experienced some serenity walking around The Place’s building between performances. Maybe it was the unexpected heatwave that gave us sun well into the evening, or the distant syncopated rhythms of jazz music fading into each other from doors swung open at either end of the corridor. All this swept into my emotional foreground by the sensitivity, sensory awareness and intuition, embodied so tenderly by the ResLAB artists.

Amongst the performances I watched, many took a multimedia approach, including photographs, immersive performances and film to formulate emerging perspectives and reflect on their time spent in dance education. Yima Lin’s short film, *My Meditation Journey*, took us along a path of personal discovery, in which stillness and eccentricity were in divine contrast. The short film offered a vulnerable and at times satirical lens to self-acceptance,

connection and self-expression. Paradoxically, for Lin, embodying stillness in solitude became a venture to reconnect with life outside of herself. Amongst our efforts to engage with the world and expose our nerves to the sensual experience of living, we might look to our internal landscape for direction. Maybe our bodies already know where they are taking us.

Reflecting on their improvisational practices, Jaymie Powell and Elfin Bonome looked to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory to respond to the nature of embodiment and feelings of disembodiment. Powell took a methodological approach to reveal a spectrum of sensations felt by improvisational dancers, between immersion and psychological detachment. Bonome followed a thread of introspective curiosity. Flow is a term that emerged from the study of psychology and seems to be on the collective minds of the dance community. For many of us, it makes up our reasons to keep dancing. To feel the joy of getting lost in motion. Is it embodied disembodiment to be outside of the self, yet completely physical?

“Shaped by attention, sensation and real-time decision making” is how Daniel Sutton described his practice after the performance held in studio 1. We gathered around the circumference of the space, where a circle of light hit the floor. The performers watched each other improvise to a spoken word soundtrack, discussing their relationships to movement as they danced. Sutton's work felt like an extension of an ongoing process of discovery. Sutton's approach to embodied research was shared across the day by choreographers whose explorations centered methods of improvisation and score-making. Fostering non-hierarchical systems of creativity is a quiet rebellion when we so often expect our dancers, and ourselves,

to find our rung on the industry ladder and hold onto it tightly.

When we dance to feel embodied, we are making a gesture of autonomy. The variety of work presented at ResLAB was an assurance of this growing perspective and of the nature of improvisation as a practice that encourages collective discovery and self-realisation.

ATTENTION

SUBCONSCIOUS



RECONNECT

“Follow Your Nose, Follow Your Toes: Dancing as a means to listen to the body”
by [Isabella Gaynor](#)

Driven by asking myself why I dance, this self-reflective research explores the role of impulse in dance: how it is evoked in certain practices, and how dancers can simultaneously deepen their engagement with a codified technique and their natural instincts using breath and developing movement patterns in the body through repetition and technique training. By looking at movement as an animal instinct and primary need, and noticing how pedagogical practices and codified technique training such as Graham technique have influenced my connection to my impulse, I developed a practice that uses breath and repetition to awaken a dancer’s somatic awareness, allowing them to follow the impulses that arise in each part of their body. Although we have our own idiosyncrasies when listening to our impulses and instincts, the necessity to exercise our animal ability to move does not change, and for me, this exhibits as dancing.

“I Like What You’ve Done With The Place”
by [Louise Lawson](#)

“Flow is not something we make happen, it is something we can learn to listen for, make space for, and invite in.” As dancers, we may often find ourselves in spaces that feel uninspiring or uncomfortable, whether in auditions, rehearsals or intensives. Yet, we are rarely encouraged to reflect on how these environments affect our ability to engage. My research explores how both physical and facilitative elements, such as lighting, sound and spatial design, influence our subconscious access to flow state. Through an embodied inquiry supported by somatic and affect theory, I investigated how dancers respond to environments that don’t naturally support them, and how awareness of these conditions

can foster new adaptability and presence. What emerged was a nuanced understanding of flow as not just an internal psychological experience, but a relational one, shaped by the sensory and atmospheric qualities of space. This research has deepened my belief that our environments truly matter. By becoming more sensitive to them, we can create more immersive, responsive conditions: both for ourselves as dancers and in our roles as facilitators.

“Installation called ‘Sketches and Pockets’, dissertation was titled ‘How can presence underpin the creative processes of artists?’”
by [Daphne Wright](#)

I am investigating how the processes of painting and dancing can be linked by the artist attending to an awareness of the present moment, what can this demeanour of presence bring about in the art that is made, and how does a mindful approach influence my own creative processes? I have researched visual and dance artists such as Anthony Eyton, Richard Diebenkorn, Deborah Hay and the Hofesh Shechter Company, as well as the spiritual teachers Thich Nhat Hahn and Eckhart Tolle. The work of all of these artists is so exciting to me. They have something slightly unexplainable in their art, an energy that is quite wondrous and uncontained – there is a freedom to their approach that enables ‘miracles’ of pure expression to transpire. I have learnt that this freedom can be harnessed through a mindful practice of quietening thoughts, and entering a meditative state, aiming to find a mental spaciousness from thinking with an awareness of the present moment; presence.

“‘Unscripted Motion’ An Exploration into Creative Thought in the Improvising Body”
by [Elfin Bonome](#)

The nature of creativity through the lens of contemporary movement practice, focusing particularly on improvisation as both a conceptual and embodied act. Drawing on philosophical, psychological, and neuroscientific frameworks, the work constructs a layered understanding of creativity as an emergent, subjective process—one that resists fixed definition and instead thrives in ambiguity, intuition and lived experience. Grounded in theories from Boden, Sawyer, and Csikszentmihalyi, creativity is explored as both the generation and recognition of novel configurations, closely tied to intrinsic motivation and the immersive psychological state of flow. Improvisation is positioned as a potent site of creative emergence—an act of moving without a predetermined path, guided by sensation, memory, emotion and the body’s interaction with the environment. Neuroscientific insights into the Default Mode Network (DMN) reveal how improvisation activates a unique interplay between conscious reflection and subconscious instinct, allowing the mover to inhabit a paradoxical state of structured spontaneity. Through embodied research, including a series of self-devised improvisational tasks, I explored how conceptual prompts and auditory stimuli influence the capacity to enter flow and generate authentic movement. Tasks grounded in thematic stimuli, such as ‘chaos’ or ‘freedom’, revealed the power of constraint to liberate expressive possibility, while fluid musical scores paradoxically hindered intuitive engagement, revealing habitual patterns and internal resistance. Through this, I situate improvisation within holistic and somatic frameworks, emphasising the creative potential of mind-body integration. By attuning to internal states and external stimuli, improvisation becomes a process of

self-discovery, resisting aesthetic judgment in favour of raw authenticity. Ultimately, my work argues for improvisation as both a creative and introspective act—an ephemeral dialogue between mind and body, memory and movement, structure and surrender—where creativity is not merely performed but lived and embodied.

“Internal landscapes”
by [Daniel Sutton](#)

This dissertation explores how Body-Mind Centering (BMC), a somatic methodology developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, enhances improvisational dance practice. Using a practice-as-research approach, the study examines how BMC’s focus on internal body systems—skeletal, muscular, nervous and skin—can deepen somatic awareness and support authentic, intuitive movement. Through structured studio explorations, reflective journaling and improvisational tasks, the research investigates how BMC principles foster creative confidence, fluidity and embodied intelligence.

The study is both personal and collective, addressing how somatic practices can shift improvisation from a space of hesitation to one of trust and discovery. Exercises such as “Follow the Hand” and group improvisation circles revealed how sensory awareness and body system integration support spontaneous expression. The findings suggest that BMC enables dancers to move with greater presence, adaptability and creative agency, affirming improvisation as a dynamic interplay between sensation, perception and embodied action.



IDENTITY

BY JANEJIRA MATTHEWS

Places and people – the combination is inseparable. Where we spend our time so often forms our identities, but rarely do we consider how we affect the spaces we inhabit. The works at ResLAB were full bodied expressions of identity that filled the rooms they were set in. Each installation and performance transformed its space into something that perfectly encased the essence of the artists within, sometimes fun, moving or empowering, forming a symbiotic relationship between the dancer’s identity and the performance space itself.

Anna Ala-Korpi’s *My Third Space* firmly sets the tone for the day with sensory delights. Her third space is somewhere comforting to take refuge, isolated from all else. Club music, dark lighting and bright textiles spilling across a lecture room floor echo the chaotic fun of someone young and upbeat. The little desk doubling as a dressing table suggests a bedroom, as does the band posters climbing the wall, socks drying in a corner, a calming corner with a mottled light, empty drinks bottles and a den set to one side as a party place (“welcome to the club!” the sign reads). It’s hard to imagine this lecture room as anything other than Ala-Korpi’s personal place, a physical manifestation of her personality. Small handwritten affirmations stuck to a tall mirror remind us we are enough, we are beautiful. When I sit in front of the mirror to read them I feel like I am enacting something Ala-Korpi has done herself, and I get a glimpse into what it might be like to be another person. Or at least to share something with this sunny personality I’ve just met. Queerness, neurodiversity, Ala-Korpi’s Finnish speech sounding out from headphones and blue watery fabric marks a self-embrace of Ala-Korpi’s identity that envelops visitors in a warm pocket of her essence.

Walking into a small, quiet room, I am tucked away from the drifting conversations in the corridor outside. Soft music, Ludovico Einaudi’s *Summer Portraits*, gently envelops me. Like Ala-Korpi’s installation, Ty Burrows’ exhibition *Capturing Queer Joy* also embraces queer identity, but the feel and approach could not be more different. Ala-Korpi’s space is energetic and quirky, Burrows’ is pensive and softly emotional. It’s a reminder that people can’t be categorised and squeezed into boxes, no matter how much Western society demands it. Burrows’ own experiences with gender identity are beautifully stilled into light, shade, sunlit colours and the monochrome of portrait photography. Intimate close-ups of friends’ faces, Burrows themselves and sweet moments between same sex couples radiate a tender poignancy. Collectively, the photos reveal the ordinariness of people living their lives, queerness meshed into simply being. Simply living. If only society saw it as that simple.

Amongst the photos pinned up on the wall rests a book bound by Burrows’ hands. I turn the pages, the rough grain brushing against my fingers. Every page is weighed down with emotion. Excerpts from Burrows’ written dissertation deepen the significance of every image, most of all Burrows’ documentation of their top surgery and how it impacted their sense of identity. It’s brave and honest, and I struggle to leave the physical space Burrows has so clearly carved with their heart.

The physical body is examined again in Serra Kösebay’s *Plastic Limbs and Sahtekâr*. Plastic mannequin arms are piled on top of Kösebay, transforming her into a distorted body in the dim light. Slowly, Kösebay’s limbs come to life as fingers flex and stretch, the motion expanding through the body. Rippling, arching onto hands and knees, Kösebay moves with a

slow fatigue. Imposter syndrome sticks in the stiffness of plastic limbs as Kösebay attempts to make them part of her own body or drags them in what feels like heavy obligation. This fakeness moulded in synthetic is mimicked in Kösebay’s body at times as she assumes a rigidity one moment or flips and curls the next in a display of virtuosic flexibility. A physical comment on impressively high standards and ability, longing for more and the confusion that accompanies it, *Plastic Limbs* perfectly captures a dizzying psyche torn between its desire for something perceived as better and a sickened weariness. *Plastic Limbs and Sahtekâr*’s unpredictability fascinates, pushing me to question every small move. Kösebay’s muscles harden and melt, at times it seems their very fibres are desperately trying to absorb the plasticity in a bodily identity crisis. Layered and complex, *Plastic Limbs and Sahtekâr* is a considered and dark step into corporeal illusion and the mind’s doubt.

Joy and mental disorientation mark the day’s experience of identity so far, and it feels fitting to conclude with healing and a touch of magic. Mahala Tucker confronts and enchants with *Mahala, The Obeah Woman*, an assertion of power rooted in Jamaican spiritual practices. A wooden staff in hand, Tucker claims her space by sweeping observers out of her way, dispersing them into clusters around the room. When she dances around us, her movements are grounded with twisting legs and bouncing feet. Sometimes she makes relentless eye contact with a single person watching, holding it until they dance back. Power seems to emanate from Tucker’s insistent presence and command of the space, and it’s a strange experience to be faced so brazenly with someone’s sense of self. There are seconds of stillness, then electric energy made even more visible in the lightning bolts on the underside of Tucker’s skirts.

The description of her piece is in the form of a poem in the programme, referring to Tucker’s birth, and by extension her, as fiery and loud. Attacking the movement with intense gaze, we find that *Mahala, the Obeah Woman* is formidable and magnetic.

The students’ written dissertations also turn to their identities for inspiration. Gender and Eurocentricity act as key themes in viewing dance as an art form and the current climate for those who engage in it. With mainstream discussions concerning toxic masculinity on the rise, *Why Men Move* by Jonah Wigley addresses much-needed conversations in relation to dance. The study questions why men don’t move by examining stereotypes of strength paired with shame often experienced by the men who do dance. These issues are not new to dance, but their long-term nature is surely problematic in itself. Damaging beliefs around masculinity have often caused bullying and concerns around male mental health in relation to dance training but Wigley’s research uncovers the reasons behind it and what measures various dance companies have taken to lift men up through dance. Although the paper does not draw on primary sources, it sets up a strong basis for future investigation and should encourage its readers to consider their own views on gender. It would be interesting to experiment with how the research could be expanded beyond writing as it carries strong potential for development into other mediums.

Olivia Francis’ dissertation recognises her English-Caribbean heritage as a key to examining whiteness and decolonisation in contemporary dance. It is no challenge to find writing on contemporary dance that focuses on European practice, and reading Francis’ abstract makes me realise how easy it is to lose sight of contemporary’s African roots unless it

is spelled out. More than simply viewing the status of aesthetics in contemporary dance, Francis uses her findings to challenge notions of decolonisation and performative authenticity. She speaks about how dancers of colour may alter their behaviour to work in white spaces, providing a consideration deepened by her own identity, but I wonder what authenticity means to her. “Authenticity” has become a common buzzword in popular culture, and Francis seems to do well in recognising its many layers. In her abstract, she touches on cultural authenticity alongside the behavioural, making for a promising argument for change to take place regarding power and agency in Western contemporary dance.

The practical and written work created by the students this year present a kaleidoscope of identities and approaches. Where installations and performances animate the physical spaces they happen in, allowing dancers to mould spaces unique to them, the written papers actively seek to change the wider space that this generation of dancers are about to enter. That the work across the cohort feels collectively hopeful, informed and even powerful reflects the bravery of each individual in pouring a little of themselves into their research and art.

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“A journey into the folklore history of Jamaica and connecting with this aspect of my culture to develop a piece ‘Mahala The Obeah Woman’”

By Mahala Tucker

‘I came down on a lightning bolt,
nine months in my Mama’s belly
When I was born the midwife
screamed and shout
I had fire and brimstone
coming out of my mouth
I’m Mahala, I’m The Obeah Woman’
(Lyrics from ‘Exuma, The Obeah Man’
by Exuma).

Triggered by a visit to the John Lyons exhibition of ‘Carnavalesque’ I started on a journey of learning about the folklore and traditions of the Caribbean with a particular focus on my Jamaican heritage. Interested in making a multi-disciplinary piece I explored how dance, costume, music and oral storytelling are used in both traditional and modern social settings in Jamaica. Taking particular inspiration from the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica and the Christmas tradition of Junkanoo I made a solo piece designed to introduce different folk characters to the audience in a setting that felt interactive and immersive.

“How Contemporary Dance Has Become A Westernised Practice: An Analysis of Identity Within A Western Style”

by Olivia Francis

Navigating contemporary dance, a Western practice, as a non-white body, induces complex and challenging feelings surrounding identity, whilst inhabiting a space that lacks cultural inclusivity. Discovering elements of my heritage and identity, which both coincide and juxtapose the Western aesthetic, has been

powerful and liberating as I explore how to free myself from societal expectation and limitation whilst uncovering what it means to be a Black dancer. Through conversation and self-analysis, I undertook the task of drawing upon personal experience, scrutinised through the philosophies and frameworks of bell hooks and Sara Ahmed, as well as Critical Race Theory, to gather broad insight into the non-white contemporary dance experience and what that has entailed for various individuals. Whilst no tangible output has resulted from this research, my future artistic endeavours are to be fully informed and reflective of my research project, which has given me huge clarity and assurance of my right to place myself and take up space within contemporary dance settings.

“PLASTIC LIMBS AND SAHTEKÂR: An Embodied Choreographic Investigation Into Imposter Syndrome, Cultural Identity, And Belonging...”

by Serra Kösebay

Plastic Limbs and Sahtekâr is an embodied choreographic investigation into the lived experience of Imposter Syndrome, interwoven with questions of cultural identity and belonging. Drawing on somatic practices, psychological theory and practice-as-research methodologies, this work explores how self-doubt is physically carried in the body; through gesture, breath and presence, and how movement can offer a form of inquiry and transformation. Mannequin limbs became central metaphors within the choreographic process, symbolising disconnection, weight and the internalised voice of fraudulence. The research also includes conversations with Turkish dance artists living abroad, reflecting on displacement, marginalisation and creative survival. Situated within a broader discourse on mental health in the arts, Plastic Limbs and Sahtekâr proposes choreography not as resolution but as

resistance: a way to hold contradiction, reclaim space and choreograph a sense of belonging. This work offers a deeply personal, yet resonant contribution to conversations on identity, vulnerability and embodiment in contemporary dance.

“An exploration into the notion of third space through a queer and neurodivergent lens”

by Anna Ala-Korpi

What’s my third space? I propose a personal reimagining of third space as a queer, neurodivergent sanctuary, existing beyond the physical. Last year, I wanted to create an immersive safe space, however taking up space felt too vulnerable and exposing; I wasn’t ready. Almost a year later the ideas resurfaced when thinking about my interests for this project and thus I started exploring links between queerness, neurodivergence, nightlife, community and belongingness and created my installation; levähdyspaikka:3. Just like these ideas, I realised that third spaces are fluid, flexible and ever changing. I hope that my work provides a discussion that highlights the power in cultivating self-worth and community through the concept of third space. I believe that the act of creating and inhabiting these spaces can lead to collective liberation and futures where belonging is a lived reality for all. Remember, you’re welcome here.

“Capturing Queer Joy”

by Ty Burrows

By curating photos of queer people, I can show this beauty to more people other than myself. This is why I have decided to curate my own gallery. The final exhibition will consist of a room filled with portraits of queer people existing in different spaces. I want the exhibition to be somewhere where you look in every direction and are faced with the unique joy of a queer

person. I have a passion for photography, and I want to pair this with the urge I have to flaunt the accomplishments of my own community. For me, the timing of this project is a necessary protest against the current political state of the world when it comes to liberation and equality within the LGBTQIA+ community. My ambition is that this gallery will aid as a comfort and acknowledgement that the LGBTQIA+ still exist and will always have the energy to fight for what we need.



IMMERSIVE PRACTICES

BY ISABELA PALANCEAN

“Immersion is not escape but intensification – an experience that overwhelms the senses and unsettles boundaries.”

In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetic*, Erika Fischer-Lichte offers a counter-perspective to Guy Debord’s idea of the ‘spectacle’. While Debord frames spectacle as a tool of domination – detaching people from direct experience – Erika Fischer-Lichte posits the performative moment as a site of embodied co-presence and transformative potential.

After witnessing five of this year’s third-year works from the London School of Contemporary Dance, I find myself particularly drawn to this tension. From theoretical research into digital commodification to the practical exploration of baking as a choreographic device and methodology, the selected works exposed, on the one hand, the artificially constructed nature of dance while, on the other, revealing a potential to move and affect us beyond aesthetic frameworks, i.e the production apparatus typically behind a dance piece, including costumes, staging, and the visual qualities of movement, such as fluidity, precision, or stylisation.

In *The Choreographed Consumer: Dance, Fashion & the Digital Spectacle*, Lucy Coleman explores the rise of dance-based advertising, using the 2024 and 2025 GAP fashion campaigns as case studies. Coleman points out how dance “serves as a conduit for fashion to move beyond static imagery, showing not just how garments look but how they move, feel, and behave”.

Arguably quite basic, GAP’s baggy jeans, white T’s and stripy tops become highly desirable when worn by dancers performing fluid isolations, grounded pliés, and sharp, syncopated footwork drawn from hip-hop and contemporary jazz. In her research, Coleman reveals the power of dance, although here used commercially, to transform – both our material, as well as perceptive reality.

In *Repositioning the Spectator: The Role of Audience Placement in Perception and Engagement*, Mary Payne examined the concept of kinaesthetic empathy further, comparing different spatial configurations and their impact on the relationship between audience and performer. According to her research, the proscenium model seen in traditional theatres elicited feelings of detachment and passivity – by contrast to the heightened engagement reported in immersive settings. Most interestingly, however, Payne’s study underlined the importance of tangibility in creating a fuller, deeper engagement; moments of feeling touched by air as a dancer passed, hearing breaths, making eye contact. It pointed towards an increased connection when witnessing performance in situ as opposed to via a screen.

Testing the live-digital binary further, Katrin Tani’s piece *Beyond and Alongside the Screen* asked the question ‘Can a virtual character be brought to life?’ Performed across both screen and studio space, her multimedia dance installation started with Tani sitting on a chair towards the screen – a reflection of the viewer’s own immersed state. As the film progressed, Tani’s contorted and laboured stretches suggested an attempt at activation, almost like a two-dimensional character learning how to be three-dimensional for the first time.

What was interesting to note was the prominent

use of the chair in relation to the performer’s movement, to the extent in which the two became technically intertwined. This struck me as a powerful visual representation of suture theory, referring to the idea that viewers are “stitched” into film, creating a sense of self-identification with the story and/or characters. Despite being inspired by suture theory, Tani’s weirdly fun and surreal piece resisted a straightforward conflation of the live body with its mediated image; instead, Tani’s non-linear, non-synchronised approach disrupted seamless identification, foregrounding the gaps, disjunctions, and slippages between virtual and real entities.

If Tani approached the idea of immersion from a technological angle, Xel Ortega returned us to nature in her piece *The Sun’s Daughter*. Envisioned as a “ritual passage from darkness to light – a dance of femininity, togetherness, and sacred grace”, the piece was refreshingly raw, its dizzying leaps and collective, trance-like swirls conferring a sense of forceful spontaneity and unedited release. While so much contemporary dance revolves around a perfect execution, Ortega’s piece invited us to tap into our primeval roots, where rhythmic foot percussion and an embrace of ritualistic elements evoked a deeper, more universal beauty.

Rather than delivering a polished product, the choreography grew out of an exploration into how the dancer might be transformed through the process of dancing. From highly energetic sequences, the dancers moved into states of rest followed by a subsequent awakening – their bodies arched towards the sun’s luminous call. Audible breathing emphasised physical exertion, while the repetitive, almost hypnotic motifs drew the audience into a meditative state – together reinforcing the experience of

dance as simultaneously bodily and spiritual.

stage.”

“Something in the world forces us to think. This something is not an object of recognition, but a fundamental encounter.” – Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

Turning around, I, like most of the other participants, was profoundly amused to discover that the soloist in question was in fact a man casually riding a bike.

Subtly captured by Deleuze here, the idea of embodied cognition, thinking and moving took centre stage in Lilah Boback’s piece *Conduit (film)*. A contemporary dance piece showcasing physical reactions in response to the atmospherics and sonics of post-rock music, *Conduit* revealed not only how movement is driven by sound, but also how it can act as a powerful channel to the collective unconscious. The minimalist, shadow-hued set referenced the black-and-white videography of the original track by SŦURL – a drone-rock band formed by filmmaker Jim Jarmusch and producer Carter Logan, known for their cinematographic soundscapes. The dancers’ stark, expressionist steps appeared dream-like as if retracing Berlin’s eerie post-socialist architecture depicted in the music video. With its heavy emphasis on atmosphere and performativity, Boback’s piece evoked an act of conjuring, where viscerally charged gestures reactivated memory, presence and place in real time.

Using pedestrian footage, and audience participation, *This is a Dance* by Jack Baron challenged common expectations of what dance is and how it is traditionally produced.

Initially facing a blank wall, audience members were invited – if tapped on the shoulder – to turn around and watch the screen, consequently allowing their auditory experience to align with the visual.

“The dance begins as a soloist crosses the

Using performance-coded terminology – solo/duet, background/foreground, cueing the exit/entry of – as well as dance-specific terms such as “turns, strides, or transition”, Baron’s piece created a playful tension between direct and indirect experience, performer and audience member. While the technically complex vocabulary stood in stark opposition to the seemingly mundane actions shown on screen, the piece revealed how performance often unfolds much closer to our immediate surroundings than it may initially be expected.

Can baking be seen as a form of dance? How about eating a home-made cookie, or a cupcake? These are some of the questions that arose during and after watching Elina Saryazdi’s work titled *Baking and dance: a documentary*. Resisting institutionalised norms of dance, and what these should look like, Saryazdi’s personal love of baking was transferred over to improvised choreography in her search for authentic expression. Here, meaning was not drawn from how something looked, but from how it felt.

The tactile, rhythmic and sensory aspects of baking – kneading, folding, waiting, rising – were translated into dance motifs that emphasised playfulness, texture and process over outcome. Audience members were invited to savour a homemade cookie, piece of bread or cupcake, while watching the associated movement improvisation derived from that recipe. Light and airy batter manifested as graceful, flowing limbs, next to grounded and

contained articulations to signify the patience and care required in letting dough rise. The piece documented the dancer’s own journey from merely representing to fully inhabiting movement. Each shift, slide and spiral emerged from an internal impulse rather than aesthetic intention. Having my other senses – taste, touch and smell – engaged, I felt a different, if not closer, connection to the dancer. Like a mindful exercise, the experience gently quieted my critical, anxiety-prone mind, allowing me to embrace the shared, sensory act of dancing, baking and eating.

Ultimately, these works reveal that immersion in dance is not about escapism, but about deeper presence. Whether through the act of baking, the vibrations of music, or a fleeting gesture in a park, immersion becomes a mode of heightened awareness. As Fischer-Lichte suggests, performance holds transformative potential not because it detaches us from reality, but because it invites us into it more fully.

And yet, this promise of transformation is not without complexity. In an era saturated by curated experience, immersive practices risk being co-opted into the very spectacle they seek to resist – packaged for consumption, stripped of ambiguity. What emerges, however, is a rich, if uneven, field – where dance becomes a site of negotiation between embodiment and aesthetics, agency and choreography, intimacy and mediation.

“performance holds transformative potential not because it detaches us from reality, but because it invites us into it more fully”

ABSTRACTS

“The Choreographed Consumer: Dance, Fashion & the Digital Spectacle”

by [Lucy Coleman](#)

This dissertation emphasises that dance in fashion advertising functions as more than an aesthetic or performative element; it is a complex, strategic tool used to communicate style, identity and emotional resonance. Dance acts as a visual and embodied spectacle, showcasing not only how garments move on the body but also expressing individuality, functionality and desire. Advertising has shifted from overt product placement in traditional media to lifestyle-oriented content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Influencers and online creators use dance to present clothing organically, forming parasocial relationships with audiences who are inspired by their style and presence. This creates a form of soft persuasion, where the consumer is sold an aspirational image rather than just a product. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital transformation, positioning social media as a dominant space for both cultural connection and commercial influence. Ultimately, the use of dance in fashion advertising merges embodiment with marketing, producing a digital spectacle that appeals to both emotional and social desires.

“Repositioning the Spectator: The Role of Audience Placement in Perception and Engagement”

by [Mary Payne](#)

Growing up in Louisiana, where most of my early dance experiences took place in traditional proscenium theatre settings, I understood dance as something viewed from a distance: fixed, formal and frontal. It wasn't until later in my education that I began to question this norm. Performing in intimate, non-traditional spaces, I noticed how much closer I felt, physically and

emotionally, to the audience. This led me to ask: How does an audience's proximity and position in the space of a dance performance influence their relationship with dance? Drawing from the work of Sandra Reeve, Cassandra Ann Abate, Rose Biggin and Alexandra Kolb, I examine how different performance layouts influence the way dance is received and experienced, both personally and politically. To explore this further, I conducted a practical workshop where participants watched live dance from different spatial orientations and reflected on how their position impacted their experience. Through this inquiry, I aim to contribute to ongoing conversations about how contemporary dance can challenge traditional audience-performer dynamics and foster more meaningful, immediate and inclusive experiences.

“Beyond and Alongside the Screen”

by [Katrin Tani](#)

The research considers if a character within a film can be brought to a 'live' context. To display the difference between the live and mediated performance, the research delves into Philip Auslander's and Peggy Phelan's thoughts on liveness, which compares the two mediums through their philosophical nature of being, questioning the two forms of performance learning from the mediums and how film theory can challenge the live performance space. The writing expands on suture theory within film as a main framework, including Laura Mulvey's key concepts, which talk about the character and its relationship to the audience. Lastly, the paper looks at visual aspects in Wes Anderson's recognisable distinction of character presence in film. Through these perspectives, the paper suggests that rethinking the boundaries between film and live performance can open up new possibilities for understanding presence, connection and performance across mediums.

“Contemporary Dance as a Conduit for Atmospheric and Aesthetic Perception, Informed by Music”

by [Lilah Bobak](#)

How can I create a choreographic practice that prioritises authentic, yet cohesive physical reactions in response to the atmospheric qualities and aesthetic input from post-rock music? In this dissertation, I explore this question through my theoretical and practice-based research on atmosphere, aesthetics, kinesthetic affect and audiovisual congruency, all viewed through a contemporary dance lens. I have connected contemporary dance, music and atmosphere to show how a choreographic practice can be structured to encourage similar aesthetic perceptions within the shared movement of the dancers and the choreographer. How can I create conditions and structure a rehearsal to maximise dancers' connection with atmospheric input from movement and music? How can music encourage cohesive aesthetic perception through kinesthetic reaction to the atmosphere in dancers? I explore how collective atmosphere and individual response to the atmosphere don't sit in opposition to each other, but naturally find cohesion through both music and movement.

“Dance Performance – How Can We Subvert Expectations Within The Audience To Alter What Dance Is Perceived To Be”

by [Jack Baron](#)

I started my research wondering how we, as dancers, can change an audience's perception of a dance performance. I ended up thinking that it's actually us, dance artists, who need to change our perception. My favourite moment is my conclusion – “The most powerful element of dance for me, though, that I've found, is the engagement of the audience's imagination. If you engage an audience's imagination, their engagement deepens as you give them power

to be involved in the dance, or the defining of the dance, with you, as I alluded to with the thoughts around what happens if the pencil snaps. I still don't know, and I don't think I want to know, as it is this power of not knowing that has caused me to think so deeply about this piece and continue to think about it and engage with it in this way.”

“How can baking enrich and inform contemporary dance practice?”

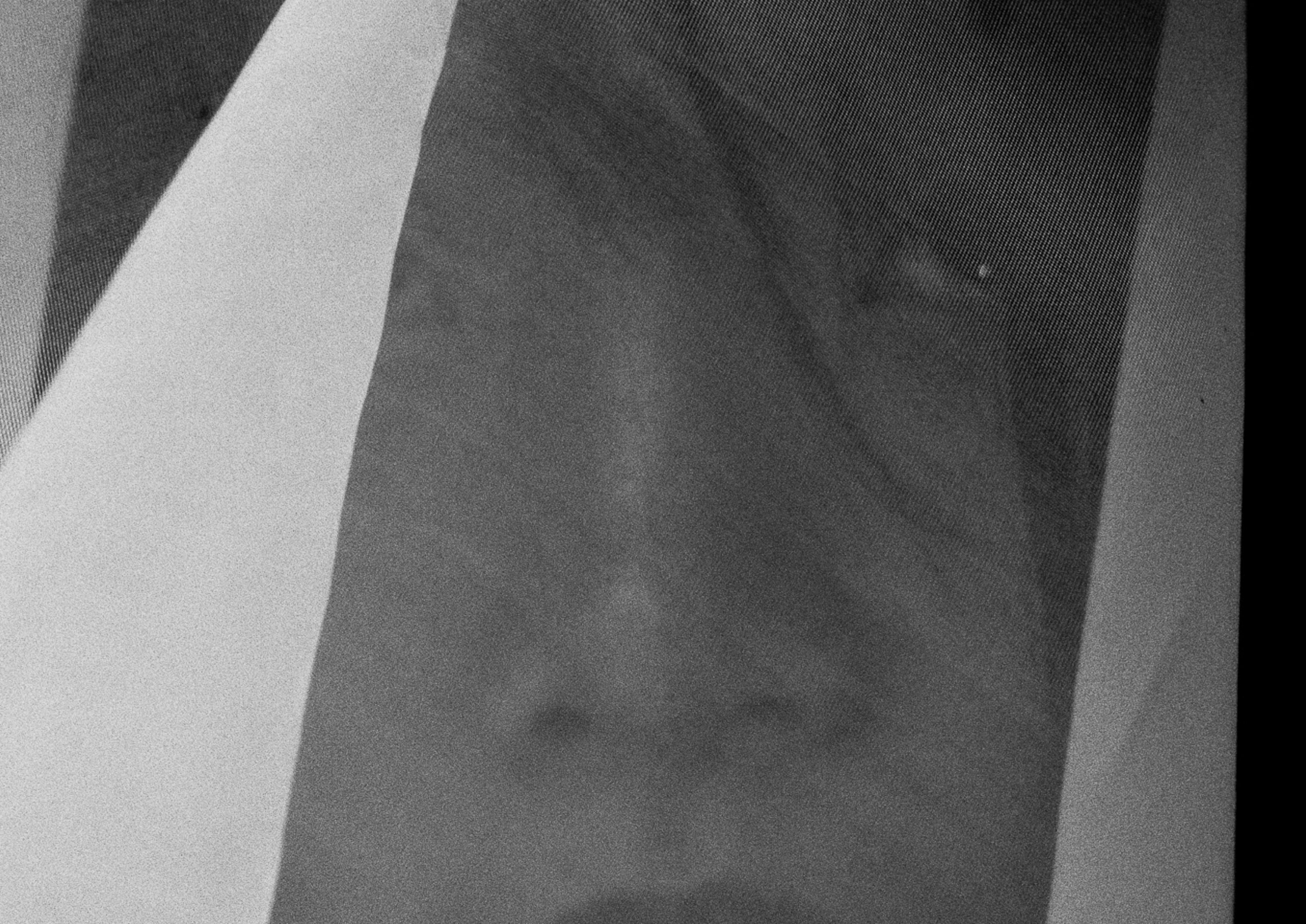
by [Elina Saryazdi](#)

As someone who is passionate about both disciplines, I see them as tools for emotional expression and have noticed strong parallels in their structure. I became curious about what might happen if I began treating baking as an active part of my practice – not as a metaphor, but as a physical, creative framework for moving and making. This research centres on letting baking lead the movement, using recipes as frameworks for improvisation with myself and others. The result is a documentary-style film that follows my journey from individual to group discoveries. It presents outcomes from my practice-research, accompanied by reflections from the dancers. This project brings together two parts of my life that had previously operated separately, and in doing so, pushes back against the idea that only certain activities count as 'art'.

“The Lung of the Divine: Choreographing the Sacred Breath/The Sun's Daughter”

By [Xel Ortega](#)

The Sun's Daughter is a ritual dance—a journey from darkness to light, from fracture to wholeness. A circle of women seeking a breath of light, something greater than themselves. Through Aztec-rooted ceremony, Latin rhythms and contemporary dance, they spiral through celebration into trance, arriving together to a state of grace.



HYBRID STYLES

BY FRANCESCA MATTHYS

As people we are multifaceted. As artists we bring a smorgasbord of influences that inform the lens through which we view the world and our artmaking practices. From the moment we start to create, we acquire multiple lineages of practice with us, as we navigate finding our artistic voices and as we discover our true selves. Personal lineages and heritages may weave their way into these artistic discoveries, other disciplines, or artistic lineages. As individual artists, we are the sum of a myriad of artistic viewpoints.

ResLAB was indeed a reflection of these multifaceted expressions. I sincerely value this module and having independent research as a way to understand the many influences we encounter in the beginning of a budding artist's career. There is no doubt that the work produced by this year's BA3 cohort is rich and promising in its explorations and overall artistic rigour, ranging from performance work, academic speculations to teaching methodologies.

In our contemporary dance history and present, there have been multiple endeavours to create hybridised practice. Pioneering artists include Katherine Dunham, Akram Khan and Dada Masilo all incorporating a range of disciplines, dance styles as well as parts of their cultural heritage as artists to create their own unique hybrid practices. During the ResLAB, a new generation of dance artists shared a window into their processes pertaining to culture and hybrid styles.

Through a practical demonstration, Anneli Tan proposed some solid insights on how hybridised dance practices in dance pedagogy can support the development of well-

rounded dancers. Through the presentation of various exercises she shared how Pilates, Traditional Chinese Dance, Breaking, amongst others, can be integrated in contemporary dance practices. These explorations have formed Tan's strong training methodology for dancers, to encourage a holistic approach to movement and mobility.

Tan made me reflect on what we inherently bring in our embodiment as people from diverse backgrounds. We often train diligently in styles that are often quite new to our bodies and tend to place more value on this. Tan's inquiry made me question how we may find the balance between embodied practices inherent to our bodies, through lineage alongside new vocabulary, to strengthen our dancing. Her approach does more than just support dance pedagogy, it is also rooted in the belief that hybridised dance practices have the potential to bring people and communities together.

Overall, it was a delight to witness the dedication and technical awareness displayed by this blossoming dance educator and artist. With a consciousness of how technical material can be taught in the most efficient and student-centred way, this is a positive reflection on where the future of dance pedagogy may develop.

Yaorao Cai, who like Tan draws from Chinese classical dance as a formative part of her training, interrogates her diverse dance background in dance across China and the UK. This dissertation is an investigation on educational philosophies and pedagogical frameworks across borders, exploring Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Paulo Freire's theories of the banking model versus problem-posing education.

Cai's work is a comprehensive approach to

hybridisation that does not discard anything but rather is all-embracing. Her work critiques how Chinese classical dance has offered her qualities such as perseverance and mental rigour whereas the UK educational system through which she experiences her contemporary dance training focuses on inclusivity and autonomy of individual voices. This journey is just one that reflects the nuances of discovering one's artistic voice. A reminder that one's path can never be identical to the next. Cai's approach grounds us in the viewpoint that dance practice may not be a one-size-fits-all and that, regardless of where you go, every experience that we come with as artists and people has value in the future development and trajectory of our careers.

Madeleine Jesson shares a film, offering how her immersion into Krump as an artform, has supported her artistic development. The film beautifully honours not only the history of the practice, through cypher and training footage alongside interview and personal reflective voice recordings, but reveals the core elements of this street dance style. Krump, which emerged in the early 2000s in South Central Los Angeles, may be on a very surface level perceived to be 'aggressive', however Jesson's film sensitively articulates the healing power of Krump as an artform and how it is transformational in growing community and trust in ourselves.

Observing Krump dancers, I am always drawn to the intense pulsating through the heart and centre, and how potent this is, considering it is our most overt place of emotional processing. Krump is indeed an emotional dance with space to release and discard what is no longer needed to thrive.

Within the film, Jesson poignantly shares that although she does not necessarily share

the same background and life experiences as the creators of Krump, it has offered her so much that she will forever be grateful for. This acknowledgement of position and privilege when engaging with diverse dance practices displays a sincere honouring of dance lineage that is relevant across contexts.

This sense of homage and respect being paid to practices that have supported the development of young artists is a strong thread throughout all the works I observed, which is apt as we traverse the world of hybrid practice. It is even more important to have an awareness of the history of these practices, especially when not from these heritages, which is something which the BA3 students have illustrated well.

Jon Rodd uses body percussion as a tool to process and share his personal stories. This solo is sophisticated and tender, sharing not only a clear timeline of body percussion's origins but also milestones within the performer's own life story. Rodd narrates how historically enslaved Africans in America's Deep South would use body percussion as a form of communication when their drums were taken from them. Similarly in South Africa, gumboot dancing emerged from miners being forbidden to speak while working in the gold mines.

As part of the history of body percussion, Rodd also touches on its emergence from 'Stepping' as a rhythmic dance practice that developed in African-American fraternities. Through this, Rodd's solo is informative and earnest whilst preparing us for multiple layers of grief. The heart is another focus as our attention is brought to its beating rhythms, its ability to break and hold onto memories, to remember. It is a moment that I believe asks us to become present to both the moment and our own heartbeat.

“... homage and respect being paid to practices that have supported the development of young artists is a strong thread throughout all the works”

As Rodd shares the loss of his brother, his movement becomes layered; clicking rhythms and body slaps like swatting flies, like swatting grief from oneself, like soothing oneself, like grieving. This solo is a sweet spot between skill and emotion, sharing various embodiments of resonance and through various artefacts around the room like an altar/shrine for his brother and a eulogy from his grandmother, reminding us art can be a powerful channel for emotional processing.

Throughout the works we witnessed at ResLAB existed a strong presence of work that finds its roots in African-American culture and history, one that is both vast and complex. Both Albert Jeffery and Daphne Peters approach their research through their individual practices within street dance, particularly Breaking and Waacking, with Jeffery's dissertation making comparisons between contemporary dance spaces and Peters' installation fusing her artform with martial arts.

It is interesting to note that both Waacking within the culture of street dance and martial arts are often observed in circular, communal environments where spectators also become participants. Shifting the hierarchy

of conventional theatre and performance, Waacking originates from club culture. This is evident in Peters' installation, as the demarcated space (like a boxing ring) embellished with a clothing rail, lights and performers jamming together, becomes a club in what also feels like a bedroom, a gathering space before the night ahead. This blurred experience of space lends itself to the blending of genres. Waacking and boxing are depicted in the installation and performed skillfully by Peters. Both are characterised by strong and defined arm movements that embody both power and elegance.

Jeffery also speaks on the quality of Breaking and how its crossovers with contemporary dance serves for a more all-encompassing dance offering. Emerging in the 1970s Bronx in America, as a result of the socio-political landscape experienced by Black and Latinx young people, this artform is paralleled in Jeffery's work, with the emergence of hip hop dance theatre as an extension of hip hop as a street dance style. Jeffery's research is insightful and vast, offering not only a critical overview of the history of the artforms mentioned, but interrogating themes of ethics, psychology, culture and theatrical conventions.

This dissertation outlines how a full integration of Breaking into contemporary dance practice including performance styles is still ongoing, with the presence of stylistic limitations. Having myself recently watched Breakin' Convention – a UK dance festival – renowned Breaking crew 'The Ruggeds' displayed a sense of connection, emotion and storytelling that aligns very much with contemporary performance practice as Jeffery shares in his work. This, alongside the performance happening in a theatre space that majority of the time houses contemporary dance, illustrates this ongoing negotiation

between practices.

The research projects that I experienced at ResLAB are indeed inspiring and a clear reminder that there is no one pure practice. ResLAB is always a reminder how vital it is for students to keep exploring, creating these hybridisations, contributing to a more dynamic and inclusive dance sector.

“Hybridity in dance and pedagogy: Embarking on a journey of merging dance styles into teaching practice”

by [Anneli Tan](#)

This dissertation explores the role of hybridity in contemporary dance and pedagogy, focusing on how it informs the development of a personal teaching methodology. Through studying key artists and companies like Jason Mabana, Jose Agudo, RUBBERBAND, and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, it evaluates the different approaches of hybridisation and teaching practices, such as those that are structured intentionally or emerge organically through personal synthesis. Drawing on practical experience, literature review and choreographic exploration, the research highlights that effective teaching lies not only in technical training but in creating space for exploration, individuality and embodied understanding. Positioning this investigation within a broader socio-cultural context highlights that hybridisation in dance not only merges styles but also fosters a more profound understanding, dialogue and inclusivity. Through practical research, I not only found my own artistic identity but also contributed to the growing dance industry by creating phrases that educate dancers to be versatile.

“The Spatial, Social and Personal Experience of Hip-Hop and Related Dance Forms: How do Lived Experience and Background Influence Responses to Krump?”

by [Madeleine Jesson](#)

Using critical phenomenology allows us to understand the individual and collective experience of Krump. By understanding personal histories, social positioning and embodied shape perception, it is evident that Krump is much deeper than just a dance style. For individuals like myself, who come from a different

background to the origins of the style, engaging with Krump means navigating the complexities of identity, privilege and lived experience. In order to appreciatively interact with Krump, and any other cultural dance form, it is essential to become aware and remain aware of the historical, social and cultural context of the dance form, and to recognise your positionality in relation to that.

“Exploring the storytelling functions of rhythm within a body percussion framework”

by [Jon Rodd](#)

Within my research I have explored rhythmic structures and techniques in order to understand their functions within a storytelling context. In order to theoretically and practically research this, I have chosen to engage with this question through the frameworks of body percussion and percussive dance practice. I am interested in how rhythmic practices have shaped the stories we have told in the past and how we can utilise this knowledge to deepen our understanding of storytelling. As an artist, rhythm has always fascinated me in how we communicate with one another. I am trained as both a dance artist and a musician, meaning that before engaging with my research, I had a basic understanding of rhythmic language within music. However, I was interested to translate this knowledge onto the body and engage with the challenges that might come from this.

“The Interplay of Tradition and Individuality: A Comparative Study of Dance Education in China and the UK”

by [Yaorao Cai](#)

This reflection explores how my experiences with dance in both China and the UK have shaped my identity as a dancer, teacher and artist. My early training in China was grounded in discipline, determination and cultural pride—values that

were deeply embedded in my upbringing and reinforced by my family, education and society. These qualities instilled in me a strong sense of resilience and an enduring commitment to growth. Moving to the UK marked a turning point. Immersed in a more open, explorative educational environment, I began to see dance not only as technical mastery but as a space for creativity, critical thinking and self-expression. Concepts that once felt unquestionable started to shift, and I found myself navigating new ways of thinking, moving and teaching. This experience encouraged me to reflect on cultural conditioning—how much of what we value comes from within and how much is shaped by our surroundings? As I moved between these two worlds, I became increasingly interested in how different pedagogical approaches influence not just how we learn, but who we become. Drawing on ideas from Bourdieu and Freire, I began to consider how education can either reinforce or challenge societal norms. Through this process of critical self-reflection, I aim to create a more holistic and adaptable dance pedagogy—one that draws from the rigour and focus of my Chinese training and the freedom and individuality encouraged in the UK.

“The Breaking-Contemporary Crossover”

by [Albert Jeffery](#)

This dissertation examines the dance technique of breaking and the cultural, societal and historical significance it holds. These interpretations are analysed through the lens of Hip Hop Dance Theatre, with particular focus dedicated to how contemporary influences contribute to its progression. In doing so, the legitimacy of the art form at its current state is questioned, as ideas are unlocked seemingly in tandem with the separation of legacy. The research outlines breaking’s origins to depict its positionality, linking potentially overlooked ideas into the growth of breaking’s popularity, cementing

its legacy as a dance-embodied cultural movement, and eventually broadening to allow for experimentation. The knowledge gained continued to inform evaluations of notable performances, within which contemporary ideas of progression can be identified, allowing an informed understanding of its presentation and narrative capabilities. The process delved into the physical and psychological initiatives and inhibitions irrefutably affiliated with the crossover, in accordance with the cultural and ideological alignment each aspect owes to its respective disciplinary origin. Expansions of traditional considerations of what constitutes both “Hip Hop” and “Dance Theatre” are detailed, in particular, the adaptations made by Gavin Vincent and Menno Van Gorp in their respective performances to illustrate the creative potential offered by varied outlooks, settings and mindset in their technical executions. Much of the research can be accredited to decorated scholars such as Imani-Kai Johnson, Serouj “Midus” Aprahamian and Paul Sadot, without whom the structure of breaking’s explorative potential would be noticeably less clear. This paper aims to inform and analyse, but serves a tertiary function of self-reflection, informing my personal practice and encouraging considerations of personal obligations to ensure integrity, representation and sensitivity are practiced for any future developments.

“Waacking, Martial Arts and Self Discovery”

by [Daphne Peters](#)

I am researching how waacking and martial arts contribute to self-discovery, as both have profoundly impacted my personal journey towards finding peace and authenticity. Waacking helped me embrace my sexuality and discover my identity as a mover, particularly after studying it in South Korea and later exploring punking in the UK. Martial arts, which I practiced as a child and resumed two

years ago in London, has strengthened my confidence, structure and resilience. Both art forms face societal misconceptions despite their transformative power. My research examines their histories and impact on self-discovery, questioning how institutions can preserve their authentic roots while teaching them effectively. Through research, performance and video documentation, I aim to showcase these art forms in their original contexts—waacking’s queer club origins and martial arts’ battle traditions. Drawing from Princess Lockeroo’s philosophy on waacking as “physical personification of absolute truth” and Bruce Lee’s limitless potential philosophy, I explore different dimensions of self-discovery.



GENDER AND FEMINISM

BY JOSPEHINE LEASK

The live work and dissertation abstracts I watched and read, grouped under the topic of feminism and gender, interrogate female creativity and freedom in dance, as well as articulating feminist critiques of societal expectations, patriarchal perspectives on women, binary structures, contemporary dance and ballet. Across the performances and written abstracts, the students engage with theoretical theories of gender performativity, the female gaze, somatic practices and choreographic processes.

The three performed pieces investigate movement, sound, film, objects and photography to express themes of female liberation, forms of self-care and self-love, and a celebratory reflection on the transition from girlhood to adolescence. In the written work, students build on intersectional feminist writers to analyse the queer potential of ballet, the embodied power of improvisation for women and the dismantling of gendered aesthetics in contemporary dance.

Phoebe Woodthorpe's *The Posture of Power* addresses how women occupy space, bringing attention to movement and gestures that feed into gendered expectations of how we should behave and appear in both the public and private realm. Through a variety of postures, unison formation and steps, the four dancers question how bodies respond to imagined contexts, claim, negotiate and deny space. Sitting semi-reclining in a Graham fourth, they survey us with a hard gaze. Their legs gradually open wider and to the repetitive beat of the music they shift from a contained position to full 'manspreading', their upper bodies pulsing in sharp, aggressive contractions. The performers enact alternating sequences of movement that are minimal, confined and tense; or free-style

dancing and headbanging that are expansive and unrestrained. At one moment they remind me of a rowdy, liberated girl band, the next, a group of avenging Furies, spreading menacingly across the stage, claiming what is theirs. Compelling to watch, Woodthorpe's work questions how important it is to be aware of how we move, often unconsciously, shaped by perceptions of gender as well as cultural and social norms.

In *Scenes from a Room* by Amelia McCulloch, three moving bodies semi-concealed by grubby looking duvets, sheets and pillowcases, indulge in private bedroom activities: yawning, scratching, masturbating, stretching. They slowly gravitate towards each other, morphing into one big sleepy, slug-like huddle. From the mess of feathers and other debris it looks like there's been a riotous sleepover party. However, McCulloch is referring to a different form of female resistance – that of 'Bedrotting'. These women are spending the day in their bedroom, letting everything hang out, performing self-care and deliberately opting out. Their appearance, tangled bed hair and shabby pj's, recall TikTok's 'Gross Girl' – an influencer who fiercely rejects societal expectations of the well-groomed, organised, responsible, productive and accommodating young woman. As the performers chew and grimace at the audience, tying themselves together in loved-up knots, McCulloch's female bedroom becomes a site of female abjection, where bodies are free to embrace the grotesque, neglect their personal hygiene and perform socially inappropriate actions to push back against patriarchal constraints. Here they carve out a space where women can recharge and just be themselves.

Esmee Orgles's installation, *Looking at femininity through a lens*, consists of a film, photographs and a selection of personal

objects, all of which are framed through a female gaze. The objects assembled on a table are markers of a girlish femininity – a candle holder, bangles, nail polish, pink trinkets. On the wall, photographs touchingly capture the female subjects/dancers in conditions of joy, anger, frustration, contemplation, sadness or rest. The film represents the women in unself-conscious states as they pursue work, leisure or hobbies: stretching and dancing in a studio, running joyfully down a hill, hugging a tree, or playing in a band. We can witness their individuality and wholeness as Orgles captures them. They pose for Orgles with ease and her filming/photography evokes a nostalgia for the transitions of young girl to adult in a context that is free from a judging, sexualising or disempowering male gaze. While maybe a utopian vision, the work captures both the joy and complexity of young womanhood.

For their written dissertation, Fionnuala Fraser's refreshing deconstruction of ballet as inherently queer, argues that queer identity and desire are expressed, erased and reimagined within ballet. Framed by queer theory, feminist critique, performance studies and deconstruction, Fraser's work is also informed by their own personal and embodied experience of being a ballet dancer. From this embodied perspective, they analyse ballet as an evolving medium, which has meanings and identities that are always constructed by creators, performers and audiences. While critiquing ballet's ties to colonialism, heterosexuality and patriarchal norms, Fraser looks beyond the rigid traditionalism and gender essentialism to argue for the form's queer potential. Through a queer methodology that embraces ballet's choreographic fluidity, they question traditional male/female boundaries in gesture, shape, touch and proximity.

Using case studies from John Cranko's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Coppelia*, Fraser deconstructs, for example, "non-hierarchical partnering, the reciprocal gaze and mutual emotional vulnerability between the dancers" to identify fluid gender expression and shared agency. In *Coppelia* they bring attention to sapphic desire and lesbian erotics in the relationship between the ballerina Swanhilda and the automaton Coppelia. The study contributes a much-needed queer methodology and feminist intersectional approach that looks to ballet as a site of contradiction, intimacy, spectacle and silence. And I love that Fraser's central argument articulates how ballet is intrinsically queer.

Charli-May Townend develops a feminist lens to critique the societal expectations and structures that shape how gender is performed and perceived in contemporary dance. She points out how movements coded as masculine or feminine in dance reinforce the societal construction of gender. Drawing on her personal experiences as a dance artist in training she reflects on how gender has impacted her mentality, sense of identity and artistic choices: for example, the expectation in ballet for women to be 'graceful' and men to be physically strong. Gender performativity (Judith Butler) and feminist intersectionality (bell hooks)

provide a framework through which the author considers how contemporary practices offer opportunities for more fluid and inclusive artistic expression.

Looking at two case studies, Maxine Doyle's *Bradley for BalletBoyz* and Holly Blakey's *Phantom*, Townend questions how contemporary dance offers a space where gender roles can be interrogated, reversed or abandoned. Townend elevates a recurring theme in the essay on the importance of intention both in her choreography and personal practice. She argues that "gender should only play a defining role in performance when it is thematically necessary" and calls for dancers and choreographers to critically examine the motivations behind their movement choices. Townend also articulates how training environments, casting decisions and audience perceptions still carry gendered expectations but notes a shift in professional companies and choreographers toward non-gendered roles, physical equality and open expression of identity. What emerges from the writing is how Townend gives value to all aspects of gender identity as part of an expansive and authentic practice, while advocating for greater inclusivity, and diverse practices in dance.

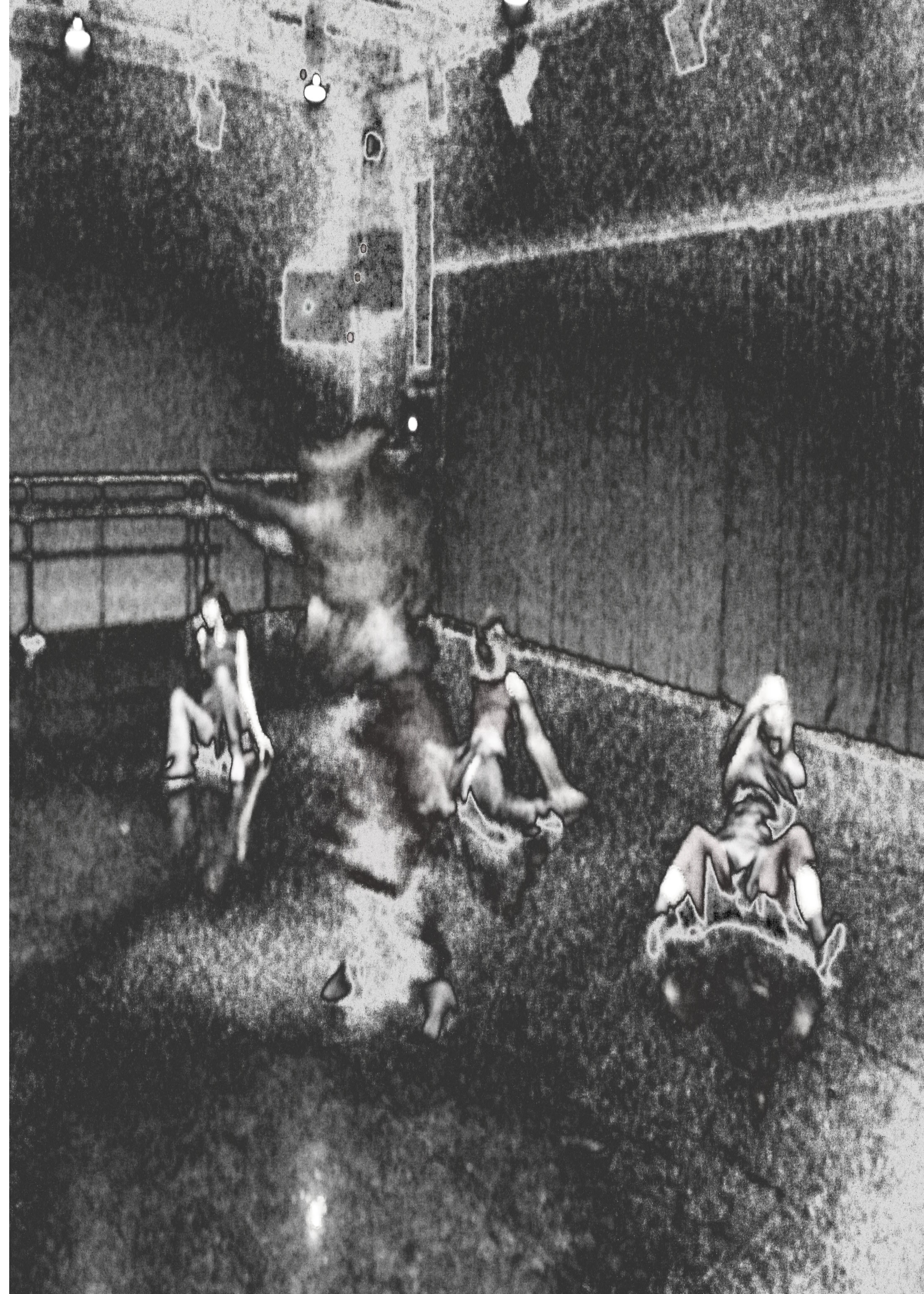
“The three performed pieces investigate themes of female liberation, forms of self-care and self-love, and a celebratory reflection on the transition from girlhood to adolescence. In the written work, students analyse the queer potential of ballet, the embodied power of improvisation for women and the dismantling of gendered aesthetics in contemporary dance.”

Amina Abdel-aal's dissertation explores female freedom through improvisational dance practice. She argues that improvisation serves as a method to reclaim bodily autonomy and female freedom from societal patriarchal norms and an internalised male gaze. Through personal reflexive inquiry, she investigates how traditional gender representations have shaped her self-perception and relationship to movement. Her work aims to reposition improvisation as a site of resistance, liberation and embodied feminist practice.

She defines the freedom within improvisation as an internal and external release, from societal expectations and gaze, aesthetic judgment and perfectionism. Grounded in feminist philosophy (Simone de Beauvoir and Butler) and somatic enquiry, Abdel-aal's intriguing process of freewriting, improvisation and reflection take place in outdoor natural environments or mirror-free studios, away from expectations and judgement. In her process, she reflects on how she finds autonomy and self-discovery, aided by her practice of Gaga, with its emphasis on sensory awareness and individual experiences. This enables her to occupy space more expansively, follow sensation rather than expectation and to move from internal impulses.

Finally, engaging with the work of feminist choreographers, ecofeminism and embodied feminism she interrupts patterns that occur in her movement. Describing the project as "not a performance but a private ritual – a room of one's own for movement through and liberation" this feminist reflection on improvisation is an inspirational contribution to dance research.

All of these students' works collectively embody an encouraging re-engagement with feminism and gender, through an intersectional lens that embraces diversity, all genders and sexualities. What emerges is an exciting body of work by a generation of young dance artists who refuse to be defined by men or limited to binary frameworks in their personal and artistic journeys.



ABSTRACTS

“The Queer Art of the Ballet”

by [Fionnuala Fraser](#)

What is queerness, and is ballet it? At the core of the form, what potential of being is there? Through the intersection of gender studies, deconstruction, and performance studies and a sense of utopian hope, potential answers can be found. Choreographic analyses with this mixed lens attempt to provide perspectives and ideas that have yet to be expressed in the realm of feminist and queer ballet literature. The literature is already limited, and even in the modern queer sector, there is a lack of artistic and choreographic analysis. A primary element of the analyses is defining ballerina and ballerino as unique identifiers of presentation that bodies take on when performing on stage. Otherwise, the studies are choreographic and narrative analysis, encompassing movement, character, gesture, emotion and more. One study is on the gender fluidity of pas de deux, which is examined through the balcony scene from John Cranko’s Romeo and Juliet. The second analysis is telling Coppélia as a story of erotic sapphism, and the potential in other ballets for erotics between their ballerinas. These explorations seek to push the boundaries of how ballet is analysed and examined, and how queerness is considered concerning the arts. The core of the work is not to claim, reclaim, counterread, interpret and the relevant synonyms. Rather, it is a statement of being. Ballet is queer.

“Looking at femininity through a lens”

by [Esmee Orgles](#)

This dissertation explores the representations of femininity, through the lens of the female gaze, challenging traditional portrayals of women on screen. Shifting the focus away from the historically dominant male gaze, it examines how female artists can reclaim the narrative

and offer more authentic, diverse depictions and representations of womanhood and females in art. To redefine women and femininity on screen, empowering women as subjects rather than objects of cinematic storytelling is critical. While researching femininity in art, particularly in film, I was able to develop and cultivate my photography and videography work that also explores themes of girlhood, for my practical research within my dissertation.

“The Gendered Box We Put Ourselves In: Addressing our relationship with our gender situated in contemporary dance”

by [Charli-May Townend](#)

Although dance has a history of conforming to gender roles it also has a history of challenging the stereotypes as an act of rebellion and questioning society. To me contemporary dance is always pushing the boundaries of not only what art is, but questioning and pushing political and social boundaries and opinions. Dance can be an act of protest and activism. I also think that having these strict gender roles within dance hinders artists, performers and choreographers from their creative potential. We are putting ourselves in a tight box, limiting our self-expression and artistry. The more choreographers challenge these social norms, the more contemporary dance can evolve towards a more inclusive space filled with creativity. This shift encourages both choreographers and performers to embrace new possibilities for expression and physicality, moving away from rigid gender expectations. Through my own personal experience as well as observing other dance performances, it has become clear to me that gender does not always need to define a performance’s meaning or intention. While gender can influence how a piece is perceived by an audience, the ultimate goal should be enabling artists to express themselves fully without being confined by traditional labels.

“How Can Dance Embody Body Language to Reflect and Subvert Traditional Gender Power Dynamics and the Patriarchy?”

by [Phoebe Woodthorpe](#)

This research explores how body language influences gendered opportunities in dance, shaping both perception and professional roles. As a woman using she/her pronouns, I have examined this topic through the lens of gender bias and patriarchy, drawing from personal experience and critical analysis. Although dance is a female-dominated industry, it paradoxically offers greater visibility and opportunity to dancers of other genders, often privileging them in casting and leadership pathways. This disparity raises questions about why such imbalances exist and persist, despite the numerical dominance of women. My research investigates how systemic gender inequalities continue to shape career progression in dance, particularly affecting women’s access to authority and recognition. It challenges the assumption that female prevalence equates to equity, highlighting instead how entrenched patriarchal structures continue to limit women’s roles beyond performance—especially in choreography, direction and institutional leadership. This work contributes to the broader discourse on gender representation within the performing arts.

“What Does Cheerleading Say About Gender in American Culture?”

by [Emilie Sears](#)

Using cheerleading as a lens, I am researching how gender is expressed and reinforced in American culture utilising Judith Butler’s theory of gender. Fleeing from religious persecution, the early Americans structured their newly found land based on free speech, the right to protest and the right to religious beliefs and practices. Through the contextualisation of America’s

origins, the cultural values and standards of human behaviour may be explained. Starting as an act of community spirit alongside Ivy league sporting events in American universities, the implementation of cheer as an extracurricular in academic institutions transformed it into a platform for modeled behaviour. The study of gentility training and the crossover into desirable traits needed to become a cheerleader, demonstrate the power of tradition in American culture and how it shapes societal standards of expected human behaviour. The power of tradition and religious practices shape the bubble of American culture, defining human behaviour as something to be performed rather than something innate in the human experience.

“Moving beyond the gaze: dance, nature and the path to empowerment”

by [Nancy Dickinson](#)

The female body has long been a subject of interest in many areas across the arts, sciences, politics and so many more. I have set out to explore how we can empower and appreciate the female body through movement practices, investigate what restrains a woman’s sense of freedom and find out if the male gaze creates a sense of objectification that holds us back. I am passionate about women being able to move freely and express themselves without fear or objectification. I want to understand why the female body is viewed as a sexual object and whether dance contributes towards that or helps us as women break free from objectification. As a woman and a dancer this research feels important to me as I have felt sexualised for what I do in some scenarios and yet I have also learnt empowerment and a real admiration for the strength and versatility of the female body and what it can do. In a typically female dominated environment there is so much to celebrate and so many opportunities for us as women to learn and uplift each other.

FACILITATION AND CONFLICT

BY RACHEL ELDERKIN

Honest and in-depth investigations of personal practice, artistry, creativity and the dance sector feature across the works I encounter from the third-year students' works at ResLAB. Each student has delved into their own form of expression, exploration and discovery, whether through a workshop, performance presentation or written dissertation. They are artists finding their own ways, exploring different paths and interests. What is striking within this group is a strong awareness of self and of their own values, and importantly, an interest in how those values can resonate through their creativity, research or even within the dance sector itself.

This value-driven approach is at the core of *MESSIAH WITH A TOOLBOX*, a performance by Milo Harper that spans both research process and artistic product. Asking the question 'what can I learn about the relationship between my core values and my artistry by acknowledging my values before beginning a new creative process?' Milo shares with their audience an in-depth interrogation of their artistry.

There's a very natural, human quality to the way in which Harper offers their audience an insight into their experience and discoveries, sharing poetry, manifestos and their self-reflective observations with honesty, generosity and humour. Through a process that involved taking on a new project or form of exploration each week, always centred around their values, Harper has taken an opportunity to search for a way in which their values and artistry can grow together, while exploring the multiple connections between this and the world around them.

Observing Hana Carlson's workshop *A Choreographic Facilitation Practice: Building Intentional Culture* we are offered an insight into another process of self-discovery.

Themes of nature and healing recur as Carlson gently shares with the participating dancers the ideas and images she has been exploring. Sometimes these lead into an improvisation, sometimes Carlson offers set movements to the group that seem to reflect elements from her research that she has found inspiring. Drawing from nature, qualities like growth, unfolding and spiralling generate a basis for movement.

The workshop quickly brings in different tasks and ideas, letting the dancers explore within various nature-inspired frameworks, while giving insight into Carlson's own process and explorations. Working with the group of dancers, Carlson's workshop feels very much a part of her research process, continuing to investigate, explore and find clarity as she gives form to her practice.

Coming straight from another sharing, I enter Yu-Ning Tan's *Inclusive workshop* with Ning! part way through. The atmosphere feels open and Tan is inviting the group to choose their own music for an improvisation. In pairs, one participant dances with eyes closed, while the other silently observes and draws in response. Encouraged to lean into wherever they are at that moment, some dances are quiet, others joyful, and you can sense individual confidence growing as the dancers settle into their movement and begin to let go.

Afterwards, the focus of the session shifts towards drawing and the tone becomes more informal and conversational as the group share their impressions and creative responses. The provocations Tan offers the dancers are centred

around removing any external influences, with the intention of allowing space for the participants to follow their impulses, whether that is for dancing or drawing, and to simply 'show up as you are'. Throughout, it feels that Tan is open to allowing the workshop to go with the group, continuing to explore how she might facilitate in a way that allows space to move, connect and support one another 'without having all the answers'.

The theme of inclusivity in facilitation is also explored in a written dissertation by Amelia Leece. Her essay *An Exploration into How Participating in Community Dance Classes Can Support the Physical, Emotional and Social Wellbeing of Over-60s and the Role of the Facilitator in Maximising the Experience* suggests that the inclusivity of community dance in terms of its adaptability, inclusive communication and use of collaborative and creative tasks for participants, generally has a positive effect on participants' wellbeing. By researching community dance through a physical, emotional and social lens, Leece examines its holistic benefit and the potential it has to counteract challenges that many older adults can face, such as loneliness, declining health and societal marginalisation. Her emphasis on the role of the facilitator offers an interesting viewpoint, demonstrating that creating a space where multiple ability levels can be included and mistakes embraced supports a sense of emotional safety. She writes that participants cited their teacher's 'kindness, humour, and adaptability as key reasons they kept returning to class'. When dance operates in an inclusive, connective and collaborative way, it can create spaces of creativity and joy that hold a unique power to benefit wellbeing, bring people together and improve quality of life.

The experiences shared in Leece's essay offer

an interesting parallel to Becca Dodd’s written dissertation entitled “The Impact of Hierarchy on the Dance Sector: Power Dynamics and Their Consequences”. The role of hierarchy in the dance sector is a wide-ranging and deeply embedded topic to question and unpick. Dodd chooses to focus her research on the ‘impact on collaboration, creativity, autonomy, productivity, and well-being’ with an aim to understand ‘how hierarchy can both support and undermine dance practice’. Recognising that hierarchical structures can have both positive and negative effects is key within her research. While in some instances hierarchies can offer clarity and direction, in others they can perpetuate inequality and hinder inclusivity. Examining multiple theoretical models, practitioner accounts and through her own personal reflection, Dodd searches for an outcome that isn’t binary but instead reflective and adaptable, acknowledging the multiple situations and needs that might be encountered across the dance sector. Throughout her research, there is an emphasis on the importance of trust and collaboration and the need to centre this in dance spaces. Like Leece’s research into community dance, Dodd’s dissertation demonstrates that how we lead and facilitate are so often key to an individual’s experience of dance. Looking towards where her initial research could lead in the future and the systemic issues it could address, Dodd reflects on her findings and hopes that her dissertation ‘offers a foundation for reshaping dance collaboration around care, co-creation, and accountability.’

Digging further into thoughts around how we create and facilitate dance spaces and highlighting, perhaps, the potentially negative impact of hierarchical structures is Elina Wates’ written dissertation *Did Dance Ruin My Life?* Taking a very open approach to her personal

lived experience, Wates interrogates the impact of institutionalised contemporary dance education on student wellbeing and mental health, through critical autoethnographic reflection, peer discussion and wider interdisciplinary research. To investigate this question, she uses the frameworks of comparison, expectation and lack of freedom, which feels indicative of the challenges that can be faced in dance spaces, particularly those that are focused towards a performance career. Skipping back to Leece’s essay, it’s notable that community dance spaces actively work to counter these challenges for the dancers participating. When so much of the sector that students are graduating into is focused around a freelance career that requires ongoing self-motivation and regular rejection, all while working with an art form that is inherently embodied, the consideration of wellbeing and mental health are hugely important. Invariably, it feels under supported. Wates’ dissertation is a candid provocation that raises a pressing question, while recognising the importance of her own mental health and wellbeing, especially in relation to dance. However within this, Wates also notes a desire to reclaim dance as a source of joy. While her research focuses on the outcome of institutionalised education towards a dance career as a performer, there are many paths and forms that dance can take, and spaces to be found within this that can support and facilitate the joy of dance.

Centering personal values and experience emerged as a recurring theme and inspiration for the student works encountered within the group of facilitation and conflict. Lily Isabel Mackie Walker’s essay “Conflict and Creativity: A Historical Analysis of the Inter-Play of Conflict and Dance” delves into the political and emotional power of dance. Inspired by her personal experiences engaging with Iranian

performance activism in diaspora, Walker’s written dissertation researches Cold War cultural diplomacy, the work of choreographer Pina Bausch, and contemporary Iranian women’s dance activism. These case studies allow Walker to explore key angles on a broad and complex topic. By exploring the interwoven relationship between dance and conflict across historical and geopolitical contexts, she considers how dance can function in times of conflict as a form of catharsis, resistance and political communication. She writes about how dance can offer a way or space to help process trauma and the impact of this on choreographers and creative processes, as well as how, by offering a form of autonomy over one’s body, dance can become a way for communities under repressive regimes to continue to express identity. Here, the embodied experience of dance once again becomes a way to support wellbeing, to process emotions and to connect to humanity. As Walker writes, dance in these contexts can act ‘as a vital medium for political expression, communal resilience, and emotional truth’, offering a needed space for expression that goes beyond words and, often, beyond political and cultural boundaries.

Across these varied strands of research, each student is digging into their own values and exploring how these can be centred, whether in a creative process or in the way those values might inform their path within the dance sector. Equally, when those elements do not align, there is a willingness to interrogate that. This feels hopeful. When we centre what is important, then we can instigate change, and in a sector where change is needed that feels a very positive frame for these fresh and evolving creative practices.

**“the embodied experience of
dance once again becomes a
way to support wellbeing,
to process emotions
and to connect to humanity”**

“MESSIAH WITH A TOOLBOX”

by [Milo Harper](#)

MESSIAH WITH A TOOLBOX is an hour-long solo performance of both process and product from my dissertation research surrounding the relationship between my core values and artistry. Through six weeks of experimenting with acknowledging my core values before beginning new creative processes, I landed on a realisation of my own spirituality and an understanding that my core values are ever-present imbued themes in my artistic output. Together, my core values make up my learned coping mechanism and gauge for decision making. They exist as a little creature in my stomach with a toolbox (perhaps in the form of Kermit), ready to offer me my core tools as I navigate my day to day life. My value creature is my compass, my resilience, my messiah.

“A Choreographic Facilitation Practice: Building Intentional Culture”

by [Hana Carlson](#)

I want to create this world for us to live in where our curiosity and creativity gets to live. Where there can be a foundational language [movement language] so that we can create freely. If we are intentional with what this language means and what it is saying and everyone in these four walls can speak it, then we can play and create sentences [solos], paragraphs [duets, trios, group work], and essays [dances].

“An exploration into openness and flexibility within inclusive facilitation: What if not knowing is the most inclusive thing a facilitator can offer”

by [Yu-Ning Tan](#)

The question ‘What if not knowing is the most inclusive thing a facilitator can offer?’ sits at the

heart of my research; a provocation, a reflection and a call for vulnerability in the way we hold space for others. In a society that often values expertise, solutions and certainty, especially within educational or therapeutic contexts, I’m interested in what happens when we let go of the need to know. What might emerge when we prioritise presence over prescription, curiosity over control? This research explores inclusive facilitation within dance spaces, centering on improvisation-based practices for the disabled community. I turn to improvisation because of its radical openness: it refuses a singular way of moving or being, offering instead an invitation for everyone, disabled and non-disabled, to discover movement on their own terms. It is a practice that makes space for uncertainty and difference.

“An exploration into how participating in community dance practices can support the physical, emotional and social well being of over 60s and the role of the facilitator in maximising the experience”

by [Milli \(Amelia\) Leece](#)

This study explores the physical, emotional, and social well-being impacts of community dance classes on adults aged over 60 as well as the role of the facilitator in maximising these benefits. Given the context of the rapidly ageing population in the United Kingdom, where the number of older adults is projected to rise significantly by 2050, there is growing interest in identifying accessible, effective practices that support healthy ageing. Community dance, as a participatory and creative movement practice, offers a unique approach by fostering holistic well-being through embodied connection and social engagement. Using a qualitative case study methodology, this research investigates two over-60s community dance groups through participant observation and unstructured interviews with both participants and facilitators.

The findings highlight that community dance supports well-being in interconnected ways: physically, by enhancing exercise and mind-body awareness; emotionally, by boosting confidence, mood, and emotional regulation; and socially, by facilitating empathetic connections and social bonding through shared movement experiences. A key insight is the synergistic nature of these well-being dimensions, where physical activity, emotional expression and social interaction mutually reinforce one another. Participants consistently described the benefits as holistic rather than isolated. Additionally, the role of facilitators emerged as critical in maximising these benefits, particularly through offering adaptive teaching methods, encouraging social interaction, and creating a supportive learning environment that embraces mistakes as part of growth. This research contributes to ongoing discussions around community dance practice, ageing and well-being, highlighting the potential of dance as an accessible, inclusive tool for enhancing quality of life in later years.

“The Impact of Hierarchy on the Dance Sector: Power Dynamics and Their Consequences”

by [Becca \(Rebecca\) Dodd](#)

In my dissertation, “The Impact of Hierarchy on the Dance Sector: Power Dynamics and Their Consequences”, I explore how hierarchical structures function within the dance industry and how they can both support and hinder collaboration, creativity and autonomy. Drawing on both personal experience and academic research, I argue that rigid power dynamics often go unquestioned, leading to environments where dancers may feel disempowered, overlooked, or creatively limited. To unpack these dynamics, I examined three key frameworks: Jo Butterworth’s Didactic/Democratic model, Nicola Haskins’ Rhizomatic approach to choreography and Adrienne Maree Brown’s transformative justice lens. Each offers a distinct way of reimagining

hierarchy—not as something to abolish entirely, but as a system that can be used intentionally, transparently and with care. One of the most significant takeaways from my research was the central role of dancer autonomy. I initially approached the topic thinking there might be a simple answer, perhaps that hierarchy should always be avoided. But the deeper I delved, the clearer it became that the issue is not black and white. Hierarchy is a complex tool, and its impact depends on many factors, including group size, age, ability, experience level and context. I also explored how removing hierarchy entirely can lead to a lack of direction and productivity. While too much control can stifle creativity, too little structure can create confusion. What matters is how hierarchy is implemented, whether it is imposed or shared, rigid or responsive. In response to these findings, I developed A Model for Facilitation: Decentralising Power in Collaboration—a practical framework for dance leaders seeking to create inclusive, balanced, and responsive environments where both structure and autonomy can coexist.

“Did Dance Ruin My Life? “

by [Elina Wates](#)

This dissertation explores the negative impacts of institutionalised contemporary dance education on student well-being and mental health. Through an autoethnographic methodology, the research critically reflects upon the author’s lived experiences within vocational dance training, specifically examining the effects of comparison, expectation and lack of freedom. While considerable research exists concerning body image and mental health within ballet, contemporary dance education remains an under-researched area, particularly in relation to its emotional and psychological demands on students. The study positions itself within wider conversations about the toxicity of competitive, image-focused training

environments, interrogating how vocational institutions perpetuate unrealistic expectations and prioritise professional readiness over holistic student care. Drawing upon academic literature, reflective writing and informal discussions with peers, the research reveals that comparison, often disguised as healthy competition, fosters perfectionism and chronic self-criticism. These dynamics blur personal identity with professional aspiration, contributing to emotional exhaustion and burnout. The findings highlight how implicit cultural expectations, rigid hierarchies and the omnipresence of mirrors in training spaces cultivate environments where psychological safety is compromised. The author identifies a persistent tension between discipline and self-care, with students internalising harmful ideals of productivity and endurance, often at the expense of mental health. The dissertation argues for the urgent need for dance institutions to embed inclusive, student-centred practices that prioritise well-being and foster environments of autonomy, competence, and belonging. Ultimately, this dissertation reflects a personal and collective reckoning with the realities of vocational dance training. It advocates for systemic change, calling for a dismantling of exploitative traditions and the creation of psychologically supportive spaces where dancers are valued as people before performers. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to an emerging discourse on sustainability, ethics, and care within dance education.

“Conflict and Creativity: A Historical Analysis of the Inter-Play of Conflict and Dance”

by [Lily Walker](#)

An extract from the Case Study on the Soviet-American Cultural Exchange during the Cold War: “How the Soviets would perceive the American work was of utmost importance, this was the first impression of the United States on the Russian public, and the fact that dance was the

vessel used shows its importance within conflict and exchange. The American government had to ensure the dance company demonstrated itself as capable and more impressive than the Soviets. To the government, the tour was simply a form of propaganda, a power play to prove they were more impressive than the Soviets. As a result of this, the tour was generally well received. Dancer for ABT at the time, Maria Tallchief recalls in her autobiography that “the excitement of the occasion compensated for the primitive state of affairs we had to endure . . . hundreds of other people were hurling themselves at our feet.” This success was important for the conflict as well as for the case of choosing to use cultural exchanges as a government tool. This event shows us the impact of dance on conflict. We see clearly that despite the determined intentions of both governments to use this as a chance to prove superiority, the artistic and emotional qualities within the dancing overpowered that desire. The sharing of cultural dance allowed the American public to view the Russians in a positive light, and in turn dance was able to impact the conflict by easing the tensions between the public and disrupting the aims of the country’s leaders.”



DANCE AND HEALTH

BY THEA STANTON

In today's dance world, a new generation of dancers is raising questions that cut to the core of how we move, why we train, and what it means to belong. Through deeply personal and rigorously researched work, six young researchers—Tabatha Willmore, Evie Longstaff, Madeleine Knight, Emma Dexter-Smith, Melody Weston-Shaw, and Catie Brignull—offer a profound insight into the dance sector's strengths, struggles, and future possibilities. Their dissertations explore themes of identity, injury, mental health, pedagogy, inclusion, and body image, all rooted in their lived experience as dancers.

What unites their voices is a shared courage to confront complexity with honesty, compassion, and imagination. In a field that has long prized discipline and conformity, these young thinkers champion nuance, empathy, and transformation. Together, they sketch the blueprint for a more holistic, human-centred dance culture.

The body is both instrument and identity in dance—a truth that can empower but also burden dancers. Tabatha Willmore's dissertation on injury as a disruptor of identity paints a moving picture of how bodily limitations can shake one's very sense of self. Drawing from her own experience, Wiilmore shows how injury is not just a physical setback, but a psychological reckoning. She encourages a redefinition of excellence—not as perfection, but as resilience and adaptability.

Catie Brignull echoes this emotional turbulence in her exploration of body image. For Brignull, the idolised dancer physique—slim, toned, “aesthetically pleasing”—casts a

long shadow, especially on young professionals still forming their identities. She highlights how silent comparisons, institutional expectations, and even well-meaning feedback can chip away at self-worth. Yet she also sees hope in reflection, education, and open dialogue. Body image, she argues, must be discussed—not as an afterthought, but as central to the dancer's experience.

Emma Dexter-Smith expands this conversation, focusing on the psychological toll of “embodied expectations.” Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical theory, she explores how dancers perform not only choreography but also social roles—curating confidence and aesthetic excellence while concealing fatigue and anxiety. Dexter-Smith's work is a powerful call to recognise the emotional labour embedded in dance and to dismantle the perfectionist culture that disconnects dancers from their own authenticity.

Evie Longstaff's dissertation investigates the invisible threads connecting childhood development and dance habits. Through a wide lens—covering motor development, attachment styles, parenting, and skill acquisition—she shows how early life lays the groundwork for later training. Her reflections on perfectionism, fear of failure and self-consciousness offer a refreshingly honest perspective on how psychological and social factors shape not just ability, but motivation and confidence.

Longstaff's research reminds us that every dancer arrives with a unique background, and those differences matter. Her findings suggest that greater empathy in teaching—understanding why a student hesitates or excels—can foster more inclusive and effective learning environments. Dance education, she argues, must see beyond physical aptitude

to embrace emotional and developmental diversity.

In her study on flexibility, Madeleine Knight offers a fresh take on an often misunderstood concept. Rather than treating flexibility as merely a technical asset, Knight views it as a gateway to expression, confidence, and creative identity. Her combination of quantitative data and qualitative insight reveals that enhanced mobility not only improves physical range, but also deepens emotional connection to movement. What's striking in Knight's work is her emphasis on kinaesthetic awareness—the dancer's felt sense of motion and presence. By blending goniometry with improvisation and reflective practice, she shows that flexibility is not just about how far the body stretches, but how fully the dancer can inhabit and trust that movement. In doing so, she challenges rigid hierarchies around “correct” form, offering instead a vision of freedom through embodied care.

Willmore and Dexter-Smith both make it clear that dance culture too often neglects psychological health. Tabatha compares injury recovery to grieving, emphasising the importance of mental support alongside physical rehabilitation. She critiques institutions that applaud resilience but discourage vulnerability, calling instead for spaces where dancers can process openly and recover fully.

Dexter-Smith focuses on the mental strain caused by institutional demands and media representation. Whether it's the pressure to be “Instagrammable” or the emotional labour of maintaining a front-stage persona, she argues that the dancer's inner world is constantly at risk of being overruled by external expectations. Her vision of success is not about constant visibility, but emotional integrity and

sustainable artistry.

Both researchers underscore the urgency of treating mental health not as an individual shortcoming, but as a cultural responsibility. Their work suggests that the real strength of a dancer lies not in unbroken stoicism, but in the courage to feel, reflect and resist.

No voice advocates more passionately for systemic change than Melody Weston-Shaw. Her dissertation is a heartfelt and incisive analysis of how race, class, disability and neurodivergence continue to shape (and often limit) access to dance. Drawing from personal experience and case studies, Weston-Shaw makes a compelling case for inclusive dance spaces that are not just welcoming—but structurally, financially and emotionally equitable. Weston-Shaw's work is grounded in the belief that dance is a healing, connective force—but only when it is truly accessible. She spotlights organisations like Candoco and Stopgap, which place access at the heart of their practice, using adaptation not as compromise but as creative expansion. Her call to “reimagine the dance world” includes not just better funding or broader casting, but a fundamental shift in how we define value, excellence and professionalism. Through her writing, Weston-Shaw reminds us that inclusion

is not a trend or an optional project—it is the future of dance, and it must be woven into every aspect of education, programming and performance.

Across several dissertations, the teacher emerges as a central figure—not just in shaping technique, but in shaping identity, confidence and mental health. Brignull, Longstaff and Weston-Shaw all highlight how pedagogy can either reinforce harmful ideals or nurture self-expression and wellbeing.

Brignull draws on the teaching methods of Rachel Rimmer and Anne Burnidge, whose feminist and somatic approaches value dialogue, individuality and community. These educators build spaces where dancers feel seen and heard, encouraging reflection and authenticity over perfection. Longstaff, too, points to the power of emotionally intelligent teaching, especially in recognising the developmental and psychological roots of students' behaviour.

Weston-Shaw emphasises that inclusive teaching is not about lowering standards, but broadening definitions of success. She champions adaptive methods, reflective practice and emotional check-ins as essential tools in creating classes that are both rigorous and kind.

All three researchers make it clear that educators hold enormous potential—

not just to refine a dancer's body, but to affirm their sense of self. When teaching is rooted in care, creativity and critical awareness, it becomes a form of empowerment.

What emerges from these six dissertations is not only a critique of the current dance landscape but a hopeful reimagining of what could be. These researchers are not just pointing out what's broken—they're offering ways forward. Their vision is one where dance is expansive, not exclusive; where the body is honoured, not objectified; where excellence includes empathy, and success is measured not just in accolades, but in sustainability and joy.

As dancers, they have known the weight of expectation. As researchers, they have interrogated it. As future educators, practitioners and leaders, they are ready to transform it.

Their work speaks to a larger shift happening in dance: away from uniformity and towards diversity; away from silence and towards reflection; away from the isolated pursuit of perfection and towards collective care. These voices matter. And if the dance world listens—truly listens—it might just find itself moving in a more compassionate, inclusive and vibrant direction.

“Do Early Childhood Experiences Predict Habits in Dance?”

by [Evie Longstaff](#)

This dissertation investigates how early childhood experiences influence motor development, skill acquisition and training behaviours or habits in dance. Throughout my own training, I have noticed differences in motor development and skill acquisition. From early gymnastics classes to my current teaching practice, I have consistently observed disparities in ability among individuals with seemingly similar training experiences. In my current training, I notice disparities in terms of skill acquisition, leadership tendencies and career aspirations. These observations have led me to hypothesise that early childhood factors could significantly contribute to individual variation in dance performance, leadership and aspirations. The research suggests that parenting styles significantly shape an individual’s approach to learning, discipline and resilience, all of which play a critical role in dance training and career development. While permissive and neglecting parenting may present challenges in structure and confidence, authoritarian parenting may foster academic achievement at the cost of creativity and risk-taking. Authoritative parenting appears to provide the most balanced foundation for success, as it encourages self-discipline, adaptability and confidence. Evidence suggests that early childhood experiences, including parental influence such as encouragement, and exposure to independent problem-solving, play a critical role in shaping a dancer’s training habits and career trajectory. The evidence supports my hypothesis that early experiences shape later engagement in the dance industry. These factors not only have an individual impact, but also interact, contributing to the diversity in dancers’ experiences.

“What are the psychological ramifications of embodied expectations established by media and the industry?”

by [Emma Dexter-Smith](#)

This dissertation investigates how dancers internalise unspoken pressures within the professional dance world, revealing a psychological landscape shaped by institutional norms and media influence. While dance is celebrated as a liberating art form, it is also governed by deeply embedded ideals, dictating how bodies should move, look, and feel. These pressures create what this research terms as embodied expectations: the internalisation of external norms that shape not only movement, but dancers’ emotions, identities and sense of self-worth. Drawing on embodiment theory and dance psychology, this work explores how dancers are conditioned to become emotionally articulate yet emotionally silenced, technically flawless “dance machines” who often perform at the expense of their mental wellbeing. Conservatoire-style training, with its emphasis on uniformity and discipline, and the idealised aesthetics perpetuated by classical ballet, contribute to a culture of conformity. At the same time, platforms like Instagram and TikTok add a digital layer of performative pressure, encouraging curated identities and constant visibility. Personal reflections of exclusion and not fitting the expected dancer mold highlight how these norms can lead to anxiety, burnout and identity struggles, particularly when artistic freedom is filtered through the need for external validation. Rather than accepting these conditions as inevitable, the dissertation proposes ways the dance world can evolve: by fostering more inclusive environments, deconstructing perfectionist ideals, and prioritising dancers’ mental health and authentic expression. Ultimately, this research challenges the industry to rethink what it values, suggesting that true artistry comes not from conformity, but from

resilience, individuality, and well-supported creative freedom. In the concluding chapter, I offer a hopeful but urgent call to action: inclusivity cannot be treated as a side project or an occasional grant application. True change demands rethinking dance education, funding models and studio practices, ensuring that all dancers — regardless of background, body, or brain — can access the transformative power of movement. As I argue, “By reimagining the dance class experience and dismantling its structural barriers, we can create a world where dance — both as an art form and a therapeutic practice — is accessible to anyone with the passion to move.”

“How does injury impact the lives of dancers: Encompassing their identity within the professional and personal realm?”

by [Tabatha Willmore](#)

In my recent dissertation, “How does injury impact the lives of dancers: Encompassing their identity within the professional and personal realm?”, I set out to explore how injury affects dancers far beyond the physical. What began as an academic investigation quickly became an intensely personal journey, one that compelled me to confront my own identity as a dancer navigating life post-injury. Through reflective writing, theory, and lived experience, I examined how injury can fracture a dancer’s sense of self — especially for those of us whose identity is deeply rooted in performance and achievement. My research also delves into adaptability — the ways in which dancers respond to physical limitations with creativity, resilience and reinvention. I questioned the dance industry’s romanticisation of pain and perfection, and instead argued for vulnerability to be recognised not as weakness, but as a vital, courageous act of presence. Throughout, I critiqued the institutional narratives that often pressure dancers to push through injury

in silence. I believe we need a cultural shift — one that places dancer well-being at the centre, and affirms the value of the artist beyond the body’s ability to perform. This work is both a scholarly exploration and a personal reckoning. It is an invitation to the dance community to listen more attentively — to our injuries, our identities and to the stories that emerge when we are no longer able to dance as we once did. In those moments, I’ve found, we often begin to uncover who we truly are.

“Body image In the dance industry: How an idolised body image is affecting young professionals and the next generations of dancers”

by [Catie Brignull](#)

This dissertation explores the critical impact of idolised body image on young dancers and future generations within the dance industry. Through a comprehensive literature review examining psychology, history, pedagogy and sociology, this study investigates how dancers’ perceptions of themselves are shaped by media representations, institutional expectations and cultural demands within dance communities. The research reveals that persistent pressures to conform to narrow physical ideals, historically rooted in ballet’s traditional emphasis on slender physiques, significantly affect dancers’ mental and physical wellbeing. These pressures manifest in unhealthy dietary behaviours, compromised training focus and long-term body image issues that negatively impact both career development and personal health. The study demonstrates how dancers frequently prioritise “looking good” over “performing well,” leading to detrimental effects on their overall well-being and professional growth. The findings emphasise the crucial role of dance institutions in fostering healthier training environments through pedagogical approaches that prioritise self-expression, independent thinking and body

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awareness over unattainable physical standards. While the dance industry shows emerging trends toward body diversity and positive representation, substantial systemic changes remain necessary. The study concludes that implementing educational frameworks focused on diverse body representations and holistic well-being can create safer spaces for current and future dancers, ultimately promoting sustainable attitudes toward body image and encouraging a more inclusive dance community. This research contributes to ongoing conversations about dancer welfare and provides practical recommendations for educational systems to better support young professionals while challenging entrenched idealisation practices within the dance industry.

“‘An Investigation of the Influence of Flexibility in Enhancing Dance Versatility, Aesthetic Quality, and Expression in Performance’”
by Madeleine Knight

This study investigates the influence of flexibility on dance performance, focusing on versatility, aesthetic quality and expressive potential. Six contemporary dancers participated in a flexibility and visualisation intervention, assessed through goniometer measurements and independently rated in aesthetic competence across eight parameters. Quantitative results demonstrated consistent improvements in flexibility and modest but notable enhancements in aesthetic competence outcomes, particularly in coordination, spatial awareness, and energy dynamics. Qualitative survey responses indicated increased kinaesthetic awareness and expressive intention post-intervention. The study also depicted how contextual factors such as music tempo, future career aspirations, and institutional decolonisation ethos may impact perceptions of flexibility’s artistic value. Findings suggest that targeted flexibility training

not only improves physical range but enhances expressive clarity and technical execution. These results highlight flexibility as an integral, context-sensitive component of dance artistry rather than a solely athletic attribute, offering practical insights for curriculum development and performance pedagogy.

“Exploring the Intersection of Wellbeing and Dance: Enhancing Inclusivity in Dance Spaces”
by Melody Weston-Shaw

Dance has long been celebrated for its power to heal, connect and transform—but who truly has access to these benefits? I explore the deep intersection between dance, wellbeing and inclusivity, questioning the assumption that dance is “for everyone” when structural barriers say otherwise. Drawing on neuroscience and psychological research, I trace how movement activates neural pathways, sharpens cognition, reduces stress and fosters emotional resilience. Yet despite the evidence, access to dance remains shaped by socioeconomic, physical and cultural gatekeeping. Through case studies of pioneering companies like Candoco and Stopgap, as well as large-scale initiatives such as the Critical Mass Project, I examine how some organisations are reimagining inclusion — not as an afterthought, but as a creative force. My own lived experience, growing up in a working-class family and navigating the hidden costs of dance training, informs my argument that financial and systemic barriers continue to exclude many from the studio.



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