DANCING WITH MYSELF

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE NINTH DAY OF MAY 2021

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
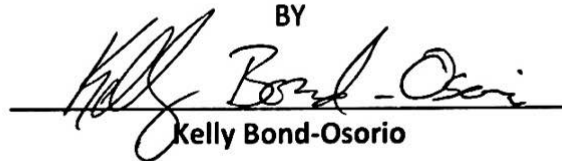
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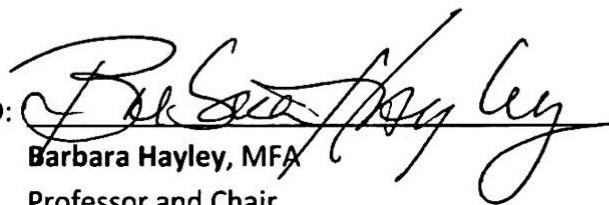
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FOR THE DEGREE

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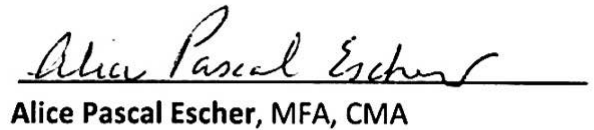MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY

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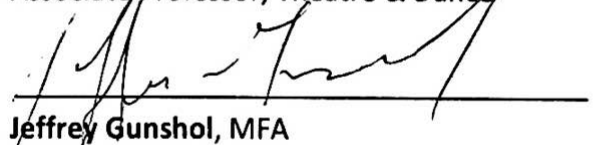Kelly Bond-Osorio

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I.   Introduction

Dancing with Myself, *still from drone operated by Sean Knapp*

On the floors of Tokyo-o
Or down in London town to go, go
A-with the record selection and the mirror's reflection
I'm a-dancing with myself
Oh, when there's no one else in sight
A-in the crowded lonely night
Well, I wait so long for my love vibration
And I'm dancing with myself
…
When there's nothing to lose, and there's nothing to prove
And I'm dancing with myself, oh, oh, uh-oh
…
If I had the chance, I'd ask the world to dance
If I had the chance, I'd ask the world to dance
If I had the chance, I'd ask the world to dance
Oohhhhhaaaawwww!!

—Billy Idol and Tony James, excerpts from *Dancing with Myself*

At the end of 2019, I began a creative process centered on nostalgia, specifically on an imagined future nostalgia, in which I and collaborator Ellery Burton imagined missing the things we have now—parents, children, environmental luxuries like relatively clean air and water. We made a movement phrase to Bruce Springsteen's *I'm on Fire* even while we grimaced at the line "Hey, little girl, is your daddy home?" I figured this song would eventually make its way out as things do in a lengthy creative process, not knowing at the time that the entire line of research would actually be forced to exit the stage. Everything but the name that I had already settled in to: *Dancing with Myself*.

When the pandemic of Covid-19 arrived in New Orleans in March 2020, it was after only a single day of working with a larger group I had invited to join the process. Then, there we all were—at home. "Let's try zoom." "Let's try working outside." We tried. I was uninspired. I didn't know how to work like this. Or I didn't *want* to work like this. The things that interest me in making experimental dance work are knotted up together with the audience. With people. With looking in their eyes, testing our proximity, and considering the possibilities of this shared moment together. If that's the interest, what happens when we can't be together?

Nothing. Nothing happened for several long months.

Feeling the necessity of progress toward the fall thesis performance—and through many discussions of possible alternative outdoor sites, since it was no longer possible to have the work in the theater—I landed in the summer on an idea to do an installation of live bodies surrounded by colored chalk. I eventually recognized that the premise of this work, which would involve inviting and tracking the closeness of audience members to performers, was not a safe idea for anyone.

Scrapped. My one idea was gone.

At some point in late August, I recognized a needed return to *Dancing with Myself*, but this time true to its name: a solo. A solo, and more specifically an outdoor solo, would allow me to make some sort of direct contact with others, albeit at a safe distance, and to forgo the otherwise necessary mask, which I found very challenging to consider as a performer.

Dancing with Myself became a solo performance enclosed within an electric pink fabric "island." It's also a paper, now a proposed triptych of works, and of course a pop song from the 80's. While the latter is credited to Billy Idol, the former are results of my research from beginning this graduate program in fall 2018 until the present. The performative themes came to be centered on the feelings that arose without in-person connections, physical proximity, and touch, yet deeply desiring them. The imagined future nostalgic moment was here. The written research you are now reading examines the creative process and dramaturgy of that work, along with my accompanying and related studies and writings on phenomenology and the im/possibilities of *being oneself* in contemporary performance. This will lead us on a path toward the future imaginings of the proposed triptych of which this solo is the beginning, which I offer in conversation about my continuing questions and artistic next steps.

II.   Phenomenology / Presence in Performance

Presence is something that often comes up in conversations about dance and performance. When I was a younger dancer, "stage presence" specifically was the thing that we all hoped to have and show up with. But what does that mean? What is it? In some conversations, it was said that you had it or you didn't; it couldn't be learned. It had something to do with focus and energetic expression in space. As I have matured in the field, the conversation changed to the broader topic of "presence" and this specifically has to do with awareness and time. Awareness in time.

A practice of presence has become ingrained in my art-making over the years which I see as an expansion of the importance of "being with" myself and my audience as I explore the offerings of the choreography or direction. It's easier when it's my own work, and for me, it's almost always my own work that I'm performing. When I'm in the studio with myself, with other performers, and with ideas (hopefully), how do I practice this? How does it come about?

Within a work, sometimes there is improvisation within some sort of structure, and sometimes the series of movements or words is set in linear time. The practice is about using these tools (improvisation or the set score) to engage and interact with the audience—this person in this moment—to feel the sensations of *now*, and to allow these current sensations along with the physical environment to influence or fuel the performance. I relate this to what Martin Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* "a making present that awaits" (380), or bringing forward the possibilities of a moment.

In a moment—in a heightened performative moment—we can share, learn, gain a type of intimacy with a person (or with many) in a way that is outside the possibilities of everyday life.

Or, perhaps it's more true to say, beyond the usual expansion of our everyday selves. We take the opportunity to *see* another and to *be seen*. In an essay entitled *Performance as Meaning: Locating preconceptions and reflections on performance through a phenomenological lens*, I discuss how these moments of connection "ultimately substantiate our own experiences" (Bond-Osorio, 2018, APPENDIX I). To take a phenomenological perspective, which as I understand it is the practice of presence I've been discussing, or what Maaike Bleeker, John Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou call "the embodied nature of being," it means "we exist *among others who also experience the world*. Phenomenology insists that the embodied nature of being means more than having a body in a world; it means we exist through the experience of intersubjectivity" (8).

An opportunity to purposefully engage with this relationship to others is through performance. Bleeker et al explain that "[p]erformance stages this each time an act requires or acquires a witness in order to come into being *and to come into meaning*" (8). Performance can be a site of "embodied reflection" that "only takes place through the attendance of others; it can only begin to exist through the involvement of others *to whom it can respond*. There are many means by which performance persists, but as a phenomenon it arises utterly embedded in a perceptual world dependent on others " (Bleeker et al, 8). This dependency is one I felt deeply as I tried to continue the early creative process of *Dancing with Myself* without a grasp of how to engage sans the felt "attendance of others." It is a driving mechanism in my work.

III.   Me, but not *only* me, plus you

…the individual is obsessed by 'the obligation to exhibit himself in order to be able to be…'
—Lea Vergine, as quoted in Jones (21)

Escapade (2019). Photo by Abbie Brandao.

The *me* in performance does different things than *daily-life-me* would do. I don't usually

take my clothes off in front of strangers, but I have done so in performance. I don't usually aim

finger-guns at people, but I have in performance. I've been told the cadence of my speech is

different within these different frames. But there is also continuity; there is no dividing line.

There is no *me* in daily life and then *me* in performance. The *me* in performance is simply the

daily-life-me responding to all the adrenalin, stimuli, environment, interactions, and knowledge

of what's to come (at least in part) in the loosely delineated timeframe before us. This section

will examine the heightened nature of the performative event in which a performer acting as

herself can never be *only* herself and will offer the interaction between audience and performer

as a sum greater than its parts.

Let's trace this line of thought through an excerpt from my essay, *My Body in Performance:*

A dance artist's practice of phenomenology (APPENDIX II):

> Eventually, I do sit in the chair [referencing the early solo that led to my work *Escapade*
> (2019)] and reference how a performer can sit on stage but cannot "take a seat" (Husserl,
> Phantasy, 620, as quoted in Camp, 31), calling attention not only to potential connection in
> that moment between myself, sitting on stage, and the spectators, sitting in the house, but
> also to the construct of that moment—that even though I am acting as myself, that things
> up to that point have "consist[ed] to an unusual degree of things that are what they seem to
> be" (Bert O. State as quoted in Camp, 21), within a shared present, I am also not only
> myself.
> Camp discusses the potential of the "analogy between acts of consciousness" that allow
> one to hold both of these ideas at once—the ideas of me as myself and not only myself in
> any given moment in the work:
>> [This analogy] suggests a way out of a deep-seated prejudice about theatre: that it isn't
>> real. This is an enduring theme in anti-theatrical thought—the anxiety about false
>> seeming that goes back to Plato—and it runs right through twentieth-century analytic
>> thought—J.L. Austin's idea that the performative utterances on stage are withered or
>> parasitic. (31-32)
> "For Husserl, what is on stage is certainly real, objects and actors stand there as
> themselves. But they have been modified in such a way that they cease to belong to the
> world in a common way" (Camp, 31-32). This modification occurs through the dual
> separation in both delineated space and time. I have separated myself from you by being on
> stage while you are in the audience, and I have put forth this proposal of performance that
> is always already removed from the life-world for a period of time. No matter how real I am
> onstage, "[t]he conflict with reality 'is there from the beginning' (Camp, 28, quoting Husserl,
> Phantasy). I become a Husserlian image object. In theatre, for Husserl, "…the contents of
> images presented are made up of perceptions of precisely the things they pretend to be"
> (Camp, 28), which is how I am both myself and not only myself at once:
>> …[W]hat prevails is a competition between apperceptions of the physical image thing
>> and apperceptions of the image object. Consciousness directs itself to either one or the
>> other in a given act. We turn our regard "from what is perceptually given to the figment
>> interpenetrating with it" (Husserl, Phantasy 585). (Camp, 28)
> The removed or bracketed reality of the performance event is juggled with the
> embodied perception of the performer's body growing more fatigued, out of breath,

weaker, etc. The "image object apprehensions trade off with the consciousness of the actual things that support them" (Camp, 28). (Bond-Osorio, "My Body in Performance")

In *Dancing with Myself*, the bracketed reality is only partially set apart in time and space. There is a clear beginning with the start of the music and my approach toward the spectators, as well as the deliberate delineation of space made by the fabric. However, I would argue that both of these beginning brackets are incomplete; they are left intentionally open for the purpose of allowing the physical reality of the present moment to overcome the perception of me/the performer as image-object. This is accomplished through the "soft" or unnamed ending (the action doesn't change with the ending of the music, nor does the performer leave the performance space or bow), as well as the removal of the fabric boundary in the last section of the work. My aim is to connect with others in real-time and space, for the lines between performance and life to be erased (even while traces are still present), and to remove some of the questions one might have about the reality of the experience in the present time and space.

photo by Abbie Brandao

In continuing consideration of my practice of presence and the direct relationship it has to

my research of the reality of the performer versus image-object in performance, I look to

contemporary philosopher Shaun Gallagher's proposals of embodied interaction and these

interactions as greater than the sum of their parts. The following is an excerpt from my paper

Enactive Embodiment and the Offerings of a Performative Framework (APPENDIX III):

> My eyes and actions give you clues to my intentions, and in this way, art mirrors life.
> Both inside the performative setting and without, our intentions are always directional, at
> least on some level. Intentionality is discussed further in the writings of Shaun Gallagher,
> who proposes not only that our interpersonal understanding is embodied, but that the
> interactions themselves are opportunities for transcendence. His idea of transcendence, in
> this case, is rooted in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1969) and rests on the idea that
> "[t]he other person, in her otherness, resists being simply an entity—whether physical
> object or epistemological subject. The other is not the sum total of her ontological parts, but
> in some way transcends all of those parts" (Gallagher 2014). (Bond-Osorio, "Enactive
> Embodiment")

It is not only the other that is more than the total of her parts, but the interaction between

self and other that offers greater possibilities. In a footnote from Gallagher, Di Paolo et al state

that "interaction can dynamically create phenomena that do not directly result from the

individual capacities or behaviors of any of the partners if investigated on their own" (Di Paolo

et al 2008, as quoted in Gallagher 2014: 279). In performance, a direct relationship between

audience and performer can allow purposeful time to consider our interaction. In the majority

of the creative process of *Dancing with Myself*, it was this area of possibility that was lacking for

me as I worked alone and uncertain of the specifics of how I might be able to physically interact

with and engage an audience. I see this relationship, as does Gallagher, as an opportunity to

move beyond myself, which I have had so much of during the relative isolation of Covid-19:

"...the transcendence that may be found in interactions can open up a vista of possibilities—

possibilities of further interactions that have the potential to take me beyond myself, and that

make the other incalculably significant, someone I turn away from at my own risk" (Gallagher

2014).

IV.   Creative Process and Dramaturgy of *Dancing with Myself*

Dancing with Myself presents itself as a solo work about relative isolation and separation that is meant to be shared with a group. The difficulty of finding the thread of intimacy and connection, which has been the most important and interesting artistic pursuit for me for many years, was not only the ruling and overwhelming constraint of making this work during the time of widespread Covid-19, it also became the theme of the work itself. The work and the process are inextricably linked, just as choices within the work enable, require, or inform others. In this section, I will discuss the overlapping layers of space, form, movement, music, text, and the audience-performer relationship.

Because this work was created within the frame of an interdisciplinary MFA program, it feels important to address the relationship between my artistic work and my named secondary discipline of philosophy. It has been my experience in the past that the strings of my philosophical readings and thoughts as pulled into and through my physical practice have led me to feel immobilized in the studio—how does one translate philosophical ideas into physical actions? In recent years, I have let go of that direct correlative relationship for a more subtle and foundational one. I trust that my research in philosophy and other areas has become part of my internal library of information and experience, and I allow my studio practice to unfold as it will with that understanding. *Dancing with Myself* exists upon a foundation of philosophical and performance research, and the choices arose from there.

Space and form

We are at Audubon Park in New Orleans. We've landed here after much mental and physical location scouting, along with hard-won negotiation of permissions and permits on the part of professor, advisor, and advocate Barbara Hayley. The location is officially called Cecile's Crepe Myrtle Grove, but no one knows that, and I instead give directions by saying "the oval of grass on the inside of the walking track near the Walnut Street playground," or something along those lines. It's a very public, energized space with lots of people around enjoying the beautiful fall weather. *Dancing with Myself* is part of a shared performance event called *Split/Shift* alongside Rebecca Allen's graduate thesis work, *Landing*. This is mainly for logistical reasons in my mind, but I can also see how it might be interesting to see the works of the Theatre & Dance Department's two graduate students side-by-side. The works themselves, however, are quite disparate for a shared event, although one can always make connections. [See Rebecca Allen's thesis for more information on *Landing*.]

Landing ends; the dancers bow. The space of this ending becomes the space of my beginning. I walk toward the area of the grove where most of the audience is left after viewing *Landing*. This changes slightly each time as in some instances audiences travel with the movement of the dancers in *Landing* and in others they are more or less planted, turning their bodies or heads to see the work. Wherever they land, I walk toward them as The Donnas rendition of *Dancing with Myself* begins to play loudly. They are loosely grouped in one area, and while I was waiting I was watching, eyeing where or near whom I might approach with my electric pink bolt of fabric—making a possible pathway through groups of people and in some instances choosing a path exactly where others are standing or sitting.

photo by Abbie Brandao

I reach my selected space within the audience grouping and immediately begin to unroll the fabric I am carrying that matches my electric pink Lycra leotard and drawstring-waist, cuffed pants. Even down to the hi-tops. The fabric is an extension of me. I am making a boundary, a fluidly-shaped island as large as my 60 yards of fabric will allow. Some choose to dance along to the music. Some have quickly given me a wide berth. Others hesitantly wait to see whether they need to move or not. A young elementary school kid danced in my way and then helped me roll out fabric until his parents came to get him. The end of the fabric overlaps the beginning. I am inside, you are outside. We are separate and safe. I toss the cardboard interior cylinder aside and walk to the center of the space I've made for myself, made for us really since the outer boundary of my space helps create your space. The music fades.

Form and movement: *action is primary*

photo by Abbie Brandao

Meg Foley is a Philadelphia-based dance artist with a long-time improvisational performance practice she calls *action is primary*. Even before learning about the physical research work, which she began in 2010 and continues to the present, I was drawn to the name, since for a long time I felt my work was based in the world of thought, for which I had trouble finding a physical life. Action as primary sounded exactly where I wanted to be.

After attending a workshop on the practice in February 2020, just before the pandemic, I felt interested and invested in further explorations of this work. It felt aligned with my performative and choreographic interests through its valuing above all the practice of presence. In fact, Foley uses the phrase *action is primary* as part of the research score and describes the intention of

this section as "hold[ing] what you are doing at the center of what you are doing, even as it slips towards new centers." It is a constant practice of presence. Of further interest to me is that it arrives at form through the act of presence. Foley describes it as follows:

> As a practice,
> it embraces attention as form, emotion as shape, and vice versa.
> it embraces presence as fluid, malleable, choreographic, and integrated to the form of a given moment.
> it embraces physical identity and the omnipresence of embodied reality.
> it values agency, accountability, not knowing, failure, and working to/past/on top of the edges of things.

The practice continued to occupy space with me as I worked in the studio on *Dancing with Myself* and also in my teaching where I learned more through offering some of Foley's ideas to others. Two parts of the score played a key role in what became the *Dancing with Myself* solo: *intervention* and *authentic melodrama*. Intervention is the play of intervening on oneself constantly—changing what you're doing, where you're going, what you're thinking, your impulse for action. Constantly. Nothing is ever complete, not a pathway of walking to the wall, nor an arc of the arm in space. It is all initiated and then intervened upon. I found it extremely challenging and fun, and it felt useful in considering a trajectory for one section of the work in particular: the improvisational "free-dancing" along with Dolly Parton's and Kenny Rogers' *Islands in the Stream*. The score began as a sort of "groove" along to the music, growing in size and intensity, which then became intervention. I wanted this section to move from casual and fun movement toward overwhelming. Eventually, my idea of using intervention softened as I felt some uncertainty about the specific idea of "intervening" on myself. The two ideas I was weighing were *more* to the point of exhaustion or *change*. Through working with dance artist Shannon Stewart as an invited director for a few days, I moved toward the idea of the dance growing in size and becoming uncontrollable: allowing the dance to take over the dancer.

Outwardly, these ideas may not have looked very different, but I felt more grounded in what I was doing from the inside.

Authentic melodrama is a part of Foley's score that asks the performer to allow the experience of the body's shape to call forward emotion, or vice versa, to let a felt emotion move into shape, and then allow those to expand. To dive into feeling and shape in body and voice. This idea led itself toward the shaping of the last segment of the "tea party" section in which the fabric becomes an imagined body of water and I, as the performer, embody an aging and dying whale. I can't say that authentic melodrama as Foley intended it was present within the piece but it certainly influenced my choices of shape and action in the creation of those moments.

photo by Abbie Brandao

Movement and music

When I reflect on the sounds of *Dancing with Myself*, I hear 80's pop music, original experimental compositions, birds in the park, my microphone cutting in and out, the soccer game going on nearby, and all of the words.

As I enter, the namesake song *Dancing with Myself* by The Donnas begins to blast loudly from our one speaker on a dolly. I've chosen The Donnas version of this song, because I prefer the association of an all-female rock band as "my" voice in this moment over that of the song's (credited) author and problematic figure, Billy Idol. There are other versions of this song, but I chose this one for the intensity of the music and vocals that lends a sort of desperation to the idea and image of dancing with myself.

Later: my hands are moving against the pants on my thighs, then up to my hips, up the front of my torso to come fidgetingly together near my heart. Moving up to my throat, my face, my hair, eventually beyond to reach into the air above my head with arms extended. I surrender.

photos by Abbie Brandao

Greg Svitil's original score layers drama onto this moment, which is of a different dramatic tension to what comes before and most certainly what comes after. It adds to the emotionality of the gesture and the intensity of my direct eye contact with you. My hands retrace their path

down to my legs. Enter a new idea: the music cuts abruptly as I reach for the phone in my back

pocket, taking a moment to open my photos where I've saved screenshots that I'll read from.

photo by Abbie Brandao

"I thought I'd share my quarantine playlist with you: *Dancing with Myself*, The Donnas

version; *In The Air Tonight*, Phil Collins; *Every Breath You Take*, The Police; *Don't Stand So Close*

To Me, The Police…" I continue to read the list that obviously speaks to the moment of the

pandemic, and I also wonder if two titles in a row by The Police stir people's thoughts about the

current crisis and protests of police violence against black and brown bodies in our country. The

list is made up almost entirely of songs from the 1980's, stemming from nostalgia for my

childhood during this decade, nostalgia that was part of the impetus for the original group work.

Making its initial appearance in *Escapade* (2019), I've wondered about the emergence of popular music in my work. I trace it back to witnessing a work by Rosie Herrera at the Contemporary Arts Center in 2019 and recognizing the role that popular music could play in a current, relevant, and thoughtful dance work, and specifically the role it could play in my own creative process at that time. It became a driving force in *Escapade* and continued into *Dancing with Myself*. Prior to this, in 2011-12, Mel Krodman and I used popular dance music in our rehearsal room for *Colony,* but never intended it to be in the work itself. However, we were so drawn to the driving rhythms of Petey Pablo's *Freek-A-Leek* that we eventually urged our composer, Greg Svitil (who has created sound compositions for every work I've created or co-created since then), toward a similar rhythm and pulse in his final composition for the piece.

Colony *in performance at Emory University, 2014. Photo by Steve Krodman.*

My reading of the playlist is gradually drowned out by the rising volume of Parton's and Rogers' *Islands in the Stream*, the last song I share from the list, lining up my naming of this song

with the words matched in song lyric. As a duet, *Islands in the Stream* felt like a powerful choice

of music in a work about isolation and desire for connection. Two people as islands—separate

yet holding their space for one another in the stream of life and people passing them by:

> Islands in the stream
> That is what we are
> No one in between
> How can we be wrong
> Sail away with me
> To another world
> And we rely on each other, ah-ha
> From one lover to another, ah-ha
>
> I can't live without you if the love was gone
> Everything is nothing if you got no one
> And you just walk in the night
> Slowly losing sight of the real thing
>
> But that won't happen to us and we got no doubt
> Too deep in love and we got no way out
> And the message is clear
> This could be the year for the real thing
>
> No more will you cry
> Baby I will hurt you never
> We start and end as one
> In love forever
> We can ride it together, ah-ha
> Making love with each other, ah-ha (Parton and Rogers)

This song places me, the performer, on an island. The fabric island of my own creation. I have

willingly made it and am necessarily inhabiting it. And you are there, too. Another island and

there is no one in between. We can be together like this.

   The idea of the fabric island was one that arose when I encountered an image of Christo and

Jeanne-Claude's *Surrounded Islands* (1983) in my ceramics class a few months before the

scheduled premiere. This boundary of fabric could help me ground my movement ideas in space

and ease some of the thematic and logistical problems with which I was still grappling. I initially

imagined using white fabric but was given electric pink to try out, because the costume shop

just happened to have it lying around. Oddly enough, pink is also the color of the original

Surrounded Island installation. I loved the color and the association I made to the neon colors of

the 80s, and I was sold.

Surrounded Islands (1983), Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Photo by Wolfgang Volz.

Islands / living on an island / being an island, along with the accompanying water, became

imagery for the work that connected directly to the theme of isolation and the desire on my part

of connecting with others in life, but also for me through the performative act. This real-life

desire and the "crisis" I felt during the creation process became integral to the work itself.

Without these restrictions, the work would not have become what it is.

I put the phone in the river of fabric. I groove to the music. I let that grow bigger. I allow the

dance to take over. I exhaust myself and eventually release the movement to find stability and

stillness to breathe: "This is where I am now." We Are The Physics' single lyric repeats, "Action

action action action action!" which contrasts my inability or unwillingness to continue moving through the struggle, and instead to catch my breath, to take care of myself, even while my inner voice is demanding "ACTION!"

Music and text

After one performance, an audience member approached me and said something along the lines of, "It must be really hard to give a 30-minute monologue." Until that moment, I had not once considered what I was doing to be monologue. I have never considered myself to be an actor, so this was a somewhat foreign lens for me to view my work while I can also understand the background of this perspective—there is a lot of talking in this work and less in the way of traditional movement phrases or phrasing.

For me, the text is part of the sound score and the storytelling. It is another way in which we connect with each other. The layering of musical sound, text sound, and the sound of the body moving in the grass not-too-far away are all entry points for connecting to the work and through the work to another human.

Text and togetherness

photo by Abbie Brandao

"I'm really glad you're here. Make a place to sit down. Sit down": the tea party section. It is a literal invitation to come closer and sit "with" me and was inspired by Wendell Berry's poem, *How to Be a Poet (to remind myself)*. The structure of the text I devised involves a welcome; an offering or lack of offering; referencing something not present, but desired; and then decomposing*. For example, in the first "round," I invite people to have a seat closer to the circle, followed by the wish that I had food or drink to offer them. I mention the possibility of them drinking their own provisions and then talk about the food I ate before performing, going into some detail about its current state of digestion. This structure repeats three times as it evolves from my offering-without-having-anything-to-offer, moving through my concern of not having anything to offer you performatively or as the creator-performer of this work (all while reversing the words so that in the end you are the one in the position of concern about having nothing to offer), and finally offering an idea of what to do with your tears and devolving into the death of a whale from natural causes via the lyrics of Harry Nilsson:

> Sit beside the breakfast table
> Think about your troubles
> Pour yourself a cup of tea
> And think about the bubbles
> You could take your teardrops
> And drop them in a teacup
> Take them down to the riverside
> And throw them over the side
> To be swept up by a current
> And taken to the ocean
> To be eaten by some fishes
> Who were eaten by some fishes
> And swallowed by a whale
> Who grew so old, he decomposed

The lyrics are circular and in the end return us back to the beginning:

> Now everybody knows
> That when a body decomposes
> The basic elements
> Are given back to the ocean
> And the sea does what it ought'a

And soon there's salty water
(Not too good for drinking)
'Cause it tastes just like a teardrop
(So we run it through a filter)
And it comes out from the faucet
(And pours into a teapot)
Which is just about to bubble
Now
Think about your troubles

Within *Dancing with Myself*, this cycle offered me a clear option for moving from death back to life while also serving as perhaps an obtuse way of considering the part of the cycle we're all in now collectively. Things won't always be the way they are right now.

In the final section of the work, signaled in my mind by my stepping onto the fabric—or into the "river," another consideration of death—I blend my own words about death, time, and the "aboutness" of the work with the words of poet Danusha Laméris through her poem *Small Kindnesses*. Through living in community, we could view our connections as "fleeting temples," returning to Gallagher's opportunity for transcendence.

Small Kindnesses

I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,
have my seat," "Go ahead—you first," "I like your hat."

--Danusha Laméris, *Bonfire Opera*

Togetherness and isolation

I look around and assess that I'm basically in the center of my island and remove the masks I've been wearing to safely be near others during the roll-out. I take a full, deep breath. It feels good to breathe outside without a mask. I was insistent from the beginning that I wouldn't or couldn't perform with a mask. I didn't feel it was possible to connect with others the way I wanted to without exposing my face in full expression. More recently, Professor Amy Chaffee reminded me that there are many performance traditions that rely on masking. I hadn't related Covid safety masks to the traditions of masking, although this might ask me to inhabit my body in different, non-habituated ways. This was not in my line of thinking during the creative process, although now I'm curious.

Later, I talk to you about a discarded idea I had for the piece: that the performance space would be surrounded by plexi-glass. We could be millimeters apart and still be shielded from each other, and I wondered if that would allow us to feel connected, or if it would just feel like glass. Of course, because I talk about it in the work, the idea was not totally discarded. Instead, it is another example of how the process directly inserted itself into the work.

photo by Abbie Brandao

The fabric—the weight of it all is piled on me. I have gathered all of these outwardly poured parts back on myself, covering my body, my head. I slowly raise the parts of the fabric that I am holding as Tiffany's *I Think We're Alone Now* fades in. I'm alone because I'm hidden amongst myself. You are left alone, because I have "gone away". I've left you without my nearly constant gaze. There is instead a muppet, a monster, a larger-than-life fabric mop that begins bouncing up and down as I start a sort of jog to the music:

> Running just as fast as we can
> Holdin' on to one another's hand
> Tryin' to get away into the night
> And then you put your arms around me
> And we tumble to the ground
> And then you say
> I think we're alone now (Tiffany)

I've disappeared in one grand magical flash. I dropped to the ground with the fabric on top of me and I am suddenly no longer where I was. Obviously, I'm beneath the pile of fabric; you can most likely make out the edges of my back or hips amongst the pile of pink, or maybe even see my hair. But I'm not coming back. The music continues a while longer and then fades away. The audience applauds. There is no return. No bow. Instead, I lie on the ground until I know most of the audience has dispersed.

photos by Abbie Brandao

V.   Continuing Questions

Dancing with Myself is not a culmination of my graduate studies at Tulane. It is rather a

continuation of my research into phenomenology, presence, the possibilities of the self in

performance, and the potential offerings of this specific relationship with others. Just as this

work grew from the works I made previously with the continual input of new information and

experiences, another idea or perhaps several have already starting swirling in its wake.

I am proposing *Dancing with Myself* as a triptych, a series of three distinct works that all

follow a similar line of questioning, or a questioning that grows upon itself as questions often

do. I am continuing with the second work, currently titled *Dancing with Myself (together)*, by

returning to some of the original group ideas, moving between explorations of embodied

sensation and pop culture/communication in movement and voice, alongside live and recorded

music that tries on the ideas of nostalgia and "future sounds." The work will ask questions that

are both singular and social in an attempt to consider a future nostalgia— looking toward a

future when we no longer have the people, relationships, or world that we value now.

Ultimately, how does this future imagining affect our lives in the present moment? As a series, it

holds the overarching idea of using nostalgia to create personal and communal space for

exploring interconnectedness, while preferencing an experiential investment over virtuosity in

performance through fluidly shifting roles (dancer becomes musician, for example). It asks us to

bear witness to each other's vulnerability, strength, struggle, desire, and flesh, and through this

holds the potential to engage in socio-political discussions using the work as a springboard.

As I move toward this next phase of research, I am considering what lessons and questions

from *Dancing with Myself* I'm carrying with me. I learned that feeling intimacy with others

doesn't depend on proximity, but on a shared experience that asks for some level of self-reflection. I am questioning my "hard line" on performing without a mask and wondering if it was absolutely necessary for this work. It did feel important to expose my face and full facial expressions, and I missed not being able to see others' faces to gauge the journey through the work with me (or lack thereof). I couldn't always tell if someone was smiling at me, but I could see their tears. I'm also now very curious about purposefully not being myself in performance and if that might be against every reason I've laid out as a proponent of it. I'm curious about being a character, especially within the frame of experimental dance that often asks us to be where we are, when we are, and who we are.

These are just a few residual lines of thought that are carrying me forward in my artistic practice, which has always been interdisciplinary and even more so through the MFA interdisciplinary dance performance program. During these past three years, I have been largely influenced by the considerations of my proposed "second" area of study—philosophy—while also greatly appreciating the flexibility of field and range of study this program allows. Through this, I have been able to pursue threads that led me to classes in anthropology, theatre, painting, and ceramics—all of which challenged my perspective, sometimes physically, sometimes socio-politically, and offered new ideas to my performance practice. Most relevant at this moment are perspectives from the theatre lens that are allowing me to see myself as a director and actor.

As I reflect on how those areas of study influenced my art-making, it is worth considering how the field of dance and performance might contribute to these fields in return. While I can't know the many potential pathways of entry for this discussion, I feel confronted by the thought that dance and performance are so vast in the rivulets of possible research that they of course must intersect the interests of other fields. My studies in philosophy at Tulane were centered on

phenomenology, perception, and metaphysics. These areas each rely on embodiment in specific ways (through presence, relational perspectives, and inherent knowledge of lived experience), and dance as a pathway for active engagement with one's own embodiment can only serve as a rich tool for deeper learning.

My research at Tulane has allowed me the time and reflective space for expansion of thoughts about next and future steps. In the coming year, I plan to begin work on *Dancing with Myself (together)*, considering myself more fully situated in the role of director for this project, as well as performer (most likely). I intend to continue to expand my written research and offerings, contributing to the field through this pathway. Each of these will guide my pedagogical growth and offerings as I continue to pursue teaching in a higher education environment. My research for the foreseeable future will persist in engaging with ideas of intersubjectivity in part through a continually deepening engagement with my own embodied experience. I am left with this final thought from Bleeker et al on the vital offerings of presence and performance: "... the world is fundamentally mysterious as well as the site of all that we can know. ...[I]nvite ambiguity instead of identification, and...locate the stakes of grasping that world in our urgent and inconclusive contact with others" (1). My embodied experiences in the microcosm of performance and the macrocosm of the life-world are the source of foundational knowledge.

APPENDIX I

Performance as Meaning:

Locating preconceptions and reflections on performance

through a phenomenological lens

By Kelly Bond-Osorio

15 October 2018

[T]he proper response to phenomenology is theatre.
   --Krikor Belekian (from a personal interview as quoted in Bleeker et al, 8)

In the above statement by Krikor Belekian, architect and noted collaborator of physical

theatre's Jacques Lecoq, we are directed toward a particular relationship between

phenomenology and theatre that points to both as embodied modes of perception. In their

introduction to *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and transformations*, Bleeker,

Sherman, and Nedelkopoulou clarify this statement: "Belekian draws attention to performance

as phenomenological analysis in action: a demonstration of the means by which we perceive,

experience, and think about the world" (8). Even as performance allows us insight into the

phenomenological process, it serves then as "a privileged object of phenomenological

investigation as well as a means of developing phenomenological practice" (Bleeker et al, 1). In

this paper, I will discuss the phenomenological reduction proposed by Husserl as it relates to

locating meaning in performance. I will attempt to show that a "clean slate" viewing, or one

without relational thought, is not only unlikely but also unnecessary for fully engaging with a

performance work. Finally, I will suggest that it is our intersubjectivity, our beingness with others in the world, that provides the necessary connection to allow our search for meaning, in performance and beyond, to have meaning in itself.

Both performance and phenomenology offer opportunities to encounter the world experientially, to note one's actual experience via the senses. These fields also propose that no prior knowledge is needed to be fully engaged with the experience or object at hand. In fact, prior knowledge can be a hindrance to being fully present with one's actual experience. At the very least, a phenomenological approach would suggest that one set aside any associated information. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in her seminal book, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966), states that "[t]o approach dance as a phenomenal presence is to presuppose nothing in advance of the immediate experience of dance" (5). In our case, we will look at a wider category of performance that includes but is not limited to dance. For us, performance will be "understood as the enactment of collaborative practices meant for other people to witness" (Bleeker et al, 4). These encompass works of dance, theatre, and body or performance art, but will not in this instance include live musical performance, since this is outside my area of research at the time of this writing.

Sheets-Johnstone continues:

Whatever knowledge we may have of dance, in general or in particular, is extraneous to the lived experience of any dance. Such knowledge may affect only our aesthetic expectations and judgments of that experience. Hence, the kinds of dances we have seen before, the extent of our own participation in dance—all prior experiences with dance—influence the manner in which, and the level at which, we approach and evaluate it. But to be pre-reflectively involved in what is now appearing before us on the stage is to be fully and

exclusively responsive to it, such that the sense of that appearance is immediately and

directly apprehended (1-2).

Sheets-Johnstone posits that to be fully responsive to or fully engaged in a performance, one

must "be pre-reflectively involved." This phenomenological view of performance, and indeed,

Husserlian phenomenology itself, proposes that one should attempt to engage with each

encounter, or each performance, without preconceptions by assertion of the

"phenomenological reduction, or epoché, which has served as the starting point—albeit

subsequently abandoned by many phenomenologists—for phenomenological reflection. The

epoché involves bracketing phenomena, removing them from our everyday experiences of and

assumptions about them" (Bleeker et al, 2). In response to Husserl, Jacques Derrida described

the phenomenological reduction as "a scene, a theatre stage" (Bleeker et al, 2):

> The operative assumption is that, if the Husserlian phenomenological approach invites us to
>
> take a distance from direct involvement with the world, this same distance will replicate the
>
> purported distance between what happens on stage and audience members. Accordingly,
>
> theater presents a staged version of the *epoché* because they both involve perception apart
>
> from the quotidian. As Mark Franko observes, "The very operations of reduction and
>
> bracketing could be those of the proscenium stage itself" (Bleeker et al, 2).

By removing the experience from the plenum, or fullness of our ordinary encounters with sense

objects, Sheets-Johnstone posits that one might have a *lived experience* of the object or artwork

at hand:

> When a dance is *there* for us, we intuitively know that it is there; something alive and
>
> vibrant is happening on the stage, and as we are totally engaged in our experience of that
>
> happening, we too are alive and vibrant: we have a *lived experience*. Judgments, beliefs,
>
> interpretations are suspended: our experience of the dance is free of any manner of

reflection. We are spontaneously and wholly intent upon the continuously emerging form

which appears before us, thoroughly engrossed in its unfolding (1).

In contrast to this poetic and idealist description, I believe a performance can be "there" for us

even while reflecting upon the event at hand. I stand with Amelia Jones in her 1997 article for

Art Journal, "'Presence' in Absentia," in her statement that "there is no possibility of an

unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product, including body art" (12), and I extend

that statement to propose that not only is it not possible but also unnecessary as a means of

knowing a work.

According to Sheets-Johnstone, a performance (dance specifically, in her case) is an inherent

wholeness that is broken by reflection:

So long as we, as dancers and as audience, are wholly and unequivocally engrossed in the

dance, the unity and continuity of the work is unbroken. It is only when we reflect upon the

experience of the work as it is being created and presented, when we remove ourselves

from our immediate encounter with it, that we interrupt the flow and fragmentize its

inherent totality (3).

This description relates directly to Husserl's life-world. It would seem that the life-world has an

inherent totality that we both exist within continuously and also fragment by means of not

being present with it constantly, but by getting lost in thought. Even the phrase "lost in thought"

implies that you have gone astray, you have left the path, the groundedness and locationality of

the life-world. That is not to say that one should not think. It would be an error to posit the act

of thinking as going astray. Instead, phenomenology suggests that we allow our reflections,

presumptions, plans and memories to work in service of our experiential knowledge that should

remain the basis of our understanding. Thoughts should not pull the rug out from under

whatever that temporal truth was.

Performance, in our case, is the stand-in for the whole, the microcosm inside the macrocosm. But perhaps different genres of performance, and even more acutely, individual works ask for different ways of viewing and experiencing them. For example, the idea of "suspension of disbelief" might ask us to set aside our current experience of place and time and be present with the work that exists in another place and time, agreeing that the stage in front of us *is* that place and time. A traditional staged performance of *Peter Pan*, for example, would operate in this way. On the other hand, a work such as Jérôme Bel's *Veronique Doisneau* (2004), which places its subject exactly in the very place and time of its presentation and audience, invites reflection *as well as* real-time engagement with the visceral sensory experience of the performance. Through its very presentness, I propose that the work holds space for this type of viewing. Meaning exists in the work on both the experiential and reflective level in real-time. And indeed the reflective level, as long as one's reflections are focused on the work at-hand, can also be experiential. My experience of Bel's work is one that includes emotional responses fed by thoughtful reflection spurred by place.

Sheets-Johnstone's description of "…the indivisible wholeness of any created form…does not mean that the created form cannot be analyzed. It means only that what is in and of itself complete, a totality, cannot be reduced to a set of elements, parts, or units, for there is no way of reconstituting these separate units into the whole" (5). Both Sheets-Johnstone and Husserl in a related way give preference to a true nature rather than a collection of appearances. This breaking down into a collection of appearances is accordingly what happens in reflection. The parts, in their isolation from the whole, become Idealist or Rationalist cognitive elements that are either sensible or intellectual. We sometimes allow our reflections then to reframe our understanding of the work, the understanding or meaning of which we gleaned from the initial viewing. This is a mistake according to Sheets-Johnstone:

The meaning of any dance comes alive for us only as we ourselves have a lived experience of

the dance, and is not the result of either prior knowledge of dance or any later reflective

efforts. If we reflect upon the dance after it has been presented in the hope of discovering

its meaning, we can arrive at its significance only from a distance. Such a meaning is akin to

a lifeless fact, a second-hand piece of information, devoid of felt, lived-through significance.

No more than the dance itself has the meaning truly existed for us (1).

Although I would agree with Sheets-Johnstone and more broadly with the phenomenological

posit that "it is the immediate encounter which constitutes the foundation of our knowledge…"

(2), I contend that post-experiential reflections are not the same as second-hand information,

devoid of "lived-through significance." A vital part of reflecting back on the event will include

one's *experience of the event*. The failure is only in allowing those post-experiential thoughts to

feed one another until the meaning and understanding that is most true and therefore most

valuable, the one gained while and through the appearance and disappearance of the

performance, has become so distant that the viewer cannot or does not relate directly back to

the event itself. We are divorced from the experience from which all of our technical modes of

thought arise. This connects to Husserl's account of the mathematizing of nature and how the

failure is in not redirecting those thoughts and extensions back toward its beginnings in the

natural world.

While reflection need not alter one's experience of meaning of an event, it can deepen and

enhance one's understanding by serving to historically locate an event or artistic oeuvre. Jones

elaborates:

While the viewer of a live performance may seem to have certain advantages in

understanding…, on a certain level she may find it more difficult to comprehend the

histories/narratives/processes she is experiencing until later, when she too can look back

and evaluate them with hindsight (the same might be said of the performer herself). As I

know from my own experience of "the real" in general and, in particular, live performances

in recent years, these often become more meaningful when reappraised in later years; it is

hard to identify the patterns of history while one is embedded in them. We "invent" these

patterns, pulling the past together into a manageable picture, retrospectively (12).

It is in these later reflections, sometimes much later reflections, that relationships between

events form that allow us to see patterns and place our experiences among others' experiences.

Our minds look for connections; we find value in relational meanings. It is these relationships

that ultimately substantiate our own experiences:

Since its formalization by Husserl in the early twentieth century, phenomenology has been

driven by the claim that what this means above all is that we exist *among others who also*

experience the world. Phenomenology insists that the embodied nature of being means

more than having a body in a world; it means we exist through the experience of

intersubjectivity (Bleeker et al, 8).

Bleeker et al continue this thought by stating that "[p]erformance stages this each time an act

requires or acquires a witness in order to come into being *and to come into meaning*" (8).

Performance proposes a kind of "embodied reflection" that "only takes place through the

attendance of others; it can only begin to exist through the involvement of others *to whom it*

can respond. There are many means by which performance persists, but as a phenomenon it

arises utterly embedded in a perceptual world dependent on others " (Bleeker et al, 8).

Embodied engagement and relational intersubjectivity are vital offerings of both

performance and phenomenology. Each proposes "that the world is fundamentally mysterious

as well as the site of all that we can know. They are modes of thinking and embodied

engagement with the world that invite ambiguity instead of identification, and that locate the

stakes of grasping that world in our urgent and inconclusive contact with others." (Bleeker et al,

1). Our embodied experiences in both the microcosm of performance and the macrocosm of the

life-world are the source of foundational knowledge, but according to Sheets-Johnstone,

> What emerges is a descriptive analysis and not a body of definitive knowledge. Answers in
>
> the form of definitive knowledge tend often to become static and sterile because their very
>
> patness estranges them from the thing in question. On the contrary, if the descriptive
>
> analysis is sound and valid, it should continue to stimulate many vital questions and not
>
> dissolve into easy verbalisms which lose their significant, felt meaning (2-3).

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APPENDIX II

My Body in Performance:

A dance artist's practice of phenomenology

By Kelly Bond-Osorio

14 December 2018

To be is to be perceived.
  —George Berkeley

I am working on a solo. My work is technically in dance; I place it there partly because of my

background, but also, it continues to makes its way with that medium because of my use of and

play with the body and concepts surrounding its histories, taboos, and possibilities. Depending

on the reader's sensibilities, for the sake of clarity, it might also be termed *body art*. For several

months now, I have worked in the studio on telling stories of my body, finding out where and

how they live in me and wondering what relationship they might have to an audience. Actions

and images arise. And words. Lots of words early on; less words now as my choice to be present

with the stories has become more embodied.

Early in this process, I began working phenomenologically. This arose organically based on a

(not so) simple prompt given to me by a guest artist, Vincent Cacialano: *Do something you will*

regret. Make a mess. Know very little of what is going to happen. Considering how to approach

this prompt, I focused on how to move through what I didn't know, and I decided, based on our

earlier conversations, that I would be patient. The very open structure I developed gave me a

starting point and a list of possibilities, and I would be present with what I was doing and listen

to my sensations, rather than trying to think ahead, to know what to do next. I relate this to

what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* "*a making present that awaits*" (380). Some might say

that this is simply improvisation, and yes, it definitely *is* that, but not *simply* that. The focus was

not on doing while not knowing the next thing or the future, but rather on living in a specific

present experience. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone states that if "we presuppose nothing in advance,

our perspective remains continually fresh and open, an uncharted and exciting path of

discovery" (2-3). This "exciting path" is one that is now propelling me forward in my artistic

practice.

In subsequent performances, I allowed the ideas and focus to shift and transform, and I find

myself in another place not entirely unknown to me, although I hope my approach has grown as

my ideas and experience have. I now move through a solo structure that knows a bit more of

the story it wants to tell, meaning it has more of a delineated structure, while also remaining

open to new possibilities based on the realities of the body and the energetic offerings of the

audience, among other things. As I mature into this way of being present in performance, I am

curious about the transformation of my phenomenological practice when there are more

guideposts for me to touch along the way. Sheets-Johnstone aptly describes the way in which

presence allows the dancer to both produce and follow the current of the dance simultaneously:

> The dance comes alive precisely as the dancers are *implicitly* aware of themselves and the
>
> form, such that the form moves through them: they are not agents of the form, but its
>
> moving center. Because they are themselves immersed in what they are creating, because
>
> they are not going through specified movements as one would go through a series of
>
> technical manoeuvres, what is created and what appears is a unique interplay of fluid, ever-
>
> changing forces, a dynamic and cohesive flow of energy, not in the sense that the dancers

continually change relationship and positions, but because the dancers and the dance are

one. (3)

This idealist view of performing that I believe can and does arrive in a mature performer

conjures for me Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the "misleading image of time as a river"

(Sherman, 145). Jon Foley Sherman in his essay "Doing Time with the Neo-Futurists" states the

crux of Merleau-Ponty's argument as, "The water passed by flows not to the future but towards

the past, while the 'still-to-come is on the side of the source'" (*Phenomenology of Perception* as

quoted in Sherman, 145). The "still-to-come" mingling with Sheets-Johnstone's "dynamic and

cohesive flow of energy" leads me to wonder whether the dancer-creator is the source or is

standing in the river.

Maaike Bleeker, John Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou, in the introduction to their

collection of essays, *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations*, state

that "[b]oth performance and phenomenology engage with experience, perception, and with

making sense as processes that are embodied, situated, and relational" (1). Using the

framework of this solo which is the current basis of my phenomenological research, I aim to

discuss the embodiment of time for myself as the performer as well as for the audience, and

also to look at image consciousness in relation to the perceived un-reality of the stage space.

By taking on the phenomenological attitude, I am not asked to forget what I know. I am

instead taking a different stance toward it. Husserl refers to the "'horizon' of nonactive and yet

cofunctioning" aspects of an object, the object being the performance in this case (159). These

cofunctioning aspects for me are the structure or form of the work which exhibits itself as past-

present-future within the timescale of the piece; my own past-present-future that is referenced

in the work; and my real-time interaction with the audience. These aspects are "nonactive" only

when they have taken a backseat to other aspects that are pushed forward in the ebb and flow

of the work. The aforementioned altered stance that allows me to remain in a

phenomenological performative state even with all of this cofunctioning information is the

privileged position of being present with the active aspects of any given instance. The

movement of these aspects into the foreground and background are based necessarily in time,

and Husserl describes our relationship to things within the horizon as an open system of

relations that extend forward and backward in time (160). There exists the past, which even at

the beginning exists differently for myself and each audience member. I have the past

experiences of iterations of the work, as well as the bodily stories and experiences I might

access within the work itself. Spectators might have experience of the work formerly, or of my

prior work, or maybe they have read my biography in the program, or have assumptions of me

based on my appearance and voice. All of this information is co-present with the anticipation of

possible future perceptions (Husserl, 162).

At the beginning of this currently untitled solo, I stand with a notebook and tell "the things

that I know." The notebook then remains in that location as a reminder of that moment and an

anchor of the past. In my account of "known" things, I mention that I will sit in a chair. Sheets-

Johnstone might describe this by saying "[w]hat is written down as a notation of dance is a guide

to the future appearance of a dance, an appearance which is not, until the dance is re-created"

(2). This prediction, for it has not yet happened and we can't be certain that it will, has the effect

of placing the audience in that potential future moment, and their desire to reach it is

constantly tugging at the present. Eventually, I do sit in the chair and reference how a performer

can sit on stage but cannot "take a seat" (Husserl, *Phantasy*, 620, as quoted in Camp, 31), calling

attention not only to potential connection in that moment between myself, sitting on stage, and

the spectators, sitting in the house, but also to the construct of that moment—that even though

I am acting as myself, that things up to that point have "consist[ed] to an unusual degree of

things that are what they seem to be" (Bert O. State as quoted in Camp, 21), within a shared

present, I am also not *only* myself.

Camp discusses the potential of the "analogy between acts of consciousness" that allow one

to hold both of these ideas at once—the ideas of me as myself and not only myself in any given

moment in the work:

> [This analogy] suggests a way out of a deep-seated prejudice about theatre: that it isn't real.
>
> This is an enduring theme in anti-theatrical thought—the anxiety about false seeming that
>
> goes back to Plato—and it runs right through twentieth-century analytic thought—J.L.
>
> Austin's idea that the performative utterances on stage are withered or parasitic. (31-32)

"For Husserl, what is on stage is certainly real, objects and actors stand there as themselves. But

they have been modified in such a way that they cease to belong to the world in a common

way" (Camp, 31-32). This modification occurs through the dual separation in both delineated

space and time. I have separated myself from you by being on stage while you are in the

audience, and I have put forth this proposal of performance that is always already removed

from the life-world for a period of time. No matter how *real* I am onstage, "[t]he conflict with

reality 'is there from the beginning' (Camp, 28, quoting Husserl, *Phantasy*). I become a

Husserlian image object. In theatre, for Husserl, "…the contents of images presented are made

up of perceptions of precisely the things they pretend to be" (Camp, 28), which is how I am both

myself and not only myself at once:

> …[W]hat prevails is a competition between apperceptions of the physical image thing and
>
> apperceptions of the image object. Consciousness directs itself to either one or the other in
>
> a given act. We turn our regard "from what is perceptually given to the figment
>
> interpenetrating with it" (Husserl, *Phantasy* 585). (Camp, 28)

The removed or bracketed reality of the performance event is juggled with the embodied

perception of the performer's body growing more fatigued, out of breath, weaker, etc. The

"image object apprehensions trade off with the consciousness of the actual things that support

them" (Camp, 28).

This unavoidable construct of separation is itself addressed within the piece, not only in the

moment of sitting, but also through the "drawing" of a line near the front of the stage space.

This "drawing" occurs through the placement of clothes as I undress and lay them one piece at a

time. The nude body—*my* nude body—potentially allows more insight into how the past-

present-future is manifesting in the body of a physical person. Without our embodied selves,

time doesn't exist, doesn't have meaning. "Time means nothing free from our embodiment, a

state of being that involves our bodies but does not originate from them alone" (Sherman, 144-

145). Sherman describes how our relationship to time changes in the presence of the nude

body:

> It goes without saying that few things quite focus our attention like that moment in a play
>
> where a naked person appears quite close to us. This provokes different desires for time. A
>
> desire for it to pass quickly or slowly, to change its aspect for us. To move faster so that we
>
> don't have to look anymore or to move slower so that we can look longer. The actor's naked
>
> body disrupts the experience of time by directing our attention to time… (144)

Perhaps this "directing our attention to time" allows us, both audience and performer (because I

also feel this tension of the gaze in our relationship), to fully embody the experience of the

work. The disruption of our experience of time, as Sherman describes it, actually serves to place

us in the moment. It "focus[es] our attention." Being in the Moment, as written with

Heidegger's emphasis, at which we arrived through disruption, can alternatively serve to stitch

together the Self of the past-present-future. Heidegger states, "The existence of the Moment

temporalizes itself as fatefully whole, stretching along in the sense of the authentic, historical

constancy of the self" (377). We relate past versions of ourselves to present, giving us a sense of

continuity. The past is always co-active with the present.

"This kind of temporal existence 'constantly' has its time *for* what the situation requires of

it." (Heidegger, 377). Just as my naked body sitting in a chair asks the audience to be present

with their own experience, I also choose to be present with you. Husserl states that we must

"turn our attention to the fact that in our continuously flowing world-perceiving we are not

isolated but rather have, within it, contact with other human beings" (163). I have time *for* you; I

am *in* time with you. "But each individual 'knows' himself to be living within the horizon of his

fellow human beings, with whom he can enter into sometimes actual, sometimes potential

contact" (Husserl, 164). Real-time engagement with the audience is a vital cofunctioning aspect

of the work for me, but it also speaks to the balancing of image consciousness. I am an image

object, but I am also making eye contact with you right now.

Through this solo research, I am continuing to investigate the potential of being

phenomenologically present. I am trying to enjoy, to notice how the present moment is

informed by the past. And how the past really isn't the past but is co-forming the present

moment. I know that perception unfolds in space and time, which prompts me to choose this

action before that one, etc., and that this temporal flow is crucial to our experience. The

extension of limitless possibilities that are not directly experienced but could be experienced is

what makes the work of a choreographer and performing artist ever new. Through an attitude

of open investigation, Husserl would say that I can also liberate the mind to a greater openness

to the condition of things.

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APPENDIX III

Enactive Embodiment and the Offerings of a Performative Framework

By Kelly Bond-Osorio

26 April 2019

Her knowledge, one might say, is already in her action.
—Shaun Gallagher (2005: 220)

His being is a question to him. He lives his answers.
—Sidney M. Jourard (1968: 105)

I: Introduction

I am looking at you. You see me. You react, which means perhaps that you look away

uncomfortably or, instead, meet my gaze. In an everyday environment, both the response and

its repercussions would likely be minimal, even insignificant. But because this is a

performance—a framework that is usually held between a beginning and end, and automatically

encapsulates the action of what goes on—we have the opportunity to rest in this place. To sit

with our choices, to focus on our interaction and what it means in this space and time. Perhaps

noting the intimacy and vulnerability of looking into another's eyes and realizing its

transformative power.

I have a practice of looking into other people's eyes. As humans, we look at the eyes of

others often, when we are spoken to, for example. It is an action that allows us to understand

the other, while also signaling the directedness of our attention. People do this with varying

degrees of consciousness toward the action, but there are few who would call it a practice, something done regularly and with intention. My practice has arisen over time and is closely linked to my artistic interests.

When I perform, which in most instances is my own choreographic work of experimental dance, I offer my gaze as a means of direct interaction. Although it feels nearly impossible to call something *pure* or *unmediated*, these instances of visual connection move toward these sentiments in their intimacy, openness, and vulnerability that steps beyond that of verbal communication. We could extend this to say my face and, further, my entire body has a language that outweighs my words, even if my words are not my own, but are from a script, for example. My eyes and actions give you clues to my intentions, and in this way, art mirrors life. Both inside the performative setting and without, our intentions are always directional, at least on some level. Intentionality is discussed further in the writings of Shaun Gallagher, who proposes not only that our interpersonal understanding is embodied, but that the interactions themselves are opportunities for transcendence. His idea of transcendence, in this case, is rooted in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1969) and rests on the idea that "[t]he other person, in her otherness, resists being simply an entity—whether physical object or epistemological subject. The other is not the sum total of her ontological parts, but in some way transcends all of those parts" (Gallagher 2014). In his 2014 essay, "In your face: transcendence in embodied interaction," Gallagher focuses specifically on the face as he leads us toward the idea that "the face-to-face is primarily an ethical relation" and therefore necessitates a response.

In this paper, I will discuss Gallagher's "obligation to respond," as well as his "interaction theory" as posited in Chapter 9 of his 2005 book, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. I will use these as a foundation for examining the transcendent potentialities of live, interpersonal interactions

both in an everyday setting and within the performative environment of experimental dance, which I propose as an opportunity to experience and reflect in the moment of face-to-face interaction. In the following section, Section II, I will lay the foundation of Gallagher's interaction theory on which I will build Section III in which I offer Maurice Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeity in relation to performance as a framework that allows us to step beyond the everyday experience and examine the offerings of our interpersonal interactions. In the final section, Section IV, I discuss Gallagher's "obligation to respond" as well as his treatment of transcendence in relation to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, while proposing that our emergence back into everyday life following the self- and socially-reflective bracketing of the performative environment leads us closer to an idea of transcendence.

II: Gallagher's Interaction Theory

In interpersonal social interactions—whether in the momentary passing of strangers on a sidewalk, or at dinner with a friend—we are in constant dialogue, often verbally and always non-verbally. We make statements with our eyes and pose questions with our bodies. We physically offer connection and ask for distance. Understanding the methods and means of social cognition is a task often undertaken as theory of mind. In Chapter 9 of *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, entitled "The Interactive Practice of Mind," Gallagher discusses the two main approaches of theory of mind: theory theory and simulation theory (2005: 206). Theory theory suggests that we "attain…understanding of other minds by implicitly employing a theoretical stance" which "involves postulating the existence of mental states in others and using such postulations to explain and predict another person's behavior" (Gallagher 2005: 206). Simulation theory suggests that rather than theorizing, we use something like a practiced skill to put ourselves in

another's shoes, arguing "that one…uses one's own mental experience as an internal model for the other mind" (Gallagher 2005: 206).

In contrast to these theories of mind, Gallagher proposes an alternative in his *interaction theory*, suggesting that our understanding of others "is *primarily* neither theoretical nor based on an internal simulation. It is a form of embodied practice" (2005: 208). He discusses developmental research examples, such as neonate imitation studies (2005: 225), that offer insight into pre-theoretical social interactions prior to the age of four, which is when much developmental research claims that children are able to recognize that others may have different beliefs than their own: "Prior to this,…the basis for human interaction and for understanding others has already been laid down by certain embodied practices—practices that are emotional, sensory-motor, perceptual, and non-conceptual" (2005: 223). Gallagher suggests "that these embodied practices constitute our primary access for understanding others, and continue to do so even after we attain theory of mind abilities" (2005: 224). His statement of embodiment as primary to interpersonal understanding does not deny the cognitive processes laid out in the theory and simulation theories; instead, he places those mentalistic maneuvers as the exception rather than the rule.

Theory of mind relies heavily on Cartesian assumptions of mind-body dualism and operates through the lens that the mind is something hidden away, while the observable body "borrows its intentionality from the mental states that control it" (2005: 209). In contrast, Gallagher proposes that in the majority of our interactions, the inner workings of the mind are not hidden but are evident in our actions and the actions of the other: "communicative interaction…[is] accomplished in the very action of communication, in the expressive movement of speech, gesture, and the interaction itself" (2005: 212). Both communication and interpersonal cognition are embodied.

III: Performance as Staged Intentionality

If we follow the premise that in most daily interactions our intentions are evident in our action, then we have the opportunity for deeper reflection and, as we will see, transcendent possibilities if we look through the lens of performance. Gallagher offers these words on the meaning of *intentionality*:

We actively perceive the actions and emotional expressions of others as forms of intentionality—i.e., as meaningful and directed. Enactive perception of others means that we see their emotional expressions and contextualized actions as meaningful in terms of how we might respond to or interact with them. (2017: 77-78)

In this instance, Gallagher's definition of "meaningful" is in its most basic form; the actions simply signify something. However, these significations result in a broader "creation of meaning" through the intersubjective coming together (Gallagher 2014). As Di Paolo et al. (2008) put it, "interaction can dynamically create phenomena that do not directly result from the individual capacities or behaviors of any of the partners if investigated on their own" (footnote from Gallagher 2014: 279).

These dynamic phenomena are at the forefront of many choreographers' works who create within the field of experimental, and sometimes contemporary, dance. For the sake of clarity, let me loosely describe *experimental dance* as a term I use for my own work, and can aptly use for that of others in the field, such as Miguel Guittierrez and Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, among many others, that suggests performance that is body-based and action-oriented, although not always focused on *movement* itself as a primary concern. *Contemporary dance* is a genre that follows modern and post-modern dance in lineage, but has been "present" in some form for several decades, so it is not exactly contemporary in that sense of the word. For our purposes, I would

like to focus on a specific type of audience-performer relationship that is often proposed in experimental dance. Within this frame, the setting is the space that you are currently in, i.e., the theatre, studio, gallery, courtyard that is the location of the performative action; the performers are usually acting as themselves, rather than as characters; and there is often a direct engagement with the audience on the verbal, physical, and/or conceptual levels of the work.

In order to look at possibilities of embodied dynamic intentionality, we need to consider the creation of meaning as inherent in the task of the choreographer. By placing one thing in relation to another in time or space, we invite connections. Each action is meaningful in this context. Performance exists as direct embodied intentionality and has the potential to offer a heightened viewing of interpersonal connections that are already present in our lives. In this way, performance can also be conceptually driven experimentation in social interaction. Sometimes these interactions are presented between individuals on stage, and often they are propositions that take place between performers and spectators. The choreographer or director crafts these interactions, but the dynamic of the real-time interaction between performer and audience member is unique every time. For example, in my work *Escapade* (2019), the performers approach audience members at one particular moment, and for the sake of simplicity, let us say that they do it the same way each time; however, the audience members are on the other side of that action, and they have the agency of their own choices. Action toward and attention to these elements is at least partially constitutive of the work. From the standpoint of the choreographer, the audience's reaction to the intersubjective proposals of the work is necessary for the work to exist at all. The performers can perform the actions without an audience, but the work does not exist until the audience is present to engage with it.

Gallagher discusses a more primary kind of intentionality, specifically that of infants and their caregivers, and "suggests that in this kind of interaction there is a bodily intentionality

distributed across the interacting agents, an intentionality that couldn't be realized without

there being an actual interaction" (2017: 77). Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses the term

intercorporeity: "There is…between this phenomenal body and the other person's phenomenal

body such as I see it from the outside, an internal relation that makes the other person appear

as the completion of the system" (Merleau-Ponty as quoted by Gallagher 2017: 77). Both or all

communicative subjects are necessarily engaged for meaning to be generated:

"[I]ntercorporeity involves a reciprocal, dynamic, and enactive response to the other's action,

taking that action as an affordance for further action…" (Gallagher 2017: 77).

In the context of performance, we have the opportunity to sit with and reflect upon our

"enactive response to the other's action," to notice our choices and the interpersonal

potentialities of real-time engagement. "For our understanding of other people," Gallagher

suggests "that we rarely need to go beyond contextualized overt behaviors (actions, gestures,

speech-acts, etc.)" (2005: 215). In performance we are of course asked to go beyond, to

evaluate the events at hand and to make an attempt to understand or simply to experience the

artists' vision. However, our interaction with the performers themselves *as people*, although

their overt behaviors are often beyond the everyday, are still first-hand interactions *with people*

in real time.

Because a performance asks for our time in a more or less delineated way, usually with a

clear beginning and end, our reflection is one that could be ongoing during the performance and

maybe even offers us the chance to try out an alternative action or response within the time

frame of the work, or perhaps on a different viewing of the same piece. The performative

framework allows an engagement with interpersonal interaction and cognition on a

supranormative level. Before moving into the transcendent possibilities of this proposal, let us

examine Gallagher's "obligation to respond," as it will lend some potentially metacognitive loft

to guide us toward transcendence.

IV: Transcendence and the Obligation to Respond

In order for the loop of communicative exchange to be completed, an intentional act needs

to be read by a receiver who then registers, either consciously or unconsciously, that

information. This loop can be mundane and unnoticed, and even when it is, we have, according

to Gallagher, opportunities posited by another's actions:

I see the other's actions as an affordance for my own possible responsive action (which may

be very different from hers); I see the other's action as inter-actionable or as calling forth a

response on my part. This notion of intentionality underpins an embodied-enactive account of

everyday social cognition and joint action. (Gallagher 2017: 80)

This exchange is not only a space alive with opportunity, but, as Gallagher puts it, it is also

an obligation. His insight relates directly to face-to-face interaction; "the face is the center of

gravity for our social interactions" (Krueger and Michael 2012: 4, as quoted in Gallagher 2014).

In face-to-face interaction, we perceive the other as other. Gallagher draws on Levinas in saying

that the "other is not, analogically, another *me*, or a set of mental states that are like mine.

Rather, Levinas suggests, the other, in her alterity, makes an ethical demand on me, to which I

am obligated to respond—the face-to-face is primarily an ethical relation—the other's face is

perceived as an obligation to respond" (Gallagher 2014).

This "obligation to respond" is linked with Gallagher's localizing of the face as the

"anchor" of our "conceptions of moral responsibility and ethical demand" (2014):

In intersubjective contexts, visual perception of the face of the other is not equivalent to

glancing at an object. It's not a matter of me seeing the other's face, *simpliciter*, but of seeing

that the other sees me (or quite literally, seeing the other seeing me). The fact that the other

returns the gaze, and that this strongly registers in our perception (cf. Sartre, 1956; Stawarska,

2009), provides part of the basis for regarding the other not as mere object but as a perceiving

subject—and carries with it ethical significance. (Gallagher 2014)

He suggests that it is in face-to-face interaction "that we will be able to find an explanation

of the kind of transcendence discussed by Levinas" (Gallagher 2014). "For [Levinas], I experience

transcendence 'when the face has turned to me, in its very nakedness. It is by itself, and not by

reference to a system'" (Levinas, 1969: 75, as quoted in Gallagher 2014).

Gallagher refuses the idea of transcendence as referencing the mind as something hidden

beyond the face or held in higher regard, and prefers a sort of "naturalistic interpretation"

(2014). Although Levinas refers to transcendence as "a relation with a reality infinitely distant

from my own reality" (Levinas 1969: 41), Gallagher instead brings transcendence down to a

more reachable height that stems directly from our embodiment:

What is important is that the other looks back at me, as I meet her gaze with my own—this

mutual experience, which is an aspect of primary intersubjectivity, sparks an interaction

between me and the other. The transcendence…is not something unreachable in the other, but

is generated in the interaction that transcends all individuality. (Gallagher 2014)

The "mutual experience" referenced by Gallagher is one that most of us encounter

throughout our days. But just like the practice of looking into other people's eyes that I

mentioned in the introduction, I wonder if we notice these interactions enough to call them

experiences. I offer, again, the performative environment as a place for self and other reflection.

Following the performance, as we emerge back into our everyday lives, we might notice that

experiences actually become experiences and that in our encounters with others, we are able to

realize how our interactions with each other generate that which is greater:

[T]he transcendence that may be found in interactions can open up a vista of possibilities—

possibilities of further interactions that have the potential to take me beyond myself, and that

make the other incalculably significant, someone I turn away from at my own risk. (Gallagher

2014)

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BIOGRAPHY

Kelly Bond is a choreographer, director, performer, yogini, and mother who creates and works in the field of experimental dance. Her most recent works include *Dancing with Myself* (2020), a solo work envisioned as first in a triptych, and *Escapade* (2019), which was nominated for a Big Easy Classical Arts Award for Best Choreography (full-length). For a number of years, Kelly held a long-term collaborative relationship with Philadelphia-based theatre artist Mel Krodman, together creating *Jean & Terry: Your Guides Through Dark, Light, and Nebulous* (2016) and *Colony* (2012). She has served as an adjunct professor of dance at The George Washington University and University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She is a returning graduate student on track to receive an MFA in interdisciplinary dance performance at Tulane University in May 2021. She holds an MA in European dance-theatre practice from Laban in London which she attended as a Jack Kent Cooke Graduate Scholar. She also holds a BFA in dance performance and a BA in English from the University of Southern Mississippi. Kelly was a 2014-15 Artist Fellow with the TN Arts Commission as well as an artist with ex.e.r.ce08 at the Centre Chorégraphique National de Montpellier.

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