

I'M ALWAYS IN THIS BODY

Justine A. Chambers & Seika Boye

Dear Seika,

We spoke for over two hours. These words are our shared archive. They are where we met and continue to meet. They are a map of our friendship in the fourth dimension—a score for moving through time. There's this beautiful thing, which is that, 25 years later, I still choose you.

*Love,
Justine*

DANCING ALONE IS DOING SOMETHING. DANCING IS DOING SOMETHING IN AND OF ITSELF. IT IS ITS OWN THING HAPPENING.

SB We were poor and hardcore. Everything else we did was between dancing. And everything was (about) dancing.

In this moment J.N. talked about being like a cat. Dancing as being ready to go anywhere at any time in space with your body. I think about being in the world that way. I think about being careful in the dark. If you get up at night to pee or your kid is crying ... those are dances.

Now I think about the dancing that's recognizable and not recognizable.

Walking is definitely my dancing right now. Where there are recognizable things like music, physical intensity, getting hot, going faster, acceleration. It's like creating a class out of a walk. It reaches a peak. And if you had told me 15 years ago I could find a peak while walking I would have been like *fuck off*. Now ... now I can. I want to break into a run (except I can't because of my body).

jac *Because of dancing you can't run. I don't even run for the fucking bus.*

SB The morning after I exert, after leaving the ground, my body is screaming. I get carried away in the dancing of it—the push and the push and the repetitive action and the momentum.

I remember the first time I saw him drop a board and get on it. I think I had known him for two weeks. He got on his board and I was like (intake of breath), “Oh, I like love you.” It is flow (beauty) and responsiveness.

jac *Always performance and practice at the same time.*

SB And resistance. Our repeated paths in the world. That is dancing.

jac *I am the choreographer of nothingness.*

It's about being together. For me it's about being together in whatever way. All of it is about us trying to figure out how to organize being together.

We are in a heightened awareness in the world ... and those become serious dances. And the dances that are handed down. Those spatial negotiations are ... they're real.

SB The dancing itself is the closest thing to freedom. Which is why you start to find it in your everyday. I can find this everywhere ... that's a beautiful realization.

Being present. That is such an exciting thing to be with. That's what dancing gives us.

I hope that I am always dancing because dancing, as I've come to understand it, is just a state of awareness and self in relationship to other things ... all things.

THERE'S NO NEUTRAL

SB One of the most continuously active violences that goes on in performance training, that also reveals a lack of understanding of privilege, is to ask someone to empty themselves or to be “neutral.” It's control.

jac *I come with all of it—all of it and 14 generations before me. This idea that we can empty ourselves is so unbelievably scary.*

SB The idea of potential—how dangerous talking about potential is without acknowledging all that can disrupt it. As educators, we have to take care of that too.

I never look at someone who can't do something and think they're a failure.

THE BIG HURT

SB The phrase “systemic white supremacy” was not in circulation among me and my peers in the ballet studio in the 90s.

It's the difference between feeling like something was off and knowing that something is wrong and that space in between. The role that plays in the hurt, and how the knowing helps the hurt to dissipate because it's not you.

jac I came back through another portal which made it feel far from the heartbreak.

SB There is isolation in having boundaries. I think this is part of our dance. How you become isolated when you set boundaries for yourself, and you set boundaries because you are being isolated, right? But what happens when you set a boundary and you're forced into an isolation, but you're also choosing it. You're saying, Look, I don't accept this, and I know it's happening right now. That immediacy, that shift in knowing what's happening to you when it's happening. You can't unsee it.

Have you read the new Zadie Smith? She says: “A long-preserved privilege dies hard. A long-preserved isolation, even if it has been forced, is painful to emerge from.”¹

What it means to emerge from the isolation. What it means to be seen and then everybody is watching you see them watching you. It kind of reminds me of puberty. Feeling exposed, feeling confused. That's the arrested development that racism does to people. We don't get to mature at the same rate because we are out of sync in different spaces.

Finally being seen and the deep pain of watching people just see you. How profoundly painful that is.

¹ Zadie Smith, “Postscript: Contempt as a Virus” in *Intimations: Six Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 73-83.

jac *I think about my mom. She trained us not to be exposed or not to expose ourselves or to give ourselves away. With a glance she would be saying: We don't do that. I'm not going to tell you why, but my face, my body, are telling you that you're in fucking danger.*

SB Self-awareness disappears when you give it all away.

jac *Pain is private.*

SB I'm always in this body. And in fact, when I'm in front of you [the audience], there are parts of me that go into a pocket inside this body. You don't get it all. I know how to give just a part. That's the intention.

I KNOW BECAUSE I WAS THERE. I KNOW BECAUSE I LIVED THIS LIFE.

jac *We are continually shaping our bodies by our lived experience.*

SB Being asked to remove the self says that your subjective perspective is not valid. Which is the work we are trying to undo. And that we can have conversations that are both about the dialogue of theories throughout history AND talk about lived experience and their intersections. Both things are true. Theories are theories. My life is not a theory.

jac *I really hope that today we won't work in a theoretical way. Let's be practical.*

I do this thing (compartmentalization) so I can be present with the material that we are working with, and like you said you heard Esther Perel say in a radio interview: "Save some of the best of yourself for at home."² We can only do what's happening.

OUR SHARED FRIEND LM

LM *I remember going into the Bravo studios (I don't even know how I got an appointment) and asking if we could dance on their roof. The producer's name was J.G.*

² Esther Perel interviewed by Piya Chattopadhyay, "#101: Esther Perel," *Out in the Open*, CBC Radio One, April 24, 2020.

I think he listened to me, then proposed we dance inside instead—he later admitted he only let me explain my idea because my press kit was so crappy, and he thought it was daring that I went for it anyway. Ha!

SB Yes, working with L.M. behind that bar gave me some sanity. She was rebellious at heart and I didn't have many dance friends like that at the time—at least not that I was aware of.

jac *Tenacity at its finest.*

SB She was a hustler with a heart. Like me. Like you.

There are so many people who have never seen me “dance.” So I'm almost not a dancer to them, and it's meaningful for me that you know me in that way.

jac *Time is not a thing when you have danced with someone. You know them always.*

THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL CONVERSATION, AS USUAL

SB Conversation is all we've had over these months. It's been a handful of people in deep conversation and that's been survival.

I tell my kids: dance it out, dance it out, dance it out.

They have learned that you do show up at someone's door and you can have something *to move* and not something to say.