COLLECTIVE EMBODIMENT AND COMMUNAL FEELING:
A CRITICAL SOMATICS APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Daniel Dilliplane: Collective Embodiment and Communal Feeling: A Critical Somatics
Approach to Performance for Social Change
(Under the direction of China Medel)

"Collective Embodiment and Communal Feeling: A Critical Somatics Approach to

Performance for Social Change" argues for a novel approach to performance for social change

that focuses on the sensory and somatic dimensions of collectivity as the basis for countering the

atomizing politics of neoliberalism. It proposes a critical somatics approach to the deconstruction

and reconfiguration of participants' embodied subjectivities, emphasizing the cultivation of

conditions that facilitate experiences of collective embodiment and affective interdependence.

Whether in the kinesthetic awareness of bodies dancing together, the situational or

proprioceptive awareness of a collective engaged in creative disruption, or the physical contact

of activists' clasped arms forming a human chain in protest, these conditions require

multisensory engagement, improvisational coordination, and shared feeling. Based on

ethnographic accounts of the phenomenological experience of collective embodiment, I argue

that such experiences *enact*—rather than merely argue for—forms of collectivity through their

operation on the level of the body.

This approach to performance for social change builds on the experience of practitioners

and artist-activists in an effort to preserve the core contributions of existing techniques while

seeking avenues to overcome their susceptibility to the influence of increasingly ubiquitous

neoliberal frameworks. Opening with a consideration of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the

Oppressed as a touchstone example, I argue that the technique's cognitive approach to social

change and its emphasis on discursive techniques contribute to the manner in which it individualizes responsibility for combating systemic oppression. Turning to Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter's InterPlay as an example of an affective approach to performance for social change, I critique its practitioners' culture of individualism, but identify the critical potential of its recognition of collective embodiment. Extending this analysis to protest and direct action, I explore the existential prefiguration of communities of care and the cultivation of communal feeling, an affective and collective form of embodied cognition. After offering a series of activities designed to create the conditions for experiences of collective embodiment and develop the affective bonds of communal feeling, I close with a consideration of the broader implications of positioning speculative theory at the forefront of movements' political practice.

For Douglas Dilliplane

PREFACE

Protestors encircle a Confederate statue, join hands, and chant the words of Assata Shakur: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." The feel of soft flesh of hand clasped in hand enhances the sensation of collectivity not only in opposition to the statue and the history it represents but also in support of another mode of relationality, a gesture toward intimate solidarity. The chorus of voices grows increasing loud and defiant as their differing timbres overlay to create pulses of sound that vibrate through bodies and echo off buildings.

On the wooden floor of a dance studio, artist-activists take deep breaths in unison before swinging and thrusting their bodies with and around one another in improvised movement. A proprioceptive awareness develops of the movement of limbs—limbs that are their own or others' indiscriminate—and bodies make contact, leaning into one another and sharing weight, then connected at a distance, moving together from across the room. The collective movement surges and shifts in its energetic qualities, then subsides as all come to stillness.

Facing off against a wall of police, activists have interlocked their bodies into a blockade with flesh intertwined with PVC and metallic prostheses. Mediated by lockboxes, they experience a heightened sense of awareness of one another as authorities work with power grinders to sever these synthetic corporeal connections. Having rehearsed together for this eventuality, affective communication of support and commitment transmits, resonating from skin to skin across intermedia bridges.

Cavorting between and amongst marchers and lines of police officers, a troop of clowns

bring levity to a tense encounter, mocking the militarized police force and producing mirth for the protesters. For weeks they have been training together in traditional clowning and Lecoq's *bouffon* technique, retraining their bodies to respond to confrontation with spontaneity and humor. Playing with limits, they feel for and push the edges of trouble, slipping into and out of it again and again.

Advancing the possibilities conjured in these vignettes, my research presses at the limits of what is sayable by asking readers to consider experiences in which sensibility contradicts what we think we know about political agency. Whether in the kinesthetic awareness of multiple dancing bodies, the situational or proprioceptive awareness of the performing collective, or the embodied collectivity of clasped hands and lockboxes, sensations that dissolve the firm boundary of the individual enact possibilities for collective subjectivity by actualizing imagined collectivity in shared feeling, improvisational coordination, and multisensory engagement. Such experiences of embodied subjectivity challenge established notions of individualized political subjectivity and corresponding approaches to social change rooted exclusively in policy-making and public discourse.

As I articulate the conceptual bases and practical potential of the enactive constitution of collective embodiment, the language that I deploy often requires a high degree of academic complexity and specificity. While this language aids the precision of my scholarly arguments and research insights, it can also contribute to the alienation of this work from the communities in which I have participated in order to develop it. I regret that this manuscript may as a result feel at times distant or detached from the contexts in which so much of this knowledge was produced. Unfortunately, my academic entrainment—and especially my background in philosophy—often exceeds my capacities for diversification in strategies of thinking and writing. That said, those

with whom I have worked directly know well of the care and commitment I bring to communities of which I am a part as well as my lasting engagement with and contributions to communities that also serve as subjects of my research. What I have produced here in written form is nothing more than a testament to what they—in the depth of their embodied wisdom— have taught me.

My approach to social transformation on an embodied level is the outcome of years of studying and applying performance as an activist tool with various groups and reflects a prefigurative politics—when social movements actualize desired worlds of equity and solidarity in their modes of organization and collective action. Traversing binaries between speech and action as well as between representation and reality, performance provides an ideal paradigm for exploring the interplay of sensory experience and political practice. While social movement discourses tend to conceptualize the value of protest performances in terms of their artful presentation of political messages, the politics of performance extends also to the somatic, operating directly on sensory bodies. In addition to constituting repertoires of embodied cognition, such acts offer an experiential groundwork for emerging notions of collectivity that move beyond the individualistic mindset and political theory of neoliberal capitalism.

I am no stranger to the subjective fabrication of neoliberal individualism. Raised as white and male in semi-rural Pennsylvania, I was constantly enculturated with an individualistic mentality that constrained my imaginative capacities for relationality and political action by equating value with the maximization of personal profitability. My early educational experience provided clarity in my lived understanding of diversity as well as both the possibilities and limits of my mobility within the social hierarchy. Gradually internalizing the competitive spirit of education as a form of entrepreneurial self-investment, I first attended one of few remaining

racially diverse public schools before subsequently—thanks to the financial support of scholarship awards—transferring to a local private high school with a wealthy but culturally and geographically diverse student body. Taught on the one hand that with hard work I could escape the fates faced by friends from my youth and on the other that no amount of effort would offer me the opportunities held by my—often lazy and ignorant—peers from boarding school, I rapidly developed an awareness of the injustices of the supposed meritocracy of the myth of economic individualism.

While this early socialization has and will continue to impact my scholarship, my experiences with performance and protest, acting and activism, have offered me glimpses of other worlds already taking shape alongside this one. The promise inherent to theses other possible worlds with new ways of living beyond the supremacy of whiteness, patriarchy, neurotypicality and able-bodiedness has deepened my understanding of how my own liberation is bound up with that of others. However, this promise is fraught with the risk of reenacting forms of toxic relationality, including the reproduction of the culturally appropriative dynamic of a modernist aesthetic paradigm and the risk of contributing to patterns of exploitation between activist communities and academic researchers, among other ways of failing in my commitment to social justice values or my responsibility to the communities in which I participate as both a member and a researcher. I have fallen short—and will inevitably continue to fall short—at times, making mistakes that hurt others or betray my faith in the possibilities of this promise. That said, having tasted it, I cannot abandon the pursuit of these other worlds, and thus will seek always to renew my commitment by transforming my failings into new and embodied knowledge to be lived in my relations with others.

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INTRODUCTION

Performance might seem a poor research paradigm for investigating social and political transformation in a moment when movements use "performativity" to indict the insincerity of nominal support from bandwagon-hopping politicians, fickle corporations, celebrities willing to risk nothing, and others lacking in genuine solidarity. Such critiques of performative allyship and virtue-signaling correctly highlight the inadequacies of speech as a form of political action but also reflect a more general conceptual orientation toward performance as contributing to a realm of spectacularity and representation rather than one of materiality and tactical engagement. Crucially distinguishing practical action from discursive and cognitive domains with distinctions between saying and doing or between intent and impact, activists frequently situate performance on the side of the fabricated and ornamental.

The reduction of the role of artistry and performance-based tactics in social movements' repertoires of contention to aesthetic persuasion also reflects this attitude toward performance as mere spectacle. While many forms of protest—from banner drops to guerrilla theatre—make use of art and performance to varying degrees, for many activists this creative component functions to increase movement visibility and enhance the efficacy of messaging within the mediatized landscape of public political discourse, reducing artistry to a means of marketing revolution. Indicative of an increasingly widespread constriction of political imagination in the face of neoliberal capitalism, this dismissive and instrumentalizing devaluation of creativity contributes to movements' strategic stagnation as they recycle protest tactics with only minimal regard for diminishing efficacy in novel contexts.

This conceptual orientation contrasts with that of most academic performance theory, which, while sharing activists' concerns with the relationship between speech and action and between representation and reality, emphasizes performance's transversal efficacy. From J.L Austin's theorization of performative speech acts in order to reveal the perlocutionary dimension of discourse generally to Judith Butler's approach to the performativity of gender as an example of the iterative or citational materialization of reality, performance scholarship disrupts commonplace binaries and maps complex interactions across domains. Moving beyond questions of correspondence—is it true to reality? Does it act in accordance with what it says?—these approaches to performance explore the nuances of performance's creative enactive potential. In this vein, I approach performance as a process of worlding, the prefigurative enactment of alternative ways of life organized around other systems of value.

The rise of social practice art indicates that artists need no convincing of this constitutive potential of performance, but also illustrates why activists remain skeptical. Often described as a social turn in the world of high art, since the late 1990s, artists, critics, and curators have taken an increased interest in art that takes human relationships as its medium of expression by creating, upsetting, and otherwise reconfiguring social relations through participatory performance. While scholarly criticism often reduces the complex relational aesthetics of socially engaged art to a simplistic binary between the construction of consensus-driven community and the social disruption of relational antagonism, Shannon Jackson illustrates how such art offers critiques of the neoliberal privatization of public support systems by leveraging its institutional interdependencies and the heteronomous circumstances of its production to create compassionate and responsive models of collective life and public infrastructure.[1] This reformist

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[1] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

approach to politics, however, clashes with the renewal of radical values and autonomist orientations in many contemporary US-based movements.

Performance for social change, by contrast, represents a more grassroots approach that closely accords with current movement attitudes by engaging politics on a level of subjectivity. While social practice art reconfigures the civic structures of interdependence, performance for social change operates as a rehearsal for everyday life, emphasizing the quotidian micropolitics of social interactions. Techniques that fall into this category use creative embodied practice as a tool for experimenting with the self and its capacities for action. Although these techniques often include tactics that functionalize performance as the artful presentation of political messages or as a symbolic display of collective power, they also offer a trajectory to social transformation through experimentation with the embodied subjectivity of performers themselves. My inquiry emphasizes this aspect of these techniques as a corrective to the individualized subjectivity of neoliberalism. In so doing, it acknowledges that, at its best, performance for social change— imperfectly—blends theory, creativity, and politics, making it an ideal framework for the prefiguration of new worlds characterized by horizontality and community care.

In an effort to knit together the inquiries and insights of artists, activists, and scholars, I focus my study on a variety of techniques of performance for social change in order to explore how they enact—rather than merely argue for—modes of collectivity and interdependence that oppose the responsibilizing individuality of neoliberalism. In a time of intense polarization and divisiveness, politics seems less and less to be a question of truth or efficacy and increasingly one of community belonging. Therefore, without diminishing the value of social justice efforts targeting law and policy, my research considers the role of affect and bodily sensation as avenues toward an embodied comprehension of other ways of experiencing the world and as the basis for

participation in new collective subjectivities. Articulating an approach to social change characterized by decentralized mutual reliance, adrienne maree brown describes the process of becoming interdependent as "a series of small repetitive motions."[2] Instead of pursuing social justice exclusively through cognitive empathy in the face of systemic oppression, I explore how performance for social change offers opportunities for rehearsing such interdependent collectivity on a somatic level.

Concluding that the critical potential of such techniques lie not primarily in their cognitive and linguistic aspects but in their contributions to subjective mutation on an embodied and existential level, I sketch possible directions for a critical somatics approach to performance for social change which engages the emergent and unanticipated through engagement with the sensing body. "Collective Embodiment and Communal Feeling" attempts to write the multiplicity of embodied subjectivity as a gateway to affective collectivity. Based on ethnographic accounts of the phenomenology of collectivity as cultivated in the collaborative embodied activity of performance for social change, I argue that the sensory experience of collectivity achieved through engagement with touch and coordinated movement challenges the atomizing politics of neoliberalism. I theorize the corporeality of affective bonds as a social flesh, constituting a form of collective embodiment capable of circumventing language and consciousness.

Social flesh is not a utopian theory of unmediated affective communication but the basis for what I call communal feeling. Recognizing the priority afforded to sensations differentiated as belonging to the self, this emergent type of embodied cognition contests the individualization of responsibility for the processing of affective life by practicing an interoceptive responsiveness to sensations that would typically be externalized as belonging to others. By increasing our

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[2]adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico: AK Press, 2017), 93.

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capacity to internalize others' affective frameworks, we enhance the embodied cognition of communal feeling across many forms of social difference. As a scholar-practitioner, I apply phenomenological ethnographic observations regarding the role of movement and touch in the activation of communal feeling to the development of a pedagogy of embodied tools to enhance and enrich the possibilities for embodied collectivity.

Community-Engaged Research-Creation

Because of the transdisciplinarity of my inquiry, this study utilizes a mixed methodological approach that combines performance studies with elements of critical cultural studies to explore the sensory politics of performance for social change. Creative and ethnographic methodologies of a performance-based research paradigm are crucial to the sensory components of this inquiry as well as to its grasp of knowledge that—eluding linguistic capture—is transmitted only on a body-to-body basis, while critical cultural studies frameworks are essential to its political aspects, mapping the structuring material and discursive articulations of these practices. By juxtaposing analysis of critical scholarly and social movement discourses with phenomenological and ethnographic data, I am better able to trace both the discursive and existential components of the production of political subjectivity.

This research is multi-sited, tracking applications of performance for social change techniques across multiple locales and in the work of a diverse range of practitioners. Extensive participant observation—including movement analysis—in protests, performances, training sessions, and organizing meetings for social movement organizations and communities of artist-activists form the foundation of the study. Although some of these organizations have an international character, most of my research was conducted in urban centers within the United States, notably Chicago, Oakland, and Washington DC, especially with Theatre of the Oppressed

Chicago, multiple regional chapters of the InterPlay movement, and small grassroots social movement organizations like the Chicago Light Brigade and Lifted Voices. Artist-activists working in these communities address a wide variety of social and political issues—from environmentalism to neurodiversity—however, during the years of this research, white supremacy and anti-blackness have become a core focus of many movements, reflecting the current political moment in the US broadly-speaking, and this emphasis is often reflected in the data.

I supplement this participant observation with interviews of artists and activists leading and coordinating this work and extensive analysis of movement writings, including both materials produced for internal consumption—such as training documents and newsletters—and materials produced for external audiences—promotional materials, press releases, public articles and books. Additionally, because the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the interruption of many relevant trainings and events, driving the limited remainder into the digital sphere, I was forced to adjust research plans, including forgoing proposed participation in ultimately cancelled direct action trainings. As a result, in the chapter on protest practices, I rely more heavily on interview accounts, ultimately enabling an enhanced focus on insurgent frames of enactment rather than protected spaces of rehearsal.

My approach to this research also draws on creative and engaged orientations toward scholarship. As a scholar-activist, committed engagement with the communities that inform my research is incredibly important, impacting my relationship to the field and thereby the development of my inquiry. Drawing upon Dwight Conquergood's approach to ethnography as "coperformative witnessing," I pursue knowledge in the "particular, participatory, dynamic, intimate, precarious, embodied experience" of coactivity with communities rather than the

distanced observation of a supposedly dispassionate epistemological standpoint.[3] My inquiry is transformed through this engagement, resulting not in the democratization of the research process but in a more interested and responsive analysis. Taking inspiration from engaged ethnographers of activism and social movements, like Maribel Casa-Cortés, Michal Osterweil and Dana Powell, I recognize the movements and communities with which I engage as legitimate knowledge producers in their own right—with distinct, embedded modes of inquiry and methods of knowledge distribution—and I knit together diverse forms of knowledge to address "problem spaces" in which "the work and aims of a social movement and those of a researcher may occupy a common or overlapping political space."[4]

Because a significant portion of the knowledge artist-activists and direct action organizers is practice-based and transferred through embodied culture, the fact that I take performance as my primary point of departure is of particular significance. Echoing Conquergood's critique of textocentrism, Diana Taylor argues that "the tendency in cultural studies to treat all phenomena as textual differentiates it from performance studies" and concludes that, "part of what performance and performance studies allow us to *do*, then, is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge… Every performance enacts a theory, and every theory performs."[5] Examples of this relationship between theory and practice abound in performance scholarship, from Bertolt Brecht's actor training methods based on his theories of epic theatre or Augusto Boal's praxis in Theatre of the Oppressed to Soyini Madison's scholarship on activist practices

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[3] Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 37, 92.

[4] Maribel Casa-Cortés, Michal Osterweil and Dana Powell, "Transformations in Engaged Ethnography" in *Insurgent Encounters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 207.

[5] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 26-27.

or Conquergood's theorization of ethnographic research as coperformance. Following Taylor, I consider the lived practices of social movements as forms of embodied cognition, representing unique knowledges and theoretical orientations that may or may not also be captured in discursive form. In attending to these epistemological approaches, I can distill how processes of social change are theorized by different practices of performance for social change.

Furthermore, committed to conducting my scholarly work in such a manner that is mutually beneficial rather than extractive, I have consistently striven to cultivate deep engagement with the activist communities and artist-activist networks that I have worked with on this research. In an effort to incorporate their input throughout the research process, I have sought intersections between my inquiry and the questions and concerns of practitioners, presented them with targeted versions of preliminary research findings, and shared early drafts of this manuscript for consideration and comment. Additionally, I have volunteered my time and skills through extensive participation in the work of many of the organizations included in this study, helping to develop social justice programming, shape strategic plans for increasing organization diversity and inclusion, and organize performance and protest events.

Moreover, as a scholar-artist, my work draws upon methods of research-creation—or performance-as-research—that consider creative processes as legitimate forms of knowledge production and dissemination. Erin Manning describes this emerging research paradigm as concerned with "the question of how art itself activates and constitutes new forms of knowledge *in its own right*" as well as inquiries into "how practices produce knowledge, and whether those forms of knowledge can engagingly be captured within the strictures of methodological ordering."[6] Operating outside the conceptual split between aesthetic theory and practice, research-creation offers pathways to forms of embodied cognition that—due to their fleshy and

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[6]Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 26.

processual character—struggle to achieve recognition within the established forms of intellectual life.

Reflecting artistry's pursuit of the sublime, research-creation resists fixation within rigid methodological formulations. For instance, Susan Kozel, in her articulation of a Whiteheadian approach to performance as a methodology of process phenomenology, expresses hesitance at the idea of articulating a set of instructions because doing so could render the process ineffectual and she and other practitioners "continuously modify our practices and methods, sometimes without realizing it."[7] Manning's experimental methodology of speculative pragmatism similarly locates the value of research-creation in moments of excess and escape. Riffing on Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* as well as William James's radical empiricism, Manning describes speculative pragmatism as engaging with "the techniques that tune the anarchical toward new modes of knowledge and new modes of experience. It is also committed to what escapes the order, and interested in what this excess can do. It implicitly recognizes that knowledge is invented in the escape, in the excess."[8] Inspired by her creative, philosophical, and activist approach, I look for the transformative insight offered by divergence and discrepancy from techniques of performance for social change. Such an approach might also help dislodge performance for social change from an agency/structure antinomy characteristic of its effort to blend complex and systemic socio-political analysis with a seeming inevitability of humanism in artistic practice.

In spite of research-creation's resistance to methodological fixity, my research does sketch the groundwork for a critical somatics approach and offer a set of experimental and experiential embodied exercises and activities designed in the interest of continued engagement

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[7]Susan Kozel, "Process Phenomenologies" in *Performance and Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 63.

[8]Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 38.

with the theory and practice of performance for social change. While scholarly requirements require the presentation of this research in written form, communal feeling is a form of embodied cognition and thus best transmitted through embodied practice. Therefore, in addition to this manuscript, the outcomes of this research will also take shape in workshops, performances, and other forms of embodied activity.

Neoliberalism and the Politics of the Sensory and Somatic

Neoliberalism is a political theory and economic philosophy advocating a limited role for the state in protecting property rights and creating or maintaining the fundaments of markets in the name of preserving individual freedoms. David Harvey argues that neoliberalism "holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions" and so "seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market."[9] Associated with the ascendancy of market-based approaches to government in the policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, it is characterized by privatization—the transfer of public infrastructure and services into the hands of private entities to be administered for profit—and responsibilization—the shifting of responsibility for various tasks from government and other social institutions to individuals.

Although its affinity with classical liberalism remains a subject of debate, neoliberalism represents an evolution of its predecessor's valorization of individualism, extending the logic of economic rationality to social relations. By subjecting relationships to evaluation based on their profitability to the individual, neoliberalism advocates a limited relationality based on relations of economic exchange. Articulating a distinction between affective and calculative solidarity, Kathleen Lynch and Manolis Kalaitzake argue that such thinking not only deemphasizes deep relationality and community care by peripheralizing "the conceptualization and analysis of the

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[9]David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

human work required to create and sustain people in their inter/dependency" but also minimizes solidarity with "others more vulnerable than oneself, and from whom there is no reciprocation" as valueless, restricting it to private charity.[10] As a result of the performativity of neoliberal theory, relations are increasingly characterized by this logic.

The penetrating pervasiveness of neoliberal logic is not limited to public policy or modes of relationality but also shapes subjectivity. Wendy Brown maps the economization of subjectivity as a major component of what she describes as the "stealth revolution" of neoliberalism,[11] which entails the internalization of a self-concept as human capital—*homo oeconomicus*—whereby we become the manager of our own profitability and increasingly subject all aspects of life to principles of economic value and rationality. Presenting itself as universal and inevitable, this logic seeks to destroy all other worlds by constraining political imaginaries and reducing the self to an independent economically "rational" subject seeking to maximize personal capital accumulation.

Moreover, as this colonization of subjectivity extends to the level of bodily sensation and habit, it becomes increasingly invisible and unquestionable. Elizabeth Grosz notes that "the body image cannot be simply and unequivocally identified with the sensations provided by a purely anatomical body" and is "as much a function of the subject's psychology and sociohistorical context as of anatomy."[12] Under neoliberalism, values and frameworks of profit maximization are woven into the fabric of bodily routines and habitual behaviors by directing attention toward or away from particular sensations. Linking this embodied subjectification to "one's gestures,

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[10]Kathleen Lynch and Manolis Kalaitzake, "Affective and Calculative Solidarity: The Impact of Individualism and Neoliberal Capitalism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 23, 2 (2020): 245-246.

[11]Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

[12]Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 79.

movements, words, daily performances, and corporeal dispositions," André Lepecki describes it

as "body snatching."[13] Similarly, Dimitris Papadopoulos describes this expansion of neoliberal

logic as "biofinancialization," "a universalizing ontological machine of terraformation, one that

changes all forms of life" by pervading "everyday activities, subjectivity, ecology, and

materiality" and becoming an embodied psychopolitics that "shapes perception, affects, desires,

and our self-crafting."[14] As a result, resistant action in defiance of neoliberal logic is often

instinctively dismissed as pointless and irrational, or worse, conducted dishonestly in order to

build social and cultural capital, as in the case of those who make showy public displays of

"proper" politics.

Through practices that cultivate greater attention to affects disregarded by neoliberalism's

individualizing system of value, we can reconstruct embodied subjectivity around other forms of

value. The concept of affect, like that of performance, resists fabricated binaries. As a result, it is

well equipped to acknowledge the embodied dimension of political subjectification while

remaining open to the emergent on the level of the sensory and somatic. This capacity is

exemplified by Brian Massumi's approach, which describes affects as "*virtual synesthetic*

perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that

embody them."[15] Moreover, as Sara Ahmed's assertion that "affect does not reside positively in

the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation"[16] suggests, affect is

fundamentally social. Therefore, understanding the affective construction of value—both in

valence and degree—as a product of patterns of circulation among bodies enactively constituting

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[13]André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10, 3.

[14]Dimitris Papadopoulos, *Experimental Practice: Technoscience, Alterontologies, and More-Than-Social Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 45, 7-8, 38.

[15]Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 35.

[16]Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, 2 (2004): 120.

shared worlds, I approach affective transmission as a portal to other worlds—i.e., as an access point to different affective milieus that construct subjectivity otherwise.

Understanding affective transmission in this way could have profound implications for prefigurative social movements. Social justice is frequently reduced to an intellectual discursive exercise or participation in anemic and constrained forms of protest rather than a way of living or the practice of basic forms of relationality that constitute collective life. If instead it is approached as affective attunement through embodied cognition, it can provide an affective— rather than linguistic—basis for connection across various forms of social difference, suggesting novel avenues for movements working to create cultures of inclusion and equity rooted in sensory and somatic experimentation. Performance for social change can provide avenues for experimenting with the sensory and somatic bases of such affective transmission.

As praxes that reject Cartesian mind-body dualism, somatic practices offer some models for this experiential affective exploration. Attuning participants to the diversity and complexity of sensory experience, somatic practice cultivates appreciation for sensations that don't fit neatly into the normative schema of the sensorium and for which we often have little to no language outside of the specialized terminology of somatic practitioners. By refusing to excise or ignore such sensations, these practices, such as Bartenieff Fundamentals, Body-Mind Centering, Alexander Technique or the Feldenkris Method, can cultivate embodied ways of knowing and doing that run counter to neoliberal logic, using performance for social change's spaces of rehearsal to prefiguratively constitute new worlds characterized by deep relationships of communal care.

I trace aspects of this method in techniques of performance for social change in order to articulate the groundwork of what I call critical somatics. Joining other scholarship tracing the

relationships—both sympathetic and critical—between creative somatic practice and neoliberalism, especially those with a focus on the body and forms of collectivity,[17] my work argues that the sensory exploration of critical somatics is key to the deconstruction of individualizing neoliberal subjectivity as well as its reconstruction around other systems of value that don't hierarchize the worth of human life based on social difference.

By accepting an expansive and exploratory approach to the sensorium and seeking to collectively "make sense" of the politics of affect, a critical somatics approach to performance for social change can challenge neoliberal embodied subjectification through the exploration of somatic and sensory bases for embodied collectivity and interdependence. Emphasizing the role of the tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive senses to this work, my research embraces scholarship that grounds the relationship between aesthetics and politics in sensation—such as Jacques Rancière's theory of the redistribution of the sensible—while multiplying sensorial possibilities and incorporating a more holistic approach to sensation by expanding beyond regimes of visibility and sayability. These senses are of particular interest because of the degree to which the sensations attributed to them tend to exceed intelligibility in terms of established sensory and linguistic categorization as well as the propensity of such sensations be experienced as a dissolution of any firm boundary between self and world. These characteristics make them particularly relevant to processes of subjective mutation and enhance the possibilities for transindividual or supra-personal collective subjectivities capable of shared sensation. Such sensations propose collectivities not based on the ontological primacy of individuality and

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[17]See, for instance: Ramsay Burt, *Ungoverning Dance: Contemporary European Theatre Dance and the Commons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) and Noyale Colin, "The Critical Potential of Somatic Collectivity under Post-Fordism," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 12, 2 (2018): 235-249.

suggest experiences of freedom rooted, instead of in individualism, in the notion that our liberation is tied up in that of one another.[18]

Social Movements and Collective Subjectivity

The proliferation of social movement activity since the 1960s gave rise to what has been called "new social movement" theory, which identifies various characteristics thought to distinguish these movements from those that came before. Perhaps reflecting new emphases in scholarly inquiry as much as changes in the conditions for and practices of social movements, this theory exhibits increased interest in movement culture and the construction of collective identity and highlights these movements' more decentralized and horizontal organization as well as their politicization of everyday life. Steven Buechler describes new social movement theory as the abandonment of classical Marxism in favor of "other logics of action (based in politics, ideology, and culture) and other sources of identity (such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) as the sources of collective action."[19] Many theorists of these movements characterize their goals as postmaterialist, reinforcing a clear division between social and economic spheres that neoliberalism has demonstrated to be largely historical if not entirely artificial.

Rather than revive this division, I approach the study of contemporary social movements instead through a distinction between an identitarian discursive paradigm and a postrepresentational prefigurative paradigm. This distinction is based on divergent theories of subjectivity in the work of Michel Foucault and Félix Guattari and is not meant to characterize entirely clear and discrete types of social movements but to describe divergent approaches to

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[18]See, for instance: Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) and Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

[19]Steven Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46.

political strategy that are embodied by the practices of activists and organizers to varying degrees. While I believe that both approaches are important to the understanding and conduct of social movements, the postrepresentational prefigurative paradigm better accords with my study of embodied interdependence in performance for social change as a foundation for resistance to neoliberal individualism

From a general perspective, I conceptualize the production of subjectivity as the structuring of the experience of selfhood in accordance with a particular way of life characterized by specific relations, agencies, and logics. For Foucault, this structuring is a function of discursive frameworks of power/knowledge and subjective mutation is the result of the fractured, incomplete, and multiplicitous character of such frameworks. Operating in this Foucautian orientation, Butler describes the delimitation of agency within established pathways that it implies as "the paradox of subjectivation," arguing that because "the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms" agency is constrained to "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power."[20] Her approach to agency within the power/knowledge framework of gender parallels Foucault's ethics of self-cultivation, which requires "a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self" that is "not simply 'self-awareness' but self-formation as an 'ethical subject'."[21]

This theory of subjectivity corresponds to what I call an identitarian discursive paradigm of social movements, which entails a politics of recognition and redress organized on the basis of a discursively constructed collective identity. Under this paradigm, the discursive negotiation of

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[20]Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xxiii.

[21]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 2 The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 28.

contingent and fractured identity becomes a political praxis aimed at the construction of unifying collective identities that can serve as strategic loci of for petitioning or otherwise engaging established structures of power. Although identity remains contested, it nevertheless serves as a reference point, and "difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity."[22] The success of movement activity is judged on the basis of its capacity to ensure—at least temporarily—the fixation of collective identity into forms that can be recognized by the state in order to achieve redress. For this reason, many identitarian social movements increasingly treat established forms of identity as determinative, making their role one of giving expression to the communicative norms and collective understandings of pre-existing minority groups. As a result, however, strategic essentialism risks crystallizing differences in perception, communication, and action, trading a biological essentialism for a cultural or social constructionist one.

Moreover, this paradigm reduces all forms of collectivity across social difference to discursively-constructed coalitions. Increasingly narrowly constructed formulations of collective identity necessitate the collective action of broader constituencies when addressing their demands to the state. Within a framework in which collectivity is mediated by a discursive process of articulation, the preservation of difference within such collective action across social difference requires what Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau call a "chain of equivalence"[23] through which distinct struggles can be articulated without collapsing their differences through a common—usually oppositional—relationship to an external reference point. Thus, collectivity

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[22]Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 138.

[23]Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 127.

becomes a strategic necessity of coalitional politics subject to rational calculation rather than a product of relations of solidarity and the affirmation of a positive interdependence.

A Guattarian approach to subjectivity, on the other hand, involves both a discursive dimension in which individuals are assigned various social identities as well as a machinic structuring, which operates through an asignifying semiotics to structure the relationship between self and world on an affective level. Machinic structuring synthesizes decoded intensities and amodal or synesthetic perceptions—in a more-than-human pragmatics of enunciation—to produce emergent subjectivities. Describing the result of such a process as "not a structure, built around a stable and knowable quantity of lack, but an unmapped 'exterior' surface ever demanding new thrills of contact and relationship," Nick Mansfield suggests that the analysis of emergent subjectivity lies not in "the buried archive of dark and forbidden repressions, but the highly charged, hyper-stimulated open and excitable surface of the skin."[24] While neoliberal capitalism can manipulate these decoded flows in a machinic enslavement, Guattari and Gilles Deleuze stress the infinitely diverse relationality of such syntheses, calling their analytic technique schizoanalysis.

This theoretical orientation corresponds to a postrepresentational prefigurative paradigm, which involves autopoietic experimentation with subjectivity undertaken on an existential basis. Under this paradigm, difference is proliferated through continuous collective experimentation with subjectivity in order to actualize new worlds characterized by different modes of relationality and logics of action. Although movements that exemplify this paradigm, including, among others, the Zapatista, Occupy Wall Street, and alter-globalization movements, commonly position themselves in opposition to neoliberalism and exhibit a macropolitics of insurgency,

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[24]Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 142-143.

they are ultimately rooted in autonomist and anarchist models of organizing and thus emphasize the micropolitical foundations of independent bases of power.

Neither collapsing differences into a structuring unity nor articulating them into a discursive chain of equivalence, this paradigm approaches politics as an embodied and collective process of actualization rather than an exclusively interindividual process of discursive expression. Instead of petitioning governments or other social institutions to enforce protections for particular marginalized ways of life, these movements enactively constitute new systems of valorization through the reorganization of social relations, new ecologies of perception and engagement with the environment, and—especially—the production of new subjectivities, or what Guattari calls "the ethico-aesthetic aegis of an ecosophy: social ecology, mental ecology, and environmental ecology."[25] In this way, a postrepresentational prefigurative paradigm identifies the basis of social transformation in the construction of the self, encouraging a principally internal focus and emphasizing the enactment of modes of relationality and forms of decision-making characteristic of the worlds movements desire to actualize.

This paradigm is foundational to my inquiry for its recognition of the existential and collective aspects of subjective mutation. Approaching language as only one of many semiological systems, it emphasizes the embodied culture of social movements as a site of the production of subjectivity. Despite tracing the political at the intersection of textuality and embodiment, performance studies scholarship tends to over-emphasize the discursive dimensions of subjective constitution, building almost exclusively on the works of Foucault and Louis Althusser. However, as Maurizio Lazzarato—operating in a Guattarian orientation—argues, "subjective mutation is not primarily discursive" but rather is "fundamentally an existential affirmation and apprehension of the self, others, and the world" and "it is on the basis of this

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[25]Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Continuum, 2008), 28.

non-discursive, existential, and affective crystallization that new languages, new discourses, new knowledge, and a new politics can proliferate."[26] This understanding of the practice and politics of subjectivity encourages the kind of reintegration of emotions and the body into politics that George Katsiaficas describes as a "rationality of the heart"[27] and greater consideration of collective action as a form of embodied culture, attending to what Kevin McDonald describes as movements "involved in *doing*, where the senses are at the heart of action."[28]

Moreover, understanding subjectivity as arising from a preindividual affective milieu, this paradigm acknowledges the always already collective character of subjectivity. Emerging from the autopoietic collectivity of a group encounter, collective subjectivity[29]—or alternatively, the group-subject or subject-group—describes the structuring of the capacities and limitations of collective entities. In articulating the social character of this concept, Guattari specifies that the application of collective is to be understood "in the sense of a multiplicity that deploys itself as much beyond the individual, on the side of the socius, as before the person, on the side of preverbal intensities, indicating a logic of affects rather than a logic of delimited sets."[30] Based on this collective character of preindividual affect, this paradigm recognizes the possibility of

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[26]Mauricio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014), 16.

[27]George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), 236.

[28]Kevin McDonald, *Global Movements: Action and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 214.

[29]Brazilian scholar José Maurício Domingues offers a theory of collectivity that does not draw explicitly on Guattari's but is similarly multidimensional. Articulated from a sociological rather than cultural perspective, his work considers the economic production of classes as collective subjects, interindividual formulations of collectivity, as well as the material or spatio-temporal constitution of collective subjectivity. See especially his *Sociological Theory and Collective Subjectivity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

[30]Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Sydney: Power Publications), 9.

collective subjectivities constituted independently and in parallel with individual subjectivity rather than as a secondary composite entity.

Ultimately, this embodied and collective character of subjectivity informs my theorization of the diverse range of performance for social change practices as sites for the enactive construction of new modes of relationality. These sites entail interaction across social difference primarily through touch and coordinated movement, as in the linking of arms to form a human barrier in protest, the sharing of weight in improvised contact dances, or the collective dance of a protest march in order to evade police barriers. Through such experiential experimentation, the postrepresenational prefigurative paradigm cultivates collectivities that not only preserve but proliferate difference, as for instance Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's multitude. Movements can assemble across this proliferating difference through the cultivation of affective bonds of solidarity formed in that shared embodied activity of experimentation. I refer to these affective bonds as the social flesh of collective subjectivity.

Social movements oriented toward the constitution of this social flesh engage in experimentation with the boundary work of collective corporeality. Erin Manning describes this work as "the crafting of transindividual modes of existence, modes of existence capable of integrating complex notions of interdependence and care."[31] I approach it as an emerging form of embodied knowledge entailing new ways of distinguishing affective syntheses as relations of interiority from those of exteriority and new manners of processing affect. This embodied knowledge is what I describe as communal feeling. When the boundary of the collective is constructed on an affective basis, it exists in parallel with—rather than subject to—individual

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[31] Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 128.

cognitive calculation, and enabling the resultant form of embodied relationality to resemble a pre-personal version of bell hooks's idea of "love as the ethical foundation for politics."[32]

Protest and Performance for Social Change

While Guattari's approach to politics is grounded in art as "an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment, which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself,"[33] echoing a modernist avant-garde aesthetics, this antistructural quality exists across a wide range of human activity. Victor Turner's theory of liminality maps the temporary suspension of normative structures of experience beyond aesthetic frames to various social contexts. In parallel with Émile Durkheim's distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity, Turner distinguishes the liminality of rites of passage and ritual practice in pre-industrial societies from the liminoid practices of art and play in industrial societies. Unlike rites of passage, which transform participants by transitioning them between two pre-defined social designations, the transformative capacities of liminoid practices are more indeterminate and incomplete, potentially generative of new subjectivities.

Protest offers another antistructural experiential frame for subjective mutation. While protest events are often evaluated in terms of their capacity to serve as a form of collective political speech, the question of their political efficacy also lies in their capacity to transform participants. Lazzarato notes that "for political subjectivation to occur, it must necessarily traverse moments in which dominant significations are suspended and the hold of machinic enslavements is thrown off"[34] and argues that protests, strikes, riots, and other forms of direct action are prime examples of this suspension. Rachel Meyer and Howard Kimeldorf similarly

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[32]bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 294.

[33]Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 131.

[34]Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, 19.

argue that protest events offer spaces for the temporary rupture of everyday embodied patterns and introduce the concept of "eventful subjectivity" to describe "how even small and more common collective action events can produce transformations in understanding and identity."[35] Protest, like ludic and artistic encounters, breaks with normative social structure, potentially reconstituting subjectivity in ways that exceed this experiential framing.

I use the umbrella term "performance for social change" to encapsulate a wide range of embodied techniques that attempt to formalize the potential of these antistructural practices and deploy liminality in the reconstitution of social and political life. Thus, performance for social change encompasses various engaged performance forms, from paratheatrical practice to guerilla theatre, as well as protest and direct action. While I recognize that protest and direct action have their own unique genealogies as more widely practiced forms of embodied radical culture, in Boalian fashion, I also understand them as part of the broad repertoire of performance for social change. I embrace this inclusive understanding of performance for social change primarily as a methodological consideration essential to transdisciplinary research in the humanities. It enables the assembly of diverse cases characteristic of scholarship in both performance and cultural studies in order to facilitate the theorization of emergent cultural phenomena that exist across a broad range of practices. Furthermore, it is my hope that by transgressing formal taxonomies of such practices I can disrupt entrenched discourses with their commonplace disputes regarding political efficacy—especially those that marginalize embodied cultures of political prefiguration.

While I am more interested in the questions that a broad range of cases enables than I am committed to securing this term as *the* comprehensive overarching category for this work in scholarly discourses, there are nevertheless strong practical and conceptual reasons for this

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[35]Rachel Meyer and Howard Kimmeldorf, "Eventful Subjectivity: The Experiential Sources of Solidarity," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, 4 (2015): 450.

choice of terminology. My use of "performance for social change" represents an effort to balance the conceptual transversality of this work with familiarity and applicability to the language of practitioners and artist-activists.

Moreover, this framework is staunchly anti-hierarchical. While it relates art to the politics of social life, it is far less instrumentalizing than terms like "applied theatre" that designate art's subordination to politics. It evades common hierarchies of theatrical practice, including those of artistic form and the division of labor common to Western taxonomies and divisions of artistic training that ignore the transmedial character of art-making among lower classes and outside of the "West." Most importantly, premised on engagement and interaction, it is grounded in the rejection of any strict conceptual division between performers and spectators reflected in Boal's famous portmanteau "spect-actor." While acknowledging a unique role for the artist-activist as a deliberate deviser of social situations, performance for social change embraces the participatory character of the event, refusing the possibility of spectatorial distancing—as in Taylor's concept of the scenario[36]—and recognizing that any effect is a function of the encounter and thus beyond the control of the artist—as in Manning's notion of participation as a transindividual unfolding opened by an artistic process.[37]

However, focusing on antistructural techniques may seem somewhat unsophisticated or naïve in light of theories of liminality in a post-industrial context, which stress the affective activation of ludic or aesthetic modes of perception over the social structuring of experiential frames. Such theories suggest that the structuring tendrils of neoliberal capitalism's colonization of other spheres of existence infect and recapture profit from the antistructure of liminoid activity. For instance, Jon McKenzie uses the term "liminautic" to describe liminality in post-

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[36]Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 32.

[37]Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 54.

industrial societies, arguing that the deteriorating boundary between work and leisure has made antistructure more mobile and fleeting, no more than a peripheral aspect of any and all semiological systems.[38] I nevertheless focus on techniques that take creative resistance as their explicit intention—and especially those aimed at those without pre-existing technical expertise— because I believe the shift in scholarship away from such techniques neglects the insights of practitioners, the evolving character of techniques, and the importance of engagement with nonspecialist populations. Moreover, I maintain that, by continuously refocusing performance for social change around moments of affective excess that interweave the social and the somatic in ways not necessarily anticipated by existing techniques, practitioners can best support efforts to achieve relative autonomy.

Therefore, I think of performance for social change less as an established set of specific techniques and more as the ongoing reconstruction of embodied creative practices that seek to continuously remap potential access points to antistructure for implementation at new intersections of the aesthetic and the socio-political. As such, my approach to performance for social change emphasizes its embodied character, encouraging a more restricted role for language in its practice, recognizing it as a primarily embodied epistemological tradition, and arguing for the inseparability of internally-oriented practices of collective embodiment from any resistance to neoliberalism.

Despite using aesthetic frames and physical presence to disrupt ideological entrenchment, many approaches to performance for social change continue to place a high level of emphasis on transformation in language and thought, subordinating the embodied to the cognitive and linguistic by positioning efficacy as the reconstruction of political debate in critical discussion. For instance, Grant Kester, in an effort to move beyond a binary between the consensus-driven

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[38]Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 93.

community of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and the social disruption of Claire Bishop's relational antagonism,[39] advocates the abandonment of a modernist emphasis on shock and subjective dislocation in favor of a dialogical aesthetic that focuses on reframing political disagreement through dialogue and duration.[40] This discursive strategic orientation manifests itself in the structure of practices that use embodied creativity as a lead-in to discussion but also in attitudes that perceive protest and direct action as deconstructive embodied social activity requiring subsequent shifts in public discourse or government policy in order to be deemed successful.

While I acknowledge the value of critical discussion, I question the extent of its capacity to activate transformative affect and advocate an approach to socio-political transformation and its analysis on an embodied level. As a result of the ubiquity of neoliberal commonsense, linguistic processing tends to activate logics that individualize responsibility for social change and impede deep engagement with affects that don't conform to such logic. Thus, although I do not advocate excising linguistic engagement from performance for social change, I encourage strategies that approach it as one mode of relating among many and consider how it can support a fully embodied experience of collectivity.

Consider, for instance, the protest practice of "the people's mic," which circumvents municipal laws restricting the use of amplification equipment by using the voices of the crowd as a microphone or bullhorn replacement with the audience repeating the words of a speaker so that others farther away can hear. Through this organic amplification in an outward rippling echo, this practice constitutes a literal enactment of a collective subject of enunciation. While the

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[39]Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 2002); and Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" *October* 1, 110 (2004): 51-79.

[40]Grant Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art" in *Theory of Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

linguistic content of such an act is certainly worthy of consideration and analysis, the embodied act of becoming a vehicle for another's expression by contributing to this collective echo is potentially transformative in its own right. Ultimately, because cognitive and linguistic engagement tends to collapse back into dominant formulations of identity and logics of action, my research not only advocates a more circumspect role for speaking but also encourages an understanding of it as a form of collective and embodied activity.

My research also recognizes that performance for social change exists primarily as embodied cultural traditions transmitted body-to-body, often with only a limited textual life that exists merely as a supplement to—or reminder of—embodied training. Practitioners become familiar with these techniques on a sensory and somatic basis, first as participants then as facilitators, in order to develop a practical knowledge of them on an embodied level. In many cases, they train in a variety of techniques and often practice blended versions. Given these alter-economies of sharing, borrowing, and re-mixing, the accumulated embodied knowledge that these practices represent is resistant to genealogical tracing and economic frameworks of intellectual property.

As a touchstone example of performance for social change canonized in concert with its professionalization within academia, Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed might challenge this observation. My engagement with this technique recognizes its prominent place within this tradition but also seeks to reconceptualize it for both scholars and practitioners as part of a cultural tradition of embodied knowledge. Boal himself recognizes the difficulty of genealogical tracing for performance for social change exercises, noting in the preface to *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*:

> many of the games, exercises and techniques in this book are original, having been completely invented; others were taken from well-known games and modified… the

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exercises have a wide range of origins. Some of the games are as old as Brueghel… some are still in the making and some are still to be invented.[41]

Other compendia similarly note both diversity and uncertainty in sourcing material.[42] As a result of this diversity and uncertainty of embodied transmission, the accurate citation of specific sources of inspiration for exercises that have been altered, adapted, or simply adopted can become quite difficult. Thus, while it is appropriate to offer credit to those who create durable inscriptions of this knowledge, we must also be skeptical of claims to individual authorship as potentially appropriative efforts to personally capitalize on knowledge produced in collective embodied experimentation.

Finally, my research stresses that the embodied aspect of performance for social change is both deconstructive and productive of the new ecologies, subjectivities, and relationalities that resist neoliberal hegemony and expansion. Protest and performance for social change typically entail a component of active contestation against the status quo. However, in many cases, they simultaneously prefigure worlds of interdependence and community care. Yates McKee aptly argues that "collective resistance and collective invention are inseparable, and it is in such situations that the sensory forms and imaginative visions of art per se are liberated from their intuitional enclosure to participate in the construction of new forms of life-in-common."[43] While performance for social change—as I have already acknowledged—often encompasses repertoires of protest and direct action, I occasionally use the term prefigurative protest to emphasize this duality of direct contestation and prefiguration in particular techniques as well as the role of artists and activists in the design and implementation of these coincident aspects.

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[41]Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (London: Routledge, 1992), 16.

[42]See, for instance: Michael Rohd, *Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998).

[43]Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London: Verso, 2016), 16.

Without diminishing the value of social justice interventions aimed at law and policy, my inquiry focuses on the collective self-cultivation in experiences of a ludic, aesthetic, or insurgent character—experiences much like those that Anja Kanngieser describes as performative encounters[44]—by looking for moments of affective excess that challenge neoliberal individualism through the affective production of collective subjectivity. Focusing on the sensory and somatic dimensions of this collective self-cultivation, I explore how performance for social change—in addition to disrupting automatized patterns of perception and action constructed through acculturation—can activate transindividual affect in the constitution of embodied collectivity. Understanding performance and protest as embodied cultural practices capable of contributing to this collective self-cultivation, I advocate a critical somatics approach to these practices in order to cultivate the affective bonds of a shared social flesh and enrich an embodied knowledge of communal feeling.

Chapter Breakdown

I open my inquiry in the first chapter with an interrogative reimagining of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) as a touchstone technique in performance for social change. Numerous TO practitioners have called for a reevaluation of the efficacy of many of its recorded techniques, frequently citing the responsibility that these techniques place on oppressed people to overcome systems of oppression and its inadequate theorization of the relationship of the politics of the everyday to structural and systemic analysis. In response to these calls, I argue that the humanist Marxism underlying Boalian theory results in an emphasis on discursive techniques that are particularly susceptible to the corrupting influence of increasingly ubiquitous neoliberal logics of responsibilization. Reviewing various existing efforts to amend and extend Boal's

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[44]Anja Kanngieser, "…And…and…and…The Transversal Politics of Performative Encounters," *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 6, 2 (2012): 266.

work, I argue that these approaches cut against Boal's most important contribution to performance for social change: an attention the politics of the body in patterns of perception and habituated action. I conclude by advancing a preliminary version of what I call critical somatics, which not only questions the normative schematization of the body but refashions links between our sensory experience and bodily capacities.

In the second chapter, I suggest that Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter's InterPlay offers a more affective approach to performance for social change. Exploring the nuances of its theory and practice, I chart its rejection of mind/body dualism, its embodied and impassioned epistemology, and its advocacy of a playful and embodied orientation to prefigurative social transformation. Based on extensive ethnographic research with the international community of InterPlay practitioners—with special attention to its representational approach to organizational equity and inclusion—I argue that more somatic approaches to performance for social change remain insufficient in the face of neoliberal individualism without a specific emphasis on the exploration of transindividual affect. I argue that the tools for such an exploration already exist in the InterPlay philosophy, but remain an underdeveloped aspect of its practice. I theorize the corporeality of social flesh as the existential basis of collective embodiment and trace its characteristics in practitioners' experiences of what they refer to as "the group body." I conclude with a description of the disorienting experience of such a collective embodiment in a moment of conflict across differences of race and sexuality at the annual convention of InterPlay practitioners in 2018 that illustrates its potential for social transformation.

The third chapter extends my inquiry beyond creative laboratories and into the streets, tracing sensations of transindividuality and collective embodiment in the lived experiences of activists participating in protest and direct action. I offer a more detailed articulation of protest

and performance for social change as examples of the embodied knowledge of social movements, tracing affinities between collaborative creative practices and anarchist organizing principles. Grounded primarily in a series of interviews with activists, movement organizers, and direct action trainers, this chapter explores direct action as a site of both deindividualization and the existential construction of communities of trust and care. I argue that haptic, kinesthetic and coenaesthetic sensations in protest form the basis of collective individuation by troubling the normative distribution of sensibility dividing interoception and perception. I theorize communal feeling as the embodied cognition of the collective subject, entailing an interoceptive responsiveness to affect that would normally be classified as belonging to others. I close with a limited exploration of how the planning of activists and organizers cultivates this communal feeling in protest and direct action events, noting the impediments created for this work by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the fourth and final chapter, I present the preliminary elements of a performance pedagogy of critical somatics based on the insights of this research. I describe activities of my own devising as well as ones created in collaboration with other artist-activists or adapted from techniques in which I have received training. These exercises vary—from guided individual movement meditation to the sensory exploration of another's autonomic somatic activity—but emphasize collectivity in physical contact and coordinated movement. I have offered numerous workshops based on these exercises in various settings, from universities and independent research institutes to autonomous art and activism spaces, including one called "Sensing Bodies In Common" delivered as an embodied research product at the University of North Carolina with the support of an Arts Innovation Grant.

I conclude this manuscript by revisiting performance as an enactive methodology for the work of prefigurative social movements. Connecting the imaginative work of science fiction and the cultural politics of biological metaphors for collective embodiment with the political praxis of movements, I argue performance for social change can function as a speculative pragmatics, prefiguratively rehearsing social justice in new modes of belonging across social difference. Approaching performance in this way, I consider the imaginative horizon of collective subjectivity enacted on an embodied level as a potential pathway out of the isolating individualism of neoliberalism.

EMBODYING SOCIAL CHANGE IN THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

In the spring of 2013, I joined Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago, a collective of artist-activists and practitioners of the diverse range of techniques that comprise Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). The group was in the midst of conducting community outreach and shaping creative responses to then-mayor Rahm Emmanuel's effort to shutter approximately fifty of the city's public schools, predominantly those serving black and Hispanic communities. During weekly meetings at an urban anarchist commune in the Lakeview neighborhood, we constructed participatory workshops for schools, youth programs, community events, and protests—especially those organized in conjunction with the striking Chicago Teachers Union. Drawing upon Boalian "gamercises," we developed embodied performance activities that responded to the unique

Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago conducts a workshop at a Chicago Teachers Union protest.

Photo by Tim Curry

circumstances of this moment in the city, shaping spaces in which participants could share the role that public schools played in their lives and what these closings would mean for them while connecting these observations to the local history of privatization and union busting concealed beneath notions of "school choice" and the expanding charter system in the city.

In addition to our responses to the massive school closings and support for the teachers union strike, during my tenure with the collective we explored and implemented a wide range of performance for social change techniques. In addition to a regular monthly introductory TO workshop, we facilitated performance and community-building workshops with various theatrical education non-profits as well as numerous social movement organizations throughout the city. We hosted socially-engaged theatre performances about political issues like policing and immigration, using TO to facilitate embodied post-show discussions with the audience. We rehearsed and performed invisible theatre on the L—Chicago's elevated rail metro system—to generate discussion about mass incarceration and the local manifestations and impacts of the prison-industrial complex. Although I had originally encountered Boal's theory and techniques during my undergraduate studies in theatre, this work didn't truly come alive for me until my work with this collective as we applied and adapted it for our particular political purposes and localized context.

Like so many others, my exploration of performance for social change began by traversing territories already thoroughly mapped by Boal and those working in a Boalian tradition. Despite the fact that I have since studied various approaches to performance for social change, Boal's work continues to serve as an invaluable foundation to my praxis. His theories and practices remain touchstones for both scholars and practitioners, with the lingering influence of his contributions continuing to reverberate throughout numerous performance for social change practices across the world. The global proliferation of Theatre of the Oppressed results in part from its close relationship to popular, activist, and scholarly discursive circulation, but also reflects the diversity and wide-ranging applicability of its techniques. From its embodied exercises or "gamercises" of *Theatre for Actors and Non-Actors* and *The Rainbow of Desire* to

its interactive performance techniques of Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, and Legislative Theatre to its approaches to protest and public engagement in Invisible Theatre and creative direct action, TO offers an extensive and expanding toolbox for artist-activists working in all sorts of social and political contexts.

While these techniques all exhibit Boal's unique combination of critical theory with the lived and embodied experience of systemic oppression in the course of everyday life, they largely reflect an approach to change whose social or collective character is primarily additive, an effect of the proliferation and implementation of new attitudes and values. Recognizing the normalization of inequity and the institutionalization of oppression in bodily habits of perception and action, Boal deploys performance as a means of interrupting these mechanized patterns in order to generate revised patterns of behavior. However, although the penetrating insight of this embodied approach to politics continues to offer inspiration to many socially engaged performance practitioners, his emphasis on conscious intervention risks perpetuating problematically individualistic notions of agency against systems of power, burdening those experiencing oppression with the onus of responsibility for instigating change.

In light of the foundational role that TO plays in performance for social change, I open my exploration of prefigurative protest by offering a diagnosis of the conceptual basis for its deficiencies in the face of systemic oppressions and by tracing potential remedies. Examining contemporary criticisms of Boalian theory and practice in greater detail, I argue that its susceptibility to the corrupting influence of increasingly ubiquitous neoliberal frameworks and logics of action is the result of an inadequate critical theoretical grounding. I characterize Boal's critical theory as a diluted humanist Marxism and suggest it reinforces his practical emphasis on conscious reflection and rational-critical discussion. Moreover, I contend that existing efforts to

amend and extend Theatre of the Oppressed through the application of more recent critical social theories further undermine Boal's fundamental contribution—his identification of the body as a site of social and political change—by subordinating the critical contributions of the body to cognition and discourse. In contrast to these efforts, I advocate a theoretical revitalization of TO rooted in what I call "critical somatics," which would offer alternative approaches to performance for social change that decenter cognition and stress the affective and embodied.

Criticisms of Boal

Criticism of Boal's theories and techniques from within the community of TO practitioners has become more pronounced and focused within recent years. My first substantive encounter with this diverse range of criticisms was in the summer of 2014 when our collective attended the 20th annual Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) conference in Omaha. The theme was "Review, Reflect, Reimagine," and we were slated to present new embodied performance activities—some adaptations of existing Boalian gamercises, others entirely of our own devising—that we had developed in order to address specific issues we were tackling in our various workshops, from youth programming on sexual violence and consent to perceptions of policing and immigration. Despite enjoying a wide variety of workshops that applied TO in everything from creative writing to puppetry, I felt something was missing from the conference. Apart from a demonstration of a bystander approach to Forum Theatre, I was struck by the extent to which the various reimaginative efforts I encountered reflected the need to adapt the practice for mainstream educational contexts rather than the desire to overcome the political limitations of the established techniques.

Julian Boal's comments at the plenary on the final day of the conference gave expression to my feeling that the institutionalization of TO was contributing to the evacuation of its radical

politics. He argued that the professionalization of the practice within the US—where it proliferates primarily within academic contexts—has ossified its techniques. This stagnation diminishes the insurgent force of TO because the revolutionary character of the practice is not inherent to the techniques themselves but arises from their capacity to intervene in the specific social and political contexts in which they are deployed. Approaches to performance for social change that were revolutionary under the military dictatorship of 1960s Brazil may prove ineffectual in response to—perhaps even reinforcing of—the neoliberal status quo in the contemporary United States. Reevaluation and continuous modification of the practice become necessary not only because its efficacy is culturally and geopolitically determined but also because dominant socio-political systems develop strategies of neutralization or co-optation.

The younger Boal's remarks were met with hostility and resistance from various perspectives in the ensuing discussion. Many academics who had built careers on the professionalization of TO within university systems responded defensively, emphasizing the limitations they face in institutional settings and the adjustments and adaptations they were already making. Alternatively, a number of community organizers and grassroots practitioners opposed his arguments on the grounds that his criticisms were themselves too abstract and academic. Reflecting the prevalence of anti-intellectualist sentiment and working-class skepticism for academic researchers and institutions in the US, this resistance was somehow both surprising and expected in light of the character of the critique presented.

Demonstrating the applicability of his critique on a level of practice, when the conference came to Chicago the following year, Julian Boal offered a pre-conference workshop exploring the dramaturgy of Forum Theatre. While Forum focuses on presenting everyday experiences of oppression for collective consideration and collaborative experimentation with possible

solutions, because traditionally potential responses are only rehearsed by stepping into the role of the one experiencing the oppression the possibilities imagined and presented tend to reflect highly individualistic thinking and courses of action. Although the process can be facilitated to focus on critical group discussion rather than to uncover a satisfactory solution achievable by the individual, the technique nevertheless encourages participants to conceptualize solutions to systemic oppression on an individual basis, placing responsibility for social change onto oppressed people and often generating feelings of isolation and powerlessness.

This workshop sought to explore possibilities for overcoming these limitations of Forum Theatre. In particular, it focused on framing questions so as not to emphasize individual responsibility, neglect the systemic components of oppression, or preemptively foreclose the possibilities for collective action in response to it. Echoing the insights of other TO practitioners regarding reimagining Forum Theatre in light of bystander theory,[45] the group's presentation of their work at the beginning of the conference demonstrated solutions that involved building community and communal responses to everyday experiences of oppression through the collaboration of those directly impacted and sympathetic witnesses.

Given the prominent place that Forum holds within TO—sometimes standing in metonymically for the practice as a whole—Julian Boal's targeting of it for critical intervention is unsurprising but also reflects a long history of critique from within the TO community. For instance, Berenice Fisher argues that TO, and Forum in particular, often enhances class divisions within oppressed groups by mapping individualistic solutions to systemic problems that—

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[45]Karen Mitchell and Jennifer Freitag, "Forum Theatre for Bystanders: A New Model for Gender Violence Prevention" in *Violence Against Women* 17, 8 (2011): 990-1013.

although they may be available to some—fail to address the roots of oppression.[46] Furthermore, she notes that the inadequacies of the technique make the politics of TO too dependent on the Joker, whose individual politics and level of training become determinative of the process. Sonia Hamel's observations echo this assessment. She argues that, in the context of an individualistic and identity-driven political paradigm, Forum Theatre can—and in the case she describes *does*— result in the reinforcement of existing power dynamics.[47] In addition to heightening prevailing inequities, Forum can also advance the notion that established systems and structures of power are immutable by individualizing the responsibility for resistance as Laura Wynne argues.[48]

These critiques of Forum, however, reflect wider conceptual criticisms that extend to much of the larger body of Boalian theory and practice. A number of scholars have expressed concerns regarding Boal's inadequate theorization of the relationship of the everyday to larger structural and systemic manifestations of oppression, resulting not only in the individualization of responsibility for resistance[49] but in a tendency to isolate this responsibility in the hands of marginalized people.[50] Mady Shutzman argues "it is problematic to transpose a third-world aesthetic of resistance to a first-world aesthetic of self-help," noting both the structural differences of power across these geopolitical contexts as well as the complexities introduced by

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[46] Berenice Fisher, "Women, Pedagogy, and Theatre of the Oppressed" in *Playing Boal: Theatre Therapy, Activism*, ed. Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[47] Sonia Hamel, "When Theatre of the Oppressed Becomes Theatre of the Oppressor." *Research in Drama Education* 18, 4 (2013): 403-416.

[48] Laura Wynne, "Empowerment and the individualisation of resistance: A Foucaultian Perspective on Theatre of the Oppressed." *Critical Social Policy* 40, 3 (2020): 331-349.

[49] See: Mitchell and Freitag, "Forum Theatre for Bystanders" and Doug Paterson, "Putting the 'Pro' in Protagonist: Paulo Freire's Contribution to Our Understanding of Forum Theatre" in *Come Closer: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed*, ed. Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

[50] Inês Barbosa, Vanesa Camarda, and Paul Dwyer, "Forum Theatre: A Dramaturgy of Collective Questioning" in *Routledge Companion to Theatre of the Oppressed*, Ed. Kelly Howe, Julian Boal, and José Soeiro (New York: Routledge, 2019), 173.

the high-end art world's celebration of subjective indeterminacy.[51] Jonothan Neelands is

similarly critical of TO's psychotherapeutic orientation, arguing that it responds to an

identitarian politics of misrecognition rather than focusing on a collective approach to socio-

economic inequality.[52] These criticisms have become more widespread and mainstream in recent

years,[53] suggesting that a more holistic critical re-envisioning of TO is required.

   I argue that the spirit of this line of criticism concerns the susceptibility of Boalian

techniques to neoliberal ideology and a politics of individualism, and thus, that any effort to

revitalize TO within the context of the contemporary US must respond to the isolating and

individualizing tendencies of neoliberalism by focusing on the rehearsal of community and

collectivity in performance. Although Boal's breakdown of hierarchical relations—as for

instance in the distinction between actor and spectator—contributes to subjective empowerment,

the structure of his techniques often fail to account for the degree to which individual

subjectivity has already been shaped by hegemonic ideology. While his notion of the "cop in the

head" from *The Rainbow of Desire* addresses this to some extent, most of his techniques are

inadequate in the face of the incessant and invasive diffusion of neoliberalism's conceptual

frameworks and logics of action, which increasingly colonize all aspects of social and political

life. As neoliberalism extends its reach far beyond the economic realm, infusing language as well

as consciousness and the imagination, Boal's emphasis on the development of critical

consciousness and everyday action make his techniques particularly vulnerable to neoliberal

individualism and its responsibilizing analytics.

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[51]Mady Schutzman, "Activism, Therapy, or Nostalgia: Theatre of the Oppressed in NYC." *TDR: Drama Review* 34, 3 (1990): 77-83.

[52]Jonothan Neelands, "Taming the Political: The Struggle over Recognition in the Politics of Applied Theatre." *Research in Drama Education* 12, 3 (2007): 305-317.

[53]Kelly Howe, Julian Boal, and José Soeiro, "Theatre of the Oppressed and its Time(s)" in *Routledge Companion to Theatre of the Oppressed*, Ed. Kelly Howe, Julian Boal, and José Soeiro (New York: Routledge, 2019).

While various practitioners seek to remedy these concerns, their efforts to revise Boalian techniques rarely advocate deep conceptual alterations to Boal's critical theory. Some focus on adapting his work without extensive consideration of its compatibility with the politics of Boal's wider theory. For instance, those calling for a "theatre of the oppressor"[54] risk undermining the revolutionary politics of TO by de-centering the lived experience of oppressed people, as Tania Cañas argues.[55] Others advocate supplementing his work with other frameworks, such as those integrating systems thinking into TO training and practice.[56] However, while I acknowledge the value of such efforts, I argue that new and revised approaches to TO are best served by an extensive parallel update to the critical theory behind its practice. Instead of acquiescing to the resistance of many contemporary TO practitioners to questions of theory by minimizing intervention on a conceptual level, I acknowledge the need to revisit the social and political theory underpinning Boal's work in order to generate performance for social change praxes that can more effectively respond to contemporary socio-political contexts characterized by the ascendancy of neoliberal common sense.

This more radical approach to revising TO nevertheless embraces the fundamental contributions of Boal and reflects his own habit of developing techniques by placing critical theory into conversation with the unique circumstances of lived experience. The efficacy and longevity of his theatrical experimentation result in large part from its effort to bring critical theory to bear on everyday life by blending it with the grounded theories of marginalized people.

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[54]Marc Weinblatt and Cheryl Harrison, "Theatre of the Oppressor: Working with Privilege Toward Social Justice" in *Come Closer: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed*, Ed. Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

[55]Tania Cañas, "a continued Theatre of the Oppressed." *Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal* 5, 4 (2020): 1-14.

[56]Jennifer Luong and Ross Arnold "Enhancing the Effects of Theatre of the Oppressed through Systems Thinking: Reflections on an Applied Workshop" *Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal* 1, 8 (2016): 1-18.

While the core philosophy and initial techniques explicated in *Theatre of the Oppressed* reflect the fitting relationship between his understanding of Marxist theory and the attitudes of Brazilians living under military dictatorship during the 1960s, as the context of his work changed so did his techniques. For instance, Legislative Theatre arose out of the conditions of his work as a city councilperson in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-90s. Rainbow of Desire reflects a more therapeutic approach he developed in response to his experience working in Europe with people for whom oppression was more internalized—more of a Foucaultian disciplinary control rather than direct enforcement by state agents. Other practitioners working in a Boalian tradition have similarly reimagined TO based on their own cultural and political contexts, as for instance in semi-invisible theatre.[57] These experiments and Boal's own trajectory over his lifetime demonstrates the evolution of his grounded theoretical approach.

Fully embracing this approach to theatrical experimentation as modification and adaption of techniques to specific political and cultural contexts, I argue that even greater attention to the interplay between the theory and practice of performance for social change is crucial to the process of reimagining what this work is and what it can do. I remain committed to "the poetics of the oppressed" more so than to any particular techniques developed and disseminated by Boal and his collaborators or disciples. Julian Boal similarly characterizes his relationship to his father's work, saying: "I don't want to defend TO as a set of techniques. I defend TO as retaking possession of the aesthetical means, as a way of retaking the means of production."[58] The mutability of TO is ultimately crucial to its continued efficacy, and its fixation into and transmission as a set of techniques will ultimately render it irrelevant. However, it is not only the

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[57]Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[58]Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland, "Considering the Future of Theatre of the Oppressed" in *Come Closer: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed*, Ed. Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 180.

practice of TO that must evolve, but its theory as well. Augusto Boal recognized this, arguing of TO that it "is a theater that has just been born, and which, though breaking all the traditional forms, still suffers from an insufficiently formulated theoretical basis. Only out of constant practice will the new theory arise."[59] So, informed by its continued practice, I return to the bases of its theory in order to consider how best to preserve its unique insights while acknowledging the need for renewal.

Critical Theory and Boalian Marxism

Although the critical theory underlying Boal's thinking is fundamentally Marxist in character, the version of Marxism that filters into his work is both humanist and diluted, having been conferred indirectly through two of his strongest intellectual influences: Bertolt Brecht and Paulo Freire. Boal's major theoretical contribution to this critical intellectual lineage is to ground both capitalist ideology and revolutionary politics in the body as a site for the production of subjectivity. The shortcomings of this contribution in terms of its amenability to neoliberal individualism result predominantly from its humanistic orientation, which leads Boal to undermine the substance of his intervention into critical discourse by subordinating the role of the body in social change to consciousness-raising and suggesting the pathway to change culminates in bringing this understanding into socio-political discourse.

Despite later efforts to distance his work from its association with Marxism, Boal's early writings and techniques exhibit a distinctly Marxist approach to theatrical production. In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, he draws upon a class-based analysis to argue that the dominant Western theatrical tradition—which he labels "Aristotelian"—serves as a repressive tool of the ruling class to instill in the masses a social ethos amenable to the political status quo. Building upon a

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[59]Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 79.

Brechtian tradition, Boal develops a Marxist theatrical praxis that ultimately aims to "transfer to the people the means of production in theater."[60] He extends Brecht's approach to critical spectatorship to the level of action, arguing theatre can go beyond the development of class consciousness by enabling the rehearsal of revolutionary action. Gonzalo Frasca refers to this Brechtian-Boalian theatrical tradition as "the Marxist drama school."[61]

Boal's Marxism—despite being the strongest theoretical undercurrent in his critical approach to theatre—results from only a limited engagement with Marxist discourse, coming primarily secondhand from Brecht's epic theatre and Freire's critical pedagogy. Because they come from humanistic traditions, Brecht and Freire emphasize revolutionary practice and human agency in their approach to Marxist philosophy. As a result, Boal's understanding of

Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago conducts Image Theatre as part of its "Breaking the Educational Machine" workshop with Kuumba Lynx.
Photo by Tania Giordani

Marxism is more humanistic than sociological. Moreover, in instrumentalizing Marx, both Brecht and Friere exhibit a tendency to abridge and simplify Marxist theory, contributing to the diluted character of Boalian Marxism.

Although there is scholarly debate about the timing and extent of Brecht's Marxism,[62] the Marxist fundaments of a Brechtian aesthetic are well-established.[63] For Brecht, revolutionary

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[60]Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 122.

[61]Frasca, Gonzalo, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology" in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York, Routledge, 2003), 228.

[62]See Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity, and the Threepenny Lawsuit* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) and Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

theatre works to develop class consciousness through the estrangement of bourgeois ideology in the minds of spectators. Brecht's epic theatre rejects a form of spectatorship in which audience members accept the common sense—bourgeois—explanatory logic of the theatrical narrative, having yielded their capacities for analytical thought to the playscript and its characters. Brecht advocates instead a dramaturgy that encourages critical distance in the audience in order to enable them to comprehend a sociological analysis of the issues presented, thereby transforming theatre into "an object of instruction" and playhouses "from places of entertainment into organs of mass communication."[64]

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy parallels Brecht's theatre insofar as it is similarly focused on the development of critical consciousness in support of revolutionary action. While recuperation of Freire's work by liberal educators has generated debate regarding the extent of Marx's influence on his educational philosophy, various scholars have mapped the centrality of Marxist concepts within his writing,[65] including, in particular, the Freirean notion of critical consciousness[66] and praxis.[67] Freire's pedagogical approach emphasizes education as a means to

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[63]See, for instance: Sean Carney, *Brecht and Critical Theory: Dialectics and Contemporary Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[64]Bertolt Brecht and John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 42.

[65]See: Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (Lantham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Peter Mayo, *Liberating Praxis: Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004); Wayne Au, "Epistemology of the Oppressed: The Dialectics of Paulo Freire's Theory of Knowledge." *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5, 2 (2007); Robert Kress and Tricia Lake, *Paulo Freire's Intellectual Roots: Towards Historicity in Praxis* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[66]Paula Allman, *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilites and Critical Education* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999).

[67]Peter Mayo, "Praxis, Hegemony, and Consciousness in the Work of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire" in *The Wiley Handbook of Paulo Freire*, ed. Carlos Alberto Torres (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019).

the development of critical consciousness, which develops through "*reflection* and *action*

directed at the structures to be transformed."[68]

Strongly influenced by these two thinker-practitioners, Boal conceives the "poetics of the

oppressed" as a revolutionary praxis focused on the everyday as a crucial site of ideological

contest. Like Brecht, he deploys the subjunctive—"as if"—mood of the theatre to cultivate

critical consciousness of the politics of everyday life. Adapting Freire's educational methodology

of praxis into a dramaturgical one, he exchanges the directness of practical action for the safety

and efficiency of experimenting with action within the theatrical frame. Thus, he anticipates the

efficacy of rehearsing the politics of the everyday when spectactors deploy the interventions they

have embodied theatrically in similar situations they encounter within their lives.

Although they center embodied action in everyday contexts, Boalian techniques

ultimately suggest that social change derives primarily from the application of conscious

reflection to these behavioral habits, emphasizing the role of rationalizing critical discussion.

Responding to the everyday politics of bodily discipline through repetition and habit, Boal

locates transformative resistance in a humanistic action-reflection model and orients his practice

around consciousness-raising as a necessary precondition for revolutionary action. While

acknowledging the Marxist undercurrents of Boalian theory, Carmel O'Sullivan considers Boal's

focus on everyday experience and individual actions evidence of the inadequacy of his Marxist

credentials. She argues that his approach to revolution is individual rather than social and idealist

rather than materialist, concluding that Boal is simply a bad Marxist.[69] O'Sullivan's critique of

Boalian Marxism has merit, but I believe her analysis neglects the value of Boal's contributions

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[68]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 126.

[69]Carmel O'Sullivan, "Searching for the Marxist in Boal." *Research in Drama Education* 6, 1 (2001): 85-97.

by conflating his emphasis on the embodied politics of the everyday with his humanistic and intentional approach to social change.

Rather than his emphasis on everyday life, I argue that the cognitive and discursive aspects of his work are largely responsible for what makes TO most susceptible to the logics of neoliberalism. Boal's focus on the politics of the everyday—rather than simply failing to account for the systemic and structural aspects of oppression—demonstrates a recognition of the dispersed operation of power and the reproduction of oppressive systems and structures through quotidian acts. Moreover, I contend that Boal's greatest contribution is his centering of the body in his exploration of the theatrical production of subjectivity. As I explore below, his notion of the spectator as the reclamation of agency resituates the locus of revolutionary activity at the intersection of perception and action, but the value of this intervention is undercut by his subordination of the embodied and affective to cognitive rationalization.

Embodiment, Discourse, and Social Change

De-mechanization of the Body

Boal's critical orientation to embodiment is arguably his most significant intervention into the Marxist discourses underpinning his work. Boal's notion of the spectator not only combines observation and action, but does so with an understanding of an integrated sensorium: "the five senses—none exists separately, they too are all linked. Bodily activities are activities of the whole body. We breathe with our whole body […] make love with our whole body […] the whole body thinks."[70] Kelly Howe highlights the making of the body through sensing and action

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[70]Boal, *Games For Actors*, 49.

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in her brief survey of Boal's approach to the body.[71] While references to embodiment and sensation in performance for social change are often appeals to some "natural" or "authentic" experience or communion with an ideologically-uninflected reality beneath masks of power and control, Boal's approach to embodied subjectivity as a construction constituted through repetition in sensation, valuation, and action suggests that the body can be a site of alterity, offering access not to a truer reality but merely to affects capable of being articulated into novel modes of being or ways of life organized around different forms of value.

Situating this understanding of embodiment at the foundation of his approach to social change, Boal introduces an affective dimension to critical praxis. His poetics of the oppressed begins with the body; the first two of the four stages in the transformation of spectator into spect-actor are "knowing the body" and "making the body expressive."[72] These stages are most thoroughly addressed in his *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* in which he provides instructions for over three hundred games and exercises. These embodied exercises are designed to facilitate awareness—both kinesthetic and cognitive—of bodily habit in terms of both sensation and movement as well as to develop the capacity for wider possibility and greater choice. He theorizes the structuring of such patterns of sensation, valuation, and action as mechanization, which results from the training of social norms into the body in the course of everyday life:

> But how can emotions 'freely' manifest themselves throughout an actor's body, if that very instrument (the body) is mechanised, automated in its muscle structures and insensible to 70 per cent of its possibilities? A newly discovered emotion runs the risk of being petrified (in the literal sense) by the mechanised patterns of the actor's behaviour; the emotion may be blocked by a body already hardened by habit into a certain set of actions and reactions. How does this mechanisation of the actor's body come about? By

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[71]Kelly Howe, "Constraints and possibilities in the flesh: the body in Theatre of the Oppressed" in *Routledge Companion to Theatre of the Oppressed*, Ed. Kelly Howe, Julian Boal, and José Soeiro (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[72]Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 126.

repetition. The senses have an enormous capacity for registering, selecting and hierarchising sensations.[73]

This understanding of affective patterning and structuration as the basis of ideology—and thus as the ground for socio-political intervention—presents a major innovation in critical praxis.

Given this understanding of the political implications of bodily constraints, Boal approaches the process of coming to know the body primarily as de-mechanization. De-mechanization involves the intensification of "sensations he [or she] has lost the habit of recognising"[74] through embodied activities that playfully offer different ways of engaging with the world. For example, in an exercise called "minimum surface contact" participants explore bodily configurations that make the least contact with the ground. They are encouraged to experiment with every part of the body as the point of contact so as to experience the impact of gravity from various positions. After some time, an additional layer is introduced in which participants work in pairs—and subsequently with groups of four or more—minimizing contact with both their partner and the ground while maintaining a physical connection with each. Participants experience a variety of possibilities for how their body can experience carrying its weight both on its own and with support from others, exposing them to sensations uncommon in their everyday life activity.

Another example would be Boal's series of exercises on walking. He considers walking as a prime example of habituated action and includes more than a dozen variations on exercises and games for walking to "activate certain little-used muscle structures" and consider "the possibilities of our bodies."[75] These include the relatively common "slow motion race" in which

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[73]Boal, *Games for Actors*, 29.

[74]Boal, *Games for Actors*, 30.

[75]Boal, *Games for Actors*, 70.

participants must—without ever coming to a stop—take large steps while endeavoring to be the last person across the finish line, multiple versions of walking while leaning against another person, walking in the style of various animals, walking using your buttocks as feet, and efforts to embody the gait of others (different culture, nationality, class, etc.) through imitation. While these activities specifically de-mechanize the patterns of movement in walking and the previous one de-mechanizes the perception of weight, other activities focus on the de-mechanization of a variety of sensations and movements as well as breath, and even emotion.

The social dimension of embodiment only shows up in Boalian theory as "mechanization." He acknowledges that one's social and environmental context gives rise to specific patterns that structure one's body and, moreover, that restructuring takes place when we migrate or travel to different contexts. However, he theorizes the activities of the first stage of his performance practice primarily as *de*-mechanization, thus suggesting that his technique offers access to other modes of being in the world through a liminal stage in which one's body is divested of its ideological construction.

Philip Auslander similarly argues Boal's approach to the body as "inscribed by ideological discourses"[76] aligns him with a more classically Marxist understanding of alienation: "Boal's use of the basic categories of Marxism in his analysis of the body in performance suggests that, like Marx, Boal wants to overcome alienation and restore basic autonomy by eliminating actor and spectator in favor of the spect-actor, thus overcoming theatrical alienation."[77] He correctly notes that Boal does not take this "neutral"—or non-alienated—body as normative, approaching it—through a more post-modern framework—as a distancing that

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[76]Philip Auslander, "Boal, Blau, Brecht: The Body" in *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism* Ed. Mady Shutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz (New York: Routledge, 1994), 128.

[77]Auslander, "Boal, Blau, Brecht," 132.

enables the development of critical consciousness. In short, Boal conceptualizes his technique as a temporary evacuation of the social constitution of the body through its de-mechanization which—in providing access to other social masks for the body to assume—makes tangible the contingency of the body's ideological construction, thus developing the critical consciousness that he sees as the next necessary step in social transformation.

Social Change as Discourse

Although Boal's critical orientation to the body presents a significant development in a Marxist trajectory insofar as it emphasizes affect as the foundation of a process of social transformation, the enduring stress on the development of consciousness—whether critical or class—and on rational-critical discussion in a dialectic of transformation threaten to undermine the value of centering the body in the first place. I believe performance for social change practitioners need to think beyond the limitations of an approach to social change that values embodiment only as a means to critical consciousness through reflection.

Boal's approach to change is one that is initially grounded in the body, but must subsequently proceed through language and discourse into social and political spheres. This orientation to the process of social change can be observed in (1) his theory of affect, (2) his sequential organization of the poetics of the oppressed, and (3) the prototypical schema of his techniques from the gamercises to Forum theatre.

While Boal uses embodied experience to intensify sensations afforded low priority in everyday life, he argues that these affects only have genuine transformative value once they have been properly rationalized into one's existing ideological framework. This rationalization of affective intensities is a process of controlling their integration into cognitive structures and subsequently reinvesting them in the social field. Boal argues "an intense emotion memory

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exercise, or for that matter any emotion exercise, can be very dangerous unless one afterwards 'rationalises' what has happened."[78] Seemingly contradicting his own arguments regarding the mechanization of cognition as an embodied phenomenon, he suggests such rationalization often occurs simultaneously with the experience and is thus "immanent in the emotion," and further argues that "the important thing about emotion is what it signifies."[79] This effort to force affect into a process of signification—and an automatic one, at that—not only places additional unearned faith in conscious meaning-making as the primary—perhaps even exclusive—site of social change but also denies the transformative capacities of affective intensities.[80]

Boal's preference for a rational-discursive approach to social change also manifests in his sequential organization of the poetics of the oppressed. As mentioned previously, he breaks down his poetics into a series of four stages: knowing the body, making the body expressive, theatre as language, and theatre as discourse.[81] While the early stages are focused on exploring bodily capacities through performance activities, subsequent stages emphasize critical discussion of possible social actions—as in Forum theatre—and politically-committed interventions into the social and political spheres—such as invisible theatre and newspaper theatre. This sequential organization implies a progression from somatics through linguistic reflection to discursive intervention, suggesting that social transformation must culminate in public discourse.

Finally, Boal's approach to social change is also embedded in the action-reflection model repeated throughout his various techniques. This action-reflection model, which directly mirrors

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[78]Boal, *Games for Actors*, 35.

[79]Boal, *Games for Actors*, 36-7.

[80]This need to instrumentalize emotion contains strong echoes of the rationalism Brecht's epic theatre approach, though Vidar Thorsteinsson argues Brecht himself eventually moved away from this position. See: Vidar Thorsteinsson, "The Affective Reversal of Brecht's Dramatic Theory." *Cultural Critique* 97 (2017): 57-83.

[81]Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 126.

Freire's pedagogy, is clearly visible in the schematic pattern of both the gamercises and the forum theatre process. While most of the de-mechanizing activities of the initial stages of the poetics of the oppressed are undertaken silently, they are typically followed by collective discussion facilitated by the Joker. In these discussions, participants reflect upon their experience of the game and find ways to verbalize their sensations from the embodied play. Some facilitators strive to develop these discussions into complex collective reflections on social difference and strategies for social change. Similarly, Forum Theatre adopts an action-reflection model as participants oscillate between the enactment of potential solutions and evaluation of these enactments in collective discussion. Whether it is this reflexive discussion after activities, the development toward the discursive in the poetics of the oppressed, or the value placed on rational-critical discussion in evaluating Forum theatre interventions, TO exhibits a tendency to subordinate affect to the development of consciousness and critical discourse in social transformation.

The rationalization of affect into existing conceptual frameworks in order to support conscious reflection and critical discussion risks evacuating the affective of its critical revolutionary potential and reinforcing an understanding of embodied subjectivity as akin to neoliberal individuality. Especially in the context of democratic inclusion and equality that tend to be cultivated in the relatively horizontal forms of discussion cultivated in TO, common sense conceptual frameworks tend to dominate. Thus, the critical affective experimentation accomplished in embodied action tends to be recuperated in the "openness" of collective discursive reflection. Grounded in this understanding of Boalian theory and practice, I consider existing efforts to renew TO by supplementing it with the work of more recent critical social theorists.

Theorizing Beyond Boal

The efforts of various TO scholar-practitioners to pair Boalian techniques with the social

and political theory of other thinkers tend to cluster around Judith Butler's performativity, Pierre

Bourdieu's habitus, or discursive theories of political subjectivity like that of Chantal Mouffe

and Ernesto Laclau. While performance for social change could undoubtedly benefit from these

theories and existing scholarly literature and creative practice attest to this fact, I contend that the

works of these thinkers are ultimately inadequate to address the criticisms increasingly levelled

at TO. This assessment builds on scholarly critiques of Butler's notion of performativity as

insufficiently able to account for social context or Bourdieu's notion of habitus as overly

deterministic,[82] but also specifically address how these theories interact with Boal's unique

contributions. Ultimately, I contend that application of these theories to TO subverts the value of

Boal's critical approach to the body without offering substantive inspiration for reimagining

Boalian techniques in ways that make them less susceptible to neoliberal frameworks.

<u>Butler</u>

Butler's concept of performativity has much to offer performance for social change

practitioners, especially those working with groups organized around social identity categories

such as race, gender, sexuality, or citizenship status. Because it can generate greater creativity by

insulating performers from the harshest aspects of social identity enforcement, the theatrical

frame of artistic performance offers unique opportunities for the rehearsal of identity as well as

for experimentation with possibilities for the performative reconstitution of its social meanings.

Thus, scholar-practitioners combining Boal and Butler frequently explore the value of Forum

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[82]Terry Lovell, "Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu." *Feminist Theory* 1, 1 (2000):11-32; Lise Nelson "Bodies (and Spaces) Do Matter: The Limits of Performativity" *Gender Place and Culture – a Journal of Feminist Geography* 6, 4 (1999): 331-353; Julia Nentwich, et al. "Change Agency As Performance and Embeddedness: Exploring the Possibilities and Limits of Butler and Bourdieu." *Culture and Organization* 21, 3 (2015):235-250.

theatre as a social space for the rehearsal and performative reconstitution of social identity.[83]

These applications of the theory of performativity to the technique of Forum theatre complement

the implications of Boal's approach to TO as a "rehearsal for revolution" in which "the

spectator-actor practices a real act even though he [or she] does it in a fictional manner."[84]

While there is undoubtedly value in such a blending, combining Boalian techniques with

Butlerian theory fails to generate an adequate rejoinder to the criticisms faced by TO. Butler's

understanding of the performative materialization of reality through repetition and citation

allows only for a constrained form of agency through the iterative performance of identity in

everyday life. She sees "the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic of power,

such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their

materialization and the signification of those material effects."[85] The identitarian discursive

orientation of Butlerian theory reduces the body exclusively to a construction of power devoid of

its own political potential outside of established frameworks for rearticulation. Thus, despite her

later attempts to consider collective performativity,[86] Butler emphasizes strategic essentialism

and an interindividual politics of collectivity, thus reinforcing rather than challenging the

individualist mindset to critical social action plaguing TO.

Moreover, reimagining TO with Butler's discursive approach to the body at is core would

threaten to reverse the basis of Boalian practice, which situates affect and embodied subjectivity

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[83]Daniel Banks, "Unperforming 'race': Strategies for Reimagining Identity" in *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, Ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York: Routledge, 2006); Nira Yuval-Davis and Erene Kaptani, "Performing Identities: Participatory Theatre among Refugees" in *Theorizing Identities and Social Action*, ed. Margaret Wetherell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Susan Sommerfeldt, et al. "Considering Performativity as Methodology and Phenomena." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 15, 2 (2014).

[84]Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 141.

[85]Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xii.

[86]Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

as an engine of social and political transformation. Despite submitting the efficacy of novel sensations to their rationalization, Boal's approach to the politics of the body contrasts its susceptibility to social mechanization with the generative and transformative character of sensation. Butler's conception of the body is incompatible with this understanding of the sensory body as a significant site of politics. Butlerian theory may pair well with Forum theatre to enhance exploration of the performativity of identity, however, as a potential supplement to Boal's larger body of work, it cannot counteract the influence of an individualizing and responsibilizing neoliberal politics and risks invalidating the essential contribution of the techniques.

Bourdieu

Other scholar-practitioners have turned to Bourdieu and his notion of habitus to enrich Boalian theory and practice. The strongest articulations of the argument for a Bourdieusian approach to TO come from Eva Österlind.[87] Focusing on Forum theatre and the techniques of Boal's Rainbow of Desire, she deploys the concept of habitus to account for the stability and continuity of social action while hypothesizing TO's capacity to overcome the intransigence of habitual patterns of action through the embodied rehearsal of new possibilities. Bourdieu's notion of habitus—which he describes as "a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions"[88]—includes physical activity—or hexis—as well as patterns of sensation, thought, and valuation. Closely according with Boal's notion of mechanization, hexis for Bourdieu is "political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a

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[87]Eva Österlind, "Acting Out of Habits - Can Theatre of the Oppressed Promote Change? Boal's Theatre Methods in Relation to Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus." *Research in Drama Education*, 13, 1, (2008): 71-82; Eva Österlind, "Forum Play" in *Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education*. ed. Shifra Schonmann (Rotterdam: Sense, 2011).

[88]Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 95.

durable manner of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking."[89] The notion of social transformation in a Bourdieusian tradition is contested.

In Boalian fashion, Österlind's application of Bourdieusian theory to TO relies upon conscious reflection to direct changes in embodied habitus, which is the first of two possible approaches to change. Greg Noble and Megan Watkins describe this approach as "a dialectic of bringing behaviour to consciousness in order to alter it, and then habituating that behavior."[90]

Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago conducts Image Theatre as part of its "Breaking the Educational Machine" workshop with Kuumba Lynx.
Photo by Tania Giordani

While there is some evidence that Bourdieu would accept a limited version of this approach to changing habitus through reflexive awareness,[91] the political valence of that transformation would be determined by the reflective philosophical habitus to which it was subjected. In accordance with my argument regarding Boal's humanist Marxism, such an approach renders the embodied aspects of performance for social change subordinate to cognitive transformation in a field dominated by neoliberal logics and locates the political efficacy of TO in the political education of facilitators and their capacity to adeptly direct discursive processes of collective reflection. Therefore, this application of Bourdieu's work to TO fails to address the criticisms of the existing techniques.

[89]Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 69-70.

[90]Greg Noble and Megan Watkins, "So, How Did Bourdieu Learn to Play Tennis? Habitus, Consciousness and Habituation." *Cultural Studies* 17, 3-4 (2003): 535.

[91]Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Waquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 137.

The second approach to the transformation of habitus focuses on how social life is transmitted on a bodily level through everyday performances without requiring subjective intervention or intentionality. According to Lisa Wade, under this approach change occurs through the interplay between a "multiplicitous social world" and a "fractured habitus."[92] Performance for social change, thus, would be one embodied technique vying for relevance within this muddled social sphere. In emphasizing how "schemes are able to pass directly from practice to practice without moving through discourse and consciousness,"[93] this approach shares much in common with my critique of Boal's emphasis on critical consciousness but offers little insight regarding how to reimagine Boalian techniques in the face of neoliberalism. Much like with Bulter's performativity, the critical potential of the body is again seemingly foreclosed, becoming merely a byproduct of various social fields.

Fisher's Radical Democratic Theatre

In a line of thinking distinct from these Bourdieusian and Butlerian orientations, Tony Fisher offers a unique re-articulation of TO which draws upon the political theory Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau as well as that of Jacques Rancière in order to "trace the limits of Boalian thought."[94] Fisher argues that Boalian techniques conceptualize internalized oppression as an ideological misrecognition to be overcome through becoming conscious of the reality the oppressive relation. He maintains that the failures of this approach are the result of Boal's psychoanalytic—rather than Foucauldian—understanding of subjectivity. While Fisher's criticisms flatten many of the complexities of Boalian theory—which is admittedly scattered,

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[92] Lisa Wade, "The Emancipatory Promise of the Habitus: Lindy Hop, the Body, and Social Change." *Ethnography* 12, 2, (2011): 226.

[93] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 74.

[94] Tony Fisher, "Radical Democratic Theatre" *Performance Research* 16, 4 (2011): 15.

fragmentary, and at times contradictory—and neglect the diversity of TO techniques, his core theoretical argument is sound and accords closely with my own critique of Boal's humanist Marxism.

Building on Boal's notion of the spectactor, Fisher advocates what he calls a "radical democratic theatre" that recognizes performance as an intervention into processes of subjectification. This radical democratic theatre operates on a twofold basis, first "uncoupling [subjects] from the discursive regime of truth according to which they are 'interpellated'" and then re-articulating "those subjects through a counter-hegemonic process in which political power is challenged and redistributed."[95] He argues that, in order to accomplish this, practitioners of performance for social change should focus on collective political action through creative protest rather than the other techniques of TO, such as the gamercises, image theatre, or Forum theatre.

Focusing exclusively on direct and collective confrontation with the political status quo, Fisher's radical democratic theatre eludes the criticisms faced by TO regarding its individualizing and responsibilizing tendencies by discarding its elements that focus exclusively on the politics of the body in favor of those that address the political sphere directly. Fisher argues for destabilizing political identities by staging an "encounter between subjects and the conditions of their subjection" in order to "reconfigure social agency by withdrawing the subject from those techniques of supervision that aim to suppress dissidence."[96] Leaping over the exploration of the body in the first two stages of the poetics of the oppressed as well as its application to the politics of the everyday in the third stage, he dismisses the initial tools of Boal's production of the spectactor in favor of those from the fourth stage, "theatre as

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[95]Fisher, "Radical Democratic Theatre," 24.

[96]Fisher, "Radical Democratic Theatre," 25.

discourse," which incline more toward political theatre and protest, such as invisible theatre, newspaper theatre, and direct action. Eliminating the somatic components of TO, Fisher relies exclusively on discursive approaches—Mouffe and Laclau's theorization of the indeterminacy and volatility of political identity which he refers to as "the democratic limitation" and Rancière's concept of the "the democratic excess"—in order to account for the reconfiguration of subjectivity.[97] In this way, he effectively circumvents the critiques of TO's compatibility with neoliberalism but abandons the technique's emphases on the body and the politics of the everyday.

While I agree with Fisher's emphasis on subjectivity as the cornerstone for reimagining TO, I advocate a continued focus on its embodied and existential dimensions. Rather than treat the embodied exploration of the gamercises as inherently individualizing or the politics of the everyday as implicitly responsibilizing, I consider the multi-stage process of Boal's poetics of the oppressed crucial to the transformation of subjectivity in a context within which neoliberalism structures subjects down to the level of perception, valuation, and action. I also share his interest in creative protest and direct confrontation as a means to reconfiguring subjectivity as collective. However, I do so not to the exclusion of other elements of performance for social change, and I emphasize the somatic dimensions of this production of collectivity.

Affect and Critical Somatics

Whether Fisher's radical democratic theatre or efforts to redevelop Boalian techniques with the theories of Butler or Bourdieu, existing attempts to retheorize TO tend to reduce embodiment to a discursive effect with little to no potential for reshaping the socio-political field, reinforcing strategies that privilege the development of critical consciousness and an

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[97]Rancière's notion of the distribution of the sensible suggests a somewhat larger role for the body than the work of Mouffe and Laclau, but nevertheless remains focused on political efficacy as legibility in registers of visibility and sayability.

identitarian discursive approach to politics. What I advocate in contradistinction to these efforts

is the modification of TO and other approaches to performance to social change in accordance

with an affective orientation to cultural politics. Insofar as they "refer equally to the body and the

mind; and […] involve both reason and the passions,"[98] theories of affect imply the existence of

an embodied cognition that is not additive—i.e., not a ex post facto grafting of the body onto an

existing notion of cognition—but a distinct mode of knowing. Under such a framework,

neoliberalism is not merely a set of consciously held attitudes or a discursively constituted

political subjectivity, but entails existential practices of relationality. Although the transactional

and extractive relations of neoliberal life are justified by capitalist discourse and political

frameworks, they are grounded in a lived and embodied knowledge comprised of patterns of

perception and action that need not directly involve conscious thought.

Therefore, in order for performance for social change to resist such patterns, it must also

operate on an embodied and affective basis. Forms of collective life emerge from these patterns

of lived and embodied relationality, aligning an affective approach to performance for social

change with a prefigurative approach to politics. In her analysis of a Forum theatre piece on

homelessness in Vancouver, Canada, Emily Beausoliel stresses the role of embodied practice in

the actualization of democratic values in collective processes, arguing that:

> cognitive and verbal strategies, while privileged in democratic politics, are often
> insufficient to cultivate the receptivity that constitutes the most basic premise of
> democratic encounters across difference. This is because receptivity is, by definition, an
> affective state, and the decision to open oneself to alternative views is thus both a
> precognitive and embodied one.[99]

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[98]Michael Hardt. "What Affects are Good For" in *The Affective Turn*, eds. Patricia Clough and Jean Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), ix.

[99]Emily Beausoleil, "The politics, science, and art of receptivity." *Ethics and Global Politics* 7, 1 (2014): 21.

This kind of receptivity is foundational to democratic life and cannot be effectively generated exclusively through consciousness-raising and critical discussion. Neoliberal collectivity—i.e., a calculated and highly contingent collectivity under constant threat by competition and individual interest—is likewise experienced and cultivated on an affective level. Recognizing this, an affective approach to TO would explore the possibilities for cultivating horizontal modes of relationality and interdependent forms of collectivity through embodied experimentation.

Thus, in an effort to remain true to the core contributions of Boalian theory and practice while amending and extending them to better combat the dominance of neoliberal logics of action, I argue that practitioners of TO and other forms of performance for social change should develop what I call a "critical somatics." Questioning normative frameworks for systematizing our sensory experience and bodily capacities, critical somatics designates praxes that engage the politics and possibilities of embodiment through experimentation on the level of feeling, sensation, and enactive capacities.

As a somatic approach, it draws inspiration from long-standing techniques, such as those of Irmgard Bartenieff, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and Moshé Feldenkris, but also connects to the work of innumerable contemporary somatic practitioners working in an activist, social justice, or anti-oppression orientation, what Martha Eddy or Sylvie Fortin would describe as a "social somatics" approach.[100] This approach to somatics is one of the central frameworks of adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*.[101] Like Boal's work, these critical approaches often respond to "the repressive effects of culture on the embodiment of the self, and also speculate on the

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[100]Martha Eddy, *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* (Bristol: Intellect, 2017); Sylvie Fortin, "Looking for blind spots in somatics' evolving pathways." *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 9, 2 (2017): 145-157.

[101]brown, *Emergent Strategies*, 202.

impact of processes of undoing, de-culturing, or un-conditioning."[102] In spite of this deconstructive approach, however, somatic practices largely adopt a therapeutic orientation, rather than—as Hillel Braude argues—understanding somatics as a radical practice with a "largely untapped potential to transform the social body politic."[103]

While engaging with this field of work, my use of the term "critical somatics" emphasizes the political dimensions embodied practice and draws extensively on the insights of scholars of performance and affect to theorize the relationship between the somatic and the socio-political. It echoes Nicole Anderson's use of the term to describe an "experiential and activist" interdisciplinary project "designed to illuminate the psychological, social, and ecological interface, and to describe the complex and dynamic inter-relationships of the constituent elements of this interface,"[104] and attends to research connecting creative practice with new forms of embodied knowledge, such as Petra Kuppers's notion of "eco soma" which focuses on "embodied labors of attention on the limits of self and world, a phenomenology that incorporates imagination with tentative reaching toward intersubjectivity and otherness."[105] This critical orientation encourages an attunement to the constitution and reconstitution of embodied subjectivity in a field of practice already dense with the disciplining effects of economic and political life.

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[102]Kirsty Alexander and Thomas Kampe "Bodily undoing: Somatics as practices of critique." *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 9, 1 (2017): 4.

[103]Hillel Braude, "Radical Somatics" in *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformation through Dance, Yoga, and Touch*, ed. Sondra Fraleigh (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 124.

[104]Nicole Anderson, *Critical Somatics: Theory and Method* (Portland, OR: Marylhurst University, 2010), 8, 6-7.

[105]Petra Kuppers, *Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 29.

Benefits of a Critical Somatics

Such a critical somatics would have a number of benefits that simultaneously embrace the critical contributions of TO while also enhancing the ways in which its techniques approach the production of subjectivity and challenging neoliberal individualism by engaging with collectivity at the somatic level. The affective theories that I advocate in this regard advance at least three crucial conceptual contributions to techniques of performance for social change; they: (1) acknowledge the critical potential of the body without relapsing into naïve humanism, (2) de-emphasize the role of consciousness and rational-critical discussion in somatic approaches to social change, (3) resist individualist tendencies by imagining the possibilities for collectivity rooted in embodiment rather than identity and discourse. I will explore each of these conceptual contributions in greater detail.

First, the affective theories I draw upon in this retheorization of TO recognize the messy complexity of embodiment by approaching the body as an emergent multiplicity. Such an approach to embodiment challenges the notion that all sensations are always-already properly categorized within a pre-established body schema—i.e., "the five senses." Instead, embodiment itself is an incomplete and on-going process; although a body may attain a level of relative stability insofar as its capacities for sensing and action are trained and disciplined, it never achieves closure or becomes completely fixed. Erin Manning, for instance, conceptualizes bodies as metastable sets of relations and focuses less on bodily continuity than on what she calls bodying: "a body in the midst of a process of becoming."[106] This notion of bodying accords well with a critical somatics approach and supports the reconfiguration of sensation, valuation, and movement.

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[106]Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 189.

Most importantly, however, this understanding of the body as emergent and processual challenges various poststructuralist conceptions of the body as exclusively a discursive product without reverting to a naïve humanism that appeals to an untenable concept of human nature. Although there is no "neutral" or "natural" body untouched by ideology, neither are bodies ever entirely determined by discursive structures of power. Retheorizing TO with theories of affect would enable us to conceptualize the critical potential of somatic exploration without falling back on arguments articulated from a classical humanist viewpoint—as Boal himself was wont to do.[107] This shift encourages us to see Boal's embodied exercises as actualizing somatic potentials and exploring emergent bodily sensations rather than as restoring capacities for authentic human feeling and action that have been lost as a result of processes of bodily mechanization.

The main impact that this insight would have on how we practice TO would be to encourage greater attention to the design, deployment, and execution of the performance-based activities—or gamercises. Many TO practitioners seem to approach these playful embodied activities as largely interchangeable pre-fabricated programmatic elements intended either as mere inducements to abstract community-building or as enactive illustrations of oppression. I know that I have been guilty of this myself, and so perhaps I say this more as a self-indictment than anything else. Nevertheless, I argue that TO would benefit greatly from an emergent understanding of the body rooted in theories affect. In particular, deep consideration of the capacity for performance-based exercises to unlock new sensations and experiences of embodiment could support the redesign of these exercises as well as provide a clearer assessment of how they can best support a wider TO program.

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[107]Michael Taussig, Richard Schechner, and Augusto Boal, "Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal." *TDR: Drama Review* 34, 3 (1990): 50-65.

Secondly, reimagining TO with theories of affect would stress the significance of the somatic in constituting subjectivity while simultaneously conceptualizing pathways to social change that circumvent consciousness. These theories combine poststructuralist notions of the embeddedness of subjectivity with a phenomenological understanding of its embodied character. John Protevi offers such an approach to the politics of affect, describing his perspective as one of "political physiology." His political physiology articulates the concept of bodies politic so as to "capture the emergent—that is, the embodied and embedded—character of subjectivity," but also stresses that "subjectivity is sometimes bypassed in favor of a direct linkage of the social and the somatic."[108] Such affective theories enhance a critical somatic approach by conceptualizing the potential for change that leaps from the somatic to the social without needing to be transmitted through the conscious subject.

In de-emphasizing consciousness—whether critical, class, or revolutionary—theories of affect like Protevi's question the centrality of rationalization and critical discussion in techniques of performance for social change. These processes have been central to the development of critical consciousness in a Boalian approach. However, discursive rationalization can allow the politics of dominant conceptual frameworks to supersede the critical potential of emergent sensations. Rather than rationalizing these new sensations in order to force them into a form that fits within our conscious framework, I believe that an affective approach suggests that we should explore them more fully on an embodied level in order for them to support the emergence of new relational fields and modes of life. If the somatic can leap over subjectivity to directly impact the social, the development of consciousness—which has been central to a Boalian approach— becomes merely one possible pathway for the applicability of a critical somatics approach.

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[108]John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 33, xi.

As a result, we might reconsider the priority accorded to critical discussion in TO techniques, and especially the embodied performance exercises. While Boal's action-reflection model endeavors to achieve a balance between embodied exploration and collective discussion, it is difficult to escape the creeping primacy of discursive processing. In line with a consciousness-raising model, many participants in TO workshops identify the rationalization of their experience in the activities as the initial outcome of their participation—which they anticipate will later lead to action in everyday life—and practitioners correspondingly seem to situate the critical and creative components of their role as facilitators in the discursive improvisation of group discussions. My own experience has been that transformation frequently erupts onto the level of discourse but that it is rarely generated or resolved there. Because some techniques—like Forum theatre—may prove to be too grounded in a consciousness-raising framework to be amenable to this insight, I argue that discussion should be de-emphasized—not entirely disregarded. However, an affective approach to TO could enhance many of the existing techniques—perhaps, for instance, by reconsidering the pattern of "enact then discuss" that so frequently defines the gamercises—as well as the development of novel variations or entirely new techniques. Ultimately, I believe that techniques rooted in an affective framework could better resist individualist tendencies by giving greater attention to somatic exploration than to its rationalization into consciousness and discourse.

Lastly, these theories of affect conceptualize the possibility for collectivity outside of an identitarian framework by emphasizing the social character of affect. Various affective approaches consider the constitution of collectivity to be a result of the circulation of affects or a process of collective bodying through transindividual affect—often with a particular emphasis on touch. Sara Ahmed, for instance, theorizes collectivity through the circulation of affect, arguing

that "it is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies."[109] Manning, on the other hand, extends her notion of bodying to collectivity, maintaining that "there is no body that isn't always already collective."[110] An affective approach to collectivity is emergent, grounded in embodiment, feeling, and sensation rather than discourse and identity.

This conceptualization of collectivity as embodied and emergent contrasts strongly with the notion of the collective as produced in the dominant modes of engagement in social and political spheres. These modes of engagement tend to reinforce individualizing processes of subjectification and situate collective efforts as a product of a collection of individuals or the work of a discursively defined group. Rooted in sensations that are not clearly categorizable within existing frameworks of perception and do not lend themselves to clear subject/object distinctions, emergent collectivity resists the individualism—whether classical or neoliberal—in such approaches without reverting to a premodern notion of collectivity as a supposedly natural and relatively harmonious community from which the individual is produced. In this way, it resembles the collectivity of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's concept of hapticality, which is "a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you… that no individual can stand, and no state abide."[111] This kind of feeling produces emergent collectivity not only in the sense of embodied sociality, but also involves nonhuman relations and is thereby productive of posthuman ecologies.

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[109]Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22, 2 (2004), 128.

[110]Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 27.

[111]Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 98.

Retheorizing TO as a critical somatics based on the insights of theories of affect would encourage exploration of the pre-cognitive and non-discursive aspects of collectivity. Creative embodied activity often reinforces a sense of individuality and encourages objectifying relations with human and nonhuman others. If we are to truly challenge individualist tendencies in TO, it is not enough simply to focus on those techniques that involve collective action. In addition to making better and more consistent use of collective political action techniques, I believe that we as performance for social change practitioners must approach collectivity as phenomenological and thus give greater attention to the design and execution of activities oriented toward embodied exploration and the "demechanization" of bodies. The way to build collectivity into subjectivity is not (only) through engagement with political formations but through the sensorium; individualism will dominate subjectivity so long as collectivity is experienced as only part of one's socio-political embeddedness and not also in one's body.

In Excess of Technique

In order to stay both practically and theoretically relevant, Theatre of the Oppressed must resist the closure of excessive professionalization and continue to evolve in response to the specific socio-political contexts in which it is deployed. TO's critical approach to embodiment offers an effective engagement with the politics of everyday experience, but its emphasis on transformation through rationalization, reflective discussion, and the development of consciousness threaten to undermine this contribution. Especially in cultural contexts in which rationality has become a shorthand for white, Western, capitalist, and masculine forms of common sense, the subordination of an embodied approach to discursive mechanisms leaves performance for social change vulnerable to appropriation and recuperation by dominant and oppressive ways of thinking.

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The ascendancy of neoliberal individualism, in particular, presents unique challenges for the practice of TO as it currently exists. Having experienced the benefits first-hand, I do not deny the transformative value and potential of discursive and cognitive approaches. However, these approaches shift the locus of politics from the embodied practices onto the facilitation of the Joker and their capacities to guide collective discursive exploration, thus undercutting the value of an embodied approach. Moreover, performance for social change techniques that don't adopt a critical approach to embodied relationality risk reinforcing an individualist mindset. Building on a history of mutability and adaptability in TO, I seek to reimage performance for social change in accordance with affective theory. Recognizing that social transformation can occur on a somatic level without necessarily rising to consciousness, such a reimagined TO will—I argue—more effectively challenge the politics of neoliberal individualism. With so much of collective life linguistically mediated and/or highly regulated and regimented—especially in the cultures of the contemporary US—there are so few opportunities, particularly for adults, to relate in a fully embodied way. Performance for social change can offer a venue for the exploration of relationality on a level of embodied cognition, cultivating socially transformative modes of relationality and forms of collectivity.

One of the performance exercises that Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago developed during our collaborations was an activity that we called "the social machine." We imagined this activity as a way of illustrating and exploring in an embodied way the functioning of large social institutions, like the Chicago public school system. Building on Boal's "Columbian hypnosis" in which a "hypnotizer" controls the movements of another who must keep their face a short distance from the palm of the "hypnotizer," we organized a groups of participants into a "social machine" in which different people represented different players within an institutional structure,

forced to follow one or more superiors. Based on participants' perceptions of the character of the

relationship being represented, they would choose which body part they would follow. For

instance, in the example of the school system, one person might represent a school principal,

who would follow the "superintendent's" hip with their chest while two "teachers" followed

their hands with their faces. The "social machine" could grow quite large and complex

depending on the number of participants and the level of detail in the analysis of the institution's

structure.

Observing performances of this "social machine" activity frequently offered an

entertainingly accurate representation of the messiness of institutional life. The relatively slow,

simple, and controlled movements of the "mayor" filtered down the hierarchy to incredibly rapid

and chaotic activity at the level of the "students." The experience of participating in the "social

machine," however, offered a much narrower perspective. While I recall having some awareness

of the larger chaos happening around me, I mostly remember these experiences as ones in which

I was focused primarily on following my "leader" and to a much lesser extend on keeping track

of my "followers."

The creativity in defining the embodied relations of leading and following generated

interesting and unique collective "social machines," and I believe that this exercise offered

participants far more than an illustration of institution hierarchy. As performance for social

change experiments with collectivity on the level of embodied cognition, moments of learning

and innovation are likely to come as an excess of the techniques constructed. Erin Manning

argues that technique only modifies the conditions of emergence, opening the possibilities for

alterity through exceeding the technique in "a minor gesture" that opens onto the "more-than" of

the technique.[112] Danielle Dick McGeough describes something similar in Theatre of the Oppressed, saying "the most powerful moments of learning occur through the body because it is so difficult to discipline. In TO learning happens when our bodies fail to hold an image or unintentionally respond to a situation. Two people accidentally touch and recognize their interdependence."[113] I believe that the greatest transformative capacity of performance for social change is to be found in precisely these moments.

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[112]Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 125-126.

[113]Jennifer Freitag, et al., "The Boalian Communication Classroom: A Conversation about the Body, Dialogue, and Social Transformation" in *Come Closer: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed*, ed. Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 74.

SOCIAL FLESH IN THE INTERPLAY PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

In the previous chapter, I made the case that Theatre of the Oppressed would benefit from insights of affect theorists in order to develop a critical somatic approach that is less susceptible to neoliberal logics of individualism and responsibilization. In this chapter, I argue that a somatic approach—although vital in this regard—is insufficient without a critical orientation to collectivity as embodied. I demonstrate this insufficiency by exploring the strengths and limitations of another performance for social change technique: Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter's InterPlay. InterPlay is a performance practice, embodied philosophy, and international social movement committed to human sustainability, community connection, and playful creativity.

I argue that the embodied and arts-based orientation of the InterPlay technique offers unique insights for the constitution of inclusive and equitable community. Through an examination of contemporary efforts by the InterPlay community to address racial equity within the movement, I contrast a more conscious and individualistic approach applied in predominantly outward-facing workshops with the development of corporeal affective bonds within the movement that do not require mediation in language and consciousness. I theorize the collection of these bonds as a form of social flesh constituting the body of the collective. In particular, I focus on a spontaneous and racially-charged conflict at the annual InterPlay Leaders Gathering in 2018 during which I witnessed the emergence of a sensing/feeling collectivity capable of processing complex social traumas. Ultimately, I suggest that an affective approach to social change—while crucial—will prove ineffective against the increasing ubiquity of

neoliberal politics unless it is undertaken with an attention to collectivity and the facilitation of such a social flesh.

This analysis is the result of an extensive and sustained program of engaged research conducted with the InterPlay community over many years. My relationship with this community began when I first started attending monthly workshops with the Washington DC chapter in 2014. In addition to numerous workshops, retreats, and conferences in the intervening years, I have completed many of the organization's major training programs,[114] becoming a certified leader of the technique in 2020. In alignment with my personal and scholarly values, I have also contributed to the InterPlay movement by serving in various organizational capacities and supporting its efforts to cultivate equity and inclusion.[115] In this way, I have sought to ensure that my research relationship with this community has not been extractive, but a mutually beneficial commitment grounded in care and reciprocity.

Because Boalian theory and techniques continue to stand synecdochically for performance for social change as a whole in scholarly literature, this in-depth study of InterPlay is particularly important, contributing to the diversification of case studies within this discourse. Although it shares some practical and conceptual affinities with Theatre of the Oppressed, InterPlay offers a fundamentally different approach to performance for social change rooted in distinct histories and frameworks. The InterPlay technique exhibits a fundamentally affective

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[114]These programs include the Art and Social Change program in Oakland during the summer of 2015, the Life Practice Program in 2016 with the DC community, the Secrets of Leading in Chicago in 2018, and the InterPlay Teaching Practicum in Raleigh, North Carolina in 2019.

[115]I have donated well over a thousand hours in service to the InterPlay community and its governing non-profit, Body Wisdom, Inc. I served for four years on Body Wisdom's Board of Directors from 2017 to 2021 and for four years as a member of InterPlay's Racial Equity and Transformation Committee from its inception in 2018 until its restructuring in 2022. I volunteered for a special task team organized to research, hire, and facilitate the work of racial equity consultants as they conducted an organizational assessment and identified strategic planning goals for continuing efforts. Also, as part of a multi-racial team, I contributed to the design, implementation, and administration of grants to support BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) projects engaged in the application of InterPlay to racial justice initiatives.

approach in its ontology, its epistemology, and its theory of change. Characterizing all knowledge as embodied, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of cognition and sentiment in the body and constructs the tools of its "embodied philosophy" based on bodily exploration and experimentation.

InterPlay's unique orientation to performance for social change has thus far received only limited attention in existing scholarly literature. Concentrated primarily in education and in religious studies, the scarce extant scholarship on the InterPlay technique tends to treat it as an applied research tool rather than a central case study and thus offers only a cursory analysis of its underlying philosophy. Much of this literature focuses on applying its embodied epistemology in educational contexts,[116] often with a particular focus on dance and performance training,[117] and by exploring it as a performance-based research method.[118] Some approach the technique as a form of embodied worship, describing its capacity to facilitate religious experience.[119] Through an extensive examination of the theory undergirding these applications, my work contributes to emerging interdisciplinary scholarship that sees InterPlay as engaged in "an intimate theorising

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[116]Gretchen Jayanti Wegner, "The Role of Improvisation and Imagination in Accessing Body-Based Ways of Knowing." *Practical Matters* 1, 1 (2009): 1-17; and Caroline M. Kisiel, "Designs for Embodiment and Soul: Offerings for Adult Learners in the Twenty-First Century College Classroom" in *Phenomenologies of Grace: The Body, Embodiment, and Transformative Futures* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[117]Mark Seton, "Nurturing Innovation in Performance Training" in *Creativity and Spirituality: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Maureen Miner and Martin Dowson (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2017); Celeste Snowber, "Dance as a Way of Knowing." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 134 (2012): 53-60; Sarah Carlson, "InterPlay: A Tool for Cultivating Expression in Technique Class" *Journal of Dance Education* 13 (2013): 61-63.

[118]Celeste Snowber, "Living, Moving, and Dancing: Embodied Ways of Inquiry" in *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, ed. Patricia Leavy (New York: Guilford Press, 2018); Kathryn Ricketts, "Creating Complex and Diverse Communities of Meaning Makers with Help from Remington" in *Perspectives on Arts Education Research in Canada*, ed. Bernard Andrews (Boston: Brill, 2019).

[119]Prashant Olalekar, "Amazing Grace: Play with the Poor as a Channel of Blessing" in *Phenomenologies of Grace: The Body, Embodiment, and Transformative Futures* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Courtney Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God's New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016); Celeste Snowber, "Dancers of Incarnation: From Embodied Prayer to Embodied Inquiry." *Théologiques* 25, 1 (2017): 125-138.

that accounts for the embodied experience of resistance" [120] and considers its contributions to social justice practice, with an emphasis on the navigation of the racial politics of the United States.[121]

Moreover, the InterPlay technique is also an ideal case study because the individualist disposition of the movement exists in tension with conceptual tools originating in the practice that suggest the embodied character of collectivity. Despite taking an affective approach to social change that engages embodied patterns of relationality, the InterPlay movement nevertheless exhibits tendencies characteristic of neoliberal common sense. In addition to manifesting in its individualistic approach to social change, these tendencies can be seen in the community's approach to internal organizational and cultural transformation, which frequently places responsibility for more equitable practices on minoritarian representatives occupying official or unofficial positions in the movement's power structure. Alongside these individualizing tendencies, however, there exist powerful community connections in the InterPlay movement capable of collectivizing affective processing in ways that can enhance efforts at social justice. Applicable beyond the specific context of the InterPlay movement, the insights gained from exploring the tension between these polarities speak to the need for artist-activists to support the cultivation of the social flesh of movement collectivities.

The chapter begins by offering a limited history of the InterPlay technique and a brief synopsis of some of its core practices and elements of its philosophical framework. This overview will emphasize how InterPlay exemplifies an affective approach to social change by

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[120]Marcus Bussey, "'We shall rise':Intimate Theory and Embodied Dissent" in *Dynamics of Dissent: Theorizing Movements for Inclusive Futures*, eds. John Clammer, Meera Chakravorty, Marcus Bussey, Tanmayee Banerjee (London: Routledge, 2019), 146.

[121]Caroline Kisiel and Dan Hibbler, "Biracial Families in Park and Recreation Spaces: A Case Study of Six Families, Implications and Possibilities." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 38, 3 (2020): 112-132; Daniel Dilliplane, "The InterPlay Performance Practice: Play and Social Change in Late Capitalism." MA Thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2016.

highlighting (1) its rejection of mind/body dualism and assertion of a physical—i.e., bodily—component to all experience; (2) its theory of knowledge as always already embodied and impassioned; and (3) its advocacy of an orientation to social change that de-emphasizes conscious and linguistic processing in order to focus on bodily sensation and habitual action. I will demonstrate that, in spite of its foundations in an embodied orientation, InterPlay's current approach to racial equity operates primarily within a representative framework. This contradiction stems in part from a resistance to the embodied aspects of collectivity—especially collectivity across social difference—rooted in the movement's self-directed approach to social change and its acceptance of a conventional body schema. These elements of the InterPlay technique reinforce the dominance of a form of neoliberal individualism that is ultimately in conflict with the values of equity and inclusion—which require a cultural and collective orientation to social problems.

However, the seeds of an understanding of collectivity as embodied already exist in InterPlay's embodied philosophy, and I deploy them in my theorization of a social flesh across which affect is shared, distributed, and transformed. I conclude by recounting a spontaneous and racially-charged conflict at the 2018 InterPlay Leaders Gathering conference in order to illustrate how the cultivation of strong affective bonds through collective embodied creativity can support the emergence of a sensing/feeling collectivity capable of processing deep social wounds that stand in the way of equity and inclusion efforts.

The InterPlay Technique: An Affective Approach

"InterPlay is an active, creative way to unlock the wisdom of the body."
–InterPlay Training Manual

InterPlay is an accessible performance practice that centers the body as the site of knowledge and creativity and encourages embodied play as a means to human sustainability and

community connection. Building upon their experience in liturgical dance, Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter formally established the InterPlay technique in 1989, extending and developing it based on the explorations of their Oakland-based performance troupe *Wing It!*. InterPlay is currently practiced in over fifty cities worldwide with active chapters in the United States, Canada, Australia, India, and throughout Europe and by practitioners scattered across the globe from Mexico to Malawi to Singapore.

The international community of InterPlay practitioners utilizes the technique in a variety of contexts, from social work and therapy to spiritual practice and community building. Performance groups like Atlanta's *Soulprint Players*, the *Wing & a Prayer Pittsburgh Players*, and North Carolina's *Off the Deep End* use InterPlay both as performance training and as a set of structures for improvisational performance. Local InterPlay chapters hold regular play sessions and meetings to practice the technique as a form of creative adult play and to facilitate community connection. Spiritual leaders in a variety of faith communities employ InterPlay in collective worship. Educators, social workers, therapists, and healthcare workers incorporate InterPlay into pedagogies and treatment plans. A younger generation of InterPlay leaders has connected with the practice through the annual Art and Social Change program and approaches it as a tool to support their organizing, art, and activism.

Basic Forms and Tools

The InterPlay system consists of twenty-four "basic forms"—performance exercises similar to Boalian gamercises—and eight "body wisdom tools," the core components of the InterPlay embodied philosophy. The basic forms of InterPlay engage participants in creative improvisation around three primary modalities of expression: movement, voice, and speech. This tripartite division is a simplification of the InterPlay system's official classification of the "five

performative ways of the body: movement, voice, word, stillness, and contact," but captures much of the conceptual complexity of the forms as they are practiced. Movement forms frequently stress the value of stillness and many incorporate contact. They engage with the movement capacities of everyday bodily activity but also borrow from various forms of dance. Vocal forms are grounded in

Participants perform a Hand Dance at the 2018 InterPlay Leaders Gathering.
Photo by Mary Ellen May

tonal vocalization—akin to wordless singing. These forms do allow for the incorporation language, but as an explicitly blended expressive mode. Speaking forms draw on basic storytelling practices, but practitioners often describe the resultant linguistic creations as "tellings" rather than stories to deemphasize common expectations and values such as narrative. This reflects the wider culture of InterPlay, which eschews the language of established artistic disciplines in order emphasize the quotidian character of embodied expression and resist commonplace aesthetic judgement.

Many of the basic InterPlay forms utilize just one or another of these modalities, but some of the more advanced forms blend and combine them. Introductory forms generally focus on introducing the possibilities for a single modality. For instance, One-Breath Songs and Group Toning focus exclusively on activating voice, Walk/Stop/Run and Hand Dances on movement possibilities, and Babbling and Three-Sentence Stories on the basic elements of expression in speech. Some forms combine two of these modalities. The Following and Leading form utilizes both movement and voice, for example, and DT3s (Dance + Talk ×3) and Gesture Choirs

combine movement with speech. A few forms make use of all three modalities, such as Big Body Stories in which participants combine movement, storytelling, and voice to share personal experiences. All the forms are primarily focused on the cultivation of personal expression, but are also designed to facilitate community, collaboration, and relationality, especially those involving contact, following/leading, and witnessing—which is how InterPlayers describe a mode of participatory spectatorship.

In contrast to Boalian gamercises' focus on de-mechanization and the rationalization of embodied experience through critical discussion, InterPlay forms emphasize the reclamation, exploration, and development of bodily capacity. Introductory forms tend to follow a recurrent structure that endeavors to make creative expression readily available to those without a strong background or extensive training in the arts. By starting from a familiar everyday activity or body part—such as the act of walking or one's hand—these forms present creative possibilities for improvisation in an incremental and accessible fashion. This recurrent structure proceeds with an invitation for participants to experiment with a limited range of creative possibilities for reimagining engagement with the familiar, then concludes by shifting into a period of open play and improvisational experimentation. For example, with the Hand Dance form, participants are initially invited to focus on their hand, then asked to explore various speed and quality combinations—smooth or jerky movements combined with slow or fast speed—as well as its capacity to form shapes and to make contact with other objects or people. They are then given the opportunity to experiment with these possibilities—and sometimes with one another— usually for the length of a song.

Alongside the basic performance structures, the InterPlay system also consists of an "embodied philosophy" that seeks to articulate various insights achieved through the long-term

practice of these forms in community with one another. This philosophy is expressed extensively

in movement writings and training documents and includes a fairly extensive vocabulary of

neologisms, but its core elements are the eight "body wisdom tools": easy focus, body

data/knowledge/wisdom, internal authority, physicality of grace, exformation, body wisdom

practices, incrementality, and affirmation. These body wisdom tools are more than mere

observations and represent a mode of existence advocated by the movement. Long-time

Washington DC InterPlay leader Kate Amoss describes them as "the way you go about being in

the world."[122] InterPlayers utilize their performance forms to understand these tools on an

embodied level and to develop their capacity for utilizing them, which they seek to do

throughout various aspects of their lives.

Although these body wisdom tools have been given form in linguistic expression, they

were originally developed through an iterative performance process undertaken by the Oakland-

based performance troupe *Wing It!*. Porter describes the relationship between embodied

performance and the philosophy by saying, "we would base our ideas on physical experience…

the practices came first and the wisdom came out of the practices."[123] The body wisdom tool of

exformation, for instance, describes activities that have a cathartic quality insofar as they involve

externalization, action, and release. Exformational activities are discovered through enactment

and can include a wide variety of actions, from a deep breath let out with a sigh to a dance of

jumping, stomping, and other forceful movements. After being discerned through embodied

exploration, these activities are given conceptual form through the term "exformation," which

was developed as a part of a theory that information accumulates in the body and needs to be

processed and released. Practices that prove consistently insightful and useful are similiarly

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[122]Dilliplane, "InterPlay Performance Practice," 26.

[123]Dilliplane, "InterPlay Performance Practice," 20.

theorized and become core elements of this philosophy. Thus, the InterPlay embodied

philosophy is always to some extent incomplete and in-process as patterns in bodily experience

are observed and their applications explored.

The Body is Basic

This body-based and processual character of the movement's embodied philosophy is but

one of many indications of the technique's fundamentally affective approach to performance for

social change. This relationship between embodied exploration and the creation of concepts

exemplifies InterPlay's attitude to the inventiveness of the body and the centrality of physicality.

Its embodied philosophy emphasizes the inseparability of all human experience and action from

its basis in physicality and the body. InterPlay embraces an affective orientation both in its sharp

rejection of dualisms—in particular those of mind/body and reason/emotion—and through its

cultivation of an expansive and inventive sensorial ontology.[124]

Despite strong connections with spirituality, InterPlay advocates a distinctly materialist

worldview, formulating an ontology that broadens the notion of physicality through the rejection

of dualisms. Within the movement, these dualisms are referred to as conceptual "splits" that not

only divide but hierarchize. Porter and Winton-Henry write against "distinctions between body

and spirit, thinking and feeling, head and heart, emotion and reason" and how we "assign them

different relative values," arguing that "the information that we have separated into these

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[124]This social movement philosophizing shares affinities with academic theories of new materialism, acknowledging the agency and vitality of nonhuman entities and embracing the materiality of emotion, spirituality, and other kinds of human activity. Despite this conceptual commonality, however, the InterPlay movement as a whole remains largely anthropocentric in its approach. Workshops are frequently conducted in outdoor or "natural" settings, but exercises do not experiment explicitly with technology or material culture. Thus, the technique emphasizes experimentation with the possibilities for subjective mutation through individual and collective affect rather than in through techno-human assemblages.

categories is completely intertwined, if not inseparable."[125] Much like academic theorists of

affect, they articulate an ontology that expands the concept of physicality that grounds

experiences in the body that would otherwise be negated or excised into independent domains,

contending that "all of our experience is physical. Feelings are physical, spirituality is physical,

thinking is physical."[126] This inclusive approach to physicality highlights the embodied character

of all experience, emphasizing the interconnectedness of domains commonly thought to be

largely autonomous.

Moreover, the InterPlay philosophy challenges the ubiquity of discursive structuring of

experience by embracing the existence of complex and distinctive pre-linguistic sensations. The

recognition of these sensations is based in part on the work of Eugene Gendlin. Gendlin's

Focusing is cited by the *Secrets of InterPlay* training manual as an inspirational text and is the

source of the common InterPlay slogan "unlock the wisdom of your body," which is borrowed

from the title of the first section of the book. Gendlin theorizes a pre-verbal "felt sense" in the

body—a physical and emotional response to a particular person, object, or situation. This felt

sense "encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject" and "doesn't come to

you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often

puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling."[127] The recognition of such pre-linguistic sensations

is epitomized by a refrain widespread within the community that you can "have" your experience

without needing to put it into words. Facilitators offer frequent reminders at the conclusion of

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[125]Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry, *The Wisdom of the Body: The InterPlay Philosophy and Technique* (Oakland, CA: Wing It! Press, 1995), 20.

[126]Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry, *Having It All: Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit Together at Last* (Oakland, CA: Wing It! Press, 1997), 17.

[127]Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing* (New York: Everest House, 1978), 35-36.

exercises that "you don't have to be able to articulate your experience in order to claim it,"[128]
stressing both the reality and value of experience that cannot be brought fully to the level of
conscious thought.

<u>Body Intellectualism</u>

Another way in which the InterPlay embodied philosophy exhibits an affective approach
to performance for social change is through its embodied and impassioned approach to
epistemology. Regarding all knowledge as fundamentally grounded in the body, InterPlay
encourages what those in the movement refer to as "body intellectualism." According to Porter
and Winton-Henry, body intellectuals reject "the language that suggests that we can be in our
'heads' or in our 'bodies' but not in both places at once"[129] by learning to "think with your whole
body."[130] Although a body intellectual examines "current sociopolitical situations and traces or
imagines their experiential roots," they do not ground critique in a supposedly ideologically-
uninflected bodily experience, but instead develop greater awareness of how their experience has
become colored by "aesthetic, political, social, or religious frameworks [that] have been so
firmly established within us that we hardly notice" them.[131] Rejecting mind/body and
reason/emotion divisions, this body intellectualism embraces emotion as an inescapable
component of knowledge rather than treating it as something to be set aside in favor of a
fabricated idea of dispassionate rationalism.

This embodied epistemology is one the central "body wisdom tools" of the InterPlay
philosophy, encapsulated in the principle of "body data/knowledge/wisdom." This core element

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[128]Porter and Winton-Henry, *Having It All*, 21.

[129]Porter and Winton-Henry, *The Wisdom of the Body*, 15.

[130]Porter and Winton-Henry, *Having It All*, 106.

[131]Porter and Winton-Henry, *The Wisdom of the Body*, 15.

is both a theory of knowledge and a method for its application. By combining feeling—sensation and sentiment—with cognition and behavior, it emphasizes that experience, knowledge, and action are all ultimately embodied. Body data are the compound and multi-layered elements of our individual experience, including sensations that go beyond the typical five senses such as kinesthetic awareness and proprioception, as well as those associated with memory, imagination, and judgement. InterPlay encourages greater attention to the richness of this internal information as well as recognition of and respect for the fact that different bodies can have profoundly dissimilar experiences.

The InterPlay notion of body knowledge asserts the existence of patterns in body data both within and across bodies and advocates the development of greater awareness of those patterns, especially on an individual basis. Understanding these patterns enables one to better manage them in order to increase opportunities for positive feelings. This application of body knowledge is what InterPlayers refer to as body wisdom. This method is quite similar to adrienne maree brown's notion of "pleasure activism," which she describes as "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy,"[132] in that both focus on a somatic approach to the cultivation of positive affects as part of a program of social justice.

Noticing and Conscious Transformation

In characterizing knowledge as always already embodied, the InterPlay system suggests that social transformation is largely a matter of developing and proliferating forms of embodied cognition organized around ease, care, and sustainability. Because the InterPlay system conceptualizes change as rooted in the relationship between habits of sensation and action, it

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[132]adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019), 13.

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recognizes the conscious development of individual body wisdom as one possible pathway to transformation.

This pathway can involve drawing our implicit biases into consciousness in order to alter patterns of behavior. Many cognitive approaches to social justice education focus on the delineation of rules for appropriate conduct and providing the rational basis for those rules. However, these approaches often fail to address the underlying sensory and emotional bases of existing problematic behaviors. InterPlay's affective approach enables participants to become aware of entrained white supremacy, sexism, and homophobia. Through greater attunement to one's own sensory and enactive patterns, one might recognize, for instance, internalized racial fears in a stomach that tightens around black people, misogyny in a gaze that only meets the eyes of men when in conversation, homophobic anxieties in a chest that flushes in response to the flirtatious energy of someone of the same sex, or ableist annoyance when someone doesn't perform according to neurotypical expectations. InterPlay's embodied cognition understands that patterns such as these cannot be simply cognitively rationalized out of existence but need to be engaged and transformed on an embodied level.

A form of personal reflection and linguistic sharing InterPlayers call "noticing" supports this intentional cultivation of embodied cognition. Sporadically throughout workshops, participants are encouraged share thoughts, feelings, and insights experienced during play. They are asked to speak only about their own experience without responding directly to the observations of others. The goal of such noticing is to reinvest this conscious awareness into one's playful experimentation and beyond the ludic or aesthetic frames of the performance practice.

However, in the InterPlay community this method remains highly individualized and self-directed with participants pursuing their own process of articulating new experiences and sensations into their existing frameworks. Because of the vulnerability required to make and share these kinds of observations, facilitators do not respond to comments during noticing circles, although they may occasionally refer to relevant elements of the InterPlay embodied philosophy. Training materials urge facilitators to maintain an attitude of non-judgmental neutrality in noticing circles, though some in the community have begun to challenge this disinterested and non-interventionist approach. Therefore, despite superficial similarities with the kind of politically focused rational-critical discussion common in the tools of TO, the InterPlay practice of "noticing" is focused more on somatic self-awareness, or what Richard Shusterman describes as a somaesthetic process of introspection and reflection upon perception,[133] than on the determination of intentional strategies to enact in the politics of everyday life situations.

Transformation Body-to-Body

In addition to this pathway mediated by conscious awareness, InterPlay acknowledges that the embodied exercises themselves can directly support the transformation of social and political values entrained into patterns of sensation and action. Emphasizing the re-patterning of connections between pre-linguistic sensations and embodied action independent of their rationalization in language and consciousness, InterPlay centers creative and collaborative improvisatory play as a site of social change. The ludic frame enhances and accelerates the entrainment of the tools of the performance pedagogy. Understanding larger social and political structures as emergent properties of basic relational syntheses, this technique stresses the rehearsal of new forms of perception and relationality in performance with the aim of generating

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[133]Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 87.

new social and political formations rooted in different relational values. Recognizing that conscious awareness can at times be an obstacle to this entrainment, this second pathway focuses on forming new associations without requiring conscious intervention, reflecting an affective approach to performance for social change that can operate directly on the body to restructure the sensory and enactive syntheses composing subjectivity.

The InterPlay tool of "easy focus," for instance, is a perceptual orientation for absorbing experience holistically. Contrasting with the direct, calculative, and instrumentalizing gaze of "hard focus," easy focus invites greater awareness of interconnectedness and heterogeneity through a more integrated sensorium. According to InterPlay Leader Training Program's *Core Element Self-Study* manual, it includes "the idea that there are many things going on in our bodies at one time, and that our bodies are capable of holding those several things at the same time" and is summarized as "the ability to widen our focus, relax our bodies in the process, use all of our senses, not just our vision, and to put ourselves in the middle of a setting rather than observing it from the outside."[134]

In practice, InterPlayers note that easy focus enriches their relationships by increasing understanding of both their own needs and those of others. They describe its capacity to facilitate the recognition of multiplicity and complexity rather than relying on simplifications that limit value to a single dimension or reduce individuals to a singular defining role or characteristic. Easy focus invites one to take oneself less seriously, decreasing the intensity of judgement—both of others and self-directed—and enabling the ability to perceive other points of view. In this way, it transforms difference and conflict from a battle to a dance. Although this mode of perception can be consciously accessed, InterPlay's performance practice method suggests that it need not necessarily be activated through consciousness but can be entrained at a bodily level.

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[134]Body Wisdom, Inc. *Core Element Self-Study* training manual, 17.

Using embodied training to bypass consciousness in social transformation, InterPlay's

affective approach to performance for social change requires that the elements of the embodied

philosophy—like easy focus—be translated into an embodied performance pedagogy

transferring these alternative modes of perception and relation directly from one body to another.

The tools of InterPlay's manner of being-in-the-world are taught primarily through the embodied

experience of the performance forms, in a manner much like that of Diana Taylor's

conceptualization of performance as embodied cultural transmission through "vital acts of

transfer."[135] While Taylor's concept focuses on the embodied transmission of identity, social

knowledge, and memory, InterPlay's performance pedagogy strives to transfer alternative ways

of perceiving and engaging with the world on a bodily basis. The instructions for teaching easy

focus, for example, encourage nothing more than a brief explanation of the concept before

shifting into performance activities designed to facilitate access to this mode of perception

experientially. This recommendation accords with the guidance of the *Secrets of InterPlay*

training manual, which specifies that the process of teaching and learning the tools of the

embodied philosophy "should be primarily experiential."[136] By emphasizing possibilities for the

unconscious re-patterning of sensation and action through embodied play, InterPlay's

performance pedagogy transmits these new modalities directly from body to body.

From the structure of its embodied exercises to its conceptual commitments, the InterPlay

technique utilizes a fundamentally affective approach to performance for social change. In spite

of significant similarities with Theatre of the Oppressed, InterPlay's underlying theoretical

framework contrasts strongly with Boalian critical theory. The InterPlay system's articulation of

an expansive sensorial ontology, its emphasis on the embodied and impassioned grounds of

[135]Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 2.

[136]Body Wisdom, Inc. *Secrets of InterPlay* training manual, 53.

Interplayers perform a paired movement activity during the 2015 Art and Social Change program.
Photo by Cynthia Winton-Henry

epistemology, and its performance-based method of social transformation illustrate the conceptual parallels between the technique and theories of affect. However, while InterPlay's cultural politics may be somewhat radical in terms of its understanding and valuation of embodiment, its principally individualistic orientations to the body and social change present substantive challenges for the movement's social justice efforts and especially those focused on the cultivation of equity and inclusion.

Neoliberal Logics and Movement Diversity

The implementation of the tools offered by InterPlay's affective approach to performance for social change into the movement's organizational structure and initiatives is unsurprisingly uneven and rife with challenges. Although its tools and forms are incorporated into the meetings of the InterPlay non-profit and those of various regional chapters and committees, the demands of this work activate neoliberal frameworks of competitive individualism that persist in the movement. These frameworks force social differences rooted in the affective bases of subjectivity to be rationalized into cognitive and linguistic frameworks and submitted to an interindividual negotiation that implicity and uncritically applies neoliberal values. My ethnographic research with the InterPlay movement suggests that the persistence of individualism in the movement inhibits its equity and inclusion initiatives by encouraging a representational approach that resists shifts in movement culture and organizational structure.

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Ultimately, I argue that, in order to overcome these challenges, collective linguistic processing must be approached as a specific instance of embodied activity. Because TO focuses on rational-critical discourse as the primary site of transformation, the Joker's knowledge and ability to communicate a critical framework is crucial to the political success of Boalian techniques. In minimizing the role of linguistic processing, InterPlay's affective approach places increased emphasis on politics at the level of the body, drawing attention to the possibilities for the transmission of new sensory and enactive patterns through embodied practice. However, just as post-representational theories seek to undermine the dominance of representation by recognizing it as merely one among many semiologies, performance for social change must learn to navigate discussion as simply one type of embodied activity among many. Recognizing that the manner in which discussion is conducted is at least as significant as its content, I argue that greater attention to collective embodiment is necessary to bringing an affective approach to performance for social change to bear on social justice efforts in a neoliberal context.

A Culture of Individualism

The InterPlay movement locates its countercultural self-image in its emphases on embodiment and self-expression, which it sees as oppositional to dominant American culture's neglect of the body as well as its dismissive and restrictive attitudes towards minoritarian identities and ways of life. Unlike the Marxist underpinnings of Boalian theory, InterPlay's early critical orientation drew primarily on identitarian social movements associated with the marginalized identities of Winton-Henry and Porter, including liberation theology, second-wave feminism and gay liberation.[137] In recent years, as issues of racial equity as well as social and environmental sustainability come to the fore, InterPlayers have increasingly oriented themselves against notions of Western culture and whiteness. Although the terminology for framing the

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[137]Dilliplane, "InterPlay Performance Practice," 12-13.

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target of their critiques has been variable and shifting, InterPlay's critical orientation at the macropolitical level has tended toward frameworks that stress personal choice and individual freedom of expression.

Despite its grounding in critiques of cultural marginalization and societal exclusion, InterPlay's individualistic tendencies largely reflect the dominant cultural and political attitudes during the time the technique was initially developed. Coinciding with the early cultural ascendancy of neoliberalism in the US, the embodied experimentation of Oakland's *Wing It!* performance troupe in the 1980s from which the embodied philosophy is derived stressed a highly individual notion of freedom as a rejection of socially and culturally imposed restrictions. This notion of freedom can be seen in the InterPlay notion of internal authority, which involves reclaiming "the part of you that knows who you are, what you like, what you want, and what you know" by paying attention to your own thoughts, feelings, sensations, and patterns of behavior in order to distinguish what you have learned on a cognitive and representational basis from what you have learned on a bodily level.[138] The InterPlay system stresses individual responsibility for seizing one's internal authority rather than collective efforts to transform the circumstances that give rise to its constraint. This attitude toward individual responsibility for self-expression reflects a culture of individualism that impacts the movement's internal processes of cultural transformation as well as efforts to apply the technique to the sphere of public politics.

This culture of individualism manifests in the practice's unquestioned reliance upon the normative sensorial and enactive boundaries of the individual body as the foundation for creative agency. Although the performance activities combine individual creative expression with the interdependence of community connection, they do reinforce individualism in their reliance upon a conventional body schema as their primary point of reference. The forms start from the familiar

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[138]Porter and Winton-Henry, *Having It All*, 6.

in an effort to reduce psychological barriers and resistances to participation among broad publics. However, initiating from this notion of familiarity relies on the normativity of able-bodied and neurotypical bodily conceptions, marginalizing those whose bodies exhibit different capabilities. In alignment with the responsibilizing logic of internal authority, workshops include frequent reminders that participants should feel empowered to adjust any instructions based on their own needs and abilities, individualizing responsibility for those who do not conform to a normative body schema to navigate their own inclusion.

This individualization of responsibility is characteristic of the wider culture of the InterPlay movement. While InterPlay is theoretically unfinished and evolving—with Porter arguing that "to systematize it is imprecise"[139]—in practice, the community is often highly resistant to changes to the technique or movement culture. This resistance is particularly strong when addressing internal criticisms that demand the creation of collective structures for addressing conflict.

For instance, a fellow graduate of InterPlay's Art and Social Change program, self-described disabled artist and activist Kassi Delphinia, shared with me her challenges navigating the movement's intensely tactile culture as a touch-averse person. She explained that, after communicating her discomfort with touch to her regional chapter, most members of the community quickly adjusted their manner of interacting and playing with her. One InterPlayer, however, even after numerous efforts to communicate with them directly, continued to ignore her requests not to be touched. She sought support from both local and national InterPlay leaders but was invariably encouraged to handle the conflict herself on an interpersonal basis. As a result, she was wrestling with a difficult decision about whether or not to continue her involvement with that chapter. She could accept that the technique's forms and tools enable

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[139]Dilliplane, "InterPlay Performance Practice," 20.

specific forms of self-expression while constraining others, but without support from the collective she was unable to actualize her internal authority.

This resistance to collective approaches contributes to the movement's struggle to formulate a coherent macropolitical strategy. Because its affective approach to performance for social change considers social and political formations emergent properties of groups, much of its political efficacy is confined to the cultural diffusion of its perceptual and relational modes. Many practitioners use the technique to organize creative protests that combine the sense of community connection and interdependence generated by the practice with the public articulation of a political viewpoint. However, little in the embodied philosophy supports an understanding of collective political action. Lacking a coherent strategy for wider systemic and structural engagement, InterPlay—like TO—risks reinforcing neoliberal individualism and responsiblization, impeding its efforts to implement social justice values both internally and on a broader societal scale.

Representation and Racial Equity

Equity initiatives present unique challenges for social movement organizations that seek to prefigure the worlds they wish to create, and InterPlay is no different in this regard. Since its inception, the movement has been largely female and welcoming to gay and lesbian folks, reflecting the marginalized identities of Winton-Henry and Porter. However, as a result of various social, economic, and cultural dynamics, it remains predominantly white and Western, perhaps reflecting the fact that the bulk of its membership was from a generation steeped in the politics of social movements that struggled to understand the intersectional character of oppression.[140] Thus, although it has included BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)

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[140]See: Kimberly Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum 1 (1989):

members since its early years, it has often been slow to recognize the ways in which members of minoritarian groups have felt unwelcome or excluded.

InterPlay leader and Grassroots Spiritual Practitioner Soyinka Rahim describes the challenges of participating in the community as one of only a few people of color during this time. In particular, she recalls an occasion during which she was invited to help facilitate an event for an almost exclusively white regional chapter. When the group exhibited an unwillingness to participate as she attempted to guide them in an opening chant, she became extremely frustrated, feeling that her race was a factor in their reluctance. She explains that she became more insistent and they later described her efforts to cajole them into participation as "too forceful, demanding, [and] violent." These comments seemed to confirm her suspicions of racist motivations, leading her to ask herself: "what am I doing here with all these white people?" Despite many similar experiences, she argues that her persistence with the community has been worth it because InterPlay is "slow, but willing to change."[141]

Over the past decade, organizational leaders seeking to remedy the dearth of racial, ethnic, and national diversity have undertaken various efforts to transform the demographics of the movement. Exemplifying critiques of the organizational deployment of the concept of diversity insofar as it "individuates difference, conceals inequalities and neutralises histories of antagonism and struggle,"[142] these diversity initiatives focus heavily on the recruitment of diverse membership with the expectation that these new members will be responsible for making the community more welcoming and responsive to the needs of the minoritarian groups they

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139-167; Winifred Breines, *The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Anthony Pinn, *Liberation Theologies in the United States* (New York: New York University, 2010).

[141]Dilliplane, "InterPlay Performance Practice," 49-50.

[142]Sara Ahmed and Elaine Swan, "Doing Diversity." *Policy Futures in Education* 4, 2 (2006): 96.

represent. Spearheading the creation of the InterPlay Art and Social Change certification program, Winton-Henry, in particular, has prioritized the training a new generation of artist-activists with a broad range of social justice goals and causes, including transgender and disability advocacy, neurodiversity, and, in parallel with contemporary US social movement emphases, anti-racism. Reflecting the movement's culture of individualism, these initiatives overemphasize a representational approach.

Under such a representational and individualizing approach, minority staff and community members serve as a racial vanguard, implicitly expected to reshape the predominately white spaces of InterPlay to make them more welcoming for anticipated future BIPOC members. They are "asked to be the caretakers for diversity,"[143] performing both the emotional and organizational labor of inclusion. This role was formalized with the establishment of an official position for the coordination of community development and leadership efforts for people of color.[144] Constructed as what Shona Hunter calls "outsiders within,"[145] those who have held this position are often highly-visible within the movement but wield limited practical authority over changes to organizational culture and practices. As the faces of diversity, much of their work entails efforts to make white people comfortable with the notion of diversity.

Meanwhile, the movement's nominally horizontal power structures conceal informal organizational hierarchies, making it difficult for them to combat the infelicitous performativity of the movement's diversity statement or to otherwise "translate individual commitment into

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[143]Ahmed and Swan, "Doing Diversity," 98.

[144]This position was initially called the Liaison to People of Color and was held by Oakland-based queer Japanese-American InterPlayer Coke Tani for two years before being passed to Carolyn Renée, a black InterPlayer based in Atlanta. The position was subsequently split into two roles to add a Liaison to International Leaders, a role held by Malawian InterPlayer Masankho Banda.

[145]Shona Hunter, "Working for Equality and Diversity in Adult and Community Learning: Leadership, Representation and Racialised 'Outsiders Within'." *Policy Futures in Education* 4, 2 (2006):117.

collective commitment."[146] While I am not discounting the value of targeted outreach or fast-tracking BIPOC for leadership positions, combining this formal inclusion with a culture of individualism ultimately reinforces existing racial divisions and hierarchies by placing the emotional and organizational labor of community transformation on these representatives of diversity.

While the growth of racial affinity groups and development of anti-racism trainings by InterPlayers of various races may be indications of a growing collective responsibility,[147] some such efforts seem only to reproduce the same logics of this representational approach. For example, when I attended an iteration of Winton-Henry and Rahim's "Changing the Race Dance" in 2018, I felt it resulted in BIPOC participants carrying the emotional weight of the challenges of interracial connection. Drawing more heavily on cognitive and discursive approaches to racial justice than on InterPlay's affective approach to social change, it emphasized developing conscious awareness of the cultural dimensions of race without creating the necessary mechanisms for processing the negative affects associated with racial conflict. Seeking primarily to generate interracial dialogue concerning everyday manifestations of racism, the design of the workshop more closely resembled the discursive orientation of TO than the affective approach typically characteristic of InterPlay.

As a result of various factors—including the inattention afforded to separate racial affinity spaces in the design of the workshop and inadequate strategies for dealing with negative

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[146]Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 134.

[147]The Liasons to People of Color and International Leaders and others within the movement have established racial affinity groups for BIPOC InterPlayers and created both internally- and externally-facing trainings. Karen Hatch has spearheaded efforts to develop a white affinity group to support white InterPlayers in their journeys with anti-racism. In 2015, Winton-Henry teamed up with black InterPlay leader Soyinka Rahim to collaborate on a touring series of embodied anti-racism workshops called "Changing the Race Dance." White InterPlayer and racial justice educator Katie Hymans organized the first iteration of an ongoing program for exploring white privilege through the InterPlay forms inspired by the work of Debby Irving called "Waking Up White."

affects—the workshop seemed to reify rather than deconstruct racial divisions. Able to express themselves freely, white participants were able to rely on the collective to support them in the processing of the negative affects they experience in connection with racism. On the other hand, negative affect accumulated in, rather than circulating through, participants of color. This outcome is illustrated in the comments of a black female participant, who described feeling that the workshop constructed her as a depository for expressions of white guilt. A white InterPlayer central to the local organizing of the workshop described feeling ashamed to have encouraged attendance of BIPOC implying that the workshop would be restorative for them. The shortcomings of the workshop indicate that, in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of the emotional labor of social justice work, performance for social change practitioners need to support a differential approach to the formulation of individual boundaries in connection to the wider collective for the purposes of affective processing.

<u>Communal, Cultural, or Intellectual Property?</u>

Because the embodied transmission of creative practice combined with its constant adaptation, alteration, and blending makes tracing authorship—and thereby questions of ownership—incredibly difficult, it is often treated as a cultural commons. In that vein, with an eye to InterPlay's origins in collective embodied experimentation, many InterPlayers describe the technique's basic creative modalities for self-expression as "birthright practices," claiming them as the communal property of all humankind. However, differential capacities to capture profit in the form of financial, social, or cultural capital from embodied creative practices result in significant tensions both on the scale of the interpersonal and cultural.

For example, on the interpersonal level, this tension manifests in an experience of Oakland-based InterPlayer Coke Tani. Tani developed a variation of InterPlay's Walk/Stop/Run

activity that offers an experiential illustration of inequality. This variation was subsequently used as part of the curriculum of Winton-Henry and Rahim's "Changing the Race Dance" workshop, from which they earned modest sums as they toured various US cities presenting it. Ultimately, Tani expressed feelings of frustration at the lack of credit she received, citing her personal experience with the challenges of monetizing her contributions to the practice as a major contributing factor in her feelings.

This tension also manifests on a cultural level, arising primarily as questions of cultural appropriation. These questions have gained greater traction within the movement as InterPlay has rapidly spread to greater numbers of non-white communities both in marginalized communities within the US as well as in a variety of post-colonial contexts around the globe over the past decade.[148] The interest of many BIPOC InterPlayers in tracing perceived correspondences between the technique and the creative and spiritual practices of their own cultures is unsurprising, especially given the long history of extractive and appropriative relationships Western theatre and performance have cultivated with the art and culture of non-Western communities.[149]

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[148]InterPlay has begun to take root in various geopolitical contexts outside of the Global North, with particularly notable growth in India. This transposition of the InterPlay technique into new cultural and political contexts will require a reevaluation of its political relevance and efficacy similar to that necessitated by the rearticulation of TO—as an approach developed under military dictatorship—within the neoliberal context of the US. The fact that in many cases this transposition coincides with capitalist "development" raises interesting questions regarding the appeal of practices with a connection to new age spiritualism in such contexts. The supposed cultural hybridity of new age spiritualism exemplifies the West's appropriative romanticization of non-Western cultures in response to the deterioration of community relations and exploitative relationships with the environment and non-human others generated by capitalism. Thus, one characterize the growing appeal of such practices in post-colonial contexts as paradoxical form of cultural imperialism in which non-Western cultures are pilfered for creative and spiritual value which is subsequently sold back to them in the guise of a Western cultural import.

[149]See, for instance: Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance." *TDR: Drama Review* 38, 1 (1994): 143-167; Min Tien, "'Alienation-Effect' for Whom? Brecht's (Mis)interpretation of the Classical Chinese Theatre." *Asian Theatre Journal* 14, 2 (1997): 200-222; and Tsu-Chung Su, "The Occidental Theatre and its Other: The Use and Abuse of the Oriental Theatre in Antonin Artaud." *NTU Studies in Language and Literature* 22, 1 (2009).

Many such correspondences exist because of loose connections between various somatic practices and new age spiritualism, which draws extensively from non-Western cultures. Such connections can be seen in the popularity of hybridized cultural products, as for example in the widespread preference for instrumental background music from the "world music" genre in InterPlay workshops. Reflecting the ongoing broader conflict regarding intercultural exchange and new age cultural appropriation,[150] the prevailing attitude within the InterPlay movement to questions of cultural appropriation remains one of indifference. That being said, BIPOC InterPlayers are, in general, not interested in adjudicating disputes regarding these cultural correspondences within a property framework, instead advocating only increased acknowledgement of them within InterPlay's pedagogical materials.

However, InterPlay founders Porter and Winton-Henry see the forms and tools as their intellectual property and so are somewhat resistant to such acknowledgements. They admit to congruencies between the InterPlay system and various indigenous practices across the world but characterize these similarities as incidental, explaining them away by appealing to the capacity of creative embodied practice to access the supposed universality of human experience. They deny any implication of appropriation by arguing that their creative training backgrounds lack any direct connections to other cultural traditions. By reframing these concerns in terms of personal history, they implicitly reject the possibilities of a cultural approach to property in favor of an individualistic one.

Moreover, this individualist account of creative practice as intellectual—rather than cultural or communal—property replicates the privatization of common or public property

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[150]See: Bruno Deschênes, "World Music." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 52, 1 (2021): 3-22; David Waldron and Janice Newton, "Rethinking Appropriation of the Indigenous: A Critique of the Romanticist Approach." *Nova Religio* 16, 2 (2012): 64-85; Michael York "New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, 3 (2001): 361-372.

characteristic of neoliberal capitalism. By invoking the language of intellectual property, Porter

and Winton-Henry implicitly displace any potential culpability with respect to accusations of

cultural appropriation and dismiss the effect of social difference on the ability to translate

creative practice into profit. In addition to indicating the detrimental influence of neoliberal

logics to social justice efforts, these tensions reflect broader challenges arising from the

combination of performance techniques that value collective experimentation, innovation, and

emergence with systems of property and economy.

In order to establish a more equitable distribution of the labor of fostering inclusive

community and the value extracted from it, InterPlay must overcome an entrenched

individualism that conceptualizes us as discrete political units personally responsible for

bettering our own circumstances. I argue that this individualism needs to be questioned on a

somatic level through a deeper consideration of the somatic aspects of collectivity. In the

previous chapter, I described how critical somatics approaches bodies as emergent and

processual sets of metastable relations, thus enabling the conceptualization of collective

embodiment. The conceptual rudiments for theorizing the social dimensions of embodiment

already lie in InterPlay's affective foundations. Embodied creative practices like InterPlay can

cultivate and strengthen the affective bonds of a social flesh capable of facilitating the circulation

and collective processing of affect across various dimensions of social difference. The

cultivation of this social flesh is crucial to social justice efforts that move beyond mere

representative inclusion toward a more genuine and just equity.

Collective Embodiment

Despite the impacts of a pervasive neoliberal individualism on the organizational aspects

of the InterPlay movement, its embodied experimental practice presents fertile ground for

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imagining new possibilities for experiencing collectivity and interdependence. Marcus Bussey suggests that Porter and Winton-Henry's approach to knowledge as embodied encourages the production of "new knowings, open-ended signals, and strange new reasoning."[151] Reflecting the emphasis that many InterPlayers place on the empowerment of individuals in the face of societal pressures and expectations, Bussey sees this inventiveness as a means to reimagining the individual body's sensory capabilities as more expansive. However, I contend that various oft-neglected sensations actually challenge the very notion of the individualized body as a natural order, arguing instead that the technique's most effective mechanisms of social transformation lie in its ability to facilitate experiences of collective embodiment.

Building on the insights and observations of InterPlay practitioners, my argument acknowledges the conceptual seeds of collective embodiment already present in the movement's embodied philosophy and stresses the strengths of the technique. It extends the arguments of artist-activists—like Chicago InterPlay and Theatre of the Oppressed practitioner Agnotti Cowie—who accord high value to the community-building aspects of performance for social change[152] and extends social and relational InterPlay concepts—such as the "group body" or "body-to-body communication"—that remain underdeveloped in in the movement's writings and practices. I theorize the notion of social flesh to explore the sensory and affective basis of collectivity as well as the political implications of the deindividualization it requires.

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[151]Marcus Bussey, "Anticipatory Aesthetics: New Identities and Future Senses" in *Art, Culture and International Development: Humanizing Social Transformation*, ed. John Clammer (New York: Routledge, 2015), 6.

[152]Cowie suggests that the "community-building element [of InterPlay] is what is missing in TO." I agree to some extent with their assessment. Because Boal originally conceptualized his techniques for use within pre-existing communities—perhaps because they were developed in a cultural context with stronger social bonds—community-building was largely peripheral. However, it is perhaps more necessary in the US because of the depth of social divisions and because many practitioners deploy its techniques with ephemeral collectives rather than established communities.

The Group Body

InterPlayers use the term "group body" both as a shorthand for a facilitator's perception of the general temperament and aggregate dispositions of workshop participants and to describe experiences of intense interconnection in collective and creative embodied experimentation. Some stress the former usage, approaching the group body as largely metaphorical. San Diego InterPlayer Nandita Batheja, for instance, acknowledges that "there is something visceral and felt about it" but describes the notion as "a convenient metaphor." They note an experience of perceiving a strong affective atmosphere when entering a session at an iteration of the Art and Social Change program in which they "felt the storm, the tension," but otherwise remain skeptical of the corporeality of the collective, asking rhetorically "does my elbow know that it is my elbow?"[153]

Others, however, use the notion of the group body primarily to describe instances in which participants feel a strong sense of interconnection with one another, such as spontaneous synchronicity, coordination, or flocking. Describing his experiences of collective embodiment with *Wing It!*, Porter says "we moved from being individual bodies in the same space to being 'one body'." Stressing the sense of interconnection over characteristics observable from the outside, he notes "although we weren't always doing the same thing at the same time, we became intimately aware of each other."[154] Under this usage, the group body is something experienced from within, and, although often described in spiritual terms, is always characterized as undeniably corporeal. North Carolina InterPlayer Ginny Going calls the group body "a living, breathing entity," explaining that when an experience of collective embodiment is interrupted—

[153]Interview with the author, 9-15-22.

[154]Phil Porter, "Grace-Moves: What WING IT! Performance Ensemble Taught Me About the Relational Nature of Grace" in *Phenomenologies of Grace: The Body, Embodiment, and Transformative Futures*, eds. Marcus Bussey and Camila Mozzini-Alister (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 334.

as for example with a coffee or bathroom break—she feels as if "the corpse of the group body is left lying on the floor in the middle of the room."[155]

Describing experiences of the group body as stretching the limits of conscious understanding, InterPlayers situate the feeling of intimate awareness it creates as sensory but unlocalizable within established sensory divisions. Pennsylvania InterPlayer Anita Bondy, for instance, calls these experiences "beyond thought" and says they involve an "additional sense" in which "one body syncs up with another… as if one knows what the other will do before they do it."[156] Minnesota InterPlayer Jason Rodney connects the group body with empathy and intuition, situating his experiences of it in

Participants of the 2015 InterPlay Art and Social Change program experiment with leading and following.
Photo by Cynthia Winton-Henry

his "unconscious reactions to the ways others are feeling."[157] Others explain it through an integrated sense of the sensorium, like that encouraged by the InterPlay notion of easy focus. North Carolina InterPlayer Tom Henderson describes it as "dropping into my whole body" and as involving "all senses, including the proprioceptive sense, in ways that I'm not thinking about it."[158]

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[155]Interview with the author, 8-31-22.

[156]Survey response, 9-3-22.

[157]Interview with the author, 9-9-22.

[158]Interview with the author, 8-31-22.

Moments of such collective embodiment alter experiences of time and bodily boundaries, resulting in feelings of peculiar enchantment. Explaining that it involves an "expansion of your field of awareness," Oakland InterPlayer Kelsey Blackwell describes it as a "softening of my physical edges… I'm more permeable."[159] Describing her first intense experience of the group body at the end of a program in which she worked with the same group for many months, another Oakland InterPlayer Kira Allen says "there is no language to it… it was happening spontaneously, but it was like clockwork."[160] She explains that it can involve "something happening in my vestibular nervous system," but mostly characterizes it as connected to an altered sense of time and rhythm.

My own first experience of collective embodiment through participation in InterPlay was on the final morning the Art and Social Change program in 2015. A group of artist-activists from around the world, who were complete strangers only two weeks before, were bonded through creative improvisation characterized by affective connectivity and synchronicity. The group wordlessly and organically shifted from engagement in semi-structured performance warm-ups into emergent collaborative creation. A few gravitated toward musical instruments in the corner of the room and began to play. Some rolled around on the floor together and others danced actively and independently around the room. Some sang, with and without words. Any sense of clock time disappeared, but I felt deeply connected to the shifting rhythms of the improvised music. I moved in ways that felt good and in ways that challenged me. Intuitive anticipation allowed creative elements to sync up, but without obligation, allowing for divergences. Remaining true to an experience that was both individual and collective, we were responsive to the cascading energies of the collective without being washed away by them.

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[159]Interview with the author, 9-1-22.

[160]Interview with the author, 9-6-22.

A critical somatics approach to performance for social change positions such experiences of collective embodiment as the driving force behind its creative experimentation. Porter, in supplementary digital training materials on esoteric topics, asserts that "our ability to create the group body experience in the moment without a plan—with forms, but not necessarily specific plans—is one of the most powerful things that we do in InterPlay."[161] The political potency of this capacity lies in the feelings of interdependence and connectedness experiences of collective embodiment generate. Echoing Porter's sentiment, Blackwell argues that over time "more somatic work offers more access to the subtleties of the collective" and that groups that relate through embodied practice experience a "fast-track" to intimacy and connection. The affective bonds of this intimate interdependence persist after the conclusion of the encounter and can be transferred into other domains.

Transindividual Affect

This collective embodiment entails modes of preindividual relationality and manifests as sensations that do not correspond to the individualized sense of self but are nevertheless experienced as proximate and intimate rather than distanced and removed. Through such sensations, the individual self is experienced as more deeply connected to both human and non-human others. Winton-Henry describes this relationality poetically, saying: "I sense myself as related to all things. My skin is not a boundary. It is a doorway. My imagination reflects and builds upon these sensations…I do not mean this figuratively. I feel my physical relatedness."[162] The somatic character of this relationality enhances a sense of social and environmental

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[161]Phil Porter, "The Group Body," *YouTube*, Jan 20, 2021, video, 5:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhMlAIMLTW0.

[162]Cynthia Winton-Henry, "Grace Operatives: How Body Wisdom Changed the World" *Phenomenologies of Grace: The Body, Embodiment, and Transformative Futures*, eds. Marcus Bussey and Camila Mozzini-Alister (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 347.

interdependence. Although they also involve a wide range of embodied correspondences, these sensations are often described as an ability to pick up on the emotional states of others.

Most InterPlayers describe experiences of the group body as being typified by positive affects, but Cowie maintains that such experiences are more about the intense relationality of affective transmission and the resultant sense of belonging. They explain that accessing these sensations requires "vulnerability and openness" in order to be "plugged into each other and to the moment." This vulnerability demands a degree of deindividualization to enable a latent capacity for affective attunement. Erin Manning, inspired by the insights of neurodivergent activists, defines affective attunement as "another mode of immanent relation where the relation radically precedes the purported unity of the self… a merging-with of vitality affects across experiences toward emergent events."[163] Cowie explains that this sense of being "plugged in" means that when one person feels something intensely enough—whether it be joy, grief, or many things all at once—"we can all feel that." This attunement does not mean that a single affect must come to define the orientation of the group, but only that it becomes part of the affective life of the collective.

Thus, building on the work of Gilbert Simondon, I argue that the basis of collective embodiment lies in transindividual affect. Simondon argues that "the collective has its own ontogenesis" independent of individual subjectivity, saying:

> The group possesses an analogue of the soul and an analogue of the body of the individual being; but this soul and this body of the group are formed by the reality provided before any splitting by the individuated beings. Collective consciousness is not formed by the joining of individual consciousnesses, no more than the social body arises from the joining of individual bodies.[164]

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[163]Manning, *Always More Than One*, 7.

[164]Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 342.

Thus, he makes the case for collectivity not as interindividuality—where the collective is conceptually subordinate to the individual—but as the outcome of a parallel process of collective individuation that occurs alongside the individuation of the individual self. For Simondon, both of these processes are rooted in a preindividual ontology of affect:

> Emotion is something pre-individual revealed within the subject and can be interpreted as interiority or exteriority; emotion refers to exeriority and to interiority, because emotion is not something individuated; it is the exchange within the subject between the charge of nature and the individuated being's stable structures; exchange between the pre-individual and the individuated, emotion prefigures the discovery of the collective.[165]

More precisely, he argues that collectivity involves the transindividual affective remainder that exists alongside and in excess of the individuated self. I understand the sensations InterPlayers associate with experiences of collective embodiment as part of this transindividual affective remainder.

Conceptualizing collective embodiment as grounded in transindividual affect allows me to distinguish the embodied cognition of communal feeling from empathy as a representational mimesis or cognitive emotional mirroring. The InterPlay notion of "body-to-body communication" attempts to grasp the sensorial interconnection of bodies without requiring mediation through language and consciousness. Porter and Winton-Henry define body-to-body communication as an "awareness of and identification with the physicality of other bodies," arguing that it is "more than a cognitive awareness or a visual noticing… It is deeply physical and even seems to precede or bypass 'thinking'."[166] Some InterPlayers try to explain this affective empathy through neuroscientific theories of mirror neurons.

However, rather than appeal to mirror neurons and a simulation model of empathy, I approach this sensory and somatic interconnection through John Protevi's concept of

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[165]Simondon, *Individuation*, 353.

[166]Porter and Winton-Henry, *Wisdom of the Body*, 39.

"protoempathic identification."[167] Protevi's account of protoempathic identification as a basic form of affective contagion or shared emotional state is based on neuroscience scholarship emphasizing the activation of viscero-motor centers[168] instead of mirror neurons. It also builds on phenomenological accounts stressing a "primary corporeal intersubjectivity,"[169] which he reframes as "primary corporeal inter-ipseity" in order to stress that it precedes the formation of subjectivity.[170] The use of this concept therefore reinforces my argument for a sensory and somatic approach to performance for social change as opposed to a primarily cognitive and discursive on.

Social Flesh

Focusing on these embodied experiences of community and the kinds of sensations that characterize them, I advance the concept of social flesh to describe the communal corporeality of collectivity across which transindividual affect is shared, redistributed, and processed. A critical somatics approach to performance for social change uses the liminality of aesthetic, ludic, and insurgent frames to cultivate the affective bonds of social flesh. These bonds cannot be effectively constituted in one-off weekend workshops but require participation in collective embodied experimentation as an iterative and ongoing practice. Because sensations of transindividuality are discouraged by the normativity of the individualized body schema, the affective bonds of social flesh are fragile. Therefore, they must be exercised in order to avoid breakdown and to be strengthened to a level capable of influencing interactions outside liminal

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[167]Protevi, *Political Affect*, 27.

[168]Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti, "A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8, 9 (2004): 396-403.

[169]Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Evan Thompson, "Empathy and Consciousness." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, 5-7 (2001): 1-32.

[170]Protevi, *Political Affect*, 128.

frames. Like the fleshy tissues of the human body, these affective bonds must be elastic—

exhibiting both adaptability and tensile strength—in order to be capable of enduring being

stretched, bent, or otherwise violently disrupted without breaking, and thereby restoring the

isolated and distanced individual subjectivity encouraged by neoliberalism.

Most fundamentally, my notion of social flesh builds on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's

ontology of flesh. For Merleau-Ponty, flesh is always already social, a chiasm of sensibility or

intertwining of the embodied subject of perception and its object in which they are

indistinguishable from one another. The boundaries between self and world are enactively

materialized in this fleshy medium of indeterminate interactivity. Although my use of the

modifier "social" might seem redundant with respect to this ontology, I use it to designate the

application of the concept to the collective—rather than individual—subject since flesh is

ontologically prior to these humanistic distinctions between individuals and groups.

This choice accords with other theories of social flesh with which my notion engages in

order to illuminate its political and corporeal aspects. For instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio

Negri also use the term "social flesh," doing so in order to articulate the inventiveness and

indeterminacy of political collectivity in their concept of the multitude. They describe the social

flesh of the multitude as "common, living substance… pure potential, an unformed life force…

producing in excess of every traditional political-economic measure of value… [which] cannot

be entirely corralled into the hierarchical organs of a political body."[171] My approach to social

flesh builds on this political potential by focusing on social formations that—rather than being

rooted in identitarian affiliation and a cognitive empathic politics—are grounded in

transindividual affect.

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[171]Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 192.

My approach to this concept also echoes the work of Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi, who similarly consider social flesh to be corporeal. They deploy the notion of social flesh to theorize intersubjective embodiment[172] and advocate for a more embodied approach to interdependence and such notions as "trust, respect, care, [and] responsibility."[173] This embodied approach to social flesh invites greater attention to the interoceptive aspects of enfleshment rather than just the intertwining of a subject with its constitutive exterior.

For this reason, I argue that performance for social change can best facilitate the development of the affective bonds of social flesh through collective experimentation with activities that attend to touch and kinesthetic awareness because these senses challenge clear distinctions between interiority and exteriority in sensation and activate a more holistic and integrated experience of the sensorium. Elizabeth Grosz describes Merleau-Ponty's flesh as "common," noting that it not only involves the intertwining of interiority and exteriority or of the subject and object of sensation—i.e., the chiasm of "the seer and the visible, of the toucher and the touched"—but also "the indeterminacy of the 'boundaries' of each of the senses, their inherent transposability, their refusal to submit to the exigencies of clear-cut separation or logical identity."[174] This holistic mode of perception closely resembles the InterPlay concept of "easy focus" and corresponds in many ways to InterPlayers' accounts of the group body. Long-time InterPlayers Tom Henderson and John Glick both explicitly identify group movement and contact forms as enhancing such experiences, with Glick noting that movement forms help him

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[172]Carol Bacchi and Chris Beasley, "Moving Beyond Care and/or Trust: An Ethic of Social Flesh," Australian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Adelaide, 29 Sept 2004.

[173]Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi, "Making Politics Fleshy: The Ethic of Social Flesh" in *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges* (Adelaide, Australia: University of Adelaide Press, 2012), 104.

[174]Elizabeth Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh." *Thesis Eleven* 36, 1 (1993): 43.

feel "more aware of the whole and flowing in it" because, although he is not consciously focusing on them, his "kinesthetic senses are on high alert."[175]

Moreover, focusing on touch and kinesthetic awareness might enhance the cultivation of affective bonds across social difference because they are less implicated in the entrained perception of hierarchized social categories than other senses. Flesh is subject to inscription and delimitation through sociogenic processes of gendering[176] and racialization,[177] and—as Ahmed argues—touch is not immune insofar as "bodies are touched by some bodies differently from other bodies."[178] However, while the subconscious apparatus of implicit bias has been extensively documented in visual and textual domains,[179] even among the blind visual characteristics retain primacy in the perception of race.[180] Thus, perhaps relating through senses with less sophisticated mechanisms for perceiving social difference might better support modes of relation that minimize unconscious othering. The aim of focusing on activities of contact and coordinated movement is not to circumvent or erase the social realities of race, gender, sexuality ability, or other forms of difference, but to inhibit modes of perception that reproduce the hierarchization of such differences and thereby naturalize rather than combat their negative effects.

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[175]Survey response, 9-5-22.

[176]Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenoloy of Feminine Body Comportment and Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, 2 (1980): 137-156.

[177]Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
[178]Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 48.

[179]See for instance: Mahzarin Banaji and Curtis Hardin, "Automatic Stereotyping." *Psychological Science* 7, 3 (1996):136-141; Katarina Hamberg, "Gender bias in medicine". *Women's Health* 4, 3 (2008): 237-243; Erin Beeghly and Alex Madva, *An Introduction to Implicit Bias: Knowledge, Justice, and the Social Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[180]Osagie Obasogie, *Blinded By Sight: Seeing Race Through the Eyes of the Blind* (Stanford: Stanford Law Books, 2014).

The Politics of Deindividualization

  From the perspective of the individualized self, collective embodiment is experienced as a deindividualization in which individual subjectivity fades into the background. This deindividualization is not an evacuation or effacement of the self in favor of an exclusive focus on external others but a comingling and holding in-common of affects typically categorized as belonging to one or another individual. So, to (mis)apply humanistic frameworks to affective attunement, we might say that this type of attunement takes as its object affects that belong to the self and to others without clearly distinguishing between the two. Thus, experiences of collective embodiment can be bewildering insofar as they resist rationalization into familiar cognitive frameworks.

  This disorienting deindividualization unlocks new knowledges and capacities but also entails vulnerability and risk. Winton-Henry suggests that the affective attunement of collective embodiment—which she describes as "sensitivity"—produces activists because "harm, like love, travels body to body faster than the speed of thought."[181] The politics of transindividual affect, however, are not universal or uniform. The deindividualization that accompanies attunement to sensations of transindividuality can unsettle subjectivity and relational formations in ways that support social justice, but the openness it requires is also risky.

  For this reason, Nandita Batheja is skeptical of an affective approach to performance for social change. Considering specifically the case of racial repair, they argue that "we carry a lot of racial trauma in our bodies… and sometimes it is too much to go into our bodies." Acknowledging the broader social impact of experiences of collective embodiment, they describe the InterPlay community as a "dysregulated space" because "it is hard to have

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[181]Cynthia Winton-Henry, "Sensitivity and Social Change," *YouTube* Aug 18, 2022, 6:45, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqhfGBVINxA.

boundaries in InterPlay." Therefore, they prefer techniques of facilitated dialogue when dealing explicitly with issues of social justice because they offer greater control and containment.[182] Batheja's skepticism is warranted, and I recognize the value of discursive and cognitive techniques. However, I also believe that deindividualization is necessary to a politics of subjective mutation that addresses the structuring of subjectivity around values of social hierarchy and individual responsibility.

With care and crafting, a critical somatics approach to the cultivation of social flesh can present fertile ground for a sensory and somatic approach to building community across social difference. Special attention must be paid to the character of the affective bonds of social flesh and how they are shaped by performance practices. Too often concepts of love, care, responsibility, and solidarity become hollow watchwords in communities of creative performance practice and our movements are infected by the toxicity of self-care through consumption and attitudes of "good vibes only." Instead, we must shape the circumstances that enable us to care and be cared for in community and to be open and responsive to negative affects. By reinvigorating both the theory and practice of performance for social change with the insights of feminist, queer, indigenous, and anarchist scholars regarding these concepts, we can prefigure communities in which these values are lived and enacted on a somatic level and not merely discursively advocated.

The experience of Kira Allen indicates this transformative potential of embodied relationality. Allen connects her personal history as a survivor of sexual assault with her experience of touch as an important access point to transindividual affect. She describes using InterPlay's contact forms to learn "how to touch and be touched without being at risk." While she notes that touch is not strictly necessary to her experience of the group body, saying "we

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[182]Interview with the author, 9-15-22.

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don't have to be physically touching to be moved," she places particular value on moments of embodied care without sexual obligation, moments of "leaning into one another, the comfort without responsibility." She explains that "the gift of the group body is touching other bodies without assault, expectation, or fear; this is not a relationship and this touch is not predicated on what I will give you—or what you will take from me."[183] While she admits finding it easier to access such experiences of collective embodiment among women of color—and especially in groups of fellow black women—Allen also describes the healing power of these experiences across difference.

Although my emphasis is on the human aspects of social flesh, a critical somatics approach to performance for social change can address the more-than-human aspect of its affective bonds. InterPlayer and somatic practitioner focused on programming for fellow women of color Kelsey Blackwell describes individual embodiment as "an unconscious survival adaptation" in the face of emotional violence and exploitation. She asserts that experiences of collective embodiment combat this adaptation by encouraging us to "see each other as human," clarifying that this mode of perception extends to non-human entities and the environment.[184] Recognizing what Miriam Tola refers to as the "the more-than human dimension of corporeality,"[185] the InterPlay *Leader Training Program* manual echoes this ecological sentiment, affirming that what InterPlayers refer to as the "kinesthetic identification" of body-to-body communication can extend to "animals, the earth, moving objects, [and] groups."[186]

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[183]Interview with the author, 9-6-22.

[184]Interview with the author, 9-1-22.

[185]Miriam Tola, "Commoning with/in the Earth:Hardt, Negri and Feminist Natures." *Theory and Event* 18, 4 (2015).

[186]Body Wisdom, Inc., InterPlay Leader Training Program manual, 87.

Collective embodiment is not the unity of a social organism or the authoritarian id of fascist collectivity but rather a fluid mulitiplicity of imbricated collectivities. Some scholars contend that in the absence of the critical cognition of the individualized ego, affective contagion produces fascist collective subjectivities, as for instance in the links Kimberly Jannarone traces between Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and fascist crowds.[187] Such arguments tend to implicitly rely on rationalist frameworks that reject emotion as inherently irrational and dangerous, foreclosing the possibility of an embodied cognition of communal feeling. While I accept the possibility of fascistic re-territorializations of deindividualized subjectivity under an ethno-nationalist and hierarchical collective ego, I deny that deindividualization and rapid affective transmission are inherently fascistic. In fact, in accordance with Jeremy Gilbert's supposition that "the common emerges precisely at the point where the preindividual becomes the transindividual," I argue they are actually indispensable to praxes challenging the micropolitics of neoliberal capitalism.[188]

Echoing Moten and Harney's characterization of hapticality as a mode of feeling that "no individual can stand, and no state abide,"[189] the communal feeling of social flesh challenges both individualism and hierarchies of state formations by resisting rigidification into a social organism or meta-individuality. In his analysis of the impact of performance training on community- and ensemble-building, Mark Seton argues that the InterPlay technique "produces neither a naïve notion of universal 'community' nor an exclusive, singular collectivity, but multiple,

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[187]Kimberly Jannarone, *Artaud and his Doubles* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2010), 116-129.

[188]Jeremy Gilbert, *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 167.

[189]Moten and Harney, *Undercommons*, 98.

interconnected collectivities."[190] Social flesh preserves the plasticity and processual character of affective bonds and thereby maintains the multiplicity of collectivity rather than crystallizing around collective identities. Critical somatics builds on InterPlay's affective approach insofar as it exposes and transforms the micropolitics of neoliberalism in modes of perception and preindividual relationality, but it also extends this approach by attending more closely to the somatic dimensions of collectivity in order to rehearse the caring interdependence of the worlds we wish to create.

A Personal Account of Social Flesh and Collective Rupture

By way of drawing this chapter to a close and in order to illustrate the political potential an elastic social flesh, I turn now to a reflection upon a spontaneously occurring collective rupture around issues of race and gender at the InterPlay Leaders Gathering in August of 2018.

InterPlayers improvise a performance for the showcase at the 2018 Leaders Gathering.
Photo by Mary Ellen May

While imperfect, the affective bonds among an experienced group of InterPlayers with longstanding relationships of creative embodied play proved strong enough to resist a complete breakdown of collective embodiment, demonstrating the capacity for communal feeling across differences of race and gender.

I first attended an InterPlay "Leaders Gathering"—an annual convention of practitioners—in August 2018 at the Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center in Bangor, Pennsylvania. Each year, the Saturday night of the gathering is dedicated to an improvised

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[190]Mark Seton, "Nurturing Innovation in Performance Training," 171.

showcase of performances. Like most of the convention's offerings, this showcase took place in a wooden barn recently constructed alongside a small pond. Not only was its interior almost completely open, but huge doors on three sides of the structure opened to create a sense fluidity with the outdoors. The floor of the barn had been covered with multicolored interlocking square foam mats. For most of the evening one end of the barn served as the performance area while people sat on the floor at the other end or on chairs scattered around the edges of the space.

After a couple of hours of performances, a black female InterPlay elder invited the entire community to participate in a ritual performance, reconstituting the space in-the-round. Designed to mark a transition into an era in which feminine leadership would be dominant across the world, this ritual began by dividing the women from the men, lining each group up on opposite sides of the space facing each other. Black women and other women of color were invited to form the front rows, leading a lyrical chant of "I am a powerful woman" and eventually initiating expressive movement and dance. Many rows of white women amassed behind them, first supporting the chanting and gradually joining in the dance, until the entire group of women were chanting, vocalizing, and moving together. The men meanwhile were asked to stand facing the women in an open posture to fully witness them in their power and to hum in support of their chanting and dancing. The few men of color had taken up drumming on the edge of the space, creating rhythms to reinforce the tempo of the chanting and enhance the ritual atmosphere of the experience.

Because women far outnumber men in the InterPlay community, there was a strong imbalance in the space with dozens of women in many rows across from little more than a handful of men. This resulted in a certain hypervisibility of those on the men's side. I recall, moreover, feeling powerless and vulnerable as a consequence of the structure of the ritual. These

affects coexisted within me alongside a strong desire to support the intention of the ritual and the empowerment of those across from me. Thus, I chose to embrace these affects as crucial aspects of the ritual process. However, doing so was made more challenging by the fact that I found myself standing next to a middle-aged white man in a flowing multi-colored skirt, calling to mind my own unfinished journey with gender identity as a queer person.

Over the course of many minutes, a variety of movements and vocalizations gave expression to feminine power as the ritual expressions of the women intensified. They stomped, wailed, thrust their bodies around the space and into the air, whooped and roared in passionate celebration. For about ten minutes, the energy of the group reached numerous crescendos as it ebbed and flowed in waves. Gradually, the ritual drew to an organic conclusion, transforming smoothly into unstructured freeform collective dancing as those on the drums altered and varied their rhythms to support the shift in atmosphere.

After days of shared embodied play—including participatory presentations by BIPOC InterPlayers and a younger generation of InterPlay leaders—as well as a night of moving performances and this powerful and stirring ritual, the group was extremely open and connected. This connectedness made the diverse energies of the collective all the more palpable. Most of the group danced in joy and celebration with the drummers feeding off of those energies and recirculating them with the beat of their drums. A few who had felt particularly empowered by the ritual were gathered eagerly around the woman who had orchestrated it. As the night had already begun to grow long at this point, many older white InterPlayers were beginning to disperse, heading back to their accommodations to rest before the final sessions the following day. However, in addition to these energies, scattered in pockets throughout the space a very different affective atmosphere was brewing.

While the complexity and diversity of the energies of the room were reflected within me, my personal experience of the ritual left me feeling debilitated and distant in its aftermath. Certainly part of me was happy for those who were clearly feeling empowered by their participation. Simultaneously, however, I found myself deeply hurt and immobilized, lowering myself to a seated position on the floor where I had stood as the dancing commenced in front of me on the far side and center of the space. In this state of discomfort, my perception became somewhat bizarre and perplexing to me as my awareness widened and flattened but also included multiple points of complexity and infinite depth. It was neither the insular myopia of solipsistic pain and interoception, nor the striated space of a distant and discrete visuality, nor the uniformity and horizontality of kinesthetic immersion. While cognizant of the incongruence and intensity of discomfort, I was utterly incapable of articulating my experience, but even if I had been able to do so, I was staunchly unwilling to disrupt others' joy by forcing it to relate to my distress.

Others did not share this reticence. At some point, the pain I was feeling erupted in another's voice. A middle-aged queer white woman sporting an ambiguous gender presentation screamed loudly in order to be heard over the music: "Stop! Stop! Stop the drums!" For a time, the drumming and dancing continued, intermingling with the sound of her screams to form a disquieting aural assemblage. Eventually the celebratory music and dance drew itself down, gradually yet prematurely quieting. In the tense calm and fragile stillness that followed, the woman passionately described how the ritual had, in taking a strict binary approach to gender identity, failed to create both literal and figurative space for genderqueer, non-binary, and other folks who do not experience fitting neatly into the boxes of male and female.

Despite an obvious collective restiveness, the group exhibited a heightened sense of awareness with a sharp but highly mobile focus. Attention was initially concentrated on this woman's ardent articulation of the wounding impact of the gender binary but rapidly bounced around the room, refusing to establish a clear and consistent center. A series of black female InterPlayers responded by asserting that one should never silence the drums, explaining that the sound of the drums is the heartbeat of the collective. They described the spiritual power of drumming and dancing and its historical role in black liberation struggles, explaining how drums had been taken from enslaved people and destroyed in order to maintain social separation and prevent uprisings. Other participants spoke of the links between the struggles of queer people and people of color and of efforts to "pass" as a means of staying safe in a dominant society violent to both groups. Still others demanded an acknowledgment of the differences between these struggles both historically and in everyday experience.

These contributions came from a wide variety of participants, and, although passionate and confrontational, were all delivered with honesty and compassion. Various intensities found expression and affects circulated through the group, drawing it tighter even in conflict. At one point the social flesh of the collective was stretched to its limits, nearing a breaking point. When the aura of conflict was most intense, a black female InterPlayer explicitly stated that she was not concerned with the pain the woman who had interrupted the drums or other queer and gender-non-conforming white people felt as a result of the ritual. A subtle but palpable shift in the energy of the group followed, and her comment was met with a chorus of non-verbal vocalizations—stunned gasps, dissenting ooooh's, and quizzical hmmmm's. Modelling the capacity for autocritique in the midst of an intense affective state, she immediately reflected and not only withdrew her statement but also openly condemned the impulse to callous

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insensitivity—in spite of the fact that it had been motivated by her own suffering. Verbal

contributions continued to come from various participants at irregular intervals, punctuated by

charged silences. Time stretched into a vast expanse while space contracted around those

participants willing to remain present to the intensities circulating about the room.

Eventually, a second eruption occurred when Kira Allen, a queer black woman still

relatively new to InterPlay at the time, began to weep deeply and uncontrollably. Between her

sobs, she choked out intensely painful personal stories of her experience as a mixed-race person,

of health issues that nearly prevented her from becoming a mother, of challenging

intergenerational cycles of abuse. She expressed the desire for her own pain not to detract from

that of others, acknowledging connections between her suffering and that of others. Not only did

her pain diffuse throughout the room as others shared her tears, but so did the cleansing release

of her cries. Under the guidance of Coke Tani and Winton-Henry, the group began to engage in

what the InterPlay system describes as "exformative" practices, such as collective breathing and

movement, to dispel not only Allen's pain but also the negative affects accumulating within the

group. More time passed; the hour became extremely late. Gradually, without any clear

resolution or sense of finality, the group scattered for the night.

This event was extremely disorienting for me. For years afterward, my efforts to make

sense of it left me with nothing but interpretations that felt crude and inadequate, reinventing

partitions and boundaries that had been dissolved in my actual experience of it. Following

Ahmed's queer phenomenological approach, I have sought to linger in this unfamiliarity in order

to discern whether this moment "can offer us the hope of new directions" or enable my

"switching dimensions."[191] At first, I struggled as my mind sought to force the experience into an

individualizing framework. I conceptualized the concluding focus on Allen and her personal

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[191]Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 158.

history as a deflection of the initial conflict and a reinvestment of collective affect into an externality rather than a genuine engagement with the internal politics of the group.

Not only was I blind to the significance of Allen's intersectional identity as both queer and black to the complexity of the rupture, but I was as-yet unable to comprehend the effects of collective deindividualization on the process. The ritual, the collective dancing and drums, even the expressions of pain contributed to a strong breakdown of the individual ego, enhancing the redistribution of affective flows. Thus, while the orientation of a personalizing individualism offers a perception of Allen as centered by the group, she nevertheless describes feeling "out of [her] body" at that moment. She explains that she was "reacting to all the ways in which [she] had been bullied in [her] life," describing becoming involved in the moment because "we don't get to be free by oppressing other people." Growing up biracial, she often felt a lack of full belonging: "I felt I didn't belong to anyone, anything… In that barn, I related so strongly to that feeling of not belonging."[192]

I now explain these conceptual scotomas as an effect of the partiality my own participation in the emergent social flesh of the collective. Over the course of the night, both in response to the intensity of my affective experience as well as in order to recapture a state of mind one might consider more appropriate to a researcher, I gradually closed part of myself off from the collective affective processing, allowing my individual ego and personal boundaries to—incompletely—reconstitute themselves. Personal boundaries and the reinforcement of the individual ego are often undoubtedly necessary responses to traumatic and abusive experiences in which the self is violently disintegrated, and, because of its correlation with experiences of aggression and harm, social difference can be a potential indicator of the need for ego-reinforcement. However, individualizing tendencies also potentially cut us off from crucial

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[192]Interview with the author, 9-6-22.

experiences of growth and belonging, and so a more nuanced and differential approach to personal boundaries is warranted. In this case, I missed the opportunity to process and release pain collectively. On a conscious level, I understood that our life experiences and thus our sorrows were considerably different. Thus, as a result, although I remained present and made the effort to engage with the collective energy and activity of the group, I enclosed my own feelings, preventing our pains from relating on a pre-personal affective level in order to be held and processed in-common.

Through this circulation, redistribution, and processing of pain, the sensing collective embodiment of social flesh emerged, its elasticity revealed in the capacity of the group to hold together while continuing to absorb and recirculate affect. While Allen describes the rupture as "one of the biggest breakdowns of [her] life," she also acknowledges that we had constructed "sacred mother-fucking ground… [and] if we can't be connected in this, then where?" Cowie similarly identifies this rupture as a prominent example for them of the group body, saying that it was "a true reflection of what the collective consciousness was dealing with at the time." Blackwell notes that "it is in the group body where there is the possibility of restoring and healing great rifts" and that "in the US, we have a hard time with discord and disagreement. We don't know how to relate and stay in a group body where there is discomfort, so we disconnect. We dehumanize each other to stay comfortable." She says of the encounter at the 2018 Leaders Gathering, "that was super uncomfortable, and *we held it*."

THE HAPTICS OF PROTEST AND DIRECT ACTION: COMMUNAL FEELING AND PREFIGURATIVE ACTIVISM

Experiences of protest and direct action, whether entirely emergent or tightly choreographed, can generate sensations of collective embodiment similar to those explored in the previous chapter. Substituting the structure of performance forms and the guidance of facilitators with movements' repertoires of contention and the coordinating efforts of organizers, I extend a critical somatics approach to performance for social change beyond aesthetic and ludic frames to the insurgent frames of protest and direct action. I explore how these practices not only use bodies to *say* something within the political sphere's frameworks of legibility but also *do* things. This doing often involves strategic disruption—such as, shutting down traffic or blocking the construction of pipelines—but also involves, through activists' embodied relationality in the act, the prefiguration of communities of care on an existential level.

Outside of the controlled environments of embodied creative practice, experiences of collective embodiment take on new meanings and attributes, particularly insofar as they combine the cultivation of affective bonds among activists directly alongside—often violent—confrontation with movement antagonists, such as police, other agents of the state, or right-wing actors. To center the lived experiences of activists and the sensations they experience in these encounters, I open with a detailed protest account that highlights thematic similarities with the experiences of collective embodiment explored in the previous chapter.

On July 17th 2014, Eric Garner was killed by an NYPD officer using an illegal chokehold for allegedly selling cigarettes individually. When a grand jury decided a few months later not to

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indict the officer, Black Lives Matter demonstrations took place in a number of US cities. One such demonstration in Chicago was attended by a white thirty-something non-binary activist. This activist usually attends protests with trusted friends, but, because of the impromptu character of this demonstration, they arrived alone. They quickly connected with a young black woman, and the two decided to stick together during the event, holding hands in order to keep track of one another in the moving crowd.

The demonstration began with a symbolic mass die-in on the icy asphalt of a downtown city street. The activist describes the experience of the die-in as "chilling," recalling both the visceral sensation of the cold street under their body as a "surprisingly horrific feeling because it reminds you of death" and the "eerie quiet" of the moment's "silence and stillness" in contrast to the typically loud experience of protests.[193] They explain that, even though they were "really really close to other people in the space," they felt a peculiar loneliness while "looking up at the night sky and the tops of the tall buildings… [and] imagining the experience of dying." The fully-embodied character of the experience allowed for the simultaneity of somewhat contradictory sensations, with the feeling of the warmth of other bodies in contact and close proximity contrasting with the somber loneliness and the chill of the freezing ground and frigid night air. They describe the power of this shared loneliness of collective mourning.

After the die-in, the protesters sought to circumvent police blockades in order to make their way onto Lakeshore Drive—a major thoroughfare in downtown Chicago—and stop the flow of traffic. The activist describes evading police and running hand-in-hand with the woman they had only just met, calling it "one of the most surreal experiences. You're running through the streets and people yelling 'the cops are that way, [*points to their left*] go that way [*points right*], stick together!'" As they confronted a line of police blocking their advance, the activist

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[193]Interview with the author, 11-1-22.

explains that they felt "scared but also in-the-moment." Then, a tall white guy in front of them encouraged the two to push his body into the police officer directly in front of them. The activist says that this protester was holding his hands up and shouting "I'm not touching you" at the officer while they pushed him forward.

Their description of this moment slips rapidly back and forth between personal and collective description and the memory of the moment exhibits some ambiguity between the individual and group accomplishment of breaking through the barricade. "So we were pushing this tall white guy into the police and I was one of the first people to crack through the police line… I mean, it kind of broke in other places, but at that point [along the line] [*using their hands illustrate this*] I was the first to get through." They give special attention to the moment of passing through the barricade in their retelling, describing in detail the moment of pushing through the police line and seeing an officer reach out to grab them. "You don't necessarily **think** about what you are doing and it all kind of happens in slow motion." Their recollection of the moment of breaking through the police line demonstrates a heightened sensory awareness combined with a reduced self-consciousness as well as a fluidity between an understanding of individual and collective experience. The intensity of the personal experience of finding themself beyond the police and on the expressway rapidly gives way to the joy of collective accomplishment. "The moment of getting through and sitting down on Lakeshore [Drive] was exhilarating… it was like, we fucking did it!"

After marching down a portion of the expressway, the protesters encountered another police barricade and were forced back onto city streets and the demonstration dispersed shortly thereafter. Reflecting on the dangers of the protest, the activist explains that "the police brutality protests are the most intense because you are face-to-face with the people that you are calling out

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and they have social and physical power over you, completely. They are even more upset and angry. There is even more retaliation." Alongside these observations, they acknowledge that their whiteness and the femininity of their presentation were likely factors affording them less harsh treatment, especially in the moment of breaking through the police line. They express gratitude for the woman with whom they held hands—with whom they subsequently developed a friendship—in the face of this risk of violent retaliation by police:

> Even with that [danger], I had my protest buddy, so we were making sure that each other was safe, in a way. We were holding hands. I was with this stranger that I now have this deep camaraderie with because it felt like we survived something very scary and epic. So we were holding hands a lot of the time to make sure that we would stick together because it was so chaotic. So, I think, in those instances, I sort of lose myself.

As this account indicates, relationships forged in such encounters are unique, with deeper connections forming much more rapidly than under other circumstances.

This protest experience shares strong resonances with the themes of collective embodiment identified in my analysis of collaborative performance practice. Touch and kinesthetic awareness continue to play important roles, as does a heightened and holistic sensory state. This coordinated navigation of a risky situation requires intense affective attunement because the situation makes extensive verbal communication impossible. While the role of language and conscious deliberation remain reduced, moments of deindividualization are more transitory than in the laboratory environment of collaborative creative practice. However, the experience of direct confrontation with antagonists intensifies the rapid development of intimate bonds and raises the stakes for relations of mutual care, trust, and support among strangers. Moreover, in such contexts, the political dimensions of transindividual affect are more transparent and explicit.

In this chapter, I explore these familiar themes in activists' experiences of protest and direct action. Although grounded in extensive participant observation in social movement organizations, the ethnographic research of this chapter emphasizes interviews with activists regarding their experience of protest both as participants and as organizers. My initial pool of interviewees consists of direct contacts from my activism, but I expanded this pool through network sampling. Because of the dangers of activism—including violence from both the state and right-wing actors—conducting this type of research with direct action organizers and activists participating in extra-legal activities requires relationships built on care and trust.[194]

Except in the case of Kelly Hayes and Claire Haas, I have anonymized the identities of these interviewees in the writing, maintaining their confidentiality in order to protect them from this potential violence. While all my interviewees have experience as organizers of protests and direct actions, only Hayes and Haas prefer to be identified by name because of the public profiles they have developed as a result of this work. Hayes is a Menominee author, activist, and direct action trainer. She is the host of alternative news outlet *Truthout*'s "Movement Memos" podcast and a co-founder of Lifted Voices, a Chicago-based collective of black and indigenous women

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[194]Developing this trust is made more difficult by the history of strained relationships between academic researchers and activists. Academic researchers are often perceived as interlopers or tourists in anarchist groups and social movements, there to extract and appropriate rather than to engage and reciprocate. Despite my history of participation with political activism, my research has been impacted by this distrust. My engagement with the work of social movements became serious about a decade ago, after the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street movement. While living in Chicago, I organized primarily with a neighborhood chapter of the Occupy movement and later with the Chicago Light Brigade. With Occupy, I helped undertake a variety of political campaigns, including a successful effort to have lead paint properly remediated at a neighborhood elementary school—one primarily serving recent immigrant families—by exposing the city's negligence, and helped design, organize, and lead numerous creative protest actions. With the Chicago Light Brigade, I worked to construct lighted letter boards for rapid deployment at nighttime protests to spell out messages for allied groups around the city, including those seeking reparations for victims of police torture, housing justice, as well as folks working toward a fifteen dollar an hour minimum wage.

Although most of the contacts I made during these years support my current research, even many of those who do explicitly reminded me that they do not speak to academic researchers. I am grateful to those who elected to make an exception in my case because of our extensive shared history, but also respect those who still preferred not to participate in this research. Not only do these relationships—built through shared collective action and organizing—inform the basis of my argument, but they have been crucial to my research. These contacts helped me to expand my interview pool by offering introductions to other activists. These introductions are extremely helpful because of the high levels of distrust for academic researchers in activist circles. Even with these introductions, I encountered resistance and hostility to my inquiries.

and non-binary organizers and movement educators. Haas is an anticapitalist community organizer who has focused primarily on housing justice. Formerly with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, she is currently the director of the Sibling Transformation Project, an anti-ableist organization composed of siblings of people with disabilities.

Approaching social movements as sites for the production of embodied knowledge, I outline the need for an experiential approach to the study of movements, highlighting its value in a moment when a postrepresentational prefigurative paradigm is taking stage at the forefront of movement politics. Considering the role of organizers and artist-activists on the construction of protest encounters, I use the notion of prefigurative protest to describe experiences of political antagonism that both deconstruct and reconfigure subjectivity on the level of embodied relationality. The efficacy of such prefigurative protests lies both in their capacity to enhance movement participation and to prefigure communities of care.

Understanding the process of subjective mutation in prefigurative protest as collective as well as individual, I interrogate the possibilities for collective embodiment in protest and direct action. I contend that haptic, kinesthetic, and coenaesthetic sensations offer unique grounds for resistance to the normative individual body schema insofar as they involve the interception of the collective, differentiating internally-oriented sensations from externally-oriented perceptual ones. I argue that a critical somatics approach to performance for social change can cultivate the embodied knowledge of the collective, which I call communal feeling. Communal feeling attends to the affective interdependence of the collective by collectivizing affect and its processing into action.

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Ultimately, I argue that, through an attention to collective embodiment and communal feeling, prefigurative protest can configure the affective basis for the production of a kind of individuality that differs from that produced under neoliberalism—a more porous and interdependent individuality. In my concluding remarks, I consider the ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the prefigurative relational work of social movements with a particular focus on the challenges of creating the experience of collective embodiment amidst the risk of infection.

Protest and Direct Action

Like other forms of performance for social change, protest and direct action are evolving bases of knowledge transferred primarily through embodied training and participation. While movement writings and direct action manuals play a role in the transmission of knowledge, for the most part the protest and direct action practices of activist culture are accessed through direct participation with communities of practitioners. Combining the insights of engaged ethnographers who approach movements as knowledge producers and political theorists in their own right[195] with those of performance ethnographers who recognize knowledge as embodied as well as embedded,[196] my research approaches these practices as the accumulated embodied knowledge of social movements regarding modes of relationality that reject neoliberal modes of relationality and resist affective distancing in response to social difference. Focusing on lived experiences of protest, I emphasize this knowledge need not require inscription in social movement discourses—or even necessarily conscious awareness—in order to be legitimate.

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[195]See, for example: Casas-Cortés, et al., "Transformations in Engaged Ethnography"; Arturo Escobar *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Michael Lechuga, "An Anticolonial Future: Reassembling the way we do Rhetoric." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, 4 (2020): 378-385.

[196]See, for instance: Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles* and Soyini Madison *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

This orientation to protest and direct action challenges the cognitive and discursive biases of academic literature that approaches embodied protest activity primarily through an expressive lens, focusing on the meanings constructed for/by the public and media representatives or those contributing to a movement's collective identity framing. Even when it combats the somatophobia of theories of democratic deliberation[197] by acknowledging emotion and embodiment, this scholarship tends to emphasize the efficacy of messaging and tactics on public discourse or governmental policy. This emphasis reflects the ascendancy of theories of collective identity and an identitarian discursive paradigm of social movements, representing an inversion of Austin's performative—which addresses how to do things with words—by exploring how to say things with bodies.

Rather than reducing embodied protest activity to public discourse, my research uses ethnographic methods to interrogate the phenomenological dimensions of protest and direct action in order to trace their transformative and prefigurative

Protesters clash with police during a George Floyd solidarity protest in Athens, Greece.

Photo by Christina Banalopoulou

potential. This approach builds on social movement scholarship that moves beyond the framework of collective identity and dismisses the ubiquitous focus on state-oriented political strategy.[198] In particular, I draw inspiration from the work of Kevin McDonald, who advocates a

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[197]Amanda Machin, "Deliberating Bodies." *Democratic Theory* 2, 1 (2015): 42-62.

[198]In addition to Kevin McDonald's "experience movements" approach, Dimitris Papadopoulos's concept of "more-than-social movements" also serves as a source of inspiration for this orientation. As Papadopoulos explains in

shift from the paradigm of collective identity to a framework of what he calls "experience

movements."[199] His analysis of an activist's experience of a blockade at a meeting of the World

Economic Forum in Melbourne in 2000 exemplifies the characteristics of this approach:

> This is not a story about the struggle to construct a collective identity, but about 'finding your place'… It is through the senses that 'you find your place'. When this is achieved, the street becomes a dance floor. This is not an experience of discursive communication… What we encounter here is embodied communication achieved through the senses, emotion, and passion.[200]

Embracing the affective and experiential emphases of an experience movements approach, I

explore the prefiguration of more caring and connected worlds in the somatic and sensory

navigation of collective action.

In addition to being largely ignored by social movement scholarship, the lived experience

of protest has also received minimal attention in social movement discourses. While some

movement writings offer narrative accounts of community-building and solidarity in movement

spaces,[201] movement publications rarely offer detailed first-hand accounts of protest or direct

action. In addition to activists' understandable hesitancy to create archives of their extra-legal

activities, the scarcity of such accounts reflects the prioritization of the strategic goals of these

activities. Because activists use protest and direct action to focus public attention, inspire action,

or produce an effect on specific issues, to foreground their own experience might be perceived as

a narcissistic tendency to divert attention from the campaign onto themselves.

Experimental Practice, more-than-social movements are defined in part by their engagement in experimental practice, which "is about modes of intuition, knowledges, and politics that trigger intensive material changes and mobilize energies in ways that generate alternative and autonomous spaces of existence" (3).

[199]Kevin McDonald, "Oneself as Another: From Social Movement to Experience Movement." *Current Sociology* 52, 4 (2004): 589.

[200]Kevin McDonald, "From Solidarity to Fluidarity: Social Movements Beyond 'Collective Identity'" *Social Movement Studies* 1, 2 (2002): 121.

[201]See, for instance: Alayna Eagle Shield, et al., *Education in Movement Spaces*: *Standing Rock to Chicago Freedom Square* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

Without denigrating the significance of the impacts of protest on news media and the

established political sphere, I deploy a postrepresentational prefigurative social movement

paradigm in order to focus on the political potential of the affective excess of embodied

democratic action that cannot be fully captured as merely a contribution to public discourse. In

addition to its discursive contributions, protest can simultaneously transform its participants,

producing new subjectivities, generating relationships rooted in affective bonds, and prefiguring

worlds characterized by community care. The affective excess of protest has become

increasingly crucial to democratic participation as neoliberal governments deploy algorithmic

governance to manage the public. Marcela Fuentes argues "discursive and bodily performances

of collectivity exemplify a feminist understanding of body politics beyond the individual, clearly

demarcated bodies, such as those fostered by the neoliberal rhetoric of self-improvement,

individual effort, and meritocracy."[202] My research considers the lived experience of protest and

direct action in order to better understand how movements' experimentations with embodied

collectivity resist the atomizing tendencies of neoliberalism by producing new individual and

collective subjects.

Anarchism and Prefigurative Protest

The conceptual shift away from frameworks of collective identity and a discursive

political approach toward ones of embodied experience and prefiguration reflects changes in the

dominant political orientation of contemporary social movements. While by no means strictly or

uniformly anarchist, many movements, especially in Europe and North America, draw more and

more upon anarchist principles and strategies. These shifts in political orientation reflect David

Graeber's observation that:

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[202]Marcela Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*: *Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 111.

anarchist or anarchist-inspired movements are growing everywhere; anarchist principles—autonomy, self-organization, mutual aid, direct democracy—have become the basis for organizing within the globalization movement and beyond… [and] have now largely taken the place Marxism had in the social movements of the 1960s.[203]

Starting with the alterglobalization movement and continuing through Occupy Wall Street into the present, horizontal and prefigurative approaches to movement politics have become commonplace as has the legitimacy of direct action as a movement tactic.

As the "success" of neoliberalism and the proliferation of its logics have made supposedly representative governments less and less responsive to dissenting voices, movements have increasingly experienced the constraints of engagement with the spheres these governments define as legitimate. More and more black, indigenous, and postcolonial movements share anarchism's emphasis on self-determination and direct action in their conflicts with neoliberal nation-states. In alignment with radical black and indigenous scholarship rejecting a conciliatory politics of recognition by the nation-state,[204] these movements are reclaiming their political agency from the representatives of the nation-state. Indigenous activism at Standing Rock embraced direct action to halt construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Direct action has also become a core strategy in the Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion movements, which also exhibit anarchist organizing principles in their self-organization into decentralized and autonomous units.

Understanding it as central to a postrepresentational prefigurative political paradigm, I approach direct action primarily through its efforts to establish autonomy from dominant ideologies and institutions and to prefigure new worlds, modes of relation, and subjectivities.

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[203]David Graeber, *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), 302-306.

[204]See, for instance: Weheliye, *Habeus Viscus* and Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

According to LA Kauffman, direct action "can refer to a huge variety of efforts to create change outside the established mechanisms of government."[205] Rather than seeking permissions or recognition within the apparatuses of the state, direct action cultivates movement autonomy by building an independent base of power. It also involves a speculative component insofar as it rehearses the worlds of movements' imaginaries. For this reason, Graeber defines direct action as "a form of resistance which in its structure, is meant to prefigure the genuinely free society one wishes to create."[206] Direct action practices self-determination by shaping social and conceptual space outside of existing political spheres and rehearsing communities of care and trust.

Because I believe such efforts are not completely extricable from a discursive paradigm, I reject any strict delineation between protest broadly conceived and direct action specifically. Moreover, particularly in light of this interest in practices of self-determination, I recognize direct action as contributing to the strategy of subjective mutation central to performance for social change. Therefore, I consider direct action as a type of prefigurative protest insofar as it combines contestation with the existential affirmation of self-determination.

Combining the dual characteristics of autonomy and prefiguration with the subjective mutation of performance for social change, prefigurative protest functions as a an experimental and prefigurative practice seeking to ground both individual and collective subjectivity in an affective milieu relatively autonomous from the curation of dominant—in this case, neoliberal—ideologies and institutions. This approach stresses the two-pronged character of subjective mutation, requiring both the deconstruction of dominant subjectivity and its reconstruction within the affective milieu of new worlds prefigured in the shell of the old. Benjamin Arditi's descriptions of insurgencies as both "symptoms of our becoming other" and "passageways

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[205]David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), x.

[206]Graeber, *Possibilities*, 378.

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between worlds" [207] demonstrates how radical politics, from indigenous resurgence to abolition and marronage, acknowledges the importance of reconfiguring subjectivity alongside efforts to invent new—or revive old—social and political (as well as environmental) systems of horizontality.[208] Prefigurative protest experiments with the possibilities for an existential affirmation of new individual and collective selves by constructing relatively autonomous spaces of existence in which we catch glimpses of ourselves and our communities as they can exist differently from how they are defined by neoliberal logics.

Devising Prefigurative Protest

Artists-activists have a critical role to play in helping to create the affective landscapes of prefigurative protest in order to deconstruct and reconstruct participants' subjectivities. Protest and direct action are similar to other techniques of performance for social change insofar as they are embodied semi-structured improvisational activities taking place within frames of liminality. Organizers of protest events and direct actions are analogous to facilitators, directors, and choreographers. They plan for a wide variety of possibilities, guide rehearsals to build a strong ensemble, and structure the experience of participants. Kelly Hayes says of organizing protests that it is about "just putting so much intention into shaping the experience for people."[209]

In the insurgent frames of direct action, the intensity of affect can deconstruct individual subjectivity in ways that can be overwhelming, especially when directly confronting antagonists. Almost all of my interviewees describe some version of a disintegrating feeling in protest and direct action that has to be managed in order to avoid a debilitating breakdown. For example,

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[207]Benjamin Arditi, "Insurgencies don't have a plan—they are the plan." *e-misférica* (2013), 7, 3.

[208]See, for instance: Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[209]Interview with the author, 11-22-22.

Claire Haas recounts an action at a bank during the US foreclosure crisis, describing experiencing "a fluttery feeling" because "there's something happening now; I'm not fully in control. It's scary. I've just crossed that threshold and something else is happening."[210] She also describes witnessing that feeling in others, observing that:

> they feel fine up until the moment where suddenly there's cops there or suddenly they're seeing the reaction of targets. They're seeing the bankers be agitated and yelling at them or crying… I've been with people who have just started crying in those moments. Some people shut down. Some people get really defensive.

When operating outside of the law and frequently in direct confrontation with agents of the state or other oppositional entities, participants are likely to experience an intensification of sensation and a heightening of emotions. Without care and planning, the unfamiliarity and intensity of the embodied actions and affective relations involved in these highly conflictual situations can activate affective feedback loops that reinforce dominant subjectivities by making its disruption too painful and dangerous.

Members of Occupy Rogers Park, in collaboration with other activist groups, blockade Chicago City Hall in opposition to massive public school closures.
Photo by Miki Pope

However, with careful design and preparation, activists can channel this affective excess into relations of care for themselves and one another in the face of the violence of the world in which they find themselves. Hayes describes emphasizing "certainty, safety, and belonging" in preparation for direct action in order to "counteract the natural dysregulation that accompanies whatever the fuck it is I'm doing, which is probably something that would normally be inciting fear, hesitation, whatever—these

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[210]Interview with the author, 11-30-22.

things that make us not do the dangerous shit." These elements help to cultivate different affective responses in collective action. When these elements are present, Hayes describes something resembling Csikszentmihalyian flow, including the dissolution of the dominant sense of selfhood and a feeling of integration with the group and the collective action undertaken:

> when you have all [three] of those things going for you, well then, I'd say I'm feeling barely aware of my body. I am completely like in sync with what I'm doing, with what I'm making happen. I'm a person that deals with a lot of physical pain, and I completely lose track of it if all those other things are on-point and the work is on-point. I'm into the artistry of what we're all creating together. It can make a lot of things just evaporate.

By acknowledging the illusory character of safety as protection offered by the state, the precarity and danger of extra-legal activity can be endured when accompanied by what Hayes describes as "a taste of what real safety actually consists of, which is our mutual investment in collective survival." Under this framework, the world she and her collaborators are creating together becomes more significant than any fear created within the frameworks of the old self and world that they are leaving behind.

Effective participation in protest and direct action benefit heavily from preparation and practice because, in the high stress and emotionally charged circumstances of these events, embodied knowledge regarding the appropriate ways in which to relate to one's peers—as well as one's antagonists—is crucial to the channeling of affective excess. While much of this knowledge has a conscious and cognitive component, much of it is affective and sensory in character. Hayes explains that preparation for direct action is extensive because: "you want the physicality of the experience to be muscle memory by the time it happens." This preparation often involves destroying lockboxes in front of those training for an action in which they anticipate being cut out of one. Hayes argues for the value of witnessing this destruction first-hand because it enables participants to "know what it smells like, what it sounds like" so that

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"when that machine clicks on, it's like: okay, my body remembers that sound, I know what that

is. I know what it's going to do. I know what it's going to smell like." She explains that because

of this sensory preparation "you're able to sit with it and process it. It's not the same kind of

horrifying experience that it would be. I know, for me these things are huge, because the body

absolutely remembers."

While this embodied knowledge can be developed in the embodied rehearsals of direct

action training, Claire Haas argues that these embodied competencies are best developed through

repeated participation in protest and direct action events:

> Giving people the time to process in advance is super helpful… The thing that I think is
> most helpful is actually doing actions. One of the things I like about a week of actions or
> a day of actions model, where people sign up for a day, is that they can do multiple
> actions. So one of the things we did, especially during the week of actions during the
> foreclosure crisis is we would do a set of actions, go to all the banks… six times in a row
> in one neighborhood where all the bank branches were. We would go door-to-door and
> people would play different roles different times, but you got to practice it. You did it
> once, debrief it. What worked? What didn't work? Okay, now we're going to do it
> again… At the end of my first week of actions, I was like 'okay, I know everything that
> could possibly happen. I know how to do every role in an action.' And I don't actually
> know everything that could possibly happen, but I know enough about how to think on
> my feet in those moments.

Whether cultivated in iterative participation or in the embodied rehearsal of direct action

training, this embodied knowledge and affective memory entrains activists' values into their

unconscious bodily reactions to the intense conflict of protest situations.

In accordance with the duality of prefigurative protest, this entrained bodily reactivity

concerns not only interactions with antagonists but also relationships between fellow

participants. Entering into highly combative and physically dangerous situations as part of a team

requires relationships of trust and support. Hayes argues that these relationships are as much a

part of direct action as the disruption being organized:

> To get to a place of trust through the practice—through the rehearsal of how we are supposed to be there for each other, and getting conditioned for that work as part of the action—that mutual support work is part of what we are training for, to be there for each other and to model our values and model our solidarity as part of this project. It's not simply the act of shutting down an intersection, or whatever. If people have time to really work on all of this stuff, you see that in the outcomes and in the embodied experience of what happens.

For this reason, when Hayes trains activists preparing to undertake direct action, she makes sure that they have ample time to discuss their desires for the action, concerns and limitations regarding their participation, and the ways in which they would like to receive support. These discussions support their efforts to prefigure communities of care in the midst of the intensity of political struggle.

This channeling of affective access by organizers is incredibly valuable, but it is worth noting that it is not strictly necessary to experiences of subjective transformation in protest and direct action. While many such events are extensively rehearsed and tightly designed and directed by organizers, as public encounters with emergent characteristics, improvisational elements play a crucial role, enabling activists to cultivate such relations on their own. A thirty-something white woman living in North Carolina shared a story from her experience of the 2017 Women's March in Washington DC. Describing a situation in which—due to the huge number of protesters on the National Mall—there was insufficient access to bathroom facilities, she explains that groups of protesters spontaneously formed human rings by standing shoulder to shoulder facing outward in order to provide a small degree of privacy to female protesters squatting to urinate. She muses, "everyone's awareness of their own bladders was an interesting tie between strangers at an event that was so heavily focused on women's bodies."[211] Despite being an entirely different kind of affective excess, this experience serves as a reminder that these processes exceed the capacities of organizers to plan.

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[211]Correspondence with the author, 11-11-22.

Political Communion and Movement Participation

Applying a critical somatics approach to the design of prefigurative protest would encourage artist-activists to craft situations capable of generating the kind of embodied collectivity experienced in collaborative and embodied creative practice within frames of political contestation. Highlighting connections between embodied relationality and forms of horizontal decision-making, performance scholars note compelling parallels between embodied practices and anarchist organizing principles similar to those actively cultivated in performance for social change.[212] While Paula Serafini rightfully questions the transposability of the horizontal creativity of "prefigurative forms of art making" to public "performance actions" in which "participants are entering a pre-constructed situation,"[213] I argue that artist-activists can choreograph and curate the conditions of prefigurative protest in order to enhance the possibilities for experiences of collective embodiment.

When applied to protest and direct action, the concept of collective embodiment resonates with experiences that Hayes describes as cultivating a feeling of "political communion." She doesn't recall if she picked up this phrase from somewhere or if it is a term she created, but she uses it to describe "an experience within direct action where people are actually having a shared experience around something profound or even sacred, something purposeful, something that helps direct people, something that helps a firm commitment." She says it involves a "sense of creation… of shared experience and shared purpose [that] elevates people in some way and can open up a sense of new possibilities" and argues that it is "a

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[212]See especially: Rihannon Firth "Somatic Pedagogies: Critiquing and Resisting the Affective Discourse of the Neoliberal State from an Embodied Anarchist Perspective." *Ephemera* 16, 4 (2016): 121-142; and Tony Perucci, "Dog Sniff Dog." *Performance Research* 20, 1 (2015): 105-112.

[213]Paula Serafini, *Performance Action: The Politics of Art Activism* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 80-81.

foundational goal in direct action, to generate *that*. If we don't have that right now, then these actions aren't worth doing."

Hayes opposes protests characterized by this sense of political communion to forms of protest that reinforce neoliberal subjectivity by constructing participation in ways that support feelings of individual accomplishment without requiring real commitment. Decrying protest events that enable participants to feel a self-righteous sense of accomplishment without genuine contributions to community care, she argues that the current political moment calls for protests that create feelings of solidarity and reaffirm movement values by serving the material needs of communities:

> I'm not big on the big marches these days. I don't think that's where it's at. I don't think that they build anything beyond an immediate sense that people get to take home as individuals, that they *did something*. When we talk about actions that affirm our values, that reaffirm our commitments—and some of those actions, in my experience, can actually involve acts of care and fulfilling community needs in various ways—I think *these* have a strong, strong potential to build bonds between people and communities that are lasting and help can help folks overcome difference, can help people build the relationality we need to solve problems together and to be in a better, larger state of solidarity.

Formulaic protest forms like big marches, especially when they are authorized by the state with permits that define pre-approved routes, over-constrain the circumstances of protest, limiting the possibilities for affective access. In doing so, they construct activism as another avenue for formalized participation in the political sphere and reinforce an interindividual approach to political collectivity. Hayes's call for a different kind of protest asserts the necessity of protest with a prefigurative dimension, engaging participants in action that directly contributes to community care.

In order to compete with the illusions of security and consistency offered by neoliberal governance, prefigurative protest must make the experience of political antagonism enjoyable

and empowering. For instance, Hayes describes a blockade action involving lockboxes in Logan Square, Chicago[214] in which, despite a higher than expected level of violence involved in the destruction of the lockboxes by police, the activists "waited out the destruction of nearly every box, and those people came out of jail smiling. We were all prepared for them to be traumatized as fuck, and they were just celebrating each other. They wanted to party." She also explains that she has witnessed "people go through really really scary fucking blockades and come out the other side describing it as a tender experience because they felt very held by the other participants and by their direct support [person]." Such positive affects can inspire consistent and long-term engagement, with more pronounced impacts on subjectivity outside of the frames of protest.

If protest experiences can generate feelings of connectedness and interdependence within creative and caring communities, they will inspire and sustain movement participation. Hayes argues that "when we successfully manage to prefigure something about the world we want, it can galvanize people in ways that are euphoric." This argument echoes Larry Bogad's identification of one of the alternative approaches to efficacy in performance protest as "bonding people through shared risks and absurd experiences, and facilitating the recruitment of new members by making activism joyous, creative, and participatory."[215] Thus, while a great deal of the existing research literature on direct action emphasizes that it is enacted by pre-existing affinity groups or organizing clusters, my research stresses the role it plays in drawing new participants into affinity groups or in motivating them to form new organizing clusters.

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[214]She writes about this protest in her forthcoming book *Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care* with Miriam Kaba.

[215]Larry Bogad, *Tactical Performance: The Theory and Practice of Serious Play* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 63.

This observation matches with the experience of another of my interviewees, a thirty-something white male artist-activist formerly of the San Francisco Bay-area collective Brass Liberation Orchestra. He describes how he first became involved with the politically leftist marching band, which coordinates with other groups to support protest actions. Seeing the group play at a port workers union strike and occupation of the Port of Oakland in 2011, he was amazed at how they enhanced the protest, not only prolonging it by entertaining other protestors, but helping to shape the affective atmosphere of the event musically by variously reducing fear, amplifying antagonism, or de-escalating moments of conflict. This experience inspired him to join the group:

> It's a kind of performance in a pretty volatile situation. I think that that's what initially attracted me to perform in those kinds of spaces… a band could really push a group of people to act differently in moment that is perceived as risky… Joining the band, I saw how much they thought about music as a strategy… it is engaging to try to make a tangible impact in the moment, not just to change people's beliefs but actually move them to act.[216]

In addition to this initial experience, his connection to the group continued to be deepened by band rehearsals and participation in future actions. He has since formed similar groups and become connected to a much wider transnational network of protest marching bands. Examples such as this encourage consideration of the impact of embodied collective experiences of affective relationality on activist networks, rather than approaching them as exclusively cognitive and informational.

Similar experiences are shared by many of my interviewees. One describes how repeated participation in direct action builds trust with fellow activists, a trust that also extends to wider collectives of participation. She notes that "there's certainly community trust that builds with experience. I was organizing with a lot of the same people, going to their events. They were

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[216]Interview with the author, 11-17-22.

going to my events. And so we know each other. So, there's that trust in the leadership of an event that also makes me trust the crowd."[217] Another activist, a white man in his late 70s, describes shared participation in collective action as central to the strong sense of community in his direct action affinity group. Recalling a mutual aid campaign as well as various creative disruptions directed at local politicians, he attributes this pattern of direct action with the longevity of the relationships of the group, saying "that's what got me involved and kept me connected. We lasted a lot longer than the Occupy downtown. We lasted longer than Occupy nationally; we weren't even calling ourselves Occupy anymore."[218] The commonness of such experiences reflects Haas's observation that "people who join up in the course of an action are more likely to stay involved in an organization over a period of time… having the action be the first thing that you do leads to longer term commitment… [and to answer] why I think that is, it's because I have seen it be true hundreds of times."

Haptics and Collectivity

Tactics involving touch and collective movement are common components of movements' repertoires of contention because of the way in which the physical body tends to be used as a strategic obstacle to impede police or other oppositional agents. However, these tactics are also examples of a broader cultural phenomenon regarding the approach to embodied relationality in activist cultures. David Graeber observes that anarchist and activist communities exhibit a greater comfort with touch, taking note of: "the phenomenology of backrubs, like the chain back-rubs in the break from facilitation training. Holding hands or linking arms in human chains. General patterns of touching: ordinary Americans almost never touch each other.

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[217]Interview with the author, 12-15-22.

[218]Interview with the author, 11-22-22.

Anarchists seem especially fond of hugs…people leaning on each other, holding hands."[219] Thus, tactile and proprioceptive sensations often play a substantial role in protest experiences not only because the protest tactics emphasize the material impact of the body in space but also because of the cultural norms of activist communities.

I argue that this attitude toward haptic relationality is more than a mere quirk of anarchist and activist cultures; it is the foundation of an embodied experience of interdependence and formative of the intense affective bonds of activist relationships. The strategies agents of the state use to contain and control collective action often enhance these feelings of connection and interdependence by intensifying the experience of deindividualization. The resultant affective excess can facilitate sensations of transindividuality and the experience of collective embodiment. Thus, as with other techniques of performance for social change, registers of physical contact and coordinated movement play an important role in the constitution of collectivity in protest and direct action.

An experience shared by one activist exemplifies these aspects of the experience of collective embodiment in protest:

> I'm thinking of those kind of kinesthetic feelings that I've had in protests. The first one that comes to my mind is [the 2012] NATO [summit protests] in Chicago. That march ended at an intersection that the police had kettled off. So the march is stopped. People stopped moving, but no one was really clear what was going on because it was a very large march. I was towards the front, not at the front but towards the front, and I started to hear fights. I started to hear things being thrown, people shouting, screams. I heard violence, basically, and I wanted to know what was happening. I did not feel safe or confident enough to put myself in the middle of it, but I moved up. I moved close to the intersection, so it was kettled off on two sides towards [the meeting location of the] NATO [summit], and I was just outside of that.
> There's a lot of physical tension at that point when you're within thirty feet from the front line of a protest. Where there's actual physical fighting between the police and the protesters. It creates waves of pushing. The protesters push forward and the police push back. Then the protesters end up pushing the next line of people back and the next.

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[219]Graeber, *Direct Action*, 264.

People start falling, rippling backwards. So from about thirty feet away, I could feel those heaves of the altercation. It's just interesting in hindsight.

   What I really remember, though, was someone being escorted out who was bleeding from the head. A medic had found him. They were pulling him out, and he went right by me. It was not a person I knew, but in that moment, it was like… it was almost like it had happened to me… or it had happened to a very good friend. It was very personal. It was like happening to all of us. I think that's interesting, that kind of collective mode of thought that comes up when you're in an event like that. That, them pushing against some protesters is pushing against all the protesters. So *that* I felt really viscerally, and I felt kind of nauseous almost.[220]

Stine Krøijer's examination of collective action at the 2009 Climate Summit in Copenhagen similarly connects the police strategy of kettling to experiences of collective embodiment in protest. Building upon the observations of a climate activist, she argues:

> the experience of becoming a collective body, or one big body acting together, as Aske phrased it, is frequent at protests. It may take a variety of forms, as when activists walk in tight blocs with their arms locked together during a demonstration, or when an outside force physically compresses bodies or confines them to narrow spaces, which in police jargon is referred to as 'kettling'. In these situations the body/ies attain the quality of simultaneously being one and multiple.[221]

Stressing the significance of bodily density, touch, and coordinated movement, these examples highlight the anatgonistic relationship to agents of neoliberal nation-states and the impact of their policing strategies on affective connections between protestors. In protest and direct action, activists willingly position themselves in these confrontational situations, which—within the framework of critical somatics—we might characterize as practices of experimental collective bodying.

Although rooted in entirely incomparable socio-historical circumstances, these examples contain conceptual echoes of Moten and Harney's theory of logisticality and its link between the forced compression of bodies and new modes of insurgent feeling. Within this theory, hapticality

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[220]Interview with the author, 11-15-22.

[221]Stine Krøijer, "Security is a Collective Body" in *Times of Security: Ethnographies of Fear, Protest and the Future*, eds. Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49.

is an experience of "the shipped," kidnapped and enslaved African people chained closely together in the holds of slave ships. They describe this process of capture, commodification, and forced movement as containerization. To become "the shipped" is to be produced as a mobile population deprived of the freedom of individual movement; as Moten and Harney put it, "to have been shipped is to have been moved by others, with others. It is to feel at home with the homeless, at ease with the fugitive, at peace with the pursued, at rest with the ones who consent not to be one. Outlawed, interdicted, intimate things of the hold, containerized contagion."[222]

This commodification of human flesh represents an extreme and violent form of deindividualization that nevertheless generates an affective excess, interconnecting the bodies that experience it. Moten and Harney describe this new mode of communal feeling as sensing through and with others, saying "the hold's terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common, to create a new feel in the undercommons… a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you. This is modernity's insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh."[223] These scholars articulate a sensory experience that resists the individualizing subjectification of Enlightenment thinking but also eschews the easiness of established forms of imagined community or collective identity.

Although kettling—like containerization—might contribute to the production of communal feeling and collective embodiment, the resulting collectivities risk fixation through interpellation by state agents and juridical apparatuses. Police frequently use kettling not only to strategically control the movement of protesters but to organize and execute mass arrests. Prosecutors then attempt to make these collectives legible to the criminal justice system by trying them in groups. These practices constitute a discursive and juridico-political process of collective

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[222]Moten and Harney, *Undercommons*, 97.

[223]Moten and Harney, *Undercommons*, 97-98.

subjectification that exists alongside the experimental prefiguration of the social flesh of collective embodiment. For example, during protests of Donald Trump's inauguration on January 20th, 2017 more than one hundred and fifty protesters were kettled by Washington DC police and subsequently arrested for property damage. In the case of the first six to be tried, prosecutors argued that, although there was no specific evidence they participated in any destruction of property, they were guilty by virtue of having stayed with those who did.[224] Although this group was eventually acquitted, such actions reveal the potentially dangerous consequences of efforts to designate, regulate, and administer collective subjects. In order to escape this imprisonment of social flesh in the confines of fixed collective subjects, prefigurative protest must continuously reinvent the collectivities of protest and direct action in order to preserve illegibility to the state.

Collective Interoception

The deindividualization that takes place within the insurgent frames of protest and direct action offers opportunities to reconfigure both the individual and the collective using the affective milieu of collective contention. As one of increasingly few examples of liminality connected to collective public life, protest experiences are particularly fruitful in this regard because of their relative autonomy from existing financial and affective economies. These encounters of collective contention introduce an extensive range of novel preindividual affects with the potential to be structured into new individual and collective subjectivities.

Describing experiences of relative intimacy and distance in protest, Hypatia Vourloumis positions touch as the foundation of an integrated sensorium in order to articulate the constitutive effect of preindividual relationality. The ninth of her ten theses on touch states that "entities

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[224]Ellie Silverman, "The first Inauguration Day protest trial ended in acquittals," *The Washington Post*, December 29, 2017.

traversing social and desiring fields are constituted through and by a matrix of senses. These

relationalities are determined by approach—to reduce distance in some cases and to increase

distance in others." She further explains:

> Countless foreign bodies are brushed and bumped against, smelt when moving within a protest, demonstration, or improvised general assembly. What is felt is a visceral turbulence of, because it is made tangible, the malleability and ephemerality of context and convention, twisting, never settling, the work itself as it unfolds, the contingency that is the absence of a finished product. Jostling bodies touch feelings… Gathering, turning blind corners, sheltering in tear gassed arcades together, pulling each other out of danger, touched to the quick we strive, arm in arm, to step into that which is here and not yet.[225]

Vourloumis emphasizes the prefigurative dimension of protest experiences. These experiences

entrain activists on a preindividual affective level, enhancing intimacy and vulnerability with one's fellow protestors while simultaneously inducing protective distancing from movement antagonists. This entrainment reconfigures

Police shoot tear gas at protestors during a George Floyd solidarity protest.
Photo by Daniel Dilliplane

the relations and boundaries of both the individual and the collective.

In similar fashion, I argue that the tactile, kinesthetic, and coenaesthetic sensations are

especially critical to the production of collectivities characterized by interdependence and intense

affective bonds because they participate more fully in the boundary work of differentiating

inward-reaching interoceptive sensation from externally-oriented perception. While most

phenomenology stresses the role of outward reaching perception in the production of a sensory

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[225]Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch, or, Writing Touch." *Women and Performance* 24, 2-3 (2014): 236.

awareness of one's body, the materialization of a border or boundary distinguishing self from world also involves inward reaching interoception. Because they are central to the experience of the sensory boundaries between self and world but are also highly susceptible to sensations of transindividuality, touch, kinesthesis, and coenaesthesis embody this sensory differentiation.

This differentiation between interoceptive sensations and externalizing perception is collective as well as individual. In accordance with Simondon's assertion that "the collective is psychosomatic,"[226] I argue that the tactile, kinesthetic, and coenaesthetic sensations of protest constitute the basis of the corporeal boundaries of embodied collective subjectivity. The circumstances of protest engender affective processes of proximity and distancing that configure new sensory boundaries of the group through collective interoception. For instance, Eirini Nedelkopoulou writes about touch in participatory public performance, describing its capacity to define the borders and boundaries of collectivity through inclusion and exclusion.[227] Protestors experience this collective interoception in the push and pull as police attempt to remove an activist from a human chain, in the vibrations transmitted through and across bodies as a grinder tears through a lockbox, in the consolidated body heat of a group of protestors on a cold night, in the joy at breaking through a police blockade and the pain when someone is violently assaulted by police.

Touch's capacity for deindividualization and collective embodiment is evident in its cultural associations with affect and sexuality. Eve Sedgwick couples touch with affect, arguing "texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together" because "both are irreducibly phenomenological" and that attending to them is "to enter a conceptual realm that is not shaped

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[226]Simondon, *Individuation*, 342.

[227]Eirini Nedelkopoulou, "The In-Common of Phenomenology: Performing KMA's *Congregation*" in *Performance and Phenomenology*, eds. Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou (New York: Routledge, 2015), 163.

by lack nor by commonsensical dualities of subject versus object."[228]Susi Ferrarello describes the constitution of the ego in sex as a "transition from an hyletic egoless flow to the awakening of the ego as intersecting with other flows" as well as the intercorporeality of intimate life in which "the body of the other is co-constitutive of the world and more precisely of myself as living in that world."[229] While Graeber argues that touch is largely desexualized in activist culture—existing as "just one possible aspect of a more general common physicality,"[230] it retains a degree of intimacy that enhances affective bonds.

Kinesthetic and coenaesthetic senses are also particularly susceptible to sensations of transindividuality. Although movement holds a prominent metaphorical significance in politics—evident in the very notion of social *movements*—its prefigurative subjective dimensions are often overlooked. Movement can be understood through objectifying spatial frameworks, but it is also includes a sensory dimension in kinesthesis, the internal sensory experience of motion. Kinesthesis (or kinesthesia) is a component of proprioception, the sensory awareness of bodily position and movement, which is crucial to the unconscious coordination of movement and the viscero-motor centers associated with Protevi's protoempathic identification.

Coenaesthesis (or cenesthesis, from the German *Gemeingefühl*) is "bodily feeling in the most diffuse and general sense."[231] Despite significant divergences, characterizations of it usually include a wide variety of sensations that cannot be localized in a single sense, such as thermosensation, nociception, balance and a wide array of sensations associated with the fascia, connective tissue, and internal organs but generally understood to be indicative of emotional

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[228]Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 21.

[229]Susi Ferrarello, *The Phenomenology of Sex, Love, and Intimacy* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 5, 113.

[230]Graeber, *Direct Action*, 264.

[231]Andrew Hodgkiss, *From Lesion to Metaphor: Chronic Pain in British, French and German Medical Writings* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), 75.

states. Coenaesthesis is often thought of as interoception, but—given the indeterminacy of the source of body heat in compressed bodies alongside the common experience of affective transmission with respect to pain and emotional qualities—its connection to individual embodiment is at best ambivalent.

The unique role that these senses play in collective interoception is the result of their participation in a more integrated sensorium that remains open to novel sensations. Serving as umbrella categories for a variety of interrelated sensory systems, these senses are conceptually bracketed off from the dominant neuroscientific organization of the sensorium, which Erin Manning refers to as the "deficit model" because it acknowledges the legitimacy only of "fixed and located" senses that fit clearly within "a pre-constituted body schema." She argues that, under this model, "bodies are only properly bodies when they can distinguish themselves from the world."[232] This model tends to exhibit an optic bias, aspiring to the universality and completeness of perception-at-a-distance and thereby supporting the clarity and simplicity of a rigid individual bodily boundary and a distanced, rational, and contemplative subjectivity. [233] By sequestering the capacities of touch, kinesthesis, and coenaesthesis for the kinds of novel sensations described as synaesthesia, multi-sensing, overfeeling, or suprasensation, this model constrains the political potential of the sensory and somatic.

<u>Communal Feeling</u>

This interoceptive discernment of the affective boundaries of the collective is a critical component of what I call communal feeling, an affective and collective embodied cognition

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[232]Erin Manning, "Not at a Distance: On Touch, Synaesthesia and Other Ways of Knowing" in *Touch* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020), 149.

[233]The linguistic codification and technological encoding of this model threatens to eradicate affective excess in other domains. In *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks expresses a concern that "the information age is making us very good at symbolization, at the expense of bringing us into contact with that which we do not know and for which we have no categories" (xi).

through which collectives develop their capacities to care for and challenge themselves. Rooted

in the fundamentally affective basis of collective life, communal feeling is an experimental

practice of prefiguring communities of care on a sensory and somatic level. In its

acknowledgment of the corporeality of collective embodiment, it deviates from approaches to

collective feeling as a metaphorical application of an individualistic notion of emotion to

groups[234] or as an interindividualistic composite that dissociates the emotional from the

sensory.[235]It is a way of knowing grounded in lived experience and bodily responsiveness.

Communal feeling is about learning how to process transindividual affect as a collective

entity in order to develop greater comfort and competence with affective interdependence. Just as

an individual body can exhibit an embodied and emotional intelligence in its entrained links

between sensation and action without requiring conscious intentionality—as, for instance,

pulling a hand away from a burning stovetop, or inhaling deeply to ease a moment of stress—the

collective is capable of developing its own embodied cognition. This communal feeling has

kinesthetic and emotional dimensions. A thirty-something Hispanic activist describes, for

example, an experience of forming a human chain with other protestors, using their bodies to

create a physical barrier to shift the affective atmosphere of a protest:

> Once I was informally in a chain of people in a protest sometime in Chicago, trying to
> isolate two groups from each other, the police from another group of people. We were
> trying to de-escalate by putting our bodies in the middle of it and creating a chain that
> they couldn't pass. So I would just say about that, when you have a big crowd—and
> certainly when you're linked together, when you're physically linked—one person's
> choice affects the whole chain. So in that way, you are one. You are trusting each other.
> You are moving as one and putting your bodies together for more impact. So, it is a
> communal experience not unlike dance.[236]

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[234]Steven Connor, "Collective Emotions: Reasons to Feel Doubtful." The History of Emotions, Queen Mary, University of London, 9 October 2013.

[235]Ami Harbin, "Collective Responsibility and Collective Feeling." *Dialogue – Canadian Philosophical Association* 53, 1 (2014): 38-39.

[236]Interview with the author, 11-15-22.

As she describes, linked arm-in-arm, the movement of one protestor impacts the entirety of the chain, resulting in a kind of dance that necessitates an embodied learning process for how to move effectively as a collective unit. Similar to how somatic practices and martial arts entrain individual bodies to respond in certain ways, a critical somatics approach to performance for social change can cultivate the collective capacities of communal feeling.

Embracing the "double meaning, tactile plus emotional"[237] of an affective understanding of "feeling,"[238] communal feeling combines sensory awareness with emotional intelligence. It entails an intuitive understanding of when to push forward to break the police barricade and when to open space for someone about to pass out from the density or pressure of the bodies around them, but it also involves an understanding of when to reinforce a particular affect and when to introduce a dissenting one. The interoceptive responsiveness of communal feeling need not homogenize the various shared affects, nor does it require a uniform affective orientation to the world. Just as an individual can process mixed feelings without invalidating aspects of their own experience, collectives can experience divergent affects as internal—i.e., as genuine and significant rather than as something to be ignored or excised—without necessarily accepting them as appropriate or prudent.

By developing the capacities of communal feeling, a critical somatics approach to performance for social change can contribute to a broader effort to increase this kind of knowledge within movements. Haas argues that "we are in a moment where there is more skilling up of emotional intelligence skills" in social movement spaces. Her assessment that "on

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[237]Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 17.

[238]It also shares generative echoes with Raymond Williams's structures of feeling, which are "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs" through an attentiveness to "the affective elements of consciousness and relationships" constituting "a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social" ("Structures of Feeling" in *Marxism and Literature*, 132).

the whole, we're doing better on that than we were" is reflective of both her own learning and her experience of movement spaces more broadly: "I'm more attentive… I'm not perfect about it at all, but I'm better at it than I used to be. And I think that that's probably a movement growth thing as well as an individual growth thing for me."

By virtue of the intensity of affective bonds, communal feeling can facilitate an interoceptive responsiveness to affects that are not otherwise a part of the affective life of a particular individual. For example, while narrating the first time she witnessed first-hand police violence, a thirty-something activist describes its role in producing an intimate and embodied knowledge of such violence. While visiting New York City, she went with a friend to the Occupy Wall Street protests in Zuccotti Park:

> Everything was fine. They were singing, and they had some signs. Then the security came… security or the police came and it was a battle. They just threw this person. Someone had a laptop connected to a camera and they were recording the event. The police, of course, targeted them first and threw them to the ground. It just happened right in front of me. They were thrown to the ground in front of me. And I hadn't seen something like that before, like completely unprovoked police violence. I remember I screamed at them. I was like, 'what are you doing!?' It was like, this communal [feeling]… I didn't know that person, but it was as though they're my family or my very, very good friend. And someone had to… my friend had to pull me away because I was so shocked. I was about to get arrested with them, [because of] my reaction. It was just my first reaction to seeing that. I don't know. It's hard to describe, the first time you see police brutality in person. It's very shocking, I guess, even though I knew about it. I knew about it intellectually, but seeing it in front of me was a very visceral feeling, too. So again, with a stranger taking it, feeling it very personally and viscerally, like my nervous system went like through the roof. I was just like, really really activated emotionally and chemically.[239]

Although she was not in this case—and, given her social identities, may never be—the victim of police violence, her knowledge of it goes beyond mere cognitive awareness. Despite not personally knowing the victim, the intensity of her response—including both her actions and the somatic reaction of her body—demonstrates a degree of intimacy in her knowledge of police

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[239]Interview with the author 12-15-22.

brutality that exceeds that generated by simply witnessing it. Moreover, regardless of its efficacy in protecting the collective, this response represents a genuine and instinctive reaction to harm done to another but nevertheless experienced viscerally in her own body.

By cultivating the affective bonds of social flesh, a critical somatics approach to performance for social change might enhance the capacities of diverse movements for communal feeling by similarly enabling affective transmission across social difference. This possibility invites us to ask: What does it mean for us to respond to another's pain as—to a greater or lesser extent—our own? How can we do so in a way that is respectful to the one who experiences it as more fully their own? Through our connections to others, can we experience—in part—affects we might be otherwise unable to encounter? Can a black person experience white guilt or a white person black joy? What would happen if such affects were held and processed collectively—*our* fear, *our* pleasure, *our* anger—as well as individually? Collectivizing these feelings would not imply that they belong to all equally, but would imply a degree of collective responsibility for processing them. This collective processing would have to be responsive to the sociogenic gendering and racialization of flesh, using strategies such as racial affinity spaces to address the lingering impact of historical failures of communal feeling across social difference, but could also create spaces to experience the joy of community connection across difference alongside the discomfort of its challenges.

Such an approach to communal feeling could support the efforts of prefigurative movements to counter the responsibilization of marginalized individuals for their own inclusion and to combat the affective alienation fostered by neoliberal atomization more generally. These efforts are commonly approached in the terminology of empathy, solidarity or community care, and, despite the fact that these concepts are often understood as components of cognitive and

interindividual frameworks, they share strong resonances with communal feeling. Hayes notes

how crucial empathy and community care are in the face of what she considers the revived

fascist politics of the current political moment:

> we are basically up against the erosion of human empathy. So, in my mind, that has to
> figure into everything we do moving forward in terms of what it means to cultivate action
> and what it means to imagine the rehearsals for the world we want. We need people to
> become invested in reciprocal care… in rescue, reciprocal care, and the idea of not
> abandoning other people, because those are the ideas that are actually antithetical to
> fascism and to this mass disposability that we're experiencing. So, building those things
> into direct action, into our experience of it, and to what people take away from it is
> something that I'm very focused on.

Mutual aid and other practices that involve showing up and *standing in solidarity* with others on

an existential level might be an easier place to start in some ways than the discursive spaces of

social justice trainings. Therefore, I argue that a critical somatics approach can make the

development of the communal feeling a core value in the devising of prefigurative protest and

other techniques of performance for social change.

Interdependence and Other Individualisms

As the notion of communal feeling indicates, the affective bonds formed in prefigurative

protest are not merely a byproduct of strategic efforts to enhance and maintain movement

participation but form the corporeal basis of an affective interdependence that challenges

neoliberal individualism on an existential level. Hayes argues that "when we are more invested

in each other than we are in the system, then we will be in a position to set terms. But that's the

shape that that investment has to take it. It has to occur at those very foundational levels." A

critical somatics approach to performance for social change operates on the foundational level of

subjective mutation by cultivating experiences of collective embodiment and practicing the

capacities of communal feeling. Only by devising experiences that prefigure the worlds we

desire to create can protest and direct action inspire commitment sufficient to overcome the precarious but familiar security offered by neoliberal nation-states.

These experiences must embrace the embodied relationality of anarchist and activist cultures, which has too often been ignored or taken for granted. Even anarchist phenomenology tends to emphasize individual uniqueness and independence by blending psychology with the embodied navigation of social space, as for instance in the psychogeography of Guy Debord's derivé[240] or the psychotopology of Hakim Bey's temporary autonomous zones.[241] These approaches deploy the idiosyncrasies of the individual psyche as the basis of resistance to dominant social cartographies while considering modes of relationality and attitudes toward collectivity as unquestioned assumptions of that psyche rather than as key components of political praxis to be elucidated. By contrast, a critical somatics approach positions this embodied relationality the basis for the cultivation of affective interdependence. Embracing Jean-Luc Nancy's assertion that, "the structure of the 'Self,' even considered as a kind of unique and solitary 'self,' is the structure of the 'with',"[242] this approach constructs prefigurative protest not a permanent or absolute evacuation of individual subjectivity but as the production of a more porous individuality, embedded in the collective and connected in a relational web of interdependence.

Protests and direct actions that focus exclusively on political antagonism without also considering the cultivation of community connection and care demand a deconstruction of individual subjectivity without offering a reconstitution of individuality as embedded in the

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[240]Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1970).

[241]Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2003).

[242]Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 96.

collective. As a result, such events can leave activists feeling drained and disconnected—even

burned. Hayes warns of this danger:

> You can definitely just wear people out, if you're just kind of draining people like batteries for a campaign and just expecting people to keep showing up because it's been calculated in this way and these are the actions that are going to have the desired result but not really thinking about it from a place of fellowship or a place of political communion. I've seen people get burnt out on feeling used for actions that they didn't feel like they had a good relationship to what was being planned.

Similarly, Haas, despite maintaining that the level of trust participants in direct action need to

have in one another is "lower than what a lot of people think," notes that "when there is not

enough trust, there are more odds of something going badly or of relationships breaking later."

Hayes explains that because of this risk, she now avoids accepting invitations in which she is

"expected to train folks who have to move faster than the speed of trust." These dangers of

burnout and relational breakdown demand greater attention by organizers and artist-activists to

the inward-reaching affective dimensions and impacts of prefigurative practice in order to avoid

potential negative long-term impacts on movements.

On the other hand, with protests and direct actions that are particularly successful in

creating empowering experiences of connectivity, organizers and artist-activists must consider

how the affective bonds created in these experiences get articulated into a reconfigured

individuality. While describing the intensity and preciousness of the connections formed through

shared participation in direct action, Hayes highlights the need for configuring healthy individual

boundaries:

> When an action goes well, if you come away feeling empowered and feeling like you did what you came to do, that can strengthen bonds between people in ways that are very powerful. [So powerful,] in fact, to an extent that I actually caution young organizers about it. When you come in through, like, the rebellions in 2020, it was something I talked to young people about. You go through these really tumultuous experiences with people; you're going to feel like you know people. It can… if you don't know better, it can feel like love. And so you need to be sure to have boundaries and be sure that you're

grounding relationships in more than the shared experience of risk and of action. That, if we're trusting people, that that's coming from a more built place. But absolutely it can create that sense of a shared stake in the world that didn't exist before. I can't think of really anything comparable in my own life experience to the kind of bonds that you can form with people through direct action.

Because the pervasiveness of neoliberal logics resists affective interdependence, such strong affective bonds are extremely rare in the experience of everyday life. As a result, inexperienced activists can personalize the relation as one of romantic love rather than the love of solidarity. While this risk should not be a deterrent to artists-activists in their devising of prefigurative protest, it indicates potential pitfalls that need to be addressed in the production of a more porous and interdependent individuality.

Because of the prominence of a false dichotomy between individualism and collectivism in Western political thought, the notion of an interdependent individualism might seem oxymoronic. Especially in Anglo-American intellectual traditions, any participation in the collective is perceived as a threat to the autonomy of the individual. While classical liberalism's bourgeois individualism seems to be little more than a precursor to neoliberal individualism's entrepreneur of the self, there have always been a variety of individualisms, including an anarchist individualism. Except for those who argue for the legitimacy of an anarcho-capitalism, theorists recognize that this anarchist individualism contrasts heavily with individualisms grounded in hierarchical and propertarian relationships. Nevertheless, even this anarchist individualism often reflects the reactionary political standpoint of individualism, stressing the negation of normative subjectivities and independence from dominant systems of political and economic organization.

If, rather than approaching them as inherently oppositional political frameworks, we—following Simondon—understand the individual and the collective as ongoing and parallel

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processes of emergence from a preindividual affective milieu, we can move beyond the notion that the individual is always the origin of resistance to a given socio-political regime. Because neoliberalism intensifies individualism to the point of atomization and isolation by reducing all relations to those of the marketplace, its politics can only be countered by an individuality characterized by interdependence, making such a shift essential. Instead, we can develop a critical somatics approach to performance for social change that focuses on the affective politics involved in the existential self-affirmation of the collective, while also recognizing a parallel constitution of an individuality embedded in the sensory and the somatic dimensions of collectivity.

Protest Amidst Pandemic

Starting in the first months of 2020, the social and political landscape for protest and direct action was completely transformed as a result of the global spread of the novel coronavirus Covid-19. Although the impacts of the pandemic were experienced across all areas of collective life, efforts to address it were polarized, rooted in drastically different values. While movements were consumed with debates pitting the dangers of viral transmission against the loss of the most powerful tactics in their repertoires of contention, agents of neoliberalism seized on the public health crisis to intensify atomization and social isolation. National governments prescribed strict limitations to in-the-flesh social interaction, advocating exceptions only in the case of labor, constraining collective embodied activity to spaces in which neoliberal economic subjectification dominates.

Because, as I have argued, the shared physical presence of direct action is crucial to autonomous prefigurative practice and communal feeling, social movements' recognition of social and physical distancing as a necessary form of community care resulted in difficult and

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immediate challenges. Movements struggled to build alternative infrastructures—independent of structures already thoroughly infected by neoliberal logics and values—to support critical community maintenance and mutual aid efforts. Shifting out of physical presence and more exclusively into digital space, movements were deprived of the embodied relationality characteristic of activist cultures. As a result, activist relationships became dependent upon and mediated by a technological infrastructure that reinforces normative individualized subjectivity. Discussing the negative impacts of the pandemic on social movements, Hayes makes similar observations, taking note of "the norms and communicative functions of social media translating into other areas of life," including "an attraction to divisiveness as a default." For instance, she notes an increase in "performing for the approval of people who already agree as opposed to trying to persuade" and argues that "the isolation of the pandemic, although absolutely necessary… did a lot of damage to our movements."

The larger implications of these shifts concern fluctuations in the experience of communal life and degenerating attitudes toward collective responsibility. Hayes describes the current moment as one "in which a lot is changing in relation to direct action" in part because of the role it can play in overcoming the re-entrenchment of individualizing attitudes toward safety and care:

> I think we're in a really really terrible place in terms of people being demobilized politically and in terms of people giving a fuck about each other. There was an energy towards the beginning of the pandemic of "let's all take care of each other, and let's all do mutual aid." And now, it's an "every man for himself" mentality. People are going along with the government story… We're really going along with disposability in a way that it didn't have to be. I think that this normalization—the further normalization—of mass death can be fought with direct action and needs to be fought with direct action. Holding on to difficult realities together and grieving rebelliously will have to be part of that. That'll have to be part of reclaiming our collective humanity after everything that we've been conditioned to sit still for.

She argues this "heightened human disposability" is the result of a "cultivated indifference," which she attributes to resonances between the public health crisis and rising fascism. Moreover, she believes that "the fact that people have gone along with it so successfully is likewise a harbinger." However, her emphasis on the potential impact of direct action and "grieving rebelliously" in collective recuperation offers hope for the continuing relevance of direct action as a prefigurative experimental practice of communal feeling.

When George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police in May of 2020, the resultant superabundance of affect refused to be privatized and individualized, demanding collective processing in shared action. In spite of uncertainty regarding best practices for mass demonstrations in the midst of a pandemic, many activists felt compelled to take to the streets. From my own participation in solidarity protests during this time, I recall feeling the intensity and complexity of innumerable coexisting affects, from fear of viral infection and anxiety over becoming a vector of transmission to sadness over accumulating loss and anger at the persistence of state-sponsored racist brutality and murder. As collective bodies sense—and strive to make sense of—such immense happenings, activists can draw upon the insights contained in repertoires of direct action in order to shape experiences that respond to the needs of the moment.

The same activist from the story of police brutality at Occupy Wall Street shared an experience of protest unique in its response to the concurrence of the pandemic and Floyd's murder. As part of her work for a Unitarian Universalist church in a small university town in upstate New York, she helped to organize an outdoor vigil commemorating Floyd's life. She explains that because of the Covid-19 pandemic, "we weren't quite sure how to get people to show up," but that—although it cannot compare with mass demonstrations in large urban

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centers—the attendance of around a thousand demonstrators felt "really huge for these small towns." After marching around the downtown area, protesters gathered outside the post office, which served as a focal point in the event.

Deploying a durational approach to commemorative silence,[243] the protestors knelt silently for nine minutes in remembrance of Floyd. Despite having participated in and helped to organize a number of Black Lives Matter marches during that time, she mentions that this vigil was unique for her in that she "really felt a kind of closeness" in spite of pandemic precautions.

> That was when we knelt together. We were on sidewalks on both sides of the street, and so we actually were very close. It's like 1,000 people, and we're all just in a crowd… I was kneeling for 9 min on the sidewalk with people right next to me. It's like: right here, right here, right here [*using gestures to describe this proximity*]. And because of Covid, I was thinking about the air and air flow. I was thinking about their breath and my own and that it was intermingling, even though we're all wearing masks.

This moment was particularly significant to her in contrast with the isolating experience of the pandemic. Describing herself as "an extrovert" who "love[s] hugs and touching," she recalls feeling "physically very lonely" and "craving touch" during this time. She notes the challenges of social distancing and the affective dissonance it created for her: "I really missed being with friends. I really missed being social. It's going to sound weird, but I missed going to church, singing with people, being near people, even if not touching, just being near people. And that feeling was replaced with fear." Because her husband is immuno-compromised, she was "really cautious in everything I did" and "suddenly very aware of touch and, of course, breath."

In the prolonged moment of kneeling alongside others during the vigil, she experienced the intimacy of proximity as both a fulfillment of longing as well as a risk to her safety—and that of her loved ones:

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[243]Dilliplane, "Staging Progressive Dissensus and the Politics of Black Silence: Black Lives Matter, Bernie Sanders, and the August 2015 Rally in Seattle." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 20, 3 (2023).

So there was a push and pull at that moment of kneeling and being close to people, of both enjoying it and also being afraid… There was this huge vibrant crowd, and that was so exciting. And like, how much of a risk am I taking right now? Trying to calculate: is this a big risk? Is this a small risk? At that time, I honestly didn't know. I couldn't evaluate. We just weren't sure. I was like, okay, I'm going to say that I feel comfortable with my triple layer cloth mask and whoever's around me being this close because to remove myself at that point would have undermined the communal experience I was having… It felt intimate. It felt intimate to be kneeling in this crowd of strangers in a pandemic. It was like touching. That was my feeling.

While this chapter emphasizes touch and movement, the sensory experience of collective embodiment is not fixed or permanently locatable within particular frameworks of sensation. Avenues to collective embodiment shift and change in response to the wider affective context, requiring creativity, imagination, and experimentation in the shaping of direct action. The accumulated wealth of embodied knowledge contained in the practices of social movements will continue to expand as activists explore new ways to enhance the embodied cognition of sensing collective bodies through protest and direct action.

TOWARD A PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY OF CRITICAL SOMATICS

In this chapter, I present a wide range of embodied exercises that contribute to the fundaments of a performance pedagogy of critical somatics. While many of these activities are—to varying degrees—of my own devising, I see them as elements of a collectively-held embodied cultural knowledge of performance for social change. Some are adaptations or variations of exercises I learned during the course of my training in various techniques. In some cases, these adaptations reflect a blending of techniques, and in others simply an alteration or adjustment based on my experience of participating in and leading them. Others were developed in collaboration with other artist-activists alongside whom I have facilitated this work over the years. In these cases, sources of inspiration and influence are even more difficult to trace. In an effort to demonstrate generosity to my many teachers—mentors as well as peers—I have made a concerted effort to acknowledge these connections where possible. However, this citational practice is inevitably flawed and incomplete. Thus, I would like to open by reiterating my gratitude to all those who have shared in this work with me; neither this research nor these activities would have been possible without you.

I have facilitated various versions of this work as parts of numerous workshops given in a wide range of settings, including universities, non-profit research institutes, independent performance venues, and autonomous art and activism spaces. Many of these previous iterations were conducted in collaboration with other performance artist-activists with diverse training backgrounds, including a convention of performance for social change practitioners converging in Chicago to share skills and explore blending techniques, at various conferences and events

with members of InterPlay's Racial Equity and Transformation Committee, and especially with scholar and dance/movement therapist Christina Banalopoulou with whom I presented a workshop called "Bodies for a Molecular Revolution" at Embros Theatre—an anarchist squat theatre—as well as the Twixtlab center for Art, Anthropology, and the Everyday and Panteion Univesity in Athens, Greece. Most recently and as part of the work of this dissertation, I produced a workshop entitled "Sensing Bodies In Common" at the University of North Carolina with support from Performance Studies in the Department of Communication and an Arts Innovation grant from Arts Everywhere.

As described earlier, on a level of theory, a critical somatics approach to performance for social change takes an emergent and processual approach to the body, de-emphasizes rationalization within language, and advances possibilities for an embodied collectivity not derivative of individuality. On a level of practice, such an approach requires the development of a high level of awareness of the nuances of our sensory and somatic experience, with a particular emphasis on sensations that challenge the normative frameworks for systematizing this experience. Thus, based on the insights of the research presented in the previous chapters, many of the activities I share herein exhibit a propensity for the kinesthetic, tactile, and interoceptive.

The goal of these exercises is to encourage greater attunement to the emotional and bodily experience of both oneself and others. While critical somatics shares affinities with a number of somaesthetic practices, these practices tend to focus only on enhancing awareness of sensations typically classified as belonging to the individual embodied subject. Critical somatics similarly encourages such an embodied awareness, but, in questioning the clarity of the sensory distinction between self and others, also extends this awareness to the affective experience of others. In this way, it echoes a distinction that Shannon Sullivan draws between those pursuing

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the embodied self-awareness generated through autosomaesthetic practice and "those who attend to the bodily matters of others," which she calls "heterosomaestheticians."[244] Closely associated with the feminization of care labor, this relational affective attunement is sometimes colloquially referred to as hyperempathy and those who exhibit an exceptional capacity for it empaths. I believe that, through a critical somatic practice, we can enhance affective attunement both in relation to oneself and others, thus cultivating the affective bonds of social flesh.

The activities do not require cognitive unpacking through discussion, instead stressing affective repatterning in accordance with the social character of affect. They incorporate deindividualization and demechanization, but are also simultaneously creative and constructive of new individualities and collectivities. Varying from guided individual sensory meditation to contact as a means of sensing another's autonomic somatic activity, these exercises focus on the development of a collective and embodied cognition—communal feeling—by troubling our habitual differentiation of interoceptive sensations from perception through physical contact and coordinated movement. In this way, they reflect the insights of Thomas Fuchs and Hanne De Jaegher's theorization of the corporeality of enactive intersubjectivity, which is grounded in the "coordinated moment-to-moment interaction of embodied agents" and their "participatory sense-making" as opposed to representational approaches to social cognition.[245] Carolien Hermans similarly applies this theory in her touch-based improvisational dance practice, which offers a wealth of tactile exercises.[246] Thus, critical somatics, by attuning us to the affective intensities

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[244]Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 118.

[245]Thomas Fuchs and Hanne De Jaegher, "Enactive intersubjectivity: Participatory sense-making and mutual incorporation." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 8, 4 (2009): 482, 477.

[246]Carolien Hermans, "To Touch and Be Touched: Interconnectedness and Participatory Sense-making in Play and Dance Improvisation." *Journal of Dance Education* 22, 4 (2022): 211-222.

and emergent syntheses of communal feeling, experiments with the existential dimension of collectivity and functions as an art or craft of the transindividual.

When leading this work, the most valuable things you can do are to practice attuning to the group with which you are working and to retain flexibility and inventiveness in how you craft the experience in order to meet its unique needs. Of course, this awareness and adaptability requires time and experience, so I would like to offer some preliminary guidance on how to facilitate these kinds of workshops. First, strive to present all instructions as invitations, empowering each participant to adjust the activities based on their ability and comfort. You should do your best to choose activities and alter instructions when you are aware, in advance, of differing abilities or physical capacities of the members of the group you are working with. Using more general terms is often useful here—for instance, "swing any body part" instead of "swing your arm" or "move" instead of "walk." It can also be helpful to stress the relativity of qualitative terms; one person's "fast" or "smooth" need not be the same as another's. However, these needs often won't be possible or apparent, so it is important to encourage participants to make their own adjustments to the activities and to communicate their own needs or boundaries to their peers, such as indicating physical limitations, injuries, or discomfort with certain kinds of contact.

Additionally, to the extent possible, it is important to give some attention to the arrangement of the space to help cultivate an atmosphere that facilitates deeper focus and a more holistic sensory and embodied engagement with the activities. Practically, this might entail things like adjusting the color or intensity of lighting, playing music quietly—most genres are fine for this, but it is preferable to use instrumental music or music with lyrics in languages not spoken by the participants—and ensuring that the space is clean with an open area for movement

as well as an area clearly available for folks to use to temporarily remove themselves from the activity to engage as a witness rather than an active participant in the action. Behaviorally, this means encouraging embodied relationality rather than exclusively linguistic relations. Except where specifically noted otherwise, these activities are designed as non-speaking exercises and it is important to constrain linguistic activity in order to avoid it taking over as the dominant mode of engagement. That said, while the intention is for the activities to be accomplished without speaking, non-verbal sounds—sighs, groans, laughter, etc.—should be embraced and even encouraged. Not only do these sounds indicate a higher degree of full-body engagement but they also offer invaluable affective expressivity for sensory attunement.

For organizational purposes, I have divided the following exercises into four categories: warm-ups and sensory attunement, coordinated movement, materially-mediated contact, and contact. These categories are not intended to indicate exact divisions but to offer a framework for referencing the activities. Therefore, you will find activities across the categories that explore sensory attunement, coordinated movement, and contact to varying degrees, but this organization indicates the particular emphasis of an activity in its current configuration and reflects my experience of its specific applicability to critical somatics. Offering a poor substitute for processes of embodied learning, these written descriptions will likely prove more useful to practitioners already familiar with comparable activities or trained in similar techniques. However, I hope that they can also provide potential access points for those without facilitation training or previous experience with performance for social change who are interested in experimenting with this work.

Warm-ups and Sensory Attunement

For the most part, the following exercises are designed to cultivate greater sensory attunement to both oneself and others. Activating a meditative state in which one quiets the cognitive activity of the "inner voice" and enriches affective awareness is a crucial component in the initiation of critical somatic exploration. Thus, many of these kinds of activities work well in the beginning of workshops as warm-up exercises. However, depending on the group and the duration and design of the workshop, they can also be an effective way to introduce or reinforce sensory attunement and affective relationality at any point, especially if incorporated into workshops that make more extensive use of discussion and linguistic engagement.

Interoceptive Sensory Meditation

Invite participants to spread out and find a space to lie down on their backs on the floor. Have them close their eyes and focus their attention on their breath. Participants place one hand on their lower abdomen and the other over their heart. Ask them to feel their heartbeat through their chest and to feel the rise and fall of their belly in concert with their breath. Encourage them to set thoughts aside and to take a moment to become fully present in the space and to acknowledge the bodily and emotional state with which they have arrived.

Invite them to take a deep breath, hold it briefly, then to let it out with an audible sigh. You can repeat this a few times to help dissipate stress and the encroaching imposition of thoughts related to obligations. Invite them again to breathe deeply and to release the breath with a strong hum. They should be able to feel the vibrations of the hum in their face and potentially also through the hands resting on their chest and abdomen.

After having them return to breathing normally, encourage them to—literally or imaginatively—sense their internal organs and the inner workings of their bodies. You can

revisit the breath and heartbeat here as well as common interoceptive senses—aches and pains, hunger, and so on—but also increasingly encourage attention to the minute—how does the floor feel on your back, what do you feel in the space behind your eyes—and to somatic activity—can you feel your blood flowing through your arteries and veins.

Gradually widen their awareness again by focusing individually on each part of their body in succession. For instance, you can start at the toes and work up to the top of the head. As you draw their attention to each body part, invite them to take note of how it feels and to engage it with small movements—wiggle toes, gently roll ankles, etc.—repeatedly flexing and relaxing muscles throughout the body.

Finally, invite them to extend their awareness beyond the boundaries of their body, imagining their sense of self expanding. Initial prompts should expand it to an awareness of the other bodies around them and then entirety of the room. Gradually, however, encourage them to imagine an increasingly wide awareness. This expansion can come through an activation of spatial imagination—expand your awareness to the whole building, the city, the continent, the planet, the universe—but it is often more effective to combine this with social and emotional connections—imagine your connection to those not physically present, to friends or family, to neighbors and acquaintances, to everyone, possibly even to ancestors. Don't rush this; try to offer spaciousness for their imagination to trace complex connections.

Conclude by returning them to an awareness of their physical body in its fullness. Alternatively, depending on your plan for the following activity, you can close by returning to a wider or narrower sense of self-awareness that might enhance the intention of the next exercise.

Meditative Movement Exploration

This exercise draws inspiration from my collaborations with Banalopoulou and reflects aspects of her training in Bartenieff Fundamentals and Body-Mind Centering. It also draws upon movement elements from InterPlay warm-up exercises. It works well as an introductory activity on its own or in combination with the Interoceptive Sensory Meditation.

Participants find a space to lie in a comfortable position with their backs on the floor. They close their eyes and focus their attention on their breath. Invite them to set thoughts aside and acknowledge their bodily and emotional state. Ask them to fully arrive to the space and the present moment.

Ask them to stretch their limbs outward on the diagonals like a starfish, then in a line with arms over their head and feet together. Have them return to the diagonals, then have them slowly contract first one side then the other by drawing the elbow down to the knee. After a few repetitions, have them bring one elbow and knee together and slowly circle the opposite arm and leg along the floor to join the limbs on the other side, resulting in them lying on their side in a fetal position. Reverse the sequence of movements to bring them back to the diagonals, then repeat on the other side. Participants should perform a few repetitions, slowly rolling from one side to the other. Then have them lift their knees, sliding their feet under them on the floor. Slowly lift the knees up toward the chest, then drop the feet back down to the floor. After a few repetitions, add the arms so that they are alternately lying with their limbs stretching out on the diagonals and curling into a ball.

Returning to a comfortable position on the floor, have them slowly open their eyes and place one hand in front of their face. Invite them to move that hand first slowly and smoothly, then fast, then in sudden jerks, pausing in various shapes. Have them explore their range of

motion with that limb, including the ability to make contact with part of their body or the floor. Invite them to move this limb in any way that feels good, reminding them of the possibilities for movement just explored. Offer this reminder to pursue qualities of movement that feel good in their body repeatedly throughout the remainder of the activity. After some time, suggest that they switch limbs or include one or more other limbs in their exploration.

Gradually encourage participants to allow their movement exploration to engage their whole body, rolling it onto one side so they can shift onto hands and feet and ultimately rise to standing. Once standing, have them continue movement exploration as a full body activity. Invite them to explore different qualities of movement—like squirming, shaking, twisting, swinging, and thrusting—as well as moments of stillness. While offering these possibilities for exploration, continue to offer reminders that participants should pursue movement that feels good to them. Ask them to slowly find a closing for their exploration. Once everyone has come to stillness have everyone take a deep in unison and let it out.

Heart-to-Heart

Participants form paired partnerships and face one another. Have them raise their right hand as if swearing an oath. Ask them to use their left hand to place their partner's right palm onto their chest over their heart. Then have them place their left hand on top of their partner's right. Invite participants to close their eyes and focus on feeling their partner's heartbeat and the rise and fall of their breath under their hand. Ask them to try to feel their own heartbeat as well through their partner's hand.

Photo by Daniel Dilliplane

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This activity works best following an exercise that involves relatively intense physical activity in order to raise the heartrate and deepen breathing. In multi-day workshops or with groups that do this work together often, you can build up to this activity as one that incorporates prolonged eye contact as well. For a less intimate version of this activity, you can invite participants to feel each other's pulses in their wrists rather than on their chest.

Pass the Pulse

Participants stand in a circle, holding hands. When the person on their left squeezes their left hand, they should squeeze the hand of the person on their right, and vice versa. The facilitator can then initiate one or more pulses by squeezing one of their hands. It is best to start with a single pulse to ensure that all participants understand the instructions before creating multiple pulses at the same time. Multiple pulses and pulses travelling around the circle in different directions work better with larger groups. Focus on the tactile connection is enhanced by having participants close their eyes, but this activity can also be conducted with eyes open.

Social Barometer

This exercise works well toward the beginning of a workshop because it enables both the facilitator and the participants to get a sense of the opinions of the group and encourages participants to take ownership of their way of thinking. Participants are invited to respond to various prompts by positioning themselves spatially within the room. As the facilitator, you should define one end of the room as representing strong agreement and the other end of the room as strong disagreement. After hearing a prompt, each participant moves to a point in the room that most accurately reflects their degree of agreement with the statement. Once all participants have positioned themselves, you can choose to simply pause a moment for all to observe the distribution of bodies before moving on the next prompt or you can identify specific

individuals and ask them to comment upon the reasoning for their placement. You can also offer participants the opportunity to pose their own prompts.

Prompts can be exclusively playful, focusing more on developing comfort and camaraderie within the group, or include the serious. Serious prompts offer opportunities to create explicit engagement with particular issues, allowing the facilitator—or, if you open the creation of prompts to the group, the participants as well—to draw specific content into the workshop. When using prompts to highlight specific issues, the construction and framing of the prompts are especially important and should be considered in advance based on the anticipated character of attendees. Here are some prompts that I have used to emphasize the goals of a critical somatics:

- In general, I feel in touch with what I am experiencing in my body.

- I know how to take care of myself when I feel emotionally activated or upset.

- I feel comfortable communicating my needs/desires or asking for help from others.

- I usually have a good sense of what others around me are feeling.

- I often unconsciously adopt the energy or emotions of those around me.

- I frequently prioritize the desires of others over my own.

Prompts can also be used to help the group develop a collective sense of awareness of one another's political orientations, identifying areas of consensus and disagreement, as well as social backgrounds and personal histories. As noted in the section on contact exercises, this exercise can be useful as a lead-in for contact-based activities because it can allow the group to self-sort in terms of their level of comfort with touch and physical contact. I'm not sure of the origins of this basic activity, but I first encountered it in my work with the Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago collective.

Coordinated Movement

The exercises in this section use the coordination of collective movement to enhance sensory awareness of others and encourage the embodied negotiation of different desires and affective orientations. Effective as follow-ups to sensory attunement activities that still focus on the individual embodied self, they emphasize attunement to the rhythms and energies of others. In order to balance an empathic connection to others with one's own individual needs and desires, these exercises endeavor to activate and develop the capacity for affective negotiation of differences that arise between one's own interests and those of others.

Mirroring/Lead and Follow

These mirroring exercises blend elements of "the mirrors sequence" from Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-actors* with leading-and-following forms from the InterPlay practice. While Boal's work stresses the intensity of focused attention and the fluidity and horizontality of leadership, the influence of the InterPlay forms is particularly important in cultivating a more horizontal relationship by diversifying the possibilities for responsiveness beyond spatial mimicry and in deemphasizing visuality by encouraging a more holistic sensory attunement. This blending has undergone a number of iterations, but is heavily inspired by work accomplished with my collaborators at an experimental performance for social change convention in Chicago in 2016.

To begin this sequence, participants should be formed into pairs facing one another. One partner starts in the role of the mirror image, trying to match their partner's movements as closely as possible. Encourage exploration of the possibilities for movement—especially movement that feels good—but also offer reminders that the intention is not to disrupt the mimicry of the mirror image but to achieve synchrony. Ideally, an observer would not be able to

determine which partner is leading the movement and which is following. Participants are likely to discover on their own that slow and clear movements work best, but you can guide them to such movement if necessary. After a period of exploration, have the partners switch roles. Encourage a smooth transition in the switching of roles. Participants should continue from the position they are in rather that reset to start over from a neutral position.

Photo by Daniel Dilliplane

Once each partner has had the opportunity both to lead the movement and to follow as mirror image, begin to have them switch roles with increasing frequency. You can begin by initiating these transitions with an instruction, but eventually encourage them to initiate the switch on their own, without using explicit communication to coordinate the change. Allow some time for experimentation with transitions. Sometimes participants achieve this on their own, but, at this point, encourage both members in the partnership to be simultaneously both leader and mirror image. This means that each partner should feel free to do any movement they want while also mirroring the movements of their partner. Encourage them to find a balance in this exchange. Some participants may have a tendency towards leading, others toward mirroring. Encourage all participants to explore both and to try to be equal partners.

Invite participants to experiment with physical distance and continuity of eye contact. At first, encourage them to do this while maintaining equal distances from the plane of the imaginary mirror. Then invite them to remain in sync but forget the position of the mirror

entirely and to move independently through the space of the room. As they increase experimentation with distance and eye contact, let them know that it is okay to give less focus to precision and simultaneity in their mimicry. The shift to the next element works best if the various partnerships become intermingled in the space rather than each occupying their own part of the room, so it may help to continue to encourage more spatial experimentation until this happens.

After a few minutes, shift into rhythmic leading and following. This can be done in a few ways. One way is to ask each pairing to explore and coordinate a repetitive movement. Have them refine this movement in terms of movement quality or tempo to ensure that both in the partnership are comfortable. Alternatively, you can have each individual begin by creating their own repeatable movement and inviting them to be influenced by the movement of their partner, blending the movements until they are again in sync. You can also simply insert yourself into the activity by repeating a rhythmic movement and asking all participants to follow you. If you choose to shift directly into whole group mirroring this way, be sure to include a period of exploration in which all participants are able to initiate a new repetitive movement and everyone follows as they become aware of the shift.

Regardless of which method of transition you choose, the goal of the next sequence is to maintain the intensity of awareness cultivated in mirroring while increasing individual freedom of movement. First, have participants continue to follow one another but to change one aspect of the movement, such as its speed, direction, or the body parts used. Then, encourage them to follow only one aspect of the movement (tempo, effort, etc.) and otherwise to move in ways that they feel like moving. If the group is still leading and following in pairs, at this point encourage them to draw influence from other members of the group. Have them continue to follow one

aspect of their partner's movement, but also pick up different aspects from others in the group. In either case, at the end participants should be moving in ways that feel good to them individually while also drawing influence from others. Encourage participants to notice if they can what types or qualities of movement seem to spread throughout the group.

Blindfolded Circle Coordination

Participants stand in a circle with their eyes closed—or blindfolded—and holding hands. Sequentially introduce various collective movements that the group can take. Start by having the group take a step to the right, then to the left. Explore rhythmic stepping—i.e., two steps to the right, then one to the left, and repeat using a specified tempo. Then try stepping in toward the center of the circle and out again. Then add raising and lowering the arms. It is understandable for participants to open their eyes to orient themselves from time to time while exploring these possibilities, but offer them encouragement to try to keep their eyes closed. The aim is for them to attend closely to touch and kinesthesis in coordinating the movement of the group. After introducing these various possibilities, invite participants to silently initiate movements and to experiment with the creation of rhythmic patterns.

This activity combines well with non-verbal vocal forms, such as InterPlay's group toning exercise in which participants play with their capacity to produce tones and collectively improvise tonal music. It also functions well as a lead-in to certain Boalian gamercises, such as the self-explanatory massage circle or the "Glass Cobra" in which participants use touch to memorize the shoulders of the person in front of them in the circle and, after being separated, have to blindly reform the circle in the order in which it had been originally formed.

Social Machine

      This exercise primarily offers a means for developing an embodied awareness of collectivity as an object of critique. As described in the first chapter, this activity was originally developed by the Theatre of the Oppressed Chicago collective and it builds directly on Boal's "Columbian hypnosis." Unlike most of these exercises, it combines collective movement exploration with linguistic processing and conscious critique, thus offering an opportunity to explicitly incorporate political or social justice content. It works best when facilitators identify and research the institution and its power structure in advance so that the collective and embodied analysis better reflects the actual structure in practice. Therefore, this exercise is most useful in workshops that explicitly address a specific issue.

      Facilitators guide the group in mapping the roles different people hold within the particular system to be analyzed. Begin by making a list of these roles. It can be useful to have a large paper pad or white board on which to compose this list. Use the list of roles to map relations of power or influence. Determine to whom each role is accountable—their boss(es) for instance—as well as the role(s) dependent upon them—subordinates, students, etc. In most cases, you will be mapping a largely hierarchical structure in which each role has one or two relations upward and a few connections downward. You will have to make considerations about how to represent the roles in a condensed fashion depending on the size of the institution and the number of participants in the workshop. For instance, in an analysis of a corporation, you may have one or two participants represent regional managers that number in the hundreds or you may decide that one person will represent all the workers below the level of store manager. The goal should be to preserve as much complexity as possible given the number of participants.

Once you have a basic map of the system's structure, begin to assign participants in the various roles. Ask each to describe the character of the relationship with those above them in the hierarchy and then to determine how they would like to represent that relationship in terms of how they will follow them. It will be useful here if you have already introduced them to "Columbian hypnosis"—in which a "hypnotizer" controls the movements of another who must keep their face a short distance from the palm of the "hypnotizer." Participants may suggest, for instance, that they will follow their primary boss by keeping their left shoulder about a foot from the back of the "boss."

Once the participants have been arranged and their movement relationships defined, invite the group—perhaps beginning with whomever represents the highest rung in the hierarchy—to begin moving. If necessary, you can suggest reasons for directing movement in a particular direction. For instance, telling the CEO that as a result of low unemployment they need to turn left and walk to the other side of the room to move production to a part of the world in which labor is cheaper. As this unwieldy social machine lumbers around, you can invite individual participants within it to take turns describing their experience aloud. Encourage them to relate their perceptions and physical movements metaphorically to the experience of the person in the role that they represent.

The exercise could conclude here or it could, in the fashion of Boalian Image Theatre, continue with the creation an ideal formulation of the system by rearranging the bodies and relationships and then the "dynamization" the social machine by experimenting with the possibilities for transitioning from the initial formulation to the ideal one, speaking aloud to describe the experience of this transition. Personally, I find that the value of these additional elements depends heavily on the system being explored and the relation of the participants to it.

If the participants are active members of the institution—for instance, teachers and administrators analyzing an educational system—these further steps can be of great value. If the participants are more distant from the lived realities of the major players within the system, I have found that this exploration, instead of offering genuine insight into what is required to change the system, either encourages a naïve oversimplification or results in a sense of powerlessness in the face of a system that seems inevitable. There is, I believe, value in the process of trying to collectively articulate an ideal, if only to draw out important discussion, but this kind of engagement begins to deviate strongly from a critical somatics approach.

Coordinated Movement through Materially-mediated Contact

The following series of activities explore some possibilities for contact mediated by physical materials. It is often helpful to introduce these exercises with eyes open, but I encourage you to work up to blindfolded exploration in order to deemphasize visuality in the coordination of the connection. As with all blindfolded activities, you should consider how to best organize the space for openness and, if necessary, designate "spotters" to help you monitor for safety.

Different materials offer different types of sensory connections and so participants may find preferences for one or another material based on the kinds of sensory attunement that feel comfortable to them. While I generally have participants begin experimenting with the materials using their hands, connections can be made between various body parts. Exploring contact mediated by materials can serve as a valuable alternative to touch and physical contact. These particular materials vary in cost and accessibility but they represent only a small subset of the possibilities.

Wooden Dowel

This exercise is inspired in part by an activity I learned from a Dutch theatre collective called Wunderbaum. It uses wooden dowels to create mediated connections between pairs of participants. The diameter of the dowels impacts the quality of the connection and the kind sensory information that can be passed along it. Thicker and heavier dowels encourage strength and clarity in movement choices. Lighter and thinner ones allow vibrations to pass along them and also flex and bend to a degree, allowing more movement

Photo by Christina Banalopoulou

possibilities and enabling more subtlety and nuance to the sensations activated. The length of the dowel also offers different possibilities. Shorter dowels are good for connecting finger to finger and increase the possibilities for combining materially-mediated contact with touch by allowing the bodies to remain closer together. Longer dowels enable more complexity and freedom of individual movement.

Have participants begin exploring the possibilities and constrains for proximity and distance created by the dowel. Encourage them first to get as close together as they can then as far apart as possible. Next, have them explore the possibilities for bodily movement without impacting the position of the dowel—what are the possibilities for free independent movement without breaking the connection with their partner. Once they have determined these possibilities, encourage them to make the point of connection with the dowel the focus of their experimentation. Have them explore the possibilities for moving in coordinated ways. Invite

them to change the point of connection with the dowel on their body—from the palm to a finger or a shoulder, etc.

After some time, have time come to stillness. Ask that one partner silently initiate movement and have the other partner follow. Invite the leading partner to consider using pressure, speed, vibration, and orientation to try to influence the movement of their partner. Encourage the following partner to pay close attention to what they can sense of the intentions of their partner through the dowel. Once they have had some time to experiment, have them come to stillness and switch roles. After both partners have tried both roles, have them again explore coordination with both partners simultaneously initiating and following movement.

Variations of this activity can include multiple dowels to create more than one point of connection between partners or to create connections between many members in a group. Having some participants witness others perform this activity from the outside can also be helpful both from the standpoint of safety—by ensuring that partnerships don't interfere with one another— and as a practice in trying to observe movement intention and response. Many partnerships will repeatedly drop the dowel during this exploration. Encourage them to try not to break the connection, but keep it light and playful. Moments when the dowel clatters to the floor can be a source of laughter rather than frustration.

Rubber Band/Stretch String

Participants can connect one or more of their fingers to the finger(s) of a partner. Stretch material works better (though beware that such materials can break and painfully snap participants), but you can also use plain string or yarn. Invite them to begin by pulling the connecting material taut and moving while trying to maintain this degree of tension in the material. Have them consider the movement at the point of connection as well as movement

away from the point of connection—i.e., what movement possibilities exist for the rest of the hand without disruption the tension in the string. Have them explore the possibilities for stretching and moving closer together. Invite them to move close enough together that all the tension goes out of the connection, then explore the possibilities for moving independently and perhaps also the possibilities for physical contact.

Offer participants the opportunity to explore the possibilities for creative movement enabled and constrained by this connection. Ask them to draw on movement that generates kinesthetic pleasure both independently and in coordination with their partner. Invite them to attune to the possibilities for communicating the desire for certain kinds of movement—direction, speed, effort, etc.—using nothing but movement and the connection. Be sure to encourage both leadership and "listening" to their partner through the string.

Additional variations for this activity can include trust and task activities in which one partner is blindfolded and the other partner uses the connection to coordinate activity. For instance, you can have one partner feed the other by manipulating their movements through the string, or one could use the connection to have the other brush/comb their hair. These variations seek to enhance communication through the quality of movement.

Lycra Loop

Lycra is an elastic fabric commonly used in exercise clothing. When sewn into compression loops or tubes, it is often used as a toy for children or to support sensory therapy for people with autism. In this latter capacity, practitioners describe its use as enhancing the experience of bodily boundaries through touch and pressure, which researchers suggest supports proprioceptive awareness and supports feelings of wellbeing by activating the parasympathetic

nervous system.[247] Loops come in a variety of sizes. The larger the loop, the more participants you can include in the activity at once. I recommend larger and longer loops that accommodate at least three adults because I use it to enhance proprioceptive awareness of the group and collective coordination.

Photo by Michelle Padley

Group exploration in these loops should always begin with the eyes open, but certain aspects can heightened through blindfolded exploration when the group is ready.

Begin by having an appropriate number of participants enter the loop and stretch it to a basic tautness. Have them position the fabric on their backs, starting at their shoulders and stretching downward. From this position they should be able to safely lean backward, supporting one another with the stretching fabric. If the tube extends below their hips, they can sit into the lean. After returning to vertical, have the participants simultaneously do a half turn to the right, rolling along the fabric until they are facing outward with the loop pressing against their chests. Then can then lean forward, again supporting one another with the stretching fabric. Encourage them to press the fabric forward with their hands and arms. After again returning to vertical, have them roll around the fabric first in one direction, then the other.

With groups of three or more, you can have one participant roll around the fabric while the others stand bunched together. The rolling participant will rotate around the group as they

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[247]See, for instance: Vincent Guinchat, et al., "Compressive Garments in Individuals with Autism and Severe Proprioceptive Dysfunction: A Retrospective Exploratory Case Series." *Children* 7, 7 (2020) and Moira Peña, et al., "Brief Report: Parent Perpsectives on Sensory-Based Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, 6 (2021): 2109-2114.

stretch the fabric in different directions. With groups of at least four and participants of roughly

equal weight, you can have them stretch the fabric into a square. From this position you can

identify two pairs at opposite corners of the square. The first pair can move toward the center and

then switch sides while the other pair remains still. Once the new square is formed, the second

pair can also move to the center and switch sides. With care, this switching can be sped up to

create a pleasant slingshot experience as one is launched into action by the pull of the fabric.

This last activity should never be attempted as part of a blindfolded exploration.

Ask the group to return again to roughly equidistant spaces around the loop. This portion

again works with groups of any size. Have them pull the fabric up over their heads to enclose

their visual perception within the tube. Once you have returned them to the original formation,

you can allow the group to experiment collectively with these possibilities and to see what

additional kinds of collective movement they can discover.

Contact

Physical touch intensifies the breakdown of the boundaries of the individual self and the

experience of embodied collectivity. Thus, an understanding and awareness of the social and

cultural connotations of touch and physical contact is an important consideration when planning

and executing workshops. While I have argued in favor of the revolutionary potential of the

tactile, touch and physical contact are by no means uniform modes of engagement nor their

politics universal. Many people struggle with touch for a wide variety of reasons, from a fear of

intimacy or anxiety regarding miscommunication as a result of its role in cultures of sexuality to

sensory overstimulation among neurodiverse folks or personal histories of physical and/or sexual

abuse. Thus, contact should always be invitational rather than a requirement of engagement with

this work and no one should be asked or expected to share the reasoning behind their desire not to engage in physical contact.

With this in mind, it is best to build to contact-based activities gradually and incrementally over the course of a workshop. Individuals who experience difficulties with contact may or may not be interested in challenging themselves in this regard and organizing the sequence in particular ways allows participants to secure a base of comfort and to better control their own limits for tactile engagement. Additionally, I recommend taking the time to explicitly note options for adjusting contact activities or for substituting them with other modes of relating. Exercises in the section on materially-mediated contact are particularly useful substitutions, but adjusting contact activities to limit exploration to physical proximity in coordinated movement is also a good option.

Furthermore, the "Social Barometer" exercise can serve as a valuable self-sorting tool to precede contact-based activities. It works best if the facilitator has previously used the exercise, but one side of the room can indicate a high degree of comfort with physical contact and the other side can indicate discomfort with contact. Once participants have sorted themselves according to their level of comfort, they can then take a moment to share any specific concerns or to negotiate their boundaries/desires before beginning a contact exercise. I am grateful to Agnotti Cowie for introducing me to this use of the exercise.

Blind Trust

Participants begin by positioning themselves relatively uniformly throughout the space so that each person has some space around them. Have them stand with their feet together and close their eyes. Invite them to slowly lean forward bending only from the ankles and holding their body stiff. Ask them to carefully find the point at which they feel they would tip off-balance and

to hold that position for a few seconds. Then repeat this while leaning backward, then to the left and right. Have them lean and rotate in a circle connecting these points.

It may be best to demonstrate the next portion of the exercise yourself before forming groups. The size of the groups (7-9 people) is particularly important for this exercise. Once participants have opened their eyes, have 6-8 people form a tight circle—shoulder to shoulder— around you. Have them take a firm stance and raise their hands in front of them. Close your eyes and place each of your hands on the opposite shoulder to form an "X" with your arms across your chest. Explain that when they are ready, you will fall and those in the circle will catch you and gently return you to an upright position. With each fall, at least 2-3 people should work together to safely accomplish the catch. Have those in the circle announce their readiness by saying "ready" aloud together. When they do, hold your body stiff, lean and tip in one direction, allowing them to catch you. Once they return you to center, have them again acknowledge "ready," and fall again in another direction. Repeat this a few times before opening your eyes and helping monitor as various groups try this.

Be sure to note that no one should feel obligated to take a turn in the center of the circle. Apart from the collective acknowledgement of ready or other necessary communication, this should be a silent activity. Encourage responsibility and focus. The goal should never be to make anyone worry or fear that they will be allowed to fall. Jokes, laughter, or side-talk should be strongly discouraged.

To extend and intensify the activity, you can continue with trust falls. These can be done in pairs, small groups, or—with the right equipment—a large group. When working in pairs or small groups, one or more catchers stand behind the one who will fall. This faller stands with their eyes closed, arms out to the sides, and body stiff. The main catcher stands closely behind

them with any additional catchers standing alongside them. The main catcher places their hands a few inches from their shoulder blades and announces "ready." Then, the faller can fall and be caught and returned gently to vertical. The fall is repeated with the catcher(s) moving further back each time until either the faller or the catcher says "that's enough," meaning either they don't want to fall any further or they don't feel comfortable supporting the fall from a greater distance.

With large groups, a ladder or platform may be necessary. The faller should still remain stiff when falling and should tuck their chin to their chest while crossing their arms in an "X." Unless using a parachute fabric with handles, catching should be accomplished from a height of about 4-6 feet and involve at least 10-12 people. Catchers do not need to interlock arms, but if they do so should grab one another's wrists.

Basic Contact

Participants begin by organizing into pairs with similar levels of comfort with physical contact and weight-sharing. While the exploration should be largely silent, remind participants that they should speak to communicate boundaries or discomfort that arises during the exercise. Invite participants to face each other and to rest their right hand gently on their partner's left shoulder. Have them gradually press more firmly. Then have them lean toward one another. Ask them to slowly release the lean, then the pressure, then the contact.

Invite the partnerships to find another way to lean on each other. Ask them to explore a few possibilities for leaning. Have them find a comfortable lean and hold it. Ask them to briefly experiment with the possibilities for movement away from the point of contact, that is, to encourage them to discover what body parts are required to maintain equilibrium and which they can move without disrupting it. Have them do this in two more leaning configurations.

Ask partners to sit back-to-back on the floor. Have them lean forward until they can just barely feel their partner's back touching theirs. Then have them lean back into one another. Ask them to tilt their head to the right and let it fall slowly and gently backward until it rests on their partner's shoulder. Have them take a deep breath and try to relax or "melt" into that contact. After a few moments, ask them to carefully lift their heads. Invite them to try to use their backs to massage each other, shifting, squirming, and pressing like a bear scratching its back on a tree.

Once they have had a chance to explore that, ask them to attempt to simultaneously rise to standing without using their hands by using their feet to press their backs together. Some may find this challenging, so allow them some time to experiment. As pairs reach their feet, ask them to see if they can reverse it in order to bring themselves back to a seated position on the floor. After a little while, if any pairs are still unable to stand, invite them to use their hands or to separate and stand up. With all groups standing, have them roll the point of contact from their backs to their shoulders. Ask them to lean just a little bit and to try to walk together while leaning shoulder-to-shoulder. If they feel comfortable, they can increase the intensity of the lean. At this point, you can review some of the possibilities explored—light/firm touch, melting into the contact, movement away from the point of contact, shifting the point of contact, etc.—and offer them a period of free experimentation.

Group Contact

Participants begin standing scattered throughout the space of the room. Invite them to make a shape with their whole body and hold it for a few seconds. Have them move slowly into a new full-body shape and hold it only momentarily before asking them to make three different shapes in a row very quickly and without thinking. Invite them to explore making shapes with

their body while experimenting with the time it takes to move from one shape to the next as well as the amount of time for which they hold a shape.

After a period of exploration, ask the participants to relate the shapes they make with their bodies to the shapes of others and to the architecture of the room. Encourage them to think in multiple ways about the possibilities for relating shapes. Ask them to relate their shape to someone or something close to them in space, then something far away. Have them imitate a shape they see, make an "opposite" shape—whatever that means to them, form a shape that complements another shape. The goal is simply to diversify in their minds what it means to create shapes that "relate" to one another.

Invite participants to create shapes that intersect or interlock with the shapes of other bodies. This instruction will increase the proximity of the group. Encourage them to interlock shapes with many different people. Have them consider the possibilities for moving at the same time as others or to move only when others around them are still. It may be necessary to offer a reminder to continue to explore stillness for this to work well. Ask them to create shapes that intersect the shapes of others in ways that almost touch but do not. Allow some time for experimentation with this.

Invite participants to make a shape that involves light contact with another person or an object in the room. Then have them make another shape that connects to another person or object with firm contact. Ask them to create shapes collectively through physical connections with one another. With some groups it may make sense to end here with a period of exploration. However, with groups that are ready, you can continue to introduce more possibilities for greater relational interdependence. For instance, you can invite participants to explore group contact shapes in which they "melt" into another, shapes in which they offer support to someone else, or shapes in

which they draw support from one or more people in order to remove all contact with the floor.

As you introduce each possibility, offer a period of exploration before introducing the next.

Group Hand-to-Hand Contact Dance Variation

This exercise is based on an InterPlay form, the "Hand-to-Hand Contact Dance." I first encountered of a version of this variation of the form with the Men's Group of the Oakland chapter of InterPlay. In addition to exploring paired physical contact, it invites group coordination and encourages consideration of expectations for the attachments we form with one another. For this reason, it can be particularly useful for groups interested in understanding feelings of obligation, possessiveness, etc. in intimate relationships.

The activity begins with participants organized into pairs. Ask each participant to raise a hand in front of them as if preparing to give an oath. Invite them to press the palm of their hand to their partner's palm. Encourage them to explore their own and their partner's level of comfort with varying intensities of pushing. Then have them try pulling by grabbing one another's wrist and counterbalancing with a lean. Invite them to return to the palm-to-palm position and then to allow the connection to move in space. After some moments to explore that, encourage them, if they have not done so already, to allow that movement to take them off their spot and around the space of the room.

Returning to stillness, have them put a small amount of space between their hands, then increasingly more until they are many feet away from one another. Ask them to drop their hand and the connection with their partner. Then have them, without moving from their spot, try to find that connection again across the distance. Have them drop the connection again and then to reach out and try to form a connection across space with someone other than their partner, even if that person doesn't reach back to them. Have them return to their partner and the palm-to-palm

position. Remind them of the different possibilities explored before inviting them to take a few minutes to explore moving with their partner.

After a period of movement exploration in partnerships, invite them to explicitly relate their exploration to others within the group. This may happen of its own accord in the initial exploration. Allow the group to explore relating as pairs, and then reintroduce the possibility of breaking connection with their partner. Invite them to explore improvisationally forming new partnerships, trios, or moving solo. Offer some time for this exploration to unfold.

Notes on Social Justice Applicability

A critical somatics approach to performance for social change is by no means incompatible with an explicit focus on social justice content. It has a wide range of potential applicability and can be oriented toward specific issues either by modifying the activities or by blending it with discursive and cognitive approaches. Strategic choices regarding the incorporation of explicit political content into critical somatics work will need to be based on the particular identities and skills of the facilitator(s) as well as the interests of the group with whom they will be working. When working with existing groups organized around a specific social identity or political issue, some assumptions can be made in advance. However, with flexibility and education one can address one or more applications without needing to pre-determine them in advance.

It is important to note that, although I have argued throughout this dissertation for a reduced role for linguistic processing in performance for social change, in my experience these activities do lend themselves to approaches that combine embodied work and collective discussion. Because my focus has been on the existential dimensions of subjective mutation, I have not offered direct advice regarding how to pursue critical discussion as a major component

of this work. As I have suggested when considering the use of linguistic frameworks in Theatre of the Oppressed or InterPlay, the political potential of collectively processing these activities in discussion will depend upon whether the facilitator(s) is/are adept at cultivating more autopoietic and autonomous articulations of the experience while gently pushing back against attempts to rationalize sensations of transindividuality within frames of individual cognitive calculation. While such affective recapture does not completely neutralize its political potential, it does to a degree limit this work to the rearticulatory and interindividual politics of an identitarian discursive paradigm.

When combining these exercises with discussion in this way, I would encourage facilitators to consider how communal feeling can be put to work in service of the content they wish to explore. Try to carry the work of sensory attunement and empathic connection into discursive engagement by linking the embodied work with the sharing of relevant experiences—with an emphasis on the affect they generate. This sharing of experience can become an access point for connecting with an affective milieu that does not correspond to participants' existing individual subjectivities. Avoid shifting too rapidly into the practicalities of problem-solving; instead emphasize deepening affective engagement with worlds previously unknown to them. Stress the limits of understanding and the need to actively pursue it. When addressing members of majoritarian groups, emphasize the need to offer support without requiring that others first make them understand the logic behind what they feel is needed.

I like to think of critical somatics as a kind of schizoanalytic somaesthetics, interrogating the idiosyncracies of embodied subjectivity and their political implications. Therefore, even when engaging linguistically, I encourage attention to the affective syntheses it reveals rather than reducing the affective interdependence it generates in creative play to a metaphor for an

appropriate political position or a correct manner of speaking. In spite of the fact that interaction within an existential dimension is rich with cultural meanings, tracing connections between affective experience and modes of relationality seems to be more straightforward in collective and creative embodied experimentation than in discursive exchanges. There are a variety of contributing reasons for this difference, such as reduced fears that their expressive mode will be policed based on entrenched political meanings, less complex mechanisms of self-deception in the recognition of their unconscious intentionality, clearer frameworks for perceiving the material consequences of interaction, and less emotional insulation from mutual responsibility for those consequences.

Whatever the reasons, although the embodied interdependence of critical somatics may be experienced as a metaphor for other relational situations, it is also simultaneously experienced as real and significant in its own right. The consequences of dropping someone in a trust fall, for instance, are readily apparent. Even if something like this were to happen, the question of intent versus impact would be considered largely irrelevant and any defensiveness or shifting of blame and responsibility would be immediately recognized as the inability to deal with feelings of guilt. Because of this ostensible directness and straightforwardness of the experience, participants inevitably identify idiosyncratic relational challenges with little prompting. Thus, I have found I am able to incorporate social justice content by drawing out and elaborating upon participants' own observations.

These observations are useful not only for highlighting the political dimensions of embodied relationality in discussion but also for inspiring variations of these activities that explore specific issues within the embodied experience. Acute sensory awareness can bring implicit bias and patterns of toxic relationality to the surface of experience. When individuals

offer and receive care and support in the face of negative entrainments, such syntheses can be disarticulated. Consider, then, the experience of a black person being lifted into the air by peers of other races during an exploration of group contact, of a woman witnessing a group of men enthusiastically mimicking a movement that she initiated, or of a nonbinary person leaning in a lycra loop opposite someone from their grandparents' generation. With thoughtfulness and care, variations of these activities can support positive affective entrainment. Experimentation with reframing prompts to metaphorize the embodied experience or offering differential instructions for different identity groups to explicitly address relationalities across social difference are areas worthy of more extensive and focused attention on the part of scholar-practitioners of performance for social change.

Even in the absence of such explicit variations, one of the most powerful ways to conduct critical somatics is to undertake it with diverse groups. This diversity often exists even in groups organized around specific social identities, and a critical somatics approach could support such groups by enhancing intersectional awareness and exploring its unique manifestations in the group's embodied relationality. Of course, such work is not always possible nor always desirable. Subjective mutation on the individual level may be necessary first—often either to make its boundaries more porous or alternately to enhance one's protective mechanisms to avoid allowing deindividualization to result in exploitation or abuse—before one is ready for engagement across larger gulfs of social distance. When appropriate, however, practicing this work with diverse groups is enhanced by co-facilitation across dimensions of social difference. Because of my own experience with co-facilitating across differences in gender, race, ability, and culture, I am a strong advocate for such co-facilitation, especially when facilitators practice these activities with one another.

Feedback from participants suggests various possibilities for more targeted and instrumental types of applicability for critical somatics. One participant at the "Sensing Bodies In Common," for example, described an interest in using the technique to develop relationships within his activist affinity group that would allow for more horizontal ways of coordinating the embodied antagonism of collective protest activity. Indicating possible applicability within direct action training, this participant suggested that more extensive training in these techniques with his collaborators might be a good way to help them stay connected to one another within high-intensity encounters, such as confrontations with police, and enable them to respond to such situations with a better awareness of the needs and desires of the group. Another participant described a kind of epiphany regarding the applicability of this work to sexual health and the embodied navigation of consent as a contingent and ongoing component of sexual activity. After acknowledging the importance of negotiating consent explicitly within language, they explained that the relational attunement to another's experience and desire cultivated by these activities would not only be helpful in establishing a continuing confirmation of consent in between such linguistic check-ins but would also facilitate more engaged and pleasurable love-making.

Finally, I would also like to suggest that these activities—or aspects of them—might provide inspiration for protest and direct action organizers looking to cultivate experiences of communal feeling in protest. As mentioned in the previous chapter, moments of what Kelly Hayes calls "political communion" in protest not only draw people to more substantive engagement with movements but do so by prefiguring worlds characterized by a more interdependent experience of relationality. Building elements of these exercises into protest events could support these kinds of experiences, creating an embodied collective experience connected to the social justice issue(s) of the event.

PERFORMANCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AS SPECULATIVE PRAGMATICS

The very notion of collective embodiment rooted in social flesh and communal feeling seems like something out of science fiction… because in some sense it is. These concepts share strong resonances with those explored in speculative fiction. In the world of Octavia Butler's Parable series, for instance, affective contagion and empathic sensory experience are symptoms of black neurodivergent protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina's "disability" of hyperempathic sensitivity. Butler portrays her capacity to experience the feelings of others as a double-edged sword, a source of difficulty and danger in an extremely violent world but also ultimately crucial to Olamina's ability to cultivate community and propagate her new religion Earthseed. In addition to its unidirectionality, this hyperempathy differs from the protoempathic identification underlying social flesh insofar as it is a representational mirroring and thus susceptible to activation through deception. Nevertheless, it represents a fictional exploration of affective bonds similar to those theorized here.

Similarly, communal feeling corresponds in some ways to explorations of collective consciousness in science-fiction, such as the planetary superorganism Gaia in Isaac Asimov's Foundation series. Including not only animal and plant life but also inanimate matter, this more-than-human group consciousness negotiates difference on a direct and internal basis. Asimov presents the desirability and ethical implications of Gaia—and its eventual evolution into Galaxia— as an open question for humanity. Gaia's hesitancy and skepticism regarding its expansionist tendencies lead it to engage in a cautious and gradual process of incorporation, securing the consent of a human representative before initiating this process with human

civilization. However, rather than directly address the challenges of communal feeling, Asimov elides political concerns regarding how this collective entity balances the affective life of its various component entities by implying the inherently democratic character of its psychic network.

I have argued throughout for placing such concepts at the center of a critical somatics approach to performance for social change. What does it mean to place concepts developed in fiction as the driving force of political praxis? What role can speculative thought play in the theory and practice of social movements? The history of mutual influence between science fiction and technological innovation serves as a reminder of the connection between creativity and engagement at the heart of a performance studies approach.[248] adrienne maree brown explicitly connects the imaginative work of speculative fiction with the efforts of social movements: "In our work for *Octavia's Brood*, Walidah and I articulated that 'all organizing is science fiction,' by which we mean that social justice work is about creating systems of justice and equity in the future, creating conditions that we have never experienced."[249] She advocates "collaborative ideation" as a necessary tool to combat the prevalence of attitudes rooted in "scarcity economics."[250]

Articulating a methodology of social science fiction, Dimitris Papadopoulos similarly argues this imaginative element is equally crucial to scholarship seeking to escape the dominance of economic frameworks of analysis. Inspired by works of science fiction authors that "bring social science to speculative fiction (*social* science fiction)," Papadopoulos seeks to "infuse

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[248]Dwight Conquergood ,"Interventions and Radical Research" in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[249]brown, *Emergent Strategy*, 160.

[250]brown, *Emergent Strategy*, 18-19.

speculative thought into social science research (social science *fiction*)" and thus to do "scholarly

theoretical and empirical research to mobilize fictional alternatives" to the ubiquitous

financialization of social life.[251] My research and analysis throughout this dissertation have

similarly applied speculative theory in the face of the social isolation promulgated by neoliberal

frameworks and, in the (trans)disciplinary tradition of performance studies, incorporated

imaginative concepts directly into embodied practice. A critical somatic approach to collectivity

will enable artist-activists and scholar-practitioners to conduct embodied experimentation on the

imaginative horizons of collectivity. Such an approach acknowledges performance as a process

of worlding in which social and political realities are mapped and transformed through

existential exploration and embodied cognition.

　　While resisting its romanticization as transcendent circumvention of conflict and social

difference, my work recognizes the collective presence of performance as contributing to its

recognized capacity for utopic prefiguration. Building on Jill Dolan's work on the "utopian

performative," I recognize that the seeds of new forms of collectivity already exist "now, in the

interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as

human beings." Focusing on how utopic community can be "experienced affectively, through

feelings, in small incremental moments that performance can provide,"[252] I similarly explore

performance as a potentially transformational cultural practice offering ephemeral revelations of

a yet-to-come democratic community across difference. Performance for social change can place

these transitory moments at the center of an experiential and experimental social practice.

　　Prefigurative social movements striving to enact forms of inclusive and equitable

community draw inspiration from science fiction literature but must avoid falling into the traps

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[251]Papadopoulos, *Experimental Practice*, 45.

[252]Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopian, and the 'Utopian Performative'." *Theatre Journal* 53, 3 (2001): 457, 460.

of conceptualizing affective empathy or collective embodiment as manifestations of divinity or technological achievement. Although collective embodiment is an emergent phenomenon, the circumstances of its actualization can be cultivated, and practitioners of performance for social change can enhance their understanding and enrich their deployment of these circumstances. Because speculative fiction often connects representations of such phenomena directly with themes of technology and divinity and because lived experiences of transindividual resonance are frequently powerful yet momentary, it is not uncommon to experience them as expressions of transcendent forces beyond human understanding or contrivance.

Many in the InterPlay community, for instance, associate their experiences of protoempathic identification and collective embodiment with the divine. Building on Porter and Winton-Henry's early experimentation with dance as a form of religious worship through creative and embodied spirituality, many InterPlayers embrace the language of "bodyspirit" and experience the work as an access point to the physicality of spiritual life. Especially for those who deploy the performance practice as a form of collective worship, sensations of transindividuality tend to be conceptualized as embodied spirituality and communion with divinity. While this connection suggests potential avenues for extending research into embodied collectivity to the intersection between performance and religious ritual, pursuing such inquiries must appreciate the diversity and complexity of these sensations rather than reduce them to an impenetrable manifestation of an inexplicable deity. The fact that these aspects of the InterPlay practice tend to be underdeveloped in its embodied philosophy suggests that romanticizing the transindividual as a return to communal spirituality might impede the development of its socio-political potential.

Popular and literary social imaginaries of technological utopianism similarly

conceptualize collective consciousness as a techno-administrative transcendence of social

difference, thus deifying artificial intelligence and algorithmic governance. While I am no

luddite instinctively and reactively opposed to techno-organic posthuman modalities of

embodiment or collectivity, I believe that technology is not immune to the biases and inequities

of its development and remain skeptical of narratives offering a technological deus ex machina

solution to social and political problems. In particular, because technological interfaces tend to

focus on visual, auditory, and textual representations to the exclusion of haptic, olfactory,

kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensations, they tend to reinforce dominant ontologies and ways

of life and are thus unlikely to effectively challenge the individualistic embodied politics of

neoliberalism.

The challenges of solidarity during the Covid-19 pandemic reinforce this assessment. As

movement organizing moved to social media and performance for social change transitioned to

digital video meeting formats, opportunities to encounter and relate to one another as fully

embodied beings—especially through touch and coordinated movement when interacting in

shared physical space—were substantially reduced. The impacts of these transitions suggest

limits to the forms of collectivity cultivated by and within the current configuration of digital

organizing—especially in the absence of supplementation with physical presence. While I do not

dismiss the possibilities for technological enhancement of social flesh and communal feeling, I

stress fully embodied co-presence and collective experimentation to the cultivation of sensory

attunement and the development of communities of care.

Furthermore, in order to develop anti-oppression work effective in the context of

neoliberalism, prefigurative social movements must avoid adopting speculative fiction's

tendency to conceptualize collective subjectivity in primarily cognitive terms. The metaphoric likening of utopic collectivity to a neural network performatively materializes an ontology in which social injustice is primarily a failure of consciousness, inspiring cognitive approaches to anti-oppression work that emphasize the interindividual negotiation of difference and often subtly reify oppressive hierarchies. The cognitive bias of such an analogy stresses rationality in attending to inequity and social difference, encouraging arbitration based on individualizing frameworks and corresponding neoliberal logics of economic calculation conducted by supposedly rational actors prioritizing personal interest.

Such approaches struggle to achieve the genuine collectivization of responsibility for combatting systemic oppression, often failing to develop transformative persuasive momentum with members of majoritarian groups. Although it is important to note how oppressive systems prune the multiplicity of the self—punishing, for example, the "feminine" in men—as well as the dehumanizing effects of the oppressor role, it is largely injudicious to imply that members of majoritarian groups don't benefit from systems of oppression, i.e., white people from white supremacy, cismen from patriarchy, etc. The inadequacy of this reasoning limits motivations for these individuals to altruism and charity, ultimately reinforcing hierarchical relations rather than deconstructing them. In the absence of affective bonds and communal feeling, a cognitive and rationalizing collectivity will continue to encumber members of minoritarian groups with the onus of contesting the inequities they face.

Analogizing collective subjectivity to the nervous system of an individual human body also naturalizes hierarchical divisions and suggests that what is needed for the effective negotiation of difference and inequity is the smooth networking of rational individual agents.

Not only is the nervous system separated into a literal center and periphery distinguishing the neural density of the central nervous system from the more dispersed character of the peripheral nervous system, but it is also characterized by numerous nested partitions—such as forebrain/midbrain/hindbrain or sensory-motor/autonomic—that normalize vertical relations—mind over body, rationality over animality, intentional over instinctive—rather than horizontal ones. Thus, idealizing the tiered character of the nervous system encourages an acceptance of supposedly natural hierarchies as necessary to the "proper" functioning of a social organism. Moreover, rather than acknowledge the problem as the purported rationality of individual subjective nodes, this metaphor suggests that a group mind composed of the biunivocalizing linearity of neural relationality can establish just relations by overcoming the limitations of communicational polyvocality. The primary challenges of anti-oppression work are not informational but affective, and so the directness and lucidity of electrical activation and neuronal transmission offers little insight for addressing them.

Rather than pursue the intellectual contortionism of a cognitive approach to anti-oppression, I imagine the social flesh of collective embodiment as more akin to other bodily systems and pursue a correspondingly affective approach that emphasizes the interoceptive responsiveness of communal feeling. Although I am skeptical of analogical parallels between the individual human body and collective embodiment, conceptualizing collective subjectivity through metaphorical associations with the body's endocrine system or connective fascia could prove more innovative and instructive. Such associations not only construct different political imaginaries but offer potential bases for the materiality of the affective bonds of social flesh.

The fascial system consists of connective tissue throughout the body—enclosing and suspending internal organs, interpenetrating the musculoskeletal and vascular systems, and

extending into the lower layer of the skin—and may, according to recent research, be the human body's densest sensory organ, contributing significantly to interoceptive and kinesthetic senses.[253] Combining sensory, locomotor, and structural functions, fascia consists of a diversity of bodily tissues and resists singular categorization. Doerte Weig argues that fascia's "shifting-sliding tensional responsiveness" can inspire more affective methodologies of embodied cognition and suggests that the emerging field of Fascia studies should encourage explorations of "the intertwinings of neurophysiologies and political togetherness."[254]

For a variety of reasons the endocrine system also offers a potentially enlightening metaphor for collective embodiment. One of its primary functions is the regulation of mood, linking it directly with the emotive and affective. Jeremy Gilbert notes that "while neuroscience has become a frequent reference point for philosophy and cultural theory, almost no work seems to have been done on the cultural mechanics of the endocrine system, which surely is the key mechanism of affective response in the human body."[255] Composed of multiple disparate organs excreting hormones that accomplish regulatory functions across the entirety of the body, it stresses a comprehensive responsiveness to diversity. Additionally, its close ties to the vascular system—which transmits its chemical messengers alongside metabolic resources —and emphasis on the communicative maintenance of internal health and wellbeing serves as a metaphorical reminder that social justice can only be achieved by connecting communication with resource distribution. Finally, in her work on the materiality of affective transmission, Teresa Brennan positions the endocrine system as crucial to affective resonance. Suggesting that

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[253]Robert Schleip "Innervation of Fascia" in *Fascia, Function, and Medical Applications*, eds. David Lesondak and Angeli Maun Akey (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2021).

[254]Doerte Weig, "Fascias: Methodological Propositions and Ontologies That Stretch and Slide." *Body and Society* 26, 3 (2020), 105.

[255]Gilbert, *Common Ground*, 151.

the communication of affect could be mediated by the secretion of pheromones subsequently absorbed through olfaction or via skin-to-skin contact,[256] Brennan's work hypothesizes a potential material foundation for the affective bonds of social flesh.

In addition to the speculative insights of these critical cultural theoretical orientations, artist-activists and performance for social change practitioners can look to more recent portrayals of collective subjectivity in science fiction—as well as scholarly commentary on these portrayals—for ideas regarding how to cultivate safety and belonging within diverse democratic communities. For instance, the risky intimacy of the transindividual affective bonds and shared sensory connection of collectivity portrayed in the television series *Sense8* offers both promise and critical considerations. Created by renowned transgender filmmakers Lana and Lilly Wachowski, the show follows the story of eight strangers from around the globe as they become aware that they are sensorily interconnected. Called a "cluster," this group of characters can feel one another's emotions and are also able to see, hear, touch, and otherwise share sensations with one another. Furthermore, they discover their ability to draw upon each other's kinesthetic intelligences, sharing—among others—skills in driving, marksmanship, hand-to-hand combat, and even acting. Ultimately they learn that they are members a distinct species, colloquially referred to as "sensates." The manner in which the series represents this transinidividual sensory network of affective bonds in many ways resembles an idealized instantiation of social flesh.

Especially with its representation of group sexual activity, the show models and invites innovative modalities of embodied relationality. Laura Horak and Roxanne Samer argue that its narrative and cinematographic representation of alternate spatialities and temporalities encourage

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[256]Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 69.

a form of "corporeal spectatorship"[257] that is especially prominent in its portrayal of sensory sharing in sexual activity. Lokeilani Kaimana and Raffi Sarkissian dismiss the role of the collective eroticism of the transindividual cluster, arguing that "any differences and potential conflicts between the sensates or their uneven representation seem to be solved—or silenced—by the series' signature orgies" insofar as these experiences "flatten intersectional connections through a dominant erotic aesthetic."[258] However, while rejecting this representation of sex as a supposedly unmediated form of communication—"a moment of transcendence that dissolves difference"—suggesting that it is a romanticization of the possibilities of social media, micha cárdenas argues that sex can be "a space for utopian possibilities of care that come about through delicate negotiations of difference."[259] While I think the case can be made that the show does in fact attend to these possibilities for cross-cultural care in some regards—particularly in the case of the largely mentalic romance between two of the cluster members, Kala and Wolfgang—I largely agree with Moya Bailey's assessment that "these orgy scenes could do more to push notions of care beyond monogamy, familial, or even cluster ties. *Sense8* wants to show us that possibility, but that possibility is always somehow out of frame."[260] Whether or not the series succeeds in its depiction of sex across difference, I maintain that the intimacy of embodied relationality can offer ground for genuine belonging across difference rather than constituting a deceptive and illusory dissolution of difference.

Although linguistic communication can—and should—play a significant role in the navigation of sexual activity, sex remains an area of social life in which embodied cognition

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[257]Moya Bailey, et al., "*Sense8* Roundtable." *Spectator* 37, 2 (2017): 83.

[258]Moya Bailey, et al., "*Sense8*," 82.

[259]Moya Bailey, et al., "*Sense8*," 83.

[260]Moya Bailey, et al., "*Sense8*," 84.

retains a certain priority. While growing cultures of consent emphasize consistent linguistic check-ins, much of the intimate relationality of sexuality is negotiated through an increased attentiveness to minute fluctuations in one's sexual partner's—or partners'—affective states. The emergent character of libidinal desire is, of course, culturally embedded and thus impacted by frameworks of gender, sexuality, religion, race, nationality, etc. While these connections may elude consciousness, the ethical conduct of intimate relations will contend with the affective manifestations of these social differences. The holistic sensory orientation of embodied cognition offers an approach to the high physical and emotional stakes of sexual intimacy different from that cultivated by linguistic negotiation. Thus, a somatic approach to performance for social change has applicability in cultivating more ethical sexual cultures. Recognizing sex as a kind of deep play, developing the embodied cognition of communal feeling emphasizes a much broader and more discerning perception of others necessitating high levels of affective attunement and responsiveness.

When speculative fiction of this kind shifts from literature to performance, rehearsal for the representation of collective subjectivity can draw upon and contribute to the body of knowledge underpinning practices of performance for social change. At that same time that the show portrays an image of communal feeling across sexuality, nationality, gender, race, religion, and culture, these social differences must be navigated in the ensemble building of its production process. In addition to examining the broader production practices of the show for achievements and failures in this regard, we might also consider emerging areas of performance inquiry and training that address the challenges of shooting scenes of intimacy with a diverse ensemble of actors. In response to a growing recognition of the abuses of entertainment industry, a number of intimacy consultants for both theatrical and media performance have appeared in recent years.

Groups such as Theatrical Intimacy Education, Intimacy Directors and Coordinators, and Intimacy for Stage and Screen offer tools for actors and directors preparing scenes of simulated sexual activity or involving kissing and other forms of intimate touch. These tools and training programs can offer another area of potential research for performance for social change scholar-practitioners.

Ultimately, by integrating the creative, the theoretical, and the practical, performance constitutes a speculative pragmatics, prefiguratively enacting new worlds and new subjectivities in the shell of the old. Without the intellectual contributions of scholarly theorists, performance for social change will recede into social and political irrelevance. On the one hand, practitioners often valorize practice and the body as oppositional to theory and the mind, thus preserving these destructive binaries. On the other hand, as the primacy of discourse in Theatre of the Oppressed reveals, their work remains haunted by the dominant pole of these dualities.

At the same time, the neoliberalization of the academy threatens to render it politically impotent. Despite the efforts of scholars across the humanities to challenge the dominance of Cartesian frameworks and re-"discover" embodiment, the insights of artist-activists remain largely illegible within the discursive frames of the majority of scholarly research. Not only does this extra-institutional knowledge present critical avenues of resistance to neoliberalism's colonization of subjectivity, but, in an environment in which the body is largely evacuated—disciplined into an inconvenient vessel for the conduct of reading, listening, writing, and talking—or reduced to a signifying function, performance studies represents the academy's last best hope for an embodied intellectualism. Operating at the intersection of scholarly, activist, and artistic orientations to the world, performance inspired by social scientific imaginaries can

challenge neoliberalism by materializing the affective bonds of social flesh and cultivating the interoceptive responsiveness of communal feeling.

This work will require the curation of experiences of collectivity sufficiently desirable to overcome fears of losing the illusion of control offered by neoliberal individuality. Even for those who habitually experience the precarity and violence of neoliberalism, this illusion often proves mesmerizing. In order to move beyond it, it is not enough for prefigurative social movements to unmask the illusion by revealing its faulty logic, they must practice forms of collectivity in which participants sense the safety of belonging. Performance has a crucial role to play as a creative form of social practice. Highlighting the temporality of performance as one of futurity, José Esteban Muñoz emphasizes its contributions to the cultivation of collectivity, using the term utopian performativity to describe performance's ability to "generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging."[261] I have argued that this epistemology must be an embodied cognition characterized by high levels of social and emotional intelligence and furthermore must attend closely to the transitory moments of utopic belonging in the here and now.

Belonging, especially across social difference, is provisional and processual, accomplished by degrees. In a world so thoroughly characterized by social-emotional ignorance, the mending of affective bonds deeply wounded by cultures of discrimination is often risky and uncomfortable. Although a sense of safety is important to social transformation, its role as a watchword in social justice circles must be questioned. As noted previously, indigenous activist and organizer Kelly Hayes argues that the meaning of safety for prefigurative social movements needs to be radically reimagined. Not only is the safety offered by neoliberal nation states

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[261]José Esteban Muñoz, "Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative" in *SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), 10.

precarious, conditional, and frequently illusory, but learning to relate on levels of deep and intimate care involves mutual risk and the potential for reopening social wounds in order to create opportunities for genuine healing. Situating her understanding of it within what she describes as a somatic tradition, adrienne maree brown approaches safety in her organizing practice as "the absence of intentional harm and the possibility of being able to make mistakes and still have belonging."[262] Valuing one another over and above the smooth functioning of systems not only requires us to—often painfully—disentangle how our identity and conceptions of our individuality are intrinsic to those systems but to simultaneously build communities that are sufficiently pleasurable and resilient to endure the messiness of this process of subjective transformation.

Unfortunately, social movement discourses of safety and belonging tend to be heavily infused with logics of competitive essentialism. The idea of an authentic self that either is or is not accommodated by the culture of a group reflects an approach to the body—often extended also to its affective states—as material facticity reflective of social identity and implicitly constructs the negotiation of difference as subject to a comparative evaluation and hierarchization of identity. Such an approach pits values that should be mutually reinforcing as oppositional, setting for example feminism at odds with transgender rights or anti-racism in opposition to immigrant rights.

Building instead on a critical somatic approach that acknowledges bodies as emergent multiplicities embedded in and constituted by socio-political fields, we can interrogate experiences of vulnerability, not in order to invalidate them—although perhaps to acknowledge that statistics often reveal relations of violence and exploitation to be the reverse of attitudes, as

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[262]adrienne maree brown, "UNC LGBTQ Center - Pride Week Afrofuturism Discussion" *YouTube*, May 16, 2022, video, 16:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTYcudBHkQM.

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in the case of those experiencing mental illness—but to understand and transform the circumstances of their production. The recognition that all bodies internalize aspects of oppressive systems while also retaining affective multiplicity encourages an understanding of social change as entailing individual subjective transformation on all our parts.

Moreover, if belonging is to offer an alternative to the atomizing individualism of neoliberalism then it must be rooted in communal feeling and the affective bonds of social flesh. The complexity and incompleteness of social justice efforts requires segregated autonomous spaces for minoritarian groups to enrich their shared experience and deepen their understanding of what they hold in common. However, if the experience of social belonging is treated as conditional upon uniformity of identity or experience, then integrated spaces will be limited to institutionalized spaces and belonging across social difference will be reduced to tolerance in the service of exploitation. Prioritizing the smooth functioning of productive systems, these spaces fix identities and sanitize relationality by disciplining it into lists of behavioral dos and don'ts. We must care for one another, but this care must be lived rather than regulated. Genuine community care requires an embodied social-emotional reasoning and truly integrated spaces must be predicated on the desire for collective awareness of the affective experience of minoritarian groups.

Combining creativity and play, performance for social change can offer a unique venue for the cultivation of social flesh and communal feeling as a potentially pleasurable autotelic activity. What is needed are skills of affective attunement on a level of embodied cognition, but learning to relate across difference can be fraught and effortful. If it is consistently experienced as such, social justice will be experienced as little more than a painful moral imperative pursued by minoritarian groups out of necessity and avoided by majoritarian groups. Performance for

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social change can help us to find the joys and pleasures of embodied solidarity, including the pleasantness of belonging even in the face of difficulty. Through the interoceptive responsiveness of communal feeling, social justice and community care can be experienced as a pleasurable activity pursued for its own sake.

However, the connections between collaborative creative play and social justice can often feel so tenuous and abstract as to make participation premised on such values feel somewhat ridiculous. It is quite easy to recall the intensity of my own early resistance to these activities. I remember being completely unable to be fully present with my own experience. Rather than drop fully into my body, I would retain a distanced perspective as if I were critically observing myself. All I could think was how stupid I must appear. In the language of the InterPlay community, I am now a "recovering serious person."

For me, the solution to this initial resistance—in spite of what the entirety of this dissertation might suggest—has not been to rationalize the instrumentality of these practices. Although I maintain that performance for social change has critical value in the face of neoliberal hegemony through the cultivation of collective embodiment, I recognize that its creative and playful uselessness is constitutive of its prefigurative capacity. Erin Manning similarly argues for a reclamation of the useless, noting that "as more and more of us actively—activistly—reframe the useless in a speculatively pragmatic sense, perhaps we can redefine value outside of a capitalist mandate."[263] Capitalism already recuperates restorative rest and play, rearticulating them within an overarching financial framework and subordinating them to productivity. While I still find myself getting caught "in my head" from time to time when engaged in this work, in those moments I no longer search for predetermined values to apply in

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[263]Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 199.

order to rationalize the practice. Instead, I try to sink into the fullness of the experience in the

hope that I find myself in a new world characterized by novel forms of valuation.

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