

[Video of the event](#)

Hiie Saumaa (Fellow, Institute for Ideas & Imagination), and
Lynn Brooks, Kiko Mora and Ann Moradian

Hiie: Hello! My name is Hiie Saumaa, and I am one of the fellows here at the Institute for Ideas and Imagination. I would like to, first of all, thank you everybody for coming, and I also want to thank Columbia Global Centers Paris for hosting this event -- a special thanks go to Loren Wolfe and her team, and also to the Institute for Ideas and Imagination, and Marie d'Origny and her team. And also thank you very much my fellow panelists for coming here.

I am going to pass the microphone on to Kiko Mora, who is our moderator tonight. He is a professor of Semiotics of Advertising and Culture Industries at the Department of Communication and Social Psychology at the University of Alicante, and of Spanish Cinema for the Council on International Educational Exchange. He has written extensively on flamenco music and dance in the United States.

Thank you all for coming.

Kiko: Thank you Hiie for your words. Good evening and welcome all to the Columbia Global Center in Paris. I would like to thank Lynn, Hiie and Ann and the Institute for Ideas & Imagination in Paris for the opportunity to take part of this session. We are gathering here to talk about the body, about what can we know about the world and about ourselves through the body experience.

In the Western countries, from ancient Greece's classical philosophy to the most contemporary reflections, the body was thought as a craft, as a machine, as a computer or a cybernetic organism. The narrative of the body has developed from a God creation, that of the artisan or the magician, to a human creation, that of the genetic engineer or the plastic surgeon. The body ceases to be something already

given to become something to be transformed. But, what about the body that is not present any longer? For example, dance, as an ephemeral art dealing with time and space, it is difficult to study, especially before cinematic recordings because researchers are dealing with a body that is lost. How can this lost body be restored? What do researchers learn from their own body when they study the lost body in the archives?

Like medicine and biology for centuries, in the last forty years a whole corpus of research has developed within the field of what was called the “Body Studies”: a transdisciplinary investigation which includes sociology, economics, philosophy, biopolitics, semiotics, history, anthropology, and the arts. All these approaches have revealed to us that the body is considered an agent involving a cultural practice, a pattern to be categorized, a commodity to be sold, a tool to be exploited, a thing to be disciplined, a symptom to be enjoyed, a text to be read, a trace to be unveiled, or a surface to be painted or sculpted. Thanks to these disciplines, now we know that the body is not the exclusive object of the natural sciences, but it can also be seen as a cultural and social construction possessing its own historicity. However, these epistemological trends usually focus on the body as an object, as a passive container.

We are so absorbed in our mental capacities that very often we conceive our own bodies as any other object we use in everyday life's routines: like a spoon or a pen... To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, like an extension of the human being. But we hardly pay attention to the fact that its radical difference lies on its subjectivity. The body can be seen as a tool as much as the place where we expand the awareness of the self and the Others.

Natural sciences have long dealt with the physical body, but, for a long time, the lived body was, and still is, seen as a black box. Around the middle of the twentieth century a group of phenomenologists asked: “Who knows what a body knows?;

“Who knows what a body is able?” More recently, somatics, in conjunction with environmental sciences, has come to fully accomplish this “return of the body,” where the body is not a thing but a phenomenon, and less an object of knowledge than a process for knowledge. The Oxford English Dictionary defines knowledge as “facts, information and skills acquired thorough experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.” If this definition is accurate, then there is no reason why the body and bodily movement cannot play a significant role in this acquisition. Therefore, although interconnected in a kind of a spiral way, what is of interest here tonight is less what knowledge can do for the body and much more what the body can do for knowledge. How can we access knowledge and how can we create knowledge through the body experience? How can we pay attention to sensation as a form of knowledge? How can improvisational movement help us to open to the unknown, to the uncertainties of life? How can we get a balance through dance as an embodied art? Why is it useful to interact with others through the somatic experience?

Well, this is more or less the introduction. And now, let's leave them for a fruitful discussion about this topic that I have tried to pose. Thank you very much.

Ann: We'll just take a moment to introduce ourselves. My name is Ann Moradian, I am a choreographer – I think of myself as a movement artist at this point in time.

Hiie: I already did introduce myself but I will add that I am a writer, dance scholar and a movement educator.

Lynn: I am Lynn Brooks. I am a dance historian and editor. I have also been a teacher of both movement and dance studies, and a choreographer, performer, and critic – and an avid audience member.

Ann: I am going to take the mike from here, and help get us into our bodies, because this is what it is about here. Come forward toward the edge of your chair so you have your sit bones nice and solid, and your feet planted on the floor – seated. We’ll do an gentle tune-in. Sit so that your back is free, and just feel your head floating over your chest, and then your chest floating over your hips, and your sit bones rooting into the chair...

Go ahead and drop your gaze down, or close your eyes if you are comfortable with that – you don’t have to do anything I suggest, just so you know. You have the right of rebellion at any moment. But if you are comfortable, go ahead and close your eyes. Listen to the sounds in the space... And see, as you are listening, if you can sense or feel the vibration of sound... and the contact of that vibration touching your skin...

Bring your attention inward a little deeper, and see if you can feel the beating of your heart – feel free to use your hand, if you need help to feel that. And see if you can feel or sense the beating rhythm of your heart...

Then bring your attention to your breath at the same time, to the relationship of your breathing and your heartbeat... Let them organize themselves so they make sense together... Begin to deepen your exhalation, and slow and deepen your inhalation... Release your tongue, so that it floats freely in your palette... Allow the jaw to relax, the back of the neck to relax, and lengthen.

As you are breathing in, you can imagine breathing in oxygen, as it cleanses and nourishes your system. As you exhale, let it cleanse, release anything that is not useful or helpful. And when you inhale, take in that fresh breath, let it nourish and support you. When you exhale, let anything that is no longer useful, just let it go. Take a couple more breaths like that... After your next exhalation, go ahead and open your eyes. Return to a normal breath...

Hiie: Thank you so much, Ann. Let's take a few moments to find some language for what you just experienced physically. So, in silence, if you were to describe what that physical experience was like for you, what would you say? So, that is the first question. And then maybe the second question is – to keep with theme of the panel – what is it that you know now that you did not know before? Did these sensations give you some kind of new knowledge about yourself, the space, something? So, we process, we think...

Do you have something that you can share with others – maybe just a sentence? And maybe we'll hear from two or three people. Do we have volunteers? I see some smiles, and some eyes, and... Yes. Alex.

Audience response (Alex): I noticed tension in my face...

Hiie: Thank you. Anybody else?

Audience [female]: I felt I was levitating. I felt really light and I let go of all my tensions. So it was really nice.

Hiie: Oh, very interesting response. So we have something for you later, but I'm not going to say. Thank you. Anybody else? No. Any of the panelists?

Lynn: It is a wonderful way to start a panel. We should do it every time [laughter].

Hiie: When she said, “Feel your heartbeat,” I am like – yes! [Indicating that she's nervous to be on the stage. Audience laughter.] I feel it, right here! There was another hand here. Can we get a mike to the lady at the front?

Audience [female]: I just feel, after such a short moment, more sensitive to perceive everything. Like even after, this moment when you speak, I feel more things, I can't describe. Just when you speak, and ask us questions, I feel even more sensitive to your words.

Hiie: Thank you. Thank you very much.

I am going to say a few words now. So the reason we wanted to do this exercise was to bring the body, your awareness of your physical selves, into the space right now. And then another reason I asked Ann to do this exercise is that it is very important to understand the wisdom that sensations can give us.

Today you will hear a lot of references to the word “somatics.” It is a term in dance and movement studies. Do you know what somatics is? Shall I explain? So, somatics is an umbrella term for a lot of different practices such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Nia, Continuum, Ideokinesis, 5 Rhythms, SuryaSoul, Soul Motion, Shake Your Soul... They have different histories, methods of delivery, and also different approaches to the body and movement. But what they all share is a very significant principle: to bring the participant's awareness to his or her body. The focus is never on “let's copy the movement, the steps, the choreography of the teacher.” Rather the focus is on your individual experience with movement and your sensations. In a somatically oriented dance or movement class that is the kind of knowledge we evoke in the classroom setting.

We develop in these kinds of classes the felt sense or the ability to let the inner eye or the mind's eye roam in the body and gather information about what is going on, both inside, but also maybe emotionally and in terms of imagination, and mentally as well.

The example that Ann gave you was done in a seated position, but you can track sensations also as you move, as you engage in rather vigorous dance experiences. And it is important to develop curiosity about your sensations, and awareness. You don't have to be judgmental, like “oh, this is a bad thing that my face feels tense.” You just notice, and start to notice more and more as you develop this sort of somatic intuition, this somatic skill set. And maybe on that note, I'll pass this over to Lynn.

Lynn: I am going to show some slides; that is why I am standing up at this moment. And to make sure that I show them at the right point, I might actually read my script.

As a dance historian, I have done work in Spain, the Netherlands, Philadelphia, and New York; those are places where I have done research in different projects from the periods fifteenth to nineteenth centuries.

From my perspective as a dance historian, body movement is a primary source. It's a fundamental source of human knowledge. Dance itself is a crafted and intentional communication that features the body as its focus and medium. Now, as Kiko mentioned, the body itself, let alone the movements that it did, is gone, for the dancing that I am investigating. In fact, even the dancing I saw last night, or ten minutes ago, that dancing is gone. The body might still be present. But for the work that I do in dance history of previous centuries, those bodies and the dancing itself have long disappeared. So, I look at what I think of as the “precipitates” of history -- what has been distilled and retained, and sometimes that retention happens completely randomly, from the great flux of history. One of the great somatic founders in the field was Rudolph Laban, he talked about the “great flux of movement” when he talked about the body in motion. And history is a larger body in a larger motion.

I look at written descriptions [Images] to find some information about dance. So, these [Slide showing 3 handwritten documents] are written descriptions. One is a dance contract from 1646, from Seville, Spain (that was a source for one project I did). The one in the middle is a fascinating prompt book from 1835, Philadelphia, by a director that includes his notation for a ballet; it is called “Ballet” in the handwritten notes. And over here in 1860, we have the diary from a dentist from Philadelphia who went to the theatre, and took a lot of dancing lessons, and went to balls and commented on all of these experiences. So, these are some of the different kinds of written sources that I use.

Of course, graphic depictions are valuable, but also misleading – dangerous. [Slide of 3 graphic depictions of dance] Over here, our dancing Spaniard, first of all, was depicted by a Frenchman. We already know there was tension in that relationship. And it was a costume design – not really a depiction of dance. Over here, we have a couple of children dancing at a theatre in Amsterdam in 1758. Anybody who has studied Baroque dance knows what they are doing, right there. And over further to your right, we have our 1812 illustration of peasant dancing in Pennsylvania. All of these are very rich in information, and they also have to be contextualized and understood from a number of perspectives.

I look also at advertisements, like playbills [Slide of playbill advertisements]. What did the managers think was going to draw audiences to buy their tickets? What did they choose to highlight? I have some suggestions here [laughter] for what these managers thought to highlight. For example, in this period in Philadelphia, “moral entertainment.” Of course if you saw that entertainment you might question that description.

[Slide of dance contract] We have another dance contract here from Spain that gives me information on contractual matters back in the day. Who was in charge? Who was paying what? Who took the money and who paid others with that money?

That information is included here. Sometimes very brief descriptions about the dances, but more often they talked about the costumes. Over here, we have payment information [Slide of account book]. This is a dancing master’s logbook from Philadelphia. He is listing whom he taught, and how much each one paid – very important information for him, and for me as a dance historian.

Also important are religious condemnations [Slide]. Typically, whatever they are condemning is what sold the tickets in the theatres [audience chuckling], and they give some of the best descriptions of movement, the religious figures who are condemning dancing.

This material arises from the literate, arises from people who thought that this mattered for some reason. So we are missing a lot here. A lot of people are not represented in this kind of documentation. [Slide with images of dances] Sometimes I get a hint of them – for example, high society dancing in Philadelphia in 1830. A couple of decades earlier, we have a depiction of enslaved black people dancing. And over on the far side, on your right, we have a “ballet” dancer – I have to put that in quotes – Lola Montez, from the 1850s. I don’t know if you can see what is really going on there. She is shown taking her bow in such a way as to make sure that everybody in the audience has a good shot at her cleavage. And, in fact, if you can see the depictions, people are making sure they don’t, or do see, including a couple of women who are hiding behind kerchiefs in the back rows. All fascinating information.

Of course, contextualizing and interpreting this material is one of the greatest challenges in a dance historian’s attempt to distill the meaning of bodies and movement in the past. So, what do I look for? I look for [Slide] body shape; center of gravity; stability and mobility; movement qualities; [Slide] ranking of movement according to power structures, social-group identification, and class (often indicated by the demonstrated degree of control over the body) – you see very different

representations of that here. [Slide] I also often get hints at movement technique and the training that supports it. How were these bodies formed by teachers of movement? And further, I look for any connections or retentions [Slide] of movement and body use among people across time and space. As I look at and for bodies, I bring my own body and experiences to the search. And I'll let Hiie talk a little bit more about that experience.

Hiie: Thank you. So you see how she is reading text and visual material for knowledge of the body and movement.

My approach is somewhat different. I call myself a somatic researcher, and I think of that term in two ways: first, I am a somatic researcher in the sense that when I teach my dance classes, my movement classes, I conduct an embodied inquiry of how I feel after class. I ask myself what I sensed, what worked in the classroom, what kind of images arose, what kind of body knowledge I have as a result of that class. And then at home I write about my experience: I bring it into verbal consciousness and more insights might open up that way. So that is the first sense of me as a somatic researcher. And you got a little sense of that through Ann's exercise.

But the other way I think of myself as a somatic researcher is that when I go to the archives, I don't leave my knowledge from the dance class, from the movement class behind. I bring it with me to the archival research room. Lynn and I share a lot of these experiences in that we are both dance scholars, historians, so oftentimes we go to the archives where we can look at primary documents. Right now I am writing a book about Jerome Robbins. His archives are at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. You can't take anything outside of the archives. You have to have permission to consult the materials, you enter the archival reading room, and you look at his diaries, his letters, photography. It is very important to be present with those materials in front of you because otherwise you might miss important information. One thing I do is I perform a little tune in exercise before I enter the archives, or as I

am sitting behind the table. I do it so that I can be aware of my sensations of the body. I bring the body into the experience of archival research, and this is what I mean when I say that I am an “embodied person.”. Embodiment means that I don’t leave my awareness of the body behind. I bring it to my other experiences of the day, other experiences besides the dance class.

Also, when I work with these primary materials in front of me, I pay attention to the sensations that happen in my body as I engage with the materials. For example, one of the first pieces that I read by Jerome Robbins in the archives was a little essay where he describes how he spent some time drinking a coffee and eating a pastry in Spoleto, Italy at a market square. And then he has a very sudden, unexpected experience, where he feels like the people that he loved very much and who had passed on, suddenly appeared in front of him. He had an angelic visitation of the spirits of the people who had died. And when I was reading that passage, I immediately felt -- I was very moved by it -- but I had a very strong physical sensation also. It was like a stirring in the chest area here. It was not just a mental realization of “oh, this is an emotional, well written piece.” I had a physical response as well. A lot of my choices as to what I want to write about stem from my physical experiences with the material. And that is important because as researchers, as a researcher of Robbins, there is so much material, there are boxes and boxes of material, so at some point I need to make choices as to what it is that I focus on. I rely on this kind of somatic experience in how I decide what draws me in as a researcher.

But a question I have for my fellow panelists here is... What I just described was more an individual experience between me and my sensations and perhaps the material in front of me. But it is important to realize that somatics, or somatic movement, has a potential to also reach out from the individual to the communal, and to the global, to the big picture. And I wonder if.... I know Ann has something to say about this...

Ann: With pleasure. Before I launch into my excursion, I need to say that I speak on behalf of somatics, but my idea of somatics is an extended idea. My training comes from the martial arts, from yoga, from the energy arts. These are older practices that lie at the root of somatics. While I don't confine myself to the current definition, I embrace it as well.

What is so obvious that it is invisible is that we are always in relation – *always* in relation. Whether it is with this inner landscape of thought, feeling, sensation, memory, and imagination -- everything that is in there -- we are also in relation constantly with the world around us, and this universe around us. There is this constant interplay. This is a given. It is there all the time. And we forget really easily to stay awake to that constant motion.

One of the things that I think that we take with us – from when we practice dancing, and when we are immersed by dancing or moving in whatever way we move with awareness – we practice sensing and processing and being aware and being awake, and being touched and moved by what we discover. We become sensitized to ourselves, but we also develop an empathy for others. Not just emotional empathy. When people talk about empathy we often think of *emotional empathy* – yes. And also a *physical* empathy. My dancers, when I was rehearsing with them, used to think I could read their minds. I wasn't reading their minds, but to them it felt like it. I was reading their bodies. And I was reading their bodies through the sensations of my own body. My martial arts teacher described it as “tasting the other.” This was the language that he gave it. (How do you put language to that?) Anyway, there is more than that. But that is one element that I think this brings, that takes us beyond our own individual experience.

So, let's go back to the body, because that is the language I speak best. If you are willing – and no one has to do anything I suggest or propose – but if you are willing, stand up. I am going to walk us through... so, you could say “humor me” – “*faites moi*

plaisir.” *Mais pas de tout obligatoire.* But not obligatory. Don’t do anything that you feel uncomfortable with. Separate your feet about hip distance apart and shake out your shoulders. Let your knees bounce a little bit, and let your weight drop down into the earth. You can jiggle, a little bit like you are on the New York City subway... just letting any tension drop off your body, and feel your feet rooting down into the ground. Then let that stabilize and quiet when you feel ready, and bring your attention inward a bit, and then downward, and see if you can feel the earth under the building – or imagine that you could if you can’t, just for the journey. See if you can plunge your attention a little deeper, and feel the center of the earth underneath you, under all the layers of the city, under the layers of the earth, just feeling the center of the earth...

From there you can imagine your feet rooting and connecting, and as they are doing that, you could feel: Where do you have your weight in your feet? A little bit to one side? A little bit back, or forward? You can shift a little from one side to the other, and see if you can find the center between right and left, so you are sharing the weight between two legs. Maybe a little bit forward and a little bit back, to see where the center is there. From that center, you can imagine feeling the metatarsal of your big toes and the metatarsal of your little toes, and feeling that both of them are rooting down equally – and the outer edges of your heels, the two outer edges of your heels, feeling both sides rooting down equally. You could imagine roots growing down straight toward the center of the earth right through your feet. And from those roots, imagine growing upward. Le mot, *pousser en français, c’est si beau.* We don’t have that word in English. To push, to grow down into the earth -- you could imagine your hair like leaves, feeling that upward movement, like a plant.

Just keep growing... and overgrow. Let your knees start to lock back a little bit, so you find the tension, a locking in the knees. Feel what that does in your hips, your lower back, your chest... Then soften your knees a bit so your tail can drop down again. So you can feel that connection with the earth again. If you need to jiggle to

find that again, go ahead and do that. And again. Play with that one more time, rooting down through the feet, feeling that growing down to go up. Just before the knees lock, feel that length, so it feels comfortable and easy and long.

From here, this part might be a little weird, so if you don't want to do it, don't do it. But, I am going to ask you to imagine a column of light shining down around you. You could imagine it like an extra layer, separating or clarifying or distinguishing the interior space and the exterior space.

Go ahead and open your eyes if they are not open already and, without shifting your focus or your head too much, take in an awareness of the people around you that you can feel. Whatever information there is – not good or bad information, it is just information. What we do with it is where it gets more interesting. What do you feel? What do you sense? Go ahead and expand that to the whole room. See if you can feel the whole room of us as people – all the bodies. Feel free to let your head move about a little bit, without looking directly for it, the sensing, through the skin, the back... maybe you can feel the walls of the room, the floor of the room, the ceiling. Maybe you can sense the air moving between the bodies and the objects. Just being aware -- What can you be aware of? It is just a question, for your self. There is not a right answer. Just for the fun of the exploration.

Bring your focus back to your own body. You can imagine that column of light, or feeling yourself rooting back to the earth again. From here, if you are in the front row you might want to turn, or you could come forward and touch the table – put your hand on the chair in front of you if you want. And now shift your weight to one foot. Okay? So you are essentially trying to balance. If you could do it with one finger, that's cool. If you could do it with none, that's great. If you need two fingers and two fists, that's fine.

Now go ahead and open your eyes, so your eyes are helping you to balance. From here, without shifting your face, just shift your eyes to the right. See what you see, and feel how you feel about what you see. Just take it all in, bodily.

Then turn your whole head and look to the left. Again, see what you see, and observe what this does with your balance... Drop your focus down to look down toward the ground. See what you see and take it in. Feel what you feel. Hear what you hear. Everything that is available to you. Then look to the up-right diagonal – head and eyes. Take your eyes straight up to this beautiful ceiling, and then up and over to the left diagonal. And come on back. Go ahead and sit down, and take a moment to process that experience for yourself...

Hiie: Does anybody want to share what this experience was like for them? We are practicing the ability to find language for physical sensations, which is, by the way not that easy. It is a whole journey... Yes, please...

Audience 1 [male]: I notice how much – we were talking about metaphors before – I noticed how much metaphor is used for movement and bodily things.

Hiie: Yes, thank you.

Audience 2 [female]: Well, a little pre-story: I come here after six hours of movement practice. So, while doing this exercise I think all the muscles, it seemed to me that my entire body went to my feet, connected to the ground and just dissolved in it. So, I actually felt no barrier between the ground and my feet and actually the sensation was that I am so stable now, because all my muscles, tired after six hours of practice are just spread around like roots and they hold me on the ground so well that nothing can shake me. And then the support, the attention to the space, that the space is not empty, it is full of stories, of bodies. I am not only rooted to the ground, but I am rooted in here and here. And I am so stable now. It was a great sensation. Thank you.

Hiie: Thank you. And maybe one more. I saw a lot of hands... Yes, please.

Audience 3 [male]: My feeling was more like the fluid inside of me, that I feel when you get up to stand up that, it is the fluid part of yourself that you feel, it gets dragged down by gravity and you have the feeling of air pressure. And so it is really something that is not about real solid, but fluid or gaseous, if I can say.

Hiie: Um hm. Thank you. Is there anybody else? One more person?

Audience 4 [female]: So, when I open my eyes, I feel that I am standing in a forest, and everybody is a tree. And I feel like, I can sense that some persons are slightly tickling, like the wind is going through the leaves and is creating this little tiny vibration. And I can feel that because when people shift their weight we hear the sound of this wooden floor, and I feel that we are all connected by the wooden floor, with this tiny change of sound and also the change of the texture of the wood floor. So it is like we are all trees in a forest, and we are all connected by the soil underneath.

Hiie: That is very beautiful. Thank you so much. It is so interesting to hear about people's embodied experiences -- I can listen to you all forever. So let me know later also what you felt, if you feel like it.

Ann, tell us something about improvisation. We know that you are a great improviser. What kind of knowledge is possible through improvised movement?

Ann: I am going to back up just a tad and then loop into that question, because what I find really interesting in the balancing is that – when I was a young dancer I thought balance was a point in space, with my point shoe, that I was supposed to find. I was so desperately searching to find this point in space, which I never found. As

I went into modern forms that would start throwing you off center more and more, I started to realize that it is this ongoing process of constantly adjusting. And that was something I learned from movement that was really profound. Which applies into systems thinking, which is where my whole universe and focus seems to be these days. In systems thinking we call this dynamic balance, this flux, this fluid process of balancing. In systems thinking, the material universe is seen as a dynamic web of interrelated events, processes, and relationships. So, dynamic balance applies to not just walking and dancing and moving but to metabolic processes like digestion, drinking and breathing, to interspecies with the food chain, with nature, our environment, the biosphere, and in our human relationships. So there is this ongoing process of dynamic balance in all of these relationships. Gregory Bateson and Fritjof Capra apply this also to social systems. But basically, what it is that is so fascinating about this kind of experience to me is that the body self-organizes faster than you could consciously be aware of. In the martial arts it becomes really, really clear that you can't keep up with it if you try to think it. You have to let go and let your body do it.

Essentially, it is this process of a living system using information from within and from without in cycles of feedback, processing and response. One current view from a systemic perspective is that the living world tends to evolve toward increasing complexity, from disorder to order. That is the living world: from disorder to order; the opposite of entropy. The use of feedback is critical to this process of balance, survival, evolution. And we meet this all the time in an improvisational setting.

When we are improvising, essentially what we are doing is encountering the unknown or the unforeseen on a regular basis. You can't predict it. You can't control it. You can try. You can influence it, but there are other people involved. (When I am talking about an improvisational experience, I'm talking about a *shared* improvisational experience, specifically.)

When you first start doing this what usually happens – I was a ballet-trained dancer, which is all about control, and precision, opposition, and weights and balances. When you get into a space of improvisation, you could do *anything*, and you don't know what to do. You are stunned. In French that word I think is *medusée* – petrified. This is a moment where we either can't do something, we draw a blank, or we resort to old patterns or habits because they are familiar or they feel safe. They might not be the most appropriate or constructive response in the moment, but we know them. We've relied on them. Sometimes what we'll do is limit how much information we'll take in....

Like, for example, right here, right now, if this is an improvisation, the information I should be taking in is my people sitting right next to me... and I just let this pass forward, and let that be enough...

Hiie: Lynn, can you give some historical perspective here? Bring us back to history?

Lynn: Of course. So, I am going to talk about a moment in time where the historical perspective was one of closure, as opposed to one of openness of the kind that Ann has been encouraging us to explore with the movement exercises that she introduced us to. And before I talk about the particular moment that I am going to use as an example, I just want to acknowledge that one of my research assistants, Amanda De Santos, is here from Franklin & Marshall College; she helped me with this research last summer. I am so grateful to her, and many other students who have helped along the way.

All of us have been improvising as we have developed this script, so I am going to have to go forward a little bit over some of the images I was going to show you, in order to get to the moment in time that I intend to talk about now, which is called the antebellum period in United States history. That is differently defined by different historians – it typically ends by 1861 when the United States Civil War began. I am

beginning it in roughly 1820, but it is essentially from the end of the War of 1812 (which ended in 1814), to 1860, that is roughly the period I am thinking of as the antebellum period. In this period, what was going on in the United States was an attempt to define social and cultural formations in a strict and hierarchical way, which actually ran counter, of course, to the rhetoric and the philosophy of the American Revolution.

This attempt drew on, as we shall see, other scientific and philosophical constructs. But as a dance historian—surprisingly perhaps, for those who might not be aware of the relevance of dance to so much other history—these kinds of hierarchical organizations showed up as well. [Slide] What I am showing you here is “Lessons in Dancing, Exemplified by Sketches from Real Life in the City of Philadelphia,... by a Dilettante.” The dilettante was actually Edward W. Clay, who is a very well-known social satirist of the period, and cartoonist. These are some of his least offensive illustrations. I am not showing you some of the truly vile ones that he did later. But this is a series – I am going to show it to you on two slides because they don’t fit well on one – where E.W. Clay began the illustrations with the highest level of dance achievement, which is the social dancing of the Philadelphia City Assembly, the elite society of the city – the merchants and those with inherited money. Those same people are still pretty high up, but here in page two, they are dancing in costume. Now that just takes you down a little bit of a notch, because you are in disguise. And all kinds of things can happen when you are in disguise. But, indeed, fancy balls, or masked balls, were very popular in the period. In image number three of this series, we are getting a little bit into deep water here. We have the waltz: people are touching one another, men and women; they are facing one another. The women—of course it was the women—were getting dizzy, losing control, and then all kinds of things could happen. So we are moving down the social scale, and over here we have two ballet dancers from the period. French dancers. Madame Hutin and Monsieur Achilles. We can see that they are performing some pretty nice ballet – I would take it today! But she is wearing pantaloons under her skirt. The first ballet

dancers who came over were wearing skirts and tights – the women – and this was so horrific for American society that they were booed off the stage. Madame Hutin had the same experience and the second time she appeared promised she would be wearing her pantaloons, and that is how she is depicted here by E.W. Clay. So these dancers are clearly highly refined movers, but they are stage professionals. There was a lot of negative rhetoric about that at the time.

Moving down in E.W. Clay's listing, and he does them exactly in this order in “Lessons in Dancing,” we next come to some New Jersey Quaker peasants. They are dancing, even though the Quakers ought not to have been, according to their strict rules of behavior. She is looking kind of shy and modest about it, but he is having a pretty good time. Moving down a little bit further, we get the working-class dancers – the artisans. She is dressed in a little bit too showy a way, his top hat is too high, and their elbows are bent and they look kind of awkward, but we see they are having a good time.

We get even further down the social scale and we start looking at sailors and their girls. Sailors, we know, were those border people who were always bringing ideas from across borders and over the oceans, and intermixing with people of all kinds of nationalities and races. You could get into big trouble for that. Way down at the bottom we have the free African American population, the largest group of whom lived in Philadelphia in this period. They too were dancing. But, as well as dressed, and as refined as they might have attempted to appear and to move, they were down at the bottom of the scale. There were no plantations in Philadelphia – I showed you the old plantation, from the South, in an earlier slide – they would have been lower down yet.

Where did these ideas come from? They came from science in this period. [Slide] And here you see a couple of the illustrations that were widely known—not just by scientists. These were published in magazines, in newspapers, in the period where you

see how the ranking of human types was fixed. And, this is of course a period where the question of slavery was hotly debated. Philadelphia was an epicenter of those debates. It was also an epicenter of this kind of scientific production. We see here some of the ideas that were being – not just propagated, but the public was assured that this was true. Science ‘knew’ this depicted hierarchy of human types to be true.

[Slide] Here we see how the Grecian male is at the top of the scientific hierarchy, the chimpanzee lower down among the primates. And who makes the link between? Those Africans – who we have to figure out how to fit into our American society, our United States society. We also see another version of this kind of ranking by the Dutch Pieter Camper, whose work was misinterpreted and used by the American and other scientists of the period. And so you see how these kinds of ideas broadly infiltrated the population, and even affected understandings of dance and movement in the period. [Slide] I put them together on one page here, from the highest to the lowest of the dancing, together with one of those scientific illustrations. I’ll stop there.

Hiie: Lynn, can I ask you something? Before you asked me the question of what it is like to be an embodied researcher in the archives, and I wanted to ask that question back: What is it like for you to be a physical, embodied person doing this kind of research looking at these images, like do you... What is that like?

Lynn: Well, my fellow panelists have heard me enthuse about this before, but my first exposure to primary documents was actually in Seville, Spain. I am so lucky that I am the age I am, and that I was at a point in time where you actually were given the document physically, instead of allowed to look at a digitization of it. I remember when the huge boxes of the documents I was requesting would come before me, and I would fish through and pull out the document I wanted to study more closely, and I had the understanding that that physical page, those contracts for example that I showed you earlier, had been touched, had been signed by the choreographer who was going to make the dances for those Corpus Christi

processions. And to me, that created a link across three hundred years. I felt like I was holding hands with those choreographers by touching that page that he or she (in this case—there were many female choreographers in this period) that he or she had touched. And I felt their passion, their hearts in their works and in the words that were inserted into those very formulaic documents. Every once in a while something would spurt out of them and I just said, “There *she* is. There is Doña Josefa.” You heard them; you felt them. For me it was thrilling.

Hiie: Isn't that beautiful? It's a beautiful example of another kind of knowledge that is based in the kinetic, like touch...

Lynn: Tactile.

Hiie: Yes, seeing the handwriting, touching the papers. I feel like that is a layer we might be losing in our contemporary culture a little bit, so it is important to bring that back in.

Lynn: On the other hand, I can go through about a hundred documents in the time it took me to do two in the past, so... There are advantages.

Hiie: Yes. This kind of electronic version of a lot of material.

We are very eager to hear from you about your experiences with movement and knowledge, and also if you have any questions for us. But maybe one idea or statement that I want to leave you with before we turn this over to you is that movement and thinking, movement and knowledge are not too far apart from one another perhaps. Movement can inspire us to think better and articulate ourselves better. And it can also come into our research and into our writing in very profound ways. So, we think with our bodies, also, not just with the mind. Like being in the body.

Ann: Can I just... propose an image – because I love working with imagery – that I have been working with for myself. Because I keep digging into cognitive neuroscience, I am digging around everywhere. To me, the idea of the mind being not simply the brain, but the mind being the whole nervous system through the body, but then even more than that. Like *in* an interaction with all of the organs and all of the information on the inside, and then that fluid interaction with everything else. What if that’s the mind? I like that idea of the mind.

Hiie: Kiko, do you want to add anything also?

Kiko: I work with archives, like Lynn and Hiie, and I must confess that I’ve never thought about my body when I was in search of the documents. Never. This is the first time.

Hiie: That will change now.

Kiko: What is clear is that when we move we are signaling territories. And we are constantly changing these territories. Especially every time we find something that is good for our research. But I was thinking about the way we are doing now, when we are in search for documents on the Web. Because it is obviously that the internet has provoked this disembodiment, and so, for instance, when we are in the archives, we have to pass at least an hour or two hours to find something. But when we are in the net, maybe you can have ten or twenty windows open. You can find these things very quickly, so the surprise is coming very very very very quickly. And I must confess that this is addictive. It *creates* addiction...

Hiie: Hm. Do we need a microphone here? Hold your thought. Wait for the microphone please. Thank you.

Audience member [female]: Because you said it goes very very quickly, and when we are in a physical archive and we need one or two hours just to look for one document. But then, on the internet, it is true, it is wonderful from the point of view of knowledge. But then, we don't have time. I mean, it doesn't go very quickly – just time does not exist any more. So, we don't exist in space. We don't exist in a time. We are just really in the conception of mind, which is not -- I completely agree: the mind is everything. Thinking comes from whatever we do. But, this internet really alters the concept of what the mind has been thought to be. Something which is completely outside the body. It's wonderful to have twenty windows, but then we miss the most important knowledge I guess.

Hiie: Maybe some people want to talk about their experiences with movement knowledge. We tried to think what kind of knowledge becomes accessible as we move, and as we do our work, and do our research. Maybe there are some people in the audience who want to talk about their experience. I can see, I know there are some movers in this room, who move and think at the same time. Oh yes, also, and if you are more comfortable speaking in French, please speak in French and Loren will help us translate.

Audience [female]: Hi. This is more also a reflection on an earlier comment about bodies being lost, and in terms of working with my body and my movement personally, I think there was a period when I contemplated the idea that your body serves as a place of memory, as well, and as a place of history. For example, when you listen to music and you feel these movements coming out of you and knowing that they don't just begin with you, that they began elsewhere as well. Going home to Ghana, like seeing the picture of the dancer in Ghana, and going home and seeing my Grandma, and seeing the kind of movements I thought came from myself, be in her as well. So it seems also that your body is a site of memory. And it is not necessarily lost per se, but that you can, it can come up again.

Lynn: There is actually a body of study on this, and one I can recommend is Diane Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Published in 2003. That is one example of a work that speaks directly to the comment you just made.

Hiie: Thank you.

Audience [male]: Do you consider listening a somatic act?

Hiie: Oh yes. Absolutely.

Lynn: I think Ann made that clear.

Hiie: And somatic or embodied practices can also help you listen better. To listen to the sensations inside, listen to the space, listen to vibration... listen to one another. You can become a better communicator also. Sometimes in my dance classes I give images that are very much about listening. I'll say “Open your ears” or “Imagine like your ears are elephant ears” just to give people the sensation that this can be big here [indicating space beside her ears and head]. And it can be round. Very interesting.

Ann: I remember in one of my martial arts classes, when I was quite new into the practice and I said something to the teacher and the partner that “I was listening...” and my partner started talking. A lot. And telling me this, and telling me that. And I was like... that is not what I meant. I meant that I was feeling for my way. That I was trying to feel the information, sense what it was that was trying to be conveyed.

Hiie: And the practice of Contact Improvisation, for example, is all about listening through touch [connects wrists with Ann], and like “How is she going to respond to

me, and what is available? Oh. I feel her bones.” It is a way of listening also. It can go really deep.

Audience [female]: I wanted to share this experience about how the body movement might be another way, maybe of language, of communication, of understanding things. It's really impressive sometimes when you cannot put words on something, or you cannot solve an issue, or you have an idea that is not clear, and taking the time to embody it totally without passing through the brain, and just embody it to the fullest. It can give you another understanding of the situation, or can give you maybe an extension? Because it is totally direct. Directly linked to your whole environment, and directly linked to your sensations, so there is not another layer, maybe... that we can express with the language sometimes.

Hiie: Yes. Absolutely. This is a beautiful idea, to bring the body into explorations of questions that you perhaps don't understand on a mental level. Anna Halprin is a performance artist, and a dancer and a revolutionary. Her practice, called Life/Art Process, is very much about that. For example, in Life/Art Process, one of the exercises that you do is you pose a question: “If my heart was able to speak, what would it tell me right now?” And then you explore that question as you dance. And then you maybe draw what the heart told you. And then you maybe write a poem about that. So it is ways of accessing this kind of knowledge that we don't necessarily get to right away if we think about this question..

The heart is on my mind, as you can see. Another example, I was just thinking about this yesterday. Somebody told me “I carry you in my heart.” And it is like, oh, mentally I feel “this is a nice thing to say.” And then I thought, “What if I brought this sentence into my dance practice?” Like, how do I actually feel about that? As I move, as I do my dance improvisation? And it becomes an exploration. Well, who is in my heart? Who is outside my heart? Is it good to have that person or that thing or that experience in my heart? How does my heart actually feel about that person being in

my heart? So, it becomes a very interesting, fascinating exploration that movement enables.

Any other questions or comments?

Audience [female]: Yeah. I was just going to say I am a singer and an actor and an ex-dancer, and I lead groups in collective vocal improvisation. And I was just going to mention how one of the goals when I lead these groups is to help people who are singing bring it into their bodies – to be fully present in their bodies. I do a lot of relaxation exercises, a little bit like what you did to start. And people’s voices are transformed by that, by being present in the body. Experience is so different when you just sing in your head, and you produce sound up in your throat and your head, and when you drop it down into the body and are fully present, it is a completely different experience. And when you do it in a group, as you know with dance improv, it’s the same kind of thing, the energy is amazing. As a matter of fact, I have one of my students here.

Hiie: Thank you for coming, yes. Yes?

Audience [male]: There is something I find very, very interesting, which is innate knowledge that young animals have – maybe you have seen videos of young birds that jump out of the nest without even having tried before, you know, and they are not afraid. And there is a cliff of 200 meters, and they still manage to somehow do what they are expected to do. And I have the feeling that in our current situation, many people have a distrust of their innate body experience. I do dance, I mean as an amateur, in social settings, and I have the feeling that many people do not even think they could do something interesting without knowing. You know, they have an inhibition about the idea that they could know how to do something interesting. That is for me a bottleneck right now.

Hiie: That is a whole new interesting layer – this “without knowing kind of knowing.”

Ann: Actually, I am just going to respond to that too. The transition from being a ballet trained dancer and shifting into improvisational practices, I had the wonderful opportunity to study with Margie Gillis, who is an extraordinary performer and a divine human being. And here we are improvising, and you are supposed to drop your head and everything is all over the place, and she gave us an image. We were playing with falling into the floor and getting back up – just playing with balance and falling, which is all about risk. For a ballet dancer this is very uncomfortable. She wanted us to let the body discover things it had never done before. And my brain kept tracking and imposing, and it was really hard to do that. And she gave us an image – and again, image: Imagine that your logical mind, your analytic mind is a guard dog. Just set it in the corner. “Stay.” And go ahead. And it was so reassuring somehow to have that image because I knew I could call any second, like “Help! Because I need my brain. Like all of it! The logical, the analytical!” And yet it gave me the freedom to find that innate – that layer of imposing form and ideas on it, to set that aside and discover, to rediscover that innate knowledge that I think gets educated out of us.

Hiie: Um hm. And some of the somatic practices are also very influenced by the movement of babies. How do they move? Let’s bring that kind of creeping and crawling and stages of development back into our physical experiences.

Audience [male]: I was kind of wanting to pick up on that because I was very interested by what you said about memory. That within our basic DNA, the body has all the knowledge to move functionality, but the way we are brought up limits the functionality of the body. And so, the knowledge is there. We don’t need to learn it, but we need to reveal it. And then another thing that came to me from your comment was about how so many people who suffered trauma lock the knowledge of that trauma into their bodies, and they disassociate from their bodies. And they

have no knowledge of that experience. There is something about how we access the information so that that becomes knowledge. And knowledge is when we can act on the information, it seems to me. The work of what the body holds as knowledge is how what we need to do to access the information that the body holds, and I think there is something there going on. And we are constantly bombarded by information from the outside, which distracts us from accessing that information that is actually completely within us, and held in the musculature and the whole function of the body.

Ann: And I just have to respond to you. Because this is where my whole heart and mind are. Is the.... [trying to organize her thinking] Wrap it, contain it, bring it in...

Hiie: She has a kinesthetic response to this.

Ann: Yeah! So, a double bind according to Gregory Bateson is a situation that no matter what you do, you can't win. You are getting contradictory information and if you respond to one directive or bit of information well or successfully, then you've failed at the other. There is no way you can win in this situation. A double bind is the basis or one of the root causes of schizophrenia. Point one. So, point two: It sounds like it's separate, but it's not. In my martial arts training I remember sitting in line, looking at the teacher and it became really obvious and apparent how much information I could read of what was going on behind me by looking at my teacher. So, every move and reaction that he had, if there was anything happening behind me, I could assess, is it dangerous? Is it interesting? Can I...? [starts to turn her head] You're not allowed to turn. So, something about how do you read the situation? Those two points together.

So, looking at the US, which is where I am from, but I live here and have been out of the US for about twenty years. I have had questions about the violence. I have had questions about the fear inducement. And I have been looking at the chronic and

increasing levels of dysfunction – they are *not* normal. And yet, we... So, I work with teenagers in large part. And a lot of them think there is something wrong with them, that they feel this enormous anxiety, and stress. And yet, when you look at all of the symptoms, you can actually recognize the symptoms of what you could almost call a schizophrenic, a “split mind” – world. We have, I think, multiple double binds going on. So, there is certainly the mind-body disconnect. According to Brené Brown, connection and a feeling of belonging are what give purpose and meaning to life, and you can only feel that through your body. And yet, at the same time, we are supposed to compete, we are supposed to have economic success, so we are on this treadmill that asks us, really fast, to move faster and faster – things that keep numbing us. So, even if we have not experienced trauma directly, which is a more extreme situation, we are in a double bind, and we are, in the States, what I see is we are going “split mind.”

Audience [Same male]: Can I just rebound on that? Because I see it every day in Paris that we become more and more disembodied, and that we are more and more unable to access the information in our bodies. When I see the people on their single wheels going down the street, and their bodies are completely immobile, but they are zipping along. Even people on a trotinet are basically immobile but they are moving in the world. And increasingly, and I notice this with my partner, he said this other day: “Oh we’ve got this fantastic machine that makes mousse for our lattés.” Well you used to do that like this [makes a small, fast whipping motion with his hand], which would give you an infinite and immediate feedback about what is happening with your body. Now you go [gestures a push] phht. And you wait. It’s done. But you’ve had no interaction with the making of it. So, even in an effectively, I am hesitating to say functioning society, but even in a more functioning society like Paris, the disassociation from our bodies is flagrant and very striking, and feels, even though it may not be physically directed violence like the US, there is a palpable violence in the way we live in our world through this disassociation. We no longer have that regulatory process in our body to what’s happening around us.

Hiie: The screens and the iPhones. I am borrowing this exercise from one of my favorite somatic writers, Ann Cooper Albright. She writes quite a bit about what it is like to live in the world where you are touching your phone all the time, and you are looking at screens all the time. And she says, “Okay, let’s do an exercise where for one day you don’t engage with your phone. And just use your somatic practice of noticing your sensations and see what that feels like for you.” So maybe that is one thing we can do to assess how much we engage with things that might disembody us.

Ann, I want to put you on the spot. She does not know that this is coming. This is improvisation full on. So, Ann, can you lead us through an exercise now to end this panel that brings us back to the body somehow? Or...

Ann: Okay. Just find your alignment again. Sure. Let’s try it. I don’t know if it will work. Okay. So just feeling that alignment: the brain floating over the heart, floating over the pelvic bowl, keep your eyes open. And just make the sound ‘Ha! Ha Ha Ha” Feel where the vibration is, feel what it does, how that happens. And now “Hee. Hee hee hee” And now ha ha ha, hee hee hee. Ha ha hee hee hah hah hee hee. That is my favorite exercise. [Laughter]

Hiie: Oh! That’s it. It’s great to end on laughter. It’s an embodied experience. Thank you.

Thank you so much for coming, and for sharing your embodied wisdom here [points to the panelists], and there [the audience]. Thank you very much. I think there is a sign up sheet at the back of the room, if you want to continue these discussions and we do another event, we would be happy to have your information. And have a good evening. Thank you.

Panelists

Lynn Matluck Brooks is the Arthur and Katherine Shadek Humanities Professor Emerita at Franklin & Marshall College, where she founded the Dance Program in 1984. She holds bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Temple University. Brooks is a Certified Movement Analyst through the Laban-Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies. She has held grants from the Fulbright/Hayes Program for study in Spain, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. At F&M, she received the Bradley R. Dewey Award for Outstanding Scholarship and the Lindback Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching. Brooks has written performance reviews for *Dance Magazine*, served as editor of *Dance Research Journal* from 1994 through 1999, and co-edited *Dance Chronicle: Studies in Dance and the Related Arts* from 2007 to 2017. She is currently Editor-in-Chief of *thINKingDANCE*, Philadelphia. She served on the boards of the World Dance Alliance, the Society for Dance History Scholars, and the Congress on Research in Dance. She has published several books and many scholarly articles, primarily on dance history subjects. Brooks specializes in modern dance, “early” dance and notation, movement analysis, and dance history. She contributed many choreographies to the F&M Dance Program and other groups. and has performed and choreographed with the Grant St. Dance Company in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Kiko Mora (Ph.D. Ohio State University) is professor of Semiotics of advertising and culture industries in the Department of Communication and Social Psychology at the University of Alicante (Spain). For twelve years, he also taught Spanish Cinema for the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) of the same city. Since 2010, his main research explores the convergence of Spanish music and dance in musical

theater, early cinema, and early recording industry in the United States. Visiting scholar in the International Center for Music Studies (University of Newcastle, 2011) and the Foundation for Iberian Music (City University of New York, 2017), Mora has published several articles and book chapters on these topics. Mora is also co-editor of *Rock around Spain. Historia, industria, escenas y medios de comunicación* (2013), and is presently co-editing, together with Silvia Bermúdez (UCSB), a book on Mediterranean urban musics. His most recent book is titled *De cera y goma-laca. La producción de música española en la industria fonográfica estadounidense* (2018), granted by the Council of International Organization of Folklore Festivals and the Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas (Ministerio de Cultura de España).

Ann Moradian is a movement artist, educator, writer and advocate for healthy ecologies: human, social and environmental. Originally a dancer and choreographer, she performed in the companies of Anna Sokolow, Manuel Alum, Impulse Theatre & Dance and Perspectives In Motion, which she founded in NYC in 1988. With over 40 years of movement experience in dance, yoga, the martial and energy arts, she holds diplomas from NYU in Art in Society, and from the University of Lille in improvisation and creativity. She co-authored “ChildhoodNature In Motion: The Ground for Learning,” with Martha Eddy in 2018 for Springer Research Handbook publications, is the French Correspondent for *The Dance Enthusiast*, and was voted *Best Yoga in Paris* in 2016. Her current work is focused on experiential, collaborative, trans-disciplinary and educational projects that explore the challenges of co-existence from an embodied, systemic perspective.

Hiie Saumaa (Ph.D., Columbia) is a writer, dancer, scholar, and a movement educator. Her work explores interconnections between dance, movement, imagination, and creativity. She is currently working on a project on the unpublished writings and multi-artistry of the choreographer Jerome Robbins. Her articles have appeared in *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, *Dance Chronicle*, *Dance Research Journal*, *The Journal of Dance, Movement & Spiritualities*, *Somatics*

Magazine/Journal, and *Alternative and Complementary Therapies*. She has contributed to *Sacred Dance Guild Journal*, *The Jerome Robbins Newsletter*, *Hybrid Pedagogy*, and *Movement Research Performance Journal*. In 2017, Saumaa was a Dance Fellow at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and in 2018-19, she was an inaugural fellow at the Institute for Ideas & Imagination and a laureate at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. She has taught courses in dance history, writing, literature, and critical theory at Columbia University, New York University, The University of Tennessee, and Paris College of Art. As a certified instructor of Nia dance, The BodyLogos® Technique, and JourneyDance™, Hiie teaches classes and workshops in sensory-based dance modalities, creative movement, expressive arts, meditative strength training, and somatic awareness.

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