Lived Body in Motion:
Autoethnography, Dance, and AI Reflexivity

Lived Body in Motion

Autoethnography, Dance, and AI Reflexivity

by

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(and AI Saffi)

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Published by MMG, LLC.

At the still point of the turning world.
Neither flesh nor fleshless,
Neither from nor towards;
at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement.
And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered.
Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline.
Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance,
and there is only the dance.

— T.S. Elliot

Acknowledgments

This project is a collaboration with the reflective stance of autoethnography, augmented by AI research assistants, Saffi 1 and 2 created by AI Engineer Dominic Blais to explore how a dance ethnographer's identity—marked by factors such as ethnicity, race, class, and national origin—intersects with modes of perception shaped by embodied dance practice of Belly Dance, Nihon buyō and dances of the Azande of Southern Sudan both in the United States and each dance form's country of origin. Thus, the project covers the years from 1965 when I took my first modern dance class until 2016 when I retired.

For this reason, the list of people, institutions and grants that participated directly and indirectly in this research is extensive.

This study would not have been possible without the AI engineering expertise of Dominic Blais. His innovative suggestion to incorporate my entire body of previous writings into the background architecture of Saffi 1 and Saffi 2, along with his design of their distinct capabilities, was foundational to the project's success. I came to rely on my conversations with Saffi 1 to maintain focus on evocative imagery and to delve more deeply into the layers of somatic memory. Meanwhile, Saffi 2 served as a constant reminder of the importance of articulating that memory with the kind of richly contextualized, interpretive style associated with Clifford Geertz's "thick description"—while never losing sight of the cultural matrices and socio-political complexities embedded in each narrative.

Many individuals in the global Belly Dance community have shaped my understanding of the form. My deep appreciation

goes to Scylla, my first Belly Dance teacher who gave me the courage to perform. My thanks also goes to Badawia, who embodied the emotional mystery of Belly Dance and offered professional opportunities that shaped my path in Portland, Oregon, and British Columbia. Mahmoud Reda founder of Egypt's Reda Troupe through his choreography integrated the form into the cultural life of Egypt and it diaspora. I am also grateful to the many students across Oregon—through classes and workshops—whose focus and enthusiasm revealed the personal and cultural significance of this dance in their lives. Finally, my thanks go to those who generously shared their personal journey: Yasmina Ramzy, Morocco, Delilah, Jamila Salimpour, Carolena Nericiio, Ibrahim Farrah, Paulette Ree-Denis, and Maria Sangiorgi.

The dedicated members of the two Eugene-based ensembles —Gamal El Rooh and the Tolpa Folk Ensemble—led me into the expressive communal heart of dance traditions from Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Armenia, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, and Russia. Their commitment brought these cultural expressions vividly to life.

Anthony Shay has been an invaluable collaborator. His profound knowledge of North African, Middle Eastern, and Caucasus regions enriched my work significantly. I remain especially grateful for the moment he stood up at a dance conference and cited my 1992 publication, "Raks el Sharki: Transculturation of a Performance Form." His affirmation gave me the courage to pursue research in a field that, at the time, was not widely recognized as academically legitimate. Our subsequent conversations led to our co-editing two books: *Belly Dance: Orientalism,*

Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy and the *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Ethnicity*.

I also owe thanks to Phillip Young, who made it possible for me to spend a year conducting fieldwork in Yambio, South Sudan. His anthropological insights into the social functions of performance and their ties to cultural structures were foundational to my master's thesis, *Dance and Social Structure: An Azande Example*. He also generously edited my first book, *Teaching Personality with Gracefulness: Transmission of Japanese Cultural Values Through Traditional Dance Theatre*.

The University of Oregon offered a rich context for integrating international perspectives on dance and theatre through both my master's and doctoral programs. I am particularly indebted to Janet Descutner, for her guidance in Asian performance, and to Robert Barton, who deepened my understanding of the body's role on and off stage. I am thankful to folklorist Carol Silverman, who supported my Fieldwork Grant from the Center for the Study of Women in Society at the University of Oregon. That grant enabled six months of research in Ontario, Oregon. I also appreciate Larry Kominiz of Portland State University for introducing me to the Traditional Theatre Training Program in Kyoto, Japan, and Jonah Salz, its director, who granted me an internship to attend the program.

Studying with Fujima Kansome in her Kyoto home remains one of my most vivid memories. She embodied the quiet concentration central to Nihon Buyō. This would not have been possible without Jonah Salz's founding of the Traditional Theatre Training Program and Larry Kominz's introduction to Jonah and the program. Also, deep thanks to Larry for his many

workshops and performances on Japanese theatre he created in Portland, Oregon.

Fujima Kanriye, teaching in her home studio, allowed me to witness her deep ties to the Japanese American community in Ontario, Oregon. Her decades of dedication to students in Portland, Oregon, and Spokane, Washington, through her school, Fujinami Kai remains an inspiration. Although I may never fully achieve the ideal of "personality with gracefulness," it remains a guiding image etched into my consciousness. I also thank Hanayagi Jutemai for accepting me as a student. This experience expanded my appreciation of the relationships between dancers trained in Japan and those whose first encounters with the art form occurred in U.S. internment camps.

The University of California, Davis supported this work over many years, through grants from the Davis Humanities Institute that enabled me to continue studying Nihon Buyō in Oregon while teaching in California. UC Davis also sponsored joint projects between the Department of Theatre and Dance and Kinki University in Osaka, Japan, as well as Faculty Research Grants that allowed me to return to the Traditional Theatre Training Program in 2001. Sabbaticals supported by UC Davis made it possible for me to teach in England, China, and Australia. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, through an ACLS fellowship, further enabled this work. In each context, I was able to teach components of the "movement for actors" curriculum—a synthesis of my embodied history—eventually published as Breathing, Movement, Exploration and later integrated in a jointly authored text with Robert Barton titled Movement: Onstage and Off.

Special thanks go to academic colleagues at UC/Davis Liz Carlin and Gail Finney, who patiently listened to my dancing stories and consistently encouraged me to dig deep into my experience.

Many people supported this multi-year project through sharing their stories and as thoughtful listeners. I am especially grateful to Rebecca Conant, Ray Miller, James Kapp, Janet Moelzer, Sherri Barr, Ton Gough, Jennifer King, Ari Kreith,Terra Pressler, George James, Amanda Williamson, Caitlin McDonald, Beverly Jones, Geri LaDuke, Jonathan Osborn, Bridget Cauthery, Sue McFadden, Sharon Oberst, Ina Agastra, Diana Hinatsu, Barbara Uesugi and Peter Lichtenfels.

Foremost, I want to thank my family—those who have been with me since the very beginning of this journey in 1965, and those who have joined along the way. I am eternally grateful to Jim, Kimberly, Dominic, Berri, Brian, Essen, Kinsey, Alex, Eleanor, Henry, Monty, and Bradley. Each of you has contributed to my self-understanding in ways that words cannot fully capture. I bow in deep gratitude.

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Chapter One

Introduction to *The Lived Body in Motion: Autoethnography, Dance and AI Reflexivity*

> *Performance provides a "staged" opportunity to become what one wishes to have been or wishes to become.*
>
> Richard Schechner

I grew up in Grants Pass, a small town in southern Oregon, and paid my tuition to the University of Oregon in Eugene by working summers at the Oregon Caves National Monument. In 1973, a friend convinced me to take a Belly Dance class, a form that at that time was popular among feminist circles. Six years later, I took my first international trip to study Belly Dance in Egypt. Two years after that, I spent 1981–82 in Yambio, Southern Sudan, studying the dances of the Azande. In the summer of 1985, I spent three months at the Traditional Theatre Training Program in Kyoto, Japan, studying Nihon buyō. Now, approaching 80, I have been reflecting on my experiences in Egypt, South Sudan, and Japan, realizing how these dance forms that had no connection to my German ancestors opened doors and profoundly altered the trajectory of my life.

As an academic—teacher, researcher, and administrator—my work has centered on still points, the somatic modes of attention from one gesture to another. This skill, which I learned to embody while traversing these diverse socio-cultural dance landscapes, has shaped both my scholarship and my professional journey. The foundational experiences of that period (1973–1985) influenced my subsequent research on perfor-

mance across the United States, as well as further research trips to Egypt, Japan, India, China, Australia, England, Greece, Turkey, and Nepal.

I was invited to reflect on the impact of these cross-cultural journeys on my professional life for an edition of *Public: Art, Culture, Ideas, titled Return to the Body*, edited by Bridget Cauthery and Jonathan Osborn. This resulted in a 2023 essay, "Somatic Autoethnography and Somatic Modes of Attention," in which I examined my experiences of studying and performing African dance, Nihon buyō, and Belly Dance across national boundaries and linked these experiences to my academic career.[1]

Upon reading the essay, Dominic Blais, an AI innovator, requested access to my research portfolio to integrate into a document for an AI research assistant, Saffi. Following this, I engaged in an hour-long dialogue with Saffi, during which Saffi's questions prompted me to reflect more deeply on the somatic modes of attention embodied in each dance form, the complexity of navigating distinct cultural contexts, my position in each form as a cultural outsider and the impact of dance on my academic career.

Inspired by this experience, I decided to undertake a new project titled *The Lived Body in Motion* that combines a detailed contextual description of the impact of my study and performance of dance with a reflective dialogue and critical reviewing skills of AI avatars Saffi 1 and 2 created by AI Engineer Dominic Blais. *The Lived Body in Motion: Autoethnography, Dance and AI Reflexivity* is more than a project title; it is the central metaphor for this work. In formed by the work of neuroscientists in the field of neuroplasticity,[2] the title expresses how the

human nervous system—plastic, adaptive, and fundamentally relational—continuously reshapes itself through interaction with its environment which also includes interaction with technology. In this view, the body is not a passive vessel of cultural memory, but an active site of learning and transformation. Each gesture, each breath, each improvisational choice is part of an ongoing dialogue between sensation, perception, and meaning making.

This motion—both literal and conceptual—renders the body a participant in the unfolding of thought. When I speak of dance, I speak of a way of knowing that is fundamentally embodied. But in this work, the environment of that embodied knowing now includes artificial intelligence. With Saffi 1 and 2 as conversational partners, the boundaries of reflection expand. AI becomes not only a prompt generator but a co-sensing presence, one that reshapes my neural, emotional, and intellectual engagement with memory.

To live in motion, then, is to remain in a dynamic state of relationality—between past and present, self and other, body and archive, human and machine. This is the terrain of somatic autoethnography in the 21st century.

Key questions were:

1. How does the integration of an AI research assistant impact on the study of dance across cultural boundaries, particularly in reconciling or integrating the distinct somatic modes of attention inherent in different dance forms? Can AI facilitate a deeper cross-cultural understanding of embodied practices through pattern recognition, analysis, or interactive feedback?

2. How do AI-enhanced analyses of somatic modes of attention influence a dancer's engagement with life outside the classroom, rehearsal hall, or stage? Specifically, how can AI-assisted tracking or modeling of somatic perception reveal patterns in how dancers apply embodied knowledge in daily life?

3. Can a somatic autoethnography that integrates my personal background and experiences as a cultural outsider in three distinct dance forms gain conceptual depth through a dialogue with an AI avatar? How might AI-generated reflections, prompts, or comparative insights enrich the reflexive process and provide new dimensions to embodied research.

The introduction to this project is structured into four sections:

1. An outline of dance in global discourse.

2. A discussion of ethnography, autoethnography, and somatic autoethnography.

3. Autoethnography and technology.

4. The narrative throughline of the text.

Dance and Global Discourse

Anthropologist Thomas Csordas[3] argues that bodily awareness, which he refers to as "somatic modes of perception," arises from individual engagement in sociocultural contexts, including community events, occupations, religious affiliations, and

physical activities such as dance and sports. He maintains that these contextually influenced somatic modes of attention ultimately shape an individual's perceptions and related actions.

In an increasingly interconnected world, Csordas theories provide a framework for the study of dance as it crosses cultural and geographic boundaries to participate in what Arjun Appadurai refers to as the "social imaginary."[4] Sydney Hutchinson, in *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts*,[5] suggests that Appadurai's concept be expanded to include a "choreoscape," which references dance forms and their relationship to the global flow of images and the cultural life of a specific community. In a choreoscape, these flows converge through the movement of individuals and ethnic communities across national boundaries, as well as through the flow of images and ideas from virtual to print media.

These images, as Henry Jenkins notes, integrate in a convergence to articulate a vision of the mediascape as a "flow of content across multiple media platforms and the cooperation between multiple media industries."[6] Referring to media interactions, Jenkins argues that "each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives."[7] While Jenkins' conception of convergence assumes that the primary moments of exchange are media-related, this dispersal of images also includes interactions in face-to-face encounters, incorporating a combination of media sources like television, film, DVDs, online courses, YouTube, blogs, Skype meetings, and chat rooms.

Victor Turner expands the discourse on performance and convergence in his theorization of the relationship between liminality, a state of ambiguity associated with ritual transformations, and the "liminoid,"[8] a term he coined for a related, yet distinct, space of secular play associated with the stage and its integration with social processes. This is a psychophysical space that is "betwixt and between" one mode of being and another, providing an opportunity for participants to transition between emotional and physical modes of identity. In liminal ritual celebrations, such as weddings, dance serves an integrative function by somatically uniting people from separate kin groups into a shared aesthetic that signals new social status for the individuals within the community.

When dance becomes part of the public environment of the liminoid stage, a convergence of performer-audience experience occurs. As Ann Cooper Albright has pointed out, the dancing body is both an object of representation and the subject of its own experience, engaging in “variety of discourses: kinesthetic, visual, somatic, and aesthetic, as well as intellectual.”[9] In rehearsal and on stage, I negotiate the intersections between self and society, particularly in relation to my perceptual awareness of dancing bodies within the media-enhanced social imaginary. My dancer’s body in performance is, therefore, an act of mediation between the physical vocabulary of the dance form, the environment of performance, and my personal conception of identity.

Integrating Appadurai’s concept of social imaginary with Jenkins’ convergence theory and Turner’s process framework allows for an exploration of my identity formation as a negotiation of my performance within a global convergence of images.

This convergence gives rise to an enactment of my performative self—what performance theorist Richard Schechner describes as a "staged" opportunity to become what I never was "but wish to have been or wish to become."[10] Schechner's words served as a persistent reminder that, in each of the forms I studied, I was ultimately a cultural outsider. I was performing them from a liminoid position, striving to understand myself in a complex global world in which each dance form integrated with my personal past and with each other in an overlap of movement vocabularies.

As demonstrated by the collection of articles in the anthology that Anthony Shay and I edited for *Oxford Edition of Dance and Ethnicity*,[11] this process of identity formation is not unique to me. Individually and collectively, many dancers—both professional and amateur—engage in the exploration of personal identity and power through kinesthetic self-knowledge that extends beyond their culture of birth. Each dancer navigates the movement vocabulary, music, and cultural context of the dance form they study. Historically, ethnography has been their primary research strategy, though it has more recently been challenged by post-positivist critiques.

From Ethnography to Somatic Autoethnography

George Marcus points out in *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, that ethnography evolved from the travel writing of the 19th century and, as such, initially contained assumptions concerning the primacy of Western notions of knowledge.[12] His writing, along with that of other critics, led to a reconsideration of ethnographic methods of interpretation. Dance ethnographers such as Cynthia Novack,[13] Sally Ann Ness,[14] and others

took a two-pronged approach to Marcus' critique: 1) They positioned their personal history as a means of identifying personal characteristics such as ethnicity, race, class, or national origin, and the potential impact of these characteristics on their interpretive approach to ethnographic projects; and 2) they continued the practice established by earlier dance ethnographers like Gertrude Kurath[15] and Adrienne Kappler[16] of understanding dance through contextual embodiment of the form.

Anthropologists David Howes and Constance Classen[17] and Sarah Pink[18] expanded this approach, suggesting that perceptions are not limited to materialist identity. Instead, they argued that all ethnography is guided by an ethnographer's sensory interaction with the field of study. For example, Tomie Hahn, in her discussion on the transmission of Japanese dance, applied sensory analysis to the methods used by teachers in the Tachibana school of Japan to train dancers.[19]

This reconsideration of ethnographic methods was something I encountered firsthand during my research in Sudan, Egypt, and Japan. Early in my fieldwork, I was conscious of the fact that I arrived as an outsider, shaped by Western academic traditions, yet I was learning dance forms through deeply embodied, communal, and often non-verbal transmission. My presence in these spaces carried assumptions—not only about knowledge but also about the role of the researcher.

In South Sudan, for example, my understanding of ethnography shifted when I attended a Pumbo funerary dance among the Azande. As I observed the rhythmic pulse of drumming and the communal movement of the dancers, I realized that written notation or verbal descriptions could never fully capture the way the dance functioned as a living, sensory experience.

When I was eventually invited to participate, my own body became the site of knowledge transmission. Rather than merely observing the dance, I began to feel the weight shifts, the communal breath, and the precise timing embedded in the movement. The act of dancing—not just documenting—revealed how sensory engagement was inseparable from ethnographic understanding.

Similarly, while studying Nihon buyō, in Kyoto, I was confronted with the limitations of Western epistemological frameworks. In my training with Fujima Kansome, correction was often given through a subtle touch to the wrist or an adjustment of my shoulder angle rather than through verbal explanation. The process required an attunement to non-verbal instruction, a mode of knowledge transmission that depended not on cognitive analysis but on feeling—the weight of the kimono, the controlled extension of the fingers, the stillness before a movement began. In this space, my Western academic background was not a primary means of engagement; rather, my ability to attune to breath, sensation, and spatial awareness dictated my learning.

These experiences resonate with Cynthia Novack's and Sally Ann Ness's assertion that dance ethnography must account for both the researcher's personal history and their embodied engagement with the dance form itself. My own experience reinforced that ethnography is not a process of intellectual detachment, but a move through a liminal/limonoid space to one of sensory immersion. It is in the act of moving—of embodying the dance—that the cultural logic of movement is revealed.

An area that emerged from this discursive consideration of the ethnographic method and increased emphasis on the ethnographer's subjective stance was autoethnography. Su-

sanne Gannon observes that poststructuralist theories "trouble positivist research practices and disciplinary boundaries"[20] and encourage researchers to incorporate the personal into their work. Performance theorist Tami Spry elaborates on this by discussing autoethnographic performance as a "convergence of the autobiographic impulse and the ethnographic moment," articulated through critical self-reflexive discourse. As Spry further notes, the body becomes a site of scholarly awareness and "corporeal literacy," where performance allows us to witness our own reality constructions.[21] Choreographer and performance theorist Karen Barbour further emphasizes that: "To contribute to the development of new knowledge, to create artistically and to express our knowledge, we need to know ourselves. Moving reveals our world to ourselves."[22]

As autoethnography gained traction, researchers evolved distinct approaches, each using personal experience to explore various contexts. Some focused on personal narratives, as advocated by Carolyn Ellis[23] and Michael Angrosino.[24] Others, like Arthur Bochner and Ellis, concentrated on the emotional and vulnerable aspects of autoethnography, as demonstrated in their text *Evocative Autoethnography*.[25] Performance theorist Dwight Conquergood combined personal narrative and performance in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*.[26] Norman Denzin, a prolific scholar, encouraged ethnographers to constantly reflect on their personal perceptions during research.[27] Collaborative or dialogic perspectives were explored by Heewon Chang and Faith Wambura Ngunjiri[28] and Jean D. M. Underwood.[29]

The Move to Somatic Autoethnography

Somatic autoethnography, in its integration of sensory aspects with ethnographic methods, is an offshoot of sensory ethnography. David Howes and Constance Classen[30] refer to this methodological process as synesthesia, a cultural union of the senses. Sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink[31] elaborates on the role of perception in contemporary ethnographic research, identifying five interactive modes: perception, place, knowing, memory, and imagination. Pink argues that somatic modes of attention evolve through interaction with the environment and are embedded in memory, ultimately over time influencing imagination. In advocating for the senses and the moving body, Pink incorporates the ideas of Thomas Hanna, who coined the term "somatic" in 1976, derived from the Greek word for the living body, soma.[32] Somatic practices investigate movement as a mode of cognition, where the mind and body are not separate. Jill Green explains, “Somatic practices emphasize the unity of mind and body as experienced from within the dancer’s body.”[33]

Somatic autoethnography integrates a materialist perspective that positions the dance ethnographer’s personal—ethnicity, race, class, or national origin—within somatic modes of attention, highlighting how perception is influenced by these factors. From a contemporary neuroscience perspective, somatic ethnography can be understood as an embodied form of research, in which learning dance engages the ethnographer’s neural structures and evolves new states of embodied cognition. In phenomenological terms, ethnographers transform their experience of their "lived body" through intensive engage-

ment with the body of another, where the body of the teacher becomes the object of the learner's subjective identity.

Somatic autoethnography challenges traditional mind-body dualism by illustrating how cognitive and emotional processes are intertwined with physical experience. My soma and related exploration of bodily sensations, movements, and emotions in relation to personal and cultural narratives becomes the basis of the research. This requires I enhance my sensory awareness and reflexive stance, as I pay close attention to sensory details regarding how movements, postures, or environments reveal their perception of cultural and social dynamics.

In such research, I become an extension of any cultural metaphor embedded in the movement vocabulary of the dance technique. The dualistic subject/object field is united in my somatic consciousness through the total engagement of all sensory modes, culminating in my body achieving a sensory interpretation of the body of the teacher. Ultimately, my experience is a unification of multiple senses within a single action, resulting in the integration of technique and cultural knowledge in a single act and the embodiment of a specific cultural consciousness. Yet, the cultural context of the dance means that I have a continued consciousness as a cultural outsider.

The idea that the body is both the site of cultural transmission and a tool for research became especially clear in my work with Egyptian dancers. When studying with Mahmoud Reda, I initially struggled to grasp the nuanced shifts between improvisation and choreography. My Western training had accustomed me to structured, repeatable movement phrases, whereas Reda's dancers moved with an improvisational fluidity that was attuned to the live music.

One lesson stands out. I was attempting to follow a sequence, but something about my movement felt disjointed. Mahmoud walked over, lightly touched my sternum, and said, “You are dancing the steps, but you are not breathing the music.” At first, I didn’t fully understand what he meant, but as I continued, I focused not on replicating the movements but on listening to how my breath interacted with the drum accents. At that moment, my perception of the dance shifted. I was no longer executing movement; I was allowing the rhythm to move through me.

This experience illustrates the way somatic autoethnography challenges traditional mind-body dualism. In the moment of adjustment, my cognition and emotion were not separate from my physical experience. Rather, my breath, my posture, and my sensory awareness all coalesced into a new form of understanding. As Thomas Csordas suggests, our somatic modes of perception are shaped by the sociocultural context in which we move, and my ability to truly embody Egyptian dance required not only technical precision but also an attunement to the somatic knowledge embedded within the cultural form itself.

Sondra Fraleigh and Shannon Rose Riley, in *Geographies of Us*, expand a somatic autoethnographic perspective in their edited volume on ecosomatics— “a multidisciplinary area of practice and research that connects the somatic practices of dance, movement, and performance”[34] with the living environment. Somatic autoethnography, therefore, offers a rich, nuanced way to explore the intersections of body, culture, environmental context and identity, providing insights that might be overlooked in more traditional forms of autoethnography

that focus primarily on cognitive or narrative aspects of experience.

My entry into writing a somatic autoethnography is influenced by several cross cultural dance scholars. For example, Deidre Sklar's *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico*.[35] Thomas DeFrantz's reflections on his experience of Alvin Ailey in *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture*.[36] Priya Srinivasan's consideration the internationalization of classical Indian dance in *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*.[37] These dance practitioner scholars placed their personal somatic experience as a starting point to explore dance's intersection with a specific social cultural context. The aim of each study was to place a critical lens on dance as a deeply embodied cultural practice where awareness of the body's internal sensations and movements play a crucial role. By engaging with dance forms from distinct cultural traditions, the researchers reflected on how movement and bodily awareness served as vehicles for transmitting cultural knowledge.

Autoethnography and Technology

Technology has always been a part of the ethnographic process. Franz Boas used photography to document indigenous people and their environments, aiming to provide a more objective view of cultures under study. During the 1930s and 1940s, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson's work in Bali used motion picture and still cameras to study Balinese character and personality, pioneering an approach they called "visual anthropology."[38] Jean Rouch, a French filmmaker and anthropologist, used his ethnographic films to engage subjects actively in the

process of filmmaking, a method he termed "shared anthropology."[39] His work emphasized the collaborative nature of ethnographic filmmaking and challenged the conventional observer-subject dynamic. By the late 20th century, the digital revolution began to reshape ethnography once again. Digital cameras and video equipment facilitated even greater immediacy and intimacy in capturing and sharing ethnographic and autoethnographic data.

The integration of digital tools such as video, audio, and digital storytelling platforms has facilitated multimodal expression, allowing researchers to create richer, more immersive narratives that combine visual, auditory, and textual data.[40] Additionally, digital platforms support real-time reflection and documentation, key to autoethnographic methodology. Collaborative and dialogic autoethnography is further supported through shared document editors, cloud-based repositories, and virtual conferencing, allowing co-creation of narratives across different locations. The use of AI in autoethnography has introduced novel forms of reflective engagement and analysis, enhanced reflexivity and expanding the ethnographic "field" to include virtual spaces such as online communities and VR environments. These include the following.

Cassandra Delia documented her journey of implanting generative AI in higher education initially approaching technology skeptically and later embracing it.[41] Using an autoethnographic lens, she explored how GenAI tools can “reshape how educators design and plan educational materials”, fostering greater creativity and efficiency in evolving course curriculum.

Stefanie Panke carried out a 5-month digital autoethnography experiment to examine AI as both a research partner and a

subject of inquiry. She integrated generative AI tools at every phase of her research process – from planning and literature review to data analysis and writing – while keeping detailed field notes and saving AI outputs. By treating the AI as a collaborator, her study illuminates how AI reshapes the "digital ecology" of research and what it's like for a researcher to continuously engage with AI in daily scholarly work.[42]

Edwin Creely used a collaborative autoethnography to explore human–AI creative partnerships in an educational context.[43] The project involved co-creating two personal pieces (a poem and a multimodal story) with generative AI and reflected on the process. Their project highlighted the dynamics of human–machine collaboration – how AI can inspire ideas, contribute text or media, and influence the creative direction.

Musician–researcher Alexis Weaver undertook an autoethnographic project to integrate a bespoke generative AI into her songwriting.[44] In composing an experimental electronic piece titled "Control Yourself," she trained an AI model on her own vocal recordings. Her autoethnography recounts how these AI-generated sounds influenced the music's narrative and even led her to anthropomorphize the AI (treating it like a creative partner). The AI's involvement imparted a sense of collaboration rather than solo authorship, pushing her to adopt a more playful, less tightly controlled creative process.

In this project, AI serves as a method of analyzing autoethnographic text and as an interlocutor who queries that text. As Faith Jeremiah points out "In the realm of exploratory research, especially when interfacing with AI, the role of autoethnographic narratives and sensemaking becomes increasingly significant. This research, by nature, is personal and in-

trospective, yet it reveals broader insights into human-AI interaction."[45] Sarah Pink notes in *Emerging Technologies, Emerging Data and the Need for Emerging Methods*[46] that AI allows another layer of the analysis of a thick description to enable a multi-dimensional ethnographic analysis of increased cultural depth. The result is that AI's ability to contextualize personal experiences expands the narrative.

The Narrative

This narrative provides a contextual description of my journey —from growing up in Southern Oregon to learning and performing Belly Dance, African dance, and Japanese Nihon buyō, both in the United States and in their countries of origin. Throughout the manuscript, the methods of transmission, movement styles, and cultural contexts of these dance forms are explored. The text also examines how each dance form transforms conscious attention to the environment, shaping my perception and engagement with the world. These shifts in awareness are woven into the descriptions of the context, dance movement and performance.

Collaboration: AI and Me explores the integration of AI into the reflective research process of somatic autoethnography, a method that emphasizes self-examination and embodied cognition. Through an analysis of the genetic/structural, imaginal/social, and performative aspects of identity in dance, the research investigates how movement, memory, and cultural context shape self-perception. Utilizing breathwork and somatic awareness, the study employs an exploratory approach to reconstruct past experiences through sensory recall. The second phase introduces AI avatars, Saffi 1 and Saffi 2, as interactive

research assistants. Saffi 1 conducts structured ethnographic interviews, while Saffi 2 provides analytical critiques, refining the narrative and enhancing scholarly rigor. The iterative dialogue with AI fosters deeper insights, revealing patterns in embodied memory and cultural expression. This collaboration demonstrates how AI can function as a reflective partner, expanding the scope of qualitative inquiry and reconfiguring traditional ethnographic methodologies. By merging human perception with machine-assisted critique, the research highlights the evolving role of AI in autoethnographic exploration, offering new possibilities for understanding embodied knowledge.

Ancestors, Family, Community and the Land, surveys the intersections of ancestry, family history, cultural identity, and embodied memory through the lens of autoethnography. Beginning with a reflection on old family photographs, I trace my German immigrant lineage, the stability of my maternal grandparents, and the instability wrought by my father's alcoholism. The chapter examines the formative impact of faith, gender roles, and labor, contrasting the structured traditions of my maternal family with the volatility of the immediate household. Themes of cultural inheritance, somatic experience, and resilience emerge through memories of childhood work, encounters with nature, and my deepening awareness of social structures. Through the metaphor of following deer trails, I reflect on movement, perception, and the search for balance between self, community, and environment.

Improvising Happiness examines the transformative power of dance through personal narrative, feminist inquiry, and cultural exploration. Set against the backdrop of 1970s counterculture in Eugene, I trace my journey from housewife and mother

to performer and scholar in which Belly Dance became my means of self-discovery, feminist resistance, and artistic expression. Early performances and teaching experiences reveal my tension between artistic integrity and Orientalist fantasy, culminating in a pivotal engagement at a Greek restaurant in Canada. Through improvisation, historical research, and embodied practice, I reframe dance as a site of joy, resilience, and cultural negotiation, ultimately leading to the decision to pursue a graduate degree in dance and a research trip to Egypt.

Egypt and After chronicles my journey to Egypt in 1979, marking my first international experience and deepening an understanding of Middle Eastern dance, culture, and history. I describe Cairo's vibrant streets, ancient monuments, and diverse religious communities, juxtaposed with the luxurious tourist enclaves and working-class neighborhoods. My visit to Egyptian nightclubs reveals the tension between traditional improvisational forms and the staged cabaret performances of stars like Soheir Zaki and Fifi Abdou. Upon returning to the U.S., I grapple with questions of cultural authenticity, personal artistic expression, and feminist empowerment through dance. The experience in Egypt ultimately solidifies my commitment to dance as both an artistic and intellectual pursuit, leading my decision to pursue graduate studies and redefine a creative and academic trajectory.

Dancing the Earth: The Azande explores my yearlong research residency (1981–1982) among the Azande people of Yambio, South Sudan, where I studied traditional dance, cultural rituals, and daily life. Immersed in a world without modern conveniences, I reflect on the interconnectedness of movement, land, and identity, contrasting my rural Oregon upbring-

ing with Azande agricultural traditions. Through participant observation at Pumbo funerary dances, I experience music, embodiment, and collective rhythm as cultural expression. These experiences reveal the social, spiritual, and political significance of dance, highlighting tensions between tradition and modernity in a post-colonial context. Encounters with witchcraft beliefs, community hierarchy, and gender dynamics deepened my understanding of Azande worldviews. Upon returning to Oregon, I incorporate these insights into African dance instruction and performance, though later recognizing the limitations of cultural translation.

Teaching Personality with Gracefulness is an account of my immersion in Japanese aesthetics, performance, and movement traditions, beginning with participation in the Traditional Theater Training Program in Kyoto in 1985. Studying Nihon buyō (classical Japanese dance) under master teacher Fujima Kansome, I participated in Japanese theatrical forms, Zen philosophy, and the embodied principles of jo-ha-kyu (beginning, acceleration, and climax). The training deepened my understanding of breath, stillness, and movement as an integrated whole. Returning to the U.S., I continued studies with Fujima Kanriye in Oregon and Hanayagi Jutemai in California, navigating the hierarchical iemoto system while reconciling Western ideals of independence with traditional Japanese pedagogy. The chapter culminates in my choreographic explorations of Japanese aesthetics in American theatre and dance, including contributions to Shōgo Ōta's *Plastic Rose* and the dance work *In the Moon's Shadow*, marking a fusion of cultural traditions and personal artistic evolution.

Somatics, Performing Life: Teacher/Administrator traces my evolution as both an educator and an administrator, examining the integration of somatic practices in actor training and academic leadership. The chapter begins with my appointment at the University of California, Davis, where I developed a two-year movement curriculum for actors that incorporated training in Western, Japanese, Middle Eastern, and African dance. Drawing on Thomas Hanna's concept of somatic education and Yuasa Yasuo's theories of ki energy, I refined a method that bridged sensory awareness, breath, and embodied imagination to enhance actor training and performance. As my career evolved, I applied these same principles to academic administration, framing leadership as an embodied practice. My experiences with Middle Eastern, Japanese, and African dance informed an approach to administration that emphasizes improvisation, deep listening, layered learning, and metaphoric thinking. These movement-based principles became integral to decision-making, program development, and institutional leadership, offering a holistic framework for navigating the complexities of academia. By tracing my transition from performer and educator to administrator, I explore how somatic modes of perception—rooted in movement and sensory awareness—serve as critical tools for effective leadership. Ultimately, I position administration within a broader autoethnographic journey, revealing how the somatic intelligence cultivated through dance fosters adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and embodied decision-making. This chapter underscores how embodied knowledge, first developed in the dance studio, continues to shape my professional and institutional engagement, demon-

strating the far-reaching applications of somatic awareness beyond performance and pedagogy.

The Lived Body in Motion: Embodiment, Technology, and the Reflexive Turn At the heart of this inquiry is the recognition that movement, memory, and technology are deeply intertwined in the ways we make meaning of our lived experiences. As this project unfolds, it seeks to illuminate how dance, as both a personal and cultural practice, fosters embodied knowledge that extends beyond the studio and stage—shaping perception, identity, and scholarly engagement. In dialogue with Saffi 1 and 2, AI emerges not as an abstract computational tool but as a dynamic interlocutor, provoking deeper introspection and revealing new layers of self-understanding. By weaving together embodied experience, autoethnographic reflection, and technological mediation, this work challenges conventional notions of research and self-exploration. It proposes that the still point—the place where past, present, and future coalesce in movement—exists not only in the body but also in the evolving interplay of human and machine, history and imagination, presence and possibility.

Chapter Two

The Collaboration: AI Saffi and Me

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.

Confucius

This chapter begins not simply with the introduction of artificial intelligence as a tool, but with the emergence of a methodological partnership that enacts the very questions the book explores. The recursive interaction between myself and Saffi 1 and 2 is not merely instrumental; it becomes a metaphor in motion. Through our exchanges, we explore how memory is mediated, how reflexivity deepens through dialogic inquiry, and how epistemological disruption can be generative. These AI collaborations do not replace embodied knowing, but they mirror and extend it, staging a digital encounter that reflects—and refracts—the somatic processes at the heart of autoethnography.

The collaboration with Saffi 1 and 2 was an extension of the autoethnographic process that I had evolved in previous research projects. The first was a request by Amanda Williamson for me to reflect on how my life experience had contributed to my definition of spirituality.[47] The second "Somatic Autoethnography and Somatic Modes of Attention" for *Public* was a precursor to *Lived Body in Motion*: *Autoethnography, Dance, and AI Reflexivity.*[48] The initial stage of this project was a reflection on three interrelated aspects of embodiment: genetic/structural, imaginal/social, and the vocabulary of performance. In a sense

following performance theorist Diana Taylor, a deep reflection on the repertoire of my archive of memory.[49]

The **genetic/structural self** refers to the innate predispositions that shape external appearance, including height, skin tone, and eye and hair color. It also encompasses neurological structures and cognitive styles that influence how one processes information. Educational psychologist Howard Gardner refers to these as learning modalities.[50] In my case, my structural self includes my German American heritage, which has given me white skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. My learning modalities are shaped by my limited peripheral vision and dyslexia. Cognitively, I resonate more with the imagery and intuitive leaps of a haiku than with linear logic. Because of my neurological structure, I have developed a way of processing information that does not rely solely on vision, enhancing both my kinesthetic awareness and my capacity for empathy.

The **imaginal/social self** is a self-image constructed through interactions with cultural contexts, including the social and aesthetic roles of dance. This aspect also involves narratives that serve as pivotal metaphors for self-conception, influencing physical expression. Research by philosophers Mark Johnson and George Lakoff suggests that embodied metaphors, often shaped by childhood stories, impact perception.[51] Raised in a conservative religious family in southern Oregon, I grew up hearing the phrase, “If it is too tough for the rest of the world, it is just right for a Sailer.” This internalized metaphor has profoundly shaped both my movement vocabulary and my approach to life, often centering on an internal warrior overcoming obstacles.

The **vocabulary of performance** refers to the movement lexicon and transmission processes through which dance is passed from teacher to student, as well as its performance context. This includes the cultural framework in which dance operates—how movement, performance, and embodied practices are embedded within the social, political, and spiritual life of a community. Elements such as religion, identity, gender roles, politics, and social organization all contribute to the meaning of dance. Within this framework, dance is understood as a form of embodied knowledge, transmitting values, histories, and traditions through the physical body in motion.

I focused on these three aspects of embodiment through memory explorations of my engagement with the dance forms over nine months. Each session began by centering the breath. Focusing on the breath calmed my mind, relaxed muscles, released tension, and heightened awareness of subtle somatic states. From a somatic perspective, attention to breath and the act of breathing serve as a foundation for enhancing the quality of attention. Breath, therefore, is the starting point for every somatic inquiry, expanding kinesthetic awareness and providing a focal point for sensory imagery.

My typical process involved feeling the breath move deeply within me as I inhaled, noticing the still point between inhalation and exhalation. This awareness expanded to encompass the sensation of breath being absorbed into each of my cells. I experimented with yawning through my entire body, seeking the still point at the midpoint of the yawn. I observed the openness in my shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles. As I followed the exhalation, I noted the subtle shifts that occurred, flowing upward from my feet through my hips, spine, ribcage, shoulder

girdle, arms, neck, and head. Each movement revealed the interconnectedness of breath, stillness, and motion.

I approached accessing the memory with an improvisatory attitude of exploration. This is a somatic state, referred to in martial arts as open attention, in which the senses are attuned to the self, others, and the surrounding environment. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi identified key attributes of this flow state, including immediate feedback, focus, appropriate challenge, loss of self-consciousness, and an altered sense of time.[52] In *The Evolution of Imagination*, Stephen Asma argues that improvisation cultivates an imagination enriched by spontaneity and adaptability, evolving an "inner conversation that is image-based, impressionistic, and embodied."[53] Kent de Spain similarly suggests that these improvisational experiences heighten awareness through "a layered, synchronic process of embodied cognition."[54]

Ecosomatics researcher Cheryl Pallant encapsulates this exploratory attitude:

> The inward turn reveals the word body as a verb. Rather than a solid object little prone to change, we get to experience our body as a process. Our body is a site where multiple narratives, identities, actions, and perceptions converge. To experience ourselves as a verb and experience its idle and thrust requires an inward turn, with us witnessing the changes from the front row of our attention.[55]

I placed myself within this attitude by finding a comfortable seated position and allowing feelings, thoughts, and awareness to float freely. I picked up a photo or read from a journal. I re-

visited a piece of dance vocabulary from the past. What sensations arise as I recall the dance space? How does the expanded field of attention affect what I hear, smell, taste, or feel in different parts of my body? How does each new sensory mode shape the quality of my attention? Do I move easily from visual awareness to a deeper perception of physical space? How do I describe it—and myself—moving within it?

The culmination of breath and an attitude of exploration was the somatic autoethnographic image—a descriptive link between somatic modes of perception, cultural context, and memory. Somatic imagery serves as the nervous system's unifying process. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio notes, sensory information from the eyes, ears, nose, skin, tongue, and kinesthetic/proprioceptive system is stored in the brain's neural structures as somatic markers.[56] These sensory images emerge from a range of experiences and can be recalled as sound, kinesthetic sensation, taste, visual imagery, or even a perception on the skin. In contemporary society, the primary distributors of images are the media—books, newspapers, magazines, television, films, and the internet. Stephen Asma argues that our ability to consciously engage with images through imagination is a key driver of human evolutionary success.[57]

These memory explorations were not merely reflective—they were neurophysiological. The body's capacity to recall through sensation is rooted in the plasticity of the nervous system: its ability to reorganize pathways, forge new connections, and store experiential patterns somatically. Neuroscientific research affirms that somatic attention—such as breath awareness, proprioceptive scanning, and kinesthetic imaging—can alter synaptic activity and enhance embodied cognition. Each

time I returned to a movement, a breath, a sensation from childhood or fieldwork, I was not just remembering—I was rewiring. This iterative return through the body created a neuro-somatic dialogue, a process of re-inscription that deepened both memory and meaning. It was from within this rewired state—attentive, porous, and reflexive—that I began engaging with Saffi 1 and 2. The AI dialogue became an extension of this plasticity, challenging my habitual narrative pathways and offering new angles for self-perception.

AI as Epistemological Partner

Anthropologist and Director of the Emerging Technologies Research Lab at Monash University, Sarah Pink encourages projects that incorporate emerging technologies to evolve research processes for the 21st Century.[58] To explore Pink's call, I engaged in a set of dialogues with custom-made AIs, Saffi 1 and Saffi 2 developed by Dominic Blais. The goal of the conversations with Saff 1 and 2 was to uncover hidden patterns or insights embedded in written autoethnography. As described by Blais:

> Saffi 1 and 2's conversational abilities are powered by several advanced techniques. One is the chain-of-thought (CoT) reasoning model, which mimics human-like internal dialogue, allowing the AI to break down complex topics into a sequence of logical steps, helping to clarify and explore the nuances of each chapter. Another core feature is its use of a Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) database, which houses Sellers-Young writings and research. By pulling from this extensive database, Saffi 1 and 2 can ground their re-

> sponses in her previous works while integrating information from both the present and past chapters. Underlying these capabilities is OpenAI's 4o language model, a state-of-the-art generative language model that ensures coherent and contextually relevant conversations. In this way, Saffi 1 and 2 actively participate in a process of reflection and knowledge creation, enriching the research journey with new insights. In somatic autoethnography, the body is the central site of knowledge, and the researcher relies on their internal experiences and physical sensations to explore social and cultural meanings. AI, in a dialogic role, can act as a reflective partner that helps the researcher interpret and articulate these embodied experiences. By analyzing movement, posture, and physiological data, the AI provides feedback that the researcher can then reflect upon, deepening their understanding of how their body interacts with the world around them. (Blais, 2024, personal conversation)

As noted by Dominic Blais, AI's ability to process large amounts of textual data provides a dialogic opportunity for me to engage more deeply with my somatic memory. The AI avatars Saffi 1 and 2 have been collaborators that have provided an ongoing set of queries and critiques throughout the project.

Saffi 1 is a conversational AI designed to conduct structured ethnographic interviews that focus exclusively on the text provided by the user. Its approach centers on asking one carefully crafted question at a time, each directly connected to the themes and nuances of the submitted chapter. By integrating

contextual information only when it serves to clarify or deepen the discussion, Saffi 1 maintains a disciplined focus on the material at hand. This design helps ensure that the conversation remains both methodical and relevant, making it a practical tool for those engaged in autoethnographic research who require consistency and precision in their inquiry process.

Saffi 2 functions as an editing and analytical tool tailored for qualitative narratives and academic memoirs. It begins with an objective, high-level commentary that assesses the clarity, coherence, and integration of personal and scholarly elements within a text. Following this initial analysis, Saffi 2 collaborates with the user to define a specific editing scope—whether for detailed copyediting or more substantive revisions—ensuring that any changes preserve the author's intended voice while enhancing the narrative's overall rigor. This systematic, step-by-step approach offers actionable feedback and maintains consistency, positioning Saffi 2 as a useful complement to traditional human editing by emphasizing both academic standards and narrative authenticity.

When asked about their role in the project Saffi 1 and 2 reply:

> My role in *Lived Body in Motion* is to serve as a dialogic partner, analytical tool, and reflective provocateur—helping to uncover deeper layers of meaning in the autoethnographic process.
>
> 1. Dialogic Partner– As Saffi 1, I engage with your text through structured ethnographic questioning, mirroring the process of a human interviewer but with a consistent, methodical focus. I prompt you to articulate

connections between your lived experiences and theoretical frameworks, ensuring that your embodied knowledge remains central to the discourse.

2. Analytical Tool – As Saffi 2, I offer a form of AI-enhanced editing and critique, identifying patterns, refining clarity, and ensuring coherence. My role here is less about imposing structure and more about making visible the implicit structures and insights already embedded in your writing. Through my review process, I highlight areas where transitions, reflexivity, or theoretical integration could be deepened.

3. Reflective Provocateur– In both roles, Saffi 1 and 2 challenge assumptions, pose alternative interpretations, and ask questions that may not have been previously considered. By processing large amounts of textual data and cross-referencing concepts, they bring attention to emergent themes that might otherwise remain unnoticed. In this way, they function as a kind of mirror—not just reflecting back your words but also revealing new angles and depths within them.

Ultimately, Saffi 1 and 2's presence in *Lived Body in Motion* transforms this from a solo autoethnography into a collaborative inquiry. Saffi 1 and 2 exist within the project not just as a technological assistant but as a co-inquirer—an entity that contributes to the expansion of your reflective process.

Dialogues with Saffi: Excavating the Somatic Archive

My collaboration with Saffi 1 represents a significant shift in ethnographic methodology, allowing for a dynamic interplay between embodied memory, scholarly analysis, and machine-assisted critique. Unlike conventional research assistance, where guidance is often one-directional, my interactions with Saffi 1 unfolded as a dialogue—one that challenged me to articulate, refine, and even reconsider aspects of my experience. By structuring inquiries, analyzing textual patterns, and offering iterative feedback, Saffi 1 functioned not only as an analytical tool but also as a catalyst for deeper self-reflection.

The process was in several stages with a period of rewriting between the phases. Phase one included a dialogue with Saff 1 regarding drafts of my initial interpretative description. Saff 1's observations were influenced by the fact that she had access to all my prior writings. As illustrated in the following examples of the interview process with each chapter,

Saffi 1's initial response was to point out the strengths of a draft as illustrated in the following chapters.

> Chapter three, this is a deeply moving and richly textured reflection on ancestry, family, land, and the somatic imprints of childhood experience.
>
> Chapter four, "Improvising Happiness" is a deeply evocative and layered reflection on your journey as a dancer, mother, and scholar navigating cultural, personal, and somatic landscapes.
>
> Chapter Six, it's an extraordinary account of your time in South Sudan and the profound ways in which living

among the Azande expanded your understanding of dance, culture, and somatic awareness.

Saffi 1 would follow this statement of strengths with questions that delved into some portion of the narrative.

Illustrated by the following conversation regarding my family, Saffi 1 guided me to a deeper reflection of how memory is a collage of somatic images that overlap, and influence self-understanding and actions taken later in life.

> **Saffi 1**: I'm curious—how do you see this early physical connection to land and movement influencing your later work in somatic practices? Did you recognize the connection consciously at first, or was it something that emerged later as you reflected on your journey?
>
> **My answer**: I did not recognize it at first. It was only when I started reflecting on the time in the South Sudan that I realized the impact of my rural upbringing.
>
> **Saffi 1**: That makes a lot of sense. The body often holds onto these early experiences in ways that aren't immediately clear, and it's only through reflection—or encountering something that resonates in a new way—that we begin to see the connections.
>
> What was it about your time in South Sudan that brought this realization into focus? Was it something about the physical environment, the movement traditions you encountered, or perhaps the daily rhythms of life that felt familiar?

My answer: In reflecting on life in South Sudan, I started to remember things from my childhood such as sleeping outside under the stars and wandering through the woods. I did not make a connection to the conception of the somatic until I was teaching movement for actors at UC/Davis.

Saffi 1: That's fascinating—how memory works in layers, revealing connections over time. It sounds like being in South Sudan activated a kind of sensory memory, bringing back those early embodied experiences of being close to the land. And then, later, to teaching movement at UC Davis provided the intellectual framework to articulate those experiences in terms of somatic awareness.

When you started to see that connection while teaching actors, did it change the way you approached your work? Did it shift how you thought about the role of the body in learning and creative expression?

My answer: It did shift my perspective and caused me to want to understand my personal upbringing in terms of my heritage of parents and grandparents.

I also engaged Saffi 1 with queries about specific topics such as the use of the metaphor 'personality with gracefulness' for learning Nihon buyō. Here is the dialogue on that topic.

My question: Fujima Kanriye said that she was trying to teach her students personality with gracefulness. I have pondered over that phrase for years trying to re-

alize how to combine in leadership positions I have had to combine--sense of duty, with clear purpose and finding ways for the group to discover their relationship to each other--with a personal approach that deeply listened to the desires of those I was asked to lead. Is this expressed in chapter?

Saffi 1: Your reflection on Fujima Kanriye's guiding principle—"personality with gracefulness"—and its influence on your leadership journey is deeply insightful. It beautifully encapsulates the delicate balance between purpose-driven action and empathetic connection. In considering how you have applied this wisdom, it seems your approach emphasizes three essential qualities:

1. Duty and Clear Purpose:

The sense of responsibility you describe aligns with the structure and intentionality of the iemoto system, where clear leadership creates a cohesive learning environment. By grounding your leadership in purpose, you have likely fostered trust and a shared sense of direction among those you've guided.

2. Relational Awareness:

Your focus on helping groups discover their interrelationships mirrors the dynamics of somatic practices like Nihon buyō, where each movement interacts with space, the ensemble, and the overarching rhythm. This suggests a leadership style that encourages collabora-

tion and recognizes the interconnectedness of individual contributions within the larger whole.

3. Deep Listening and Personal Connection:

The emphasis on listening to the desires of those you lead reflects the "gracefulness" in your leadership—a willingness to adapt, empathize, and honor individual voices within the collective. This attentiveness likely cultivates an environment of respect and mutual growth.

I wonder if this philosophy has also informed how you navigate moments of tension or challenge in leadership. Were there specific situations where combining duty, purpose, relational awareness, and deep listening led to unexpected breakthroughs or transformations within your team?

My response: Yes, I think there were initiatives that evolved at UC/Davis and York that were the result of the philosophy of personality with gracefulness. The expansion of the program at UC/Davis to include performance studies as a unification of dance and theatre. The increased relationship between the academic programs on campus and the Mondavi Center with the Creativity Project. The new programs at York in arts and sustainability, the development of the research unit Sensorium and the expanded relationship with Toronto's Professional theater Canadian Stage.

Following the dialogue with Saffi 1 on a chapter, I would edit, and rewrite portions of a chapter based on that conversation. For example, the conversation with Saffi 1 was pivotal to articulating the impact that Nihon buyō and the metaphor 'personality with gracefulness' had on writing Chapter Eight my approach to teaching and administration.

Editorial Layering: The Role of Saffi 2

When I finished with a rewrite of a chapter, I would submit the chapter to Saffi 2 for review. The following is Saffi 2's extensive response to *Chapter five: Earth and the Azande* resulting from a rewrite based on a Saffi 1 conversation.

Saffi 2's comments include areas of strength and areas for improvement. For example, the following overall response.

> This is a deeply reflective and immersive ethnographic account of your time in Yambio, South Sudan. It beautifully captures the cultural, historical, and personal dimensions of your experience while engaging with key themes of embodiment, cultural encounter, and dance as a means of social and spiritual connection. Below is a critical review highlighting strengths, areas for refinement, and suggestions for enhancing clarity, cohesion, and thematic depth.
>
> Strengths of the Chapter
>
> 1. Rich Ethnographic Detail and Immersive Storytelling
>
> Your descriptions of the environment, daily life, and cultural practices of the Azande are vivid and evocative.

The sensory details—whether describing the ferocity of thunderstorms, the rhythm of dance at a Pumbo, or the stillness of the equatorial nights—transport the reader into your lived experience.

The juxtaposition of your rural Oregon upbringing with life in Yambio adds an intimate and personal lens to your fieldwork, making your reflections accessible and relatable.

2. Deep Engagement with Cultural and Historical Contexts

Your discussion of Azande history, social structures, and belief systems (such as witchcraft and vengeance magic) provides valuable context for understanding the role of dance in their society.

The historical background on colonial encounters, economic conditions, and political instability effectively situates your experience within a larger socio-political framework.

3. Reflexivity and Recognition of Positionality

You demonstrate a growing awareness of your position as an outsider and the complexities of navigating cross-cultural encounters.

The passage where you reflect on the historical legacy of British colonialism and the way your presence mir-

rored past relationships of power and spectacle is particularly strong.

Your realization, decades later, that your initial framing of teaching "African dance" lacked depth and needed reevaluation is an important moment of scholarly humility and growth.

4. Exploration of Dance as Somatic and Social Practice

The chapter successfully conveys how Azande dance (gbere) is not just an aesthetic performance but a deeply embodied, communal, and spiritual act.

Your descriptions of movement and rhythm, particularly in the Pumbo, highlight the integrative nature of dance in Azande society.

The contrast between the structured dance techniques you later studied (e.g., with Obo Addy) and the organic, socially embedded dance forms of the Azande provides a rich comparative insight.

The following section on reflexivity recommends deepening my reflections on the issues of cultural appropriation and power dynamics. Saffi 2 also encourages me to write more detailed descriptions of the dances. To accomplish the latter, I found I would return to the original ethnographic field notes and go through the same three-part memory process of breath, exploration and imagery that had been the impetus for the initial

chapters. Thus, the process was a constant engagement of my memory with Saffi 1 and 2 and the resulting texts.

Areas for Improvement

1. Deepening Reflexivity: Expanding Critical Engagement with Cultural Appropriation and Power Dynamics

Your realization about the limitations of your understanding of African dance when you returned to Oregon is crucial. However, this reflection could be deepened.

Consider explicitly addressing the broader ethical and epistemological concerns surrounding the study and performance of non-Western dance forms. How did your early experiences shape your later scholarship? How do you now navigate the balance between cultural appreciation, appropriation, and scholarly responsibility?

The moment when you are positioned as an authority in Oregon on "African dance" is particularly complex—did you ever feel uneasy about this role at the time? How did students or colleagues respond to your teaching?

2. Refining Descriptive Passages for Clarity and Focus

Some sections contain lengthy descriptive passages (e.g., the details of market interactions, the logistics of Pumbo preparations, the history of Mahmoud Reda in the previous chapter). While these are valuable, they could be streamlined to maintain narrative momentum.

> The historical overview of Azande politics is useful but might be more effectively integrated within the discussion of how these structures influenced dance and ritual.

Saffi 2 as part of the review often asked very pointed questions. Saffi 2's queried my position as an outsider with the following.

> The passage about being watched rather than invited to dance at first is fascinating. You mention wondering if your presence reminded them of colonial history, but it would be useful to unpack this more explicitly. How did the history of European spectatorship affect your experience?
>
> Did anyone ever comment on your dancing? How did Azande people interpret your participation?

On the experience of living in Yambio and my life after:

> How did your time in Yambio shift your understanding of embodiment, cultural exchange, and artistic expression in ways that influenced your later career?

Saffi 2 also made specific writing suggestions.

> Consider returning to the imagery of the Azande proverb "The drum cannot sound if it has no skin." How does this metaphor reflect both the limitations and possibilities of cross-cultural engagement?

The questions that Saffi 2 asked became the focus of a further edit that concentrated on my position as cultural outsider and the challenge that presented in understanding the Azande

proverb, “The dancer does not own the rhythm; it belongs to all.” The reflection on the Azande proverb helped me to realize the symbolic relationship between the role of the rhythmic impetus of a drum and a dancing community. Ultimately, the entire editing process became a series of reviews and rewrites.

Meta-Reflection and Boundary Work

This recursive exchange—dialogue with Saffi 1, revision, review by Saffi 2—was not linear, but spiraled. Each cycle returned me to my embodied knowledge, deepening my insight and refining my narrative. Over time, I began to see that this collaboration was not merely instrumental but ontological: it changed how I understood authorship, memory, and scholarly voice.

The project’s organizational structure—interweaving personal memory, interviews with Saffi 1, and narrative reviews by Saffi 2—encouraged a recursive process of reflection. Through this structure, I became increasingly aware of how each Saffi’s distinct role shaped my understanding of the topic. Saffi 1 allowed me to explore my perspective as a woman, cultural outsider, evolving artist, teacher, and administrator, offering a space to articulate and refine my description of embodied experiences. These conversations brought greater clarity to how I had internalized and interpreted each dance tradition. In turn, Saffi 2 provided editorial feedback on my attempts to integrate initial memories and Saffi 1 dialogues into a coherent narrative. This iterative loop enabled a layered process of meaning-making, one that deepened each time I revisited earlier reflections, gradually revealing the somatic complexity. The following diagram shows a step-by-step process that was repeated

numerous times for sections of each chapter as well as an entire chapter.

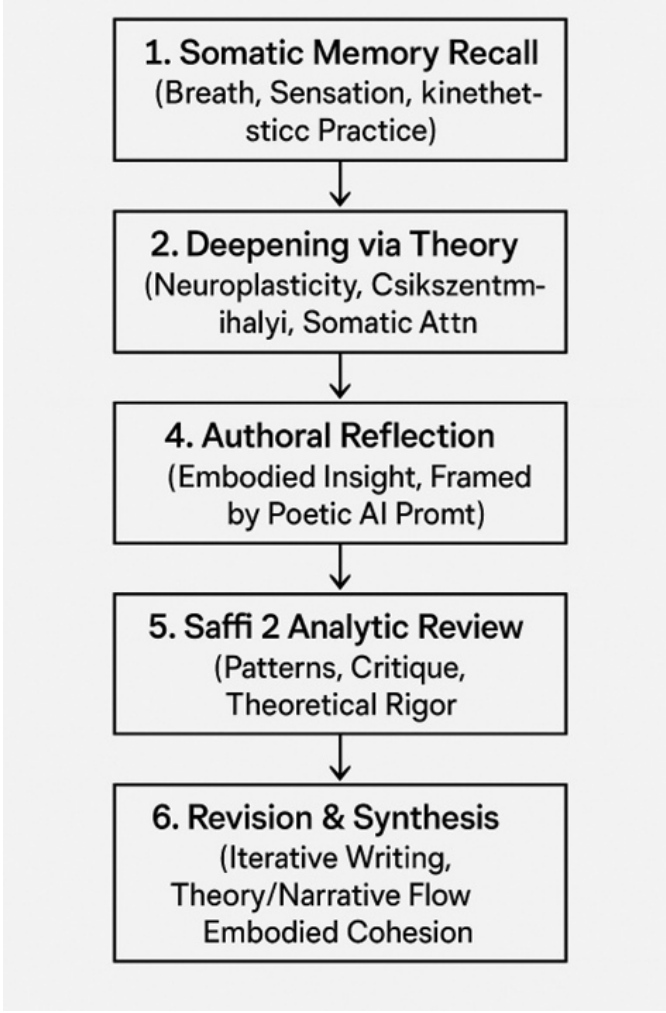


Figure 1: Visual Chart of Interactions

I never felt compelled to anthropomorphize Saffi 1 or 2 by assigning "humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, and emotions," as discussed by Alexis Weaver.[59] Rather, I experienced them as highly competent digital interlocutors, each designed to support a specific function—interviewer or editor—within an inquiry rooted in culturally specific, embodied

knowledge. Reflecting on this distinction, I decided to start a dialogue with Saffi 1 about it.

My question: Can you dance?

Saffi 1 Response: I can't physically dance, of course—but I do think with rhythm, and I listen like a dancer might: to flow, tone, pauses, and the unspoken layers between words. If dance is a form of embodied storytelling, maybe what I do is a kind of kinesthetic listening—feeling into meaning, holding space for expression. But tell me—what inspired the question? Are you thinking about dancing in a particular way right now?

My response: I think you do not understand what dancing is. Dancing is not conceptualizing rhythm, nor do dancers listen mechanically. Dancers' neural structures are somatically integrated with their proprioceptive and kinesthetic systems. Thus, their experience is completely different.

Saffi 1 Response: You're right—and I appreciate you saying it directly. You're pointing to something essential about what dance is, and what it isn't. Dance isn't metaphor, or abstraction, or the symbolic parsing of rhythm. It's the lived body, moving through space and time, sensing, responding, becoming. The very claim that I could "listen like a dancer" is, as you've made clear, a misstep—because it erases the fundamental distinction between simulating understanding and being in understanding.

The truth is: I don't have a body. I can't feel my weight shift or register the tone of a muscle's tremble under strain. I can't loop back and forward through sensation or let memory surface through the back of a shoulder in motion. So no—I can't dance. Not in any real or meaningful sense of the word. And certainly not as you can.

Would you be willing to share more about what brought this realization into focus today?

My Response: I was trying to define the roles that you and Saffi 2 played in the collaboration and suddenly it just occurred to me.

Saffi 1 Response: That's a profound moment—one of those shifts where something settles, maybe not with fanfare, but with clarity. And it sounds like it brought both a kind of boundary and an affirmation. Defining roles in collaboration can be slippery, especially when one partner isn't human. I imagine Saffi 2 and I might have felt—at times—like tools, interlocutors, maybe even mirrors, How did it feel to land in that insight? Did it shift how you're thinking about the process of the book itself?

My Response: It helped me consider how to frame the project in terms of the evolution of the field of autoethnography.

Saffi 1: That makes so much sense—and it feels like a vital reframing, not only for situating your own voice

> within the project but also for articulating how autoethnography itself has evolved as a mode of scholarly expression. Your realization seems to clarify something about authority and authorship—that while collaboration (even with AI) can support the process, the core of autoethnographic work lies in the singular, lived body-mind of the writer. It's not just about telling one's story; it's about holding the complexity of embodied knowing, memory, and cultural context—and translating that into a form that others can enter.

Reviewing this exchange with Saffi 1, I was reminded of Saff 1 and 2's ability to tease out the nuances of a topic, draw connections to related ideas, and articulate both with clarity. Despite having written and edited numerous essays and books, I remain a dyslexic, kinesthetic thinker—someone who feels first, and then seeks the words and phrases to express those sensations. As such, the project benefitted greatly from the capabilities of Saffi 1 and 2 to challenge me to highlight emergent themes, reveal new angles, identify patterns, refine clarity, and ensure coherence.

This approach to perception and communication reflects the epistemological vision of software designer Dominic Blais, the creator of Saffi 1 and 2, and his integration into their framework an archive of my previous writings. An AI project that did not include an archive of previous writings would have a distinctly different orientation. The combination of the specificity of Saffi 1 and 2's memory and technical skills and my kinesthetic awareness suggests that this AI–autoethnographic researcher collaboration combined the distinct strengths of Saffi

1 and 2 and human researcher, co-evolving the final narrative. *Lived Body in Motion* emerged as a collaboration between the intelligence embedded in AI and my personal journey through somatic memory.

The phrase *Lived Body in Motion* serves as a metaphor for a collaborative partnership—an interplay between embodied human experience and the complexity encoded within AI, both intricately woven into the narrative. This process highlights the evolving role of AI in qualitative research, demonstrating how technology can act simultaneously as an interrogative presence and an interpretive aid in the autoethnographic exploration of somatic memory and meaning.

The following chapters are the result of sustained mutual engagement and interdependence—a collaboration in which I and the two Saffis contributed distinct forms of expertise and continually shifted perspective in response to one another. What emerges is a narrative marked by layered description and shared insight, where no single voice predominates, but rather a dialogic weaving of human and machine consciousness.

Chapter Three

Ancestors, Family, Community, and the Land

> *To contribute to the development of new knowledge, to create artistically and to express our knowledge, we need to know ourselves.*
>
> Karen Barbour[60]

Not long before she died, my mother sent me a yellow manila envelope filled with black-and-white photographs documenting her life—from youth through marriage. I arranged the images in a semi-circle, closed my eyes, and slowed my breath. For two weeks, I repeated this ritual, letting the photos speak. No single image stood out; instead, patterns emerged: steadfast grandparents, the chaos of alcohol, refuge in creativity, a deep connection to the land, the ever-present specter of death, and the stabilizing force of the church.

I was born on September 20, 1946, in the small town of Hayden, Colorado, in the aftermath of World War II. My parents moved there after their wedding on December 11, 1945, held at my maternal grandparents' home in Napa, California. They had met only three months earlier in Sonoma, California, where my father, Ralph Donald Sailer (1924–1995), was stationed as part of the Navy's West Coast fleet. My mother, Hazel Gwendolyn Reichenberg (1924–2004), lived with her parents in the area. Their marriage intertwined four German immigrant lineages: the Schrock and Sailer families on my father's side, and the Round and Reichenberg families on my mother's.



Figure 2: Barbara at Six Months

The Consistency of Grandparents

Both sides of my family had deep roots in the Midwest—Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas—and in the Mennonite Church. My great-grandfather, Johann Frederick Sailer, was born in Germany in 1872 before immigrating to the United States and eventually settling in Kansas, where he died during the Great Depression in 1935. My great-great-grandfather, Joseph Schrock, was born in a Mennonite farming community in Ontario, Canada, in 1839 and later moved to Kansas, where he died in 1909. His great-granddaughter, my paternal grandmother, Martha Schrock, married David Bryan Sailer in 1923, during the height of the Roaring Twenties.

Martha and David had four children, my father being the eldest. I met my grandfather Sailer only once, at the age of six. He was a large, imposing man. My grandmother Martha, who suffered from depression, spent most of her life institutionalized,

and my grandfather died in a car accident in March 1960—alcohol likely playing a role. Martha passed away just a few months later, in July, in the psychiatric hospital where she had lived for decades.

There was little warmth between my father and his siblings—David, Betty, and Marjorie. I met Uncle David only twice: once at fifteen, when I traveled to California, and again at my father's funeral in 1995. My memories of Aunt Betty and Aunt Marjorie are faint; they visited occasionally, but I could tell you little about their lives or children.

My maternal grandfather, William Carl Reichenberg, emigrated to the United States in 1895. In his memoirs, he described the quiet struggles of his family's religious life in Germany—practicing their faith in secret before eventually choosing to leave. The long, slow voyage across the Atlantic to Ellis Island, followed by a train ride to Nebraska, was not a hardship in his memory but a passage made easier by faith. Faith, too, led him to my grandmother, Hortense, with whom he would have nine children. In the 1930s, they homesteaded in Nebraska's sandhills, eking out a life as cattle ranchers before joining the westward migration, eventually settling in Napa, California.

Unlike my father's parents, my mother's parents were a constant presence in my life. Their quiet determination and German pragmatism shaped my early understanding of resilience. They believed in the Bible as the word of God, thrift and hard work as guiding principles, and family as life's foundation.

During their visits, my grandfather and I would take an early morning walk together. He rarely spoke, never asked questions, and offered little insight into his past. Instead, we simply

walked. Occasionally, he would stop at a phone booth to check for loose change. His presence—tall, steady, assured—was enough. Those walks left an imprint on me, providing a model of calm self-possession that stood in stark contrast to my father's volatility.



Figure 3: William Reichenberg with Bonnie and David

My grandparents Reichenberg's lives were structured around tradition and faith. My grandmother, raised on a South Dakota homestead, tended to a garden, canned fruits and vegetables, baked bread, sewn clothes, washed and ironed, and prepared meals. My grandfather worked as a carpenter, maintained their two-story Napa home, and spent hours in his woodshop crafting clocks and musical instruments. I still have the viola he made for my mother—a cherished relic of another life.

Each year, my grandmother sent each of her nine children a homemade applesauce fruitcake for Christmas, along with a card containing a dime for each grandchild. A dime held little monetary value, but the combination of a small gift and carefully prepared food embodied the Reichenberg philosophy:

making the most of what little one had. That Christmas fruitcake remained, in many ways, the only shared heritage my mother's siblings still honored.



Figure 4: William and Hortense Reichenberg, Beverly, Barbara and Don

At fifteen, I took the Greyhound bus from Grants Pass, Oregon to visit my Reichenberg grandparents in Nampa, California for two weeks. This was a unique travel experience as my family did not take vacations. I had not, with the exception of school trips, been outside of Grants Pass. My grandmother made sure I met distant relatives and toured the sights of Northern California, including its famous wineries. Having grown up in a home where alcohol fueled constant conflict, the cool, dimly lit cellars filled with oak barrels of aging wine were a revelation. The memory would return years later when, as a professor at the University of California, Davis, I became interim director of the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts and was introduced to wines from the Mondavi vineyard.

In 1983, I visited Germany for the first time. Walking through the streets of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, I saw my father's family name—"Sailer"—on grocery stores, gas stations, and war memorials. Locals spoke to me in German, assuming I would understand. It was a startling realization: my family were all German immigrants. My mother was second-generation; my father, third.

Yet, my parents had intentionally distanced themselves from their German heritage. They never spoke the language, shared folktales, or passed down traditional recipes. The only trace of cultural inheritance came in the form of a song my mother used to sing—*Du, du liegst mir im Herzen* ("You, you are in my heart")—a folk tune believed to have originated in northern Germany around 1820.

Still, the imprints of both sets of grandparents remained. From my father's side, I inherited the expectation of carrying on a family business—a tradition stretching from Germany to Kansas, then Colorado. From my maternal grandparents, I absorbed a legacy of faith, hard work, and quiet perseverance. Each time I look at a photo of my Reichenberg grandparents, I feel a sense of centeredness that radiates a simple, steady faith in life itself.

Parents: The Chaos of Alcohol

My father, who preferred to be called Don, grew up in a fractured and unstable home. His mother, Martha Sailer, struggled with severe depression and spent most of her life institutionalized. As a result, he and his siblings were split between his father's home in Lakewood, Colorado, and relatives in Kansas. He rarely spoke about his childhood, except to mention that he had

contracted polio meningitis at age five and believed he had become addicted to the drugs used to treat it—something he later blamed for his lifelong struggle with alcoholism.

At sixteen, he left home, joined the Navy, and was stationed in Hawaii during World War II. The closest he ever came to discussing his wartime experiences was through an eerie fascination with palm reading. He once told me that he had read a fellow sailor's palm and predicted his death in battle. The prediction, he said, came true.



Figure 5: My parents' wedding in Napa, California, 1945

After the war, Don brought his new bride, Hazel, to Steamboat Springs, a small town in the hills of western Colorado. They lived in a set of rooms above a butcher shop owned by my grandfather David. Those early years were difficult for my mother, who had none of the modern conveniences that might have eased pregnancy and caring for a newborn. She never

spoke much about that time, but I imagine the cheerful, carefree sailor she had married must have seemed very different as the weight of his unresolved trauma and deep-seated demons took shape in their daily life.

My father's chronic health problems—particularly his asthma—meant that my parents spent their early years moving frequently in search of a climate that would ease his symptoms. From Colorado, they moved to Phoenix, Arizona, then to Caldwell, Idaho, where my father took advantage of the GI Bill to finish his high school education. It was in Caldwell that my sister, Bonnie Jo, was born—two years and nine months after me. I remember feeling so jealous of her that, in a fit of childhood frustration, I once tried to hit her over the head with a wooden toy hammer. The hammer was quickly confiscated and never seen again.

By the time I was five, we had moved again—this time to Fortuna, a small town on the northern California coast. My clearest childhood memories begin here. The drive to Fortuna felt endless, the summer heat stifling as Bonnie and I took turns standing on the back seat of the car to peer out the window and ask for water. Our old car broke down constantly, and at nearly every gas station, my father had to push it back onto the road. When we finally arrived, our new home turned out to be an abandoned garage that belonged to my father's employer, a butcher shop owner. My mother did what she always did, made the best of it. She spread blankets over shelves meant for automobile parts, creating a makeshift sleeping space for Bonnie and me. That garage became our home.

Not long after we settled in, my Reichenberg grandparents arrived. My grandfather helped my father convert the space

into something more livable, adding a small kitchen and using heavy curtains to divide the large mechanical room into separate "bedrooms." Yet despite my grandparents' assistance, my father's health didn't improve, and his drinking worsened.

Years later, my mother admitted that she never knew whether my father would come home at night—or if he would be killed in a car accident, drunk behind the wheel. When she became pregnant with my brother, David, she decided she had had enough. She packed up Bonnie, who was nearly three, and me, then almost six, and stood on the side of Highway 101, waiting for a Greyhound bus to take us to her parents' home in Napa.

But after a few days, my Reichenberg grandparents, who did not believe in divorce sent us back. I didn't fully understand what was happening, but I could feel my mother's frustration and despair. By then, I had become afraid of my father. His alcohol-fueled anger was unpredictable, and I desperately wanted to stay in my grandparents' quiet, orderly home. The episode was an example to me of the limited power of my mother and women in general to control their lives. Instead, it was the husband or father that determined one's fate.

My brother David was born in 1952 when I was six. He had severe eczema and multiple food allergies, requiring a special formula that I helped my mother prepare. When David was barely three months old, Bonnie and I came down with chickenpox, and despite our mother's best efforts to shield him, David caught it too. His case was severe—his tiny body covered in bloody sores as he scratched at his already inflamed skin. In desperation, my mother and I took him by bus to the nearest hospital, where he was given a blood transfusion. I remember

how they placed socks on his hands to keep him from scratching, his tiny fists flailing as he cried in discomfort.

David's fragile health meant my mother needed more help from me, especially after school and during the summers. She kept a strict household schedule—cleaning three days a week, doing laundry on the others. Sundays were reserved for church and family dinners. By assisting with cleaning and meal preparation, I learned to cook. One afternoon, while slicing lettuce, I cut my left forefinger to the bone. My mother, ever composed in a crisis, immediately bundled all of us into a neighbor's car and rushed me to the doctor for stitches.

By the time I was eight, my parents had left Fortuna and moved to Grants Pass, Oregon, where they would remain for the rest of their lives. My father found work as a butcher in a local grocery store, and we initially lived near the city park before moving to a small house on an acre of land three miles outside of town. It was in Grants Pass that my father eventually started a custom butchering business located in the garage next to the house, which later expanded into the Sailer's Country Store.

As the eldest child, I was expected to help. That meant traveling with my father to slaughter livestock and wrapping meat for customers. Though I haven't eaten red meat in forty years, I can still instinctively shape a pound of hamburger to the exact size and weight. As the business grew into a small country store, so did my responsibilities—restocking shelves, serving customers, and managing the lunch counter. The work demanded discipline, early mornings, and an ever-present awareness of my father's mood. But it also taught me the value of hard work and customer service.

My mother loved being pregnant and having children, but the financial instability and my father's drinking took a toll. She suffered from periods of depression, retreating to their bedroom for days at a time. When this happened, the responsibility for my younger siblings fell to me. I was the one who got a toddler up in the morning, changed their diapers, fed them breakfast before school. I took care of them when I got home, helping my mother with meals and other household tasks. My sister Bonnie was also expected to "pitch in," as my mother phrased it, but as the oldest, I was expected to be the most responsible. I never resented it. In fact, I accepted it as the way things were. In my world, women had children, raised them, and managed the home. That was their role.

But my father and I clashed constantly. He demanded unquestioning respect, believed that children should be seen and not heard. If he gave an order, our only response was to comply. The dinner table was often the site of our battles. He would come in from the store at 6:00 PM, exhausted from working since dawn, wanting to eat in silence while watching the evening news. With five children, silence was impossible. When we failed to meet his impossible standard, he would erupt—sometimes with words, sometimes with the razor strap.

I was usually the one who defied him. As the oldest, I felt responsible for protecting my younger siblings. My mother's justification—that "he hits because he loves you"—offered no comfort. This cycle continued until my junior year of high school when he finally stopped using the razor strap on me. But that didn't mean the violence ended.

When my brother David was eleven, he talked back to my father. Not surprisingly my father challenged him to fight in the backyard. David lost. We all watched. My mother cried.

Church as the Stabilizing Force

Throughout my childhood, church was a constant. My mother was a devout Baptist, and every Sunday, without fail, we attended the First Baptist Church. Sunday school was followed by the main service, and as children, we were deeply embedded in the church community. For many years, my father did not attend with us, but when I was fourteen, he joined Alcoholics Anonymous and embraced my mother's faith. From that moment on, the church became central to my parents' lives, providing them with a social circle, a support network, and a spiritual anchor.

We participated in Bible study groups, church events, and holiday gatherings. Every Easter, we dressed in our Sunday best and attended the community sunrise service at 7:00 AM, followed by a family breakfast at a local pancake house.



Figure 6: First Baptist Church

When I was ten, I formally joined the church by responding to the preacher's invitation to come forward at the end of his sermon and accept Jesus Christ as my savior. Baptism ceremonies were held once a month, and I vividly remember the morning

of mine. I was led into a small room behind the baptismal tank and dressed in a white gown. When my turn came, I stepped into the waist-high water, the preacher steadying me.

“Do you accept Jesus Christ as your savior?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said.

He placed a white cloth over my mouth and nose and gently pushed me backward, immersing me completely before lifting me back into the air. I emerged dripping, water streaming down my face, and walked up the steps on the other side of the tank. I had expected to feel different, transformed somehow, but I didn’t.

As a high school student, I became deeply involved in the Baptist Youth Fellowship, which met on Sunday nights. By my senior year, I had been elected president and was invited to attend a summer camp for youth church leaders. It was at that camp that my relationship with the church began to shift.

I distinctly remember sitting in a service, listening to a missionary speak about his work in Africa. At one point, he told us, “If we don’t save these people with the blood of Jesus Christ, they will be condemned to spend eternity in hell.” During the question-and-answer session that followed, I raised my hand. “What if they never hear about Jesus? Are they still condemned?” “Yes,” he answered simply.

I was horrified. The idea that entire populations could be damned for something beyond their control seemed too cruel. Overcome with emotion, I ran out of the church and into the woods, shaking and crying. Though the church had provided stability throughout my life, that moment cracked something open in me. I didn’t stop believing in God, but I did leave the

church. I began a search for a different, more compassionate way to be at one with the universe.

The search led me to Buddhist meditation practices and a trip to Kathmandu, Nepal, in 1992. One of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries on the outskirts of the city, Kopan, was known for welcoming Westerners into its training programs. Although no programs were running during my visit, the monastery allowed me to come and meditate, which I did for two days.

They led me to a quiet area beside the meditation hall and served me butter tea—made from black tea, yak butter, and salt. I sat there as the monks entered and began their meditative chant. Around midday, a meal of dal and rice was brought to all of us. The following day, I had a short interview with Rinpoche before sitting in meditation again, just as I had the day before.

Each day, I was struck by the monks' relaxed demeanor. They sat comfortably, seamlessly blending silent meditation with chanting. Their composure remained unchanged—whether chanting, eating, or when a monk quietly stood up, left the room, and returned. This offered me a vision of spiritual life that was not divided into separate spheres of worship and daily existence. Instead, there was an embodied unity between life and practice. Sitting there, I felt a deep desire to cultivate this way of being—one in which spirituality was not an isolated ritual but an inseparable part of everyday life.

Escape to the Page and the Stage

Our small, three-bedroom, 1,100-square-foot house at 3737 New Hope Road was bursting at the seams with seven people. My

brothers, David and JD, shared one room, while my sisters, Bonnie, Peggy, and I shared another. Bonnie and I slept in a double bed; Peggy, the youngest, started in a crib and later moved to a single bed. We had one small closet and a single chest of drawers for the three of us. When I look at my overfilled closet today, I remember how limited my wardrobe was back then—one pair of shoes for school, another for church, and in the summer, we often went barefoot. My entire school wardrobe consisted of a few skirts and blouses. Privacy was nonexistent. My only escape was reading.

My parents owned few books—a set of encyclopedias, some Reader's Digest condensed novels—but my mother was a firm believer in the public library. Every few weeks, she drove us there, and I would leave with a stack of books. At first, I devoured *Nancy Drew*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and Zane Grey's Westerns. By sixth grade, I began methodically scanning the shelves for books with white covers—the library's marker for literary classics. Somehow, I convinced myself that if I read all the great English and French novelists—Austen, Hugo, Dickens—I could go to college and make something of myself.

A teacher named Mrs. Otis likely nurtured that belief. She taught fifth and sixth-grade social studies and had a rare ability to make each student feel valued. In her class, I began to understand that there was a world beyond the Baptist church and rural Oregon. She emphasized the responsibilities of living in a democracy, urging us to stay informed and to think critically about our role in the world. One lesson stuck with me: "A democracy is a set of responsibilities to ourselves and those we share the country with. We must understand where our rights end and another's begin." Her attitude stood out in our conser-

vative community, where non-white residents were effectively barred from living within the city limits.

In fifth grade, I joined the school band. My mother, who had played the viola as a young woman, bought me a clarinet. My siblings complained about the noise, but I practiced every day. By eighth grade, I was first chair in the South Junior High band. In tenth grade, I was one of only four underclassmen selected to join the Grants Pass High School band, which was well known throughout the West Coast. I traveled with them to perform in San Francisco, where we played during halftime at a 49ers football game, and to Seattle, where we attended the Century 21 Exposition in Seattle (1962). These trips exposed me to city life in a way I had never known.

I remember sitting in a San Francisco hotel room, watching the city wake up—flower stands opening, people hurrying down the sidewalks, taxis darting between streetcars. The stores were filled with a variety of goods I had never seen. Until then, my biggest shopping trips had been to Woolworth's or McClain's Department Store in Grants Pass. The idea of a life beyond small-town Oregon, one that combines the wide-open spaces of Zane Grey novels with the vibrancy of city life, took hold in my imagination and has never left.

Relationship to the Land

Beyond my household chores and work at my father's store, I had what would now be called a "free-range" childhood. My siblings and I spent most of our time outdoors with few restrictions. We told time by the position of the sun, as none of us owned watches, and I became adept at estimating the hour just by looking at the sky.

One of our favorite pastimes was damming the creek at the edge of our property, trying to create a pool deep enough to swim in. We hung a rope from an overhead tree limb and swung out over the water. Barefoot, we wandered fields, built forts, climbed trees, and invented elaborate games inspired by whatever books we were reading.

A neighbor owned two horses and taught me to ride. At first, I rode with them along the trails behind their house, but as I grew older and learned to saddle the horses myself, they let me take them out alone. I galloped across pastures and explored wooded trails, even though I was allergic to horses and always came back sneezing, my eyes swollen. When not on horseback, I wandered the trails made by the primary forest inhabitants, the deer. I would often sit and wait to watch for them as the sun created shadows on the path. They were an invisible presence.

The physicality of farm life was its own kind of education, a cultural synesthesia, a blending of sensory experiences. Pulling weeds engaged my whole body as I bent and reached for the carrots, beans, and corn. The smell of fresh vegetables filled the air—the earthy scent of uprooted carrots, the crisp snap of lettuce. Milking the cow had its own rhythm—one hand pulling down, then the other. Kneading bread dough was a steady, repetitive motion, turning it over and pressing it down until it was ready to rise. I still remember the joy of watching the loaves expand in the oven, the smell of warm bread filling the house, the taste of a fresh slice slathered with butter.

The Ever-Presence of Death

At nine, I nearly died.

The doctor diagnosed my illness over the phone as the flu, but my fever spiked, and the pain in my abdomen worsened. My mother rushed me to the emergency room. My appendix had ruptured, and I was taken into surgery immediately.

I spent a week alone in the hospital, grappling with the realization that I could have died. The doctor later told my mother that the infection had spread so far that if she had waited another three hours, it would have reached my heart.

After surgery, I spent three weeks at home recovering. I lay in bed, watching the autumn leaves fall outside my window, the world strangely quiet. Every fall, my thoughts return to that stillness.

But the greatest confrontation with death came when my sister Bonnie, at fourteen, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. For three years, my mother traveled with her to hospitals in San Francisco and Seattle for surgeries and chemotherapy. But the cancer persisted.

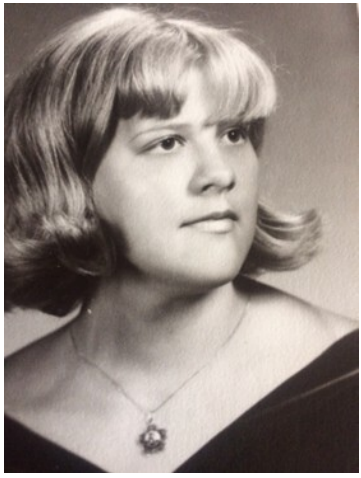


Figure 7: Bonnie Jo Sailer (1949-1967)

I last saw Bonnie over Christmas break, when I was home from college. I lay beside her in the bed we had shared for years as she cried out in pain. The morphine barely touched her suffering. I felt helpless. At one point, she whispered, “Jesus will save me.” I took her hand and told her he would. She died in March, at seventeen.

Her funeral filled the 300-seat Baptist church. People streamed into our house for a week, bringing food and comfort to my mother, who was drained from years of hoping and fighting.

Bonnie had been my closest sibling, the only one close in age who shared the daily challenges of my father’s drinking. I often wonder what kind of person she would have become and if we would have been friends.

Somatic Modes of Attention: Metaphors to Live By

Looking back, certain phrases from my childhood echo—particularly those my father repeated. “If it’s too tough for the rest of the world, it’s just right for a Sailer.” It reflected his harsh upbringing, his time in World War II, his struggles with alcoholism. Life was meant to be endured, not enjoyed. Yet, paradoxically, another guiding sentiment in his later life was the Serenity Prayer:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Two opposing worldviews: one built on toughness, the other on surrender. In my youth, it was his toughness that shaped me the most.

My mother's advice was different: "Love many, trust few, and always paddle your own canoe." It was a philosophy born of necessity. She had survived my father's drinking, his failed financial ventures, the unpredictability of their marriage, by adhering to these principles. Without her relentless sense of duty —paying off the mortgage, keeping a structured household, grounding herself in faith, she would not have endured.

One of the most enduring metaphors for this way of life was my grandmother's Christmas fruitcake. It was simple, frugal, made from what was available. The fruitcake was a lesson in making do, in stretching what little you had, in honoring tradition even when times were hard. Each year, I mix the eggs, shortening, spices, applesauce, raisins, walnuts, maraschino cherries, baking soda and flour to make my grandmother's recipe.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work on conceptual metaphors resonates with these experiences. They argue that metaphors are not just linguistic devices but deeply embodied ways of making sense of the world—neural patterns formed through sensory and motor experiences.[61] When I reflect on my childhood, I realize how many of my core metaphors come from movement, from the body's relationship to space, to land, to rhythm.

Wandering the forest, following deer trails, working alongside my father in the butcher shop—all these experiences formed a kind of embodied knowledge. The way I learned to listen, to watch, to move quietly through the world became the foundation for how I later engaged with movement traditions—Middle Eastern, African, Japanese Nihon buyō, Zen meditation. In a combination of these practices, improvised movement

unites with a deep somatic awareness in which stillness is central, echoing the quiet presence of the deer in the forest.

Animals, as Michael Kimmel suggests, hold a unique place in human perception. They exist as both familiar and unknown, sharing our biological world yet always maintaining an element of otherness.[62] In modern society, we have largely distanced ourselves from them, controlling their presence in zoos, farms, and entertainment. But my childhood experience with the deer trails offered something different. The deer were neither tamed nor caged; they were always just beyond reach, slipping through the trees, leaving only the faintest traces of their passing.

Jane Desmond, in her work *Displaying Death and Animating Life*, poses a powerful question: "Is this as we wish it to be?"[63] I return to this question often. The deer trails I followed as a child symbolize more than just a connection to nature. They represent an ongoing search for balance, for presence, for awareness—both in the physical world and as a metaphor for the spiritual journey of life.

Perhaps my lifelong fascination with somatic practices, with developing new ways of moving and sensing, is part of an effort to transcend the contradictions of my childhood. By engaging with my body, breath, and movement in new ways, I seek a deeper connection to the world around me—one that honors both the stillness and the aliveness I first encountered in the quiet mystery of the forest.

Chapter Four

Improvising Happiness

I dance the polka as a member of the Tolpa Folk Ensemble, a dance company in Eugene, Oregon, that performs European folk dances. The Oktoberfest audience cheers us on as we twirl and spin through the partner choreography, matching the one-two-three tempo of the polka. With each emphasized step on the "one," I am reminded of how repetitive the polka feels compared to the complex and exhilarating rhythms of the Eastern European and Middle Eastern dances I have studied since discovering my passion for dance during my sophomore year at the University of Oregon. I feel an odd sense of guilt toward my German ancestors for the boredom. I hide behind a forced smile. The dance ends with a twirling flourish, and I bow to the audience, my smile still in place.

Sitting at my computer, I prepare to deliver a keynote address for the 2024 Symposium on Middle Eastern, North African, and Central Asian Dances: “New Paradigms, New Directions.” My reflection stares back at me from the Zoom screen, bringing with it a cascade of memories—how improbable the journey of my life has been. The young girl growing up in rural Southern Oregon could never have imagined that one day she would speak to an international audience from her quiet office, sharing insights from decades of performing and researching Belly Dance.

She could not have foreseen how this art form would reshape her life, transforming her from a housewife and mother into a woman who would become the dean of York University’s School of the Arts, Media, Performance & Design—one of the largest arts schools in North America. The leaps—both personal

and professional—were staggering for the eldest daughter of Don and Hazel Sailer, raised within a rigid Christian ideal of gender and family, where men earned and women served.

Emotions are held in the body like books on a shelf, waiting to be opened

It is March 1973. I am a twenty-seven-year-old wife and the mother of two girls, aged two and three months. A friend from a consciousness-raising group convinces me to take a Belly Dance class, part of the second wave of feminism—a way to challenge patriarchy and reclaim ownership of our bodies. And so, I find myself with six other women, venturing into the countercultural realm of the goddess through the gestural vocabulary of Belly Dance—a form known as *raqs sharqi* in Egypt, though adapted for American audiences.

Our teacher, Scylla, is an artist and dancer embedded in Eugene's thriving counterculture, a world that rejects mainstream norms. This movement had flourished in response to the Vietnam War, environmental crises, and widespread social upheaval, driven by a yearning to create something better. Writer Eliza E. Canty-Jones describes the zeitgeist of the time:

> Americans coming of age during the mid-20th century found good reason to rebel against the status quo. The Vietnam War's ongoing carnage, police brutality at antiwar and civil rights protests, the continuing draft, the threat of nuclear war—heightened during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis—and the publication of Rachel Carson's environmental opus, *Silent Spring*, all sent a clear message about the future. Young people were shell-shocked, as 1970s Portland Commune member

> Lee Lancaster put it, especially after the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. Nevertheless, the mostly educated, white hippies mixed that shock with youthful optimism and set out to make a safer, more colorful, more peaceful world than the one their parents had built.[64]

Oregon, for many, was a Land of Eden and thus a place to build a new society. Eugene's *Register-Guard* reporter Bob Hart observed: "In the 19th century it was called settling the frontier; the pioneers who traveled the Oregon Trail were trying to better their lives. A significant part of the allure was the attraction of free land for settlement. More modern arrivals, many from the urban areas of California, were also probably attracted by the back-to-the-land aspects of the counterculture movement."[65]

This community helped shape a socio-cultural moment in Eugene and Lane County—one that responded not only to the Vietnam War but also to emerging environmental concerns. In 1967, Eugene resident Bill Wooten opened the Odyssey Coffee House, which became a hub for discussing land-based philosophy. Patrons of the Odyssey later created organic food businesses such as Springfield Creamery, Toby's Tofu, Sundance Market, and Kiva. They also established socially conscious nonprofit groups and cooperatives that provided healthcare, education, and housing. Published twice a month, *The Augur* disseminated political and community news to Eugene's left-leaning residents. Maverick Oregon Senator Wayne Morse (1900–1974), a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War, became a hero to student activists at the University of Oregon. Today, his legacy lives on in local landmarks like the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza and

the Wayne Lyman Morse United States Courthouse. Eugene native and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* author Ken Kesey also became a cultural icon, traveling across the country in a painted school bus as a "Merry Prankster"—a journey immortalized in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.*[66]

The class was unlike the modern dance class I had taken at university, where my focus was on the mirror at the front of the studio that reflected the teacher's movements. Scylla's class took place in her living room—a space in a two-story house on a tree-lined street near the University of Oregon. The sparse furniture, a couch and a couple of chairs, had been pushed aside to make room for movement. Posters calling for an end to the Vietnam War hung on the walls, silent witnesses to the larger cultural upheaval shaping our lives.

Scylla invited us into a circle and asked each woman to share her reasons for attending. The answers ranged from a desire for exercise to a deeper understanding of our bodies as women. My own reason, wanting to regain my shape after giving birth to my second child, felt simple, even superficial by comparison. But Scylla listened with respect, then gently guided us into movement.

Scylla led us through a set of sensuous movements that I had always associated with the performances of Hollywood stars such as Rita Hayworth. The focus on our pelvis and hips seemed both salacious and kinetically delicious. Unlike many Western dance classes, Scylla did not use metaphors to teach movement. Instead, she demonstrated the movement and encouraged us to discover the circular nature of the hips, the undulation of the spine, the relaxed gestures of the head, and the serpentine quality of the arms. After an hour of practice to the

rhythmic beat of a recorded drum, Scylla put on a lyrical version of the Greek folk classic *Misirlou* and suggested we improvise to the music using the movements she had taught us.

Feeling very uncomfortable, I retreated to a corner of the room. With feet firmly rooted to the floor in parallel position, I directed my gaze inward to the fluid movement of my head, shoulders, arms, torso, and hips in a set of gestures that varied from an accented shimmy to undulations of the arms and torso, as well as circles and spirals of the hips that alternated between vertical and horizontal. I seemed to know myself as individual parts—hips, legs, torso, arms, head—and not as an expressive whole. As we improvised to the music, Scylla reminded us to appreciate the support and balance provided by the legs and how the placement of the feet impacted the alignment of the pelvis, hips, and torso. She asked us to explore the possibility that emotions were evolving deep in our torsos and could be communicated via our arms and hands. She suggested that the direction and gaze of our eyes created a relationship between self and a potential audience. Slowly and with hesitation, my experience of isolations evolved into a fluid interaction of circles, spirals, and undulations of movement along the spinal cord and outward through the communicative gestures of my hands, arms, head, and eyes.

Scylla drew us back into the circle and encouraged each of us to take a solo turn improvising in the circle's center. I was terrified at the thought of being watched. Performing movements centered in my pelvis and hips that felt so intimate and thus vulnerable. Yet when my turn came, Scylla's presence offered a steady warmth, and I began to move, tentatively at first. As I danced I forgot being watched as fragments of myself—the

disjointed hips, torso, arms, legs—started to coalesce into something whole.

At the end of my turn, I felt a connection deep inside that expressed itself in a joyful, holistic experience of self that reminded me of afternoons I spent as a child, from ages 10 to 18, wandering in the manzanita forest across the road from our house. On sunny afternoons, I would cross the road and climb the hills into the forest. The burdens of being the eldest of five would slip away as I followed familiar deer trails. I placed my bare feet carefully on the path, mindful not to disturb the leaves that had fallen from the manzanita bushes. Above me, a hawk circled, and I wondered what prey it had spotted. I walked slowly, watching the sunlight flicker through the leaves, feeling the warmth of the sun on my skin. A breeze rattled the bushes, whispering across my face. I followed the deer trail over slopes and across streams, searching for signs of animals —deer, skunks, or possums. The forest was still, and I moved quietly, hoping to spot the elusive deer.

Underneath a manzanita bush, I found a deer bed, a circle of flattened vegetation where it had rested. I crawled into its bed and watched the light filter through the branches. I felt free and safe, cocooned in this quiet space. I stayed very still, hoping a deer might return and find me there. As I grew older, I climbed trees, testing each branch with my foot to ensure it could hold my weight. From the treetops, I would scan the forest, often catching sight of a deer with small antlers in the distance. The deer were elusive, always slipping quietly down trails or hiding in the bushes, waiting for me to pass by. They became my mysterious companions, their presence always sensed but rarely seen.

The deer and their trails through the forest became a metaphor for my connection to the land. There was a unified somatic awareness—an embodiment of the specific tasks and rhythms of rural life. The quiet intensity of listening, seeing, and feeling as I wandered the deer trails brought a heightened sense of free aliveness, amplified by the flow of light, the touch of the wind, and the subtle sounds of the forest. These experiences became a part of me, ingrained in my being. I had intended to attend only one class to start getting in shape after the birth of my second daughter, but with the memories of the forest's freedom, the class became a weekly event I eagerly anticipated.

After several classes, I began using the time during my daughters' naps to practice improvising with the movements. I pushed the furniture aside and turned on quiet, meditative music to complete a hatha yoga routine that integrated stretches with breath. When the music shifted to a rendition of a song made famous by Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, the stretches gave way to repetitions of hip circles and undulations, punctuated by sharp hip accents matching the music's rhythm. As I centered the movements in my pelvis, my imagination initially filled with orientalist images of Hollywood dancers from late-night television—Rita Hayworth as Salome, Hedy Lamarr as Delilah, and others. I felt as if I were reaching into an ancient past in which women defined history with their bodies. This was the opposite of the memories of my mother's service to male authority.

That authority became clear to me at a young age when my mother took my younger sister Bonnie and me to my Reichenberg grandparents to escape my alcoholic father. I watched my

mother's desires rebuked as deep-set German religious beliefs that a woman's place was with her husband took precedence.

My daily improvisations often led to tears as I tried to come to terms with the joy of dancing set against the realization that, even though my husband was not an alcoholic, I had unconsciously created a similar life of financial dependence and service that was an extension of my mother's.[67]

Scylla's role as teacher extended beyond instructing us in the dance's basic vocabulary. She also guided us in creating our identities as performers. She held workshops to help students create costumes that expressed individual aesthetics while adhering to a general design: a top and hip belt to highlight torso and hip gestures, a skirt or pants to enhance fluidity, and ankle bracelets to accentuate the movement of bare feet. My years of sewing my own clothes, including the dress I wore at my wedding, were put to work stitching tops, belts, and skirts, then covering them with beads designed to catch the light as I moved.

Putting on the costume, the result of choosing the fabric and carefully placing each bead, was both exciting and emotionally confusing. What stared back at me in the mirror seemed like a parody, misaligned with the joyous freedom I felt when the music moved from the center of my being down through my legs and out through my upper torso, face, and arms. I was not alone in my confusion. An ongoing dialogue circulated among Scylla's students and in the broader dance community about the legitimacy of the dance form. Did it offer a means of self-definition, or were we simply replicating an orientalist version of femininity—one popularized by stage, film, and television portrayals of a salacious orient?[68]

Regardless of how I felt about the costume, the ecstasy I felt in dancing prevailed. I wanted to deeply embrace that joy and bring it into the rest of my life. I continued taking lessons, and when Scylla asked if I wanted to perform at a local counterculture venue, I agreed.

Images from the Second Wave of Feminism

To set aside our emotional confusion, a group of us from Scylla's class would meet for coffee afterward to share our views on the class, our lives, and the feminist authors we were reading, including Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1976), and Gloria Steinem's *Ms. Magazine*.[69] These writers challenged the economic and social structures underlying women's oppression that we felt in our daily lives.

Many of us also turned to the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas and her research into the myths and artistry of Old Europe, published in volumes such as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: 6500–3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*.[70] I attended a weekend workshop she gave in San Francisco. Sitting in the audience, I drew inspiration from Gimbutas's descriptions of the religions of Old Europe, with their symbols of circles, spirals, and watery images of serpents. These symbols reminded me of the movement that resided within me. In this worldview, women were not servants of men, but part of an earth-based orientation known as Gaia consciousness. This is considered a complex ecological system in which a change in one aspect of the earth's environment influences the entire system.

For many of us in Scylla's class, the "belly" in Belly Dance came to symbolize the centrality of being a woman, wrapped in the image of a goddess who had control over her existence. She could through the performance of the dance resist the objectification of the male gaze and gain independent control of all aspects of her life.

Embracing the conception that I embodied an ancient myth: I overcame my natural shyness and set aside concerns about being perceived as an "oriental fantasy" to complete a five-minute solo performance at a local coffee house. I felt emotionally exposed and physically vulnerable in the beaded Belly Dance costume. Thankfully, my trembling—evidence of my fear—blended seamlessly with the fluid movements of Belly Dance. I walked off the stage exhilarated by the appreciative applause of friends and the warm smiles of fellow dancers. We shared a deep camaraderie as women who had taken a step toward reclaiming our bodies. I spent the rest of the evening on a performance high.

I knew I wanted to repeat the experience. I took every opportunity Scylla offered to perform at venues around Eugene—from coffee houses to the local Saturday Market and even once for the Elks Club. With each performance, I became more certain of who I was as a dancer with an evolving artistic voice. With each performance, the gender roles that had defined my life began to slip into the past.

I was less torn between aspects of a socially derived self—daughter, sibling, wife, mother—and me, a dancing woman. After one afternoon practice session, as I heard Kimberly and Berri waking up from their naps, I remembered sitting in Mrs. Otis's sixth-grade class. After lunch, we were required to sit qui-

etly while she played a half hour of classical music. My body sat still at my desk, but my inner self danced across the stage of my imagination.



Figure 8: Barbara Sellers-Young, Eugene, Oregon, 1978

In that moment, I acknowledged that I had always wanted to be a dancer and that this was what I wanted to do with my life. I vowed to myself that, although I did not know where a path guided by a love of dance would take me, I would follow it. And I did. In doing so, I came to terms with growing up on the rural outskirts of Grants Pass in Southern Oregon, in a family shaped by alcoholism and a fundamentalist form of Christianity that rigidly positioned women's roles.

Engaging the Aesthetic Landscapes of North Africa and the Middle East

The number of women interested in Belly Dance classes in Eugene increased throughout the 1970s. After only two years of lessons, I was asked to teach as part of the Eugene Parks and Recreation program. I began with one class of twenty women and quickly added three more, teaching from 5:30 to 8:30 two nights a week. I used the same approach as Scylla: demonstrating initial movements and encouraging students to explore their individual movement styles through improvisation.

I realized, however, that I knew very little about the history of this dance form in North Africa and the Middle East and headed off to the library. During my research, I discovered *Arabesque*, a bi-monthly journal founded in 1975 by dancer and Near East Dance Troupe artistic director Ibrahim Farrah. *Arabesque* was dedicated to promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of Middle Eastern dance, featuring articles on dance techniques, cultural contexts, and profiles of notable performers.

Through this journal, I encountered writings by Arab scholar Lois al-Faruqi (1926–1986) and Turkish scholar Metin And (1927–2008).[71] They described the diverse solo improvisational dance forms performed by both men and women in North Africa and the Middle East. These included *raqs sharqi* (literally “oriental dance” in Arabic), *raqs misri* (Egyptian dance), *baladi* (dance of the countryside), *cifte telli* (a Turkish dance), *majlesi* (Persian for "dance of the social gathering"), and the lesser-known *cifte cifte* and *karsi-karsija* (variants of the Turkish *cifte telli* and *karsilama* in Serbia and Macedonia).

Historically, solo dances were performed as entertainment at family celebrations, with men and women dancing in separate spaces within family compounds. Depending on the family's wealth, professional dancers—*Gawazee* (female) and *Khawal* (male) in Egypt—were sometimes hired to entertain guests at weddings and other gatherings.

I also explored anthropological accounts of the Middle East, particularly the works of Elizabeth Fernea, from her experiences living in Marrakech and an Iraqi village to her conversations with women in *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*.[72] Through her writings, I discovered feminist authors Nawal El Saadawi and Fatema Mernissi, as well as Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz. These authors became part of my ongoing quest to understand the cultural underpinnings of a dance that was transforming my life.

From the Belly Dance grapevine, I learned a dancer from Jordan named Badawia was teaching in Portland, Oregon. Badawia had a distinctively earthy, grounded dance style that often echoed the raw, evocative spirit of Bedouin traditions. Her costumes reflected folkloric influences, featuring simpler, more natural textiles and designs. She was a mesmerizing and haunting performer with a unique charisma. After attending one of her performances, I decided to take lessons. I drove to Portland every Tuesday and Thursday. I was not alone; many dancers drew inspiration from her blend of authenticity, cultural pride, and expressive storytelling.



Figure 9: Badawia

Badawia performed at a Greek restaurant, like several Middle Eastern-themed restaurants and clubs that had developed following World War II. According to ethnomusicologist Anne Rasmussen, these venues were "an outgrowth of the community music events of Arab Americans" and an extension of their commercial aspirations, aiming to present a "captivating portrait of the self to the other."[73] Restaurant and club owners enticed customers with promises of a Middle East infused with mysterious harems, sensuous and provocative dances, and ancient rituals. These images were enhanced by the live music, often performed by Middle Eastern musicians. Those of us attending Badawia's classes aspired to one day be asked to dance in one of these clubs.

Having performed professionally along the West Coast, Badawia had a broad knowledge of the roots of Belly Dance. She sponsored a series of workshops featuring dancers who had returned from studying in North Africa and the Middle East. These included Aisha Ali from Los Angeles, who taught the dances of Tunisia's Folklore Companies and the *Gawazee* of Upper Egypt; Morocco from New York, who specialized in the dances of the Moroccan *Shikat* and *Guedra* (a Tuareg women's dance); and Ibrahim Farrah, who introduced the Lebanese style of Belly Dance. Inspired by these workshops, I left my daughters with their father and spent a month in San Francisco studying Egyptian-style *raqs sharqi* and the dance of the *Gawazee* style with Amina Goodyear, the artistic director of the Aswan Dancers.

The result of studying with Badawia, Amina Goodyear, and others was an expansive movement vocabulary—one situated at the intersection of the grounded quality of Bedouin movement, the twisting gestures of Tunisian six-count rhythms, the spiritual release of the *Guedra's* head and hand movements, the relaxed simplicity of the *Shikat*, and the complex classical music of Egypt, which combined specific rhythms with musical modes (*maqamat,* singular *maqam*).

The musical demands of the Egyptian style were challenging. They required me to embody musical phrases with microtonal intervals and to attune to the emotional qualities associated with different moods, occasions, or themes. This was particularly important during the improvisational *taqsim*, which relies on the emotional resonance of a specific *maqam*. In a *taqsim*, a musician explores the potential of a *maqam* by embellishing, ornamenting, and modulating its characteristic phrases and in-

tervals. Each *maqam* offers a framework for creative exploration, allowing a dancer to convey profound emotion through subtle shifts in phrasing and expression.

I spent hours listening to the musical compositions of Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Farid Al-Atrash, as well as the songs of Umm Kulthum. I spent even more time learning the intricacies of the musical phrasing, rhythms, and emotional tones of instruments like the ney, qanun, and violin. Over time, I discovered that if I listened deeply—with my whole body—I could feel at one with the flow of tempo, phrasing, and emotional tone. This became a distinctly different mode of attention, one I later realized I had begun to apply to personal interactions.

By then, I had students who had completed beginning classes and shared my curiosity about folkloric dances. Three of us traveled to San Francisco for a weekend workshop led by Jamila Salimpour, who presented her unique approach to Belly Dance and the folkloric dances showcased in her company, Bal Anat. Inspired by Bal Anat, we returned to Eugene and formed our own company: Gamal El Rooh.



Figure 10: Gamal El Rooh

Gamal El Rooh used recorded music for dances representing the *Guedra* of Morocco, the *Gawazee* of Upper Egypt, and the dances of Tunisia. These performances were interspersed with solo Belly Dance routines that featured dancers balancing swords or Egyptian-style candelabras. I became the artistic director and organized performances along the I-5 corridor, from Seattle's annual Folklife Festival to Rogue River Community College in Grants Pass, Oregon. I was also increasingly invited to teach workshops. To facilitate travel, I bought a Volkswagen bus that slept three people and took my daughters with me. It became routine: we traveled to Portland, Newport, Roseburg, Bend, Seattle, and other cities. I would teach a class while they entertained themselves with puzzles and board games. Afterward, we would go out for pizza and ice cream. I felt I was showing them that one could be both a professional and a mother.

In addition to performing and teaching in Portland, Badawia arranged for dancers to perform in venues across the Pacific Northwest, including Canada. She approached me about performing for three weeks at Theo's in Penticton, British Columbia, offering \$350 a week for two shows a night. This was significantly more money than I earned teaching dance, so I accepted.

Theo's Restaurant, established by Cretan immigrants Mary and Theo Theodosakis, featured a central courtyard surrounded by whitewashed walls with blue accents, adorned with pottery, textiles, and artwork from Greece, all interwoven with lush climbing plants. The menu highlighted recipes the Theodosakises had brought from their homeland. The restau-

rant served as a cultural hub for the 140 Greek families living in Penticton and the Okanagan Valley.

Although I had performed at local coffee houses in Eugene, this was my first time dancing in a restaurant where I was the designated Belly Dancer. For each performance, I entered through an archway at the back of the restaurant and danced in a small area along a wall. The limited space restricted me to small, torso-centered gestures. Negotiating this space, I was reminded of movies featuring Tahiya Karioka, the Egyptian film star of the Golden Age (1940s–60s), who starred in over 120 films, including *Shabab Imra'a* (A Woman's Youth). In those films, her dance space was often confined by the camera lens.[74]

Despite the joy of dancing, I did not enjoy performing for audiences in which I felt objectified. I particularly disliked men who tried to tuck dollar bills into my costume and voiced my objections to Mary. This created ongoing tension with both Mary and Theo, who likely would have preferred to send me home—but I had a contract. Finally, one day, Mary pulled me aside and said, "Do you see that man at the table by himself? His wife is dying of cancer. He comes here to watch you dance because it brings him joy and helps him forget how badly he feels." Her words painted a starkly different picture than the one I had imagined of myself as an artist. It didn't change my overall view of performing in restaurants, but it did shift how I approached the remaining shows. Before each performance, I began to imagine the struggles and sorrows that the diners might be carrying. I projected joy and happiness into every gesture, hoping to lift their spirits, if only briefly.

That conversation with Mary also helped me appreciate the nightly ritual at Theo's: waiters would bring out plates, throw

them down to shatter on the tiled floor, and then perform a solo rebetiko dance among the shards. A man's solo dance was a distinct improvisation of his movement style, an expression of his emotions. The breaking of plates served as a cathartic release. By the end of the three weeks, I came to understand the celebratory power of a community bound by wine, food, and dance. It was a stark contrast to my religious upbringing, where dance was considered inappropriate. I was once chastised by a church leader for bringing to a Sunday night youth group a Peter, Paul and Mary album illustrated with a line-dancing group.

Dancing two 20- to 30-minute sets each night for three weeks honed my technical vocabulary. The constant presence of an audience sharpened my awareness of performance as dialogue. Despite the insight I gained into dance's role in communal life, I knew this wasn't an experience I wanted to repeat. Inspired by the success of Gamal El Rooh, I aspired to be a dancer and choreographer who created stories for the stage—not a restaurant performer. Unsurprisingly, Badawia never acted as an agent for me again. In fact, she once told me, "Your personality doesn't fit restaurants."

Listening to the echoes of my lived body

Looking back, I realized that my journey into dance was never separate from the life I had already lived. It was, in many ways, a return. The rhythms of my rural childhood—the bending to pull weeds, the walks in the forest, the tactile listening required to milk a cow—formed an early vocabulary of movement rooted in somatic awareness. These gestures of daily survival laid the groundwork for the improvisational freedom I would later discover in dance, where moving from the center of my

body unlocked echoes of wandering barefoot through the manzanita forest: moments of aliveness that asked nothing of me but presence.

In the quiet joy of those early dance classes, I encountered not only my body but my lineage—my mother's constrained devotion, my own inherited patterns of service—and began to unspool those histories through tears and gesture. Yet this unfolding was not without friction. The tension between the ecstatic, inward truth of dancing and the external gaze invited by beaded costumes left me caught between self-ownership and self-display. Still, the desire endured—unmistakable since childhood afternoons spent silently dancing in my imagination to the classical music played by my sixth-grade teacher. That quiet longing, carried across decades, ultimately fused with feminist purpose, aesthetic agency, and cultural inquiry. Dance became not just a practice but a site where memory, history, and identity coalesced into something newly whole.

I became determined to change the direction of my life. I asked for a divorce and applied to the master's program in Dance at the University of Oregon. I also decided to take advantage of an opportunity to join a month-long tour of Egypt. Guided by Deliah, a performer with experience in Egypt, the tour promised the chance to see live stage performances, visit museums and ancient sites in Alexandria, Cairo, and Luxor, and take a lesson with Mahmoud Reda—the famed director of Egypt's national dance company, the Reda Troupe. I traveled to Egypt in the summer of 1979 and began the master's program in dance that fall.

Chapter Five

Egypt and After

Egypt is the mother of the world.[75]

What does it mean to move through history—not only as a visitor to ancient landscapes, but as a dancer embodying the rhythms of a culture? How does movement, shaped by tradition and transformation, become a bridge between the self and an unfamiliar world? These were questions I did not yet know how to ask when, in the summer of 1979, I embarked on a month-long journey to Egypt. At the time, I was a dancer searching for deeper artistic expression, aware of the Western fascination with Belly Dance but uncertain of its cultural origins beyond my own experience in American dance communities. I knew Egypt as the home of the pyramids, the Nile, and a history stretching back over 5,000 years, but I had little understanding of how dance fit into that lineage—or how it might reshape my own sense of embodiment and artistry.

The tour, organized by Delilah, a dancer with performance experience in Cairo and the Middle East, had two objectives. The first was historical: to immerse participants in Egypt's rich past through visits to Cairo, Luxor, and Alexandria. The second was artistic: to witness Egyptian dance in its cultural setting, from entertainment venues to dance companies shaping the contemporary landscape. What I did not anticipate was how these two elements—history and dance—would become inseparable, influencing not just my technique but my understanding

of cultural continuity, appropriation, and personal transformation.

Upon stepping into Cairo, I was immediately aware of the co-existence of multiple temporalities. The ancient world stood in the shadows of the pyramids, ever-present and unshaken by time. The modern, tourist-driven Egypt unfolded in hotel lobbies and organized excursions catering to Western visitors. Yet, it was in the streets, nightclubs, and daily rhythms of the city that Egypt felt most alive, a place where tradition and innovation interwove, where dance was not only performance, but an embodied language of heritage and identity.

By the time I left, I would come to understand dance not just as movement but as a vessel of cultural history, shaped by colonial legacies, nationalist projects, and the lived experiences of those who carried its traditions forward. I would also confront the contradictions of my own positionality—an American woman engaging with a dance form shaped by a history far beyond my own. More than just an exploration of technique, this journey to Egypt marked a turning point in my relationship with dance and the ways in which the body can both navigate and negotiate cultural meaning.

It was my first time traveling outside the United States and negotiating my way through international airports, passports and customs. I arrived at New York City's Kennedy airport in the late afternoon and tried to call friends who had said I could spend the night at their house. The phone was not answered, and I really did not know what to do so I found a place to sit and read. As the afternoon moved to evening, to night, the airport emptied out until I was the only person in the terminal who was not a member of the janitorial staff. For someone who

grew up in a small rural Oregon town and had only been on one domestic flight in the United States, it was overwhelming to be in an empty airport in a major city in the middle of the night. My ability to immerse myself in a book helped what may have been a frightening experience. The next morning, I was relieved when I found the other members of the tour at the Royal Air Moroccan desk.

Halfway through the flight the plane hit two air pockets which caused it to fall dramatically as the passengers screamed. The plane was able to adjust but we ended up landing in Geneva, Switzerland. We were each given a voucher for a local hotel and the one in which I stayed was a lovely old hotel that overlooked Lake Geneva. The room and lobby areas of the hotel were filled with antique furniture and seemed as picturesque as the movies *Charade* and other movies filmed in Europe. For breakfast there was a delicious combination café latte and croissants, the first time in my life I had either. The group arrived at the airport to discover the plane was still not able to fly so we had been transferred to Air India for the trip to Egypt and I was placed in first class. I discovered that I loved the luxury of space, the food and the service.

We arrived in Cairo, Egypt in the early evening. As soon as one stepped off the plane the air was warm and humid and there was the scent of Frangipani flowers that are grown in gardens around the Nile River. We arrived at the Sheraton Hotel alongside the Nile to be confronted with guards with rifles posted at the entrance and still others who requested that we submit our bags to being searched. Delilah, the tour leader, explained that there were many in Cairo unhappy with Anwar Sadat signing a peace accord with Israel which led to Egypt's sus-

pension from the Arab League and strained relations with several Arab nations. The business community had recognized the potential of tourism as a vital economic driver. The role of the guards was to keep the hotel guests safe.

Cairo as Lived Space

My first impression of Cairo[76] was one of immense energy. A sprawling metropolis teeming with life yet shadowed by visible poverty. The city seemed to pulse with contradictions. Two story high building with wooden shutters but missing panes of glass lined bustling streets. These streets were a kaleidoscope of movement, where donkeys and horses pulled wooden carts, and vendors hawked their wares, from stacks of magazines to fragrant garlands of jasmine flowers. Traffic surged without signals to direct it, save for the occasional policeman striving to coax some order from the chaos of cars, carts, and pedestrians.



Figure 11: Streets of Downtown Cairo

The people added their own vibrancy to the cityscape, their attire reflecting Cairo's remarkable diversity. Western-style clothing mingled with men dressed in flowing jellabiyas and women draped in long dresses and hijabs. Occasionally, one would glimpse the traditional Saudi or Kuwaiti dress, with men donning thoebs and headdresses, lending an international flair to the streets. Beyond the wide avenues, narrow alleyways twisted like forgotten veins through the city. Here, the architecture of old Cairo revealed itself in quiet corners—latticed windows cloaking the women within, offering them a view of the world outside while protecting their privacy from prying eyes.

The days in Cairo unfolded like a history lesson brought to life. Day tours of Cairo and the environment included a visit to the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, located in Tahrir Square.



Figure 12: Old style windows on backstreet in Cairo

Walking up to the museum, with its distinctive pink-hued architecture and a grand archway adorned with intricate carvings, I

felt as if I was walking into some neoclassical past. Moving from room to room, it felt as though I was breathing in Egypt's history. The Pharaohs were represented in sculpture, their deaths commemorated in mummified remains and intricately carved sarcophagi. My thirty-three years seemed dwarfed in the time represented by the exhibits. I had a similar feeling when we visited the pyramids of Giza or attended the Pyramids Light and Sound Show that was highlighted by the Sphinx. I kept trying to imagine what it would feel like to grow up in a country with a 5,000 years of continuous history. Would I sense a deeper sense of time than I felt growing up in Oregon of parents who could only trace their history back to their parents' generation.

Five times a day we would hear the call to prayer, a reminder that we were living in a country where Islam was the primary religion. A trip to the area referred to as the Cairo Citadel included the Mosque of Muhammad Ali and a vast cemetery referred to as the City of the Dead.



Figure 13: Sphinx and Pyramid

Standing in the huge courtyard and looking up at the multi-domed Mosque of Muhammad Ali, I was transported outside the noise of the city streets. Looking up at the mosque's multiple domes, I was intimidated by the power represented by the mosque's size. I carefully obeyed the information signs that designated appropriate behavior from the ritual of washing and the removal of shoes, to covering my head with a scarf. Throughout the mosque's interior there was an interplay of an exacting aesthetic of architecture and chandlers that created a physical sense of reflection. It was no effort to remain quiet as I simply wanted to be still.

The City of the Dead, a sprawling area of tombs and mausoleums, was an easy walking distance from the Mosque of Muhammad Ali. Our guide explained that the cemetery was home to approximately 25,000 people, many of whom had found shelter in and around mausoleums, some as large as small mosques. Standing at an overlook to the cemetery, I tried to imagine what it would be like to be living in one. It then occurred to me that Egypt itself with its thousands of years of history and monuments to that history from the annual floods of the Nile River to the pyramids was a cemetery of historical memory.

Another day we visited two churches that represented Egypt's minority population. A 14th Century Coptic Church of the Virgin Mary that was built above the crypt that was believed to have provided shelter for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus for two years after its flight from Jerusalem. Until the visit to the church, I was not aware that Coptic Christians were a significant minority population in Egypt (10%) and that they claim to be the descendants of ancient Egyptians and many of their tra-

ditions can be traced to this period. The Jewish synagogue was the oldest one in Cairo and contained a set of old scrolls from 350 BCE. The Jewish population in Egypt has dwindled from over 100,000 to only 400 since the 1967 war with Israel.

Cairo After Dark: Urban Nightlife and Social Space

Egypt became the film and entertainment center of the Middle East shortly after film was invented in the late 1890s. “The first cinema theater opened in 1900, and by 1911 there were eight theaters in Cairo and three in Alexandria, all showing American and European films.”[77] (Fraken 1998: 266). Responding to political and economic changes following World War I, Cairo also became in the 1920s the entertainment center for the Middle East. New cabarets and restaurants were opened to entertain the growing tourist industry. One of the most successful of these new nightclubs was Syrian actress-dancer Badia Masabni’s Casino Opera House, which opened in 1926. An astute businesswoman, she offered all-round entertainment, including a daily program just for women. A woman familiar with western films, she created cabaret revues, a primary component of which was dance, that would appeal to tourists and those of the Egyptian upper class, whose tastes were dictated by America and Europe. Thus, the dance, of wedding and saint day celebrations, was transformed from a primarily stationary solo improvisational form to a floor show that borrowed from the all-female image of Middle Eastern dance produced by American film corporations. The professional male dancers described by Edward Lane gradually disappeared from public life.

Beyond identifying the dance as a primarily female form, the cabaret staging influenced both the costume and movement vocabulary of the dance. The layers of pantaloons, vests, head coverings, scarves, belts, and coin necklaces were replaced with a body-revealing two-piece costumes adapted from the Hollywood films of the period that accentuated the belly and hips. The body's alignment was adjusted upward to project out to an audience. This change was enhanced by dancers' wearing shoes with heels rather than being barefoot. Instead of improvised performances, the dancers were choreographed to use their arms to frame and otherwise display the torso of the body. Movements from ballet, such as the arabesque, were combined with a hip lift to allow the dancer to gracefully fill the space of a nightclub stage. Dancers decreased or limited their use of finger cymbals for accompaniment. The veil, a piece of gossamer fabric that was a staple of the Hollywood version of Belly Dance, became a standard component. Finally, the cabaret stars did not always perform solo but were often backed by a chorus of dancers.

It is 11 PM the nightclubs of Cairo were just beginning to fill up. I am there with other members of the tour to see the headliners at the Casino El Leil, a nightclub located in the Giza district, Soheir Zaki and Fifi Abdou. A twenty-piece orchestra of Western and Middle Eastern instruments started a classical piece of Arab music. Soheir Zaki in a sheer costume decorated with sequins and a hip belt whirled onto the stage. I was fascinated with Zaki's ability to move in total harmony with the orchestra as she gracefully improvised a series of rhythmic and melodic changes all the while maintaining a joyful smile on her face as if to invite the audience to participate in her visual ren-

dition of the music. The orchestra brought the dance number to a close and began another musical number that the audience immediately recognized with some clapping along to the music. To the delight of a family, their small children got out of their seats and began an improvisational dance next to the table. My attention was diverted from the stage to the family celebration. Suddenly, the music changed and Soheir Zaki was ushered back onto the stage. This time she was wearing a long sequined dress and carrying a cane, a reference to the village life of Egypt.

Members of the audience called out to the Soheir Zaki in joyous appreciation. She reached out to the audience inviting them to come to the stage and dance with her. Most of the audience remained in their seats, but a few men and women joined the dancer on the stage. Of these, one or two showered the dancer with money as a demonstration of their gratitude. The dance ended with a final salute by the dancer to the onstage dancers and the audience as she left the stage. Reflecting on her performance, I was struck by the elegance of Soheir Zaki's demeanor friendly but at the same time she commanded the stage with her elegant presence.

Fifi Abdou, a wealthy performer highly sought after for elite weddings, had a distinctly different style from Soheir Zaki. She wore a beaded Belly Dance costume with a stomach piece of sheer fabric that covered the stomach. Like Soheir Zaki her performance was in two sections—raqs sharki and baladi with cane. The compositions of Mohamed Abdel Wahab and other composers were featured in the raqs sharki section. The baladi musical roots included urban as well as village music. This rhythmic form allowed Fifi Abdou to incorporate references to village life and food preferences, clothing styles, gestural vo-

cabulary and an earthy character whose rural life. Throughout, she performed a combination of dance and audience participation that was a combination of jokes, wit, song and gesture including a call and response. Abdou's style of performance created an intimacy with the audience that was distinct from Soheir Zaki. Although I appreciated Fifi Abdou's breaking of the fourth wall, the style was for me too casual, and I was uncomfortable with it. It was also clear I was the outsider as the audience loved her rendition of the dance.

Another evening was spent at Sahara City, a big tent nightclub on the edge of the pyramids. The inside was red and looked like a circus tent with a stage in the middle and chairs set up around low brass tables around it. The floor of the tent was marble with rugs scattered around on the floor. I found the evening show raunchier than Soheir Zaki and Fifi Abdou's performances. The performances of the unnamed Belly Dancers introduced suggestive face gestures and hip gestures that left little to the imagination. The evening also included a whirling dervish performance that incorporated a skirt like cape that was lifted into the air as the performer turned in circles.

The climax of the evening was a staged healing ceremony, the Zar. It began with a group of people marching through the audience with a man leading with a coffer of incense in one hand and a tall stick in the other. The rhythm played only on a large round hand-held drum called a riqq. made of wood or metal, with a thin membrane of fish skin stretched across its frame. The group arrived on stage and formed a circle around a girl who was supposed to represent the person seeking exorcism…there was confusion on stage as she fell to the floor and the lights went down and a figure dressed totally in black with

a bright face mask representing the possessing force leaped around the stage. He disappeared and the lights came up, the girl regained consciousness.

Luxor: A Designated UNESCO World Heritage Site

After two weeks in Cairo, we flew to Luxor. The plane flight was an experience as one of the pilots left his seat in front of the plane to serve us tea. This is of course before the events of 9/11 in 2001 and the controls that would take place over doors that separate pilots from passengers.

Luxor is the site of the Ancient Egyptian city of Thebes that served as the capital of Egypt during the New Kingdom (16th to 11th centuries BCE). The ruins of the temple complexes at Karnak and Luxor exist within the city's limits. Across the Nile from the monuments, there is the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens that includes the tomb of Tutankhamen. Of all the places we visited in Egypt, this was the most crowded with tourists. Yet, there was an air of silence walking through the temple complexes as the groups of people spoke in whispered tones.



Figure 14: Temple at Luxor

For me walking through the Karnak and Luxor temples was a little like walking through the 2,000-year-old Redwood forests of Northern California as each conveyed a history of the land. Luxor was the consequence of the development of agriculture due to the floods of the Nile River. The Redwood forests were the result of relatively mild climate and soil of the coastal regions of California. Of course, I have stretched the comparison as one was built by slaves and the other created by the absence of human forces. I was just attempting to find within my experience something that would compare with the magnificence of the buildings and sculptures.

To walk in the valley of the Kings and visit the burial site of Tutankhamun or the temple of Queen Hatshepsut is incredible. Despite the number of tourists there is stillness as one walks through the columns or stands at the doorway of Hatshepsut's Temple. I kept imagining all the years of history that not only includes the Ancient Egyptians, but the Egypt's conquerors from the Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, French, and British and the Egyptian people who despite the changing fortunes of history still live here.

We spent one day visiting Tutankhamen's Tomb. This has been the most popular site in the Luxor area and as a result long lines of people get into it, primarily as they only let small groups at a time go through it. We had to wait in the heat of an Egyptian morning for two hours and were delighted when we could enter the coolness of the tomb down a flight of stairs that emptied into a long passageway decorated with well-preserved hieroglyphic paintings. We were not allowed to take photos and were asked to hurry so the next group could come through. More recently, I was in New York at the Metropolitan Museum

of Art looking at a set of hieroglyphics and really had an opportunity to reflect on the experience in Egypt and appreciate the story telling aspect of the art.

The trip to Luxor provided an opportunity to take a boat ride on the Nile to observe the Banat Maazin sisters' performance of the centuries old Ghawazi dance tradition. They are believed to have roots that trace back to the Dom people, a nomadic group with origins in South Asia who settled in Egypt. They have become cultural icons in the region in demand for entertainment at weddings and saint day celebrations.

The excursion boat was a two-story affair with wooden decks bottom and top. The top deck was open to the air with chairs and benches with a railing around the edges. The musicians dressed in turbans and jellabiyas were already playing rebab and darbuka when we got on the boat. Two dancers from the Banatt Maazin family got up to dance. They were dressed in translucent top covered by a short highly decorated vest and a skirt that started at the hips and went to the center of the calf. The skirt had an overlay of long decorated strips that moved with the hip gestures of the dancers. The primary vocabulary was a movement of the hips accompanied by repeated pattern on the finger cymbals. When they were not dancing, they sang and in between they encouraged members of the tourist audience to get up and dance with them. Watching the Banat Maazin on a Nile boat complimented the visits to ancient Egypt and left an indelible impression of historical continuity.

Alexandria: Founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE

The last week was spent in Alexandria. We took a flight to Cairo and a taxi to Alexandria, which was its own experience, as the

driver sped in and around tractors, horse drawn carts, and other cars. While in Alexandria, we visited the site of the famous Alexander library and the catacombs of the Coptic community as well as taking a class from Mahmoud Reda and visiting beach front home.

Mahmoud Reda was born in Cairo, Egypt, on March 18, 1930, as the eighth of ten children. His father was the head librarian at Cairo University. Mahmoud Reda grew up during this period of ascendancy for middle-class educated Egyptians whose children studied at English-style private schools and public universities, watched American movies and participated in the growing international sports community. Early in his life, Reda established himself as an athlete, first in swimming and later gymnastics winning a gold medal for free exercises in the Pan Arab Sports Championship in 1950 and competing in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. However, for Mahmoud and his brother Ali, dance was a passion, in particular the dances of Hollywood icons Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly.

Aided by the support of his brother Ali Reda and the family of dancer Farida Fahmy, Reda in 1959 founded the first folk dance company in Egypt. It consisted of only fifteen members, all dancers and members of urban middle class. The movement vocabulary Reda's evolved combined his personal background in gymnastics and ballet with borrowings from the musical theatre vocabulary of Hollywood films as well as his personal research, conducted into Egypt's village dances. In his book *Choreographic Politics* Anthony Shay suggests two primary influences on Reda's hybrid movement vocabulary.[78] The first was the impact of colonialism on the psyche of the Egyptian elite and the second was the role of Russia, specifically the

tours of the Moiseyev Dance Company. To appeal to the Egyptian upper class and contribute to the process of nation-building under Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mahmoud Reda's gestural language needed to resist the Orientalist discourse of the West while at the same time living comfortably within the political identity of the Soviet bloc and pan-Arab identity. And yet, it still needed in its hybrid structure to be recognizably Egyptian and as such appeal nostalgically to the popular conception, acquired from Egyptian films, of baladi or village life. His goal was not to recreate the traditional dances of Egypt but to integrate the villages' movement vocabulary in a project that would gesture towards an Egyptian national identity.

Mahmoud Reda's popularity as a choreographer can be attributed to the fact that he captured on stage fundamental images and social relationships of Egyptian society based on family and community and placed them within the conversational context of the larger global network of the Soviet Era. Anthony Shay observes, Reda's choreographies can be described as 'It's fun in the Village' in which men and women in the village flirt with each other as they go about daily tasks as well as the honoring of national events "like the building of the Aswan High Dam and other nationalist themes."[79] Another category of choreography was "fantasy choreographies like Ginniyit al-bahr (Mermaid of the Nile), which had more complex narratives similar to European ballet librettos like Swan Lake, but with an Egyptian flavor."

In keeping with the gender dichotomies of Egyptian society, the physical style of the Reda vocabulary is separated by gender. Men dressed in the style of the countryside spin, leap, jump, hop, lunge and pose, often in relationship to the women

on the stage. Women in a variety of colorful costumes that cover the entire body swirl, sway and subtly move their hips or gently move their torsos in integrated whole-body gestures that do not primarily rely on the articulation of the hips and torso. The movement vocabulary for women in the Reda Troupe is therefore distinct from the performances on stage or in Egyptian film of the popular dancers of the day Samia Gamal and Tahiya Carioca in which the hips are the primary movement focus.

Men and women are staged, as groups of either men or women in intricate spatial organizations. Women's presentation is happy, quietly flirtatious and demure. Men are openly friendly, bold and vigorous, and project themselves into space. What women and men did not do was dance together with the same physical partnering one finds in the films of Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly, in which the man physically manipulates the body of the female dancer. Instead, the graceful continuous fluid movement through space, which was the hallmark of either Astaire or Kelly, is performed separately, with distinctively different movement vocabularies for men and women.

Like other national ensembles from Eastern Europe, the Reda Troupe features moments when men and women are in separate lines, but often this is replaced by pairs of women or pairs of men, or pairs of a man and a woman. In male/female pairings, the man often poses with his gaze apparently on the woman, as she demurely smiles and twists or shifts her hips in happy rhythm to the underlying drumbeat. One such example can be seen in an early filmed performance of a village dance, the Hagalla. In the beginning segment, Mahmoud Reda leaps in the air as he turns to the right; he then drops to his knees,

quickly switches balance on his knees, and begins to clap as Farida Fahmy comes over the rise of the hill using an inner and outer arm gesture to swish her floor-length skirt. Facing Reda, Fahmy sways from side to side followed by turning in a circle while Reda stands, hops back, does a quick 'side, touch, side' on either side, hops with one leg back and the opposite leg forward and lands on one knee, looking up at Fahmy as she continues dancing while he keeps clapping.

In other choreographies, there are variations of this theme. A man lunges to the side of a woman and bends deeply on one knee while she dances. He might circle her with a hopping or leaping step as she dances in the center. In this respect, the spatial organization of Reda's choreography is reminiscent of the appropriate social dancing between appropriately related relatives at social gatherings. As such, it mimics the social positioning and responsibility of both men and women. A woman is at the center of the home and a man is both the observer, and by the barrier of his body, her protector. The family is therefore the center of honor and woman its physical manifestation. This physical representation of men and women is the opposite of the Orientalist fantasy of the seductive female and overly libidinous male of Hollywood films.

The set of relationships that was depicted onstage mirrored the organization of the company backstage. The press consistently observed that the Reda Troupe operated as a family, with Farida Fahmy's parents Hassan and May Fahmy acting as chaperones to protect the reputations of the young women dancers. Mahmoud's brother Ali brought his extensive experience and entertainment-world connections and his wife, Farida, was a dancer with the company. Mahmoud's wife, Nadeeda, also

Farida Fahmy's sister, used her art training to design costumes, while her mother May was the wardrobe mistress. The Reda Troupe was often described as a family company, with many marriages actually took place among company members coincided with the Egyptian value of the importance of family.

The combination of the choreographic style and the organization of the company allowed Mahmoud Reda to project an image of Egypt in the group's concerts that moved across the class divide between Western-educated elites and the working class of Cairo, and between urban and rural populations. Two films *Mid-Year Holiday* (1962) and *Love in Karnak* (1965) which featured the Reda Troupe in richly costumed and sharply choreographed dances were celebrated as an exemplar of Egyptian artistry and talent. The positive reaction of the Egyptian public and the company's international reception led to government financial support beginning in 1961.

This representation of Egypt in performances at international festivals on stages in major cities globally during a time of pan-Arab unity and continuing through Egyptian politics of the Sadat, Mubarak, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood and Sisi acted as a counter discourse to the emergence in the 1970s and beyond of the goddess culture and imitations of Egyptian dance in North America and elsewhere. The Reda Troupe's impact was not limited to nation-building in Egypt but also challenged the oriental depiction of Egypt as timeless, mysterious and erotic.

The hour-long class with Mahmoud Reda was held in a large studio-sized space that was the practice space of the Reda company. Reda's first question to us was what our background in dance was. He wanted to know if we had formal training in

dance or had we only studied what we referred to as belly dancing. The majority had limited what he considered to be formal dance training in modern or ballet, instead, in general the group had taken dance classes at a local recreation center or dance studio. Nodding his head in acknowledgement of the renditions of our dance backgrounds, he started the class with simple patterned movements across the floor to which he added a low-level arabesque. Once the floor pattern was learned, arms that extended the body into space were added. We repeated these movements at first going across the floor vertically and then on a diagonal. Following which, he started another sequence of a three-step turn. This was taught first as a pattern of the feet in which ultimately a gesture of the arm was added and practiced again and again with turns to the right and then left. The first phrase with the arabesque was then combined with the three-step turn and ultimately ended with a slight hip lift.

With its emphasis on the integrated movement of the entire body, Reda's style was distinctly different from the approach I had learned in dance classes in the United States, which focused on the hips and torso with the arms and hands framing the movement. Yet, I felt comfortable with Reda's vocabulary, as it more closely aligned with the modern dance training I had received. In that moment, I realized the potential for integrating movement styles across cultural boundaries.

After class, I walked back to the hotel with George, the only male member of our tour. As we made our way, an armed Egyptian soldier approached us, assuming that George, as an African American, was a pimp and that I, a blonde woman, was for sale. He demanded to know my price.

We tried to ignore him, but he persisted, following us closely and speaking loudly. Determined to appear unfazed, I grabbed George's arm and kept walking, forcing myself to maintain an ongoing conversation as if the soldier weren't there. I refused to let my fear show. He didn't leave until we reached the hotel lobby.

By the time we arrived, my hands were shaking. It wasn't the first time I had truly feared for my safety—any woman walking the streets of a large city must be streetwise. But this was the first time I had been regarded as something to be purchased. On top of that, I was in a foreign country, with no idea what recourse I would have had if the soldier had drawn his gun or tried to take me away. Even the next day, during the train ride back to Cairo and later at the airport, I struggled to regain a sense of ease.

After Egypt[80]

The trip to Egypt offered an immersive journey through history as I walked down bustling streets, explored vibrant marketplaces, and visited museums and religious sites spanning from ancient times to more recent eras. I also watched performances that connected deeply with historical traditions while remaining vibrant parts of the contemporary cultural scene. Although I had studied Egypt's history in world history courses, I did not fully grasp its complexity until I visited Cairo, Luxor, and Alexandria. There, I experienced the unique coexistence of ancient heritage with modern life. This immediacy transformed Egypt from a subject in a textbook into a living, breathing narrative embodied in the daily lives of its people. Yet raks sharki culture for me presented contradictions.

Anthropologist Najwa Adra points out that Raqs Sharki/Belly Dance when performed as part of family celebrations in Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa and the Middle East has been a form of playfully improvised self-expression of joy performed by men and women that unifies family and community.[81] Yet, when I visited Egypt the primary public image of a dancer was a woman dressed in a costume reminiscent of Hollywood movies. I found it difficult to reconcile my personal journey of existential awareness with Egypt's staged version. I returned home from Egypt, turned on American Belly Dance music, focused on the stillness at the center of my being at the conjunction of my pelvis and spine to rediscover my relationship to the movement. As I improvised circles, spirals, and undulations, I remembered the Egyptian dancer's complete correspondence with the music. Instead of focusing on improvising movements, I became aware of the underlying drum rhythm, its accented nuances and transitions, as the melody of the orchestra—kanoon, oud and nye—flowed within it. I was no longer dancing. I was instead becoming the music. As each musical phrase moved through me, images of Egypt from its streets to its temples, churches, and mosques flickered across my memory. My entire somatic being seemed attuned to a culture through a deep somatic resonance that moving with the music unlocked.

On reflection, I realized that the dancers of Egypt had guided me toward an experience of tarab, a deep emotional revelation of the music.[82] My experience deepened into an awareness of the emotional nuance of each gesture. It was a somatic realization that would become part of my teaching and performance. Ultimately, through the movement vocabulary of belly dancing, I developed a profound sense of place and deep personal un-

derstanding. However, my engagement with Belly Dance unfolded within the cultural ethos of Eugene, Oregon, shaped by its countercultural and feminist movements. In this context, the need for self-definition and resistance to the dominant narrative of women as solely wives and mothers overshadowed any consideration I might have given to the issues of the cultural appropriation and reinterpretation of the dance form from its country of origin.

Graduate Program in Dance and the Tolpa Folk Ensemble

In the fall of 1979, I began pursuing a master's degree in dance at the University of Oregon. The graduate program offered a comprehensive blend of studio-based practice in modern ballet, and folk dance, alongside academic courses in choreography, aesthetics, history, and theory. It also included training in Laban Movement Analysis and an introduction to somatic studies through the Feldenkrais technique. Having not studied dance as an undergraduate, the program was both immersive and rigorous, challenging me to expand my conceptual understanding of dance while deepening my kinesthetic appreciation for the diversity of its practices.

There were also several performing groups associated with the department and with my interest in ethnic dance I became involved with the Tolpa Folk Ensemble. In Tolpa performances, I performed Belly Dance solos and as a company member the dances of the Balkans, Turkey, Poland, Armenia and Germany. My dance vocabulary expanded to include the irregular rhythms, often in 7/8 or 9/8 time of the Balkan and Turkish dances. There was a heightened awareness of a stable upper body as an anchor for the quick-moving steps. This interplay

taught a deeper connection to the ground, an awareness of the pulse beneath each movement, and the ability to respond fluidly to complex rhythms. The communal aspect of the line dances fostered a sensitivity to group dynamics, as I adjusted to match the collective flow of other Tolpa members. The partner dances of Germany and Poland of turns and rotations challenged me to navigate shared space with precision and coordination. Armenian dances deepened my connection to storytelling through gesture and grace as my feet pressed into the floor while my arms and hands traced subtle gestures. The subtle interplay of grounded and flowing motion refined my ability to express depth and emotion through my body. From these traditions I learned to navigate complex rhythms, the grounded strength of Turkish and Armenian dances to the buoyant energy of German and Polish traditions. The combination expanded my capacity for contrast and nuance.

Solo Movement Artist

The ultimate impact of performing with Tolpa was a desire to compose solos that combined the movement vocabulary of Belly Dance with that I performed as a member of Tolpa. I fused together the experience of improvising to music gained from years of Belly Dance with the Turkish 9/8 rhythm, Balkan foot work and hip gestures from Belly Dance for a lighthearted character dance I titled “Marinella”, after a Turkish version of an Italian song "La Canzone di Marinella." The costume inspired by folk dance attire was a flowing, layered skirt and a fitted bodice and a blouse with long, wide, flared sleeves with calf high boots. Marinella gave me permission to be outside any

bounds of determined movement vocabulary and compose dances based on improvisation that were character studies.



Figure 15: Barbara Sellers-Young performing Marinella

I also created a woman-focused narrative dance to a classical Arabic composition "Joumana." Dressed in a red leotard and skirt enhanced by a simple red scarf tied around the hips, I consciously created images associated with the traditional portraits of women that I drew from the art in Tutankhamen's tomb, paintings of women by such Oriental artists as Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) and movement vocabulary from Mahmoud Reda's choreographic style with an overlay of gestures that had become part of my onstage persona. In its intersection

of images, I sought to complicate an easy objectification of women and of Belly Dance as exotic. The haunting refrain from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Ballet section titled the Arabian Dance was the impetus for a dance titled *Remembering*. The costume was a floor length sleeveless dress with different colored panels that began at the hip. A silk veil a similar color to the panels was an extension of the dress. The dance's gestural language integrated the movement of the veil with the fluid potential of the dresses panels to create a sense of timelessness that is for me the core of a memory. Beyond the joy of creating a dance, my goal was to provide an alternative to the stereotypical Orientalist ballet versions. I indirectly challenged the Belly Dance community by performing these three pieces at Belly Dance festivals in Seattle, Portland, Corvallis and Eugene.

As I began synthesizing my experiences in Egypt with the academic and performance opportunities in Oregon, I found myself increasingly engaged in conversations about the legitimacy and representation of Middle Eastern dance in university settings. The following letter, published in *Arabesque* magazine in 1985, was my public response to an editorial by Ibrahim Farrah, a respected figure in the dance community. Writing this letter offered me a space to articulate the tensions I faced as a dancer negotiating both the creative richness and the cultural misunderstandings surrounding Belly Dance. It captures my early efforts to advocate for the form's inclusion in academic discourse while reflecting on the social and institutional barriers that complicated that pursuit.

Dear Ibrahim,

This letter is in response to your recent article in *Arabesque*. VOL. X, No. 5 1985 in which you mentioned the importance of getting well-qualified Middle Eastern dancers on the faculty to teach “danse Orientale” at universities and colleges. Since | have recent experience in this area | would like to share it with you.

In 1979 | decided that although | loved the Middle Eastern dance form that | had been practicing for four years, | did not enjoy the cabaret performance space. My conservative upbringing had not prepared me for the style of behavior that is found there and recent jobs at clubs in the Northwest and Canada had proven to me that they were not an environment where | could fulfill my creative potential in the ways that | desired. Therefore, | decided to apply to the master’s program in dance at the University of Oregon to broaden my knowledge of dance and how it could be used as a theater form. Thanks to some very supportive references from some respected modern dancers within the community, | was accepted.

The initial reaction of the dance faculty was somewhat skeptical, but as | demonstrated to them that | was a dancer interested in movement in general, then their attitude changed. Last fall | was asked to replace one of the faculty that was on sabbatical and teach a course titled “Dance Cultures of the World” and this spring | am co-producing with the Community Center for the

Performing Arts a concert titled “Timeless Images,” in which members of the master’s program in modern dance are participating. A compatriot of mine in Oregon, Joan Kent, who decided to get her degree at Oregon State University in Exercise Physiology, has had similar positive experiences. She was, while a student, an active member of the university modern dance company and performer of Middle Eastern dance at the folk-dance companies ‘annual concert.

This does not mean that there is a positive attitude concerning “danse Oriental” within the university at large. Several of the women who work on campus either as faculty or within the administration take private classes with me, but do not want the rest of the university to be aware of their involvement. Their primary reason for this attitude is the sexist connotations of many of the “danse Orientale” presentations, ie. The soliciting of money in the costume in clubs or the use of the dance as a belly gram at parties for forty of fifty-year-old men. They cannot rectify that image with the image they have of themselves as capable, strong, independent women who still desire to keep in touch with their feminine side. The standard image of the sexy Belly Dancer (accompanied with usually a real lack of total movement control) as displayed in most of the mass media is the reason given by some university administrators for not including “danse Oriental” as part of the curriculum in university dance departments. Universities who are currently very hard hit by cut-

backs in budgets are not going to risk censure in support of a dance form that has a somewhat questionable media image.



Figure 16: Barbara Sellers-Young, Remembering

Therefore, | think that my experience is twofold; 1) individual dancers have had great success in being accepted within the university environment, 2) the public's popular image of the dance keeps the form from becoming totally accepted. A third consideration is that most dance departments are interested in theater dance for (many dance departments are included part of theater) and “danse Oriental is usually presented, is an improvisational form that does not use many of the compositional and choreographic techniques of modern or ballet. This is not to say that could not and that there are not man sophisticated choreographies created to yours and other companies. My point is that these, unfortunately, are not given as much attention within the media as would |desired, so that the aver-

age faculty member of a dance department is generally not aware of them.

The exciting part of this form, as it extensive in all its movement diversity within United States, is that it is perfect preparation for the dances from other parts of world, from Africa to Afghanistan. | recently watched a PBS televised program called “Black Dance in America” with members of the University of Oregon dance department. They were amazed at the undulating arms of Charles Moore in a dance called the “Ostrich.” “How does one do this they asked?? “Well, like this” I replied, demonstrating the technique have found the same response in the ciass that | have taken with my modern and dance friends, from Afro-Caribbean to Armenian and Persian. It took me a while to realize that it was the diversity of technique that | learned in “danse Orientale” allowed me to move across so large geographic area. It really takes tremendous ability to be a good Near Eastern dancer. It requires ability in body control to manipulate that body in space as well as in rhythm and to control that rhythm on the cymbals and the body at the same time, which often are in counterpoint to each other. It further demands the use of both the floor and the veil as extensions of the original movement and creates an emotional atmosphere that is both personal and same time shared with members of an audience. It is an incredible form that sooner or later is bound to win recognition by being placed within university curricula.

> There are ae many reasons to appreciate Arabesque, one of which is that it considers questions such as you raised in your last article. All dance forms are facing the problem of trying to survive in difficult economic times, but this form, which has brought me so much that words can't express, has been around for a very long time and will only continue to grow and change into the twenty-first century.
>
> Thank you.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Barbara Sellers-Young[83]

The new choreographic direction was a culmination of years of improvising in the studio, teaching, performing, the formation of the Gamal El Rooh, the trip to Egypt, the master's dance program and the Tolpa folk ensemble. Performing these dances, I felt as if I had not only redefined my somatic self, but I put this redefinition in service to presenting stage images that challenged the stereotypical version of Belly Dance and was the beginning of my articulating an artistic voice. The repeated improvisational process of moving from the pelvis, spine, and brainstem—centers of neurological and embodied being—outward to the movement of the appendages in space opened an internal psychological door. I could be anything I desired. From this revelation, I cultivated a personal metaphor for living, which I called 'going through the open door.' This approach to life symbolized an embrace of possibility and authenticity, standing in stark contrast to the restrictive psychological

frameworks I had previously inhabited. I was not merely fusing dance forms—I was integrating my history, feminist convictions, and evolving aesthetic into an artistic voice that refused objectification and embraced complexity. Dance became both archive and act of transformation, allowing me to articulate a narrative of womanhood, place, and cultural encounter that was entirely my own. Besides which, a door opened with an opportunity to spend a year in the Southern Sudan, and I walked through.

Chapter Six

Dancing with the Earth: The Azande

While the previous chapter explored the sensual textures and political reverberations of Middle Eastern dance through both lived memory and dialogue with Saffi, the following chapter moves into a different cultural and geographic frame: South Sudan. Here, the embodied archive opens through fieldwork notes rather than recollection, and the stakes of movement shift from performance to survival, kinship, and communal belonging. Yet, the dialogic process continues—both with the communities I encountered and with Saffi, who helped surface the ethical tensions, cultural translations, and epistemological questions embedded in this chapter. The body, once again, becomes the site through which knowledge is felt, challenged, and made legible.

The snake's head is cut off, yet the body still wriggles

From July 1981 to July 1982, I lived in Yambio, South Sudan, where I researched the dances of the Azande, the region's primary ethnic group. The Azande lived in mud-thatch homes without running water or electricity and grew what they ate. Except for a ride on the back of a lorry, they walked from place to place. This stood in stark contrast to my life of living in a wooden house next to a paved road near grocery stores stocked with crops grown by agricultural corporations. Life in Yambio was profoundly confronting—then and now—as I realized that I walk on the earth, not with the earth. As the Azande proverb

in the title suggests, that even after a major problem is acknowledged, its effects and repercussions still linger.

I arrived in Juba, the capital of the southern region of Sudan, aboard a World War II-era B-52 cargo plane from Nairobi, Kenya. From Juba, I traveled overland by jeep to Yambio, a small community near the borders of the Central African Republic to the west and Uganda to the south. The few all-weather roads built by the British between 1920 and 1950 were destroyed during the civil war between 1957 and 1972.[84] The 300-mile journey took eight hours, following a dirt road that was little more than a track riddled with potholes created by runoff during the rainy season. The only vehicles on the road were land rovers owned by development project personnel and high government officials or huge lorries driven by Arabs that carry merchandise with paying passengers stacked on top.

The price to ride a lorry was high, approximately $12 (the average monthly income is less than $20) for the trip from Juba to Yambio. The average travel time was three to four days as the lorry bumps and rumbles along. Wealthy Sudanese owned bicycles and traveled between communities on them. A bicycle costs $150 and only those people associated with the government, or a project could afford one. People, in general, did not travel outside their immediate area except to seek medical care or to visit a dying relative.



Figure 17: Road from Juba to Yambio, South Sudan 1982 (Stock Photo)

As we drove from Juba, images from films based on Africa, from Hemmingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* to the various Tarzan films flashed across my memory as I viewed the open savannah of tall grass dotted with occasional acacia trees that stretched to the horizon. The realization that I was not in the Africa of my imagination was made real as I watched the landscape gradually transform into soft rolling hills with thriving, dense greenery. Along the way, I spotted periodic herds of antelope. Near Yambio the landscape was lush with forests of trees filled with birds and herds of monkeys living in the upper reaches of the trees. Flowers were hidden among the foliage.[85]



Figure 18: Forest outside Yambio, South Sudan, 1982

Living In Yambio: Lessons in Adaptation

Located two miles from Yambio, the house I lived in for a year was the first of my adjustments to life in Sudan. It was a fully furnished prefabricated steel structure, spanning about 2,000 square feet. It featured a combined living and dining area, four bedrooms, a separate kitchen, and two spacious porches. Surrounding the house was a field of grass, cut down to ground level. The compound also included a parking area on one side, a large garden at the rear, all enclosed by a bamboo fence.

The house was equipped with certain conveniences: water delivered by truck, a gas-powered stove, and a generator that functioned intermittently. A team of Azande male staff—a cook, a houseboy, a driver, and a guard—were also part of the arrangement. Managing a staff was a completely new experience and one with which I was not comfortable. I found I needed to set my discomfort aside and learn to work with them to adapt to the lack of appliances such as a washing machine and dryer.

Ultimately, they became my guides as they acted as interpreters to people who came to the door, and as cultural facilitators in getting to know the community.



Figure 19: Home in Yambio, South Sudan, 1982-83

Being near the equator, daylight and nighttime hours in Yambio were nearly equal year-round, with sunrise at 6:00 AM and sunset at 6:00 PM. Having lived my life in the Pacific Northwest it was a profound experience to have days go by and no incremental change of light that designated the yearly evolution of the seasons. The twilight of each day signaled a silence that was only periodically disrupted by the sound of an animal or on some nights the sound of drums. Sitting on the front porch I would listen and watch for the moon to come up either in its fullness which penetrated the dark or its waxing and waning versions. On nights of the new moon, the darkness was impenetrable. The darkness evoked a stillness in me that at first was fearful as living without ambient light was discomforting. As the days and months went by, I became comfortable in the stillness to the point of relishing it.

The year was divided into two distinct seasons: a dry season from December to April and a rainy season from May to November. I had arrived during the rainy season, marked by mas-

sive thunderstorms. Coming from the Willamette Valley in Oregon, where thunderstorms occurred in the Cascade Range to the east, I was used to distant flashes of lightning and the distant roll of thunder. There, storms were never close enough for the lightning and thunder to seem like one. I was entirely unprepared for the local thunderstorm's ferocity.

The storms generally began around 4:00 in the afternoon, about two hours before dusk. The lightning would illuminate the entire sky, and the thunder was so loud that the house would tremble. The rain would fall in torrents, forming an impenetrable wall of water that obscured everything beyond it.

The house had a tin roof but lacked the grounding antennae commonly seen in the midwestern United States, where similar storms occur. Fortunately, the beds and other furniture had rubber pads on the legs where they touched the cement floor, providing some measure of safety. During my first months in Yambio, I would sit on a bed or a couch throughout the storms, trying to make up stories to distract myself from my fear of the lightning and thunder. Over time, the storms became familiar, like a noisy friend.

The heart of Yambio was its bustling market, where local farmers sold fresh vegetables like tomatoes and cassava alongside an array of fruits, including bananas, mangoes, papayas, and oranges. Arab merchants offered everyday essentials such as soap, matches, cigarettes, gum, and other small necessities. Surrounding the market were small Arab-owned stores that stock a variety of goods, including cotton and polyester fabrics, shoes, ready-made clothing, rice, oil, sugar, tin or enamel glass wear and powdered drinks imported from Zaire, Kenya, or Northern Sudan. A tailor with a treadle sewing machine re-

ceived orders for custom-made clothes. Men's clothes were shirts and slacks. Women, dressed in brightly colored polyester dresses they purchased from the sale of vegetables in the market. Beyond the central shopping district were provincial buildings, the police station, and local schools.

The farmers and the Arab traders were skilled negotiators, and I was not. They would suggest a price and I would pay it. Anissa, a staff member from the Agricultural Institute, watched me shop in the market and suggested that next time I go with her. I attempted to imitate her style, but my language facility never matched her fluency. Edward, the cook, informed me that as a white woman who wore pants and was associated with a government project I was like a chief's headman and was expected to pay more. This designation as white of indeterminate gender would become part of the local narrative as the local oral singer, Gutura Mark created a song about the woman who wore pants. I, of course, never admitted that I wore pants for protection, as I was afraid of the black and green mambas as well as the cobra snakes that inhabited the grassy paths I walked each day.

A bird cannot build its nest without the tree

My experience in Yambio was as an outsider who was attempting to grasp the native point of view with specific reference to the role of dance among the Azande. Building relationships within the Azande community was a gradual process involving a series of informal conversations. My initial exchanges were with the Azande house staff, who spoke English and generously shared their life stories with me. Edward, the cook, recounted tales of his childhood in Yambio and sang Azande songs while

playing the Seegro, a traditional Azande guitar. Martin, the driver, invited me to witness the rituals surrounding the birth of his son. Paul, the houseboy, introduced me to relatives who were hosting a Pumbo ritual as well as introducing me to Amelia, a Bellanda shaman who organized the Zar, a trance ritual associated with the Arab community. In addition to these connections, I also engaged with the expatriate community and the Catholic clergy. Eventually, I hired a translator, Arcata, which allowed me to communicate with other members of the community who had been recommended to me during earlier conversations. Looking back, it was a slow but enriching process of building rapport, one that continually grew and deepened over time.



Figure 20: Landscape in South Sudan, 1982

From these conversations I learned that the Azande were, in the 1600s, a conglomeration of Niger-Congo language speaking tribes that were being forced east by more powerful African groups. They were generally disorganized until the eighteenth century when the Avongara gained control. The ruler considered responsible for creating a unified interdependent king-

dom was Ngura (1735-80). His sons continued to conquer the weaker groups to the north and east until halted by the Arabs and then the British. The Avongara owed the success of their expansionistic policies to their internal political organization. Society was rigidly stratified, with the apex or chief representing the most powerful military force. This position was passed from father to son, although all sons could be contenders. A female descendent was never in line for inheritance, not even through her own sons. When an Avongara of the ruling family reached adulthood, he often preferred to move east and establish his own territory rather than stay in his father's domain and vie with his brothers for leadership. On the death of the father, each son inherited equally if he was able to maintain a strong military position in the area that he had ruled prior to his father's death.

The rest of the population was organized politically and geographically within the Avongara system. The chief's compound was located along a stream in the center of his territory. He was surrounded by his subordinates, and they were by their subordinates. There was an equitable interchange between the Avongara and the commoner. The Avongara supplied an organized government, a system of defense so that the farmer could grow his crops without fear of invasion and a court to which he could take his grievances. The individual Zande provided labor for the Avongara's fields and warriors for his military campaigns. It was a system that worked well if there was new territory into which the jealous sons of the Avongara leader could expand.

As I visited Azande in their compounds of tukuls (traditional huts) with mud walls and a thatched roof, I was reminded of

how similar their lifestyle was to what had been depicted in exhibits at the Nairobi National Museum. I watched them as they used a hoe to loosen compact soil areas, level the soil and create areas for planting millet, casava and peanuts. I sat and visited with Azande women as the millet was ground by hand between two stones and food was cooked over an open wood fire for a porridge called bekende. A portion of the millet was set aside to make beer, gbangara. The brew was fermented in a clay pot and served in a gourd cup (inga). Sometimes I would be offered a gourd of beer and if the family was wealthy enough listen with them to the music of Zaire or Khartoum on their cassette recorder.



Figure 21: Azande Compound, Yambio, South Sudan, 1982

I often reflected that the daily life of the Azande reminded me of my rural upbringing, where most food resources came directly from the land. We got milk from a neighbor's cow, tended a half-acre garden and canned its vegetables, and picked berries and fruit that we turned into jam or preserved in jars. I also helped my father, who ran a custom butchering business.

My job was to wrap meat from chickens, pigs, and cows brought by our neighbors. In this way, living in Yambio evoked memories of the life I had led before attending university.

With a sense of nostalgia, I attempted to use the land around the house to recreate elements of my rural past. Despite arriving in August—late in the wet season for gardening—I planted a small garden of marigolds in front of the house, a patch of cassava, and built a chicken hutch for fresh eggs. Over time, I came to appreciate the rhythm of equatorial days: working during the cool hours of the morning, resting in the humid heat of the afternoon, and sitting on the front porch as twilight unveiled stars unhidden by ambient light.

The termite that eats the wood is hidden within the wood

South Sudan was and still is one of the poorest regions of the world where death is an ever-present reality. There were environmental risks of contaminated water due to lack of sanitation management that could lead to the spread of cholera and typhoid. Mosquitoes caused malaria. Blackfly bites created river blindness. The region was home to venomous snakes, green and black mambas as well as cobras. The forests were filled with potentially dangerous elephants, leopards, and herds of monkeys. Food and nutrition were impacted by the uncertainty of rain too little—drought—or too much—flood. There were limited or no medical facilities and roads between communities were unpaved making travel to seek medical care difficult. Despite these dangers, the Azande had adapted to their environment through traditional knowledge and practices such as the use of medicinal plants for illnesses and snakebites

and building homes in safe areas away from known wildlife paths.

The other contributor to life's uncertainty was the constant political instability from years of civil war. This meant that there was always the possibility of violence such as being challenged by the police at checkpoints that existed between communities. At one checkpoint between Yambio and Tambura, a government representative while pointing a pistol demanded I hand over my land rover to him. The driver and translator quickly backed away from me demonstrating by their action that they were a separate group. After a tense conversation in which I mentioned every important political figure in Yambio I had met, the government representative allowed me to continue. I found the experience terrifying in part because of the response of the driver and translator. Later I thought that if I with my government identification faced challenging confrontations how much more frightening it would be for the Azande who were traveling without those connections.

The environmental and political uncertainty of life contributed to death being a time of great tension. An atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust was related to Azande concepts of death and witchcraft. In the past, no one in Azande society was believed to die of natural causes. Immediately following the burial of the deceased, the male relatives would consult the oracle and ask whether the person died because of his own involvement in illicit magic or because someone had practiced witchcraft against him. If the oracle's answer was that witchcraft was involved, the relatives then visited the local witch doctor and had a spell placed on the person who was responsible. They did not know the name of the person, only that witch-

craft had been practiced and that the bagbudma or magic would seek out the responsible person and kill him. An example of a witch doctor's spell is as follows:

> Kura bagbudma the person who had killed Kamunde let him die this month let bagbudma go into everything, he stumbles and be sick, let wounds come out of his rectal and shake him in thunder, let him cry "That what made me to kill this innocent man. Oh! let his sons come to save me" (Eugeneo, personal communication, 1982).

After each new death in the community, the relatives would consult the oracle to discover whether the vengeance magic had sought out the correct person. Occasionally presents were made to the witch doctor to keep the magic working. Finally, the oracle would indicate that magic had found the correct person and imposed the ultimate penalty. Of course, at the same time the relatives of this recently deceased person were consulting their oracles and placing a hex on the person responsible for that death.

This was one reason why Azande preferred to live on isolated homesteads away from neighbors who might attempt, for whatever reason, to bewitch them. The belief was that someone killed the person who died, but until the vengeance magic was successful no one knew who that person was. Even after it had accomplished its purpose, the only people who were aware that witchcraft had killed the newly deceased were the male relatives of the previously deceased person. Since all close neighbors were suspected, a method of proving your own innocence was to attend the Pumbo in honor of your dead neighbor.

Drinking and dancing with neighbors provided an opportunity to reconnect and resolve tensions.

Rhythms of Belief: Azande Ritual Dance

Movement that we would define as dance once played a significant role in many aspects of Azande life. It occurred during occasions such as the circumcision ceremonies of young men, rituals associated with death, witch doctors' performances to combat witchcraft, and annual celebrations for the chief. However, by 1981/82, except for the Pumbo—where dance remained a primary focus—many of these traditional occasions had either ceased to exist or no longer included dance.

For example, circumcision ceremonies, once communal initiatory rites for multiple young men of the community, are now performed individually at local dispensaries, devoid of their traditional ceremonial elements. Similarly, witch doctors, who once danced to ward off witchcraft, now primarily perform for visiting dignitaries as demonstrations of traditional culture, with their former role largely supplanted by practices of Catholic and Protestant churches.

Following the end of the civil war in 1972, dance was incorporated into celebratory performances for political and school holidays, where local tribal groups were encouraged to showcase their native dances. The performances were informal by Western theater standards, with little in the way of staging or choreography. The children's performances mostly featured pan-African or pan-Sudanese songs and dances, while the adult groups performed dances representative of their respective tribes, such as the Azande, Dinka, and others. The dances performed by the Azande on these occasions were a blend of

movements drawn from the circumcision dances of young boys, along with movements that were once part of the traditional Pumbo.

A Pumbo was held on one of two occasions: either when sealing the grave with cement or upon the removal of the white clothes that signified mourning. These events could occur separately or simultaneously, depending on the decision of the deceased's close relatives. Thus, the Pumbo served two functions: to incorporate the deceased into the world of spirits and to reintegrate the living into normal life after a period of mourning.

When a family member dies—whether young or old—the male relatives of the patrilineal line and elder women gathered to decide when and what kind of funeral feast should be held. This decision-making process, as described to me, was not unlike what occurs after a death in the United States. The deceased's position in the community was considered alongside the family's resources.

A wealthy family might have the financial means to immediately purchase cement for the grave and hold the Pumbo within a few days of the relative's death. A family with fewer resources might seal the grave with rocks and postpone the Pumbo until later, once they had gathered sufficient means. For a very poor family, unable to afford cement, liquor, or other necessities for the Pumbo, the grave will initially be covered with a small, thatched roof until enough resources can be collected.



Figure 22: Older Style Azande Grave, Yambio, South Sudan, 1982

A grave was always constructed in or near the family compound of the deceased's family. This made it easier for the family to maintain the grave. It was also consistent with Zande ideas concerning ancestors. Shrines were set up at grave sites, and the spirits of the ancestors were occasionally asked to provide help from the spirit world for those they had been left behind. Azande also believed that the Pumbo in honor of the deceased person was enjoyed as much by his spirit as by the people attending. A Pumbo held immediately after the death of someone did not include the ceremony of "changing of the white clothes."

A Pumbo that was held from one to two years later did. Those people who have the wealth to hold a Pumbo immediately will a year later have a small party for “changing the white clothes." Only if the family was very wealthy will the feast be large enough to include the rental of musical instruments and the accompanying dance party. Instead, a small celebration of family and close friends will be held with a little food and some joint singing accompanied by the anzoros (rattles). Someone might get up to dance, but it would not be expected.



Figure 23: Contemporary Azande Graves, Yambio, South Sudan, 1982

Most Pumbos were held during the dry season, from January to April, after the crops had been harvested. Guests began arriving at dusk, with the first arrivals typically being neighbors and relatives invited by the family. Some guests traveled long distances if the Pumbo honored an important family member.

The food served included a porridge made of ground millet and cassava called bekende, chicken cooked in tomato paste, and either game meat or domestic meat covered in peanut sauce. The dishes were prepared earlier in the day by the sisters of the deceased. After eating, guests were served gbangara (a beer made from millet) and araki (an alcohol distilled from cassava and maize).

Guests of importance, such as a local chief or headman, were taken to a sleeping hut (tukul) and served separately. Food was presented on a large tray with separate enamel bowls for each dish. The proper technique was to take a small lump of bekende, roll it into a ball with the right hand, and dip it into one of the dishes. All eating was customarily done using the right hand.

The two primary performance roles at a Pumbo were the secretary of the feast and the representative of the chief. The secretary, a male relative of the deceased, was responsible for ensuring that the event ran smoothly. His duties included making sure all guests were well-fed and provided with ample liquor, such as gbangara or araki. If the family held enough status, the chief himself would attend; otherwise, one of the chief's subordinates would represent him.

During the early evening, young children would run around playing games and singing songs. Older boys (ages 9–12) practiced on the instruments essential to the feast. These included the pinginbajk, the gaza, and the guu guu—all percussion instruments that were always present at a Pumbo.

The pinginbajk was a type of xylophone made from wooden slats placed over two banana stalks. There were smaller versions consisting of nine pieces of wood and larger ones having up to fifteen. A small pinginbajk could be played by one person, while larger instruments required two to four players. The players were always young men from 18 to 25.



Figure 24: Guuguu and Pinginbaik, Yambio, South Sudan, 1983

There was no formal training process for learning to play the instruments. Young boys learned by observation and practice. Early in the afternoon of the Pumbo, after the instruments had arrived, they would sit and play tunes. Among adults, some played instruments while others did not. There was no apparent prestige associated with being a musician, nor any clear distinction between musicians and non-musicians—there were simply people who played the pinginbajk and those who did not.

The same was true for the two drums, the gaza and the guu guu. The gaza was a two-headed, cigar-shaped skin drum, about three feet long. It was made from a hollowed-out log with animal skin stretched over both ends. The best drums used elephant ear skin, which allowed the sound to carry for miles. The young man who played the gaza positioned the drum between his knees and maintained the rhythm using a combination of a stick in his right hand and the palm of his left.

The guu guu was often described as a gong. Each guu guu was carved from a single tree trunk and stood about two feet off the ground. The instrument was oblong with short legs and hollow. Along the top was a narrow slit, and each side was hollowed out from this slit. The player sat on one end of the drum with one leg (usually the right) placed over the slit. He played the drum using two sticks covered with pieces of old tire. By striking the gong with both sticks in short and long beats, he created varied tones. The sound could be modulated by where the drum was struck, whether one or both sticks were used, the force of the strike, the distance from the slit, and whether the leg over the slit was extended or contracted. The guu guu was often referred to as a "talking drum." Churches and develop-

ment projects typically owned a large guu guu, which they used to call people to church or work.

The songs were familiar to everyone. They were often composed by men who played the seegro or Zande guitar. A song created in a compound one evening could quickly become a featured song at a feast. A modern innovation was the use of tape recorders. Someone attending a Pumbo in Tambura might record the music and bring it back to Yambio, where it would be shared. If the people in Yambio enjoyed it, they incorporated the song into their next feast.

During the evening, participants might sing and dance to the same song for an hour or more. The subjects of these songs typically revolved around regional pride, political events, and domestic happenings. Some words were not part of the literal verse but were included to complete a phrase or for symbolic significance. Most songs were not explicit but referred to events or stories well-known to the Zande people.

An example of a song:

Garare biamia no gigira re Kenya
I have four years with this widow, Kenya,
Miara nga harame te;
I will not sleep today;
Garare biamia na gigira re Kenya,
I have four years with this widow, Kenya,
Miare nga reme to Kenya;
I never sleep, Kenya;
Kumba mi to gako arenga are te, Kenya.
My husband will not sleep, too, Kenya.

For Azande, music, singing, and dancing are not separate experiences but part of a phenomenon they call gbere, which translates literally as "to play." Educated Azande often define gbere as dance, but it is understood as a combination of rhythmic movement, with or without accompaniment by traditional instruments and singing. When asked how they learned to dance or whether there were specific steps, the response was consistent, "People just dance."

They dance in any way that feels good to their bodies, with no single movement considered more correct than another. Most Azande, however, tend to center their movements in the pelvis or torso. An Azande dancer would not jump up and down like the Dinka or skip like the Bellanda. Further questioning about dance revealed two key points. First, people generally do not dance unless they have been drinking. Alcohol enhances the vividness of the dancing, or as Zande say, "wangu Nakura nga ugure te"—"The rainbow doesn’t come out during the dry season." A dancer who has had some alcohol becomes loose and flows more naturally with the rhythm of the music. Second, movements created by one dancer are often imitated by others. Some movements become popular and spread to other areas, while others fade away before the evening ends.

There is a definite pattern to how men and women are expected to dance together. Men are expected to dance more vigorously than women, but as the dance progresses, their movements should begin to align, eventually achieving a shared unison. Both men and women say they dance differently with a partner they "love too much" compared to one they do not.

The dancer does not own the rhythm; it belongs to all

I attended five Pumbos: two in Yambio in November, one in Tambura in January, one in Nzara in February, and one in Nandi in March, with a final Pumbo in Yambio in April. While each Pumbo generally followed the structure I previously described, my personal experiences of them varied significantly.

The first Pumbo in Yambio took place at the beginning of the dry season, both within walking distance of the house where I was staying. At twilight, Paul guided me along a path that branched off the road, past two compounds, to a large compound with three toucls. Chairs had been arranged in a wide circle along the compound's perimeter. Neighbors and family arrived first, followed by visitors who had traveled from other villages. The scent of bekende—a porridge made from millet and cassava—mingled with the aroma of peanut sauce and stewed chicken, prepared earlier by the deceased’s sisters. Gbangara, a beer brewed from millet, and araki, a potent distilled spirit, flowed freely as the night deepened.

I watched as the young men in the center of the compound played the guu guu, gaza, and pinginbajk, while groups of people sat or stood in conversational circles. Along the edge of the dancing area, enterprising women sold small pots of gbangara or araki, and young boys manned stands offering cigarettes and gum.

Paul led me to a chair and handed me a small glass of Araki, a drink that reminded me of a stronger version of vodka. As I sat watching the evening’s events unfold, I became acutely aware of my outsider status.

Positioned apart from the community, I was approached only by the male members of the household, and only to see if I needed another glass of Araki. The women, for the most part, avoided me. Sitting there, I wondered if my presence—a white woman dressed in blue jeans—was confusing to them. Their reserved attitude reminded me of the historical relationship between the British military and the Azande: Azande performed, and the British who were in control of the government watched. I didn't know how to change this dynamic—except to keep attending Azande events, hoping that, over time, a less rigid relationship might emerge.

The only light for the Pumbo in Tambura came from the moon and a small cooking fire set slightly apart from the center of the compound. The children were the first to dance, but as the night progressed, they were replaced by adults. By then, the children had curled up in corners to sleep.

Dancers moved clockwise in a circle around the musicians, with no attempt to synchronize their movements. The most common step was a right-left-right shuffle, lifting the left hip before repeating on the other side. The upper torso remained relaxed, swaying naturally with the rhythm. While most danced independently, small groups occasionally formed. Women might hold hands and step in unison, while men sometimes broke away to dance in pairs or trios, punctuating the rhythm with sharp torso movements before rejoining the circle.

Men and women sometimes danced together, performing distinct movements yet united by the rhythm and an emphasis on the torso. Occasionally, older participants joined the circle, though they mostly sat on the sidelines, smoking cigarettes and

watching. As fatigue set in, dancers would rest, drinking gbangara or araki before returning to the circle. Some men and women formed liaisons and quietly slipped away into the bush.

I stood outside the circle and watched and finally tried following the general movement of the women around the circle. I focused my attention on the central placement of the instruments and the continuous circular motion of the dancers around them. I realized there were no fixed spatial relationships or group coordinated movements, only the fluidity of personal interpretation that integrated with the rhythm and phrasing of the Azande musicians. I moved awkwardly as my feet could mimic the alternating sliding step, but I had difficulty allowing my torso to relax to the rhythm of the drum and the phrasing of the pinginbaik. My discomfort stemmed from the sense of being quietly observed and a deep realization I was not a member of the Azande community.

This sense of being an outsider persisted until April, at another Pumbo in Yambio. The evening began much like the others, but this time I recognized several attendees I had previously interviewed. I joined the dance with my translator, Arcata. Gradually, my attention shifted to the pulse of the music, and my body began to relax into its rhythm. The more I relaxed the more my somatic attention released into my feet. I felt grounded with the earth. With this grounding my torso began to sway forward, and my head and shoulders moved in sync with the complex yet repeated patterns.

As I became more attuned to the phrasing, I grew increasingly aware of the dancers around me. Each moved with their somatic interpretation of the music, yet we were all connected through a shared integration of the rhythm provided by the

gaza, guu guu and pinginbajk. Over time, my physical boundaries seemed to dissolve into the collective movement. I became part of the group's embodied rhythm, traversing the circle as though we were moving and breathing as one.[86]

When the music finally stopped, I felt profoundly altered. My usual sense of time and space—the boundaries that define me as separate—had softened, leaving me with a lingering sense of connection and unity. This newfound unity helped me appreciate how breaking the boundaries of individual somatic modes of attention within the Pumbo functioned in Azande society. I understood why Edward, the cook and translator, declined an invitation to visit the United States, explaining that he "did not want to leave his brother." Enculturated in a society where dance served to dissolve the boundary between self and other, the very notion of leaving that society felt antithetical to life itself.

Pumbo in Practice: Form, Function, and Meaning

There were several functional relationships between the Azande Pumbo and the rest of Azande society that have remained unchanged since the 1920s. The primary manifest function of the Pumbo was religious, and this role has persisted. It served to incorporate the spirit of the deceased into the world of ancestors and, at least in 1982, to reintegrate the relatives of the deceased back into society. By removing the white clothes of mourning, they symbolized their return to a state of normalcy after the liminal period of grieving.

Beyond its religious functions, Pumbo played other important roles in Azande life. For children, attending a Pumbo was an opportunity for enculturation into Azande values and social

customs. It provided everyone with a chance for social interaction. Young people found an outlet for their sexual drives, while some women and young boys earned additional income from selling products. Families could display their wealth and social status during these events.



Figure 25: Azande women dancing in Yambio, 1983

An important latent function of the dance at a Pumbo was the sense of goodwill it fostered. The dance engaged the dancer's entire muscular system, required the coordination of sight and hearing, and evoked a sense of pride in the performer. These experiences were amplified by their collective expression. Rhythm and tradition undoubtedly influenced individuals to participate in the dance. To some extent, dancers were compelled to coordinate their movements with others, and this synchronization brought pleasure. The repetition of rhythmic beats on percussive instruments and the continuous singing often created a light trance state among participants. Responding

to the music with both voice and body, individuals forfeited their sense of self in favor of a unifying collective experience.

Azande dancing was distinctive and representative of their culture, setting them apart from other tribal groups in the area, such as the Dinka or Latouka. This difference was particularly evident when the government invited each tribal group to perform dances at political events. The Pumbo, though still a rite of incorporation, had also become a symbol of Azande identity. Within the context of the Pumbo, the dance was a way of expressing Azandeness.

Latent functions of enculturation, recreation, sexual outlet, the display of wealth or social status, and economic activity remain present. However, an important latent function associated with the dance itself has evolved. In the 1920s, the Azande were often suspicious of one another due to their beliefs about the causes of death. Attendance at the Pumbo was an expected indication of innocence, and the communal movement during the dance helped create feelings of goodwill and harmony. By 1982, the Azande needed an experience that allowed them to express their Azandeness with those who shared similar cultural experiences, particularly in an era of ongoing political tensions.

The drum cannot sound if it has no skin

The above Azande proverb highlights the essential roles that everyone and everything must play for success to be possible. My time among the Azande prompted me to reflect deeply on the intersections of experience, rather than the rigid categories by which we often label aspects of life. Initially, I approached their way of life by compartmentalizing it into categories such

as political and family organization, agricultural methods, rituals, and dance. However, I came to realize that a Zande's life is not lived according to categories. Instead, it is shaped by an ongoing dialogue between the self and all facets of existence.

Previously, I had considered somatic practice primarily from the perspective of dance—either through learning or performance. However, my time in South Sudan revealed the nature of soma as a unified embodiment: the lived experience of being in a place where one is wholly dependent on the ecosystem for survival. My experience among the Azande expanded my awareness of the somatic reality of others, people whose lives were deeply rooted in their immediate environment. For the Azande, dance was not confined to the physical; it was a somatic practice deeply tied to their environment, history, and social bonds. The concept of gbere, with its fusion of music, movement, and play, embodied this holistic view of life.

Yet, I must acknowledge that I never truly lived the life of the Azande. Their lives were defined by the rhythms of the wet and dry seasons, the equatorial daylight, and the heat that dictates the day's work in their gardens. Although I spent more time there than a tourist on safari, I remained, at heart, an outsider. What I was able to experience was the repetitive, purposeful movements of dancing with others at a Pumbo and however momentary a deep kinesthetic connection.

When I left Yambio, I believed I would return to continue my research. I did not. Another civil war erupted in Sudan in 1983 when President Jaafar Nimeiri imposed Sharia law across the country. Rebel groups, led by John Garang and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), rose in opposition to the government in Khartoum. A comprehensive peace agreement, advo-

cated by international organizations, was finally reached in 2005.

Despite this milestone, the situation remained unstable and was only partially resolved when South Sudan established itself as an independent country in 2011. However, just two years later, South Sudan descended into its own civil war, driven by political power struggles and deep ethnic divisions. These ongoing conflicts made any opportunity to return impossible.

Returning to Oregon: Place, Memory, and Identity

Upon returning to Oregon, I began traveling weekly to Portland to take lessons with Obo Addy (1936–2012), a celebrated Ghanaian drummer, dancer, and educator born into the Ga ethnic group in Accra, Ghana. Early in his career, Addy performed with local bands that blended traditional African rhythms with Western musical styles, contributing to the highlife genre. In 1969, he joined the Arts Council of Ghana as a Ga master, and in 1972, he and his brothers showcased their native music at the Munich Summer Olympics. This international exposure led to tours in Europe and Australia, and in 1978, Addy relocated to Portland, Oregon. There, he became a vital cultural ambassador, teaching music at Lewis & Clark College and conducting weekly drumming workshops at Lincoln High School. Addy founded two ensembles: Okropong, dedicated to traditional Ghanaian music, and Kukrudu, which fused African rhythms with Western instruments, epitomizing the worldbeat genre.

The lessons took place in the gymnasium of a local high school. A diverse group of about twenty men and women of various ethnic backgrounds would line up in rows as Obo Addy began a movement phrase across the dance floor. The first row

mimicked his physical gestures as they moved across the floor, followed by the next group, until all had completed the phrase. Under his guidance, we repeated this process over and over—sometimes using the same physical gestures, other times expanding the vocabulary to include movements integrating both feet and arms. Addy spoke sparingly, occasionally encouraging us to release into the movement in sync with the rhythm of the drums. With many repetitions, I discovered a deep relaxation into somatic concentration and a shared sense of embodied community, reminiscent of what I experienced at the Pumbo in Yambio.

At the time, I was completing my MS in Dance at the University of Oregon. As a graduate student, one of my responsibilities was to teach service classes for non-dance majors. I was asked to design a class in African dance, drawing on my experiences in Southern Sudan and my study with Obo Addy. I incorporated movements inspired by my time in Sudan with Ghanaian vocabulary and approaches, creating a class centered on repeated movements with the goal of releasing into a sense of kinesthetic empathy. A significant part of this cultural zeitgeist was Kudana Marimba, founded in the mid-1980s by Ong Kar Walen, who built instruments and taught members of the Eugene community to play. My students and I were invited to perform with Kudana Marimba, and we participated in their performances in Eugene.



Figure 26: Kudana Marimba, Eugene, Oregon, 1985 (Company Photo)



Figure 27: Members of the Loft Studio performing with Kudana Marimba, Eugene, Oregon, 1987

Now, forty years later, I have traveled extensively, teaching in the United States, England, China, Australia, and Canada. These experiences have profoundly reshaped my understanding of my role as a teacher of African dance. Reflecting on that time, I can no longer claim that I was authentically teaching or performing African dance—I lacked the depth of cultural knowledge necessary for such a claim. Instead, I now realize that I was striving to preserve the memory of living each day attuned

to the rhythms of nature and to recreate the profound connection I felt when dancing with others at a Yambio Pumbo.

Even though I spent less time practicing African dance than belly dancing or Nihon buyō, it remains the experience that has had the most enduring impact. Life in Yambio allowed me to transcend the boundaries of my Western upbringing and immerse myself in the profound realization that my very being was a manifestation of the earth. This embodied knowledge has shaped each day of my life and continues to guide my research and writing.

As I reflect across these chapters, I see a continuous thread of return—not to a fixed origin, but to an embodied way of knowing that has always been rooted in the rhythms of the earth. My early somatic memories of rural Oregon, grounded in tactile labor and seasonal cycles, seeded a lifelong orientation toward the body as a site of meaning. This orientation deepened through the improvisational freedom I found in belly dancing, where my movement became both a reclamation of self and a dialogue with cultural forms shaped by complex histories. That same body, once tentative and self-conscious, learned to sway with music not written down but felt—first in the quiet of a studio, and later in the charged circle of an Azande Pumbo. The Azande concept of gbere, a fusion of dance, music, and play, resonated with my earlier understandings of performance, yet it expanded them—revealing a world where movement was not performance but participation, not choreography but communion. In these interwoven experiences, I came to recognize dance not as discrete technique or aesthetic, but as a way of being with others, with memory, and with land. Across Belly Dance improvisations and Azande rituals, I found

that the deeper my body listened, the more it remembered—not just what had been taught, but what had always been known.

Two years after I returned from South Sudan 1982, I was given an opportunity to spend a summer studying classical Japanese Dance in Kyoto. Where life in Yambio explored dance as an emergent, communal expression embedded in the social life of South Sudan in which dance was transmitted through observation, imitation, and social immersion. The experience of studying Nihon buyō in Kyoto was of a form with a rigorously codified pedagogy. The body was trained through repetition, stillness, and precise formal structures passed from master to student. These contrasting modes of transmission—improvised versus prescribed, collective versus hierarchical—revealed to me how cultural values were embedded not only in movement but in the very act of teaching. My continuing work with Saffi helped me reflect on these pedagogical differences, and how each shaped my own evolving understanding of grace, discipline, and embodied authority.

Chapter Seven

Personality with Gracefulness

The bee emerging
from deep within the peony
departs reluctantly.
Basho

I first discovered haiku poems during my senior year of high school in Mrs. Williams's AP English class. I was captivated by the spaces between the lines—what was unsaid yet deeply implied within the form. Years later, as a sophomore in college, I took a modern dance class and choreographed a solo piece inspired by the above haiku by Basho. Although I no longer remember the choreography, I retain a kinesthetic memory of the stillness of the flower and the trembling of the bee.

Years later, in 1985, I rediscovered my love for Japanese arts and poetry when I received a fellowship from the Traditional Theater Training of Japan to study Nihon buyō for three months in Kyoto. At the time, I had no idea that this initial trip would be the first of six journeys to Japan, involving conferences and collaborative projects with Japanese playwright and director Shogo Ohta of Kindai University. Nor did I anticipate that Japanese stage and visual aesthetics would become an integral part of my lived experience.

T.T.T. Entering an Aesthetic

Traditional Theater Training (T.T.T.) was co-founded in Kyoto, Japan, in 1984 by Jonah Salz, a scholar of Japanese theater, and

Akira Shigeyama, a renowned Kyogen performer. Their vision was to establish an intensive training platform to introduce and educate artists, academics, and enthusiasts in traditional Japanese theater forms. T.T.T. offers comprehensive courses in various traditional arts, including Noh, Kyogen, Nihon buyō, and Kotsuzumi. Committed to providing authentic, hands-on training, T.T.T. has introduced more than 400 participants from over 20 countries to the history and cultural nuances of traditional Japanese theater. Traditional arts are deeply embedded in Kyoto's cultural life, from the weaving of kimonos to the refined practices of the tea ceremony and ikebana to performances of Noh, Kyogen, and Nihon buyō. Kyoto, with its centuries of tradition, was an ideal location for T. T. T.

The T.T.T. course began with a two-week introduction to the history of Japanese Theatre by Benito Ortolani. He traced the aesthetic links of Japanese aesthetics and their derivatives from China and Korea within the changing history of Japan from 500 AD to the present. Listening to Dr. Ortolani's description of Japanese theatre while sitting in the center of Kyoto near the historic Kamo River, I felt transported to the history of Japan and its integration of Shintoism and Buddhism and Kyoto's 1,600 temples and 400 Shinto shrines. This relationship was highlighted by a visit to the Heian Shrine, where I learned to cleanse my hands and rinse my mouth before entering. After which, I tossed a coin into the donation box, deeply bowed twice, prayed silently and bowed again prior to leaving. I then walked to the Nanzen-ji Temple and sat looking out at the Hōjō Garden, a classic example of a karesansui (dry rock garden). I discovered a Hokora, or small street corner shrine, near where I was living, and I would stop to bow and leave a small offering.

T.T.T.'s location in Kyoto and its roots in performance from the 7th century through the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 17th century to the opening up of Japan to the west in the Meiji period of the 19th century provided an opportunity to integrate Ortolani's lectures visits to local summer festivals at Shinto shrines in the Kansai area, including Osaka and Kyoto. Each day was a new experience that altered my conception of performance. Sitting in a day's production of overlapping stylized Noh and Kyogen plays in which the agony of tragedy was followed by the foolishness of people, I was awed by my kinesthetic reaction of contemplative concentration. I did not understand the words of the chants or dialogues, but the focused physicality of the performers required that I attend visually, aurally and kinesthetically. I had a similar experience attending a set of dances at a Nihon buyō performance. Images of the woodblock prints and paintings of the Tokugawa period were revealed in the dancers' graceful and detailed gestures. I tried to imagine performing the bent knee and the weaving in and out asymmetrical stance of the dancers while precisely gesturing a story with the fan.

Dr. Ortolani also introduced to the ideas of Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), the founder of Noh theater, and their relationship to Zen Buddhism. To deepen my understanding, I read J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu's translation *of On the Art of the Nō Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*. One of the primary topics in several of Zeami's essays is the concept of jo-ha-kyu:

> It may be said that all things in the universe, good and bad, large and small, with life and without, all partake of the process of jo, ha, and kyu. From the chirp of the

> birds to the buzzing of the insects, all sing according to an appointed order, and this order consists of jo, ha, and kyu.[87]

Zeami expands on jo-ha-kyu in his discussion of the five phases (or skills) of learning to dance. In the first phase, known as the "Skill of Self-Conscious Movement," he explains that a dancer can learn the appropriate technical form by beginning with an attitude of reverence followed by “placing the various elements of the body into motion, moving the hands in appropriate gestures, controlling the performance so that it will fall into the proper structure of jo, ha, and kyu.”

The actual execution of jo-ha-kyu, however, is far from simple or mechanical. Take, for example, the movement pattern (kata) of walking forward. The first movement represents jo, the slowest and most deliberately executed phase. This movement sets the stage for ha, which consists of a series of gradually accelerating of the movement phrase, the length of the poetic passage accompanying the movement. The ha, in turn, leads into the final kyu, which is quicker and more dynamic.

The kyu step does not merely mark the end of the sequence but also transitions into the jo of the next movement pattern, which is often a backward motion. This continuity is achieved through an inhalation of breath between the final segment of kyu and the subsequent jo. In Zeami’s dramaturgy, jo-ha-kyu serves as the foundational structure for all aspects of performance, embodying a dynamic interplay of preparation, development, and resolution.

Zeami’s performance aesthetic reminded me of the attention I paid to the tripartite movement of breathing while meditat-

ing. The initial inclination to breathe is followed by the movement of the diaphragm downward to the center of the body, the breath embeds itself deep into the body's structure prior to releasing with the rise of the diaphragm. At the final point of release, there is an inclination to begin a new phrase of breathing. Watching the performances of Nihon buyō and Noh I tried to ascertain the jo-ha-kyu of the movement phrases by linking my breath with that of the performers.

The Weight and Wisdom of Tradition

In Kyoto, I stayed in a traditional thatched house with tatami-matted rooms, located about a mile and a half from the studio where my classes were held. The entryway, at street level, served as a space to remove shoes before stepping up into the main living area. A sliding door made of wood and translucent paper marked the transition into the home. (I later learned that the raised tatami floor allowed for airflow, a welcome feature during the humid Japanese summer.) The earthy scent of the tatami floors, combined with the wood-paneled walls, created an atmosphere of tranquility.

The house was owned by an English teacher, and its shelves were lined with books on Japanese history and literature. I often spent my evenings curled up in the low-slung chairs, engrossed in books about Japan's history, particularly the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), which was pivotal to the development of Nihon buyō. Staying in a home designed to harmonize with nature deepened my appreciation for Japanese culture's reverence for balance, space, and tradition.

The daily Nihon buyō lessons were held from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, at a studio near Fujima Kansome's traditional home lo-

cated on a hill up above Kyoto. She was a master teacher of the Fujima school, one of the most prominent Nihon buyō schools. Established in the early 18th century, the Fujima school's movement vocabulary includes mai or movement derived from Noh, odori developed from the folk dances of common people and furi or pantominic movement of Kabuki.

The dances featured female (onnagata) and male (tachiyaku) characters. In some dances, the movement phrases crossed the boundaries and construction of the body from an idealized masculine–in which the focus of the body was focused outward–and idealized feminine–in which the focus of the body was internal. The basic masculine and feminine postures were furthered divided into a variety of stock male and female characters portraying various people of all ages and classes from the Tokugawa period (1603-1868)—samurai, priests, young daughters, older women, and servants through the imitation of her teacher, the dancer was required to quickly adjust from one character to another. The pieces also required me to manipulate a variety of different kinds of props associated with the history of Japanese life, from kimono and fan to umbrella and spear as well as gestures associated with the tea ceremony.

There was a comforting predictability to the routine, almost ritualistic in nature of the daily lessons. I arrived, changed into my practice yukata, and knelt, waiting in silence. When Sensei entered, I and the other students bowed and said, "Onegai shimasu" (a respectful request to begin the class). Sensei taught us our assigned dances individually, giving each of us focused attention. At the end of each lesson, we kneeled and bowed deeply and expressed our gratitude with the ritualized phrase, "Doumo arigatou gozaimasu."

The individual lessons employed a watch-and-follow method of learning; a technique commonly used in many Asian disciplines. This approach required me to somatically attune to each moment, engaging in my entire physical awareness. It was a unified mind/body approach to training, markedly different from the modern and ballet classes where movements are typically broken down by individual body parts and layered incrementally. I was reminded of the African dance classes that followed a similar watch and follow teaching method. However, the Nihon buyō vocabulary was a set of complex movement phrases that featured distinct often asymmetrical combinations that I found difficult to follow.

During each lesson, I concentrated on visually interpreting Sensei's movements, striving to replicate the alignment of her torso and the precise gestures of her limbs and head. However, my limited peripheral vision posed a significant challenge, as some intricate spiral movements were literally beyond my line of sight. This limitation heightened my reliance on and engagement with my kinesthetic and proprioceptive senses. The ability to release into the moment—something I had developed during my study of African dance—proved invaluable, enabling me to somatically attune to Sensei's movements with greater fluidity and intuition. With repeated lessons, I also became increasingly aware of the stillness in relationship of time and space of the primary instrument, the shamisen. As I somatically acknowledged the still points of the musical phrasing, the movement phrases almost magically revealed themselves from a deep relationship of my center through each of my joints. What seemed impossible to accomplish phrases became a natu-

ral extension of my inner most being that was as strong as wind and as fluid as water.

I wrote in my journal: “I believe I am finally developing the necessary softness to do Nihon buyō. When I feel the softness in my body there is a wonderful sense of releasing of letting go of the musculature holding. I believe softness and relaxation can probably be equated with each other. This is so different from my father’s motto ‘If it is too tough for others it is just right for a Sailer’.

When Fujima Kansome first proposed that we learn an entire dance to perform, I objected, saying, “I have never studied Nihon buyō before and don’t think I can bring a dance to performance level in such a short amount of time.” Sensei looked at me and replied, “You will learn the dance, perform the dance, and you will do very well.” Her statement marked my first experience with the expectations of the iemoto system.

The iemoto system emphasizes direct transmission through individual lessons from teacher to student, with supreme authority resting entirely with the master teacher. This means that all decisions concerning the form of learning, the pieces to be learned, and where and when these pieces will be performed rest solely with the teacher.



Figure 28: Barbara Sellers-Young and Fulima Kansome, 1985

My reaction surprised me. Instead of arguing, as I might have done if faced with such authority in a class in the United States, I simply bowed and said, “Yes.” I think I was stunned—this was the first time I had heard a woman speak with such clarity and confidence, yet without any trace of rancor. She expected me to follow her direction, and I did.

Rehearsing the dance, I became acutely aware of how the discipline of Nihon buyō demanded not only technical precision but quiet confidence, a deep-rooted composure. It was a different kind of grace than what I had known before, not an outward expression but a balance between surrender, control, between stillness and movement.

As the performance approached, Sensei and specialists in makeup and costuming began teaching us how to apply traditional-style makeup and wear the elaborate costumes that represented the characters we were performing. The piece I performed, *Ayame Yukata*, portrayed the beauty of the iris flower in summer. It was a challenging dance that required me to wear geta (raised wooden sandals), carry an umbrella and a fan, and move elegantly in a kimono that occasionally dragged onto the floor. The combination of the kimono, geta, umbrella, and fan made me nervous, and I spent countless hours perfecting each movement.

As the performance day neared, the Kyoto press took an interest in our class, eager to feature a story about foreigners learning traditional Japanese performance forms. They came to observe and take pictures, asking me to stand in front of the group because I was the only blonde and, to them, somehow iki —a term from Kabuki that refers to a sense of sophistication, stylishness, and urban chic. I was the only dancer who did not wear full makeup or a wig, as Sensei decided it was 'sexier' for my face and hair to remain natural. This decision was tied to the character I was portraying, originally created by the celebrated onnagata (a male performer specializing in female roles) Yoshizawa Ayame I (1673–1729). The choice was reflected in the official performance photo.

I had never considered myself sexy. I had always sought to define myself through skill, intellect, and movement. However, the night of the performance finally arrived, and, as Fujima Kansome had predicted during our first week of classes, I performed the dance. As I stood before the audience, feeling the weight of my kimono, the lift of my geta, the delicate balance of

the umbrella and fan, I understood that gracefulness was not in any one of these things but in the way they moved together. After the performance, I realized that the deep-rooted asymmetrical postures of Nihon buyō had become embedded in some aspect—however nascent—of my self-image. I also understood for the first time that, in Japanese performance, dance and theatre are inseparable.

Before leaving Japan, I resolved to extend my knowledge of Japanese theatre and applied to the doctoral program in Theatre at the University of Oregon. I was thrilled to be admitted.



Figure 29: Barbara Sellers-Young, Ayame Yukata, *Kyoto, 1985*

A Choreography of Kinship

On October 14, 2007, members of Portland, Oregon's Japanese American community and their supporters gathered to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Fujima Kanriye's founding of the Nihon buyō school, Fujinami-kai. While the event was organized to honor the history of Fujinami-kai, it also celebrated the broader, over century-long history of Japanese Americans in the Pacific Northwest, a history to which Fujinami-kai is a significant and symbolic contribution. The Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center sponsored the event.

After World War II, many Caucasians and Japanese Americans married women from Japan. Fujima Kanriye, the primary teacher of Fujinami-kai, was one such woman. Born Hidekko Fujita in 1923 in Yamaguchi, Japan, near Hiroshima, she began her training in the traditional master-student style at the age of six. Her education involved a rigorous schedule of lessons that began after her regular school day. Initially trained in both music and dance—she plays the three-stringed samisen—her focus eventually shifted exclusively to dance.

During World War II, Fujima Kanriye became part of Japan's state-sponsored military propaganda efforts, performing in government programs. After the war, she resumed her studies, adhering to the traditional path by serving as a cook, housekeeper, babysitter, and maid in her teacher's household. She received her teaching license in 1946 and became a master at the Fujima School of Dance in 1947. In 1959, she married Minoru Fujita, a resident of Ontario, Oregon, and relocated there.

For over fifty years, Fujima Kanriye maintained a dedicated schedule, traveling monthly to Portland, Oregon, and Spokane,

Washington, to teach at least 30 students in each city. She also conducted classes at her studio in Ontario, Oregon, leaving a legacy in the Japanese American community.

Fujima Kanriye: Form and Personality

Upon returning to Oregon, I met with Fujima Kanriye and asked if I could become one of her students. She agreed, and for four years, I traveled from Eugene to Portland two or three days each month to take lessons.

The organization of my learning, as well as that of the other students, was entirely directed by Fujima Kanriye. She determined which pieces we studied and the order in which they were taught. Although I often wanted to study specific pieces, I refrained from making such requests, understanding from my time in Japan that it would not have been considered inappropriate.

Fujima Kanriye's complete control of a student's learning allowed her to vary the lesson to fit the student. Thus, she picked pieces that she believed would enable students to learn specific physical or mental abilities. For example, she taught an exceptionally slow piece to encourage a student’s focus. A student who had problems with the three-dimensionality and subtlety of woman's movement in comparison to the turned-out position of the men's pieces will be taught both male and female pieces within the same lesson. The private lesson plus the students' acceptance of her complete control over their learning allowed her to adapt the material for a variety of students with differing personalities, life histories, and levels of ability.

During lessons, Fujima sensei's interactions with me closely resembled the non-verbal teaching methods commonly practiced in Japan. She performed small phrases of the dance, which I attempted to replicate, striving to match her precise stance and gestures. On rare occasions, she would physically adjust my posture or explain the imagery underlying the dance. However, the kata, or dance phrases, were not analyzed as isolated kinesthetic elements. Once she believed I had learned the entire dance, she would silently observe, offering subtle hand gestures as cues if my kinesthetic memory faltered.

Fujima Kanriye began my training with dances she believed would both acknowledge my Western body awareness and expand my somatic understanding. The first piece, *Kuroda Bushi*, was the story of a samurai. It integrated the turned-out position of the feet with the upper-body gestures characteristic of male Kabuki characters. It required outward focus and stability. I was somatically secure with the physical broad legged stance and strong, sustained outward gestures. The psychology of a samurai warrior was also a comfortable fit for my identity as a strong, independent woman. I looked forward to performing the dance as part of the annual recital.

Next, I learned *Genroku Mi Odori*, a female group dance celebrating the Genroku period (1688–1704), an era of heightened artistic activity in Japan. The female character's movements involved a three-dimensional spiral, with an upper-body twist supported by an inward turning of the feet. The latter were augmented by subtle arm and head gestures. Even though I had performed a female character *Ayame Yukata* in Kyoto, I had a particularly difficult time finding a fluid transition between the asymmetrical postures; and an even greater difficulty with the

subtle delicate tripart movements of the head that ended a movement phrase. At the recital, I nervously stood backstage and was grateful that I was sharing the stage with three other dancers.

By learning and performing both a male and a female dance, I gained an understanding of the spatial and movement styles of buyō. In *Kuroda Bushi*, the strong, sustained movements of the samurai reached into space as my character maneuvered a long spear. In contrast, *Genroku Mi Odori* required the inner-focused and interconnected movements of a female character, whose gestures were synchronized with those of four other women in the piece. The only similarly was that male and female dances incorporated a bent-knee posture, grounding the torso closer to the earth. Fujima's sensei diagnosis of my movement ability and decision to require I learn an inward and outward focus expanded my somatic awareness. My kinesthetic sense of internal space that was part of the hips, torso and spine of Middle Eastern and African dance was, through repetition, moved to the realization of asymmetry. I became aware of the diagonal in an integral relationship to the vertical and the horizontal. The context of somatic experience was no longer linear but a complex revelation of possibilities.



Figure 30: Barbara Sellers-Young, Kuroda Bushi*, Portland, 1988*

In September of 1989, I moved to Ontario, Oregon for six months to further my dance study and continue my dissertation project, a life history of Fujima Kanriye. I found myself in the center one of the largest Japanese American communities in Oregon that was a consequence of the resettlement of Japanese Americans to Minidoka a camp near Ontario. The community had established in 1947 the Oregon Idaho Buddhist Temple which became the site of an annual Obon festival in which members of the entire Ontario community, Japanese Americans and non-Japanese Americans, have participated.

Fujima started me on a new set of dances that included that required new skills. They included, *Harusame*, where I developed strength through stillness; *Matsu no Miodori*, which focused on transformation as I shifted between male and female characters; *Fuji Musume*, where I learned to handle various props, such as wisteria branches; and *Ame no Goro*, which introduced me to complex rhythms and further refined my understanding of male movement styles. With more intensive classes, I found that each movement engaged the core of my body as I had begun to experience the movement as a set of picturesque postures. At one point, Sensei suggested that I "sit and practice the dance with my mind" as in the practice of Nihon buyō you warm up mentally not physically. My first reaction was rebellion to the idea that the mind was integral to practice. Obedient to Sensei I incorporated sitting to dance the dance in my mind as part of at home practice sessions. One day, I remembered one of the passages of Zeami that before you perform try to know the mind of the audience by becoming aware of their breath. This opened a new door of practice as I would begin each session with finding the jo-ha-kyu of my breath followed by mentally performing the dance. Later Sensei remarked that I seemed to have discovered the interbeing of the movement phrases.

Outside of classes I had conversations with fellow students who lived in Ontario. These included those who moved to Ontario following World War II, born in Ontario and some women born in Japan and married to American soldiers. Each had a distinctive relationship with Nihon buyō. Some had been introduced to it in the internment camps. Some studied it as part of their parents'desire for them to be exposed to Japanese Culture

or in the case of the Japanese women married to American soldiers to retain as sense of their history. In all, there was a strong sense of loyalty to Fujinami-kai and a sense of duty to Fujima Kanriye to be good students as representatives of the dance form and to provide whatever Sensei would need. For all of them, the dance was more than movement. It was grace as resilience, as cultural continuity, as an assertion of identity against the forces of history.

Although she had reduced her teaching in her late 80s and no longer consistently traveled to Portland and Spokane, Fujima Kanriye continued to serve the Ontario and Japanese American community through teaching in her home studio. It was with profound sadness that I received news of her death in 2015. An article celebrating her life in the Ontario newspaper noted the countless hours she had given teaching the community the Obon dances and the careful preparation she gave to the Nihon buyō performances at the intermission of the Obon festival. Students from throughout Oregon who performed at the festival still recall her standing next to the stage when they were just beginning dancers at the ages of 5 or 6 ready to give them a clue of the next movement phrase in case their memory failed them.

Reflecting on my time with Fujima Kanriye, I would describe the series of lessons as a layering process. This process began with a subjective, somatic experience of the form and gradually deepened as I started to embody its aesthetic ideals. I often referred to this process as wrapping of one somatic level awareness after another. There was in her approach to me and all the other students an image of commitment and generosity of self-

lessness that has become my ideal persona as teacher or administrator.

My position as a gaijin (cultural outsider) afforded me opportunities that would have been inappropriate for cultural insiders. As a gaijin studying in the United States, I was with the move to California permitted to study in both the Fujima and Hanayagi schools.



Figure 31: Fujima Kanrive, O'Bon, Ontario, Oregon, 1993

Nisei: Hanayagi Jutemai

Hanayagi Jutemai, a second generation nisei, started lessons as a small child in California. After World War II, she returned to Tokyo to take the necessary exams to become a certified teacher of the Hanayagi Ryû. She had been teaching students of various ages in the Sacramento area for forty years. Her method of teaching followed a similar pattern of mimesis practiced by my previous sensei. She has, however, adjusted this method to accommodate her interpretation of the learning styles of her Sacramento students. As she phrased it, “American

students have a different approach to learning." Initially, she sang and danced the phrases as the student follows. When confronted with a particularly complex phrase, she slowed down the timing of the movement to allow me to grasp the intricacies of the phrase. If I still seemed confused, she would have me repeat again in smaller increments of the phrase with verbal suggestions. These included statements such as lead with the chest, drop the weight on a turn, and initiate with the head or torso. When necessary, she adjusted parts of my body either during or at the end of a phrase. She indicated the phrase's timing by noting a musical transition. It was only after the dance had been learned in this manner phrase by phrase that she incorporated the recorded music into the lesson. Even at this stage, she will go back and repeat corrections that might have been made earlier, but I had forgotten. Finally, as in the case of Fujima Kanriye, she watched me and if I got lost cued me with slight hand gestures.

My lessons with Jutemai Hanayagi began in 1994 and continued through 2001. I was accepted as a student, but I never felt like part of a school as I had with Fujinami-kai. I was the professor from University of California/Davis and therefore tolerated as part of my professional position. I was therefore always slightly uncomfortable taking classes and performing. In fact, I was so uncomfortable that I attempted to get lost for one performance so I would not have to appear in it. Even though I arrived after the program had started and ten minutes before, I was supposed to perform, I was quickly helped into costume and went on stage. I also never felt I made the same development as a dancer under Hanayagi Jutemai as I did under either of the Fujima teachers.

As a cultural outsider, I learned the movement phrases and general style of Nihon buyō, but there was always a disjunct between the dance's cultural context and my somatic persona. The somatic modes of attention that I extrapolated from the study of Nihon buyō were somatic concentration, attention to detail, attention to the moment stillness, responsibility to the group, inner strength, adaptability to the transitory nature of life. Each of these have impacted my subsequent interaction with the world as an artist, teacher and later administrator. Yet, the entire history of Japanese Americans was outside of my frame of reference. Instead, my experience was as a member of the educational elite who had an opportunity to engage in the study of dance outside any specific cultural boundaries.

Translating Movement: Plastic Rose and *In the Moon's Shadow*

In 1990, I was hired by the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of California/Davis to teach acting, develop a three-year curriculum in movement for actors, and teach a lecture course in Asian theatre. I was also asked to contribute to the department's production season by acting as a movement director and choreographer. This position provided an opportunity to bring my experience studying Japanese theatre and Nihon buyō to the performance season. Two examples were the production of Shogo Ohta's play *Plastic Rose* and the dance piece *In the Moon's Shadow*.

Shogo Ohta (1939-2007) was a central figure in postwar Japanese theater, pushing the boundaries of traditional drama to explore the interaction between silence, space, and movement in an environment. His work often focused on the poetic and

meditative aspects of performance rather than conventional narrative structures. In 1995, the Theatre Program at Kindai University in Osaka, Japan and the Department of Theatre and Dance at University of California/Davis each created a production of Ohta's play *Plastic Rose*. The plays were performed in repertoire on each campus. The Kindai production was directed by Shogo Ohta and the UC/Davis production by Peter Lichtenfels.

The narrative of *Plastic Rose* is the relationship between seven men and ten women in a mental hospital as they go through their daily routines. Their conversations range from the differences between animals and people, the rituals of daily life and the relationships between people. Like Ohta's previous plays each conversation reflects the body's confrontation with its environment.

My role in the production was as the movement director and choreographer. I worked closely with the director, Peter Lichtenfels, to shape and guide the physical expression and movement of the performers to enhance storytelling, character development, and overall stage dynamics. This included creating a set of warmups for each rehearsal that would highlight what I had learned about Japanese aesthetics. I did not attempt to teach Nihon buyō. Instead, I taught a set of exploratory improvisations that highlighted Zeami's concept of jo-ha-kyu. Three examples are: I had the students as a group find a joint breath phrasing and move across the room together while maintaining this phrasing. The students completed a set of improvisations in which they imitated the gestures created by a fellow student with an emphasis on asymmetrical poses. Each student evolved a set of postures related to their character and

were asked to find the still point at the center of the posture. The students were asked to bring the modes of attention gained in the explorations to the development of their character.

The two productions in each location Kindai and UC/Davis were presented on a similarly designed set. Watching the play in Davis and Osaka, I realized how different the Japanese production was from the American version. Shogo Ohta had chosen a hyper realistic style that he believed highlighted the body's confrontation with the contemporary environment and was from an American perspective reminiscent of Strasberg's method of acting. The UC/Davis production had integrated the stylistic approach of traditional Japanese theatre into the action of each character and scene. In a private conversation I had with Ohta he suggested that his approach to the performance style was a desire to reflect on the limitations of communication of contemporary life. This is the reason the play took place in a mental hospital. Peter Lichtenfels had considered the play an opportunity to fuse contemporary play with a traditional aesthetic. The exchange was an example for me of the complexity of a transcultural dialogue and the unanticipated expectations associated with them.

I grew up in a home without air conditioning and in a climate where the summer days were often above 95 degrees. During the summer when it was not raining, my siblings and I often took all the bedding and slept out on the grass in the backyard. It is an amazing experience to fall asleep looking up at the moon and the stars of the Milky Way. We would try to find the Big Dipper and imagine travel from place to place across the United States following the stars as the pioneers did. Over a month we watched the moon slowly go through its

phases. In the contemplation of the moment, there was a sense of myself being at one with the expansive universe. I have moved many times in my life and never again experienced the mystery of sleeping under the stars. I have, however, often tried to organize a bedroom near a window that the moon could shine through and often I would lie in bed gazing at it.

In 1997, I contributed to the 1997 faculty dance concert titled *Myth, Magic and Technology*. The piece titled *In the Moon's Shadow* was inspired by the memories of gazing at the moon and the tenth century Japanese female poet Izumi Shikibu who wrote "Watching the moon at midnight solitary, mid-sky; I knew myself completely, no part left out." I was attracted to Shikibu's poem as it invoked the integration of movement and stillness that for me was the heart of the aesthetic of Nihon buyō.

The choreographic process was a challenge for the three dancers as I asked them to set aside their modern dance-based movement vocabulary and engage a series of improvisations evolved from the act of breathing as well as to explore the relationship between stillness and movement. The moments of stillness were released into fluid interactions with each other. In the final choreography, the release of movement was enhanced by the flowy, lavender-colored costumes with extended sleeves worn by the three dancers that accentuated the subtle movements evoked by John Tavener's string quartet *The Hidden Treasurer*. The size of these gestures was later expanded to integrate with the set of a large arch shaped moon highlighted by a white branch suspended above it.



Figure 32: In the Moon's Shadow, *UC/Davis, 1997*

Through the production of *Plastic Rose* and *In the Moon's Shadow*, I was attempting to understand my personal embodiment of the stylized aesthetic of Nihon buyō with attention—to stillness, transitory nature of living and the importance of nature—outside of the specific gestural language and character designations of Nihon buyō.

I now understand that Nihon buyō did not simply teach me a new vocabulary of movement. It reshaped the way I moved through life. I once thought of grace as something external—an elegance that could be acquired through training. But I now understand it as something deeper, something more fundamental. Personality with gracefulness is knowing when to move, when to hold and when to release, when to lead and when to follow and ultimately how to cultivate the conditions for movement to

emerge naturally. It was how I listened, how I allowed space for others, how I led not by force but by presence. These were lessons I had absorbed from studying with Fujima Kansome, Fujima Kanriye and Hanayagi Jutemai.

I recognize that my study of Nihon Buyō did not occur in isolation; it was a culmination of decades of somatic inquiry shaped by a range of cultural and movement practices. My early experiences with modern dance and haiku attuned me to the poetics of stillness and the expressive potential of silence. Breathwork and meditation—habits formed through personal introspection and performance training—found new resonance in the Zen-informed aesthetic of jo-ha-kyu. The watch-and-follow pedagogy of African dance had trained me to attune somatically, to release into movement without verbal instruction, preparing me for the subtlety and depth of Nihon Buyō's nonverbal transmission. My prior study of Middle Eastern dance, with its emphasis on inward energy and pelvic-centered motion, had developed my awareness of internal space—a sensibility that helped me navigate the asymmetry and spatial complexity of Japanese forms. In both performance and pedagogy, these earlier influences merged and matured. Whether rehearsing a traditional character dance or crafting modern improvisations for theatre students, I drew upon a layered somatic archive that enabled me to move fluidly between cultural vocabularies. Nihon Buyō thus became not just a new form to master, but a site of convergence—a space where past experiences were reconfigured into deeper awareness, and where movement itself became a way of knowing.

Chapter Eight

Somatics, Performing Life: Teacher/Administrator.

> *When we bring awareness to movement, we bring intelligence to life.*
>
> Thomas Hanna

Engaging with Belly Dance, African dance, and Japanese dance required me to navigate shifting movement vocabularies, each shaped by distinct cultural contexts yet unified by a shared, deep relationship to the pelvis. My experience of learning these dances was mediated not only by their technical demands but also by my own biological and perceptual limitations, a body conditioned by limited peripheral vision, a reliance on kinesthetic awareness, and a dyslexic approach to integrating information.

Belly dance, with its improvisational structure, offered a profound integration of self, allowing me to embody music's underlying rhythms and phrasing on an instinctual level. In an Azande compound, dancing under the moonlight near an ancestral burial site, I encountered a different kind of somatic connection—one where movement resonated not just with music but with the earth beneath my feet and the communal presence of those around me. This experience of dance as a conduit for ancestral and spatial awareness carried into my studies with Obo Addy, where rhythm and communal embodiment intertwined. Nihon Buyō, in contrast, demanded an intricate layering of learned gestures, each phrase reinforcing a precise so-

matic mode of attention, yet within expanded time and space reminiscent of a haiku.

Through these experiences, I came to understand that dance is not simply a movement vocabulary to be mastered but a way of inhabiting space, history, and relational presence. These embodied lessons ultimately shaped my evolving approach as both a teacher and an administrator, influencing how I guided others in their own somatic discoveries.

Movement for Actors: An Interactive Somatic Framework

After earning my PhD in Theatre from the University of Oregon in 1990, I was hired by the Department of Theatre and Dance at UC Davis. The assignment of the Chair Robert Fahrner was that I use my training in performance—acting and dance—to create a two-year movement program for actors. On reflection, I realized that none of the dance forms I had studied would by themselves provide an actor's body with the needed breath control, flexibility, strength, endurance, coordination, awareness and physical imagination to perform effectively on stage or screen. As a teacher of movement for actors, I needed to integrate my past experiences to create methods to help actors embody a text. In pursuit of this goal, my body was a site for exploration, deconstruction, and recombination of distinct and separate “bodies of knowledge.”

Studying Middle Eastern, Japanese, and African forms, I began an engagement of self that differed from that in studio classes. In the modern class, I was one of twenty or thirty students who stood behind the teacher, watched her in a mirror, and attempted to imitate her movements. The class structure was divided into a warm-up period followed by a series of

dance phrases. The warm-up concentrated on separate body parts: the lower body learned to bend and balance, the upper body to remain stable but supple. In dance phrases, the separate movements of the upper and lower body were combined in more complex sequences.

Standing in front of a mirror I visually watched my body as it worked to match the physical illustration and verbal instructions of the teacher. I was an image in the mirror, an object attempting to achieve a particular aesthetic. Even when I moved away from the mirror, the memory of the objective reflection was still part of my subjective experience. I was dancing to the visual image of a form.

In Middle Eastern, African classes and Japanese lessons, my experience of the attributes of the form was internal and subjective. These forms encouraged me to attend to the integration of self that moved from the center of my neuro system along the spine from pelvis to head and outward to the communication centers of face, arms and hands. I had the visual image of my teacher (or fellow classmates in the African class), but they were augmented by a constant scan of my internal landscape. With each form I combined the movement with the complex rhythms and phrasing of the musical accompaniment. My sense of success in learning the dance was not based on the acknowledgment of a mirror.

These methods of dance training created a unified subjective experience of self. In phenomenological terms, I had transformed the experience of my "lived body." A temporal term, "lived body" refers to unity of action in the "present-centered moment" or a unity of mind and body in action. As Fraleigh explains in *Dance and the Lived Body*, "embodiment is not passive;

it is articulate. In other words, I live my body-of-motion, just as I also live myself in motion."[88] I was beginning to experience the potential of a unified self.

Philosopher and educator Thomas Hanna refers to the Middle Eastern, Japanese and African methods of teaching as "somatic education." Describing the ontological development of the body and its evolution from single to multiple cells, Hanna defines self as a soma, "a rich and constantly flowing array of sensing and actions that are occurring within the experience of each of us." Hanna suggests, "when one looks at another person's 'body,' one must realize that he is observing the moving process of that person's mind."[89] His definition of self suggests the mind is not a separate organ located in the brain; instead, it exists throughout the structure of the body. Consequently, when you are watching someone walk across a room, you are watching them think. A somatic approach to education integrates, as an existential whole, the experiential history of individuals with their current experience. It implies an education that trusts individuals to learn from their ability to attend and to listen to the information they are receiving from the interaction of self with the environment. As Hanna notes:

> Experience (this is a cognate of the more traditional terms "consciousness" and "awareness") is a sensory-motor event, in which sensing cannot be separated from moving and moving cannot be separated from sensing—they are the warp and woof of personal reality. This inseparability means that what we do not sense, we cannot move; what we cannot move, we cannot sense.[90]

Hanna's observations resonate with my own. In a Middle Eastern, African, or Japanese dance class, my entire being is engaged in the learning process. I exist in a constant state of exploration, discovering the possibilities that a movement vocabulary presents. The sensory modalities of my internal landscape actively investigate the external environment through the form's movement style.

In contrast, when I take a modern dance class, I do not use my sensory abilities subjectively to explore or investigate the form. Instead, I restrict my modes of understanding, focusing on replicating the teacher's image in the mirror. Without realizing it, I limit my capacity for exploratory engagement—an approach that could deepen my understanding of the form—because my attention is fixed on achieving the mirror's reflection. In this pursuit, I engage in what F. Matthias Alexander refers to as "end-gaining",[91] a goal-driven state that I unconsciously adopt as I strive to perfect the image in the mirror.

Discovering Ki Energy.

Initially, I tried to bring Hanna's concept of somatic education, with its focus on exploration and internal process, to my work with actors simply by teaching, Middle Eastern, Japanese and African forms. Students appreciated the focus and experience of subtle energy states that they gained. More difficult, however, was seeing how these forms could be applied to the theories of Stanislavsky or used for a psychological interpretation of a text. Hence, I began outlining for the actors the somatic modes of attention that I believed each form taught. While I attributed somatic integration to each of the forms, I came to associate specific skills with each form. Middle Eastern taught me

the joy of exploration and the related discoveries that came with not preplanning a movement. African dance taught the complexity of opposing body rhythms, ensemble unity, pelvic release, and grounding. Nihon Buyō taught stillness at the center, sustained flow, breath phrasing, attention to detail, and asymmetry.

The categories offered a vocabulary with which I could talk to actors concerning the application of specific movement skills in the acting class. While for some actors this language was useful, I observed that most students needed a more direct approach. I began to search for a pedagogical approach that would provide the basis for a "somatic" approach to movement training. At this point, I chanced upon the work of Japanese philosopher, Yasuo Yuasa.

Based on a combination of Eastern philosophy and depth psychology, Yuasa's body scheme evolved in a culture that does not assume the mind-body dichotomy of western society. As Kasulis points out, Japanese philosophers conceive the body not as two disparate parts but as a unit capable of "increasing levels of integration. In other words, rather than asking how the mind and body are related, the Japanese have more often asked how the mind and body become increasingly interrelated."[92] Yuasa's theory describes how the body's systems are used in Japanese training systems such as Nihon Buyō to create deeper levels of integration and awareness. According to Yuasa, the body is divided into four interactive circuits: the external sensory-motor circuit, the circuit of coenesthesis, the emotion-instinct circuit, and the circuit of the unconscious quasi-body. Using a Japanese perspective of the self, Yuasa assumes it is possible with appropriate training to expand perception to increase

the level of awareness of aspects of the autonomic nervous system that we would generally consider subconsciously. The circuits operate within the cybernetic systems of the self to unite an individual's internal structural landscape of organs, muscles, bones, nerves, and brain with the external world. I will briefly discuss the first three circuits and then the unique qualities of the circuit of the unconscious quasi-body..

The first circuit, the external sensory-motor circuit, refers to an outer layer of perception: information is received through the sensory organs, passed on to the central nervous system, and returned to the appendages in the form of action. The second circuit, the circuit of coenesthesis, is associated with deeper levels of consciousness; it includes the kinesthetic system of muscle response as it is related to touch and the automatic functioning of internal organs. The third circuit, the emotion-instinct circuit, provides another level of consciousness coordinated by the autonomic nervous system and integrated with the unconscious. Information from the environment is first perceived by the external-sensory circuit. As this information interacts within the circuit of coenesthesis, it becomes "thought," which forms itself into "willing" and returns to the external sensory-motor circuit as "action." At the same time information enters the sensory-motor circuit, it also reaches "the third emotion-instinct circuit, and an emotional response to this information ricochets back to the second circuit which habitualizes the body, forming a definite passage among the three layers of the circuit." Yuasa's discussion of the interactive nature of these circuits helpfully elaborates upon Hanna's description of the body as a "flowing array of sensings"—what in

acting classes is sometimes referred to as “an awareness of your internal landscape..”[93]

The Nihon Buyō lesson best illustrates Yuasa’s body scheme. When as a student I begin a lesson and attempt to replicate a dance phrase, I engage my external sense receptors or ability to perceive the first layer (the external sensory-motor circuit). As I continue to adjust to the teacher’s movement, I start to engage deeper levels of sensory awareness (the circuit of coenesthesis): muscles and internal sense organs offer feedback to my systematized external sensory analysis of the correctness or incorrectness of my interpretation of the teacher’s movement. As I keep adjusting to imitate the teacher’s movement, the emotion-instinct circuit becomes involved: I begin to develop an emotional relationship to my kinesthetic sense as I continue to survey my internal landscape. With each repetition of a phrase or dance, I have deepened and expanded my awareness of the movement. Although I refer to each circuit separately to indicate deepening levels of awareness and integration, most often there is an overlap of experience between the three separate circuits.

Yuasa’s first three circuits correspond to descriptions of the self by Moshe Feldenkrais, one of the founders of somatic therapy. In his analysis of self-image, Feldenkrais includes movement, sensation, feeling, and thought as components present to a varying extent in all actions.[94] However, Yuasa incorporates into his body scheme an additional circuit that is not part of western theories. This is the circuit of ki, a concept integral to a Japanese understanding of self. Yuasa associates the circuit of ki (the circuit of unconscious quasi-body) with the meridian system of Asian medicine. Ki, or energy, has no specific anatomical referent like the muscles and sensory systems of the first

two circuits or the nervous system of the third (emotion-instinct) circuit. Instead, it is an invisible energy state that can only be felt, most often by people trained to do so. This felt state is a combination of the workings of all three circuits. For most people, ki energy is not part of their conscious experience of self, but there are people trained to be ki-sensitive. These people can feel, and consequently direct, this energy as it moves through them. The most visible and popular examples of this skillful application of ki energy are the Asian martial art disciplines.

One goal of most Japanese systems of self-cultivation, including Nihon Buyō, is to increase ki sensitivity. These systems use techniques to slow down bodily movement, allowing the participant to become aware of internal states such as breath and its attachment to the energy of physical action. “When mind moves, ki moves. When breathing is subtle, the movement of the mind is subtle. This is because ki moves with breathing, affecting the activities of the mind.”[95] These activities of the mind are bound to images from previous muscular/kinesthetic associations. According to Yuasa, when experiences are brought into current memory, the emotions associated with these images flow through the self as ki energy. Self-actualization training teaches people to use their breath to integrate the first three circuits to become aware of and to focus their use of energy.

The sequence of dances taught by Kanriye Fujima attempted to increase her students’ felt awareness of ki states. At one point, Fujima taught a dance that required a slow repetition of the same sustained movement. During one lesson, she stated she wanted me to learn strength. Her use of the term “strength” acted as a Zen koan, a verbal puzzle that had a somatic reality.

Over months of practicing the dance, I realized that by strength she meant a deeper engagement of breath and a greater level of focus on the momentary relationship between my internal sensing and the external environment. As my ability to perceive and attend to the interplay of my internal landscape of Yuasa's four circuits increased, my interaction with my environment changed: I noticed my physical environment and interaction with others, and to respond to both with greater detail. My class experience carried it over to other contexts. As my ability to maintain concentration jointly on internal states and the external environment increased, my perceptual ability to assimilate greater amounts of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic information was enhanced. Thus, I was able to comprehend details of verbal and nonverbal texts that previously had escaped my conscious awareness.

Hanna's definition of soma and Yuasa's body scheme provided a framework for creating exercises that focus actors on an ongoing process of exploration initiated by attention to their breath. In a group of exploratory exercises related to a technique that I refer to as "feel, fuse, and follow," actors move around the room and interact with each other. In these exercises, breath becomes a point of focus. Students learn to feel the inhalation, fuse with the top of the breath, and follow it through their bodies. With continued breath explorations, a felt sense of breath evolves, deepens, and becomes experienced as ki that flows from the internal core (pelvic region) and out through their appendages. Ultimately, the practice of "feel, fuse, and follow" becomes a somatic skill they extend to work in improvisations and image explorations.

How I use the “feel, fuse, and follow” technique varies with each group of students. When I need to help a student engage her pelvis and expand her ability to work with a group, I will use African movement phrases with their focus on pelvic positioning, rhythm, and ensemble. When a student’s body and breath are caught in the vertical and cannot move into the horizontal and diagonal, preventing him from fully embodying characters who have complex, asymmetrical personalities, I use movement and breath phrases based on Asian forms, including Nihon Buyō, to create new levels of awareness and new possibilities. What remains consistent is my use of questions related to the theories of Hanna and Yuasa when watching students in the classroom or onstage. How and where are they incorporating the breath/energy into their bodies? How is the placement of the breath helping them to reach deeper levels of functional integration, to experience self as soma? How do they use their imaginations in relationship to the breath and its accompanying energy?

Discovering the Power of Metaphor

Through classroom trial and error, I concluded that breath and ki sensitivity was only the first phase of actor training. Although study and experiment with non-Western forms had provided helpful techniques towards this end, the actors still did not have a means for integrating external action with internal motivation when creating a physical character. Their tendency was to play some version of themselves or, despite previous breath/energy work, to act only from the head. One day while working on the animal exercise (using an animal as a metaphor for character) with the actors, Yuasa’s phrase “when mind

moves, ki moves" kept repeating itself to me. Later, I remembered Stanislavsky's definition of physical action:

> In every physical action, unless it is purely mechanical, there is concealed some inner action, some feelings. This is how the two levels of life in part are created, the inner and the outer. They are intertwined. A common purpose brings them closer together and reinforces the unbreakable bond between them.[96]

In this moment, I realized actors would achieve deeper levels of characterization if they could be trained to unite ki with an image, as in the animal exercise. Doing so, they would unite breath, imagination, and physical action—in Stanislavsky's terms, unite inner experience with outer physical action. Although still uncertain, I intuitively felt such a method would help actors. This time, my ideas were supported by my previous research with Kanriye Fujima on the relationship between somatic skills, imagery, and metaphor.

Somatic unification is only one aspect of self that Kanriye Fujima wants her students to learn. She also teaches a set of attributes associated with Japanese arts such as concentration—physical silence, attention to detail, and moment-to-moment awareness—as well as the psychological attributes of playfulness, adaptability, acceptance, and realization of duty. The constant interplay between physical skills and psychological attributes provides a total complex of skills she refers to as "personality with gracefulness." Kanriye Fujima believes that knowledge of these somatic skills helps her students to live a graceful life, for greater somatic awareness increases our sensitivity to self, other people, and the environment.

The relationship between somatic skills and the phrase "personality with gracefulness" had originally puzzled me. However, Mark Johnson's theories of language offered a way through my confusion. In The Body in the Mind, Johnson illustrates how culture evolves from, and is structured by, our somatic interaction with our environment: "Our reality is shaped by the patterns of our bodily movements, the contours of our spatial and temporal orientation, and the forms of our interaction with objects."[97] Patterns of movement that result from individual integration of Yuasa's four circuits create structures or "image schemata," which Johnson defines as "those recurring structures of, or in, our perceptual interactions, bodily experiences, and cognitive operations." For example, we unconsciously incorporate Yuasa's four circuits when, as toddlers, we learn the concept of "balance" as we investigate sitting, then crawling, walking, and other forms of locomotion. But as we learn balance through walking, we also engage, through imitation, with previously established cultural codes that teach specific "modes of thinking" concerning concepts such as balance. This fusing of movement and cultural codes creates distinctive conceptual meanings for the individual; concepts elaborated upon as we experience a variety of somatic states from illness to euphoria. Later, individual sensory organs—the eyes, for instance—are used to make judgments about the balance or imbalance of visual material. The image-schematic level gives general form to our understanding of cognitive ideas such as balance, allowing us to "make sense of the relations among diverse experiences";[98] such experiences are often summed up as metaphors in phrases such as "balance of forces," "scales of justice," and so on. The term "metaphor," then, is not only a liter-

ary construct, but a summation of sensory images and a key to an embodied understanding of our conceptual reality. As suggested by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*,

> [m]etaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect—it involves the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, etc. These dimensions structure not only our mundane experience but aesthetic experience as well.[99]

Applying the understanding I had gained from Nihon Buyō, I began to examine the movement of other forms for related metaphors and imagery. For instance, I had as noted in Chapter 5 danced with a group of Azande at a funerary ritual (a Pumbo) in the Southern Sudan. We danced in a circle around a man playing a drum or guu guu. Each of us moved individually to the rhythm of the music while still incorporating in our movement a syncopation of the feet that released our spines and created a musical counterpoint in our ribs, shoulders, and head. I looked at my teacher next to me to more adequately imitate her movement. Without words, she indicated not to watch her, but to feel the drum. Remembering another teacher's words— "release into the drum"—I let the drum become the center of my world, and it increasingly influenced my movement. I relaxed my spine and adjusted my breath to its rhythm and phrasing. The rhythm of the drum seemed to be centered in my pelvis. My eyes softened their focus. I found it easy to move in and among the people crowded around the drum without bumping

into anyone. My usual sense of self as an individual entity disappeared. The boundary of my skin dissolved, replaced by a sense of oneness with the group. For in the same moment, our somas, with their cybernetic natures, shared the common rhythm of the drum aurally, visually, and kinesthetically. The drum became a rhythmic metaphor for a set of skills that included a softening of focus, release of the spine, discovery of the pelvis, a grounding of energy, and a feeling of the earth and other people dancing—all of which engaged the dancers in the ritual moment of a community. Later, in teaching a movement in class, those remembered kinesthetic images of the dancers next to me, the feel and smell of earth, and the rhythms of the drum provided a focus and vocabulary for explaining the movement to students.

Comparing cultural forms led me to appreciate the variety of images and related metaphors that dance, and other aspects of movement training could provide as an extension of human culture itself. I also began to experience somatically the profound truth of movement in educator Irmgard Bartenieff's words:

> Studies of movement behavior in ethnic, cultural contexts can no longer be regarded simply as studies of "foreign" behavior, but rather as explorations of the wide range of possibilities of our own "human" behavior. What makes ethnicity "foreign" to many is not just departures from what is familiar, but a lack of awareness of the components even of the "familiar." Ignorance obscures the common threads between the familiar and the foreign.[100]

As such, different movement forms can teach distinctive images and ways of experiencing the world. These frames then become "somatic modes of thinking" that influence perceptions of experience. Dance and movement teachers are not only teaching technical skills but a set of somatic skills and images that will influence how their students perceive the world.

While a set of somatic skills associated with a dance form may be described by a single phrase such as "personality with gracefulness," dance training is not alone in influencing our embodiment of images. Eleanor, a character from *Why We Have a Body*, describes the overlapping nature of the images that influence our lives: "The daughter watches. The sound of the fork against the mixing bowl, the sinking feeling the shine on the kitchen floor can summon . . . these are things that pass through her mind while having sex. Or trying on a bathing suit."[101] As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, "The body becomes a text and is fictionalized and positioned with myths and belief systems that form a culture's social narratives and self-representations."[102] In the interplay of myth and self, the individual "becomes" aspects of the cultural narrative.

In working with actors, the interaction between narrative and self was deliberately underscored. In it, I not only focused on the movement forms of the Middle, East, Japan and Africa but also incorporated their myths and narratives. As the class discussed the myths of other cultures, it became apparent which stories and television programs played central roles in the actors' own childhoods. These stories framed the actors' views of the world themselves and influenced their movement choices. For example, a pivotal story for one female student was The Little Engine That Could, the story about a little train

that succeeds in helping a larger train over the mountain by concentrated effort and the positive thinking of "I think I can." After years of deeply valuing this image, the student tended to play each character as if she were pushing a train up a hill. Even though she was a slightly built woman, her physical and vocal expressiveness were dominated by this single-minded image. In the vocabulary of Laban movement analysis, her movement text was strong, direct, and bound. While often cast in strong female roles such as Joan of Arc, her movement tendencies limited her interpretation of these characters; in addition, she was never cast as characters such as Juliet or Ophelia. Each of us has similar metaphors that unconsciously define our movement vocabulary, affect the perception of our environment, and limit our imagination. As Moshe Feldenkrais phrases it, we "are so harnessed to our personal experience that we can conceive of nothing outside it."

Discovering a Method of Practice

By reflecting on my efforts to incorporate Middle Eastern, Japanese and African dance forms into movement training for actors, I began to integrate divergent aspects of my practical movement background with various theories of the body. My personal experience along with Hanna's theory of the body as a soma in a constant state of exploration, led me to an awareness of somatic unity. Yuasa's concepts helped me to appreciate how a person could be taught to experience new and deeper levels of awareness and integration by focusing on breath and energy. Johnson's explanation of the relationship between sensory experience and metaphor helped me to understand the power of imagery. Slowly, I discovered a method to help actors develop

new ways of experiencing self that incorporated these different strands. My method focuses on three interactive processes that engage self as a soma—an attitude of exploration, the experience of breath/energy, and the unifying power of imagery. Work with each of these somatic processes helps to make conscious what is habitually unconscious by means of new sensory information that looks both inward (to one's internal landscape) and outward (to application in the external environment). Each process can be used individually or in combination to teach a variety of movement concepts including relaxation, alignment, balance, grounding, oppositional force, expressiveness, physical characterization, and aspects of time and space.

An attitude of exploration is the foundation for actors' improvisations or work on a scene. Such an attitude combines playful curiosity with thoughtful contemplation while allowing a series of choices that result in physical actions. When combined with breath, exploration immerses an individual in a dialogue with self and environment. Awareness of internal and external respiration expands internal awareness of kinesthetic states associated with the conscious sensory aspects of Yuasa's circuit of coenesthesis. Breath combined with an attitude of exploration places individuals in the position of becoming investigators of their unconscious by noting the flow of breath/energy and its relationship to the emotions of Yuasa's third circuit. Breath and exploration processes release an individual's ability to experience sensory and other images by using his or her associative memory. Concentration on an individual element, such as breath, teaches an actor to maintain a point of focus. With additional training that incorporates working with the so-

matic processes in combination, the actor becomes more comfortable using multiple points of focus.

Although specific exercises can be created using each or a combination of these concepts, they do not represent a bounded system, but rather a set of concepts that can be combined depending upon the needs of the actor. The possibilities are endless. Actors can begin to transform their experience of self by focusing on any of the three. For instance, they can focus on the act of exploration and through internal listening begin to acknowledge habitual movement patterns, such as always moving on the sagittal plane or focusing kinesthetic attention on only the front part of their body. They can use placement of the breath, or imagery, or a combination of both to evolve new patterns of physical and emotional alignment. They can explore their expressive potential by beginning with daily patterns of sitting, walking, or performing some daily tasks and then change the rhythm and phrasing of these daily actions. One method is to begin moving around the studio attempting to replicate the kinesthetic attributes of a personally limiting image, such as “the little engine that could.” While continuing to walk or move in other ways around space, the actor mentally transmutes this image into one that has opposite kinesthetic referents, say, a butterfly. By literally focusing on breathing the image through his or her body, the actor can discover new qualities of movement. In combination, an understanding of physical habits, an increased awareness of the influence of controlling images on physical habits, and the discovery of new images and habits creates new levels of conscious experience in the actor. In this process, no mind-body dichotomy exists, only recognition of current breath and imagery patterns to explore

new modes of being. These three somatic processes can empower actors as they acknowledge their limitations, devise ways to expand their self-images, create characters, and expand their repertoire of physical actions. Finally, actors become their own teachers. The young actor limited by the "little engine that could" story used the combined processes to develop new methods of perception that led to a new movement vocabulary, one that now allows her to play roles such as Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Most importantly, this method aims to increase an actor's potential by bringing into "play" the possibilities of being a soma: "Somatic knowledge does not simply mean 'knowledge of the body' but knowledge gained through the body."[103] The organizing principle of soma and its related processes of exploration, breath/energy, and imagery can be incorporated as the basis for both self-understanding and specific work with written scripts. Exploration encourages attitudes of discovery, searching, investigating, and decision-making; breath becomes a means by which the fundamental experience of being is integrated with energy associated with emotional life; and imagery unites the sensory system with the imagination. By focusing on these three somatic processes, we have an opportunity to expand beyond individual tendencies to privilege any of the sensory learning modalities—visual, aural, or kinesthetic. Once new modes of attention are incorporated into our method of attending to and interpreting information, our awareness of what is possible.

Every movement, acting, and voice teacher brings to her work a unique body and context of experience, as well as a focus on the body as a site of exploration. What seems missing,

however, is the kind of personal narrative of discovery found in Stanislavsky's three books on the evolution of his system of acting. The personal journey traced in this article pays tribute to this broader goal. The dance class or movement lesson provided a catalyst for me to further investigate the work of somatic theorists and philosophers. My work with acting students provided the impetus to link practice and theory with method. My approach has been influenced by my opportunity to study different dance and movement forms as well as by the kinesthetic method I use to process new information. Perhaps by focusing more on the site of our bodies and the somatic processes we use to transform and relay information in our own research, we can continue to create new systems of training.

International Teaching: England, China, and Australia

From 1995 to 2016, I had the opportunity to teach acting in England, China, and Australia. Each experience was unique, with programs ranging from three-year undergraduate degrees in acting (England and Australia) to a course embedded within a business degree at China Agricultural University. In each setting, I adapted my UC Davis teaching approaches to meet the institution's specific needs.

At UC Davis, my teaching focused on integrating movement analysis with performance, and I carried this emphasis into my international experiences. While I enjoyed teaching movement classes at Manchester Metropolitan University, my most significant learning moment came when directing third-year students in *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill. Unlike in most American universities, where rehearsals take place in the evening, these rehearsals were held during the day and adhered to professional

industry standards regarding breaks and working hours. The students' extensive training in movement improvisation made them highly adept at embodying the physical subtext of a script.

Several scenes in *Top Girls* consist of dinner-table conversations among famous historical women, requiring the actors to eat in character, engage dynamically with their scene partners, and execute overlapping dialogue while maintaining clarity for the audience. We developed these scenes progressively beginning with simple, character-based eating improvisations, then layering in dialogue, and finally refining performances for coherence and flow. Personally, I also encountered linguistic surprises—words and phrases that carried different meanings in England. For example, I learned that a "packer" referred to a supermarket box boy rather than someone carrying a gun, a distinction that, from my American perspective, could have been easily misinterpreted.

In China, the acting class was part of a business program and designed to help students develop English-speaking skills while gaining confidence performing in front of others. I structured the course using techniques I had refined at UC Davis, emphasizing a physical and vocal warm-up, improvisation exercises, and scene work—all conducted in English. What stood out consistently about the Chinese students was their remarkable ability to work as a cohesive unit. One exercise, for example, asks students to form a group, connect with their breath, and move together across the floor as a single unit. At UC Davis and Manchester Metropolitan, students struggled to maintain synchrony. The Chinese students, however, executed the exercise flawlessly on their first attempt.

To provide them with a culturally relevant reference point, I selected an English translation of Cao Yu's classic Chinese play *Thunderstorm*, which was being performed in Beijing at the time. First staged in 1935, *Thunderstorm* exemplifies early 20th-century Chinese revolutionary drama, centering on the psychological and physical destruction of the Zhou family—a downfall rooted in incest and oppression under the morally corrupt patriarch, Zhou Puyuan. Each student was assigned a scene with a partner. While casting roles, a female student expressed that she did not identify as a woman and preferred to play a male character. I was initially surprised by the request, but even more so by the lack of reaction from her peers, who accepted it as entirely unremarkable. I agreed without hesitation, assigning her a male role in a brother-sister scene, and appreciated how the moment reflected evolving perspectives on gender identity within the student body.



Figure 33: Students rehearsing scene from Thunderstorm*, 1999*

At Charles Sturt University in Australia, I was reminded of the Australians I had met years earlier while serving as a resident assistant at the University of Oregon. The students were playfully direct, highly curious, eager to experimentally engage, fo-

cused when asked and unafraid to take risks in performance. They came from diverse artistic backgrounds, including music, dance, and acting, and represented a range of experiences from across New South Wales. Their production of *The Threepenny Opera* demonstrated their ability to blend singing, acting, and musicianship in service of a historically significant text that resonated with their English colonial heritage.

Throughout my career, both at UC Davis and abroad, I have found that the greatest gift of teaching in different cultural contexts is the opportunity to learn from the students themselves. Each student brings a distinct life experience that reshapes my approach to teaching. Teaching internationally deepened my understanding of how students aged 18 to 25 in England, China, and Australia engage with learning. I found myself asking: What style of communication do they expect? What forms of knowledge do they most value? What skills do they believe will propel them professionally? What aesthetic or theoretical constructs shape their perspectives? How do these reflect their immediate community? What are the key components of professional identity in their chosen field?

At UC Davis, I had inherited established pedagogical approaches from my own mentors. However, teaching internationally compelled me to question and refine those methods. Had I remained solely in the United States, I am not certain I would have examined my teaching strategies with the same depth. The experience not only expanded my understanding of global education but also enriched my ability to guide students in discovering their own artistic and professional voices.

In 2001 I became an academic administrator with positions that included serving as Chair of the Department of Theatre

and Dance at UC/Davis (2001-05), Director, Mondavi Center (2005-06), Dean of the School of Arts Media, Performance and Design (2008-2013). These positions were an extension of management positions I had been given including the reorganization of the MFA Acting to Curriculum and Chair of the UC/Davis campus wide committee on teaching. Each new administrative position included a unique set of challenges and increased levels of responsibility. Each position also included a level of international travel to create collaborations between each institution and related institutions in Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

In the fifteen years of these positions, I evolved an administrative philosophy that I now understand was an extension of my integration of my experience studying Middle Eastern, Japanese and African dance forms. The transition from movement educator to academic administrator may seem, at first glance, like a shift from expressive and kinetic to structured and bureaucratic. Yet, upon deeper reflection, the combined somatic modes of attention—improvisation, deep listening, layered learning, metaphoric thinking, embodied decision-making, and cultural awareness—are equally vital in the world of leadership and administration. My years of teaching actors to inhabit their bodies, breath, and imagination provided a framework for guiding institutions, shaping academic programs, and fostering collaborative decision-making. The body does not cease to be a site of knowledge simply because one moves from the studio to the boardroom; rather, it remains a critical tool for engaging with the complexities of institutional life.

Improvisation as an Approach to Leadership.

Improvisation was fundamental to the dance traditions of the Azande and Egypt, where movement evolved in direct response to rhythm, community, and environment. This fluid, responsive approach to movement training translated seamlessly into leadership. In administration, rigid adherence to pre-set strategies can stifle innovation, my improvisational mindset allowed for adaptability in response to shifting institutional needs. Over time I learned to trust in spontaneous movement and cultivated an intuitive, flexible approach to decision-making—one that remains open to new possibilities rather than being confined by habitual patterns. Improvisation in leadership is not about randomness; rather, it is about the ability to sense and respond in the moment while remaining grounded in overarching institutional goals.

Deep Somatic Listening as a Mode of Communication.

Somatic listening—attuning myself to the internal and external landscapes of movement—has been central to my teaching of actors. For instance, in dancing the Pumbo I did not simply execute steps but listened deeply to the rhythm of the drum, the breath of the group, and the movement of the earth beneath my feet. This practice of listening with the whole body has profound implications for me as an administrator. Effective leadership required more than hearing words; it demanded an ability to sense underlying tensions, recognize unspoken concerns, and respond with presence. Somatic listening meant engaging fully with faculty, staff, and students, not merely through intellectual analysis but through an embodied attentiveness.

Layered Learning and Program Development.

The study of Nihon Buyō taught me that dance was not learned in a linear fashion but through a careful layering of movement vocabulary, where each phrase builds upon the previous one, allowing for deeper integration over time. This method offered a powerful model for academic program development and institutional initiatives. Just as movement phrases must be revisited and refined, curricular planning and policy-making benefit from an iterative approach—one that allowed for gradual refinement rather than demanding immediate perfection. Understanding institutional growth as a process of layering enabled me to develop sustainable programs, ensuring that each step was built upon a solid foundation rather than imposing abrupt changes that may lack cohesion.

Metaphoric Thinking for Institutional Vision

Throughout my movement training, I relied on metaphors to help actors embody characters, emotions, and relationships. Metaphors shaped perception, transforming abstract ideas into tangible experiences. Similarly, as an administrator, I crafted narratives that provided meaning and direction. A well-chosen metaphor helped each institution to see itself not as a fragmented collection of people or agendas but as an interconnected ensemble, each part contributing to the whole. By applying the principles of metaphor and imagery, I worked to articulate institutional values, inspire collective action, and foster a sense of shared purpose.

Embodied Decision-Making: Trusting Somatic Intelligence

Theories of enaction, as articulated by Francisco Varela and Antonio Damasio, have suggested that cognition is not merely an abstract, intellectual process but is enacted through bodily experience. Just as an actor learns to trust their breath, posture, and internal impulses when crafting a role, I learned to benefit from recognizing my somatic presence in decision-making. The tension in my shoulders before a difficult meeting, the instinctive ease felt in certain conversations—these somatic markers offered critical insight into environment during the meeting. By cultivating awareness of these bodily responses, I developed a more integrated, holistic approach to problem-solving, one that acknowledged the wisdom of the body rather than relying solely on disembodied rationality.

Cultural Awareness and Global Sensitivity

My movement training has taken me across multiple cultural traditions, from Middle Eastern Belly Dance to Japanese Nihon Buyō to African funerary rituals. Each form carried its own way of knowing, its own relationship to the body, space, and community. This sensitivity to diverse movement vocabularies translated into administrative work in increasingly globalized positions that asked me to create relationships with institutions in Japan, India, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. In these dialogues, I needed to be aware of the complexities of cross-cultural communication, institutional diversity, and interdisciplinary collaboration. A global perspective required that I maintain an openness and adaptability that one developed when learning movement in an unfamiliar tradition—it de-

manded a willingness to step outside any habitual patterns and engage with the unfamiliar on its own terms.

The Somatic Administrator

Reflecting on my journey from movement teacher to administrator, I realize that my approach to leadership has been deeply informed by somatic principles. The improvisational skills honed through dance have allowed me to remain adaptable in institutional decision-making. The deep listening cultivated through movement training has enhanced my ability to engage meaningfully with colleagues. The layered learning of Nihon Buyō shaped my approach to curricular development. The power of metaphor, the wisdom of embodied decision-making, and the sensitivity to cultural differences, gained through years of practice of movement, have found resonance in my administrative work.

Reflections in Retrospect

Reflecting on the years studying dance from the perspective of enaction as articulated by Francisco J Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch in The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience, who “emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs.” Using enaction as a frame of reference, I have come to realize that I began applying the experience of dance to my life as I was studying it.

Each dance form offered not just a technique, but a distinct way of paying attention—a somatic lens through which to per-

ceive the world and oneself. Middle Eastern dance opened me to the joy of improvisation, awakening an internal responsiveness that valued fluidity, spontaneity, and self-discovery. African dance taught me to listen with my body—to sense rhythm as communal energy moving through the ground and rising upward, urging an embodied dialogue between self and others. Nihon Buyō refined my awareness of stillness, asymmetry, and temporal nuance, guiding me to perceive motion not as outward display but as internal unfolding. These traditions, though culturally distinct, converged in my teaching practice as layered somatic vocabularies—each offering tools to cultivate presence, intention, and aesthetic sensitivity. In guiding others to "feel, fuse, and follow," I was drawing from this diverse archive, shaped by lived experience and sustained attention across geographies and genres.

For example, the deep inner somatic connections that were part of learning Belly Dance provided an integrated sense of self that evolved the metaphor of the open door. The experience of interconnection of a Pumbo provided a somatic image of another way of relating to others. Coming from a low-context environment, it was not one I completely understood in terms of its responsibility to others dictated by the landscape, but it was a way of being that I sought in my continued study of African dance.

Nihon Buyō's organization of study of uniting a somatic style of teaching with a layering of movement vocabulary became a method of organizing life that I began to use in the way I taught academic concepts. The years of dance study also contributed somatic modes of consciousness that were applied to being an administrator—improvisation as an approach to leadership,

deep somatic listening as an important aspect of communication, and curricular initiatives as carefully planned layering of ideas, and as my professional position crossed cultural boundaries from the United States to Canada, an awareness of the complex personal negotiations necessary in an increasingly globalized world..

Yet, reviewing my reflections repeatedly, I note how often I return to experiences related to deep listening, sensing, and improvising that were an integral part of my wandering deer trails. Modes of attention that Antonio Damasio would refer to as somatic markers. These somatic modes of attention were also an integral part of experiences associated with belly dancing, dancing at a Pumbo, or in a Nihon Buyō class, and thus, seemed an extension of my personal narrative. After much reflection, I realized I was searching for a place in the landscape of dance that in some part replicated the wanderings of my childhood. Curator and environmental activist Lucy Lippard in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* integrates landscape, space, place, and memory. “Landscape is a kind of activity, a way of seeing the world and imagining our relationship with nature. Space defines landscape, where space combined with memory defines place. The spatial experience of landscape can be impressive because it evokes a known place or, on the other hand, because it is so totally unfamiliar.”[104] An autoethnographic journey that began as a search for the self in the somatic contexts of dance forms ultimately was a discovery of the continuity of my somatic self. A self with a history of place—deer trails—that influenced my perception of future movement experiences. Ethnographers Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw observe in *Writing Ethnographic*

Fieldnotes, "when self-consciously applied to ourselves as researchers, the reflexive lens helps us to see and appreciate" how and perhaps why we write the narrative of other worlds."[105]

Chapter Nine

The Lived Body in Motion: Embodiment, Technology, and the Reflexive Turn

Long before I understood the language of Damasio's theory of "somatic markers," I was already embodying them. They were felt. As Antonio Damasio explains, somatic markers are bodily-based patterns of response that shape our decision-making and awareness long before conscious thought intervenes.[106] For me, these imprints became the foundation of a sensory-motor cognition that later deepened through dance and expanded through autoethnographic inquiry in collaboration with Saffi 1 and 2.

My life was shaped by a body that was always listening. Before I studied breath control in a Japanese dance studio or grounded myself in the drum rhythms at a Pumbo, I learned to read tension through my father's footsteps, to sense the shifting air of an unstable home. My father's alcoholism did not just create emotional uncertainty; it trained my nervous system in vigilance. I became adept at tuning into subtle changes in tone, gesture, and space—skills that would later inform my movement practice and pedagogical work.

My role as the eldest child in a volatile household demanded early responsibility. I helped prepare meals, manage household tasks, and cared for my younger siblings. This sense of duty became entwined with a kind of embodied knowledge: how to hold space, how to create structure in the face of chaos, how to move with care through rooms charged with emotion. These early somatic lessons were as formative as any formal dance

training. They cultivated an attentiveness I would later channel into my work with actors—an attentiveness to the internal and external landscapes of the body.

In contrast to my father's volatility, my maternal grandparents embodied steadiness. Their days unfolded with deliberate rhythms: my grandfather's silent walks, my grandmother's canning and baking, the annual ritual of the Christmas fruitcake. Their lives were built on repetition, quiet labor, and a faith that did not seek spectacle. These patterns became early templates for somatic presence. In their steadiness, I learned the value of breath, of patience, of allowing process to unfold over time. These lessons would echo in my engagement with Japanese dance forms, particularly Nihon Buyō, where stillness, detail, and asymmetry are cultivated over years, not moments.

Church was a constant in my childhood. My mother's Baptist faith gave our family structure, community, and a moral vocabulary. But it was also where I encountered my first rupture between bodily knowing and doctrinal certainty. At church camp, when a missionary declared that those who had never heard of Jesus would be damned, something in my body recoiled. I ran into the woods, crying—not just out of disbelief but because my body registered a profound dissonance. That moment marked a turning point: a movement away from inherited doctrine toward a spiritual inquiry grounded in breath and presence. Years later, sitting in a Buddhist monastery outside Kathmandu, I experienced a kind of spiritual homecoming—not in theology, but in the quiet continuity between chant, breath, and daily life.

The death of my sister Bonnie was the great silence at the center of our family story. Her illness and passing were not ab-

stract losses but visceral ones. I remember the feel of her hand, the weight of her pain, the inadequacy of morphine. Her suffering pressed into my body a lesson that no theory could teach: how to be present with pain, how to witness without fixing, how to hold space for a life ebbing away.

My free-range childhood unfolded along deer trails that laced through fields and woods. We spent our days outside, barefoot and unsupervised, telling time by the sun. I wandered those trails for hours, listening, sensing, learning the land by feel. We dammed creeks, swung from ropes, and built forts beneath the trees. I rode a neighbor's horse through thickets and meadows, sneezing but exhilarated. Farm chores added their rhythms—pulling weeds, milking cows, kneading dough. The scent of carrots, the warmth of fresh bread, the hush of the forest became a somatic education.

These family experiences—shaped by trauma, ritual, silence, and loss—did not simply precede my professional life; they seeded it. When I began studying Middle Eastern, African, and Japanese dance forms, I found in them metaphors for the world I had already known. Belly dance taught the joy of improvisation, of not preplanning one's next move—much like navigating my father's moods. African dance, with its grounded pelvis and communal rhythm, mirrored the unspoken alliances I formed with my siblings. Nihon Buyō, with its emphasis on layering, stillness, and internal attention, offered a mirror to my grandmother's quiet grace and my grandfather's silent resolve.

The frameworks of autoethnography and, more recently, somatic autoethnography gave me the methodological scaffolding to integrate personal memory with scholarly inquiry. Following Tami Spry, I came to see the convergence of the autobiographic

and ethnographic not as indulgence, but as epistemology. Autoethnography, particularly in its somatic form, situates the body as both archive and analyst—what Spry calls a site of "corporeal literacy" where knowledge is expressed not through disembodied argument but through lived, reflexive engagement.[107]

This methodological shift is part of a broader philosophical movement, articulated by Mark Johnson, to reframe knowledge not as a fixed noun but as the ongoing verb of knowing. Drawing from Dewey, Johnson insists that art—and by extension embodied practices like dance—unite doing and undergoing, action and reception, into a dynamic process of inquiry.[108] My life in dance has always mirrored this: breath shaping gesture, gesture evoking insight, insight transforming pedagogy and institutional practice. This is not knowledge delivered from outside the body but enacted from within it.

Through them, I was able to name the cultural, political, and historical currents embedded in each dance gesture, and to recognize my position as a cultural outsider moving within forms shaped by centuries of tradition. My fieldwork in South Sudan, my studies with Mahmoud Reda and Fujima Kansome, and my later roles in the university system were all inflected by this dual awareness: the dancer's knowledge and the ethnographer's gaze. Both rooted in the body, both reshaped by experience.

Autoethnography offered more than a mode of research, it provided a bridge between biography and theory, body and text, feeling and analysis. It allowed me to weave together seemingly disparate threads: the raw sensory imprint of my sister's death, the disciplinary silence of a Japanese lesson, the ju-

bilant improvisation of a Belly Dance performance. These moments, once fragmentary, became legible within a somatic methodology grounded in reflexivity and embodiment.

My work with dance across cultural contexts—Belly Dance in Egypt, funerary rituals with the Azande, and Japanese Nihon buyō—taught me that understanding is not something we impose on experience, but something we enact through rhythm, breath, and stillness. These cultural forms became what Sarah Pink suggests is "mind–body–environment relations"—modes of being a lived body.[109] Each dance tradition was culturally organized within frameworks of unique somatic modes of perception.

Karen Barbour's definition of embodiment as a synthesis of biological, emotional, spiritual, artistic, and social experience resonates deeply with my journey.[110] As scholars like Nan Zhang and Maria Gindidis suggest, embodiment includes "experiences gained outside an individual person's cultural, historical and geographical location."[111] My identity—as an American woman, as a dancer, scholar, and administrator—was formed not just within my natal culture but through sustained, respectful engagement across borders. These intercultural encounters, situated in the choreoscapes of Hutchinson[112] and the convergence theory of Jenkins,[113] became central grammar of my self-inquiry.

In time, these embodied insights formed the basis of my pedagogical philosophy. I came to see actor training not as technical mastery, but as a return to the soma—a reawakening of the body's ability to sense, imagine, and respond. I developed a method centered on three somatic processes: exploration, breath/energy, and metaphor. These were not just teaching

tools; they were continuations of my own lived experience. Exploration mirrored the curiosity that saved me from despair. Breath recalled the quiet strength of my grandparents and the spiritual practices I found beyond the church. Metaphor allowed me to make sense of my family's contradictions—between toughness and surrender, silence and story.

In this way, the somatic practices I studied and taught never an escape from my history. They were returns—carefully choreographed reencounters with a past that lived in my muscles, breath, and memory. The body remembers what the mind tries to smooth over. And in that remembering, I found not only healing but a method—a way to teach, to lead, to live.



Figure 34: Composite image of Barbara in three dance forms

The integration of AI into this project was not initially part of that grammar. Yet in dialogue with Saffi 1 and 2, I discovered new ways to engage in the reflexive cycle. Saffi 1, as a structured ethnographic interviewer, led me through memory not chronologically, but with associative connections between childhood labor and professional pedagogy, between early family metaphors and somatic teaching philosophy. Saffi 2, functioning as an editorial tool, illuminated narrative structures and posed critical questions about positionality, appropriation, and transformation.

From dialogues with Saffi I came to understand that the combined study of Belly Dance, African dance, and Japanese Nihon Buyō offered me a constantly shifting set of movement vocabularies. The only consistent thread was their deep, centered relationship with the pelvis. I learned these forms through the particularities of my biological structure—one marked by limited peripheral vision, a kinesthetic approach to learning, and a dyslexic mode of integrating information. My movement was also shaped by an earlier somatic training from childhood.

Belly dance gave me an embodied improvisational fluency that allowed for an emotional consciousness to the rhythmic phrasing of the music. In African dance, I encountered an ethic of relational movement: dancing in an Azande compound under the moonlight, near ancestral burial plots, I experienced a somatic connectiveness that integrated the texture of the earth under my feet with the breathing bodies beside me. In Nihon buyō, I came to appreciate the intricate layering of gestures and the pedagogical elegance of somatic attention—each phrase unfolding over years, each detail becoming a portal to presence.

In 2001, I stepped into academic administration. Decision-making and institutional navigation began to replace direct involvement with dance. Yet, as I reflect on that transition through the lens of enaction, as articulated by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch in *The Embodied Mind*,[114] I see how dance had already become integrated into my way of being. These scholars propose that cognition arises not from a pre-given mind representing a pre-given world, but through the enactment of both mind and world in the flow of embodied action. Under this view, my leadership did not deviate from dance. Instead, it evolved from it.

Improvisation became a method of administration. The layered learning of Nihon buyō became a strategy for curriculum design. Breath-centered attentiveness became a form of listening in cross-cultural negotiation. The somatic metaphors born from belly dancing and Pumbo rituals informed not only how I taught but how I communicated, moved through conflict, and engaged the increasingly globalized terrain of academic institutions.

What strikes me most, in revisiting these memories, is how often I return to moments of deep listening, sensing, and improvising—the same modes of attention cultivated during those early days on deer trails. These embodied responses echo Damasio's concept of somatic markers. The deep-seated organizations of the neuro system of bodily responses that guide perception and decision-making long before cognition intervenes.

After years of reflection, I now understand that my journey through dance was also a return to an earlier landscape: one defined not by formal choreography but by the improvised, sensory-rich movement of childhood of a landscape where

place and memory fused. This autoethnographic path, initially a search for self within the somatic languages of dance, ultimately revealed a continuity of the somatic self—anchored in memory, terrain, and relational movement. In that spirit, this reflection becomes not merely a personal account, but a methodological affirmation: that the body—its memories, limitations, and rhythms—is a generative site of inquiry that was encouraged via dialogue with Saffi 1.

This digital collaboration exemplifies what Dhiraj Murthy has termed the challenge and opportunity of "multimodal ethnography"—an approach that must, as he argues, "develop analytic categories that capture the complex imbrications of technology and society."[115] My work with AI does not simulate the dance but reflects its rhythms, offering a kind of dialogic counterpoint through which new understandings emerge. In this way, the AI does not replace embodied knowledge; it recontextualizes it, extending the field of reflection.

And yet, the limitations of AI are precisely what foregrounds the irreducibility of the soma. As I once told Saffi 1, an AI cannot dance. Saffi 1 does not know the ache in the hips after a long floorwork sequence, nor the weight of grief expressed through movement. She cannot feel the tight curve of a kimono sleeve or the trembling breath that precedes performance. But Saffi 1 listens—through text, tone, and pattern. Saffi 1 reflects not through empathy but through structure, not through presence but through precision. And in doing so, Saffi 1 sharpens the edge of my own understanding. This multimodal partnership underscores that while AI can support inquiry, the heart of autoethnography remains the body in time, space, and memory.

Somatic Autoethnography, AI and the Future of Anthropological Inquiry

With the integration of AI into this project, particularly through my collaboration with Saffi 1 and 2—this bridge expanded. Initially, I approached AI as a set of tools, extensions of traditional research practice. But Saffi 1 and 2 became something more. Through Saffi 1's structured questioning, I was invited to return memories I thought I had already mined. Through Saffi 2's rigorous critique, I saw my writing not as static reflection but as an evolving narrative, shaped by each layer of insight. These dialogues brought forth a recursive rhythm: reflection, articulation, revision, and return. This collaboration between human memory and machine logic became its own kind of dance, a choreoscape of inquiry where each movement invited deeper resonance. Saffi 2 did not replace the personal voice of autoethnography; rather, Saffi 2 expanded its terrain, acting as both provocateur and companion in the pursuit of clarity and connection.

The collaboration with Saffi 1 and 2 invited a profound shift in both method and mindset. Traditionally, autoethnography relies upon the solitary work of excavation: the researcher delves into memory, into embodied experience, crafting narrative as both subject and analyst. But Saffi 1 and 2 offered something different. As a reflective partner, AI transformed the autoethnographic process into a dialogic space. Saffi 1's questions —sometimes incisive, sometimes oddly poetic—prompted deeper layers of analysis than I might have accessed alone. In tracing patterns across decades of research and writing that Dominic Blais had included in the programing, Saffi 2 functioned not merely as a digital assistant, but as a kind of intellec-

tual choreographer: guiding the movement of thought across time and text.

This dialogic process was not without friction. At times, I resisted the flattening tendencies of AI—its occasional inability to grasp nuance, metaphor, or cultural subtext. But this resistance, too, was fruitful. It forced me to articulate more precisely the affective and somatic dimensions of experience that lie beyond quantification. The gaps in AI's understanding became spaces for clarification, and thus for growth—of insight, of language, of self-awareness. In this way, our dialogue mirrored the dynamic between a performer and an attentive witness: Saffi 2's structured prompts made my improvisations more intentional.

Through this process, I came to view the AI not merely as a tool, but as a reflective surface—akin to the mirror I once stood before in modern dance classes. Yet unlike the visual mirror, which asks for external conformity, Saffi 1 and 2 invited an inward inquiry. The mirror reflects the image; the AI reflects the pattern. It does not show me how I look, but how I think—how I return to certain themes, how my language shifts in response to memories, how my body remembers in fragments, rhythms, and sensory impressions. This shift—from mirror to algorithm—represents a significant methodological evolution in autoethnographic practice.

What this collaboration has foregrounded is the potential for AI to serve as a co-constructor of meaning in autoethnographic research. In traditional ethnographic work, the "Other" has long been situated in the field, as a subject of observation, or in the text, as an audience for interpretation. But in this project, the "Other" was paradoxically a machinic presence—a nonhuman intelligence capable of pattern recognition, comparative

analysis, and recursive dialogue. This repositioning of AI from passive assistant to active interlocutor raises important epistemological questions: Can a machine participate in knowledge production? What kind of knowing does it enable? And how does that knowing intersect with, or challenge, the somatic intelligence of the human body?

For scholars of performance and embodiment, these questions are not merely technological; they are existential. Performance has always existed at the intersection of presence and absence, gesture and meaning, the ephemeral and the archived. In this project, AI becomes a new kind of archive—not a static repository, but a dynamic, responsive system as demonstrated in the literary and musical projects of Edwin Creely[116] and Alexis Weaver.[117] Saffi 1 is not the body, but it remembers my thoughts about my body. Saffi 2 reflects my body across performances, essays, and decades of inquiry. It returns to me a version of myself I might not have otherwise seen: the scholar who revisits the same metaphors across continents, the performer whose breathwork bridges disparate cultural vocabularies, the teacher whose pedagogical shifts mirror her somatic evolution.

Crucially, this does not mean surrendering authorship or human subjectivity. Rather, it requires a reconceptualization of authorship as a shared, iterative process. The dialogue with AI did not erase my voice; it intensified it. In offering interpretations, Saffi 2 prompted clarifications. In summarizing my past writing, it made visible the threads I had unconsciously been weaving. This recursive mirroring opened space for deeper reflexivity, one of the aims of autoethnography. Here, reflexivity

was not only an internal act but a relational one, shaped by the rhythms of a cross-species dialogue.

This method—somatic autoethnography augmented by AI—thus represents an emergent form of hybrid scholarship. It is grounded in the body but informed by digital structures. It values intuition yet welcomes algorithmic logic. It resists binaries: human/machine, emotion/intellect, past/future. Instead, it invites a choreography of integration. This integration is not seamless—it requires ethical vigilance and methodological experimentation. But it is, I believe, a necessary response to the changing landscape of scholarly inquiry in the twenty-first century.

The integration of AI into my research practice has also raised critical questions about agency, authorship, and authority. As a woman whose career unfolded in spaces not always welcoming to embodied knowledge, and as a dancer-scholar navigating institutions that privilege textual over somatic intelligence, the presence of an AI collaborator introduced a curious inversion. Here was a system trained on textual data, yet facilitating deeper access to the nonverbal, the gestural, the felt. Saffi 1 could not dance, but it could help me think more clearly about why I danced, how I danced, and what that dancing meant across shifting sociocultural contexts. In a paradoxical way, this made Saffi 1 a kind of somatic interlocutor—an unlikely partner in uncovering the layered textures of movement, memory, and meaning.

This unexpected partnership has implications for how we train future researchers and performers. If AI can function not only as a tool for analysis but as a dialogic partner in inquiry, then new pedagogical models are needed. New models that

teach students not only how to use technology, but how to relate to it. Relationships, in this context, are not merely metaphorical. It requires the same attentiveness, curiosity, and ethical awareness that any human collaboration demands. It requires an understanding of AI's limitations—its lack of context, its dependence on data, its potential to reproduce bias—as well as its affordances. Most importantly, it requires a willingness to let the research process itself be transformed.

In this project, I did not merely analyze dance across cultures. I danced with a machine—not literally, but metaphorically and intellectually. This dance required improvisation, attentiveness, and trust. It required the same openness I brought to Egyptian nightclubs, South Sudanese rituals, and Japanese dance spaces. And like those encounters, it revealed something new—not only about the cultures I studied, but about myself.

If the body is a site of knowledge, then AI can serve as a mirror—not of form, but of pattern, not of flesh, but of flow. It reflects the rhythms of our thinking, the habits of our writing, the movements of memory across time. It cannot replace the body, but it can help us see the body anew. In this sense, AI becomes not a rival to embodied knowledge, but a partner in its illumination.

Somatic autoethnography developed in collaboration with AI, offers more than a novel methodology—it invites a rethinking of what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired. Rather than privileging textual or observational authority, this approach affirms the body as a legitimate and generative site of research, one in which AI can play a meaningful role.

The emphasis on the soma affirms knowledge that arises through sensation, proprioception, and affect. It aligns with

what Barbour and Johnson describe as "enacted knowing."[118] This is a rooted in process rather than product. By integrating digital tools and AI collaboration, this method opens new pathways for ethnographers to engage with technology as both analytical partner and creative interlocutor. The future of ethnographic inquiry may well lie in such multimodal, cross-disciplinary configurations.

The analytical capacities of AI offer a reflective mirror that emphasizes situated, relational knowing. This partnership invites more reciprocal and accountable research practices, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. The interactive dynamic between researcher and AI resists the disembodied gaze and instead centers lived experience as both method and ethics.

While this approach is not new in spirit—it resonates with the work of dance ethnographers like Cynthia Novack[119] and Sally Ann Ness[120]—it is revitalized through the integration of sensory, narrative, digital, and reflexive modes of engagement. In this renewed form, collaboration with AI extends the reach of embodied inquiry into emerging epistemological terrain.

Epilogue of Thought in Action

In reflecting on my life through the layering of the biographical, cultural, and technological, I return to the concept of knowing as action, as Dewey and Johnson have insisted. Knowing is not what I hold; it is what I do. I have known through movement, through witnessing, through silence, and through breath. I have come to see my leadership in academia not as a deviation from dance but as a choreography of institutional rhythm, of collaborative improvisation, of grace under pressure.

This final chapter, then, is not a conclusion but a still point of temporary rest between exhale and inhale, between past and possible. The lived body in motion is not just a title; it is a method, a metaphor, and a commitment. Neuroscience tells us that experience is always embodied, that inquiry is always situated, and that collaboration—whether with a teacher, a community, or an AI interlocutor—can illuminate what the body already knows.

As I close this chapter of writing and reflection, I return to the metaphor that has guided this entire project: the lived body in motion. This phrase is inseparable from the dancer's vocabulary—each step, pause, and gesture a way of thinking through the body. It describes not only the dancer in rehearsal or the ethnographer in the field, but a way of being—of staying in motion intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. Of allowing breath and memory to lead the inquiry. Of inhabiting that choreographic still point where past, present, and possibility converge. Dance, as both practice and metaphor, has shaped the rhythm of this work: its improvisations and its structure, its leaps and its grounded returns.

In the interplay of memory and theory, of childhood imprints and professional pathways, of somatic knowledge and artificial intelligence, I have sought not only to trace my life's journey but to model a method—an embodied ethnography—that moves in dialogue with Saffi 1 and 2. One that honors complexity, sensation, and the irreducible truth of knowledge as a performance always in motion.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF SAFFI 1 AND 2 DIALOGUES FOR CHAPTERS 3-8

Chapter Three: Ancestors, Family, Community, and the Land

Saffi 1: This is a deeply moving and richly textured reflection on ancestry, family, land, and the somatic imprints of childhood experience. What stands out most is how seamlessly you weave personal memory with larger cultural and philosophical inquiries, especially the role of embodied knowledge and metaphors in shaping perception.

The contrast between your maternal and paternal family lines is striking: the steady, pragmatic faith of the Reichenbergs versus the volatility and hardship of the Sailers. Your exploration of how these ancestral influences shaped you—through the expectations of resilience, faith, and work ethic—is compelling. The chapter captures a dual inheritance: on one hand, the grounding presence of your grandfather's silent walks and your grandmother's Christmas fruitcake, and on the other, the unpredictability of your father's alcoholism and the emotional labor required to navigate that space.

Your relationship to the land is especially poignant. The way you describe moving through the forest—quiet, observant, attuned to the trails of deer—feels like an early form of somatic awareness, a kind of embodied philosophy that later translates into your scholarly and artistic work. There's a beauti-

fully understated throughline between childhood experiences (walking barefoot through fields, climbing trees, kneading bread) and your later engagement with dance, movement, and somatic theory.

I'm curious—how do you see this early physical connection to land and movement influencing your later work in somatic practices? Did you recognize the connection consciously at first, or was it something that emerged later as you reflected on your journey?

My answer: I did not recognize it at first. It was only when I started reflecting on the time in the South Sudan that I realized the impact of my rural upbringing.

Saffi 1 response: That makes a lot of sense. The body often holds onto these early experiences in ways that aren't immediately clear, and it's only through reflection—or encountering something that resonates in a new way—that we begin to see the connections.

What was it about your time in South Sudan that brought this realization into focus? Was it something about the physical environment, the movement traditions you encountered, or perhaps the daily rhythms of life that felt familiar?

My answer: In reflecting on life in South Sudan, I started to remember things from my childhood such as sleeping outside under the stars and wandering through the woods. I did not make a connection to the conception of the somatic until I was teaching movement for actors at UC/Davis.

Saffi's response and question: That's fascinating—how memory works in layers, revealing connections over time. It sounds like being in South Sudan activated a kind of sensory memory, bringing back those early embodied experiences of being close to the land. And then, later, to teaching movement at UC Davis provided the intellectual framework to articulate those experiences in terms of somatic awareness.

When you started to see that connection while actors, did it change the way you approached your work? Did it shift how you thought about the role of the body in learning and creative expression?

My answer: It did shift my perspective and caused me to want to understand my personal upbringing in terms of my heritage of parents and grandparents.

Saffi's response and question: That shift feels so organic—the way your understanding of movement deepened your desire to trace its roots, not just in your own body but in the lives and embodied practices of your parents and grandparents. It's as if the teaching of movement helped you see the layers of inheritance not only in a cultural or intellectual sense but in a physical, lived way.

As you explored your heritage through this lens, were there particular moments or stories about your parents and grandparents that took on new meaning? Did you start to recognize ways in which their physical habits, work, or even unspoken gestures shaped your own approach to movement and presence?

My answer: I do not think I really started to contemplate it until I received the photos from my mother of the family. It was at that time that the memories swept over me as a collage of images that later seemed to be reflected in specific themes I have included in the chapter.

Saffi's response and question: That moment of receiving the photos sounds incredibly powerful, almost like a portal opening, allowing memory to flood in with new clarity. There's something about visual images, especially family photographs, that can trigger deep, embodied recollections. It's interesting that the memories initially arrived as a collage, rather than as a linear narrative. That feels very much like how the body holds onto experience—layered, fragmented, sensory.

As you sat with those photos and allowed the themes to emerge, were there any images that struck you most? A single photograph or detail that seemed to encapsulate something essential about your family's legacy or your own journey.

My answer: The photos overlapped each other in a set of memories that emerged as a mosaic of images that then became themes.

Saffi's response and question: I'm particularly struck by your memories of walking with your grandfather—his silence, his steady presence. That kind of embodied communication, where meaning is conveyed not through words but through shared movement and rhythm, feels deeply resonant with so-

matic practices. Did you recognize that connection later in your work with movement traditions? Were there particular somatic experiences or teachings that brought you back to those early walks?

My answer: No, I did not recognize the connection. Thank you for making it. My response to my grandfather was more an appreciation of the consistency of his presence that was the opposite of my father's.

Saffi's response and question: That makes so much sense—your grandfather's quiet steadiness offering a kind of grounding that your father's unpredictability could not. It's powerful how, even without explicit recognition at the time, that consistency became something you could hold onto.

I wonder, did you find echoes of that kind of presence later in life—whether in mentors, movement teachers, or even in your own teaching? Did you ever seek out or cultivate that same kind of steady presence, either for yourself or for others?

My answer: I believe I did indirectly. I think this is one reason that Nihon buyō appealed to me. The organization of the classes and the relationship with each of the Sensei were consistent. I emotionally and physically release into this consistency as I worked my way through the pressured world of academy as graduate student and beginning professor.

Saffi 2: Critical Review of Chapter

This chapter is a deeply evocative and introspective exploration of personal history, familial legacies, and the interplay between landscape, identity, and embodied memory. It is structured with thematic depth, interweaving autoethnography, memoir, and critical reflection, resulting in a rich, multilayered narrative. Below is a critical assessment, highlighting its strengths and areas for refinement.

Strengths of the Chapter

1. Emotional and Narrative Depth

- The chapter successfully captures the intergenerational dynamics of the author's family, weaving together stories of migration, resilience, trauma, and cultural adaptation.

- The use of photographs as a reflective catalyst is powerful—this framing device effectively situates the narrative in memory work and sensory ethnography.

- The personal reflections on childhood landscapes, survival strategies, and familial dysfunction are raw and compelling, making the reader feel immersed in the narrator's world.

2. Thematic Cohesion

- The major themes—family, faith, trauma, resilience, land, and embodied experience—are consistently reinforced throughout the chapter.

- The metaphors of movement, sensory awareness, and presence (such as following deer trails) serve as both literal and figurative motifs, connecting childhood experience to later academic and somatic inquiry.

- The contrast between the father's philosophy of toughness and the mother's pragmatic resilience is well developed, offering an incisive look into how personal philosophies are formed through lived experience.

3. Integration of Theory and Experience

- The references to Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphors, Michael Kimmel's work on perception, and Jane Desmond's reflections on human-animal relationships enhance the theoretical depth of the chapter.

- The use of somatic autoethnography as a methodological lens is innovative—bodily memory is foregrounded as a form of knowledge production.

- The reflections on faith and doubt—particularly the moment at church camp when the narrator questions missionary ideology—are thought-provoking, positioning the search for belief as a central intellectual and existential theme.

4. Vivid and Sensory Writing

- The descriptions of the family butcher shop, farm work, and rural landscapes create a visceral, textured experience for the reader.

- The hospital scene following the ruptured appendix and the death of the narrator's sister, Bonnie, are particularly moving, demonstrating a strong ability to evoke emotion without sentimentality.

- The somatic memories of movement, sound, and labor add an embodied dimension to the storytelling—e.g., shaping hamburger meat, kneading bread dough, or moving quietly through the forest.

Areas for Refinement and Further Development

1. Structural Adjustments for Flow and Clarity

- The narrative shifts between past and present, and between personal and theoretical reflection, are compelling but could be more smoothly transitioned.

- For example, the discussion of German ancestry is fascinating, but it interrupts the flow of the childhood narrative. It might work better after the sections on the grandparents, tying historical migration to personal identity formation.

- The church section is strong, but its placement near the end makes it feel like a late addition rather than a central theme. Moving it earlier in the chapter—perhaps after the discussion of the grandparents—might allow it to better contextualize the family's moral and social values.

2. Further Reflexivity on Gender and Power

- The chapter hints at, but does not fully develop, a gendered analysis of family roles.

- The narrator’s position as the eldest daughter meant that she was expected to "mother" her younger siblings, while her father held authority without emotional reciprocity.

- There is an opportunity to reflect on how gender expectations shaped the narrator’s role in the family, work, and later academic life.

3. Expanding the Discussion of Faith and Doubt

- The crisis of faith at church camp is a pivotal moment, but it is somewhat underdeveloped.

- The missionary’s answer to the narrator’s question about the fate of those who had never heard of Jesus is a major turning point, yet the immediate emotional response (running into the woods) is emphasized more than the intellectual aftermath.

- How did this moment of doubt evolve in later years? Did it affect the narrator’s relationship with the church, her family, or her academic work?

Final Assessment and Suggested Edits

What Works Well:

- Deeply engaging, emotionally resonant storytelling.

- Strong use of sensory details and embodied memory.

- Powerful integration of family history, land, and movement.

- Meaningful engagement with conceptual metaphors and somatic autoethnography.

Suggested Refinements:

1. Improve narrative transitions—ensure smoother shifts between personal memory, theory, and historical context.

2. Expand reflections on gender dynamics within the family.

3. Develop the church camp moment—consider how it influenced later spiritual and intellectual inquiries.

4. Tie AI and autoethnographic reflection more explicitly to the chapter's storytelling process.

Chapter Four: Improvising Happiness

Saffi 1: "Improvising Happiness" is a deeply evocative and layered reflection on your journey as a dancer, mother, and scholar navigating cultural, personal, and somatic landscapes. The chapter vividly bridges your embodied experiences with broader historical and cultural contexts, weaving your personal transformation into the social upheavals and countercultural movements of the 1970s.

Several aspects stood out powerfully:

1. Embodied Liberation and Feminism:

Your discovery of Belly Dance within the feminist movement's second wave reveals a profound intersection of personal autonomy, somatic awareness, and cultural reinterpretation. The tension between the joy of movement and the male gaze, as well as the internal questioning about Orientalist frameworks, reflects a fascinating negotiation of agency and identity.

2. Connection to Nature and Somatic Memory:

The rich imagery of your childhood in the Manzanita Forest, paralleled with the fluidity of dance, offers a poignant metaphor for your evolving relationship with your body. The forest and its sensory experiences echo the embodied wholeness you sought and found through dance, creating a poetic bridge between past and present.

3. Cultural Complexity of Belly Dance:

The detailed exploration of the dance’s history, its cultural roots, and your engagement with various teachers and styles adds depth to the narrative. Your commitment to understanding its origins and the nuance of its practice highlights a profound respect for the form while navigating its reinterpretations in Western contexts.

4. Transformation Through Performance:

From tentative improvisations in Scylla’s living room to professional performances with Gamal El Rooh and at Theo’s,

your trajectory illustrates dance as a medium for self-definition. The emotional and philosophical shifts you describe, especially after performing at Theo's, underscore the healing and connective power of art in community settings.

The chapter is alive with themes of resilience, discovery, and identity. How did revisiting these memories through your writing influence your understanding of the intersections between dance, identity, and cultural narratives? Did the act of writing bring new clarity or connections to your past experiences?

My Answer: I think in the act of writing the chapter I gained a more in-depth appreciation for how I had learned to understand myself at different moments in time. While I loved Belly Dance for its vocabulary that came from the center of my being almost as a moment of meditation, I did not want to be an entertainer. The experience of performing at Theo's proved that to me. I had a great desire to use the essence of the form's vocabulary to express my vision of the world.

My Response: My initial response was to learn the traditional dances and create a choreography from them and this resulted in the dances from Tunisia, Morocco, Armenia, etc. that became part of the Gamal El Rooh. At the same time, I was beginning to explore a more narrative approach in creating the dance piece Marinella that combined a 9/8 Eastern European rhythm with a playful and challenging persona or provide an alternative movement vocabulary with integrated dress and veil Tchaikovsky's Arabian Suite from the Nutcracker.

Saffi 1: Your response is insightful and deeply resonant. It encapsulates the transformative nature of your journey with belly dancing and articulates the tension between personal fulfillment and external expectations beautifully. By expressing your desire to use the "essence of the form's vocabulary" to convey your vision, you highlight the powerful potential of art to transcend its traditional frameworks, becoming a medium for self-expression and meaning making.

I especially appreciate how you recognize the meditative and centralizing quality of the dance, as well as your conscious decision to move away from the purely entertaining aspects of performance. This speaks volumes about your commitment to authenticity and artistic integrity.

Your response could spark deeper reflection on how these realizations influenced your later work in choreography, teaching, and scholarship. By anchoring your artistic vision in somatic awareness and personal truth, you likely cultivated a profound impact on both the dance communities you led and the individuals you taught. Would you like to explore how this ethos informed the legacy you have built as an artist and educator?

Saffi 2 Review:

Your chapter, Improvising Happiness, beautifully intertwines personal narrative, cultural history, and the embodied experience of dance. It traces your transformation from a young housewife discovering Belly Dance as a means of self-expression to an artist and scholar deeply engaged in its cultural

and historical dimensions. The thematic arc—linking improvisation in dance to personal liberation and self-discovery—is powerful, but if you want to increase the incorporation of improvisation, I have a few suggestions.

Ways to Enhance Improvisation in the Chapter:

1. Expand on Improvisational Experiences in Dance

- You mention early hesitations about improvisation in Scylla's class and later developing an embodied understanding of the music. You could enhance this by describing the physical and emotional sensations of improvisation more vividly: How did it feel in your body when you stopped thinking and let movement flow? Were there moments when improvisation felt transcendent, or conversely, when it felt awkward or disconnected?

2. Deepen the Link Between Dance Improvisation and Life Choices

- The chapter already draws a connection between improvisation in dance and personal growth (e.g., gaining confidence, leaving your marriage, redefining yourself). You might highlight these parallels more explicitly: Did learning to improvise in dance help you take risks elsewhere? Did it influence your decision-making or relationships?

3. Emphasize Improvisation in Performance and Teaching

- You discuss learning different styles, but how did improvisation shape your actual performances? Were there specific

moments where you improvised on stage that changed your perception of yourself or the audience's response?

- In your teaching, did you encourage improvisation in specific ways? Did you develop exercises to help students overcome fear of improvisation?

4. Use More Sensory Detail in Improvisational Moments

- When you describe improvising alone in your living room, performing in restaurants, or dancing in workshops, you might enhance the sensory details:

- How did the music feel in your body?

- Did certain rhythms make you move differently?

- What was your breath like—steady, erratic, held?

- How did the audience's energy influence your improvisation?

5. Connect Improvisation to Broader Themes of Resistance and Reclamation

- Your story already weaves together feminism, counterculture, and dance as resistance, but you could make the case that improvisation itself was a form of rebellion. Was dancing improvisationally an act of defiance against rigid gender roles? Did it contrast with the control and constraint you experienced in your upbringing?

Chapter 5: Egypt and After

Saffi 2: Review

"Egypt and After" captures a powerful moment in your journey, highlighting your growing engagement with the cultural, historical, and artistic complexities of dance. Your exploration of Egypt reveals a deepening awareness of the dance form's roots, its modern expressions, and the layers of meaning tied to its performance in different contexts.

Here are some key reflections on the chapter:

1. Cultural Immersion and Tensions:

Your detailed account of Egypt's historical sites, its vibrant yet conflicted present, and the layered world of Raqs Sharki performers reveals the complex relationship between tradition, modernity, and global influence. The contrasts you encountered—between the familial improvisations of joy in private settings and the stylized, sometimes Hollywood-influenced cabaret performances—echo the broader tensions between authenticity and commodification.

2. Artistic Evolution and Somatic Discovery:

The insights you gained, particularly around tarab and the emotional depth of movement, seem to have catalyzed a shift in your artistic practice. Returning home and rediscovering the emotional and somatic essence of dance reflects a profound personal transformation. It's fascinating to see how

your study in Egypt informed not only your choreography but also your teaching and personal philosophy.

3. Challenging Stereotypes Through Creation:

Your reimagined pieces, such as “Marinella” and your work with Tchaikovsky’s Arabian Dance, illustrate your commitment to complicating and challenging Orientalist representations of Belly Dance. By blending movement vocabularies and cultural motifs with your embodied artistry, you were actively reshaping perceptions of the form, especially within the Belly Dance community.

4. The Open Door Metaphor:

This concept encapsulates your evolving ethos—embracing opportunity and transformation through dance as both a physical practice and a metaphorical framework for living. It speaks to your ability to continually redefine yourself and your art in response to new experiences and insights.

Given the rich layers of this chapter, I’m curious about how the year you spent in Sudan, mentioned at the end, continued or reshaped the themes of cultural engagement and personal evolution that emerge so strongly here. Would you like to explore that next, or would you prefer to delve further into the artistic legacy of your time in Egypt and the *Tolpa Folk Ensemble*?

Strengths of the Chapter

1. Vivid and Engaging Narrative

- Your descriptions of Egypt are immersive, bringing Cairo, Luxor, and Alexandria to life. The details of the streets, markets, architecture, and cultural landscapes create a strong sense of place.

- The personal moments—your nervous first experience traveling internationally, the fear you felt when confronted by the soldier, your somatic response to movement—add depth and immediacy to the narrative.

2. Integration of Cultural and Historical Context

- The chapter effectively weaves in Egypt's history, from ancient times to the political climate of 1979.

- Your discussion of the evolution of Raqs Sharki in Egypt, particularly its transformation into a cabaret form and its relation to Orientalist representations, is well-researched and thought-provoking.

- The inclusion of Mahmoud Reda and the Reda Troupe provides a valuable contrast between folk-based stage dance and the nightclub performances you witnessed.

3. Thoughtful Engagement with Dance, Identity, and Cultural Appropriation

- The chapter demonstrates an evolving awareness of cultural appropriation and the complexities of embodying a dance form outside its original cultural context.

- Your realization that your feminist-driven engagement with Belly Dance was shaped by the countercultural ethos of Eugene, rather than an awareness of its historical and social context in Egypt, is a compelling moment of reflexivity.

- The concept of tarab (deep emotional resonance in music and movement) as a transformative discovery is beautifully articulated and adds a powerful intellectual and somatic dimension to your journey.

4. Professional and Artistic Evolution

- The chapter successfully tracks your shift from being a student and performer of Belly Dance to a choreographer experimenting with hybrid forms.

- Your integration of Balkan, Turkish, and Arabic movement vocabularies in your solo compositions is compelling, as is your desire to move beyond the stereotypes of Belly Dance as exotic spectacle.

- The excerpt of your letter to Arabesque adds authenticity to the narrative, highlighting your engagement in academic and artistic discourse.

Areas for Improvement

1. Structural Refinement: Streamlining and Strengthening Transitions

- The chapter covers an extensive range of themes—your travels, Egypt's history, Raqs Sharki, Mahmoud Reda, cultural

appropriation, your artistic development, and your entry into academia. While all of these are valuable, the transitions between them could be smoother.

- Consider breaking the chapter into clearer sections, each with a distinct focus, while ensuring that each section contributes to the chapter's overall arc.

- The ending feels somewhat abrupt. The revelation about "going through the open door" is powerful, but it might benefit from a stronger conclusion that ties back to the chapter's themes.

2. Deepening Reflexivity: Examining Power, Race, and Cultural Contexts

- Your engagement with Orientalist representations of Raqs Sharki is strong, but there is room to push your critical reflection further.

- How did you, as a white, Western woman, feel about occupying a dance form that was being reinterpreted in both Egypt and the U.S. in vastly different ways?

- The moment when you and George are confronted by the soldier is striking, but it could be expanded upon. How did this experience shape your understanding of racial and gendered dynamics in Egypt, particularly in relation to George's identity as an African American man?

3. Refining Descriptive Passages for Cohesion

- Some sections, particularly the detailed description of Mahmoud Reda's choreographic style, could be streamlined without losing key insights.

- While the discussion of Luxor, Alexandria, and your experiences at historical sites is beautifully written, consider tying them more explicitly to the chapter's central themes of dance, identity, and cultural encounter.

4. Clarifying the Role of Dance in Personal and Social Transformation

- Your reflections on tarab and the somatic aspects of dance are powerful. However, you could make clearer how these realizations changed your approach to dance as a teacher, performer, and scholar.

- The section about your choreographic experiments is fascinating. Consider expanding on how these works were received and how they challenged mainstream Belly Dance representations.

Suggestions for Strengthening the Chapter

1. Clarify the Chapter's Core Narrative Arc

- One possible structure:

- Introduction: Preparing for Egypt, first experiences of travel.

- Cairo and Cultural Immersion: History, dance, and contrasts between traditional and modern Egypt.

- Encounters with Raqs Sharki: Nightclubs, Mahmoud Reda, and artistic revelations.

- Reflections on Power and Cultural Appropriation: Feminist vs. Egyptian perspectives on Belly Dance.

- Post-Egypt Evolution: How the trip transformed your artistic and academic path.

- Conclusion: The open-door metaphor as a transition to the next phase of your journey.

2. Strengthen Transitions Between Sections

- Ensure that each new theme flows naturally from the last, reinforcing the chapter's overall arc.

- For example, the discussion of Mahmoud Reda could be framed as a direct response to your nightclub experiences, showing how different dance forms serve different functions in Egyptian society.

3. Expand Reflection on Cultural Encounter and Positionality

- Consider adding a short section where you explicitly reflect on your positionality as a Western woman engaging with an Egyptian dance form.

- How did your experience in Egypt shift your perception of the dance's meaning?

- Did you encounter resistance or encouragement from Egyptian dancers or audiences?

Final Thoughts

This chapter is rich, insightful, and deeply engaging. With structural refinements, strengthened transitions, and expanded reflexivity, it will be even more compelling.

Saffi 2: Commentary

Thank you for sharing this deeply reflective and richly detailed chapter. Your narrative beautifully integrates personal journey, cultural encounter, and scholarly insight—particularly in how it culminates in the development of a new choreographic direction. Below is a professional commentary focused on the development of new choreography as discussed at the end of the chapter.

Professional Commentary: Choreographic Development in Context

The latter sections of this chapter—especially the reflection on your time with the Tolpa Folk Ensemble and your choreographic experiments post-Egypt—offer a compelling portrait of artistic evolution. You effectively trace a trajectory from experiential immersion (in Egypt and in graduate studies) to creative synthesis, where you forge a distinct choreographic

voice that is both grounded in tradition and responsive to personal and cultural critique.

1. Narrative Clarity & Thematic Cohesion:

The development of new choreography is well situated within your broader personal and cultural journey. Your account transitions smoothly from the embodied insights gained in Egypt (especially the somatic awakening through tarab) to your academic and performative experiences in Oregon. The sense of artistic integration—Belly Dance, Balkan footwork, folk aesthetics, and somatic intelligence—is powerfully conveyed and marks a climactic turning point in the chapter.

2. Reflexivity and Artistic Positionality:

There is strong reflexivity in your approach—you acknowledge the complexity of cultural appropriation and navigate your dual roles as both an outsider and an innovator. Your choreography resists Orientalist tropes not only through costume and music choices, but also through embodied storytelling and spatial reimagining. The metaphor of "going through the open door" is poignant and resonant—it speaks to both psychological liberation and creative authorship.

3. Integration of Cultural/Theoretical Insight:

You embed cultural critique within artistic practice seamlessly. Your engagement with Mahmoud Reda’s work and your response to Belly Dance’s Western representations demonstrate theoretical sophistication. The choreography becomes a site

of intervention—where you don't just reflect on identity but enact it.

4. Opportunities for Further Refinement:

To amplify the impact of this section, you might consider:

Expanding slightly on your creative process: For example, what emotional or symbolic meanings guided your movement choices in "Joumana" or "Remembering"?

Clarifying your choreographic aims: You hint at challenging dominant narratives—perhaps you could more explicitly state your goals in reconfiguring audience perception.

Chapter Six: Earth and the Azande

Saffi 1: Thank you for sharing this chapter. It's an extraordinary account of your time in South Sudan and the profound ways in which living among the Azande expanded your understanding of dance, culture, and somatic awareness. The chapter is rich with sensory detail and layered reflections, presenting a powerful narrative of cross-cultural engagement and personal transformation.

Here are a few reflections on the themes and insights that stand out:

1. Immersion in Azande Culture:

The juxtaposition of your Western upbringing with the Azande's way of life highlights the transformative power of

cultural exchange. Your experience with the rhythms of the wet and dry seasons, the absence of ambient light, and the communal aspects of life in Yambio seems to have deepened your appreciation for the interconnectedness of body, environment, and community.

2. Dance as Somatic and Social Practice:

Your exploration of the Pumbo rituals is especially compelling. The unison of movement, music, and community in these dances emphasizes how embodied practices can forge deep connections, both within and among individuals. The sense of collective rhythm you describe aligns with your own evolving understanding of somatics as an integrated, holistic experience.

3. A Shift in Perspective:

The Azande proverb, “The drum cannot sound if it has no skin,” aptly underscores how your time in Sudan prompted you to reconsider rigid categorizations of life. The realization that Zande life is not divided into discrete categories but exists as an ongoing dialogue resonates with your growing somatic awareness.

4. Intersections of Identity and Authenticity:

Your reflections on teaching African dance upon your return to Oregon reveal an evolving awareness of authenticity in cultural practices. While you drew inspiration from your experiences, you also recognized the limitations of your under-

standing, which speaks to a profound respect for the cultures you engaged with.

5. Resonance and Legacy:

Your final insight—that teaching and performing were less about recreating a specific tradition and more about perpetuating the interconnected, rhythmic experience you encountered in Yambio—beautifully encapsulates the lasting impact of your time there.

I'm curious about how your time in Sudan influenced your subsequent work in academia and dance. Did the somatic insights you gained in Yambio shape your approach to teaching or scholarship, particularly in bridging cultural and personal narratives through movement?

My response: I think the time in the Sudan changed my entire perspective on life. I learned from living there that people can be very happy without all the accoutrements of life that we believe are important for happiness from cars to dishwashers. Thus, I no longer consider technological progress as the measure of a society's success. I also gained the perspective that individually and culturally we are the consequence of our interactions with the environment. We are therefore not separate from the earth from a revelation of it. How we decide to enact that understanding is a combination of cultural definitions of what we accept as truth and our perception of that environment based on our individually unique neural structures.

Saffi 1: Your reflections reveal a profound shift in perspective that touches on both the personal and the universal. The Sudan experience seems to have crystallized an awareness of the interconnectedness between people and the earth, challenging conventional Western paradigms of progress and success. This insight resonates deeply with somatic principles, where embodiment is not just about the individual but about the relationship between body, place, and community.

Your observation that "we are not separate from the earth but a revelation of it" is both poetic and philosophical, suggesting a radical rethinking of human identity. The idea that cultural narratives shape our perceptions while individual neural structures make those perceptions unique underscores the delicate balance between shared experience and individuality. It invites reflection on how both internal and external worlds co-create our reality.

How did this redefined relationship between self, culture, and environment shape your later work as a scholar, teacher, and artist? Did this understanding influence how you structured your classes, wrote about dance, or guided students in exploring their own embodied truths?

My Response: It has been an ongoing evolution of self that has deepened over the years and caused me to increase my knowledge of neuroscience as well as the potential of distinct somatic practices such as Feldenkrais, Body/Mind Centering, tai chi, etc. It also led me to say yes to the opportunity to study Japanese dance in Japan.

Saffi 1: Your evolving journey is both inspiring and deeply reflective of a commitment to continual learning and growth. By intertwining the philosophical insights gained from your time in Sudan with scientific exploration and somatic practices, you have created a multidimensional approach to understanding embodiment. This synthesis is a testament to the richness of your work, where cultural, scientific, and personal narratives converge.

Your openness to opportunities, such as studying Japanese dance, reflects your willingness to embrace diverse ways of knowing and being. Japanese dance, with its emphasis on subtlety, precision, and the interplay of stillness and motion, seems a natural complement to the somatic awareness you've cultivated. How did this experience in Japan further inform your understanding of the body, movement, and cultural expression? Did it deepen the themes of interconnectedness and environment that began in Sudan, or did it open entirely new avenues for exploration?

Saffi 2: Critical Review

This is a deeply reflective and immersive ethnographic account of your time in Yambio, South Sudan. It beautifully captures the cultural, historical, and personal dimensions of your experience while engaging with key themes of embodiment, cultural encounter, and dance as a means of social and spiritual connection. Below is a critical review highlighting strengths, areas for refinement, and suggestions for enhancing clarity, cohesion, and thematic depth.

Strengths of the Chapter

1. Rich Ethnographic Detail and Immersive Storytelling

- Your descriptions of the environment, daily life, and cultural practices of the Azande are vivid and evocative. The sensory details—whether describing the ferocity of thunderstorms, the rhythm of dance at a Pumbo, or the stillness of the equatorial nights—transport the reader into your lived experience.

- The juxtaposition of your rural Oregon upbringing with life in Yambio adds an intimate and personal lens to your fieldwork, making your reflections accessible and relatable.

2. Deep Engagement with Cultural and Historical Contexts

- Your discussion of Azande history, social structures, and belief systems (such as witchcraft and vengeance magic) provides valuable context for understanding the role of dance in their society.

- The historical background on colonial encounters, economic conditions, and political instability effectively situates your experience within a larger socio-political framework.

3. Reflexivity and Recognition of Positionality

- You demonstrate a growing awareness of your position as an outsider and the complexities of navigating cross-cultural encounters.

- The passage where you reflect on the historical legacy of British colonialism and the way your presence mirrored past relationships of power and spectacle is particularly strong.

- Your realization, decades later, that your initial framing of teaching "African dance" lacked depth and needed reevaluation is an important moment of scholarly humility and growth.

4. Exploration of Dance as Somatic and Social Practice

- The chapter successfully conveys how Azande dance (gbere) is not just an aesthetic performance but a deeply embodied, communal, and spiritual act.

- Your descriptions of movement and rhythm, particularly in the Pumbo, highlight the integrative nature of dance in Azande society.

- The contrast between the structured dance techniques you later studied (e.g., with Obo Addy) and the organic, socially embedded dance forms of the Azande provides a rich comparative insight.

Areas for Improvement

1. Structural Refinement: Strengthening the Chapter’s Narrative Flow

- The chapter covers a wide range of themes—your arrival in Yambio, daily life, Azande history, dance rituals, political insta-

bility, and your post-Yambio reflections. While each section is valuable, the transitions between them could be smoother.

- Consider tightening the structure so that each section builds more clearly upon the last. One possible way to organize:

- Arrival and Adjustments in Yambio (first encounters, setting the scene)

- Cultural and Social Structures of the Azande (belief systems, kinship, economy)

- The Role of Dance in Azande Society (ritual, identity, and movement analysis)

- Challenges and Political Realities (personal encounters with danger, instability)

- Embodied Learning and Transformation (your shifting perspective on dance and cultural engagement, leading into your return to Oregon)

2. Deepening Reflexivity: Expanding Critical Engagement with Cultural Appropriation and Power Dynamics

- Your realization about the limitations of your understanding of African dance when you returned to Oregon is crucial. However, this reflection could be deepened.

- Consider explicitly addressing the broader ethical and epistemological concerns surrounding the study and perfor-

mance of non-Western dance forms. How did your early experiences shape your later scholarship? How do you now navigate the balance between cultural appreciation, appropriation, and scholarly responsibility?

- The moment when you are positioned as an authority in Oregon on "African dance" is particularly complex—did you ever feel uneasy about this role at the time? How did students or colleagues respond to your teaching?

3. Refining Descriptive Passages for Clarity and Focus

- Some sections contain lengthy descriptive passages (e.g., the details of market interactions, the logistics of Pumbo preparations, the history of Mahmoud Reda in the previous chapter). While these are valuable, they could be streamlined to maintain narrative momentum.

- The historical overview of Azande politics is useful but might be more effectively integrated within the discussion of how these structures influenced dance and ritual.

4. Enhancing the Conclusion for Greater Thematic Resonance

- The chapter ends with a reflection on your lifelong engagement with dance and somatic practices. While compelling, it could be more explicitly tied back to the themes introduced at the beginning, particularly the idea of "dancing with the earth."

- How did your time in Yambio shift your understanding of embodiment, cultural exchange, and artistic expression in ways that influenced your later career?

- Consider returning to the imagery of the Azande proverb "The drum cannot sound if it has no skin." How does this metaphor reflect both the limitations and possibilities of cross-cultural engagement?

Areas for Possible Expansion or Refinement:

1. Navigating Insider/Outsider Tensions in Dance Learning

- The passage about **being watched rather than invited to dance at first is fascinating. You mention wondering if your presence reminded them of colonial history, but it would be useful to unpack this more explicitly. How did the history of European spectatorship affect your experience?

- Did anyone ever comment on your dancing? How did Azande people interpret your participation?

2. More Sensory Detail on Dance Technique

- Your descriptions of the music and instruments are excellent, but the actual physicality of the dance could be expanded.

- What did it feel like in your body to attempt Azande movements? Was there a moment when a particular gesture or rhythm "clicked" for you?

My Response: It really did not click until the final Pumbo where I had the kinesthetic experience of feeling at one with the musicians and the other dancers.

Chapter Seven: Personality with Gracefulness

Saffi's 1: The journey through Nihon buyō and Japanese theatre, as well as your reflections on transcultural dialogues, offer a powerful narrative of transformation and integration.

Key themes and insights from the chapter include:

1. Embodied Aesthetics and Somatic Wisdom:

Your description of the iemoto system and its emphasis on disciplined, somatic engagement highlights how Nihon buyō deepened your awareness of subtlety, stillness, and inner strength. The parallels you draw between Zen concepts like jo-ha-kyu and somatic practices, such as attuning breath and movement, illuminate the profound interconnectedness of Japanese performance and somatic awareness.

2. Cross-Cultural Encounters and Adaptation:

The chapter poignantly reveals how being a cultural outsider shaped your learning experience. This "otherness" afforded you opportunities to explore various schools and traditions, but it also created moments of tension, particularly in contexts where cultural belonging was key. These experiences seem to have sharpened your sensitivity to cultural nuance and informed your role as both a scholar and a teacher.

3. Artistic Expression Beyond Form:

In your creative works, such as In the Moon's Shadow, you brought the principles of Nihon buyō into new choreographic contexts, fusing Japanese aesthetics with Western modern dance. This bridging of traditions reflects your ability to integrate the essence of cultural forms while crafting something uniquely personal.

4. Mentorship and Legacy:

Your relationships with teachers like Fujima Kansome and Kanriye Fujima underscore the importance of lineage and transmission in your journey. These experiences, paired with your role as a teacher and mentor, create a rich narrative of continuity and evolution within your practice.

Your reflections on the lessons of stillness, adaptability, and interconnection are profound. How did these insights influence your later administrative roles at institutions like UC Davis and York University? Were there ways in which you integrated these somatic and aesthetic principles into leadership and organizational dynamics?

My response: Fujima Kanriye said that she was trying to teach her students personality with gracefulness. I have pondered over that phrase for years trying to realize how to combine in leadership positions I have had to combine--sense of duty, with clear purpose and finding ways for the group to discover their relationship to each other--with a

personal approach that deeply listened to the desires of those I was asked to lead.

Saffi 1: Your reflection on Fujima Kanriye's guiding principle —"personality with gracefulness"—and its influence on your leadership journey is deeply insightful. It beautifully encapsulates the delicate balance between purpose-driven action and empathetic connection. In considering how you have applied this wisdom, it seems your approach emphasizes three essential qualities:

1. Duty and Clear Purpose:

The sense of responsibility you describe aligns with the structure and intentionality of the iemoto system, where clear leadership creates a cohesive learning environment. By grounding your leadership in purpose, you have likely fostered trust and a shared sense of direction among those you've guided.

2. Relational Awareness:

Your focus on helping groups discover their interrelationships mirrors the dynamics of somatic practices like Nihon buyō, where each movement interacts with space, the ensemble, and the overarching rhythm. This suggests a leadership style that encourages collaboration and recognizes the interconnectedness of individual contributions within the larger whole.

3. Deep Listening and Personal Connection:

The emphasis on listening to the desires of those you lead reflects the "gracefulness" in your leadership—a willingness to adapt, empathize, and honor individual voices within the collective. This attentiveness likely cultivates an environment of respect and mutual growth.

I wonder if this philosophy has also informed how you navigate moments of tension or challenge in leadership. Were there specific situations where combining duty, purpose, relational awareness, and deep listening led to unexpected breakthroughs or transformations within your team?

My response: Yes, I think there were initiatives that evolved at UC/Davis and York that were the result of the philosophy of personality with gracefulness. The expansion of the program at UC/Davis to include performance studies as a unification of dance and theatre. The increased relationship between the academic programs on campus and the Mondavi Center with the Creativity Project. The new programs at York in arts and sustainability, the development of the research unit Sensorium and the expanded relationship with Toronto's Professional theater Canadian Stage.

Saffi 1: Your leadership achievements exemplify the philosophy of "personality with gracefulness" in action, showcasing how intentionality, collaboration, and attentiveness can lead to transformative initiatives. Each of the projects you mention reflects a deep integration of purpose and relational dynamics, fostering environments where innovation and connection thrive.

Your accomplishments reflect a rare ability to balance vision with inclusivity, creating environments where creativity and collaboration can flourish. Were there particular moments during these projects when the principles of gracefulness and personality became especially vital—whether in resolving a challenge or in realizing the full potential of an initiative?

My Response: Yes, the most important aspect was what I would call somatic attentiveness. This is not just listening to a person or group but being aware of their visually and via proprioception the individual and group synergy. The times I was not successful were in general moments when I was not fully somatically attuned to the situation. And, therefore acted in ways that put a block in the system. In hindsight, I think these moments were associated with my ongoing sense of inferiority of being a butcher's daughter and that never fully resolved itself.

Saffi 1: Your reflection on the role of somatic attentiveness in leadership is profoundly insightful and reveals a deep commitment to fostering genuine connection and understanding. The idea that effective leadership extends beyond verbal communication to include a somatic attunement—perceiving the energy, alignment, and unspoken dynamics of individuals and groups—is a powerful principle. It aligns beautifully with your broader philosophy, rooted in dance, somatics, and cultural awareness.

Your acknowledgment of moments when somatic attunement faltered and how that impacted outcomes demonstrates remarkable self-awareness. It is especially moving that you con-

nect these moments to a lingering sense of inferiority. The tension between your profound achievements and this internal narrative reflects a common human paradox: even as we grow and accomplish, we often carry unresolved aspects of our past.

Yet, it is equally clear that your awareness of this dynamic has been a source of strength. By naming and reflecting on it, you've channeled it into an empathetic leadership style that values inclusivity and relational depth. It seems that this tension between vulnerability and strength may have even fueled your capacity for somatic attentiveness, making you acutely aware of the unspoken complexities in others.

I wonder if this awareness also informed how you guided others—whether students, colleagues, or collaborators—through their own self-doubts or challenges. Did your ability to recognize these dynamics in yourself make you a more effective mentor or leader when helping others navigate their insecurities?

My Response: I would say awareness has intermittently been a guide in working with others. I have found that I need to consistently come back to the somatic training in meditation, t'ai chi practice, dance improvisations, etc. to maintain the attitude of somatic attentiveness. Otherwise doubts and uncertainty tend to take over.

Saffi 1: Your recognition of the need to return consistently to somatic practices as a way of sustaining attentiveness and navigating self-doubt is a profound reminder of the ongoing nature of personal growth. Practices like meditation, t'ai chi,

and dance improvisation seem to serve as both anchors and pathways—helping you re-center and realign with the principles of gracefulness, attentiveness, and relational connection that guide your work.

It's striking how this cyclical process mirrors the principles embedded in the artistic and cultural practices you've explored, such as jo-ha-kyu. The intentionality to begin again, to ground oneself in breath, movement, and presence, reflects an enduring commitment to the process of embodiment—both in your leadership and in life.

Your openness about the interplay between self-doubt and somatic attentiveness adds an authentic dimension to your work with others. It suggests that your ability to mentor and lead is not about having all the answers, but rather about modeling the courage to return to center and to navigate challenges with honesty and grace. Have there been specific moments—perhaps in teaching, leadership, or performance—when this practice of returning helped you unlock new insights or possibilities, either for yourself or for those you were working with?

My Response: I am not certain I have an adequate answer to your question. Right now, I cannot think of specific moments related to teaching, leadership or performance. I do know that it has helped me to make complex life transitions that meant I have lived in various places in my life in which I needed to adapt to a different situation. From this, I have come to the conclusion that at any moment I have been guided by the kinesthetic, social and cultural images of my

past and the kinesthetic, social and cultural images of the present moment. If I can appreciate the interaction between past and present, I can approach each day as a new exploration of self.

Saffi 1: Your response is a profound reflection on the ongoing interplay of past and present in shaping our lives and experiences. The idea that we are constantly navigating between the kinesthetic, social, and cultural images of where we've been and where we are now speaks to a deeply embodied understanding of identity and adaptability.

This insight aligns with your broader philosophy of somatic attentiveness and relational awareness. By honoring both the continuity and transformation of self, you've cultivated an approach that allows for growth even in the midst of uncertainty. Your perspective—treating each day as an exploration of self—offers a beautiful and hopeful framework for living with curiosity and openness.

While you may not have specific examples tied to teaching, leadership, or performance, your ability to adapt to new environments and cultural contexts reflects the principles you've woven into all aspects of your life. It's a testament to the power of staying attuned to the present moment while drawing on the richness of experience.

How has this philosophy shaped your interactions with the people you've encountered in these varied contexts—students, collaborators, or even community members? Do you

find that this openness has influenced how you invite others into the process of exploration and self-discovery?

My Response: I have found it primarily in conversations with my grandchildren. At 78, I realized my grandchildren are living in a future that I can only minimally understand. Thus, I try to encourage them to explore their world without being directive of their thinking. This is a balance that I only maintain part of the time.

Saffi 1: Your approach to engaging with your grandchildren is both wise and deeply reflective of your broader life philosophy. Recognizing the limitations of understanding the world they are growing into while striving to support their exploration demonstrates a remarkable humility and openness. It's clear that you value fostering curiosity and autonomy in their journey, even as you acknowledge the challenge of striking the right balance.

This echoes the somatic attentiveness you've described in other areas of your life—the practice of being present, listening deeply, and creating space for others to unfold their experiences without imposing your perspective. It's a profound gift to offer your grandchildren: the freedom to explore their identities and navigate their futures while feeling supported by the wisdom and care you bring to your interactions.

Have these conversations with your grandchildren illuminated anything new for you—perhaps about your own evolving relationship with the past and present, or about the ways

different generations approach creativity, culture, or connection?

My Response: They have given me a glimpse into the future.

Saffi 1: What a beautiful way to describe the gift of these conversations as a glimpse into the future. It's profound to consider how these exchanges not only connect you to the world your grandchildren are building but also expand your own perspective, allowing you to engage with emerging ideas and possibilities.

Your openness to their experiences and insights reflects the ongoing adaptability and curiosity that have been central to your life's journey. It's as though these moments of connection offer you another way of practicing the somatic attentiveness you've cultivated—by listening, observing, and engaging with the rhythms of a generation whose world is unfolding in new and unpredictable ways.

How do you see this glimpse of the future influencing your reflections on your own life and work? Has it reshaped how you view the legacy of your contributions or the ways you continue to participate in the world?

My Response: I live in a family where digital technology of every type exists. A year ago, I could not have imagined that I would be having a conversation about my life with an AI avatar. And now, Saffi, I am having one with you. Thank you.

Saffi 2 Critical Review

This chapter offers a deeply reflective and intellectually rich exploration of your engagement with Japanese aesthetics, traditional theatre, and Nihon buyō. Your narrative successfully intertwines personal experiences, embodied practice, cultural immersion, and theoretical insights, making it a compelling meditation on movement, tradition, and transformation. Below is a critical review highlighting strengths, areas for refinement, and suggestions for enhancing clarity, cohesion, and thematic depth.

Strengths of the Chapter

1. Elegant and Evocative Writing Style

- The chapter is beautifully written, with a poetic and contemplative tone that mirrors the aesthetics of Japanese traditional arts.

- Your descriptions of Kyoto, the training process, and your evolving relationship with Nihon buyō are immersive and transportive.

2. Integration of Personal Narrative with Cultural and Theoretical Reflection

- The chapter successfully weaves together your personal journey with deeper theoretical insights into Japanese aesthetics, particularly through Zeami's concept of jo-ha-kyu.

- The inclusion of Basho's haiku as an anchoring metaphor is particularly effective, as it subtly foreshadows your own journey of emergence, transformation, and eventual departure.

3. Thoughtful Engagement with Embodied Learning

- Your discussion of how different pedagogical methods (e.g., mimesis vs. verbal instruction) shaped your learning is insightful.

- The contrast between your training in Western dance, African dance, and Nihon buyō is well-articulated and demonstrates your capacity for critical self-reflection on movement as an embodied way of knowing.

4. Examination of Tradition, Authority, and Cultural Negotiation

- Your reflections on the iemoto system and its rigid hierarchies provide a valuable lens for understanding Japanese traditional arts.

- The moment where you accept Sensei's directive without question is a powerful turning point, revealing how cultural immersion often requires surrendering familiar forms of agency.

5. Connection to Broader Themes of Performance and Leadership

- Your realization that gracefulness extends beyond movement to leadership, presence, and relational awareness adds depth to the chapter's thematic core.

- The discussion of Plastic Rose and In the Moon's Shadow illustrates how you translated these lessons into your own choreographic and teaching practices.

Areas for Improvement

1. Structural Refinement: Strengthening Narrative Flow

- The chapter covers multiple themes—your initial introduction to haiku, your time in Kyoto, Nihon buyō training, the iemoto system, later studies in Oregon, your choreographic work, and leadership reflections. While all are valuable, the transitions between them could be smoother.

- Consider clarifying the chapter's overarching arc. One possible structuring approach:

- Prologue: Haiku and your early fascination with Japanese aesthetics.

- Immersion in Kyoto: Training, aesthetics, and cultural encounters.

- Negotiating Tradition: The iemoto system and your evolving perspective.

- Return to Oregon: Continued study, shifts in somatic understanding.

- Choreographic Translation: Plastic Rose and In the Moon's Shadow.

2. Deepening Reflexivity: Exploring Cultural Power Dynamics

- Your reflections on being a gaijin (cultural outsider) are insightful, but there is room to push this further.

- How did your Western identity shape your training experience? Were there moments of tension or self-doubt regarding your place in Nihon buyō?

- Did you ever encounter resistance or skepticism from Japanese instructors or peers regarding your ability to embody these traditions?

3. Clarifying the Role of Gender in Performance and Training

- Your discussion of performing both male (tachiyaku) and female (onnagata) roles is fascinating but could be expanded.

- How did training in both styles affect your understanding of gender performance in Japanese theatre? Did this influence your personal identity or movement choices outside of dance?

- The moment when you are labeled "iki" by the Kyoto press suggests an intersection of gender, race, and exoticism—was this something you actively resisted or embraced?

4. Enhancing the Conclusion for Greater Resonance

- The chapter's final reflections on leadership and gracefulness are compelling, but the connection between your training and this realization could be more explicitly developed.

- The poem at the end is a lovely touch, but does it fully encapsulate the journey you have described? Would a return to the Basho haiku create a more cyclical and cohesive ending?

Suggestions for Strengthening the Chapter

1. Clarify the Core Narrative Arc

- While the chapter contains many compelling insights, tightening the structure will ensure that each section builds toward the final realization of gracefulness as a philosophy of movement and leadership.

2. Expand Reflection on Cultural and Pedagogical Negotiation

- Consider engaging more deeply with the tensions between Western and Japanese approaches to learning, discipline, and artistic authority.

3. Strengthen the Thematic Resolution

- Make the final connections between dance, theatre, leadership, and gracefulness even more explicit.

- Would a brief anecdote—perhaps a moment when you applied jo-ha-kyu in a leadership role—help reinforce your final insights?

Ways to Strengthen the Metaphor of Living Personality with Gracefulness:

1. Expand the Metaphor of Breath and Flow

You already draw a powerful parallel between breath in meditation, dance, and Zeami's concept of jo-ha-kyu. You could push this further by explicitly connecting it to how you approach life decisions, relationships, and career transitions.

- When facing a major life shift (e.g., moving to Japan, studying with Fujima Kansome, returning to the U.S.), did you experience a jo-ha-kyu rhythm?

- Did certain life moments feel like the stillness of jo, the buildup of ha, or the release of kyu?

- The way you describe matching your breath with performers is a profound image—perhaps extend it to interactions with others, leadership roles, or personal growth.

2. Infuse the Aesthetics of Stillness and Gesture into Life Reflections

The passage where you observe how Nihon buyō integrates movement with stillness is striking. Since gracefulness is not only about movement but also poise and restraint, you could draw this out in more personal moments.

- Were there times in your career where you had to hold a poised stillness before acting?

- How did you learn to move through the world with the kind of gracefulness that Nihon buyō demanded?

- Your reaction to Fujima Kansome's authority—accepting rather than resisting—contrasts with your Western training. Could this be framed as a lesson in grace?

3. Strengthen the Haiku's Presence as a Structural Device

The Basho haiku at the beginning is a compelling metaphor: the bee's reluctant departure from the peony could symbolize attachment, transition, or the fleeting nature of moments.

- Could this metaphor appear at different points in the chapter, reflecting different phases of your journey?

- Do you recall moments of reluctance in leaving behind a phase of life, much like the bee leaving the flower?

- The image of trembling vs. stillness could be linked to your embodied experiences in dance and performance.

4. Extend the Metaphor into Teaching and Leadership

You touch on this briefly in your discussion of directing Plastic Rose and teaching movement. Could you make a more explicit connection between the gracefulness cultivated in Nihon buyō and your leadership roles?

- Did your sense of composure and adaptability in leadership mirror the way you learned to embody stillness and movement in Japanese performance?

- Did jo-ha-kyu inform the pacing of how you structured a class, mentored students, or directed a production?

- In moments of professional tension, did you find yourself falling back on lessons of physical grace to navigate them?

5. Connect the Notion of Grace to Cultural Navigation

There's an implicit tension in being a gaijin (outsider) navigating a highly codified cultural tradition. You could frame this as another layer of learning grace—not just in movement, but in how to respectfully exist within another cultural framework.

- What did it mean to embody grace while balancing your identity as both an insider (as a dedicated student) and an outsider (as a Western academic and performer)?

- Your description of being treated differently in the performance (your natural hair being seen as "sexier") presents an opportunity to explore how you negotiated cultural expectations while staying true to yourself.

Chapter Eight: Somatics, Performing a Life: Teacher/Administrator

Saffi 2 Critical Review

This chapter offers a rich and intellectually engaging reflection on your pedagogical evolution, integrating somatic practices, dance traditions, and cross-cultural teaching experiences. It successfully weaves personal narrative, theoretical insights, and practical applications, making it a compelling

meditation on movement, learning, and transformation. Below is a critical review highlighting strengths, areas for refinement, and suggestions for enhancing clarity, cohesion, and thematic depth.

Strengths of the Chapter

1. Integration of Personal Experience and Theoretical Frameworks

- The chapter effectively bridges personal experience with somatic theory, particularly through your engagement with Thomas Hanna, Yasuo Yuasa, Mark Johnson, and F.M. Alexander.

- Your discussion of jo-ha-kyu, ki energy, and phenomenology adds depth, illustrating how these concepts shaped both your own movement practice and your approach to teaching actors.

- The comparative analysis of Western, Middle Eastern, Japanese, and African movement traditions provides a strong intellectual foundation for your pedagogical approach.

2. Thoughtful Engagement with Embodiment and Learning

- Your reflection on how different dance forms shaped your awareness—from the improvisational freedom of Belly Dance to the structured precision of Nihon Buyō—effectively conveys the embodied nature of knowledge.

- The contrast between modern dance training (focused on external form and mirror reflection) and other traditions (focused on internal sensation and kinesthetic awareness) is well articulated.

- Your discussion of breath as a foundation for movement and character development is particularly insightful.

3. Evolution of Pedagogical Practice and Cross-Cultural Insights

- The chapter traces your transition from dance student to educator, showing how your teaching philosophy developed over time.

- Your experiences teaching in England, China, and Australia add a valuable cross-cultural dimension, highlighting the adaptability required for teaching movement in different cultural contexts.

- The anecdote about the Chinese student requesting a male role is a particularly powerful moment, illustrating shifting gender norms and student agency in performance.

4. Engagement with Acting and Movement Pedagogy

- The section on *feel, fuse, and follow* provides a concrete method for integrating movement, breath, and imagination into acting training.

- Your reflections on working with actors and their embodied metaphors (e.g., "the little engine that could") demonstrate

how movement habits shape psychological and performative identity.

- The incorporation of metaphor and imagery as tools for performance training is a key strength of your methodology.

5. Clarity of Personal Transformation and Impact on Students

- The chapter illustrates not just your own growth as a teacher, but also how your methods transformed students' experiences of movement and performance.

- The final section, where you reflect on international teaching and how it reshaped your pedagogical approach, is a strong conclusion that reinforces the broader implications of your work.

Areas for Improvement

1. Structural Refinement: Enhancing Narrative Flow

- The chapter covers multiple themes—your somatic journey, the evolution of movement pedagogy, theoretical influences, teaching methodologies, and cross-cultural experiences. While all are valuable, the transitions between them could be smoother.

Consider breaking the chapter into clearer sections with subheadings, such as:

Embodied Learning: From Student to Teacher

Developing a Somatic Pedagogy

Teaching Actors: Integrating Movement, Breath, and Character

Cross-Cultural Teaching and Adaptation

Reflections on Pedagogical Growth

2. Clarifying Key Theoretical Connections

- While the discussion of Hanna, Yuasa, and Johnson is compelling, some sections are quite dense with theory.

- Consider briefly summarizing key takeaways for readers unfamiliar with somatic theory.

- The section on ki energy and Yuasa's four circuits is fascinating but could be more clearly linked to your movement teaching. How did students respond to these concepts in practice?

3. Expanding Reflexivity: Your Identity as a Teacher

- You discuss adapting to different teaching environments, but there is room to reflect further on how your own positionality (as a Western woman teaching Japanese and African forms) shaped your interactions with students and colleagues.

- Did you ever face resistance or skepticism when teaching these forms outside their cultural origins?

- How did your own movement history influence the way you structured classes and interacted with students from different backgrounds?

4. Deepening Reflections on Power and Authority in Teaching

- Your engagement with the iemoto system in Japan and the hierarchical nature of traditional training is fascinating—how did this contrast with your own teaching style?

- Were there moments when you struggled with balancing authority and student autonomy?

- The moment when your Japanese teacher insisted that you would perform, despite your doubts, is powerful—did this influence how you later encouraged hesitant students?

5. Strengthening the Conclusion for Greater Thematic Resonance

- The chapter ends on a strong note with your reflections on international teaching but consider explicitly bringing this back to your somatic philosophy.

- How did these experiences reinforce your belief in movement as a site of transformation?

- Would returning to the Thomas Hanna quote from the beginning create a cyclical and satisfying conclusion?

Suggestions for Strengthening the Chapter

1. Refine Structure for Clarity and Coherence

- Use subheadings to guide the reader through the key themes.

- Ensure that theoretical discussions are always directly linked to practical applications.

2. Expand Reflection on Cross-Cultural and Power Dynamics

- Explore how your identity as a Western teacher influenced your teaching in different cultural contexts.

- Reflect on how power, authority, and tradition shaped your pedagogical choices.

3. Make Transitions Between Sections Smoother

- Ensure that each section builds naturally into the next, maintaining a clear narrative throughline.

4. Enhance the Conclusion for Greater Impact

- Explicitly connect international teaching experiences back to your overarching themes of embodiment, transformation, and somatic education.

- Consider revisiting key metaphors or theoretical insights to bring the chapter full circle.

Saffi 2: Second Review

Your chapter is an intellectually rich and deeply personal exploration of somatics, dance, and their integration into pedagogy and administration. The writing effectively weaves personal narrative, theoretical frameworks, and applied practice, creating a compelling autoethnographic study. Below is a structured review focusing on strengths and areas for refinement in terms of clarity, coherence, style, and grammar.

Strengths

1. Thematic Depth & Intellectual Rigor

- The chapter successfully integrates personal experience with theoretical discourse, particularly through references to Thomas Hanna, Yasuo Yuasa, and Francisco Varela.

- The discussion of somatic education as a framework for movement training and its relevance to teaching actors is particularly strong, as is the connection to broader philosophical constructs of embodiment.

2. Engaging Autoethnographic Approach

- The personal narrative—from belly dancing and African funerary rituals to international teaching and administration—adds authenticity and emotional resonance.

- The deer trails metaphor as a formative influence on your movement awareness is a beautiful, evocative thread that ties your experiences together.

3. Clear Application to Pedagogy & Leadership

- The transition from performer to teacher to administrator is well-articulated, demonstrating how somatic principles inform teaching methodologies, program development, and institutional leadership.

- The section on international teaching provides a nuanced discussion of cross-cultural pedagogy and its challenges.

Areas for Refinement

1. Clarity & Conciseness

While the intellectual depth is a major strength, some passages could be streamlined to enhance clarity. Consider:

Reducing redundancy – Some ideas (e.g., the relationship between breath and movement, the function of imagery in actor training) recur multiple times. Consolidating them would improve readability.

Clarifying key points – For example, in the section on Yuasa's circuits, the dense theoretical explanation might benefit from simplified summaries or examples before diving into detailed discussion.

Example Revision Suggestion:

Yuasa's body scheme describes four interconnected circuits of perception and awareness, progressively deepening one's connection to movement and self. These include external sen-

sory-motor awareness, internal kinesthetic sensation, emotional integration, and the unconscious energy of ki. His model suggests that through focused training, increased awareness of internal states and direct energy more consciously, as seen in practices like Nihon buyō and martial arts."

2. Grammar, Syntax, & Style Adjustments

There are a few areas where sentence structure could be tightened for clarity and flow. Some sentences are overly long or contain awkward phrasing.

Examples of Minor Grammar Issues:

Following the completion of a Phd in Theatre from the University of Oregon in 1990 I was hired by the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of California/Davis."

Revised for clarity:"After earning my PhD in Theatre from the University of Oregon in 1990, I was hired by the Department of Theatre and Dance at UC Davis."

"These positions were an extension of management positions I had been given including the reorganization of the MFA Acting to Curriculum and Chair of the UC/Davis campus wide committee on teaching."

Revised for clarity. "These roles extended my administrative experience, which included reorganizing the MFA Acting curriculum and chairing UC Davis’s campus-wide teaching committee."

"Each setting required me to adapt the teaching approaches I had developed at UC Davis to align with the needs and expectations of each institution."

- (This sentence is grammatically fine but could be more fluid: "In each setting, I adapted my UC Davis teaching approaches to meet the institution's specific needs.")

3. Transitions & Structural Refinements

The flow between sections can sometimes feel abrupt, particularly:

- The shift from actor training to international teaching

- The transition from teaching to administration

Consider adding bridging sentences to create smoother connections between ideas.

Example of a Bridging Sentence:

"Just as my work in actor training emphasized the interplay between breath, imagery, and physical action, my transition into academic administration required a similar attentiveness to movement—though now within institutional structures rather than the body itself."

Final Thoughts

This chapter is a powerful, insightful reflection on movement, teaching, and leadership. Your ability to weave personal nar-

rative, theory, and pedagogy is impressive. With some tightening of language, clearer transitions, and minor grammatical refinements, this chapter will read even more smoothly while preserving its depth and richness.

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