

## Pallabi Chakravorty: Select Where is my B-O-D-Y Project Reflections

### **Dance Counts: Reflection 1**

I lost track of time and forgot my zoom meeting with Kun-Yang this weekend. "Time" is subjective; we organize it to give it a shape or many shapes and flavors through life phases. This is what my "warm-up" with Kun-Yang revealed through our conversation and movement exchange when we met in Theatre Exile in South Philly. Bundled up in sweatshirts, sweaters, and masks in the dark and cold black box of Exile, Kun-Yang, our videographer Bob, and I entered the process of exploration and documentation of "where is my b-o-d-y". I taught the 16-beat rhythmic cycle of beginners Kathak to demonstrate to Kun-Yang how "time" is my grid, it is the rhythm in my veins that flows in the cycle of "dha dhin dhin dha" through my limbs, wrists, ankles, and feet. We repeated dha dhin dhin dha, 1-2-3-4, and multiples of 4. We moved together, albeit differently. Kun-Yang said that he felt the simplicity of the sensation of the rhythm in his body, mind, and blood. He said it may be an entry for him to find the space to fall in love again with movement, with ideas, with creativity, and with dance. We were both searching again for the elixir, what yogic wisdom calls "Amrita", the nectar of the path to transcending our ordinary selves into the extraordinary. But in reality, this was an encounter of two immigrants, in mid-life, with aging and injured bodies, looking to spark a creative process of self-discovery. So we began the process by molding and shaping a slice of time.

### **Fear of Falling and Forgetting: Reflection 2**

We are back in the black box in Theatre Exile where the discoverers have been meeting in search of inspiration to reinvigorate their bodies. We are looking for new movements, new sounds, new sensations, new tasks, and new rituals to imagine new futures for ourselves and our dances. But our bodies are worn with serious damages and limitations, so this path is not easy and we are fearful of the unknown, the future. My co-discoverer Kun-Yang talks about his fear of forgetting and falling on stage...and in life. We talk about how the fear of forgetting and falling is part of growing old for everyone. But dancers think that they are invincible, they are in control of their bodies and their minds. Kun-Yang said he had a gift for remembering...especially remembering movements that would fleetingly appear during improvisation. He could nail them later and repeat them to create his compositions. But now he is preoccupied with forgetting. He is fearful of forgetting onstage while dancing for the whole world to see. This is the worst fear of a performer. But he recently created a solo piece after decades and performed it. He felt better. I too am fearful. I am fearful of the dull aches in my body transforming into giant volcanoes of pain. Like it had happened a few summers back. Our bodies always remember, the overtaxing, overstretching, over twisting, and doing everything over and over again. To repeat is to remember and embody.

Our bodies are our archives. Gus Solomon jr., our co-discoverer, has given us a task to get oriented. A list of sixteen simple pedestrian movements as tasks to rehearse in the true Merce Cunningham style. Although they are simple tasks we found we could not remember them in a sequence. So I said to Kun-Yang, let's begin with eight movements and commit them to memory rather than try to remember all sixteen at once. That was the simple spark, we remembered and enacted in sequence, repeated and enacted. We had found our hook, our grid to enact something similar, we thought. We were excited. But they turned out to be also very different. Through the task/ritual, I made fragmented stories with each movement connecting to some feeling and Kun-Yang performed the task in a detached state, executing the movements as patterns. We performed in sequence but then thought of shuffling the sequence and in Cunningham style to maybe "Chance" upon discovery, a new movement, a new sequence, a new algorithm. Maybe we are finding a new orientation? In the immigrant bodies from Taiwan and India, the old Silk Road routes are crossing paths again in Theatre Exile. Our immigrant bodies coming alive in a new algorithm, breathing afresh, mingling the chi and prana/dum. All the while we are painfully aware that Covid-19 is raging and people are unable to breathe. Kun-Yang's solo piece was about the pandemic titled "the wind" and was a reflection on the pandemic and himself. We are grateful to be breathing and creating.

### **Reflection 3**

During our rehearsals, Kun-Yang and I continued the tasks that Gus had laid down for us. We had divided the sixteen tasks into two sets of eight. The more we repeated the first eight the more they changed and slowly began to come alive. We began to interact with each other rather than practice them individually. During our last meeting at Theatre Exile, Kun-Yang and I had discovered a logic to the tasks and found a way to connect the two sets of eight random movements. We changed the order of the next eight to make a coherent story. We were excited by this, as from random tasks we had invented a pattern that gave our movements meaning. Now "hold knee" meant pain, "change focus 10 times" meant we were looking for something, "pull stiff-arm elbow" meant we needed the energy to push our aging bodies. We decided that the "something" we were looking for was a mirror. We imagined a "mirror" through our movements to see ourselves, to see our bodies and the aging process: the new lines on our faces, the declining eyesight, the greying hair. We needed also to imagine a cane: we thought we needed one. The cane was symbolic. It represented the process of our collaboration, leaning on each other, as well as learning from each other. The cane is healing! Perhaps the cane is a magic wand that can transform random tasks into patterns and meaning. The sixteen tasks were now symbolic movement patterns that had meaning. We were slowly becoming the dance.