

FORUM

Turning Around Dance Research

Karyn Recollet, Seika Boye, VK Preston, Angélique Willkie, Freya Björg Olafson, Lindsay Eales, Patrick Alcedo, MJ Thompson, and Michèle Moss

With Alana Gerecke and Mary Fogarty Woehrel

Here, we offer a Forum that features nine dance studies specialists we find inspiring. We approached these moving thinkers with a set of five questions, each geared to connect with the theme of the special edition: backspace. We think of this as a written expression of turning around: rather than looking at the research or researcher head-on, we consider what we can learn by twisting to take in the multiple and peripheral entities that surround each of us. Our questions attempt to draw out an expanded notion of background: previous and future scholarly and artistic pathways, directions, and communities; kinaesthetic experiences and memories; personal commitments; and backgrounded labour. We seek to explore how these various backgrounds fold together to constitute any given, seemingly singular frontal presentation. For us, this is another way of getting at issues of citational politics in scholarly research, embodied influence in artistic work, and labour standards or so-called “work/life balance” in both realms.

We have asked Karyn Recollet, Seika Boye, VK Preston, Angélique Willkie, Freya Björg Olafson, Lindsay Eales, Patrick Alcedo, MJ Thompson, and Michèle Moss to respond to our prompts by gesturing toward the artists and scholars who inform their work, as well as the background activities and moves that situate it. We also asked them explicitly about their lived, kinaesthetic experiences of their backs in everyday life. We hope that this Forum fosters an embodied and grounded account of some of the networks of dance scholarship that stretch across the country. Further, we hope that this contribution will prompt consideration of how we are introduced to fresh ideas in Canada: which sites, performers, scholars, venues, and commitments shape the conversations we animate.

Karyn Recollet is an urban Cree assistant professor in Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. **Seika Boye** is a lecturer in the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies and director of the research-focused Institute for Dance Studies at the University of Toronto. **VK Preston** is an assistant professor at the University of Toronto’s Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies. **Angélique Willkie** is an assistant professor in the Department of Contemporary Dance at Concordia University and a Concordia Research Fellow. **Freya Björg Olafson** is an assistant professor in the Department of Dance at York University. **Lindsay Eales** is co-artistic director of CRIPSIE (The Collaborative Radically Integrated Performers Society) in Edmonton and a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. **Patrick Alcedo** is an associate professor in the Department of Dance at York University. **MJ Thompson** is associate professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Practices at Concordia University. **Michèle Moss** is associate professor of Dance in the School of Creative and Performing Arts, University of Calgary. **Alana Gerecke** is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Theatre at York University. **Mary Fogarty Woehrel** is an associate professor in the Department of Dance at York University.

Karyn Recollet

1. Who is the most cited author in your work?

The artist/writer I most cite at the moment is Pauline M. Gumbs' gorgeous thought experiments within the *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018). I creatively imagine Gumbs' generative and sustaining genealogy of relation with future landing practices of Indigenous futurist thinkers and activators. This genealogy reflects a citational practice that respects those who continue to spatialize us lovingly into the future, such as M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005). Adapting the shape of an archive, Gumbs has forged "a series of poetic artifacts that speculatively documents the persistence of Black life following a worldwide cataclysm." *M Archive* "is written in collaboration with the survivors, the far-into-the-future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse" (Gumbs 2018, xi).

2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).

Ashon T. Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (2017);
 Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018);
 Billy-Ray Belcourt's *The Wound is a World* (2017);
 Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013);
 Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016).

3. Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.

Waawaate Fobister (Anishinaabe).

4. Describe the ways you move your back, or your back moves you, in your everyday life.

I learned from an incredible Dine body Somatic practitioner Nazbah Tom so many insights into the past present and present futures of my body as an extension of my future ancestors. They taught me to think of my back in ways that can hold space for future ancestors and I will always remember this teaching. I hold my futures, pasts and presents in this space of my back and I think about my spine as a time travelling device.

5. What's the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say "no" to a project?

The needs of my daughter Gracie will always be the most important to me as we collectively hold space for this star being. She is my reason for everything.

Seika Boye

1. Who is the most cited author in your work?

Hmmm, that's tough. I'm in [the] early stages of a new research project so it feels like I don't know . . . but I'll say that Thomas F. DeFrantz comes up a lot when I am working and thinking. I read him not only for content but because he is an excellent writer craft-wise. He

uses form and his voice with such clear and clever intention. His writing performs, and for all of its sharpness, it is kind.

2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).

Zadie Smith's *Feel Free* (2018)

Gabriella Giannachi's *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday* (2016);

Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland's co-edited *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory* (2018);

Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019);

Monica Gattinger's *The Roots of Culture, the Power of Art: The First Sixty Years of the Canada Council for the Arts* (2017)

Also, Michelle Obama's *Becoming* (2018), obviously.

3. Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.

Nina Simone.

4. Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.

My back, my back, where to begin. It was a hypermobile back for many, many years. Now that I am in my mid-40s it is less mobile, much less mobile. Two pregnancies are hard on a hypermobile person because hormones make loose joints even looser which is painful and I “suddenly” went from being a very confidently moving person to a tentatively moving person. I had to get to know my back again. I have an unreliable tailbone and SI joints, which also affects the top of my spine—the bottom pulls one way and the top pulls in the other. An MRI once had my doctor at the time asking if perhaps I had an extra vertebra.

So, in short, I move my back carefully. Very, very carefully and with a lot of subtlety, for comfort, throughout the day. I shift around a lot and ultimately I get up and walk. I walk a lot; that is when my back feels great. Walking is all of the parts moving—which is so profound.

My back helps me express love. For all of its supposed unsteadiness, it allows me to pick up my seventy-two-pound seven-year-old. I do it daily so that I keep having the strength. I can no longer pick up my eleven-year-old so I know that it ends. . . . It is so intense when your kids are young and you are carrying them ALL OF THE TIME. But then it ends . . . and that is intense in a different way . . . so I'm hanging on to it for as long as I can!

I also teach movement to actors which involves a constant and ongoing discussion of the spine—backs are so beautiful, every one. What a gift in life to get to know people through their spines. When I think about a skeleton and how magical it is I get goosebumps, every time. So backs move me emotionally and intellectually.

When my back is really sore it tells me that I have stopped being attentive to my body and so to myself in the many things I do in a day. Usually it hurts when I get very busy, too busy. So it that respect, it is my back that brings me back to myself as a grounded, attentive, efficiently aligned, mobile and ready to go human again and again and again.

5. What’s the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.

Reason to miss class: I have to be careful here and not give students ideas! Ha. I really like going to class, true story. Any time I have not gone it’s because I was too tired. Like deep tired. Not that exciting but true. Now the reasons for being tired, that’s another set of stories!

Saying “no” to projects, that’s changed over the years. I just wrote to someone that “I just literally do not have the minutes in the day to do it.” Come to think of it, my back will also often signal if I should say no. It literally twinges in the places that will suffer if I take on too much, or even think about it.

VK Preston

1. Who is the most cited author in your work?

I have many favourite writers who shape my excitement about the field. I read them, and I also do my best to practice an ethics and politics of citation, building on Sara Ahmed’s “Making Feminist Points” (2013). Making citation conscious is something I’ve learned from, and it reorganizes how I work. My aim is to complicate lists and challenge pre-existing pathways, especially my own. This means taking up authors at multiple career stages, LGBTQ+, POC, and trans colleagues’ writing—and also working from periods that haven’t been read as rigorously as they might. Reading activist critical theory from the 1980s was a revelation earlier a few years ago—really formidable work that isn’t read now. I aim to imagine each new project as another constellation of voices. The result shakes out what isn’t evident on the surface. Reading and writing together is key—keeping these choices dynamic keeps processes in motion.

2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).

Ralph Lemon and Triple Canopy’s co-edited *On Value* (2015);
 Randy Martin’s *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (1998);
 Julietta Singh’s *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018);
 Kazuo Ohno and Yoshito Ohno’s *Kazuo Ohno’s World: From without & within* (2004);
 Kate Elswit’s *Theatre & Dance* (2018).

3. Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.

“Marais” was a seventeenth-century, gender-crossing performer I can’t figure out. I’d love to know what was going on with that work—so time travel would definitely help. As with Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests* (1992), I can’t often tell when satire is really slippery whether past dances are defiant or deeply reactionary—or both. It would probably be a total surprise to see such work.

4. Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.

We had a wonderful workshop this term with Christine Wright—who is just a brilliant somatics practitioner and educator. She engages language as beautifully as she does movement, and she used an expression that haunts me, describing movement research

observation as “achingly specific.” For me, activating the back body was about committing to greater choice and specificity as a mover—as well as acknowledging the unseen. Like many who have performance training and experience, who then become writers, I’m still grappling with how movement and writing work in relationship. These proportions and practices keep changing—so that’s interesting. I don’t think there’s a “single solution”; it’s a dynamic relationship. I’m standing as I write this—and reflecting on my back while writing is making me move.

- 5. What’s the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.**

Committing to work that needs love and attention.

Angélique Willkie

- 1. Who is the most cited author in your work?**

Choreographer Ligia Lewis.

- 2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).**

Carrie Noland’s *Agency and Embodiment* (2009);

Imayna Caceres, Sunanda Mesquita, and Sophie Utikal’s co-edited *Anti*Colonial Fantasies/Decolonial Strategies* (2017);

Françoise Vergès, Gerty Dambury, and Leïla Cukierman’s co-edited *Décolonisons les arts!* (2018);

Toni Morrison’s *The Origin of Others* (2017);

N. J. Enfield and Paul Kockelman’s *Distributed Agency* (2017).

- 3. Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.**

Josephine Baker in the 1920s–30s.

- 4. Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.**

With increasing difficulty! Listening to my back means I stay away from talking about dance and keep doing dance!

- 5. What’s the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.**

My kids!

Freya Björg Olafson

- 1. Who is the most cited author (artist) in your work?**

Laurie Anderson.

- 2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).**

André Lepecki’s edited collection *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance*

Theory (2004);

N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999);

Frédéric Pouillaude's *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance* (2017);

Stephanie Rosenthal's edited collection *Move. Choreographing You: Art & Dance Since the 1960s* (2011);

Ryan Eyford's *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West* (2016).

3. **Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.**

Jacolby Satterwhite.

4. **Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.**

Daily my back is conditioned/choreographed by manufactured objects, computers, cellphones, and chairs. I counteract this conditioning with massage balls, a foam roller, and Pilates according to internal cues of pain and discomfort.

5. **What's the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.**

This fall it will be necessary for me to miss a number of my classes in order to premiere my new work “ME – Motion Aftereffect” at Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg October 31 to November 2, 2019. Since January 2017 I have been practising saying “no” as an ongoing New Year's resolution necessitated when my artistic and community practice was leading to burnout.

Lindsay Eales

1. **Who is the most cited author in your work?**

So many more than one. . . . Aside from two of my co-collaborators and in(ter)dependent scholars—Dales Lange and Nathan Fawaz—my work draws a lot off of Margaret Price, Rachel Gorman, and Sara Ahmed.

2. **List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).**

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018);

Adrienne Maree Brown's *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017);

Eli Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017);

Anna Harpin and Juliet Foster's co-edited *Performance, Madness and Psychiatry: Isolated Acts* (2014);

Petra Kuppers' *Studying Disability Politics and Culture: An Introduction* (2014).

3. **Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.**

Sins Invalid or Alice Sheppard (again).

4. **Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.**

Crunchy, knotty, spiralling, big winged, with the occasional full body roll.

5. **What's the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.**

I used to just say I had raging diarrhoea (which was sometimes just easier and sometimes true). Now, in my crip and Mad communities, I can actually say that I can't get out of bed, or that I am fallow, which I have come to know is a vital time of Mad stillness and decomposition that nurtures the generativity of spring.

Patrick Alcedo

1. **Who is the most cited author in your work?**

Benedict Anderson.

2. **List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).**

Felicia Hughes-Freeland's *Embodied Communities: Dance Traditions and Change in Java* (2008);

Catherine Hernandez's *Scarborough: A Novel* (2017);

Glenda Tibe Bonifacio's *Pinay on the Prairies: Filipino Women & Transnational Identities* (2014);

Kristin Norget, Valentina Napolitano, and Maya Mayblin's co-edited *The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader* (2017);

Mark A. Wrathall's edited collection *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time* (2013).

3. **Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.**

Alice Reyes (the Philippines' National Artist in Dance and modern dance pioneer in that part of the world).

4. **Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.**

I arch my back when ideas spring forth as critical, original, and poised to be interventionist. My back succumbs to the softness of my bed and to the gravity that governs it when I filled my day with productivity, lightness, and perseverance to be better for tomorrow.

5. **What's the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.**

Aside from being physically unwell, the best reason would be the need to attend to a project that is more pressing and urgent.

MJ Thompson

1. **Who is the most cited author in your work?**

Historical: Freud, Marcel Mauss, Marx, Henri Lefebvre, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall.

Contemporary: Jonathan Crary, Peggy Phelan, Thomas F. DeFrantz, Fred Moten, Michael Taussig.

2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).

John Durham Peters' *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (2016);
 Mark Fisher's *The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson* (2009);
 Ursula K. Le Guin's *Searoad* (1991/2004);
 Judith Hamera's *Unfinished Business: Michael Jackson, Detroit and the Figural Economy of American Deindustrialization* (2017);
 Christine Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016).

3. Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.

Historical: Eleo Pomare, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown.
 Contemporary: Savion Glover, David Neumann, Louise Lecavalier, Malik Nashad Sharpe, and Ellen Furey.

4. Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.

Back moves in everyday life: slowly, carefully, with lots of bodywork to keep it from turning into a steel rod.

5. What's the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.

July.

Michèle Moss

1. Who is the most cited author/artist in your work?

Tommy DeFrantz.

2. List up to five books (titles and authors) that you ordered or purchased in 2018 (or 2019 so far).

Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver's *Jazz Dance: A History of Roots and Branches* (2014);
 Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018);
 Danielle Robinson's *Modern Moves: Dancing Race during the Ragtime and Jazz Eras* (2015);
 Vic Satezewich and Nikolaos Liidakis's "Race" and *Ethnicity in Canada: A Critical Introduction* (2017);
 Halifu Osumare's *Dancing in Blackness: A Memoir* (2018).

3. Name an artist you would like to see perform if effortless, obstacle-free travel (and time travel) was an option.

Rennie Harris.

4. Describe the ways you move your back or your back moves you in your everyday life.

Ha ha ha ah ah ah, what a crazy question but don't even get me going regarding my back! Never had back pain in my youth—I think!? Seems like I should've but don't think I did. Now, humpf, it's all assess everyday. Lower back pain has me spending my fortune. The good news getting stronger and stronger but you can't dial it in. I need my back strong to do the bare minimum of my work never mind rocking it out or dreaming of hitting it out of the park!

5. What's the best reason you have given to miss a class, rehearsal, or deadline—or to say “no” to a project.

Hmmmm, I do try to meet my deadlines—am I a nerd/geek or just forgetful and delusional?