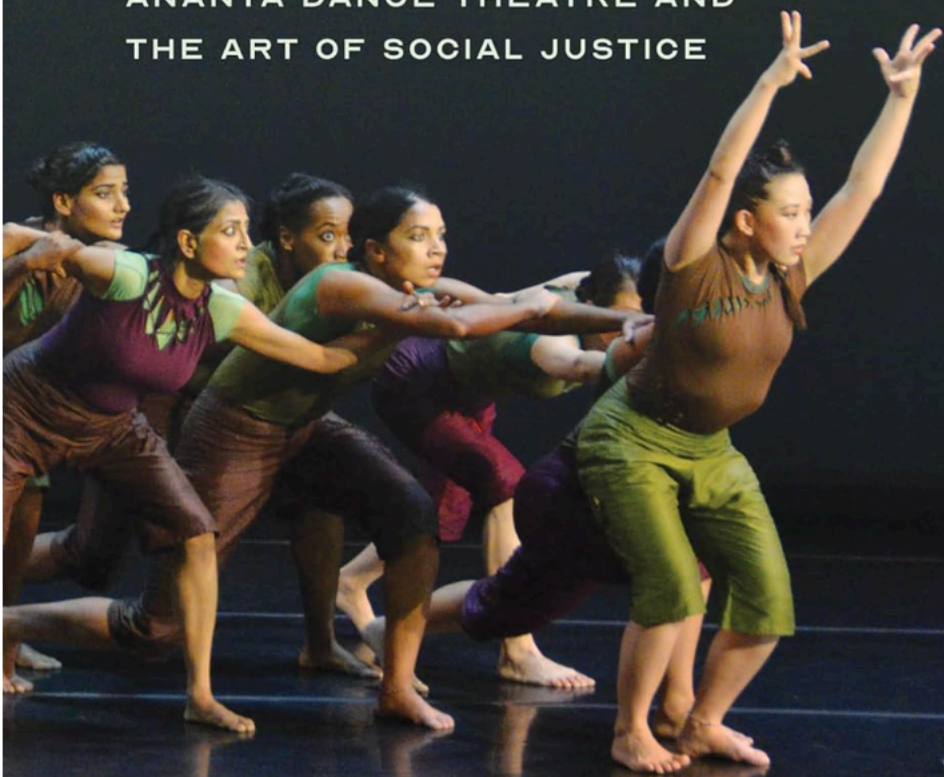


dancing transnational feminisms

ANANYA DANCE THEATRE AND
THE ART OF SOCIAL JUSTICE



EDITED BY
ANANYA CHATTERJEA, HUI WILCOX,
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THIS STAGE IS NOT A SAFE SPACE

THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ

IN 2017, I ATTENDED THE PERFORMANCE OF *SHYAMALI* BY ANANYA Dance Theatre at the O'Shaughnessy Theater in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Pleasure. In this remarkable work, a dozen artists move through a three-act fantasia concerned with the ways that "dissent against oppression fuels life force." In ninety full minutes, the artists reveal connections among the valiance of women who reject silence to work together against injustice. Many elements of this work command attention. We in the audience note ADT's mature physical technique, which combines strengthening methods from martial arts with Odissi dance movements based in advanced deployments of rhythmic structures, in meditation and transcendental techniques, and in breathtakingly coherent compositional devices. We note how the performance builds out from Ananya's core company and those who have gathered to perform in this particular work, alongside the astonishing guest artistry of Mankwe Ndosi. We note that the first portion of the performance includes participants from ADT workshops seated on the floor of the very stage where the dancing happens, creating an intimacy of connection among them and, indeed, all of us in the theater. We note the mature musical, costume, lighting, and visual coordination of the work, which confirm shared concerns across material environments in the service of this storytelling. And we note how the work feels confident, full, surprising, and moving in its engagement of theatrical dance within histories of social justice activism.

The experience reveals relationships of affiliation. By being in the presence of the performance, we claim relation to its possibilities; we claim



FIGURE 15.1. (From left, foreground) Kealoha Ferreira, Renée Copeland, Ananya Chatterjea, and (background) Alessandra Lebea Williams as Ahiwa / Seer in *Sutrajal: Revelations of Gossamer* (2019). Ahiwa witnesses the intimate trio of Ua / Rain-Spirit-woman, Izzicatapir / Mad Musician, and Siyaaah / Shadow Dancer. Photo by Paul Virtucio. Courtesy of Ananya Dance Theatre.

responsibility to participate in its process. We gather in the theater to join in the challenge of joining; of agreeing to participate in a questioning toward shared care and a potential crafting of safety of expression, emotion, affection, action. In presence of the theatrical invention, and in knowledge of the ways that the experience represents an aspect of a larger activist-feminist-of-color-artist intervention, we work with the questioning of safety as a scarce resource, one necessary to the enlargement of social exchange. Pleasure. Affiliation. Safety. (figure 15.1)

Safety, in this encounter in the theater, as we consider the performance and its terms, and its extensions into the world and from the world. The theatrical event encapsulates our willingness to vibrate together in a shared stuttering toward understanding. Its architecture allows us a safety of assembly, for the moment.

ADT continues as a beacon of creative artistry that brings out the best in its collaborators and audiences in the contexts of contemporary performance. The company engages a range of artistic activity that includes dancing, staging symposia, participating in activist actions, facilitating meetings

among diverse leaders, including organic intellectuals and PhD faculty members. Most importantly, ADT values the place of artistry as participation in social justice movements, as a crucial connective site that can inspire necessary shifts in shared awareness.

Shyamali arrives as part of a multiyear sequence of creative explorations, destined to move to *Shaatranga* in 2018. Reflecting on the performance, I consider how the artists of ADT model ways that women artists of many ethnic, sexual, gender identities and presentations can work together to create unimaginable, inspirational worlds of possibility, bringing us all forward in the space of crucial creative encounter. I begin to consider a context for recognizing this particular artistry, and the ways that it connects to social justice, yes, but also to global flows of contemporary dance theater.

Contemporary dance theater tends to depict physical vistas of change and mutability suited to the theatrical moment. In the work of Pina Bausch, Ohad Naharin, and Bill T. Jones, for example, exquisite physical gesture comments upon its own invention and disappearance as capacities of the moment. But dance theater concerned with fomenting and inspiring social change materializes infrequently in global contexts. The pointed ambition of ADT is to create performance that comments upon the theatrical moment in response to events and circulations of the social outside of the theater. ADT works well beyond the decorative spaces that might inspire other works by other artists, which might reflect rather innocently on a historical occurrence or the character of a cityscape. ADT works to inspire social activity by delving into the challenges of contemporary living in relation to research conducted by its collaborating artists. Moving us toward concerns that are decidedly “unsafe” for far too many outside and even those gathered inside the theater.

Ultimately, ADT proves that the rhetorics of “safety” inside theatrical dance circumstances can be disrupted by choreographic and activist work that intends to straddle possibilities among these modes. While the space of the theater may have allowed for a moment of meditative confluence, the themes of ADT works and their fierce, evanescent remainders push us toward action that might jar the floor and shake loose oppressive social convention. Theatrical seclusion may have held contemporary dance at arm’s length from general considerations of social crises, and especially antiracist, antimisogynistic, profeminist possibilities. ADT works to bring light to values of communal resistance, demonstrated by physical gestures deployed for the theatrical moment—and also toward activist dissent in the world. Reflecting on the 2017 performance and its relationships

to other modes of contemporary dance theater in circulation, I realize that the stage that ADT dances on is *not* safe.

DIASPORIC ENCOUNTERS

I've been fortunate enough to collaborate with Ananya herself, in an invention we constructed to consider an encounter through difference. In March 2001, we met in the rehearsal hall to develop dance theater that allowed us to explore questions around coalition-building and shared political struggle among diasporic populations. Over many years we had asked these questions of each other, particularly about how we engage conversations outside of Europe. How do diasporic populations of color encounter each other outside of the specific gazes and lenses put in place by white hegemonic structures? We wondered: What are some of the ways in which performing bodies of color negotiate considerations of identity in their creative processes? How do mainstream cultures racialize Black and Asian performing bodies differently depending upon their nationalities and passports, their individuated social histories, or the particular economic and geographic locations that surround the material circumstances of performance? How does the performance of specific cultural forms rise in importance within shifting grounds of white mediation? How can theatrical bodies insist on a redefinition of assumptions and resist the stereotypical representations that overdetermine the reception of cultural forms in the spaces of a globalized popular imaginary?

We created a small dance theater work with a dynamic, open structure that can absorb ongoing conversations and questions that concerned us in the shifting terrain of world situations. A movement texture that is porous, and an open structure that can accommodate injury, travel, distance, musician availability, differing performance circumstances, and available technological possibilities. The work, *Diasporic Encounters*, premiered in Boston at Kresge Little Theatre in 2002 and has been shown in Minneapolis at Intermedia Arts, at the India International Centre in Delhi, and at the Centre National de la Danse near Paris.

Our creative process was rich with questions, and our conversations interlaced movement improvisations and our arrivals at structural and compositional moments. As we worked to stage the politics of this encounter, we found that we couldn't make do with the given models of choreography—as in “the well-made modern dance” or the expressional abhinaya of Odissi. We had to create hybrid models of performance and process, to make a

dance that embodied the politics and the physical techniques we each brought to our encounter. Our questions pushed us to arrive at a place where the elements of performance invention had to be realigned to account for our positions in diaspora and our need to meet outside the colonizing gaze of Europe. We realized that performance is not an isolated moment; rather, it offers a nugget of condensation, heightened by the saturated ideas within our body that we had been exchanging. Years of conversations allowed us to enact the liveliness of space that embraced the intersections of these ideas and constantly changed the piece.

Here I share some of the conversations and concerns that emerged as we developed this work. To begin, we wondered at possibilities of relation across and through race, without having to privilege white supremacy as the beginning point of our collaboration.

BEGINNINGS

ANANYA: It is impossible not to recognize that peoples of color, while lumped together as an undifferentiated mass of people when needed, are also racialized very differently in the United States. While all of these communities have very different histories in this country, this also disrupts the possibilities of creating a politics of solidarity and consolidates our positions in a pecking order where we turn back on each other as competitors for precious morsels.

We need to shift the focus from always having to talk through Europe. It seems that we remain so entrenched in the hegemony of Eurocentric conversations that our concerns cannot move away from the locus of whiteness. Attention to our relationships with one another is always deferred by the need to deal with the larger oppositional force.

THOMAS: I want to talk about Black culture as a text that is misread all over the world as a strange cipher of resistance and coolness. As in hip-hop, of course, which stands as a convenient dissident pop culture *mélange* for youth around the world. This becomes annoying because (at least) the political—and material—history of Black people in the United States is minimized/erased from this depiction.

ANANYA: See, this is why I want to be around you; you make me see things differently. Now I'm in Java. And it is like what I see in India, in Singapore, in other places in Asia. Once again, when I turn on the television, I see the very image that the capitalist culture machine wants to reproduce. It seems that for most of the young rap artists on TV, English offers little—they're not so comfortable speaking the language when they are being interviewed, for instance. But when they rap, every gesture, every musical intonation, is about being Black, and especially American Black. But do they know what being Black in the United States has meant? I mean, I understand the power of rap and hip-hop, but is there a way of loving the music and the dance while appreciating the underground whence it came?

THOMAS: This is why I want to engage a materialist analysis of dance and corporeal presence. It's not enough to think of hip-hop as a way to dance resistance, or a way to express cool, all of it wrapped up in an innocent sort of detachable style. Cultural theorist Richard Wright gestured toward the inherent tension in dancing through the desires of others in his report on the Bandung Conference: "There is a nervous kind of dependence bred by imperialism: not only are the people taught Western law, ethics, and finance; but they are encouraged to develop a taste, yea, a need, for goods which are only to be had from the European mother country. . . . [H]ow can they have the cooperation of the West and at the same time fend off what they feel to be the desire of the West to dominate?"¹ How, indeed, can we be attracted to modes of expressive performance born in the crucible of disavowal as a means to engage contemporary theatrical thought? Hip-hop contains the evidence of resistance and cool in its very structures, but the need to replicate its contents throughout the world is born from models of capitalist dependency. Yes, hip-hop offers so much information as a form of resistant creativity, but there are other sources of resistance as art available in other contexts. Your work in ADT, for example, models an urgent physical chronicle of hegemonic refusal.

American studies theorist Roderick Ferguson, in his exquisite articulation of a queer of color critique, calls on us to "reju-

venate our understanding of intersectional analysis to address a moment in which capital must negotiate with differences of race and class as well as gender and sexuality to achieve itself.”² He suggests that our too-easy capitulation to normative expressions of gender and sexuality places us in systems of racial formation controlled by the states that we are called upon to represent. How do we dance against expectations? Is there any safety to be had in this nonnormative relationship?

ANANYA: I’m caught in the high contrasts of cultural production here, so much like when I am in India. I see the sassy hip-swinging of the young women pop culture stars. . . . I’ve never seen anything like it. It could more than compete with Lil’ Kim or Nicki Minaj. And then my gaze is torn away by the perfect balance and contemplative inward focus of the Bedoyo. Simultaneously. . . .

Keep talking to me. Tell me more what you mean when you say “material analyses of dance.”

THOMAS: We must return to the materialist narrative. In this, I mean a materialist historical narrative, as opposed to a textual narrative that might be created through an analysis of performance. I don’t want to create a sort of Judith Butlerish rendering of a “performance of gender and class in dance.” This reading can defuse real-world circumstances of class and economy, and render all performances as equivalent “performative acts.” But all is not equal. I mean to consider dance as a practice that may have class effects through performance—by its very existence. I follow Ferguson here, who reminds us again and again that canonical sociology “attempts to discursively suppress an actual material heterogeneity,” to force us into identities far too narrow to be creatively useful in our shifting varieties of intention and relationship. Material heterogeneity “critically exposes the gender and sexual diversity within racial formations”; this might be exactly what we hope to do in our creative invention.³ We wonder at a Marxist analysis of theatrical performance. This becomes hard to do because Marx didn’t

consider performance as practice. Meanwhile, Butler and many of the textual critics want us to consider all practices as performance. In this model, in awkward shorthand, I “perform” being a Black queer academic, artist. Well, we know in dance there is a practice of dance that precedes and in effect supersedes any performance—this practice is what I’m trying to uncover. How can concert dance make a material difference in the world through its very performance? The early moderns believed this to be possible, and some Black Americans like Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey have proved this to be true. And of course there are professional dance artists who achieve class mobility through their practice of performance. Ailey started life dirt poor, and now his company has built a huge complex on 55th Street, the largest dance center in the United States. I’m not sure, but I’m trying to unpack some ideas around this.

LOCATIONS

Ferguson propels us to consider how state formations and minority nationalisms must be simultaneously critiqued, as “investments in gender and sexual regulation [are] the linchpin between state, cultural, and revolutionary nationalisms.”⁴ We struggle to find our footing in critique within and across Black and brown communities, all the while surrounded by whiteness that intends to collapse our possibilities and narrow our points of view. As we critique nationalist proscriptions of gender and sexual normativity, our queer meetings in dance *matter* as actions of resistance. We stretch “classical” forms toward experimental distensions, to queer tap dancing or so-called modern dance partnering, amplifying our disidentifications with spoken text in the performance. Still, performing the work in different parts of the world, we realize how critique moves; that state formations are slippery, that resistance can resemble titillation depending on the context. We push each other toward a vigilance of exploration, reminding ourselves that “staying safe” was never part of how we decided to collaborate.

THOMAS: How do you think it’s going?

ANANYA: Well, I’m a little bit anxious about how this piece is going to be read because it seems that whenever a “man” and a “woman”

dance together, there's a way in which the piece gets read in specifically gendered terms, so that it's either about a romantic relationship or about the fact that they're engaged in a battle of the sexes. As if people exist only on that plane.

THOMAS: That's true, but there is also a place where men and women seem to have different responsibilities to each other, or to society at large, and then we ask questions such as, "What kind of action is appropriate for a man that is political? What kind of actions are appropriate or preferred for a woman?" And we have to be willing to try to resist that as well. I think that's something that you and I are trying to think through: how we can move toward something where the power dynamic isn't preset or predetermined.

ANANYA: Don't like surface multiculturalism . . . machinery for producing diversity? Naaah.

THOMAS: My difference from you—nonimmigrant, forced migration. . . . I *want* to look back.

ANANYA: But looking back not through nostalgia . . . to find cultural specificity.

THOMAS: We support each other, share power, share weight, build a coalition.

ANANYA: A politics of commitment, staying committed to the process of working together, building solidarity.

THOMAS: Work through it, past misunderstandings, through the misdirections, work through it.

ANANYA: Through our dancing and through our performing, and see how our bodies get scripted in terms of these politics that I can only describe as radical.

THOMAS: I think the most radical part is how messy it is and it has to be. It's not neat to think deeply and intently about our

differences and our shared struggles. But we have to. We have to find ways to look toward something that is progressive and ultimately, we hope, liberatory. We have to.

REDIRECTING

We dance together. Gestures emerge. We collaborate with an amazing musician, Akili Jamal Haynes. Akili conjures music through an astonishing, endless array of musical instruments and approaches to sound. He works as a trombonist, bassist, keyboardist, beatboxer, and most regularly as a percussionist. He composes across genre, constructing sound as it might be found, crafted, revised, reheard, and remixed. Ananya's daughter Srija, a child at the time, plays through our research rehearsals, singing a melody that she makes up as she runs and skips. Akili incorporates the spontaneous song into the soundscape of our work, playing it on a flute. The room is potent with questioning, even as the room expands across the globe through our travels, physical, intellectual, spiritual.

ANANYA: Resistance might also mean deflecting. It often takes the path of insisting on beauty and working toward coalitions even when war is the order of the day.

THOMAS: In *The Color Curtain* Richard Wright details his personal experiences at the 1955 Bandung Conference, where leaders of Asian and African nations met to discuss issues including colonialism, racism, international economic and social cooperation, and world peace. What came of that gesture toward collaboration by people of color? How do artists of color collaborate across geographies and cultural traditions? Is Europe always figured as the centerpiece for collaboration?

Reading *The Color Curtain*, I wonder who Wright imagines as its audience. Yes, it is written to the magazine that commissioned it, but who else? Who is getting to hear Wright be critical from his own perspective as a Black American? And what is the point here? Also amazing is the degree to which he reproduces racial stereotypes about Asians and how he doesn't locate his own paternalistic impulses in all of it.

The volume reads like an insider's travel narrative, which places it in a strange context among other texts that we might

now call cosmopolitanism. For example, he relates how he read about the conference in the newspaper and decided to go on the spot, just having returned to Paris from a “long, tiring trip in Spain.” All of us should be so exhausted. But the guest list of the event was extraordinary—Sastroamidjojo of Indonesia, Nehru of India, Nkrumah of Gold Coast, Zhou Enlai of China, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, and on and on. Wright calls it “this meeting of the rejected [that] was in itself a kind of judgment upon that Western world!”⁵ The event was sponsored by Burma, India, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Pakistan. At the conference, twenty-nine nations convened with the following stated aims:

- to promote good will and co-operation among the nations of Asia and Africa,
- to consider social, economic, and cultural problems,
- to consider problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples,
- to view the position of Asia and Africa and their people in the world of today.

In his commentary on the conference itself, Wright stressed the “potential unity among the participant nations based on their shared distrust of the West . . . the hostility of Asia and Africa to the West based on how they had been constructed by the West as the racial Other.”⁶

This was such an important event, and yet it is not taught in many Black studies departments.

ANANYA: That’s because Black studies was conceptualized narrowly within area studies and its white lens. It makes me think of Trinh T. Minh-Ha and her comments on access to the other in ethnographic research. How it seems to mandate that all others stay within their racially prescribed areas so that Indians should study Indians, and Taiwanese should do Taiwanese, and Ghanaians can do Ghanaians, but white researchers can do anything. I so appreciate being able to work on Sardono Kusumo and Nora Chipaumire, artists and thinkers with whom I find a solid political and artistic resonance.

TRANSNATIONALISMS

Jigna Desai, Danielle Bouchard, and Diane Detournay write toward “an epistemological and political economy of queerness that questions and decenters the United States and places queer studies into question in relation to transnational feminism, postcolonial feminism, and women of color feminism.”⁷ We wonder toward this formation and its affordances, and how we can enliven our creative projects without resorting to a US-centrism that depends on white scaffoldings for understanding experimental dance. Following Desai et al., we have taken up the task of “theorizing ‘epistemic violence,’ ‘thievery,’ and other such concepts—attending to their connections and discrepancies—as a means of forwarding responsibility as a persistent question without resolution.”⁸ We look for allies but don’t fret when few come forward.

ANANYA: Where are you? We should talk.

THOMAS: I’m at a dance conference in Ireland, writing, sending you strength. I wish you were here. Is this a new cosmopolitanism? Our travels around the world seeking strategies to better enliven discourse as well as creative address with each other, students we work with, communities who gather around our performances. But traveling matters here: in moving through, we begin to imagine how to hone our awarenesses in diaspora.

In Ireland things are different—Ireland is a “first” world sort of—but you know they too are a “postcolonial” people in a way, having only achieved independence from that same British Empire in 1923. The people are friendly, but their spirits seem really beaten up. Out in the countryside, I met a young woman who had never thought of college or been to the big city—Limerick—that is only sixty kilometers away from her home. Her access to the privilege of mobility is cut off in a way that seems familiar to me. But of course, it is different, as she is Irish in her homeland, not in diaspora.

ANANYA: I wish you were here and we could think about Ireland and Indonesia side by side—what a profound contrast. So much

dance here. The anxiety around time—something I have learned from rushing around all day in our crazy schedules—cuts into my ability to appreciate classical Javanese dance. My hurried blood is responding jerkily to the steady, slow stream of movement. I can't get it to still. Sitting in the court yesterday, watching the dancers perform the Bedoyo under that hugely vaulted roof, painted so beautifully, I thought, "How can I dance of angst here?" I listened to the finely crafted yet complex harmony of the gamelan and reflected on the different kind of dance possible here, one that lives and breathes outside the global political unrest and mainstream American-influenced pop culture trends that inhabit the street right outside.

THOMAS: Why am I not there with you? I'm thinking about the idea of the beauty of the roof coming from the acknowledgment of all the time and effort, energy and patience that have gone into producing it. Patience and focus as being part of what can clear the way for beauty, and with so much concentrated effort, how can we imagine a future violence? Beauty is often created in response to a violent past. Think of the beautiful spirituals that grew as resistant creativity—and hidden messages for escape—out of the crucible of slavery and lynchings of Black people in the US South. But when we make beauty, can we imagine something that subverts the need for making violence? Misogyny, abusing children, race crimes, ethnic cleansing. Maybe there is less time for this because of the effort, the desire and passion, that goes into making outrageous beauty. A relationship with beauty might preclude some of the dispersals of violence.

There is a gamelan at MIT; I made a kecak for them once. I thought it was a violent form, crafted to express human response to epistemic violence. Its hybrid arrangement of voice and interlocking rhythm surprised me. Rhythms fit together in a jangle there, and the human voice amplifies the sense of striving toward something as much as achieving it. Its form revealed striving as a condition of its creation in a palpable, breath-filled manner.

Where are the dances about the social violence in Java? Does Sardono create dances about political unrest? How does he do

this? Are other choreographers working to express social and political violence?

ANANYA: I talk about the politics in dance making here with Sardonio a lot. The conversations flow freely from multiplicity in the interpretation of Islam, to class and gender violence, to xenophobia and the dangers of nationalism. His work pulls me into the heart of these issues, into their intersection, and sometimes collision, with each other. We talk about the necessity of holding complexity, so even as we critique organized religion, we push back against violent stereotypes of Islam. On the streets outside, I see the women in hijab riding their scooters and going about their day. Their performance of daily femininities overturns the proclamations of many Western feminists about how the scarf has impeded a notion of “feminist progress” for Muslim women. Through rehearsals, at regular intervals, we hear the *azan* (calls to prayer) over the loudspeaker, from neighborhood mosques, and they heighten the soundscape for the artistic work. Conversations about the political unrest, about the bombing in Aceh, are like a murmur, constantly present, part of life and the artistic process.

WORKING TOGETHER

Ferguson reminds us that “we need modes of analysis that can address normativity as an object of inquiry and critique.”⁹ Toward this, we meet in dance, as a formation that resists normativity in terms of its unwieldy unpredictability as we imagine it together. We honestly don’t know how any audience might take in our inventions, even as we hope that its oddities and specificities inspire reflection and, possibly, a resistant stance. Working together, we hold each other up in some ways, and leave each other out to dry in some ways, allowing each other to do as we will in the invention. This formal organization seems crucial: each of us, including Akili Haynes, could discover ideas and reveal performance as we would in each iteration of the work. Above all, we know that we will not arrive in normative, recognizable formations in this work together. We will arrive unpredictably, to each other, the experience, and the various audiences we encounter. Our performance is not a place of safety; rather it offers an urgent site of working through and toward our ever-emerging relationships.

THOMAS: But how does dance fit into the political unrest? Is it altered—as a practice—by the world situation and the place that individuals feel in the ever-changing world? Are the interruptions for prayer that we now endure new or continuations from before 9/11?

ANANYA: To my outsider's eye, the political unrest seems to move outside of the classical dance; like in India, the historic violence has been folded into the normalness of life. There are discussions constantly, of course, so it's in the air, and much talk on TV; I see Megawati Sukarnoputri doing powerful campaign speeches. I find myself very frustrated by my lack of knowledge of the language. The Bedoyo sits in the midst of all of these life streams.

THOMAS: Richard Wright settled some scores with an observation that many journalists “seemed to have forgotten that for centuries Asian and African nations had watched in helpless silence while white powers had ‘disposed of’ their ‘destinies.’”¹⁰

We mustn't let this happen again and again.

ANANYA: I think there's a problem—how folks of color get racialized differently—because I constantly wonder why white folks try hard to delegitimize my work in a different way from that of Black Americans . . . and I think it's because subconsciously (because you will argue that they're not so evil) at least they don't want us to talk across them, only through them and with their permission.

THOMAS: I don't think the white folks care enough to try to stop our conversations across them, or for us to only be allowed to meet each other through them and with their permission. I *do* think they want access to all information and conversations. But then it's up to us to grant that or not. So for me, many of the conferences we attend re/present *their* turf, *their* conception of the possibilities of academic debate. So when we want a group of international scholars working through ideas or concepts that interest us, we've got to arrange it all from scratch. Well, we've started to do this through our collaborations. But

you know, I'm not interested in restructuring their group; it's actually fascinating to me to witness how they work and think.

I do wonder, though, how we have these conversations in English, and often in the high theoretical literary language of the academy.

Back to Richard Wright, who offered, "Thus, the strident moral strictures against the Western world preached at Bandung were uttered in the language of the cultures that the delegates were denouncing. . . . [B]y this means English was coming to contain a new extension of feeling, of moral knowledge."¹¹

ANANYA: But this is why we dance! When we dance we reach to communicate through the realm of the body, beyond words, beyond concepts bound by the West. Remember the ending of our dance piece *Diasporic Encounters*; we kept counting it "wrong." The "one" was in different places—we never could get round to where the "one" really was. We decided to listen to each other's without altering our own "one." We had to create an alternative listening in order to achieve the final bit of the piece and work together. This is the possibility of our encounter.

THOMAS: The possibility to not know together and discover by doing and building out from our differences. Performing the piece, I always feel a need to stay entirely attuned to the choices that you and Akili make in the moment; that my preparation for the work is allowing myself to be available to our encounter and its complexity. And it is complex trying to imagine diaspora as movements that distend and diverge, even with some similarities, but more disparities than agreements. What we share cannot only be our discomfort with Western hegemonies and US-centric global popular cultures. It must be something about the knowing through moving alongside, the making together that encourages us each to bring so many ways of understanding into the process and resist narrowing our vision to a single step or a balance. Sharing weight in our dance amplifies how I understand social possibilities for ancestors and great-grandchildren to come. Now as part of a continuum.

ANANYA: I wonder how we can hold on to these solidarities that we have built over time when everything seems to be crumbling. It would seem these unwavering friendships and alliances are in fact what keep us grounded through these times. We must question so much of what we have learned. Thank goodness I can call you. . . .

Dancing with Ananya opens space and time toward possibility. Unanticipated spaces—spaces of diaspora, in the case of our collaboration many years ago. Spaces for women of color, and those intentionally identifying alongside them, in the case of *Shyamali*. Spaces for all of us to reconsider how we come into relationship. And openings of time: a daughter singing a tune half-remembered that becomes the material of a musician’s invention; imagining dance through historical events that predict future alignments. The creative process is unstable in its searching through and toward. Unstable, and unpredictable, the stage crafted through this urgent artistry surprises, confronts, demands, and remains emphatically not *safe*. *Axe!*

NOTES

- 1 Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (Cleveland: World, 1956), 112–13.
- 2 Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 144.
- 3 Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 21.
- 4 Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 146.
- 5 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 12.
- 6 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 241.
- 7 Jigna Desai, Danielle Bouchard, and Diane Detournay, “Disavowed Legacies and Honorable Thievery: The Work of the ‘Transnational’ in *Feminist and LGBTQ Studies*,” in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, ed. Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 46–62, 50.
- 8 Desai, Bouchard, and Detournay, “Disavowed Legacies and Honorable Thievery,” 61.
- 9 Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 148.
- 10 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 238.
- 11 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 200.