

Choreographic Practices

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## EDITORIAL

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# Making choreography, making community

### Keywords

identity  
authorship  
power  
soil

### Abstract

*Amaara and Simon are choreographers who co-edit Choreographic Practices (along with Dani Abulhawa and Lee Miller). In this editorial they peer into the relationship between making community and practices of choreography and how it might help us rethink the nature of authorship and authority. They talk about their best moves and also call on the work and practices of Sophie Strand, Miranda Tuffnell and D. H.*

*Lawrence to propose that being an artist might be so much more than the first-person pronoun in 'here's something I made'.*

This editorial was written by two people who are friends, and who are both choreographers, and both co-editors of *Choreographic Practices*: Amaara Raheem and Simon Ellis. They (although it is really *we*) started the writing as a conversation but what follows is an attempt to weave their individual and collective voices, experiences and ideas together such that *we/they* will use four pronouns: *we*, *he*, *she* and *they*. We sincerely hope this is OK for you (dear reader), and that it will make sense. It started like this:

Hi. Are you making choreography right now? Because more recently, I feel I've been making not choreography but rather, community.

We will dodge this question (at least initially) because it reminded us of an American artist and writer called Sophie Strand. She writes about ecology and spirituality, and lives with a connective tissue disease (Ehlers-Danlos syndrome). In a recent interview with Charlotte du Cann (writer and editor for Dark Mountain<sup>1</sup>) Strand imagines a new history of storytelling that is not about individual authorship. She says,

what if I reframed authorship and took it out of modernity and said: what if I am making good soil, what if I am beginning the composting process of these ideas, so my particular life is not the only vehicle of its completion? What if someone else can come plant in this soil and sprout something else? So when I make art these days it is about creating space which other people can enter into, it's not about me as an individual charismatic author.

(Strand cited in DuCann 2022: 80)

Strand's words resonate directly with the idea that instead of making choreography you feel you've been making community. We are fascinated by questions of authorship and, in dance at least, perhaps those questions more than 30 years ago were a rather facile or naive response to working as a dancer *for* choreographers who had begun to employ devising strategies in their work. Instead of dancers being choreographed *on*, we became people who created movement and material *for* choreographers who then said 'yes' and 'no' and edited those materials. We remember feeling like it was some kind of scam in which they got the credit, the pay and the kudos. One of us even joked with a dancing colleague that we should save our 'best moves' for our own work.

natural  
dependence  
ecology  
movement

1. <https://dark-mountain.net>. Accessed 9 September 2022.

One of her best moves was in 2004 when she took a long train journey to Abercych, West Wales, to a dance studio nestled in the magical Gwyddil Valley; a week-long retreat with dance artist, writer and teacher in movement and imagination, Miranda Tuffnell. Here she explored body and landscape amidst the glory of bluebells up near the beginning of the track across the river; slid over fallen trees; opened her senses; sat in the sun; sourced new arrangements, materials and sound in the woodlands, riverbed and pasture; collected wild garlic; let the sensation of thought dissolve through her body allowing her own time and expression; watched wild ducks make their way upstream; unfastened a space between thoughts; cultivated a sense of openness, an availability for movement.

Such an experience or 'best move' sounds akin to making community with the earth rather than systems or practices in the service of someone. Many of his formative dancing experiences meant knowing and being reminded of who the (human) boss was, and he did not feel like a community was being made. Of course, that changed as he got more experienced and became more adept at finding people he wanted to work with and who were sensitive to questions of authority and power.

What Strand offers is something entirely more radical. It is a means by which we might undermine the entire system of authorship in any context – academic, artistic, creative, business, etc. – such that we recognize how the agency and creativity of humans and non-humans extend far beyond the *I* in 'here's something I made'.

Much of the soil in Black Range, Victoria, Australia is sandy, eroded, full of agricultural chemicals, and it's really hard to grow food. It's easy to imagine (as urbanists), that one just plants seeds into the ground to make things grow, but no, it's not that simple at all. One has to first 'make good soil'. They think of this often when making choreography – the conditions, the foundations, the nutrients, the quality of air, the composting, and the worms – not the ground itself but in the ground beneath the ground.

As challenging as making community is, Sophie Strand's ideas about making compost for the future also mean imagining choreography to extend beyond our lifetimes and how choreographic practices might be predicated on a deep understanding of the ways we humans are bound to the natural world (as if there is such a thing as *natural* in this world), and timescales that humans struggle to imagine.

That wonderful poem 'Snake' by D. H. Lawrence (1920) begins:

*A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
To drink there.*

The 'pyjamas' reminds us how unprepared we so often feel when we encounter the 'natural' world.

So, yes, we are making choreography although calling it choreography feels like a stretch. But perhaps what is more important is that whatever it is we are making we make in full recognition that its dependence on others, on resources, on non-human beings and things is worth remembering; that it is some kind of choreographic compost for the future. Each choreography is a community with tissues connected weakly or strongly beyond the limits of one's imagination. They are in love with this idea, and – as the Beatles sang – they feel fine. And they want you (dear reader) to know that some of this editorial was written while wearing pyjamas.

This volume 13.2 of *Choreographic Practices* contains six distinct contributions. The first, 'circling, tumbling, dancing around: Back pieces' by Katrina Brown, uses text, footnotes and images to examine the poetic, physical and philosophical functions and implications of dorsality. SanSan Kwan's 'Remote proximity: Making immersive dance under COVID-19 lockdown' details the attempt to adapt Lenora Lee Dance's *And the Community Will Rise* from an immersive dance to an immersive screendance. In 'On the table: An open invitation' Caitlin Dear and Ebony Muller share their hosting practice in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, and how it works to include movement practitioners who are working with people from diverse fields including martial arts, game design and therapy. Leni Van Goidsenhoven, Jonas Rutgeerts and Carrie Sandahl present a position paper called 'Differing bodyminds: Crippling choreography'. In it they explore what crip theory can afford choreography and dance, and how it might help understand difference as being something other than not-the-norm. Italian artists Titta Raccagni and Barbara Stimoli share a conversation with co-editor Simon Ellis about their performance practice called *Pleasure Rocks*. They discuss the development of the practice and how it has generated multiple forms of presentation and representation. Finally, two of *Choreographic Practices's* assistant editors Josh Slater and Rachael Davies use a discussion format to review the *Choreographic Devices* symposium held at London's Institute of the Contemporary Arts in June 2022.

## References

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## Contributor details

Simon Ellis is an artist working with practices of choreography, filmmaking and dance. He was born in the Wairarapa in Aotearoa/New Zealand, but now lives in Coventry and works at C-DaRE. He

grew up in a family where politicized conversations about equality, consumerism and even technology were common. These conversations have shaped his values as an artist, and underpin much of what his practice is about, and how it is conducted. He also thinks about the ways humans might value things that are not easily commodified, and likes to imagine a world filled with people who are sensitive to their own bodies, and the bodies of others.

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Amaara Raheem was born in Sri Lanka, grew up in Melbourne and spent fifteen years in London. Multiple homes and a lived experience of migration informs her ways of working with movement and words. A dance-artist who crosses many borders, Amaara holds a Ph.D. from the School of Architecture & Urban Design (RMIT University); works as a lecturer at the Victorian College of the Arts (dance); sits on the Artistic Directorate for Next Wave; and is the inaugural feminist-in-residence with live art collective, APHIDS. Recently Amaara was selected for ABC Top 5 – a two-week media training which aims to discover Australia’s next generation of dynamic thinkers and give them a voice.

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