The Role of the Body in Traversing Liminal Spaces of Selfhood and Identity.

By

Soph Cardinal (they/them/theirs)

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the role of the body in navigating the liminal spaces that shape our individual notions of selfhood and identity. The author examines how centering the body's physical, emotional, and cultural lineage can contribute to a greater understanding of the nuances of selfhood. By evaluating Gloria Anzaldúa's theories of nepantla, Judith Butler's theories of the performative acts of gender, and Omi Salas-SantaCruz's theories of decolonial trans* feminism, the author illustrates how existing scholarship supports the idea that embracing all aspects of the multifaceted self is achieved through centering the body. This intentional emphasis on the body as a tool for understanding intersectional identities and the essence of self correlates with pedagogical and creative processes resistant to Westernized colonial ideologies. Within this scholarship, the author calls for an emphasis on the trans and gender non-conforming body in exploring liminality in selfhood. This literature review questions how embodiment, through pedagogical praxis positioned within the field of dance, can advance research in selfhood and identity by employing the body to navigate the complexities of what constitutes all facets of who we are.

Introduction.

My identity is, and has always been, deeply connected to my existence within the ethos of liminality and the "in-between." Binaries were never spaces I longed to inhabit, yet I always felt they were non-negotiable. I grew up training as a ballerina in the rural towns of Cave Creek, Arizona, and Springfield, Illinois. From a young age, I realized that my escape from the small-town rhetoric of homophobia, racism, and transphobia was to put on a leotard, tights, and pointe shoes, trying to recognize the person in the dance studio mirror staring back at me. I was assigned female at birth. And I played that role well, embracing everything that social media, television, my family, and peers told me was part of growing up as a young woman. I wore dresses and heels to all dinners and social outings, except for the "Jack Sparrow" costume from *Pirates of the Caribbean* that I hyper-fixated on when I was 12 (it wasn't until my early 20s that I realized this was due to an overwhelming sensation of gender euphoria, transcending me into an identity that felt inherently true to who I was yet unobtainable in the environments I inhabited). I even joined a sorority during my first year of college, longing to embrace the femininity I was constantly told was mine alongside a house full of "sisters." I did everything right to fit into what I understood about being assigned female at birth, yet while I lived with this gender assignment, I had never felt so lost in understanding who I was.

I am non-binary. I do not inherently exist as masculine or feminine, as a man or a woman, but rather in the liminal spaces of gender identity that cannot be defined by the binary terms embedded in our Western culture. When I first came to understand this about myself, I felt fearful. Living within binary structures had always limited me from discovering the multiplicity of my selfhood, but it was all I had known. Growing up in small rural towns in the early 2000s, I lacked exposure to the language, histories, or experiences of queer and trans individuals that

could help me navigate my gender identity. I would stand in front of the mirror in ballet class and feel physically repulsed by my chest. Seeing two lumps and curvy hips characteristic of female anatomy in the exposed clothing put on display for audiences to view and perceive ensured that my body existed as a separate entity from my "self." One was an act, while the other was a voice of truth urging to break through. Movement was my outlet, my way of physically embodying the emotionality I did not yet have the language to express verbally. Yet, I never felt that my gender could be fully represented through the cultural structures of the dance environments I was in.

I felt permission to start exploring the nuances of my gender identity when I began my undergraduate program, where I was introduced to the language and histories of queer and trans folx that allowed me to articulate the disconnect between my body and my “self.” I earned my BFA in Dance, thrilled to connect my newfound understanding of identity with the movement practices deeply rooted in my lineage. While dance claimed to be a space where individuals could freely explore their identities through movement, I faced adversity from peers and faculty when I came out as non-binary. I was told to continue wearing dresses in performances, as the audience would perceive me as female, even while I started presenting more masculinely in my performative act of gender. After graduation, when I moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career as a commercial dancer, I was asked in nearly every audition and class to dance in the “girls” group. When I resisted and chose to dance with the men instead, I was told to return to where I belonged. How could I be told to return where I belonged when belonging was the furthest thing from what I experienced? The movement exploration spaces I saw others permitted to embody, contingent upon their embodiment fitting within binary structures, suddenly felt like an invitation from which I was excluded.

These experiences of feeling that my body, selfhood, and identities were not allowed to be intertwined led me to ask: What is the role of the body in understanding the self? How does exploring selfhood and identity through the body foster a sense of belonging? Can centering the body in pedagogical dance practices serve as a tool for decoloniality within academic institutions? By evaluating existing scholarship on gender theories, selfhood, and decoloniality, this research navigates these central questions to understand how the interplay of our physical body with culture, spirit, and environment contributes to the nuanced complexities of selfhood.

Defining Identity and Selfhood.

Essential to the foundation of this research is establishing the defining attributes of the two key terms it relies on: identity and selfhood. The way these terms are expressed through physicality and emotional states is deeply personal to an individual's sense of self; however, theories and ideologies enrich our understanding of these terms' evolving definitions.

The prolific writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, queer Chicana feminist scholar whose work most notably developed border theory and mestiza consciousness, provide a primary framework for understanding these terms. Her work, *Light in the Dark = Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, extensively remaps the culmination of cultural, spiritual, and physical experiences that contribute to the diverse identities shaping an individual's sense of self.[1] Although a deeper exploration of her work is essential to grasp her conception of identity, she asserts that "identity is a framework for a complex composition that melds together disparate persons. It is an ongoing activity of constructing an ordered latticework of time, space, and

[1] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark."

emotional climate, of stringing together a series of scenes and experiences, and of holding all these together by memory."[2]

As humans, we do not exist with a singular identity. Instead, we are a culmination of states of being derived from an evolving understanding of our body, mind, and spirit and how those interact with the outside world around us.[3] To articulate and understand these states, we must traverse the discomfort of liminality. In her earlier work, *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa coins the term "borderlands/(B)orderlands." borderlands refer to the physical continental border of Texas-Mexico, where Anzaldúa was raised and learned to unearth the multitude of her identities as a queer Chicana woman.[4] Borderlands refers to the theoretical framework developed by Anzaldúa that extends beyond the physicality of landlocked borders to encompass the crossing of spiritual, cultural, and emotional borders that can lead to transformational states of being.[5] These two terms relate to understanding identity as a terminology by illustrating that while our identities can arise from the physical and geopolitical land we navigate (borderlands), they are also shaped by the transformational discomfort experienced when traversing the Borderlands of our gender, sexuality, race, and cultural lineage.[6] These categorical classifications can contribute to an individual and collective understanding of identity; however, if they are examined solely within the binaries of their labels, they can stifle knowledge of the complex nuances of the self.

Anzaldúa calls for remapping identity beyond categorical notions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion.[7] While naming these identities can attune to corresponding

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[2] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark", 185.
[3] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark."
[4] Anzaldúa, "*Borderlands = La Frontera."*
[5] Anzaldúa, "*Borderlands = La Frontera."*
[6] Anzaldúa, "*Borderlands = La Frontera."*
[7] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark."

relations between people with similar identities, abiding by strict borders can "hinder communication and prevent us from extending *beyond* ourselves."[8] These borders can curate a sense of 'otherness' between identities, contributing to colonialist ideologies of oppression that separate 'us' versus 'them.'[9] This concept is explored through nos/otras.[10] Deriving from the Spanish word 'nosotras,' meaning 'us,' Anzaldúa physically dissects the word into two discrete meanings. 'Nos' refers to 'us', while 'otras' refers to 'others'. This slash refers to the physical and ideological binary divide between oppressor and oppressed. Anzaldúa coins this term as a theoretical framework to evaluate the narrative of otherness. While navigating identities in states of *nos/otras,* there is a disruptive divide of us/them. These spaces are where categorical identities of race, gender, sexuality, and class create distinct borders that culminate a separation of people, land, mind, and body.[11] These divides house fear and ignorance. The us, *nos,* fear the other, *otras.*[12] This fear of 'other' contributes to the negotiation of conflict. Within conflict, we are asked to address the cracks and Borderlands that inhibit the fission of *nos/otras* back into unified nosotras.[13] Anzaldúa proposes that addressing these cracks and borders and navigating the liminal spaces between them can be a theoretical solution to this divide, leading to an understanding of selfhood that exists beyond the binary fissures of identity. This liminal space is called *nepantla.*

> Nepantla are places of constant tension, where the missing or absent pieces can be summoned back, where transformation and healing may be possible, where wholeness is just out of reach but seems attainable.[14]

[8] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 75.
[9] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 81.
[10] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 79.
[11] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 82.
[12] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 77.
[13] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 81.
[14] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 2.

Navigating the liminal spaces of nepantla dismantles polarity and oppression by fostering a 'web of connection's' that contribute to a sense of selfhood.[15] Rather than confiding to the constructed notions of identity derived from social, political, and cultural structures, nepantla encourages an understanding of how the body, spirit, and loss relate to our understanding of who we are. The concept of a web of connections reveals how our cultures interact with the world around us. Rather than a fixed state, nepantla encourages us to negotiate how our thoughts, feelings, and experiences, in conjunction with the feelings of those around us, contribute to a transformation of selfhood.[16] This experience of addressing our identities in relation to those around us encourages a sense of change that can produce tension and drastically shift our understanding of who we are.

Change is a fundamental aspect of navigating nepantla. Traditions and culture contribute to a human fear of the unknown. This fear ties change to tension, often hindering our desire to explore the liminal spaces that inherently exist in the unknown. Furthermore, nepantla is frequently associated with grief and loss. By encouraging individuals to reflect on their unknown identities, they engage in a transformational process that shapes their sense of self intertwined with the fear of change. Throughout this process, there is often a loss of a familiar state of being, leading to the emergence of a new facet of self.[17]

During my first semester of graduate school, I was hospitalized on my 25th birthday after suffering a stroke due to an intracranial vertebral artery dissection, which resulted in a blood clot in my basilar artery. In a matter of minutes, I transitioned from being healthy and active to fearing for my life. Dance and movement generation was one of the largest components of my

[15] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 83.
[16] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 83.
[17] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 89.

identity and selfhood; embodied creative practices were where I could feel myself transcend into my most authentic form. After the injury, I was forced to evaluate all aspects of myself to understand who I was outside of these two defining factors that I temporarily could not explore. While I am fully recovered, I am surrounded by grief over the sense of 'normalcy' I experienced in my life before that incident. While this monumental trauma has resulted in a plethora of fear, grief, and loss, it has become an additional root in my web of connection that continues to shape my sense of self through navigating liminality within loss.

Navigating nepantla is a choice, not a requirement. Because we fear the unknown, the easiest option is often to avoid traversing these liminal spaces, even when they constitute a greater understanding of self.

> "To become nepantleras, we must *choose* to occupy intermediary spaces between worlds, *choose* to move between worlds like the ancient shamans who *choose* to build bridges between worlds, *choose* to speak from the cracks between the worlds, from las rendijas (rents). We must *choose* to see through the holes, *choose* to perceive something from multiple angles."[18]

Navigating the self through nepantla requires bravery—detaching from preconceived notions of our identity shaped by societal, political, and cultural constructs and instead embracing the complex web of connection that represents our authentic selves. While identities result from binary structures curated by these established systems, nepantla lays the groundwork for selfhood, allowing individuals the agency to explore aspects of the self beyond these Borderlands and embrace liminality to better understand who we are. Through analysis of Anzaldúa's theoretical frameworks, which centers bodily acts within the understanding of the self, the role of performative acts while navigating liminal spaces can be examined.

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[18] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark," 93.

Liminality Through a Trans Body.

I turn to Judith Butler's "*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory"* to evaluate the role of the body in understanding identity, specifically through a gender lens. A revolutionary queer and non-binary philosopher and researcher best known for their books *Bodies That Matter* and *Gender Troubles,* this 1988 essay became the foundation of Butler's theoretical framework, which posits that gender is a stylized and repeatable series of performative acts developed alongside culture, time, and societal constructs.[19] This framework is assessed through the phenomenological theories of 'acts'. Deriving from Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and George Herbert Mead, the phenomenological approach "seeks to explain the mundane way in which social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs."[20] Through this working definition, Butler theorizes that gender is constituted through learned, stylized bodily gestures derived from arbitrary societal constructs rather than a fixed state of being. Thus, the body—specifically the bodies of trans and gender-nonconforming people—becomes a vessel of expansion beyond these repeatable, stylized, and constructed notions of gender, allowing for a deeper understanding of the roots of the self.[21]

Referring to Merleau-Ponty, Butler elaborates on the idea that the body is a historical construct from which meaning, appearance, and perception are derived over time and through repetition rather than from a predetermined set of beings.[22] With this understanding, the body materializes possibilities, where existence is influenced by the conditions arising from lived experience and historical context. This influence is most clearly evaluated through the

[19] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender," 519.
[20] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender," 519.
[21] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender," 521.
[22] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender," 521.

constructed notions of gender as a corporeal style. Gender, as an embodied concept, comprises an external and physical set of strategies necessary for survival, perceived through our interactions with society and culture, rather than as a self-realized state of being shaped by the individual's selfhood.[23] Whereas sex derives from binary biological implications, gender requires the body to perform to these historical notions of what it means to be a ‘man’ or ‘woman, ' omitting any navigation of being and selfhood through the body that does not fit within these two categorical labels.

> “Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes, nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.”[24]

Relating to Anzaldúa, choosing to navigate the liminal spaces of gender outside of the binary construction is an act of nepantla. Binary structures of gender serve to define the boundaries of humanness within the confines of colonial hierarchy.[25] The evolution of gender as a performative act illustrates how the binary nature of gender creates a divide for those subjected to colonization, marking them as fundamental others (nos/ortras).[26] The inherent othering of individuals who choose to navigate the liminal spaces of gender through nepantla to dissect its essence as a performative act may encounter punitive consequences within colonial hierarchies.[27] Traversing these liminal spaces of identity, as expressed through transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, positions the body as a crucial site for understanding the self.

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[23] Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender,” 522.
[24] Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender,” 522.
[25] Salas-SantaCruz, “What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism,” 3.
[26] Salas-SantaCruz, “What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism,” 3.
[27] Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender,” 522.

Susan Stryker's *When Monsters Speak* contextualizes the role of the trans body, particularly through the act of transitioning, as it navigates selfhood within the constraints of othering. As a trans woman documenting the unspoken histories of transgender individuals, this collection of writings examines how the physical act of transitioning represents gender as a performative act, further elucidating the complexity of selfhood within the trans body. Stryker challenges the notion that transition results in a happy and 'real' gender. If gender is a performative act that is not an absolute fact and does not yield a finite 'realness,' as asserted by Butler, then transitioning arises from the *necessity* that stems from the experience of othering.[28][29]

Those who do not conform to the binary construction of gender assigned at their birth face societal, physical, and cultural repercussions. I believe this often results from the fear, as outlined by Anzaldúa, of oppressors who fit neatly into these performative binary notions. They fear those who navigate the liminal spaces between genders in their quest for selfhood. While transgender and gender non-conforming individuals navigate these liminal spaces out of necessity for survival, they face punitive consequences from the 'authors of gender' for existing beyond the performative structures created by colonial frameworks.[30] This illustrates Stryker's point that the act of transition is "an art of the body, which of necessity is also a politics of the body, due to the infuriating obstacles placed in the way of our individual and collective self-transformation."[31] The discomfort yet necessity of engaging in nepantla has been familiar to me through my experiences navigating identities as a queer and non-binary individual.

Before coming out, I felt alienated from my body, sensing that the skin I inhabited was not my own. Not only did I not know who I was within my body, but my relationships with those

[28] Stryker, "When Monsters Speak."
[29] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender."
[30] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender."
[31] Stryker, "When Monsters Speak," 12.

closest to me shifted, as I could not embrace and vocalize the most authentic yet deeply hidden parts of myself. While I spent the first 20 years of my life fearful of what would come from navigating the unknown aspects of my identity, I chose to embark on that journey out of *necessity*. I knew that I could no longer happily and healthily live in my body, which was desperately trying to fit into colonial gender roles that it was not made for. This required me to step into the discomfort, loss, and fear associated with dissecting the known and embrace the liminal spaces surrounding my gender identity to forge a new pillar of who I am.

Although the physical spaces I occupied as a dancer have not historically allowed for embracing this pillar alongside my movement exploration, traversing nepantla to understand my selfhood as a non-binary artist has enabled me to approach movement with all facets of my mind, body, and self intertwined. This has led me to consider the role of liminality and nepantla in the pedagogical structures of movement exploration. How can centering marginalized identities in pedagogy support a fuller understanding of students' wholeness of self? What role might generating movement play in helping traverse liminal spaces of identity? While this essay does not aim to answer these questions, an evaluation of decolonial trans* feminism will assist in curating a foundation to explore these inquiries.

Decolonial Trans* Feminism as a Theoretical Pillar.

A recent work written in 2024 by trans-Latinx scholar Omni Salas-SantaCruz's, "*What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism and What Can It Do for Queer/Trans BIPOC Education Research?*" establishes the theoretical framework of decolonial trans* feminism and demonstrates how its application within academic institutions can reimagine knowledge, selfhood, and identity beyond Eurocentric colonial hierarchies. To begin dissecting the

intricacies of this ideology, Salas-SantaCruz first analyzes coloniality as a terminology through Aníbal Quijano's concept of 'coloniality of power'.[32] Coined in Quijano's 1991 untranslated publications, omitting his prolific work from reference in scholarly and peer-reviewed articles in Eurocentric institutions until 2004, coloniality is the:

> "Social classification of the global population based on the idea of race, which replaces traditional relationships of superiority and inferiority established through domination with naturalized understandings of these hierarchies. This means that racial distinctions become seen as inherent and natural rather than constructed and imposed."[33]

By distinguishing individuals through heterogeneous terms, coloniality transforms into a multifaceted structure of oppression centered on Eurocentric power, dominance, and knowledge production across social, political, cultural, and economic institutions.[34] While race serves as the categorical classification upon which the term coloniality was imposed, it simultaneously functions as a focal point around which other systems of exploitation revolve.[35] These systems are constructed and reproduced in a colonial context to erase existing structures of social, political, and cultural organization.[36] Salas-Santa Cruz further assesses this claim through the categorization of gender as a structure of colonial power.

Gender, as a colonial power, is established and expressed through two primary binary categories: "man" and "woman." This dichotomous classification was essential to the colonial project, defining what it means to be human by imposing this binary structure of being onto non-Western populations, thereby erasing or drastically altering established Indigenous gender structures.[37] This binary gender framework thus acts as another colonial system of "othering,"

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[32] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 2.
[33] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 3.
[34] Fúnez-Flores, "Aníbal Quijano: (Dis)entangling," 2.
[35] Fúnez-Flores, "Aníbal Quijano: (Dis)entangling," 2.
[36] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 3.
[37] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.

establishing that colonized people are inherently inferior and unable to attain the dominant norms of the colonizers. This assertion holds particularly true for trans People of Color. As evaluated by trans* Latine scholar P.J. DiPietro, colonial systems reinforce the subjugation of trans people of color by disrupting Indigenous bodily practices that deeply intertwine with cultural, spiritual, and social senses of self.[38] The aesthetics and practices of trans* individuals within Indigenous populations often establish and maintain balance within their communities. Colonial conquest frequently misrepresents these practices through a lens of perversion and degradation, exacerbating the "othering" of trans People of Color by depicting them as less than fully human, separating integrated bodily practices from the self. [39] This normative othering based on gender further marginalizes trans* people of color within colonial systems by viewing their acts of transition as perverse and unnatural, elucidating that their identities and selfhood cannot safely exist within colonial institutions.

DiPietro advocates for reimagining gender to illustrate the colonial system of the terms' creation as a corporeal form of resistance. Capitalized "Gender" refers to the colonial binary system of "man" and "woman," as previously discussed, which serves as a systemic categorization to maintain control over Indigenous bodies.[40] Lowercase gender refers to the "unattainable statuses of being men or women, highlighting the constructed and enforced nature of these categories within the colonial framework."[41] Finally, "genders" (with quotation marks) refers to liminal states of being that are neither "man" nor "woman," but instead represent identities and embodied states that resist colonial categorization and control, specifically those of

[38] DiPietro, "Neither humans, nor animals, nor monsters."
[39] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.
[40] DiPietro, "Neither humans, nor animals, nor monsters."
[41] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.

gender non-conforming and non-binary individuals.[42] Through this nuanced differentiation of language proposed by DiPietro that contextualizes gender as a colonial power, Salas-SantaCruz calls for the integration of "genders" within academic institutions, allowing students -particularly QTBIPOC students- more fluidity and agency in navigating the liminal spaces of their selfhood and identity outside colonial binary structures of academia.[43][44] This encouragement of nepantla through the exploration of "genders" establishes a centering of non-binary epistemologies to be integrated within pedagogical practices, fostering a richer understanding of the nuanced complexities of selfhood.

Decolonial trans* feminism aims to "examine the life and resistant practices that exist within the cracks of gender (coloniality)."[45] This examination involves centering exploited systems of knowledge, QTBIPOC voices, and non-binary epistemologies to dissect the colonial frameworks that shape social categorizations.[46] Salas-SantaCruz evaluates Catherine Walsh's *"The Androgynous Whole"* to define androgyny as a blend of masculine and feminine aesthetics that transcends traditional Western binary gender categorizations of what defines a "man" and what defines a "woman." This embodiment of fluidity through gender performance illustrates how non-binary and androgynous epistemologies can converge a multitude of identities and states of being, forming a sense of self that goes beyond binary notions of gender.[47] This rejection of binary expression and embrace of multiplicity and nuance challenges not only colonial notions of gender but also Western views of the self and knowledge by encouraging an integration of all facets of identity while navigating the liminal spaces of the self.[48]

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[42] DiPietro, "Neither humans, nor animals, nor monsters."
[43] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.
[44] Anzaldúa, "Light in the Dark."
[45] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.
[46] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.
[47] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.
[48] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 4.

The asterisk in decolonial trans* feminism symbolizes non-binary knowledge and acts as a force of resistance against colonial constraints by emphasizing fluidity and multiplicity within the framework's name. The asterisk is not merely representative of a singular identity; rather, it embodies the complexities and nuances that characterize human existence beyond binary structures of being.[49] The intentionality of this symbol, specifically within the term "trans," contextualizes a reimagining of identity to reflect the intricate nature of human experience outside of the coloniality of gender. Rather than evaluating gender from colonial concepts of "man" or "woman", the asterisk encourages the inclusivity of gender non-conforming and non-binary individuals by representing the fluid nature of "gender."

Poet Alan Pelaez Lopez argues that the asterisk illustrates movement and a sense of life, embodying the emotions experienced while navigating the liminal spaces of identity. It signifies fluidity rather than a finite state of being, acting as a portal that encourages endless possibilities of existence. It serves as a pause that prompts reflection but is not a final destination nor an answer. It represents a transformative state of resistance against oppressive categorizations that is "not a star; it is not a burning rock, but some might argue that it is a rock that burns."[5051] These personified images of the asterisk, as described by Pelaez Lopez, encapsulate the idea that the asterisk is not simply a linguistic tool for emphasis but also a symbolic representation of the transformative nature of navigating identity and selfhood, as well as resisting colonial language and structures of being.[52] Understanding the complexities of the asterisk within "trans*" further illustrates the nuance, fluidity, and resistance inherent in dissecting selfhood and identity through the lens of "genders."

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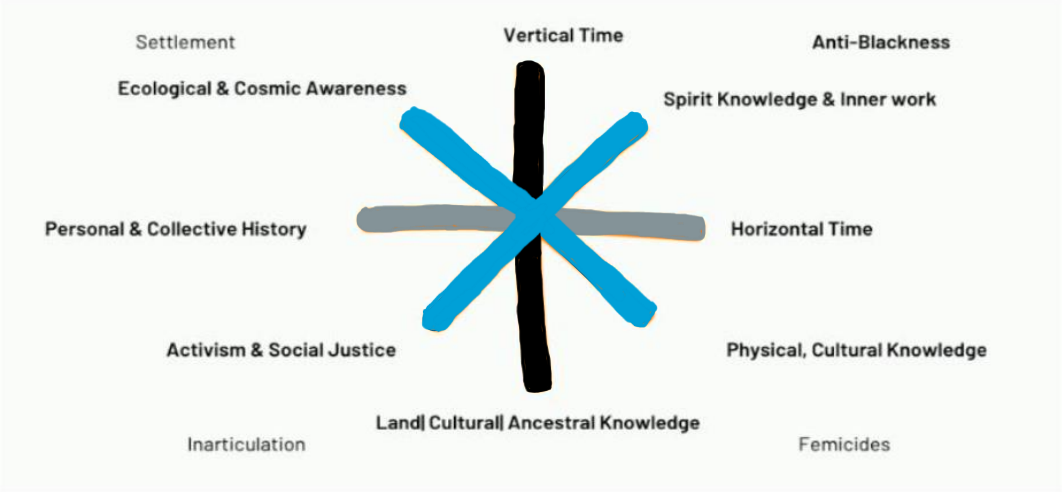
[49] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 9.
[50] Pelaez Lopez, "trans*imagination."
[51] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 9-11.
[52] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 9-11.

Salas-SantaCruz further analyzes the role of the asterisk as a tool for understanding the convergence of knowledge with identity, culture, history, and time to address the intersectionality of oppression within colonial structures. The contextualization of the asterisk's role is illustrated in Figure 2. The physicality of the asterisk is expressed by the following equation: X + vertical plane (extraordinary knowledge) + horizontal plane (ordinary knowledge) = the asterisk.[53]

Figure 2

The Asterisk as Representation of the Androgynous Whole



SantaCruz identifies the symbolic "X" formation as representing the complexities of identities shaped by a multifaceted intersection of knowledge systems that cannot be understood solely through a singular categorical identity. Horizontal knowledge refers to linear and Eurocentric ways of knowing that emphasize finite products and objective truths in understanding identity within the context of existence. This form of knowledge is reflected through Western scientific and rational thought within curricula and methodologies that

[53] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 9-11.

prioritize objective learning while marginalizing non-Western and Indigenous perspectives.[54] Vertical knowledge signifies cyclical and transcendent ways of knowing that connect mind, body, and soul by centering ancestral knowledge and cultural traditions to embrace the nonlinear complexities of existence.[55] Within academia, this is illustrated by the inclusion of storytelling and cultural practices to link individual identity with cultural and communal identity. These three foundational pillars of the asterisk highlight the multiplicity of experiences and identities that develop our understanding of reality. By formulating them in a physical configuration that overlaps and intersects each axis with another, the asterisk serves as a way of valuing multiple epistemologies to cultivate knowledge systems that promote identity within the exploration of knowledge.

While these are the three primary pillars that curate the asterisk, the surrounding phrases contribute to a greater understanding of the necessity for convergence of identity within knowledge systems. Anti-Blackness refers to the racial discrimination of Black individuals within colonial institutions and calls for a curation of spaces within academia that uplift Black voices through curriculum and pedagogical practices. Femicides refer to the patriarchal violence and killing of women and gender non-conforming individuals within colonial structures. Within education systems, Salas-SantaCruz calls for educators to advocate for environments of resilience that work against this systemic violence. Settlement refers to the challenging of occupying and claiming Indigenous lands, people, and knowledge systems. The connection of all these terms, in tandem with the formulation of the physicality of the asterisk, highlights the

[54] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 9-11.
[55] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 9-11.

symbols' embodiment of converging identities and systems of knowledge that center on multiplicity and fluidity.[56]

Decolonial Trans* Feminism and Decolonizing Curriculum in Pedagogical Praxis.

At the center of decolonial trans* feminism is integrating theory into praxis within academic institutions. It offers a theoretical framework that resists systems of oppression and coloniality by positioning the convergence of selfhood liberation with systems of knowledge at the core of its epistemological foundation.[57] This theory has been assessed through dissecting gender as a coloniality into a more fluid understanding of existence by employing "genders" that embody the ethos of liminality beyond binary gender norms. The symbolic representation of the asterisk simultaneously challenges the coloniality of knowledge and gender by encouraging a convergence of identities and knowledge systems to address various forms of experiences within our understanding of reality. These theories are expanded into pedagogical praxis by centering QTBIPOC experiences to deconstruct colonial institutions of knowledge that have historically omitted these narratives from existing within them.

Implementing theory into praxis requires recognizing and analyzing the complexities of coloniality within the frameworks of power, gender, and knowledge. By dissecting aspects of coloniality that exclude identity, the body, and cultural knowledge in the process of knowledge generation, educational focus can shift towards reimagining curricula that resist embedded colonial knowledge systems to emphasize multiplicity and encourage exploration of selfhood within academic institutions. A reimagining of curricula is essential for this convergence to exist.

[56] All definitions in this paragraph are derived from Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism."

[57] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism."

The coloniality of curriculum is an "imperial/colonial doctrine insofar as it is conceived as a pedagogical mode of imperial domination aimed at colonial domesticity."[58] Within this, dominant curriculum utilizes the coloniality of power, gender, and being to control and manage the distribution of knowledge through Western ideologies.[59] Within these colonial structures of curriculum, the oppression of colonized groups and recognition of their experiences are omitted. If they are centralized, such as in critical race theory and gender studies, they are subjected to scrutiny by colonial powers – further illustrating to students that the multiplicity of their identities, if they exist outside of binary colonial norms, are less than, perverse, or other.[60] Institutions of higher education are specifically ridiculed for upholding coloniality through producing material technologies of displacement on Indigenous populations and reproducing systems of knowledge that prioritize Eurocentric narratives over diversified curriculums.[61] This demonstrates that coloniality is embedded within the structure of colonial institutions. Dismantling the ivory tower requires dismantling the oppressive systems characterized by its formation. Decolonial trans* feminism as a pedagogical praxis works towards this disentangling by recognizing the coloniality of curriculum and decentering its emphasis on Eurocentric histories and knowledge.

Decolonial trans* feminism encourages the blending of ordinary and extraordinary knowledge, the intersectionality of identity, lived experiences, and cultural practices, evaluated through the physical embodiment of the asterisk, to foster inclusive and reflective educational inquiry.[62] Thoughtfully including QTBIPOC voices and histories within a classroom context, and

[58] Fúnez-Florez, "(Dis)entangling the geopolitics and coloniality of curriculum," 7.
[59] Fúnez-Florez, "(Dis)entangling the geopolitics and coloniality of curriculum," 7.
[60] Fúnez-Florez, "(Dis)entangling the geopolitics and coloniality of curriculum," 8.
[61] Fúnez-Florez, "(Dis)entangling the geopolitics and coloniality of curriculum," 9.
[62] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 11.

centering these epistemologies' cultural, social, and political experiences in educational inquiry, promotes an interplay between the self and academic practices.[63] Developing a syllabus that incorporates these voices into its structural framework establishes a foundation of trust, identity, and fluidity as the structural pillars of educational knowledge. However, these themes must be contextualized through actions over the course's duration. Decolonial trans* feminism advocates for the engagement of art, culture, spirit, and body in the daily practices of academia to bridge gaps between differing experiences and realms of existence, cultivating a transformative space for students to explore selfhood through academia.[64] Emphasizing fluidity within identity deconstructs colonial impositions of gender, championing academic environments where QTBIPOC students and their "genders" are met with celebration, respect, and care, and encouraging them to engage in more reflexive practices that integrate all facets of their identities.[65]

At the time of writing this, there is a daily assault on QTBIPOC individuals and their right to exist safely within their bodies and identities. I am writing this paper at a public university in Utah, where in 2024, House Bill 261 was enacted, prohibiting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and programs in public universities, K-12 schools, and government offices – mandating the removal of DEI language and any race or gender-related terms from their program names.[66] This erasure of language coincided with House Bill 257, which bans transgender individuals from using bathrooms and locker rooms in government buildings that do not align with their gender assigned at birth.[67] On a national level, Donald Trump has signed

[63] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 13.
[64] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism," 13.
[65] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism."
[66] Tanner, "Gov. Cox signs Utah anti-DEI bill."
[67] Tanner, "Gov. Cox signs Utah anti-DEI bill."

executive orders prohibiting transgender women from participating in K-12 and collegiate sports, barring transgender service members from military service, and cutting federal funding for gender-affirming care for children under the age of 19.[68] While these actions blatantly seek to erase the experiences and livelihoods of trans* and gender non-conforming people, gaining dangerous traction within government institutions to do so effectively, the fear and hatred underlying these drastic measures are not new but have been perpetuated and reinforced through colonial institutions.

Despite ongoing legislative efforts to vilify and erase trans* individuals, we will continue to exist, work, and, most importantly, love. Navigating nepantla within the context of "genders" during a time when doing so incurs punitive consequences- institutionally, physically, and emotionally- demonstrates an undeniable act of both bravery and necessity. I find it essential to combat such hatred and fear within my pedagogical practice by curating trustworthy spaces where all facets of the self can be safely explored. As a non-binary educator in these turbulent times, I recognize that this does not guarantee that all students have the space to explore elsewhere. I was drawn to decolonial trans* feminism as a pedagogical and theoretical framework due to its intentional focus on fluidity and multiplicity, creating inclusive spaces for marginalized voices within academic institutions. Deliberately centering these narratives, especially in the current socio-political climate, represents an active form of rebellion against colonial structures that perpetuate the erasure of narratives outside Eurocentric ideologies.[69] The experience of "othering" that correlates to the necessity of traversing nepantla contributes to a

[68] Saric, "Anti-trans executive orders Trump has Signed."
[69] Salas-SantaCruz, "What is Decolonial Trans* Feminism."

pedagogical praxis that encourages the dynamic interweaving of identity with academic inquiry to encourage students to explore their selfhood within a generation of knowledge.

Nepantla Pedagogy.

Nepantla can be implemented into pedagogical praxis by fostering learning environments where students can negotiate their constantly moving states of being at the center of their literacy practices. Testimonios serve as a foundational attribute to connect the liminal spaces of nepantla to pedagogy to understand who we are and how we know.[70] In *Pedagogies from Nepantla: Tenstimoni, Chicana/Latine Feminisms and Teacher Education Classrooms,* Linda Prieto and Sofie A. Villenas evaluate the role of testimonio in pedagogical praxis to create a kinship of care between students and educators. These testimonios are stories and experiences typically conveyed from a person in a marginalized group that are shared, written, and passed down. Inherently political, sharing these testimonios in a public setting curates a space for those who witness it to recognize the injustice and violence rooted within these experiences to call for an urgent change.[71] Engaging in these testimonios, acknowledging and naming the experiences that have caused "othering" through traversing liminal spaces of identity, can often reveal tensions or challenges characterized by cultural dissonance.

> "Cultural dissonance highlights the contradictions we experienced in the institutions of family and education, particularly along markers of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status and experience, and language. It also emphasizes the profound learning and consciousness we were developing as children about power and justice in society, even if we did not have the language to express and sort out the contradictions we experienced on a daily basis."[72]

[70] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio," 50.
[71] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio," 52.
[72] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio," 54.

This understanding of cultural dissonance highlights that engaging in pedagogies of nepantla often affiliated with contradiction and discomfort. By addressing the multiplicity of our identities and sharing how these identities interact with socio-political climates, we confront uncomfortable realities of tension and dissension within these experiences. While it is essential to share the hardships of these moments, recognizing the instances of healing and resilience within cultural dissonance is equally valuable. Sharing testimonios during these moments of dissonance can not only articulate personal stories of how oppression and privilege influence our experiences but also examine the role of intersectionality within power structures. In pedagogical praxis, engaging in nepantla to navigate cultural dissonance can help students and instructors in "recognize self/other and work the spaces/interstices at which we are all located."[73] I have experienced homophobia and transphobia in my field of study that hindered my selfhood from integrating with my movement practices. However, as a white individual, I have not faced racism and hold privilege within many institutions because of that. Naming and sharing these identities through testimonios represents an act of nepantla through cultural dissonance. By sharing these experiences with students, educators can create spaces that allow for exploring the intersectionality of our selfhood and experiences. Asking students to engage in similar testimonios may lead to discomfort and moments of stasis. Such moments can foster further knowledge and reflection. Encouraging students to contemplate who they are and reflect on pivotal moments in their testimonios can create space for exploring the self and its interaction with others.

In these moments of tension, pausing for reflection necessitates an act of caring, *cariño,* from both the student and the teacher. By sharing our differences in privilege and perspective,

[73] Prieto, L. & Villenas, S. "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio," 63.

our testimonios can form the basis for connection and compassion, especially for marginalized voices present in academic spaces dominated by predominantly white identities.[74] By centering the act of testimonios in fostering care, the fullness of students' identities can be essential to the experience of sharing without creating a disconnect from the complex emotionality of existence.[75] Instead of sharing testimonios solely through verbal exercises, integrating reflective activities such as journaling, sharing food or snacks, walking, and creative practices like art can cultivate a space where care between students can bridge the gap between discomfort and newfound knowledge. The act of care within nepantla pedagogies exists not only in reflection but also in actively recognizing other individual and collective experiences by engaging students who "enact racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, or anti-immigrant sentiments, not as individual racists, sexists, or nativists, but as cultural beings who tap into vast epistemological systems that support hierarchies of dominance."[76] This means that testimonios embracing cariño invite students and individuals of all races, genders, cultures, and classes to participate in this reflective practice to share their specific histories while also recognizing the impact of colonial hierarchies of power on marginalized voices whose experiences of oppression have not historically been prioritized. By engaging cariño within testimonios, Villenas and Prieto encourage a communal space for discussion that shares global and personal traumas while simultaneously promoting hope and emancipatory action.[77]

Nepantla pedagogies also advocate for centering nepantla literacies that challenge identity boundaries and broaden who students are as creators of literacy.[78] José Ramón Lizárraga

[74] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio,"64.
[75] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio,"64.
[76] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio,"64.
[77] Prieto, & Villenas, "Pedagogies from Nepantla: Testimonio,"64.
[78] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 41.

and Kris D. Gutiérrez assess this claim in *Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands: Leveraging' In-Betweenness" Toward Learning in Everyday Life.* This examination of nepantla literacies must first arise from resilience at the margins. Drawing on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, the hybrid Spanglish employed within US academic institutions by US Latinx is a language that allows students to "connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both."[79] In US academia, English is regarded as the formal hegemonic language through which knowledge is evaluated. For dual-language learners, integrating into academic institutions that prioritize English as the primary language often leads to the devaluation of their culture, placing them in an in-between state where the rich multiplicity of their identities and the knowledge stemming from them cannot be integrated into their academic practices.[80] The authors urge educators to incorporate students' "full linguistic toolkit" into the everyday practices of scholarly inquiry, fostering learning environments that engage students more deeply by encouraging all facets of their identities to meld with their academic practices.[81] Lizárraga and Gutiérrez further contextualize the adoption of a full linguistic toolkit to support the integration of nepantla literacies in academic institutions by connecting to Prieto and Villenas' pedagogical emphasis on testimonios within nepantla pedagogy.

> "Nepantla emerges from concentered self-reflection and naming of marginalization; a creation of self-authored testimonio that embraces the fluidity of identity. We believe that youth are particularly adept at curating selves, at reflecting, historicizing, and organizing for new possible futures in small interactions, through the use of language and gesture. Moreover, we find that they ingeniously repurpose tools toward objectives that they define themselves."[82]

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[79] Gloria Anzaldua.
[80] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 41.
[81] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 41.
[82] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 41.

By recognizing dominant literacy practices and sharing reflective testimonios from students whose identities do not align with the dominant culture, engaging in liminal spaces of identity while traversing nepantla within pedagogical praxis can curate a space where students' ingenuity and identity become the focal point of academic inquiry. This cannot be achieved without intentional effort from practitioners. Nepantla pedagogy calls for a deviation of Eurocentric academic norms to encourage educators to recognize moments of hierarchy within curricula and educational practices, cultivating a playful and explorative classroom culture that appreciates hybridity within language, culture, and identity. Centering linguistic learning with a holistic approach can inspire new ways for students to navigate knowledge generation by acknowledging all aspects of their cultural and linguistic identities.[83] This can co-create academic environments that structurally support the development of innovative literacy practices embracing fluidity within concrete applications.[84] By embracing liminality within nepantla literacies, students can become empowered to develop "powerful selves" that are [85]both challenged by the demands of navigating in-between spaces and learn to thrive.

The Self Within Dance Pedagogy and Movement Generation Practices.

The theories of nepantla, gender as a performative act, and decolonial trans* feminism each constitute a centering of the self to deconstruct colonial notions of identity. Executed in pedagogical praxis, these theories contribute to centering the self and body within a broader context of academic inquiry. While they all correlate the body as a focal point of understanding the self, the authors evaluated in this review thus far have not been positioned within the field of

[83] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 45.
[84] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 45.
[85] Lizárraga, & Gutiérrez "Centering Nepantla Literacies from the Borderlands," 41.

dance and movement exploration. Yet, their contributions to the decolonial theories and theories of the self provide a framework in which the role of the body, specifically through dance practices, can be evaluated. Nyama McCarthy-Brown and Alfdaniels Mabingo contextualize elements of these foundational theories into their research to prioritize the body, identity, and selfhood within the context of dance pedagogical practices.

Culturally relevant teaching was developed to prioritize the voices of marginalized students within the dominant culture and curriculum.[86] Coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the 1990s, this pedagogical praxis focuses on students' cultural backgrounds, communication and learning styles, and cultural beliefs to create a curriculum that empowers a multifaceted approach to knowledge, encompassing all aspects of the self.[87] This is implemented in praxis by acknowledging cultural heritages within formal curriculum, bridging home and academia, teaching for various learning styles, and incorporating resources and materials from a multicultural perspective.[88] Embracing this pedagogical approach can create learning environments in which each student's culture and holistic identity can contribute to their process of knowledge generation. Culturally relevant teaching is linked with critical pedagogy, an extension of critical race theory. Critical pedagogy seeks to "unoppress the oppressed" by dissecting identity classifications of race, class, and gender to unify people through a centralized understanding of critique and struggle.[89] These two forms of pedagogical praxis became the foundation of Nyama McCarthy-Brown's "Critical Dance Pedagogy".

Written in 2017, dance scholar Nyama McCarthy-Brown's *"Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World: Culturally Relevant Teaching in Theory, Research and Practice"* evaluates the

[86] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 17.
[87] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 18.
[88] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 19.
[89] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 19.

roles of race, class, and gender within dance practices to equip dance educators with tools for embracing multidimensionality, particularly in dance pedagogy.[90] The foundation of these tools derives from Critical Dance Pedagogy (CDP), which integrates culturally relevant teaching and critical pedagogy with the dancing body. While culturally relevant teaching primarily focuses on students of color, CDP can also address multidimensional demographic considerations.[91] McCarthy-Brown asserts that dance educators often claim that dance is an open creative space where all identities are welcome to explore. However, particularly within Western higher education institutions, students whose identities fall outside of colonial power often feel excluded from the welcoming nature that educators assert dance spaces possess.[92] Although dance departments have held classes in folk, ethnic, world, and global dance since the 1960s, these courses are frequently elective credits, and their content is not developed beyond a basic understanding of the forms' origins. This inherently positions these forms as "other" or "less than" the dominant academic studies of Eurocentric forms like ballet and modern dance.[93] McCarthy-Brown proposes CDP to challenge these institutional hierarchies and to create spaces for scholarly inquiry where students from diverse backgrounds can cultivate a sense of belonging within their curriculum.

The integration of CDP must begin with the development of diverse course content and extend into daily practices. McCarthy-Brown illustrates how to contextualize CDP into action within technique, composition, and theory-based courses throughout the novel. While these tools are interchangeable despite course format, this reflection primarily focuses on their application to teaching movement generation and physical technique courses. Educators can cultivate a

[90] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World."
[91] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 19.
[92] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 19.
[93] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 20.

classroom culture that validates their lived experiences while simultaneously creating space for students' experiences as whole beings, contributing to the cultural atmosphere. The curation of classroom culture starts with the syllabus that outlines the curriculum and protocols. By centering QTBIPOC voices in readings, histories, and assignments within the syllabus, educators can establish a sense of care and trust with students on their first day of classes.[94] This approach can extend into the procedures implemented in daily practices. McCarthy-Brown advocates for reimagining dress codes within dance environments to be inclusive of gender non-conforming individuals, establishing accessibility codes that redefine what classifies a dancing body and who can access movement exploration, as well as recognizing cultural holidays and rituals that exist outside traditional Eurocentric academic calendars. While educational institutions might determine some policies that cannot be changed, creating classroom codes that address the complexities of multiplicity impacting each student's life can establish a clear set of expectations while simultaneously building a culture that embraces diverse states of being.[95]

While elements of classroom culture can be established through the syllabus and introductory classes, intentional effort is required to continue building community, trust, and culture throughout the semester. Surveys and goal-setting exercises designed to understand students as multifaceted individuals can place their identities at the forefront of educational inquiry.[96] These introductory exercises, with specific prompts aimed at exploring students' lineage, movement affiliations, and goals, can demonstrate care and accountability, contributing to an evolving class culture. Establishing a ritual with students to begin and end class fosters a unique sense of community that sets the energy for the session and connects everyone in the

[94] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.
[95] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.
[96] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.

space. These rituals could be derived from introductory surveys or developed collaboratively in class to create a brief embodied practice that links the bodies of all present for the day.[97] If the dance class features a live accompanist, these rituals can also serve to incorporate them into the culture, emphasizing the vital connection between generating music and movement.

The intentional centering of the self within movement practices can contribute to a greater development of classroom culture. Each dancer comes from a lineage of movement affinities they gravitate toward, whether through the plane they prefer to move in, the dynamic and quality choices they explore, or the musicality that feels most natural to their bodies. Recognizing these affinities and curating exercises and phrases that affirm those choices while challenging them to explore unfamiliar ones will connect the preferences of each student's body expression within the class context.[98] These affinities can be further explored through the guidance of improvisational practices.

McCarthy-Brown highlights that while improvisation is not exclusive to Western culture, the desired aesthetics of improvisation in Western educational institutions are typically derived from formal dance training in styles such as ballet and modern dance. Through a CDP lens, intentional improvisation can serve as a means of movement generation that is true to one's selfhood and cultural background by actively engaging in improvisational practices that acknowledge all voices within the space. Many improvisational practices occur in silence, which can place African American, Native American, or Latinx students, whose cultural heritage of movement is often closely tied to music, in an "othered" state.[99] McCarthy-Brown encourages educators to consider a range of musical accommodations with diverse rhythmic structures while

[97] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.
[98] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.
[99] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.

engaging in improvisational practices, ensuring that each student can connect their culture, selfhood, and body to the movement generation prompts being presented to them.[100]

Consent for physical touch in improvisation and technique courses fosters a culture of trust and care. Contact improvisation involves moving with another person through physical touch. Additionally, many instructors offer feedback tactically, using touch to assist students with alignment and quality. While tactical input can inspire new sensations of movement that unlock different affinities, it must be practiced consensually. Many students, particularly those in the LGBTQIA+ community, may have complex relationships with their bodies, especially regarding touch, and might be hesitant to participate in practices involving physical contact.[101] Consent is not a fixed state – what feels comfortable for a student one day may not feel the same the next. Establishing a protocol to address consent in each exercise, while offering alternative guidance for students who are uncomfortable with contact, can help create classroom environments where the body can safely engage in movement practices.

The body is at the heart of dance practices. It serves as the instrument through which we express, perform, identify, and exist. Our bodies physically bear the weight of everything placed upon them – including our race, gender, abilities, class, and size. Since dance revolves around the body, it becomes a vessel through which our experiences with society, politics, culture, and identity are embodied. There is no separation between the mind and body; our body houses our mind, and our mind exists through our body. However, many dance educators encourage dancers to enter movement spaces by asking them to leave emotional, physical, or cultural baggage at the door to arrive as a "blank slate."[102] This practice disconnects our experiences from our bodies,

[100] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.
[101] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.
[102] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 50-64.

further marginalizing the voices of QTBIPOC students and those with differently abled bodies, who often face discrimination based on societal constructs of their bodies. McCarthy-Brown employs critical dance pedagogy to reimagine the role of the body within dance education, making it a central vessel for exploring all facets of the self through movement. This necessitates prioritizing QTBIPOC voices in dance spaces, reframing policies and codes to acknowledge the multidimensional aspects of identity, and intentionally affirming the cultural lineages of each student in dance pedagogy to ensure that the body remains central to the understanding of the self.

Ugandan Ph.D dance scholar Alfdaniesl Mabingo correlates the body as a site of self within the context of African Dances to prioritize connection and co-creation in movement generation practices through his article *"Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections, Co-Becoming, Co-Construction, and Relationships through African Dances in Tertiary Education."* Reflecting on a movement generation process he led in 2023 at the Dance Department at Rutgers University, Mabingo questions how dancers, drummers, and singers engaged in dance-making through African dance forms can cultivate a sense of collaboration, connection, and becoming.[103] Central to this exploration are the philosophical theories of Ubuntu and Vā. Ubuntu inherently embeds diversity, equity, and inclusion practices into its framework long before the term DEI was adopted in higher education institutions, facilitating "humanistic borderless connections between people regardless of their diverse backgrounds."[104] This was emphasized in Mabingo's work *Olusuku Iwa Jjajja (The Grandmother's Garden)* through a multifaceted approach to movement generation that centered not only on dance-making but also on drumming, singing, clapping, chanting, and storytelling as a form of Vā, characterized by the

[103] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 1.
[104] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 2.

liminal spaces where people become communal and co-constructed.[105] The term dance-making, as opposed to the choreographic process, is intentionally used here to highlight the collaborative process Mabingo facilitated that focuses on co-becoming through this multidisciplinary approach to movement generation.

> "As a facilitator, I sought to nurture a space where performers' bodies would experience a force emanating from the presence of other bodies. Ubuntu provided a window to understand the performers as collective agents, and dance-making and performance as a sociality. Vā rendered the dance-making and performance spaces as places where dancers, singers, and musicians were immersed in philosophy, process, participation, pedagogy, people, and performance."

In the African dance ontology of Ubuntu, performance and dance-making serve as sources of knowledge production. Acknowledging each contributor's diverse skills, passions, and perspectives creates a shared space for connection and evolution through movement processes.[106] This process intertwines singing, dancing, drumming, and conversing, where convergence and communion exist through the generation of movement and an embodied practice that centers on the self and the physical body in all aspects of this communal space. Vā acts as a liminal or in-between space where dancers, singers, and drummers can share their experiences and knowledge to embody the dances and creative processes as a means of knowing and relating to the world through a co-constructive relationship that prioritizes the identities and selfhood of each individual contributor.[107] Engaging with this liminal space represents a form of storytelling and meaning creation that positions the body as the focal point for storytelling through movements, energies, drums, sweat, songs, and fellow dancers.[108] Storytelling through embodied practices requires listening to both the bodies and the voices. Mabingo's process

[105] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 2.
[106] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 3.
[107] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 3.
[108] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 3.

involved talanoas, informative conversations and exchanges, to share lived experiences and knowledge through vocalization and movement generation. Intentionally sharing testimonials alongside those engaged in this embodied practice fosters a deeper collaborative space of being and serves as a connection point for stories to be embodied through this multiplicitous form of dance-making.

Whereas most Western choreographic processes prioritize the mastery of movement, this process embeds dance-making through the mind and body, working interchangeably with drums, singing, storytelling, and chanting as a collective genesis of knowledge. Within this framework, the dancers also work with *endege*, ankle bells to integrate artistic expression and the embodiment of movement through a multidimensional approach that extends beyond simply memorizing and repeating choreographed movement. This approach serves as a relationality between the creation of movement and musical embodiment, contributing to the centering of communal spaces and shared knowledge. Pairing the body's movements with the physicality of the bells to curate musical embodiment constructs individualized meaning within these experiences that can be shared and related to others in the space engaging in the same process while also allowing for differing knowledge and insights. Singing and the voice are other intricate and intentional elements that enhance the performers' understanding of self and community throughout this process. While many students claimed they were not strong singers or felt fearful of using their voice on stage- particularly as dance in Western culture is often explored solely through the physical body in motion- the integration of the voice into this process allowed students to establish a deeper connection with the movement and feel aligned with others who were also incorporating their voices as integral parts of their movement. This merging of movement generation with other embodied elements such as chanting, percussion,

and storytelling illustrates how dance, as an embodied and multidisciplinary practice, can foster intentional exploration of our identities through movement and how embracing these identities and selfhoods can nurture a sense of community and belonging.[109]

Mabingo illustrates that engaging in the experience of dance-making derived from African worldviews creates a space where symbols, art, oral narratives, storytelling, music, and dance are central to developing communal shared knowledge, with each individual and their experiences playing an integral role.[110] Through Ubuntu, the Indigenous forms of communication of knowledge are established through shared relationships and knowledge formations that shape how reality is perceived.[111] The performers engage in this by integrating dance-making, drumming, chants, and storytelling to show that dance-making is not merely a process of memorization and repetition of known movements but can be an embodied practice where all components of the performance extend the individual self to contribute to a shared group experience that fosters interconnected knowledge. Within academic institutions, dances of African communities have often been regarded as intellectually illegitimate, and if offered at all, they are frequently available only as elective credits. This article advocates for a decolonial approach to dance pedagogy that embraces communal knowledge forged through African philosophies and embodied practices, such as Ubuntu, to demonstrate how "dances and their inherent pedagogies can provoke reflection on meanings and nourishment of experiences anchored in the discursive, experiential, and intersubjective relationship between identity, body, thought, experience, culture, knowledge, and contexts."[112]

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[109] This paragraph outlines the movement generation process as experienced by Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections." It contains details from pages 6-9.

[110] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 7.

[111] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 7.

[112] Mabingo, "Beyond Collaboration: Making and Staging Connections," 9.

Neither McCarthy-Brown nor Mabingo explicitly state the role of nepantla, gender as a performative act, or decolonial trans* feminism as foundational attributes of their research. However, the context of each of these sources clearly illustrates how centering identity and the multifaceted experiences of the body within dance pedagogical practices can contribute to a more diverse exploration of movement generation, which relates to the theories outlined throughout this paper. Mabingo employs the concept of Vā within the dance-making process to explore the liminal and in-between spaces of communal experiences through storytelling. This does not exist in isolation from memorizing movement but is deeply interconnected with the percussive, dance-making, and vocalization attributes of creative praxis, allowing space for individuals to understand the facets of themselves within the community. McCarthy-Brown's development of Critical Dance Pedagogy focuses on the marginalization of QTBIPOC voices within dance pedagogy, the centering of non-Western dance forms in the curriculum, and engaging in pedagogical practices that adapt to meet the individual needs of each student through class codes and curriculum. This illustrates how decolonial trans* feminism encourages pedagogical praxis that embraces the multiplicity of selfhood and identity to promote various knowledge systems within academic inquiry. Both texts address the colonial notions of academia that dictate which performances of the body are considered acceptable and continuously explored through the curriculum, and which are marginalized and omitted – calling for a reimagining of dance-making and dance pedagogical praxis that centers these voices instead of othering them. By centering the body and granting validation and permission to explore the multiplicity of selfhood and identity, both Nyama McCarthy-Brown and Alfdaniels Mabingo provide a framework for connecting these theories to dance-making and dance pedagogy, continuing to center the body as a means of understanding the self.

Conclusion.

The body and the self are intrinsically linked; one always informs the other, and one cannot survive without the other. Yet the process of undergoing transformation to understand who we are within our identities and experiences is not easy; it requires discomfort and the embrace of the unknown. Gloria Anzaldúa evaluates this act of liminality through the concept of nepantla. As explored in this research, nepantla is a space of tension in which traversing leads to a greater understanding of wholeness. To comprehend who we are, we must dismantle the categorical and colonial identities imposed upon us and begin to engage in reflection and practices that enhance our understanding of how our true sense of self fits into these spaces. This relates to Judith Butler's theory of gender as a performative act. Rather than being a finite state of being, Butler asserts that gender is derived from repeated performative acts influenced by colonial notions of binary gender. Trans* and gender non-conforming individuals navigate these liminal spaces of identity through their bodies and lived experiences to grasp their sense of self beyond colonial institutions. These acts of liminality, which center the body to understand the self, illustrate how this process embodies decoloniality.

Decolonial trans* feminism is a theoretical framework for evaluating how prioritizing the self within academic institutions can lead to decolonial practices that specifically highlight QTBIPOC voices within the curriculum and pedagogical praxis. By intentionally centering multiplicity, fluidity, and intersectionality, this theology establishes the impact of embracing the complexities of identity and the self in the knowledge-generation process. It opposes colonial systems, which value knowledge based on Westernized institutions that compartmentalize the self and body from academic practices. Instead, it encourages curricula and educational practices that embrace culture, gender, race, and spirituality to promote a greater understanding of the self

through academic inquiry. Nepantla pedagogy expands upon these theories into praxis by centering liminality and in-between spaces of identity within academic spaces to encourage the wholeness of self to integrate into academia. Through testimonios that encourage reflective discourse around our lived experiences and an emphasis on holistic and hybrid literacies, educators can curate spaces that enable students to use knowledge generation to understand who they are as individuals.

While the primary theories of nepantla, gender as a performative act, and decolonial trans* feminism are not specifically addressed in dance scholarship, the contributions of these theories to understanding the impact of traversing liminal identity spaces enhance our perception of the body and self. This knowledge connects to dance pedagogical praxis and movement generation processes that embrace multiplicity and fluidity within identity constructs. Nyama McCarthy-Brown illustrates this by developing Critical Dance Pedagogy, a pedagogical approach rooted in culturally relevant teaching practices. This approach encourages dance educators to create spaces where students' culture, gender, race, and bodies are central to their knowledge generation through movement. McCarthy-Brown emphasizes the importance of centering the self to help students unlock new knowledge through the body by providing tools that can be utilized in curriculum development, classroom codes and rituals, and improvisation and movement classes. Alfdaniels Mabingo outlines a dance-making process drawing from African philosophies of Ubuntu and Vā, which focus on collaboration in movement, percussion, vocals, cultural lineage, and storytelling. This process encourages all members of the co-creative experience to work together in a communicative setting to understand how dance can contribute to individual and group identity. Through this multiplicitous approach to dance-making that is not solely centered on the repetition of movement, Mabingo illustrates how movement

generation processes that allow space for the self to exist within the body can become a system for generating knowledge.

This research provides a foundation for understanding the impact of traversing liminal spaces of identity to navigate selfhood. While this process may be uncomfortable and forces us to confront unknown areas within our identities, it connects the self with the body to emphasize who we are within institutions that do not inherently create space for that. These resources all highlight the body as a central vessel for navigating this liminality; however, limited scholarship specifically links this exploration to movement generation through embodied practices such as dance. Although recent years have seen dance pedagogy scholarship begin to promote pedagogical practices that support an approach to intersectionality within the curriculum to encompass a broader range of identities in academic inquiry, the role of traversing liminality to discover an evolved sense of self through movement generation is not explicitly emphasized.

As an embodied practice, intentionally centering the multiplicity and fluidity of the self- evaluated through nepantla, gender as a performative act, and decolonial trans* feminism- within movement generation practices has the potential to creates a deeper connection between the self and the body in dance-making processes. As claimed by McCarthy-Brown, dance-making is a space that is "open, welcoming to all, and, by its creative nature, relevant to humanity. I argue that social constructs of race, class, and gender permeate all aspects of society, including Dance Education, and must be challenged consistently, with all resources possible.[113] While dance is inherently an extension of the self through movement, as the body is responsible for execution, this privilege of being welcoming to all is not extended to all its participants.

[113] McCarthy-Brown, "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World," 19.

As a queer and non-binary dance-maker and artist, I have experienced othering, nos/otras, in dance environments where my identities could not be safely expressed through the physicality and performance of my body. These experiences, combined with my research on the role of the body in traversing liminal spaces of identity and selfhood, have become my impetus to evaluate how dance-making and movement generation can create spaces where nepantla fosters a greater understanding of who we are through movement. What is the role of the body in fostering selfhood and identity through dance-making? How might this support pedagogical and choreographic practices focused on process rather than product? Can this cultivate a sense of belonging? This literature review will lay the groundwork for my exploration of these questions within the context of my dance-making and pedagogical praxis. Through this, I hope to inspire those around me to embrace the ethos of "in-between" by exploring their own bodies in movement to understand how who we are is inherently linked with our mind, body, and self.

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