

***Shifting Tides. A Multidisciplinary Creative Process Fusing Dance,
Somatics and Black Feminist Theory: An Interview with the
Choreographer***

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Abstract:

In this article, I discuss my artistic intent and creative process for creating my Master of Fine Arts thesis concert, *Shifting Tides*, in a transcribed interview done by my friend and teacher, Nii Armah Sowah. As an artist, I am interested in human connection, and I am conceptually interested in exploring the ways connection heightens our self-awareness and understandings of cultural and gender difference. In addition to exploring means of connection, I explain how black feminist standpoint theory can be applied to choreography. The interview depicts how I pushed the performers to discover who they are on a deeper psychosomatic level, to develop self-awareness in their whole bodies, in order to cultivate a higher communal cognizance, while staying aware of their racial and gender biases. The essay displays how a multidisciplinary performance process can be used to create growth, and to help communities shift into a higher consciousness based on the hypothesis that when we truly know ourselves, we can know each other and accept differences that are based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality through the application of cultural narratives, holistic dance rituals, and feminist practices.

1 **NS—Can you first of all state the title of your piece?**

CH- The title of my piece is *Shifting Tides*.

NS- *Shifting Tides* -- that sounds profound. You must have gone through a lot of process to arrive at that title. Can you say a little about that title?

CH- I felt that a lot of the energy coming from the piece was very ocean-like -- waves, coming in waves -- and I'm personally very attracted to the ocean and the element of water. I also choreographed the piece in sections, and each section seemed to have a pretty crucial shift as far as meaning, as far as movement, and as far as quality is concerned. So after a long process of just writing words that seemed to mean something to me within the piece and after looking at the energy, I came up with *Shifting Tides*. When you watch the ocean, waves come in different forms. You can have really light, gentle waves that gently touch the sand; you can have harsh like (whoosh) waves that just crash onto the shore, and some so high that you can't even go back onto the beach because you will be swallowed into them. You can have high tide and low tide; there's a lot of variations just within that, and I felt like the piece had a lot of those variations, highs and lows, and softness and hardness.

2 **NS- So what you're saying is you arrived at the name during or after the piece was created, or during the process?**

CH- During the process.

NS- So what would you say was your inspiration for the piece?

CH- My inspiration for the piece was very analytical at the beginning. I was looking at theories and a big one was black feminist theory, which was partially developed by Patricia Hill Collins. Basically, when you study African American studies or feminist studies, they talk a lot about the black women's voice not being present in American culture and American society, and that if there's a black women's presence in film, or in performance, or on stage, usually they don't have much of a voice. As far as publications go, there are very few black women who are publishing in academia and able to get their stories out. So as part of the feminist movement, black scholars and women in the community developed a way to get the black female experience out and they called it black feminist standpoint theory. This comes from the regular feminist standpoint theory which is based on experience.

3 NS- That's the feminist theory. How different is the black feminist theory?

Black Feminist History Overview: Historically, the term feminism has been used to describe a western-based movement for the equality of women that began with the fight for abolition. Early white feminists supported anti-slavery campaigns, even though they were rarely allowed to attend abolition meetings due to their inferior status (Davis 51). Frederick Douglass was one of the first males to speak on behalf of women's suffrage, linking the plight of white women to black liberation. Black feminist Sojourner Truth attended the first national convention on women's rights held in 1850 where she delivered her infamous speech, "Ain't I A Woman." Labeled as the hero of the convention, Truth was the only woman who dared to take on critiques by men that claimed women were a weaker sex and could not handle voting. Truth showed the men the muscles in her arms and said, "Look at me! Look at my arm!" revealing her tremendous muscular strength, "I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns and no man could head me! Ain't I A Woman?" (Davis 61).

4 As the plight for women's rights expanded, so did its ignorance of the special circumstances of black women. Many feminists have pointed out that early feminism was exclusive to the privileges of white women, despite its history of being supported by black liberationists. Groups such as the Combahee River Collective and scholars including bell hooks have written about the importance of not only analyzing the lives of women, but also dissecting how determining factors that include race, class and sexuality are pertinent. Sojourner Truth's speech serves as an example of the need for feminists to create an epistemology based on the black female's experience. Truth's experience in the United States was not the same as white females. Her work consisted of heavy labor outside in the fields and although she did learn to read and write, these privileges were considered dangerous in

her case and normal to white women. Truth was prohibited from owning land or legalized marriage, and she was not allowed to stay home and raise her children. All twelve of the children she bore were sold as slaves to outside plantations. Truth obviously lived an alternative experience based on the construction and politics of race.

5 Another reason why black feminist standpoint theory differs is due to the black female experience displaying points of intersectionality concerning not only gender, but race and class. Patricia Hill Collins, a major scholar in feminist studies argues that historically, black women have always been the female outsiders, despite their involvement within white families. She gives the example of black slaves and maids and nannies, caring for white children and their families' homes, while knowing they would never be a part of their household due to the confines of racism (Collins 308). Collins' "outsider within" example shows how a different consciousness developed within the minds of black women and she insists that this perspective needs a different form of analysis to explain its differences from the white female experience. That feminism requires an epistemology that acknowledges the intersectionality of race, gender, class and sexuality.

6 **NS-** Now in which ways did the black feminist theory or another theoretical framework inspire your work?

CH- It inspired me to create a piece that came out of my experience.

NS- Your experience?

CH- Yes. My personal experience dancing, my experience writing, and my experience living. Later, I opened that up to include the experiences of my dancers. So, some of the information that's in the piece, actually a good amount of information, was coming from them and their personal experiences.

NS- But why would it not be feminist experiences, why is it black feminist?

CH- It is black feminist experience in regards to me being the choreographer and in regards to me bringing in other black female writers like Ntzo Shange who was another big inspiration. A lot of my research and dance choreography is about bringing in the black female voice and I turn to other choreographers and writers like Jawole Zollar and Ntzo Shange, women who are examples for me, and I bring their work into my pieces. It gets more confusing when I'm bringing dancers in who aren't black women, because I have to figure out ways they're not just trying to replicate the black experience that I'm bringing. Like in this case, the text of Ntzo Shange. So in that regards, I do think that it became more of a feminist experience, but to me, I think it's important to have that particular black female voice in the choreography, not just the other voices, and it kind of, I would say, makes a through-

line for me. It's something I can really grasp on and use within the piece and then fuse that with other people's experiences, but it stays true in a way to that black female voice, without me just putting it on them and saying, "Hey, you're going to be black women and live this experience now," because that wouldn't really make sense.

7 **Black Feminist Standpoint Theory Overview:** Black feminist standpoint theory is premised on the importance of including first-person female-based narratives in theoretical analyses. Feminists created this theory based on women's standpoints and argued that women's narratives held a different knowledge and viewpoint than men's, especially concerning gender subordination. Black feminists later expanded feminist standpoint theory to include analyses of not only gender, but race and class during the 1960's and 70's. Scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins argued that black women needed an alternative epistemology that included analyses of race, class and sexuality due to black and white women's social disparities and perspective differences.

8 During the 20th century, black people utilized race constructions to form communities and resistance against the government, and in the sixties and seventies, subverted the negative connotations associated with "black" and looked to their ancestral history in Africa to establish pride and dignity within themselves and their culture. At the same time, black dance also became a category of performance and attempted to define a black aesthetic (DeFrantz 5). Though "black dance" did not have a specific aesthetic, the black arts movement worked in some of the same parameters of the black power movement, to create art that was inspired by, about, and for black people. Integral to this movement was the involvement of the community where the artist and the audience were not separate, but were two forces working together and considered extremely valuable (DeFrantz 5). At this time, blackness was seen as essentialist, a carry-on from its original connotations. Many scholars, such as Brenda Dixon Gottschild, have challenged race and essentialism. Theories like post-structuralism, that view society as a social construct, argue that race does not have anything to do with blood or DNA, but evolves around language and meanings that are arbitrary without their being any connection to societal identity and labeling.

9 In this paper, when I refer to being "black" I am coming from an essentialist viewpoint, because I am aware of the power that labels and constructions have placed on our ability to think and identify, which affects how public audience members view performers. I agree with cognitive science and philosophical researchers, Lakoff and Johnson, when they state that "every living being categorizes" (17). We have been trained and taught to categorize people and things with labels on the basis of race and gender and we do it because

categorizing items is a necessary neural function. Though some categorization happens consciously, the majority of categorization is unconscious and formed through our experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 19). My artistic work does not challenge categorization by creating new categories through methods of reversals such as cross-dressing or physically transforming gender and race, but utilizes the raw body as it is apparent in the world and perceived by the status quo, because it is on that every day level that I am interested in change.

10 **NS-** That's a very interesting position because what I want to ask you about is your creative process, and specifically how these theories played out in your process -- you know, in real terms.

CH- In real terms? **NS-** How did you integrate theory? Explain with specific examples.

CH- Okay. So, going back to Ntzo Shange. We read a monologue that was called, "somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff" and she talks about this woman who has been taken advantage of by men and has "lost pieces of herself" due to that. She goes on this journey of how she can get that back, how she can get her stuff back, and it's written very poetically. So, we read this and we watched film footage of it and I had them do writing exercises about their "stuff," defining what their stuff was to them and situations that they felt their stuff had been taken. A few dancers went into the literal terms of "my stuff" being "my sexuality" or "my virginity", and talked about being in situations where they felt a man abused that and took that away from them, and how they felt they were left with nothing -- they were shamed, they had low confidence. Then, I had them write a poem or words of how they would take that back -- ways they could get that back for themselves or they could let go and get that back. So, that's a way that in the process actually, that black feminism came in and then I had them dance it through improvisation, or at least apply that energy to the choreography that I gave them that was coming from my body and my experience. I also took the writings and created choreography based on their writings so it was a mutual exchange.

11 ***somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff* excerpt:**

lady in green (excerpt)

somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
not my poems or a dance i gave up in the street
but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgettin while stealin
this is mine/this ain't yr stuff
now why dont you put me back & let me hang out in my own self
somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
& didnt care enuf to send a note home sayin
i waz late for my solo conversation
or two sizes too small for my own tacky skirts

what can anybody do wit somethin of no value on
 a open market/did you getta dime for my things/
 hey man/where are you goin wid alla my stuff/
 this is a woman's trip & i need my stuff/
 to ohh & ahh abt/ daddy/ i gotta mainline number
 from my own shit/now wontchu put me back/ & let
 me play this duet/wit this silver ring in my nose/
 honest to god/ somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/
 & didn't bring anythin but the kick & sway if it
 the perfect ass for my man & none of it is theirs
 this is mine/ nt ozake 'her own things'/ that's my name/
 now give me my stuff/ i see ya hidin my laugh/ & how i
 sit wif my legs open sometimes/ to give my crotch
 some sunlight/ & their goes my love my toes my chewed
 up fingernails/ niggah/ wif the curls in yr hair/
 mr. louisiana hot link/ i want my stuff back/
 (Shange 49-50).

12 **CH-** Another way that the experience of the dancers came in was by doing self-portraits. I had them at the beginning draw themselves, how they imagined themselves, what they felt they looked like, and then take words from their drawings that explained what they saw mentally, or imaginarily, or emotionally and also physical elements from the drawings, and than make "I am" statements with them. So it would be, "I am light blazing eternally," or something like that, and then we would dance those out as well. We would do improvisations and they always had a partner who was holding their drawings while they did their dancing and said the words. They were coaching their words to them and the dancers were coaching their words back. I also took movement from those explorations to set in the choreography that was coming from their bodies and their experiences of how they viewed themselves, and that changed over time, because it was a process of getting to know ourselves in that particular way with the drawings and the movement and the words describing who we were.

NS- So basically, your dancers have to bring their own experience, right?

CH- Yes, and this whole "I am" dance imagery was created by Anna Halprin who is a pioneer of postmodern dance and is also a healer, a performance artist, and does workshops all over the world on self-healing.

NS- Black?

CH- No, she is not black, she is Jewish (laugh) which could be argued as being "similar". There's some relations, but for me that's more of a spiritual aspect that comes into the work.

13 **Anna Halprin's Dance is Life Process Overview:** Born in America and of Jewish descent, Anna Halprin is an artist, healer, writer and teacher who recently celebrated her 90th birthday. Along with her daughter, Daria Halprin, Anna co-founded the Tamalpa Institute

based in Northern California. The Tamalpa Institute specializes in training students in movement and somatic psychology in order to teach them how to integrate mind, body and emotional connection.

14 I took my first workshop with Anna the summer of 2009 and later in 2010 at the Esalen Institute located on the coast of Big Sur. The Esalen Institute offers artists of all mediums a place to retreat and engage in workshops and/or personal practices. Anna's workshop, "Dance is Life," began on a Sunday evening and continued until Friday afternoon. We practiced the process for eight hours a day over a period of three sessions, while eating meals and sleeping on site. The workshop included drawing and movement exercises, nature scores, and movement rituals that included lessons in anatomy and psychophysical relationships.

15 I believe participating in this workshop for the last two years has significantly changed my life and my views on dance. The depth of knowledge I experienced in this workshop consumed not just my body, but my psyche and soul. I was converted to the process within five days. My inside soul was exuberant with the experience. When I left the institute, I felt real change, and that I had grown as a full human being. For example, many of the exercises Anna guided us through seemed to easily translate to real-life situations. One practice that stands out was a partnering exercise that explored the dynamics of passiveness and aggressiveness. Anna spoke about how in relationships, each partner exhibits a certain degree of passiveness and aggressiveness, and our confrontations are negotiations of these energies. We practiced dancing certain amounts of these qualities with a partner, and I witnessed how difficult it is to encourage someone who is completely passive to cooperate in physical movement. Also, it was almost impossible for us to be completely aggressive at the same time. This exercise made me aware of passive and aggressive qualities in my intimate relationship that I had never been able to define in a material sense before experiencing it in terms of movement. I had only been receptive to the dynamics we have towards each other on an emotional level. Performing these types of exercises heightened my consciousness and my ability to see what I was feeling, as well as have a better understanding of my emotions. For one of the first times, I felt I was in the presence of an artist whose spoken metaphors translated into physical realities that I could easily apply to situations in my life.

16 **CH-** At first I thought this piece was going to be all about love, and that was really my first inspiration -- to show a work where there were all types of different people loving each other and getting along (laugh).

NS- I remember that.

CH- And I got that from the *Cosmic Race*. It's a book written by Jose Vasconcelos that talks about the fact that we are evolving into a race that is not based on color or ethnicities, but is based on consciousness. I believe that part of consciousness comes from knowing yourself. So, that was part of my inspirational goals, that through the dancers knowing more about themselves, that would facilitate a higher consciousness, and that we could become more than just 'I'm a black woman' and 'you're a black man' or 'white man' or 'Latina' or whatever.

17 The Cosmic Race Overview: Jose Vasconcelos, a Spanish descendant, was born in Mexico, and is considered to be one of the most important and influential Mexican intellectuals of the twentieth century (Vasconcelos 1). His theory on the cosmic race argues that the Latin American mestizo constituted a new race, a “cosmic race” which would be the race of the future. Though criticized for being racist, Vasconcelos’ theory is interesting in his explanation of why the New World was formed and differing cultures were forced to mix. He predicts that the multi-racial children of future generations will serve as peacemakers in the world. When looking at differences and new ways of acceptance, it makes sense that physical and cultural mixing would be extremely impactful in ending hate crimes and tragedies, such as ethnic cleansing and genocide. Jose predicts, “The future race will not be... destined to prevail over its ancestors. What is going to emerge out there is the definitive race... made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples and for that reason more capable... of a truly universal vision (3). The final race. The cosmic race (Vasconcelos 4).”

18 NS- Lets go back to where Anna Halprin comes in. Explain the ways her work was inspirational to yours.

CH- Her work was inspirational to me more on a therapeutic level and a consciousness level because as a dancer and a choreographer, I am not as interested in only creating movement, putting it on my dancers, and then directing them to do it in the space. I am definitely more interested in dancers coming up with their own movement and broadening their experience and their horizons and feeling as if the piece is connected to them for real. I am interested in performance being genuine, like physically, spiritually, for the performer. It's hard for me to really explain that in a logical speech type way, versus just a kinesthetic feeling way, you know. It is hard to explain what the difference is when you feel like you're in the piece, versus just doing the choreography you're told to do, and that's more what I'm interested in because I've been dancing for a really long time, and what excites me is when it's real -- when I feel like its open and channels are being opened, and things are passing through, and the energy is at a conscious place than just mimicking what I'm asked to do. So, I felt like when I've done Anna's “I am” process, it's been very real and true to me. When I have

watched people do this process, they create movement that seems authentic and coming from their bodies, but it is also connected to things they're going through at that moment, and I wanted my piece to have that inside of it -- those qualities and experiences inside of it, versus just telling a story or something like that, so it got jumbled in there.

19 **NS-So when you're talking about it, I think you are speaking to ownership -- the dancers taking ownership, being affected by the engagement in the work. So, how did non-movement elements play a part in this whole process? I'm talking about lights and costumes and all that. Did you have to use them?**

CH- Did I have to use costume and lights? No, I don't think I had to, but I knew that the ending goal was to create a performance in a space that is accustomed to having performances as a thesis concert, and I think that too is what I'm interested in -- the balance of using the aesthetic components of the concert dance realm but also having the therapeutic, spiritual, theoretical aspects inside of it. So, we could have gone raw and bare-naked, but I had these elements that were at my disposal, like an awesome lighting designer. I also think that lights are important as far as changing moods and changing the scenes, and because my piece was choreographed in sections that shift, the lighting really helped with that. The costumes? I'm not a big fan of costumes personally, and I tried to find a costume designer, but my costume designer backed out on me at the last minute. I didn't really know exactly what to do. But I also have this thing where I feel like it is important for my work to reach younger generations of women who I think need guidance, and that I'm just more inclined to help. I feel like I'm attracted to helping them. So, definitely the costumes were a reflection of that more contemporary dress. I had this idea of metallic colors, and I think that the female body is beautiful and is something that can be shown to be beautiful and sexy, and I think that gives young women a sense of power as well, so I had that in mind when I was choosing my costumes.

20 **NS- So the lighting is making your work more spectacular and the costumes is somehow to give power to the feminine?**

CH- Yah, and then the two men were dressed very simple, but I would say more contemporary -- dress slacks and a button up shirt. Another thing I didn't talk about, integral to my process, was the importance of nature, which connects to the water element. We did do work in nature, like mirroring exercises and sensory awareness walks where we'd close our eyes and walk around outside, and learn to feel and trust our way without the eyesight to build up other parts of the senses. Also, doing the dancing outside in the grass, and paying attention to the sky or the sun, and how it feels on our feet and on our chest, added to our process and

helped me as a choreographer be able to bring in elements of nature into the studio. I could say, "okay we're going to practice this section and we are going to concentrate on when we did it in the grass and how that felt." Or, "we're going to concentrate on how it felt when we were mirroring the trees and those shapes, and put those shapes into this part of the piece." I think, going back to the spirituality of it, the consciousness of it, and the higher energy, that nature is a big part of that, it's a big part of us, and when we disconnect ourselves from that, we're not as connected to each other, or to the work that I am interested in doing.

21 NS- So, how does this element of nature as an inspiration, how does that match up to the feminine?

CH- Well, I could just say, mother earth is mother earth and that we are a part of it, but I think it has a lot to do with especially being a woman. I'm not going to go into the whole analyses of what makes a woman and I'm not even trying to be biological, and again this is where black feminist standpoint theory comes in, because right now, I'm speaking from my own experience. I can't speak for all the women and what they believe, but as far as from my experience, the connection to the earth and its growth and life is also a part of me, and I experience it definitely, especially being a mother, and those natural elements tend to seem very feminine to me.

NS- Are you willing to establish a strong connection between the black feminist and nature as partners in your inspiration?

CH- Yes, I think so.

22 NS- I'm interested in the other aspects of your non-movement elements like props and sound. Did you have any other text besides the "I am"?

CH- Yes, besides the "I am" we did "Hey, Gimmie My Stuff" which was inspired by Ntozake Shange again and also by what I've learned in African and African Diaspora culture of the call and response method. So, I would call out the text and they would respond in a song that went along with the movement. It also pointed to the feminist nature of it, because in the piece, that song was directed towards the men and at that point they became silent -- their voice wasn't as pronounced as all the women's voices were. Because I was using Ntozake Shange's monologue as an impetus, that thread of black feminist theory came into the section, as well.

23 NS- I'm interested in your sound, and how you arrived there.

CH- I feel that I am definitely a contemporary choreographer. I usually approach movement without having any sound at first, in silence, and I knew that I wanted to work with an electronicist that could design the sound. I didn't want to use songs that I already knew. I

wanted the work to be composed, and I wanted it to be in a free enough range musically that I could do all types of movement to it. So, I wanted to work with someone that could do that. Luckily, I met Albert Mathias when he was here for faculty dance concert last year, and I really enjoyed the way he worked with Kathleen Hermesdorf creating sound for her piece. He's really open to different ideas. So, I had approached him and asked him if he'd be interested in creating sound for my piece, and he said "yes" which I thought was wonderful. Since we were at a long distance from each other, I basically looked into his past music repertory and chose music that I felt fit the qualities of the movement I was working with. I then created my own score from his different songs and sent it to him, and he adjusted, added, and gave advice, and finished the sound. In the lag spaces of the piece, he created sound to help carry over the sections into the next part. Beginning the piece at a certain sound frequency and changing it into a different sound frequency was important to me, and Albert is someone who has a consciousness about that. I knew I could relay and work with him on that.

NS- Very important, the evolving.

CH- Yah, and sound always affects the bodies and what they are doing. So, it was really important that the right sound is coming in at the right sections at the right time to create the atmosphere, as well as the impulse inside the bodies.

24 **NS- I think the sound was fantastic, but I have a question. You talk about shifting tides; you talk about your connection to nature. You talk about the feminine and your connection to the monthly cycle and all that, and you had a piece that was drawing from all these to present a feminist piece of work. I'm wondering about what concentrations you had along these lines in choosing who played your music and what material he used? I'm talking about your musician was male, and also, I know some people record live music like nature sounds and rain sticks and stuff, organic material. You used electronic music. Was this a conscious choice or just what showed up?**

CH- It was conscious. If one of my big points was to find a female musician and to have all this natural sound happening, I could have concentrated on that, but my focus was on me creating the work. I saw it more as a gift, that this world renown sound designer who has worked with well established contemporary dance choreographers, which I think is an important factor, was considering performing in my MFA concert. Since Albert has worked extensively with modern dance artists, I felt like I could communicate to him what I wanted, and that it was an easy process. I also knew that he was reliable, and that he could elevate the space while supporting free form movement at the same time. I did think about him being

white and being male, but he is a part of the world, and that's just how it happened, to be honest. NS- So, just to be clear, you are using black feminism to be inspired but it is open to other voices. CH- Yes, it is.

25 NS- My biggest question was, has always been, what difference does it make that you have created this work?

CH- I think just having dancing bodies makes a difference in the world, because dance is something that is pertinent to our existence and everyone is in constant motion with their bodies and continually moving. The body is a vessel for many things, for everyday activity, but also for power. Some people invoke different spirits and deities using the body. Other people use it as a method of healing. There are those big grand things, and performance in general can be a reflection of what's going on in our society and it paints a picture for people. Like I said, in the U.S. there's not much about the black female experience and giving a voice to that, but I also showed that different people can come together and create a work, and can comment on things that I personally feel should be changed in this world. For example, I have this scene with me and Deshawn and the rest of the dancers. I call it 'the animal dance scene' that shows us in a different state, as far as this more ferocious and fierce state, and it kind of plays with this idea of the man and the woman and the Garden of Eden. In the original story, the woman is a temptress and eats the apple, but instead I changed it in the performance to show two bodies, a male and a female, going after the apple, but the man being the one who actually eats it, and the woman then having to take on the consequences from that. I think that's what can be beautiful about performance. You can take ideas that are renown around the world, like this apple idea that I feel has been forced upon a lot of cultures, and change them. The whole Adam and Eve story, I don't believe is really my personal creation story, but I've been forced to know it, and I have been somewhat forced to accept it, even though I don't. And I can take something like that, and people can know where it's coming from, and I can say, "well what about this, have you thought about it this way?"

26 NS- So your re-writing the universal archetypes?

CH- Yes, you can re-write it, and I don't know if people realize how impactful live performance is, or even film. Any time you put people in a space and you show them something, it becomes part of their collective memory or their individual memory, and then our own collective memory together. We can be making new ideas, and showing new ideas, and showing ways that the world can be, and that was my original impetus -- to show that our reality doesn't have to be what it is. That reality can be something else. I can believe that I am the stars, and that I am the mountains, and that I am perfect, and I am beautiful, and that can

be our reality versus not having those types of confidences. I also work a lot with stereotypes because there are a lot of stereotypes surrounding different people, different ethnicities, women, different races, all these different categories we have. I'm interested in turning over those stereotypes and presenting something else into the world, presenting another truth, and I think that dance can do that.

27 Touch is very important, and I implemented it into my piece, and choreographed the audience being touched by me. I think it's important that we realize we are all human beings that have emotions and lives to live. On the regular proscenium stage, I think it's easy to get away from that -- that people can watch, and they can kind of check out if they want, and just think that they're just watching a pretty picture. I want it to be more than that; I want people to know I'm alive, and I'm breathing and I'm serious about the world changing. I'm serious about the world changing, and I'm serious about putting this out there. So, I'm going to touch you, so you can feel my electricity go into your electricity, and realize that we're not that far apart, that we don't have to have things separating us, there doesn't have to be that fourth wall, that we can live beyond that, that we can live together and share the same spaces -- that we can connect.

28 **NS- So, you're questioning the status quo? Or attempting to push the edges of what is normal or acceptable? Do you feel like you got the message through? Do you believe it's been a worthwhile project in terms of impact?**

CH- Yes, I feel that it was successful. I know I can talk more for the dancers and how they changed over the course of the process in knowing themselves and opening up themselves, and being able to take on different expressions of dance that they weren't necessarily doing before. Audience wise, I know that I went out during intermission and people were talking, and there was a buzz and an energy and a warmth in there, and people were excited and communicating with each other, which is different from other shows when I've come out into the lobby and it's quiet and people don't really know what to do. The audience's energy intensified. **NS-** Because there's something to chew on. **CH-** Yes, and because it was different. It was different than just the normal proscenium stage performance. I also think that if the performers are changed, then that is going to be noticed by outside observers. That energy is going to be able to latch on to someone watching if it's really true. So, I believe that in a way, they got some of that energy of transformation that we as a core cast experienced. Then, when reading students papers, they reflected that they appreciated the empathetic kinesthetic perception, and people told me they were on the journey with me all the way, and that they felt present, and they felt like they were in the piece, and that we were taking them

with us on our journey versus them only being observers. That's really what I'm fond of -- people being able to go along with me, even though it's only in this 25 minute time frame, that we can, over the course of the year evolve, and bring some of that evolution and transformation to the people watching us in that short time span. I think that definitely happened, so I'm happy about that. I feel like this is a lifetime of work, and I just started doing it, so I'm just going to continue.

29 NS- I always have this question given the current world situation. I know the piece took months of work and took a lot of energy and resources. Do you think that this is the best use of your time or the resources in contemporary society? Given the needs that need to be met, is this the best use of your resources and time and energy?

CH- Is it the best? Well, I think it's a part. I think there's a lot of work to be done, and at the same time I was doing this, I was also volunteering at the domestic violence shelter teaching yoga, so it wasn't like I was 24 hours just on this piece.

NS- Is there some of that information you are willing to integrate into the paper and into your thesis to give context to who created and what kind of life it came out of?

CH- I can. My interest is in doing the same "I am" process with other people, and I was doing that with children who are victims and live in domestic violence households, and I am interested in continuing that and setting movement with them, and them doing their own mini-versions of Shifting Tides. Those would be a lot more condensed and not so much involved in lighting and sets. I don't know, well, that's part of the issue I think with therapeutic work -- I don't know if it's for people to just come and watch. I don't exactly know that, but I do know that I do love the concert dance world, and I myself go watch performances and I don't think that should stop, but that I want to be changed now when I go, if I'm giving my time to go watch something. I want it to change me; I want it to effect me.

30 NS- So, you're very interested in utilitarian practical use of the form. So much as you're into concert performance, you feel that the material should not just be art or some intellectual exercise, but should effect people on other levels emotional, psychological, spiritual, in which way it borders on the transformational experience. Would you call it healing?

CH- I think it's healing for the people involved. I don't know if it's healing for the people watching. I haven't been able to get into that too much and healing is such a general word. I know that I don't think that people left abused, nor the dancers. Were they healed though? I don't know. I know they were excited and they felt good and I think that's healing, but that's me, and other people coming from other cultures would say that maybe if you're depressed

and you're really tired, that's actual healing. I come from a place where I think that joy and happiness is a beautiful thing, and it is very healing. People were smiling, and people cried during the performance, they must of had a visceral, emotional experience of some regards. I think that was profound, but I don't know if it was healing.

31 **NS- Now many in the arts are devoted to making art and you seem to be edging towards more, I don't know what to call it? What would you call it?**

CH- Arts for social justice maybe?

NS- Or arts for social change?

CH- I'm definitely into social change and I know that piece has that for sure. But, I don't know if it's because I'm from California and in California we don't have as much of a separation between art for social justice and art. In California, most of the more avant garde artists, even if they're creating work in the concert realm, still base it on something. There is usually a transformative purpose behind it that has a spiritual or social basis. It wasn't really more until I came here that I started seeing such a big division between "community" dance pieces and "high" art pieces. In my undergrad we were fighting against that separation of high art and low art or popular art and these categories, and I think it has a lot to do with categories, and the fact that in Western culture, we've been taught to separate these things. In my mind it's not really separate. I understand that some art is going to be done more in communities and it's not going to be dancers that are working in technique class everyday doing it, but I wouldn't say that that's not art either.

32 **NS- I think that there is something to say for the kind of work you're doing in terms of the impact, but when you find yourself in mainstream environment or mainstream institutions there are messages that come across very often. You realize that the piece of work that is focused on technique and spectacle may be more pleasing to watch and when a piece that is not so tilted to that end is made, it tends not to be high art or have all the sharp lines and manicured arms. As an artist living in mainstream society, what are your experiences with these two?**

CH- It's so interesting because I think that talks to the context of the work as far as genres go. A lot of my modern teachers have been postmodern, and postmodern movement was about bringing the real person into the concert dance world, and not having to be trained, and not having to be able to do double pirouettes and attitude turns, but just having the body in the space. Walking was considered okay in the postmodern movements, and modern concert dance seems to have gone into this more technical ballet oriented realm. It's hard because I have definitely been technically trained, and I don't dismiss technique. So again, I feel like

I'm trying to balance those worlds. I come from a postmodern lineage that says if you just walk its okay and it can be put on the concert stage, but obviously isn't happening right now. Right now, in contemporary dance, it is that mixture of balancing, like Bill T. Jones, Liz Lerman and Anna Halprin. They are more the artists I identify with, who bring in regular people and teach them movement, but it's not all technical, but will also have a cast of more technical dancers doing harder phrasing and styles. I'm more interested in mixing that -- mixing the 'just human' with the technically trained body dancer, mixing the therapeutic with the stylized aesthetic forms that I've been taught.

33 NS- Does this have any bearing in the feminist?

CH- I think so. I think it has a lot of bearing in feminist theory, because feminist theory is based on the world. Bringing light to everyone basically, whether they're oppressed or not. It is more of a horizontal theory, horizontal plane versus a vertical lineage. In the horizontal realm we are all just existing and we need to be acknowledging everything and everyone, not just the patriarchal form. The patriarchal house has levels and the highest level is this, and below that is that. I think in dance, when you can mix these different ideas, it helps level it out into this horizontal realm versus being patriarchal based in hierarchy.

34 NS- You said you're more aligned to the postmodernist. What's the difference between postmodernists and contemporary?

CH- I think that the postmodernist movement was a big rebellion and it was a 'taking away'. It's also linked to the civil rights movement, but it was this idea that 'I am this, and I can do whatever I want, and that should be okay.' I should be accepted, even if I just stand here and twiddle my thumbs, I am still a human being and I should be accepted, and this idea of acceptance for everyone was a big basis of the postmodern movement. The contemporary post-colonial movement is more layered. It's taking in history and culture as well, and adding those layers onto the postmodern body, versus trying to shed everything. I felt that postmodernism was trying to shed, and based in the idea of sameness. The contemporary post-colonial framework is more about saying, "No, we have histories, we have backgrounds, we have a culture, and I don't need to get rid of that, but I can understand that I am a human, and I am existing now at this time, but I can also bring in those other influences that I have. I don't have to hide them, and I have to learn how to work with all those layers to create that dance."

NS- Now modern, postmodern, avant-garde or post-colonial, are they not all rebellions to something?

CH- Yes. Of course (laugh).

NS- Thank you.

CH- Thank you.

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