

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Un/Commoning Pedagogies: Moving To/Gather in Difference

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RASHID JOHNSON. THE NEW BLACK YOGA. SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK PURCHASED WITH FUNDS CONTRIBUTED BY DAVID SHUMAN, 2012. © RASHID JOHNSON

## Introducing: Un/Commoning Pedagogies Collective

Collaboration, as Lauren Berlant described it, is a “super-intensified version of teaching” (Wang 2019). Since 2019, the Un/Commoning Pedagogies Collective (UnCPC) has been creating a collaborative space in which radical anti-racist approaches to teaching and learning are explored, exchanged, and elaborated *through embodied modes*. In these times of broadening commitments to reckoning with the racism and white supremacy deeply embedded within social structures, especially with regards to our structures of education, we regularly come together to move, to discuss, to listen, to process, and to collaboratively write towards liberated anti-racist futures. We are Black folks and white folks<sup>1</sup> working in studios, in higher ed classrooms, and in performance spaces. Our work lineages and histories are rooted in various kinds of movement practice. We bring the moving body into our classrooms and studios whether we are teaching dance, Africana studies, anthropology, sociology, performance studies, cultural studies, or gender and sexuality studies.



**FIGURE 1:** THE UN/COMMONING PEDAGOGIES COLLECTIVE (UNCPC) WORKSHOP AT THE DANCE STUDIES ASSOCIATION 2019 CONFERENCE, *DANCING IN COMMON*, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY. PHOTO CREDIT: JESS MCCORMACK.

As anti-racist dancer-scholars, we understand that our bodies are included in anti-racist practice, and that anti-racist discussions need to be part of the movement classroom/studio. We are inspired by the collaboration between The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) and Urban Bush Women (UBW) who integrate embodiment into the work of undoing racism. As UnCPC, we carry lessons learned from trainings with PISAB and UBW, as well as other related endeavors, to develop methods not only for talking about injustice in our classrooms and studios, but also for enacting the work of undoing it. We center the importance of the body in addressing racism and

other forms of oppression, while knowing that it is through the body that these injustices and violences are enacted. We insist that the body both holds an awareness of how racism works and must be engaged in efforts toward more just, equitable, and joyous/joyful futures.

We began our work together as people from various positionalities wanting to emphasize the importance of moving alongside one another while honoring difference. This anchors our labor toward crafting embodied anti-racist practices in our spaces of teaching, learning, scholarship, and performing. As a collective we foreground movement just as we embrace the time needed for each of our voices to be heard; we are friends and we are collegial; we do the work for which we are advocating—a relatively uncommon choice we continue to make in our contemporary moment of consumer-oriented production and neoliberal institutional models. In subversion, we meet regularly to just be in relation, as we also labor together to bring other modes of being into fruition: producing workshops in academic settings and at conferences, co-authoring articles, sharing movement practice, making performance together, and discussing classroom and institutional dilemmas, challenges, and successes. We involve each other in classroom/studio exchanges, where we co-teach across the borders of our various institutional affiliations.

In spring 2021, during COVID’s rage and an intense spring semester, UnCPC facilitated several workshops, classroom exchanges, and a performance—all online. Inside of these varied engagements we employed a simple yet generative exercise we called *Do Something, Do Something Different*. This exercise invited participants to focus awareness and intentions towards their fellow movers in order to *Do Something, or Do Something Different*. Participants would follow one

person’s movements – *do something* – and when they had an impulse to move in a different way – *do something different* – they could follow another person’s movements or offer up a movement of their own. In an online meeting setting, some movers would collectively (and wordlessly) explore what it was like to move their whole bodies within the frame of their screen, while others would experiment with a close-up perspective: a creasing forehead, a puckered mouth, blinking eyes. The simple yet challenging instruction to *do something, or do something different*—follow one person or another, be a leader, or move on one’s own—illuminated a plurality of possibilities for thinking through the challenges and promises of this current moment. How do we

pay attention to one another? What does it feel like to initiate group movement? How might one move as another does? What does it feel like to initiate movement to which others may not feel drawn? These questions speak to our collective's larger concerns regarding the importance of working with and across differences, while also attuning to one another, forming group practice, and feeling what it feels like to move in times of isolation, fatigue, and instability.

Here, in this essay, this exercise anchors our written reflections and our sharing of tools for facilitating body-based awareness and collective movement practice across demographic and spatial contexts, all geared towards anti-racist learning. We begin with setting intentions for collective body-based anti-racist work and provide some guidelines for collective care. From there, we move into an orienting Grounding Practice, which then bridges into a foundational question of the Un/Commoning Pedagogies Collective: How do we build spaces of connection without nullifying difference and positionality? We respond with a series of written conversations in which we provide examples of teaching that integrates and explains body-based exercises. These reflections offer engagements premised on positionality in various ways to further illustrate the power—and potential misfires—of centering the body in our work with students. Next, we introduce readers more fully to *Do Something, Do Something Different*. Each collective member offers insights they have gleaned from the exercise as we've led it in different contexts. We close with an integration practice that we use as an integral component of our workshops and classes.

## Grounding: Collective Care Practices in Embodied Anti-racist Work

### Community Guidelines

We always begin group processes by devising community or collective agreements. Such agreements aim to craft an intentional framework for gathering and serve as important foundations for forging anti-racist and equitable spaces, with the aim of allowing participants from marginalized socio-political locations to be fully present and heard, while also decentering whiteness. Our practice of devising collective agreements adopts strategies from Urban Bush Women (UBW), the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB), and the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA). The principles we work by are

also inspired by the authors and practitioners cited in the [re]source list. The following agreements informed our writing and can be a further guide for your reading, in addition to, of course, teaching or facilitation. These agreements are ongoing, and only the beginning of the journey.

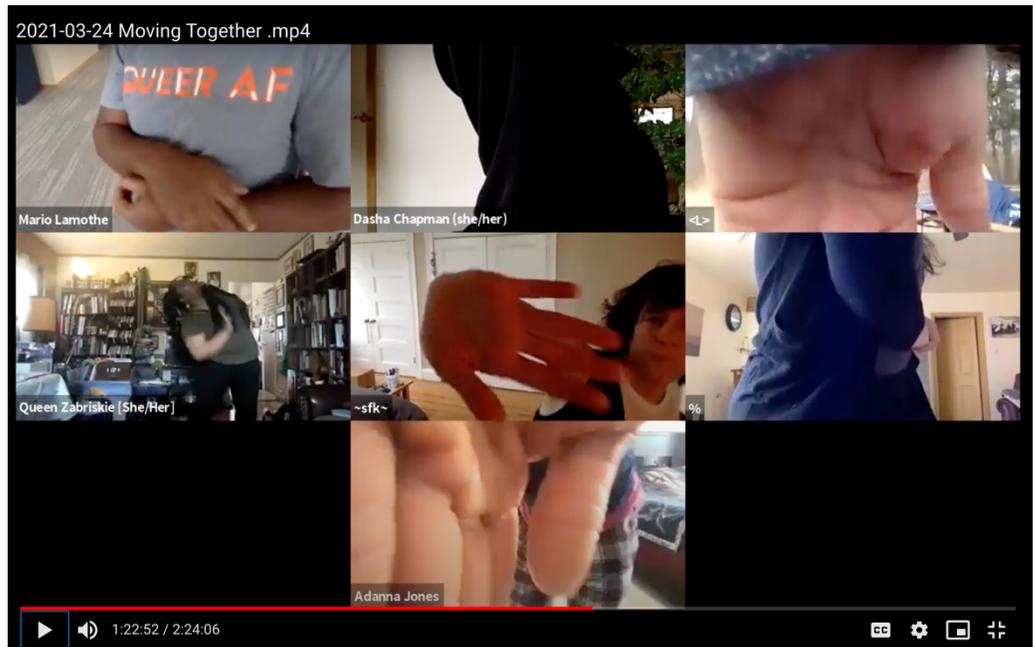


FIGURE 2: UNPCP GROUP MEETING, *DO SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT* EXERCISE. SCREENSHOT FROM ZOOM VIDEO, 2021.

1. To BEGIN:
  - a. No one knows everything; together we know a lot. Trust that there is more knowledge in the dialogic exchange of information.
  - b. Write/Read not as an expert, but as a part of.
  - c. What happens here stays here, and what is learned can be shared.
2. On CONTRIBUTING:
  - a. Step up, step back. Be aware of how much or how little space you take up in the group.
  - b. Speak from the I. This allows us to hold ourselves accountable, concretize the abstract, and remain honest and embodied (i.e. deeply connected to our own bodies).
  - c. Assume good intentions, but recognize impact.
3. On PROCESS:
  - a. This is a space of learning.
  - b. Value experimentation and collaboration.
  - c. Trust the often uncomfortable process of growing.
4. On DIFFERENCE:

- a. Respect and appreciate differences.
  - b. Listen-feel-sense for understanding, not debate.
  - c. Being together in our differences takes time, long-term commitment, and patience.
5. On EMBODIED PRESENCE:
- a. Be present, stay engaged in your body.
  - b. Take care of yourself as needed.
  - c. Practice returning to the body.

These agreements aid us in bravely inhabiting the space in collectivity, preparing us to attend to our moving bodies.

## Grounding Meditation

Grounding serves as a warm-up to more full-bodied exercises; it opens the possibility for deep listening with and through our body. We often utilize this exercise in our UnCPC meetings and in our larger community workshops.

### **We invite you to undertake this meditation as part of your experiential reading of our article.**

In a quiet space, settle your body comfortably supported in a chair or laying down on the floor. Set a timer, take off your glasses, soften your gaze on to a single point, or close your eyes.

Ask yourself this question, and notice how it lands in and on your body in this moment in which you find yourself:

### **What is pressing on you in regard to anti-racist practice and embodied teaching/learning?**

For one to three minutes, let's meditate on this question. Notice your embodied responses to it.

Scan your body, and ask this same question again: **What is pressing on you in regard to anti-racist practice and embodied teaching/learning?** Notice and describe your bodily sensations. Begin from the top of your body and move down. Or begin from the bottom of your body and move up. Breathe normally and pay attention to how the air affects each part of your body with every inhalation and exhalation. Bring awareness to the areas you often ignore, such as your jawline, in-between your ribs, or your fingers and toes. With each breath, note any tensions, discomfort, knots, or twinges. Describe just the sensation, or, in continuing to take stock of your body's sensation, offer attention to one body part and recover the lived moments that your body is now holding on to.

Here is an example of a body scan, though yours should and will sound entirely different. *The top of my head is open, I breathe normally, and notice how the air affects other parts of my body with every inhalation. I notice that there is tension and stiffness in my jawline. This tension feels old, prickly, stuck, yet mobile. When I wear a face mask, I push my bottom jaw forward in order*

*to breathe better. I teach dance wearing a face mask and my students now need air breaks in addition to water breaks. What is pressing on my body is air and the right to breathe.*

We ask that you complete this activity alone as an experiential part of your reading. However, in group settings and practices, you can do it in pairs where one person is the silent witness/listener and one person is the doer/vocalizer. If you are conducting this work in pairs, a clear transition between roles is vital.

This grounding meditation exercise tilts the practice of meditation and the ubiquitous "body scan" toward urgent matters, yoking somatic practice to social context and self-reflection. In doing so, understandings of one's habits in relation to the stakes of anti-racist practice potentially reveal themselves in one's visceral, physical, sensorial form. This practice can be tilted toward any number of burning or resonant questions that might be well attended to through embodied self-reflection. The next section is framed by one of these questions that we as a collective have dwelled upon since our initial convening.

## SHARING: How do you build spaces of connection without nullifying difference and positionality?

The following provides a view into written and verbal exchanges we have fostered since the early days of our collaboration in 2019, carried through 2020's pandemic circumstances and intensified movements against anti-Black racism, and through to 2021, when our concerns press upon us and our students in increasingly visceral ways. Specific exercises we have used in our classrooms, workshops, and studios are accompanied by reflections on how these exercises work in and through bodies. We each speak from our individual positions—from the I—accounting for our own movement histories and how they inform our pedagogies, acknowledging how such positions influence the ways in which each of us approaches building anti-racist spaces of connection within the academic settings in which we work.

### **Making Space to Show Up in Crisis**

[AKJ]: As a Trinidad-born, US-raised, always ready to *bus' ah sweet wine*,<sup>2</sup> sometimes creole, unmarked as Latina, yet always-already recognized as "Black" and "female," I carry varied embodied and movement-centered knowledges with me into all aspects of my work. In my teaching, I am committed to carving out multiple types of spaces for sharing, responding to, and proliferating the wealth of our combined knowledge(s) through speech, text, and movement. With the invasion of COVID-19 into the most intimate parts of our lives, the very ways we understand each other and the world have come into question. Faculty across the globe were asked to transition from in-person to remote teaching *immediately*. And we, as an institution and community, had to come to terms with the inequities that were once invisibilized by the very shelter of the ivory tower (from food security to health, safety, and access to technology and tools). In effect, the first thing that I felt obligated to address was: "How has this drastic shift in

learning, connecting, and communing affected how you live, at the level of your living, breathing bodies?" From this space/place, students were asked to literally use their bodies to respond to our in-class discussions and readings (both before and during the shelter-in-place mandates). This allowed us all to show up however and wherever we were, mentally and physically. And according to my students' feedback, it allowed them to stay connected to their own bodies as well as to each other's felt experiences, even as we transitioned into remote teaching/learning.

Fast forward to Fall 2021, when my classes were no longer remote and I had to deal with the effects and affects of COVID in-person. The realities of health, death, and care—both for our whole selves and our larger community/(ies)—hit us (my students, myself, and the college more generally) *hard*. Making space for processing our realities, so that I *can* teach, learn, and show up to class, became a game of structured improvisation. The "structure"—our Class Agreements (which were modified versions of the Community Guidelines discussed above)—became the constant that I used to ground the students and the class itself. For instance, when the campus had to deal with a massive tragedy, my Afro-Caribbean dance class needed to pause and breathe outside of the classroom and my repertory dance class needed to find breath in the classroom and with each other. Our first class agreement is "Stay present/in the room," which I have further defined as: "Take care of yourself as needed" in order to be an active participant. You are expected to move and engage with your whole body, so it is important to take care of all your needs so that you can show up and be present, especially with regards to your health and overall wellbeing. Better said, I am teaching students to take the time to process and access what resources they themselves have to call upon to meet their mental and physical needs in order to show up and be active participants in-class. Upholding these agreements, from nourishing their bodies (i.e., hydrating, sleeping, eating, etc.) to nourishing their minds (taking time to breathe and process their anxieties or emotions), became a practice of improvisation. The choices we made as we moved through time and space—as dancers, students, and just humans—all became an act of meeting the moment and leaning into our strengths. What I then learned, based on my students' participation and my own experience, was that this particular way of improvising gave us permission to show up (even when it felt most raw or vulnerable) and still contribute to the class in a way that gave us access to those goals and intentions of the course which remained integral and necessary. Simply put, it is all about IMPROVE-I-sation! With that said, as a few of my colleagues mention below, not every student was willing, able, or open to such work; so I had to make space for their resistance, our discomfort, the disconnections, and the misunderstandings. In other words, I had to really lean into this idea of IMPROVE-I-sation.

### **Playfulness is Rigorous**

[ML]: I confront this question of positionality, critically working through my positions as a Haitian-American scholar and artist educated at elite institutions in Haiti, the United States, and France. I am surrounded by caring colleagues and collaborators. Yet I navigate my interactions with students and peers with a relentless emotional and physical

fatigue, laboring to hold these positions in critical dialogue and tension with my interlocutors' senses of self. I aim to deeply sense and feel bodies in spaces; my body relaxes or stiffens according to the energy they emit. We actually all do this, though some are better at gatekeeping felt-sensing interactions. Thinking of this, students and I devise rules of conduct for infusing playfulness and kinesthetic learning in an institutional classroom laden with arrogance—taking up Maria Lugones, as cited by D. Soyini Madison: "norms, rules, expectations, values, and structures are not for playing...[in] spaces inhospitable to our identity and being" (Lugones in Madison 2019, 123). I became acutely aware that the onus falls on me to underscore playfulness. Playfulness does not equate to a lack of importance, as a student formalized in her disagreement with my methods in a course evaluation. Therefore, the first week of any class, I use the following exercise (Madison 2019, 25) to aid students and me in keeping this question as our compass throughout the semester.

Clusters of at least three students each analyze an image I have pre-selected that features a group of people. It can be from a photograph, a painting or visual art piece, or an advertisement. I tend to select images that include a diversity of bodies in locations or situations that are not overly familiar to the students, so they don't rely on pre-existing meanings as they move through the exercise. Students are then tasked to "D.I.E.T."—describe, interpret, evaluate, and theorize—how individual positions and social differences are conceived, imaged and circulated. They describe the elements such as bodies and objects of the visual material and ways that design elements (shapes, forms, colors, etc.) contribute to enhancing the image. They interpret the image and consider the visual material's details, and to the best of their ability, they propose ideas the artist is trying to convey. They evaluate the image; they reflect on the effectiveness of the artist's message as well as bridge their interpretation to popular and theoretical knowledge of the social and cultural conditions of the people and objects being depicted. Last, students theorize. I urge them to think critically about the visual object's significance for viewers, and to discuss the artist's position vis-à-vis what is being documented. To nuance their theorizations, I ask them to reflect on their own position vis-à-vis the image and to explain how they register it.

The active embodied component of the exercise requires students to be living statues: they stage the photograph and facilitate a conversation between the image creator and the depicted scene. Each student then speaks from the points of view of the various objects or characters within the image using the following prompts. How are they each expressing differently what it means to be within the frame or parameters of the image? How are they expressing their relationship to the other figures or images around them? In their various voicings of what is within the image, are they giving more emphasis to one or more bodies and/or objects over others? Why and why not?

Enabling students to discuss their awareness about relationality and positionality, this is an exercise that can be repeated intermittently with them to direct attention to how they might contend with and reproduce social positions and relations. They perform stand-ins to bodies in the

foreground and background of an image and our everyday life as a means to understand the imbricated ways in which power differentials are represented, narrativized, and appropriated, while at the same time embody the effort required to shift these dynamics.

## “How I Move”: Towards Choreographies of Social Locatedness

[DAC]: I am a white first-generation American whose Jewish parents grew up in South Africa and Israel. My work as an educator is steeped in and emergent from over seventeen years of dance-based study, ethnography, and collaborative relationships with African, Caribbean, and African American dancers and arts-activists. With training in Africana movement modalities and Performance Studies, I teach interdisciplinary courses in dance studies which integrate practice, theory, and history. Because of my short dark curly hair and how I move through space and on the dance floor, I am sometimes mistakenly identified as light-skinned Black or mixed-race. Teaching at the intersections of disciplines, worlds, and practices, I made clear then (and now) my social identities and my social commitments to my students up front.

An exercise I’ve incorporated into many of my courses—all of which blur the separation between studio and seminar—investigates what white feminist Adrienne Rich terms “politics of location” in tandem with what Black feminists insist on as intersectional positionality. I encourage students to consider how one’s intersecting social locations (positionality) are in fact physically inscribed, incorporated, experienced, performed, reinforced, reinterpreted. How do you move through the world, literally (c.f. Adeyemi 2017)? What disciplinary forces, trainings (broadly conceived), and circumstances make particular movements possible or impossible, proper or improper? I assign readings to prep the students in their considerations—tilted more or less toward “Dance” or social location, depending on the class. Students write short essays in relation to these readings and questions. In the next class session, we parse through their writing to find the action prompts and descriptive terms they themselves wrote. We then use those as movement prompts to explore through the body in the studio. After some individual work in relation to their movement/action terms, students string together a brief phrase or improvisational framework for their own “How I Move” choreographies. Afterwards, we reflectively write again. Throughout the semester, I return to this process and the students’ choreographies in various ways—again, depending on the course. Sometimes we use the movements generated as each student’s base from which to explore other concepts (such as discipline via Foucault, or the erotic via Lorde); other times the exercise becomes a consistent touchstone for students’ analyses of how social formations are in fact bodily, and how this gets mobilized or rearticulated through specific dance practices.

This work can be difficult, but rewarding. During one movement session, a white student who had written from a kind of self-deprecating paralysis resulting from her white privilege felt frustrated in the studio by the immobilized

inertia that her written words prompted in her body. The discursive, once reflected back to her in this way, shed light on her bodily desire to actually activate herself differently. This was a “non-dance” student and the experience powerfully marked her recognition of what embodied engagement with ideas can do.

Doing this exercise with a different class, a Black student who was highly sensitized to the consistent surveillance and policing of her everyday bodily existence, was not comfortable exploring movement in the presence of others whom she did not know well. After noticing her discomfort and checking in with her, I suggested she spend the time writing about what she was feeling and experiencing. In many ways, her inability to feel free to explore (her own) motion in the studio was an iteration of her initial writing about surveillance in everyday life, so as difficult as that was, it seemed to “fulfill” the exercise intent. This exercise prompted a recognition of the ways that this student’s consistent practice of dancing in her bedroom by herself served as her daily restorative and liberatory praxis. These bedroom dances became the site of her final research project, investigating “shapeshifting” and Black women’s choreographies of recuperation (Cox 2015; Knowles 2019).

## De-neutralizing the Dance Studio, or the Dance Studio as an Intersectional Space

[LW]: In DAC’s example of inviting students to respond to/explore positionality as a movement practice, I am struck by how the bounds of this exercise necessarily expanded beyond the classroom. Addressing identity and positionality challenges the norms of my dance training—in which the studio was presented to me as the ideal laboratory, a neutral space. This neutrality is a myth that perpetuates white supremacy.

[QMZ]: My earliest dance class memories are filled with artists, educators, and activists using Black culture and history to challenge ideas of white supremacy and undo the impact of racism on youth in my community. My family’s creative life was deeply connected to the creative arts center that we lived right across the street from, Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center. My mother, Beverly Zabriskie, sold her bean pies at the center and volunteered as part of an arrangement that the center made with parents who could not afford the classes, even after receiving scholarships. The artists, educators, activists, and youth at Mind-Builders taught me some of my earliest lessons about the power of the arts and equipped me with life lessons through movement and songs that I still sing to this day. It was through Mind-Builders that I met my first West African dance teacher, Ms. Wilhelmina Taylor, who, with love and discipline, taught valuable lessons about respect, pride, and dignity. Mind-Builders, my mother, Ms. Taylor, and others at the center continue a Black aesthetic legacy which struggles for “the right of black folk to love and enjoy” (Du Bois 1926) life, themselves, their community, their heritage, and their culture.

## DOING: Do Something, Do Something Different



**FIGURE 3:** UNPCP GROUP MEETING, *DO SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT* EXERCISE. SCREENSHOT FROM ZOOM VIDEO, 2021.

The exercise *Do Something, Do Something Different* was rooted in collective member JD's studies with white "downtown" New York City postmodern improvisers such as KJ Holmes and Jennifer Monson, and emerged as a more formal improvisation structure during their collectively devised ensemble work of the mid-2010s. While crediting the influence of improvisation studies with Holmes and Monson is necessary, it is also important to credit the often-unacknowledged influence of Black, Indigenous, and Asian cultural practices that value improvisation emergent from the collective; influences that white-historicized postmodern improvisation practices have historically invisibilized, beginning in the 1960s and continuing on in the legacy of experimental downtown dance.

### *Instructions for Group:*

We will move together for three minutes.

Your task is to do something or do something different.

The goal is for only two things to happen at the same time—something and something different.

If you decide to do the same thing as someone else, do it exactly the same, knowing that exactly the same is impossible.

If you decide to do something different, do something really really different.

### *Notes for facilitator:*

If conducted over Zoom rather than in person, ADD: If possible, please turn on your camera.

You may repeat the cycle as many times as desired, adding new layers to the prompt. For example, in the second round: Now when making movement choices play with speed, levels in space, distance/proximity, etc.

### **Reflecting: Experiences with this Exercise in our Classrooms and Workshops**

[JD]: As a first-generation student, white, queer, and from an under educated, rural, working-class family, my experience in most environments, especially in higher education, is one of exclusion and difference. I also emerge from the legacy of the study and practice of white postmodern dance, which, in my experience, tends to universalize experience, decentralize identity, and invisibilize white privilege. Still mired in white postmodern dance—with its universalized experience, decentralized identities, and "neutralized" white privilege—I desire to continue to facilitate dialogues and experience around strategies, tactics, exercises, and conversations about how to be together with difference in our collective movements. How do we model something

different, together in our differences? How do we exist in difference, together, with the utmost care? How do we promote inclusivity without defaulting to a universalism that is inherently white supremacist? How do we experiment and be open, without expecting everyone to have the same experience? How do we un-privilege the calm, rather than the anxious or uncomfortable?

I struggle with moments of cohering the collective in relationship to cultural differences. I desire to be part of a we from our various complex and nuanced identities, without inflicting the harm that comes from a we that privileges white supremacist, colonialist, cisgendered, classist (and other) violences. Just noticing my body aids me in moments of difference—I notice my breath, the shape of the container of my body, feel my feet on the ground, the weight of my head. Attuning to my body allows for my experience to shift. I check into my body, notice what sensations, temperatures, qualities, images, pains, ruminations are present—move through my thoughts, feelings, emotions. Integrate. I am able to approach from the calm, approach from the embodied, and respond rather than react. I have learned this approach from dancing, from meditation practice, and from experiments and experience in integrating theory and practice in my teaching. I find these kinds of integration exercises useful to approach all types of thinking and learning, and especially potent when addressing difficult subjects like racism, colonialism, equity and inclusion, and intersectional power hierarchies.

*Do Something, Do Something Different* is one more toy in the toolbox and tool in the toolbelt for how to be in and move with difference—rather than extract from and exploit

difference. I have been teaching versions of this exercise in classroom, studio, rehearsal, and hybrid contexts for nearly a decade. Un/Commoning Pedagogies collective has employed this exercise as part of public lectures and workshops, guest lectures and class visits, co-taught classrooms, breakout rooms in our virtual workshops, as well as in process and performance. *Do Something, Do Something Different* is a physical means to practice difference, practice community, practice togetherness. The exercise encourages participants to be seen, to make choices, to lead, or to follow. *Do Something, Do Something Different* requires people to be aware of themselves alongside other people. In fulfilling a replication of someone else's movement, students/movers/people learn about the impossibility of exact replication. *Do Something, Do Something Different* enacts and embodies the inherent failure of exact repetition and the inherent failure of how being together is not the same for everyone.

*Do Something, Do Something Different* reveals how in trying to be the same there are choices made about what part you are copying. Participants engage in whole body movement or small gestures or everything in between. Their choice-making process is very choreographic—it focuses on an orchestration of movement through space and time. In this context, then, is it the speed, the shape, the position in space/on screen? Choreographic, here, functions also in terms of the social—how do you choreograph or arrange yourself in relationship to other people. Choreographic, however, does not mean movement arises from original invention. In fact, *Do Something, Do Something Different* presses on the notion that movement invention can be original—instead it reveals how all movement is sourced from other movements.

[DAC]: Doing this exercise as part of a UnCPC guest workshop with Dance MFA candidates, I am at once co-facilitator, participant, and witness. I notice a Black woman's assured comfort in leading and making choices around changing movement, and other people's recurrent draw to her choice-making.

In my "Dancing Diasporas: Black Dance in the Americas" class at a small liberal arts college in North Carolina, I see my mostly but not all white students looking to me for direction. Then the outspoken white male sets himself apart and creates a new stream of movement with "daps" and other gestures gleaned from Black vernacular culture—an embodied archive he is just starting to recognize as carrying forward Black aesthetics and histories.

In a small group with three students and me, we use the exercise to explore how we make choices, mirror each other, and develop empathy. What does it feel like to be inside someone else's movement? I try to recede in my screen as we oscillate between following the ease of sweep and arc expressed by a white American trained dancer, the cautious yet curious arm explorations of a white new-to-dance student from Italy, and the small intimate gestures around the face of a Black American trained dancer.

The following questions arise as I practice this exercise, and can be used as guides or prompts for discussion:

What does it mean to follow someone? What parameters define the bounds of moving with, as opposed to moving differently? Do you notice yourself hanging back, often choosing to move like someone else, or do you notice yourself always being one to change the trajectory? What might that tell you about your relationship to the/a group? What feelings come up as you follow another's motions, instincts, and inventions? How does it feel when you have the power to make others move? What does it feel like to initiate, to guide others in movement; to define the shape of group movement?

[SFK]: The invitation to move or be moved, to see or be seen, felt like an antidote to the stressors of showing-up from our confinement spaces over Zoom. The intense upheaval of the moment called for reckonings big and small and here was a way we could continue to engage, a way to move inside of anti-racist teaching and practice even while remote. Adjunct teaching makes the cadence of my work unpredictable and so during our UnCPC Spring 2021 collaborations, I was not teaching. Participating in our collective work without the pressures of teaching provided me the space from which to clarify how I situate myself as a white cis-het woman anthropologist studying, thinking, and teaching through West African vernacular performance.

Prompting each of us to move with attentiveness to our fellow movers, *Do Something, Do Something Different* shed light on how I show up in my white body even as my intention is to be present with those who were right there showing up and moving on my computer screen. It took me some time to find a rhythm; at first I wanted to make sure that my whole body was in the frame, but doing so while attending to the folk with whom I was moving was challenging—I was too far from the screen to really see what others were doing. Coming closer to the screen, moving a hand, an eyebrow, an elbow, a foot enabled a more direct and durable connection, one that allowed me to follow and be followed. Releasing my own effort towards being seen to the task of more clearly seeing and echoing back others' movements shifted my watching and listening in a way that was more attentive to the collective. Responding to my fellow movers' initiations prompted in me another way to feel into what it is to step back as a white woman: to witness and to follow with compassion and care.

[QMZ]: I have to admit, the first time I participated in this activity with UnCPC it felt fun and silly, but I did not see its power. It felt like a good activity to use to connect with others and warm up in preparation for the "real" dancing, and so I engaged with the spirit of "trusting the process" (PISAB). As we continued to explore this exercise with different parameters and I moved my body trying to follow and connect with my collaborators as well as figure out when and how to go off and do my own thing, different thoughts and memories began to surface. I often struggled with my own limiting thoughts, which I'd internalized from different dance and non-dance contexts.

When I tried *Do Something, Do Something Different* in my undergraduate Race and Ethnicity class during the

Spring 2021 semester, I did not know if my mostly non-dance students would be open to such an activity. However, my co-instructor, Dr. Sarah Hernandez, and I were having an issue with getting students in the online class to keep their cameras on, and we were worried that students were starting to disconnect from each other and the class. We often started our sessions with a grounding activity to help students relax and connect to themselves. I wanted to see how *Do Something, Do Something Different* would work as an activating activity to help them connect to each other. Much to my joy, the students turned on their cameras and moved together in similarity and difference. When discussing what came up for them in the group, one student jokingly commented that they were happy they were in their room by themselves and that no one was watching them. We all laughed in agreement. Later in class, my colleague, Dr. April Flakne, brought us back this student's comment during her critical phenomenology lecture to talk about how we often internalize ideas of others and/or standards of society and how this impacts our own actions, self-concept, and how we move in and through the world.

[AKJ]: The first time I experienced *Do Something, Do Something Different* was during one of our UnCPC "move together" Wednesday morning sessions. I remember the exercise giving me a sense of purpose at the time. I was feeling a bit all over the place and spread thin, due to my academic responsibilities. But because I needed to pay attention to everyone on the screen in order to make the simultaneous decision on how to contribute something different to the space whilst remaining in unison with my colleagues, I found myself connecting to my colleagues in ways that affirmed, challenged, and expanded their/our moment-to-moment experiences. After we used this exercise in our performance at Brown University's Festival of Dance, I had my students incorporate it into part of their final performance for the Spring 2021 Virtual Dance Concert. Because of Covid-protocols, we were still doing everything virtually. And because I experienced the success of *Do Something, Do Something Different* as a virtual exercise firsthand, I wanted to have my students try it out. They were given this task, only a week before the concert, so they only had two classes and one rehearsal to figure it out. Oh and they struggled—they felt lost, wrong, confused, efforting to find and maintain connection. It is important to mention that my students always want to be "right." If they feel awkward, then they think they're doing it wrong. So, in response, I ended up changing the rules a bit to help ease their anxieties around not wanting to "mess it up." But now reflecting on it, I see there is value in "feeling silly." So if I were to do it again, I would have them "relish" their feelings of awkwardness, "beyond the expiration date" as S. Ama Wray might say.

And I have even taken this lesson into my current classes, creating a space for students to remain in the liminality of feeling "silly or awkward," such that they do not feel panicked or anxious. Together, my students and I have learned to trust each other in a way that fosters constant improvisation, constant in-betweenness. Their task now becomes trusting the "not knowing," the "awkwardness," the feeling of being "wrong" or "silly." In doing so, they now

have the option to show up *as they are*, with their discomforts in-hand and at the forefront of their consciousnesses. In other words, I have tasked them, and myself, with bringing our whole persons into the rooms, whilst remaining transparent about who we each are (now and in the moment). From this place of clarity, we literally move, improvise, and (re-)create our voices with dance. Instead of asking, "how do we dance when we are not OK?" I now ask, "What does your dancing need to look like, given the person you are now and in this moment?"

[LW]: When JD offered the *Do Something, Do Something Different* score in our group, it gave us an immediate way to be in movement conversation across our varied movement vocabularies and histories. I enjoyed the focused attention that I felt when joining someone in their movement, seeing and learning from their particular embodied voice, studying the details. This score asks us to jump into that learning, "Do something!" and to remain supple. As soon as I "got it," "it" shifted, and something new arose in the group. At the same time, all of our inclinations and desires were invited to the party. When we joined an action, we added volume to what was already happening. When we "did something different," we catalyzed change.

I taught a loose version of this score to the students in my course, "Moving, Making, Meaning." Instead of limiting it to two actions at a time, they could join any action that they observed, or they could offer their own. We played with doing this at different percentages: 50/50 borrowing and offering, then tilting toward more joining or more initiating. (I learned about "playing with percentages" in dance practice from Chris Aiken.) Afterward, I asked them to choreograph short sequences with movement gleaned from the shared practice. They performed the resulting choreographies a few at a time, and the students who were watching gasped with appreciation for the connections and distinctions between each person's creation/curation. Each student's dance drew on the communal memory bank that they had created together. Rather than collapse into a single movement vocabulary or unified style, they each articulated the felt experience of moving together through their own voice.

[ML]: The doctoral students enrolled in my graduate-level Anthropology seminar "Critical/Performance Ethnography" experienced this exercise 12 weeks into the semester. The embodied session "Pleasures and Challenges of Collaborative Work" in partnership with Brown University's undergraduate Theater Arts and Performance Studies students followed scaffolding work about how ethnography is implicated in many of the themes reviewed in this essay. It was an opportunity for our multi-ethnic, multi-national, physically- and ability-diverse students to rehearse how our previous discussion about critical and performance ethnography seriously considers the contingency, context, and aesthetics of interactions in the field and of quotidian life. Additionally, nine out of the ten students who participated wouldn't call themselves dancers, and one lived with mobility challenges. Yet, through this exercise, many of

them acknowledged how simple pedestrian gestures they offered and the mirroring and adaptations of those by others attended to their sense of bodily comfort in various spaces and tapped into their archive of sensory knowledge that let them “read” identity codes, and structures of power. The consensus was they experimented with the possibilities and limitations of establishing strangers’ trust in a bracketed timespan, much like they would in the field. The session evolved into an expansive, unexpected, and humanistic choreography, all the more beautiful because they felt that consent was discussed prior to the exercise. It allowed them to subtly negotiate consent throughout: Some people choose to be witnesses (be off-camera and observe). Others participated as much as they desired or were able to. The choreography seemed to undulate as people flocked around a movement and broke away from it. It activated their sense of humility and appreciation for doing necessary yet potentially fraught collaborative work.

## Integrating: Closing the Container

Integration is a necessary component of the work. In our processes, we aim to open people up towards courage, which can also open wells of emotion, memory, and sensation. We must therefore carefully close the portals. A closing practice supports the recognition of what came up or came through in the process, and prepares people to move out into the world beyond the container.

The following integration prompt offers a way to feel back into the inquiry and touchstones for learning, and serves as a kind of “before and after” consideration to see how the work has landed, where it has landed, what it has unearthed.

Take a moment to bring yourself to stillness; to sit back from this text and all that it contends. Soften your gaze, turning it inward. Feel into your body once more, coming back to the body scan practice at the opening of this essay. Pick a place to start your scan: from your feet and up along your spine to the crown of your head, or from the crown of your head along the spine down to the soles of your feet. Notice points of reverberation, of tension or tenderness along the way. Stopping in those places to bring care-filled breath. You might place a hand on those places to cue your breath there or to simply bring warmth and physical support. When your scan feels complete, pay attention to your body’s sensations. How does it/do you feel now, as opposed to when you first started reading this article? Take note and reflect.

We offer you a moment to attend to the places and spaces that come away feeling shored-up, or possibly tender or unraveled. Integration is not necessarily tidy; it is about bringing an awareness of the work done and the work that remains.

## To/gathering: A Postscript on Moving Together in Difference

Our first collaboration as what would become UnCPC was formed to plan and facilitate a workshop for the 2019

Dance Studies Association Conference for which the “commons” was a central theme. One of the guiding questions for our workshop was, “How do we forge common ground without nullifying difference?” In the three-plus years since, we have continued to ask this question while engaging in frequent dialogue, co-leading workshops, co-writing and co-editing articles, exchanging teaching, sharing movement practice, and creating a virtual performance. Meetings often include time to talk about what is coming up in our individual teaching and research as well as our familial and professional relationships. Tiredness is a theme, but this takes a different toll depending on how we are situated. When, as part of our collective work, we began a shared movement practice in 2020 across Zoom squares, an exercise in repetition and duration brought by one of the white collaborators yielded a powerful conversation about how the stakes of pushing and exhausting oneself land differently for bodies racialized as Black or white.

In the world and in our classrooms, we each hold quite different positionalities in relation to race, gender, power, and privilege. Our urgencies look and feel distinct from one another. And, while we share a rootedness in dance and consider embodiment integral in our teaching, many other aspects of our teaching, our relationships to institutions, and our fields of study diverge. We find resonance together, but not as a single voice. While somewhat unwieldy and slow at times, our seven-person collaborative writing, moving, and facilitation work reflects our pedagogies. This work helps us dig into how we want to hold space for others in workshop environments and craft space for the body-in-difference in academic environments. As we continue to ask, “What is urgent in regard to anti-racist practice and embodied teaching and learning?” we are aware that the necropolitical effects of racism on Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color mean that the stakes of anti-racist practice are located at thresholds between life and death.

It was during the meeting in which we were finalizing these essay revisions and also processing a difficult semester that we found out the news of bell hooks’ transition. In the midst of processing two of our Black colleagues’ intense challenges navigating white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalist structures, continually reinforced as they are by people in leadership within institutions where they work and circulate, one of them saw the devastating news and vocalized it to the group: “bell hooks passed at the too-early age of 69.”

The space we hold for each other enacts an insistence that we gather in difference. We also recognize the vital importance of affinity spaces in which people of similar racial identities commune for support that can only be worked out amongst themselves. Affinity spaces offer valuable opportunities for metabolizing, healing from, and gaining new insights into racialized experience. We utilize this necessary practice at times. However, as Un/Commoning Pedagogies, our call for “moving to/gather in difference” mobilizes us to convene in ways that allow each of us in their fullness to shine in relation; that is, to activate and put into motion what hooks, following Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called “beloved community,” “where loving ties of care and knowing bind us together in our differences” (hooks 1996, 263-264). As hooks advised: “Beloved community is formed

not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world” (hooks 1996, 265). We work inside a practice that centers our never-neutral, socio-historical, political, and politicized bodies. We reclaim our connections to embodiment that have been severed due to, as hooks articulated so well, the entwinement of white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism. We believe this effort can provide routes toward “care and knowing” each other and ourselves in transformative ways that make us better comrades in the work of visibilizing, challenging, and undoing white supremacy in our respective spheres of influence, labor, and love.

## Notes

1. While still up for debate between us, our decision to capitalize the “B” in Black and not the “w” in white was influenced by the debates of the time in 2020. See Coleman 2020; Pika 2020.
2. Trinidadian saying, meaning to seize the moment and *wine*, which is a rolling hip dance that includes, but is not limited to, dexterous and vigorous rolls, gyrations, thrusts, and shakes of the hip, pelvis, and buttocks.

## [RE]SOURCE LIST

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