

# My Body

## Performer Journals



Laura Walker  
MRes in Creative Practice  
UHI Shetland

### Note to the reader:

The journals have been arranged by date first. Performer names have been removed in an effort towards anonymity though they have all acknowledged that audience members (both in-person and digital) will likely be able to identify performer responses due to their reference of key moments in rehearsal.

All performers have approached their responses differently, and with varying levels of engagement with the personal thematic relevance.

Performer 5 withdrew from the research due to other commitments but consented for their reflections to remain part of the research.

**25.03.22**

---

### Performer Journal 3

Generally it was just a joy to be back doing drama. Specifically doing improvisation and exploration exercises than blocking a script. I was particularly drawn to being involved in this project due to its focus on women. Less on the 'body focus' than the female perspective.

However the body focus interested me as it assumed, for me, a physical focus, which is always the medium that interests me the most. Physical theatre is that excited me the most as an audience member but also as a participant. Perhaps I am more confident in expressing myself with my body than with words and that's possibly because of having a movement background but also because I feel less judged during physical responses and more self-conscious when using language. I find it much easier to be uninhabited about letting my body release than I do letting my voice free.

The idea of exploring and learning about particular physical methods is also exciting.

The group being so small was a little disappointing, though having past experience with more than half the group definitely makes it easier to let go and of course to trust. Only 5 of us there with a 6th to come means that the three of us here who have devised and created before already have an open understanding of where we are coming from in our own delivery. We already have got rid of inhibitions and have trusted each other in the past in terms of physical support and in relation to emotional sharing.

Laura, as the facilitator and researcher of this process is very clear and open about her intention and is very easy to warm to and feel safe with. Her ongoing shared creative friendship with performer 2 also means it is a comfortable group which feels safe and relaxed.

Coming into this type of body exploration, particularly when this involves contact with others is particularly strange because of our focus on space and audience during Covid. It's become almost counter-intuitive to hug, touch and certainly to be entwined around someone. Yet we do go there because the exploration leads to it.

Coming to in an unknown body and unfamiliar place make that exploration obvious rather than peculiar, however tentative it feels.

I find myself thinking of the part of myself that I can't physical see and that's then the part I wish to explore in others as it makes them seem more real to me.

Overall a good start and glad to have the chance to be involved.

---

### Performer Journal 5

Struck by the survey responses and how young they seemed. Seemed stark how much our focus shifts away from weight and mirrors to perhaps more emotions and empathy as life goes on. But then thinking - life is different for young women today than 30 years ago, more pressure? But I was 20 in the era of the superwaif model...perhaps different rather than more. Reminded of my own 20 something body and face insecurities. I have different vulnerabilities and insecurities today.

Felt good after the session. Good to think and move differently for the first time in at least 2 years.

**01.04.22**

---

## Performer Journal 2

### Initial Feelings

- Feel far more comfortable coming into the space having recently experienced a dance and movement therapy workshop. More confident in my movement and instincts / not overthinking
- Looking forward to collaborating with a range of women, with different backgrounds
- Very excited to create a physical theatre piece without the pressures of fulfilling academic grades, ticket sales, or other pressures.
- Curious to interrogate my relationship with my body in a different context.

---

## Performer Journal 3

I really need to write my thoughts much sooner after a session as my memory really isn't what it was.

Initial disappointment that there weren't larger numbers and new faces.

Also a bit sad we didn't do the crossing over name warmup that we'd done the previous week as that had felt like a good Friday awakening.

We chatted a little about a couple of the types of practices that we are going to investigate. Today we are going to look at Butoh and the style of Frantic Assembly. The Butoh involved very contemplative slow moving action with a lowness that felt quite grounded and earthy which kind of juxtaposed against the lightness that the slow actions seemed to create.

Frantic Assembly excise was very good fun. We worked in pairs to create a series of interlinking movements that utilised 'Round', 'by', and through in an endlessly repeating cycle that eventually helped create a story. It was interesting to see the different interpretations of its use with one group very clearly showing a character-based narrative and the other creating actions that were indistinguishable as separate movements.

---

## Performer Journal 5

Lots of work tonight on different tempos, volumes and repetition. Lots of folk saying they felt exhausted with it being the end of the week. Enjoyed the session and tried to push different movement styles, ones I wasn't so confident in. There was a nice shape to the session which seemed to almost build to a bridge and then crept back.

I feel already very trusting towards the others in the group. The space feels safe, grounded and empathetic.

**08.04.22**

---

## Performer Journal 1

Exploring themes – Motherhood / Weight / My body doesn't belong to me / Community.

I quite like the solo exploration of the themes – very freeing of the mind and body.

I feel like I'm thinking a lot about what the themes mean to me before I move and am unsure if that helps or hinders.

15.04.22

---

## Performer Journal 1

Feel a little more settled with the themes this week so can go into the space not thinking too much.

Also feel like I'm warming up more to reaching out during the movement exercise and engaging with others. I'm not as focussed on the internal thoughts behind the actions, rather more looking for that connectivity.

I find these sessions to be great decompressors after a stressful day / week. I get a lot of pent-up energy out, which is nice.

---

## Performer Journal 2

Survey response

(q.8) Mind-body separation – glad almost 3/4 believe mind and body are not separate!

(q.10) Fascinated that in noting how connected people feel to their bodies emotionally, responses were largely definitive. E.g. – very (8-10), neutral (5), or low (1/3). Few lingered in the middle ground.

I personally think I feel spiritually connected over intellectually connected?

(q.12) It's astonishing how far we project our views of ourselves onto others. Why? We ought to entertain the idea that opinions exist outside of our own, lived experience.

(p.20) I note how sad/angry it makes me that so much of our interaction with the world relies on a strong, positive sense of identity and appearance. Yet I know I am equally as bad.

(Conclusion) Super interesting to note that we seem to hold onto this idea of a shared experience / solidarity / community as females – yet each 52 respondent has identified wholly unique viewpoints and worldviews. I wonder if this has something to do with us perpetually feeling the need to rebel against patriarchal structures, or if it is our own engrained, learned behaviour? Safety in numbers? It's far more tangible a connection than males seem to experience. What other sections of society feel this way, if any?

Agree with the sentiment regarding body image. Less appearance fears = healthier and happier in my experience too!

...only 19% feel women should make their own choices re motherhood etc.?!

(THEME 1) Weight & Strength

- Excited!
- In line with my own relationship with my body
- What it is to lean into & accept my weight
- Similar to d+m therapy workshop reflection

(THEME 2) My body doesn't belong to me

- I feel comfortable in my body and identity, so curious to explore when I can't relate
- Interesting in context of pregnancy, politics

(THEME 3) Community vs Competition

- An interesting avenue of exploration as both have overt benefits and disadvantages
- I begin from a more community learning position
- Curious to see how far my feelings align – bad for being envious online & in gym

(THEME 4)

- I see myself as a mothering figure, interested to look into this further
- In what ways is this harmful or nurturing in our family units / close circles?
- Why haven't I wanted to be a mother?

[None of these categories exist in a vacuum. Which came first, etc. will be an interesting point of discussion]

Space to reflect on my own mum and generational stuff. Mum not able to mother me... etc??

...

It was nice to begin the session 1-1 with Laura, reflecting on my responses to the survey report. Particularly with some distance, I found it interesting to return to my initial thoughts and explore them in more depth with someone to bounce off. I do wonder how different our conversation might have been with our other participants present, though, as I think I'd have been less inclined to discuss questions regarding to sex openly. In saying this, I think having the opportunity to talk as an ensemble would offer a richer, more varied reflection.

I was definitely glad to have another performer enter the space for the physical exploration of the four themes. Despite moments of solo investigation, just having another participant in the space helped me to be less aware of myself / self-conscious.

Our exploration of 'community & competition' offered an interesting interconnection between push / pull, protection /

For me, it highlighted the complexities of female relationships in the desire to reach out and hold one another, while also experiencing feelings of jealousy or scarcity. When you think you are protecting someone, you're actually pinning/trapping them down. Moreover, the way we tentatively joined one another felt animalistic in some ways – sussing out the others' intentions and trustworthiness before committing to the dance. Ensuring the other performer and I were both going to keep each other safe felt to be a significant aspect of accepting the interaction.

Exploring the theme of 'mothers' was hugely interesting with performer 1 noting the little games which emerged between us and how much time we spent on the ground. It felt very reminiscent of my childhood, where I spent a lot of time sitting and playing on the living room floor. Especially when we played with our feet together and legs wide – as this is often how I played with my hamster with my mum and friends. In this way, many of the actions I did were drawn directly from things my mum would do with me. (e.g. walking fingers up the other performer's arm). It was comforting to take turns to mother and be mothered. It all felt very safe and careful.

'My body doesn't belong to me' is one I didn't necessarily feel much connection to, so was curious to explore physically. My initial response was to move in ways which did not come naturally to me, but doing this made it hard to think much beyond 'I feel daft!' / I then turned to using movement which felt I wasn't in control – pushing myself up against the wall in an effort to feel like someone else was in charge. I realised here that I was doing things to myself that were knowingly uncomfortable or silly which led to me feeling drained, stuck and tense.

Mostly I found myself using pushing motions with Laura reflecting that I reminded her of a video game character. Perhaps this was a subconscious point of reference for me to imagine being led by another.

**22.04.22**

---

### Performer Journal 1

Discussion: met the other participants / went into more detail on the survey results.

It was great to meet everyone properly this week.

I love that we got to look at the survey as a group. Now that I know more about the results and where the themes have come from, I feel more confident working with the material.

This week really highlighted the different perspectives on womanhood and the specific themes to me. Hearing what others had to say was really interesting as some of the themes I was initially struggling with was, I think, due to being unsure of how to relate to them (motherhood, for example). It helped expand my perspective.

It's also nice seeing as someone who participated in the survey now being involved in the practical element and interesting to see where the two meet.

---

### Performer Journal 5

After a long break session 3 was really a discussion around the issues. It was interesting though to hear a bit more about the survey and to give my own thoughts around this. My preference would be to look at body image and explore this in more detail but I'm not sure that would be the groups' ideal.



**29.04.22**

---

## Performer Journal 2

Coming into the session off the back of a tiring week was challenging. Not being in the headspace for an energetic rehearsal made me apprehensive, but I looked forward to having a full group again for the first time in a while.

Energy overall seemed to be quite low – so I was glad of the solidarity while sorry that we mostly all felt a bit flat.

Beginning the physical group exploration of 'weight' felt a comfortable starting point. I noticed I found it hard to stomp and use my whole weight as I moved – as an ex-dancer and someone who enjoys delicate movement, being heavy-footed is tricky and counterintuitive. I wondered what it would be like / how it would be possible to experience the whole weight of myself. Moving then towards working with another performer, I recalled the lifts and balances used in my previous movement work experiences. In particular, the advice that our hips are our strongest point of contact (e.g. mums with babies & dancers on Strictly). I wondered here how the significance of anchoring or lifts from the hips relates to us as women.

Give and take and sharing the burden became main points of conversation. Feeling safe to relinquish the weight offered by the others while knowing there was a strong foundation for me to offer my weight was a comfort during this exercise, although I noticed I was never brave enough to fully plant all of my weight onto the others for fear of hurting them. Partly, this is because I'm aware of the various ages within the cohort, but also the different physical abilities.

IMAGES: scales, friendship

Community vs competition was most interesting when explored as a collective. I found that I adopted the actions of the majority – as I remained singled on the sidelines. Our movements felt cat-like, as though we were protecting our patch of the street, and feminine in its fluidity. I moved the way I felt safest in adopting the actions of the majority.

To me, this reflected our wider society. Perhaps predominantly similar to the high school mentality among a lot of young women and their friends (from my experience!) as well as politically. By lastly coming together and completing a ritualistic wave-like movement, it was nice to be following the rhythm of the group while maintaining the individuality of specific actions. Perhaps we work best when we can maintain an element of personality amid the work of the community.

The next 2 themes I find challenging to explore. Despite having warmed up by this point in the rehearsal and feeling more refreshed, I immediately felt back into myself. Probably because I never know when to begin.

'Mothers', unlike my exploration the previous week, was a strictly solo exercise. It somehow didn't feel right to interact with the others. I also struggled to be child-like, sticking to being the nurturer. I found myself walking along a tight-rope – which I interpreted as needing to find the balance between being mothered and mothering as this is a question which has been prevalent in the wake of a recent break-up.

With my own mum having passed away years ago – I find it hard to explore as a theme as there are no direct maternal connections in my life. It is something I have always been pretty closed off about, so put my struggle to play with theme down to this.

Perhaps too, in conducting the exploration this week alone, my inability to be playful or find movement indicates a difficulty in mothering myself, or conversely, an aversion to needing to mother others.

'Body doesn't belong' offered more discoveries this week than last. Leading with similar start points, I chose to imagine seeing my body through a VR headset, which helped me to feel a disconnect between my mind and body. Curious to note then the digital connection between my vision of VR and Laura's previous interpretation of my video game movement.

It is also worth noting that there was one particular movement I unintentionally fell into which unlocked a strong and unpleasant memory. The physical shape washroom an event I had not previously considered to have had much of an impact on me... but clearly there is still some emotional debris there. I intend to go home and reflect some more on this, and perhaps mention it to friends.

☼ I made a conscious effort too, not to display my reaction as it was not something I felt ready to talk about.

---

### Performer Journal 3

Looking at mother as a theme.

Large period of self exploration that felt a little limited. Too easy to fall into familiar movement patterns rather than creating or exploring different styles.

I used the thoughts I had about the feeling of never being off duty with kids. Swapping from burst of energy and constant alertness to exhaustion and temporary resting.

When we moved into working in pairs I felt a need to explore reliance on friends or networks to support parenthood. The idea of the collective supporting each other in relation to time out but also in relation to childcare itself. There was also a feeling/action that was responsive to a time rhythm. A clock pendulum that never fully allows relaxation as the on-call status of parenthood is always on your mind.

---

### Performer Journal 5

We moved on to more exploration of our and others' bodies. We all have such different areas of sensitivity and ways of enjoying our bodies. By the end of tonight the agreement was to work on mothers, weight and society. It's all good although starting to feel a bit concerned about the final performance, such as it will be. I'm worried that there's no narrative as yet in our work, it feels like a series of slightly confused events. I'm going to trust the process though. It'll all work out.

**06.05.22**

---

### Performer Journal 1

Further exploration in solo work / 'My body doesn't belong to me' as our chosen theme.

I like that connectivity seems to be the thing that grounds us and allows for us to rebuild that connection to the body – allows for reclamation.

---

### Performer Journal 2

Today held a particularly emotionally powerful impact, which I hadn't expected. What I continue to find is that moving my body in certain ways or envisaging scenarios can unlock a strong response which I otherwise struggle to muster. For example, from Laura's invitation I found a sequence of movements from a time where I nurtured a friend at uni. In particular, dancing with them as my invisible partner to the music brought up a lot of sadness, grief for the lost relationship and hope that they are doing better now. Remembering what it was like to draw them in and desiring desperately to keep them safe and well, before watching them drift away and let go, really hit home what an impact we have had on one another. Strangely, this coincided with a conversation with my old flatmate and mutual close friend had about this person earlier today. I think having these deep emotional ties more readily available, I was more vulnerable to allowing them to overflow. Having drifted apart from this friend and reliving the care, support and love we'd shown one another proved a painful nostalgia.

Being able to cry openly in the space has been so liberating and healing. Knowing that I am safe in the company of these women who won't judge me or mollycoddle me has been key in enabling me to freely explore my own stories and tune into what my body needs and feels.

---

### Performer Journal 3

I came to this session very late and particularly exhausted and I think only took part in a small section but that focused on the idea of 'the body is not in your own control' (paraphrasing here!)

Community is what comes back to me but that may be a residue from the previous week, but I recall an intersection and frame of togetherness.

I also recall an exploration where barriers and enclosures were featured.

This could have been a result of parenthood [being put in a box with particular expectations or assumptions being made about your roles and therefore behaviours] [the barriers being a parent creates in relation to career, friendships, studying, social learning and participation] but could also have been about our bodies and illness or age putting barriers to our desires to go particular places or more in certain ways.

Puppet master / puppet.

---

### Performer Journal 5

I found tonight's session difficult to connect with. It's the first time this has happened and I think perhaps a couple of things contributed. When we warm up we do it individually and I guess I would benefit from a creative, group warm-up for at least part of it. When we started the first

exercise tonight it felt as though I was going into it "cold". The exercise was simply about creating a brief story about nurturing. I found it incredibly difficult to access any imagination initially and this frustrated me. I also felt oddly self-conscious for the first time in a while - perhaps because there were only 2 of us there I felt I was being scrutinised more closely, although this may just have been me!

The 2nd exercise resonated more for me - I guess I'd warmed up a bit by then. It's an interesting concept about "my body doesn't belong to me" . A lot of different routes to go with it!

**13.05.22**

---

## **Performer Journal 2**

I went into tonight's session feeling ropery. Having a cold all week, I've struggled to come into the space feeling prepared but glad to be here. If the previous weeks are anything to go by, I know I will leave feeling much better for being here.

Beginning, at another performer's request, with more of a group warm up was a lovely way to begin. I agreed that I'd like there to be more ensemble work to help bring us together since collaboration is key to the project. Particularly as I didn't feel great, I think working together helped keep me present and build my spirits.

Hold & release was a nice puppetry exercise – encouraging us to consider the impact or actions on another through the lens of 'my body doesn't belong to me'. Universally we agreed it was preferable to be the puppet & be acted upon. Is it easier to be manipulated? Are we used to it, hence why it was more comfortable than being the master? In everyday life I enjoy relinquishing control to another anyway, so perhaps this partly comes from not wanting the responsibility. I also noticed I considered the intricacies of performer 5's body more than she did mine, in terms of moulding individual knuckles etc. I put this down to me doing similar sculpture exercises regularly as a drama graduate, but it might be interesting to explore. On the other hand, she was far more forward in twisting & pushing me to move in tricky ways. I wonder if this comes from the trust that I will vocalise any issues? Or maybe an assumption / prior knowledge I am quite supple?

Then swapping pairs, it was great to work with performer 4 for a change! We got totally lost in exploring her puppetry so slightly dropped the specified task. However, playing with the tension / shifting weight just through the finger tips proved a worthwhile investigation – with spectators commenting on the ambiguity of who was leading who. Regaining and asserting our autonomy in this way felt organic.

Whereas, Performers 3 and 5 painted a much clearer story of a reluctant dancer. Beautiful and comedic, the power balance was really clear and explained in a fun way. For me, it highlighted the impact authority figures and voices have on our formative years and how this impacts our later life.

Finally, leading with 'unusual' body parts was an interesting prompt to consider the forgotten or unloved parts of ourselves.

Using the nape of my neck, I was compelled to consider 'a different perspective'. Giving it the chance to lead and experience the world was a challenge – being uncomfortable and wary of facing the wrong way, never knowing what I was walking into. Yet, when it left me I felt guilty for not giving it more time and space to really explore. I felt lazy and selfish. This is something I recognise in myself recently for feeling like I'm not trying hard enough to do nice things for others, and punishing myself too much.

## **Performer Journal 3**

I voiced my worry about a lack of energy within the sessions as I was feeling that individual stretches and sole physical exploration were somewhat limiting to my ability to feel creative.

We did a group warm up and then moved to slightly more directed exploration.

I found this much more satisfying. We did 'lead by a random body part' exercise which is not a favourite but gave a level of route to journey through.

We utilised the puppet/moulder/master theme that we'd started with the previous week but made use of it to create more of a story. I enjoyed what we created for maybe only the 2nd time through this process.

---

### Performer Journal 5 \*final session attended\*

A much better session tonight although my energy and focus was low at the beginning of the night due to a poor night's sleep. We did a group warm up which makes a difference both in terms of bonding and warming up as a group and connections within the group. Some of the exercises have been quite similar in the past and I have found that I get a bit restless doing these. It was a relief to do something different tonight. Pace could do with being altered at times and I must admit the constant music can make it more difficult to focus.

The performance date is 1st July. This gives me some continued anxiety as its difficult to see something tangible in terms of performance at this stage.

**27.05.2022**

---

## Performer Journal 1

Dealing with the theme of harassment.

I ended up enjoying this session way more than I thought I would. The steady build-up of the flocking to the more harassing elements was great for steady exploration. Perhaps helped by the fact that I know and trust the other performer and the researcher personally, I felt secure in exploring this theme in what felt to be a productive way.

The main crux of the conflict came down to power dynamics. I think the societal expectation that women should be more docile and submissive leads to some powerful images and shapes in the body being created when the body is more dominating. I think where the power sits in the body is also very interesting (for me, it was the hips and shoulders, a little in the knees also).

---

## Performer Journal 2

Tonight felt mildly frustrating in terms of attendance! However, waiting back for the remainder of the session with performer 1 was undoubtedly the right choice, and proved productive. When this [lack of attendance] happens, I find it difficult to rebuild the motivation to work...but never yet have I regret it. Something valuable always appears from every workshop, even when I least feel up to it. I think a lot of this stems from being recharged and fulfilled by the company of others – particularly those I consider friends.

ANYWAY! Exploring F.A's fluff exercise was a new and interesting way to excavate physical relationships for me. I was surprised how difficult I found it to remember our sequence, but after a while I allowed myself to roll with it and capture the essence of the original. Adding motivations and intentions proved beneficial to building connection and story, although I did notice my brain would fixate on Laura's offerings instead of just moving intuitively from the stimuli. Music also played an integral role, as it has throughout this process, in influencing the emotions or atmosphere of the space. As Performer 1 and I found ourselves on the floor, she on top of me, the song that began could only be described as something from *Magic Mike*. Such a serendipitous moment offered by our rehearsal backing track affirmed the fun, yet safe and entirely consensual relationship we have built. Laughing about the absurdity of the moment just after having open and caring discussions about how we were moving or touching one another felt truly joyful. This really made me feel looked out for and I appreciated how beneficial it is to double-check individual boundaries with colleagues/others/everyone.

I leave as ever feeling rejuvenated, with a renewed desire to look into...

---

### Performer Journal 1

Outdoor session! Flocking! Dancing! So much fun!

Loved this session! It just felt like a gigantic play session!

I feel like I got the opportunity to get to know the other participants better and just connect to myself, others and the world better.

It seemed to clear my mind more and I felt my focus heightened during this session.

---

### Performer Journal 2

Working outside this evening has a pleasant effect on the session. Initially, I thought lacking musical backing tracks would inhibit my movement and contribution but in fact, I think the natural environment had the opposite effect. The peace of the surrounding area and organic soundscape made space for us to move and respond to one another intuitively without the influence of a song's atmosphere, leaving me feeling very zen and present and in tune with myself. However, rehearsing in an open public space did restrict my willingness to fully explore – particularly when revisiting our topic for the opening sequence constructed several weeks ago. I wasn't able to fully let go into the way I usually can when working in a studio together. I attribute this to a mix of self-consciousness and perhaps prudishness (my section requires a lot of touching and squeezing of the body).

Going on to work together, as individuals within a shared organism, the flocking exercise was a moment of true cohesion, focus and calm. I felt able to go with the flow and move in ways which felt good, meanwhile retaining an awareness of various physical abilities. Moreover, I didn't once feel the need to compare my way of moving to the rest, which afforded me the space to be in the moment and lose myself to the group. Speaking to wider themes, for me it celebrated our individuality as part of a shared experience. The focus being on synchronicity rather than quality/accuracy was a key player in this.

Returning to my personal theme of disconnection in relation to alcohol, I found a great sense of release in giving up my body and conscious decision making to the puppet masters. Using the 'hold/release' exercise as a stimulus, the experience of being manipulated both gently and more rough accurately replicated the end and flow of being too drunk on a night out. Especially with my eyes closed I felt this aided the element of unpredictability and dizziness – as I didn't know myself where my 'masters' were. In saying this, still being fully sober of mind while my physical being was getting haphazardly used and moulded was unusual. Not that I wanted to stop, as I placed full trust in my peers, but in that I retained full awareness of every decision they made and carried out on my body. I was also distinctly conscious of how much weight I controlled along with my balance. Feeling the 'masters' become bolder and harsher as they grew in confidence as a group in their ability to push the boundaries/tempo/movement styles was challenging, as I naturally worked to protect myself a bit more and control my movements.

This came into play again later on, when I was prompted to choose moments to attempt to escape. Carefully selecting when to give in to the manipulation and relinquish control, versus finding times to make a run for it, was reminiscent of my own thought process when found in unfavourable circumstances. In order to be safe, it is often easier to give in and let things happen



to you than to put up a fight. Making such decisions and choosing your timing is an act of self-preservation. Once, I'd argue, is very common among women. This highlighted a key dichotomy between mind and body regarding alcohol consumption – as these situations almost rip the two apart. While your body becomes a mere vessel, a thing to be acted upon, your mind constructs a firm wall, behind which it can safely calculate the best next moves. For me, they stopped interacting with or informing one another at this point. This is the moment where the disconnect is most prevalent.

Exploring immobility was tremendously challenging. I particularly struggled not to fidget or adjust myself, and longed to make physical or verbal contact with my peers. It felt near impossible to make a meaningful connection or to build any kind of relationship/trust, which is rather far removed from my experience in life in general as well as within this ensemble. Allowing us to then follow our impulse to interact was like releasing a coiled spring – the relief and curiosity all at once of meeting these people, getting close ...

Ending with 'fluff' once more presented similar finding to last week, yet I felt able to play within the cycle much earlier on in the exercise. Creating little narratives and characters or personas within the movement helped to build a rhythm, allowing the section to become more considered and dynamic.

Every week, I forget how cathartic and grounding these sessions are. No matter how I come in feeling, I always leave feeling refreshed and more peaceful.

---

### Performer Journal 3

Looking back, having not kept up reflection well I'm not sure that I utilised that request of identifying a force. I think all through this process has been focussed on my age and how that has made my body feel.

I definitely, even before going through this project, spend a lot of time thinking about and being frustrated by the things my body doesn't do, or at least doesn't do easily.

Coming from a place where I used my body as a tool and creative medium when I was younger, I took it for granted. That's not true. I worked it hard and expected much from it. I didn't take it for granted I just didn't take on board how it would stop delivering so well.

Despite my dance background this is, I think, the first performance based work I have done that has not contained any element of text.

I found that tricky not least because it felt liquid, constantly evolving and somehow elements of words seem stabilising or at least the idea in my head was that words would pin it all down a bit, like tent pegs, giving the piece some anchor points.

Working in different spaces was actually quite a positive accident to the experience. Whilst having the studio was great in terms of freedom of movement and possibly a feeling of professionalising what we were doing. When we worked in the MacLean Room I felt more of a team somehow. It was more like being in someone's sitting room and therefore more intimate and less intimidating. It was easier to say truths, open up.

Likewise working outdoors was a bit daunting with the thought of being on display and so being more inhibited.

This was, however, not the case and actually being outside in the sunshine was actually very liberating and I for one felt more physically free.

It was outside that we first did the flocking exercise that was to become part of the end piece. I totally loved doing that, although I don't think I ever achieved that same level of joy as I did that 1st time.

10.06.22

---

## Performer Journal 1

### Butoh Session

☼ Homework: Finding 2 shapes that represent the beginning and end of my solo journey.

Entered the session with the shapes in mind, just need to figure out the journey.

Getting to play with the time we had to explore that journey was really great – had the opportunity to feel it out in real time.

I love Butoh as a practice but forgot the mind-frame you need to explore it and do it properly. I'll need to work on this going forward > Sort of like what I need to do in real life as well.

---

## Performer Journal 2

Exploring our individual themes using Butoh-inspired shaped was something I found challenging. Partly, as I have a pre-existing apprehension / fractured experience of the practice and also, more generally, because I struggle with sustained movement.

As expected, I found the experience frustrating. Wanting to move slower than I was or could but also, not feeling able to. I think this was mostly due to the type of balancing I was exploring (to be as grotesque and disconnected possible I attempted to use uncomfortable poses and transitions that did not come naturally to me). Consequently, it was challenging to stay in the moment or focus on / move with the breath. I realised later that I was too worried about how the shapes and transitions appeared aesthetically, rather than how they felt. Obviously, as a key aspect of Butoh, I aim to give into the experience more next time and see how this changes my physicality.

I wonder if this correlates with my themes of societal judgement in itself? Appearance focussed actions are maybe my brain's prerequisite to decision-making?

There was a natural moment of change upon realising I could move single muscles, without travelling or using multiple parts of the body simultaneously. From here, I became far more relaxed, balanced and comfortable. The key is maybe to only worry about one thing at a time.

Spending time working together to map out the work in progress sequences also dispelled some of the anxiety within the group and offered valuable clarity for the trajectory of the piece. Next week will be a welcome opportunity to further explore my individual section, and connect the aspects of my starting pose to the feeling of inebriation.

**17.06.22**

---

## Performer Journal 1

Outside again!

I can safely say these have been my favourite rehearsals of the project.

The piece feels more pulled together after today. I really like the mix of themes in there.

I can't believe how connected to my being I feel after these sessions – they've got me thinking about the body and the mind differently. I've learned to treat them as one entity. I want to now explore this in my own work.

Weirdly enough, I compare the feeling I get after these sessions to the feeling I get after getting a tattoo or wearing my favourite jacket. It's such a simple pleasure, but it's enough to recentre myself and become reacquainted with who I am as a person. Plus, then share that with others and find connection.

---

## Performer Journal 2

– HOMEWORK –

30 mins movement

- Initial frustration, knowing duration of task negatively impacted my mindset
- Music guided an internal story of love, loss, returning etc. Impact of inebriation on attraction and honesty based on real experience
- Found myself focussing far more on isolated joints or limbs this time. Knew everything could be far more drawn out. Also invited less pressure to travel.
- Continue to find sustained movement challenging. I'm so impatient!
- Found myself exploring my body and new ways of tangling, discovering and being discovered. Less focus on balances for absurdity
- Want to discover / utilise my face more!

– REHEARSAL –

Returning outdoors was a more welcome concept, despite wind etc, after such satisfying experiences last time.

I find our warm ups to be one of my favourite aspects of the sessions, as they often allow us the most opportunity to connect with one another. It always feels so wholesome and peaceful when carries out on the lawn.

Focussing today on solidifying material rather than creating it was welcome for my stressed brain. It has always been my preferred element of theatre – making, knowing you have done all you can and simply need to polish and embellish.

My key takeaway would be how nice it is to relinquish control to performers 1 and 3 in my portion of the performance. Fully trusting them with my body, and allowing myself to be puppeteer felt so serene. Ironical, considering the context of the control they were emulating. I think I enjoy having the pressure of decision-making taken away from me, as so much of my life is fast-paced and relies on my judgement / leadership. Thus, it's so pleasant to know what is going on is outwith my

power or control. Perhaps that's why drinking can seem so liberating – the eliminating of fearing consequences.

Similarly, I find blocking really enriching and insightful. Adopting the movements of others is brilliant for understanding how different bodies move and exploring everyone's movement vocab. Performer 3 especially, with her balletic and fluid gestures, and her desire to travel, always fills my heart. Following her softness almost feels like being a child copying ballerinas on the telly. For me, it is innocent, nostalgic and graceful. Maybe having the strongest connection to this echoes my love of dance as a child. Instead, when I lead, I am always mindful of others' abilities. This does not inhibit my natural rhythm but does influence where I move and how.

As a tactile being anyway, I've always welcomed the group touching or moving me as they see fit. Even in creating a fluff with my partner, nothing ever felt too far or invasive. Her warm, motherly presence certainly aids this. With these final partnerships I think I'd have liked more chance to explore our relationship / sequences without the directorial pressures of aesthetics or an imminent performance. I was aware in myself that many of my choices felt performative over genuine or heartfelt. I wonder the impact of such exercises in a drama therapy context?

**24.06.22**

---

## Performer Journal 1

Last rehearsal!

Tried to go into today super focussed. Quite challenging with a head cold but I tried my best.

Still working on that meditative headspace needed for the whole performance, but the Butoh part integrally.

Fluff section also feels like it could have more – hopefully get the time next week to work on it.

Overall, feeling good and confident about next week.

---

## Performer Journal 2

Very glad to have been given the space of WASPS tonight! Despite the echoey room, it was fab to get a feel for the type of performance space we'd have to work with next week.

Continuing to emphasise ensemble warm ups feels like it's working well to maintain solidarity and establish a strong interconnectedness. These moments are among my favourite aspects of the sessions.

Mapping out the running order of the piece along with the soundtrack for the first time also solidified our individual and group intentions throughout, leaving me feeling more confident as we step away from devising and creating material, and towards polishing.

Now, the main thing I'd have liked to explore further is the stare between me and my partner. As a significant moment of connection, I don't feel like we've pushed it as far as we could have in previous rehearsals. If we had the chance, 'd have liked to spend an indefinite amount of time interrogating the experience and find the parameters between comfort/discomfort, connection/disconnection, any potential lost, etc. At present, the moment feels very much for structural purpose rather than one of inner experience.

Expanding and elaborating on fluff with my partner was rewarding and tiring. Building up to moving away from distinct gestures was easier than before, although again it was a challenge to remember the sequence!

01.07.22

---

## Performer Journal 1

### Performance and Final Thoughts

- Fluff – after working on it prior to the performance, I felt that this was a real strength of the piece for me. Going back to what I spoke about in an older entry – how do women wield power physically? I feel that section showed how volatile a body can be regardless of gender.
- Butoh – focussing on going inward and re-centring myself helped me get through that section. One of the moments I'm most proud of.
- Connection – the interactions between the performers throughout. It felt like a show of reclamation and solidarity.

...

Beginning this practice, I didn't really interrogate my own thoughts of my womanhood all that much. I often found that it got in the way of other aspects of my identity (my queerness) or my life in general (career, interactions with strangers). I'm grateful this time allowed me to question and reconcile elements of my identity and my womanhood.

I no longer feel like my womanhood works against me – it's just a neutral fact about myself. But I've found joy in that neutrality and will work more personally to build on what I've learned here.

---

## Performer Journal 2

### Performance day

Very cathartic to share and be as slow as possible

Rewarding to have one audience member reflect on emotional response to my opening sequence of clawing at my body. It now feels silly almost? Gained an appreciation for myself and how far I've come. Knowledge that I won't look like this forever so to make the most of it and not berate myself. Especially since sharing space with older women who clearly find it difficult to come to terms with their new abilities. Never take youth for granted.

Sweaty. Tired. Sore. Remaining inwards during Butoh for the first time was joyous, allowing myself to forget about the outside world and exist solely in the moment, from muscle to muscle. Felt I'd nailed the journey and understanding, particularly of Butoh's meditative qualities. Definitely hope to be able to foster this kind of focus in other aspects of life!

'be more gentle with yourself' has been the intuitive phrase which came to be when exploring Butoh transitions, and I hope to do so from here on in. Although I don't feel like I'm as in tune with my physical and emotional bodies as I first thought, this practice has certainly sparked a desire to continue exploring the therapeutic / potential of physical theatre.

Overall I also wish I'd been more comfortable to draw certain sections out more, and I now wonder if this is a complex about trying not to take up too much space??

---

## Performer Journal 3

I was so much happier once I know the intended structure of the piece. Once we had a blocking I felt much more able to relax about being part of a sharing.

There were still elements I struggled hugely with. Although I've been involved often with devised process I've never participated in something where the end 'product' was still a fluid, constant evolving thing. The lack of time restraints that music would naturally have created made me quite anxious. Not wanting to either reach a place where I had nowhere left to comfortably go before everyone else had reached it nor wanting to be solo on the journey with the rest at their end points. This did start to become easier but I was never fully comfortable with it.

The same was the case for the fluff section. There was a couple of middle phase periods when I felt happy with the sequence but as the time was extended on it (without being fixed) and the movement range added to I definitely felt less focused and less 'in the zone'.

In relation to the piece for me as an individual, I was happy with the initial solo sections and would have happily extended that exploration as I felt I know who I was and what I was trying to replicate or express.

I did kind of love the intensity of our Butoh journey but that inability to entirely lose myself definitely detracted for me.

I loved the flocking section though I kind of wish we changed the space between us more (i.e. sometimes close and tight, sometimes spread out).

I enjoyed the follow-on from that of the dual sections.

Generally I am glad to have participated in this project.

I enjoyed working in an all-woman environment and exploring the themes. I found the research and the questionnaires really interesting.

I do think there is much scope to explore this much further and to utilise other ways to do that.

It was a lovely feeling when an audience member understood and related to my personal exploration as I worried that generally the work might be too abstract to connect.

---

## Performer Journal 4

**With reference to your personal experience of the devising process, physical theatre forms, and performance; what do you feel it is to experience womanhood for you?**

First, it is extending it further than the roles both society and oneself can lock ourselves in. As a working part-time single mum, I can be prone to let those two roles overwhelm me and forget that if I limit myself there, my well-being decreases. A creative process, should it be theatre, photography or alternative practices for me such as shibari, is needed to be challenged in a positive constructive way.

Second, as I entered this experience I turned 50 and a lot of what I am hearing around me regarding this new phase of my woman's life I am entering is quite negative. The insidious effect it can have on you is very interesting despite statements that one is fine and not that much affected by the ageing process. The reaction of most of my colleagues was to be impressed that I was entering such a "scary experience". I am not particularly brave or strong and it led to dismissed conversations on the values of one's abilities.

Third, Butoh. Though I was familiar with this type of dance, I had never experienced it personally during any creative process. I found it a very challenging process in its slowness. Introspection and openness to the world were replaced by judgment and self-criticism which I feel I very much associated with womanhood in its clichés or stereotypes that we try to escape.