

**Reaching across from here to there, in precarious times:
Remote-teaching embodied creative practice through scores, instructions, and
poetic invitations**

Alys Longley#, Janaína Moraes and Joanna Cook
Dance Studies Programme, University of Auckland
#Corresponding author: a.longley@auckland.ac.nz

(Submitted: 17 January 2022; Accepted: 29 May 2022)

Abstract

How can we attend to students' experience of agency, spatiality, sensation, mobility, freedom, and play in tertiary dance and interdisciplinary arts education, while working through lockdowns or in readiness for them? How do we cultivate care, joy, and imagination in such teaching-learning situations? How do we create spaces that are grounded and focussed while also creating maximum space for independence, idiosyncrasy, experimentation, delight in material practice and difference? This article responds to the above question through ten vignettes narrated by Alys – a Masters and PhD supervisor and Course Director teaching undergraduate courses, Janaína and Joanna – post graduate students and teaching assistants on the same courses. Concepts of weak theory, articulated by Biesta (2009) and Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993), and the poetics of care (Tronto, 1998) are core to this article, which posits that as educators our commitment to wellbeing and our acts of care are of utmost importance in precarious times.

Keywords: artistic research, creative education, dance education, practice-led research, weak education, weak theory

Part One

As dancers, interdisciplinary artists, tertiary educators, and researchers, we, Alys (Associate Professor in Dance Studies), Janaína (PhD student and Graduate Teaching Assistant), and Joanna (PhD student and Graduate Teaching Assistant), have all been working intensely to extend our practices of *holding space* for our creative practices, for our students, for our research, for each other, through the period March 2020 - November 2021. Based in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), Aotearoa (New Zealand), we have experienced extended periods of lock-down teaching through all of 2020, and in the second part of 2021. In this writing, we will discuss how practices of care were embedded in our online studio teaching, as we asked: How can we attend to dance students' experience of agency, spatiality, sensation, mobility, freedom and play in tertiary dance and interdisciplinary arts education, while working through lockdowns or in readiness for them?



How do we cultivate care, joy and imagination in such teaching-learning situations? How do we create spaces that are grounded and focussed while also creating maximum space for independence, idiosyncrasy, experimentation, delight in material practice and difference?

In this writing, we will discuss how practices of care were embedded within our creative educational practices, with examples drawn from our collaborative online teaching of a first-year paper, our experiences of study and supervision, and our experiences of creative research, which led to new pedagogical approaches. We will discuss a dance course at The University of Auckland which is predicated on groups of about thirty students, learning about dance and creative processes together in studios, every week for twelve weeks. For assignments, students would usually create and perform duets, and develop experiments in somatics, improvisation, choreography, interdisciplinarity and site-specific practice toward an artistic project performed with the class. The context of self-isolation in face of a global pandemic has brought into perspective what matters in the future of learning, leading us to ask: How are practices of care and relationship-building evident in tertiary education? Working in the destabilised, global trauma of pandemic times, we are attempting to put care at the centre of learning and teaching practices, in an insistence that to create anything we all need a reservoir of wellbeing and inspiration. Wellbeing, trust, and inspiration must be resourced – space must be cultivated that safely allows these processual affects to flourish. We understand that the very nature of safety is contestable, as it requires constant revision – what feels safe is not generalisable, it might change depending on the context. With this awareness, we have attempted to respond to the idea of safety in a malleable way, especially while working from the domestic studios we have created due to the constraints of COVID-19 and then by supporting our students to develop their own domestic studio spaces.

This article is structured in two parts. In part one we outline the creative and educational context which influences how we understand pedagogy, creative practice, and artistic research. Through this article we have included images from our creative practice that evoke the relationality and thematics of the pedagogical ideas that inform this writing (Figures 1-14). In Part Two we present 10 vignettes that engage narrative, poetic methods (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) to evoke first-person, embodied experiences of tertiary teaching in dance studies, at a time of digital pivoting and re-imagining the future of our discipline.

The vignettes address practices we have employed in the attempt to cultivate care, joy, and imagination in creative education. Through these, we address our research question; how do we create spaces that are grounded and focussed while also creating maximum space for independence, idiosyncrasy, experimentation, delight in material practice and difference? They are presented as a constellation of experiences (Hall, 2013) not tied neatly together but held loosely, allowing themes to be open, entangled, in flux and only partially understood (Wright, 2015: 72). These vignettes present polyphonic voices which have unfolded through our artistic education and research, via digital spaces.

Our vignettes are organised in three key sections:

1. As the teaching team for *Dance 101 G- Introduction to Dance and Creative Practice* wherein the authors moved studio practice from dance studios to online spaces
2. Developing creative pedagogies out of international artistic research projects *Mapping Porous Borders/ Mapeo de Bordes Porosos*, *Projecto Cartón* (Longley, et al., 2020) *Let Us Drink the New Wine Together!/ Beberemos El Vino Nuevo, Juntos!* (Longley & Pincheira, 2021).
3. As supervisor-researcher relationships within PhD and Masters Study – embracing micro-supervision sessions and finding continuity at a time of fragmentation.

As with educators across our globe, from the times of our first COVID lockdowns, it became evident that the post-COVID teaching and learning world will be engaging the digital and the embrace of asynchronous learning as it rarely did before. Our learning became digital through catastrophe, and the question of how best to resource students through precarious times has led to an epic redevelopment of curriculum.

This article concludes with a discussion of how orienting our teaching and learning practices through explicit practices of care, heightened creative agency, focussing on expanding disciplinary fields, multi-modality and international ally-ship could be considered in the development of future creative curricula.



Figure 1: Janaína Moraes and Dancers. FAR – Flash Art Residency, Auckland, 2020

Copyright Janaína Moraes
Photographer Christina Clarke

Orienting with Care

The concept of care is central in this article, but, what, specifically, does such a widely used word refer to? Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher, in their seminal article *Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring*, describe care as:

a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher & Tronto, 1990: 40)

According to Tronto and Fisher, care is a practice and orientation that is both absolutely central to human identity and life, and a largely under-appreciated orientation in terms of how we accord value in capitalist systems. Tronto (1998) outlines three definitions of care in human life - as a species activity, as an action, and as a flexible standard:

a philosophical term we use because it suggests that how people care for one another is one of the features that make people human ... a practice, not as a set of principles or rules ... a standard, but a flexible one" (Tronto, 1998: n.p).

Tronto draws on her research with Berenice Fisher (Tronto and Fisher, 1990), to expand:

Because we tend to follow the traditional division of the world into public and private spheres and to think of caring as an aspect of private life, care is usually associated with activities of the household. As a result, caring is greatly undervalued in our culture--in the assumption that caring is somehow "women's work" in perceptions of caring occupations, in the wages and salaries paid to workers engaged in provision of care, in the assumption that care is menial. One of the central tasks for people interested in care is to change the overall public value associated with care. When our public values and priorities reflect the role that care actually plays in our lives, our world will be organized quite differently. Tronto (1998: n.p)

The university is one such institution in which professionalisation, excellence, global impact and quantified outputs are generally prioritised over 'soft' values such as care, kindness, and wellbeing (Burton, 2021). In this context excellence and success are measured by pass rates, Grade Point Averages, completion times and academic values such as clarity, knowledge and disciplinary skill. How does care fit into the language and values of academia? In academic cultures where workloads increasingly rely on time-poor staff on hourly contracts, who bears responsibility for the interstitial work of holding space and attending to how, rather than what, students are experiencing academic study? Are we properly attending to how students are experiencing their time at university *together*, as communities of learners?

Academics such as Hobart and Kneese (2020) and Zisman Newman (2021) articulate care as 'connective tissue' – in learning situations care moves through affect, through often-less-tangible qualities such as the tone of the room, or the way that communities are created.

Theorized as an affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world, care constitutes a feeling with, rather than a feeling for, others. When mobilized, it offers visceral, material, and emotional heft to acts of preservation that span a breadth of localities: selves, communities, and social worlds. (Hobart and Kneese, 2020: 2)

The COVID pandemic has demanded teaching while experiencing crisis-situations. This has cultivated a responsiveness to ever shifting situations, learning when to follow and when to resist. In doing so, we have put care at the centre of teaching-learning practices, so that practices that were formerly implicit became much more explicit. This meant that we discussed care and wellbeing as a central issue in assessments and expectations. We placed an emphasis on care of self and family a priority in how we expected our students to perform academic values – with the timely handing in of assignments becoming secondary to their wellbeing.

We attempted to foster "care-full" spaces that shared creative agency within our teaching. As we moved from shared studio spaces to domestically-based online learning, making space for sensory awareness, embodied attunement, and non-normative embodied dwelling became even more central to the course.

Weak Theory and Weak Education in creating spaces for imagination and difference in creative pedagogy

Central to our understanding of education and pedagogy is the concept of weakness, in which we draw from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's writings on weak theory (2003), and Gert Biesta's discussion of weak education (2009). These approaches to weak, rather than strong practice support knowledge and theory as fluid, mobile, and relational. We recognise that a multiplicity of singular approaches rather than a generalised, normative, or hierarchical framing of achievement. Understanding creative education through weak theory and weak education allows us to orient more toward process than outcome, toward diverse artistic practices rather than virtuosity and toward life-long learning rather than short-term displays of skill. Weakness as an orientation supports us to resist dominant individualist, competitive framings of knowledge as something that can be ranked in terms of human excellence. Instead, we understand creative potential as holding endless, multiple kinds of difference. We see success as contextual, and defined in endless ways, rather than singularly defined by a position in a competitive job market or economic worth.



Figure 2: Joanna Cook, *Fragments of Silent Skin*, 2020
Photographer Yin Chi Lee

Our understanding of weak theory is informed by Sarah Wright's (2015) article *More-than-human, emergent belongings: A weak theory approach* which presents an approach to human geography that allows a focus on emotional affect, texture and co-becoming.

Where strong theory demands comprehensiveness, exclusivity and grand claims, weak theory supports partial understandings and multiplicity, and allows for both contradictions and inconsistency ... Weak theory sees things as open, entangled, connected and in flux. (Wright, 2015: 392)

In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick defines weakness in critical practice in opposition to the paranoid, defensive orientation of much academic work. For Sedgwick: 'Paranoia is *anticipatory*. Paranoia is *reflexive* and *mimetic*. Paranoia is *a strong theory*. Paranoia is a theory of *negative affects*. Paranoia places faith in *exposure*' (2003: 130). In contrast, Sedgwick posits reparative reading as an alternative orientation to critical traditions aligned with strength and defensiveness.

The desire of a reparative impulse, on the other hand, is additive and accretive...it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self. (2003: 149)

This idea of repair – of care, of making and adding and resourcing others, is a productive critical orientation in our pedagogical work. Also central to our understanding of weakness in education is the work of Gert Biesta, who differentiates weak from strong education. According to Biesta, weak education recognises that education can never be perfect, that it is interpretive,

and that each student will interpret educational experiences differently, depending on their subjective uniqueness. In contrast strong education focuses on teaching as being generalisable, effective, replicable, and reliable.

Whereas strong education operates in the realm of being — the realm, so we might say, in which force matters and matter is forced — weak education ... operates in the realm of existence, rather than in the realm of essence. It is only in this other realm that the human subject can manifest itself in its uniqueness, and it is because of this that the weakness of education matters and, in a sense, matters most. (Biesta, 2009: 355)

We consider weak approaches to theory and education to allow creative, embodied and relational approaches to teaching to thrive. In teaching interdisciplinary creative education in a large university, weakness is also valuable when considering multi-modal practice, as this approach to learning turns away from mastery to support vulnerability, experimentation, imperfection, and learning-with-others. This requires an explicit move away from the hierarchical language of much normative education to value care and relationship over excellence and replicability.

Expanded fields of performance and pedagogy

As dance artists and educators engaging in teaching-learning experiences through 2020–2021, we have been finding ways to care for our students remotely. We have been asking; how can we provide the highest degree of care, student-agency, direction and focus in learning situations, while also allowing students to work away from the screen, work with embodied imagination and creativity, and to allow idiosyncrasy and difference in specific tasks? This involves making space for “un-learning” as much as it does skill development. Un-learning, in this context, is related to a culture of inquiry in which educators attempt to unsettle naturalised concepts and/or structures, behaviours and/or relationships, practices and processes within institutions and bodies of knowledge. This has involved expanding notions of what is ‘right’ and offering multiple entry points to assignment briefs, and replacing answering with responding while making time for listening. Within our understanding of weak pedagogies, we see value in differentiating the idea of answering - usually tied to a sense of being right or wrong - from the notion of responding. Being responsive considers the multiple and diverse contexts of students, with the awareness that they may be facing challenges beyond our imagination.

Multimodal practices can offer concrete ways to materialise responsiveness. We share an understanding of creative practices as expanded fields wherein the disciplinary tropes of artistic forms spill beyond each other, so that the forms of creative works are not limited to their typical material expression. Through our varied research practices, we have experimented with how such expanded fields open up space for experimental collaboration and new forms of teaching (see [Fragments of Silent Skin](#), [Invitation poétics](#), [Mapping Porous Borders/ Mapeo de Bordes Porosos](#)). The dis-orientation caused by the suspensions of time and space, created by the pandemic,

guided us to re-situate our own practices as artists, teachers and researchers. Our studio pedagogies of co-creation are largely predicated on working in a shared room – in these spaces even when we work alone we do so *together* and we are able to witness each-others' experimentation and vulnerability. We find this kind of co-working intensely motivating. Sharing work is a rich opportunity for community-building, wherein our differences provide new ways of experiencing what an art practice can be, and how it can mean differently for different people. With this taken away from us, we found ourselves setting students creative tasks and parallel ways to playfully document and share them with each other. These sharing and documentation practices became central to developing our experimental pedagogies. When teaching classes in which many students were inexperienced in dancing and performing, the challenge of sharing dances made alone in bedrooms became too much to ask. Instead, we pressed into care and expanded assignment briefs and workshop content to include experimental forms of video, drawing, creative writing, and dance practice, to soften the intensity of performing for classmates.

Our attention has moved to how we can develop creative provocations that catch the diverse experiences of our students. We see multi-modal approaches to education as vital for supporting our neuro-diverse student-body and share an understanding of creative practices as expanded fields. The forms of creative works are not limited to their typical material expression when the disciplinary tropes of artistic forms spill beyond typical boundaries. We've been encouraging students to see extraordinary creative potential in ordinary, banal spaces such as bathtubs, the steam from a kettle, the light of a streetlamp, through tasks such as moving in a garden with one's eyes closed, or writing from the point of view of non-human forms such as clouds, rocks, cars, grass or birds. An expanded dance practice may take material form as a poem, a drawing, a music improvisation, in which embodied research is expressed in whatever form best suits the thinking involved. Expanded practices encourage experimentation with all available media including multi-modal sensory states, shifting between analogue and digital modes and diverse material conditions. The field of performance writing has a vast realm of resources to enable unconventional, sensorially rich, conceptually specific, open-ended, agile, relational modes of engagement, creation, feedback, and co-presence (Forti, 1974; Forsythe, 2010; Goulish, 2000). These include working with the possibilities of voice and sound as a kind of touch, atmosphere and world-ing, (Forti, 1974; Longley, et al, 2020; Fernald, 2007); developing modes of somatic interaction where precise physical states can be shared through language, metaphor, kinesthetic cueing, and imaginative states; and performative score-based approaches to developing tasks for making and response (Longley and Fitzpatrick 2020). Differentiated from music scores, such scores tend to be open-ended, and present modes of interactive making and feedback that work in feedback loops between digital and analogue, on-line and off-line, material and discursive modes. To support our students in developing creative experiments we make ad-hoc video clips from our houses on our mobile phones, discussing [constraints and affordances, improvisation, moving alongside somatic readings, and choreographic](#)

[creation](#). Readers can access these clips through our [Dance 101G](#) website, which we have made in order to allow this article itself to have a multi-modal reflection of pedagogy.

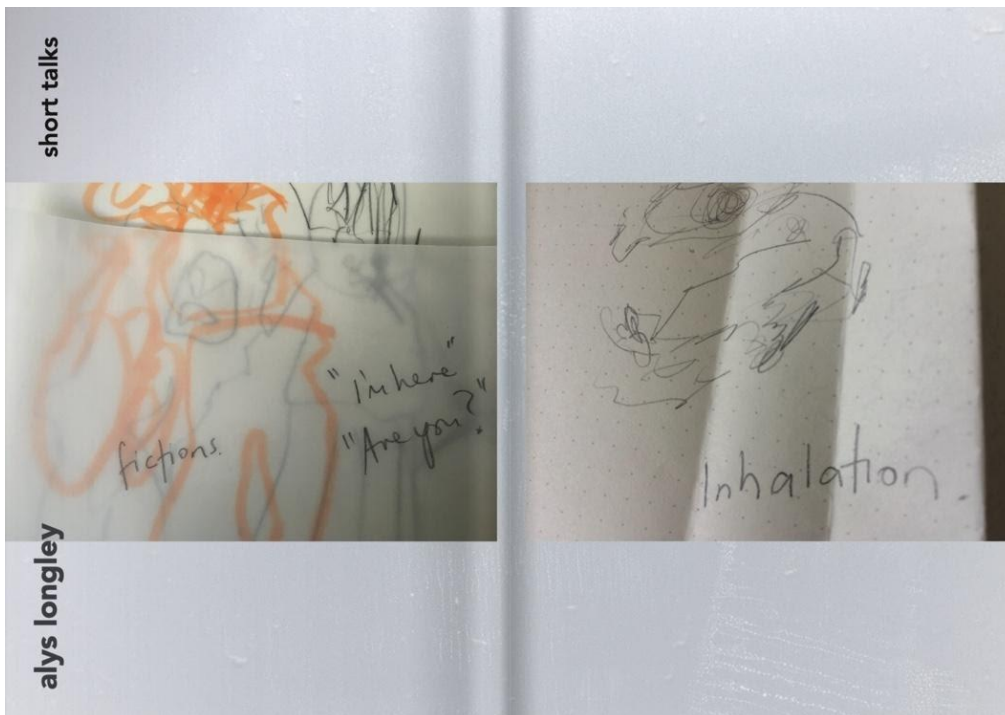


Figure 3: "fictions. 'I'm here'. 'Are you?'" Alys Longley
Language is an Intangible Bridge artist book

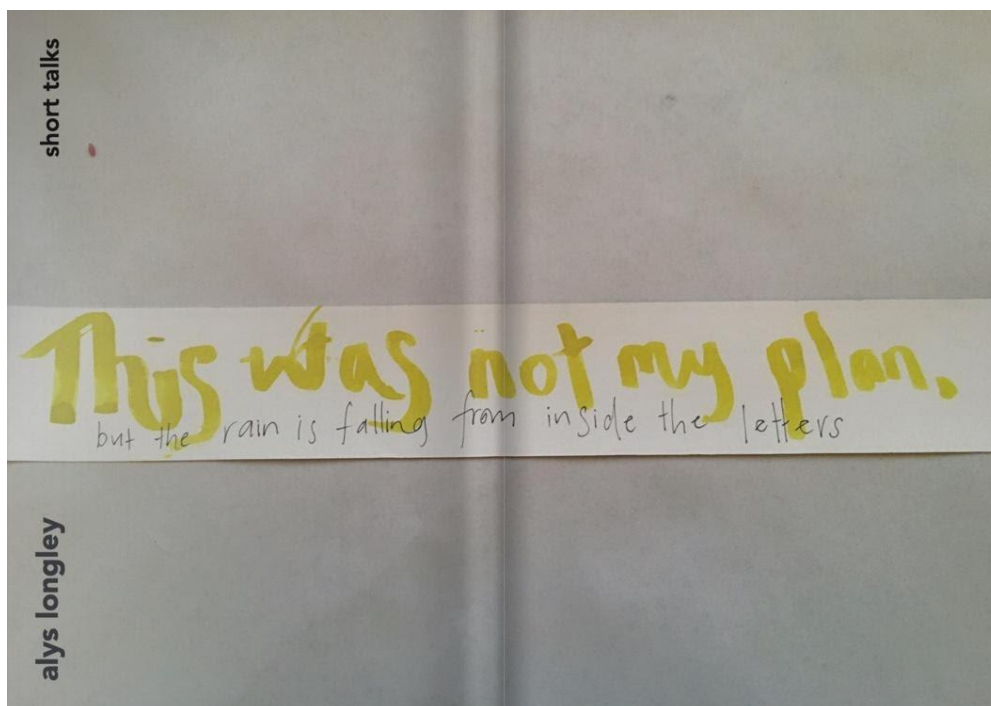


Figure 4: "This was not my plan, but the rain is falling from inside the letters" Alys Longley
Language is an Intangible Bridge artist book

Part Two: Ten Vignettes evoking creative pedagogy during COVID-19 lockdowns in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand

“What I have to say to you cannot be generalised, but it can be shared” (Cixous, cited in Bottoms & Goulish, 2007: 192).

Creative education is a tender, sensitive practice that regularly calls for students (and often teachers) to be vulnerable, open minded, experimental, and playful. In dance, we include embodied practices of sensing and feeling in definitions of knowledge. The experiences that have emerged through our teaching of Dance 101 during times of pandemic, and in our work as post graduate students and as a supervisor have been tumultuous, enriching, difficult and surprising at different times. Gurt Biesta highlights the unpredictable nature of education as part of its weakness, wherein experiences regularly divert from their intended progression and resistance often meets intention. As such the narrative and poetic structure of the vignette offers a way to present a myriad of singular experiences that highlight some of our creative, teaching and relational strategies to continue to meet, connect and learn through catastrophic times. As ungeneralisable accounts, these vignettes resist academic orientations toward strong assertions and defensible positions. Instead we offer a series of poetic snapshots, of unanswered questions, of moments of inspiration and togetherness that reflect education as a space of vulnerability, atmosphere and personal discovery that may align with the stories and experiences of others. Poetic and narrative writing allows us to attend to experiences of spatiality, sensation, agency, freedom and play in educational encounters – and to follow non-linear, affective practices for considering embodied and artistic learning spaces.

The structure of these vignettes is informed by the prose styles of the books *Ordinary Affect* (Stewart, 2007) and *The Hundreds* (Stewart & Berlant, 2019) which collect short, intense written pieces which concentrate intensities of affect through attention to the potentials of writing style. Each time, there is recognition of how the spaces we exist in consume us, move us, move through us.

Vignette One: The Neverending Story and Fluid Beginnings (Alys)

Dance 101G: Introduction to Dance and Creative Practice

It is our first online lecture after the pivot from in-person to digital classes. I ask the students to
 join me with a tall glass of water, one third full.
 I ask them to make a circle with their arm so the water whirls in whirlpools, to focus on the
 circles of movement in the glass

I play the theme-song from the 1984 film *The Never Ending Story* (Moroder, 1984)

I ask them to place the water down and to find the fluid circles in their own fluid bodies, to find

spirals both internal and subtle, and then soaring - peripheral

to open momentum pathways for fluid bodies to move us in endless spirals that circle in scales
from the barely perceptible to reaching past the edges of one's physical space,

buoyed by gravity

buoyed by our relation with the earth, the atmosphere, the air, the ground.

The music is dreamy and funny and ridiculous and hopeful

we spiral in little boxes on each other's screens

moving each other, moved by each other, releasing into movement – ridiculous and alive

we warm the space, laugh into the space, readying ourselves to share our voices and our
movements and our worlds

with each other

Vignette Two: Lockdown and Pivoting Questions (Alys, Janaína, Joanna)

Suddenly, as we unexpectedly launched into digital co-teaching, in our re-thinking of relationality and dance, we were found ourselves asking formerly-taken-forgranted questions that required utterly responses in a locked down teaching environment:

How might we facilitate trust?

How do we create tasks that are at once clear and open for rich and diverse translation?

How do we support the students to take risks, to share work with each other, without the held space of a shared studio?

What forms of feedback are kindest in such circumstances?

How do we hold the timing of making, sharing, feedback and assessments when the time we can tolerate online is drastically different to that of the studio?

How do we adapt the affordances of Zoom to enable a sense of play and relationality?

Vignette Three: Creative Assessments - Hands on and Heads in (Janaína, Joanna and Alys)

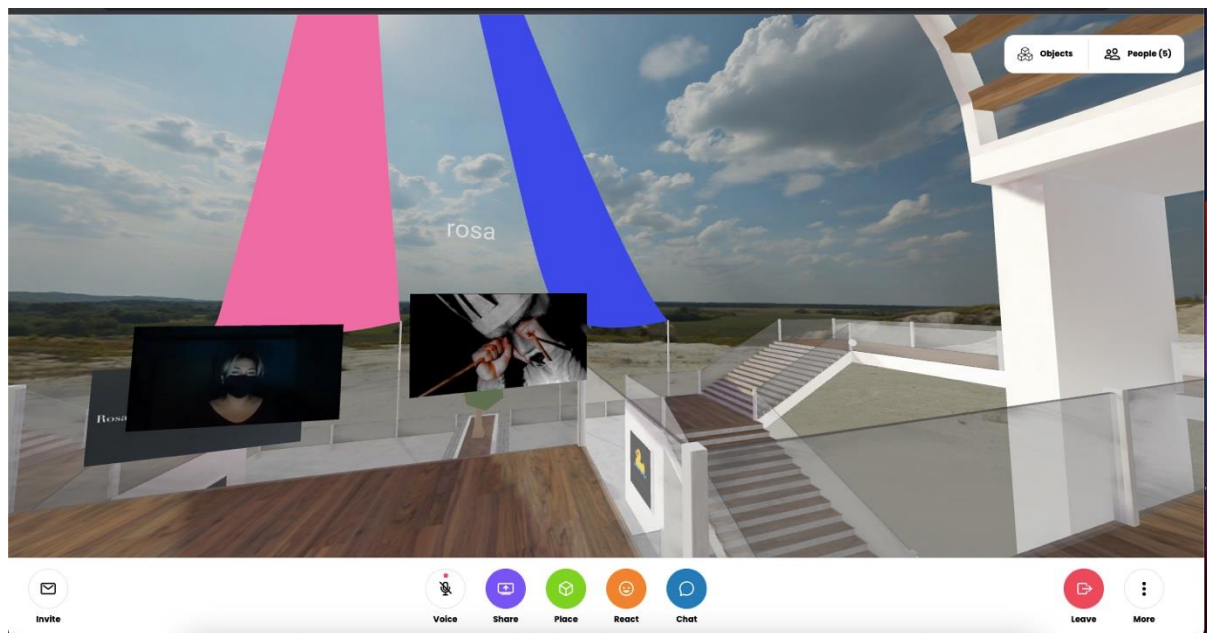


Figure 5: Student's Artist Projects in a digital-game exhibition through Mozilla Hubs (3D Space) 101G Semester 2/2021

As learners, teachers and artists we want to make bridges between the personal creative journeys of students and institutional expectations. In this, we consider assessments powerful opportunities for feedback. Assessments create provocations for students to situate their work alongside key practitioners and philosophical discussions, and to reflect on their experience of collaboration.

We are thinking of assessments that can simultaneously be clear in what they are asking and while remaining open to the ambiguities of creative processes, and asking; 'Can our exam spark joy?' We attempt to design an exam that allows students multi-modal articulation such as diagrams, dance video improvisations, voice message uploads, drawings – to accept and celebrate weakness and attempt, while discouraging expectations of mastery or virtuosity. We want our exam to demonstrate to the students that artworks are valued as knowledge in the university, that neuro-diverse approaches to learning can be supported in exam situations, we hope to creatively scaffold students into assessment moments in a way that supports their wellbeing, learning, their creativity.

We have encouraged students to allow their work to be seen *in process*, witnessed in different phases by each other. Students have received and offered feedback and experimented with the assignments as opportunities for arranging idiosyncratic creative projects around shared assignment briefs. Final projects for the course were shared in a virtual gallery space using the 3D spaces of Mozilla Hubs. This offered a game-like situation in which students could place their work in different digital rooms. Wandering through, they were able to find their peers, view a

diverse range of approaches and share conversations in real time. This brought focus to the social aspects of sharing creative processes and created opportunities to comment on each other's achievements and laugh at the awkwardness of walking with their avatars in the digital gallery, to some extent relieving the stress of typical final assessment.

Vignette Four: *t r a n s f o r m a a ç ã o* (Janaína)

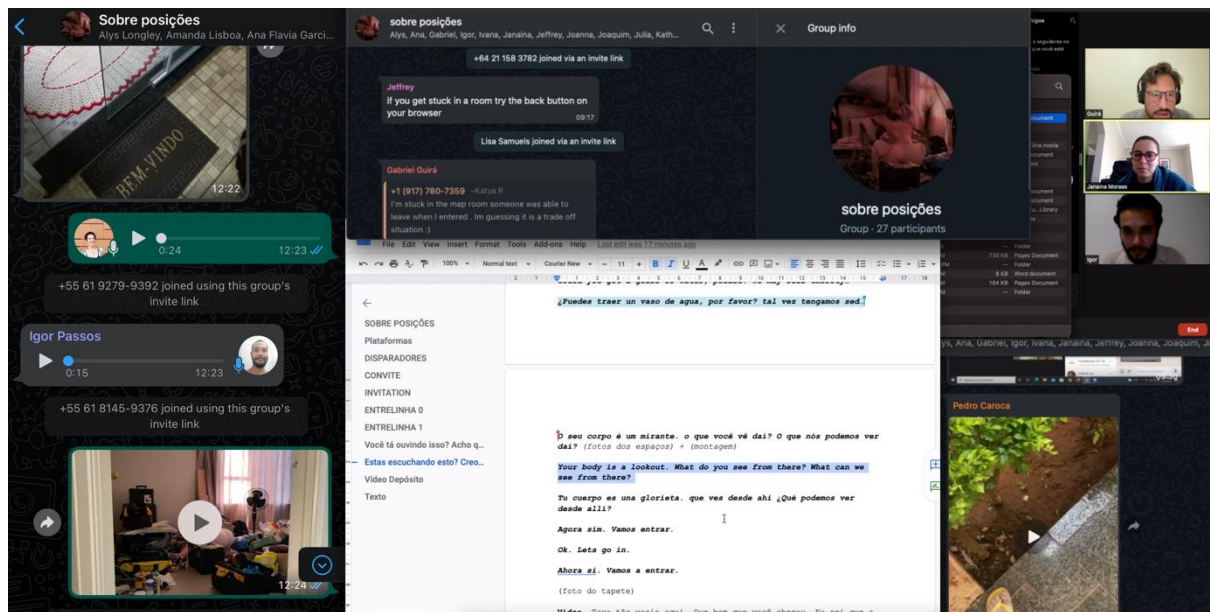


Figure 6: Sobre posições
Copyright Janaína Moraes

Formação is Brazilian Portuguese for the action of forming, creating shape, manufacturing.

Forma ação. Forma em ação. Form in action. Formation.

In Brazil this world is largely used in the sense of “someone’s formation”: all the things that inform, reform and transform one’s ability to be, relate and articulate (with)in the(ir) world.

Formação: pedagogical practices, a set of knowledge on a specific subject, someone’s background within specific fields.

I have been thinking how my practice teaches me to put different forms in action, or else, to act in different form(alitie)s. At the same time, my practice teaches me to (re)learn from/by putting things in rel-action. Relying on relationships. Relating to act.

Formação that occurs in-out-and-around people, territories, residences, and, yes, institutions. Learning through the awareness of the formative experiences that happen in the corners, corridors, backyards, streets, parks, beaches, screens, keyboard, edges...

Experiences in the
margins.

Transitory forms of learning. Learning because in transit, in relation

al episodes of connection.

Contexts of/for

togetherness.

These practices have been encouraging me to think how to transition from the idea of transmission (transmitting knowledge) to the poetics of trans-mission - a queer mission, a re-orienting device (Ahmed, 2006), as the “mission of transitory experiences” and “transformative relationships”. Missions of passage; othering; visiting each other’s homes and challenging what might be home for learning: a pedagogy of hospitality.

This image - home - has become the driving force for my making > which is my teaching > which is my dancing. How to invite learners to learn with each other, in conversation.

co-verse-action.

conversa-ação.

?

Vignette Five: The Seed of Deviation (Joanna)

The milieu of the pandemic generated a shift in my practice. As a professional dancer my ability to continue working was destabilised by the realities of the pandemic. My practice shifted from orienting from studio and stage space, to a domestic environment. I reassessed a lot of what I knew, to undo formal dancerly conditioning. Through attentive, responsive openness to the context and exposure to new forms of creative experimentation I cultivated a multimodal approach to dancing.

My research, *Fragments of Silent Skin*, began in a domestic space and unfolded into the digital, sculptural, artist book(s) and studio spaces. It became interactive as witnesses of the work were invited to engage in their own experience through participatory performance. This work reversed the tendency for choreographic guides that focus on ‘how to do’ and make dances, instead, it works from a different value system – (un)doing through action, recycling, and reparation.

Part of the poetic text that closes the *Fragments of Silent Skin* thesis reads:

She thinks she is comfortable.

Blind to her contortion,

Her threads hug tightly,

Constricting her breath.

She reaches for a surface

To feel her own containment,

There is safety here,
But freedom,
there is not.

Fear encourages retreat.

Resistance meets possibility

This research generated a pool of resources that proffer tools for undoing, and empowerment through modes of working, ways of entering the studio, methods for practice, and specific approaches to embodiment and multimodality. These tools offer permissive space to resist or move beyond conditioned structures and freely engage with intuition and experimentation.

The desires cultivated within my artistic practices entered into my approach to teaching. Desiring to create space for students to engage with their own idiosyncratic approaches to creativity - exploring how they might approach creativity, dance making and academic assessment, differently.

Recognising the academic box but finding traces of self with(out) in the boundary-lines...

...Creating space for, and giving permission to the seed of deviation

Vignette Six: Mapping Porous Borders (Mapeo de Bordes Porosos) (Alys)



Figure 7: Artist Maps in the Let us Drink the New Wine Together!/ Beberemos El Vino Nuevo, Juntos!

Project – Nipan Oranniwesna, Paul Hughes, Meng Qu and Simona Zollet, Alys Longley

My creative teaching is inspired by my work as an artist and creative researcher. When this era of COVID began, it initiated a new creative collaboration with Chilean visual artist Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira as we attempted to find ways to continue collaborations with artists across the world, to materialise care and inspiration at a time of intense separation, increased isolationism, and border closure. Hyperlinks for these projects are contained here: [Mapping Porous Borders/ Mapeo de Bordes Porosos](#) and [Let us Drink the New Wine Together!/ Beberemos El Vino Nuevo, Juntos!](#) These works are about crossing languages and geographies, to create points of connection through artistic practices, including 1) digital artistic maps, 2) analogue postal works sent artist-to-artist to countries across every continent in the world 3) choreographic workshops utilising scores and instructions 4) a virtual exhibition space which allows visitors to chat and dwell together in real time while navigating a series of digital spaces. Each attempt in this series presents a means for connection, a practice of reaching across the border at a time when dwelling together became impossible. The following piece of writing was created by Austrian artist Sabina Holzer and myself as we exchanged plans for her contribution to this collaboration – we described the project in the following terms:

this call
 this mourning
 this tenderness
 this reaching out nonetheless
 this precarious attempt
 these futures
 these communities yet to come
 these acknowledgements and worships
 these sparks of hope and also little losses
 these acts of friendship across languages and borders
 these acts of faith in small bodies of paper
 these envoys that move across weather systems, cloud patterns
 my summer to your winter my sky blue to your snow white
 sending the stuff of my shade to meet what it is that is giving you warmth
 to somehow exchange what shelter is, what holds us

For me, such projects are central to developing creative pedagogies. The ability to share current work with students allows me to share the vulnerability and excitement of developing a process in real time. I can then provide students with examples of how I am personally working through some of the provocations and projects I set for them in my own work, and show that even in such a restricted time as COVID it is vital and possible to stay connected with and aware of issues occurring for our international community. Overall, New Zealand's response to COVID has been one of the most successful in the world (Corlett, 2021), and for me it was important that students understand their privilege in this respect, and to consider countries who were facing

much graver dangers and greater restrictions. For me international artistic practices can be powerful means of gaining insight, care, and compassion for those who live beyond national and cultural borders (Longley, 2017).

Vignette Seven, Proyecto Cartón – Facilitating international connectivity and new teaching resources within the isolation of lockdown (Alys and Joanna)

Alys: Reaching Across Borders as a Form of Creative Pedagogy

Part of the Mapping Porous Borders/ Mapeo de Bordes Porosos project was the choreographic workshop *Language is an Intangible Bridge*, in collaboration with the Centre de Création O Vertigo in Montreal. This intensive workshop aimed at bringing together artists from around the world in a single workshop, presented through Zoom. Dancers worked simultaneously in studios in Auckland, Montreal, Stockholm and Santiago, and the session was run in English, French and Spanish.

We created a book of scores and provocations in order for participants to be able to go offline and return, while finding independent pathways through shared provocations for dance creation. Like the workshop, the book can be accessed in French, Spanish and English. This book can be accessed here (the English version begins on page 86):

Language is An Intangible Bridge

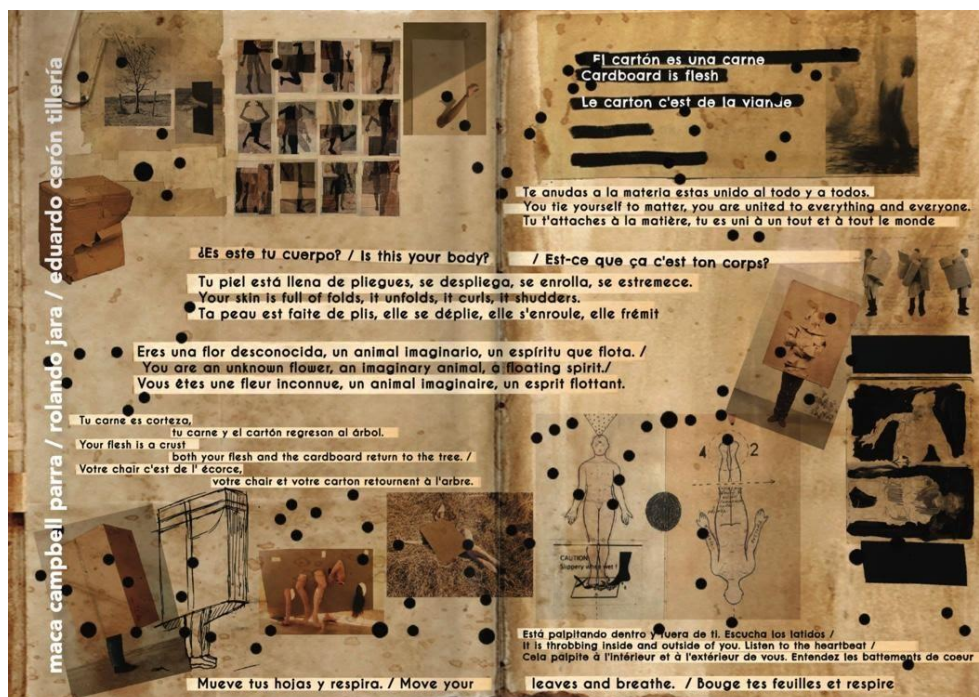
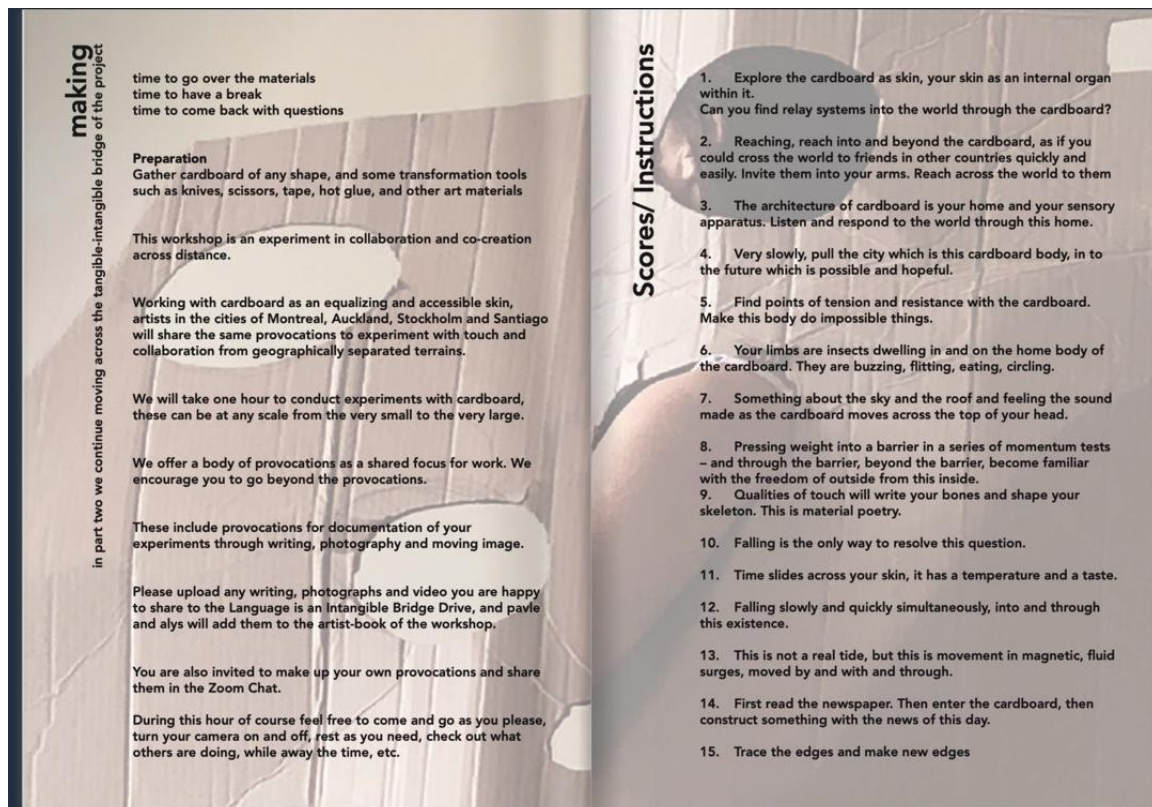
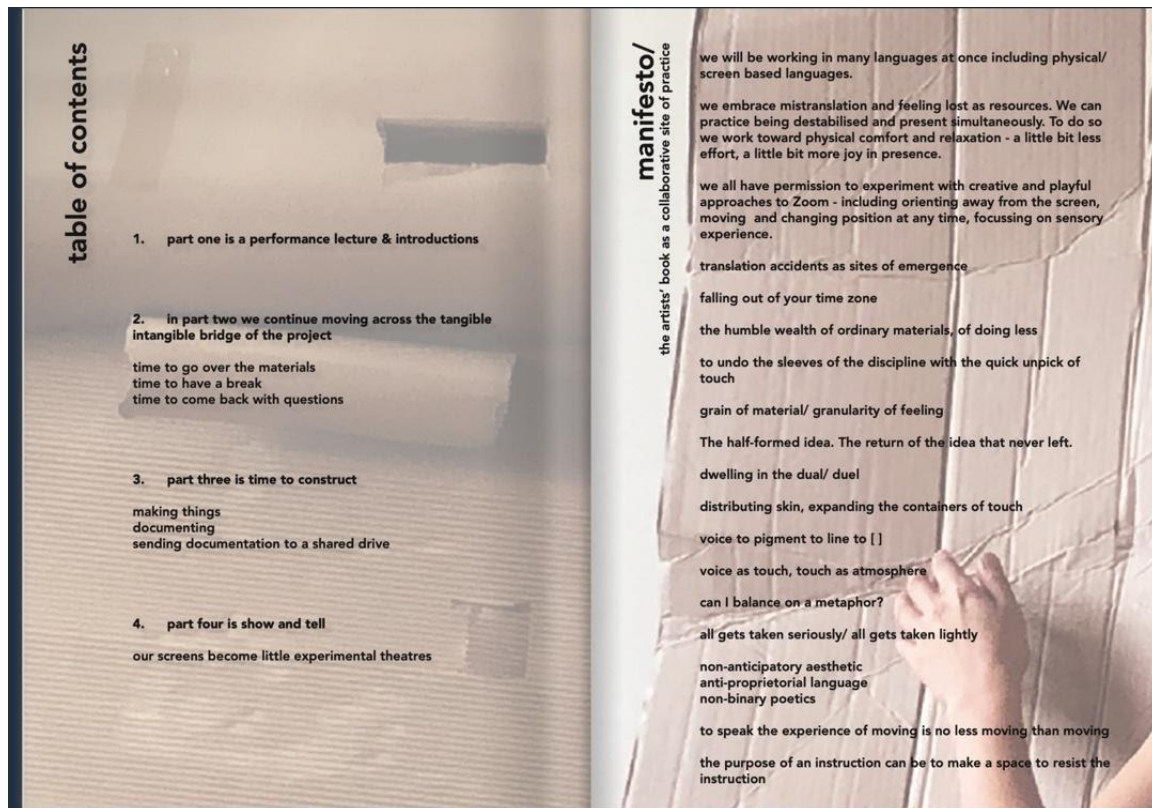


Figure 8: Proyecto Cartón
Macarena Campbell-Parra, Rolando Jara, Eduardo Cerón-Tilleria
Language is an Intangible Bridge artist book



Figures 9 and 10: Proyecto Cartón

Alys Longley, Macarena Campbell-Parra, Rolando Jara, Eduardo Cerón-Tilleria, Pavle Heidler
Language is an Intangible Bridge artist book

This workshop became a core teaching material for Dance 101G. We adapted the original workshop into a two-hour session, with students referring to the score-book as a key course reading. Students responded most strongly to the imperative 'The purpose of an instruction can be to make space to resist the instruction'.

Central to the *Language is An Intangible Bridge* workshop and book is the idea of creative resistance, of following curiosity, of refusing to let ones' body be colonised by Zoom. Instead, we aimed to actively resist the normativity of the Zoom screen to find restful, spacious, alternative physical spaces, while using Zoom to bring us into relation.

A key element of this workshop was real-time documentation, with Stockholm-based artist pavleheidler and I working together to create an artist book at the same time as our participating artists were uploading videos and photos of their creative experiments. This document of the project can be found here:

[Language is An Intangible Bridge Workshop Workbook](#)

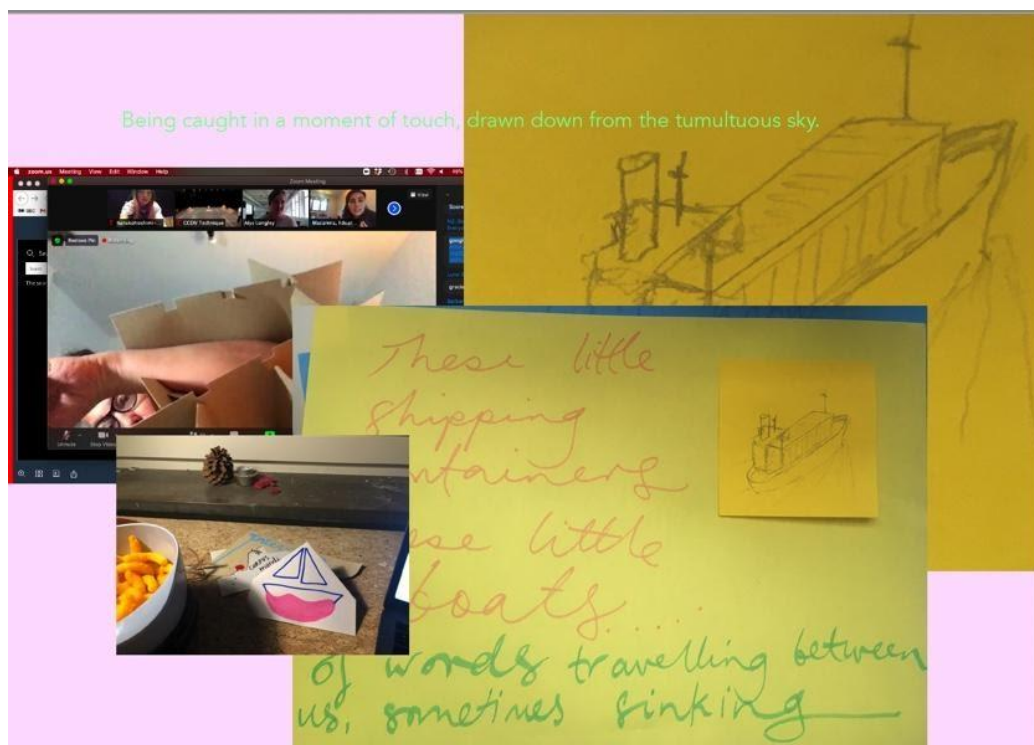


Figure 11: Page from *Language is An Intangible Bridge Workshop Workbook*, designed by pavleheidler and Alys Longley, with contributions by participants in the *Language is An Intangible Bridge* Workshop, hosted by CCOV Montreal

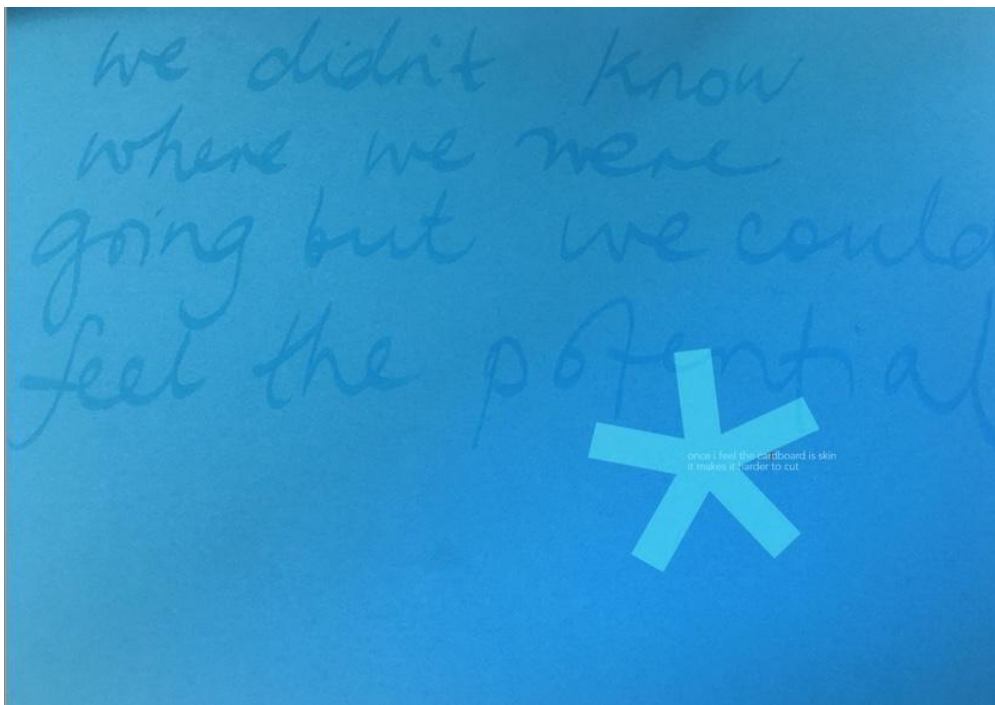


Figure 12: Page from *Language is An Intangible Bridge Workshop Workbook*, designed by pavleheidler and Alys Longley, with contributions by participants in the *Language is An Intangible Bridge Workshop*, hosted by CCOV Montreal

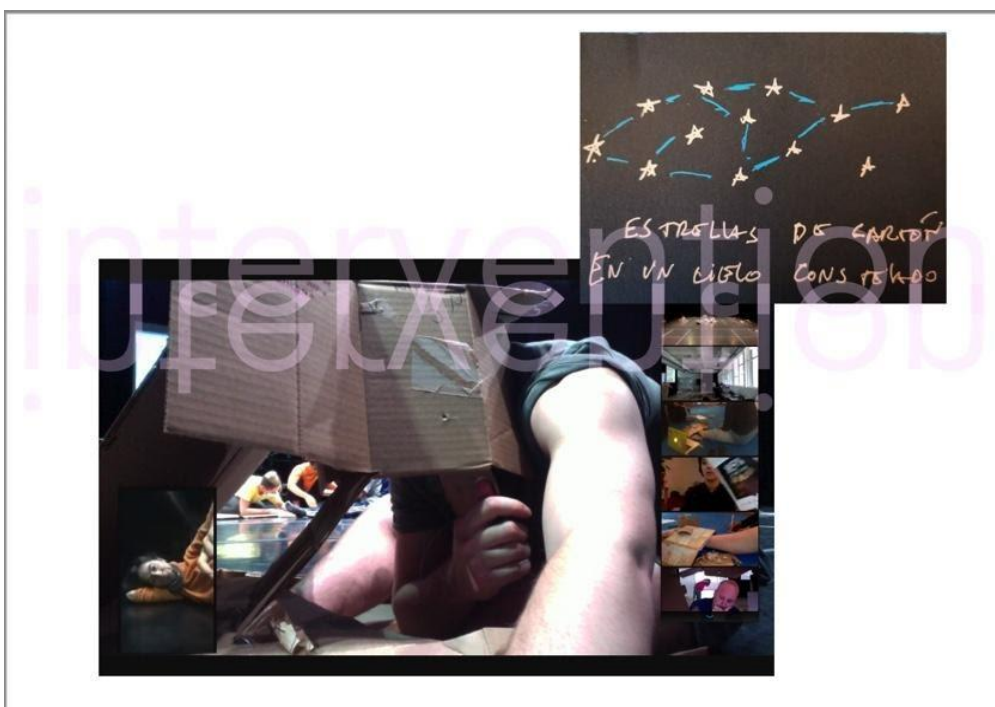


Figure 13: Page from *Language is An Intangible Bridge Workshop Workbook*, designed by pavleheidler and Alys Longley, with contributions by participants in the *Language is An Intangible Bridge Workshop*, hosted by CCOV Montreal.

Joanna: Notes on Participating in the Projecto Cartón workshop

Alys Longley and Swedish dance artist pavleheidler (2020) frame non-anticipatory aesthetics, 'practised by not wanting to know in advance. We learn by following. We follow intuitively. We respond instead of predicting. We are deliberately unsure of what we are doing. We place our relationality and method of working (somatics, friendship, curiosity, humour) first' (Longley & heidler, 2020).

*my body is my body
my skin is shared with you
by you
supported
held
a bridge between us
language trickles across the bridge
slowly drenching me
experiencing cartón
a project shared in a studio space in Auckland
that held a multicultural multilingual community
as it zoomed across oceans
connecting with
Aotearoa NZ
Santiago
Montreal
and Sweden
touching nations
and crossing cultures
in a time when separation segregation and social distancing
was prevalent
using language
zoom
and cardboard
to create bridges
connections across unreachable borders
we arrived in living rooms and studio spaces
as they landed with us in a dance studio in Auckland
the reading of the beautifully created
language is an intangible bridge book
washed through the space
as English*

met French
met Spanish
and all could meet in the shared experience of language translating
finding us standing along the bridge
guided into layers of multisensory experience
with touch reaching into
and beyond
across the world
to your friends

qualities of touch
will write your bones
as time slides across your skin
fluid surges trace the edges

Vignette 8: Togethering as a Mode of PhD Supervision: On artistic conversations through various constraints (Janaína)

I believe it was June 2020, just after the first lock-down, when we were allowed to safely share spaces here in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), Alys and I were sitting in a dance studio and organising a range of papers with different sizes and colours, ready to connect ideas into a (mind) map. As soon as we started talking, however, the both of us knew that, on that day, it was our skins that would be mapping the research questions. The intense desire of feeling touch, once again, became fraught with the necessity of slowing down rationality and opening up sense-ability. The ability to sense touch, sight, sound, proximity ... Every single gesture was a landmark for concepts to be felt. This was the first time I had the experience of discussing a methodological approach with a research supervisor, through the medium of Contact Improvisation. That day, the inscriptions of knowledge were made at a somatic level, and this shifted an important key in the development of my research.

Being a recent-arrived migrant in Aotearoa (New Zealand) around March 2020, I had not been in contact with many people before the first lockdown hit Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). At that time, I had ideas for a project, desire for collaborating and the need of a resident status - 'We can accept applications from: Individuals who are New Zealand (NZ) citizens or permanent residents' (Creative New Zealand 2020). A few weeks before we went in that first lockdown, Alys had introduced me to one of her post-graduate students, Joanna Cook. The sense of friendship was what gave me courage to approach Joanna to ask for support in an Emergency Relief Grant application. From the lack of my citizenship to a collaboration based on allyship. In August 2020, in the midst of a process for our collaborative showing of research material, COVID forced Joanna and I to move our studio practices to our own homes. Instead, we were connected through the third space of the digital. The context of transitioning sites in the midst of the shifts on the social

distancing rules presented us a range of questions: 'How/what is the shape of our togetherness in the face of the emerging context?'; 'How do we materialise our sense of being together?'; 'Within each iteration and its specific circumstances, how do we re-materialise contexts of togetherness?'. These questions opened up the reflection to a fundamental issue: 'how do we sustain our togetherness?' Sustainability at this point, was not oppositional to change nor a synonym of permanence. Perhaps being sustainable can mean acknowledging the openness of an ever-changing world and embracing flexibility: Trans-formations are happening. How do we per-form them?

In April 2020, during a poignant lockdown, we spontaneously started to exchange fragments of personal research experiments through WhatsApp messages. Daily snippets of images, short videos and long audios started to evoke a fractal of affectionate and low-stake experiments that particularly supported me through the rollercoaster of motivation in self-isolation.

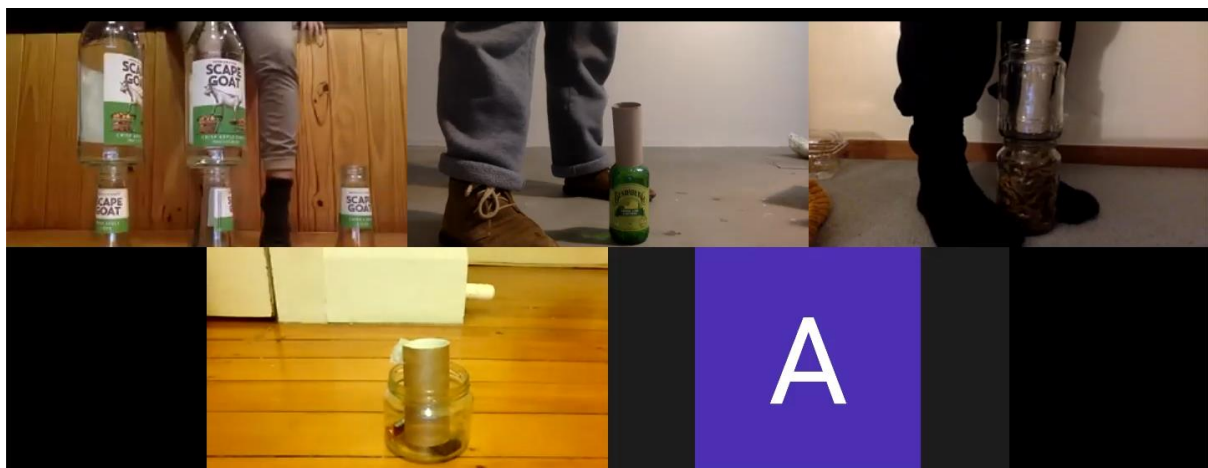


Figure 14: AND Lab and Politics of Togetherness' Workshop with Guest Artist Fernanda Eugênio (BR/PT) 3R Dance Project hosted by Janaína Moraes and Joanna Cook

The displacement of formality makes me wonder about what is affordable. We start to entangle the institutional with the personal, we start to move the ideas of what a thesis is, what supervision is, what research may be. We make trusting and "being there" fundamentals for the research process. We make each other invitations for keeping in movement, even if through small gestures. Invitations become performative, they guide us through micro-programmes. Research looks at life, daily experience teaches us about different pathways for researching. A picture that is sent, a video that responds to a research question, every single thing matters. It is a matter of staying connected, not to be productive all the time, but to remember we are here, together.

Vignette 9: Togetherness as Micro-Supervision (Joanna)

My master's journey began at the same time as New Zealand moved into its first lockdown. It was destabilising to work in a space through an era within which hiding, covering and fear were

prevalent. Brain fog and Zoom fatigue limited my ability to digest or absorb the academic reading I needed to be doing. This reality could have unsettled the foundations of my research journey. However, during a WhatsApp call with Alys (WhatsApp to have a break from Zoom – even the small changes made a difference) I vividly remember Alys offering the provocation, ‘just do what you need to continue.’ This freedom (and care) to untether from the understanding that I ‘had to’ read gave permission to follow my intuition: what did I need? What did the work need? In those early days, Alys would often offer research challenges, but always with an added ‘but you don’t HAVE to’ which gave me the motivation to continue because the challenge came in a package of freedom, not pressure. It was about me as a human first. The work was secondary because /was the work. Caring for myself was not only the key to the continuation of my research, but was central to the philosophy of our relationship.

Vignette 10: Togethering through Micro-Supervision (Alys)

We have just gone into our first lockdown in March 2020, and I have two students who have just begun serious independent artistic research. Janaína is exploring concepts around residency, poetics and translation in choreographic practice. Joanna is exploring feminist multimodal practices for undoing the silences enculturated into her voice as a woman. Usually, our practice would grow from conversations in my office, studio showings, and written feedback, but as we pivot to working from zoom, suddenly a new approach is needed. I am exhausted from working with my undergraduate students and academic administration, and keeping up with emailing is utterly overwhelming. This is a world of incipient burn-out, of suddenly attempting to be a primary school teacher to my two young daughters while simultaneously playing my part in keeping the university functioning, being there for all my students, attempting to recreate the very nature of what teaching is. We are trying to continue. Instead of checking-in with Janaína and Joanna over email, I send voice messages, while sitting under a tree in my garden, over WhatsApp. Over time, these messages become core to the rhythm of my week – I look forward to hearing what Joanna and Jana are working on, to going outside to a quiet spot and listening to their friendly voices, to hearing their questions and thinking alongside them. To seeing how they continue their work beyond anything I could imagine or instruct toward. I put these two in touch with each other, encouraging them to share work with each other and give each other feedback. As much as anything, this kind of supervision is one of friendship and support – it is like sunshine. We reorient the intensity of independent research into finding a rhythm of doing, and of reflecting, in whatever form is motivating in that moment. We remind ourselves that this is a time of global crisis, and that we can’t expect ourselves to function as usual. Somehow, we are experiencing this catastrophe together, and somehow every generous, positive and caring word is precious. I try to breakdown tasks into small actions of inquiry (leaving space for wonder, for rest), to engage maximum freedom, and minimum pressure. As I write this, I realise how vital creative conversations are for me as an artist, as an academic, as a teacher, as supervisor. I chat with Joanna and Janaína about my work with the *Mapping Porous Borders* projects – as Joanna

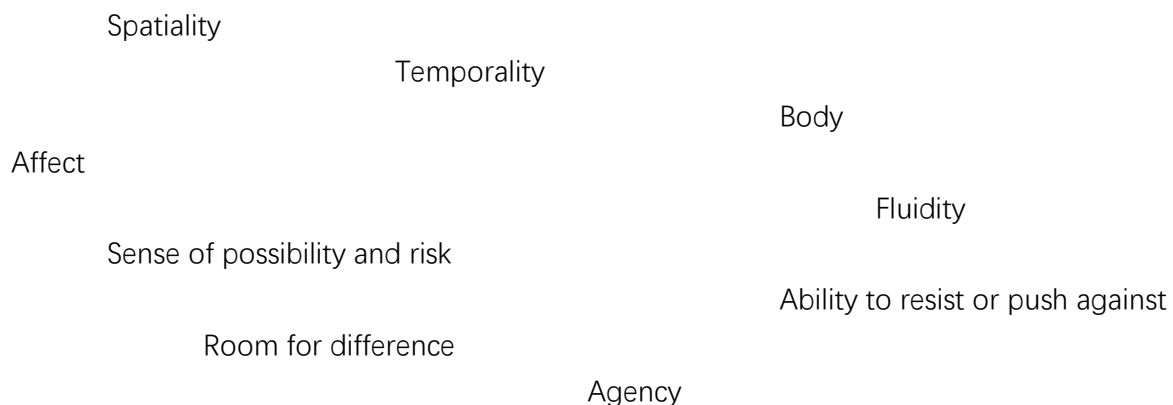
makes a website for her Masters website, I learn alongside her and make one for the *Mapeo* project. Our artistic stories provide a ground of hope and care through this exhausting, precarious time. It plays a vital role in sustaining us.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the experiences we shared as artists, educators and researchers during the destabilised milieu of the pandemic, this article articulates the ways in which we are re-orienting our teaching-learning practices through care and creative agency. In her (1998) article 'An ethic of care', Joan Tronto writes that care is often undervalued, and considered a 'menial' activity. We strongly agree with Tronto that care needs to be much more strongly valued across all kinds of institutions in contemporary life, including the university. Embedding care into education is anything but menial. It requires careful preparation, attendance to the diverse needs of students, imagination and empathy. It requires we look beyond the content students are assessed on, to carefully explore how relationships leaven students' experience of cultural and psychological safety, their physical experience, the way their experience is valued in the learning space.

We reimagine the future of our discipline through a lens formed out of two years of pandemic, yet we're also cognisant that the rise of digital education was imminent in any case, and that the question of how to offer studio-based creative education through virtual formats was inescapable. In teaching Dance 101G and engaging choreographic Masters and PhD supervision online, we lost the affective richness of in-person learning, and were forced to find new kinds of relationality. These emphasised independent creative problem-solving and a greater focus on multi-modal documentation. In our teaching and artistic research, we translated the poetics of physical experience into words, video, drawing, instructions. Artistic research projects with international colleagues such as *Language is An Intangible Bridge*, *Mapping Porous Borders*, and *Let Us Drink the New Wine, Together!* generated approaches to artistic practice that emphasised creative independence, idiosyncrasy, experimentation, and delight in material practice and difference. Above all, though, we have attempted to develop creative pedagogies that focus on care, connection, continuation, conversation, and relationship.

The ten vignettes presented in this article reflect specific strategies grounded in dance and interdisciplinary creative practice. They are not generalisable but they do offer specific aspects and tools that could unfold within other educational contexts:



Playfulness
Humour

Pleasure

Teaching through the period 2020-2022, our biggest challenge has been the ambiguity of open-ended assignments. When all is said and done, some students simply want to be told what the outcome of their work should look like, they want to be confident that they can achieve a high grade. Yet artistic research involves following and trusting ideas that sit at the edge of sense. This is where concepts around weak education, weak theory, and responding to the works of others in low-stakes creative formats have been invaluable. Key pedagogical values that we have made explicit when engaging with students are care for ourselves, care for each other, care for our families and communities, and the value of attempting even the smallest imaginative task. We have focussed on supporting each other to continue making and inventing in challenging times, as a practice of hope.

Author Biographies

Alys Longley is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and teacher. Alys's work exists as live performance, artist-book, installation, film, education curriculum, poetry, performance writing and lecture-demonstration. Alys's sole authored books include *The Foreign Language of Motion* and *Radio Strainer*, (Winchester University Press). Alys is an Associate Professor in the Dance Studies Programme, University of Auckland.

Janaína Moraes is a dance, performance and pedagogy artist. She is a PhD Candidate in Dance Studies at the University of Auckland experimenting with the poetics of invitation and art residencies. MA in Performing Arts (University of Brasília/Brazil) and PGDip Contemporary Studies in Dance (Federal University of Bahia/Brazil).

Joanna Cook is a dance artist, researcher, multimodal choreographer, and teacher. She is a PhD Candidate at the University of Auckland exploring the possibilities of Multimodality as (feminist) Choreographic Practice. She holds an MA Dance Studies with first class honours and a PGDip Dance Studies with distinction (University of Auckland).

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