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Late-pandemic shapshot: what were dancers thinking?

On a day in January, 2022, dance majors, a few guest professors, and one world-famous choreographer (Alonzo King) were asked to finish three sentences about how they were thinking and feeling.

After too many classes on zoom, dance majors had come back into studios gratefully, wondering what “back to normal” would feel like. Everything seemed familiar, yet not quite—a sort of “*déja-new*.” In a writing course called “Critical Issues in Dance,” where this journal originated, dance majors and a few guests were asked by Professor Jennifer Fisher, University of California, Irvine, to complete three sentences:

Today, I am feeling...

Today, I am thinking...

Today, I would like to...

Albany Adele (senior dance major)

Today I am feeling...

Strong. I ran today, which is something I have started to do more often. When I run, I can physically feel my worries melting away. The only thing I need to worry about is catching my breath.

Today I am thinking...

With gratitude. I am grateful to live in a safe home with people whom I love. I am grateful for my health especially in a time such as this.

Today I would like to...

Be a good teacher. I am teaching after this class and I want to help my students find joy in dance. I would also like to get a good night's sleep. I have fallen victim to TikTok late at night.

Sergio Camacho (senior dance major)

Today, I am feeling stressed about all the personal and at home responsibilities that must get done but I also feel a sense of ease knowing that time will allow for these things to settle

Today, I am thinking of my artistry and technique that needs to be the best it can be to have any sort of chance of joining a company

Today, I would like to ease the knot that feels so tight in my brain

Ebett Cruz (senior dance major)

Today I am feeling: sweaty palms, short breaths and tv noise in my brain though not from an actual TV

Today I am thinking: “Am I making the right choices? Most importantly, am I being honest with my choices?”

Today I would like to: Live up to my responsibilities and the commitments I made.

Alyson Ely (senior dance major)

Today, I am feeling.... Excited, bummed and anxious. Excited because I just opened the invitation to my best friend's wedding, I can't wait. Bummed because I will not be a “groom's (wo)man” in the wedding like he told me I would be when we were kids. Anxious because daily existence can be nerve-racking.

Today, I am thinking... about my future, near and far. Planning out the day, the week, the quarter, the year.

Today, I would like to... dance in the sun, feel strong, hang out with my cat and read the book

Lindsay Gilmour (dance professor at University of California, Irvine)

Today, I am feeling....
uplifted. I surfed in the morning while my husband and daughter made sandcastles on the beach. The ocean was cold as I paddled out to join a community of fellow wave riders. I know none of them by name, but still there is a kinship in sharing space and time and a love of the ocean. It is how I often feel in a studio of dancers.

Today, I am thinking...about darkness and light and how long to stay in darkness before opening a door or window. How long do I stay in my own frustration and sadness before shifting my awareness to what is beautiful and light? Many say we need darkness for growth and transformation. A seed germinates in the darkness of soil, yet it also needs the warmth light. In darkness there is mystery, a different kind of knowing, not a not knowing. In a dark forest we know with our other senses. We smell a steam, hear cracking of sticks underfoot, even taste the salt in the air closer to the sea. In darkness we go into what we know and know it differently.

Today, I would like to...be present with my 8-year-old daughter as she makes Valentine's day cards a month in advance, creates party invitations for Alexander Hamilton's Birthday, which is Tuesday, and sews new clothes for her stuffed cat Fluffy. When I tune into her energy, time slows and the world expands. It is a lovely place to be.

Lauren Gold (senior dance major)

Today, I am feeling free yet bound by my responsibilities. It is such a nice day out and I am motivated to read, take a walk, or find inspiration in the day, yet I have to surrender myself to Zoom and homework. I can feel the joy on the tips of my fingers, but cannot reach it.

Today, I am thinking about the future. I am trying to prepare myself for life after college, but it is

hard in the little free time I have. I worry that I'm not going to be prepared enough because of this lack of time.

Today, I would like to release all of the negativity that has consumed my life for the past few days and start fresh. I want to be able to find some rhythm in this time and be able to feel more productive with it.

Sena Hernandez (senior dance major)

Today I'm feeling the warmth of the sunlight and the easy breeze through my body.

Today I'm thinking about the summer days, wishing I was laying on the sand reading a book, and listening to the waves.

Today I would like to be present in this beautiful weather and disconnect from my devices.

Maya Holbrook (senior dance major)

Today I am feeling stiff and unmotivated. My body is screaming for a break, a time that I can let all of my tension go, a time where the stress of deadlines has washed away. I'm feeling like I need clones of myself to be able to get everything done. One Maya is not enough.

Today I am thinking about all of the unknowns. There are so many public issues, so many causes I could be devoting myself to yet I choose to watch Netflix instead. There are so many informative resources out there but how do I go about finding them? Just the thought is overwhelming. There is so much to know about historical events and yet again I choose to watch something more mind-numbing.

Today I would like to get through the day. I have things to look forward to in the next couple of days but I need to try to get all of my stuff done first.

Naomi Jackson (Professor, Arizona State University, guest lecturer on dance and ethics in the course)

Today, I am feeling a little tired but eager to finish the summaries of my book chapters for my new book on Dance and Ethics. I am also feeling like doing the latest Wordle word game with my son because it is so much fun.

Today, I am thinking that I hope my coughing husband only has a common cold and not COVID because that would cause major upheaval in our household. I am also thinking that the podcasts I've been listening to about relationships by Esther Perel called "Where Should We Begin" really are brilliant and everyone should hear them to become more emotionally intelligent.

Today, I would like to complete my list of tasks while celebrating my last day of freedom before going back to teaching. I would also like to find another good series to watch since I just finished Emily in Paris season 2 on Netflix.

Alonzo King (choreographer, artistic director Alonzo King LINES Ballet, San Francisco)

Today I am feeling scratchy in my brain.
The wise say that effort is progress and impatience is anger.
I have to accept where I am along the road and keep walking.
I can't buy any zeal.

Today I am thinking that I wish I could stop thinking.
I better start dancing. We've got to drown in something that
isn't harmful. Everybody needs a get-away. I've got to let go
with deadlines swarming all over me. If I could assist someone
in anything that would help. Laughing at myself always helps.

Today I would like to smile more, be more kind, take nothing for granted.
Stand in awe at everything before me, inside of me, over my head and under
my feet, friends and loved ones on the left and on the right. Strangers don't exist
when the heart is open.

Today I would like to blow out the candle of my little self and expand into
everywhereness. I want to feel the assurance of a great love that death won't interrupt.
Today I would like to bend over backwards and expect nothing in return.

Brandye Lee (dancer/choreographer, guest on history of Black ballet schools in the course)

Today, I am feeling....
Like a fish washed-up on the shore. Every now and then I get hit with an invigorating wave. But
so much—dare I say too much?—of the time I'm just so damn uncomfortable.

Today, I am thinking...
Me: (in my D.C. accent, congratulating myself): Well then, apparently I must be growin' like-a-
mug!

Today, I would like to...
(Monotone computer screen/electronic voice in my head): "Be the change. Be the change. Be the
change be the change be the change be the..."
(The sound of a record player needle scratching clear across the vinyl).

Me looking in the mirror at my a-few-too-many-missed-opportunities-already-this-year self:
Nah Sis. DO...The Change.

Repeats "Do the change" over and over again like Marcus in Boomerang when he lands on the
name Strangé. Slowly begins clapping that builds into vigorous applause while repeating, "Do
the change! Do the change! Do the change!"

Walks towards the door, and turns out the light on exit.

Amecie Lublin (senior dance major)

Today I am feeling drawn to my covers. enclosed in a room of drapes with minimal light shining through. I created this in observation, but now I see this might be symbolic to me in a metaphorical sense.

Today I am thinking about what happens when your brain second guesses. Why do I second guess? What happens with every synapse among each neuron to cause the brain to overthink?

Today I would like to take a breath and go for it. Feel what I need to feel, accept what you cannot change.

Rebekah Lund (senior dance major)

Today, I am feeling... tired, warm and better than previous days. It feels like I am going through the motions and not really thinking about what I am doing.

Today, I am thinking... when will I be able to get out of my apartment because they have taken away the stairs to get out. Also the ice cream I had last night.

Today, I would like to... enjoy the sun for a couple of minutes in between classes and rehearsals.

Amanda McCarthy (senior dance major)

Today I am feeling ...
Many emotions, changing by the hour or with each new task that I begin.

Today I am thinking ...
About all the possibilities that can happen in my life within the next couple of months

Today I would like to ...
Reset my mind and body for another week of school and dancing. Keeping up with my daily healthy habits that keep me stable.

James Murray (T.A. and second year MFA student)

Today I am feeling....particularly numb. Could be the Novocain from the dentist visit. Could be my carefree indifference?

Today I am thinking...of what I think about most days — what will tomorrow look like?

Today, I would like to... be back in California. I hear it's in the 80s. Also, karaoke sounds nice right about now.

Jackie Ondrusek (senior dance major)

I feel burned out and exhausted. I am feeling slightly hopeless but trying to bring light to what the future holds.

I think about how grateful I am to have the life I do and to be fortunate enough during this pandemic despite it still being difficult for me.

I would like to do something that makes me happy this week to get my mind off of my life and school right now.

Ariel Scott (senior dance major)

Today, I am feeling fluffy pink, like it should be a day off, like the sunshine is especially warm-beautiful-cozy...

Today, I am thinking that I don't want to go to rehearsal, that Irvine is beautiful, that these chocolate biscuits are tasty...

Today, I would like to be free and unencumbered, to lounge in the sun and read with no responsibility - no homework - no deadlines, to be warm and cozy and stagnant, to dance... but only if it's for me

Freya Starks (senior dance major)

Today, I am feeling less overwhelmed than yesterday. I feel rested and somewhat more in control of my day.

Today, I am thinking I need to get all of my Oceanography lectures done. I am thinking of ways to maintain control through the chaos of Zoom land, scheduling rehearsals and soon to be driving 8 hours back home.

Today, I would like to get along with others around me and make more time for intentional self-care and relaxation.