



PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

PERFORMING THE PANDEMICS THE INTERMINGLING CREATION OF A DANCE FESTIVAL AND A COMMUNITY AMIDST A GLOBAL EMERGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Stemming from one creative experience that emerged in London during the lockdown period of early 2020, called the “Emergency Festival”, this article is a result of observations based on practice, centred around the festival that a group of multicultural, interdisciplinary movement-based researchers and dancers created, curated, and participated in. It explores the possibility of making a radical alterity out of a hitherto previously established ideas of territory, time, and community, using performative writing as practice-based analysis scheme. Employing the concept of “communitas” by Victor Turner (1969) to approach the phenomenon of dance through distance, the article examines the importance of the emergence of collaboration as a way forward, epistemologically looking at dance as a method of creating and sustaining communities that are longing for a sense of home in times of change. The writing is divided into three parts, focussing on the aspects of space, time, and community, all the while embedded in the nature of movement and its effect on the practitioners, and onlookers, concluding with contemplation on the place of dance in varied mediums and the way forward to study it in a period of global disruption.

Keywords: Dance, communitas, performance, pandemic, community-building

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María José Bejarano Salazar Costa Rica, 1987. She has a degree in psychology and specialized in Dance Movement Therapy in Argentina. She recently completed the Erasmus+ Choreomundus Program. She has worked on the empowerment of vulnerable communities through play, community arts and creativity in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Argentina and Colombia. As a community dance artist, she is currently developing Proyecto Colibrí – Acompañamiento Creativo, a Costa Rica-based initiative that aims for community development through community dance, ICH, and the research of corporeal tools for social change and sustainable development. Her academic research focuses on the relationships between dance, community, and territory.

- ▶ **Naiara Müssnich Rotta Gomes de Assunção** is a historian, anthropologist, dancer and teacher from Porto Alegre, Brazil. She holds a BA and an MA in History from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and a MA in Dance Anthropology by Choreomundus - International master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage (NTNU/SZG/UCA/RU). Her academic interests include the history and current developments of belly dancing. She is the coordinator of the project *Hunna Collective - Historians who dance* that seeks to intertwine theoretical and practical knowledge about Roma dances, oriental dances and its fusions.

Subhashini Goda Venkataramani is an interdisciplinary performing artist and researcher and a poet from Chennai, India. With a masters in English literature and another in Dance Anthropology, her creativity is influenced by growing up in a multicultural, multilingual neighbourhood layered with complex everyday narratives of gendering, storytelling, and transgression. The core of her artistic practice revolves around traditions and memories, while her academic research is situated at the intersections of dance, politics, and rituals, aiming to highlight her perspectives to understanding “dance”. She is currently pursuing an interdisciplinary PhD at University College Dublin.

Attaining clarity on the ephemerality that gets washed up every time a performance is finished is not easy, but somehow the stability of the traces persisting after those moments of theatricality open the possibility to start speaking about them. Yet for the subject of this article, theatricality was far from the only fleeting or unstable element in the mix. This article was written by four different pairs of hands coming from different parts of the world: India, Brazil, Ecuador, and Costa Rica, telling the story of the emergence of a dance festival amidst the first lockdown of 2020 in the city of London. There were fourteen migrant dancers and students behind it (including the four authors of this article)¹ living in the UK to complete their last semester of the *Choreomundus* - International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice and Heritage at Roehampton University. After spending the previous semesters in small cities of Hungary, Norway, and France, as part of our Erasmus Master's path, we were ready to enjoy all the cultural and social activities of a cosmopolitan capital. Then, COVID-19 happened: right at the moment when the world was set to hold still and the health regulations unanimously urged people to "stay home", an international group of dancers from eleven different nationalities found themselves looking at their current place of residence - the Mount Clare student residence of Roehampton University in South-West London - as a place to be yet transformed into a home.

Amidst the shock and turbulence, one of us got infected with COVID-19. Talking was not allowed anymore, because of the pervasiveness of a virus that was still to be confirmed. Holding our breath and words was a safety issue, but art was still a viable option to coalesce and support each other as started to be seen across the world (Heyang & Martin, 2020; Kunjumon, 2020; Nancy, 2020; Supiano 2020), although this is the first account that we have seen combining alternative uses of space to engage audiences both physically and virtually. Since we were all dancers, we performed: we performed the panic, we performed the isolation, we performed the personal space, we performed the public space in between the two buildings, functionally labelled E1 and E2 (image 16), that we occupied in Mount Clare, and we performed the pandemic. After a first disruptive performance by Jorge Poveda, who wanted to communicate with our sick neighbour through a window, twenty-one performances followed. This series of interventions became vertices for the transmission, discussion and improvisation of dance practices, all of which after a couple of iterations were proclaimed as "Performing the Pandemics – Emergency Festival".

As dance, performance art, installations, live streams, online classes, drawings, poetry, discussions, video-arts, songs, and rituals were birthed, these communal moments of creativity started consuming daily-life spaces and objects like duvets and blankets. Worthy of several explorations, clothing items and scarves became excuses for dances, while the world entered its seemingly indefinite quarantine. The ordinary became extraordinary, while the extraordinary conditions of a global pandemic started to become more commonplace. In an outward direction, the dances that were presented in the green space in-between our buildings, started infecting everything around them - neighbours, passers-by, drivers, onlookers, buildings, trees, houses, animals, and security guards. Inwards and outwards, these daily performances, built a ritualistic

▶ habit and assisted in the appearance of transient sculptures made of flesh and fear for the observing neighbourhood. Ultimately, it all served as a device to re-shape our perception about the shared spaces and the emergent community attached to them, while facing a global emergency. Interrupting the melancholia and channelling a rather invigorated account, we look back on this series of art interventions that we, and progressively all the neighbouring buildings, witnessed and celebrated through the safety of our own windows.

The traces of these experiences are not only aesthetic and artistic, but social and technological, as using digital forms of connection glinted during these times as almost the only way to belong to the social world beyond our personal spaces (Gao & Sai, 2020). Paradoxically, technological resources that used to be framed as a synonym of automation and disembodiment, suddenly became the very resource to trigger, inspire and share the results of the embodied expressions created within the Festival, regardless of how “pixelated, tracked, deformed and dematerialized” they could be (Mandalaki & Daou, 2021, p. 238). Some of the consequences of this violent stream of creativity have made their way through the virtual space at *emergencyfestival.wordpress.com* and the list of all the performances, with dates and names of the dancers, can be found in the Appendix list of this article.

This interwovenness of materials, positions, and languages that were unleashed by the twenty-one dance performances of this Festival have shaped a multidimensional body of knowledge, experiences, and diversity that we wish to discuss through this article. In this vein, our aim is to analyse the artistic experience of the “Emergency Festival” as a liminal space for multicultural community-building in response to the global pandemic, approached through Victor Turner’s (1967) concept of *communitas*. Complementarily, we use the concept of liminality to address the unusual atmosphere that inaugurated other logics different from everyday routines, such as observed in rituals but lately discussed in the context of performance art, theatre and happenings. According to Turner (1967) there are social events that invert social structure, occupying a “moment into and outside time” (Turner, 1967, p. 103). These events emphasize a general social bond over the regular structural specific bonds, which are usually hierarchical. Therefore, the condition in which a community lives an event where social structure is temporarily broken or inverted is understood as “liminal”. Such liminal space has the potential to generate an intense experience of togetherness and intensified communal spirit which Turner referred to as *communitas*. In this sense, we aim to analyse the Emergency Festival as a liminal experience, which provoked a strong *communitas* that reverted the widespread isolation amidst global unforeseen conditions.

This article, being the result of a collective practice-based exercise, did not stem originally from theoretical underpinnings. Instead, it was written as a way to systematise our varied lived experiences revolving around events common to the four of us. We understand this analytical exercise close to the performative writing proposed by Ronald Pelias (2005). ▶

Performative writing features lived experience, telling, iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life. With lived experience, there is no separation between mind and body, objective and subjective, cognitive and affective. Human experience does not reduce to numbers, to arguments, to abstractions. (Pelias, 2005, p. 418)

Therefore, we have structured an exercise of academic writing to recover the actions, events and perceptions related to a series of artistic interventions, intersected with a theoretical discussion. As some threads of the affective, aesthetic, and relational experiences persisted through this text, the reader will note a creative prose as well as a poetic narrative that mirrors our complementary positionality as artists and researchers. We believe in the richness of both perspectives interweaving instead of allowing either one to absorb and eclipse the other.

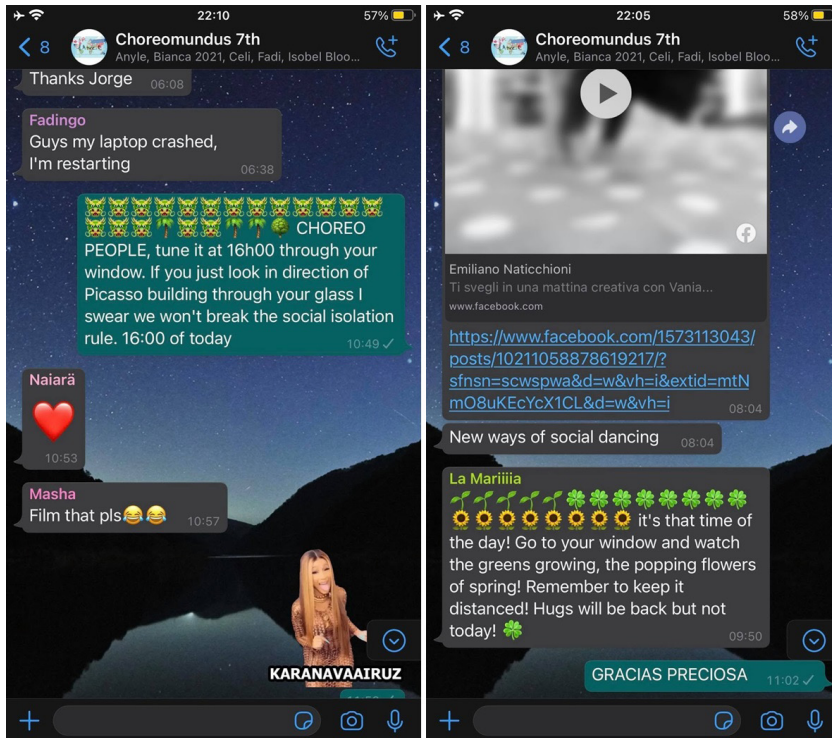
To present the results of our analysis on how the festival created a sense of *communitas* and a rupture in the structure of our daily lives, we have identified three salient branches that allowed us to systematize the ensuing reflections. First, we are choosing to approach this long cycle of dance performances highlighting the *space(s)* wherein they were presented, either physical or digital, as they fundamentally shaped the involvement of audiences and creators. Therefore, the first section of this article will talk about the transformation that happened in the territory that we suddenly had to call “home”. These transformations of the yard/stage wherein we performed, from a non-space that we barely noticed in the months of winter to the re-signified locus for the resurgence of dance will be accounted as both affective and concrete. The second section of the article will discuss the transformation on the perception of *time* caused by the confinement and how the dance performances provided chronological anchoring and reframing of daily life in quarantine. Lastly, we will discuss, through the concept of *communitas*, how these metamorphoses in space and time shaped the multicultural *community* of students that was built around them to cope with the global pandemic. We will deepen into these matters in the following sections, so we invite the readers to jump into the plural and complementary narratives that compose this written body of memory. Make yourself at home – as we did – and “please, do not mind the mess”².

Improvised stage/improvised home: alteration of the space through performance

We walked past the yard between our buildings countless times, and we barely noticed it. A paved trail next to a lawn covered in grass, and a fence; nothing fancy. It was an unimportant ground between our residence and the street. A non-place, it could be said, one of those spaces that exist only as mere transitions. Abruptly, this non-place was redefined when our colleague Jorge sent us all a message: “look outside your windows at 4 pm” on March 24th, 2020 (screenshot on the left of image 1) and did the performance that was to inaugurate this whole festival. This invitation turned our gaze towards the yard with an unprecedented attention, remarked by ensuing daily invitations through social media that soon became a tradition, as seen on the screenshot on the right of image 1.

Image 1

Reframing the physical space through the virtual interaction. Screenshots of the invitations to watch the first and the 12th performances. Announcements made by Jorge Poveda Yáñez on the 24th of March and by María José Bejarano on the 4th of April 2020.



Soon, given the difficulties of mobility in the context of a paused world, a different kind of migration began to happen inside out, and consequently, our surroundings mutated their meaning. We started performing in this yard, which emerged as an alive stage with changing colours, temperatures, wind, rain, growth of the grass, squirrels, and a big tree that grew leaves as the seasons changed, witnessing our dances. This yard became the first evident territory being transformed by dance, from a transitory ground it turned into the scenery for all sorts of images, hops, emotions, memories, and spins brought to life by our bodies. Thirteen of these performances and the changes on the environment can be attested through the following images. The titles have been created for analytical purposes in this writing and the accompanying descriptions narrate the content of the performance in a poetic voice.

- ▶ **1- Breaking time and space (Jorge Poveda Yáñez):** He walks around in circles carrying his blue feather. He manifests a new routine. Is this the first time we really saw the yard?

Image 2

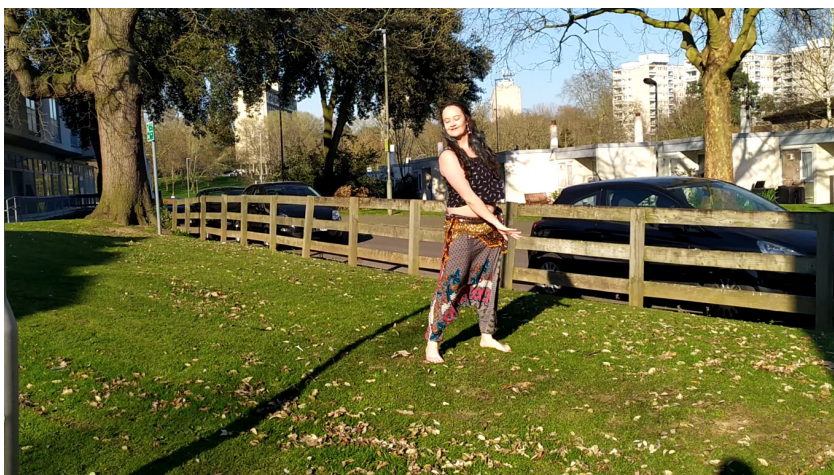
Jorge Poveda Yáñez's performance on the 24th of March 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



- 2- Raising questions on the Orient (Naiara Rotta Assunção):** Hip movements bringing foreign sounds of other territories into the backyard.

Image 3

Naiara Rotta Assunção's performance on the 25th of March 2020. Screenshot of video by Fadi Giha.



▶ **3- Flowering in spring (Subhashini Goda):** She paints the yard with new colours, is she the dance or the flower?

Image 4

Subhashini Goda's performance on the 26th of March 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



4-Building a home in transit (María José Bejarano): She created a circle with beloved objects that symbolised a home. An embodiment of a hard decision about staying or leaving, and a plea for being sustained by this new territory.

Image 5

María José Bejarano's performance on the 27th of March 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



- ▶ **5- Putting herself at risk (Bianca Beneduzi):** Wash your hands, wash your hands, watch your hands.

Image 6

Bianca Beneduzi's performance on the 28th of March 2020. Screenshot of video by Tainá Louven.



- 6- Nowhere to go (Anyla Musa):** Embodying the domestic elements, where does my home end and I begin?

Image 7

Anyla Musa's performance on the 29th of March 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



- ▶ **7- A hundred steps in the same place (Fadi Giha):** Thousand ways of walking into a 2x2 room.

Image 8

Fadi Giha's performance on the 1st of April 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



- 8- Immune victory (Celina Gallo):** Dance performance after overcoming a COVID-19 case.

Image 9

Celina Gallo's performance on the 2nd of April 2020. Picture by Mark Lenini Parselelo.



▶ **9- Two meters of affection (Fadi Giha and Dafni Pantazopoulou):** Incorporating rules of distancing for touch.

Image 10

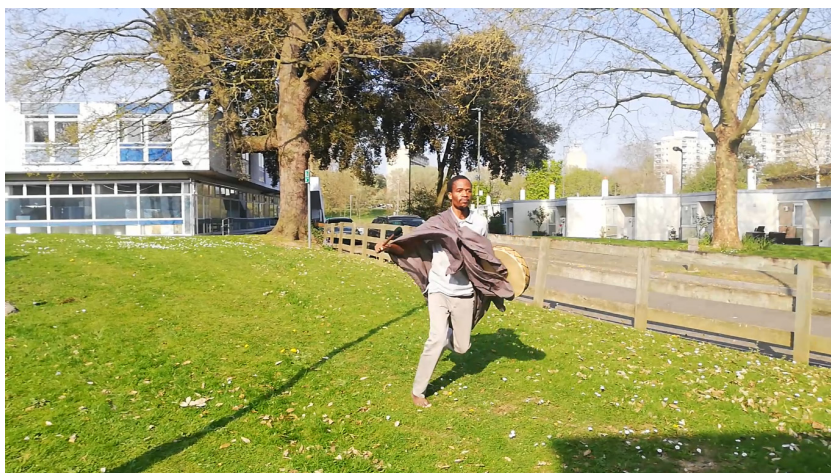
Fadi Giha and Dafni Pantazopoulou's performance on the 2nd of April 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



10- Bringing back home rhythms (Gwerevende Solomon): A community lives in one body.

Image 11

Gwerevende Solomon's performance on the 9th of April 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



▶ **11- A changing tradition (Mariama Hashiem):** Body storytelling of ancestral Ghanian dances.

Image 12

Mariama Hashiem's performance on the 10th of April 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



12- Community spirits come alive (Goriola Oyinkansola Olabanke): Some Orishas live in the intersection of paths, such as this intersection in our residence yard.

Image 13

Goriola Oyinkansola Olabanke's performance on the 12th of April 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



▶ 13- Playing with presence (María José Bejarano, Anyla Musa and Mark Lenini Parselelo): When dance is possible without a body.

Image 14

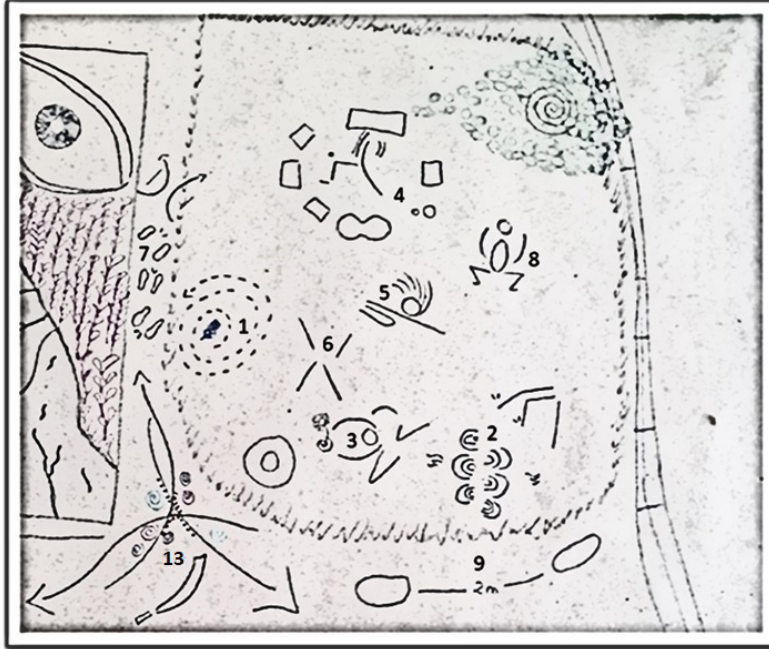
María José Bejarano, Anyla Musa and Mark Lenini Parselelo's performance on the 26th of April 2020. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



This transitory space previously described as a non-place, was filled with significance by the bodies in movement. The following map (image 15) matches the previous pictures of the performances, each of them with different dance elements, rhythms, motifs and so on. This is a map of the dances we all did, inclusive of the four authors of this paper, in a sort of creative notation of the dances. The performances are represented through a symbol associated with the quality of movement or trajectories of the dancers. This graphic material supports the narration of the reconfiguration of the space in the garden as we lived it, using a creative score of the performers and the liminal space founded by these episodes. As we said, prior to the festival, we barely stayed within this space, but later it became a place of memory; we took care of it and we noticed even the smallest details of the changing elements present in it. ▶

Image 15

Map of the performances on Mount Clare Garden by María José Bejarano.



The second territory impacted by these performances was inevitably our bodies. As with every other human being during these times, our bodies turned into immunological battlefields with certainties always in suspense: safety yet to be found within our flesh; affection and support yet to be found through distance; normality yet to be found through virtuality; a sense of home yet to be found in a place initially transitional. Dance seemed like the appropriate weapon to face these challenges. It allowed us to enact, express, and narrate our trajectories and the breaking point in each life within an unprecedented global emergency.

With the passage of time, our dancing bodies inaugurated a less notorious, less palpable third territory behind these evident places. It could be referred to as an affective territory. The resignification of our residence space and the possibility of performing our dances built an alternative relationality that impacted the emotions expressed on conversations and common everyday actions; the thoughts and expectations towards one another; a constructed an altered sense of community that felt as new social territory being inaugurated. By surprise or by election, we found ourselves positioned in the role of witness of each other's growth, health, wellness, calm, peace, ease and learning. It is in this territory that the dance became present, and not in the garden by itself, nor solely in our bodies. It is this relational territory of intermingling interactions what gave support to the surge of this dance festival, as a translucent spider web weaving among all those involved. Thick enough to be felt, yet invisible to the foreign eye.

► **The time of the clock and the time of the performance: transformation in the perception of time through dance**

The resignification of space and of the bodies inhabiting it shaped the upbringing of the Emergency Festival. But having to deal with “time” in a moment where part of humanity was quarantined, working from home and practising social isolation, was an additional fleeting sensation. During the first semester of 2020, testimonials of people finding new hobbies, starting yoga classes, learning how to make bread, asking for movies and series suggestions, were widespread across the internet. Trying to fight the sensation of being trapped in the *Groundhog Day* - making a reference to the 1993 movie with Bill Murray (Ramis, 1993) in which the main character saw himself living the same day on repeat - people found themselves trying to cope with their confined solitude and with their “abundance of time”. The experience of the community of international students built around the Emergency Festival, however, was quite different, and it could be better grappled through the following time-related parallels.

It is said that in some cities and localities in the tropical regions by the rainforest of the North of Brazil, the time is measured according to the rain. Every day, at some point in the late afternoon, a heavy tropical rain falls, breaking the day into two: before and after the occurrence of the rain. The inhabitants of these areas move around the cities and villages counting on that: “Are we meeting before or after the rain?”, “Is the plumber coming to fix the sink before or after the rain?” The rain serves as a concrete device to measure time and this, in turn, alters people’s representations of it.

Similarly, to think about the subject of “time”, Edward Thompson (1991), the British historian, wrote that in the 17th century, the image of the mechanism of the clock took over the European life, causing great changes in the perception of time. He investigated the progression of the notion of time based on natural phenomena, to a time ruled by the clock hands, which marked the passage of rural society to an urban one centred on productivity. He then differentiates the notion of “time of the clock” from the “time of the tasks”. In the capitalist industrial societies, the clock rules peoples’ lives, determining periods of work and rest. In rural societies, nature is the biggest reference: you sleep when it is dark, you wake up when the sun is up, you plant and harvest when the seasons are appropriate. Thompson, though, recalls that some of us still maintain, to a certain degree, this “natural” working rhythm:

The work pattern was one of alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness, wherever men were in control of their own working lives. (The pattern persists among some self-employed - artists, writers, small farmers, and perhaps also with students - today, and provokes the question whether it is not a “natural” human work-rhythm). (Thompson, 1991, p. 373)

As foreign dance-artists that had to call the student accommodation located in the almost rural outskirts of London a “home”, we were almost drawn to return to that pre-capitalist time that Thompson mentions, where nature and tasks regulated peoples’ lives. And, as the Northern Brazilians, we also had a daily event to measure this time, although instead of “the rain”, we had “the performance”. The tasks we had to accomplish were

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- ▶ scheduled according to the time of the festival: “Is the online class before or after the performance?”, “are we meeting to arrange our module assignments before or after the performance?”, “are we cooking lunch before or after the performance?”

Indeed, there was a parallel between the rise of a community around these performances and the change of perceptions regarding our common space, but also regarding a shared notion of time. The spring transformed the landscape of the Mount Clare residence wherein we had our dance stage: the air was filled with pollen and falling petals, the tree in front of our houses passed from a dull brown to green and alive. It almost felt like our dancing was bringing life to that environment, our corporeal interventions seem to mimic the cycles of nature. We then became more attentive of our inner cycles and how they influenced others. We started to feel more connected to our own bodies but also to the bodies of the others in the group. The moment of the daily performances was also a moment of collective care: it was when we allowed ourselves to pause on our readings and writing, move to the yard or look out from the window, to check how the others were, if the quarantined ones needed essentials from the supermarket or pharmacy and so on. We already had a community, as classmates that were studying and travelling together for a year and a half, but the Festival brought us an unprecedented sense of *communitas*, as mentioned by Silvia Citro and María Luz Roa:

Perhaps, just as health professionals teach us hygienist techniques, it is the indigenous, Afro, mestizo and popular sectors, who can teach us to build from the collective, new arts of re-existing, new collaborative micro-policies that bring us back the way to be joyful subjects and not just disease vectors, that offer virtual hugs and not just illnesses. It is not just about entertaining ourselves as a time-pass, but about “entre-tenernos”³ to re-exist with others and live-in-time. For this reason, although we cannot get all together and go outside, perhaps more than ever, it is necessary to say now: I STAY AT HOME BUT IN COMMUNITAS. (Citro & Roa, 2020, para. 16, our translation)

Our *communitas* was built within the framework of these transformations of the notions of time and space, of “the self” and “the other”, in a way that the “otherness” of these fourteen dancers from eleven different countries seemed compatible. The chronological aspect of the daily performances, always presented at 16h00, built a common time different from the time of the clock, a “particularised” timing for the way life was organised around *this* space with *these* bodies.

Bodies bent together: Sustaining relationships and communities in and through dance during times of change

As in any Festival organisation, but specially in emerging dynamics, roles started to be defined by contingency. One of us took the lead on the recordings for archiving purposes, one of us was devoted to live transmissions on social media, another one engaged through taking pictures and another colleague was responsible of announcing the performance of the day by yelling out her window, in a scene that resembled theatre show announcements from before the digital era. The role of the audience and the performers was also flowing every day. The way in which the audience located themselves varied too, from one performance to another, creating multiple configurations and relationships between performers and spectators.

Image 16

Jorge Poveda Yáñez's performance on the 04th of April 2020. This picture shows the perspective of the performers. It is possible to see Fadi Giha and Majo Bejarano filming Jorge dancing and some open windows and curtains in the buildings E1 and E2 from where the Mont Clare residents watched the performances. Screenshot of video by Naiara Rotta Assunção.



Very soon we invited friends from outside our residence to perform solos. Keeping social distance, they started summing up from other residencies on campus. As we started to analyse these dynamics and as this article began to take shape, a re-reading of the notion of *communitas* brought our attention to the following passage. Edith Turner writes

We saw the alternation between fixed and fluid custom, where anything might happen, where the tight fit of systems was dissolving into something fluid and growing original unit by original unit, different from anything before as if a seed in the ground were unwrapping. This is generativity itself, free, untrammelled like nature, and autonomous, open to the energy and spirit powers of primal existence. Also, liminality sometimes becomes a way of life, a much broader phenomenon, generating another whole genre of culture. People of all kinds populate its in-between world. (Turner, 2012, p. 168)

While this was an observation made during her fieldwork in the African continent, the text strongly related to what we were going through, and becoming, during our time at the Mount Clare residence. In fact, ours was a community that was being formed and moulded in a state of perpetual liminality. Our ideas of what a community is, have always been, and healthily so, diverse. Some of us, for instance, seek togetherness in having lunch, while for some others, community activity involves quiet contemplation in a public space, soaking in the comfort of the others' presence. In such terms, it becomes intriguing how this group of people gathered to form a common experience for themselves to express and to digress. In such extraordinary times, with a lack of familiar fixed rituals for space or for time, factors such as the necessity to be at a place at a particular time made way for other newly created factors such as just being present while dealing with an uncertain tomorrow.

▶ In the small space between the E1 and E2 buildings in Mount Clare, we saw the creation and the fruition of a community that came together aided by a pandemic. While the world continued to count losses every day, there was a glimmer of hope that began to shadow our grief of isolation, and that was this unknown strength arising from dancing together, either physical or digitally. Soon, this gave way to groups being created online with a cognizance being developed on virtual learning. Not limited to dance, old friends and relationships began to resurface during this period as people reconnected within the shrinking world of the internet. These incidents impacted our dancing and in turn, the dances impacted us. Scripting a space for movement can be challenging in such uncertainties. A new world order warrants a new methodology, a new community, and a new way of looking at academic thought – which entails creating from a radical empiricism of that which is known and that which is felt too.

To study dance in isolation is an approach that needs to be addressed with scepticism. Dance after all, is embedded, and resonates with, a community. Therefore, in the community we lived in, every dance that was curated at the festival, knowingly or unknowingly, came as a direct reflection of our state of mind. And so, it happened every day. A community built in solidarity, in a mutual quest for seeking balance amidst imbalance, a stable footing, a home in an impermanent territory. This community was ratified and reified when our Syrian classmate cheered “*aiwa aiwa!*” amidst a performance and we all turned to him to ask what it meant, only to be told it was to cheer the dancer, and soon we joined the chorus of screams as Naiara Rotta Assunção danced. Languages and cultures, hitherto alien to us, became a part of a specialised vocabulary of ours. Characteristics that were previously very specific to each individual, amalgamated into each other’s behaviour patterns. When María José Bejarano processed her uncertainty about going back home in Costa Rica through a performance, trudging her suitcase symbolically, we all experienced the power of the rites of passage that dance can give space for. Watching her take out objects one after another, fulfilling her liminal phase of moving physically from one continent to another, made time stop and transformed the space. These territories of our bodies, of the stage, of the seasons, and of the backstage, were being redefined consciously, with a sense of protest at the unknown, and a sense of relief at having to redefine them according to our comfort.

A community was formed in the quiet grassland as we watched Jorge Poveda carry out his first performance, a feather in hand, a symbol of the spring and the promise of summer. A community began to grow in its size as it brought us together to encourage Celina Gallo, our first COVID-19 warrior and a classmate, as she danced after having endured the illness. At that moment, her victory was all of ours. A community began its outreach as we invited more “outsiders” to join and become part of the process, while remaining respectful of the imperative social distancing. But these moments of theatricality and performativity were not the only ones feeding into a sense of *communitas*. A supporting circle was being created in the little things beyond such moments. These were at instances when someone was at their weakest; or when having long conversations on traditions back home. It was created while reflecting on our differences and similarities, or while making meals together influenced by each of our tastes. We converged when ▶

▶ sustaining heated talks on reclaiming dance and academic spaces or having sudden workshops on different dance styles of just movement-based creativity so we could explore how our ideas were changing. Each of these activities were curated completely impromptu as the passage of time egged us on, even as the labels of what we had done came much later. All these activities were being curated offline for a small group of us while simultaneously made available to our larger communities online. It came to be that these online communities were also kept abreast of everyday events, re-marking the alternative sense of time that was founded by the anticipation for the performances of 16h00 every day. Indeed, as it were back in Tamil Nadu, India, where the passage of seasons was often marked with festivities or special prayers, it came to be that the daily performance was a ritual configuring a cyclical time.

On and offline communities: Presence and Virtuality

One day I decided to watch the performance through my Instagram. I realized I could observe differently our stage: the tree, the fence, the building... the whole picture. Our Greek friend Dafni Pantazopoulou was performing. I could see the colours of the blanket she was using, with Dafni saying goodbye through her dancing. Generous 2D that gave me another perspective of this experience. An outlook of how that liminal space that was the yard became an ally of the bodies in movement and got to people in other places through virtuality. It seemed to me, though, that this dance was localised, belonged physically to this space, to this intimacy of our community. It resembled those videos of the bears of the Arctic or the flamingos in a lake in the countryside of Bolivia, in which those movements only make sense in that territory. I was witnessing an unspoken love affair between the land and the bodies. (Excerpt of María José Bejarano personal notes)

This text describes the transformation of dance in the new global circumstances through the comparison of two perspectives of the same event, through physical presence and through virtuality. This comparison raised some insights on the contrasting topics of site-specific dancing and virtual dance experiences. The screen does not let the viewer feel the breeze or feel the reactions of the other witnesses. It certainly does not give access to the mentioned spider web of affections covering our residence, knitting together our community. Moreover, it becomes relevant to reflect on how overlapping territories complement the experience of dance through virtuality. These topics are undeniably associated with the phenomenon of human presence. We are not omnipresent as Gods are. We are bodies with limits. We cannot be materially present in two places at a time and despite the illusions of technology, virtual presence is another kind of presence. This fourth territory set by the virtual space is yet to be grasped for dance, meaning making, and community.

It was indeed challenging to think about a continuous community after every one of us returned to our respective countries of origin, as we all graduated and got our master's degree. The Emergency Festival created a group of people working together physically, although socially isolated, while producing online content for vicariously participation. Within this context, came a festival of curated dance films, invited talks, ▶

and other ventures into dance studies. What was created on the lawns of the Mount Clare residence continues to stay active online through social media groups and chats. From social distancing in a small space to being distanced by countries, there continues to be events where each of us dwell in creating dance archives and online content, some of us involved in pedagogical practices and some others on digital creativity. It seems urgent to approach the online community making from the concepts of liminality and *communitas*, as a way to discover the reconfigurations of the social structures triggered through virtual dance experiences in contrast to the analysis done in the present article. Although these matters exceed our initial premise, we believe they represent a complementary subject that we recommend to be researched in the future because the meaning-making processes, interactions, and levels of online involvement might bring new insights for an expanded notion of *communitas*.

Final notes

The Emergency Festival was a metaphor of the transformation of our community, of a worldwide family stuck together in front of an otherwise insignificant yard. The word “metaphor”, in Greek, means transportation, and ironically for a group of mobility students who were unable to move to any other place, we embodied our metaphors. We: a group of diverse migrants who were forced to “stay home”. The questions have changed, the bonds have deepened. And this experience of dancing together, was a transit to a new logic distant from the horror of a pandemic, approaching a sensation of feeling sustained through dancing. As described in the following quote: “Dance unfolds its potentiality precisely in the offering of alternatives, of utopias, developed with the help of the body and through the organization of movement. It therefore focuses on the challenges and the possibilities that lie in ‘ways of worldmaking’ (Klein & Noeth, 2011, p. 9). Dance was then created by us to cope with the upcoming uncertainty given by the pandemic isolation, a means for embodying this intense period, a way to keep utopia in the horizon and transform the territory we saw ourselves occupying.

All the examined layers describe an application of the concept of *communitas* and how our improvised stage got subsumed as a liminal space to create a transformation in the configuration of our social bonds. While tracing back the apparition and constitution of the Emergency Festival, we have re-discovered the palpable re-figurations in our sensibilities, affections and corporealities. While the big tree got green with the change of season, the squirrels played around more often and the air felt warmer; our thoughts, feelings, bodies, and whole existences mutated too. The common challenge of a global crisis was intersected through recurrent interventions of art. This experience allowed our participation in social life even in conditions of isolation, while exploring collaboratively performative compositions. From a ritualistic point of view, the iterative art events of this festival re-framed our residential spaces and walk-through sites: our yard was turned into a stage where part of our history as a community and as individuals was per-formed.

The usability of the notion of *communitas*, allowed for the events recovered in this article to reveal the pragmatic nature of the community-building process in relation to time and

space, which advances the verbal discourses about the importance of community life to a more palpable level. By foregrounding the perceived transformations of space and time caused by dance interventions, the implication of this article underpins the necessity of concrete actions, instead of dematerialized beliefs, to heighten the sense of belonging to a community. As we navigated retrospectively through the creation and evolution of this contingent community, a new light is being shed on artistic interventions and creative actions as a resource to inaugurate new threads of relationality and a heightened sense of belonging within social groups. Beyond the pervasive notion of art being important in times of change we discussed affectively and performatively the specific alterations that took place in the creation of the Emergency Festival, hoping to offer the reader possible trends to identify and study other experiences of creative and social entailments being carried during these challenging times.

Finally, without disregarding the crucial value of the digital spaces for sharing and circulating dance, we wanted to radicalise our attention on the physical spaces that hosted the first batch of performances, with the intention of highlighting the territorialised nature of a practice that re-shaped our surroundings in a moment when all that we could do was dance. The stillness, the stagnation, and the despair were sharply interrupted by our dancing practice. The sense of agency that we regained in a moment where everything was out of our control, is an open invitation to keep interpolating our bodies as the medium to cohabit a space with others, even with two meters of distance in between. The images, the astonishment, the beauty, and the implacable presence of bodies dancing outside our windows, in front of our buildings, and outside of our rooms, is the generous outcome of interrupting our lives, and the ones of those who joined us, with the bait, the promise and the spell of our dances.

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Declaration of interest statement

We confirm that the text has been read and approved by the authors without excluding the attribution of others. Moreover, we certify that the authors have reached the individuals appearing on the images, screenshots, and the text of this article and obtained the corresponding authorization to publish such materials.

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APPENDIX - LIST OF PERFORMERS AND DATES.

List of performers of the Emergency Festival, in alphabetical order, with nationality and place of living at the moment of realisation of the festival (within the campus of the University of Roehampton, London, UK):

1. Anyla Musa (Kosovo), living in Mount Clare E2.
2. Bianca Beneduzi (Brazil), living in Roehampton's Chaplaincy.
3. Celina del Socorro Gallo Pastrán (Nicaragua), living in Mount Clare E2.
4. Dafni Pantazopoulou (Greece), living in Roehampton Whitelands.
5. Fadi Giha (Syria), living in Mount Clare E1.
6. Goriola Oyinkansola Olabanke (Nigeria), living in Mount Clare E1
7. Jorge Poveda Yáñez (Ecuador), living in Mount Clare E2.
8. Maria José Bejarano Salazar (Costa Rica), living in Mount Clare E1.

- 9. Mariama Hashiem (Ghana), living in Roehampton Whitelands.
- 10. Mark Lenini Parselelo (Kenya), living in Mount Clare E1.
- 11. Naiara Müssnich Rotta Gomes de Assunção (Brazil), living in Mount Clare E1.
- 12. Solomon Gwerevende (Zimbabwe), living in Mount Clare E2.
- 13. Subhashini Goda Venkataramani (India), living in Mount Clare E1.
- 14. Tainá Louven (Brazil), living in Mount Clare E1.

15. DATES OF THE PERFORMANCES AND THE PERFORMERS*:

24/03/2020 - Jorge Poveda Yáñez.

25/03/2020 - Naiara Müssnich Rotta Gomes de Assunção (with the participation of Anyla Musa singing).

26/03/2020 - Subhashini Goda Venkataramani.

27/03/2020 - Maria José Bejarano Salazar (with the participation of Anyla Musa singing).

28/03/2020 - Bianca Beneduzi (with the participation of Maria José Bejarano, Naiara M. R. G. de Assunção and Tainá Louven singing).

29/09/2020 - Anyla Musa.

31/03/2020 - Dafni Pantazopoulou.

01/04/2020 - Fadi Giha.

02/04/2020 - Celina Gallo.

03/04/2020 - Maria José Bejarano Salazar.

04/04/2020 - Jorge Poveda Yáñez.

05/04/2020 - Dafni Pantazopoulou and Fadi Giha.

08/04/2020 - Naiara Müssnich Rotta Gomes de Assunção.

09/04/2020 - Solomon Gwerevende.

10/04/2020 - Mariama Hashiem.

11/04/2020 - Bianca Beneduzi.

12/04/2020 - Goriola Oyinkansola Olabanke.

13/04/2020 - Dafni Pantazopoulou.

14/04/2020 - Celina Gallo.

19/04/2020 - Naiara Müssnich Rotta Gomes de Assunção and Subhashini Goda Venkataramani.

26/04/2020 - Maria José Bejarano Salazar and Anyla Musa (with the participation of Mark Lenini Parselelo playing the guitar).

*For the video-arts created after these presentations, we had Adrián Cabezas (Ecuador) from *Universidad de las Américas*, collaborating with the musicalization, according to the information included on the website of the Festival.

NOTES

- ¹ The list of the participants of Emergency Festival and the dates of each performance is available in the Appendix by the end of this article.
- ² “Make yourself at home and, please, do not mind the mess” is a classic way Brazilians introduce their guests into their households, even when it is impeccably clean and organised.
- ³ In Spanish, the original language of this quotation that was translated by us, “entrenener” means “to entertain” but “entre-tener” is a play with this word: entre = in between, tener = to have and nos = us. Therefore “entre-tenernos” would mean “to have each other” or “to be there for each other”.
- ⁴ “Aiwa aiwa”, loosely translated from Arabic as “yes, yes”, were words of encouragement and joy expressed by one of our classmates on watching the performance.