

A Call to Action, or The Political Body in Dance and Protest:

An Investigation of Victoria Marks' Not About Iraq

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The body as a vast reservoir
This is beautiful. Bodies hurling, rolling, flying, falling.

Stepping over what you don't want to see. Symbolic action and physical intervention.
Persuasion and obstinate recalcitrance.

Propelling individuals.
Body succumbs, unpredictable whims.

Power. Mine. Civilized. Art. Body limp. Everything is ok...?
Where do I stand?

*The poetry included here and elsewhere in the paper was made by borrowing words from *Not About Iraq* by Victoria Marks, and the articles *Choreographies of Protest* by Susan Leigh Foster and *Bodies on the Line* by Danielle Goldman.

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Victoria Marks' *Not About Iraq* (2007) has struck a deep chord in me. In the midst of our current political climate, this work, examined from several different angles, reminds me how inspired I was as a high school student when exposed to Upton Sinclair's (1906) novel *The Jungle*. Reading and writing about the disparity between positions of power and the working class addressed in this book ignited a fire in me. Around the same time I also studied political protest movements of the 1960s and longed to participate in that kind of collective energy. At that point I swore to commit myself to social and political work that would help shift the great imbalance of power I observed from the standpoint of my privileged upbringing. After briefly studying political

science as an undergraduate, I decided to pursue dance as my life path, and tried to convince myself I could create and participate in political dance works that would fulfill my desire for social justice activism. Yet as I moved forward, dance often became a place to escape from the realities of my own life, and the injustices of the world I began to feel powerless to do anything about. I felt discouraged, and questioned if dance could really be a vehicle to create significant and lasting change in the world. Would I be better off going back to my plan of working with social and political activist organizations “out in the field,” where I could more clearly see the impact of my labor?

These questions have troubled me through my years in dance, however, studying *Not About Iraq* has renewed my passion for political performance work and my belief in the potential of dance to connect to larger socio-political issues. Through description and analysis of Marks’ multi-layered work, experiential somatic information and a review of relevant literature, I investigate political bodily metaphors in *Not About Iraq*, the physical recalcitrance of the body in dance and organized protest events, and the potential of dance to mobilize people to create political and social change. I look more closely at the body as a “vast reservoir” of information, of signs and symbols, as well as the elusive nature of truth controlled by those in positions of power. I have used poetry throughout the paper as my analysis transitions across means of creating social change, and ways bodies and movement can be used in political dance works or social protest events. The poetry provides metaphors, like the bodily metaphors in *Not About Iraq* that provoke critical thought and have the potential to inspire action through example.

I acknowledge that I have left out an in-depth analysis of parts of *Not About Iraq*, and in the leaving out have also not addressed numerous ways that this work could be perceived. My conclusions are influenced by my own history and present work as an artist. This in depth study of *Not About Iraq* has inspired me to think more deeply about ways I might create political works, both in process and product, and how my work could reach audiences that might not typically attend a theater. The question of access is one that troubles me in the concert dance arena as it relates to social and economic justice. I feel encouraged to further investigate ways to bring dance performance to broader communities. The work has reminded me what an impact dance can make, to affect people on a kinesthetic level to make changes in their own lives, so it feels imperative to help expand its reach. As a dancer I cannot help but feel the energy of the act of dancing when I view a work, and as I perceive the dance to be a call to action, I hear that call and hope my response will ignite this fire in others.

Undeniably, viewing a dance performance can be a way of escaping reality, as one is awed by the amazing capacity for beauty and grace held within the human form. Though the dancers in Marks' *Not About Iraq* exhibit those qualities, the work is not one of escapism. In this eloquent yet disturbing evening length work for seven women, Marks intertwines movement and text to lead her audience on a journey of questions about contemporary life, and of how to act as a citizen in a world where the "truth" is often hard to discern, and the balance of power distribution is highly unequal. My study is based on a 2008 video of the work as it was presented at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery in New York City, which is now available through the Alexander Street Press: *Dance in Video*. In her work of six sections, Marks does not present anything obvious

about the war in Iraq; I don't blatantly see soldiers or guns, or hear words referring to Iraq, war, or protest. Instead I see dancers dressed in costumes that suggest everyday comfort, and hear words that provoke questions about how the media shapes understanding of political issues. As I view the work on my small computer screen, I am filled with the questions Marks proposes: Who is in control of public life, and how does this control shape how I think? How reliable are the sources of what I see and hear in the media? How do I know who and what to trust? What is evidence? What is justice? What is art, and what is its role as being "civilized?" What does it mean to look away? What does it mean to be "ok" in today's world? All of these lead me back to my larger query: Can dance possibly attempt to answer these questions? And if so, can it create significant political and social change?

Seeking answers as they relate to my own life and study of dance, I dive deeper into the work. Through multiple viewings, I seek clues hidden in the movement, in what Ananya Chatterjea (2010) describes as "bodily metaphors" in her article "In Search of the Choreographies of Daily Life and Struggle." Chatterjea claims that these metaphors have the potential to create a different understanding of issues that activists and researchers often look for in statistics. She also believes that this understanding can open up a deeper emotional access, where healing and potential encounters of restorative justice can take place (10). I look closely for this kind of information as the dance begins.

At the start of the piece, the small theater space is silent save for the sounds of rustling programs. A large window fills the back wall of the stage space, and soft blue-violet highlights its tall panels and arched crest. The lit window references the multiple

uses of the space as theater and church, and it creates a sense of calm, which belies the conflicts of power imbalances and the illusive nature of truth about to take place in the dance. A sweet yet definitive voice enters the silence with her command, "Lights up." Taisha Paggett announces her presence as a performer and as someone in control of the proceedings. Her chocolate brown slacks and light blue button down shirt suggest a military uniform, and I wonder what this is saying about her role of power? Paggett's long limbs engulfing space contrast smaller, tender gestures, like that of her fingertips touching her sternum, softening her chest as if she was feeling the weight of her own heart. She continues with slow, deliberate balances that are interrupted by graceful turns and leaps, exposing the clarity of her technique. These calculated movements intermingled with collapses or more pedestrian gestures, remind me of her humanness in the midst of the beauty of her dancing.

A voice from the audience broadcasts her opinions about the dance, and solicits others to align with her. "This is beautiful. Isn't this beautiful?" she asks. Quiet chuckles of uncertainty are heard through the crowd, and her image appears in the corner of the edited version on the screen, allowing me to see the response of some of the audience. It is evident when she stands up that she has a designated role in the evening's performance, as her statements become more explicit: "This is, the truth....Words are so....But the body!" and then confidently steps onto the stage. She is the choreographer of the work, Victoria Marks, and claims her role of power in this scenario by openly stating, "This is about power....Mine."

Her statements continue to direct how I think about the dance, as she goes on to say things like: "This is civilized. This is art. Everything, is ok." It's as if she's questioning

the place of dance in society, and telling me that while I watch the movement of this beautiful dancer, “everything” else going on outside this performance is “ok.” Paggett, who has just collapsed on the floor, juxtaposes Marks’ assuredness. Chatterjea’s idea of bodily metaphor is clear in this example: it would be hard to deny the visceral response of what she represents with her crumpled body on the floor. Still convinced, Marks continues to repeat herself, finally poking and then kicking Paggett lightly in the back until she begins to move again. What is “ok” about a woman lying coiled in the fetal position on the ground? Marks is clearly satisfied by the response she received, going on and on about the “ok-ness” of everything, when Paggett stops in mid-movement and walks knowingly over to Marks. She seems to be reclaiming control, giving Marks a look of patient annoyance. Nodding her head, eyes receptive, she finally quiets Marks by commanding “lights out.”

When the lights return and the duet continues the roles of power are still in question between the two women. While Paggett dances, Marks watches her and explains the recorded sounds I hear. “This is the sound of children!” I wonder who these children are, and where they are as they remind me of my own elementary schoolyard, which was situated in an affluent neighborhood one and a half blocks from my home. The overbearing sound of a helicopter informs me that these children are not in such a comfortable neighborhood. Marks wants us to believe her statement “This is silence” as the helicopter rages, and I imagine the fear and discomfort that must be felt by children who see and hear these war machines daily.

The first section sets the stage for the underlying themes of the dance that will unfold, as the two women take turns telling us what “this is” through words and

movement. “Looking away, looking at you, not seeing,” covering her mouth or eyes, a collapse, standing on all fours. “This is...I don’t know...this is balance...standing at attention...democracy...a confession...a joke,” and the list goes on, shifting between describing bodily actions and embodying personas or ideas such as a “terrorist” or “my sexy black...” or “evidence,” standing in a X shape with her whole body, then frantically wiping herself clean of it. This X serves as another bodily metaphor, reminding me of the evidence I possess in my own body, which I cannot erase by wiping myself away. The lights fade again per Paggett’s request, until she changes her mind, “Wait! Stop! This is not the end of this dance!” And blackout. The memory of the potent bodily metaphors of this section have been imprinted in the darkness, and I am on the edge of my seat wondering how these images will unfold as the dance progresses.

This idea of responsibility lies as much in the hands of US citizens as it does elected government officials. In an interview with Marks (2008) that prefaces the recorded version of the dance, she explains her feeling of not knowing how to act as an American citizen, because she has ceased to be able to recognize what is real. Marks refers to the skewed political information the public receives through media sources in the US, making it difficult to discern the truth. In her 2011 essay “About Not About Iraq,” Marks wondered if she could make a dance that was political, without being didactic: “Could a dance be a forum in which to better understand my own problematic sense of citizenship?” (2) Though in many ways Marks’ dance can be seen as anti-government or anti-media, the elusive nature through which she makes statements-- both about and not about Iraq, about the media and not about the media for example-- keeps her from appearing didactic as it positions her as a questioner rather than a teacher of truths.

Clues to understanding the statements that are both being and not being made in the dance lie in the movement and the words, and the duality of meaning and transformation that occurs as the performance progresses. I kept looking for these clues, these bodily metaphors, to further my understanding of the work as a form of protest. The “X” that shows itself in different ways as the sections evolve becomes “evidence.” In the second section, women who are disconcerting in their lack of care as they dance around, unaware of their environments, become a comment on contemporary American life. This section asks me to look closer at the bodily metaphors seen in gesture and spatial relationship, and to further question my own responsibility as citizen.

* * *

Conscious positioning of bodies in relation to the changing structure of power.....
Mental, physical and spiritual training. Not out of place
How do I...?
Re-direct, maintain composure, moral and spiritual rubric.
Transcend..... free to fall

* * *

When the lights come back on blaring over the stage, a new dancer’s voice is heard commanding “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight!”, a call that traditionally signals dancers to begin dancing, but this one also reminiscent of a military officer calling his troops. One at a time five dancers enter clad in short black polo dresses, sporting exaggerated smiles, jazz hands, and shoulder shimmies, bobbing their way through a seemingly happy-go-lucky dance that has a kind of giddiness reminiscent of

cheerleaders. Paggett, at first standing in the middle of them, reluctantly joins the dance for moments, then pauses to watch, question, or reflect back to her statements from the first section, such as the “X”, or the “not seeing.” The contradictions of bodily metaphors here leave the viewer feeling disconcerted about who these women are and what they represent. At times a few stop their dance and crawl army style on the ground while the others pay no attention. At other moments the group stops and walks slowly off stage, leaving one dancer to curl over as if she’s in physical or emotional pain. Some momentarily join Paggett in her gestural metaphors, possibly questioning the blatant “not seeing” of the happy dance, while others continue on, unaware. Frantic running on and off stage, not knowing where to go, suggests chaos and fear, while obvious gestures of “tough guys” or arrogant soldier-like walks refer to an attitude of blind power and strength.

The happy-go-lucky-ness continues throughout this section, interspersed with more metaphors of the women frozen in shapes evoking images of anguish and fear. A series of dancers rolling on the floor suggest bodies dying, while others stepping or hopping over them nonchalantly refer to the “looking away” and “not seeing” by the general public that Paggett has been implying in her gestures. The spatial metaphor of the giddy dancers performing virtuosic movement with their heads held high, while not seeing the dead bodies on the ground gives reference to the idea that they are perhaps above having to worry about this information. Though the rolling bodies appear to be below their notice, the women also seem to recognize that their stable lives have been shaken, and they are left somewhere in the middle trying to understand how to respond

to the realities of war as it conflicts with what they have been told or believe to be true about their own lives.

This section's duality of meaning compels me to seek more information about how the dance could be a form of protest. Susan Leigh Foster's (2003) article "Choreographies of Protest" offers some insight, as she writes of the physicality and organization of bodies involved in three different events of protest. Here Foster argues for the "crucial difference" offered by the physical interference of bodies in forms of protest, in today's age where "bodies gather primarily at shopping malls, and when protest is frequently conducted through online circulation of petitions" (395). Thinking about section two in relation to the article, I see how it questions the actions of many in today's society, who want to hide their eyes from the realities of war, or the facts that our government may be wrongly positioned on behalf of our nation. It questions our responsibility as citizens, our "looking away" while lives are being destroyed through war. Not seeing the dead bodies coming home from Iraq, due to the hiding of information by the government, might be grounds for stepping over them as they roll across the stage in the dance. But at some point the "not seeing" becomes a choice... What seems to be below notice might make me trip and fall if I continue to look away. I have a responsibility to question this scenario.

Looking at forms of protest and reflecting on the similarities between these events and a dance performance can offer a window into in the self-reflectiveness required to take action. Foster writes of three major non-violent protest events in recent US history: the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960, the ACT-UP die-ins of the late 1980's and the World Trade Organization meetings protest in Seattle, WA in 1999. She argues that

all three of these events shared a “recalcitrant physicality” that refused to comply with those in positions of authority. All three also rehearsed and implemented specific procedures and tactics of non-violent direct action and non-cooperation (396). Foster makes clear that she does not intend to look at these events as dances, nor does she want to demonstrate the shared sentiments of many artists and activists. Rather, she seeks to

reconstruct these events, asking of them the kinds of questions that a dance scholar might ask: what are these bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; what choreography, whether spontaneous or pre-determined, do they enact?; what kind of impact does the collection of bodies make in the midst of its social surround?;...how have these bodies been trained, and how has that training mastered, cultivated or facilitated their impulses?;...what kind of relationship do they establish with those who are watching their actions? (397)

Applying these questions to a dance performance, furthers my understanding of the depth of its meaning, and while watching a dance performance is not the same as participating in an organized protest event, I would argue that dance can also mobilize people to action because both activities involve bodily training and a kind of choreography. And while audience members may not have the same training, experiencing the kinesthetic empathy of a “call to action” of a dance could possibly have the same effect.

While the use of the body is different in these scenarios, the intention for the

training is similar. Training to perform in dance speaks to the importance of being clear in one's body in order to articulate a message, as does training for protest. The example of the ACT-UP die-ins involved participants training to act as dead bodies lying in the street. The protestors were taking advantage of the well-traversed Wall Street in order to gain attention, where people obviously could not avoid stepping over the bodies. Similarly, the virtuosity in section two is used as a way to both gain and divert attention: while the eye is drawn to their virtuosity, it is taken away from the rolling, dead bodies below, leaving me to question conflicting images. Though protest events and viewing a dance performance are not the same, seeing a work such as *Not About Iraq*, reminds of me of my humanity and leads me to question what it means to be a body "standing on all fours naked," or collapsed in the fetal position on the ground. My spirit could arguably be ignited when reminded of my corporeality through viewing a visceral dance work.

The contradictory messages of the second section give way to the third where Paggett stands in her open armed X, which leads to a duet by two other dancers reminiscent of the rolling bodies seen earlier. This time the rolling which seemed to symbolize death in the last section now yields tenderness, but also sorrow, as one dancer appears to console the other through her insistence to roll. It seems she is trying to comfort herself in the rolling, and is oblivious to the other person who is trying to help her, which suggests pain and disorientation. The music in this section is slow and sweet, with a hint of sadness that allows me to empathize with the interaction between the two women; a reminder that even as I question my civic responsibilities, I am still human, desiring love and personal connection.

Marks questions her own power in section four, as she saunters onto the stage

with open arms, a gesture symbolizing authority as she shows off the dancers. Raising her arms above her head in a “ta-da!” type motion, she reminds me of a proud politician knowingly in control and physically showing her power. What else is she in control of here? Who is she representing? After covering a mischievous grin with her hand, she proceeds blank faced, to explore the multiple meanings of gestures made with her index and middle fingers: a peace sign, victory, bunny ears, scissors, quotation marks, smoking a cigarette, and so on, until the two fingers finally point out at the audience in the gesture of a gun. After aiming her “gun” at three different people, another mischievous smile crosses her face as she raises her thumb to symbolize the trigger, and she shoots. A chill runs down my spine, as I feel her manipulating the audience with the dance of her two fingers, where she seems to comment on the level of control of those in positions of authority, making decisions that affect the multitude with the power of their little fingers. After the sounds of marching soldiers fill the room, and Marks’ finger dance looks more to represent movements of a dancer than of a soldier, her performance is brought to a halt when Paggett enters the space and calls “Cut!”

Marks’ appearance in this section comes back to her earlier inquiry about not knowing how to act as a citizen. I see this questioning as a call to action, both for herself and the audience. This idea is similar to Chatterjea’s intentions. She also describes her work as a “call to action” and believes in the power of dance to create political change. Chatterjea describes her work as “cultural activism,” through an intersection of artistic excellence, social justice and community building (6). She argues that the kind of collaboration it takes to participate in dance, both as practitioners and audience members, can be a vital source of training for social justice work. I think it is the same

kind of preparation required in protest events such as the ACT-UP die-ins, where the participants had to train to be involved, but similarly the people stepping over the bodies had to shift their thinking about what they were actually doing (or not doing). The response of those stepping over the bodies could be paralleled to my response as an audience member affected by what I see in a performance such as *Not About Iraq*, enough so that I shift my decision making process towards becoming a more responsible citizen. But the challenge of making change in the political sphere, Chatterjea claims, is the accountability of measurable policy change, because as she explains, in performance a product is not left behind that can be used to measure our effectiveness. Perhaps grant writing could be this measure, because many require a documentation of audiences served. That said, I also acknowledge the challenge of this kind of work impacting immediate policy change (10).

Although my passion for social justice is ignited through *Not About Iraq*, I still question the capability of dance to create real and lasting change in the world. I feel many of my doubts lessen as I am reminded of the kind of collaboration of which Chatterjea writes, such as the moments of sharing and negotiating space in a dance class or performance, and sharing creative ideas through work in the studio. I am reminded that I feel empowered by being present in my body, and that this presence has opened my mind and heart to be an active participant and honorable citizen. Chatterjea's "bodily metaphors" have the potential to open the emotional space required for healing, and support the claim of this type of empowerment. This kind of healing is needed on a global scale in order to create lasting change. My beliefs that dance can inspire this change are being reaffirmed.

Chatterjea does however acknowledge the difference between creating dances about political subject matter and process based work driven by intentions and strategies of social justice efforts. This kind of dance making requires community partnerships, and building relationships in order to establish trust over time. She believes that this focus on process and community building creates greater access to her company's work, and that they are able to reach new audiences in this way (9-11). Though *Not About Iraq* was not a process based-work, I would argue that this dance has the potential to create the kind of change that Chatterjea speaks of, such as the creating of bodily metaphors that allow for a different kind of understanding of the issues that activists and researchers often seek in alternative ways (10). This goes back to her idea of the power inherent in the very nature of dancing, that this "bodily labor of dancing that produces meaning and significance in the doing" is enough to spark some kind of change in those who participate and/or witness this activity through performance (14). Because *Not About Iraq* asks so many questions of contemporary American society, it would be hard to view this work and not question one's own responsibility as a citizen. This questioning alone is a step towards creating change through awareness and action.

I believe in the power of *Not About Iraq* to ignite personal and therefore larger societal change, but question the work's accessibility. As far as I know, it has only been presented in traditional Western concert halls. Though Marks' diverse cast might suggest that the dance has been seen by people from wide-ranging communities, I would guess that it has not gone much further into a broader social strata than those who might typically patronize dance performances. I wonder then, is it enough to make

the work and show it to a typical contemporary dance audience in the United States? How could this kind of work, addressing political material, reach further into communities where it would have a broader impact, or affect political officials whose actions it so closely questions? Chatterjea's method of making dances through community building and partnership is one way to reach populations who might not otherwise have access to viewing concert dance, so perhaps this process applied to *Not About Iraq* could allow it to reach a larger audience. Marks' 2008 work *Action Conversations*, which was the culmination of a 15-week workshop bringing veterans of the Iraq war and civilians opposed to the war in conversation with each other, is another way of engaging a broader community. This work was later made into a documentary, which allowed its reach to expand even further through the accessibility of film. It is these types of questions that Chatterjea and Marks are attempting to answer through the "creative labor" of their work, in hopes to "hint at a different way of doing things" (Chatterjea 2010, 9-14). Marks' earlier query from her 2011 essay "About Not About Iraq," about the potential of dance to be a "forum in which to better understand my own problematic sense of citizenship?" seems to question this potential even if a dance is not getting directly involved in communities through social justice work (2). I hope that a dance about political subject matter would be just that.

Desiring to feel this creative labor of which Chatterjea speaks, and knowing the power of my own body to give me pertinent information in the doing, I learned a section of the work to deepen my understanding of it. I chose to embody the movement of one woman within a small portion of a long trio, the fifth section of Marks' work. Her short black, polo collared dress reminded me of the mothers of my childhood neighborhood,

and of a dress my own mother wore. The beginning of this section, which is nineteen minutes long, the three women enter the stage in the dark and begin to move abruptly when the lights suddenly flash on and driving music pierces the silence. They are dancing big and strong, swooping and leaping and slicing, yet with fluidity and clarity of lines and space. Something has happened with these three characters as the dance has progressed, and it is beginning to culminate here. Maybe they are in the middle of the war zone? I think the woman in black is an American, a mother or a wife of a soldier. I see one of the others as an American soldier, and the third...an Iraqi soldier? Subscribing meaning to their characters helps me to find some kind of understanding in their interactions.

I begin my study when the attention shifts to the woman in the black dress. I can see her subtle movements in the shadows, the partial view of her building my curiosity. After a series of running towards and away from the exit, the other two dancers transition offstage, while the woman in black continues this way. I feel the urgency in her run, and the subtlety of her look towards the exit, as if she was quickly calculating her escape. I wonder what or whom she is running from? I feel that “fight or flight” response in my own body as I run from something I don’t understand. I feel nervousness in my body, as I know, as she seems to know, something is coming, something she, and vicariously I, don’t want to face. Did she receive news of the death of a loved one? Is she being forced to see the ways in which she is inadvertently contributing to the violence in her lack of awareness?

She is now in a circular pool of light and looks out with a clear gaze, a momentary sense of calm passing over her as she begins to shake her head no. She is

firm in her beliefs. “No...no...that’s not happening... Everything is ok...” she seems to say. Shaking her head more vigorously, “ no, no, no, no, no”, she crouches forward, raising her open palms to the level of her head, “That’s enough! I don’t want to hear it!” I am reminded of this denial in myself, and the ways in which I knowingly or unknowingly “look away”. She pauses, looks out with a sideways glance and a lick of the lips, maybe for a moment, believing... Licking my lips, taking it in, shaking my head, shutting it off. Shaking, crouching...she, and I, take a step back, then heave forward throwing her right arm, my right arm, again, and again, as if she’s expelling the information she just heard. I feel the information leaving my body, and with a final flick of the foot and hands and shake of the head, she, and I, won’t have it. I feel the intensity, the conviction of my beliefs in that throwing. I am reminded... Maybe if I pretend nothing is going wrong in the world, all of the wrongness will go away. Maybe this will be easier than feeling like I am too small to make a difference.

She seems to surrender to the information she’s received, as her movement opens up with swiping, slicing arms, left then right, laying back, open chest, taking it in. This movement feels good in my body as a momentary sense of release, and relief. She flicks it off her hands again, and in an instant the other two women are back. The lights go dark save three rectangles of light that claim their space, large enough for each woman to stand in her own spotlight. The same driving music from earlier proceeds, and the women begin to move in unison, legs stationary, arms swooping, slicing, arcing. Torsos circling, arching, forward, and backward. They seem to be communicating about their shared experience of the same events, though they each play a different role in its unfolding. With each swooping movement, they take a step

back towards the darkness. The music stops suddenly as the lights abruptly flood the stage. Jarring, screeching sounds pierce the silence at regular intervals, giving my body the sensation that bombs are being dropped around me. I feel the chaos in their running and slashing, responding to the fear of not knowing when another blow is coming. Lights out, sound still going; I sense their movement in the darkness, the screeching still rumbling again, again, and again, so I keep leaping. My heart is pounding. Alone in the studio, I have resistance to keep learning this movement. It is challenging my body. It is challenging my spirit... I stand still, now in silence, trying to be patient for the lights to come back on so I can join the dancers again. It feels like eternity.

When the music and lights surge on, I rejoin them, and begin to feel the joy of the momentum. The repetition helps me to find the sense of letting go, of trusting my body, of really dancing. There is power in this letting go. There is power in the commitment to this dance. They find their way to a vertical line and with clear intention, march towards the exit. This time they make it off stage, and the music fades. I know their story is not over, that they are still feeling the impact of this dance, of the war, of hearing or not hearing the truth... But perhaps in this moment, in the silence, they, and I, can find a sense of peace in the quiet space between.

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Edges of our skin, a global historical struggle.
Evidence...our belief in the possibility of instigating change.

Body as catalyst for transformation.

Sheer commitment to the dancing, you could change something.
The energy itself, the labor of dancing.....could spin the world.....

Trying to integrate my experience of learning the movement with my deepening thoughts about the work, I look to Randy Martin's (1998) book *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. In his introduction Martin claims, "Dance lies at the point at which reflection and embodiment meet, at which doing and anticipation are intertwined" (1). Right! Reading this after experiencing the dance somatically, then writing about it, I feel he just hit the nail on the head for me. In his discussion of dance and politics, he goes on to say

If one grants that along with dance, politics cannot have a solitary form or unitary object, if neither can be one thing or about one thing, it becomes possible to notice a proliferation of political activity throughout the social fabric and not simply confined to what are formally considered to be political institutions. (2)

And once this is acknowledged, he claims that political activity can be recognized in all aspects of life. Martin does however, make clear that "Politics goes nowhere without movement" (3). While politics appears to exist everywhere, the author asserts that without the labor of participation, politics stands as ideas and theories that exist only in stillness. In this way there seems to be "a gap between a thinking mind and a acting body [which] makes it impossible to understand how people move from a passive to an active state" (3). This goes back to Chatterjea's idea of creative labor, and that the power inherent in the very nature of dancing is enough to spark some kind of change in those who participate and/or witness this activity through performance (Chatterjea 2010,

14). Martin goes on to explain that because dance presumes bodies are already in motion as its normative state, it could potentially bridge these chasms between mind and body, subject and object, and process and structure (3). *Not About Iraq* could possibly be a step towards the bridging of this gap.

Though the making or viewing of *Not About Iraq* could not by itself cause change in other political or social arenas, because it attempts, through dance, to mobilize ideas around the politics of war, citizenship and official responsibility, this work has the potential to create a lasting affect on those who participate in or witness it. In relation to this, Martin states, “clearly connections and meditations can establish a certain legacy for dance beyond the scene of its performance” (6). These connections made could create a ripple effect on its participants, inspired by the dance to take action in his or her life to be a more conscious and engaged citizen. Here Martin echoes Chatterjea’s notion of “hinting at a different way of doing things.” As Marks states in her aforementioned essay that as an American citizen she has ceased to be able to recognize the truth, her response to this uncertainty was to take action by making a dance (Marks 2011, 6). Then she says, the rest is up to us, to interpret

the evidence, find the truth (however impermanent), and take action accordingly. We will do this...through our daily choreographies at work and at home, as well as in the dances we make. If citizenship is about understanding and interpreting the complex events (actions) that surround us, and finding *our* “right” actions on behalf of our communities, local and global, then dance is an excellent primer for the work ahead. (6)

Martin says, "Dance has much to offer the problem of theorizing participation and mobilization, for dance emerges through the mobilization of participation in relation to a choreographic idea" (4). I hope that through the mobilization that dance offers as its framework, I might find inspiration to ask deeper questions, to find real "truths" for when the "truth" received through the media can be so elusive. Martin also offers the idea that through the critique of politics in regards to ideas about mobilization, dance can be illuminated, and that illumination can then work back on our sense of knowing what to do more generally in life (2-3). Or, as Marks puts it, "knowing how to act as a citizen." Maybe this understanding can offer the type of healing Chatterjea speaks of with her bodily metaphors, or dance having the potential to open up a deeper emotional access where encounters of restorative justice can take place (10). Through her numerous questions, of "truth," of power roles between choreographers and dancers, as well as political officials and citizens, Marks tries to offer a bit of that illumination. Perhaps by looking at *Not About Iraq* as a work of protest, though looking alone could not create change in societal or political realms, the potential for this protest to mobilize people to action could possibly be realized. This kind of action might instigate real and lasting change that the world so desperately needs.

The final section of *Not About Iraq* brings me back to where I started, with Paggett claiming the stage alone. Her movement reminds me of what I have seen throughout the course of the dance, as well as throughout the long course of this war. I see in her movement reminders of a nation conflicted by power struggles and misunderstandings, as I, and others like me, navigate between what I am told is true and what I want or don't want to believe. This version of the movement feels different, at

times slower, at times more angular and broken, showing that her conflict around all these questions has not found resolution. She also moves periodically with a giant smile across her face, obvious in its lack of truthfulness. It's as if she's trying to convince herself and me that everything really is "ok," clearly knowing that it's not, and not knowing what to do about it other than just smile. Her "this is" statements come back, now repeating herself in conflict over whether or not this is a "joke" or a "prayer." Then she leaves it to me to decide, telling me that I "know what this is." Do I? By the end of this dance I question if I know what anything is. How am I to know? What is the truth and where do I find it? And if I did know the truth, could I find the courage to do something about it? Can I even find truth in my own body? She calls for the lights to fade out one last time, and gently wipes away the evidence, the lies, or maybe the truth off of her body, perhaps in an effort to find evidence that her body is truly hers. As the lights fade and she backs up towards the darkness of the church, I am left thinking that this really might be a prayer, calling us to action in it's conflict and injustice. Then again it might be a joke as it symbolizes imbalances of power and a lack of consciousness. And in my own confusion and conflict of all these issues, I know that it is both, and that it is up to me to decide how to respond.

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