



PRAXISPACE

ISOLATION, OBSTACLES, TOXIC POSITIVITY, AND MAKING ART IN A CRISIS

ALEXANDRA BELLER

Well. When writing last month's essay about Exertion and Recuperation, I certainly never imagined we'd land here. It's been a rough couple of weeks, and most artists have been hit from two sides: financial and artistic (including spiritual, emotional, physical). Our shows are canceled or postponed, rehearsals halted, collaborations ceased, projects dismantled. It is heartbreaking.

There has been too much advice, too many articles written about HOW TO... Most of them boil down to HOW TO make the most of the situation: buck up, turn lemons into lemonade, do exactly what you were doing but with a new model. There's a lot of advice out there. I am not here to offer more of it. I am here to offer you permission. Permission to:

- Grieve
- Give up
- Be depressed
- Not make art
- Do it differently than your friends/family/colleagues
- "Sell out"
- Not try
- Not try harder
- Pivot
- Not care

However you are doing this is right. You are surviving something incomprehensible. Look at you; that's amazing! Great job. Perhaps you have done it shuffling around your apartment, eating cold cereal, ranting about people on facebook, and not getting "back on your feet." Perhaps you've launched two new online courses and made up your lost income and discovered a new model for collaboration. **THEY ARE BOTH FINE.** The model of toxic positivity circulating around is dangerous, shaming, and lacks empathy. I reject it. If you are feeling optimistic and positive, enjoy yourself. If you are feeling rage, apathy, grief, frustration, and resentment, live in them fully. There are no good or bad feelings. There is no hierarchy or goal for how we should feel (not ever, and especially not now).

What I do think is important is figuring out how to tune back into our needs and desires. It is tempting, when faced with obstacles, especially obstacles to our freedom and choice-making, to shut down wanting things. It's painful to want things and not be able to create or get them. It has a tendency to shut many of us down to feeling desire overall. But losing desire is losing touch with some very basic, and very juicy, parts of our humanity.

It feels dangerous to want things we can't have. "I want to be in a studio." "I want to be making art again." "I want to sleep for a week and not be needed by my kids." "I want a hug." "I want to feel community again." "I want to be back on stage." It feels easier not to want what we can't have. But in shutting down the desire for specific things we often turn off the whole faucet. So I would like to invite you back into desire, even though it may be frustrating, depressing, and enraging. Those feelings are no better or worse than any others, and they are a gateway back to our truer, fuller selves.

Knowing what we want always gives us an opportunity to get it. Not knowing what we want or need usually assures that we cannot satisfy our desires. In letting our feelings back in, letting our desires back in, we may find that there is a part of us that does want to make some art. If there is not, that is wonderful to know, accept, celebrate, and move forward with. That IS making the best of things, adapting, pivoting... And if there is a desire to create, then the question arises... how?

Obstacles always offer opportunities. We have certainly learned that through making art, or having relationships, or cooking dinner without having all the ingredients to your recipe. I have found that the cycle from obstacle to opportunity often follows a similar route:

- Disbelief
- Anger
- Feeling lost/apathetic/helpless
- Depression
- A glimmer of hope/an idea
- Some excitement
- Doubt
- More excitement
- Action
- Pride/relief/contentment/happiness

You have likely been through your own cycle when faced with an obstacle, from which you eventually created an opportunity. Can you remember what your process was?

One thing that has helped me to ground myself lately, in addition to lots and lots of forgiveness (or trying to forgive myself for what I am not doing at any given moment), is enumerating the opportunities and silver linings. For example, I do most of my class prep while commuting to and from my teaching gig at Princeton (5 hours, twice a week). But I never have my books with me, or wifi on my computer, or space to move. It has

been a blessing to have access to my books, the internet, and a floor to move on (not to mention no moving train) while preparing for teaching. It has made my classes better than they were. In figuring out how to offer embodiment that would have come through movement, I had my students do an art project which I never would have thought of, and now want to keep in my syllabus. Instead of our final live showing, my Intro to Contemporary Dance class is making a film together and I am genuinely excited for it.

When I cross check some of the things I desire with some of the things that I am doing, I have found that a lot of what I want is already happening, but I was failing to notice it. I want to be back in the studio, making the show I was working on. I still feel sad about that, but I am also noticing that making this dance film with my students is pretty rad too. It doesn't replace what I lost. I don't have to stop grieving for my show in order to be excited about my film. Feelings are not acid and base; they don't cancel each other out. But in feeling all my feelings, I find I'm making room for some joy, some bits of excitement, some glimmers of hope. I find I make room to be curious and discover, especially when I take the pressure off feeling that I should.

If you check in with yourself and find that you DO crave some art, some community, some collaboration... Choose a score, make it, share it, starting with this one...



PRAXISPACE SCORE #16: FINDING DESIRE

1. Be in stillness.
2. Let the stillness become something you are having a relationship with.
3. Without imagining movement, shape, or form, allow yourself to feel any desires in your body in this moment.
4. Try to let your body make the next decision, whether the decision is more stillness or movement.
5. If the decision is stillness, ask your body to decide on it again and again until it makes a decision to move.
6. Once your body makes a decision to move, repeat that move over and over again until your body makes a clear decision to do something else.
7. Do those two things over and over until your body does something else.
8. Continue until your body decides that's enough.
9. Videotape your phrase and post it to PRAXISPACE.

SUGGESTED VIEWING:

On the Boards TV has made all their full length dance content FREE through April.

From their website: Here's how individuals may access free rentals:

- Choose a performance on <https://www.ontheboards.tv/>
- Pick the 48-hour rental option, then add to your cart (you can do this with as many films as you like)
- Go to Checkout
- Enter your name and email address
- Use the promo code ARTATHOME20

ABOUT PRAXISPACE

PRAXISPACE IS OUR ONLINE COMMUNITY OF COLLABORATORS, DANCERS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS. EACH MONTH, MEMBERS RECEIVE AN ESSAY AND SCORE FROM ALEXANDRA. IN ADDITION, MEMBERSHIP GIVES ACCESS TO THE PRAXISPACE PLATFORM WHICH INCLUDES MEMBER PROFILES, COMMUNITY BOARDS, SCORE PAGES (TO SHARE YOUR WORK!), AND ACCESS TO PRAXISCHATS—MONTHLY ZOOM MEETINGS WITH ALEXANDRA TO DISCUSS YOUR WORK AND RESPONSE TO THE SCORES, HELD THE LAST FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH.

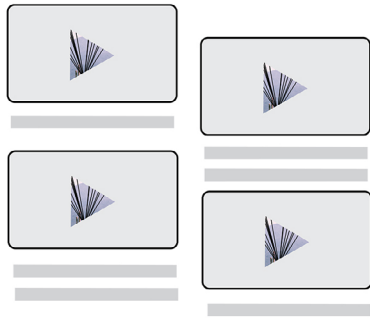
We welcome you to join us on PRAXISPACE. Sign up at a discounted rate using code “50for3” for \$50 for 3 months of access (regularly \$40/month). Or, if your financial situation is uncertain or you are in financial distress but would like to sign up for the platform, we are offering free 3-month access [by signing up at this link](#). PRAXISPACE is an online platform of choreographers, artists and makers, a space to share work and yourself.

A virtual studio, library, and coffee shop in one.

GET \$50 FOR 3 MONTHS

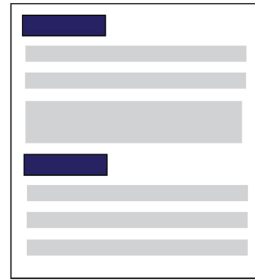
CHECK OUT PRAXISPACE





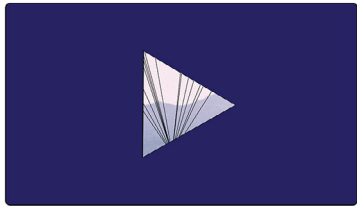
Video Board

Post your videos here, ask questions about your work, receive feedback. Also share photos, links, and status updates.



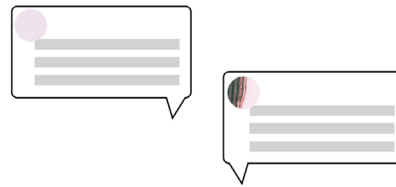
Article Archive

Articles on art, dance-making, performance, context, life.



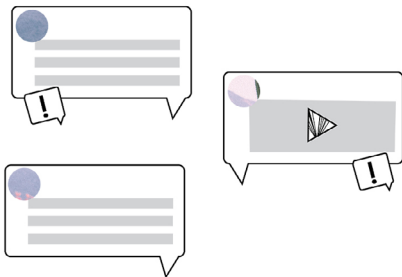
Video Archive

We've also got archived video content for our members, from iconic works to research.



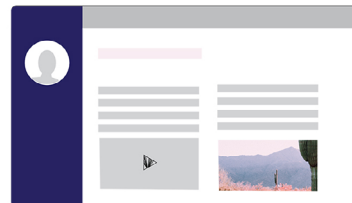
Messaging

Once you became a member, you can have conversations with other members, publicly or privately.



Community Board

It's a chat room! A space where all online members can have a live chat with other members in one place.



Dedicated Profile Pages

Each registered member gets their own profile with their personal bio and an option to show other information.

