

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Shannon Murphy

A Taste of the Inside

by Lu Donovan

“We explore digestion as a model for collaborative and collective care.”

The day I sat down with [The Efforts of Moving Through Together: A Zine](#), I was visiting a friend who had just prepared us cups of digestive aid tea. Following a smorgasbord picnic in little tupperware containers, I was belly full and sipping on baobab leaves, ready finally to dig into Issues 1 and 2, “The Small Intestine” and “Mouth and Esophagus.”

My hands adjusted to the small object, my fingers tried to act nimbly as they flipped through the pages. Meandering into the world of Issue 1, I found collages, poems, and QR codes linking to videos and an accompanying SoundCloud playlist. The music started, a chorus of cavernous echoes, and I imagined being aboard a Ms. Frizzle adventure, driving deep into the folds of a small intestine.

The two zines are part of a six-issue series that explore different sections of the gut tube. Shannon Murphy, the project steward, has assembled a group of ten artists that now join her in research and content contribution. The cohort has been working on gut research, exploration, and meditation since 2016, weaving through praxis, performance, and written media. Both issues begin with an intro that sets up the practice as a dance, “Dance, reflective and active/Dance as people in motion.” Though a skeptic could argue that zines are of the written medium and therefore not dance, these paper objects propose frameworks that bring attention to movement on our insides during a time when much of the world still feels so stagnant. To me, that’s a dance. Created in January and April 2021, I appreciate that the zines propose other forms of togetherness outside of a FaceTime, a Zoom rehearsal, or an outdoor distanced attempt at a hangout. “We’ll get through this together,” claim [2020’s TV ads](#), a mass corporate attempt to touch on a shared pandemic experience. The title of Murphy’s zine also proposes a “moving through together,” and I’m curious to know, who’s included in this “together?”

At Murphy's [Dark Moon](#) two years ago, I sat as witness to this ensemble's gut meditation performance, fully envious of their participation in the group praxis. The dancers, a similar, though "ever-motile" collective, swayed into and out of each other's limbs, communicating so clearly with such little speech. The group swooped me away; I was completely engulfed by their melodramatic swirls. I remember wanting to be inside their improvisation, knowing how sensational it feels to follow pleasure and link with others' movement desires. Sitting around the stage's perimeter, still on the outside, I wondered about the sharing, the making-visible, of this practice.

The zines did something similar for me. Like getting a peek into a clique's inside jokes, I read and gained just a taste of the group-created intimacy. "The sound of Michele walking through the grass and crunching leaves. She's walking across my diagram," scribbles Megan Quinn in a photograph of her notebook. The sentence "the crickets do not want fried onions" shows up repeatedly through Issue 2, a strange phrase whose context only the group understands.

In reading, I'm instructed to "lick a page or two—not the edges! Watch out for paper cuts! Dry tongue—wet your tongue and swallow." At times, I'm welcomed into sections of the meditation that correspond with the mouth and esophagus. "The Small Intestines: A Field Map" explains how this organ of absorption can be a blueprint of how we transform and sustain revolution. In Issue 2, I'm invited to reflect on what's next with William Robinson's "Begin," an 8-page offering on ways to start. These bite-sized snacks leave my appetite wanting more.

Murphy's group shares their internal dances (and poems, and collages) of moving together, proposing templates of what could be. Knowing that this process was led by their guts, an anatomical system I too can explore as a model of care, I started to consider the relationships in my life that mirror those formed inside these itty bitty pages.

After 2 years of engaging with this work, I'm still challenged by what their performances and publications stir up in me. There's something here about feeling on the outside but still included. Like traveling through a digestive tract, I'm not here to stay as part of the collective body, but still able to witness their systems at work. I'm in awe of the sacredness of their inner world, an environment that absorbs, decomposes, transforms and begins and becomes something new. In fact, I'm moved to follow Murphy's lead and feel deeper into my gut, to learn from a pre-existing system on how to move toward worlds, large and small, of care.

Shannon Murphy and collaborators, [The Efforts of Moving Through Together: A Zine](#), Volume 1, Issue 1: The Small Intestine, January 2021.

Shannon Murphy and collaborators, [The Efforts of Moving Through Together: A Zine](#), Volume 1, Issue 2: Mouth and Esophagus, April 2021.

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