

Twelve Eights of Choreography from Tomorrow and Tomorrow

By Anja Hendrikse Liu

1: *Assemblé*, to assemble

Watching Haru's last body-cap. Again; the eighteenth *again* today. The project is to watch my teacher's choreography til I can feel it, then feel it til I can move in it, then move in it til I learn it, or at least learn it for today, for the moment; *learning is in a moment and in every moment*, Haru used to say.

In the projection, she surges and billows into a *renversé*, a sweeping up-and-over leg and *hold-hold-hold* held-breath apex, and a twist and dip and

glitch

2: *En avant*, traveling forward

Watching Haru's last body-cap. Again; the twenty-fifth *again* today. The project is to watch her choreography til I can feel it, and I can almost feel it now, my hands moving without prompting through the first eleven eight-counts of music.

Haru surges and billows into a *renversé*, a sweeping up-and-over leg and *hold-hold-hold* held-breath apex, and a twist and dip and

glitch

3: *En arrière*, traveling backward

Watching Haru's last body-cap. Again; the ninth *again* today. Maybe a different today. Recording myself now, as I move in sync with her, no limits on storage with the new data grant. Just me and Haru, the music, and the body-capture studio, a modular black box moved here for this purpose.

We surge and billow into a *renversé*: sweep, *bold-bold-bold*, twist and dip and

I fall out of it, with nowhere else to go.

Again, the tenth time,

Again, she used to say, until I got it perfect.

I can't get this perfect.

The project is to watch her choreography til I can feel it, then feel it til I can move in it, then move in it til I learn it. I've spent months insulated from the city in the studio box, doing this project with all Haru's work: unfinished and finished-for-now and never-finished drafts. Jumping back and forth through the years as the strand of one dance led to another, learning from the shapes her life makes now that it's over. I've always saved this piece for last: her last, *the* last, the last that mattered. Her life has spun into a web for me after so long breathing in her movement, but all lives have a death, as all webs have an end.

Watching Haru's last body-cap. Again; the third *again* today. I don't understand. The body-capture is perfectly tagged. File: uncorrupted. Resolution: crisp as a good *dégagé*. I've watched it in projection, in VR, broken it down to notation and coordinates and standardized postures, yet no matter what I do, there's a piece missing at the end, just at the sundown of the *renversé*, a lacuna, neatly incised, a

glitch

4: *En avant* again

Eleven glorious eights of choreography, then that *renversé*, then nothing. A whole lot of nothingness to learn. I still don't understand. Body-cap was supposed to solve this problem, so students like me could learn choreography forever: learn it the way it was intended, the way it was messed-up-and-run-again, the way it was imagined for bodies and spaces like ours, or theirs, or anyone's.

Watching Haru's last body-cap. Again; the thirty-fourth *again* today. I make myself keep going after Haru's *renversé* dissolves. I'm a choreographer, after all, have been for fifty years. I'm not bound by arbitrary ending, any more than I'm bound by blank walls on all sides. I capture and capture and capture myself, ready for the moment I catch it — *it*, something, I'll catch it in a fleeting moment, and with the body-cap running, fleeting will become forever, just like it should've been when Haru first caught it.

5: *En dedans*, inward

Watching Haru's last body-cap. Again; the thirteenth *again* today.

If I can just finish it, catch it,

Again.

"Catch" starts to feel like a virus. Racing through my cerebrospinal fluid, uncatchable but already caught, this need to catch. No escape now, and anyway, I don't want escape.

Echappé is *escape* in ballet terms. I try an escape. Again. Legs bound tight in a jump, then knifed outward to second position. A brief star in the air; well, brief for me, but endless for Haru with her effortless *ballon*. I always struggled to capture that weightlessness.

In my professional life, I've trained myself, mostly, out of self-doubt (*ballon* always the exception). But there was a time before I needed training. In my first childhood studio. It's one of the only studios left in the city that's not modular, still bound to one foundation and one purpose.

They're tearing it down. So I've heard. A rumor. It's good that it'll be gone. It was built a century ago, no thought to sustainability or collaboration.

Yes, it's good that it'll be gone. Very good, only good. Good to make way for innovation. There's no body-cap in that studio, bodies only captured in wall-to-wall mirrors.

And I'm back to *capture, catch, catch, escape,*

glitch

6: *Posé*, to step

Another virus: the idea of my childhood studio. I won't need forty-seven *agains* if I can remember how it felt to learn without the weight of another life upon me.

I turn the body-cap off and step outside.

7: *Chaseé*, to slide

Streets slide in my view. I suppose it's possible I've spent too long in the un-sunned studio box. Invested too much in the body-to-cornea-to-digital-projection pipeline.

Things have been rearranged while I wasn't watching. I often wake these days from a sleep or a choreography to find a different layout of buildings. Good-different. Modular spaces reconfigured from kitchens to studios to mycelial incubators. A breathing city. *In a moment and in every moment*, Haru would've observed, here, watching the paths of people converge, make sparks, listen and share, until their learning reshapes the intersections between them, and the buildings shift again to the shapes needed for the next moment's play.

The city's skeleton is still familiar underneath, good-familiar. I follow a rib to my childhood studio,

Which is

Not there

glitch

8: *À terre*, on the ground

I follow a rib to my childhood studio,

Which is

My right-now studio.

Exactly how I remember it.

Exactly.

Because it is right-now.

Bodies captured in mirrors. Every *plié* doing exactly what the teachers instruct, rooting into the ground; this building has never and will never move.

It's good that it'll be gone. It doesn't make sense in this new shape of city.

But how can they tear down a building that isn't here anymore?

I find my way to the right-now right-now. I must've misremembered the street address. Or maybe it's become a lacuna in the city, like the blank at the end of Haru's dance. In the right-now right-now, I'm facing something that's also called a studio but bears no resemblance to either my childhood or the black-box body-capping whale's mouth of my new grant-funded space.

People inside. Some are children. Some older than me, eighty or ninety. They've come together in this moment, and the funny thing is, I can't tell if they've met before or when or how.

No bodies are captured here, not in mirrors or technological eyes. The building breathes within its skin of recycled recyclable polymer, breathes through wide-open windows. Dancers converge and scatter in a microcosm of the city around them, and the city listens to them in its own slow time; tomorrow, after listening, it'll look slightly different. Some of the dancers are also painters or poets, I see as I watch, and others are here to work and talk and eat, and they process like constellations around the central core of dancers who are doing exactly what I've done for fifty years: feeling the floor with every unfurling of feet, digging into it, taking off for endless moments, their bodies stretching into illusive weightlessness before leaning into the unhurried fall and the floor and the earth below that. The bodies and their buildings and their people are alive in this momentary place.

9: *Tendu*, to stretch

I stand outside the studio for a long time. The project is to watch the dancers and non-dancers in their space, watch them til I can feel it, then feel it til I can move in it, then move in it til I learn it. *Learning is in a moment and in every moment.*

The dancers nod to me as they pass. The floor wears the brushstrokes of their movements, imperceptible except when the sun hits the marley at a certain angle, but I know those brushstrokes will nudge the building into its new shape tomorrow and tomorrow. With every *tendu*, the dancers have stretched another millimeter into the future; with every millimeter into the future, the shape of the *tendu* stretches in kind.

Someone invites me inside.

I can't. I have to get back to

glitch

10: *Manège*, merry-go-round

My studio.

Watching Haru's last body-cap.

The project is to watch her choreography til I can feel it, then feel it til I can move in it, then move in it til I learn it, or at least learn it for today, for the moment.

Haru surges and billows into a *renversé*, a sweeping up-and-over leg and *hold-hold-hold* held-breath apex, and a twist and dip and

glitch

But

glitch

But there's still

g g litch

11: *Developpé*, to unfold

My studio. Watching Haru's last body-cap. She surges and billows into a *renversé*: sweep, *hold-hold-hold*, twist and dip and

glitch

and

g g litch

and this time I keep dancing.

glitch

I find her original music and let it play beyond the breakage of the *renversé*.

glitch

I dance with Haru.

I dance in my disappeared childhood studio.

I dance for the body-cap.

One more eight-count beyond the eleven she completed.

I dance right-now in places that don't exist anymore, until finally, I find myself dancing with Haru again. She billows into a *renversé*: sweep, *hold-hold-hold*, twist and dip and

A *pas de bourrée* and a landing, a little messy, flush-cheeked, *port de bras* relaxing into its component parts of arms-neck-head. "I can't remember what comes after that," she says, and she turns off the body-cap.

glitch

12: *Soutenu*, to sustain

That can't be right. Just a *pas de bourrée*, one of the *renversé*'s favorite neighbors, and then nothing to fill out the rest of the eight-count.

Unless it's true.

That Haru didn't know how it ended.

Or that she did catch the ending, once, and looked at what she'd caught, and unhooked it purposely from the body-cap's leash.

I surge into a *renversé*: sweep, *hold-hold-hold*, twist and dip, and a *pas de bourrée* and a landing, a little messy but not off-balance,

And now I'm dancing outside, someplace I've never been before.

glitch

I'm dancing in the modular studio space, surrounded by breath. Funny thing is, I think I've danced here before.

glitch

I'm dancing with the body-cap, not simply because it's there and expected, but because I want to write a message to myself for tomorrow and tomorrow. When I return to the music, I want to be able to breathe with this moment.

glitch

I'm dancing and dancing. I've found my way into the twelfth eight-count, which is sometimes the first eight of a whole different dance. Like the people in the new studio, I stretch my *tendu* a millimeter into the future, then stretch back, never quite to the same place, each *tendu* inflecting the ones that come after, leaving brushstrokes on the marley floor. I look around, and see a thousand new shapes for myself in the city. I look around, and improvise a piece for no audience at all except the body-cap when I want to breathe with it. I look around, and begin again.

Again.

Coda: *Révérence*, which is just what it sounds like

Now you.

What dances will you make in our twelfth eight?