

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund 2022-23*

A sort of fat dance pilgrimage, 4-18 April 2024

(aka Gillie Kleiman visits Body Home Fat Dance in Portland, Oregon, USA)



Photo: Beth Olson Creative

I visited Body Home Fat Dance in Portland, Oregon, for two weeks, after meeting its organiser, KT Kusmaul, online.

The LUTSF monies came together with other funds raised (through my Another Route fellowship and a Developing Your Creative Practice grant from Arts Council England) to enable a very rich experience - I have found myself saying that no residency has ever gone so well.

Body Home Fat Dance is one of numerous fat arts, culture and community platforms across the city of Portland, which includes other fat dance activity, a thriving Facebook group, a fat thrift store, club nights and other events. One of the major reasons I wanted to go to Portland was because of this history of fat culture and activism, which runs deep and has an impact on the city and its people's ways of being. This makes other kinds of things possible in dance than I have been able to achieve at home in Newcastle upon Tyne, England; I wanted to be influenced and inspired as well as do some dedicated choreographic research.

KT and I met several times online prior to my visit to Portland; through these encounters we agreed that the best way to serve both my learning and the community Body Home Fat Dance has created was to run a series of workshops. I was very sensitive to the facilitative formats and economic arrangements KT has with their regular, occasional and prospective

*postponed with permission from LUTSF due to scheduling circumstances

participants, not wanting my wading in with public funding to undermine what happens in a city and country with much less public funding for the arts (believe it or not); this did not seem to be a concern in practice.

The series was entitled 'Fat Contact', which is my current area of choreographic interest. We ran three evening sessions, two full day sessions at the weekend, and another evening which acted as a summary. There were between six and 18 participants in each session; some came once and others came multiple times. We rented the studio at Performance Works North West, which was perfect for our needs, and provided a performance-ready environment for the final session.

The way I like to run workshops (and rehearsals) at the moment is to always have a sense of working towards a performance at the end, even if the performance is just a few minutes and the audience is the room we're in. Not only does this help with a sense of focus for the time together, it also enables me to consider structure and relationships between different sorts of materials, supporting my ongoing choreographic thinking. I set up the workshops to make this possible, and the participants were with me on it from the get-go. This made it very straightforward to transition to the final evening, where we did a 45-minute performance and hosted a very fruitful discussion with attendees, who were participants who didn't want to perform, friends of participants, and other interested parties.



Photo: Beth Olson Creative

I think we did good work. I felt my facilitative and choreographic skills well-exercised; I felt the choreographic propositions were interesting; I felt - and heard - that the participants appreciated their experiences; I think that the kernels of choreography that we developed hold potential. I like what we did and what we made.

The work could not have happened in this way without the support of others. Specifically, I invited an ongoing collaborator, fat screendance specialist and filmmaker Magdalena Hutter, who was already in the Pacific Northwest at this time, to join and document the workshop. She was also an important interlocutor on some of the details of the interpersonal matters as well as the choreographic concerns. KT introduced me to Mickey Pollizatto, a dancer and musician, who supported the space with creating and recording sound. And finally KT, who was a participant as well as a crucial behind-the-scenes facilitator, fostering trust and good humour as well as supporting in very practical ways.

My intention is to continue with this choreographic enquiry, ideally resulting in a touring performance, though it seems ever-harder to make productions possible. I also hope that it will be possible for a return visit to Portland to continue to deepen the relationship with this (fat) (dance) community; KT and I are in discussion about this.