

**SuarezDanceTheater** (Santa Monica, CA) continues a bi-coastal collaboration with choreographer, **Lori Teague** to create the dance-theater project, ***Rule of Thumb***. Teague and Suarez are expanding research that began in 1992 on the Emory University campus. The first version of *Rule of Thumb*, choreographed by Teague, humorously blended theater and dance to characterize the challenging formation of a woman's sexual identity-- framing the disparities of power that pervade heterosexual relationships in patriarchal cultures and the influential, antiquated parameters imposed by religion. Suarez was an original cast member.

Their recent collaborative process tracks the evolution of their feminist values, the landmarks that taught them to be girls and women, and the transitions that continue to re-shape the expression of gender identity. Some parts of this abundant landscape of resources are currently wrapped tightly into the relationships bodies have with societal norms and cultural identity. They continue to excavate. The completed work will premiere at Emory University, March 1-3, 2018.

### **Shareback:**

Over the past nine months, our physical research of gender identity/gender fluidity has intersected with a variety of sociological readings, observations of life itself, documentaries about LGBT issues, and a variety of artists' works, including Cindy Sherman's self portraits. Meanwhile, we march. We protest. We stand in solidarity.

### ***As women, as transgender, as lesbians, as girls, as gays.....HOW DO WE RESPOND?***

Our third intensive in Atlanta, Georgia, 10 days in the studio, was full of discussions, review, development, listening, and laughter. We were joined by cast member, Juana Farfan, for about half of the rehearsals. She was part of our 1<sup>st</sup> intensive. We also explored the intention of our prompts to facilitate two workshops, one on Emory's campus and the other in East Point, at Lucky Penny's Work Room, a choreographic lab founded by another Emory dance alumnae, Blake Beckham. We also shared an excerpt of *Rule of Thumb* at the Critical Juncture Conference: Intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and disability.

In the studio, the act of mining personal stories is rooted in creating improvisational structures. These structures help us find in roads into the body and then become scores we can repeat. The selection of movement scores and prompts we are sharing have proven to be most useful, meaningful, and engaging thus far. The overall intention is to integrate the inner self with the outer self, to explore ambiguity and embodiment. Some of the scores allow the senses to lead, specifically seeing differently and listening through the body. Feel free to try them on, morph them, and adapt them to different groups. They can be used with highly trained mover/performer and those new to moving. They can also be adjusted for movers of all abilities.

**WHAT'S IN A NAME** (layers): We begin our workshops with this. First introduced to Lori at an Anna Halprin workshop by Dohee Lee, an amazing improvisational vocalist. It is a good ice-breaker. We have re-shaped its intention.

Say your name: exploring the dynamics of the sound of your name (syllables, vowels, and consonants) in any way you want, while also creating/releasing movement. The leader/facilitator of the group demonstrates. We recommend trusting your impulses, enjoying playing-- going big, goofy, and showing the range of possibilities. The group responds by echoing the sound and movement or by creating a unique response to what they heard and saw. Depending on the size of the group, you can cycle around as much as you want. It warms everyone up and usually gets people laughing. It certainly reveals some of the layers of our personalities. \*Play with nicknames, change your name, or give yourself a nickname.

**Evolution dance:** (Also a great warm-up because it is personal.) Movers chose a time in their lives to begin: in utero, a toddler, at eight. They delve into movement stimulated by internal and external landscapes of that age. Movers explore and create movement from that place. Sensorial memories and one's imagination lead the body's movement. Prompts are facilitated by a leader who keeps the group progressing through time. (Examples: *Follow your desires. Follow patterns of movement. How do you relate to space at this age? Move through a chunk of time, you can always go back. Move into a dense period. What are you sensing? What connections are you making?*) Give this improvisation a minimum of 15-20 minutes until everyone has eventually evolved to today. \*Pick a similar time in life for the whole group...being 14, being 24.

**WITHOUT LABELS** (shedding): How can we really see someone? Is there a new way to see that will yield change? Here we practice seeing – taking someone in without judgment, without labeling. It reminds us of the way a baby sees without words, unattached to identification.

Move into pairs, one will see the other first. First observer, follow your focus into the landscape of the body. Allow yourself to fully see while also allowing yourself to be seen. Play with proximity, levels, point of view, and time spent in one spot. Allow yourself to also be still. Give yourself time. Try to free yourself of emotional responses by looking, and being seen simultaneously. \*Both movers create 4-6 postures and continue to loop through them. What still has flexibility is your focus.

***As a studio practice, we asked ourselves not to “perform.”***

**Inside/OUTSIDE:** First, everyone begins walking in a circle. The group can decide the direction of the revolution, then simply follow that flow. As movers are walking, the leader calls out words that influence a response--words like narrow, loud, pointed, grotesque, shame, powerful, lead, truth, lengthen, protrude, sink, centered....These words represent ideas, context, and situations that shape our being. Each word is felt and explored by shaping/posturing with a dynamic life on the inside of the body that is personal. The body responds authentically. Embody the action, respond, and notice your choices. The leader allows time for movers to

discover each word, but with the goal not to over think a response. Sometimes there are words that a mover doesn't respond to. They can be unsure of that relationship. Notice that too. After some time, the space is open for any mover to say words that they are interested in exploring. Some words that have been introduced include purging, resisting, loud. We found it useful to have a post-moving reflection-- noting how time and space are affected by each word and what words were easy or difficult to embody, and why. \*Next time you enter this score, try moving freely through the space, instead of in a circle.

**Just ask:** This score is a lovely and gentle way for movers to connect with each other. Movers pair up. The receiving mover asks for an area of their body to be supported as they move – it can be an area of injury, vulnerability, or simply an area where they want comfort. The “ support” mover lightly touches, molds to that area (usually with their hands) while staying in conversation with the receiver about comfort and need and moving while adapting to their movement. The “supporter” is listening through their own body. Allow ample time for partners to explore. Change roles when ready. \*Change partners, or stay with this partner and explore other areas of the body.

**Feedback:** It all started when a woman noticed that her body wasn't always congruent with her face, and that her face exaggerated her feelings. So we explored...being quiet, being modest, being pretty, looking young, looking important...stretching, fixing, filling, distorting, revealing, etc... This playful conversation between your face and your body is explored with a sense of curiosity and potential for exaggeration. We have found it effective to use a mirror for the instant feedback.

Sit or Stand in front of a mirror. Allow the body to take a shape, then allow the face to respond to the shape of the body. Try it in reverse – the face morphs into a shape and fills the rest of the body. The face and body can be in conversation with each other, in response to each other, or in juxtaposition. Plenty of potent gestures and postures will be revealed for further analysis. This is also a super fun exercise – it gets you connected to your body, emotions and each other. \*Explore how your shapes, your emotions, your qualities coexist in relation to each other.

**“I am” (disclosures) to be, or not to be.**

Gather, standing (or sitting) in circle in close proximity to each other. In popcorn style, make singular statements about your identity starting the lived phrase as “I am...”. (Involuntary movement accompaniment is welcome but also not necessary.) Encourage everyone to include the superficial and the deep. “I am a woman. I am far-sighted. I fall into depressions often.” Listen to others, *It will build trust in the group.* Continue to trust your own impulses to speak. Notice what you are withholding. Notice what comes easily. The collective statements are not in conversation with each other, but may certainly inspire each other. Each time you speak, notice your own response to your statement. *It builds trust in your self.*

**An important guide:** We have found that being clear that everyone in the circle is creating a container of empathy, but each in charge of their own revelations.

\*Christine used this structure with the veterans group she works with. They did it seated in chairs in a circle. Each mover said “I am....” with a movement. Then the group echoed the words and movement. After going around the circle they had a movement and vocal phrase that they added music to. Christine noted the range of “I am” statements. I am a disabled veteran. I am a carpenter. I am freedom.

*Improvisational Scores give the individual agency. It is important to sit down and chat about the strengths, and the many interesting entry points for each one.*

*After all is said and done, each day in the studio has a loose plan, gets interrupted by an idea bursting to the scene, gets derailed by hunger or humor, goes in deep, and most importantly is a dialogue with everyone invested in the space.*

**Our process yields authentic vocabularies from personal histories living in the body.**

**Our process is about following and follow through.**

**Our process is about listening and responding empathetically.**