Movement Research/Critical Correspondence **9/27/06**

Alma Esperanza-Cunningham and **Mary Armentrout**
talk to **Faye Driscoll** in advance of *Seen: San Francisco*,
a Movement Research Studies Project, curated by
Trajal Harrel and Armentrout

Alma Esperanza-Cunningham: Are you from the Bay Area?

Faye Driscoll: I am originally from Los Angeles, actually. I lived in New York for about nine years, and then I went back to the Bay Area in 2002, and then moved back here last year. So, I've gone back and forth between California and New York.

Alma: You're a good person to facilitate this discussion. You'll be able to have some insights I'm sure about being in the Bay Area, versus...

Faye: Yeah, I think so. I have my own subjective experience, and hopefully also some objective idea of it. Have you been to New York?

Alma: Yeah, I actually went back there several times. The last time I lived there was for five years, and I bounced back and forth. The first time, I was there for a year and then came back. I wasn't quite ready to move. The second time, it was also for a year. Then I was like, "Ok, I've got to do it." I really felt that New York was so great. There are so many great learning experiences if you want to pursue dancing in New York. I was there for five years and, I probably would still be there, if it weren't for the fact that my family's over here. I really did find that the scene there felt as if the dancers felt more determined. I think that has to do with good and bad. The good side and the bad side, which are just subjective, which is whether... You have to be really determined to be in New York because of the weather... I know some people like seasons, but it was really cold, coming from the West Coast.

Faye: Yeah, really cold and really hard.

Alma: Really, just difficult. Everything's intense and you need space, and there's no space. Here, it's pretty much the other side, where it's actually quite beautiful. There are no seasons, but it's beautiful, and generally speaking, because of the weather, because of the environment, even though San Francisco is a city, there's more space when you look around.

Faye: Yeah, I found that there, definitely, less struggle to survive.

Alma: Less of a day-to-day struggle.

Faye: Exactly. I find that interesting, how that affects the way people make work.

Alma: I think that what you said has something to it because I'm thinking, when I was in New York, I felt like it took so much to do two or three things in a day. Because I was living in Washington Heights, and you'd take the subway downtown, you'd take the subway to Brooklyn, your day's done. Because it's less dense, it feels like I can do more here, which is an odd thing. It's definitely more casual here, so you have to be really self-motivated.

Faye: Do you find that it takes an extra level of determination to get all of those tasks done? I find here, in some ways, even though it is a harder place to live in a lot of ways, it's also a place where there's a lot of flow happening. If I want to get on the to-do list train, I can jump in, and everyone else is in that mode too, so in some ways it's easier. I throw a little pebble in, and it turns into this huge thing pretty quickly here. Whereas there, I felt like I had to keep throwing stuff, and throwing it again, and throwing it, and then maybe I'd get some response.

Alma: I think that especially if you're thinking about being an artist in the community, my experience was that it felt like there was more of a community in New York. When I moved there, I worked at Movement Research. I was really lucky that I got a job there after a couple of months. I auditioned for DTW's Fresh Tracks, and I got in.

(Mary Armentrout joins the group.)

Faye: I would just love to hear, if each of you could take a turn to talk a little bit about your background, (I already went through it with Alma), about your artistic background and your history, just so that we can get to know you.

Mary Armentrout: Darn, I wanted to hear Alma's! I grew up mostly on the East Coast in State College, which is where Kent State is, a little university town in Pennsylvania. I had wonderful training with a creative dance person there, who was just fabulous. Then I ended up in L.A. for high school, which was terribly, terribly shocking to my little academic being somehow. I did some really horrifying ballet training and interesting things, which is all, in retrospect, lovely. Then I went to Sarah Lawrence, which was great. I had a wonderful time there, all things considered. I think it's the kind of place that was perfect for me. They don't particularly care if you had much technique. There was a lot of emphasis on composition and choreography, and trying to understand what that might be for yourself. That fit in really nicely with a lot of my early training. Then, I ended up here and there in New York a little bit after school, in Europe a little bit, and then suddenly ended up in the Bay Area, because my boyfriend was getting a degree.

We've been here since '87, and I didn't think I was going to be here for very long at all. It's a very curious thing because I've been in the Bay Area now for a long, long time—practically 20 years—and I've always felt, ‘Oh, we'll be leaving tomorrow or tomorrow,’ which is not the case at all. It took me a while to adjust my head around that. For a long time, I went through this phase of ‘Oh, I wish I was back in New York. I wish I were there. I'm sure it's much better there.’ I'm sure I would have thought that no matter where I was, and it's completely an illusion to be thinking that. It took me a while to

figure out what I could do here, and what was good about being here, although I think at the moment, it's pretty fabulous in a lot of ways. It's interesting, but it's also the sort of thing where I have the kind of critical analytical mind that won't stop, and so I'm always comparing it to my mythical New York, which has no existence anywhere.

Faye: I'm curious to hear what that is for you, what the myth is, and also what you found to be good about San Francisco.

Mary: Yeah, as I was just thinking about what to say in this, as I was driving home in the traffic from my beautiful studio, where I have all this incredible space and pretty much quiet in this crazy, industrial part of Oakland—with the BART trains going nearby, and the airplanes landing nearby, it's still pretty quiet. I had just been on the phone to your lovely Dance New Amsterdam to rent a little bit of time. Oh shit! $25/hour! And here I am, sitting in my studio, which is costing me way under $2/hour… That kind of difference. I have beautiful sunlight, and I have this roof right out the windows. There's such luxury of space and time here, and if you can figure out how to use them with focus, and I think Alma probably understands this too, it's pretty fabulous. I started going back to New York for little hits of New York, so that I would come back here and go, 'Wow, this is great.' In certain ways, there are a lot of good things, and that's not to say that there aren't things that I don't like about the Bay Area scene. There are also things that are objectively not good.

Faye: So, since 1987 you've been making your own work?

Mary: Yeah. I definitely feel like I'm one of those people who looked at the idea of dancing for someone else and was just like, 'Oh, do I have to?' I understand how in certain ways, it's really helpful, but also I was really injured for a while, and I had to figure out how to protect my chronic back injury from this. I think that a lot of different factors kept me from dancing for other people all that much, and I think it's great in the long run. I also feel like it was hard for me to find my own voice, and I needed a lot of space and quiet to find it. So that was great.

Faye: Great.

Alma: Mary touched upon something that I feel is important, which is focus. In the Bay Area, there is a lot of opportunity if you're self-motivated and focused. Studio space is not cheap in the Bay Area, but if you are focused and determined, you can create situations for yourself to make the work. I think that that could be said anywhere, but it seems like there's a lot of opportunities to have your own voice, because the Bay Area dance audience is not as critical as in the East. There's a lot of opportunity for people to create their own voices. I often look at it as creating a work, like the birth of a baby, taking risks. In the beginning, it can seem cliché, but if you really further investigate and go deeper into it, you can be touching on something quite radical, and the pressure to be accepted, or the pressure that you'll be critiqued by a very vocal audience can stop that development from happening, so people are pushed into going in a way that they think is going to be more accepted within the standards of that community.

Faye: Georgiana and I were talking about the motive of the new —trying to one-up originality constantly—which can push the work on one level to not be stuck in these trite repetitions of things you've seen. But it can also, like you said, keep people from digging deeper in a really honest way, into what interests them, getting overly concerned with what, for me, sometimes feels reactionary to what's around you, instead of digging deep into your own truth about it. Alma, what is your background? I heard a little bit about your experiences in New York, but where are you from originally?

Alma: I'm from the North Bay, so I'm just 30 minutes from the Golden Gate Bridge. I started early on with my two sisters in ballet. We were really lucky because we didn't just go to any corner school. We had a really excellent ballet teacher, who then took us to a really excellent ballet school. I reluctantly was forced to go to ballet for nine years. I hated it. My mother would push me with my two sisters to ballet class. I ended up quitting in my teens. I think I was 15 when I quit. I felt that I needed to. Once I got the opportunity to stop dancing, I was like, 'Great.' There were so many other things I wanted to do. Then I stumbled back into dance at 23, and the most amazing thing is that if you have really good base knowledge of the body, because you've had instructors that are... my ballet instructor at 9 was giving us Feldenkrais exercises! It was a really good approach for ballet, actually. So, when I came back to it, it was all very easy, and I ended up moving to New York at 25.

I worked for some people over there, and then I came back here. I think by that time, I had had my own voice, and I was really eager to dance, and do what I wanted to do. So, I have gone on a very independent path. I don't really have a particular person that mentored me per se, in terms of an aesthetic that I follow or a style of movement that's specific. But I definitely feel like my younger training gave me a really good analytical approach to movement. Later on, when I was in New York and I started studying, I took a Trisha Brown workshop, and it was the most amazing thing. I'd been studying at Alvin Ailey, and I built all this muscle, and I could do so much, and then I took a Trisha Brown workshop, and I'm like, 'What's going on here?' I was like, 'What is this?' I think that was really pivotal.

Faye: Do you find that is an influence in the way you approach making work?

Alma: Yeah. Being exposed to different kinds of movement, which came from when I first moved to New York, did have a major impact in how I started to look at movement and the different ways I could approach it. Having a really good, strong training early on that gave me an analytical perspective on movement in general, enabled me to take it and appreciate it. Definitely, the Trisha Brown workshop. I think it was one of the first workshops that she was teaching. Debbie, her dancer, was teaching it, and it was phenomenal. Then I went to Movement Research on a Monday night—after doing all the uptown dance stuff at Alvin Ailey—I got to Movement Research, and I saw Susan Braham. She danced with Stephen Petronio. I saw her do a solo, and I was like, 'Oh my God, this is modern dance.' I am influenced by exposure to different approaches that

didn't actually originate from the Bay Area, or I didn't have the original experience in the Bay Area. I probably was first opened up to it being in New York.

Faye: That brings me to my next question, and maybe we can stay with Alma, and then go back over to Mary about what your process is like. What influences you, and what do you find around you in the Bay Area? For me, it was going to see bands out there. There's a really awesome music scene, and I actually was less influenced by going to see dance, than I was by going to see other kinds of performance when I was out there. What's your process like? And talk a little bit about your inspirations.

Alma: Ok. I definitely think my work is influenced by various, different art forms. It's abstract. It's influenced by the Minimalist movement, the Pop Art movement... The more I go and examine art... I was just looking at the Mannerism Movement, and I was thinking, 'There are definitely elements of that that I explore in my work.' So, I think it comes from a lot of different places. It comes from a book I could be reading. It comes from a television show that's so ironic that it leads me to start going someplace else. My work is definitely extremely personal. The way I take the movement, the way I sequence it, and the way I frame it, is completely personal, but I would have to say it's definitely movement-based. I wouldn't say what I do is dance-theater.

Mary: I think there's a lot of dance-theater going on in San Francisco.

Alma: There's a lot of dance-theater, a lot of aerial work. Dancers I've worked with have done cabaret-aerial work. It's really interesting. I appreciate seeing some of the stuff that's happening in the Bay Area in that direction. I am also inspired by some dance performances I go to in the Bay Area, but generally speaking, the resources that feed the work I make don't necessarily come from dance. They come from images, art, literature…

Faye: How does that get translated into your body?

Alma: It gets translated in a very personal way. The work generally comes out as this exploration of the feminine persona, or the feminine body, and I think it has to do with the fact that it is so personal, and it's a real natural curiosity for me to really investigate this body that we have as women, and how it moves and the shapes, and the vulnerability and the power.

Faye: And Mary, could you speak about what's exciting to you right now about it, what's engaging you particularly at this moment?

Mary: It's interesting thinking about what it is that I do, trying to formulate it. I constantly fall into some version of a dance-theater camp, partly because what's interesting to me is trying to figure out how the body in dance, the body in movement, the person that's being this creature up there, can stay human. That's one of the things that, for some reason, is very central to me. It's kind of a strain, in a funny way, of anti-formalism, although I feel like I'm rather Minimalist in my approach in some ways.

Faye: The dancer being an automaton, just kind of faceless and moving around up there. David Neumann calls it the "Fuck You" modern dance face.

Mary: Right. I've always been one of the ones accused of being an actress. My face is always alive, and I think it's partly whatever that is. But another layer for me is all the Feldenkrais work that I've done, basically to heal my back. It became a really wonderful process for me, and a way of understanding how incredibly complicated we are at all times, even just physically. Your body is doing about four different things at once, and you don't know what the other three are. So, the way that you can kind of build up all these layers of consciousness or unconsciousness or desires of different sorts, or *awarenesses* of different amounts in the body, in the performing body… And it can get into this interesting layered place that's dealing with the world of psychology perhaps, but definitely dealing with the body more as a human, always a human thing, rather than going off into the way in which the human form can be just a form, or a beautiful form, or be some kind of natural shape or natural metaphor for other things.

Faye: How does that translate? Do you use text? Is it more a body-based experience?

Mary: Text. I start a lot from everyday stuff and use a lot of repetition and looping. I've gotten into using a lot of props and video, although that kind of goes in and out. I find also… just layering movement and text, sometimes minimally, sometimes not minimally... different things that you can create between face and body.

Faye: What's the work that you're bringing to the Judson?

Mary: I'm bringing this newly minted solo.

Faye: Great. That you're dancing?

Mary: Yeah. It's a solo that I will be dancing. It's called *Three Statements*, and it's three different little sections of this kind of exploration, movement with different layers going on, some words. I like to create these ambiguous, layered things.

Faye: I find it's hard for me to talk about things mid-process. I'm working on a solo right now, and for some reason I have a resistance. I'm still in this process of knowing it, and so when people ask me what it's about or what I'm doing, for some reason, I'm like, "I'll tell you later."

Mary: I'm like, 'Good thing I didn't talk to you till today' because three days ago, I wasn't really quite certain.

Faye: What's the work you're bringing?

Alma: I'm going to bring a duet titled *Princess*. It's a working title, and it's basically a duet that explores a relationship between... It's very feminine. It's from a very feminine

perspective. It explores aggression and power and intimacy. The name *Princess* comes from the first study of this, which was *Deconstructing a Princess*, where I created a set of movement that was all very cosmetic movement, and then later on, I worked with another dancer who came in. Her task was to abstract the dancer from dancing. With that kind of task, or with those kinds of tools in the studio, we developed what we'll be showing. I think it definitely has a lot to do with power, and it's a little bit dark, in the sense that there is aggression there. It's still a work-in-progress.

Faye: I've been interested in, in my own dance making, creating structures. Sometimes I go to these very intense, esoteric places, and ideas and psychological spaces, and sometimes it's the simple structure that I set up for myself that is the most powerful, or the most revealing. What you were saying about just setting up someone to set up a space or a distance for a dancer… it's interesting what that can convey.

Maybe we can just open this up for a conversation to happen. Some thoughts: I was talking to Trajal [Harrel] about what the differences are between the New York and San Francisco dance scenes, and how the more charged political atmosphere of San Francisco may affect the work that is made there. I found, being out there, the progressives are taken to a whole new level of liberal politics. It's a liberal one-upmanship that happens sometimes. Who can be the most progressive? Which I think is amazing. I myself don't necessarily... I'm not drawn to overtly political work. We could just talk also about the geography. For me, seeing palm trees on a daily basis affected me. What is the sense of dialogue you might feel like you're having with both your environment or your geography, or other artists in your community? We had touched on the thing that brings you to focus, that Alma was talking about, being able to focus more, or having to focus more in a way because you don't have this resistance around you, or this highly critical environment around you. What dialogue you feel like you are having with your environment? I'm just throwing out thoughts, and you all can take these wherever you want.

The other thing that Trajal and I had spoken about was the hierarchical thing that goes on: New York, and other places. Maybe you don't even feel that towards New York. And then how you view work through a certain lens: if we know, ‘Oh, it's from the Bay Area.” Or, ‘it's from New York.’ Is it possible for us to step out of that, and just view the work without that hierarchical lens on it? Any thoughts you both might have on any of that?

Alma: It was interesting because I just got an email from Margie Jenkins. There was going to be a workshop and a discussion about artists in academic environments. There's definitely a movement of choreographers working in institutions, because they're not getting support in other areas. I thought that that was really interesting because I feel like, if we look in the Bay Area—and I think this is probably national, but especially in the Bay Area—if you look at the larger companies that aren’t the hugely established companies, often they're affiliated with a school. I thought the fact that artists are now going in that direction, out of survival, to be able to make their work, and to try to continue to have a company, or have a group of dancers, a steady group of dancers that you can work with… It's interesting to see how that influences dance-

making, just for the fact that it's affiliated with an institution, so with that there's an environment that influences work.

Faye: A lot of artists, I think, find their income through becoming educators, and yeah, that is an interesting question.

Alma: I was thinking about that a little bit lately, and it seems like I see that happening more and more around me with choreographers that were able earlier to be funded and have their company, and their companies were pretty successful. But with the cuts in funding, they went towards working at UC Davis, or these institutions. And how that changes it for us too, because of our accessibility to the work. It's very interesting. That was something that just came up as you were talking. But, with me, I feel like in general, the San Francisco scene is really, because of the environment, it is very political. And I think that one of the things that we've been known for is very political work. People are not afraid to speak up in San Francisco. That's not my genre, but that inspires me, in as much that there's that freedom and that power to be an individual and to come out and say, 'Here I am.' I'm also excited by all these other new movements that are going on. The aerial work, I think is interesting to see how that's developing.

Faye: Yeah, I think people out there are taking that traditional circus form and trying to push it.

Alma: Yeah, pushing it in this sort of Burning Man, theatrical escapade. It's going into the clubs; it's going into shows with bands on stage at concert halls.

Faye: It's more accessible in that way.

Alma: Yeah. It's taking dance and movement theater, and putting it in all these different places. And I think that there are a lot of people that feel that that's a little bit cheap, and there are other people that feel like the hierarchy is not important. I think that that's another interesting thing. I find myself sitting back, because I do work with dancers who do a lot of that, and we always have this dialogue that's kind of a debate about the value of it. And part of me is excited about it, and part of me is, 'Ok, they're not making money being able to pursue their dance on stage in a more formal context, and now they're able to make their money at clubs and at concert halls.' It's fun as well, and it's a lot more glamorous. And it's so accessible that they're suddenly reaching new audiences, and that's exciting too. It's an interesting debate that I'm still tackling, which is: at one point, I love it, and at one point, I hate it. I have a love-hate relationship, I guess.

Mary: I have a slightly different perspective on it. In some ways, I think that part of the uniqueness of the Bay Area scene comes from the fact that there is so little institutional presenting and institutional support. Funding goes up and down, and it's not like there isn't money here. There is some money here, relative to the number of people who are doing work, but there aren't really institutions that are going to take you on and present your work, especially not year, after year, after year. So, there are all these different ways in which people in the scene try and figure out how they're going to stay afloat.

You can become more accessible because your audience is paramount to you—that's where your funds are coming from. Fitting in with the whole political thing, I think is another reason that people do that, although I also feel like part of the reason that people do political work here is that it's a mecca for people to find themselves, on the one hand, and it just naturally comes out of that.

Faye: (Laughs.) That's interesting, yeah.

Mary: Well, if you look at people like Joe Goode, who are basically doing this autobiographical gay work, and that's been politicized, but that's because he feels free to talk about who he is because he's here, and we're just totally used to that. That's normal.

Faye: Yeah. So it's not necessarily political there.

Mary: Yeah, that's what the Bay Area is for. Another thing that I think is really neat, is the way that we have a lot of... Influences have different amounts of weight than they do in New York. Butoh, I think is a big influence out here, as it is in many places internationally, but it's interesting that the mix gets shifted and Formalism is not as important here as it is in New York.

Faye: Yeah, that's interesting to me, the way influence is digested differently there. The lineage—even with Margie, and with Joe—, the way that it's digested because maybe of what people come to San Francisco seeking, or maybe because of the geography, or the mix of the elements just being different. But I think if you put a similar influence in New York, it's not noticed, or it's digested completely differently. And San Francisco has this whole take on it, its own history with it.

Mary: And I think you're right that geography does play a role too. If you really wanted to, and you wanted to be really Hippie about it, you could rehearse outdoors practically all year long here.

Faye: Probably naked if you wanted to, too.

Mary: Yeah, it doesn't get cold. Scott Wells has done beautiful work out in some of the parks that are the old military encampments along the coast, and I've done contact with him out there. It's the most fabulous setting. You're in the city. You're five minutes from the studio, and you're completely on this cliff on the coast, and all of this natural beauty.

Faye: Yeah, that doesn't happen here. I worked with Kathleen Hermsdorf when I was out there, and there were a few rehearsals where she was like, ‘It's too nice, let's go to the beach,’ and we went down to Fort Funston and danced with a bunch of driftwood, and I was like, ‘I'm not in New York right now.’

Mary: I think a lot of the scene out here too is a lot of people who have come from New York at different points going, ‘I'm sick of living in a hell-hole and not getting any sun,

and asphalt everywhere.' So, a lot of people really value the quality-of-life aspects about living here. And also, the extra time and space around making work. One of the byproducts of the fact that there are no big institutions that you're trying to please, and you need to self-produce all the time pretty much, is that you're always on your own. You have immense freedom. It's totally stupid, and scary and really hard, on the other hand, but in a certain way, that's what Alma I think is talking a little bit about, the more critical atmosphere in New York.

Faye: It's interesting to me having been here and left here partly because I was burnt out, and was touring with a dance company and felt so jaded in a lot of ways. I'd got to see work and feel very critical about most work I saw. And then I let go and came to San Francisco, and found myself enjoying things that I don't think I would have enjoyed when I was here because I wasn't open enough. My heart wasn't open. My eyes weren't open. In some ways that was a trip for me because I put so much value on my critical way of seeing things. And I still think that it's important to understand the development of the form you're in, so you're not just repeating things that have already been done, or you're making choices to be derivative, but I found it interesting that when I was out of that context, that I was in some ways more open and able to receive work for what it was doing. Not because it was my aesthetic and it was the kind of work I wanted to make, but because there was heart to it. I was a little more open to receiving what the work was saying.

Mary: I think that for me, it seems like the New York scene is just so hot and everybody is so busy trying to figure out what's happening today and what's hot today, and you can't miss anything. You have to see everything and parse it right away so then you can do the next brilliant move. It's like everybody is participating.

Faye: It's a response and a dialogue, which is really exciting to be engaged in.

Mary: Oh, absolutely. It's really fun to be part of, but on the other hand, I always feel like, I might just lose my legs. The current would take me, and I would sink.

Faye: You wouldn't know necessarily where you stood in that. Yeah.

Alma: I remember before, when I was living in New York, I was reading an article in the *New York Times* and Meredith Monk had stated the decentralization of art, basically that people were moving out of New York City and making art in other places, and it was inspiring to me. I feel strongly about this: I feel like I could be anywhere, and I'd still be making work.

Faye: That's really exciting. That's really exciting.

Alma: I feel like the thing is... well, finding dancers and having to train them, but I could find a way wherever I was, to make work. So, for me, it's not a question of, 'Is it going to make me a better choreographer than...' It does inspire you when you form those connections, and I think in the Bay Area, there have been a few times that I've been

really lucky to have had opportunities to participate in residencies where I had a relationship with a more established choreographer, and that was really great. That wouldn't have happened, had it not been in the context of a formal residency. We're all so busy doing our stuff, that we don't have those meaningful exchanges. We don't go out for coffee. I know I've participated in Margie Jenkins's CHIME (Choreographers in Mentorship Exchange) Program, and that was really cool. I partnered with Robert Moses, and it was really wonderful. We're coming from different places, but I felt like we learned a lot from each other, and we made a meaningful connection.

Faye: That's precious.

Alma: It's precious in this kind of climate we're in.

Faye: I thought Alma brought up something interesting in saying that the kind of work you're making, you would be making anywhere, and I think that's really cool, and a question that I have in art-making. Is there something just essential to my work that is an essence, and is important, and is there regardless of who I'm perceiving my audience to be?

Mary: I wish I could say the same as Alma, but I don't know that I feel that. I feel that context does play a role in what I feel I can create, and there's some way in which I feel like the work that I make out here in the Bay Area, just fucking looks wacky. (Laughs.) I don't think it would be quite the same in New York. It would be different, and it's interesting playing with how that works. Out here, I feel myself pushing myself to be a little more accessible. I can allow myself to be political because that works. I try in some ways to make the layering and the abstraction and the complicatedness simpler. It's funny, making this piece, the solo that I'm bringing to New York, I'm like, 'Oh, I don't have to have those restraints on because the audience is more sophisticated.'

Faye: You know who your audience is going to be, yeah.

Mary: That, to me, is a problem, and I don't know how real it is. I don't know how much I'm doing it to myself. I think that something about what Alma is saying is correct, there's always a core, but I feel fairly clearly ways in which my edges get messed with by my context.

Faye: Or you're perceived context.

Mary: Right.

Faye: That's an interesting question: what am I perceiving my audience to be? I think some of why I felt really groundless when I was in the Bay Area and I made work was that I didn't know. In New York, I felt very clear that they would get my jokes. They would know what part was witty, and they would know I was being ironic. And I just wasn't sure that people out there would know in the same way, and so that made me feel very groundless. Recently, I made a piece in Chicago. I had a very brief period of

time to create something on a company there, and knowing that it wasn't going to be seen by my New York peers, I allowed myself to make choices which I might have considered to be cheesy, had I been making it here, because there I felt really free. I was letting my choices happen, and they weren't constantly in this filter of, 'Oh, that's been done before, or that's cheesy, or that's bad.' How do we give ourselves space to loosen up from the context we're in or perceive ourselves to be in? Also, it's such a tight climate right now, that it doesn't always feel like it's ok to experiment in the way that we want to or need to.

Alma: Yeah. It's hugely challenging. In 2000, I started having a company and I moved from New York to San Francisco. I just went at it, and you get reviews; you get good reviews. But, you know, there's some point when it's not about the review. Right now, I feel like I'm at a place choreographically where if I can't take risks because people are going to think I'm silly, then I'm not going to grow. Why do I need to be at a place where I have to be so original? I've made a conscious choice this past year that I don't want to get stuck in habits. There is a core to my work, but I want to be able to expand and grow, and the thing is, there's always that thing for an artist, that anxiety or fear that you get to a certain place and… Playing with the familiar is not always a bad thing. I think that people are constantly looking to push the envelope, and I guess for me, I really want to examine making work to classical music. I want to examine making certain kinds of dances. I want to be able to expand and grow, and I feel that because we are aware of critics and reviews, and our audience, it's a hard thing to sit there and go, 'I'm going to do it.'

Faye: If you are a little more established, then you think you have an audience that has an expectation of you and of your work also, so that can feel...

Alma: Restricting.

Faye: Yeah, restricting. That's the thing about living in a society that's consuming constantly and spitting out. How some of that drive towards constant newness and constant originality is a part of that, and doesn't necessarily... Basically, what is good, powerful art? Is it always the new thing? Not necessarily.

Alma: The question is also, how do you get deeper? Does deeper mean that you have to go to new territories? Not necessarily.

Faye: Right. Are there any thoughts or ideas coming from Mary or Alma that you want to throw out in this conversation?

Mary: I think that was a nice conversation.

Faye: Yeah, definitely something I would actually like to do more often, have these kinds of conversations with people.

Mary: Yeah, and I would love to see what we can do to get this kind of New York/Bay Area conversation more ongoing.

Faye: Yeah.

Alma: I second what Mary stated. I think it's a great thing if we could have something that would continue, a conversation between the West Coast and the East Coast, and that other people could have access. We are so regionalized, and it feels so true that San Francisco is another world.

Faye: Hearing both of you speak, I feel the struggles are very similar, and the ways that you articulate your process, and what you're going through and what inspires you, I think it's just more fuel to the fire of art-making. Why seclude ourselves from that into these insular scenes? The more the merrier, I guess is what I'm trying to say, in terms of dialogue, in terms of opening up these spaces, or even geographically, seeing ourselves as so separate.

Mary: I heartily agree. I think it's great. The more that we can just have a conversation going, the more that we can recognize our great similarities as well as our differences, and I think that that can be helpful.

Faye: I'm really looking forward to seeing your show coming up. It's October 16th. Thank you so much for taking the time to have this conversation.

Mary and Alma: Thank you!

Faye: I'm looking forward to meeting you in person. Have a wonderful evening.

Mary and Alma: You too.