

Inertia: First and Second and Third Steps Towards Life & Death

I started dancing when I was just two years old, trading in my baby pink bunny socks for baby pink ballet slippers. I don't remember those first years of dance, but I feel them every time I step into a studio. L5 and K5. I grew up in those rooms: dusty hardwood floors, eggshell white walls (the kind of eggshells that come from real chickens, not the bleached ones that you dye during Easter), and big mirrors which got smaller as the years went by. Home. Tucked away in Cubberley Community Center where you could walk through the shaded, echo-y halls and peek into Mandarin lessons and violin classes before sprinting away from the scary strangers who happened also to be strolling past, collapsing into giggles with your very best friend in the bathroom.

Naturally, I am a remarkably bad dancer. Let's imagine talent as a standard normal distribution ranging from 10 to -10. I perhaps sat at a -7 with a z-score of -0.524^1 , not quite a rare event but getting close. It is rather unfortunate to be head over heels in love with something that you are very bad at. I took it as my cross to bear².

At age ten, I dedicated myself wholly to hip hop. Unlike other dance forms, hip hop is free of rules. It is open and exhilarating and new every time. Looking back, it was a funny

¹ $\alpha = .29$; $z^* = -0.553$ (I am currently enrolled in AP Statistics and, as you may be able to tell from my references, I do not understand it very well. I, however, understand it enough to know that $\alpha = .29$ does not make my fabricated number on the talent scale "not quite a rare event but getting close." I would like to acknowledge that I do know a rare event means a p-value smaller than $\alpha = .05$. But, as this is a lyrical essay and not a statistics paper, I am hoping you will permit me that creative liberty. Poetic license? Maybe I will use that argument to negotiate points back on my stats final.)

² I was just reading *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir*, una "nivela" escrito por Miguel de Unamuno en mi clase de literatura española. Me siento muy extraño escribir en inglés mientras estoy hablando de una obra en español. Bueno, the story is about a Catholic priest who is secretly an existentialist. In one part of the book, Don Manuel says that he must "llevar la cruz de nacimiento," which translates to: carry the cross of birth (isn't it interesting how that sounds so strange in English? I promise it makes sense in Spanish). It is quite a sad declaration. The simple but profound pain of living. Not even living. Being alive. Okay now back to my essay. (Unamuno, Miguel de. *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir*. Encuentro, 2021.)

choice. With no sense of rhythm and the limb control of a baby calf, you would've thought I'd stick with a more structured genre. Freestyle³ is the heart of hip hop. My teammate Angela, a freshman in high school when I met her (she might as well have been 25 to me at the time) and a soccer player with no previous dance experience, had a real, raw, striking talent for it. She stood tall and mighty at a 9 on our scale (z-score of 1.645⁴). Stepping into a cipher, she would melt into the music. Watching her, I understood: a “ding!” here, vocal there, the kick, the bass, the melody. That is talent: making the decidedly untalented feel like they could get up and do what you are doing with that same blissful ease.

Freestyling was petrifying to me. I spent a not insignificant amount of time crying in the Cubberly bathroom after sprinting away from ciphers. Years after I had pushed past this fear in my home studio and begun practicing on my own, I had my first real one-on-one dance battle at a workshop in Santa Cruz. It was not as horrific as I had imagined it might be. I danced, she danced. She danced better of course, but at least I danced. After the battle, I burst into tears in my dance teacher's arms. He knew. The tears were coming, win or lose. To me, movement and trust are inexorably intertwined: to embrace one is to embrace the other.

I have been thinking a lot about inertia lately. In dance, the overwhelming power of inertia is palpable. On the pitch black stage, looking out at the deep red curtains — made deeper, darker, more mysterious by the low light — holding your breath before you are rendered blind, deaf, and dumb by the sudden attack on your senses which is soon to come, you are held still. You are held still because you are still because you are made still and an external force⁵ has not

³ Apologies if this is common knowledge but I have been advised to provide a definition for freestyling. Freestyling is improvisational dance.

⁴ Imagine!!! Very nearly a rare event in the most wonderful of ways.

⁵ Per the (second) dictionary definition: Inertia is a property of matter by which it continues in its existing state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line, unless that state is changed by an external force. (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>)

yet presented itself to make you move. But then swoosh! The curtains open. And click! The lights turn on. The floor begins to vibrate with sound, urging your feet to “move! MOVE!” They comply. The sensory overload propels your body into motion. You melt from ice into clear blue water, twisting and floating and spinning from one shape into the next, filled with a new kind of inertia: the beautiful, wonderful, exhilarating kind. How could you ever stop moving? El momento es eterno, la a eternidad momentanea,⁶ and you could never stop never never ever.

swoosh⁷. The curtains close sadly, quietly, and so, too, do you. It’s over, and the loss stops you in your tracks. The weight settles, and you cannot imagine moving again.

The following is an abridged version of my first draft of this essay. It was written while I was in a state of mind similar to that of a dancer after a performance, especially if that dancer had not gotten a lot of sleep recently. It reads as follows:

i have spent a lot of time in the last two years (as i recall.. could be seventeen) sitting. why? you may ask. why, bryn, would sitting be preferable to standing? walking? skipping? jumping? dancing? running? yoga-ing your way to anything any thing other than sitting? i do not know. i ask myself that all of the time. while i am sitting.

while i am sitting, i am thinking about sitting. and thinking about sitting takes me through my twenty-two imagined life trajectories. one of which includes sitting forever.

as i sit, motionless stagnant decomposing into the soft soil of time, my mind sprints. it has been sprinting for as long as i have been sitting, which — as previously established — is somewhere between two and seventeen years.

⁶ This is a quote from *Mi Caballo Mago*, another story from my AP Spanish Lit class written by Sabine R. Ulibarrí. I love it. It translates to: The moment is eternal. The eternity is momentary. But, of course, it is prettier in Spanish. (Ulibarrí Sabine R., & Gerdes, D. (1993). *Mi caballo mago*. In *The best of Sabine R. Ulibarrí: Selected stories*. essay, University of New Mexico Press.)

⁷ It is a sad swoosh (this is intentionally lowercase).

inertia...is a property of matter. that phrase completes itself in my head automatically (because it has inertia). like nonverbal siri offering suggestions when you begin typing a sentence. you type: i want an, and she suggests: avocado cat job . and you say what? no? but kind of yes how did you know.

sitting is defined as: a continuous period of being seated, especially when engaged in a particular activity. (google also defines sitting as: in a seated position, which does not give me a lot to go off of). per this definition, my continuous periods of being seated must often (especially) be accompanied by engagement in a particular activity. what is my particular activity, you may ask (i may ask)? my particular activity is thinking, which is also facilitated by inertia. inertia, a property of matter, matters very much in this process, and it is very adept in acting upon my brain (which, obviously, is made up of matter). my brain often likes to settle on a series of similar questions: what matters? why do i matter? what should matter? does this matter? etcetera. inertia.

i have set out to write an essay about living in the moment but it seems i am writing an essay about not living in the moment which seems very on brand for both inertia and me. i don't know how to live in the moment because my brain and body are inertia-ing in opposite directions and i think i need them both in order to do that.

That is the gist of the essay⁸, which was originally supposed to be about living in the moment but which quickly mutated into an essay about movement, which, to me, is living in the moment. Around a month or so ago, I pulled out my pale pink sticky notes to write a message to myself⁹. It simply reads: "INERTIA," and is accompanied by doodles of three bunnies (one is

⁸ In case you were wondering, the essay concludes with: "it is 11:38 pm and my eyes burn. time to stop sitting. i think i would like to lay down instead. goodbye <3".

⁹ I find manifestation fascinating. I understand the concept but have trouble with the execution. It feels like a lie. If I tell myself I have a cat, will I get a cat? No. My mom is allergic. I will not be getting a cat no matter how much I manifest it. But I suppose that's not a good example. Perhaps better: If I tell myself I am the kind of person who has a cat, will I become the kind of person who has a cat? Maybe I will. I don't

painting, one is hopping, and one is dancing). I stuck the note on my bathroom mirror, and I see it each morning as I get ready for my day.

Interestingly, the first definition for inertia on Google is: a tendency to do nothing or to remain unchanged. I did not know that when I wrote the sticky note. It is rather ironic, given that doing nothing and remaining unchanged (“sitting forever”) are two of my greatest fears. When I think of inertia, I think of movement and relief. Inertia, to me, is an assurance that the first step will always be the hardest and that, after that first step, the weight will lighten and the movement will become easier and easier until the car is soaring down the mountain in Tesla self-driving mode.

I believe in science. I believe that moving will become easier. And I also like to look at cute bunny drawings first thing in the morning.

At night, I like to pop in my earbuds and freestyle before getting ready for bed. As my little sister ignores me from her side of our room¹⁰, my mind descends from its usual perch up above to rest alongside my heart, silencing itself to listen to the steady rhythms of breath and blood. Brain and body pulled together, I sink into the velvety darkness and trust that I will keep moving. It is not quite the potent inertia of performance on stage in the blinding lights — I sometimes need a pause to think because the moves won’t come — but it is good enough. After intermission, the show goes on. I trust that I will go on. Moving. Forever.

know. I have trouble convincing myself to believe something that I know is not true. Anyways, I think sticking up post-it notes is a method of manifestation, so I may be manifesting without even knowing it. I do enjoy post-it notes.

¹⁰ I truly do not even think Tessa (my sister) notices anymore when I dance. Nobody in my family does. We have a mirror right by the dining room of our house, and I routinely leave the dinner table to begin dancing in front of it. The conversation never falters. However, Tessa often likes to Facetime with her friends in our room at the same time as I like to dance. The other day, I did not realize that she was on Facetime (I blame Apple because I was wearing AirPods at the time), and she flipped around her camera to make fun of me to her friend (shoutout Chloe who is a cutie and I love her). That was, admittedly, a little embarrassing.

Bibliography

Dixit, J. (n.d.). *The art of now: Six steps to living in the moment ...* Psychology Today. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200811/the-art-now-six-steps-living-in-the-moment>

Dixit summarizes different methods that can be used to live in the moment. In writing this essay, I felt it was important to learn about how various people achieve a state of mindfulness, as I know that not all techniques work for everyone. Understanding these methods helped me to better interpret my own behavior and how I use parts of my life, specifically dance (also yoga which I don't talk about in the essay), to find a place of calm and presence.

Inertia and mass. The Physics Classroom. (n.d.). Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.physicsclassroom.com/class/newtlaws/Lesson-1/Inertia-and-Mass>

As I was writing this essay and inertia became a major focus, I decided that I needed a quick science refresher. This website provided ample information on inertia which allowed me to incorporate the concept into my essay smoothly and accurately.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

A. W. (2021, November 11). How movement therapy can heal traumatic stress. Experience Life. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://experiencelife.lifetime.life/article/how-movement-therapy-can-heal-traumatic-stress/>

In my own life, I have certainly experienced that movement is an incredibly healing force. For this essay, I wanted to do some more research on the impacts of movement on the mind as well as the

body. This article describes treatments for trauma and stress which involve mindful, targeted movement to help the mind heal. In my essay, I worked to incorporate this idea.

Ulibarrí Sabine R., & Gerdes, D. (1993). Mi caballo mago. In *The best of Sabine R. Ulibarrí: Selected stories*. essay, University of New Mexico Press.

Unamuno, Miguel de. *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir*. Encuentro, 2021.