2 I was right about this timeline. I received my first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on 11 May 2021. Our Ph.D. was formally approved by British Columbia's Minister of Advanced Education on 21 May 2021. As part of the second phase of BC's "Restart" plan to ease COVID-related restrictions, live theatres in the province were permitted to reopen with limited capacity as of 15 June 2021.
3 Mark Bachman, "In-person Instruction: Some Classes Have Already Returned," *SFU News*, 24 March 2021, www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2021/03/in-person-instruction--some-classes-have-already-returned.html, accessed 14 April 2021.
4 Peter Dickinson, *My Vancouver Dance History: Story, Movement, Community* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020).
5 See Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2007): 149–68; and Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). Victoria Fortuna examines how dance and choreography can offer alternatives to the disciplining of movement patterns and bodily comportment in contexts marked by political violence in her excellent *Moving Otherwise: Dance, Violence, and Memory in Buenos Aires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
6 Lee Su-Feh, "Openings and Obstacles," *The Capilano Review* 3.43 (2021): 12.

Peter Dickinson teaches at Simon Fraser University, where he is Professor and Graduate Chair in the School for the Contemporary Arts and Director of the Institute for Performance Studies. He also edits the open-access journal *Performance Matters* (https://performancematters-thejournal.com).

Cite this article: Peter Dickinson, "Dancing Alone Together," in "Notes from the Field: Remembering Times of Crisis," *Theatre Survey* 62.3 (2021): 347–351. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557421000284.

• • •

Grace Is a Practice

Isaiah Matthew Wooden

Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, USA
Email: wooden@brandeis.edu

doi:10.1017/S0040557421000296

There was certainly much about the hurried switch from in-person to online teaching and learning in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic that inspired angst. The decisions that many colleges and universities made to halt on-campus activities and deconcentrate their communities left scores of us scrambling to pack up some of the things we hoped would help us withstand a few weeks away from our offices and classrooms. When I think back on those frenzied days, I often chuckle at how naive I was about the extent to which the pandemic would radically upend our lives, forcing us to rethink every aspect of our ways of being in the world. I was in the middle of leading a discussion on *The Tempest* in my dramaturgy course when the official word came down from university administrators that all classes would move online and most students would have to vacate their residence halls. A palpable feeling of dread quickly swept over the stuffy classroom. Students began to weep and to wonder out loud what the news would mean for, say, their senior thesis projects or the department's futuristic mounting of *The Tempest*, which would have to shutter before its second weekend of scheduled performances. I tried my best to remain optimistic, even as I too began to question what the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557421000296 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fast-moving changes would mean for how we would finish out the semester. I felt a special call to offer comfort, reaffirming my commitment to supporting students no matter what was ahead.

In the weeks that followed, I would develop a deep and abiding disdain for the word "pivot" ("unprecedented" too). Its casual overuse had the effect of obscuring just how dizzying and destabilizing the constant demand to change course quickly often proved to be. Despite this and other annoyances, I remained steadfast in my resolution to provide students with meaningful learning experiences. I retooled my syllabi, familiarized myself with the features of Zoom, and studied up on best practices for teaching remotely to make the adjustment to online instruction less harrowing for students and for me. I also began contemplating new ways I might center care in my pedagogy. I have always approached teaching with a deep sense of reverence and gratitude. Indeed, I consider learning and creating in community with students—and exciting their curiosity about the transformative possibilities of theatre and performance—a tremendous gift. I, therefore, was profoundly encouraged and energized by the many appeals during the early months of the crisis for faculty members to become more attuned and responsive to students' well-being—and to our own personal wellness. There was an open invitation to be gentler with ourselves and with each other—and, indeed, to extend as much grace as possible. Given the devastating impact of the pandemic, it seemed safe to assume that everyone would benefit from experiencing more kindness and compassion.

The urgency we once felt to act and move with grace was sadly one of the earliest casualties of our constant pivoting. I can remember the precise moment when I realized how anxious some were to return attention to academia's peculiar obsession with punitivity and austerity. It was during one of the many "emergency" meetings I attended with colleagues to plan for the fall 2020 semester. The change in rhetoric and tone was jarring, with barely any acknowledgment of just how hard everyone had been working to map out a sensible and sustainable way forward. What we got instead were insinuations that some members of the community had used the shift to emergency remote learning to shirk their work responsibilities altogether. Ultimately these were given as the rationale for the new wave of scrutinizing measures and procedures we would be forced to endure. This pattern would notably repeat. Indeed, whenever the time came to introduce a new policy driven by the need to address the pandemic's economic fallout, we could expect some mention of faculty or staff shortcomings. The irony of all this, of course, was that the resulting intensification in workload would, by and large, go uncompensated.

As we begin to shift our collective focus back to determining how best to provide students with the in-person and residential experiences in which so many of our institutions have specialized for decades, I have been thinking a lot about the lessons on which we might draw from this challenging period to prevent compounding our already high levels of stress, anxiety, and exhaustion. I keep returning to the spirit of goodwill that marked so much of how we went about recalibrating our ways of doing things at the onset of the pandemic. Those of us who make, do, and love theatre understand well how valuable and important forging and sustaining collaborative community can be. I keep wondering, then, how we might continue to harness this awareness to make sense of the trauma we have endured and, importantly, to reimagine and remake our world collectively.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557421000296 Published online by Cambridge University Press

When confronted with big existential questions like this, my first instinct is to see what insights the theatre might offer. The early iteration of acclaimed playwright and performer Anna Deavere Smith's *On Grace* that I had the pleasure of attending has been on my mind quite a bit lately. The project, which Smith honed during her tenure as the first artist-in-residence at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and further developed in collaboration with cellist Joshua Roman, offered up a rich array of reflections on its titular subject. Crafted from interviews Smith conducted with various interlocutors, as well as her own deep dive into the sacred and secular literature on the topic, the vignettes each exposed fresh revelations about the meanings of grace. What continues to strike me most about the project are the ways it rendered grace both as something you can have or receive, as well as something you can *do*. Watching Smith bring life to her subject in multiple and unique ways throughout the performance served to reaffirm for me the idea that *grace is a practice*—that is, it is something we can both strive for and embody in our everyday lives. The world can no doubt be impossibly harsh and cruel, as so much about the COVID era has demonstrated. To my mind, that is all the more reason we should pursue as many opportunities as we can muster to cultivate and enact a practice of grace.

I have come to think about grace in much the same way that the activist, educator, and organizer Mariame Kaba thinks about hope. Hope, Kaba contends, is a discipline. Kaba notes that it was a nun who first encouraged her to begin engaging the idea of hope in this way. "The hope that she was talking about was this grounded hope that was practiced every day, that people actually practiced all the time." This articulation of hope is deeply rooted in the belief that another world is yet still possible if, as Kaba puts it, we "choose differently."[1] In proposing that we reorient our understanding of and relationship to grace, attuning ourselves to the quotidian ways we might activate it, I hope that we too will choose differently. Indeed, my wish is that the months ahead will see us all continue to offer our students as much grace as possible—and to extend that same grace to our faculty and staff colleagues, as well as to anyone else with whom we interact in our professional and personal lives. I want us all to remember that grace is a practice, one we can choose to pursue, embrace, and embody daily.

Endnote

1 See Mariame Kaba, "Hope Is a Discipline," interview by Kim Wilson and Brian Sonenstein, in *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Tamara K. Nopper (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 26–7.

Isaiah Matthew Wooden is a director-dramaturg, critic, and assistant professor of theatre arts at Brandeis University. He publishes widely on contemporary African American art and drama—from the plays of Lydia Diamond, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and Robert O'Hara to the performance work of Derrick Adams, Jefferson Pinder, and Adrian Piper.

Cite this article: Isaiah Matthew Wooden, "Grace Is a Practice," in "Notes from the Field: Remembering Times of Crisis," *Theatre Survey* 62.3 (2021): 351–353. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557421000296.

• • •

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557421000296 Published online by Cambridge University Press