Caroline Butcher
Research Statement

While my research exists under the vast umbrella of "contemporary dance", I draw motivation from my investigation into the historical, cultural, societal, aesthetic, and political contexts of jazz dance. Artist-scholars Thomas DeFrantz and Chanon Judson describe jazz as a way of organizing: a technology of staying in and moving through; of honoring the past and looking towards the future; of creating possibility in impossible conditions; of thinking collectively against oppressive norms; of moving together through disagreement; of radical adaptability: and of creative collaboration.[1] With acknowledgment and critique of my positionality in relationship to the layered history of jazz and its emergence and creation in Black social spaces, my research aligns with this framework as one that prioritizes sitting with discomfort and building resilience through a holistic, collaborative, and embodied artistic praxis.

In relationship with this methodology I use impossible tasks, durational scores, and rigorous physicality as compositional tools that center an embodied manifestation of labor through endurance and skill. These scores then become a creative and functional practice of relentless commitment, situating the body and mind in relationship to discomfort to facilitate individual growth, relational intimacy, and societal change. I am motivated by the belief that these processes, practices, and strategies encourage personal reflection from the doers and witnessers, tangentially impacting the spaces around us.

I care about research that stems from relationships as I believe that the substance of creative work is enriched by the depth of connection built through the creative process. I often create work in collaboration with others to maintain a sense of openness and fluidity and to discourage a myopic view of my research. I welcome how collaboration challenges my habits and questions the aesthetic values I may wrongly hold as ideals.

Created for my culminating MFA Project, "Always/Already" is an evening length group work that asks both audience and performers to consider how we exist in uncomfortable spaces. It is an exploration of the tension between the history of jazz dance and musical theater, and my positionality within both forms. Repetition, intense physicality, and choice-making reflect an exploration of surviving uncomfortable spaces in order to activate positive change. Through a durational and endurance-based performance the work pursues the unanswerable, wrestling with the ongoing task of confronting complex pasts while living in their aftermaths.

Premiering in 2025, "A Disaster in 2 Parts" is a duet made and performed in collaboration with artist Anna Pillot and live musicians Victor Mestas, James Hoskins, and Jesse Mano. This work calls into question audience expectations as well as the Western-European organization of performance through disruptions of space, continuity of narrative, and a "stage-ready" aesthetic. In its second iteration as commissioned by the City of Boulder for the closing reception of the 2026 Boulder Arts Week, audience members were confronted with their own discomfort as we

[1]DeFrantz, Thomas and Chanon Judson. Uprooted Teachers Workshop, 16-18 August 2025, Sunlight Studios, New York City, NY. Lecture.

performed the piece in a crowded lobby moving dynamically amongst unexpecting and confused guests.

My most recent work “Far Within”, choreographed for the 2026 Denver Fusion Flight Festival, is a solo that explores the relationship between institutional expectations, desire, and earning. Using a blend of score-based improvisation and choreographed movement, the piece is an embodied juxtaposition between outward performativity and a relentless inner dialogue. In a system that seems to require us to always be generating the newest and most innovative ideas, what happens if we use what we have in the faith that it is, in fact, enough?

My artistic work is a blend of theoretical and embodied research, merging the lenses of critical theories with the making and doing of dance. Through the pursuit of impossible tasks and unanswerable questions I wrestle with my relationship to self, other, and the contexts in which I exist. I am driven by a desire to create opportunities for purposeful self-awareness, disruption of assumptions, and generous relationality through both process and performance. Through my artistic practice I am committed to investigating how my humanity informs how I (literally) move through the world.

Work Samples

1) "A Disaster in 2 Parts", 2025
   Concept and Choreography: Caroline Butcher, Anna Pillot
   Dancers: Caroline Butcher, Anna Pillot
   Musicians: Victor Mestas, James Hoskins, Jesse Mano

2) "Somebody Clap", 2024
   Concept and Choreography: Caroline Butcher and Anna Pillot
   Dancers: Caroline Butcher, Anna Pillot

3) "Great Minds Drink Alike", 2023
   A synthesis of insights from scholars and artists, songs in my head, and what I'm drinking.

4) "Standing Small", 2022
   Concept and Choreography: Caroline Butcher
   Dancer: Caroline Butcher

5) "Always/Already", 2022
   Concept and Choreography: Caroline Butcher
   Dancers: Caroline Butcher, Kate Gomez Moore, Anna Pillot

Writing Samples

1) Presenting Denver - Behind the Performance Reviews
   a) Dance Continua Festival, 2026
   b) Wonderbound, 2026
   c) Nosilla Dance Project, 2026

2) MFA Project Paper, "'Always/Already': An Impossible Task", 2023

3) Foundations in Ethnic Studies Research Paper, "An Analytical Approach to 'Hellzapoppin'", 2022