

Caroline Butcher  
Artist Statement

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 research I grapple with navigating my relationship to self, other, and the constructed contexts in which I exist, pursuing impossible tasks and unanswerable questions. I use process and performance to encourage radical self-awareness, disruption of assumptions, and generous relationality.

My research is motivated by pursuing and creating strategies for enduring discomfort because of its necessity - learning how to sit with and in uncomfortable feelings is required for individual growth, relational intimacy, and societal change. Yet it is also important that I do not take myself too seriously. I don't believe that I can change world systems with choreography, but I do believe that the processes, practices, and strategies in which artists participate and audiences witness can encourage personal reflection which then tangentially impacts the spaces around us.

My most recent choreographic work, "Always/Already", was an investigation of existing in uncomfortable spaces. Specifically, I was asking myself, the performers, and the audience to consider how to reconcile the lineage of jazz dance in the United States and its roots in blackface minstrelsy, through its emergence as a social and vernacular dance form in Black spaces, to its popular misconception as solely musical theatre. The tenets of Critical Race Theory (including revisionist history, structural determinism, and consistent racialization in the United States) guided the research of jazz music and dance in its early roots in the 1800's, its emergence as a social dance form, and its contemporary commodification and commercialization. Through a durational and endurance-based performance the work pursued the unanswerable, wrestling with the ongoing task of confronting problematic pasts while living in their aftermaths.

As an extension of exploring discomfort, another important theme in my work is physical exertion. My work centers a physical manifestation of labor through endurance, skill, and/or a combination of both. Being a human is hard and there is a tenacity required to keep showing up to that work even if there is no perceived reward. Through intense physicality my work embodies this reality, relentlessly committing to the task though it may seem impossible and futile.

I believe in bringing my whole self to each artistic and creative endeavor. Though I don't directly intend to make identity-based work, I also believe that each project is rooted in my own experiences making it inevitably based in my identity in some way. As such I am motivated to find ways to use the act of making to embrace my whole self and the whole selves of collaborators, taking care to not silo off parts we or others assume don't belong. Ultimately I care about research that stems from relationships, self-awareness, sustainability, vulnerability, brutal honesty, authenticity, hard conversations, connection, humor, irony, and sometimes even self-deprecation; research that is committed to investigating the question of how my humanity informs how I literally move through and navigate the world.