

I WANT TO BE MULTIPLE SELVES,
ALL IN THE SAME SELF,
ALL IN THIS MOMENT.
I WANT TO KNOW
WHAT THAT DOES TO
MY ORGANIZATION OF MYSELF.
HOW AM I STRATEGIZING
MYSELF?

Shifting Lanes: ENGENDERING IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPACES

Here is an excerpt from an essay contributed by Lela Aisha Jones, movement artist, researcher, and writer. Lela wrote an account of her interactions as an outsider with the male J-Sette Community.

“Stay in your lane.” A well-versed J-Setter, from Donte Beacham’s squad *Mystic Force*, said this to me in Dallas, Texas during a late night rehearsal. He feels there is really no need to make the privately-public J-Sette community of gay, Black males a mainstream venture. The private spaces he enters are safe and the ecstasy he has felt ever since the first time he danced on a J-Sette dance floor is a liberation like no other. “Why fight if you don’t have to?” Staying in your lane creates spaces that avoid conflict – allowing the joy of the movement experience to live at the forefront. J-Setters have made their own lanes completely and will *break it* down literally to the ground at the drop of a hat, even in a Philadelphia club that has no idea what in the twirl they are doing. Philly (Philadelphia, PA, USA) can be harsh and folks will give you some intimidating looks if you crowd their territory without a proper introduction. J-Setting is from the southern part of the US and although Philly is an urban dwelling it has some small town tendencies like glances with an attitude from locals directed toward perceived intruders. The residents of Philly have a right to protect their local lanes from the general passerby who wants a moment of fame in their town, right? The truth

is they have cause to be concerned because if you give them some space, J-Setters will take it. They step out of their lane and into that of others boldly — gay, Black, male, and in full swing and they do it well. When you see the sparkling wristbands flailing, nude tights flying, sports bras gripping with alter ego names flashing, and shorts accenting the crevice between the thighs and the buttocks bouncing, you can’t help but take a second look. Being present first-hand for the bodily transformations and split-second swerves between masculine and feminine norms is like watching a butterfly surfacing from and retracting into a cocoon. The sheer embodied delight they wear in every cell of their bodies shifts your consciousness until you are visually invested in the agile feminine/masculine overtones and may soon find your own body unexpectedly mimicking — unconsciously encouraged by their engendered pleasure.

Although gay, Black, male J-Setters rarely emerge for public viewings in heterosexual communities, they don’t exactly stay in their lanes either within their own environment. They have permission to and they love shifting gender lanes. One might even say that J-Setters thrive on the option to engender a character. In

the way I have heard it, the phrase *stay in your lane*, could mean anything from *get out of my business to be who you are and I will be who I am*. Some people may not ever want to know a man who enjoys the spotlight when wearing womanly movement or attire and these people may take the concept of *stay in your lane* to mean *don’t intrude upon my fragile consciousness with premature engagement*. I realize everyone will not agree that they have been deprived if they never experience gender transformations but I believe they will be missing an endearing and fierce part of life.

One of the most fascinating aspects of J-Setting, a nighttimer social and club dance culture, is the absorption and emulation of masculine and/or feminine traits. J-Setters take these traits beyond their normally understood qualities and recycle them into blurry traces and indiscernibly, indefinably gendered ways of moving. For J-Setters this process of shifting is about being oneself to the max and acquiring a character. This is a culture where transgendered(ness) comes full circle in a cycle of mixing, underscoring, over scoring, and intertwining that conjures a feminine/

masculine brew to intoxicate the privately-public community. These dangerous brews are also visible in Voguing, an elder to J-Setting, through the competitive category of *blending*. Blending explores the potential to purposefully fool the “normal” heterosexual daytimers into thinking that you are one of them. Can you, as a transgendered, transsexual, or transwoman sit next to a heterosexual man and be so convincing (so real) as a woman that he never even thinks twice about whether you really are genetically a woman or not? For many men living a heterosexual lifestyle, to consciously encounter a transwoman can be shocking, terrifying and even exhilarating as well as hazardous. There are countless writings, movies, and news stories that expose volatile interactions of heterosexual men being fooled by the expertise of a transsexual and/or transwoman. This ability is impressive and daunting at once.

Mimicking *woman*, is central to J-Setting just as it was to its club-culture-elder, Voguing. Also central to voguing was its near obsession with affluent white culture and this high-class, dynasty woman can be seen in J-Setting reflected through particular movements and patterns of gesturing

referred to as prissy. Prissy is delicate, cautious, and gorgeous, as opposed to it’s vibrant *masculinized* neighbor, *bucking*. Bucking reminds me (*vulnerably*) of the base and *booty shake* isolation dances I used to do as a teenage girl in Florida. There is a forceful aspect to bucking that prissys probably would not be caught dead performing and we as young girls would have been dead if our parents had seen us dancing like that in public. The context for my death was the constant fight my grandparents and parents fought to rid us (the new generation) of stereotypes that may have hindered our ability to progress and/or attain upward mobility in society. The context for the prissys is ironically similar, although with distinctions, in that they want to exude a glorious civilized and not employ their perceived understandings of bucking as wild and untamed. The concern is questionable because some of the dances that our parents would ground us for are now a part of the Beyoncé and Michelle Obama work out plan for the health of our youth. It’s (wait for it) “normal”.

To read the full article, please visit [ideosynCrazy.org](#) and look for the article in the [Writings section](#)

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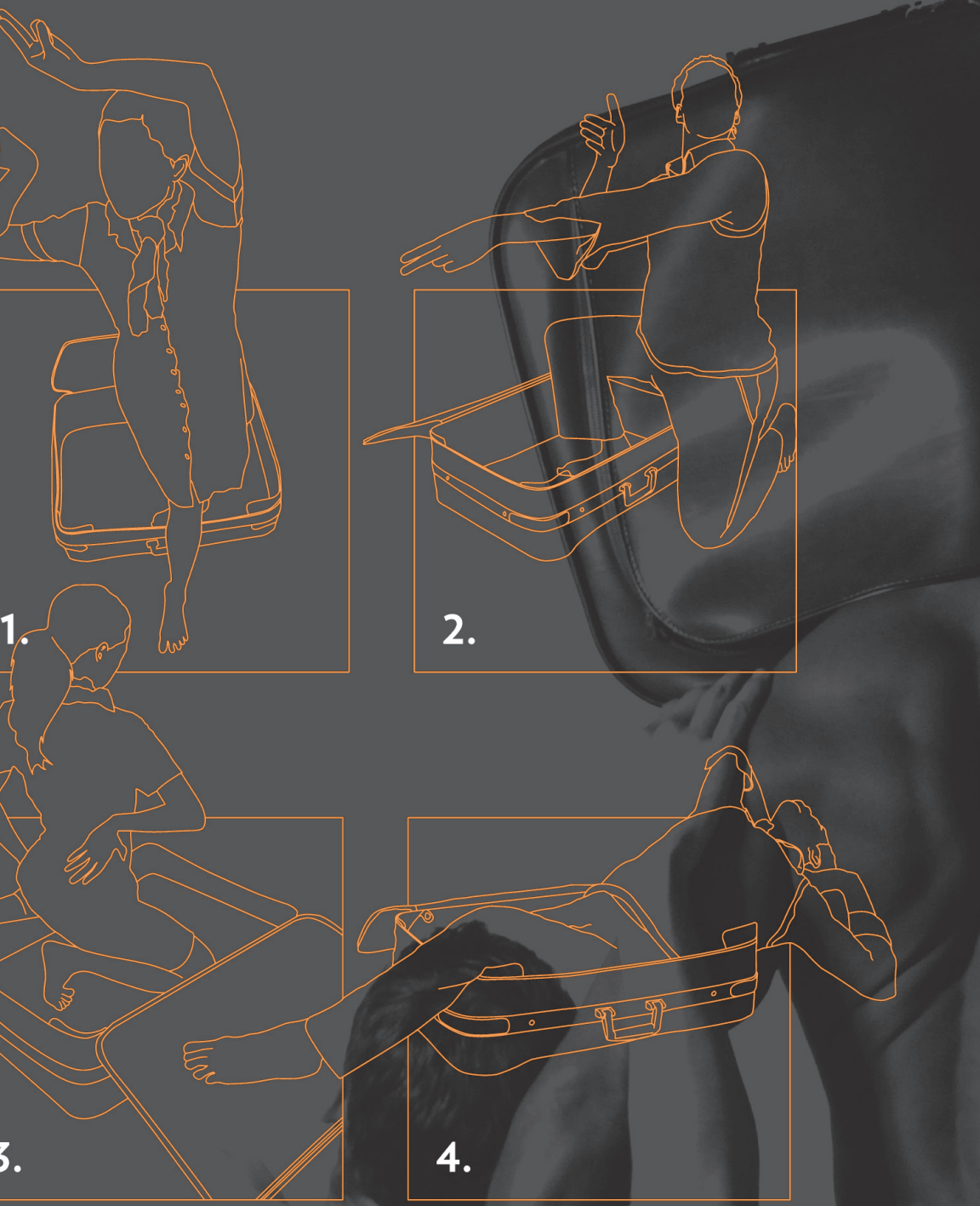
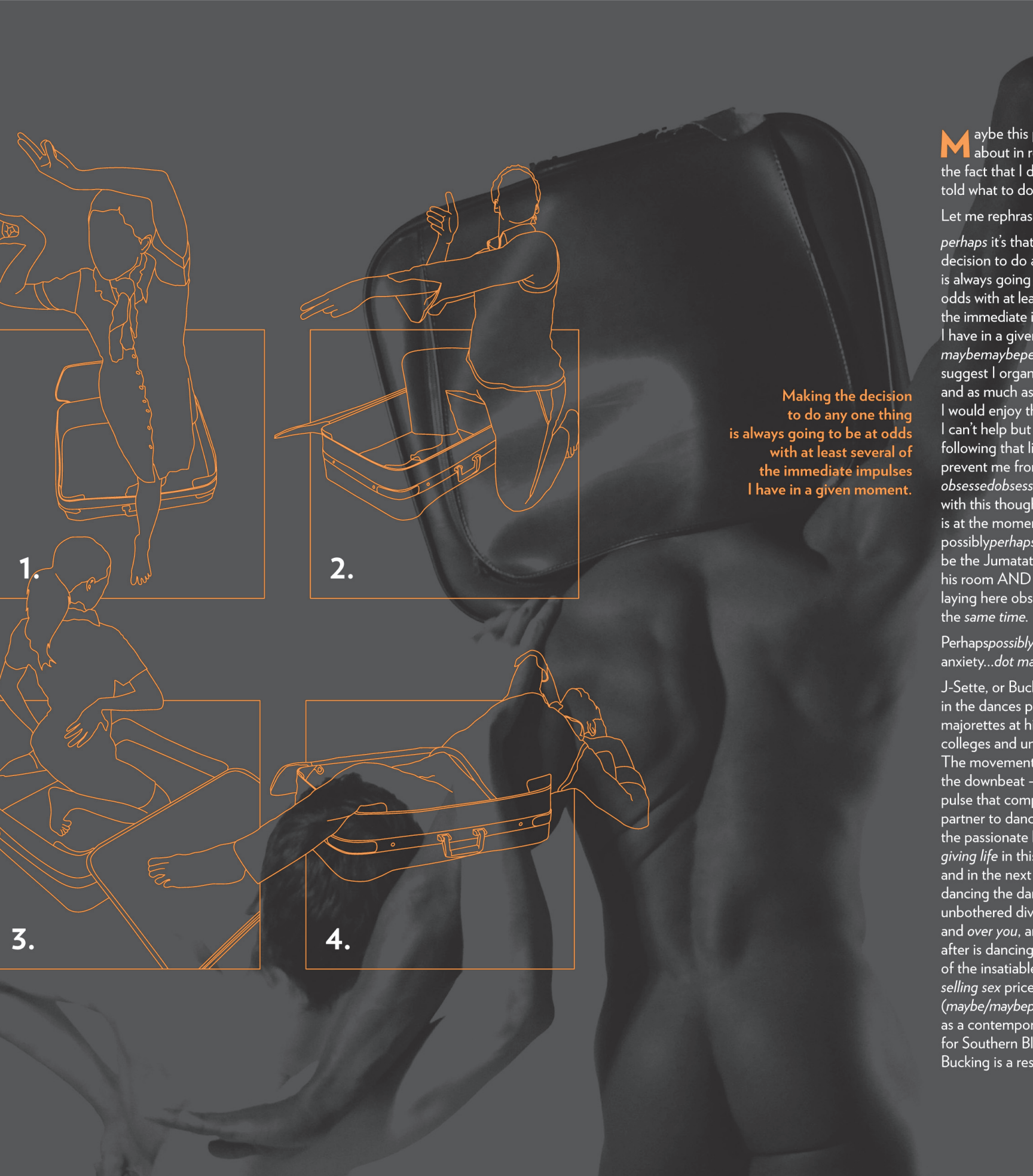
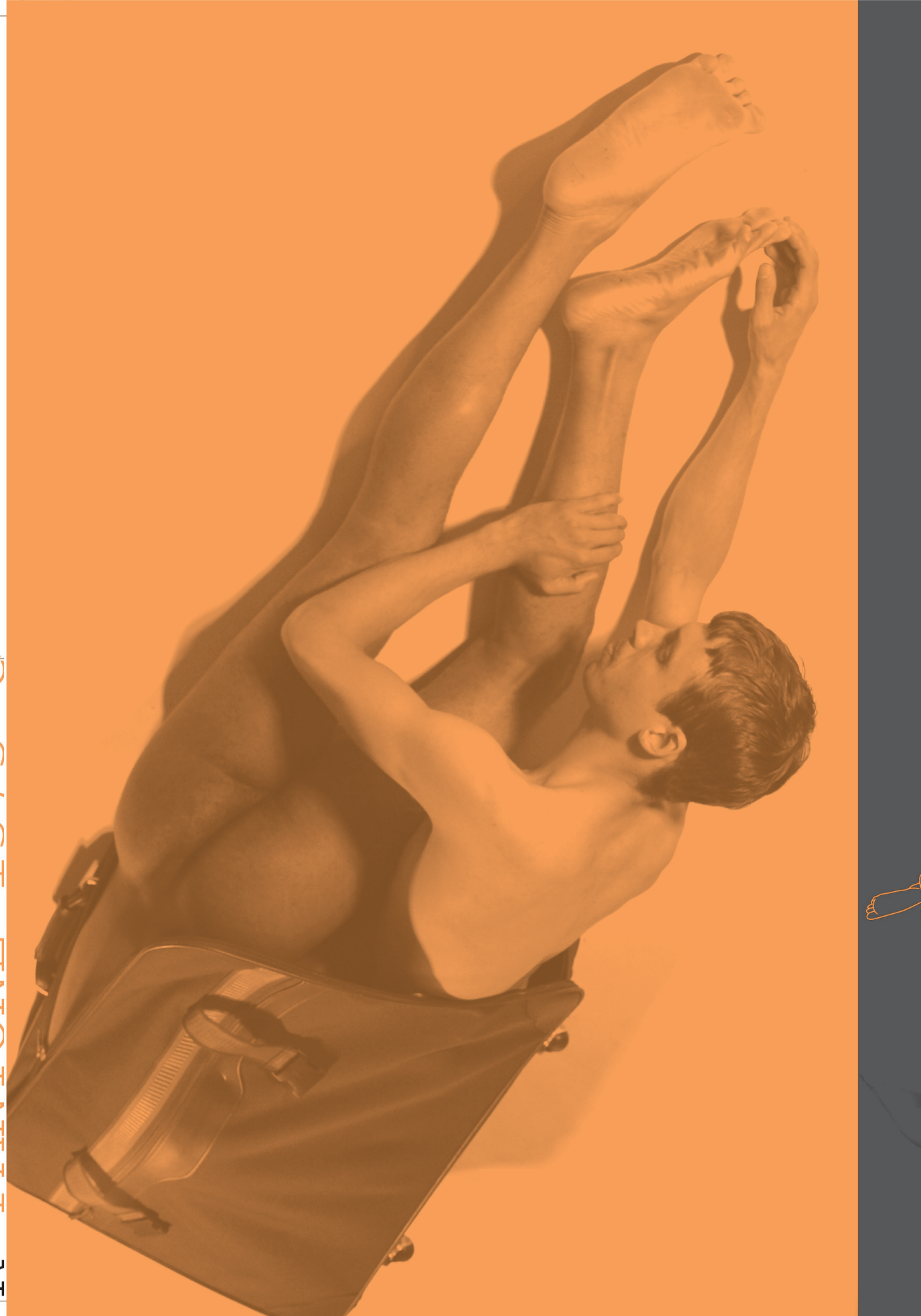
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PRIVATE PLACES



Making the decision to do any one thing is always going to be at odds with at least several of the immediate impulses I have in a given moment.

Maybe this piece came about in response to the fact that I don't like to be told what to do.

Let me rephrase...

perhaps it's that making the decision to do any one thing is always going to be at odds with at least several of the immediate impulses I have in a given moment — *maybe maybe perhaps* — you suggest I organize my room, and as much as I know that I would enjoy the organization, I can't help but feel that following that line of action will prevent me from laying here *obsessedobsessesobsessed* with this thought (whatever it is at the moment). And I can't possibly *perhaps perhaps maybe* be the Jumatatu cleaning his room AND the jUmataU laying here obsessed at the *same time*.

Perhaps *possibly* it's commitment anxiety... *dot maybe dot dot dot*

J-Sette, or Bucking, has roots in the dances performed by majorettes at historically Black colleges and universities. The movement lives deep in the downbeat — that impatient pulse that compels a willing partner to dance the dance of the passionate hero who is *giving life* in this very moment, and in the next moment is dancing the dance of the unbothered diva who is *over it* and *over you*, and the moment after is dancing the dance of the insatiable flirt who is *selling sex* pricelessly. Perhaps (*maybe/maybe possibly-perhaps*), as a contemporary practice for Southern Black gay men, Bucking is a resolution of

public and private identities, coalescing on the dance floor — a chance to travel through a cascade of vibrant selves in the course of an 8-count.

Donte Beacham — with whom I have worked and from whom I have studied J-Sette for over a year now — is a master switcher, calling upon different aspects of his personality at the drop of a downbeat. *Beatswitch. Beatswitch.*

I wanted a little of that — in performance. I want to be multiple selves, all in the same self, all in this moment. I want to know what that does to my organization of myself. What do I prioritize, and what do I sacrifice? How am I strategizing myself?

Maybe this piece is a question about being and becoming... and the variety of reasons that we decide to be and become. "Decide"? *Maybe* "allow ourselves"... Maybe it's about being and becoming the selves and thoughts and ideas and dreams that flow through us. "Flow through"? *Maybe* they stay *perhaps...* *My self keeps changing and SOMEHOW, I have to figure out how to get it to (or let it) interact with other changing selves...* Being alone is less comfortable when I'm not sure who I'm here with. Maybe this piece is about being comfortable with that.

— Jumatatu
jü - mə - 'tä - tü

BUCKING

J-Sette movement and performance, or Bucking, is perhaps a resolution of public and private identities, coalescing on the dance floor — a chance to travel through a cascade of vibrant selves in the course of an 8-count.

TRY THIS →

STEP #1:

Stand there. Maybe with your eyes closed. Quietly. Be with yourself.

STEP #2:

Do an internal scan of your body, starting from your highest point — the tip of your head, the top of your hair... Fill yourself in one layer at a time from this highest level. Remember that you are three-dimensional. Take your time with each layer — at least one inhale and exhale, as if you are breathing life into each layer. Notice your senses at each layer. How does this layer hear? How does it access physical sensation? Remember that you are three-dimensional. Scan all the way down to the bottoms of your feet, growing closer to the ground with each layer.

STEP #3:

Once your body is filled in, stand there once again. Open your eyes and see what you see. Hear what you hear. Taste what you taste. What do you feel?

STEP #4:

Begin to move around in whatever space you are located. You are you, but in this moment, you are performing you: you accentuated by the breath of life. Remember that you exist in three dimensions.

STEP #5:

As you move, feel your relationship to gravity. Feel the way gravity assembles the narrative that we humans have with verticality — that lifelong conversation between up and down. Feel the presence of down. Feel it calling you. Feel the presence of up. Feel a desire to express your ability to be up, your full vertical height in standing. Feel how your weight acknowledges gravity. Perform yourself.

STEP #6:

Realize that you are going to switch your relationship to gravity. You are going to imagine that gravity exists differently — maybe up becomes left, and down becomes right. Maybe it causes you to weigh less. Maybe it is a diagonal force. Maybe it is different 3 feet off the ground than it is 6 feet off the ground. Imagine fully what this new gravity is.

STEP #7:

Move into this new gravity. Perform yourself in this new gravity. Does it affect your voice? Does it affect your eye-sight? How does it make your body feel? Live in this place for a little while.

STEP #8:

Repeat steps 6 and 7 three more times.

STEP #9:

Come to a place that is comfortable, and rest. Perform the scan of your body from Step #2, and bring your body back to a place that feels familiar. Take your time.

Private Places was developed using similar systems of multi-layering, multi-tasking. You can repeat these steps substituting for gravity any of the following: your personal weight, your sense of direction, your focus/perspective, and an array of others that you can decide upon yourself.