

Kevin M. Kane
A Creative Manifesto: My Aesthetic

As a person and an artist, I am not one thing at all. As Walt Whitman once wrote: *I am large, I contain multitudes*. Likewise, I function and engage in the performance arts with an understanding that we all have a complex personal story worth telling and can tell in multiple ways... It is an idea I share with my students/collaborators: as people and as artists, they are more than they might imagine themselves to be. Multidisciplinary performing arts and innovative art making can help tell these stories, using a variety of forms, techniques, and methods, that can enlighten, inspire, and connect us to others.

For nearly 20 years, as an engaged citizen and passionate community arts activist in the Los Angeles area, I have worked to build a creative process and a theatre arts and dance-making practice that allows me to use a variety of dance, movement, and theater forms as a way to bring many kinds of youth together to explore the human condition and explore numerous issues of relevance in our community.

This work is multidisciplinary in nature. It is open to and makes use of a mix of expressions and vocabularies to express meaning, craft a narrative, share a story, paint a landscape, or tell truths: movement and dance, music and song, voice and speech, original and classic texts, and even video and photography.

- By referring to my own reflective and creative writing and autobiographical texts, I can share intimate and vulnerable realities about my own life. Likewise, by using classical texts and poetry, as well as original spoken word poetry, artists have the chance to refer to others' experiences and perspectives at the same time they can use their own voices as messengers of emotion, perspective, and meaning.
- Drawing on a variety of movement practices and dance forms - securely situated within the post-modern aesthetic, including yoga and breath work, contemporary dance, contact improvisation, physical and movement theater, gestural and abstract expressions, and many Western and international social dances and ballroom styles, along with using students' various physical practices and skills – the creative process attempts to create a range of movement vocabulary that allows students a chance to explore and express meaningful ideas through movement.
- In the words of Pina Bausch: *what does it mean to move and to be moved?* In my words: I endeavor to jump off from this profound question and follow through to the creation of a performance form that is relevant and personal and, one hopes, universal.

I believe deep meanings – questions, contradictions, complications, suggestions, and solutions – can be expressed in ways that include both verbal and embodied articulations. This multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to theatre arts and performance allows all kinds of performers to contribute to the performance material. It seeks to incorporate many voices and perspectives into the creative conversation; it is an attempt to suggest a microcosm of our society; it endeavors to locate and articulate what it means to live in the contemporary moment.

As a devised theater and dance-theater maker, I am always excited and drawn to the use of metaphor – symbols, poetic gestures, allegories – as a way to express these deep meanings with a combination of artistry, urgency, relevance, and resonance.

- My work is inspired and informed by the educational reformer John Dewey and provides both rigorous arts training and discipline-based arts instruction (traditional and non-traditional models) in a fertile environment where diversity can be imagined broadly and where dialogue that leads to creative collaboration can produce extraordinarily relevant performance pieces.
- Again, like Pina Bausch, as well as Robert Wilson, Augusto Boal, Bill T. Jones, Liz Lerman, Robert Lepage, Ann Bogart, DV8 Physical Theatre, Anna Deavere Smith, Moisés Kaufman, Lisa Kron, John Leguizamo, Ohad Naharin, and John Tiffany and Steve Hoggett, and other premiere multidisciplinary theater artists and dance ensembles, autobiographical and verbatim-theater practitioners, this work focuses on essential images and gestures, motifs and verses, and then probes them until they reveal deep, unexpected, and resonant meanings and associations.

The creative space I facilitate is diverse and inclusive and seeks always to initiate transformation, both

individually and collectively. The creative work acts as a bridge, intersecting and connecting two lands with traffic flowing in different directions, a view that shows all sides.

- Cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of bridges/ bridging is helpful, for as she describes, "*transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries*" but always leading to new, unexpected discoveries and directions.

My work is creative, dialogical, and reflective/ reflexive in nature. I am drawn to memoir and autobiography as a jumping off point (for me and all my student performers and co-creators) as we explore the realities of the human landscape. In ourselves, we see others, and vice versa.

- Rather than situate ourselves fully in the world of autobiography, however, I like to also explore how these stories, our stories, can be told in ways that are also primal, instinctual, and subject-textual as a means to reflect humanity in both micro- and macro- ways.
- My hope is that the texts, poems, movement, and dance that are generated through such a process is accessible, dynamic, emotionally and intellectually resonant, and, ultimately, universally relevant.
- The goal is for the movement motifs, and the larger performance that contain them, to be as deep and complex as the issues at hand and the dancers themselves.

In this work, the ensemble is a metaphor for community; it is a symbol of our contemporary, global reality. We recognize and celebrate the uniqueness and differences of all individuals while also seeking to identify the points where we overlap and intersect, the ways in which we are similar and what we have in common. In doing so, we start to see ourselves, others, and the entire human family more clearly and more compassionately.

- My ongoing engagement with theme-based theatre arts practices allows me to grapple with the metaphorical motif of the human experience, both as individuals and parts of communities, painting it as a kind of journey. Such a journey constantly uncovers the many ways humans beings get *from here to there*: asking who we can help and guide along their way, as well as who and how others help us along our paths. The resulting embodied canvas can reveal a rich landscape that directly and metaphorically refers to the various opportunities, experiences, and choices that human beings face. How do we live our lives in ways that we can be happy, safe, connected, stable, and productive? How can theatre practices help us understand why these questions are at the core of our existence but can be described and understood in countless ways?

The work of a multidisciplinary theater artist can be as spiritual as it is creative and artistic.

As an art-maker, I choose to ask: can all people, all kinds of viewers, relate to the piece and respond to or be inspired by the questions and intentions being raised, the content, forms and images being used, and the various landscapes being traversed?

With these goals in mind, my work is most often theme-based, using socially and culturally relevant motifs, symbols, conditions, and concerns as jumping off points.

- Over the years, I have been drawn to explore such themes as: the nature of home and community, nationalism and trans-nationalism, queer and liminal identities, immigration, poverty and hunger, disaster and displacement, water access, HIV-AIDS and sexual health, peace and conflict, bullying and oppression, and other social injustices and imbalances.
- I have learned that this work, which will ultimately be expressed, at least partially, in an embodied way, always involves some engagement with identity exploration. Therefore, the creative process I have developed incorporates and relies upon complex thematic interrogations that often begin with the most basic of questions: *who am I?*
- I contend that it is a combination of our minds, hearts, and bodies, full vessels of meanings and perspectives, bodies intersecting with other bodies, helping and being helped as we get from here to there, that allows us to understand the larger issues of our time more clearly, more deeply, and with more compassion.

This work requires full investment from all student artists and collaborators. The result of the creative and social processes integrated in this work allows everyone to connect personally and deeply to the material and to take ownership of it. It belongs to all of us.

That said, I love being the director, the editor, the interpreter, the iterator, the interpolator, and the craftsman. At this point, I have a large toolbox as a multidisciplinary theatre arts instructor and dance theater maker, with many creative strategies and artistic methods at my disposal, yet am always open to learning more from my students. I hope the work is mutually beneficial and transformative. I am still inspired, and always grateful, for the opportunity and ability to use these tools to design, build, and create meaningful theater, dance and movement.