

Unearthing AfrOist Body Governance (ABGs): A Dialogue

yaTande Whitney V. Hunter, Orlando Zane Hunter-Valentine

yaTande Whitney V. Hunter, PhD, Assistant Professor of Dance, Temple University 1700 N. Broad 309B Philadelphia, PA 19121, ORCID: 0009-0002-0627-5702

Orlando Zane Hunter-Valentine, MFA Adjunct Professor of Dance, Ohio University, One Ohio University, Athens, OH 45701, ORCID: 0009-0009-5287-7000

Abstract: *Unearthing AfrOist Body Governance (ABGs): A Dialogue, intuitively examines somatic practice through the artists' extensive experience in movement and dance within African diasporic and global forms. Prompted by a 16-week Alexander Technique course facilitated by Hunter-Valentine at The Ohio State University, this dialogue initiates an ongoing exploration of a new somatic framework rooted in African diasporic epistemology, drawn from longstanding African traditions and ontologies and based on a theory of cultural continuity (AfrOism) introduced by Dr. yaTande Whitney V. Hunter.*

Keywords: *decolonize somatics, wellness, spirituality, Africanist, sekpoli, embodiment*

The dialogue below captures a conversation initiated by choreographers Orlando Hunter-Valentine, then an MFA graduate student at The Ohio State University, and Dr. yaTande Whitney V. Hunter. They sought an alternative to the Alexander Technique. The prompt arose from a request for Hunter-Valentine to facilitate a 16-week Alexander Technique course at The Ohio State University. In response, Hunter-Valentine and Dr. yaTande began talks that led to the conception of AfrOist¹ Body Governance (ABGs).

This dialogue documents the initial virtual conversation between the two artists as they explore the need for alternative somatic methods. Through these discussions, they identify core issues and challenges that inspire the development of a new somatic practice, AfrOist Body Governance (ABGs). ABGs is a practice rooted in African diasporic epistemology, drawing from longstanding African traditions and ontologies and based on a theory of cultural continuity (AfrOism) introduced by Dr. yaTande. The dialogue examines somatic practices through the artists' extensive experience in movement and dance within African diasporic and global forms, initiating an ongoing exploration of new somatic frameworks and inspired by such artists-practitioners as Ade Ola², Dr. S. Ama Wray³, and Oludaré⁴ for their contributions in centralizing Africana perspectives on the subject of somatics and embodied aesthetics.

1 A theory of cultural continuity coined by Dr. yaTande Whitney V. Hunter

2 OriBata, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Quo892UeV9M>

3 Embodiology, <https://www.embodiology.com/>

4 Kiire Wellness, <https://www.kiirewellness.com/>

Orlando:

Recognizing the body as African Americans in the United States, specifically, with the knowledge of diasporic somatic understanding.

yaTande:

I would venture to say even more that, yes, it's [AfrOist Body Governance/ABGs] another take, it's an alternative.

These concepts that we're going into, existed long before any of this socio-cultural "stuff" of slavery and colonization and all of that. So it's like, how can that teach us? Which is why I think it is so important to think about, the Orisha⁵, the divinities, of deities, because that system of knowledge goes back so far that I think there's something in there that we can learn from to bring forward into the contemporary right?

The body has always existed. But to take this idea from the fact that in AfrOist, Africanist, African diasporic, however you want to say it, cultural understanding, the body is deeply engaged in the process of living. Right? It's not, we've never tried to escape the body. And furthermore, we have understood that the body becomes a medium and a vessel for other energies to pass through to inhabit.

And that's really, I think that's the key to this [ABGs] because it says, *oh, okay, my body is not just my own*. So, then you can say that extends into the idea even that, well, if my body is not my own, my body is the community, belongs also to the community, then what is the responsibility of my well-being in this body that I am possessing at this point or inhabiting at this point? What is the larger responsibility?

Um, If you don't have a *well* body then what spirit can come through.

How can you hold that?

And, you know, I think it's really interesting that in... the Lebou people⁶. And this Ndeup dance is performed, this ritual, really, this ritual is performed when people have some ailment, largely mental ailment, and they need to discover is going on. But the main focus of this ritual is to communicate with the ancestors, to say, "hey, what is going on with this person's body?" What is going on with this person? Right? And so right away, you go like, oh, okay, so, right, it's not about just going to a therapist and sitting and talking about it. It's about going into the ritual, into the circle where everybody is present. The public is there. The community is there. The spirit comes invoking spirit. Spirit speaks. Spirit speaks in terms of language. Spirit speaks in terms of song. Spirit speaks in terms of movement to reveal what is needed for the well-being of this person.

And so in that sense, right, the body, a body that is well is one that can sing, one that can dance, one that can be okay with being in community. Um, and so that's a different concept,

5 Orisha – commonly known in Yoruba-based cosmology as manifested forces of nature.

6 (The Drum's Voice: African inspired dance and rhythms from beyond, <https://drumsvoice.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/african-dance-as-a-ritual-of-healing-senegalese-ndeup/>)

right?

Orlando:

So we're concerned about wellness? Right.

yaTande:

Yeah. Well, right. Because as I see it, wellness and healing is slightly different. One reason is that healing presumes being unwell, being sick.

I have to get well. I have to heal myself. You have to heal a wound or whatever.

Whereas wellness, I think is more about sustaining, a sustained sense of being whole.

And I love all of these ideas because every word that you use around like wellness, feeling whole, holistic, this idea of emptiness is there, this idea of like a well, a deep well is like a deep hole. It's like, right?

Holistic implies in some way this sense of, you know, there is a whole, there is something that is not there. And in some way, you kind of think about it like, I think about it like, well, that's interesting from an Africanist point of view, because in, you know, Haitian Vodou, this idea of the *gros bonnaj*, which is the big angel, right? The big good angel, good big angel, is the one that during possession, goes away.

Right? So it's this big space that is left for then this other entity, this other energy to enter into your body. And when that entity is finished, *the big angel* comes back as opposed to the *tibonnaj*, the little angel. The little angel never leaves. That's always with you until the end of your life. And then that goes away and has to be captured into a vessel.

But just this idea of the *big angel* leaving, it implies to me this kind of this big hole that's now in your body to allow and to invite this other energy, a space to inhabit. And so maybe, you know, maybe from an Africanist point of view, you know, like, being well is about having a kind of hole inside of you, a space

Orlando:

for spirit to [inhabit]

yaTande:

Right! That it's not about you trying to feel everything up in you, but it's about leaving a space that things can pass through.

Orlando:

I feel like this is going into, like, is it Taoism or something like that where they talk about emptiness?

yaTande:

Oh, okay.

Orlando:

Like, or Buddhism or a Zen Buddhism or just like, yeah.

In Zen Buddhism the focus of the dogma is to have no thought. Removing the concept of there being something to be or do. However, the Zen Buddhism concept is to be fully present in just being. Removing the need to fill up space on the inside births authentic spirit movement.

You have, there's that sense of nothingness. Like to reduce yourself all the way down to nothing so that then pure spirit can be.

yaTande:

Yeah! I mean, I think that somehow, okay, so let's even think about, let's think about these principles of elongation. You know, I know that in Graham [Technique, for example, we always talked about, you know, lengthening the spine and think about the space in between, right? The space in between the vertebra where movement actually begins to happen, can happen, because there is space.

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

And if everything is compacted down, there's no movement because there is rigidity and everything. So if space is what promotes mobility, then and space is a hole or space is nothingness, then you do need a certain amount of nothingness as a part of your body, for your well-being.

I don't know.

Orlando:

That makes me think about, the organs. And because those are just kind of like these holes in these spaces, they're kind of like. Puffed up, you know?

I mean, I'm thinking more like the intestines

I don't know. The pancreas seems like it's kind of like there's no hole in the pancreas. It's like a solid.

yaTande:

Yeah, they always talk about the pancreas looking like a feather or something.

Orlando:

The heart, the heart has holes, the arteries, different arteries of the heart.

Because I was also looking in Dancing Wisdom and she [Yvonne Daniel] was saying that "beyond understanding, body systems, respiratory, digestive, muscular, skeletal, and physiological personality, characteristics and psychology are understood in terms of the associated divinities

in the dancing religions of the Americas.” (Daniel, 2005, p. 5)

So, I think also what we were just talking about earlier was like, keeping that space open for spirit because that's like spirit is what's missing in Western education.

So they remove spirit so it can be more, like you said, accessible. Or so they think it's more accessible.

yaTande:

Well, the removal of spirit was, you know, a project of the philosophers because they wanted to be able to talk about these things without having to talk about religion.

Basically, they were trying to get power from the religious people. They created philosophy as a

way of engaging with the same ideas, just in a secular, non-religious way. Which is how we're able

to talk about these things without having to talk about how Ifá or, you know, how whatever the

religious, the religious body, even though, you know, in our [African spiritualists] way, you know,

it's more about spirituality. It's not religion, religious doctrine, per se. It's about understanding, understanding the body and spirit, you know, in a different way. But in any case, right, that there

is, you know, there is a lack of. There's lack of I'm just thinking about like, you know, Bartenieff⁷ where it is very corporeal, you know, in terms of, you know, *feel the arm doing things sensationally*, you know, like *feel the arm doing this thing*. And so then, I guess a question for us is, you know, what, you know, what really, what does spirit have to do with that? Right?

All right. Yeah, that's, that is kind of the question, you know, like, right? Is this [ABGs] is this a thing about spirit or is this something about, I mean, the body- as spirit. I mean, we yes, we know that. You know, it's interesting because there is the idea that the body is spirit.

So you're like, if the body is. spirit, why do we have all of these organs in, you know, things, physical things? And I guess these are like our biological anchors on this terrestrial plane, which we will not need once we leave this.

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

But if *sekpoli*⁸ is about the breath of life, then none of this would work without the animation of air, of breath, of life.

⁷ The BartenieffFundamentalssm (BF) are a set of principles developed by Irmgard Bartenieff, who studied with Rudolf Laban. Bartenieff developed a methodology exploring the principles of kinesiological functioning that can be used to observe and analyze our bodies in motion and which can be extended to all types of movement possibilities.(Laban / Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies, <https://labaninstitute.org/education/>) <https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/alexander-technique>),

⁸ A concept that refers to the primal breath that is provided all living beings by Mawu (the supreme deity of Ewe/Fon cosmology)

Orlando:

So then that goes into thinking, so maybe it [speaking of the methodological order of the ABG system] goes breath into organs or digestive systems.

Because I think that those [the movement of the organs within the body] are the first dances.

yaTande:

The way that, yeah, that's the good way to think about. Like the way that the organs are moving in relation to each other, right?

The way that they are constructed in the body, the heart, right. Right. Yeah, I think that's a good I think that's a useful thought. The way that what happens when the heart pumps moves, that sends energy, that sends blood and such to this place within, which makes this one move.

I mean, like, these things are all happening in our body. Right? The movement, the water is allowing these things to these organs to glide across each other, expand, and compress, you know, and all of that..

Orlando:

So, like, breath, digestive systems. Because initially I think we were like, breath, then, spine. But we still have to have to be in the soft goods first, I think.

Yeah. before we start we get to structure, which is maybe the fourth one, right? I think because the fourth one here was muscle or organize as you had it. And I'm like, if we think about that in relationship to Saturn with which it relates to the bone instead of muscle.

yaTande:

So is?

That's not the question.

Orlando:

So two's the question. So two.

Oh, okay, this is really good! This is really good. Because it's kind of forcing us to do this kind of. I mean, it's a real stretch because the serpent body is also soft

you know, but we're relating it to the hard quality of the spine, which is a bone structure. So... *digestive*. So we going from the breath, sekpoli, and understanding this animation of the body and the first dances being that kind of parasympathetic movement.

Orlando:

And then muscle..

yaTande:

Or, I mean... Thinking, you know, it's the breath. breath comes into the body, right, we're

born, we're animated by breath. We already have... until we're born, and we're depending on air and such from our mothers..

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

But once we're born, it's when we then, get our own breath then, to go by. And also at that time, we have our body already. Right.

And so from then, that moment on, we're just, our body is just growing at that point.

Orlando:

Right. Right.

yaTande:

So. And our different systems [what kind] are kicking in as our body matures. So I'm just thinking about, right, this idea of having the body already, right? Which is that part of this kind of wholeness principle, this wellness principle, is that if we are here, we have the body, so it's about creating consciousness about what of the body is functioning and how that body is functioning, versus having to do so much work in... sort of like... detailing what the...

Well, no, you got to detail what the thing is.

Orlando:

So, thinking about leaving space, because I love the idea. I mean, when we talk about thinking about the in between, you know what I mean? We know that that's where we can find, you know, that kind of expansiveness.

And so, what were you just saying about wholeness?

yaTande:

Yeah, just this idea that wholeness is a, through wholeness, there is a possibility of mobility, of, yeah, of mobility. I mean, you think about stretching the muscles, what you're doing is bring, you know, you talk about breathing into that muscle.

So and that's all for purposes of flexibility and mobility. And it is, right? It's the air.

Air is the principle here because even in fluids, even in the water... There's so much air in water. So you know, this idea of lubrication, lubrication as connected to aeration.

These two principles are always together because, for example, we can talk about moving as, you know, Damballah, Agwe, whatever, as the ocean, La Siren [the mermaid] , as the ocean. But we can also talk about that motion as blowing wind, as wind blowing, right? So perhaps there's something, right, there's something in that that helps us understand or get clearer about what the activity of breathing.

I think that's what we're doing. I think we're bringing consciousness to the function, to the productive function of the body. Maybe not productive, but something...

Because I'm thinking about when people say, "oh, no, I can't dance; I don't dance."

Orlando:

That's because, right.

yaTande:

You know, there's a part of that that's like, it's because you don't, you're not aware of the fact that.

Orlando:

You're already dancing

yaTande:

you are already dancing because of dance is movement and that dance is so, so much like a cultural thing. Right?

That, you know, this expectation that I don't, it's also like saying, "I don't have to dance." Oh, no, I don't dance. It's not that you don't dance. It's like, "I don't have to dance to be a productive and functioning person in this society. But we know that in our indigenous communities, particularly in Africa, you know, like the king, the queen, the Oba, they have to know how to dance. If you do not dance, you cannot be... You cannot be the leader of this community. [laughing]

So, you know, from that perspective, it's like, okay, so then, how does this thing that we're building function to bring consciousness around the fact that dance movement is, you know, a fundamental, a prime activity of a well life.

Orlando:

Right. Yeah. And "Afro solo, man", uh I just do different kinds of like installations. And so one, I have this one that's like wellness recipes. So I just have a marker there and people just write what their recipe for wellness is. And so that's been one way that I've kind of thought about wellness because that recipe is specific to each person..

You know, it's like, what we're telling people, or what we're having people experience is not that this is a one-off kind of prescription of something. You know, this is a way of existing consciously

Around what helps you feel the most mobile and flexible.

And it's not productive.

What is it in, I mean, it is this idea of product/production, but I don't want to use the product

yaTande:

Right, right.

Orlando:

Let me see...

That's what it is. Creating. Helping people to create their own recipe for wellness. And not just saying "well, the recipe for wellness is if you get your spines sitting up straight and you sitting in your monkeys".

You know. So, yeah, it's helping people to create this. What they feel as necessary for them, and we're helping them through this African/AfrOist cosmology of body organization practices. That are spirit induced.

Because it is you can't, for AfrOist practices, you can we don't decouple spirit. It's like we are spirit. So, we experience the world and the processes that we created are spirit. I mean, hoodoo, voodoo, like wherever we go. It's like, okay, y'all feel is there's something there.

yaTande:

I mean.

I'm thinking if we say that everything has spirit, well, I say every living thing has spirit, and every animate object/being has spirit, and every inanimate object can be imbued with spirit. But ultimately, the premise here is that spirit is breath.

Orlando:

And where there's no breath, there is no life.

Well there's no breath, there is no life, and we can look at soil and see that you need aeration. And again, that goes back to what we were talking about earlier. You need aeration in the soil for the plants to live, for the seed to grow.

yaTande:

Right.

Orlando:

If the soil is packed tightly, there's no opportunity for that seed to move towards the sun.

Or for the roots to even spread down into the earth.

And also, if the soil is too aerated, the seed washes away. And I mean, it gets planted somewhere else, but that's a whole other thing. Okay.

So it was like how this wholeness is also about something about balance.

yaTande:

Right having just the right amount of air, space to grow.

Which, um.. um which talks about which talks about balance and harmony because someone who is, say, got a lot of air, needs something to ground them.

Someone who's very, you know, for lack of better word, sort of flighty. It's something [earth] to ground them.

Which, I guess, is why the organs and the bones and such exist in our bodies.

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

Because gravity, as the universal force, all of that stuff has weight. So it is a *thing* that it is what actually grounds us.

So, if we're moving from a perspective that is Afro-centered, not particularly, not necessarily Afrocentric, Afro-centered. Then there are some things that are necessary to consider.

An Afro-centered embodiment principle says that there is consciousness about the body as a vessel/conduit of spirit – that the body is not yours alone, perhaps..

That there is a consciousness around the body as nature.

Orlando:

Right. Okay, the Umfundalai technique, what is it called?

yaTande:

Umfundalai Technique⁹ is a pan-African dance technique that is premised on Afro-centric theory. Umfundalai is a theory. [As I understand, first it [Umfundalai] started as a theory that then was applied to the body, the dancing body.

And so it is an effort to reorient the dancing body to principles that are African-centered pan-Africanist principles of nature, of community, you know, a lot of what we're saying here. Right. They don't talk about spirit so much. But they don't not talk about it. You know what I mean? As opposed to Dunham, for example.

Orlando:

Right, right.

yaTande:

It is very much centered about these spiritual forces in/of the body. In fact, the vocabulary coming from, you know, this pantheon of [Haitian Vodou], right?

⁹ Umfundalai, <https://www.umfundalai.net/>

And so that's a very good question because it makes me, reminds me that in my estimation, this has to be a pathway to wholeness wellness, a well body as opposed to and that and that the exercises and the whatever's don't have to be all the same and codified as this is the prescription.

Orlando:

Right, right, right.

yaTande:

Because it's not aesthetically based.

Orlando:

It's more... Conscious based.

It's about the awareness of how you're thinking and organizing the body when you're like, oh, yeah. If I see, you know, um I don't know, seashell somewhere. Am I, like, associating that with what in the world?

You know what I mean? Like, if I'm engaging in the soil, am I understanding that I'm also an image in a reflection of the soil?

You know, in terms of how I think I can grow and and literally be alive because soil, you need living soil..

I wonder if it's useful to think about the body and that concept, in which I have in the past, you know, thought about the soil of the body is the marrow Or, the body of the earth, yeah.

yaTande:

The heart... is like a sun.. The bones are like, um. tree, you know, something that gives structure. Bones are like, yeah, like trees.

You know, the blood is like the water. Right. Okay.

Orlando:

I mean, I love that too, because it goes... So that's why I was like, how do we as, because, again, we are teetering a line inside of the academy in terms of how much, again, this is where that spirit comes in and in terms, in the philosophy and religious practice and all of that stuff. Because speaking of it that way in terms of the body as the earth, too, because that's also the principle we say that the consciousness is we see the body as nature.

And again, we keep having these conversations about this reflection back into how we can organize the body towards these things we see outside of us. You know, so use as the sun is the heart. The blood is the water, you know, the breath is the air we breathe.

You know what I mean? So, like, having that kind of constant interplay and then saying, oh, and this is also Oya or Yemaya. You know what I mean?

Like, I think having the consciousness of the natural elements being the forefront and then

sliding spirit in there because they are already the elements.

So I think just because I'm like, if we use *spirit* in the language of the... Well, could you, can you?.

yaTande:

Well, I mean, sure, you just have to define it, you know, I think. Right, because when you start, talking about *spirit*, then there's a lot of ideas

Orlando:

Exactly.

yaTande:

But there's you just simply have to, you know, orient, you know, the participant to what we mean by spirit.

I mean, also, you know, to talk about deities, the divinities is really focusing this around a kind of cultural representation of these things that we all share.

Orlando:

Right. Right.

yaTande:

So my question then, is it actually important to talk about as air, or is it the main importance to talk about breath, air, space, and one of those ways that it manifests in the world is through this divinity that in Yoruba is called Oya.

Right. Is this about Oya or is this about breath? And air? You see what I mean?

Orlando:

Yes, yes, yes.

yaTande:

Because in one way, one way, it could be, oh, well, this is nothing, but, you know, some kind of spiritual / religious experiment.

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

Let's say. Versus to remove that to remove that frees us up of having to be, um, uh,... obligated to Yoruba mythology.

Orlando:

Right, right, right.

yaTande:

Pathology and Pantheon? But I also understand that. I mean, like, for me, a monkey is a monkey.

Right? But based on why you're using monkey as a symbol, then is determined by how monkey is considered in from your cultural perspective. Right.

Which is the rub for you, as you're saying.

Orlando:

Right, right...rough.

You can't tell a black man.

You white woman, can't tell a black man to, you know, "embrace your monkey."

Get into a monkey, you like....

yaTande:

So, for me, I'm almost like, so do we. Do we remove that component or do we just, not overlook it, but do we restore it to a kind of..., I don't even know if that's possible. To a kind of neutrality that is, if we remove the racial implication, is that possible, right?

Is it possible to remove the racial implication of these things, of these ideas and restore them?

I don't know that's possible because there's always like...

I used to think about this. The way that I teach Graham from my perspective, like I might say in a movement, this is like a Shango movement, right?

And then I have to explain what Shango is. But in the sort of codification of Graham you can use whatever imagery, whatever label you want to put on that imagery to get them to this understanding, this consciousness, this understanding about that movement.

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

So what I'm saying is that another teacher who teaches Graham may never use Shango, right, because they don't have that reference. Right.

But it's not about Shango per se. It's just the way that I evoke that energy. It's the language that I used to evoke that energy to do this technical thing in the technique.

Maybe it would be different if what Graham had done was to maintain the [Classical] Indian cultural references to her movement, then maybe we wouldn't see it as, because then we would realize, oh, this is nothing but Indian dance.

Orlando:

Right, right. Right.

yaTande:

So, in Alexander, you know, with this, they're pulling from a lot of different places.

Orlando:

Right.

yaTande:

And so I guess ultimately the question is, why couldn't you learn Alexander and employ different imagery as your way to it?

Like, why does it have to be monkey? Does it have to be, you know, what if you use the language of the Fon/Ewe for the monkey instead of just the English word 'monkey'? You know, is it enough to change, is it enough to change the language of the thing? Or, is the language of the thing also codified? You understand what I'm saying?

Orlando:

Right, right, right.

Well, I think, I mean, because it was created from this, I mean, it was pulled from different things. But the consciousness of where it comes from in the 18, 1860, whatever the hell he created this in.

And it's still living as a thing as a he was he has things called "Man's best something." Like very patriarchal, very, you know, I mean, it's a white supremacist, man situation. Like the whole idea of it needs to go.

And so here we are like, oh, well, if that's going to go,

yaTande:

What could replace it?

Orlando:

Yeah, especially inside of this space where people are learning about their bodies and having to generate from this white.. I mean, now it's the face of it is a white woman, an older white woman.

So she's translated. You know what I mean?

It just don't feel right to me.

And I'm like, to, it's like, Again, we can't tear down a master's house with the master's tool. Right.

yaTande:

Okay.

Orlando:

We need a whole, we need need the whole shit to be fucked up and we're like, okay, so what's here? We got what we got. What do we have? What do we got? What do we got? Well, I mean, right.

yaTande:

And so my response to that is, so actually, what we are doing, because it is what Alexander is doing as well in terms of, though it's not explicitly expressed, he's moving from a phallocentric Western ideology that is based in Christianity.

That is supported right. So a Christian centered, even though that part of it is not expressed in Alexander, the notion is implicit, right?

Because we know that the West is primarily Christian oriented. Okay, so this option here is Afro-centered organization and consciousness around the body, which means you have to talk about spirit. You have to talk about certain things.

Orlando:

Yes, okay, okay, okay, okay. [clapping].

yaTande:

You understand what I mean?

Orlando:

Yes, yes.

yaTande:

And in essence, it is a kind of Ifá for the body because what we're trying to do is reorient thinking...

Orlando:

Yes, yes!

yaTande:

away from the Christian centered Western ideal of the body, an idea and ideal of the body, towards an Afro-centered consciousness, idea, and ideals of the body.

Orlando:

Yes.

yaTande:

And the way that that happens in those circles is we talk about things in relation to spirit.

Yes. And those spirits in the various cultures of the African paradigm is they have specific language. They have specific words that are names and things that are used for their power.

So Iyansa is not just “mother of nine”, but it is all that that means [culturally]

Ogoun, is not just metal, but it is the deity that has this history that’s attached to it.

Right. So in some way, I guess what I’m arguing is that we actually can’t get away from this notion of this proximity of the sekpoli, which we never can and Africanist, you know, ideal, right?

You can never get away from the intersection of sacred and the secular. They coexists. They coexists.

So in this system, this there’s no way to just talk about what the body is doing. Right. Because it’s not just the corporeal body that is active.

There is something else active. And this, in fact, is what has actually been removed from the Western centered idea

Is that it’s not about spirit; it’s about the physical, physiological body, but that doesn’t jive in this way.

Because we also know that so much of healing and wellness has to do with how we think about our body in relation to being well, being healed and such. You cannot get healed. You cannot heal yourself if you don’t think that you can.

If you don’t have the mental consciousness around what it means, how breathing can and encourage well-being.

yaTande:
[Laughing]

Orlando:
Um, I think that’s.

yaTande:
Oh, so, so so, okay.

So then, Okay, so the sekpoli principle, then, is really about finding where breath as a healing force exists in every part of the body. From the organs to the bones, to the marrow, to the ligaments, to the testes, to the ovaries, where is the breath that exists in all of that in all of those body parts and all of those parts of the body?

yaTande:
And once you get breath, as you were talking about with the soil. And once you get breath and air into those parts of the body, then you can instigate and encourage wellness and healing

in the body.[as] a state of wellness in the body.

You can restore your body to a state of wellness. So it is about, it is, this was this way. This was my thing that I was going crazy about in my head, my own head.

It is absolutely about the breath. It's not about just the breath coming into the body as an animated force, right? But it's about where breath is in my pancreas, where breath is.

Orlando:

Yes, there we go! There we go! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. [snapping]

yaTande:

It is in my elbows? And that is really the polycentrism of the body because it means that there is no one nucleus that physiologically, yes, the blood is pumped from the heart and so on. But once that blood gets into that area, it's got to activate something..

So it is. it is a polycentrism that is happening that is about, I'm going to keep doing this with my finger until I get flow, until I activate and really use that air, that spirit, that energy that is in my hand and possible with my hand.

It's about locating, locating the breath in and the various, you may have written this already, but locating the breath in the various parts of the body and using it. Using it to encourage wellness, flow, whatever you want to call it.

Right.

Oh! So okay, so it's like, yes, the sekpoli principle is Mawu has given us breath, animated us. But now it is our capacity, our agency to use that breath in our body to maintain our well-being.

Orlando:

And you can do that through petitioning and knowing Oya, who governs [the breath].

Okay, there we go! Okay, okay. And who.

yaTande:

And that gets us to the Orisha, the divinities, because it's like, okay, then you ask yourself, well, why is Oya? Why is she governed? Why is she considered to govern, you know, the lungs or Obba, the stomach...

yaTande:

So like. Great, great. Yeah, okay.

Okay, so, now I feel like we have the foundation.

yaTande and Orlando:

[Laughing...]

yaTande and Orlando:

The foundation, yes!

Right? It's like, now we understand why, fully, why this *breath of life* is so central. And how it's functioning for us in this system.

Right? Because what we're asking, now we can begin to think about the exercises, right? Now let's focus on that foot that is inactive. How can you get more mobility in that foot?

yaTande:

Bring, use, how could articulation circle the foot, you know, stretch, peel the foot, you know, all of these things that fold focus on animating, right?

Mawu has given us the air. Now, we have to use what we've been given.

Orlando:

You have to send breath to it. You have to send breath to it. You have to send breath to it.

Orlando:

[Yelling and shouting affirmatively] And there goes the principle. Like, Ananya always has said to me, "there's nothing breath can't move." "There's nothing breath can't move." And every since she said that to me, I was like, she's right. And so any time I'm feeling something in my body, I'm be like, okay, it might be painful. And you'd be like, -itch. Find it. We breathe it.

I breathe it, I'll breathe it out. And you know, like, that breath is healing.

And it's the healing. Oh, my gosh! Oh, my gosh!

yaTande:

It's the space. It's the space that you give that area. It's the intentional space that you begin to use in that area.

And any area of the body that has a joint has space.. And that's really the Damballah principle.

yaTande:

That's why it's the serpent body.

Orlando:

Yes!

yaTande:

Every part that has mobility in our body has space, and that's what we want to start to use and move and encourage more space in that area where you feel stuck.

You feel stuck in your shoulder, begin to slow.

Orlando:

Yes.

yaTande:

Initiate. Slow big, you know, 'til that shoulder begins to open up. You start to go for space and energetically, that shit changes how you feel about that area.

Because you're giving that you're acknowledging the space that that area has that is already there by virtue of the joints that are there.

Like. That was a breakthrough too.

Orlando:

That really was.

Like, that. Yeah. And that's the grounding principle. Sekpoli!

It is. I mean, we have it there. I mean, we know it, but I think it's like we begin to all the way embodied.

yaTande:

And then how and then that influences [and] determines how we then think about, you know, that vocal breath, those three breaths.

Orlando:

Yes.

yaTande:

Why that's important because vibration moves through, right?

Finding out how the vibration gets into the knee, gets into the thigh, gets into... the right?

All of that. Because it becomes a really important thing, right? Because basically we're saying, okay, now we're clear that what we're doing is we're, you know, activating air.

We're using air, air as breath, breath as air, to bring consciousness and thus, and, ultimately wellness to a space. Opening, opening..

Orlando:

sekpoli

That is so good! That is so good! That is so good!

yaTande:

I have a whole new idea now about articulations and isolations, right?

You know, I always think about it, yes, in terms of mobility to the area, but if we think about it, mobility is the use of space, is the actualization of space in the body, then that becomes something to like, oh, sensations start to happen. And that's what we want.

Orlando:

That's right!

yaTande:

We want sensations to happen. We are not just more movement. We want those movements to trigger sensation.

“Oh, my God! I can feel this now. I can feel my shoulder now. That reminds me of when I was 10 years old when I used to play in the meadow!!”

Orlando:

Memory and then that comes in. Exactly. Right.
And that's in the muscles. Memory is in the muscles.

yaTande:

Yes!

Orlando:

And in the blood.

Okay, I have to get on this call. Thank you so much. I love you, I love you, I love you.

yaTande:

I love you; love you too.

Orlando:

Thank you. Yes, we're doing great work.

yaTande:

We're doing the work.