

Yasuhito Nakasato

**The Embodiment Dance for Grief: An Autoethnographic Inquiry into Nishimonai Bon
Odori and Indigenous Drumming**

Interactive Arts and Technology, Simon Fraser University

IAT 801 G101: Qualitative Research Methods and Design

Dr. Thecla Schiphorst

April 25, 2026

Abstract

This research investigates somatic practices for grief, drawing from my personal experience of the loss of their grandparents in Japan while residing in North America. This geographic and emotional distance created a sense of “absence-guilt,” which this research seeks to reconcile through the embodiment of Nishimonai Bon Odori. Historically performed in Japan to honor and commune with the deceased, this dance serves as a somatic bridge between the living and the spirit world. Utilizing a practice-based autoethnographic approach, the core of this research focuses on a ritualistic synthesis: the integration of the ancestral intentionality of the Bon Odori with the sacred, grounding rhythms of Indigenous drumming from British Columbia, Canada. By combining these two distinct cultural lineages, the research proposes a cultural shift in the mourning process—moving away from sedentary, internalized grief toward an active and rhythmic performance. Through these somatic practices, the paper examines how the body acts as a living archive for memory, allowing the practitioner to honor ancestors across geographic borders. The findings suggest this ritual could provide a pathway for transforming trauma into a tangible, embodied connection and that ultimately this fusion of cross-cultural somatic practices can create new, resilient frameworks for mourning within immigrant communities.

Introduction

For this research, my motivation is the result of personal loss. Both of my grandparents died while I was living in North America. I was not able to attend my grandfather's funeral service, and when my grandmother passed away, there was no formal service; her ashes were taken care of in a hospital in the mountains. I felt a deep sense of guilt for not being present for them before they passed away, especially since I had not seen them for a long time. Ever since their passing, when I face challenges in my life, I ask them for the courage to overcome them. To support myself emotionally and to show my appreciation for the life they gave me, I needed a way to physically and emotionally honor them by bringing my Japanese heritage and my life in Canada together. My goal is not only to find a way to honor my grandparents and process my own grief, but also to contribute to the broader immigrant community. Many immigrants are unable to easily return to their home countries, leaving family members behind. While death is a part of nature and we all mourn, grieving from afar can cause feelings of guilt and psychological trauma. Through this research, I aim to provide a brief overview of how somatic practices and embodiment dance can be used to honor our ancestors and heal the grief of absence.

To navigate the complexities of grief across physical and cultural distances, this research is structured around the central framework in which *Bon Odori* serves as a somatic bridge (See Figure 1). The paper will first establish the geographic and cultural context, tracing the path of the Japanese diaspora to Canada, specifically acknowledging the unceded Indigenous lands of British Columbia. Following this, the methodology section will detail my autoethnographic approach, positioning myself as the researcher interpreting the act of honoring deceased ancestors. The core of the research will then explore the somatic loop—how the rhythm, repetition, music, and dance of *Bon Odori* serve as a vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue. Finally,

the research will conclude by illustrating how these interconnected elements culminate in a directed, physical practice of honoring and healing.

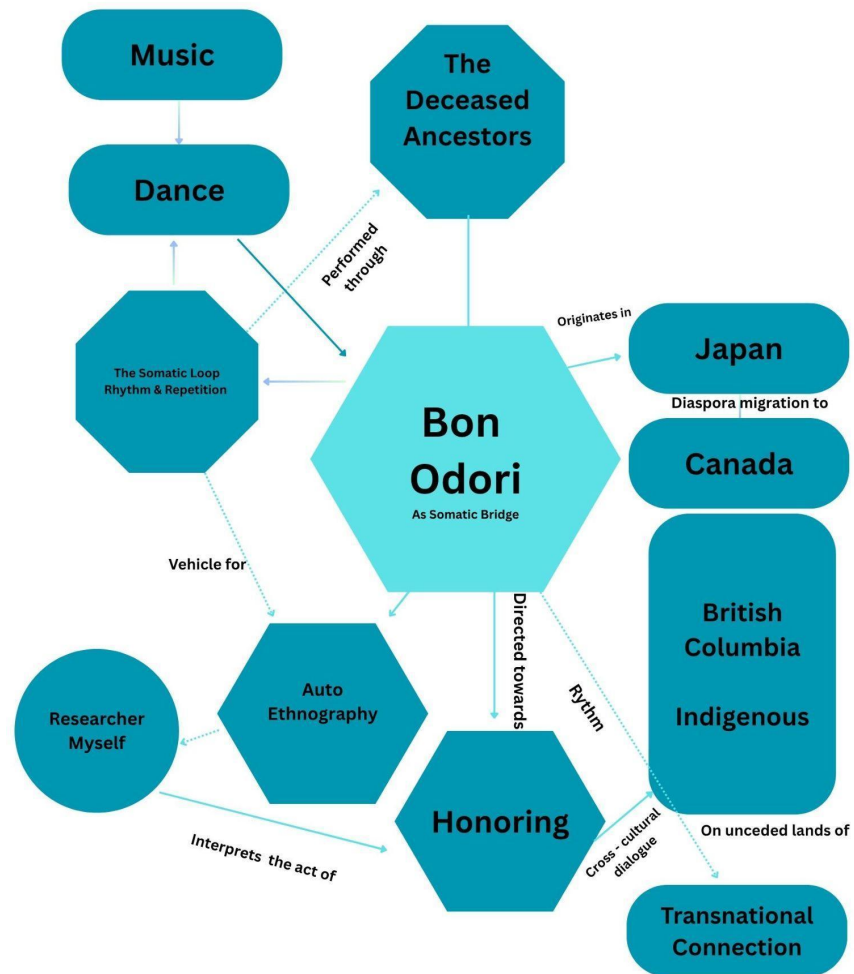


Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Existing literature confirms that grief is a profoundly physical state (Pearce & Komaromy, 2022) that benefits from non-verbal, somatic interventions (Dominguez, 2018; Lee et al., 2013). Furthermore, culturally specific mourning rituals have been shown to mitigate complicated grief by providing a sense of communal structure (Akunna, 2015; Lobar et al., 2006). However, these studies predominantly focus on clinical therapy settings or intact cultural traditions operating within their native homelands. This research contributes to an innovative treatment strategy by shifting healing from the clinic to a self-directed autoethnographic practice. By adapting *Nishimonai Bon Odori* alongside Indigenous drumming on the unceded lands of British Columbia, this research introduces a new framework for cross-cultural mourning to address the trauma and grief.

Three intersecting frameworks inform this research:

1. continuing bonds theory (Simpkins & Myers-Coffman, 2017): Frames the dance not as a tool to move on, but to actively nurture a dynamic, living relationship with my grandparents.
2. disenfranchised grief (Dominguez, 2018): provides a lens for understanding the socially unacknowledged guilt and somatic distress of immigrants unable to return home for funerals.
3. haptic autotheory (Papa, 2021) & embodied knowing (Miller et al., 2018): position physical, repetitive somatic practice as the primary method for creating a tangible "afterlife" for the deceased, establishing an internal sense of home that transcends physical distance.

Research Questions

How does the somatic repetition of Bon Odori function as a methodology for processing ancestral grief within my body in Canada?

Sub-Questions

1. Where was the grief sitting in my body before the dance, and where is it sitting now?
2. How does the embodiment of Nishimonai Bon Odori bridge the space between the Canadian landscape and my grandparents?
3. How do I feel, and where is the grief located in my body while dancing? Is it heavy or soft? Is there an external pressure?

This research explicitly moves beyond Western, verbal-centric mourning models, which often overlook the embodied, non-verbal residues of ancestral and diasporic loss. The rationale for this shift is that talk-based therapy often bypasses the embodied manifestations of grief—the physical mourning that is central to the experience of loss. My main question builds on the work of Akunna (2015) and Lobar et al. (2006). This research bridges a critical gap: the experience of cultural displacement where external ritual containers have been severed. By extending Butté's (2023) concept of movement as an internal home and applying Papa's (2021) haptic autotheory to the physical body, I explore how traditional gestures provide a somatic vocabulary that verbal models cannot offer. This approach moves beyond the mere observation of the weight of grief (Pearce & Komaromy, 2022; Shaw, 2015) to investigate how ancestral movement functions as a somatic container (Dominguez, 2018) for those grieving across borders.

Finally, my inquiry into the rhythmic loop departs from the clinical models of Lee et al. (2013) and Simpkins & Myers-Coffman (2017). While these authors validate the efficacy of Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) for trauma, my research shifts the focus from a therapist-led intervention to a self-directed, ancestral ritual, testing whether the inherent structure of Nishimonai Bon Odori can facilitate the continuing bonds necessary for long-term healing outside a clinical setting.

The primary purpose of this research is to move the discourse of bereavement away from the goal of "closure" and toward the practice of connection. By exploring Nishimonai Bon Odori as a methodology, this research makes two distinct contributions:

1. To the Field of Somatic Studies: It provides a micro-level case research on how traditional dance can process trauma.
2. To Diasporic Scholarship: It documents how third-culture or displaced individuals reconstruct ancestral meaning in a new landscape (Canada), specifically through the integration of Indigenous drumming.

Research Methods

Methodological Choice and Justice

For this research, I have chosen an autoethnographic methodology. Through this methodology, I will engage in reflexive journaling and somatic practices following sessions of the Japanese ritual ceremonial dance, Nishimonai Bon Odori. Autoethnography is the most appropriate choice for this research because it deliberately connects deeply personal, subjective experiences with broader cultural and social contexts, specifically the cultural dialogues between Japan and Canada. Because my research investigates the healing of personal grief and the

honoring of my ancestors, the data is highly sensitive. Autoethnography allows me to ethically navigate this sensitive terrain by positioning my own body and somatic experiences as the primary site of knowledge building. While phenomenology was also considered for its focus on lived experience, it was ultimately set aside because it aims to synthesize the experiences of multiple individuals to find a universal essence of a phenomenon. My research, however, does not seek a generalized understanding of grief; rather, it aims to explore a singular, highly personalized, and culturally specific journey of somatic healing, making autoethnography the most rigorous and appropriate methodological fit.

To further justify this methodological choice, I ground my approach in Spry's (2001) foundational framework for performative autoethnography. Spry argues that the performing body is a legitimate and rigorous site of academic inquiry and knowledge production, moving beyond traditional text-based qualitative methods. Because I operate on the assumption that the body is an archive for trauma and ancestral memory, I require a methodology that honors the physical form. By physically performing the Nishimonai Bon Odori, I am not just writing about grief; I am actively investigating it through the somatic vocabulary of my moving body. This performative methodological stance allows me to systematically capture and analyze non-verbal data—such as rhythm, physical weight, and haptic release—that standard qualitative interviews or observations could not fully articulate. It rigorously bridges the gap between my deeply personal, physical experience of loss and the broader cultural discourse of diaspora.

Researcher's Position

My connection to this research originates in my childhood, where I attended summer festivals and watched adults dancing for their ancestors during the Obon season, the Memorial Days in Japan. This past experience deeply motivates my work, but it also means I approach this

research as an autoethnographer, deeply entangled with the subject matter. My positionality in this research is characterized by a dual role: I am both the primary researcher and the practitioner. My institutional position as a student at Simon Fraser University provides the foundational framework for this research; it offers the necessary structure and rigor to translate a deeply personal journey into formal qualitative research. However, my deeper positionality is rooted in my cultural identity and my lived experience of grief. My motivation is to use this academic opportunity to actively honor my ancestors and process trauma through the Nishimonai Bon Odori and Indigenous drumming practices I engage with, having learned about Indigenous cultures and the healing power of the drum from Gary George, an officer for community relations at SFU.

I ground this work in the primary assumption that the body is an archive for trauma and ancestral memory, holding meanings that words alone cannot fully articulate. However, I must remain critically reflexive; my profound desire for healing risks introducing subjective confirmation bias. To keep my research precise and honest, I will pay close attention to the times when I do not feel any connection at all, writing down the quiet or empty moments just as carefully as the times when I feel happy and ambitious.

A critical ethical dimension of this research involves combining Nishimonai Bon Odori with Indigenous drumming from British Columbia. As a temporary resident from Japan practicing on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, I recognize the power dynamics inherent in merging these two distinct cultural lineages. The ethical challenge lies in ensuring this fusion is a respectful dialogue rather than an act of cultural appropriation. I position myself not as an owner of these traditions, but as a temporary resident and an international student seeking a somatic grounding in the land that currently

holds my grieving body. This requires a commitment to relational trust and agreement, ensuring that the use of Indigenous rhythms is a gesture of respect for the local lineage of resilience that supports my personal journey of mourning. I am consulting directly with Gary and using his original music with his explicit permission. This ensures I am engaging in a mutual relationship rather than extracting broader community traditions.

The primary challenge to the validity of this research is maintaining authenticity against the temptation to present an exaggerated story of healing and honoring while ignoring the messy data of grief. To ensure this, I rely on three concrete methods: a five-minute grounding meditation before practicing, which allows me to focus on internal sensations rather than the pressure of executing Nishimonai Bon Odori perfectly; reflexive journaling using questions prepared in advance to anchor my reflections more objectively; and video recordings of my somatic practices, which allow me to observe my physical movements from an external perspective.

Participant, Site, or Case Selection

Site and Context

The primary physical site for data collection and the in-person interview is my private residence in Burnaby, British Columbia. This isolated setting was purposefully selected to prioritize emotional safety. Because this research deals intimately with personal grief, a secure environment is required to remove the performative pressures of a public studio, allowing me to focus entirely on internal sensory experiences, somatic responses, and emotional processing. The international interview will be conducted virtually via Zoom.

Participant and Case Selection

In this autoethnographic research, the primary participant is myself; I act as both the practitioner of the somatic embodiment dance and the subject of observation. Multi-data will include video recordings of the physical practice on my iPhone and my immediate reflective journaling, guided by pre-written questions to ensure focused somatic and emotional reflection. To deeply contextualize the somatic practice, two external participants were purposefully selected via purposive sampling to provide expert knowledge on the intersections of music, mourning, and performance. Because the goal of this research is deep qualitative exploration rather than broad generalization, a sample size of two highly specialized cultural custodians is justified. Participants were recruited via phone texts and email.

1. Gary George: An SFU Officer for Community Relations and a professional Indigenous drummer. He possesses extensive experience performing at significant cultural events, including SFU reconciliation events and graduate ceremonies. He will provide the live Indigenous drumming during my somatic practice.
2. Takashi Konno: The Secretary General at the Ugo Town Tourism and Local Products Association. He is a lifelong professional drummer for the Nishimonai Bon Odori during the Obon season. He will be interviewed in Japanese via Zoom.

Data Collection

Autoethnographic Somatic Data

The primary data is generated through my embodied practice of the Nishimonai Bon Odori, combined with Gary's drumming. To capture this somatic experience, I engage with two methods. First, I record my physical practice on my iPhone to capture somatic movements, rhythms, and expressions that I may not consciously register in the moment. Second,

immediately following the practice, I engage in structured reflective journaling. To ensure the journaling remains focused on sensory and emotional processing rather than becoming a purely unstructured diary entry, I write my research questions in my notebook as follows: Where was the grief sitting in my body before the dance, and where is it sitting now?

How does the embodiment of Nishimonai Bon Odori bridge the space between the Canadian landscape and my grandparents? How do I feel, and where is the grief located in my body while dancing? Is it heavy or soft? Is there an external pressure?

Interview Data

To contextualize my practice, I conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the two performers. I conducted a 30-minute in-person interview in my room with Gary George, focusing on his process for creating the music, his response to my somatic movements, and the cross-cultural atmosphere of the session. Additionally, I conducted a one-hour virtual interview in Japanese with Takashi Konno, focusing on the traditions of the Nishimonai Bon Odori, the cultural symbolism of the performer's attire (the *zokin*), and its connection to ancestral grief.

Collecting data on deeply personal grief presents several practical and emotional challenges, which I have addressed through careful research design:

1. Language and Translation: Conducting an interview in Japanese with Takashi Konno and integrating those insights into an English-language paper presents a challenge due to linguistic and cultural nuances. To address this, I carefully translate and transcribe the interview, paying special attention to culturally specific terms related to mourning that may not have direct English equivalents.
2. Capturing Transient Somatic Data: Somatic sensations and emotional feelings can be difficult to recall accurately after the fact. To mitigate data loss, I use iPhone video

recordings as a secondary visual record, and I commit to my immediate journaling while the physical sensations are still present.

3. Emotional Burden: Engaging directly with the grief of losing my grandparents carries the risk of emotional burden, which could influence the data collection process. To address this, I utilize pre-written questions in my notebook. If the emotional weight becomes too intense, these questions serve as an anchor, gently guiding my focus consciously back to specific somatic and sensory reflections.

Data Analysis

To make sense of the data collected in this research—which includes interview transcripts, reflective journals, and video recordings—I will use a qualitative thematic analysis adapted for autoethnography and somatic research. Because my primary research question investigates how somatic practices function as a methodology for processing grief, my analysis must prioritize physical, embodied sensations alongside verbal reflections.

The analytical process begins with data planning and preparation. I will first transcribe the 30-minute in-person interview with Gary George and the one-hour Zoom interview with Takashi Konno, paying special attention to culturally specific nuances regarding the Nishimonai Bon Odori. Following the transcription, I will engage in a process of data triangulation by reviewing my iPhone video recordings along with my immediate post-practice journal entries, ensuring that my visual data aligns with my written somatic reflections.

Once the data is prepared, I will utilize an encoding process focused specifically on capturing raw sensory data rather than immediately jumping to academic concepts. First, I will read through my personal journal entries and extract direct, embodied quotes. For example, when analyzing my journal responses to the prompt, "How do I feel and where is the grief located in

my body while dancing?", I look for specific textures and locations. Based on my March 12th entry, I applied descriptive codes such as soft release, lack of external pressure, and joyful sentiment. Additionally, reflecting on my March 14th entry, where I noted the practice felt "less intense" and I became "more comfortable," I generated codes for reduced physical intensity and comfort. Similarly, for my March 16th entry, the phrase, "I know my feet were on the floor but when I was practicing the spinning part, I felt like I was flying," generated codes like grounded feet and weightlessness.

This coding process will also be applied to the interview data. In Gary George's transcript, I coded for themes of rhythm and cross-cultural connection, using phrases like concurrent movement and heartbeat rhythm. In Takashi Konno's interview, I coded for therapeutic movement and ancestral dedication.

After generating a list of these initial, grounded codes, the next step in the analysis is to group them into broader themes. By building themes directly from my journal quotes and interview insights, I ensure the findings are rooted in the physical data of this experience rather than pre-existing texts. For instance, my somatic codes of weightlessness and soft release, combined with Mr. Konno's note on the dance being "therapeutic and calming like Tai Chi," synthesize into the theme: "Hand Gestures and Haptic Autotheory."

This thematic, embodied approach directly answers my research questions and bridges the gap between my methodology and findings. Triangulating my internal, quoted journal reflections with external interview insights ensures that my final themes are rooted in highly specific somatic evidence. To visualize this analytical progression from raw somatic data to an academic framework, Table 1 provides an example of my coding matrix.

Table 1

Example of Thematic Coding Progression for Somatic Autoethnography

Data Source	Raw Data / Quote	Initial Somatic Codes	Synthesized Theme
Reflective Journal (March 12th)	<i>"I felt joyful... I was listening to my body and thinking of my grandparents but I was not sad. It is soft. There was no external pressure."</i>	Soft release; lack of external pressure; joyful sentiment	Hand Gestures and Haptic Autotheory
Reflective Journal (March 14th)	<i>"It was not a heavy sensation but I was feeling so relaxed... I think the hand gesture part became less intense and I became more comfortable with how I was moving."</i>	Relaxed sensation; reduced physical intensity; comfort	Hand Gestures and Haptic Autotheory
Reflective Journal (March 16th)	<i>"I know my feet were on the floor but when I was practicing the spinning part, I felt like I was flying. I didn't feel a sense of fatigue..."</i>	Grounded feet; weightlessness	Hand Gestures and Haptic Autotheory

Interview Data (Gary George)	<i>"I also know that I thought about, um, what we call a heartbeat. Which is, boom, boom, boom... your movements. I would say it was concurrent while I was watching you move."</i>	Heartbeat rhythm; concurrent movement	Rhythm and Cross-Cultural Connection
Interview Data (Gary George)	<i>"You know, there's diversity and many cultures throughout the world, and it was nice to see the, uh, um, what the belief is in Japan and what we believe over here."</i>	Diversity; shared beliefs; natural flow	Rhythm and Cross-Cultural Connection
Interview Data (Takashi Konno)	<i>Describing the somatic experience of the dance as "therapeutic... calm and relaxing, like Tai Chi."</i>	Therapeutic movement; calming; physical grounding	Hand Gestures and Haptic Autotheory
Interview Data (Takashi Konno)	<i>Describing how performers dedicated their dance to their late instructor at her funeral.</i>	Ancestral dedication; spiritual connection	Rhythm and Cross-Cultural Connection

Validity

Because this autoethnographic research relies on my own deeply personal and emotional experiences as primary data, I must apply a high level of reflexivity to ensure the findings remain valid and go beyond mere subjective opinion. The primary threat to validity in this research is the risk of confirmation bias; there is a temptation to construct an exaggerated narrative of healing to satisfy my own desire to process grief. To navigate this and ensure authenticity, I will implement the following strategies:

1. **Data Triangulation:** To prevent my findings from relying solely on fleeting internal feelings, I will cross-reference multiple data sources. My internal, subjective journal entries will be triangulated with external, objective video recordings of my somatic practices. Furthermore, incorporating historical and cultural insights from interviews with Gary George and Takashi Konno will anchor my personal experience within documented traditions.
2. **Reflexive Anchoring:** Engaging directly with ancestral grief carries a heavy emotional burden that could skew data collection. To mitigate this, I will use pre-written questions to guide my reflective journaling. If the emotional weight becomes overwhelming, these predetermined prompts will serve as an anchor, redirecting my focus back to objective somatic and sensory reflections.
3. **A five-minute grounding meditation** precedes practice to center internal sensations and alleviate performative pressure. Additionally, I actively document moments of emotional emptiness or disconnection in my journals. By intentionally recording these "quiet" moments, I prevent an exaggerated narrative of healing and ensure my research reflects a balanced, honest perspective of grief.

Preliminary Results

The preliminary findings of this research emerge from my initial somatic practices combining Nishimonai Bon Odori with Indigenous drumming, as well as early insights from my reflective journaling and my performance in class on April 7th. These somatic practices reveal that the physical act of dancing activates my body's archive of grief, moving my theory out of my head and directly into my physical movements. By focusing on how my body feels during the dance, three main themes have started to emerge:

1. In my practice, I use the black *zukin* (hood), which traditionally hides the performer's face and symbolizes the presence of the deceased. During my interview with Takashi Konno, he explained that while the exact origin of the button between the eyes is unknown, the hood itself is a vital part of the traditional design. This design allows the dancer to step away from their individual identity and connect with the spirit world. This connection was poignantly illustrated in June 2025, when Konno shared a story of a *Nishimonai Bon Odori* where performers dedicated their dance to their late instructor at her funeral. This act of dancing for the deceased illustrates continuing bonds theory—the idea that we do not simply "get over" grief, but instead maintain an ongoing relationship with those we have lost. When I performed with Gary in class for the first time, I danced outside of my room for about two minutes and felt surprisingly calm. This was primarily because, inside the *zukin*, I was able to focus on my internal feelings and listen to his drumming; I did not feel nervous in front of an audience. The meditation beforehand also helped me center myself before the performance.

2. The specific hand gestures and rhythmic footsteps of the *Nishimonai Bon Odori* served as a physical vocabulary that shifted my internal emotional state. In my March 14th journal, I recorded that as I added full-body turns, the hand gesture part became less intense, and I became more comfortable with how I was moving. By March 16th, the repetitive movement culminated in a profound physical shift: *"I know my feet were on the floor, but when I was practicing the spinning part, I felt like I was flying. I didn't feel a sense of fatigue; it was a soft release."* These somatic sensations of flying and soft release are direct manifestations of Haptic Autotheory and Embodied Knowing. The grief of losing my grandparents across an ocean initially felt heavy; however, the repetitive action of the traditional hand gestures created a tangible afterlife within my own body. The physical practice itself, which Mr. Konno described as "therapeutic... calm and relaxing, like Tai Chi" became an internal sense of home that transcended the geographic distance between British Columbia and Japan.
3. Practicing this ritual in the private space of my room to the sound of Gary George's live Indigenous drumming grounded my emotional experience. In the interview with him, Gary told me that he watched my movements and matched the rhythm concurrently, creating what he described as a "heartbeat... boom, boom, boom, boom." He observed a cross-cultural intersection, stating, "There's diversity... and it was nice to see the belief in Japan and what we believe over here." On April 7th, when we performed together in class, I felt my dance and his drumming become one. Without his drum, the experience would have been entirely different. While practicing at home in silence forced me to focus solely on the sounds of my own body, Gary's drum beat truly resonated with me, matching my own heartbeat.

Contributions and Implications

This research offers a critical intervention in how we process grief across geographical and cultural divides. A primary contribution of this research is its shift away from clinical, therapist-led interventions toward a self-directed, autoethnographic somatic practice. By documenting the synthesis of Nishimonai Bon Odori and Indigenous drumming, this research provides a micro-level case study on how ritual dance can be adapted to process grief. Furthermore, it contributes significantly to diasporic scholarship by illustrating how displaced individuals can reconstruct ancestral meaning and build a cross-cultural bridge. The implications of this proposal extend deeply into the conceptual frameworks that ground it. By engaging directly with Disenfranchised Grief, this research suggests that the personally unacknowledged guilt experienced by immigrants who cannot return home for funerals can be validated and mediated through shared rhythmic and somatic practices. The cross-cultural intersection of the Japanese *zokin* and Indigenous drumming offers an implication for Embodied Knowing and Haptic Autotheory: it demonstrates that the body itself can become the archive and the home when the physical homeland is out of reach. Finally, the overarching implication relates directly to continuing bonds theory; this research shows that the ultimate goal of mourning is not to let go or move on, but to actively cultivate a dynamic, living, and rhythmic relationship with those we have lost.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic inquiry began with a profound personal motivation: the loss of my grandparents in Japan while I resided in North America, and the lingering absence-guilt that accompanied my inability to attend their funeral services. To reconcile this physical and emotional distance, I sought a way to honor them by bridging my Japanese heritage with my current life on the unceded Indigenous lands of British Columbia. Through the methodological framework of practice-based autoethnography, I explored the somatic synthesis of the ancestral Nishimonai Bon Odori dance and the grounding rhythms of live Indigenous drumming. My preliminary findings reveal that the repetitive, haptic vocabulary of traditional hand gestures and the rhythmic heartbeat of the drum serve as a powerful somatic bridge, transforming heavy grief into a soft release. The cross-cultural intersection allows me to step outside my individual identity and tangibly connect with the spirit world. Ultimately, the answer to the ‘so what’ question of this research lies in its potential to serve broader immigrant communities. Many individuals find themselves grieving from afar, cut off from the communal mourning structures of their homelands. This research suggests that we are not helpless in the face of geographic displacement; the body can become a transnational carrier for memory. By shifting the mourning process from a sedentary, internalized sorrow to an active, cross-cultural physical performance, this research proposes a new, resilient framework for healing—proving that while we may be separated by oceans, we can still dance with our ancestors.

References

- Akunna, G. I. (2015). An African Igbo Perspective on Mourning Dances and Their Application to Dance/Movement Therapy. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 37(1), 39–59.
- Butté, C. (2023). Dancing at the edge. Finding home. Reflections on movement practice and personal loss. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, 18(4), 305–315.
- Dominguez, K. M. (2018). Encountering Disenfranchised Grief: An Investigation of the Clinical Lived Experiences in Dance/Movement Therapy. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 40(2), 254–276.
- Eliot, K., & Meglin, J. A. (2019). Dances of Loss, Grief, and Endurance in the Face of Trauma. *Dance Chronicle*, 42(3), 265–269.
- Lee, T.-C., Lin, Y.-S., Chiang, C.-H., & Wu, M.-H. (2013). Dance/movement therapy for children suffering from earthquake trauma in Taiwan: A preliminary exploration. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40(1), 151–157.
- Lobar, S. L., Youngblut, J. M., & Brooten, D. (2006). Cross-cultural beliefs, ceremonies, and rituals surrounding death of a loved one. *Pediatric Nursing*, 32(1), 44.
- Miller, J. P., Nigh, K., Binder, M. J., Novak, B., & Crowell, S. (2018). *International Handbook of Holistic Education*. Routledge.
- Papa, V. (2021). Interfacing grief: haptic autotheory & performance as afterlife in Anne Carson's Nox. *Women & Performance*, 31(3), 232–250.
- Pearce, C., & Komaromy, C. (2022). Recovering the body in grief: Physical absence and embodied presence. *Health*, 26(4), 393–410.
- Shaw, B. (2015). Phantom Limbs and the Weight of Grief in Sasha Waltz's "noBody." *Theatre Journal*, 67(1), 21–42.
- Simpkins, S. A., & Myers-Coffman, K. (2017). Continuing Bonds in the Body: Body Memory and Experiencing the Loss of a Caregiver During Adolescence. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 39(2), 189–208.

Spry, T. (2001). Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis.
Qualitative Inquiry, 7(6), 706–732. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700605>

Appendix A

List of Participants

- Yasuhito Nakasato: Primary researcher, author, and practitioner of the somatic embodiment dance.
- Gary George: SFU Officer for Community Relations and a professional Indigenous drummer. Provided live Indigenous drumming for the somatic practice.
- Takashi Konno: Secretary General at the Ugo Town Tourism and Local Products Association. Lifelong professional drummer for the Nishimonai Bon Odori during the Obon season.

Appendix B

Observation and Journaling Protocols

- Setting: Practice takes place in a private residence in Burnaby, British Columbia, an isolated setting chosen purposefully to prioritize emotional safety and remove performative pressure.
- Pre-Practice: A five-minute grounding meditation precedes practice to center internal sensations and alleviate pressure.
- Recording: The physical practice is recorded via an iPhone video to capture transient somatic movements, rhythms, and expressions objectively.
- Post-Practice Journaling: Immediate structured reflective journaling is conducted following the practice to mitigate data loss. If the emotional burden becomes too intense, the pre-written questions serve as an anchor to gently guide focus back to somatic reflections. Moments of emotional emptiness or disconnection are also actively documented to prevent an exaggerated narrative of healing.

Reflective Journaling Prompts:

- Where was the grief sitting in my body before the dance, and where is it sitting now?
- How does the embodiment of Nishimonai Bon Odori bridge the space between the Canadian landscape and my grandparents?
- How do I feel, and where is the grief located in my body while dancing?
- Is it heavy or soft?
- Is there an external pressure?

Appendix C

Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Takashi Konno

- Date: March 25, 2026
- Format: 1-hour virtual interview conducted in Japanese via Zoom.

Topics Covered:

The traditions of the Nishimonai Bon Odori.

The cultural symbolism of the performer's attire, specifically the zukin (hood).

The connection between the dance and ancestral grief.

Interview Guide for Gary George

- Date: March 26, 2026
- Format: 30-minute in-person interview.
- Topics Covered:

The process for creating the music.

Responses to the researcher's somatic movements.

Observations regarding the cross-cultural atmosphere of the session.

Appendix D

Data Analysis Process

- Methodology: A qualitative thematic analysis adapted for autoethnography and somatic research, prioritizing physical, embodied sensations alongside verbal reflections.
- Preparation: Interviews are transcribed with special attention paid to culturally specific nuances regarding mourning.
- Triangulation: Subjective journal entries are cross-referenced with objective video recordings and external interview insights to navigate confirmation bias.
- Coding: Raw sensory data is extracted into descriptive codes (e.g., "soft release," "grounded feet," "heartbeat rhythm").
- Thematic Synthesis: Initial grounded codes are grouped into broader academic themes (e.g., "Hand Gestures and Haptic Autotheory," "Rhythm and Cross-Cultural Connection") directly bridging physical data to academic frameworks.

Appendix E

Project Timetable

- March 12, 2026: Reflective journaling session capturing a joyful sentiment, soft release, and a lack of external pressure.
- March 14, 2026: Reflective journaling session capturing reduced physical intensity and growing comfort with movement.
- March 16, 2026: Reflective journaling session capturing grounded feet alongside feelings of weightlessness and flying.
- March 25, 2026: Takashi Konno shared an illustrative story regarding performers dedicating a dance to their late instructor at her funeral.
- March 26, 2026: A 30-minute in-person interview was conducted with Gary George, focusing on his process for creating the music, his response to the somatic movements, and the cross-cultural atmosphere of the session
- April 7, 2026: In-class performance combining Nishimonai Bon Odori and live Indigenous drumming.
- April 26, 2026: Final paper submission date.