

## **Futures of Black Dance**

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January 12, 2114. Durham, NC

### **in the afrofuturist dance instruction is a solitary pursuit.**

**TeleBrea Roth'astein** waved her hand in front of the sensor pad to open the door of the classroom assigned to Arts and Culture 732.5: Black Social Dance. She needed to check the visual imaging interfaces for her class, scheduled to meet for the first time that evening. TeleBrea was known by a global cohort of students to be a tough but approachable professor of an indeterminate age who encourage her students to understand black dance as a capacity and a strategy, more than a collection of dance forms or even a set of particular practices. Her interface sessions were smart and sweaty; a combination of discussion, provocation, integrated neural system participation, and some very old fashioned dancing. For tonight's session she expected most of the 1500 enrolled university participants and some 80,000 witnesses, with 5 live presence students coming in person to dance in the neural-system participation classroom.

TeleBrea had only been teaching at this private university for a couple of years; well, teaching in person, that is. Long ago, she had run a successful neural distance dance academy of her own. Only recently, the university picked up the feed and broadcast her teaching as an elective 'physical activity' to its student network. it was just two years ago that she was asked to do in-person, on-site sessions. this was highly unusual for someone working in dance, and in particular, black social dance; to be invited to teach classes on campus. TeleBrea's participation vectors had gone from the 1200 she used to have participating in her broke-down, home neuro-pulse network – and that had been operating at a truly slow 5 million clicks per second - to this brave new world of nearly 100,000 students at a time plugged into a hyperfast 2 billion responses per second, full neural interface. She liked working in these advanced, newly-outfitted facilities, where at the tap of her temple-processor she could summon a team of IT support ready to troubleshoot whatever communication that might gone awry.

### **in the future, dance classes are taught by way of distance neural interface as often as not.**

honestly, though, telebrea didn't have much experience working with live students in the classroom. her home-teaching sessions had always been conducted without any students in proximity. and the distance neuro-pulse students tended to be awkwardly detached as they tried to perform the movements that she demonstrated, even if their pulse devices guided their gestures through tiny electric charges. distance dance lessons became popular when neural implants replaced wearable sensors; as dance teachers could generate movement within the very bodies of their students, telebrea, like other industrious dance teachers, jumped onto the bandwagon of impulse-driven instruction. the emergent technological interfaces allowed more and more people to

take up dancing as a creative physical exercise. the plug and play method of having a talented dancer literally move you by way of her movements attracted all sorts of students.

**in the afrofuture, traditional black social dance is still taught body-to-body – at home.**

telebrea's specialty was the old-timey black dances of the twenty-first century. she learned these dances from her father, when she had been a little boy, his father, zekiel, came from a dancing family, and telebrea's parents had met at a dancing protest in new Detroit. zekeil and jadeena – telebrea's mother – danced all the protests that they could in the 2070s; at the resistance against central congo overdevelopment; at the rethinking repatriation affair of south florida; at the holistic happiness hoedown staged in chinese cote d'ivoire. when telebrea was born, zekiel and jadeena knew that he was no single-gender child, and they did the work to allow him to express the fluid gender identities that suited him. intra-gender children were not all that uncommon at the dawn of the twenty-second century; but that dispersed community didn't make anyone's lives easier. between five and eight years old, telebrea preferred to be recognized as a boy, and zekeil taught him the basics of turn of the last century b-boying as he could; he learned those from the old WW4 internet archives that you could still find hooked up to some church communication networks. he taught him the wind-jamming line dances that had been popular in the 2030s, those dances that had become popular in the great power failure decade, when most black folk lived with electricity only half the time. and he taught him the man-to-man be-a-man partner dances, that had developed in the megajails of the 2060s; those dances that alternated tender caress in hand dancing and full-bodied slam dancing, crashing one into the other to synthesized sounds of the mechanical apocalypse. telebrea enjoyed these styles, and the way that his father guided him through the movements the old way, by demonstrating, playing together, discussing the metaphor and meaning, and through full bodied, hand shoulder leg and foot contact.

telebrea learned her warrior dancers from her grandmother, tesladella roth'astean, her mama's mama, who had emigrated from argentina in the 2050s. tesladella taught her the long-time ago black power fertility and power dances – twerking and j-setting. learning these dances from her grammamere helped telebrea understand her feminine and social self as a capacity she had to practice. in the middle of a vogue drop, a movement she always did as part of her twerk sequence, telebrea thought of herself as a badass girlboy, ready to kick the ass of racist bs worldwide and across time.

**in the afrofuture, some dancers claim mixed-gender, mixed-race blackness**

Telebrea's social dance classes gained in popularity as he matured as a mixed-gender mediated personality. he began posting his 3-d visualization dance logs as a teenager, first alternating gender representation week by week and then day by day. she didn't want her gendershifting to be a trick, so she always chose a unified mode per day;

something perhaps recognizably male, surreptitiously androgynous, but demonstrably female, or sometimes straight up fem-bot glamour puss. her glamour puss persona, while popular, took considerable time to generate, and Telebrea only worked that mode on occasion. Telebrea's claim to blackness, though never wavered.

in the afrofutur, neural attachments allow students to connect with instructors at at the level of musculature impulse.

The five on-site student teaching assistants freaked Telebrea out. they were young, hungry for movement, agile, and not very nice, she thought. of course they each had excellent technique, and could do pretty much anything that came their way. they were all hyperflexible, and a couple of them could dislocate their shoulders on command to perform the old 'mars-man' styles that blew up in the 2140s. the university assigned these teaching assistants to telebrea without her consultation, and they were paid with tuition remission and super fast neural connection interfaces. the teaching assistants provided an alternative physical narrative for the distance learners; students could alternate between the impulses that Telebrea emitted and those of any of the teaching assistants. Telebrea knew her dancing was infinitely more nuanced than that of the TAs, but many of the course enrollees preferred to feel the spikes of energy cast by the younger dancers.

Teaching, Telebrea relaxed into remembering the dances and engaging their contours. She dipped, with subtlety and suppleness, carefully tending to the motions and their implications, narrating the histories as she had been taught them, and demonstrating their bounded weightiness, rhythmicity, and affect. Today she chose to focus on the oldest dance in her repertoire, a strangely free-floating, but rhythmic partner dance from the old days. Telebrea knew his black history, and he knew that this was a dance about the industrial prison complex, and the way that 21<sup>st</sup> century black youth would engage in extravagant gang dance battles, and how this dance was very popular as part of that practice. the dance called for a sort of weighted volition down and back, down and back with the legs, while the arms floated and pushed, gathered into loose fists, and the chest heaved in time to a soundscore of dogs barking and the old police sirens.

Telebrea danced, and the TAS looked bored. She knew that they would rather be doing their "bumping time" interface dances, the ones that gave full-body stimulation by neural feedback in response to slightest passing erotic thought. some folks thought of these new styles as just sex dances, that these new dances that interfaced young people did together in groups of 8 or 10 were nothing more than electronic orgies; they had nothing to do with dancing and little to do with black culture. Telebrea wasn't sure. maybe there was something in this group undulation that had emerged in a hook-up network between Oakland and South Memphis that told a story about black erotic connection? once, she switched on her feedback paradigm; this allowed her to feel the gestures that her students created, to better understand where the movement worked and, more commonly, where it didn't. sure enough, while most of her students were trying to capture the gestures she created, others were watching interface news feeds or chatting about music.

Telebrea did the unusual. She screwed up her face, clenched her fists, deepened her voice, and morphed into a male personae. "Come on now, wake up!" he said .. "This is an important dance you need to know to understand black history! This is an old courtship dance that would be done by partners who wanted to get each other's attention. Jack your legs, heave your chest, make a loose fist, and push up alongside your partner so you can dance in team. Let's go now, this is it. It's time to do the... running man!"

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