



Configurations in Motion:
Performance Curation and Communities of Colour
3rd Edition

Concordia University
SLIPPAGE: Performance|Culture|Technology
Montréal, Canada
June 1-2, 2017

CONTENTS

Co-edited by Seika Boye, Jane Gabriels, MJ Thompson.
Essays appear in order of presentation.

Configurations in Montréal:
Performance Curation and
Communities of Colour, 3rd Edition
Overview
4

Configurations in Montréal
2017 Presenters
6

Configurations in Motion
2015 and 2016 Presenters
8

By Way of Introduction: An Exchange
of Thinking Among Seika Boye and
Thomas F. DeFrantz
10

Curating with Artists & The Bronx
Jane Gabriels
18

Corps de rythmes et résistances
Rhodnie Désir
25

Greetings from Pow Wow Montréal
Alan Harrington
35

Position Statement
Soraya Peerbaye
38

Curating Dancers and Dances
from the African Diaspora
Vivine Scarlett
44

Notes Toward a New Configuration
Tara Aisha Willis
52

Redressing “Black as Problem” Through
Critical Performative Pedagogy

Nicole L. Martin

58

Thinking with Four Scenes:
Performance Ethnography in Haiti

Dasha A. Chapman

65

Re-Politicizing Community Arts

Nikki Shaffeullah

76

Notes From The Sunken Place:
Decolonizing Institutional Practices
from Within

Rasu Jilani

88

Turning Point(s) +
(Still) Under Construction

Joyce Rosario

95

opening out toward grace

thomas f. defrantz

101

Position Statement

Christine Sokaymob Frederick

108

The Gulf Between Two Places:
Good Ideas and Thoughtful Intentions

Seika Boye

114

Dance is Foundational

MJ Thompson

119

Thank You’s

123

Cover Image

*Dusk Society, Dusk Dances Festival, Toronto, 2017.
Choreographer and interpreter: Rhodnie Désir /
Artistic Director of Rhodnie Désir Création.
Photo: John Lauener.*

CONFIGURATIONS IN MONTRÉAL: PERFORMANCE CURATION AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOUR, 3RD EDITION OVERVIEW

Canadian and American performance curators, artists, and scholars gathered in Montréal June 1 and 2, 2017 to share work, develop resources, and build strategies for supporting performance in, for and by Black, Indigenous and communities of colour in Canada and the United States.

Convened by the department of Art Education at Concordia University, in collaboration with the University of Toronto and the Institute for Dance Studies, SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology, and Duke University, the event was curated by Dr. Thomas F. DeFrantz (Chair of African and African American Studies and Professor of Dance and Theater Studies at Duke University); and Dr. Seika Boye (Lecturer at the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies and Director of the Institute for Dance Studies at the University of the Toronto), to explore topics that impact communities of colour.

The event included morning statements from presenters, with live translation in French and English, and public discussion, as well as an afternoon long-table on June 1st. A talk by DeFrantz, entitled “Dancing the Museum,” took place in association with DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art on June 2nd at Montréal’s Museum of Fine Arts.

The gathering in Montréal built on two previous iterations of *Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation and Communities of Color* first convened at Duke University in June 2015 and then again in July 2016. Produced by DeFrantz with Montréal-based curator Dr. Jane Gabriels and post-doctorate fellow Dr. Dasha Chapman, *Configurations* has involved approximately 15-20 curators, artists, scholars, presenters, and funders each year, and has resulted in a self-published booklet of essays. This 2018 publication constitutes a partial record of the 2017 gathering.

Montréal was the first step towards *Configurations* moving beyond its initial home at Duke to become a mobile source of information/knowledge-sharing, able to move where needed and bring people together. At Concordia, project collaborators were MJ Thompson (Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies and Practice



Configurations in Montréal participants. Photo: Staff.

Art Education, Concordia), Jane Gabriels (Independent Curator, Ph.D.), David Rose (BFA candidate, Studio Arts), and Angelique Willkie (Assistant Professor, Department of Contemporary Dance, Concordia).

Configurations in Montréal: Performance Curation and Communities of Colour, 3rd Edition was presented with generous support from the following: Art Education Department, Concordia University; Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture, Concordia University; Office of the Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University; SSHRC/CRSH, SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology, Duke University, and the University of Toronto (Institute for Dance Studies and Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies), in addition to DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art, Pepatián, and International Community for Performing Arts Curators (CICA-ICAC).

Links

<https://criticaldancestudiesMontréal.com/events/configurations-in-Montréal/>

<https://sites.duke.edu/configurationsinmotion/>

<https://dhc-art.org/thomas-f-defrantz-event/>

<https://vimeo.com/275759059>

Interviews

<http://www.concordia.ca/cunews/finearts/2017/05/configurations--q-a-with-thomas-f--defrantz.html>

<http://www.concordia.ca/cunews/finearts/2017/05/configurations--q-a-with-seika-boye.html?c=finearts>

<http://www.concordia.ca/cunews/finearts/2017/05/configurations--q-a-with-jane-gabriels.html?c=finearts>

CONFIGURATIONS IN MONTRÉAL 2017 PRESENTERS

Dr. Seika Boye

Dance scholar, artist and educator //
Lecturer, the Centre for Drama, Theatre and
Performance Studies // Director, Centre for
Dance Studies, University of Toronto

Dr. Dasha A. Chapman

Scholar, dancer, and community connector //
Visiting Assistant Professor, Critical Dance
Studies, Hampshire College/Five College
Dance

Dr. Thomas F. DeFrantz

Professor, African and African American
Studies, Dance, Theater Studies, Gender
Sexuality & Feminist Studies, Duke
University // Director, SLIPPAGE:
Performance|Culture|Technology

Rhodnie Désir

Dancer, choreographer, speaker and artistic
director of RHODNIE DESIR CREATIONS
(Montreal) // Executive producer, BOW'T
TRAIL Project

Christine Sokaymoh Frederick

Co-founder and Artistic Director, Alberta
Aboriginal Performing Arts // Producer,
Rubaboo Arts Festival // Executive Director,
Dreamspeakers Film Festival Society
(Edmonton)

Dr. Jane Gabriels

Curator/producer, writer, and performer //
Executive Director, Made in BC - Dance On
Tour (Vancouver) // Co-Director, Pepatián
(Bronx, NY)

Alan Harrington

Founder, The Red Urban Project // Founder
and Organizer, Montréal Pow Wow

Rasu Jilani

Social sculptor, Independent Cultural
Producer, Director of Recruiting and
Community Engagement, NEW INC at
New Museum (New York)

Dr. Nicole L. Martin

Lecturer and Director of Academic Affairs,
Lewis Honors College, University of
Kentucky

Soraya Peerbaye

Curator, Producer, Poet // Program
and Curatorial Co-Director, Anandam
Dancetheatre (Toronto)

Joyce Rosario

Interim Artistic Director,
PuSh International Performing Arts Festival
(Vancouver)



Presenters participate in Long Table Discussion, Configurations in Montréal. Left to right: Thomas F. DeFrantz and Jaamil Olawale Kosoko; Soraya Peerbaye, Jane Gabriels, and Rasu Jilani; Vivine Scarlett. Photos: Staff.

Vivine Scarlett

Administrator, choreographer, instructor //
 Founder and Curator,
 dance Immersion (Toronto)

Nikki Shaffeeullah

Facilitator, director, performer, community-
 engaged artist // Artistic Director, The
 AMY Project (Toronto)

Tara Aisha Willis

Associate Curator of Performance, Museum
 of Contemporary Art Chicago // PhD
 candidate in Performance Studies, NYU

CONCORDIA PARTICIPANTS

Lisa Ndejuru

(French/English Translation)
 Ph.D. Candidate, INDI, Concordia
 University (Montréal)

David Rose

(Research Assistant)
 BFA Candidate, Studio Arts, Concordia
 University (Montréal)

Dr. MJ Thompson

Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies
 and Practices, Art Education, Concordia
 University (Montréal)

Angelique Willkie

(Collaborator/Organizer)
 Assistant Professor, Department of
 Contemporary Dance, Concordia University
 (Montréal)

SPECIAL GUESTS

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko

Performance artist and poet // 2017-19
 Princeton Arts Fellow // Dance/USA Board
 of Trustees

Michèle Moss

Associate Professor, Dance,
 University of Calgary

CONFIGURATIONS IN MOTION 2015 AND 2016 PRESENTERS

Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation and Communities of Color's first and second editions were hosted by SLIPPAGE: Performance, Culture, Technology in residence at Duke University, as well as the African and African American Studies Department and the Franklin Humanities Center at Duke University. The first meeting was convened June 27-28, 2015, and the second edition was held July 14-15, 2016 at Duke. These gatherings gave artists, educators, and presenters an opportunity to collectively discuss, reflect and envision together collaborative opportunities, and to model language and points-of-view that might help enliven discourse in the performing arts. The following is a list of presenters from the first two *Configurations in Motion* symposia.

A. Nia Austin-Edwards (2015, 2016)

Founder, PURPOSE Productions //
Editor and contributor, *The Dance*
Enthusiast

Lori D. Barcliff Baptista (2016)

Director, African-American Cultural
Center, and Adjunct Assistant Professor,
School of Theatre and Music, University of
Illinois-Chicago

Moira Brennan (2015, 2016)

Program Director, Multi-Arts Production/
MAP Fund

Dasha A. Chapman (2015, 2016)

Postdoctoral Associate,
African and African American Studies,
Duke University // Ph.D. NYU Performance
Studies

Thomas F. DeFrantz (2015, 2016)

Professor, African and African American
Studies, Dance, Theater Studies, Gender
Sexuality & Feminist Studies, Duke
University // Director, SLIPPAGE:
Performance|Culture|Technology

Jane Gabriels, Ph.D. (2015, 2016)

Director, Papatian (Bronx, NY) // Co-
founder, International Community of
Performing Arts Curators CICA-ICAC
(Montréal)

Ebony Noelle Golden (2016)

CEO, Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative,
LLC // Artistic director, Body Ecology
Womanist Performance Project

Aaron Greenwald (2015, 2016)

Executive Director, Duke Performances

Levi Gonzalez (2015)

NYC-based dance artist // Director of Artist Programs, Movement Research

Tempestt Hazel (2016)

Curator, writer, artist advocate // Founding editor, *Sixty Inches From Center*

Ishmael Houston-Jones (2015)

Choreographer, teacher, performer, author, arts advocate

Rasu Jilani (2015)

Independent curator, social sculptor, entrepreneur // Director of Community Programs, MAPP International // Co-Founder, Coup d'état Arts

Joseph F. Jordan (2015)

Associate Professor of African/African-American Studies and Director of the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Christina Knight (2015)

Art historian, playwright // Consortium for Faculty Diversity // Postdoctoral Fellow in Theater and Dance at Bowdoin College

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko (2015)

Independent curator and artist // Co-director of anonymous bodies

Mario LaMothe (2016)

Postdoctoral Research Associate, African-American Cultural Center, University of Illinois – Chicago

Nicole L. Martin (2015)

Ph.D., Performance as Public Practice at The University of Texas at Austin

Paloma McGregor (2015, 2016)

Choreographer, writer, organizer // Founder, *Dancing While Black*; Co-founder, *Angela's Pulse*

Craig T. Peterson (2016)

Director of Programs and Presentation, Gibney Dance

Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor (Ben Pryor) (2016)

Independent curator and producer operating under the moniker *tbSPMGMT*

Risa Shoup (2016)

Independent Curator and Development Consultant // Executive Director, Fourth Arts Block (FABnyc)

María Wethers (2015, 2016)

Dancer/Performer // Independent Manager, Producer and Curator

Tara Aisha Willis (2016)

PhD candidate in Performance Studies, NYU // Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, Movement Research

Andrea Woods Valdés (2015, 2016)

Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance, Duke University // Artistic Director, SOULWORKS/ Andrea E. Woods & Dance

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: AN EXCHANGE OF THINKING AMONG SEIKA BOYE AND THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ

As curators of the 3rd iteration of *Configurations in Motion (in Montréal)*, we decided to begin with a few questions to set a frame for the essays that follow in this booklet. Here are our reflections.

What might curation feel like for people of colour?

SEIKA BOYE: I read this question and consider two things: 1. the experience of curating for the public; 2. experiencing something that I perceive to have been curated for me – as a mixed-heritage Black woman. These perspectives and positions are actually very different – curating and programming are almost always done collaboratively; experiencing performance is ultimately a personal experience – regardless of who surrounds you (though of course your company can change how a performance is received). My experience as an individual is what I bring to my collective curatorial collaborations. Depending on who is in the room, this job can be drastically different. The difference that I want to focus on here, over a year since we gathered in Montréal, is the phenomenon of what Rosemarie Roberts (dance studies scholar, dancer and educator based at Connecticut College) refers to as ‘social ghosts,’ which she writes, “denote the present, but mostly absent, dynamics of oppression and privilege that individuals learn to embody, conceal, and ignore in a White world” and “describe the redolent and concealed social issues that haunt individual lives and plague society.”¹ The details of these social ghosts differ among people, based on their identity intersections, geographic locations, class and life experience. What I wonder about curating is how the nuance of individual experience culminates in collective and shared forms of resistance. How, I ask, is curation a form of resistance with the potential to reach beyond the scope of one’s personal experience and into a realm of collective impact – especially when the themes of creative output aren’t necessarily ‘about race,’ when we don’t always want them to be ‘about race.’ How does the acknowledgement of a ghost in the room, as opposed to an elephant, create community based in the moment by

1. Roberts, Rosemarie. “Dancing with Social Ghosts: Performing Embodiments, Analyzing Critically.” *Transforming Anthropology* (2013): 4-14.

moment, day by day moving forwardness that is required of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

THOMAS DEFRANTZ: I'm thinking that a challenge for curators has to do with the understanding of peer group. Are curators trying to work in order to demonstrate to other curators what could be? Are the ghosts in the room the other curators and funders who might somehow celebrate your achievement as a good curator, or are they the family members who weren't able to attend the performance? Can they be both of these, and if so, whose desires might be respected more? In some ways, I wonder if the ghosts in the room aren't all the people who make attending performance very much a group event. After all, none of us are locked into an individual identity that stays somehow singular. So while attending a performance might be personal, to me, it isn't really singular. Thinking in this way, if we're trying to satisfy supposed comrades who are other curators, we might miss out on creating an environment that encourages people who are not "professional audiences" to gather and experience performances. My experience as an individual is surely bound up in our potential as a group. But if the group I am most concerned with are the other curators who might want to, say, read this collection of essays, then I seem to be busy with a peer group who are not actually the people I work alongside daily to shape our encounters – that would be the audiences I hope to gather to respond to the performances.

Maybe this leads to a related question: Who do you curate for?

SB: I agree with you entirely that the experience of a performance is personal but not singular. I think immediately of your "I'm Am Black (you have to be willing to not know)" (2017)² and the work you do through this writing to clarify and complicate the experience of witnessing a performance for a Black person. It actually took my breath away because you described something so personal so well – and part of that power was through describing how the group we witness with impacts the personal experience, including the scan about in theatres and lobbies for who is there and who isn't ... the ghosts ...

So, who do I curate for? Can I say I don't know, or rather, for people I don't know in addition to those I do. For people who might often feel that most of what is offered in performing arts and visual arts spaces is not for them. I love the people and communities I know, but I also want to encounter new people. I want to

2. DeFrantz, Thomas F. "I Am Black (you have to be willing to not know)." *Theater* 47, no. 2 (2017): 9-21.

discover what happens through expanding relevance – I want my white mom of two Black adult kids to care as much as two Black teenagers. I want my sons to care. I think very often about the students I teach and expanding the scope of their ideas of what may speak to them, while also having an increasing awareness that I know less and less about their social spheres. I spend far more time at home in my kitchen and living room hanging with my boys than I do at performances – which means I’m also thinking a lot about generational divides when I curate. Who has time to attend a performance or an exhibit or a workshop and how might shifting the time it is offered bring different people into a space?

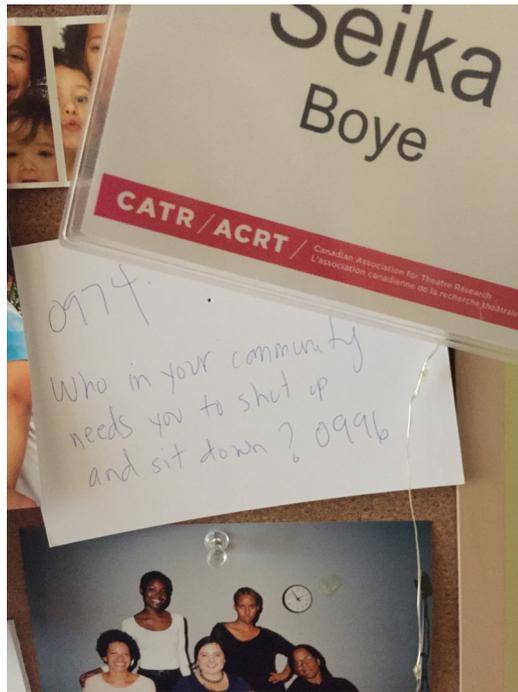
When I refer to the collective experience of curating I speak to the fact that we are so often (or I am so often), not making decisions alone. When MJ (Thompson) and Jane (Gabriels) invited me to invite six people to our gathering and left it entirely up to me (for real) I realized how rare this experience was ... is. And I would say I thought a lot about young(er) voices, about the people who I think would feel happy, expanded, emboldened, relieved to know one another. I’m talking a lot about age here, which surprises me to write but which makes so much sense.

It is never my primary goal to demonstrate something to another curator, but often I find myself asking “isn’t it obvious that we could or should do this or that?” and then I realize NO, it is not obvious! What a revelation that has been to me in recent years. So now, as I find myself in new rooms and new spaces with new people and different decision-making powers I don’t hesitate to say what seems so obvious. We are in a political moment where people seem to listen – for who they are listening I am not always sure, I can’t be, but as you suggest, and I like this, perhaps the ghosts are the people who aren’t in the room with me. That’s who I’m curating for or rather this is who I am motivated by. I also have a postcard on my bulletin board from Selina Thompson’s *Race Cards*, which I attended in Toronto in January 2018. We were instructed to write down the contents of one of one thousand cards in her installation about performance, Blackness, and curation. The card I chose, #0996 asks, “Who in your community needs you to shut up and sit down?” I try to ask myself this more often.

What seems important to you about engaging ‘histories’ as a starting point for your work?

SB: I am a dancer, a historian and a writer and more and more often I curate. The questions that I process through these practices are often (but not always) about Blackness, location, legislation, bodies in groups and crowds together. I want to

know what ghost is with me at the corner in any given city, in a studio, in a classroom. At the most basic level, knowing the history of a place is about personal safety. Who am I at this intersection of longitude and latitude and am I safe? This is a question of the history of a place. From this point, engagement with a location and its people is also a dance with its history and the history I am making in it. When I curate, or present, or write, or dance, or teach I hope to acknowledge that there are social ghosts in the room for people, even if I don't know it. I am ready to validate if needed. When curation is ahistorical doesn't it lack this notion of safety and survival that is inherent to human instinct? How can curation be a form of validation without always being a repetition or 'about race' or 'dependent on colour?'



Card #0996, Selina Thompson's *Race Cards*, Toronto, 2018.
Photo: Seika Boye.

In “The Color Fetish,” Toni Morrison writes that “colorism is so very available — it is the ultimate narrative short cut.”³ It is the ultimate narrative shortcut because of the history of racism and the strength of racist stereotype – but what happens when these short cuts leave out the social ghosts – what happens when the history presented is the one that benefits from and uses colour in order to repeat and support and reinforce white privilege and supremacy? What happens if we stop repeating ourselves for the benefit of those other than ourselves? What happens when we curate without these easy short cuts? What do we inherently challenge? Morrison defends her own goal to “defang cheap racism, annihilate color fetish, which is reminiscent of slavery itself.” Her need to defend herself comes from what she describes as being accused of literary white-washing because she has worked

3. Morrison, Toni. “The Color Fetish.” In *The Origin of Others*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017 (41-54).

for decades to write without the “ultimate narrative short cut.” In Canada, right now, I feel that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has become one of these narrative, and curatorial, and political short cuts. Black Lives Matter has become a narrative short cut. These are short cuts that negate the social ghosts that preceded these political moments, the ghosts that they will create, the ghosts that will persist as the moments fade. For me, the future of curating is about acknowledging social ghosts without depending on the narrative shortcuts of people who have been oppressed and violated by the constant onslaught of racism in the United States and Canada and beyond. *Configurations in Montréal* was an opening to actualizing, articulating and trying to see this hinged goal manifest.

How, I ask, is curation a form of resistance with the potential to reach beyond the scope of one’s personal experience and into a realm of collective impact – especially when the themes of creative output aren’t necessarily ‘about race,’ when we don’t always want them to be ‘about race.’

Seika Boye

TD: I’m very glad you feel this way about our gathering! I agree that when we assemble, we realize that other possibilities abound, and that our capacities needn’t be limited by our circumstances ‘at home.’ But this is also what we want for our audiences: that they might assemble to consider how capacities expand and there are social possibilities beyond what has been proscribed by the dominant social orders. For me, the ghosts that you refer to are shifty and fugitive, and able to distend beyond any singular awareness; they remind us to stay open to possibilities. So they can and do accompany us throughout our lives, whether we attend performances at the community center or the opera house. But they also hope for us to feel, in a progressive way, an opening out toward others in our encounters with performance. I think of the ghosts as being much smarter than we are, because they understand the connections among us better than we do. For me, to acknowledge the ghosts in our shared labor as curators means to make space for them in the conversations and in the venues – to consider what might happen if we paid attention to their presence, as you say.

Maybe the metaphor of curation as engineering could help some here. When we think of engineering, we tend to understand some limits to the encounter and its responsibilities. A bridge is designed to allow people to move from one place to another. It doesn’t matter much how it looks, but it does need to function

effectively. Sometimes its appearance will aid its usefulness, as people might be encouraged to cross the bridge if it appeals to an aesthetic sensibility. But we don't expect bridges to move everyone everywhere; they are quite particular in their location and value. What if curation was considered in this way? We aren't all trying to move everyone everywhere; but we do need to provide an effective bridge that helps people move. It matters who is moving, and where they are moving to and from. But the bridge needs to be a particular place in order to function. Too often, I think that curatorial platforms are designed to be fancy and fun, but

not to be sturdy or in relationship to any particular groups of people or places. Who is coming across this bridge, from where, and headed towards what? It can seem like fun to put a bunch of performances next to each other and hope that audiences will enjoy the things that you like, but ultimately curators might want to be concerned with who is going where in order to design sturdy platforms. And understanding who might want to be moved and how they move could be more of the curator's craft, rather than being focused on the performance objects on the 'art island.' Far too often, I think that curators focus on the 'art' rather than the craft of encountering people and helping them imagine how to move.

SB: I love this engineering proposal! Thank-you. And thank-you for naming this concern with 'art.' It's the 'art' that leads to the revolving door of the same crowds, and the family members who will weather one performance a year but not ... five or six. Why would they? What you are proposing is that a bridge is a place in itself and a path to somewhere else – it takes us somewhere that would otherwise be very difficult to go. I often use the image of a tension bridge when teaching movement and balance in particular – and the principal that dynamic, directional energy (tension) in multiple directions, simultaneously, is required in order for the bridge to be suspended and, as you say, sturdy. And it needs to stay that way otherwise it loses its potential to be a useful bridge. This principal of tension is also a radiant image, and if you are an actual human achieving balance in this dynamic way, it is

We really do have to move beyond thinking of curation as an exercise of power or a demonstration of skill, but rather imagine it toward the actions of caring, listening, and responding in grace. Often, this means moving out of the way, towards the quiet, and cycling away from the circulations of power that surround abundant resources and real estate.

Thomas DeFrantz



CURATING - COMMUNITIES - COLOR panel discussion, Configurations in Motion 2016, Duke University.
Photo: Roxanne Campbell.

a radiant and wonderful feeling. This is a deeply useful way to think of the active role of curating. And, it brings us back to your suggestion that ghosts “hope for us to feel, in a progressive way, an opening to encounters with performance” and that they are “smarter than we are.” This is a feeling I carry often – the one that people coming to see performance or exhibitions about performance are much smarter than I am because they know themselves better than I know them. I surrender to this fact or at least I try. As curators, don’t we hope to reach just one part of a person, and if we’re lucky one part that they themselves don’t know is there? And we have to keep asking ourselves, who isn’t here?

TD: Yes, so very well asked! And if we could help encourage the possibilities to slow down and reconsider; to imagine care for another as a capacity of performance, well, this could be one of the ways that our curatorial work enlivens in the place of emergent relationships. Rather than in the hallways of some sort of history of art or aspiration to be settled into relationships of power and privilege. We really do have to move beyond thinking of curation as an exercise of power or a demonstration of skill, but rather imagine it toward the actions of caring, listening, and responding in grace. Often, this means moving out of the way, towards the quiet, and cycling

away from the circulations of power that surround abundant resources and real estate. The idea that sometimes we need to sit down and shut up resonates deeply for me here. White supremacy and white leadership are implicated directly in this assertion now, and will be for some time in the future; whiteness needs to understand that it is not helping at all as we need to reshape the worlds we live in and what will be possible. Obviously, we will never understand enough about how we come into relationship as people to account for the multitude of things that happen in performance. But in a willingness to get out of the way we can maybe model the “something else” that is so important to cultivating a livable future. Thank you, dear Seika, for this opportunity to imagine outward together.

SB: Thank you, Tommy, for all of the possibilities and potential you have opened up for so many.



SEIKA BOYE, PHD is a scholar, writer, educator and artist whose practices revolve around dance and movement. She is a Lecturer at the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of the Toronto. <http://dramacentre.utoronto.ca/seika-boye/>. <https://ago.ca/artist-residence-seika-boye>.

THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ, PHD teaches at Duke University and directs SLIPPAGE: Performance|Culture|Technology, a research group that explores emerging technology in live performance applications. slippage.org.

Jane Gabriels
CURATING WITH ARTISTS & THE BRONX

THE SOUTH BRONX is one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States and, with its strong Afro-Caribbean-Latino communities, is also a site of *enormous* cultural wealth. It is also a borough now experiencing the impacts of hyper-gentrification.

Within this context, what might curatorial work do to support strong futures for local artists? This essay provides possible sites of growth emerging from an investigation of the past with the future in sight.

To first offer some historical context on the borough, here are some quick and incomplete insights, which might sound fantastical, and which also actually happened:

We begin with the river and flat land reaching into rolling hills. The river is renamed after a Dutch immigrant. First Nations get what they can until their voices are mostly whispers among the trees and they fade, stage left, in a 1, 2, 3.

Like a demanding fist, that island to the south, that previous Lenape territory, keeps knocking. It builds a bridge, railroad tracks, subway lines, anything to pull the Bronx closer. Manhattan claims all the attention - clasping at rivers luxuriously reaching and curling around its swagger.

Skip ahead, skip ahead.

Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted is hired to create a plan for the farms and villages in the Bronx. He proposes to build upon what is already happening there and offers to develop a series of small towns scattered throughout the borough with interconnecting roadways that flow and sweep around the hills. The corruption that is often politics throws that proposal the politicians paid for into the river and they adopt the grid from the island to lock in property values. Bam. That first got the door open.

Soon, soon there is a king who moves first and asks questions, if there



South Bronx. Photo: Marisol Diaz-Gordon, 2003.

are any left to be uttered, later. Robert Moses. He moves and shoves huge numbers of people out the way of his construction. A group of women take a bus south to protest against the plans to uproot their families. Yep, you guessed it. The building went on, a huge feat of engineering. The hills bowed and the engineers clapped their hands in victory, and politicians joined in the applause too, and people were moved out of sight, in a sudden rapid exit, stage right.

For the people who remained, it got worse. No. Yes. Someone owned that building, and someone decided to tell someone to burn it down to collect on the insurance from someone else. My friends' family woke up from their sleep in time to get out. Twice. She became a documentary photographer – catching and saving moments before they're gone, before they fade into that river of time.

How do we imagine with and beyond this history? In terms of performance curation, the question I've been thinking about is: How do we curate futurities? Or - to connect this thought even more with process - how do we continue to find and continue expansive practices that curate for / towards many futures?

As part of my research, Pepatían acknowledges on its website that our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Weckquasgeek (Algonquin speakers, closely related to the Lenape), and the Siwanoy. Land acknowledgement is not that

common in the United States, and is something that we're learning more about from our northern neighbors. It's a first step towards larger steps.

Moving from this current recognition of the past, we move into the near present: to better understand what long-standing collaborators and friends were thinking about the changes in their home borough, I interviewed Bronx-based artists and residents. Here are some excerpts from Spring 2017 interviews:

"I see the potential for this new audience that comes in, and within that confluence there are people that want culture, art and I think the borough is positioned to take advantage of that - it has the space."
Soldanela Rivera

"A long, long time ago, with the Zulu Nation, Queen Rha, Rha Goddess taught me: 'Rok, if your students, particularly your female students, aren't learning how to think critically, from you, then there is no point in you teaching them how to do a headspin.' That really hit me hard. This is an older woman who was part of that first Zulu Nation, that beginning, and she was like: 'What's the point? What's the point of doing a headspin if you don't even know why people got on their heads in the first place back in the 60s and 70s.' It made such a difference because now I stop breakdancing just for me, and I was like now I have to tell people, 'You see me doing this on the floor? There were no dance programs.' This is what we had that was tangible and could do right now. And I was in charge of saying what the fundamentals are. I created the vocabulary. This is what I start to give back, this is how I start to give back." *Rokafella*

"My name is Caridad De La Luz, I'm a spoken word artist and performer, better known as La Bruja. I'm also a teaching artist, and I'm born and raised in the Boogie Down Bronx, and I still live here. Where I live there's a beautiful space that I've been

"I see the potential for this new audience that comes in, and within that confluence there are people that want culture, art and I think the borough is positioned to take advantage of that - it has the space."

Soldanela Rivera

cultivating. It's a garage from the 1920s, an old trucking garage that is now being utilized to do readings, meditations, dances, rehearsals, photo shoots. It's an open space. And outside there's also a natural space, where we have two sibling trees, that are well over 100 years old. I'd love to see artists experience the Bronx in a whole other way - and see what type of creativity and art comes from that connection." *Caridad De La Luz*

"I would like to see Hostos Community College get its science building, its medical health care building. One of the things that I'm concerned about in the future of the school is the fact that there's not enough real estate for it to grow as it begins to fight that other new growth. They still have the only free dental clinic in the borough, and they want to expand that. That's needed. ... The other thing I'd like to see some kind of inter-borough crosstown service. The borough is big, and it's hard to move from side to side. Have like maybe at four points - one around the Van Courtlandt area, and you can just cut, and then west to east - you go to 145th, you use that same strip, but above, kind of like arching, like super sci-fi." *Soldanela Rivera*



In addition to ongoing performance, mentoring and teaching projects produced by Pepatián, these interviews provide insights and material as pathways to think about future curatorial projects. They offer possibilities that could continue moving ground before it is further solidified underneath the weight of gentrification forces and pressures. And they foreground the primacy of local artists in the history, culture and future of Bronx, New York.

To better mark the ground-shifting efforts of local artists in the borough, the Bronx-based Artists and Non-profit Organizations 1840-2014 Timeline (available on Pepatián website: www.pepatian.org) highlights the previous work of local artists and residents to create impactful changes in the Bronx. By placing arts and non-profits at the center of the boroughs' history and development, this timeline builds on previous work by other Bronx organizations and individuals to further focus on the vision and dedication of borough residents and artists.

Curating the future can include looking back into the past for places of support and lineage; it is also about imagining what could also be created as boldly as possible from that past, out of that past, despite it, beyond it. These current interviews could well be precursors to the next round of moves by artists and residents to vigorously support the quality of life in their home borough. Artists and residents are checking in, checking back in, moving outwards, and checking in again. The borough itself as Elder.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: JANE GABRIELS, PHD is a performer and writer whose doctoral dissertation from Montréal's Concordia University focused on artists, creative process, and non-profits in the South Bronx, New York. She has helped initiate and been invited to co-organize several symposiums on performance curation: L'Université du Québec à Montréal (2014), Duke University (2015), and Concordia University (2017). She recently co-edited *Curating Live Arts: Critical perspectives, Essays, and Conversations on Theory and Practice* (Berghahn Books, Fall 2018) and contributed a chapter. In 2012, she graduated from the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance. Currently she is Executive Director at Made in BC - Dance On Tour (Vancouver) and contributes to the ongoing work of the Bronx-based, non-profit arts organization, Pepatían, as one of its co-Directors. pepatian.org; janejaneproductions.com madeinbc.org cica-icac.org



Jane Gabriels. Photo: Marisol Diaz.

CARIDAD DE LA LUZ, widely known as “La Bruja” (“The Witch”). Best known for her performances on Russell Simmons’ HBO series “Def Poetry Jam,” she is one of America’s leading spoken-word poets. Her awards include recognition as a “Bronx Living Legend” by the Bronx Music Heritage Center and inclusion in a list of “Top 20 Puerto Rican Women Everyone Should Know.” She was recently a lead in the successful Off Broadway run as China Rodriguez, the revolutionary daughter turned Young Lord in the musical “I LIKE IT LIKE THAT.” In 2017, she performed a full-evening length compilation of songs for “Salsa Bruja” with a full band as part of Wave Hill’s Bronx Salsa Fest, featuring local dancers choreographed by Nilsa De La Luz. dedicated artist-activist, La Bruja frequently

performs at schools, universities, hospitals, and community centers around the country. Creator of the “From The Page To The Stage, How Can I Change the World?, Write Your Wrongs, Latinas 4 Life” and other writing workshops, she has facilitated these workshops in schools and community development centers nationwide with transformational results. La Bruja continues to support positive change for the hip-hop generation through organizations such as Voices UnBroken, BronxWorks, New York City Mission Society, Good Sheppard Services and Papatian, Inc. She is currently developing a 1920s trucking garage on her property into a new arts, culture and healing/wellness center. labrujamusic.com, papatian.org/salsa-bruja



Caridad De La Luz

ANA “ROKAFELLA” GARCIA (co-Artistic Director and Producer, Full Circle Souljahs) Hip-Hop dancer/choreographer Ana “Rokafella” Garcia began street performing with crews: The Transformers, The Breeze Team, and the New York City Float Committee, and in 1994 she was a part of GhettoOriginal - a Hip-Hop dance company. As a b-girl, she’s been featured in Fabolous’ “Holla back Youngin” and KRS One’s “Step into a World” rap videos and the Fox film *Brown Sugar*. She and her husband Kwikstep founded Full Circle Productions, a Hip-Hop collective. They presented *Soular Power’d*, their Hip-Hop theater directorial debut, on Broadway’s New Victory Theater and received rave reviews. Rokafella has taught workshops at NYU, MIT, UMASS and Howard University as well as at neighborhood high schools and community centers. Rokafella wrote the



Ana “Rokafella” Garcia

introduction to Martha Cooper’s *We B*Girls* photo book and has been hired by the US State Department as a Cultural Envoy Artist. She has judged breakin’ contests in Europe and South America and is the producer of a documentary film about b girls titled: *All the Ladies Say*. She believes Hip-hop was born to help urban youth get through the ups and downs of life with something to hold on to. <http://www.fullcirclesouljahs.com>



Soldanela Rivera

SOLDANELA RIVERA has a multifaceted background as a professional dancer, actress, choreographer, television host, production coordinator, teaching artist, project captain, documentary researcher, tour manager, a music/theater/ film publicist, concert and theatre producer, adjunct lecturer, director of communications, an oral history collector, a podcast host, and regularly

consults and collaborates for a variety of clients in the arts and entertainment field. Presently, she serves as Director of Presidential Strategic Initiatives for Hostos Community College of The City University of New York. Her podcast, Notes From A Native Daughter, features candid, honest, intimate one-on-one discussions with artists, leaders, and individuals who represent the Pan-American experience to talk about arts, culture, and society. soldanela.com; notesfromanativedaughter.com

Rhodnie Désir
CORPS DE RYTHMES ET RÉSISTANCES

Alors bonjour, tout d'abord j'aimerais remercier les organisateurs de m'avoir invitée, c'est vraiment un privilège d'être ici. Merci aussi à Phillip Spzorer de m'avoir recommandé. Ma présentation va se dérouler en deux temps. La première partie sera d'un ton plus poétique afin de vous amener dans une réflexion tout autre: vous faire danser les méninges; et la seconde présentera un des projets phare que je mène en ce moment et qui s'appelle le projet BOW'T TRAIL.

Je me suis posé la question à savoir si ma danse était peuple, si ma danse était mouvance, geste. Telle une onde que j'attrape, je compose, j'articule de A à Z, je questionne, j'analyse, je tente de répondre et de reprendre, d'attraper, de mâcher, d'avalier même ce qui est indigeste pour mon regard : JE CRÉE.



BODY OF RHYTHMS AND RESISTANCES

I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me; it's really a privilege to be here. Thanks also to Philip Spzorer for recommending me. My presentation will take place in two stages: the first part takes a more poetic tone to bring a different kind of reflection, to make the brain dance. And the second part discusses one of my key works right now, the BOW'T TRAIL project.

I asked myself, is my dance culture, movement, gesture? Like a wave that I catch, I compose, I articulate from A to Z, I question, I analyze, I try to reply and renew, to catch, to chew, to consume that which is visually indigestible: I CREATE.

Hand to hand, I grab and let go. DECONSTRUCTION. The wait settles. I look, I am looked at, and so we look at each other through many eyes. INTERSECTION.

De mains en main, je sers puis je relâche. DÉCONSTRUCTION. L'attente s'installe. J'observe, on me regarde et donc, nous nous regardons aux travers de plusieurs yeux. INTERSECTION.

L'esprit de Legba est au carrefour et je le remercie d'ouvrir les voies. On pose devant moi des témoignages, des vécus, des livres de corps et d'esprits, de cœur, de temps. ESPACE. J'observe de loin l'indifférence, la différence de ce qui est écrit dans le livre du peuple. Je m'approche, j'écoute par le corps. Ma peau est éponge, mon sang est sève, je me rapproche de ses voies et mes pores absorbent ce qui tente d'être et de naître. TEMPORALITÉ.

Le temps a passé, les générations se sont fondues, confondues, défendues. Le colonialisme a eu le temps d'enfourcher les langues, les êtres, les cultures, de les bousculer, de les savonner à coups de pierres. DEBOUT.

De résistance en résistance, résiliences pour naître, pour être, et raconter. RECRÉATION. Devant les cris et les larmes de l'identité, l'art pour armes. Un souffle. Naissance soutenue par des tambours, des chants et des danses. Mes ancêtres ont su donner naissance à des forêts de fleurs polyrythmiques alors que le



Legba's spirit is at the crossroads, and I thank him for opening the way. Testimonies are presented to me, experiences: stories of bodies and minds, of the heart, of time. SPACE. I observe from afar the indifference, the difference between what is written in the story of a people and what is. I approach, I listen through the body. My skin is a sponge, my blood is sap. I get closer to his ways and my pores absorb what I attempt to be and give birth to. TEMPORALITY. Time has passed, generations were founded, confounded, and defended. Colonialism had time to get on the tongue, to infiltrate the being, the culture, to jostle and wash away with stones. STANDING.

From resistance to resistance: resilience to be born, to be, and to tell. RECREATION. Before the cries and tears of identity, art is a weapon. A breath. Birth sustained by drums, songs, dances. Even as the uprooting took place, my ancestors were able to give birth to forests of polyrhythmic flowers. Jazz, Blues, Candomblé, Haïtian Vodou, Reggae. MOVEMENT.

From Haiti to Brazil, from Mexico to Cuba, from Colombia to Peru, art was not incidental or dissociated from the people. Choice was a necessity for life, for existence, and I see that their arts were more contemporary than ever. Passed from generation to generation as a point of honor and respect for the breath of physical, mental and spiritual recreation. Built in the moment: past, present, future. While time itself was learning which letter of the alphabet would

déracinement sévissait au même moment. Jazz, Blues, Candomblé, Vaudou d'Haïti, Reggae. MOUVEMENT.

D'Haïti au Brésil, du Mexique à Cuba, de la Colombie au Pérou, l'art n'était pas accessoire ou dissocié du peuple. Le choix était une nécessité pour vivre, pour exister, et je constate que leurs arts furent plus contemporains que jamais. Transmises de générations en générations en guise de point d'honneur et de respect sur le souffle de la récréation physique, mentale et spirituelle. Construite dans le moment présent, futur, composé. Alors qu'en même le temps, lui-même apprenait quelle lettre de l'alphabet allait lui permettre de se prononcer au nom d'une liberté, au nom d'une communauté, de la nature, de l'espace. ANCESTRALITÉ.

Dans ces mouvances, je m'inspire de ce qui ne s'appelait pas à l'époque médiateur culturel, chorégraphe, producteur, commissaire; mais ce qui était et est encore tout simplement mouvance. Je me positionne pour mieux cerner et construire, bâtir pour ma communauté, pour les communautés ce qui est constamment audience. Pour mieux me situer comme artiste. RÔLE.

Ma danse s'ancre et est indissociable de la communauté, du cercle de la vie : de la société. Le tambour est le cœur du citoyen et la parole c'est l'impulsion qui lui



BOWT TRAIL. Chorégraphie, interprétation, mise en scène, compositions vocales et sonores
(Choreography, performance, staging, vocal and sound compositions): Rhodnie Désir

permet de devenir ce qu'est un artiste : un portevoix des sans-voix. Ma danse s'actualise pendant qu'on se crée des vocables pour épouser ce qui glisse toujours entre les mains—le temps. Ma danse est tout simplement mouvement.

C'est ainsi que j'ai envie de vous plonger dans le projet BOW'T TRAIL que j'ai créé depuis décembre 2015, et pendant que je vais parler je vais faire défiler les images que vous pourrez également retrouver en ligne.

En 2013, j'ai créé un solo qui s'appellait BOW'T. Un solo dansé et tambouriné qui aborde le propos de la migration et la déportation, mais d'un point de vue psychique. Je m'interrogeais sur le parallèle et la distinction qu'on pouvait créer entre le corps migrant, donc qui part volontairement, ou un corps qui part involontairement d'une terre. Et au fil de cette recherche chorégraphique, je voulais réellement parler de cette relation psychique. Au cours de mes recherches, j'ai rencontré un nœud : celui de la traite négrière et les conséquences que ça avait encore sur le monde. Le colonialisme au sens plus large. Je réalisais alors que l'omniprésence et l'impact non seulement du café, du sucre, du chocolat, mais le fait que mon histoire soit absente de livres d'Histoires scolaires du Québec avait un impact majeur sur ma présence et mon rôle d'artiste. Parce qu'imaginez-vous donc que sur les près de



allow him to pronounce himself in the name of a freedom, in the name of a community, of nature, of space. ANCESTRY.

In these movements, I am inspired by what was at the time not called a cultural mediator, choreographer, producer, commissioner; but what was and still is simply movement. I position myself to better identify and construct, build for my community and others that which is always an audience. To better situate myself as an artist. ROLE.

My dance is anchored in and inseparable from the community, from the circle of life: from society. The drum is the heart of the citizen, and speech is the impulse that allows her to become what an artist is: a voice of the voiceless. My dance actualizes itself while we create forms to embrace what is always slipping between the hands: time. My dance is simply movement.

This is how I want to immerse you in the project BOW'T TRAIL.... In 2013, I created a solo called BOW'T. A dance and drum solo that addresses the subjects of migration and deportation, but from a psychic point of view. I wondered about the parallels and distinctions between the migrant body who leaves voluntarily, and those bodies forced away involuntarily. And throughout this choreographic research I really wanted to talk about this psychic relationship. But as I went

700 pages d'apprentissage d'Histoire en secondaire 4, il n'y a même pas la somme d'une page de livre qui raconte mon histoire, et disons le aussi : votre histoire.

ACTION.

Parallèlement à cela, je fais face à l'obligation de justifier mon art et ma discipline auprès de diffuseurs québécois, particulièrement quand vient le temps de faire tourner mon œuvre en dehors du réseau montréalais. De question en question, on me demande si BOW'T est vraiment une œuvre qui est contemporaine parce que je m'appuie sur l'ancestralité. On me demande : "...mais tu utilises le tambour, des rythmes haïtiens Vodou d'Haïti... peut-être que ce n'est pas contemporain parce que tu utilises le tambour?" On m'a aussi affirmé que la migration ça ne concernait peut-être pas vraiment le Québec. Pas dans la majorité, mais ces questions font partie du peu d'entre-elles qui sont venues à moi. Je me suis dit pourquoi ces questions m'étaient-elles adressées, pourquoi mon œuvre se faisait questionner sur sa contemporanéité alors que d'autres, qui effectuent de l'appropriation culturelle sur des rythmes dansés, chantés ou tambourinés de mes ancêtres n'avaient pas à s'expliquer. Pourquoi on applaudissait leurs innovations, mais que mon art devait lui s'expliquer? Pourquoi est-ce que je suis confinée à définir mon art et à ne pas



on, I encountered a knot: that of the slave trade and the consequences that it still has on the world today. Colonialism in the broader sense. I not only realized the omnipresence and impact of mundane objects like coffee, sugar and chocolate but also the fact that my story is missing from Québec history books. This had a major impact on my presence and role as an artist. How can it be that in the nearly 700 pages of the Québec Secondary 4 (Grade 11) history curriculum there is not a single page that tells my story? And let's say it—your history also. ACTION.

At the same time, I face the obligation to justify my art and my discipline to Québec media, especially when it comes to touring outside the Montréal network. Again and again, I am asked if BOW'T can really be considered contemporary work because of its reliance on ancestry. I'm asked: "... but you use the drum, Haitian Vodou rhythms ... maybe it's not contemporary because you use the drum?" I was also told that migration might not really be of concern to Québec. Not the majority, but certainly part of the questions regularly sent my way, I thought, "Why were these questions addressed to me?" Why was my work's contemporaneity questioned while others, who carry out cultural appropriation on the dances, songs or drummed rhythms of my ancestors, are not called upon to explain their connections? Why did we applaud their innovations, while my

pouvoir juste faire mon art tout simplement en lien avec la communauté pour qu'elle serve uniquement à remplir une programmation associée au Mois de l'histoire des noirs ou une série que j'appelle ethnique qui est souvent indissociable du terme "Afrique." Comment, comme artiste consciente du poids de l'audience, du citoyen, de l'humain tout simplement, je pouvais devenir un acteur à part entière et je pouvais m'assurer que le public ne soit pas un accessoire, mais que ce soit une action concrète, humaine qui ne serve pas uniquement à remplir des quotas, mais qui devienne réellement une action sociale? C'est là qu'en 2014, en allant justement au Burkina Faso pour présenter mon œuvre, que j'ai réalisé que tout était une question de perspective, d'éducation et d'ouverture. De fil en aiguille l'œuvre BOW'T s'est transformée et je me suis dit: et si Bow't devenait mon propre livre d'histoire. Si Bow't me permettait de remonter à la source, de traduire l'un des plus grands crimes contre l'humanité, mais aussi de tracer les similitudes avec l'actualité et les mouvements omniprésents des peuples Noirs dans le monde. Et si mon œuvre devenait en fait mon laboratoire social, mon instrument de mesure, que mon corps soit mon instrument de mesure. Au même titre que ce fût la matière première pendant plus de 500 ans. Et si mon regard d'artiste commissaire revenait à penser mon



art had to explain itself? Why am I confined to defining my art and not able to simply do my art in connection with the community? Why must the work serve to fill programming associated with Black History Month or a series that I call "ethnic," which is often inseparable from the term "Africa?" How—as an artist aware of the weight of the audience—could I become an actor in my own right and ensure that the public is not an accessory? How to create concrete human action that resists serving quotas, and becomes a real social action? It was in 2014, while presenting work in Burkina Faso, that I realized the importance of perspective and education. One thing led to another, and the work BOW'T changed. What if BOW'T became my own history book? What if BOW'T allowed me to go back to the source, to translate one of the greatest crimes against humanity, but also to trace the similarities with current events and the omnipresent movements of Black people in the world? My work became my social laboratory, my body its own measuring instrument. Just as it had been raw material for more than 500 years. I rethought my art as a creation inseparable from the public. CONNECTION. The BOW'T TRAIL project was born.

Today, BOW'T TRAIL encompasses the original work BOW'T; I challenge myself to recreate it entirely from A to Z in each country where I go. This work takes on a new birth, a new colour, a new flavour, a new rhythm. I begin with meeting a local drummer in each country I visit:

art en tant que création indissociable du public. CONNEXION. Est né le projet BOW'T TRAIL.

Concrètement le BOW'T TRAIL reprends l'œuvre originale BOW'T et je me donne pour défi de la recrer entièrement de A à Z. Le tout, dans chacun des pays ou je me rends. Cette œuvre reprend une nouvelle naissance, une nouvelle couleur, une nouvelle saveur, une nouvelle rythmique. Pour se faire, je rencontre un tambourineuraire local (un musicien) par pays : en Martinique, en Haïti, au Brésil, au Mexique, en Colombie, aux États-Unis, au Canada... et j'en passe. En rencontrant ce porteur de mémoire qui est le tambourinaire local, je suis en mesure d'avoir accès à ce premier savoir. Les autres savoirs auquel je m'inspire pour mon travail sont mes sources d'inspirations: des porteurs de la culture. Ici, je parle d'anthropologues, de sociologues, d'anciens, d'artistes, de musiciens, et j'en passe. Au total et jusqu'à aujourd'hui dans l'espace d'un an et sur trois mois, parce que le parcours dure un mois dans chaque pays; j'ai rencontré un minimum de quatre-vingt-dix spécialistes qui m'ont transmis leurs savoirs. Est-ce que c'est en restant à Montréal et me questionnant sur mon art, sur mon œuvre, sur sa contemporanéité que j'aurais pu être exposé à ce savoir? Je ne crois pas!



Ainsi, le parcours se poursuivra jusqu'en 2019 et la beauté c'est que ça va devenir une bibliothèque multimédia, une bibliothèque numérique qu'on appelle en fait un Webdocumentaire. Vous serez donc en mesure, en 2019 (et je le souhaite), d'avoir accès à ces savoirs, ces mémoires, ces histoires, ces danses, à chacune des œuvres recrées. Et l'objectif sera pour vous de pouvoir naviguer au travers des rythmiques et des témoignages, de cette Histoire grâce à l'art dans ce Webdocumentaire. On est en train de regarder également en faire une Web-série avec différents télédiffuseurs et l'objectif c'est qu'en 2019 on puisse aussi en faire un spectacle rétrospectif à Montréal.

Donc je reviens en fait à la toute fin de la présentation. Ce que je vous dirais c'est que pour moi, le travail d'être une chorégraphe s'est multiplié et qu'à ce jour, le projet BOW'T TRAIL a pu se faire grâce à l'engagement de cette grande communauté internationale qui me prouve finalement que nous sommes tous interreliés.

En fait, le BOW'T TRAIL c'est un multiplicateur d'idées que je répliquerai à présent dans d'autres contextes. Ce qui est intéressant, c'est que de cette démarche de re-création, naît une méthodologie, qui elle sera utilisée pour une de mes nouvelles œuvres qui sera diffusée cet été à Toronto. Je travaille sur ce projet qui



Martinique, Haiti, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, the United States, Canada ... and many more. In meeting this local memory bearer, I catch glimpse of primary knowledge. I look to carriers of culture to inspire my work. Here, I'm talking about elders, artists, musicians, dancers, storytellers, anthropologists, sociologists, and so on. So far, over a year and three months, during month-long sojourns in each country, I have met a minimum of 90 culture carriers and specialists who shared their knowledge. Could I have challenged notions of contemporaneity without exposure to such a range of ways and thinking? I doubt it! The journey will continue until 2019, and the beauty is that it will become a multimedia library and Web-based documentary. By 2019, you will be able to have access to these memories, stories, dances, linked through the recreated works. A tool to navigate the rhythms, testimonials, and histories told in time and space through dance.

What I would say, finally, is that for me, the work of being a choreographer has expanded. To date, the BOW'T TRAIL project maps a set of relations between peoples and cultures, and I thank all those who've shared in the making of this project. More, BOW'T TRAIL has allowed for a methodology to develop, one that I use in new work. For example, last summer in Toronto, I worked on a project called DUSK SOCIETY, which dealt with the social-history of Toronto and used testimonies from different citizens to create a 10-minute work. In work like this, I take the

s'appelle DUSK SOCIETY qui aborde les enjeux socio-historiques de Toronto et qui fait appel à des témoignages de différents citoyens, afin que je donne naissance à une œuvre archive de 10 minutes. Ici, je prends le pouls du public. En somme ce que je veux vous dire c'est que, que ce soit pour le BOW'T TRAIL ou DUSK SOCIETY ou tout autre projet de création; ce que je retiens c'est que je suis finalement une citoyenne, je ne suis qu'une petite cellule dans un grand corps qui s'appelle le monde et que la création - peut-être - nous permet indéfiniment de nous recréer en tant que société pour mieux composer le monde dans lequel on existe.

Merci.



pulse of the public. In short, what I want to tell you is that, whether for the BOW'T TRAIL or DUSK SOCIETY or any other creative project, what I take away is that I am only a small cell in a large body called the world and that creation - perhaps - allows us to recreate ourselves indefinitely as a society to better compose the world in which we exist.

Thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Artiste Montréalaise, RHODNIE DÉsir articule son geste à partir de langages chantés ou parlés spécialement créés pour chacune de ses œuvres. En résulte une voix contemporaine dynamique et unique dérivée des cultures ancestrales d’Haïti, d’Afrique centrale et de l’Ouest. Dans ses oeuvres, elle parvient à établir un rapport signifiant entre les mémoires individuelles du présent et la mémoire collective du passé. Son œuvre phare *BOW’’T* a résonnée sur les scènes d’ici et d’ailleurs (Burkina Faso, Brésil, Martinique, Haïti), s’ajoute aux sept œuvres de son répertoire et à ses collaborations internationales (Art&Fact). En 2016, Rhodnie lançait le *BOW’’T TRAIL*: un projet pionnier et international à saveur chorégraphique, documentaire et interactive qui l’a mené à prendre part à la Programmation Culturelle Francophone des Jeux olympiques de Rio de Janeiro. Grâce à ses œuvres socialement engagées et politiquement raffinées, elle donnera bientôt naissance à deux nouvelles pièces: *Dusk Society* en 2017 (commande du festival Dusk Dances) et *MWON’D* en 2018. Oratrice charismatique et femme d’affaires (fondatrice de la compagnie DÉZAM), elle est invitée par des universités (Concordia, Duke University, UQUAM, ULAVAL) et par l’UNESCO (Les artistes et la mémoire de l’esclavage: résistance, liberté créatrice et héritages). rhodniedesir.com



Rhodnie Désir



Montréal artist Rhodnie Désir articulates her gesture based on singing or spoken languages specifically created for each of her works. The result is a dynamic and unique contemporary voice derived from the ancestral cultures of Haiti, Central and West Africa. In her works, she manages to establish a significant relationship between the individual memories of the present and the collective memory of the past. Her flagship work BOW’’T has been presented around the world, including in Canada, Burkina Faso, Brazil, Martinique, and Haiti, and adds to the seven works of her repertoire and international collaborations (Art & Fact). In 2016, Rhodnie launched the BOW’’T TRAIL: a pioneering international project with a choreographic, documentary and interactive component that led her to take part in the Francophone Cultural Programming of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Thanks to her socially committed and politically refined works, she soon gave birth to two new works: Dusk Society in 2017 (commissioned by the Dusk Dances festival) and MWON’D in 2018. A charismatic speaker and businesswoman (founder of DÉZAM), she has been invited to speak at several universities (Concordia, Duke University, UQUAM, ULAVAL) and by UNESCO (Artists and the memory of slavery: resistance, creative freedom and inheritances). rhodniedesir.com

Alan Harrington
GREETINGS FROM POW WOW MONTRÉAL

Bonjour, boozhoo, aanin, hello. My name is Alan Harrington, I'm Ojibway, I'm from Shoal Lake 39¹ and it's great to be here--thank you for inviting me. Ever since the invite, I have been kind of stumped. After talking with elders and people around in the community about it and coming here this morning and talking with people, it will come. I wanted to acknowledge that it was great to be here in Montréal again on unceded Mohawk territory. When I woke up this morning, taking in that fresh air, I thought, "It's great that we live in North America, with no wars going on and to be able to travel freely, anywhere we want and learn about one another."

I've been working the last 10-12 years in Montréal. My first job was to work with the homeless population here in Montréal, and we basically helped out everyone and anyone that was on the streets of Montréal. There is a program with the Native Friendship Centre named Ka'wáhse Street Patrol, and I got to be a part of that. And, now that I think about it, this is part of where my journey has taken me up to now: creating a unity, coming together, working together with one another. I enjoy working with many organizations and to try to start working on Reconciliation² with us, with our people. And it's been a slow start but we are headed in a positive direction.

I started a powwow here in Montréal four years ago and this is part of my journey and I guess part of my mission in life is to create unity and to share our stories, our cultures with one another. Pow Wow Montréal was here 20 years ago, and then it was one of the biggest pow wows in Montréal at the time. And, for some reason, funding runs out sometimes and, unfortunately, we had to look at different approaches. The pow wow stopped. And listening to the community members and listening to other cultures: they wanted to see a First Nations event. We have

1. Shoal Lake 39 is an Ojibway First Nations located on the northwestern shores of Shoal Lake, Ontario, near the Manitoba border.

2. Reconciliation refers to the ongoing process of recognizing the experiences, impacts and consequences of Indian Residential Schools in Canada and moving towards healing. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008-2015) gathered testimony from former students and any affected by the school system, which was funded and administered by the Canadian government and Christian churches. The Commission concluded that the system constituted cultural genocide and issued a report with calls to action in December 2015. See www.trc.ca

a good event here in Montréal called the *Présence Autochtone Festival*³ which is run by André Dumais. I sat down with André to listen to him and hear him talk about the First Nations festival, about how it started to what it is today. He is one of my mentors, who I kind of look up to now. What I believe I want to see with the Montréal Pow Wow is to have a second cultural international event here in Montréal, and we're working together on making this a bigger and better reality. The Pow Wow started off with about 100 people; funding was very scarce, and I was waiting around and waiting to see if anybody had the initiative to get it started and, you know, nothing was happening. So I decided I was going to talk to a few people and see if they wanted to jump on board.

We started off with a few First Nations and non-first-nations to sit on the actual committee of Pow Wow Montréal; we even had students from France and Germany

For me, it was such a blessing to see many different nations coming together in one big area. We need to do more of this together, working together and building that common goal.

Alan Harrington

who wanted to be part of Pow Wow Montréal to learn about our culture and to share it. And I decided that this is the way I would like to venture in and teach people around the world about some of our culture. And it's been growing each year. It's been touring around the Montréal area. This year was our fourth year and again our Pow Wow committee was a mix of all different cultures.

I'm really impressed with some of the youth and the people in Montréal that have stepped up and that have wanted to help me develop this event that really came from the community. This year it was hosted by the city of Verdun, we had about 4800 people that came in, we had about 200 dancers from across North-America that all came to be part of this event. We do have a Facebook page and spread the word through social media.⁴ This year was one of the biggest: we were part of the 375th programing. And for me it was such a blessing to see many different nations coming together in one big area. We need to do more of this together, working together and building that common goal. I don't know what else to say: it's really good to be here in this room with so many talented individuals and scholars, who are making changes in the small world that we live on. And I hope we can continue to

3. *Présence Autochtone* is an interdisciplinary week-long festival that focuses on the art, culture and history of First Peoples. <http://www.presenceautochtone.ca>

4. See www.Montrealpowwow.wordpress.com; and www.facebook.com/mtlpowwow



Montréal Pow Wow. Photo: Red Works Photography.

embrace one another, to learn from one another and have the common goal of peace in the world. Miigwech, thank you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: ALAN HARRINGTON is from Shoal lake #39 Ojibway Nation. He has been working in the Montréal Area for 11 years. He worked with the homeless population as an outreach worker with the Native Friendship Center of Montréal for more than five years, and continues to work with many organizations within Montréal and the surrounding areas. As Founder of The Red Urban Project, he has created many initiatives over the years - such as bringing back the Kanehsatake Pow Wow 2009 to the community and continuing to keep this going still today. He is also Founder/ Organizer of the Round Dance and Montréal Pow Wow events for the last four years which also continue today. Alan is passionate about teaching First Nation culture to diverse people and organizations. <https://Montréalpowwow.wordpress.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/TheRedUrbanProject/>



Alan Harrington

Soraya Peerbaye
POSITION STATEMENT

One of the inspirations for this proposal is *The Nope Manifesto* by American inter-disciplinary artist E. Jane:

I am not an identity artist just because I am a Black artist with multiple selves.

I am not grappling with notions of identity and representation in my art. I'm grappling with safety and futurity. We are beyond asking should we be in the room. We are in the room. We are also dying at a rapid pace and need a sustainable future.

We need more people, we need better environments, we need places to hide, we need Utopian demands, we need culture that loves us.

I am not asking who I am. I'm a Black woman and expansive in my Blackness and my queerness as Blackness and queerness are always already expansive. None of this is as simple as "identity and representation" outside of the colonial gaze. I reject the colonial gaze as the primary gaze. I am outside of it in the land of NOPE.¹

The impatience expressed in E. Jane's statement exists here in Canada, too, in the context of our own history. The writings and conversations around issues of identity as they connect to an infinite array of socio-political issues (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Black Lives Matter, rape culture, the international migrant/refugee crisis, climate justice, etc.), and artistic issues (cultural appropriation etc.), have created a new current of influence in equity: a collective assembly of knowledge on intersectionality, decolonization/Indigenization, and Truth & Reconciliation.

Here's some background on my current position as Programming and Curatorial Co-Director for Anandam Dancetheatre, Toronto, Ontario:

1. Jane, E., *A Glorious Nobody Hovering at the End of the World*. <http://e-janestudio.tumblr.com/post/132335744305/i-am-not-an-identity-artist-just-because-i-am-a>

- * Anandam Dancetheatre was founded by dancer artist Brandy Leary as a vehicle for her choreography, interdisciplinary collaborations, and inter(arts)sec-
toral partnerships. Brandy is a white woman trained in Indian dance and movement arts, specifically the martial art of chhau and rope art of mal-lakhamb; this provided an entry point into European-based aerial arts, contemporary dance and performance.



Brandy Leary, Anandam Dancetheatre.
Photo: Walter Lai.

- * Her training in India introduced her to fundamental principles of ritual, site-specificity, extended duration, presence, etc.
- * In Canada, these are often assumed by white dance artists, curators, critics etc. to be European elements of contemporary performance, emerging from Brandy's white identity, or her location in a community of primarily white practitioners in what is seen as current innovations in theatrical performance.
- * There is little knowledge or understanding that these elements are integral to Indian forms and provide natural bridges between "classical" and "contemporary," "performance" and "ritual," etc.
- * Brandy invited me to work with the company in 2014 as a facilitator of the Audience-in-Residence program, supported by the Metcalf Foundation, to engage audiences with varying degrees of familiarity with the company/dance/performance to accompany the company over an extended period of time, to witness and respond to works-in-progress, performances etc.
- * We found a common language and sense of urgency in addressing the assumptions of what contemporary/Canadian dance is: the binary of, but especially the hierarchy of contemporary (Euro) over "other": the terms that code a white art form and its standards of excellence, and consequently that art form's relationship to other notions of beauty, virtuosity,

and especially innovation; and the implications of that for the development of dance in Canada, from training, to research and creation, to presentation, to touring

- * We felt an urgent need to understand movements of contemporary dance stemming from non-European forms and perspectives which led to the Contemporaneity Performance Series.

CONTEMPORANEITY

- * In 2016, we submitted a proposal to the Toronto Arts Council Open Door program, which provides catalytic funding to initiatives that have the potential to create transformative change for the sector.
- * Contemporaneity is a new presenting series, focusing on contemporary expressions in non-European dance forms and perspectives, launching in the fall of 2017 and to continue for a minimum period of two years.
- * Composed of two shared programs a year, the series features works by artists involved in Asian, African, Arab, Latin American, and Indigenous dance and related practices. Presentations are supported by residency, opportunities for observation, exchanges between artists, artistic directors and presenters, Q&A sessions with audiences, writing by artists and audiences alike, and other forms of dialogue that may continue beyond each presentation.
- * This project is enacted through partnerships with dance and theatre centres across Toronto: Dancemakers, Toronto Dance Theatre, and Theatre Centre. Each edition is produced in a different venue as an invitation for venues, which were developed to support a Eurocentric infrastructure for the arts, to decolonize. This was a conscious choice to move through different environments and communities, and widening spheres of reference for all involved.
- * An edition features three choreographers presenting works up to 20 minutes in duration. At least one will be a commissioned choreography; the others may be new or a revisiting of a recent work animated by continuing and vital questions. We provide a \$2,500 fee, 30 hours in residency and three performance opportunities. Studio/performance space is provided by Anandam and the partnering venue. The emphasis is not on production



Diana Lopez Soto, *De Agua y Barro (Water and Mud)*, 2017. Photo: Greg Wong.

values, so only elemental technical support is provided. Anandam and the partnering venue are jointly responsible for publicity.

- * Each choreographer holds one open rehearsal during their residency, attended by Anandam's curators, participating artists, Anandam's Audience-in-Residence, partnering centres' artistic directors, and selected presenters. Anandam also hosts an informal social event for all participants. Performances are public and include Q&A sessions and/or panels with a wider audience.
- * In the following week, Anandam's Audience-in-Residence is engaged for the final component of the project. The AiR is a curated group of individuals, with new and returning members each season, some newly initiated to dance and even to performance; many are specialists in other fields beyond the arts. They, and any others interested, are invited to share their response through a piece of appreciative/critical writing, which may be simply a paragraph, or longer, but ultimately provides reflection on how they related to the works presented. All writing is archived on Anandam Dancetheatre's blog.

DESIGN PRIORITIES

- * The initiative is not about showcasing. Rather, it is about introducing artists, audiences and presenters to each other; making public our inquiries into matters of source, influence, state, metaphor, meaning, and connection; and collectively developing a language around “contemporaneity” that is inclusive, equal and transformative. This also engages artists, artistic directors and presenters in a discursive relationship rather than a transactional one (“pitching”); artistic directors/presenters commit to partnership and the shared risk inherent in that relationship.
- * Though mentorship is a valuable system, this is not a priority of the series. Specifically, we did not want to place practitioners of European-based contemporary dance as mentors for the project. We trust the artists working in their fields, and view the learning as multi-directional. It is not only the artists learning, through doing, new relationships, environments etc.; audiences, artistic directors and presenters also learn through listening, holding space for the connections that will activate our thinking on contemporary aesthetics and ethics. It is a horizontal relationship, rather than a hierarchical one of teaching an individual how to fit into a certain frame.

The initiative is not about showcasing. Rather, it is about introducing artists, audiences and presenters to each other; making public our inquiries into matters of source, influence, state, metaphor, meaning, and connection; and collectively developing a language around “contemporaneity” that is inclusive, equal and transformative.

Soraya Peerbaye

ON CONTEMPORARY DANCE

- * It is our belief that “contemporaneity” should speak to the cultural moment in which a choreographic act or movement takes place. It isn’t enough to say that we no longer believe in an old definition of “contemporary.” Response from diasporic/Indigenous artists to calls for contemporary choreographers is sporadic relative to our communities of practice; membership in arts service organizations from

our communities remains low. This isn't a matter of outreach; it's a matter of relevance. We need to actively take apart a Eurocentric, hierarchical classification and reimagine contemporaneity as a shared moment, a shared inquiry, a shared interest in holding the dancing body in the world. This is decolonization: transforming our relationships as a community.

- * This initiative asks, how much can the term contemporary hold? How can it grow and evolve, become more inclusive, responsive, complex in its offerings, for artists, audiences and the sector? Our hope is that Contemporaneity can be a meeting ground for the Toronto dance community in all its diversity, a platform for experimentation, risk, and exciting, diverse works; encouraging audiences, artistic directors and presenters to be ever more inquisitive; and cultivating fluency in a multiplicity of world views to truly embody the culture of the contemporary. It invites multiple ways of seeing, experiencing and responding to the dancing body, in all its capacities – solitary, social, sexual, racial, abled/disabled, political, historical, migratory, communal and ancestral.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: A long-time advocate for artists of colour and diasporic artistic practices, **SORAYA PEERBAYE** develops, curates and produces projects with dance artists across a wide spectrum of genres and cultures. She is the Program and Curatorial Co-Director with Anandam Dancetheatre; together with Artistic Director Brandy Leary, she curates the Contemporaneity dance series, centering Indigenous, Asian, African, Caribbean, Latin American and Arab contemporary dance practices in Canada, launching in 2017/18. Soraya is also a poet, whose most recent collection, *Tell: Poems for a Girlhood*, winner of the Trillium Poetry Award, was nominated for the Griffin Poetry Prize. Her first book, *Poems for the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names*, was nominated for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. sorayapeerbaye.ca



Soraya Peerbaye. Photo: Guenther.

Vivine Scarlett

CURATING DANCERS AND DANCES FROM THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

dANCE IMMERSION is an organization based in Toronto, Canada, founded in 1994 by myself, Vivine Scarlett, a dance artist drawn to all kinds of styles and expressions. The organization was established to address the lack of presentation from dance artists of the African Diaspora who create work from their own dance experiences and related environment. The African Diaspora refers to the communities that are descended from the historic movement of peoples from the continent of Africa, who were forcibly dispersed throughout the world.

The lack of dance artists from the African Diaspora, who created work from an aesthetic derived from their own dance experiences and connected environments, became the impetus and drive for change. I grew tired of dealing with colonialist expectations and wanted to do something about it.

dance Immersion had its beginnings under the tutelage of DanceWorks and Dance Ontario along with Dance Umbrella of Ontario and was further assisted as an umbrella program of Canadian Artists Network: Black Artists In Action (CAN:BAIA). dance Immersion was originally founded to provide a platform where local and national artists of African descent could showcase dance works.

The first showcase took place in 1995 and showcases presented over the next two years fostered many skills and allowed me to build relationships with local, national and international artists of African descent. The yearly presentations gave artists a performance space where they could freely express work that spoke to their chosen artistic practice. A variety of artists presented an array of dance works that graced the stage.

After three years it became apparent that the pool of work ready for presentation was running dry. The community I served was in need of more resources that provided:

- * **Additional skill development** within specific dance styles not offered in full- or long-term programs

- * **Connection to a variety of institutions** that offer information and technical training in all forms
- * **Collaborative initiatives** with like-minded artists and practices within their genre
- * **Opportunities to teach** and develop programming for children and youth
- * **Programming for children and youth** that provide training for the next generation

dance Immersion participated in an organizational exercise that strategized around sourcing new ways of delivering presentations that will benefit both the artist's and the organization's requests for expressions that fit dance Immersion's mission and mandate. dance Immersion expanded its activities to include a programming structure that offers supportive opportunities aimed at enhancing artists' careers. This structure is designed for program activities to feed each other in a circular system where each nourishes and informs the other. This new structure then needed additional researching and sourcing from an array of professional artists from Canada and abroad who would be able to assist in sharing skills and contributing activities that would expand dance knowledge, vocabulary and practices.

dance Immersion's programming currently consists of:

- * Showcase Presentations
- * In-Studio Presentations
- * Workshop Series
- * Youth Arts Programs (YAP)
- * Forums



A Board of Directors governs the organization and its day-to-day operations are administered by a team that consists of three people:

- * Executive Director/Curator
- * Program Director
- * Events Administrator/YAP Coordinator (PT)

The organization contracts professional services for specific activities involved in carrying out its various programs. A pool of dedicated volunteers assists with particular assignments for activities.

Dance artists who practice contemporary work within a European context are easily found and identified but as a curator sourcing and researching artists that include emerging dance artists from the African Diaspora proves to be an ongoing challenge. These artists need to be sourced differently – usually through avenues that include connections to community based outlets where dance is practiced. These artists are made up of a very diverse group who are at various levels of training and experience.

Once artists are identified there is a process of introduction and relationship building that includes finding out:

- * Collaborative assessment and evaluating where they are in their practice
- * If they desire to expand what they are already doing
- * Finding out what their needs and challenges are
- * Letting them know what resources are already out there to assist

Our work at dance Immersion has become far more than just adhering to mandate, mission protocol and procedures and often deals with deeper issues that have impacted artists and the effects of being pre-categorized by racial identity instead of self-identification. The constant repeated challenge of preconceived stereotypes around racial identification is a pattern that has frustrated, diverted and depressed many aspiring, emerging and professional dance artists from the African Diaspora. They are either “Too Black or not Black enough” dance artists who practice various dance forms and struggle to find a place while forever finding creative ways of communicating their dance expressions. It is important that dance Immersion empowers, informs and introduces the artists we serve to the numerous resources and opportunities that currently exist to support them at home and around the world.

dance Immersion works to strengthen our organization’s connections and partnerships in a synergy that brings a reciprocal understanding of each other’s mission, mandate and financial competency for continuance. We are members of the following dance service organizations: Dance Ontario, CanDance Network (Canada’s national network supporting the creation and distribution of contemporary dance), Canadian Dance Assembly (CDA), Cultural Pluralism in the



Jaivah Dance Troupe (formerly Nouvel Exposé). Photo: Powsy Dewhurst.

Arts Movement Ontario (CPAMO), and the International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD). Through relationships built within this network, dance Immersion has been able to promote and advocate for dance artists of African descent in a number of different ways.

As a member of the CanDance Network, we have had some success in connecting with other Canadian presenters but the challenge has been promoting artists of African Descent, whose work is not understood within a European contemporary dance definition. Our efforts continue to initiate relationship building, possibly through collaborative initiatives, tour links or workshops. Presenters often refer artists of African descent to our organization, which we are grateful for, but there is usually no other attempt by that presenter to continue a relationship with the artist referred. Work is readily accepted if it looks and feels European but these works often fit a single view and are not reflective of the promoted multicultural mosaic of Canada. The usual justification is that the work is not contemporary enough or does not fit into that organization's mandate.

We have had greater success with international organizations where we have been able to embark on exchanges of presentations, instructors, consultations and more. Organizations like IABD, consultant Mercy Nabirye from One Dance UK, Big Mission in the UK, Akumpapa Ensemble in Ghana and various other international artists/companies, who continue to not only connect dance Immersion to artists, but provide a wide range of experiences and knowledge sharing that informs the development of ideologies, research, practices and discussions around the many dance forms by dancers from the African Diaspora. My success as a curator within

this international arena has enabled me to facilitate a variety of engagement opportunities for Canadian artists from the African Diaspora who have been able to work in new environments that allowed for their dance expressions to be a part of the global contribution of dance.

It is within this international network that we have been able to connect artists in a profound way, to a foundation of experiences that evolves artists' work inside the context of their chosen dance practice. This has become an important part of

The constant repeated challenge of preconceived stereotypes around racial identification is a pattern that has frustrated, diverted and depressed many aspiring, emerging and professional dance artists from the African Diaspora. They are either "Too Black or not Black enough" dance artists who practice various dance forms and struggle to find a place while forever finding creative ways of communicating their dance expressions.

Vivine Scarlett

how we have begun to address some of our community needs within a global platform where artists can define themselves amongst like minded people and practices that inform mind, body and soul. This is done through methods that bring about an empowering confidence and understanding of the work being created by artists from the African Diaspora.

As a presenting organization, we consistently witness work, proposals, and support materials, that are in need of further development; along with guidance and mentorship in order for ideas and initiatives to reach their fruition. Support that offers administration, networking and resources has been a missing link that has delayed the growth and exchange required for a healthy arts ecology within our community. This community includes practitioners, teachers,

and administrators, where many of those practicing do not have the adequate knowledge, resources, connections or sufficient funds to address organizational/ individual challenges.

In 2015 we underwent an exercise with Mercy Nabirye that included focus groups with members from Toronto's African Canadian dance community about issues lacking within the milieu. This gave us incredible insight into what resources were needed to support the community at this time. The priority issues we have chosen to address include the need for additional mentorship, forums and symposiums

dedicated to advancing the knowledge, appreciation and practices from the African Diaspora.

dance Immersion's pilot initiatives all work separately yet still function within our existing programming that delivers diverse experiences. Although the new initiative's main focus is dance, content provides transferable information that will be marketed to multidisciplinary participants.

By cultivating a fertile ground for creating multi-layered initiatives, we define our own diverse work and continue to build on the legacy of our artistic expressions. The importance of developing the art form with organizations that collaborate through various means of support assists in building careers and establishing an overall sector that is inspired about the future and the longevity of who we are and the art forms we practice.

Yes, global networking, initiatives, collaborations, commissions etc. create additional challenges but it is important to fostering the true development of artists from the African Diaspora who continuously work amongst the inequities within the cultural sector.

Every time we get bogged down in the reality of it all, we are inspired by remembering that we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. Those ancestors whose global work shared our stories and expressions in extremely challenging times. Their work continues to influence many as we honour the legacy of Pearl Primus, Len Gibson, Eleo Pomare, Dindi Lidge, Rex Nettleford, Baba Chuck Davis, Dr. Sherrill Berryman Johnson, and so many more.

dance Immersion moves forward incorporating a West African practice where "Art is not separated but seen as a whole" (Different artistic disciplines are not separated from each but are connected and relate to one another) and it is with this concept that we forge into the universal language of our art form, networking and sourcing information that nurtures and builds who we are. Our goal is to erase old concepts while reimagining a wider understanding, and to change pre-defined perspectives, stereotypes and popular images that we currently see and subliminally gravitate towards in the belief that it is the only way.



Leonard "Len" Gibson (1926 - 2008)
and Vivine Scarlett.
Photo: Alex Francis.



Toronto-based Caribbean Folk Performers
Photo: David Hou.

This path dance Immersion has chosen widely supports others who continue to advocate for our inclusivity. We honour the work of these soldiers who continue to make sure that our art does not become invisible in the world of “visible minorities.” dance Immersion works with all, to define and develop within the global community, building relationships, connections and resources that feed, strengthen and bring together an artistic movement that is truly sourced from its origin.

There is so much more about ourselves that we have not investigated. All journeys in art, no matter its discipline or genre, are formed, inspired, developed and created from its environmental landscape, geographical location, traditions and histories, that shape not only art but the very core of human existence.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: VIVINE SCARLETT is an administrator, choreographer, and instructor, whose artistic goals and aspirations are rooted in the love of dance. She is Founder and Curator for dance Immersion (Toronto, Canada), an organization that presents, produces and supports dancers and dances of the African Diaspora while providing a number of diverse programs that enhance careers for emerging and professional dance artists. For 24 years this organization's unique mandate and vision have provided Canadian and international dance artists with opportunities that have laid a foundation for continued growth and



Vivine Scarlett.
Photo: David Captures Photography.

representation. Vivine's contributions to the field of dance are generated from an energy that has fuelled her passion leading her on a journey for over 34 years of giving and serving through the arts. As former Artistic Director and performing member of the Usafiri Dance and Drum Ensemble, Vivine created and presented works influenced by both traditional African and contemporary dance styles. Drawn to all kinds of dance expressions and movement, her passion has manifested many experiences that have served Canadian and international artists of African descent. Vivine is the recipient of the Dance Ontario Lifetime Achievement Award, a K.M. Hunter Dance Artist award and a Planet Africa Heritage Award received for her contributions. Her choreographic endeavours have received a Dora Mavor Moore award in the original production of *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*, and a nomination from The Montréal English Theatre Awards (META) for the remount in 2016. Her efforts to connect international Blacks in dance to Canada has resulted in dance Immersion bringing two youth companies to perform in Ghana West Africa and the hosting of the International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference and Festival twice. Vivine has taught for numerous institutions and organizations throughout Canada and continues her creative explorations as a freelance choreographer. www.danceimmersion.ca

Tara Aisha Willis

NOTES TOWARD A NEW CONFIGURATION

I want to think about curation and performance as practices for activating—and keeping in motion—the processual negotiation of dancing political subjectivities. The politically critical potential of work by black experimental dance artists is not always evident at first glance, especially in this moment in which what it might mean to be politically effective in the United States is being constantly reworked on both private and public scales. If our political moment vacillates between critical dissensus, sustained action, and self-protective isolation, structures and spaces that hold ambiguity and opacity carry temporarily healing and even critical potential.

I am framing these ideas with two 2016 performances I was involved with that took black lesbian feminist poet and scholar Audre Lorde’s notion of poetry as the “skeleton architecture of our lives” as a starting point for creating open-ended architectures for collaborative, improvised dance events (“Poetry Is Not A Luxury,” 1973).

First: *Enclosures for reading and responding*, a softly moderated conversation around excerpts by Silvia Federici, Fred Moten, and Audre Lorde happened within a sculptural installation by Liliana Dirks-Goodman and was interrupted/overlapped by ongoing performances. Part of the Movement Research Festival Spring 2016: Hand Written Note(s), the artists were Ni’Ja Whitson, Mayfield Brooks, Justin Cabrillos, and Marguerite Hemmings.

Second: *the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds* event created by guest curator Eva Yaa Asantewaa for Danspace Project’s Platform 2016: Lost & Found, brought together 20 black women and gender nonconforming dancers for a structured improvisation in a venue long tied to white postmodern dance histories. I was lucky enough to co-curate and co-moderate *Enclosures* and to be one of the 20 dancers in *the skeleton architecture*.

These projects based around the same Lorde text arose independently within several months of each other. Lorde’s essay, “Poetry Is Not A Luxury” demands a methodological shift in how we practice living itself—it asks us to attend to the

subtler, everyday structures of poetry, emotionality, power, and care beneath the more legible, hardened surfaces. How might curatorial work hold these “skeleton architectures” up to the light with urgency, without asking them to congeal into ultimatums?

Between 2011 and 2017 I worked in various capacities at Movement Research (MR), a non-profit artist-services organization based in downtown New York City that supports the investigations and experimentations of dance and movement-based artists. Part of that work was as the coordinator for Movement Research’s diversity initiatives, facilitating between a phenomenal group of Artists of Color Council members and Movement Research (MR) staff and board members as the group defines its mission and gains visibility.

I feel fortunate to be joining the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in my hometown, Chicago, as Associate Curator of Performance for their beautiful 300-seat theater. I know that I do so in part out of a long overdue but still frustratingly rare, slow shift in the attention of such institutions away from simply including artists and curators of color as an addendum to their programming, toward cultivating more long-term infrastructural changes, often in the form of staff and board leadership. Interesting data on this in the New York dance world can be found at Dance/NYC’s website (www.dance.nyc/), but suffice it to

As an active dancer and performer, I am also myself regularly in the position of those performers who are *hired* by the artists I will work with as a curator. So, I’m writing this in a moment of culture shock over the kinds of conversations I’m already starting to have within this new role and in anticipation of what’s to come.

Tara Aisha Willis

say, the bulk of arts workers of color work low-level teaching and administrative positions, while organizational governance is disproportionately white. I see the different versions of “musical chairs” being played between curatorial, administrative, and board leadership positions across institutions, and wonder why it still feels so surprising even to me that the MCA looked slightly beyond the usual suspects, and hired someone like myself with almost no visibility as a curator and no singular institutional commitment—who’s been juggling freelance careers as an artist and writer, as much as administrator. Before beginning work, I am already challenged by the transition from a small-budget, artist-run, artist-services organization, specifically serving the practices and processes of local dance



the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds, Danspace, 2016.
Photo: Ian Douglas.

and performance artists, to a relatively traditional performance venue housed within a major contemporary art museum that responds to local and international audiences, as well as a larger network of presenters, performance makers across genres, and funders. As an active dancer and performer, I am also myself regularly in the position of those performers who are *hired* by the artists I will work with as a curator. So, I'm writing this in a moment of culture shock over the kinds of conversations I'm already starting to have within this new role and in anticipation of what's to come.

At last year's convening, I described my familiarity with inhabiting white spaces in which my presence, and whiteness itself—including my own white and education privilege—have held varying degrees of visibility. It has been crucial to me, in all my areas of labor, to use that facility to bring as many others “into the room” with me as I can: I know not all of my fellow artists of color are willing or able to sit in those positions, to do that kind of labor (nor should they need to be), and because I know I'm one of a few insiders with the privilege to circulate with relative ease in the spaces where these conversations happen. One trick I'd like pull off in my new position will be to find ways of creating transparency with local artist communities and cultural workers around my own curatorial authorship, making programmatic decisions within informal and formal feedback loops, commissioning and

supporting existing creative collectives, communities, and co-curations. Where/ how is innovative, contemporary cultural production already being done and how can MCA amplify, support, hold up to the light, and sustain that work rather than claim it, consume it, benefit from it, and exhaust it?

One thing I've appreciated about MR is its relative flexibility for responding quickly to criticism and ongoing conversations, especially in following the lead of the Artists of Color Council on relevant decisions. But what is the bare minimum structure that needs to be in place to satisfy other institutional arms in a less adaptable structure, allowing for and protecting the maximum flexibility for artists? More immediately, how do I articulate the value of that space and flexibility to those other institutional bodies? I'd like to find some side doors to the institutional desire I already feel for finished, highly produced performance; I'd like to think about how audience-building strategies might re-center around building audiences for *artists* as much as for the institution that presents them, at multiple levels of production value and process. This will also be an opportunity to take advantage of having the resources to collect audience demographics data, whereas I've been involved in the early-stage process of finally implementing demographics collection across MR's programs for the first time. But I also will be discovering the *subtext* of the museum's expectations about who's filling the house and who *ought* to be filling it, considering that they've hired me—an early career working artist, scholar, and woman of color—to bring new ideas to the table.

The end of Audre Lorde's essay reads,

For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean (feel like) on Sunday morning at 7 AM, after brunch, during wild love, making war, giving birth, etc...

The potency of this landing place lies in the way she makes her argument felt rather than known: the ongoingness of the “skeleton architecture,” bleeding quotidian moments into the most sweeping events. In *Enclosures*, the soft architecture of the sculpture and audience in the room, and the sequential structure of discussing three texts, created temporal openings and enclosures: the performers surfaced and disappeared, navigating multiple verbal and physical relationships to audience, finding privacy in the sculptures, or inviting the audience to dance themselves. The format frayed and smeared the structure of the discourse, as we all made choices about when to speak or not. The choice-making happening around us put everyone

on the cusp, with a momentum that was temporally generous with its own lulls, breaks, incongruities, and inconsistencies. Moving in and out of spectacle, maintaining multiple bandwidths of attention, we were in it together—but the “it” was not always comfortable or clear, even as each masterful performance and voice in the room appeared. Without resolution.

Likewise, many of *the skeleton architecture* dancers hadn’t met before the show; all were virtuosic in multiple dance vocabularies and “hyphenated” roles in the dance world. We each made movement choices for ourselves while being seen and held by the group; sharing in the risk, but differently. This alchemical interaction was crafted collectively in real time within a raced and gendered alliance of individuals, each enacting our own relationships to that alliance through our unique and overlapping social and bodily knowledges. In those variously legible processes and praxes, how were we held or supported by the curatorial structure that brought us into the room? I don’t propose either of these performances or any of the work I may go on to do as ideal spaces of recuperation or ultimate healing. But there’s something crucial in improvisation as active, live, and embodied self-making—maybe curation can similarly try to be the caring proposition of flexible situations, that ask for mobile responsiveness in return, and so cultivate mutual growth and stretching for both the spaces/institutions and artists involved. How might historically and politically informed—and strategically improvisational—structures make room/shape a room for a room for the political lay of the land to surface in performance? And make/shape that room for artists to enact and reveal the living, breathing operations of relationality, negotiations of process, historical and genealogical context, and individual, politically charged embodiment?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: TARA AISHA WILLIS is a PhD candidate in Performance Studies at NYU and Associate Curator of Performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, after working on programming and diversity initiatives at Movement Research in New York. She has held editorial positions for *Women & Performance* and *TDR/ The Drama Review*, and co-edited with Thomas F. DeFrantz a special issue of *The Black Scholar*. Other writings appear in *Movement Research Performance Journal*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Magazin im August*, *Voices from the Bush*, *Dancing Platform Praying Grounds: Blackness, Churches, and Downtown Dance*, and *Performance Research* (forthcoming). Willis currently performs in a collaboration between Will Rawls and Claudia Rankine, and recently in works by Kim Brandt, Megan Byrne, and Yanira Castro. She was one of the 20 dancers in the “Bessie” award-winning *the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds*.



Tara Aisha Willis

Nicole L. Martin

REDRESSING “BLACK AS PROBLEM”
THROUGH CRITICAL PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

On the 40th anniversary of the passage of the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964, the *Lexington Herald-Leader* published an article titled “Front-Page News, Back-Page Coverage.” In the piece, the editor issued a statement of apology on behalf of the newspaper for its failure to report on Black civil rights activism during the mid-twentieth century. During the interview, the editor (who was a page writer at the time) admitted that the paper’s egregious omission of coverage on sit-ins, marches or public protests was, unsurprisingly, deliberate. As he went on to share, “The management’s view was that the less publicity it got, the quicker the problem would go away.”¹

In other words, according to the *Herald-Leader*, Blackness was the problem that needed to be suppressed, rather than anti-Black violence or Civil Rights violations. For scholars, artists, and activists committed to celebrating Black life, combatting the trope of “Black as problem,” or rather, “Black resistance as problem” is not so much a shock as it is disheartening – if not wholly exhausting. What strikes me, however, is that the silence acknowledged by the *Herald-Leader*, in response to the troubling presence of Blackness, has extended across the city of Lexington and onto the University of Kentucky (UK) campus. “Black as problem” is routinely revealed through action and interactions, policy proposals and initiatives – not as an operation hidden in plain sight but, rather, one of institutional adornment...all of which affects pedagogical praxis.

For little over a year, I have worked as an instructional consultant at the University of Kentucky’s teaching and learning center. As a centralized unit on campus, our team collaborates with administrators, faculty, staff, part-time instructors and graduate students to develop pedagogical strategies for enhanced student learning and retention. In addition to teaching courses as an affiliate instructor with the African American and Africana Studies program, I am also a co-facilitator of a workshop series called Critical Conversations About Race and Teaching (CCRT).

1. Blackford, Linda, and Linda Minch. “Front-Page News, Back-Page Coverage: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Lexington. *Lexington-Herald Leader*, 4 July 2004, p. A1.

As the title of the initiative suggests, the focus of these faculty-centered workshops is on how to facilitate productive conversations in the classroom at the intersection of race. My attempts to weave performance – specifically, critical performative pedagogy – into faculty development have been futile, at best. This is due, in part, to the geo-political and sociopolitical environment to which I referenced at the opening of this essay, though body-centered practice is generally rendered suspect in academia. I conceptualize critical performative pedagogy as a justice-oriented approach to teaching that privileges embodiment in learning. The heuristic guidelines outlined by performance studies scholar Elyse Pineau calls this pedagogical approach “learning by doing” (“Critical” 51)² wherein process and sustained “systematic” engagement are prioritized assuming that experiential learning will lead to broader justice-driven application. In other words, critical performative pedagogy transforms the classroom into a rehearsal space for social activism. It does so by attending to the *how* and *why* bodies move and respond to environmental stimuli with a focus on the impact of power and privilege. Given the way race (in this case, Blackness) operates to be discursively maintained and ascribed onto bodies, a critical performative pedagogy employs the object of “concern” as the instrument of revolution.

In my work at UK, I am asking, then: How does one enact a critical performative pedagogy about race in a space erected out of an intentional erasure of Black resistance framed as problem? What does it mean to employ a resistant pedagogical praxis while suspended between an animation of presence and erasure? How does the looming threat of disappearance (or of being disappeared) affect a person’s ability to emphasize embodied knowledge? What are the necessary conditions to modeling and advocating for a “safe” (or, I prefer “accountable”) learning environment on behalf of students of color amidst structural hostility? Most important, how is this work effective when the audience is assumed white and while under heightened institutional surveillance?

Since starting in my position, I have spent considerable time in meetings listening to conversations about “accreditation,” “strategic planning,” and “assessment.” I am surrounded by a committed collective of administrators, faculty and staff who routinely express concern for the well-being of students of color, White Appalachia, international and first generation populations. This task force of progressive educators places an emphasis on a rhetoric of “inclusion” as a way of cultivating

2. Pineau, Elyse. “Critical Performative Pedagogy: Fleshing Out the Politics of Liberatory Education.” In Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer (Eds.), *Teaching Performance Studies*, 41-54. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.

an environment wherein marginalized groups can experience a sense of belonging. They consider questions like: What does it mean to incorporate underrepresented student populations into the curriculum, content, and culture of a classroom, especially in non-humanities disciplines? How does an instructor effectively shut down harmful and exclusionary rhetoric or behavior without ostracizing and alienating the offender? How does one responsibly “hold space” for the variance of opinion and (to a certain extent) media-affirmed reality? What does it look like to productively facilitate dialogue in the classroom around ideas of race, to do no harm, and to feel okay, (to feel *pleasant*), at the end? And, inevitably, someone always asks: How can we expand the definition of inclusion to consider intersecting identities beyond an attention to race? How do we move past the black/white dichotomy?

In these moments, by nature of my job, I find myself in direct confrontation with my complicity in the unique operation of institutionalized anti-Blackness. It is a conflict felt first in my body as I imagine the pink rubber tip of a pencil brush across my feet. To remain present, legible, and valued in the room is now dependent upon my ability to reinscribe the process of deletion nipping at my heels. My chest tightens while my brain goes into overdrive, searching for the singular solution – the silver bullet to solve the problem of race, which is almost always code for the “problem of Black.” It is a solution assumed by the institutional rhetoric of “assessment,” “retention,” “safe space” and “diversity,” language and measures that cannot account for the specificities and pervasiveness of systemic anti-Blackness.

The constraints of the Critical Conversations initiative are made pliable, however, under the assumed authority of instructor of record. In the classroom, I draw on critical performative pedagogy as a method of resistance to the rhetoric of deletion (i.e., “assessment,” “safe space,” “inclusion.”) In spring 2017, I taught a course called, *Performing Black Feminisms*. This class was inspired by my former advisor and forever friend and mentor, Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Jones offered an iteration of this course prior to the beginning of my doctoral work – I never had the opportunity to take the class myself, which is partly what motivated me to offer it at the University of Kentucky. And despite the sterility of the physical space (stark white walls, aggressive florescent lights, and limited capacity for mobility), the classroom still revealed its emancipatory potential, aided in large part by the students. When the semester started, there were only six undergraduates enrolled. By the end of the add/drop period,

registration had risen to thirteen...all of whom identified as Black or mixed-race Black. I remain convinced the rise in enrollment speaks less to my own teaching abilities but is, rather, illustrative of the needs of Black students to have access to intellectual and communal spaces on campus that unapologetically give language to and affirm their lived experience as Black subjects, rather than as Black problems.

Many of my students had little exposure to the disciplinary tenets of Black feminism. So, we started there: with theories, naming practices, and historicizing. I wanted my students to situate our exploration of Black feminism via performance within the generative potential of what Hortense Spillers calls “unclaimed...possibility”

(215).³ Together, we unpacked how the trauma of the Crossing created an oceanic suspension – an unnamed space between here and there. I asked my students to imagine their bodies in that suspended state, between systems of naming, before a rhetoric of deletion, and in rebuke of “Black as problem.” I wanted them to consider embodiment as a mechanism of reform, if not necessarily one of return. This was done to dispel any desire my students may have had to find safety and rescue in a mythically unscathed pre-slave trade origin narrative.

By employing a critical performative pedagogy, I sought to make visible the mechanics and violence of institutional language while offering creative expression through the body as a tool to (re)name and (re)affirm Blackness (and Black womanhood) in all its beauty and complexity. I adapted an assignment used in a graduate course I took on performance and race in the United States with Dr. Deborah Paredez (Columbia University), and based on feedback from a friend and colleague, Dr. Katelyn Wood (University of Virginia). Simply called “Creative Response,” this assignment asked students to think intuitively about how they were understanding and processing various arguments of Black feminist theory, and to be reflective about how that understanding revealed itself in and through the body. Each

My chest tightens while my brain goes into overdrive, searching for the singular solution – the silver bullet to solve the problem of race, which is almost always code for the “problem of Black.” It is a solution assumed by the institutional rhetoric of “assessment,” “retention,” “safe space” and “diversity,” language and measures that cannot account for the specificities and pervasiveness of systemic anti-Blackness.

Nicole L. Martin

3. Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Black, White and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, 203-229. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.



response prompt focused on a different modality of performance (music, movement, narrative, ritual etc.), to which my students had to develop short original creative work.

If my students had little exposure to Black feminism, they had even less familiarity with performance methodology as a heuristic. As such, I structured each creative response to build in level of perceived performance risk, working toward the creation of a portfolio of their creative process. From this collection of work, students were asked to refine and remix their responses to create a longer original performance reflecting a Black feminist aesthetic for their end-of-semester assignment. Inspired by my obsession with the Hamilton musical mixtape, I began the semester by asking my students to create and share a compilation of five songs responding to the prompt: “What does Black feminism sound like?”

This assignment allowed me to get a sense of their range of interests, cultural influences, and ability to historicize cultural texts. Many of them conducted unsolicited independent research on artists so that their mixtape would emphasize intertextuality and intergenerational, cross-genre influences. A few weeks later, I raised the level of risk and asked them to create a movement piece to instrumental music (or without sound) that conceptualized the idea of black women’s citizenship and freedom in the United States. We held class in a black box/dance studio on campus. We moved through the space barefoot and sat on the floor against the walls. I remember one of the most compelling responses came from a mixed-race Black male student. Unlike many of the others who, at that point in the semester, still felt unsure about how their bodies could be employed as an instrument for

personal and cultural revolution, he accepted the assignment's invitation to reshape collective space, action, and thought. When sharing his mixtape, I remember this student held back from dancing while listening to songs that clearly made him want to move, so accustomed he was to being disciplined into containment. For this assignment, however, he literally and figuratively broke free. I am certain there are arguments and analyses to make regarding the relationship between Black male bodies and Black feminist praxis and aesthetics. What remains important within the context of a critical performative pedagogy, however, is the way this student propelled his body into the space as an exploration of constraint and agency, as a demonstration of rootedness and levity, and through an aesthetic that actively subverts "Black as problem."

As part of the final assignment, and to supplement their end-of-semester original performance, I asked students to write a reflective paper detailing their experience in the class. One student opened with the disclaimer that she would be intentionally disrupting the formality of an academic paper, so that she could situate herself within a genealogy of artists informed by the work of Ntozake Shange, as a method of recovering her body and in direct challenge to structural oppression...because that is what she learned how to do. I remain unsure about the utility of a critical performative pedagogy in faculty development, or if it can be translated into a language that is legible within an administrative frame. Yet, I have no doubt that teaching with a commitment to the body, in proclamation and reverence of Blackness, is the sought after solution for those who seek to enact anti-racist teaching practices. Critical performative pedagogy draws our attention to bodies within their unique socio-spatial, sociohistorical and sociocultural contexts. It demands our collective reflexivity and a willingness to confront the way language incites practices of silence and violence. A problem ignored rarely – if ever – disappears; and in the case Blackness, it is not even the original source.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: NICOLE L. MARTIN, PHD is the Director of Academic Affairs and a lecturer for the Lewis Honors College at the University of Kentucky. She completed her doctorate at the University of Texas at Austin in performance studies and African and African Diaspora studies. Her teaching and research interests rest at the intersection of performance, critical race studies, black feminisms, critical pedagogy, and critical ethnography. Her scholarly and artistic projects examine the erasures and recoveries of Black women in theatrical, film and television archives. She also investigates how critical pedagogical praxis redresses and reforms systemic inequities in the classroom. Prior to joining the Honors College, she worked as a faculty instructional consultant at UK's teaching and learning center where she partnered with faculty, departments, and administrative units across campus to advance inclusivity in the classroom. Since 2016, she has designed and conducted workshops on facilitating dialogue across cultural and racial difference for the University of Kentucky, Arizona State University, Concordia University (Montréal), and the American Bar Association.



Nicole L. Martin

Dasha A. Chapman

THINKING WITH FOUR SCENES: PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY IN HAITI

From my participation in the past two *Configurations in Motion*, held at Duke University in 2015 and 2016, I gathered that many of us didn't actually think of ourselves as "curators" in the sense of the term's historical confinement within a particular Euro-American manner of selecting, and thus excluding, works of art and artists under the rubric of a singular curatorial vision. Rather—to offer some terms I've accumulated from our previous *Configurations* meetings—the labor in which we are engaged more directly resonates with terms like gathering, assembling, facilitating, presenting, centering, writing, shepherding, radical care, purposeful production, conjuring, and emancipating.

I am an academic, a dancer and dance scholar, who is invested as much in research, writing, teaching and publishing, as I am in developing platforms for dialogue and creative exchange, and in creating work collaboratively.

I have been pursuing ethnographic research in Haiti and with Haitian dancers in the United States since 2007. My work unfolds multi-modally in a way that thrives in an open circuit: My scholarship derives its theory from the relationships I build with people through ethnography and performance; my writing requires new modes of seeing and relating in order to attend to the performances I research; my teaching and university programming allows me to share the work and bring artists in relation to young learners and different fields of practice; and these exchanges then open out new perspectives in my own scholarship, practice, and teaching.

In all these configurations, I work with artists as intellectuals, recognizing how artists themselves are researchers and producers of knowledge in their own right. They approach their most urgent problems and desires with creativity and hope, while cultivating publics through the sharing of their embodied visions.

In what follows, I share four scenes from my ethnographic and performance-based research with dance artists in Haiti. Each illuminates a constellation of problems, potentials, and possibilities regarding the interrelationships between performance and community, curation and people of color. As I have been tussling with how

these artists and their work can activate different ways of understanding what we do, I offer them as scenes to think with; moments for us to consider their resonance together.

SCENE 1

Dieufel Lamisere's house/studio/school, rehearsing *Seeking*. This major suite of choreographies centers around water, and the search for potable water that undergirds much of Haitian life. The performance choreographed labor, solitary and collective struggle as well as strength, spiritual significance and social messages. I was staying at Lamisere's house/studio/school as the company rehearsed the work in its final stages. After watching their full run-through, I went to wash my hands before dinner. I turned the faucet on and it ran dry. Sometime during their dancing, we had run out of water.

We sat at the table set up on the porch, which overlooked Lamisere's front yard half covered by the dance floor. Over dinner, Lamisere tells me how his work often traffics in issues that reveal government neglect of the people. His suite of choreographies the year before, called *Braceros*, sought to reveal life for Haitians working in the cane fields on the Dominican side of the border, who have long been mistreated and brutalized because of racialized cultural stigmas. In early 2015, in the wake of a Dominican constitutional ruling that retroactively revoked the citizenship of thousands of Dominican people of Haitian descent, a young man of Haitian descent was hung in a public park.

... I share four scenes from my ethnographic and performance-based research with dance artists in Haiti. Each illuminates a constellation of problems, potentials, and possibilities regarding the interrelationships between performance and community, curation and people of color. As I have been tussling with how these artists and their work can activate different ways of understanding what we do, I offer them as scenes to think with; moments for us to consider their resonance together.

Dasha Chapman



(Top and center) Haitidansco rehearsal of *Seeking*. At Dieufel Lamisere's house/ studio/school in Jacmel, Haiti, June 2016. (Bottom) Image from *Braceros* by Dieufel Lamisere/Haitidansco. All images by Dasha Chapman.



That summer, amidst reports of increased marginalization and deportations, Lamisere incorporated this extremely graphic and horrific image into the staging of his strong evening-length work. I was reminded of African American dance giant Katherine Dunham's *Southland*, her controversial lynching ballet from 1951. But I was also reminded of the continued cycles of anti-black violence that haunt and configure social life across the Americas, and across the waters of the Atlantic as well.

Lamisere had lived and worked as a dance artist in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in the early 2000s. He has both a real relationship with the country and a sense that for those dark skinned enough to be read as Haitian, life there is often made more precarious because of racialized stigma.

He recently brought Haitidansco, his company of 15 dancers and drummers, to the Dominican Republic for a dance exchange with Ballet Folklórico Nacional Dominicano in Santo Domingo. For their final performance, the culmination of the visit, Lamisere didn't choose to present *Braceros*; rather, he chose *Seeking*. Perhaps a gesture toward what connects people on the two sides of the island, instead of what cleaves them apart.

In order to make the trip happen, Lamisere had to crowdfund each step of the way. Visas, passports, bus fare to the Dominican Republic, hotel rooms, food for everyone, and return bus fare to Port-au-Prince. The constant calls to his transnational network became more and more desperate as the trip neared and he didn't have the funds he needed to make it happen. It seemed like an extraordinarily ambitious feat to pull off. But in the end, Lamisere made enough calls to his networks of support to make it happen.



Seeking: En busca de aqua, performance flyer, 2017.

SCENE 2

The day after the massacre of 49 queer people of color at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, queer activist and performer Yonel Charles staged an improvised dance in a very poor neighborhood of Port-au-Prince—a neighborhood in which he worked as an LGBTQ peer health educator. Charles is also the artistic director of an LGBTQ-inclusive performance group that develops dance theater



Image shared on Facebook after Yonel Charles's memorial performance, with the heading "omaj ak tout lgbt ki tonbe nou ap toujou rete byen soude" / "homage to all LGBTQ people who we have lost; we stand strong in solidarity."

work derived from Vodou aesthetics, and is a central community figure for LGBTQ Haitians living in Port-au-Prince and its surrounds. Charles' improvisational dance in honor of the victims at Pulse, was, as he said, "an homage for all my LGBTQ brothers and sisters that were lost."

Improvising in an open courtyard with a large rainbow-colored band that encircled and bound his wrists while he moved, Charles literally carved space for acknowledging and remembering queer life. At first, people didn't know what he was doing. But, he related to me, they soon warmed up to his intervention and gathered to patiently watch with interest. The act of memorialization was also an act of transnational solidarity, no doubt surprising to those who happened to see it. But Charles used the opportunity to open up a conversation about the interconnections

of queer life and techniques of care for safer sex and survival with the gender non-conforming and sexually-transgressive Haitians who had gathered around his performance.

SCENE 3, WHICH REQUIRES A LITTLE BIT MORE CONTEXT

In December 2015, I directed *Activating Petwo's Kinesthetic Imagination*, a collaborative performance project in Port-au-Prince that took place during the 4th Ghetto Biennale.¹ Started by British curator Leah Gordon and Haitian artist Andre Eugene, the Ghetto Biennale has functioned in Port-au-Prince since 2009 as a platform for raising questions about the making and consuming of art, epitomized by international art biennales and exhibitions that either wholly exclude artists of color or superficially consume their work. In response to a series of incidents in which a Haitian artist's sculpture could more easily cross borders than he could, the

The performance posited a politics of relation. It didn't negate difference; rather—we danced in it; worked with it; building something new, that is at the same time something old.

Dasba Chapman

Ghetto Biennale was conceived as a way to bring international artists to downtown Port-au-Prince where Eugene works with (and is a co-founder of) Atis Rezistans (Artist Resistance): a collective working through methods of *reklamaj*, the recuperation of found materials.² Challenging conventional methods of art-making and exhibition, the biennale requires that artists be in residency in the neighborhood of Grand Rue for at least a week to situate to the conditions in which they will create.

Our project, *Activating Petwo's Kinesthetic Imagination*, was site-specific, devised in relation to a local artist's public/private lakou or yard

space in downtown Port-au-Prince. We were four artists collaborating on the performance together: two Haitian dancer-activists (whom I'd come to know through my work in Haiti), myself, and another white American dancer-scholar who also had connections to Haiti. We leveraged the historical memory of the

1. The Ghetto Biennale is an ever-evolving experiment. In each iteration, the curatorial team aims to address the complexities and conflicts that may have emerged during the previous event. While here is not the place to rehearse debates around cultural tourism and foreign presence, Leah Gordon has spoken extensively on the dynamics of the project as well as its various problems and successes; and Myron Beasley, David Frohnappel, and Katherine Smith have all written on the curatorial ethos of the Biennale.

2. For more on the work of these artists, watch Leah Gordon's short film documentary *Atis Rezistans: The Sculptors of the Grand Rue* (Soul Jazz Records/Films, 2008) and Mksaens Denis's 2004 experimental film *E Pluribus Unum*, <https://vimeo.com/64278058>.



(Left) Yonel Charles dancing Ezili Dantò, Ghetto Biennale. Port-au-Prince, December 2015. Photo: Lee Lee.

(Above) *Activating Petwo's Kinesthetic Imagination*, Port-au-Prince, December 2015. Yonel Charles, Dasha Chapman, Jean-Sebastien Duvalaire, and Ann Mazzocca. Photo: Lazaros.

Haitian Revolution as it is encoded in Vodou-derived performance forms, and my collaborators and I (as two Haitians and two Americans) used the Haitian repertoire as our relational language across difference. Through performance we buoyed the revolutionary potential of the strong female woman-loving Vodou spirit Ezili Dantò to urgently activate these resources toward more just ways of being in common. Yonel Charles danced Ezili Dantò, a risky choice in the “ghetto” of the Grand Rue.

The performance posited a politics of relation. It didn’t negate difference; rather—we danced in it; worked with it; building something new, that is at the same time something old.

Following our site-specific performance work in Haiti, which opened up so much for all of us, I facilitated the writing of a co-authored essay to accompany and extend the project. This experimental co-authored piece appears in a special issue of *Women & Performance* I co-edited on “Queer Performance and Affiliation,” now online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2017.1315227>.

AND NOW THE SCENE

The curators of the Ghetto Biennale include in the event's structure a final "Congress" as a space for the artists to dialogue, share what went well, and air grievances. As I stood in the hot and crowded courtyard observing the many artists—Haitian and foreign—present for the conversation, I realized just how few Haitian artists created performances. Most artists were sculptors, painters, or creators who work with found materials, following the Atis Rezistans *reklamaj* aesthetic. Their objects and creative works, alongside many others exhibited throughout the hosting neighborhood, were for sale. The Biennale offered many an opportunity to possibly make a little money to help them get by—and this was the case for both Haitian artists and non-Haitian artists. And while genuine exchanges certainly did occur between people outside of, or facilitated by, monetary exchange, against this backdrop, I became aware of our choice-making as performers in a new way.

I began to consider the politics of performance in such a context. The long-established recognition of the anti-capital potential of performance seemed an ungrounded utopian prospect when faced with the realities of urban survival in Port-au-Prince and the prospects of being an artist working in the biennale context. What we found in our choice to dwell in movement-based performance was that the heart of the work emerged in our building of relationships to people, place and history through the process of creating. Working in artistic modes "in relation to people," as Thomas F. DeFrantz often proposes, allowed us to center our investigations on the conflicts and encounters that arose through the process. As body-based work, the ways different bodies get read and understood in certain spaces informed, and ultimately defined, the process. As such, we aimed to reveal and reorient the ways that bodies move, reverberate history, navigate the present, and forge other possible routes of being-in-the-world.

So when we consider the multifaceted work of artists like Yonel Charles and Dieufel Lamisere—work that encompasses a range of social praxes and addresses a number of related, urgent issues through dance and performance—here I add my voice to the call made by many in our *Configurations* group: a call directed at instituting a kind of ethics of engagement and support that recognizes process,

supporting artists in the varied stages and modes of performance-making beyond the conventional staged event with an understanding of creation and presentation in an expanded sense. And as I do so, I will gesture to a final scene to conclude my presentation, but perhaps also offer as a beginning:

SCENE 4



Jean Appolon's *Lakou Ayiti*. Photo: Dasha Chapman.

This moving image is the last scene in Boston-based Haitian choreographer Jean Appolon's recent suite of dances called *Lakou Ayiti*. The performance explored the immigrant experience, particularly filtered through Appolon's own trajectory as it came into common with other immigration stories he excavated through community workshops held in Boston during the two years of the work's development. For now I will just remark on this potent final image Appolon offers us. This figure drawn on the stage floor with cornmeal by a multi-ethnic multi-racial cast of dancers is a *vèvè* for *Ayizan*—a strong Haitian woman spirit, mother of initiation and unity. In Haitian practice, *vèvè* are figurative drawings meant to mark space as

sacred and call forth specific spiritual energies and principles. A vèvè consecrates space at the beginning of a ceremony and summons singing, drumming and dancing in community. Is there a way to think about our work in curation as a kind of writing that elicits participation and potentializes space? A coming together that can serve diverse yet holistic needs, speak to marginalized histories, and resonate in the urgent present?

These artists each cultivate a choreographic practice that at the same time routes through a commitment to pedagogy in broad scale. Lamisere's space functions as a hub for movement education and artistry, as well as other forms of learning such as costume creation, set design, the teaching of neighborhood children, drumming, cooking, and lessons about history and current social issues. Charles uses his platform as a peer health educator to engage people through performance and make space for queerness, creative expression, safer sex education and information about community healthcare. Appolon fosters inclusive participatory spaces of learning and sharing in his teaching and choreographic practices.

Let's continue to figure out ways to reach across to artists that inspire us, artists who have broad visions and create work that sustains lives. Let's vision opportunities to share this work and support their labors in significant, meaningful ways. Thank you for listening and I look forward to learning from all of you.

Acknowledgements

Deep thanks to Thomas F. DeFrantz, Jean-Sebastien Duvilaire, Jane Gabriels, Ann Mazzocca, and Phil Rodriguez for their vision and support.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: DASHA CHAPMAN

is a scholar, dancer, and community connector. Currently Dasha is Visiting Assistant Professor of Critical Dance Studies at Hampshire College/Five College Dance.

Prior, she was the Postdoctoral Associate in the Department of African and African American Studies at Duke University, and

Dasha worked alongside Duke's Haiti Lab, the Program in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, and Dance. She received her PhD in Performance Studies from New York University, and is a dancer who works in African diasporic techniques and collaborates with choreographers in New York, Haiti, and Durham, North Carolina. In May 2018, Dasha was a resident in A Studio in the Woods in New Orleans developing a collaborative community-oriented performance project "Te Glise: Exploring Relational Ecologies of Cultural Practice through Haiti-New Orleans Connections," and in the summer of 2017 she was in residence at the Power Plant Gallery in Durham developing a local history performance project, "Haiti/Hayti/History." Her writing appears in *The Black Scholar*, *Dance Chronicle*, and *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* in a special issue she co-edited on Queer Haitian Performance and Affiliation (May 2017).



Dasha Chapman

Nikki Shaffeeullah
RE-POLITICIZING COMMUNITY ARTS

It is a tremendous thing to be able to convene with fellow ‘performance curators of colour’ in this way – across performance disciplines, across a border, across working contexts, and across varying manifestations of ‘curatorial practice,’ to grapple with shared challenges, and to work toward “possibilities for healing, reparation and liberation.” I want to share about my work in community arts, and in particular about how I’m working to create avenues within and outside of established institutions for artists from marginalized communities – particularly QT2SIBPOC (queer, trans, two-spirit + Indigenous, Black, People of Colour) folks – to access the resources and training we need to produce and facilitate work with and for our own communities.

I am thrilled to be invited to participate in this conversation – and truly always grateful for an opportunity to exhale in the company of other racialized arts workers – although it is the first time I’ve had an offer to conceive of what I do as “performance curation.” Like many other creative activists trying earnestly to manifest socially transformative work while shambling together a living in these tiresome days of late capitalism, it can be hard to articulate the through lines of my work in a way that is both easily understood, and responsive to the movements and communities in which my work is based. Typically, my professional bios usually begin with naming myself as something like: *Nikki is a Toronto-based theatre and community artist*. This description is of course rendered incomplete given the colonial limitations of a racialized artist on Turtle Island attempting to describe self, location, and pursuit. For one, this place where I was born and live, known as Tkaronto in Mohawk, meaning something akin to “where the trees meet in the water,” came upon its anglicised name and city status through, of course, centuries of colonization, the displacement and genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the coerced ceding of the land to the Crown through Treaty 13. I have come to be “based” here, based on other historic and ongoing colonial pursuits of the British – the colonization of the land now called India, where my ancestors, workers desperate for better opportunity, were deceived into taking exploitative indentured labour contracts in the faraway land of the Arawak and the Carib – a country now

called Guyana. When Britain left that Caribbean colony in 1966, civil turmoil ensued, enabled by the colonial McCarthyist intervention of the CIA, and eventually, my parents, like tens of thousands of Guyanese, found a new home in this place Tkaronto, where I eventually came into the world and came to be “based.”

As for the “community artist” piece, it is another source of frustration; the “community artist” is a colonial, capitalistic construct. The need to use ‘community’ as a qualifier demonstrates how divorced from community the profession of ‘artist’ has come to be understood in western neoliberal society on colonized Turtle Island. The centering of ‘community’ in the increasingly popular title ‘community artist’ highlights the exceptionality of *community-engaged* artistic practice in the Canadian arts landscape: even though art, and performance in particular, has been a communal event in cultures around the world since time immemorial. Western society now validates artist-non-artist dichotomies by valuing certain kinds of training, presentation, and peer support. These structures have no doubt evolved in part to help artists survive under capitalism – non-commercial art-making will never be financially productive and thus requires community support (i.e. public funding) to transpire, and so we define who an artist is with clear parameters so that this support can continued to be distributed under austere eyes. And so, as arts councils began funding dedicated community arts projects, it became important for them to ensure that those leading projects were indeed rigorous artistic professionals, lest they fund purely ‘amateur’ endeavours. I am a person who wants to work collaboratively with others toward social change, and I am an artist, so I do much of that through art; I have come to identify as a community artist in order to be understandable to gatekeepers such as funders and well-resourced arts organizations.

Of course, concurrent to the professionalization of community arts in the 1990s, racialized and Indigenous professional artists whose stories, voices, and aesthetics were still considered folksy, amateur, and non-professional by the Eurocentric standards of the Canadian arts sector, continued to demand equity from resource gatekeepers such as government funders. Although avenues offering the potential for progressive change began to emerge, such as the creation of the Equity Office and Aboriginal Office at the Canada Council for the Arts in the 1990s, or of equity priority groups at various councils, the evaluation of the professional, funded, community arts sector came about at a time where racialized and Indigenous artists were still extremely disenfranchised from public art-making resources. This has started to shift, due to changes like the aforementioned ones brought about by the activism of impacted artists, but I would argue that the community arts sector is

even further behind the theatre sector in its conversations about equity (ironic, of course, because of the vaguely implied social justice aspirations of art-making that defines itself in relation to communities). A sector that has the potential to be transformatively equitable – resourcing grassroots artistic projects and the artistic arms of grassroots social movements – instead primarily supports organizations and projects with white, class-privileged leadership, reproducing the ‘white saviour complex’ tendencies of the wider non-profit sphere. ‘Expertise,’ as legitimized by white institutions is seen as primordial, and qualifications like lived experience in this community and long-term investment in this community are minimally valued.

As this form of practice has evolved within institutions, the relationship between ‘artist’ and ‘community’ has been codified in a way that enables the artist to be *removed* from the communities they are working within: the artist defines themselves, and defines how and why they have the expertise to facilitate work in the community. Projects can and are often artist-driven, rather than conceived of by members of the given community. ‘Community arts’ continues to balloon in popularity: there are increasingly more projects identifying as such, more funding streams and more university-accredited degrees in community arts (or in the field by other names, such as the British-derived ‘applied theatre,’ which *really* evokes a colonial from-without-rather-than-from-within image of a professional theatre artist ‘applying’ their practice to a group of in-need people).

There are myriad reasons why artists and organizations without previous histories of community work or activism are increasingly embracing community arts: for one, the range of funding is wider as it is often less competitive and also includes options from non-arts funding bodies. Additionally, in recent years government funders ask organizations receiving operating funding to demonstrate how they implement equity practices, and so larger arts institutions produce community arts projects, however removed from their core work, to satisfy such requirements. And certainly, some of it must simply be artists and organizations having their good will to do good community work enabled by new availability of resources that allows them to do so without cost. Regardless of the reasons, the trends are clear —we see artists helicoptering into ‘marginalized’ communities and priority neighbourhoods, well-intentioned cultural missionaries outfitted with pre-defined outcomes, project plans informed by their own training and aesthetics, and no real structures to hold them accountable to the community.



The AMY Project presents *Almeida (The Glorious)* at the 2017 Summerworks Performance Festival. Photo: Dahlia Katz.

My understanding of what is happening in the sector is informed by many things, including having seen an institutional training program from the inside – I received an MFA in Theatre Practice – Community-Engaged Theatre from the University of Alberta. I also worked as editor-in-chief of *alt.theatre*, Canada’s only professional journal dedicated to the intersections of politics, social plurality, cultural diversity, and the stage, where I read dozens and dozens of proposals and articles about community arts work in Canada. I’ve also worked as a trainer of ‘community artists’ through programs like Jumblies Theatre’s *Artfare Essentials*, and a pilot program I am launching this month for IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, People of Colour) community artists, *Parallel Tracks*. In general, I’ve actively participated in community arts networks, conferences, and conversations; and of course, I’m a practicing community artist, who works with many community arts organizations in Toronto, and pays attention to sectoral trends.

What I see is that people who are from the communities being facilitated are greatly underrepresented in the leadership of community arts projects. My professional opinion is that the community arts sector is rife with white mediocrity, but has the potential to activate meaningful and much needed social change, if we shift power, move resources, and better connect IBPOC, LGBTQ2S, poor/working class, and disabled artists with the resources and training they need to lead artistic work in our/their own communities. I grew up in Scarborough, and then Durham Region after a family move. Throughout my childhood, I was involved in a lot of anti-racist activism, inspired by the Caribbean-Canadian community I was

surrounded by, as well as activist communities I made through my school. I also became involved with theatre from a young age, somehow, despite not having any theatre or film artists or professional artists of any kind in my family. I just gravitated to theatre – first performing, then directing, then creation and devising, and was grateful to have a family who encouraged me in all my ambitions.

When I entered into adulthood and started to undertake my own training, I was interested in ways I could connect these two passions – social change activism and performing arts. Earlier in this journey, those connections manifested as looking at the role theatre plays in social, political, and economic development around the world - I was particularly searching for ways to connect back to my parents' context, coming from Guyana. But going through an International Development undergraduate major started to turn me off that approach – the field felt icky, neo-colonial: first-world people with minimal expertise, but lots of institutional backing, working in foreign contexts. I started to learn about the global non-profit industrial complex. I had wanted to find a way to work in Guyana, but the closest I found was a CIDA-funded Theatre and Development half-year internship in Peru. It's on the same continent and really not that far but a radially different context. I learned a lot but truthfully did not contribute that much. I started thinking about how my work in the performing arts could support activism that was happening here at home. I happened to move to Victoria for a bit, and there connected briefly with the amazing Lina de Guevara and her small and mighty company Puente Theatre, which was doing the kind of work I wanted to do in my life – theatre by and for people of colour, with our communities, to analyze social issues and share and celebrate our stories.

My journey continued; I began the aforementioned MFA studies at University of Alberta, while concurrently working as a theatre director and an improviser, and working with *alt.theatre* for four years. In retrospect, I see that *alt.theatre* was the first space where I was able to practice what it meant to bring artists, scholars, audience members and activists together in conversation. It's a small journal and certainly not what we might traditionally call an institution, but I was holding

'Expertise,' as legitimized by white institutions is seen as primordial, and qualifications like lived experience in this community and long-term investment in this community are minimally valued.

Nikki Shaffeeullah

that editor-in-chief role as a queer, woman of colour, low-income working artist in my twenties, where I was succeeded and preceded by two white, tenured academic editors-in-chief, farther along in their careers. I don't know if I adequately appreciated at the time how that opportunity to have curatorial power in important conversations may not always be available to me or people like me; nevertheless, I used the time to prioritize conversations about cultural diversity and performance that dug at some deeper connections: with queer and trans artists of colour, disabled artists of colour, and at the intersections of community arts and decolonization.

I started to connect more to this sector that is called community arts. I came to it through multiple entry points: one, as an artist working in "community" creating and curating performance with so-called non-artists; and two, as a theatre artist invested in equity movements. My commitment to equity movements in theatre derived from my own experiences as a practicing artist, my work at *alt.theatre*, and as a producer and facilitator interested in supporting professional performing artists from equity-seeking groups in carving spaces for themselves.

During my studies at the University of Alberta, I was interested in finding ways to create work with people from my own communities: newcomer communities, women of colour, queer and trans women – but all the mentors available to me at the university were white. This was, at the time, the only place in Canada I found where I could do a practice-based graduate degree in community arts. Community artists in the department were also doing work in racialized and Indigenous communities, but these were white-led projects. Now, I'm in Toronto. Some of my work there involves community arts facilitation for some larger organizations, and almost none of them are interested in charting a relationship between community arts and arts equity; they don't locate what they do as being part of a process of equity-building within the arts sector. For me, the connection between community arts and equity in the arts is obvious: communities of colour, and other marginalized communities, have been disenfranchised from many kinds of artmaking through the colonial destruction of Indigenous and diasporic cultures, and the colonial gatekeepers of arts funding. Community-engaged arts has the potential to be a process of healing those divides, of creating platforms for people to tell their stories, for communities to recover and revamp their aesthetic practices.

I think some of the gaps between equity in the arts movements and community arts are due to strategic essentialism. I know that historically, when artists of colour are trying to carve out space for themselves or their practice in conversation with

colleagues, larger institutions and funding bodies, they have to argue that their work is not folk-art, not amateur art, but *professional art*, as meritorious as any ballet or opera. And similarly, community artists are trying to prove that their work requires particular expertise, such as facilitation – skills that other artists in their discipline may not necessarily have. Their work is not amateur arts work but a professional practice of engaging community with professional-quality artistic creation.

I'm interested in what can be learned by a more mutually informed conversation between these two areas of equity movements in the arts industry, and community arts practice. I also want to identify how these two conversations can inform thinking on audience engagement. For example, in 'mainstream' theatre practice, when presenting to a public audience, you need to think about things like how many people will come, how to be accountable to box-office sales. One thing that community-engaged arts enables, structurally, is freedom from bums-in-seats box office stress. Community arts project budgets are more structured like social service projects, where you are not expected to necessarily bring in minimum amounts of earned revenue through box office sales – in fact, it can be understood as a greater achievement if public presentations are no-cost and thus more accessible to community members. This kind of producing model really allows art to function as a public good, like traffic lights, or clean water. Community arts structures also allow a lot of space for process-based work, and for dynamic approaches to outreach and collaboration. All performing arts could benefit from access to creation models like this. Artists from equity-seeking groups could benefit, in particular, from more time for outreach to collaborators, to develop work, to find each other, to mentor each other.

The constructed dichotomy of who is or isn't a professional artist – something that the field of community arts requires you to articulate – is challenged by the equity movements in the arts. In Edmonton, where I did my MFA work, the distinction between people from communities in search of platforms to tell their own stories, and trained, professional artists who faced more systemic barriers to professional opportunities than their white artist peers, was actually a blurry line. I don't know if that is always true in bigger cities where there are more opportunities for artists of colour, but it was true, and important to articulate, in Edmonton. This was a community project: we weren't getting paid standard industry rates, it was a long process, we were doing story gathering that really resembled work that happens in larger "community arts" contexts. But, it also felt like an equity project for artists



The AMY Project presents *Almeida (The Glorious)* at the 2017 Summerworks Performance Festival. Photo: Dahlia Katz.

of colour. Just yesterday in Toronto, I was having a conversation with a friend who is part of a dance company for Queer/trans artists of colour and they were saying they have the same problem when they approach partners and funders – funders want to see either a professional performance group who may have an equity-seeking mandate, or a community arts company; they don't know how to place work that is both. But, community engagement practices become a necessary part of arts equity work. In the arts, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour artists may be reaching out for collaborators outside of professional arts networks. Sometimes you have to cast people or engage writers that have not trained in mainstream ways, or have not previously self-identified as professional artists because, even though they have storytelling skills, those skills haven't been named or nurtured as such. Tracing these links between community engaged practices and arts equity helps us do the necessary work of re-politicizing community arts.

Currently in Toronto, my primary focus is my work as Artistic Director of a small and mighty arts organization called The AMY (Artists Mentoring Youth) Project, where I curate performance creation programs for young women and non-binary youth from diverse communities, mostly QT2SIBPOC, which weave mentorship into every stage of the process. My vision for The AMY Project is for it to be as much a community arts endeavour — where we work with each long-term cohort of participants to carefully build strong, supportive containers for

creative expression and community care — as it is an equity in theatre initiative that fills the gaps of systemic oppression left by training institutions. Recently, we've had a lot of attention on us, because we won a large award, the Toronto Arts Foundation's Arts for Youth Award, and a lot of this attention is emphasizing our place as a 'youth arts' company. Sure, we are a youth arts company – I mean, the 'Y' in 'AMY' stands for 'youth' – but I find myself feeling almost indignant about being labelled as a “youth arts” company. Something about that feels reductive: rallying behind youth is as depoliticized as you can get – literally anyone who is not a youth at the moment has been a youth at one point. It's a pretty easy cause to get behind. Or, people think of it as working with 'at-risk' youth, a concept that is paternalistic and condescending, and in a different way, depoliticizing. We are not just supporting youth, and we are not innately good Michelle Pfeiffers sweeping in to save innately perilous at-risk youth.¹ We are performing artists who come from similar experiences and communities as the youth participants, and we're building programming and mentorship models to fill the gaps left by training institutions and larger theatre organizations. We work really hard to find creative powerhouses who have not yet been able to access arts training and creation opportunities due to the extant barriers of racism, colonization, transphobia, economic inequality, ableism, etc.. We are not simply 'working with youth', we are intervening in a performing arts sector that is opaque and oppressive, to lift up people who might otherwise be excluded and to create supportive community in the process.

Another current preoccupation of mine is how to lift structural barriers that lie between IBPOC artists doing community-engaged work at the grassroots level, and community arts resources. At the end of this month, thanks to some funding



Parallel Tracks, 2017. Photo: Jamie Milay.

from the Canada Council, I'm running Parallel Tracks: this is the first iteration of a program, I'm still figuring out what it is, exactly, but the core goal is to offer a completely free and accessible platform to connect IBPOC artists with the community arts sector. I tried to keep the outreach process relatively simple, given that this is a pilot program, and passed the call for participants through specific

1. Michelle Pfeiffer portrays LouAnne Johnson in the autobiographical film *Dangerous Minds* (1995), based on *My Posse Don't Do Homework*, St. Martin's Press, 1994. A retired United States Marine, Johnson taught predominately African-American and Latino students at an inner-city high school.

contacts across the country; however, it travelled quickly and we had over 230 applications submitted within the 8-day window. In the end, we have a cohort of 12 participants, all IBPOC, originating from a mix of urban and rural areas from PEI to BC, almost all LGTBQ2S, and many are people with disabilities. They are all receiving travel to Toronto, four days of workshops on topics ranging from budgeting to facilitation to resource development, mentorship in developing a plan for a community arts project they'll produce and lead in their home communities, billets, full meals, and a \$500 honorarium each. Importantly, we'll kick off the week with a group visit to see *Talking*

Treaties. This show, produced by Jumblies Theatre, is the headline event of the three-month Touching Ground Festival. It is a large-scale outdoor community play coming out of an arts-based oral history project about Toronto treaty history, lead by my colleague Ange Loft, who is actually from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, not too far from here. The Parallel Tracks cohort will: see a giant, ambitious, fully realized community arts project, lead primarily by Indigenous artists, and performed by an ensemble of Indigenous and People of Colour artists; have an opportunity to talk with Ange about the development of *Talking Treaties*; and then undertake a series of workshops (led by myself, Kama La Mackerel, and Aliya Jamal) that support the visioning and development of their own projects.

As we gather here from across two sides of a border to talk about performance curation in communities of colour, I'd like to close with some reflections and questions on how borders impact our work as racialized artists/curators. My MFA thesis, the aforementioned devising project with a group of women of colour in Edmonton, culminated in a production called *(un)earthed*. As part of the process, each participant created a character based on a personal ancestor – this was methodology adapted from Diane Robert's *Arrivals Project*. The ancestor character

For me, the connection between community arts and equity in the arts is obvious: communities of colour, and other marginalized communities, have been disenfranchised from many kinds of artmaking through the colonial destruction of Indigenous and diasporic cultures, and the colonial gatekeepers of arts funding. Community-engaged arts has the potential to be a process of healing those divides, of creating platforms for people to tell their stories, for communities to recover and revamp their aesthetic practices.

Nikki Shaffeullah

creation process ended up being a central part of our exploration, and all the ancestor characters, from South America, Africa, and Asia, made their way into the final work. We ended up with a show where characters travelled across time and continents to meet together in a courtyard, a quiet lively outdoor space that magically spanned and connected their respective worlds. In the talkback after one show, an audience member offered how interesting a courtyard could be as an alternative to multiculturalism. Capital-M Canadian Multiculturalism, our state-sanctioned diversity framework, suggests that in Canada, diversity is like a mosaic, with different distinct pieces existing next to each other. The Canadian imagination specifically offers this as an alternative to the melting pot of the United State of America, where the intention is to disappear difference. That suggestion of a courtyard as a possible curatorial framework for how we create art and how we live our lives, has lingered in my mind. It celebrates difference, but goes further than the *terra nullius* of the mosaic, by giving form and name and acknowledgement to the place where we gather. It simultaneously anchors us to the place, while making space for movement to and from other places of origin and significance. What can this 'courtyard' image offer us as we think about gathering, as IBPOC artists, across a border? When those potentially liberatory spaces are contained within the walls of a university, how can we inhabit them fully and communicate authentically, while real time translators on headsets funnel English to French and French to English on Mohawk land? What potential for decolonial action can we harness by bringing together IBPOC bodies, ideas and ways of knowing, in this courtyard?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH

is a theatre-maker, writer, facilitator, and community-engaged artist. Currently, she is Artistic Director of The AMY Project, an award-winning organization providing barrier-free performing arts training and mentorship for youth; a resident of the RBC Emerging Director program at Canadian Stage Company; founder of Parallel Tracks, a national community arts training program for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour artists; and a Fellow of the Salzburg Global Forum for Young Cultural Innovators. As a social justice trainer, Nikki develops and facilitates workshops on equity for arts organizations across Canada. She is currently honing her facilitation practice as a fellow in the Judith C. Jones Fellowship for Trainers of Colour with Philadelphia's Training for Change. Past roles include Assistant Artistic Director of Jumblies Theatre, and Editor-in-Chief of *alt.theatre* magazine. Nikki holds an MFA in Theatre Practice from the University of Alberta and her thesis won the 2013 Canadian Association for Theatre Research award in Intercultural Theatre. Her work is informed by longtime anti-racist, queer, and feminist movement organizing, and a family who loves music, food, justice, and pun. Nikki believes art should disrupt the status quo, centre the margins, engage with the ancient, dream of the future, and be for everyone.



Nikki Shaffeeullah

Rasu Jilani

NOTES FROM THE SUNKEN PLACE: DECOLONIZING INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES FROM WITHIN

THE SUNKEN PLACE: in this context, I define the space as being saturated in institutional biases and cultural inclusion malpractices that trigger a sense of inadequacy. The Sunken Place paralyzes you, affecting your sense of agency by perpetuating barriers preventing progress and incentivizing tokenism.

Over the last eight years, I have worked in cultural production as both an institutional and independent curator and programmer/producer of visual art and performance art. My experience in this line of work has afforded me the advantage of being genre agnostic, or, the freedom to work with a plethora of artists in various disciplines in different stages of their careers. My practice is called *Social Sculpting*.

The term *Social Sculpting* is not new. It is derived from the German performance and social practice artist Joseph Beuys. In the context of my own work, *Social Sculpting* is not an art form but instead a social practice. This type of formlessness and non-specificity enables me the freedom to use my curatorial and cultural programming talents in multiple forms, including performances, public conversations, and other social programs. I work with artists as collaborators, not as agents who produce transactional objects in the name of “art making.”

My work sits at the nexus of cultural institutions’ audience development initiatives, humanities, and civic engagement. Contemporary times have called for institutions to undo their history of exclusionary practices and embrace new modes of engaging with audiences. Most of the time these projects are framed with the ever-elusive “diversity initiative.” Quite frankly, many of these efforts have come up short in sustainability and follow-through due to unrealistic inclusionary practices and a general lack of authenticity.

Last year at the *Configurations In Motion Symposium*, one of our cohort members unpacked the term curator, or curation, which means to “care for” or to “take care of.” In my opinion, the term has been increasingly flung around like a Frisbee, and has lost its meaning. Intention and context are lost; it is now a term used as an operation of merely exhibiting work.

In a recent conversation with art critic Jessica Lynne of Arts.Black, she explains that “[t]here are some curators of color who are actively trying to complicate how the public is understanding and how they are engaged in the curating process, as well as creating parallel narratives around specific cultural production.”

With this in mind, I’ve been struggling with using this word to frame what I do. I’m interested in dialogue: multicultural, intergenerational, cross-disciplinary, transcontinental, and multi-platform conversations. This is my social justice work and my form of activism. This is my way of encouraging people to move past their assumptions and biases. By engaging in creativity in a multiplicity of ways, the viewer is caught off guard, and is forced to let go of predetermined ideas of engagement, and to lose themselves in an experience in order to learn something new or take on new ideas.

I’ve done this work over the past eight years with institutions like Afropunk, The Apollo, Columbia University, The Laundromat Project,¹ Lincoln Center, MAPP International Productions, National Black Theater, The New School,² New York Live Arts,³ Weeksville Heritage Center, 651 Arts, and others.

My question to the field is this: “How can one be truly authentic in endeavors towards diversity when access, equity, and inclusion are missing from the core of their daily practices and operations?”

There is a tremendous disconnect with what many leaders of institutions and organizations say they want and what they actually do. This brings me to where I am now in my career.

In 2016 I joined NEW INC, the New Museum’s interdisciplinary incubator that brings together more than one hundred creative practitioners and entrepreneurs from the fields of art, design and technology. Some of the projects in the incubator are examining a number of socially-relevant topics, including the biases behind programming and artificial intelligence (Stephanie Dinkins), data transparency

“Company boards and management have to say: ‘diversity and inclusion is a core priority, and it’s not a flavor of the month.’”

Kenneth I. Chenault

1. Rasu Jilani, “Griots in ‘The Stuy’: A Neighborhood as a Living Archive,” a public art exhibition of photographs along Tompkins Avenue, and an online archive of personal stories from Bed-Stuy residents about the neighborhood they call home.

2. Theater of Social Action: Student Incubator on Mass Incarceration, November 16, 2015, hosted by Eugene Lang College and MAPP International productions, and facilitated by Cecilia Rubino, Brian Lewis, and Rasu Jilani.

3. Open Spectrum Critical Community Dialogues, Faces of Resistance: Young, Organized & Unified (#FORYOU), September 28, 2015. Moderated by Grace Anieza Ali and curated by Rasu Jilani.

(DATA X), tech start-ups driven by social impact (Hello Velocity), and a new pedagogical method that leverages Hip Hop and youth culture to develop core competencies in computational thinking (Rapport Studio's odeScty). These projects are a few case studies of projects and business that have tremendous potential for cultural impact - which part of NEW INC's mission.

As the Director of Recruitment and Community Engagement, I help address the lack of diversity and representation in the cultural, design, and tech sectors. This is a heavy lift for one person--but I have skin in the game, and I see this as an opportunity to implement radical recruiting methods.

Coming into this role, my intention was to establish a cohesive workspace and professional incubator that reflects a more accurate representation of New York City's diverse demographics, all without jeopardizing the program's curatorial integrity. In this context we are using NYC as a microcosm of macro issue. With this in mind, my vision insisted that NEW INC become a model of how to facilitate cross-disciplinary collisions while setting a standard for equity, access, and inclusion as core values for other cultural institutions. This would encourage innovation centers to embrace new ideas that are generated from all cultures, and to be accessible to all communities.

This may sound simple, but anyone working in this field understands that this is no easy feat. Ultimately, the question for me is/was: "Who am I doing this for?" It is not enough to criticize a system if I am not willing to be an agent of change. For me, this meant that I had to do away with my dependency on the narrative of having a villain. It's not enough to remain still and identify the problem. If I am not willing to take action, then I, too, am complicit in reinforcing the system. Let's first take a moment to look at the lay of the land.

According to a recent study by the Department of Cultural Affairs,⁴ approximately 62% of the makeup of cultural institutions in New York City identifies as White or European. In the greater United States, the cultural workforce is 90% White. In comparison, 67% of the city's total demographic is made up of People of Color.

A recent Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC), a technology research firm and urban business initiative, survey of the United States' best tech incubators and accelerators⁵ found that 20% of the businesses supported were owned by

4. Schonfeld, Roger C., and Liam Sweeney, "Diversity in the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Community," January 28, 2016, located at <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.276381>.

5. Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC)/JP Morgan Chase. "Creating Inclusive High-Tech Incubators and Accelerators: Strategies to Increase Participation Rates of Women and Minority Entrepreneurs," 2016.

women and 23% were owned by minorities. People of color make up 32% of the national tech industry, while women represent 26% (based on a Science Technology Education Mathematics diversity report). Approximately 86% of professional designers are Caucasian according to AIGA, the professional association for design.⁶

What I detailed above is the demographic landscape of the art, design and tech industries that I must navigate in recruiting and curating the NEW INC community. However, as a result of last year's recruitment, our current cohort of Members is composed of 56% Women and 48% People of Color (52% Women and 46% POC, previous year) - a welcome improvement from our 2014-2015 cohort (40% Women and 38% People of Color).

Though this short-term victory is worth celebrating, it is important to think about the long-term. Retention is achieved by refashioning our language to be more inclusionary. Recruiting and identifying talent is an ongoing practice, and intentional cultural programming is essential for creating equity.

When creative practitioners have the opportunity to build and contribute their unique talents and perspectives to the needs of their community, they can be invaluable assets in creating social impact. When access to resources are made broadly available to diverse communities, we invest in a creative ecosystem and inspire transformative change. I firmly believe that innovation is generated from a cross-pollination of all cultures, and that these hybrid ideas can introduce new economic models and practices. This is why representation is so critical in designing the future of the cultural and tech sectors.

In fact, we included this vision in our Theory of Change for NEW INC and applied it to our recruiting strategy. We know we have been successful when, over time and effort, our community—Members, Mentors, Advisors, Alumni, Staff, Interns, and Patrons—reflect the demographic makeup of everyday society in New York City that can become a model for broader communities.

The work that I do is truly lonely. In fact, I've heard many practitioners working in similar fields express the same sentiment. Often times, I am justifying the work to the same management team who hired me in order to gain further support and resources. Additionally, I am often the only Person of Color sitting at the table addressing issues of inclusion and expected to be the sole-voice and mind of the non-white demographic - which leaves me feeling as though I'm in some sort of

6. <https://www.aiga.org/diversity-and-inclusion-task-force>

tokenistic-limbo, speaking to the sentinels of a system that also binds them and their imagination.

There is a common sentiment to decolonize cultural institution, nationally; and I agree. However, I firmly believe that one cannot decolonize an institution until they have put the work in to decolonize themselves. We must first exercise critical introspection and take inventory of symptoms of stuckness that can contribute to self-sabotage and progress - in other words, practice self-awareness. Identifying social triggers and unconscious biases helps us understand the intricacies of our own complicit contributions to dysfunctional institutional practice. Once identified, its key for us to employ self-care. Engaging in the practice of undoing of institutional racial, gender and cultural bias can be extremely toxic, and have emotional and psychological effects. Taking time to tend to our mind, body and spirit is essential to developing the stamina to continue this type of work. All forms of activism are predicated on the endurance and persistence necessary for actualizing a vision. What gives me a sense of solace is that as I continue the work, more underrepresented folk will sit at the table with me--and in my grand vision, that's what victory looks like. The vision and purpose of my practice, keeps my head (mind) above the Sunken Place, although at times, the rest of my body remains trapped in it. This is a necessary sacrifice for collective progress!

... I am often the only Person of Color sitting at the table addressing issues of inclusion and expected to be the sole-voice and mind of the non-white demographic - which leaves me feeling as though I'm in some sort of tokenistic-limbo, speaking to the sentinels of a system that also binds them and their imagination.

Rasu Jilani

POSTSCRIPT: 10 INGREDIENTS FOR BLACK LIBERATION AND DECOLONIZATION

After last year's *Configurations in Motion* presentation in Montréal, I've been inspired to attend more convenings with people of color in the tech and cultural space, with the agenda to have conversations about generating more representation in the field. I think it's imperative to get outside our respective bubbles, and share our breakthroughs and insular language with the public. I found that many people working in these sectors have struggled with trappings of tokenism and have been siloed in the sea of whiteness within their respective workspaces. Most recently,

I've attended engagements like Black Media Story Summit at Google; launched a POC in Tech roundout at NEW INC; and facilitated Afrotectopia at NYU. During Afrotectopia, I facilitated a think tank called Decolonizing Blackness, Securing Black Futures. As a result, we came up with "10 Ingredients for Black Liberation and Decolonization" that we'd like to share with the public:

1. **Commit to Knowledge of Self:** Introspection is the first step to decolonizing your mind, body and spirit. Know your lineage by way of DNA testing (AfricanAncestry.com) and/or researching Black histories; be honest and accept who you are (embrace the I AM)
2. **Practice Pan African Solidarity across the Diaspora:** Share knowledge, skills, resources and legacies across continents and cultures
3. **No Fear:** Live and lead an authentic life
4. **Practice Self-Care:** Meditation and counseling (Mind); healthy food, exercise and martial arts (Body); remember to breathe and develop a spiritual practice (Spirit)
5. **Reclaim Our Narratives:** embrace lost and abandoned traditions, and start new ones
6. **Jumpstart Generational Wealth:** Start and support Black Owned Businesses
7. **Develop Black Algorithms:** Create our own technologies, create new language(s), learn and develop code and generate our own content.
8. **Embrace the Spectrum:** Include multiple identities, and expressions of 'Blackness' (biracial, transgender, queer and LGBTQ)
9. **Pay it Forward:** Take on apprentices and share what you know and do. Teach The Youth!
10. **Secure Black Futures:** Create our own institutions and a culture of self-determination



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **RASU JILANI** is an independent curator, cultural producer, social sculptor, and entrepreneur. His work investigates the intersections of art, culture, and civic engagement to raise critically-conscious conversations between artists, their local communities, and the wider public. Jilani's projects are dedicated to promoting awareness around pressing social issues through exhibitions and community-driven programs. Currently, Rasu serves as Director of Recruiting and Community Engagement, NEW INC at New Museum, a creative entrepreneurship incubator for art, tech, and technology. From 2013 through 2016, Jilani worked at MAPP International Productions as the Director of Community Programs. His work at MAPP included programming the humanities for *Blink Your Eyes: Sekou Sundiata Revisited* - a citywide retrospective, *Triple Consciousness: Black Feminism(s) in the Time of Now* at Brooklyn Museum, *Days of Art and Ideas* at The New School, artists' salons, community discussions, and artists led workshops. Prior to joining MAPP, he worked with over 125 artists to curate, design and manage artistic and community events addressing social concerns and civic issues through his brand *Coup d'etat Brooklyn*. He served a two-year tenure as Senior Fellow of Arts, Culture, and Sustainability at the Pratt Center for Community Development, where he managed art and cultural programs designed to connect New York City neighborhoods with Pratt Center's community and environmental sustainability projects. Rasu is an alumnus of Syracuse University and often teaches Theater, Civic Engagement and Activism courses at The New School. rasujilani.com



Rasu Jilani

Joyce Rosario

TURNING POINT(S) + (STILL) UNDER CONSTRUCTION

I've been reflecting on my very unconventional career path, and how I came to occupy a position of artistic leadership. I've been thinking about how most of my work has been within an organization or an institution, and it feels like an important time to define a personal practice. What would it be like outside the institutions I've worked in? How would it feel to not be one of the only people of colour in a room?

When I connect the dots backward, the path appears obvious. One of the most seminal experiences in my life was as a teenage participant in a community-engaged art project; this formed my framework for curatorial practice, especially in relation to communities of colour.

I grew up in an East Vancouver neighbourhood that had then, and largely still has, a first-generation, working-class and incredibly diverse population. In fact, the only white folk in my neighbourhood were the German widow next door and the Québécois family across the street. Both my elementary and high school had majority non-white students. The first time I experienced the feeling of being a visible minority was in university.

So, in my work as a curator, when I think of the word 'audience,' the image that comes to mind are the kids I grew up with in my old neighbourhood. When I think of what we're putting on stage, I think about: Who is being included? How are they being included? Whose story is being told, for whom, and for what purpose? Most importantly, who holds the power?

I am currently the Associate Curator¹ at PuSh International Performing Arts Festival (PuSh Fest) in Vancouver. We are in a time—finally—where we are reckoning with our true history, and acknowledging our relationship to Indigenous people who have been on this land since time immemorial. In terms of the settler population, we are rapidly reaching a majority-minority. While our mandate is not explicitly for communities of colour, we do talk a lot about programing for “our

1. At the time of event, Joyce Rosario was Associate Curator of PuSH. She is currently Interim Artistic Director.

community” which, to me, means being aware of the changing demographics of the city.

Almost 20 years ago, I was a teenage participant in *Turning Point*,² a public art project led by Suzanne Lacy³ that involved a two-year collaboration between girls and adults to identify and enhance the public voice of teenage girls. I was part of a core group of 30 young women from diverse backgrounds and part of the work we did was participating in a two-week crash-course in performance art where each young woman was paid for their participation.

Suzanne introduced us to the theory and practice of public art. We, the participants, were in largely in charge. We devised workshops, conducted site visits, public interventions, guerilla performances on transit, and published zines to recruit extra participants. It all culminated two years later in a performance called *Under Construction*, which was staged in a live construction site in downtown Vancouver. Nearly 200 of us dressed in construction boots, hats, red t-shirts, we talked in intimate circles about parental expectations, alienation from school, sexuality, violence, eating disorders, depression, relationship with other girls as well as our hopes and dreams.

Nearly 5,000 people attended the event to witness the visual presence of young women in the public sphere where we’re still positioned for voyeurism, not activism. In the final act of the performance, the audience was invited to approach the concrete stage where they were invited to listen in on the conversations we were having. The impact was immense. I think all teenagers should have media literacy courses and learn about feminist art practice and actually learn by doing, through an embodied experience. It’s been 20 years since that performance, and so many of the questions are still potent.

Being introduced to contemporary performance and experimental practice at such a young age gave me a framework for tackling the questions I wrestle with today, about the relationship of art to our sense of belonging, and re-defining what ‘us’ means; and engaging with art as a way of participating and shaping civic dialogue. And inherent to these concerns, and why we’re all here as a group, is acknowledging the particular concerns of artists and audiences of colour.

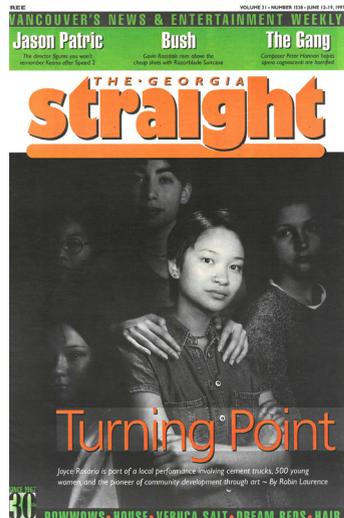
2. <http://www.suzannelacy.com/the-turning-point-under-construction>

3. Suzanne Lacy is a performance artist who coined the term “new genre public art” and whose career included performances, video and installation, critical writing and public practice. Active since the 1970’s, she helped shaped art focused on social engagement, and was invited to come to Vancouver to do a project with teenage women. *The Turning Point Project* was produced by Barbara Clausen, and is the subject of a 50-minute television documentary by Darlene Haber.



CHRIS PINE 54 • WOODPIGEON 43 • ANI KYD 48 • WHITE CHIEF 15

PuSh Festival cover image, 2014. Norman Armour, Co-Founder and Artistic and Executive Director; and Joyce Rosario, Associate Curator. Photo: Emily Cooper, courtesy of *The Georgia Straight*.



Turning Point Project cover image, 1997. Clockwise from lower right: Tricia Collins, Vania Tse, Julia Ridley, Amy Clausen and Joyce Rosario (project participants). Photo: Alex Waterhouse-Hayward, courtesy of *The Georgia Straight*.

I am a performance curator who is a first generation Canadian of Filipina descent. PuSh is a festival many would consider a mainstream institution. We program an eclectic range of work. I often get asked: what kind of work are you looking for? I am always reluctant to talk specifically about that because as there are a range of people that live in Vancouver, there is a range of work we want to be seeing on the stages, and who am I to define exactly what that means? What I will say is that I'm interested in art that shifts power, that makes room for other voices, and other ways of seeing the world. Art in which we are implicated and yet have agency, and our actions have consequence. Art that proposes the opposite of being complicit in this status quo.

I've been following some projects lately that reflect some of these values and interests. What makes these initiatives so vital is that they are occupying space, unapologetically making it happen. I love that!

In August 2016 Ravi Jain and Why Not Theatre hosted ThisGen,⁴ a four-day gathering of diverse and dynamic artistic leaders from Canada, USA, UK, Rwanda,

4. <http://thisgen.org/>

Nigeria, and Turkey who are all making significant impacts within their communities through the arts. I was invited to be a part of this group, and much like this gathering today, it speaks to the need to have spaces that shift power by changing who is in the room, and what values are at the centre.

I am also inspired by a new initiative in Vancouver, *The Future is You and Me*,⁵ led by Kristen Cheung and Megan Lau. It's a program designed to help young women of colour to take on leadership positions in creative arts organizations through mentorships and workshops facilitated by leader peers.

In addition to these projects, there are two artists who have influenced my practice and share an ability to use rage as fuel for acts of radical generosity:

Selina Thompson is a remarkable artist based in the UK. One of her recent works is an installation, *Race Cards*.⁶ Critic Lyn Gardner wrote in *The Guardian*:

For Race Cards, Selina Thompson devotes 12 hours to writing questions around race on postcards and sticking them on the wall. As with many of the shows at the festival, it involves an exchange: you read the questions and are invited to supply your own answers. Number 136 is: "Did you watch and enjoy The Help?" Number 73 is "I know that you are black, but why is that my fault?" From the writing on the walls, you can see how a conversation has started.

Emily Johnson is an artist whose work has changed me. I was invited to contribute to the Summer 2015 issue of *Canadian Theatre Review (CTR)*, for a piece entitled "Where Is Theatre Going?" edited by Laura Levin and Emma Rose McDonald. I wanted to be just a bit subversive and propose something not Canadian and not primarily theatre. I'll close my talk with what I shared in *CTR*:

For the 2015 edition of PuSh we hosted Emily Johnson as our inaugural artist-in-residence for our new space at the Post at 750. What she envisions about

What I will say is that I'm interested in art that shifts power, that makes room for other voices, and other ways of seeing the world. Art in which we are implicated and yet have agency, and our actions have consequence. Art that proposes the opposite of being complicit in this status quo.

Joyce Rosario

5. <http://thefutureisyouandme.com/>

6. <http://selinathompson.co.uk/work/race-cards/>

the world is what I would like to see in our future in theatre and as Canadians.

Emily Johnson's Shore⁷ is comprised of four phases: performances, story, community action and feast. The work reflects history by examining the land we are standing on right now. She herself is of Yupik descent from Alaska and based in Minnesota. That these places are not Canadian just reminds us that borders are arbitrary, mere political construction.

Theatre will be as expansive as the geography of Canada. The land is a stage, a means of transcending borders, embodying place, a call to action and a post-post-post-colonial future where Indigenous knowledge is crucial to how we identify ourselves as citizens.



Emily Johnson/Catalyst's *SHORE in Lenapehoking* (NYC), April 19-26, 2015. Photos: Emily Johnson.

For PuSh's 10th anniversary in 2014, we produced a documentary about the festival including voices from current and former staff, board, audiences, and artists. We heard from a wide variety of voices regarding our approach to curation and place in the community. There were also some pretty important questions posed: What does art mean for a city so young and so rapidly changing? How do we present ideas that, as Jane Heyman, a founding PuSh board member, describes, "make people see differently and hear differently about the world around them?" For me, this last question is fundamental to my practice, and, looking back, has been since the beginning.



7. Emily Johnson/Catalyst's *SHORE in Lenapehoking* (NYC), April 19-26, 2015. Photos by Emily Johnson. <http://www.catalystdance.com/shore/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: JOYCE ROSARIO is currently Interim Artistic Director at the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival in Vancouver BC, Canada. She has been with the PuSh team since 2013. Previously, Joyce spent 10 years in the Canadian dance milieu as a curator, producer and manager. Her training is in Theatre Production/Design from University of British Columbia's Theatre program, and she was once nominated for a Jessie Richardson award for Costume Design. Her first foray in performance was as a teenage participant in *Turning Point*, a new genre public art project by Suzanne Lacy. Joyce is a first-generation Canadian of Filipina descent. She is privileged to live and work on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.



Joyce Rosario

thomas f. defrantz

OPENING OUT TOWARD GRACE

We gather to discuss how we might model curatorial practice in ways that privilege difference and diversity. We come here aware that the existing models of curatorial practice do a continuous violence against people of color, against queers of color, against women of several identities, against communities that form outside of hegemonic structures. These models don't do nearly enough violence to the systems of oppression and structures of white privilege; the social mechanisms that intend to keep us all "in line" and docile. It continues to amaze me that while artists and creative projects do seek to undermine the systems of control through their inventions, curatorial practices lag in the background, re-inscribing a lack of possibility for those of us who want - and need - something different in our lives. I've argued before that curating is often like mid-level management; in this, it tends to keep things going in hierarchical lockstep, with curators as people who are simply "doing their job" to maintain order. I've also argued that curating might be like social engineering, with the possibility to build better bridges among people. But this model also suggests a utilitarian approach: that curators can simply "follow the rules" of social theory to produce the desired effect of occasional creative communications among artists and audiences.

Today, I want to explore the push-back that always comes at me when discussing these ideas from the curator-artists who inspire me - like Ishmael Houston-Jones, who has participated in this group in its last two meetings. Ishmael claims curating as an artistic practice; a creative act that discovers itself in its practice, for the purposes of realizing the unexpected. Curating as an engaged creativity that can shake the foundations that seem to hold performance in place; curating as invention.

It seems to me that the challenge with this model is that curators may then be encouraged to explore themselves rather than the needs and desires of the various communities who gather around them. And few of us seem to be truly equipped to care for others as well as ourselves and our own families simultaneously, especially in the context of creative invention that already surrounds performance innovations. How can we care for the new knowledges of original public performance, as well as the concerns of various stakeholders in the creation of that encounter: the

artists, the audiences/witnesses, the funders, and of course, the State that surrounds and interrupts our meetings?

Of course, curating performance is complex, tricky work. The stakeholders here arrive with divergent desires and different sorts of foundational assumptions. Our concerns with vectors of race, gender, sexuality, age, disability, location, religion, or access shift moment to moment, and we all struggle with how we can “stay woke” in these asymmetries and their ubiquity. I want to offer three discussion points that encourage me to stay present in these conversations, that might open discourses of curatorial practice for performance and move towards communion and equity in the professional performing arts.

1. INTERSECTIONALITY AND INTERSECTIONS

Black feminist theory opened the urgent provocation of intersectionality to account for pressures brought to bear on subjects who claim identities as women and people of color. We quickly learned to think about gender, sexuality, disability, race, class, location, age, and religion as points of pressure that inhibit and enlarge capacities of individuals and groups. Thinking of only one at a time is never enough: we need to imagine outward from an assumption of multiplicities. We’ve tended to think of intersectionality in terms of identity markers that remain somehow static, even if the proportions of those markers change over time for any individual. Sometimes I am more queer than I am Black or a Southerner, or male. But each of those designations brings pressure to bear on my place in performance; as part of an audience or as a maker.

I’m wondering now, though, at the places of intersection among those identity territories across members of audience and artists. Where do young urban queers of color intersect with elderly straights who live in the suburbs? How can particular performances speak to that place between these identities? Even if we know that these identities are moving targets themselves, where could we imagine places of contact among them?

As an example, I am currently creating a speaking role in choreographer Netta Yerushalmy’s *paramodernities* project, a multi-year, multi-part exploration of iconic modern performances of the 20th century. I perform alongside young queers of color, most of whom have limited relationship to the performances that we dismantle. Our collaboration is around Alvin Ailey’s 1960 dance *Revelations*. Even as we are all queers of color, in our own way, we are also radically diverse in terms of



Paramodernities 3: Revelations - The Afterlives of Slavery.
Left to right, Jeremy "Jae" Neal, Brittany Engel-Adams, Thomas F. DeFrantz, Netta Yerushalmy, Stanley Gambucci, Nicholas Leichter. Photo: Paula Lobo.

gender presentation, religious beliefs, or technical dance abilities. We spill into places of alignment only at times in our creative process; those places are enriched by their scarcity and ephemerality. Imagining and discovering those points of intersection, though, provide the richest moments of our creative process, and we hope that an audience will be compelled to recognize these sorts of fragmentary affiliations in our performances.

2. PRIVILEGING THE ENCOUNTER WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING ITS ASYMMETRICAL NATURE

Of course, performance suggests gathering space for an unknown. Our desire to embrace risk and a certain sort of not-knowing surrounds our shared interests in performance. This truism offers us license, as curators, to push against hegemonies of status quo, always reaching instead toward some impossible, unpredicted space.

But our abilities to absorb risk arrive asymmetrically. We are all involved in the afterlives of slavery and the afterlives of colonial desecration and murder. These afterlives encompass the ways the people of color process theatrical encounters with a particularity of political import. For people of color, performances never do one or two things at a time; they are constantly implicated in the negotiation of a

constellation of concerns, absences, omissions, eclipsing, ancestral nostalgias and impossible hope.

Cultural theorist Christina Sharpe calls contending with the afterlives of slavery “wake work”; that is, work that is done in the wake of slavery and colonial desecrations.¹ In the aftermaths of our encounters across culture, we people of color contend with the terms of abjection, as well as the terms of liveliness. Slavery persists in afterlives that envelop public encounters. We are constantly reminded of our place outside; we are rendered in resistance and in pain. For us, there is no plane of pure aesthetic, no creative experiment without blankly political implication.

So many of us are mixed in these unfathomable ways: we are mixed race, and we present gender variously; we recognize the spectrums of our sexuality and the abiding plus-ness of our existence.

These are the students that we meet in workshops and classrooms more and more frequently: they are our collaborators and our witnesses and guides; they are the promise of an integrative, globally-connected populace.

And we are they.

Thomas F. DeFrantz

Performance offers a certain sort of liveliness, but in our contexts, it is a liveliness born of disavowal.

The afterlives of slavery touch upon the social implications of afropessimism, the field of critical inquiry that turns upon the impossible subjectivity of the object. In this line of thought, bodies of color objectified will never occupy a reasonable complexity in discourses of citizenry, nor will they be allowed to express progressive imaginative agency. Because colonial encounter and slavery began from places of wildly asymmetrical relations of power, we inevitably contend with impossible discrepancies of possibility. Performance by people of color arrive under a meta-text of coercion, a forcing toward liveliness even when other sorts of political agency are flatly denied.

This meta-discourse of abjection, or disavowal, or performance by coercion surrounds the articulation of the afterlives of slavery. In this context, as curators, we are obliged to consider this asymmetrical relationship to the act of public performance and its implications. People of color arrive in complex, contradictory relationships to public performance and circumstances of mixed company. And

1. Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Duke University Press, 2016.

unfortunately, the infrastructures that tend to surround professional performance tend to tilt toward their own histories as participants in a lineage of hegemonic arts curation and presentation. Museums, universities, and institutions with real estate are always already bound up in discourses of slavery and colonial desecration that has seized resources from many for the benefit of the few. Somehow, we must begin by acknowledging these inevitably asymmetrical points of entry to our encounters in performance.

Perhaps performance and its curation could encourage the possibility of this encounter across difference as a gathering notion, or as a starting place, rather than as something to be held in the background. What if we begin by acknowledging the asymmetry and expecting it to produce odd, unreconcilable bedfellows? In this way, we might begin with the wry awareness that artists and audiences have very different modes of operation that will sometimes allow for confluence and affiliation, but just as often, perhaps, preclude those sorts of joinings. In other words, we're not trying to do "the same thing" for different sorts of audience/artist identities. We might all know this, and then maybe our task is to claim who it is that we are actually working for, as curators of performance.

3. FINDING THE MULTI-BODY TRANS- MIXED INTERSEXED +

This leads me to the third discussion point I want to raise here: the Multi-Body, Trans-, Mixed-Race, Intersexed + people who constitute the creative audiences of the now-future. So many of us are mixed in these unfathomable ways: we are mixed race, and we present gender variously; we recognize the spectrums of our sexuality and the abiding plus-ness of our existence. These are the students that we meet in workshops and classrooms more and more frequently: they are our collaborators and our witnesses and guides; they are the promise of an integrative, globally-connected populace. And we are they.

In our more-and-more radical variety, we bring varied understandings to our encounters in performance. Sometimes we are the black people, or the brown people, or the queers or the women or the trans-folk. We are the immigrants, or the disabled, or the elderly or the youth. Sometimes we are the whites, the colonials, the people who took and who torture. We shift through these identities even as they are all borne out on our skin or in our address to the world.

To make space for this variety, as curators we need to become ever more nimble in the ways that we narrate our craft and create context for performance. We have to

move beyond claiming only one place for any encounter of performance: as a “contemporary dance theater event” or a Black opera, for example. The explorations of mixed, post-colonial lives bound up in the “wake work” of slavery demands our aggressive nuance. There will surely be portions of encounter in any theatrical experience that will produce an unexpected outcome; we must find ways to open space toward these things we can’t know.

We don’t always understand how performance registers with audiences that are largely different from us. Our task might be to reference the world of the work, and allow for the truth that many people are already connected to its values and concerns before they see the performance, even if we are not among that number. The audience who might gather around the work exists, but they need to be allowed to come together in their own way. Our opportunity is to appreciate the worlds of the work and to allow those worlds to vibrate in the ways that they want to without trying to force them into the contexts and understandings that we already have.

More and more, those audiences are extremely diverse even in and of themselves. As mixed-race, queer, trans-, hustlers in a gig economy. Bare life is never far away. But in the encounter of public performance, the place of unknown operations, something else can be encouraged; something like a multiplicity of possibility, aware of what’s being left out of the conversation. We might want to open out performance toward grace, the state of generous ineptitude and confusion, emboldened by curiosity and excitement of the encounter. Imagining outward in this way, toward radical diversity shaped by the afterlives of slavery and colonial desecration, performance does what it can, to encourage us toward the space of an intersectional spontaneity. In those moments, what unfathomable things might happen?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ teaches at Duke University and directs SLIPPAGE: Performance|Culture|Technology, a research group that explores emerging technology in live performance applications. DeFrantz received the 2017 Outstanding Research in Dance award from the Dance Studies Association. DeFrantz believes in our shared capacity to do better, and to engage our creative



Thomas F. DeFrantz

spirit for a collective good that is anti-racist, anti-homophobic, proto-feminist, and queer affirming. DeFrantz acted as a consultant for the Smithsonian Museum of African American Life and Culture, contributing concept and a voice-over for a permanent installation on Black Social Dance that opened with the museum in 2017. Books include *Dancing Revelations Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (2004), *Black Performance Theory*, co-edited with Anita Gonzalez (2014), *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion*, co-edited with Philipa Rothfield (2016).

Creative: *Queer Theory! An Academic Travesty* commissioned by the Theater Offensive of Boston and the Flynn Center for the Arts; *fastDANCEpast*, created for the Detroit Institute for the Arts; *reVERSE-gesture-reVIEW* commissioned by the Nasher Museum in response to the work of Kara Walker, January, 2017. Recent teaching: University of the Arts Mobile MFA in Dance; *ImPulsTanz*; *New Waves Institute*; faculty at Hampshire College, Stanford, Yale, MIT, NYU, University of Nice. slippage.org.

Christine Sokaymoh Frederick
POSITION STATEMENT

Thank you. Thank you creator, thank you mother earth. Thank you grandfathers and grandmothers for this day and for life. I thank the Kahnawake Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida Onondaga, Cayuga, Tuscarora for welcoming me and allowing me to speak in their territory. I am the daughter of incredibly resilient people. Much of what I have to say I owe to my mother and grandparents, and I see the lines of their philosophy clearly from my ancestors to my own child. My mother has always told me that “culture is an imperative to action;” actually, she says it really loud and forcefully. It is not something that we passively experience, it is what we do. It is what we give.

Before I get into the perspectives of my art and of my cultural practice, I think it is important to share a language and vocabulary or an identity lesson. I am often asked, “What is the correct term to call you and why does it change all the time? Can’t you people make up your minds?”

I sense the frustration from many people who “just want to get it right.” But they might not be aware of the fluidity of identity. I think we can all agree that the term Indian in reference to myself is a gross inaccuracy. I am not from India; however, in 1876, Canada instituted The Indian Act. It is not a treaty. It is Canada’s response to the treaties, and it is a legal response. It is still legal and an active statute so therefore in some cases the word Indian is in fact the word we are supposed to use. I don’t want to say accurate but it is the word to use. In 1983, a time when my mother was the vice-president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, our Canadian Constitution defined the word Aboriginal to be those people of the First Nations, which includes the status and non-status Indians, also the Métis (such as myself) and the Inuit. And whereas the Indian Act is a piece of federal legislation created for the purpose of subjugating one race, the term Aboriginal in our constitution refers to the rights that I have and of all Aboriginal people within this country. Our country is starting to use the word Indigenous, which for many is an advance in the discussion and many not only prefer that term but there are a lot of official changes for it to have occurred. And certainly the work of the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada



Christine Sokaymoh Frederick (standing) and Sheldon Elter
in Matthew MacKenzie's *Bears*. Photo: Alexis McKeown.

has really pushed that word to the forefront. But we must remember that the United Nations defines the word Indigenous as those with characteristics that are distinct from those that are from the dominant societies in which they live. That is an important definition in the discussion of human rights and their violations, but I want you to understand that it is not an identity solely to be a subjugated person. It is a political identity. Therefore it is a term to be used in certain context, it is not an umbrella term meant to make it easier for mainstream to identify a nation or a culture. Cultural identity is something else entirely.

I've often introduced myself as a Cree Métis women from Treaty 6 territory, that too is a legal definition, not necessarily the way I identify myself. These are still words from another language, from the dominant, defining me. It is not inherently my own. In our language, instead of a Cree woman, I would say I am a nehi-yaw-iskwew; and they referred to the Métis as the Otipemsaak "the people who own themselves." Because the Metis did not sign the Treaties. I definitely identify with that.

The work that I do both as an artist and as an advocate is much about relation, connection, relevance and good behaviour between one another. At the core of this work is the quest to solving issues that disrupt social life and human relationships that are within our natural environment. We ask ourselves about our cultural values and the disparities that we experience. Arts, as defined by my people, by my elders,

by my mother, began as participatory processes that are imbedded in our ceremonies that include dance, song, drama, that communicated out our humanity to the creator. Sacred knowledge, histories, cultural values were transmitted and instrumental in engaging the Aboriginal community and allowing it to thrive. It is the best we have to offer society, it encompasses our philosophies, experience, skills, humour, perspectives. It is our guide to governance and process.

We have the right to identity and to define our identity as we see fit. We have the right to health, development, education and the right to history and to future. Shared stories reveal personal and collective identity, memories, and visions of the future. It has been scientifically proposed that it was the practice of art that created collective identity and thusly society on this planet. I work to support artists in changing the world to match the worthy vision of every artist exercising their right to Life, Luck, Health, Happiness, Liberty, Peace and Prayer. These are the seven prayer points of the stars in the constellation the Big Dipper, and it is a traditional prayer.

I have been passionate for the arts my whole life. I started off as a child performer at about four-years-old, and about the time I was seven I was already a representation of my culture in an international scene. It has become clearer to me the more I do, the more I work, why I serve artists. It is because I understand better the impact of colonialization and its effects on our people. We have had our identities stripped from us in the most traumatic way over hundreds and hundreds of years but when we engage in artistic practice we immediately redress the human rights violation we have experienced and the inter-generational trauma. We rebuild our culture and ourselves and we contribute to the collective identity on this land often called Turtle Island, which speaks more to the livelihood that spanned from north to south from this continent not the east to west borders of this country. Borders and barriers are broken down when artists seek to understand and use their voice to ask questions of social life and dignity.

Arts, as defined by my people, by my elders, by my mother, began as participatory processes that are imbedded in our ceremonies that include dance, song, drama, that communicated out our humanity to the creator. Sacred knowledge, histories, cultural values were transmitted and instrumental in engaging the Aboriginal community and allowing it to thrive. It is the best we have to offer society, it encompasses our philosophies, experience, skills, humour, perspectives. It is our guide to governance and process.

Christine Sokaymoh Frederick

These are lessons and perspectives from each direction. For instance, in the East direction, with its illuminating yellow and gold colours, it is usually considered the beginning. In honour of the sun's rising with themes of birth, innocence and enlightenment, recognition of the physical world. The animals associated with the East are the eagle for its vast vision and the mouse for its detailed vision. The southern direction is associated with usefulness, exploring prowess like a cougar, or a coyote, and with emotions, red, passionate colours. The West, from our perspective in Alberta where I am from, is the region where the dark green mountains lay, there-

fore a place of challenge, of introspection, meditation, like the hibernation of the bear, a place where adult mental capacities are in full gear. When we move to that spiritual white North, we take up all the knowledge we have learned from the other three directions and we transform that knowledge into wisdom. We do that by sharing it with our community. As the elders do and as the Buffalo does.

We are coming out of the time of the Bear when so many of us were raised by single mothers, parenting almost entirely in solitude like the mother bear but we are coming into the time of the Buffalo, this is what my elders have told me, when we will take strength in community, raise our children together, where shared knowledge makes up for more than the sum of its parts. Now is the time when we see the fortification of community relationships, when we see a renaissance, if I may use that term, in artistic practice and appreciation, and a resurgence in the evolution of our cultural and artistic knowledge.

I've learned to meet artists where they are at, to do the profound by presenting their work the way they want it presented, expanding artistic networks; I've learned that leadership is about connecting, engaging in the ethical and is the action that provides the most benefit for the most people, to facilitate protocol discussion and dialogue for cultural and artistic discipline and practices. I've learned that there is an underbelly to Reconciliation projects that perpetuate appropriation and trauma, that if you do not include the truth part of Truth and Reconciliation there is more damage that will



New work from Alberta Aboriginal Performing Arts, the only professional Aboriginal-run organization supporting new work and artists working in multiple disciplines across Alberta. The organization was founded in 2009 by Ryan Cunningham and Christine Sokaymoh Frederick.
Photo: Marc Chalifoux.

continue to happen not only to Indigenous people but to the entirety of our society. And certainly these projects should never be about relieving the oppressor, or settler guilt. I believe in multiple approaches. There is never one right way to do something, there are always multiple approaches because there are layers and layers to the problems and issues that disrupt our social life.

We, meaning the circle of artists I continue to work with, the people I have met who have kismet--a shared understanding of the world and work--that we all do, all of us in this room, my community: we seek to reflect the diversity of our nations and communities and representation in various situations. My mother says, "We lose the rights we don't practise." She taught me to embrace the politics that I fear. My grandfather taught me to "infiltrate, don't assimilate!", to remember my responsibility to the vitality of my culture, to fortify my commitment and to teach through politics and art, to be critical thinkers and active in practising our rights so that Mother Earth knows my foot steps upon her and that the Creator knows that I belong to humanity. Hyi hyi.

Thank you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: CHRISTINE SOKAYMOH FREDERICK is co-founder and artistic director of Alberta Aboriginal Performing Arts, producer of the annual Rubaboo Arts Festival (10th annual in 2019), and Executive Director of the Dreamspeakers Film Festival Society. She is an urban Cree-Métis and has 40 years of experience in multiple artistic disciplines. She's attended the University of Alberta, the Banff Centre for Arts, and the University for Peace (Costa Rica, Indigenous Rights in the Field). She is a former board member of the Dreamspeakers Film Festival, the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance, and is Past Chair of the Edmonton Arts Council (Chair of the Aboriginal Initiatives Committee) and former Vice Chair of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Christine currently serves on the national board of Canada2020 Frankfurt Book Fair, the board of directors for the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra/Winspear Centre, and the Edmonton Indigenous Public Art Park steering committee. She is the recipient of the 2007 Esquao Award in Arts, and the 2016 Mayor's award for Excellence in Artistic Leadership. albertaaboriginalarts.ca Dreamspeakers.org.



Christine Sokaymoh Frederick.

Seika Boye

THE GULF BETWEEN TWO PLACES: GOOD IDEAS AND THOUGHTFUL INTENTIONS

I am trying to write this without too much focus on being the last to speak. I cannot anticipate what any of you might have said today – though I am writing with the anticipation that we might have a different conversation than the ones we often have – which happen with a focus on educating others. Today we are here to share stories from a similar viewpoint about how we are making our way through individual experiences with curating performance for communities of colour in multiple and varied systemically racist and exclusionary situations. One of the most exciting distinctions at this table is the one between our guests from the United States and those of us who live in Canada as Indigenous peoples or as decedents of colonial settlers. My work looks closely at African-American overlap and diversions into African-Canadian specificity through the lens of dance and I look forward to the unfolding conversation here today.

I am personally, at this moment in time, on the precipice of significant personal change. Next week I will receive my PhD diploma and officially begin a new phase of my life. My dissertation work about where Black people were dancing in mid-century Toronto changed me in profound ways. I now have historical trajectories that I can place myself on as a Black dancer and citizen in Canada that predates the 1960s – a trajectory that extends beyond the knowledge of a few exceptional individuals and into the lives of a heterogeneous Black population. This lack of shared historical knowledge and nuance is a difference between those of us living north and south of the Canada – US border and we shouldn't underestimate its impact.

My preoccupations over the past six months, since defending my dissertation, have been about how to approach the work ahead as an undergraduate lecturer, as a director of a university research hub, as an emerging public intellectual, a writer, as someone invited to do a lot of guest speaking to school aged kids, primary through secondary and as a dance artist. I learned in the first month of the past school year that I was the first Black woman or woman of colour that some of my Black students and students of colour had ever had. I walked away from them and cried



Seika Boye teaching 4th year students Advanced Concepts in Movement, Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Toronto. Photographer: Alyson Hardwick.

hard as I made my way across campus. I cried for them and myself tears of pain and of joy. I had worked hard to be in a position to teach them but I don't think I could have anticipated just how it would and does feel. It feels complex.

So now I ask myself 'how will I serve the many tasks at hand in these varied roles while creating space for those who need it most and for myself – because 'their' first Black teacher is not all I am. Add to that the fact that in all honesty the past decade has not been my most active as an audience member or as a performing artist. I am raising two boys ages five and nine with my husband in downtown Toronto, and then there was my dissertation. My practice has been deep archival research, interrogating methods of historical work about African-Canadians that has and has not been addressed - my sources and my companions have included photography, text based documents and oral histories. I have been working hard to transform and transfer my dance practice and knowledge into an actor training context. What then are my connections and preoccupations to curating – to selecting, organizing, teaching, strategizing, moving with and presenting with care to the public? I have

I learned in the first month of the past school year that I was the first Black woman teacher, or woman of colour teacher, that some of my Black students and students of colour had ever had. I walked away from them and cried hard as I made my way across campus. I cried for them and myself tears of pain and of joy. I had worked hard to be in a position to teach them but I don't think I could have anticipated just how it would and does feel. It feels complex.

Seika Boye

made a list that is true today and that will evolve tomorrow and the day after that, because I am learning:

- To engage in a pedagogy in which considerations of race, gender, sexuality, class, disability and mental health are embedded;
- build initiatives, institutions, programs with a big picture in mind, with specific guidelines rooted in breadth of representation and artistic inquiry in tandem with one another;
- extend invitations to artists and students to do something, but not to do something for me or the institution and respect that they do that something every day;
- demonstrate and advocate for the fact that the desire for equity does not equal a simultaneous desire for equity to be the perpetual preoccupation of artistic work;
- be care-filled with language. I recently attended a panel about the potential of contemporary repertoire and people kept using the words value and potential interchangeably. This lack of particularity was a distillation of so much -- value is about the past and potential about the future. The exclusions that happen in between are profound. How have systems of evaluation (funding agencies for example) created a value system that centers whiteness and western dance forms? How does this value system of the past (and present) limit the potential for artists of colour in the future? Be careful with language;
- to remember when doing close readings of historical documents and images around Black people dancing and theorizing about power, that the Black dancing person was likely present in the picture because they just wanted to dance, or learn to dance. They are not in that image for me, they were dancing for themselves;
- to acknowledge that I am trained as a performer and that I bring my performing self to advocacy work. I make a lot of conscious decisions all of the time about how I present myself. I am making them right now;
- to consider all of the effort required to resist overt and covert exclusion on an ongoing basis, on a durational basis;
- to consider the gulf between good ideas and thoughtful intentions in my own actions. I've watched some of the best people I know jump into this

gulf with two uprooted feet and often in a moment of piecemeal planning that has not considered a larger picture or a person's individuality;

- and (finally) to address that I am preoccupied with a dispersed community of individuals who are at different points in their personal journeys about where artistic practice and their racialized identity inevitably intersect from within them and from their occupying space within systemically racist environments. This is a personal experience. There are so many mechanisms for surviving this intersection and we need to accept all of the stages of individuals. We need to be generous, kind and respectful, and resist prescriptive how to's and judgements about best ways. I think often about the people who need us to be ready for them and I will work hard to meet them where they are – to truly center them.

Thank-you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: SEIKA BOYE, PHD is a scholar, writer, educator and artist whose practices revolve around dance and movement. She is a Lecturer at the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Toronto (UofT). From 1995-2010 Seika performed and presented her choreography across Canada. More recently, Seika



Seika Boye

has worked as a movement dramaturg with various artists including Deanna Bowen and Djanet Sears. From August 2018 to February 2019, Seika will be an Artist-in-Residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Invested in movement histories and the archive, Seika's current scholarly research explores Blackness and dancing in Canada. In 2018, she curated the archival exhibition, "It's About Time: Dancing Black in Canada 1900-1970 (Dance Collection Danse Gallery/ OCAD Ignite Gallery)." Her publications include writing for numerous magazines and academic journals. Besides being Director of the Institute for Dance Studies (UofT), she participates

in and collaborates on a range of research communities and projects including the Toronto Photography Seminar and Gatherings: archival and oral histories of Canadian performance (SSHRC Partnership Development). She was recently appointed Adjunct Curator at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. Seika's book project *Dancing on Time: Social Dance within Toronto's Black Population at Mid-century* is contracted to McGill-Queens University Press. She completed her doctoral degree at the University of Toronto in 2016 and was a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellow. Seika lives and works in Toronto with her husband and their two sons. <http://dramacentre.utoronto.ca/seika-boye/> <https://ago.ca/artist-residence-seika-boye>

MJ Thompson
DANCE IS FOUNDATIONAL

WHAT IS FOUNDATIONAL FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDY? What does a foundational syllabus look like, and how might it perform differently under the weight of structural biases within the context of an English-language university in Montréal? Montréal, as port of entry to Canada for many diasporic peoples; Montréal, as 17th century city built on unceded Mohawk territory; Montréal, as cultural laboratory and point of departure for so many young people entering post-secondary study and looking for new moves.

I teach at Concordia, one of two English language universities in the city, and have been leading a large-enrolment foundations class for the Faculty of Fine Arts since 2011. Comprised of 950 student artists and scholars, led by a cohort of 23 teachers and graduate teaching assistants, the course is epic in scale and, on a good day, possibility. Notions of the choreographic and the curatorial—those actions that set in motion bodily paths through time, space and history—deeply shape my understanding of curricular planning. As the scale of the class magnifies its effects, the choreography and curation of knowledge shimmers with potential and problematics. What is foundational, then, for whom, by whose account, and in what direction?

These thoughts were on my mind when Humanities PhD and Pepatiàn artistic director Jane Gabriels first came to me with the idea to bring the *Configurations* meeting to Concordia. Thinking about my students, particularly those who continue to be underserved at the university: French, Indigenous, Muslim, Black, Brown, Asian, mixed, queer, trans, 1st-generation, employed or looking for work, some with kids or ailing parents, all looking to the future with at least one question in common: how? For these students, the foundational course holds the potential to bear witness to their arts and literatures, while building critical skills and solidarity across disciplinary and identity lines. The *Configurations*' conversation was an important chance to speak to these students' needs and rethink the syllabus through the lens of BIPOC cultural priorities.

Equally, I hoped that the discourse generated by this meeting in Montréal could infuse fresh ideas and energy more broadly into institutional practice and the Concordia student body, where, for example, a plan to found a Black Studies program was newly emergent; and where, for example, diasporic faculty remain underrepresented, reflecting neither the student body nor the City at large. How then to undo institutionalized whiteness, understood as chronic fixicity? How to support students who've been historically marginalized? How to act in the present toward a better future? To state the obvious, the discourse is foundational.

There were other reasons, too, for jumping in to support *Configurations*.

As a dance scholar based in an Art Education department, the opportunity to gather with and learn from dance specialists is a rare and enormous gift. Here was a chance to sit with scholars and practitioners working at the forefront of Critical Dance Studies (CDS), what I understand as a stance against patterned hierarchies of attention and valuation across aesthetics, geographies, ethnicities and more. Here too I was reminded of Seika Boye, dance historian and *Configurations* curator, who convened a conference in January 2016 to reflect on the conditions of dance studies as a marginalized field within the university context. At the end of this gathering, she urged us to “make one move” at our home institutions to support dancers and dance. With her words in mind, Jane and I wrote a SSHRC grant, with support from Angelique Willkie in the Contemporary Dance department, to bring *Configurations* to Concordia, and we got the funding.¹ (Funding is foundational, and within the Canadian university research context, there are excellent programs of economic support that can be readily applied for.)

Thinking about my students, particularly those who continue to be underserved at the university: French, Indigenous, Muslim, Black, Brown, Asian, mixed, queer, trans, 1st-generation, employed or looking for work, some with kids or ailing parents, all looking to the future with at least one question in common: how? For these students, the foundational course holds the potential to bear witness to their arts and literatures, while building critical skills and solidarity across disciplinary and identity lines.

MJ Thompson

1. At Concordia, the working team included former dancer and studio arts undergraduate David Rose, who worked as a research assistant on this project; INDI graduate student Lisa Ndejuru, who sat in as translator throughout; dancer/choreographer and philosophy undergraduate Hanako Hoshimi-Caines, who worked as a research assistant on Focus on Dance Research; and Andy Murdoch, who consulted throughout on publicity, documentation and live streaming.

The importance of “making one move” grew further for me when, on the final day, due to an unanticipated rainstorm, the *Configurations* group met in the Dean’s Conference room. There had been no plan to use this particular space: the scene of hiring committees, new faculty orientations, monthly Faculty Council meetings. In rooms like these, institutional power rehearses itself, as pose meets policy, politics meets pattern and social reproduction quietly ticks onward. As discussion fanned the table, and brown bodies held the narrative, I experienced the space anew for what it’s been and what it might be. If there is a Critical Dance Studies, as per Randy Martin’s opening in *Critical Moves*, part of its project involves engaging the politics and poetics of embodiment across institutional sites: that is, administration as activism; pedagogy as relational and required between departments, research commitments and labour lines; research and funding as a collective project. Speaking out, stepping up, stepping aside: Critical Dance Studies suggests a lexicon of moves, big and small, for rethinking mobility as much as movement.



D. Sabela Grimes, *Electrogynous* (2016). With video art by Meena Murugesan and digital illustration by Mr. Maxx Moses.

Following *Configurations*, in November 2017, Angelique and myself convened a conference entitled Focus on Dance Research. Organized around a keynote by Seika and a masterclass by D. Sabela Grimes, visiting from Los Angeles, with Alexandra Spicey Landé of Montréal, the event sought to bring artists, scholars, faculty and students together to mark how dance research happens. This was a chance to mark the multiple approaches, directions

and potentials of dance-focused inquiry. Short presentations unfolded alphabetically, rather than through any single thematic. What a thrill to hear Spicey theorize hip-hop as family history, just after Diego Gil channeled Whitehead on collective subjectivity. Here, the vernacular and the philosophic came together to disrupt categories of the dance imaginary and bring commonalities to bear: wherein, momentarily, and citing Thomas DeFrantz, we embodied “dance as a possibility to disrupt and construct time among us.”²

2. The citation refers to a note inscribed by Tommy DeFrantz in my copy of his book, *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion* (Palgrave-MacMillan, 2016), co-edited with Philippa Rothfield.

Through these gatherings and events, we danced—at *Configurations*, to a juke box in a small bar on Guy St in downtown Montréal; at Focus on Dance Research, to sounds by DJ Janette King in the dance studios of the John Molson Building, real estate primarily set aside for the business faculties. In the city and at the university. And, through these moments, we aim to disrupt business as usual, and remake the foundations together.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MJ THOMPSON
(Ph.D., Performance Studies, New York University 2009) is a writer and teacher working on dance, performance, and visual art. She is Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies and Practices, in the department of Art Education at Concordia University in Montréal. Her articles have appeared in *Ballettanz*, *Border Crossings*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Canadian Art*, *Dance Current*, *Dance Ink*, *Dance Magazine*, *The Drama Review*, *Discourses in Dance*, *Women and Performance*, *Theatre Journal*, and elsewhere.



MJ Thompson

THANK YOU'S

We extend our thanks to
SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology; the departments
of African and African-American Studies at Duke University;
the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies and the
Institute for Dance Studies at the University of Toronto; Pepatián;
CICA-ICAC/International Community of Performing Arts Curators;
the departments of Contemporary Dance and Art Education and the
Office of the Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University.

Additionally, thanks to Dasha Chapman at Duke University; and,
at Concordia, Pamela Caussy (Visual Collections Repository), Karl
Hele (First Peoples Studies), Andy Murdoch (Communications),
Lisa Ndejuru (INDI), and David Rose (Studio Arts).

To learn more about Configurations in Montréal: Performance
Curation and Communities of Colour, please visit [duke.edu/
configurationsinmotion](http://duke.edu/configurationsinmotion); or [criticaldancestudiesMontréal.com/
events/configurations-in-Montréal](http://criticaldancestudiesMontréal.com/events/configurations-in-Montréal); or contact Thomas F. DeFrantz
at t.defrantz@duke.edu or Seika Boye at seika.boy@utoronto.ca.



Thomas F. DeFrantz, Director

FACULTY OF FINE ARTS



Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada  