CONFIGURATIONS IN MOTION: Performance Curation and Communities of Color, 2nd Edition

Duke University

SLIPPAGE: Performance|Culture|Technology

July 14-15, 2016

CONTENTS

Overview 3

Configurations in Motion Participants 4

Dasha A. Chapman, *Introduction: Tilting the Conversation, Tilting Practice* 7

Andrea E. Woods Valdés, *Presenting wimmin@work: A Vehicle For Performance While Creating Community and Audience* 11

Craig T. Peterson, *On Curating* 16

DeeArah Wright, *Paper Dolls & Bubbles & Houses* 19

Ebony Noelle Golden, *Conjuration::Emancipation Notes on a Womanist-Centered Curatorial Praxis* 24

Ishmael Houston-Jones, *Platform 2016: Lost and Found, Curator's Statement* 29

Jane Gabriels, *Growth* 31

Lori Barcliff Baptista, *Reflections on UrBs in Horto: A community curated exhibition* 35

Mario LaMothe, *I Dream of Assotto Saint: A Community Curation Project with LGBTI Haitians* 40

Marýa Wethers, *Position Paper* 45

Moira Brennan, *Addressin Bias in the Panel Room* 49

A. Nia Austin-Edwards, *Investing in PURPOSE* 52

Paloma McGregor, *Dancing While /Black/ Lives Matter* 56

Risa Shoup, *Position Paper* 59

Tara Aisha Willis, *Sustainable Structures: Thoughts on Movement Research's Programming* 63

Tempestt Hazel, *With and For: An Approach to Curatorial Practice, Archiving, and Community Care* 67

thomas f. defrantz, *...we hold these truths...* 72

Other Participants 77

Thank Yous 79

CONFIGURATIONS IN MOTION: PERFORMANCE CURATION AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, 2ND EDITION

SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology at Duke University hosted a two-day event on July 14 and 15, 2016, to address how curatorial practice and live arts presenting can engage the particular concerns of audiences and artists of color.

Our second event to discuss these issues, **Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation and Communities of Color** gathered performers, curators, scholars, presenters, and managers from throughout the United States to examine how their work involves, invests, and can further support the creative growth of people of color. The event was held at the SLIPPAGE laboratory on Duke's Central Campus, at 1515 Hull Avenue, Durham, North Carolina.

The event took on important questions surrounding the presenting of live art, including:

How do we imagine twenty-first century configurations of performance curation and presenting that acknowledge the particular concerns of audiences and artists of color?

How does performance that relates to people of color fit into trends of contemporary curatorial practice?

In our current climate of violence, fear, outrage and grief, in what ways can we curate experiences that enliven possibilities for healing, reparation and liberation?

Participants shared their work and insights to produce focused thinking about the future of live art/performance/performing arts curation, with special attention to communities of African, Caribbean, and Latinx interests. This publication is small evidence of these labors.

The event was convened by Dr. Thomas F. DeFrantz, Chair of African and African American Studies at Duke University and Director of SLIPPAGE: Performance|Culture|Technology, and Dr. Dasha A. Chapman, postdoctoral associate in African and African American Studies at Duke University, in consultation with Dr. Jane Gabriels. The symposium was supported by Duke University's African and African American Studies Department, Dance Department, and the Franklin Humanities Institute.

Cover photo: the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds, curated by Eva Yaa Asantewaa, Danspace Project, October 22, 2016. Photo: Ian Douglas

CONFIGURATIONS IN MOTION PARTICIPANTS

SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology at Duke University has convened two Configuration in Motion symposia. The first edition was held June 27-28, 2015, and the second edition was held July 14-15, 2016. The following is a combined list of participants from both events:

A. Nia Austin-Edwards (2015, 2016)
Founder, *PURPOSE Productions*

Lori Barcliff Baptista, PhD (2016)
Director, *African-American Cultural Center*
Adjunct Assistant Professor, *School of Theatre & Music*
Faculty Affiliate, *Program in Museum and Exhibition Studies*
University of Illinois at Chicago

Moira Brennan (2015, 2016)
Program Director, *Multi-Arts Production/ MAP Fund*

Dasha A. Chapman, PhD (2015, 2016)
Postdoctoral Associate, *African and African American Studies*
Duke University
Co-convener, *Configurations in Motion*

Thomas F. DeFrantz (2015, 2016)
Professor, *African and African American Studies*
Professor, *Dance and Theater Studies*
Director,
SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology
Duke University
Co-convener, *Configurations in Motion*

Jane Gabriels, PhD (2015, 2016)
Director, *Pepatian*
Co-founder, *International Community of Performing Arts Curators CICA-ICAC*

Ebony Noelle Golden (2016)
CEO and principal engagement strategist, *Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative, LLC*
Artistic Director, *Body Ecology Womanist Performance Project*

Aaron Greenwald (2015, 2016)
Executive Director, *Duke Performances*
Duke University

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, 2016)
Choreographer, teacher, performer, author, arts advocate

Configurations in Motion Attendees, July 2016.
Photo: Roxanne Campbell

Rasu Jilani (2015, 2016)
Independent curator, social sculptor, entrepreneur
Director, Diversity & Strategic Partnerships, *NEW INC*
Co-Founder, *Coup d'etat Arts*

Joseph F. Jordan (2015, 2016)
Director, *Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History*
Associate Professor, *African/African-American Studies*
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Christina Knight, PhD (2015)
Art historian, playwright
Postdoctoral Fellow in Theater and Dance, *Consortium for Faculty Diversity*
Bowdoin College

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko (2015)
Independent curator and artist
Co-director, *anonymous bodies*

Mario LaMothe, PhD (2016)
Postdoctoral Research Associate, *African-American Cultural Center*
University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)

Nicole Martin (2015)
PhD, Performance as Public Practice
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)
Artistic Director, *Abrons Arts Center*

Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor (2016)
Independent arts manager, producer and curator
Director of Performance & Residency Programs, *Gibney Dance*

Risa Shoup (2016)
Curator and Development Consultant
Executive Director, *Spaceworks*

Andrea Woods Valdés (2015, 2016)
Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance, Duke University
Artistic Director, *SOULOWORKS/Andrea E. Woods & Dance*

Marýa 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*

DeeArah Wright (2016)
Artist, educator, creative strategist, and community engagement specialist
Co-Director, *JACK*

Participants engage in panel discussions at Configurations in Motion 2016.
Photos: Roxanne Cambpell

INTRODUCTION: TILTING THE CONVERSATION, TILTING PRACTICE

DASHA A. CHAPMAN

For the second year in a row, we convened over two summer days in Durham, North Carolina, to discuss, strategize, share and commune around our concerns and our visions for curating performance that more fully take into account the concerns, values, needs and creativities of artists and communities of color. The group was a mix of those who shared in conversation in this event's first iteration, and those whose contributions were new to the event. With participants speaking from experience working across the U.S. and the globe—New York City, Chicago, Durham, Montreal, Port-au-Prince, Montpelier, Dakar, and Johannesburg, to name a few—we cohered through varied experience and shared commitment to continuing our specific practices within live arts curation—spanning realms of presenting, performing, staging, supporting, cultivating, researching, and writing.

For me, the event demonstrated a way of working together that made intellectual space inclusive of experience, emotion, and imagination. Through conversation, individual presentations, and performance, we touched upon a range of practices that address the needs, trends, dilemmas, solvents, and dreams of culture workers and artistic practitioners working in a variety of venues and organizational models. We tilted the room toward people of color so as to model a mode of working that centers and propels itself through this particular configuration. Someone voiced early on in our meeting, "When the room is tilted like this, what spills out?" Over the course of two days, it became evident that the kinds of knowledge and modes of working that we as artists, presenters, theorists, and organizers carry moves beyond the capacity of any one room or any one event. This gathering was one iteration of how we might continue to shift our work in the world, and the worlds in which we work.

For the second year in a row, we convened over two summer days in Durham, North Carolina, to discuss, strategize, share and commune around our concerns and our visions for curating performance that more fully take into account the concerns, values, needs and creativities of artists and communities of color.

Curating was visioned as both a collective practice and a practice for collective formations that conjures events arising through shared values and care. Many participants spoke of turning toward community values and recognizing the vibrancy present in Black American, Latinx, and Afro-Caribbean cultural forms. As Ebony Noelle Golden describes in this collection, these modes of creativity that have long sustained generations could also be thought of as reliant on curatorial expertise—be it for the means of community meals, mixtapes, spiritual practice, or cooperative living: "As a young person, folks described these practices as coordinating, working, gathering, collaborating on, inviting."

> For me, the event demonstrated a way of working together that made intellectual space inclusive of experience, emotion, and imagination. Through conversation, individual presentations, and performance, we touched upon a range of practices that address the needs, trends, dilemmas, solvents, and dreams of culture workers and artistic practitioners working in a variety of venues and organizational models. We tilted the room toward people of color so as to model a mode of working that centers and propels itself through this particular configuration.

This power in intergenerational knowledge that we draw from was materialized in the dynamic of our group through the contributions of Ishmael Houston-Jones, who has spearheaded this kind of curating work for over 35 years, and Nia Austin-Edwards, the youngest member of the cohort crafting an intentionally-liberatory trajectory for supporting artists of color through her PURPOSE Productions.

White participants spoke with attention to the racially-biased orders within which contemporary arts presenting and its attendant aesthetics have long functioned. Addressing the ways white privilege and its associative logics inform decisions, they raised questions regarding appropriation under the guise of experimentation, and illuminated the deep-seated structural racism that undergirds assessments of rigor, experimentation, and programming in general. From these white curators, presenters, and funders, there was a strong call to develop for themselves a listening practice. Risa Shoup articulates it clearly here: "The very language that we use to talk to one another about our work must be more reflective of the people with whom we are working. And we're not going to achieve this if the only people telling us what is/is not successful/acceptable language are all of one type."

From the other side, Marya Weathers asks, "What is the impact of moving in and through primarily white spaces?" Many responded that even though a number of organizations and presenters have been starting to incorporate more artists of color into their programming and even their administration, they are weary of the constant labor that is required to be the only POC voice in the room, body on the stage, or underpaid and uncredited consultant. In addition to the exhaustion from a continued onslaught of violences against people of color and the constant circulation of these traumas, members of the group expressed their frustration with the ways in which "diversity" initiatives tokenize and exploit POC expertise, while doing little to change the ways institutional marginalization structurally continues.

The many different creative and practice-based modes sustained by those in the room are central to not only keeping the broader work going but also necessary for keeping themselves alive and fortified for the many battles faced. As Paloma McGregor notes, "This is where my creative practice – especially the practice of cultivating community and the ways it informs all that I do – becomes imperative to my survival. I know that the processes that lead to real impact, thoughtful

visioning, meaningful performance take time."

Aligned with the spirit of this declaration, Tara Willis poses a number of questions that can help guide a reframing of curating altogether: "How can we think of curatorial outlets as providing support and space for artists trying to sustain their careers before and beyond the moment of performance? How can I help sustain a presenting culture willing to think creatively to provide support within and outside of the expected structures for performance? What if a show is more than a product-driven chance to perform? What do artists need to feed their creative lives?"

Ishamel Houston-Jones, Ben Pryor, and Marya Weathers during an informal break at Configuration in Motion 2016.
Photo: Roxanne Campbell

Registering this attention to process, as well as the need for process-based thinking and doing, Jane Gabriels observed the ways in which Configurations in Motion as an annual gathering has fed into people's own work through the building of relationships, the sharing of ideas, and the spiritual sustenance provided by spending time with a group of inspired folks committed to the work. She writes, "The symposium generates intensities that move and spark space. There is a co-composing, a co-creating of a temporary space that is more than just the personal, but reaches into what the conversation is going to be. …None of our work concludes."

Gabriels, one of the initial conveners of Configurations in Motion who first proposed the need for this type of gathering, is now organizing its third iteration, "Configurations in Montreal" that will take place in Montreal, June 1-2, 2017, in collaboration with Seika Boye (University of Toronto), MJ Thompson (Concordia University), and Thomas F. DeFrantz (Duke University/ SLIPPAGE:Performance|Culture|Technology). As we move toward this third event, we continue to shapeshift toward future possibilities that continue to attend to communities and artists of color.

May this collection of focused thought-pieces aid in readers' thinking and rethinking of curatorial practices, performance, and creative labor as it relates to those currently underserved by existing institutions, and help build solidarities across constituencies that can more equitably support and potentially heal our performing arts infrastructures.

Dasha Chapman

Dasha A. Chapman *is the Postdoctoral Associate in the Department of African and African American Studies at Duke University, working alongside Duke's Haiti Lab, the Program in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, and Dance. Dasha's research engages African diaspora theory, performance studies, ethnography, and the queer Caribbean. She received her PhD in Performance Studies from New York University, and is a dancer who works in African diaspora techniques and collaborates with choreographers in New York, Haiti, and Durham, NC. Her writing appears in The Black Scholar and Dance Chronicle, and she co-edited a special issue of Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory on Queer Haitian Performance and Affiliation, forthcoming 2017. Summer 2017 she will be an artist in residence at the Power Plant Gallery working with Aya Shabu on a collaborative performance ethnography titled "Hayti|Haiti|History," excavating connections and cultivating imaginations between Haiti and Durham's historic Hayti neighborhood.*

PRESENTING *WIMMIN@WORK*: A VEHICLE FOR PERFORMANCE WHILE CREATING COMMUNITY AND AUDIENCE

ANDREA E. WOODS VALDÉS

wimmin@work[1] is an interdisciplinary performance showcase by women of color. It takes place during Women's history month but it is a timeless opportunity to celebrate contemporary women's history in the making. Our creative vehicles are dance, music, literature, scholarship, poetry, song and more. The variety of performers is inter-generational and the common factor is a desire to recognize one another as artistic peers and to contribute to our communities. The foundation of how and why we do our work is acknowledging that we stand on the mighty and magnificent shoulders of women artists, educators, mentors, family and friends. Our work is a reflection of our communities and our histories.

FROM THE PROGRAM NOTES

wimmin@work 2016 was conceived of as a way to say, "Hey sister wimmin artists, I see you out there working away, and I want the best for you as I do for myself." As a collective, we want to reach back to my teachers, students, mentors, ancestors, friends and family and say, "Because of you I do this thing called making art and when I speak the world speaks back. Thank you for that gift!" When Woods Valdés asked many women friends in the Triangle Area, "What are you doing for wimmin's herstory month? Let's make something happen." The overwhelming response was, "Yes, let's do something together."

As artists and educators, we spend a lot of time working hard and making life happen. We risk becoming isolated in our creative endeavors even as we work for and speak of community and social engagement. The *wimmin@work* performers are an amalgamation of independent women artists. In performance, we come together to acknowledge one another and to say, "Thank you" to our respective communities and sources of inspiration. Creativity is meant to share, multiply and grow. We invite everyone to come out as a witness and celebrant of *wimmin@work*!

After living in Brooklyn, NY for 23 years, moving to Durham, NC has meant recreating my notion of home, space and place. My identity as a Brooklynite was a point of pride. I knew my neighbors and community. The move to Durham in 2009 led me to become familiar with new modes of being and creating and also to new people and places. Even as I loved my Brooklyn years, Durham as place, space and a new home base has become very important to me and to my identity as someone who no longer lives in the big city. Along with a few others, I am one of the artists who keep this Configurations conference from being New York centric. Renewing or expanding notions of home base has lead me to to remember that curating or programing performance

1 wimmin@work 2016 video excerpts are located at https://vimeo.com/168792440.

requires a consideration for and understanding of the communities where we and potential audiences live and work. Durham, as part of the South, is also part of the Bible Belt. That is not necessarily a negative but it can be a point of tension for any non-Christian based ways of life or being. This strongly religious environment is problematized even as it promotes a version of Black identity, the Black future and inclusion. This is very different from New York City or other metropolitan urban centers where small and large spaces are likely to be saturated with eclecticism and cultural mix.

Ideas of identity, family, community and religion are a point of common interest that can divide or unite people in a variety of ways. Church and education are central to the Black community here. People relate to place and other people with a sense of self that has been forged in their religious and educational institutions, formal and social events. Understanding what people do when they are not at work or school is essential to knowing and being a part of a new community. Sometimes I am a witness and at other times a participant. I get the three African American weekly publications that carry international, national and community news specific to the Black community. Much of this information and op-eds are not available in the city or local independent papers. African American news and entertainment resources are invaluable links to the pulse and happenings of the Black Community. If you miss them, you miss a lot. Church, Greek affiliations and community cultural functions are where black families, youth, entertainers and audiences are to be found. In the Black owned publications, Black artists are not minority or rare event performers, but protagonists who represent and identify with the Black audience.

One of the greatest gifts my parents gave me as a youngster in Philadelphia was the ability to navigate through spaces where I am met with misunderstanding, ignorance, hostility, lack of enthusiasm for or doubt about my abilities. As a performer, affirming myself within the Black community has been nurturing and empowering. After all these years, that still holds meaning and priority no matter the physical location. Some positives for communities of color are that Black centered activities like Church, social clubs, neighborhood events and gatherings are where community becomes free of white gaze, encourages ethics that we as Black people define and where the emphasis on education and family is mutually understood. While the quest for rebellion, radical art and innovation are also necessary and essentials for who we are as a community, they often leave behind or simply don't find themselves taking place within the very communities of which they speak.

My father's family's ancestral burial ground is three hours from Durham. The town, Dulatown, is named after the matriarch of our family. This North Carolina place means something to me, just as Brooklyn did when I lived and loved life there. As a performing artist and educator, my concerns are and have been: Black wimmin's voices and wimmin of color in the arts—the presence of and the absence of. I am interested in working beyond national frontiers. My nation in dialogue with your nation through the arts, letting my identity clash and synthesize with your identity while we work through generational frontiers while also keeping our voices vibrant and putting

Collage Dance Company performs at wimmin@work 2017. Photo: Alec Himwich

our voices back into communities as we define them. Bigger questions come to mind like, what is of color and who and where is community?

I find that as contemporary artists, our work often misses a spiritual/religious dynamic that is essential to connecting to and with Black people. Even as we are Avant Garde, post-modern, multi-everything and resist hard definitions from outsiders, we are also community members. It is not uncommon that before and after work is presented in the major theaters or museums in Durham or in the Universities, we (or the presenters) are still asking where is the Black audience and why aren't they here? The answer is very knowable. Anyone who has been to Junteenth, Bimbé, the Blues festival, Black Film festival, MLK day parade or the Black Church will tell you that there is a rich and enthusiastic Black audience with diverse interests.

At some point in February 2015 I began to think that we as women artists should offer a performance to our communities for Women's History Month. I was very open to who "we" and "communities" could be. The call was not exhaustive but there were limitations in terms of time, space and funds. The twelve artists and their collaborators who finally answered the call came to define both women and community in a manner that brought visual and contextual meaning to what women artists do in this area. I am excited to facilitate expanding what a showcase of women's performance can look like in terms of who is on stage and who is in the audience.

Working with women's actual lives includes considerations for family, work, collaboration, mentoring, the desire to mentor and leaving openings for people to define what they want to do and how they want to do it. It was important to ask what help, support, helping hands people need. Most of the artists were independent, self-sufficient and hungry to be performing with like-minded people.

Many of us are teachers and 9-5 job working women. When we create or perform, we can't leave the teacher, mother, mentor or the activist in us behind.

Through the process of organizing the show I got to know how various artists managed to do their work. Although performing is important many women were challenged with time for creative process. Many of us are teachers and 9-5 job working women. When we create or perform, we can't leave the teacher, mother, mentor or the activist in us behind. Those roles help anchor creative work we do and give it meaning for us and for anyone who comes along to see it happen. Our audience is made up of our friends, family, community, students, children, peers and colleagues. We want our mothers, aunties, children, and neighbors in the house/audience. We want to celebrate in front of and because of them.

Rather than band together and unite, I look at the project as a way to generate and refresh energy amongst one another so that we can go back out into our respective communities stronger, more confident, less isolated, and having expanded our circle of friends and artistic support systems.

The artists were "curated" but the work was not. I enjoyed working this way. The one essential question I asked was, "What would you want to do in the show?"

Youssou N'Dour's documentary "I bring what I love" inspired how I encouraged the women to decide what they wanted to do based on what they feel passionate about in this moment. For example: "do you really want to rehearse your youth jazz (music) ensemble or do you want to sing a track from the new CD you are about to launch? "

I was not looking for a singular voice or message. I believe the multiplicity of our bodies, voices, concerns and work is what created the most impact and made for a very welcoming and embracing environment. The performance was intentionally held at the Hayti Heritage Center, Durham's center for Black culture. It's a beautiful converted church with an important history in the Black community. The audience laughed, sang along, swayed, clapped, talked back, and applauded. It was like church; being in an actual church created a congregation of sorts.

Angela Lee, the director at the Hayit Heritage Center, was so impressed she let me know she would work with me to produce *wimmin@work* for 2017. The goal for 2017 is to add dance, music and spoken word workshops wherein the community can interact with the artists, to find funds to make a touring version of the showcase, to obtain funds for the performers, to have more technical

support and to include international artists based in or out of the country. How will funding alter or shade who is "asked" or "invited"? These are questions and challenges I look forward to solving.

The roster of performers who shared the stage with me reveals the variety of voices, concerns and reasons why women make the work they do. It was not until I read it through that I realized the uniqueness of this particular pantheon of artists. I feel we have added an important element to images and representations of women artists in our community and the vast and multiple communities to which we connect.

About the Author: Dancer/Choreographer/Video Artist ***Andrea E. Woods Valdés*** *is Artistic Director of SOULOWORKS/Andrea E. Woods & Dancers and Artistic Director of the interdisciplinary, inter-generational performance project, wimmin@work. A native of Philadelphia, her ancestral roots are in the Carolinas. She is a former dancer/rehearsal director with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Co. and is currently Associate Professor of Dance at Duke University. She creates dances as contemporary African American folklore. Her creative process is inspired by folk traditions such as blues, jazz, folk music, African American literature, family folklore and movement reflective of the African Diaspora social and cultural experience. www.SOULOWORKS.com*

Andrea E. Woods Valdés
Photo: Alec Himwich

ON CURATING

CRAIG T. PETERSON

Coming to this gathering is exciting. Most of my professional gatherings and conferences are of a very different racial balance than this. Therefore, I am most inclined to use this setting as an opportunity to listen rather than to talk. Besides which, I have many more questions than I have ideas to share.

I suppose I have been around the field for a long while now - and I have witnessed our passage through a few different inquiries and approaches to equity and inclusion in the arts. A lot of terminology and approaches have been used and I have learned there are no real "fixes" – only ongoing work and vigilant effort.

But here are few very loosely connected themes that I am thinking about recently - both in response to the invitation to be here and more generally as I go about my work:

I work primarily in the field of dance, theater and live performance. I find that I am a little soured by current uses of the word "curation" as it applies to the performing arts. I grew up in the arts administration world at a time when our work was called "programming" – which feels different than curating. To me, programming is the effort to provide frames, containers or infrastructures so that artists can explore, make and share work. Curating feels precious. It feels like we took a word from the visual art world to legitimize our work. I am interested in the impact work can have as it is made and ultimately presented, not how interesting I find the work once it's finished. I rarely see a work and then curate it. More often I am having conversations with artists about ideas. Where and how do those ideas fit into a cultural discourse? And how might an artist want to engage in a broader conversation that may spring from their work? That said, I do find some of these new curatorial models quite interesting – these inquiries into specific questions or concerns. I think this approach offers a lot of opportunity with particular regard to deepening conversations around race, gender and ability. I think perhaps there is much to learn from these points of departure and I want to know more.

I remember having a conversation with a black artist/friend while standing in MOMA watching a performance. It was one of those museum performance pieces – in a gallery, by a black choreographer widely embraced by European presenters. We were talking about curation - asking ourselves what the word meant in current contexts. He asked me: "Is curation just an 'acceptable' form of cultural appropriation?"

This same choreographer and I were having another conversation – at a different time – about the all too common reduction of "black art" in the broader conversation of, well, art. He was lamenting that his work is always contextualized via his blackness. I have had this conversation with many black artists over many years. Why is dance that is created by brown and black people

"cultural" or "black"? Certainly, his interests are rooted in a variety of cultural inquiries. But isn't all art?

The conversation began because we were discussing how to contextualize his upcoming show – something I do with all artists. He sighed and said "I am just not interested in explaining my work to white people anymore. I'm tired and it just doesn't interest me."

The other big thing I have been contemplating lately is the sensitive nature of appropriation as it butts up against experimentalism. I work almost exclusively in experimental forms. Experimental art was built around the very notion of the theft of ideas ("Great artists steal….") I was talking to a mid-career white artist who was saying that she recently finds herself trying to find appropriate ways to explore. Over many years she has used various far flung source materials, very often not from her own culture. Everything ranging from Russian literature to Japanese folk dances. Her curiosities into other cultural forms and stories is, for her, about trying to understand and process the human experience. What is archetypal? What is unique to specific cultures? What overlaps? More recently she has started to worry about appropriation. Her exact words were: "What we have recently started to recognize as appropriation is what I grew up calling experimentalism."

I am not defending or criticizing her – just asking some questions about the role of experimental art and artists within the context of cultural sensitivity. Indeed, I remember a time early in my career when white choreographers were widely celebrated for "borrowing" non-European styles of dance. What do white artists need to unlearn about experimental ideas as they grow to better understand their white privilege? And how do I, as a programmer with resources, use my leverage and influence responsibly and with integrity?

I have always believed that artists are the leaders of these discussions. Artists are the instigators of cultural shifts. Artist are speaking today of the issues and ideas that will, tomorrow, be part of a broader social conversation. Against the backdrop of some terrifying political discourse and the ongoing violence against brown bodies, I can't think of a more important role for artists to play. It is critical that we find ways as a community of makers and organizers to do this with courage, urgency and care.

Why is dance that is created by brown and black people "cultural" or "black"? Certainly, his interests are rooted in a variety of cultural inquiries. But isn't all art?

Craig T. Peterson

About the Author: **Craig T. Peterson** *serves as Artistic Director of the Abrons Arts Center (New York), Henry Street Settlement's performing and visual arts center. Previously he was Director of Programs at Gibney Dance, a multi-faceted center for dance and performance development, training and presentation in New York City. For ten years, Peterson served on the staff of Dance Theater Workshop (DTW), now known as New York Live Arts, one of America's preeminent contemporary performing arts institutions. For four years he served as the organization's Co-Artistic Director. After moving to Philadelphia in 2009, Peterson launched and directed the Live Arts Brewery (LAB), a research and development program supporting long term residencies and engagement activities for local and national artists as part of the FringeArts. For three years he was the Director and Producer of the annual Philly Fringe Festival, a three-week city-wide festival featuring the work of more than 200 performing artists and companies with the explicit mission to activate communities around artistic practice, presentation and creative place-making. Peterson has served on numerous panels for inter/national arts funding institutions, consulted with various arts and social service organizations as a program site assessor and lecturer, and has traveled extensively nationally and internationally to identify emerging talent and connect with artists and arts organizations worldwide. He's a proud husband and father to five children.*

PAPER DOLLS & BUBBLES & HOUSES

DEEARAH WRIGHT

Paper Dolls & Bubbles & Houses is a freewrite inspired by the essential questions and prompts presented in preparation for the symposium and my new role as Co-Director at JACK, an OBIE-winning 50-seat performance venue founded in 2012 in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.

In the forever beginning and infinite end, Time was. The Artist was.

The artist was colorful and full of color.

The Artist had brown skin, and it was beautiful. It was wise and in love with the sun.

The Artist's heart yearned for the moon, so the Artist came to be known as a girl… her name was Dee.

Dee adored the look, the sound, the smell, the taste, the soul of the world. She created to say thank you to the world, and the world continued to give.

One day, Dee met 3 other artist girls from other ends of the earth who loved to create too.

The 5 artists talked and listened and talked and listened and talked and listened.

"You're like me!" They all declared, though their bodies and voices spoke different languages of being.

Their great great great grandmamas and grandpapas were from different lands and these folks would sometimes even join in the conversation.

"You're like me!" They all declared again, holding hands, their fingers weaving together.

They called themselves the 4 paper dolls.

They vowed to create together and share art always, and their smiles made it so.

They turned, shaped, created their unique lives, while their hands and feet stayed connected.

The 4 paper dolls paths went in different directions, yet they always cherished the fiber of their likeness, the art that their hands had

JACK, Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.
Photo: Ted Roeder

shaped and the steps that their feet had taken together. Connected they stayed.

…..

Over the years, Dee and other artists with brown skin, remembered, created, played, shared, and dreamt languages of being, together.

Sometimes, others in the world only saw their brown skin and were afraid of the artists, their skin and its deep color and colorfulness. So those people talked and talked and talked and built black boxes around the artists and called them Home.

For Dee, this home didn't feel comfortable, it was sometimes dangerous, and there were no mirrors or windows.

But, she and the other artists with brown skin started building a new Home, a House, and it was work, and it was joy, and it was good. They were free to create, share, and thank the world in this House.

When the house was attacked, they kept building and building, and it was attacked and they kept building, and it was good.

They started breaking down the black boxes and some white boxes and other boxes little by little.

They kept building and talking and listening and talking and listening and building the House and the great great grandmamas and grandpapas joined the conversation.

One day, Dee met Jack. Jack had skin the color of bright sand.

Jack adored the look the sound, the smell, the taste, the feel of the world and he created and shared and created.

His great great grandmamas and grandpapas had built black boxes and white boxes and yellow boxes, and well…everyone helped to maintain these boxes, and we added boxes, boy boxes, girl boxes, crazy boxes, sane boxes, beautiful, ugly boxes...

So, Jack had a white box around him that was comfortable and safe and there were many mirrors and windows.

He felt at home, but he wanted to be free and create and share and help people in different boxes create and share…

So, he built a bubble. It was a silver bubble where art and community and liberation happens and he invited people full of color and colorful people.

Jack's white box was feeling more crowded and he said, "If I'm holding this bubble and creating and living in my box, how can my hands and feet be free to break down the boxes…I fear that the bubble will burst."

As he talked, his voice echoed. Dee heard and listened and said, "Yes, let go of the bubble… You're like me!"

Dancers Italy B. Welton and Courtney J. Cookie in "to make ready again" by Marguerite Hemmings as part of Reparations365 at JACK. February 2, 2017. Photo: Ed Forti

They talked and listened and talked and listened and talked and listened. And their great great grandpapas and great great grandmamas joined the conversation.

Dee and Jack decided to invite other artists and peoples of all lands, voices, beings, boxes to join them in building another House...

NOTES:

In my early childhood, supported by our families and the comfort of our Montessori school setting, three schoolmates and I forged the Four Paper Dolls - a commitment to each other sealed with friendship, art-making, and exploration. This early artist community shaped my expectation for art to be something we do together, freely and for freedom. I continue to work from a place of valuing communing and community as an artistic liberation endeavor. Therefore, through my lens, any organizing of artistic experience or presentation inherently involves We...and we create, we share, and we build. And, because the liberation of brown and black people is essential to the liberation of We, authentic curation starts from a place where the self-determination of people of color is honored as integral and where there is intentional inclusion of people of color in leadership, project teams, presenting artists, and other facets of an

I continue to work from a place of valuing communing and community as an artistic liberation endeavor. Therefore, through my lens, any organizing of artistic experience or presentation inherently involves We...and we create, we share, and we build.

organization's works.

Sometimes, we create art and organizations and our idea of movements in a "bubble" that is held together and maintained by how we are used to doing things and who we are used to doing them with and for. It's an "I know what they need" approach that's indicative of white privilege. Alec Duffy, the JACK founder and co-director shares:

> *...the formation of JACK was very much in, for lack of a better word, "European" model - a white male had a vision, and created something (with helpers, for sure) that he felt like would be good for the community, without having been a "part" of that community up to that point and without having really done any consultation with that community. So this is an interesting time, because now that JACK is up and going, we're looking to back up and do some of that work that wasn't done in the foundation of the space, which may result in a shift of the kind of programs we offer. And bringing on a partner (yourself) is an important part of that.*
>
> *I would say that I recognized the ridiculousness of me feeling like I could or should {curate for communities of color} myself. Even if I were able to program a spectacular season with hundreds of artists of color that attracted thousands of people of color as audience members, with a white male at the top of the organization making all the decisions and benefiting from the success of the programming, white supremacy is maintained.*

I joined the JACK team as a Co-Director to help shift the how, who, what, and why of JACK's work and to collaborate with others to build a new JACK. The new JACK would reflect in process, presentation, and programming an investment in: transparency, assessment of authenticity, intuition, holistic strategy, ancestral guidance, and the trust that our path and impact is revealed through the process of building together. Moving away from bubble-centered curation, no matter one's background, requires both patience and a sense of urgency with a recognition that what resonates between us is greater than what inspires one of us.

DeeArah Wright

About the Author: **DeeArah Wright** *is an artist, educator, and strategist based in Brooklyn, NY. She earned a BA from University of Maryland at College Park in Cultural Anthropology and Literature of the African Diaspora. She completed graduate coursework in Dance and Community Development through NYU's Gallatin School for Individualized Study. DeeArah's dance experience reflects a passion for improvisation and dances of the African Diaspora, and she has moved with artists such as Jennifer Archibald, Kinetic Junglist Movement, and Monstah Black. As an educator, facilitator, and school administrator, she has facilitated opportunities for people all ages to self-empower and to work together for collective empowerment. In 2010, she founded and activated Gather Brooklyn, which has powered engagement through: marketplaces, partnerships, community-space management, youth arts programming, and strategic consultation. In 2014, DeeArah was the Community Liaison for Creative Time and Weeksville Heritage Center's funkgodjazz&medicine: Black Radical Brooklyn. She continues to support artists' development through organizations such as The Laundromat Project and The Field. DeeArah is a Co-Director of JACK--an Obie-winning, radical space for experiments in art and activism. Her current adventures also include cooperative initiatives, revolutionary educational framework, and writing.*

CONJURATION :: EMANCIPATION
NOTES ON A WOMANIST-CENTERED CURATORIAL PRAXIS

EBONY NOELLE GOLDEN

Question:

How many womanists does it take to curate a performance series?

Answer:

All of us! Generations of us.

For the longest time, I harbored uneasy feelings about the idea of curation. Curation has functioned as a system of vetting, gate-keeping, and exclusion for many of my colleagues, collaborators, and friends. It's been a methodological approach to maintaining systems of oppression and white normativity in academic, artistic, and political spheres. Everyone who believes and lives like us is in. Everyone else is out in the cold, waiting for a seat at the table.

Largely because the word curation is often attributed to academic and artistic disciplines, many of those in the communities I'm accountable to don't use the term to describe their practice of organizing literary, performance, cultural, or visual arts projects. As a young person, folks described these practices as coordinating, working, gathering, collaborating on, inviting.

These words incite a spirit of collectivity, action, inclusion, and interdependence that amplify community-centered creativity and love.

I remember organizing and attending programs that were so long, think Easter Pageant and Black History Month Program, because we wanted to figure out how to encourage and reflect the creative brilliance of our community. These "curated" moments were about celebration and visibility of the collective not of a select few. The vetting was more connected to witnessing, not necessarily to artistic mastery. My community is always watching and noticing itself. We know who has natural abilities. We know who really wants to sing, dance, cook, craft, quilt. We understand that in community, we should all have a space to shine and to share.

The curatorial practice I learned about as an academic discipline looked nothing like women organizing a selection of southern delicacies for a post-church potluck. No one described the absolute genius of cutting a mix-tape of radio-recorded tracks as sound curation or the finely crafted art of coordinating hair, outfit, and shoes as visual art curation. Even when these ideas were presented, they were seen as tangential anomalies instead of core methods or expressions of the practice. Curation as a practice seemed antithetical to my black cultural experience. It seemed to belong in white spaces, white boxes, on white bodies, in white academia, laced with white values

of beauty, capitalism, comprehension, and linearity.

Growing up in a masterfully and organically curated community roots my current practice. I admit, I never deviated from it but I did struggle in certain instances and environments to privilege a black and womanist approach to curation. In spaces where folks didn't understand the rigor of blackness or womanist scholarship it was exceptionally difficult to maintain, but not impossible.

I practice curation as a call to creative action. I consider the lingering impact of a suite of poems, a series of performances, a succession of panel conversations, or a collection of books as an opportunity to engage, activate, and mobilize for social action. I interrogate how a community member, and yes I am privileging community member over audience member, patron, visitor, attendee, or museum-goer, might be stirred or troubled by the subject matter. I'm interested in what they might do next because of their experience.

It's important that people recognize that there is much more than a "show" happening. I'm not invested in the short term applause as much as long-term action. More specifically, I'm invested in action that leads to the cultural, spiritual, and sociopolitical emancipation of black folks, folks pushed to the margins and experiencing the brunt force of violence exacted by white-dominant systemic oppression.

What is a term that describes a community that uses every creative capacity it possesses to tell its own story of liberation and ascension? Power.

This is why when I was invited to attend this convening of curators, artists, and thinkers at Duke University I knew I had to bring my people to perform. Why? Because there could be no better way to articulate what I am attempting to relay without my SpiritHouse family. This is what we embody in all of the work we do whether it' s organizing or performance work. We see it all as integral to our collective emancipation.

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You were born a fire sign
red like your father and mouthy
like me
at your naming ceremony the
priest wanted to call you Shango
Olokun
i just sucked my teeth and fas-
tened my seatbelt for an 18 year
ride. Fire Water.

Fire water
omnipresent and flattening.
I knew you would break the ice
because your eyes only spoke truth
In your seventh month you
dreamed new worlds with me
There was water and fire and fire
and water
alive like the elements pressing
asphalt against shore

You said pack everything up with
a pirouette on my cervix
by the time the midwife was done
removing her mask and gloves
we were in Barbados spooning
fish stew over rice and peas

I knew you would ask me before
you came rushing
down what concrete I broke in
your name so
I have prepared a list
I hope it suits you

One
I never walk without joy perfum-
ing my collarbones

Two
I see the world my mothers could
not see

Three
you are here because I loved myself

Four
tomorrow is brilliant because we
are alive

Five
There are many parts to this story
I could never stop loving you

Six
I am your mother
You are not my project
There is light here

What I'm saying is
when we made you
we pressed oil out of banana
leaves onto our thirsty backs
You came because the farmers
market sells
the sweetest onion and the biggest
knot of ginger
When we made you our spines
were soft
supple and curved around the
currents

We smiled
our toes lunging us closer to home

You are not a survival tactic
you are here because we loved you
you are not a mistake
you are not a miscalculation
you are not an incident
you are not an accident
you are not a statistic
you are not a rap sheet
you are not a prison sentence
you are here because the three of
us made a choice

We made a choice

After we performed this selection from Collective Sun during the convening, there was a palpable shift in the room. Some people cried, others sat quietly. It felt clear that there was an opportunity that we had not taken full advantage of prior to this moment. This moment reminded me as a member of SpiritHouse, a cultural worker, and a community member that there is no complete story without my people. I can't talk about my process without my people. As often as I can, I will perform, amplify, and shed light on our collective work. Anything else is hollow and false. Anything else props up a regime that works to diminish me and my community. Anything else

negates the philosophy and practice of womanism that I have grown to understand as a technology of emancipation for black women and the universe.

It is my path to continue to activate the aforementioned call to action through my practice, which is more in alignment with conjuration than curation. I work with creativity, spirit, and community to bring an undeniable focus to what is most present and pressing for those who might experience what we have to offer.

Conjuration isn't singular work. Again, it takes all of us. We function as family. Activate sankofic principles of looking back while forging ahead into the afro-future. It requires a deep understanding of collaboration. Even when one of us takes a solo we got a nation of womanists holding us up, praying for us, way-making, conjuring, teaching, shit-talking, cooking, healing so we can thrive and shine. A conjurer is only as strong as her connection with spirit and family.

I have had many opportunities to practice this form of conjuring in community and with cultural institutions. I've worked closely with Rasu Jilani as curator or Triple Consciousness: Black Feminism(s) in the Time of Now, in partnership with 651 Arts, Brooklyn Museum, and Mapp International. In this three-part engagement series, artists, activists, and scholars explored Black female identity while expanding on the ideas presented in Ralph Lemon's work, *Scaffold Room*. Triple Consciousness is a platform for creative, visionary, and transformative ideas that support the empowerment and vitality of Black women. I've worked closely with Paloma McGregor as a co-curator alongside Jaamil Kosoko and Nia Love. That year, the curatorial team tackled issues of gender, sexuality and black embodied performance through the Man Up! Series.

Also, for a number of years I co-curated Women on Wednesdays Arts and Culture project along with Nina Angela Mercer. Those years were especially important to my practice. Women on Wednesdays, currently on hiatus, is an art and culture project dedicated to celebrating the creativity, empowerment, holistic health, and civic engagement of black girls and women. Through this project we explicitly worked to engage, create, and empower our community through the presentation of boundary pushing performance and visual art. WoW not only happened at the Brecht Forum, our collaborating organization, events also took place in communities and colleges around NYC. Many relationships and creative collaborations were born through WoW, relationships are still bearing fruit years after our last official event.

Conjuring. Invoking. Evoking. Making things appear seemingly through magic. Making a way out of no way. Turning fifteen cents into a dollar. Like what happens for some single parents at the end of the month when they make a feast appear from bare cupboards. Like what happens when a prayer is answered and spirit says hallelujah, girl. Yes.

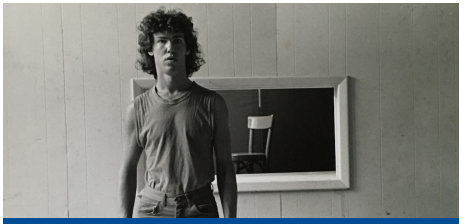
Ebony Noelle Golden

About the Author: **Ebony Noelle Golden** *is the CEO and principal engagement strategist at Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative, LLC and the artistic director of Body Ecology Womanist Performance Project. BDAC is a New York City-based cultural arts direct action group that works to inspire, instigate, and incite transformation, radical expressiveness, and progressive social change through community-designed, culturally-relevant, creative projects. BDAC boasts a roster of cultural collaborators including: Dr. Barbara Ann Teer's National Black Theatre, Angela's Pulse, The National Performance/Visual Arts Network, SpiritHouse-NC, Alternate Roots, The Highlander Center for Research and Education, Camille A. Brown & Dancers, and The Laundromat Project. The Houston, TX native is also an accomplished performance artist, poet, director, and choreographer who stages site-specific rituals and live art performances that profoundly explore the complexities of freedom in the time of now. Ebony was recently awarded a Creative Collisions residency at Space on Ryder Farm. She will use her time to continue researching and devising 125th and Freedom, slated for a summer 2017 debut. In the face of large scale gentrification and environmental shifts in Harlem USA, 125th and Freedom is a collaborative and choreographic meditation on home, remembering, and displacement. 125th and Freedom re-imagines this cultural and political corridor as Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad by activating a public(s) engagement project as well as a durational, processional, river-to-river, performance installation with an intergenerational ensemble of artists, educators and activists invested in the legacy and future of a People's Harlem. Ebony earned a Master of Arts degree in Performance Studies from New York University, a Master of Fine Arts degree in Poetry from American University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing from Texas A&M University. bettysdaughterarts.com*

PLATFORM 2016: LOST AND FOUND, CURATOR'S STATEMENT

ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES

In the early 1980s when the choreographer/performer **John Bernd** was first diagnosed with "GRID," his was the most commonplace profile in the media of a person infected with this mysterious and frightening new ailment: white, male, gay, of the upper, middle or artist class. This profile would become the ubiquitous depiction of persons living with HIV/AIDS in the popular culture and in the consciousness of most Americans. There were parenthetical mentions of intravenous drug users, hemophiliacs and others who needed frequent blood transfusions and, for a while, people of Haitian descent. Though gay, white, males of a particular class have never been the sole face of HIV/AIDS, they have been, for more than three decades, the group most associated with the disease in most public discourse in the United States. This has been the pervasive public perception not only of those infected with HIV, but also of activists, caregivers, service providers, and cultural responders. Public representatives of activist organizations, talking heads on television news programs, advertisements for pharmaceuticals in magazines, all of these gave the impression that AIDS, almost exclusively, affected white, gay, cis-gendered males. But there were other individuals and community based organizations that were active at the grassroots level who were deeply marked by HIV/AIDS. Many of these organizations and the people who carried out their missions did not fit the prevailing profile. This was also true in the depiction of artists who made work in direct response to the crisis--especially when it came to choreographers, performance artists, and writers.



John Bernd (1953-1988)
Circa 1980s, New York City
Photo: Dona Ann McAdams

According to a 2014 report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

- *"African Americans are the racial/ethnic group most affected by HIV in the United States."*
- *"Gay and bisexual men account for more than half of estimated new HIV diagnosis among African Americans."*
- *"The number of HIV diagnoses among African American Women has declined, though it is still high compared to women of other races/ethnicities."*

Javier Ninja and Archie Burnett perform in "Elements of Vogue," as part of Platform 2011: Body Madness.
Photo: Ian Douglas

Through Platform 2016: Lost and Found, we look back at the plague years of mass AIDS hysteria, specifically the 15-year span of 1981-1996, to try to recover some of what was vanished by the loss of a generation of role models, mentors, and muses.

The more we delved into the subject matter, it became apparent that realities such as the three listed here would become some of the obvious lenses through which the curatorial team and I would envision Platform 2016: Lost and Found.

Through Platform 2016: Lost and Found, we look back at the plague years of mass AIDS hysteria, specifically the 15-year span of 1981-1996, to try to recover some of what was vanished by the loss of a generation of role models, mentors, and muses. We examine what the effect of that absence has had on art that is being made in 2016. We also honor rituals of grieving and the role of healers and caregivers. Moreover, in all of these contexts, we want to correct the flawed widespread impression of the demographics of HIV/AIDS. Poet-scholar Elizabeth Alexander writes:

> *"black people in this country die more easily, at all ages, across genders. Look at how young black men die, and how middle-aged black men drop dead, and how black women are ravaged by HIV/AIDS. The numbers graft ... to stresses known and invisible. ... Survivors stand startled in the glaring light of loss, but bear witness."*

Consequently, we have risked erring on the side of welcoming more people of color, more women, and a more expansive definition of "queer" to rectify the omission of those voices from past conversations.

Ishmael Houston-Jones
Photo: Eric McNatt

About the Author: **Ishmael Houston-Jones** *is a choreographer, author, performer, teacher, and curator. His improvised dance and text work has been performed throughout the world. Drawn to collaborations as a way to move beyond boundaries and the known, Houston-Jones celebrates the political aspect of cooperation. Almost never setting his choreography, he sees the dichotomy between improvisation and choreography as a false binary. An activist artist who makes provocative work that has examined and memorialized the impact of AIDS on numerous communities, he also supports - through curation and teaching - the production of challenging art created by queer artists and/or artists of color. Houston-Jones and Fred Holland shared a Bessie Award for their piece Cowboys, Dreams and Ladders. He also revived THEM, his 1985 collaboration with writer Dennis Cooper and composer Chris Cochrane for which he was awarded his second Bessie Award. He has curated Platform 2012: Parallels and Platform 2016: Lost and Found, both at Danspace Project. He is a recipient of the 2016 Herb Alpert Award for the Arts and a 2015 Doris Duke Impact Award.*

GROWTH

JANE GABRIELS

This essay is about a collaborative residency project for dancers and choreographers in the Bronx (N.Y.), and afterthoughts about the conversations at Duke University in July, 2016.

Each participant brings a full universe of connections, links and legacies, and this gathering offers opportunities to generate other systems of valuation. In the process of sharing work collectively, even more potencies are generated. The cumulative result of listening and responding is a room of witnesses, along with the creation of an emergent space for collective reflections - in the room and here in this booklet of thoughts.

After the first symposium and resulting booklet in June 2015, and intervening panels at NPN/ National Performance Network (Dec 2015) and APAP/Association of Performing Arts Presenters (Jan 2016), we met as a large group for a second convening with many new participants around the table.

I talked about *Dance Your Future: Artist & Mentor Collaborative Residency* (formerly *Open Call*), an artists residency project initiated by the South Bronx-based Pepatián which I direct that is produced in collaboration with BAAD!/Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, and supported by funders: The Jerome Foundation, The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, The Bronx Council on the Arts and individual donors to Pepatián.

Dance Your Future aims to stir up the dance and performance scene happening in the Bronx with support for emerging dancers/choreographers of color and/or emerging Bronx-based artists. The project helps keep the Bronx what it already is - an incubator and site for works that challenge, and provoke, and offer audiences places to imagine and consider possibilities in the world. *Dance Your Future* is also part of supporting and building local narratives in a challenged borough.

Pepatián does not have its own theater space and has historically created links with other local organizations to make projects happen. Pepatián's projects work best when curatorial approaches of partnering organizations come together to pool resources.

The project helps keep the Bronx what it already is - an incubator and site for works that challenge, and provoke, and offer audiences places to imagine and consider possibilities in the world.

Dance Your Future began in 2014 with a smaller residency, mentoring and performance project, and its' success helped leverage funding from the Jerome Foundation to support a nearly six-month residency with access to free rehearsal space, mentorship, and paid performance opportunities.

Artists alumni include: Awilda Rodriguez Lora (2014); Rebecca Lloyd-Jones, Richard Rivera,

Milteri Tucker (2015), and mentors have included: Susana Cook, Jorge Merced, Charles Rice-Gonzalez, Merian Soto. All participating artists have also benefited from the experienced input of Arthur Aviles. The 2016 artists and mentors are: Fana Fraser (mentor: Dr. Marta Morena Vega), Jasmine Hearn (mentor: Ni'Ja Whitson), Alethea Pace (mentor: Alicia Diaz). All the 2016 artists are also mentored by Aileen Passloff.

As a community-building effort, other less public aspects of this project include the creative process workshop with Merián Soto to which all artists and mentors were invited to participate, and in 2016, all the artists who applied were invited. Artists received specific committee feedback on their proposals, and were sent other possible residency and workshop opportunities. Our aim is to help support artists who sent in their applications to keep growing their work, and encourage them to apply to *Dance Your Future* again next year.

BronxNet has been supportive of the project - hosting artist interviews on OPEN with Rhina Valentin, and covering performances. In print, Eva Yaa Asantewaa generously published interviews with the artists on her blog (http://infinitebody.blogspot.ca/2016/07/three-open-call-dancemakers-take-wing.html?m=1). Securing reviews and having other written feedback about the performances in the Bronx is an ongoing challenge. This lack of print coverage is also part of my desire to transform my doctoral dissertation into a book to make the information more accessible for further research, critique, discourse.

Dance Your Future is for artists hungry to create, envision and realize full-evening length works, providing subsequent opportunities to showcase in the "Bronx Artists Now: Showcase & Conversation," an Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) event for presenters and funders that I've been producing for the past six years in collaboration with local theaters in the Bronx (BAAD!, Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture, Pregones Theater - PRTT).

As the *Dance Your Future* project continues, I would like to create more places for crossover in the project's in-between times (January-March) with opportunities for emerging artists to connect with other established artists through workshops, and/or inviting these artists to teach each other. I also hope to bring more Caribbean artists into the mix as the link to the islands is an important one, especially in the Bronx.

Dance Your Future supports artists and the community that is inspired by their work, and their dedication to creating new work. This project helps support the creative legacies of the borough, as well as other Pepatián projects—like Hip-Hop Academy, the documentary film on the dance theater project Out of La Negrura/Out of Blackness, among others—and my own personal artistic projects that I hope to move forward in the borough. Pepatián's contribution to performance curation and communities of color is its way of working: creating relationships and curatorial links to pool resources and support artists.

To connect ideas in this essay about the symposium with my work in the Bronx: both are

concerned with moving ideas, generating and supporting relationships, and imagining from beyond where we are.

The symposium generates intensities that move and spark space. There is a co-composing, a co-creating of a temporary space that is more than just the personal, but reaches into what the conversation is going to be. It's the people in the room, each with their universes around them, and it's more than just the people sitting around the tables. We were easily filling up the room, and spilling over.

In a follow-up email after the 2016 meeting, Risa Shoup wrote, "how the conversation becomes part of the action that we all seek, and sometimes we really do need the conversation as much as we need other kinds of action."

To thicken the conversational soup and move this towards what I think could be a kind of "generative lab" - now that we've introduced ourselves and this focused symposium - we could move beyond the presentational model toward formats that help reveal and support other qualities of the work that are emerging through conversation. Different conversational formats could make room for what is already there, and could help further reveal and support other emergent qualities of the work - especially all the not fully-formed conclusions. None of our work concludes.

"There is a wild beyond to the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us." Jack Halberstam[1]

Maybe our work at this gathering can help thoughts evolve into more questions and ideas collectively in ways that nourish ourselves further. Maybe it's also about continuing to create other sites for peer-to-peer gatherings that help stimulate the ongoing framings of performance curation. Being together in one room and sharing the conversation is doing the work, as is connecting out with others also interested in this framing, and creating this booklet - all to continue the focus on supporting performance curation and/with communities of color.

It feels vital to connect, share and continue to speak our concerns while ideas of what performance curation is and can do are in process, and not yet formalized. We could bring more process to that process.

1 Halberstam, Jack. (2013). "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons." In Stefano Harney & Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (pp. 5-12). New York: Minor Compositions.

About the Author: **Jane Gabriels, PhD** *is the Artistic and General Director of Pepatián where she creates, curates, and supports multi-disciplinary performance by Latino and/or Bronx-based artists (pepatian.org). The South Bronx is artistic base for much of her curatorial, research, and performance work (Becoming a Boogie-Down Rican, janejaneproductions.com). She recently completed a Dance and Social Practice Incubator in the South Bronx (http://www.dancinginthestreets.org/#!dance–social-practice-incubator/c1g1e) and is a co-editor on the forthcoming book, Curating Live Arts: Global Perspectives, Envisioning Theory and Practice in Performance (www.cica-icac.org).*

Jane Gabriels, PhD

REFLECTIONS ON URBS IN HORTO: A COMMUNITY CURATED EXHIBITION

LORI BARCLIFF BAPTISTA, PHD

> *We have vacant lots everywhere, and we're talking about our kids starving and people starving and there's homeless people that's not eating, but we have all these vacant lots that could be food. My big thing, I would love to see them put fences on the side of the expressway and put food all the way down. Everywhere where there's growing space there should be food and flowers.*
> —Opening text for UrBs in Horto. Marcus Thomas, God's Gang 2010

Organized around five main themes: **Community**, **Travel**, **Work**, **Eat** and **Play**, **UrBs in Horto** is an interactive exhibit and public program series that uses text, objects, images and performance to highlight how campus and community partners and exhibition visitors have experienced the outdoors in relation to ideas about family, heritage and community. The product of Participatory Action Research, community curation, creative placemaking and social practice, **UrBs** was curated in collaboration with the University of Illinois-Chicago Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change, Heritage Garden Student Interns and the Office of Sustainability, as well as Chicago area community organizations God's Gang, Metropolitan Area African-American Senior Resource Network, George Washington Carver FARMS, and the Centers for New Horizons. The exhibit prominently features sculptural works created by artist Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz and video content produced by Chicago area documentary filmmaker Candice S. Eloby. UIC Graphic Design student Jennifer Manning is responsible for graphic design elements of the exhibit.

Until very recently, environmental history did not account for the complex ways in which peoples of African descent learned and applied environmental conservation and preservation strategies outside of the more formally recognized environmental movement.[1] Between 2008 – 2011, I participated in a multi-year, multi-sited participatory action research project conducted by the Field Museum of Natural History that assessed how to engage members of Chicago's diverse communities in citywide and regional climate action plans. Many African-Americans in the city's Bronzeville and Roseland neighborhoods who participated in Field Museum research and contributed to this exhibit identified "rural southern heritage" as one of the most significant factors that impacted their relationships with nature. African-American research partners in Roseland also made explicit connections to a community of family farmers in Kankakee County, Illinois.

Expanding upon these findings, I attempted to introduce the summer Heritage Garden intern

1 See also Glave, Dianne D. *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming The African American Environmental Heritage*. Chicago, IL, Lawrence Hill Books, 2010; and *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African-Americans and Environmental History*. Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds. Pittsuburgh, PA, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006.

cohort to a wide range of African-American environmental traditions during my 4-week unit of the University of Illinois - Chicago Heritage Garden Internship during the summer of 2014. In addition to readings and discussions that mapped the impacts of how slavery, sharecropping, day labor, the great migration, the Chicago riots of 1919, "food insecurity," and climate change exert an influence over the ways many African-Americans relate to the natural and built environments, interns began to engage Bronzeville and Roseland community partners with particular ties to Mississippi, Arkansas and other locales in the American south to gain a deeper understanding of their present-day experiences. Interns visited Pop Ivy's farm in Kankakee County as guests of George Washington Carver FARMS, listening for the connections between urban and rural southern life. They were especially attuned to the role of "allies" or "collaborators," as well as how and why they have adapted, challenged, reclaimed or discarded some environmental heritage practices.

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I curated **UrBs in Horto** with the support of a team of campus and community collaborators to provide a creative venue for them to explore and express their connections to nature, migration and each other. In doing so, I intentionally leveraged the power of the arts to drive a broader agenda – to transform how many of Chicago's diverse – and often segregated – communities interact with one another and with nature. The phrase, which is Latin for "city in a garden," appears on the corporate seal of the City of Chicago. For many of my community partners who view urban gardens as restorative spaces, the phrase functions as an ironic signifier that marks their ambivalent relationship with "the land," agriculture, and time spent outdoors. Drawing heavily from my ethnographic fieldwork in the City's Bronzeville and Roseland neighborhoods and my contributions to the intellectual framework that informs the UIC Heritage Garden Internship Program -- which highlights the links between cultural diversity, environmental sustainability, and social justice – the community curated interactive exhibit uses objects, news articles, still and moving images, photographs, maps, stories, recipes, games, crafts, visual and performance-based art to situate African-American environmental traditions within a broader context of culturally diverse and environmentally sustainable practices. Free and open to the public, **UrBs** resided in the The African-American Cultural Center (AACC) Gallery at the University of Illinois at Chicago from November 19, 2014 through August 24, 2015.

UrBs highlights the stories and experiences of my collaborators with particular ties to Mississippi, Arkansas and other locales in the American south alongside those of African, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian and European immigrants to Chicago to gain a deeper understanding of how they have experienced the outdoors not only relative to conditions of poverty, fear and violence, but also in relation to ideas about family, heritage and community.

Project dimensions include:

- Interactive mapping exercises that invite visitors to trace their own migratory routes;
- Intergenerational and intercultural story and recipe sharing activities that convey visitors' personal experiences with gardening, farming, and enjoying time outdoors;
- Intergenerational and intercultural crafts workshops;
- Guided tours and co-curricular activities;
- Objects and images curated from and by campus and community partners;
- Collaboratively proposed and generated activities

EXHIBIT DESCRIPTION

The exhibit aesthetic is meant to be critically engaging yet restorative. Prior to entering the exhibit, visitors are greeted by a vinyl reproduction of the Roseland-Pullman mural, I Welcome Myself to a New Place flanked by a quote from one of my research collaborators, which I shared at the opening of this essay. I Welcome Myself spans an entire railroad underpass and is one of the largest community murals in Chicago. Designed and created by more than one hundred neighborhood residents, the project was coordinated by the Chicago Public Art group in 1988 in an effort to figuratively and literally bridge the symbolic and spatial gap between the predominantly African-American Roseland and the predominantly white and Latino Pullman neighborhoods.

UrBs opens with oversized cartographic representations of the UNESCO Slave Project Research and Michael Siegel's map, "The Great Migration, 1900-1929," commissioned by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Both are mounted on cork panels built by UIC carpenter Bob McHale and include labels that encourage visitors to take up the yarn and push pins provided to trace their personal journeys – global, national and local – towards forming community. Community is staged as a welcoming site, furnished with a plush easy chair and blanket, side table with reading lamp, a blank journal and the late Mrs. Bessie Theus' mid-century mirror shadow box, a gift to the Center from UIC external affairs officer Caroline Swinney. Below images curated by the project team, visitors are asked to reflect upon and share small objects that

represent their community's relationship to nature, and to literally post words or images to the cork walls in response to the following questions:

What role does nature play in your community?

How are rural farmers and urban communities connected?

Visitors are also confronted by Hambriento, the anchor piece of seven sculptural works included in the exhibit crafted by Chicago artist Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz, a native of the Central Mexican state of Querétaro. Comprised of high-fire clay, acrylic, wood, concrete, wire, nails, found objects and plastic garbage, Hambriento's hollowed-out form juxtaposes the external symbolism of greed and excess against the emptiness of consumption and waste. UIC's Latino Cultural Center Director invited Piloto to lead the summer Heritage Garden Interns in a series of workshops that resulted in the creation of the flock of birds that grace the ceiling of the exhibit space. Formerly mounted in the four Heritage Garden satellite locations, each bird is crafted from organic and repurposed materials – tree branches, styrofoam, plastic bags and piping -- and reframes workshop participants ideas about wastefulness, dispensability, and a wide range of social issues, to include women's reproductive rights, immigration status and symbolic markers of cultural heritage.

A flat-panel television screen crowns a cloth and paper tree, serving as a portal to media representations of Chicago filmmaker Candice S. Eloby's capture of the summer 2014 Heritage Garden Interns' story performance. During the second unit of the summer 2014 Heritage Garden internship, Interns participated in a series of workshops led by Gender and Sexuality Center Director Megan Carney and About Face Youth Theatre that guided the interns through the process of adapting the stories and recipes that they collected from their communities into a short group performance. A founding director of About Face Youth Theatre, Carney brings expertise in using oral history collection and participatory workshops that illuminate diverse LGBTQ identities and histories to the project. Aspects of this adaptation have also been incorporated into the Garden Tour.

Couches and a display case round out the viewing area.

Along the window wall, the theme of "work" is expressed as an amalgamation of art, agriculture and activism deployed to bring about cultural understanding and social change. Photographs of HG Interns gardening, "Pop" Ivy, worker trainees from inspiration Kitchens, a job training program for the hard to employ, and Kuumba Lynx Performance Ensemble, a Chicago-based urban arts youth development organization. Posters from the People's Climate Action March were also featured as work.

A pegboard prominently features accessible gardening tools curated by UIC's Liz Thomson for the summer 2014 Heritage Garden internship. The tools include a spade, rake, and hoe with short-

handles and a set of four Easi Grip™ pieces – a trowel, fork, garden cultivator, and arm cuff.

The program bought these pieces from Disability Work Tools, www.disabilityworktools.com, which has a mission "… to make adaptive tools readily available to people can independently perform hands-on tasks in spite of injury, aging or disabling condition."

During the fall of 2014, Heritage Garden Interns connected with Horticultural Therapy Services Staff at the Chicago Botanic Garden to learn more about how to engage people of all abilities and ages in gardening. Thomson, a graduate student in Disability Studies with research interests in disability and higher education also pioneered the use of audio description in AACC Gallery exhibits, as a means of making the installations more accessible to visually impaired visitors. **UrBs** will be the third AACC exhibition for which Thomson prepares audio description.

A kitchen area includes a space for visitors to post recipes and food stories next to the vintage Apex stove on loan to the exhibit from our community partner "God's Gang." Founded out of Robert Taylor Homes in 1980, God's Gang is a holistic, volunteer-run community empowerment organization that tutors neighborhood kids, curates exhibitions on Black history and teaches about agriculture and food through farming, animal husbandry and urban gardening.

The exhibition concludes with the potential for play. For many African-Americans, the outdoors have historically functioned as a contested or explicitly violent space. UrBs acknowledges the lingering impacts of that history and invites visitors and collaborators to use the space in ways that affirm everyone's right to recreation and pleasure.

Lori D. Barcliff Baptista

About the Author: **Lori D. Barcliff Baptista** *directs the African-American Cultural Center and holds faculty appointments in The Honors College, the School of Theatre & Music, and the Museum and Exhibition Studies program at the University of Illinois-Chicago. An interdisciplinary scholar/artist, she uses participatory action research, exhibitions, and performance to explore how members of diasporic communities transmit social values and identify with multiple places and traditions through objects, images and expressive formats–especially food. She earned a Ph.D. in performance studies from Northwestern University, an M.A. in liberal studies from Rutgers University, and a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of California-Berkeley.*

I DREAM OF ASSOTTO SAINT: A COMMUNITY CURATION PROJECT WITH LGBTI HAITIANS

MARIO LAMOTHE

I have a dream. It is to introduce the visceral creations of Haitian-American poet and playwright Assotto Saint (1957-1994) first to members of Haiti's LGBTI community and later to a broader local audience. To start, my Haitian Kreyòl translation of one of Saint's performance pieces will be the basis of an embodied and creative workshop with queer Haitian men and women, which will champion how they are fully realized and fierce, contrary to constructions of them by some locals as trivial, diseased and abject. Born Yves François Lubin, and marked by his childhood as a ridiculed effeminate and same-sex desiring boy in Les Cayes, Haiti, Saint gained recognition in New York theatre and across America from the late '80s to the mid '90s – at the onset on the AIDS pandemic - for his very personal and stylized brand of radical theatre. Saint is my Haitian collaborators' spiritual elder. His struggles can now reveal solutions to theirs:

I am duty-bound to come out and speak for the thousands of Haitians like me, gay and not hustlers, who, for one reason or another, struggle with silence and anonymity yet don't view ourselves as victims. Self pity isn't part of my vocabulary. Haunted by the future, I'm desperate to bear witness and settle accounts. These are trying times. These are times of need.[1]

Saint's activist creations disseminate a pedagogy that combats patriarchal structures, which seem central to the makeup of Haitian and black communities. Based on past experiences, I foresee that my collaborators will spend time together to deeply sense, practice and forward the gay artist's lessons. This willingness is germane to my dream of witnessing LGBTI Haitians celebrate, rather than mourn, their lives.

Participants view an image from Josué Azor's *Noctambules* series that documents LGBT life in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo: Dasha A. Chapman

THE CO-CONSPIRATORS

I was conducting doctoral research on contemporary dance in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when my funding ran out. Therefore, I parlayed my knowledge of gender and sexuality studies into the position of sexual health and education

1 Saint, Assotto. 1996. Spells of a Voodoo Doll: The Poems, Fiction, Essays and Plays of Assotto Saint. New York: Masquerade Books.

manager for men who have sex with men (MSM). My employer was PSI-Haiti, the local chapter of an American non-governmental organization whose mission is concerned with sexual behavior and family planning in developing countries. USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) was one of our major donors, and we abided by PEPFAR guidelines – PEPFAR being the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Our objectives were: to steer same-sex loving men toward an abstinent or monogamist life, to lead them to use a condom and lubricant during each sexual act with a loving partner, and to test for HIV/AIDS every three months as well seek treatment if they were HIV positive.

From February 2011 to May 2015, I managed Haiti's first integrated and interactive education, information and communication program for MSM, whose bodies the Haitian Ministry of Health and various global organizations considered most at risk gateways for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. With the collaboration of LGBTI grassroots organization Fondation SEROvie, I formatted interpersonal communication sessions conducive to fostering lasting behavioral change among gay, bisexual and down-low men, and trans women.

But event participants had additional agendas. They resisted the moralistic undertones of sessions by inserting gossips, jokes, dances, songs, theater skits, runway shows and drag performances into every pause, every icebreaker, and every time a group facilitator got too relaxed. Their own end goals were to hone in on matters that directly impacted the practicalities of their life, overall health, expressions of gender and sexuality, and discrimination and stigmatization in Haiti, fringe topics in our curriculum. My beneficiaries intentionally re-curated educational activities that ultimately implied their bodies were a cesspool in dire need of decontamination and/or to be quarantined. They reconfigured conference rooms in urban spaces to small stuffy rooms on the outskirts of a village in order to re-script discourses on wellness and the human experience from their own standpoint. To me, this is a form a curation that: a) exists outside of spaces labeled theatrical and artistic, b) re-purposes an environment to sharply recognize the men and women's needs, and c) improvises and experiments with transforming potentially oppressive and unhealthy sessions into arenas of liberation. There, participants labored creatively to wash off the stain of being two of the 4Hs (Haitian, homosexual, heroin-users, hemophiliacs) that stigmatized Haitians on the island and ones like Saint in diaspora; the reader might remember that 4H was a Center for Disease Control (CDC) misnomer before HIV and AIDS bore their current more scientific names.

In March 2015, PEPFAR focused its interests strictly on testing and treatment, as a means perhaps to finally introduce PReP (Pre-exposure Prophylaxis) to the Haitian health market. Therefore, USAID no longer subsidized STD prevention sessions that doubled as my beneficiaries' safe spaces and connected their nationwide network. I left Haiti for a postdoctoral fellowship at Duke University. The groups disbanded. These dynamics were not lost to Reginald Dupont, Fondation SEROvie's executive director. A trusted advisor, Dupont placed the onus on me to continue investing in opportunities that privilege LGBTI lives as critical entities in Haitian knowledge production. Proselytizing to community members, according to USAID's and other

global health entities' models, does not incite them to self-care and self-love. "What creative and artistic means might? You have a PhD, Mario! Figure it out!"

SAINT MISBEHAVIN'

The name Assotto pays homage to Vodou's majestic sacred drum "Assoto" from whose sounds and rhythms rituals are generated, and Saint honors the legacy of Haiti's revolutionary leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture. Tapping into such magnificent echoes with a thick Kreyòl and French accent, Saint coyly bats and widens his eyes in Marlon Riggs' 1992 documentary No Regret (Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien),[2] as he advises:

> *It's a virus, and we have to constantly remind ourselves. It is not sexuality that is the problem. Go and have as much sex as possible. Go and have relationships. I do believe in one-night stands; I do believe in extended one-night stands. My lover and I always had an open relationship. But be safe. Use a condom. And there's so many facets to sex, to sexuality. It is not just fucking, fucking, and sucking. There's a whole element of jerking off, of talking dirty, of wrestling. Discover new facets. Explore. And you'll be surprised at what you find. So I say go ahead: worship each other's bodies. Love them!*

My Haitian collaborators continue to transform whatever spaces were available to them, as they dodge violent physical and psychological altercations with homophobes. Saint, a self-titled "low life bitch" snatched the page, the stage, bookstores, radio stations and marches to shout that self-care and unbridled joy are radical facets of and not contradictory to the queer person's existence.

A former member of the Martha Graham Dance Company, and close collaborator of poet Essex Hemphill and filmmaker/poet/activist Marlon Riggs, Saint devised choreographed poems and plays for ensembles that dealt directly and uncompromisingly with the experiences of black gay men in America and foregrounded the activist manners in which members of his community joined together not only in fierce protest of their treatment but also in rapturous celebration of their identities. As I realize my dream to establish a LGBTI-centered arts program in Haiti, I gravitate toward the brash art-maker because, amidst the chaos and violence brought on by HIV/AIDS, homophobia and anti-Haitian sentiments, Saint latched on to ways that interactions, relationships and expressive behaviors as performance were his sole recourse to feel whole and beautiful and to demand love.

Not only is this a pedagogy that will empower local LGBTIs, but also it will be their springboard to reach into their experiences, talents and resources in order to recover shared language, codes and embodiments necessary to energizing their subversion of negative perceptions of queerness. Thinking and moving together through a text that approximates the depth of their lives could catalyze the men and women to ask themselves and their interlocutors how the collective Haitian queer body might constitute a tool to reframe and critique race, class, gender and sexual

2 No Regret (Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien). Directed by Marlon T. Riggs. 1992. San Francisco, CA: Frameline. DVD.

A former member of the Martha Graham Dance Company, and close collaborator of poet Essex Hemphill and filmmaker/poet/activist Marlon Riggs, Saint devised choreographed poems and plays for ensembles that dealt directly and uncompromisingly with the experiences of black gay men in America and foregrounded the activist manners in which members of his community joined together not only in fierce protest of their treatment but also in rapturous celebration of their identities.

identities on the island and abroad. I hope that making art, songs and dances with and through Saint's characters and forwarding our discoveries to communities will press all involved to value difference of identities and practices.

I dream that my collaborators realize that they are contributors to a continuum of activists at home and in diaspora bent on eradicating brutalities that erode their potential. I also hope we all learn how to best cultivate, animate, and sustain pleasure in our life, especially given that queer Haitians steadily receive the subliminal message that their ways of exercising love and desire leads to death—theirs and that of their kin—and is destructive to what has been popularly sanctioned as proper Haitian personhood. For that reason, Saint's ritual-based New Long Song (1989) intrigues me. It uses an intergenerational cast of men (and in my version, women). The fabulously-attired performers are incarnations of earth, water, fire and air. Their words, songs and dances move beyond decrying psychological and physical violence toward gay black men, to emphasize what exhilarating pleasures can be found through body-to-body contact, and to recuperate modes of affection and play that have been denied to LGBTIs or that they feel they do not deserve.

ABOUT CURATORIAL ANXIETIES AND INADEQUACIES

Planning to realize that dream comes with a few anxieties. Thinking about implementing the project and organizing the spaces in which it will be incubated prompts me to ask: how do my host institution and I insure the safety of our community in and out whatever spaces we use? What are the various risk factors for all involved in such an endeavor? What resources should be accessible to participants so that they too become resources for members of their community and participate in building the momentum of a societal revolution that values free speech, dissent and non-conformity? Where will the money come from?

Beyond those logistical issues, I'm concerned about translating and transposing Saint's sexually explicit messages to a Haitian context that safeguards a strict and proper heteronormative behavioral code of conduct on the island. I feel confident that the group and I will have productive debates about the dimensions of a self-love that is mindful of self-endangerment. Saint is clear that reveling in sex acts does not deter one from taking careful protective and preventative measures. No. I'm thinking more of the local purists' mindset that the diaspora is importing

(Black) American privilege and exerting its power over "previously unaffected" Haitians. It cannot be denied that Saint's work and my elite American education exude Americanness. Saint's texts abound with Haitian and other Afro-Caribbean spiritual aesthetics, yet are stylized in performance icon Ntozake Shange's method that speaks directly to the African-American folk experience. In truth, my sustained engagement with American cultures echoes what Haitian journalist Nancy Roc wrote in the article "Is Haitian Culture in Peril?" Roc speaks in general of a Haiti slowly colonized by American "soft power." Its sly emissaries are the multi-ethnic Black manifestations of America that use seduction or persuasion to change locals' position, behavior, and beliefs. Via Saint's text and my knowledge, the tools of "soft power" include "social learning" and "perception management," which, argues Roc, the American State prefers to "hard power" that privileges coercion and direct influence.[3] Of course, this discourse by Haitian cultural purists willfully forgets how creolized and always-in-the-making New World and Caribbean folks are. Their preservation of and claims for what are considered "homegrown" and "authentic" often catalyzed contentious debates that are beyond the purview of this essay. Still, both Saint and I privilege global North identities such as gay and queer that do not easily capture the very ethno-racial practices of Haitian men and women who self-identify otherwise. They and their detractors might receive my project, its vocabularies and messages as an imposition, a coercive Black and Haitian-American "soft power."

Despite the aforementioned tensions, I do dream that a preliminary embodied workshop around Saint's work will lead LGBTI Haitians to critically recognize the benefits and drawbacks of such cultural appropriations. Additionally, our imaginations, and desires will guide us toward solutions to strengthen a network that harbor safe spaces for queer Haitian bodies at home who are victimized for deviating from their culture's heteronormative norms and its sanctioned performances of Haitian personhood.

About the Author: **Mario LaMothe** is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Illinois – Chicago's African-American Cultural Center. He was a Postdoctoral Associate in Interdisciplinary Sexuality Studies at Duke University's Women's Studies Program, and received a doctorate in Performance Studies from Northwestern University. Mario's research interests focus on theories of Caribbean performance traditions and African diaspora health cultures. His book project, Giving Bodies: Dance, Memory, and Imagined Identities in Haiti, investigates what is at stake when performing and visual artists reframe Haiti's embodied traditions to devise new images that counter internal and foreign negative representations of Haitians. Mario is also a performing artist, arts producer, curator, and LGBTQI activist.

Mario LaMothe

3 Roc, Nancy. 2009. "La culture haïtienne est t-elle en péril?" Le Matin, August 7 - 9.

POSITION PAPER

MARÝA WETHERS

I was thrilled to receive the invitation to attend this convening last year (2015), although I felt uncertain about commenting on the proposed topic as I have worked in mostly white arts institutions and movement forms. I realize now that the word "audience" may not apply as directly to my work, but "community" certainly does in that the community I curate for is contemporary dance artists of color. In my almost 20 years in the field of contemporary dance in NYC as both a cultural worker and dancer, my focus has been on creating opportunities for artists of color working in contemporary performance. Trying to infiltrate predominately white structures, which is the reality of the contemporary dance field both in terms of presenting and funding structures. This work ranged from serving on numerous funding and curatorial panels (often as the lone person of color in the room, especially back then), meeting with Executive level staff to discuss and encourage the importance of addressing hiring practices and internship opportunities for diverse communities, and adjusting criteria of the programs that I managed and guided in reshaping to include and reflect artists beyond dominant ethnic, racial, and gender defaults. Essentially, using any and every professional opportunity to advocate for contemporary performing artists of color. I did this believing that the presence of an advocating voice in the conversation could bring some awareness to the work of artists of color within these white power structures and hopefully, eventually, more resources.

Of course we are in a moment where the conversation is much more serious as we are daily watching our black brothers dying on national media by the hands, and guns, of the police force. Every damn day. And knowing our black sisters' minds and bodies are also brutalized on the daily even if we aren't making the headlines as often. But still, every damn day. So our concerns for safety, both physical and psychological, are ever more present.

What's on my mind…

ACCEPTABLE BLACKNESS

I recently saw an audition notice for a project with a much-respected and prolific (white) contemporary choreographer stating: "We are searching for dancers of a diverse range of backgrounds, bodies, and identities; performers of color strongly encouraged to apply." I have mixed feeling when I see these types of proclamations – part of me thinks "Ah ha, progress, finally!" But the troubling reality is that this diversity is being mediated through a white choreographer who for most of his substantial career showed no previous interest in our black and brown bodies. So a certain "acceptable blackness" is being curated into a white context. I bring up this example not to call out this particular choreographer but to highlight some of the ways that brown and black bodies are not safe in this contemporary dance context. The curation of acceptable blackness requires the chosen person of color to assimilate into their white context but

What is the impact of moving in and through primarily white spaces?

not mention it and certainly not respond to it. What is the impact of moving in and through primarily white spaces? In these cases it's not deadly (as in you will be murdered for it) but navigating these micro and macro-aggressions has significant impact on psychological and emotional health and well-being that accumulate over time. So we continue to find our way and our people elsewhere through a sort of necessary curation of our own experiences. [Paloma McGregor's Dancing While Black is an example of this.]

I think it's interesting to note that all of the "high-profile" projects I've performed in were in the context of Black themed curation. Parallels Platform at Danspace curated by Ishmael Houston-Jones in 2012, Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art at Studio Museum Harlem, and the controversial work "Blues" by Deborah Hay at MoMA through the Some Sweet Day platform curated by Ralph Lemon.

Curating in other contexts of "otherness": The Queer New York International Arts Festival

Last year I was invited as a Guest Curator for the Queer NY International Arts Festival. The founder and curator, Zvonimir Dobrovic, has a long history or creating visibility for queerness in his home city of Zagreb and country of Croatia through the Queer Zagreb festival. The QNYIAF evolved out of that to bring queer voices and perspective from other parts of the world to NY stages, albeit mostly European. So, based on my work developing an international artist exchange program between contemporary dance artists in the US and Africa, I was invited to bring African artists' work and perspectives into the festival. For the 2015 edition I was able to invite Mmakgosi Kgabi, a young performance artist who was based in Johannesburg at the time (now in Berlin). You can find an interview with Mmakgosi and I in Gay City News, and reviews in InfiniteBody, Culturebot, and Broadway World.

For the 2016 edition I feel honored to have been offered a research and development grant supporting queer art, established in the memory of André von Ah, the Brazilian co-founder of the festival and Zvonko's late husband. Through the grant I am curating a Black American focus in the festival in addition to work by an African artist. And here I must again thank Tommy DeFrantz because the idea came from the recent edition of the CADD conference here at Duke. I attended John Perpener's presentation about Eleo Pomare and saw footage of the amazing Donna Clark performing Pomare's signature solo, Narcissus Rising. As we all know, Pomare's work was highly political and queer before that was even a thang, and the topics are still quite relevant today. [VIDEO: www.facebook.com/AOTDC/videos/452830607642/]

I am excited by the gender play in recasting Pomare's solo about gay male leather culture with a powerful black woman in motorcycle boots and leather. I am particularly enthusiastic for the opportunity to have more intergenerational work on the program.

The evening's curation also includes work by Brother(hood) Dance! (Orlando Hunter & Ricarrdo Valentine) based in NYC and Jumatatu Poe based in Philly. [VIDEO 3min 45 sec: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOlKOEUTfkI&feature=youtu.be]

Orlando & Ricarrdo will perform "Black Jones," a duet about the complexity of black male identity and explores the possibility of Black male intimacy in different spaces globally and how these bodies are navigating, connecting, and/or resisting in a society with harshly limited perceptions. [VIDEO 2min 45 sec: https://vimeo.com/user10099706/review/172862219/e30d0715c7]

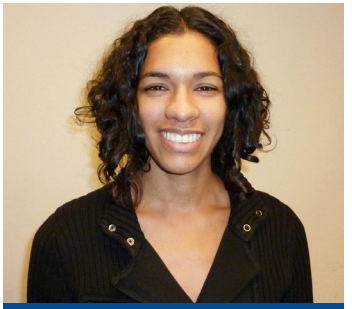
Juma performs the duet "Let 'im Move You: This is a Success" which continues his explorations of notions of African-American exceptionalism as expressed through middle class, Black American values reiterated in the J-Sette form and the artists' respective relationships to Blackness, gender and queerness through movement and living experiences.

And of course, there is an evening featuring a female choreographer in the evening-length solo HATCHED by Mamela Nyamza from South. [VIDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nid-0fN9PAA]

HATCHED, created and performed by South African artist Mamela Nyamza, is an autobiographical work that seeks to convey deeply personal and challenging issues of culture, tradition, and a woman's evolving sexuality within the customary rites and rituals of marriage. Telling the story of a woman faced with a life of dualism—between countries, identities, relationships—Nyamza is battling with her identity as a mother, while still clinging on to her life as a performer. But she also faces another conflict, as a South African woman performing in Western/European contexts. She addresses this by juxtaposing movement vocabulary and accompaniment from both cultures, referencing classical Western music and dance, and also traditional African vocal scores and grounded movement. Nyamza has created a poignant story that speaks to feelings of conflict with one's own identity and questioning where we belong in the world.

Upcoming, I will be attending the Triennale Danse l'Afrique Danse festival in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from November 24 until December 1 through The Africa Contemporary Arts Consortium. I'm curious about the proposition of "queer" as an identity in different regions in Africa, particularly outside of South Africa (Johannesburg & Cape Town). Nyamza has made work about the practice of corrective rape to "correct" suspected lesbianism through forced sex with a man (or gang rape by a group of men), as well as the existence of other forms of violence against sexual and gender nonconforming Africans. What forms of artistic expression and social activism are happening in response to the realities of queer (Black) lives in Africa?

I am also very curious how Black (queer) artistic practices and aesthetics intersect with Native and Indigenous contemporary art practices. This spring I had the privilege of performing in the Indigenous Dance Forum project with Jack Grey, a contemporary choreographer from New Zealand who was an Artist in Residence through the Asian/Pacific/American Institute of NYU. (Interesting to note, not through the dance department…). He is Maori and his work is centering indigenous traditions and wisdoms in contemporary performance practices, including extensive community activations. The project included movement artists with origins from Hawaii, Philippines, Guahan, Saipan, and other Pacific Islands. We are continuing to develop this work for two weeks with residencies throughout Hawaii for two weeks, now under the Indigenous Moving Lab.



Marýa Wethers

About the Author: **Marýa Wethers** *is a Dancer and Independent Manager, Producer & Curator based in NYC since 1997. Marýa is currently the Director of International Initiatives at Movement Research and Project Manager for Angela's Pulse/Dancing While Black, David Thomson, and Olivier Tarpaga. From 2007-2014, she worked in the Programming Department at New York Live Arts (formerly Dance Theater Workshop/DTW) as the International Project Director of the Suitcase Fund program, where she developed a cultural exchange program with contemporary dance artists in the USA and Africa, and managed the program activities in Eastern/ Central Europe. Marýa curated the Out of Space @ BRIC Studio series for Danspace Project from 2003-2007 with a particular focus on work representing the perspectives and experiences of artists who are of color, queer, and/or female. She has served on selection panels for several presenting and funding organizations in NY and nationally, and her writing, UnCHARTed Legacies: women of color in post-modern dance, was published in the 25th Anniversary Movement Research Performance Journal #27/28 (2004). Marýa is a recipient of a National Performance Network Mentorship & Leadership award and two APAP Cultural Exchange Fund grants to support research and planning trips to Tanzania & Kenya and Bulgaria. As a dancer, she has worked with luciana achugar, Deborah Hay, Daria Faïn, Faye Driscoll and Yanira Castro. Her own work has been supported by The Chocolate Factory, Danspace Project, Movement Research, BAAD, The Yard, and Kelly Strayhorn Theater (Pittsburgh, PA).*

ADDRESSING BIAS IN THE PANEL ROOM

MOIRA BRENNAN

INTRODUCTION

The thoughts I shared at the Configurations in Motion: Curating Communities of Color meeting at Duke University in July 2016 are based on discussions with colleagues who, like I, moderate peer-based grant selection panels. Those discussions are in the early stages of identifying systemic solutions to a situation that is clearly unacceptable. I will continue to report back on progress as we move forward. I also want to acknowledge that others in the field are working on this issue in parallel ways, and one of our objectives is to bring all these parties together for greater impact of the work.

SUMMARY

While technically impartial, grant panel moderators can in fact have a significant impact on the outcome of a panel process. Our influence is felt through our selection of panelists; the nature of the instruction we offer the panel; the environment created in the panel room; and our interventions / lack of intervention in deliberation, among other ways. This paper suggest an examination of that influence specifically in the context of racial biases asking: Are we doing enough to prevent white privilege from operating in the grant selection process? Are we failing to clearly identify when white, Western standards are used as the baseline measurement for who we consider "qualified" to act as panelists, and for how we encourage panelists to consider notions of "excellence"? When we do identify such bias, do we have effective strategies to intervene in ways that expand and empower our work and the panelists' work, while at the same time avoiding dictating outcomes?

INITIAL GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS / QUESTIONS

A "diverse" list of grantees is not necessarily an indication of an unbiased process. What other assessment measures can we develop to be accountable to racial equity in the panel room?

Panel moderators do not tend to receive training, nor are there field-wide protocols available for our reference. Generally speaking, "iformal" power structures tend to create space for white privilege to operate. Are we sufficiently alert to how this tendency for our roles to own privilege in this regard?

The selection of panelists can strongly influence outcomes, yet we are not formally accountable for these decisions. Can we develop other models that include greater power sharing of this task?

The role of panelist is inherently a privileged one. Do we accept it as an allowable/appropriate form of privilege? If so, how do we employ appropriate and enlightened checks and balances to

this privilege, while also allowing panelists to express themselves creatively and lovingly in the work? And how do we communicate those checks and balances to the field, to the panelists?

Have we sufficiently interrogated the practice of panelist anonymity?

Do we have effective strategies for leveling the power imbalance among a given group of panelists?

Do we have the training and language to call out racism when it surfaces in deliberations? Have we empowered all panelists to do the same?

Are we doing enough to prevent white privilege from operating in the grant selection process? Are we failing to clearly identify when white, Western standards are used as the baseline measurement for who we consider "qualified" to act as panelists, and for how we encourage panelists to consider notions of "excellence"? When we do identify such bias, do we have effective strategies to intervene in ways that expand and empower our work and the panelists' work, while at the same time avoiding dictating outcomes?

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

1. Convene a group of arts administrators whose work involves a panel selection process to begin to more precisely identify guiding considerations.

2. Contract with an anti-oppression training group to lead a group session for arts administrators.

3. Survey members of Grantmakers in the Arts (the field membership organization) to open the conversation as widely as possible with regard to the above considerations. Examples of the kinds of data such a survey might gather would be (among other questions):

   a. Where does your organization seek candidates when filling the role of program administrator / panel moderator?

   b. What qualifications do you seek?

   c. Does your organization train panel moderators in anti-racist practices?

   d. How and where do you advertise your grant opportunities? Is there a system in place to ensure targeted communities have been reached? Are those practices tracked according to applicant pool demographics?

   e. Does anyone from the potential applicant pool(s) review and comment on your grant application guidelines and language?

   f. Do you publish guidelines in languages other than English?

g. How do you identify potential panelists?

h. How are those recruiting practices shared with your applicant pool?

i. Are the review criteria shared with panelists also transparent to applicants?

j. How do you address racist or biased interpretations of criteria when it surfaces in panel deliberation?

k. Do you have ways of leveling existing hierarchy among a group of panelists to ensure that everyone in the room has an equal say?

l. Do you provide feedback to applicants?

m. Do you have a system through which applicants may (anonymously) share concerns or critiques of your program?

4. Create a resource center for arts administrators / panel moderators where they can share best practices, learn key skills, engage in undoing racism training, and more.

5. Create a database containing the names, affiliations and bios of individuals who have sat on arts grant panels to offer comparative transparency over a wider swath of the field. This would allow artists and administrators to see which panelists are being hired with less or greater frequency.

Moira Brennan

About the Author: Moira Brennan *is the Program Director for the Multi-Arts Production/MAP Fund. She studied theater at New York University Tisch School of the Arts. Her writing about the arts and feminism has been published in the New York Times, Ms. Magazine, American Theatre, Oxygen.com, among other publication.*

INVESTING IN PURPOSE

A. NIA AUSTIN-EDWARDS

I am a writer by inspiration, not occupation. Last year, my Configurations in Motion reflection was literally written on the plane ride to Durham. It wasn't until that moment that I was absolutely clear about what I needed to say, whose story I needed to tell. This year, I read the prompts over and over and found myself in hiding yet again. What else is there to say? My work has not changed. It has definitely grown but the Legacy of Liberation still guides me so what is there to add. Living in purpose means you don't speak for the sake of speaking. And while I don't believe any of the invited guests of this symposium did that, I sat there for weeks genuinely wondering what more there might be.

Then days before departing I reread the prompt once again and one call stood out: How your work focuses on the involvement, investment, and creative growth of people of color. My brain literally said - WELL DUH! I was in the midst of reviewing applications for new PURPOSE Productions team members and planning their training experience. Weeks before I had written about not only what PURPOSE is looking for, but more importantly what PURPOSE is offering. I wrote about my deep investment in the creative growth of my team well beyond their work with PURPOSE Productions. I am cultivating Liberators who can begin their own PURPOSE-full practices and enterprises. I am cultivating Organizers who can collaborate with our sojourners (read: clients) towards collectively defined success. I am cultivating Workers and Supporters who can not only get the work done, but do so in a way that supports their own thriving and development.

So this year I offer my vision for PURPOSE-full hiring . . .

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CRAFT A PURPOSE-FULL HIRING PROCESS?

Today is the last day to apply to join the PURPOSE team...well, it's supposed to be. But over the past few weeks, I done heard through the grapevine that folk ain't quite clear about what we're doing, who we're looking for, how we work and and and... While I thought stating "We value transparency and welcome any questions that may arise from our work or this process" would be enough to bring those questions straight to me, life ain't always that simple. And since we're doin thangs in our purpose-full, liberated, revolutionary way - well, let's just say our way might seem a little foreign.

First and foremost, everything we do begins with a question of purpose. Not the simple, transactional kind of purpose that says we got more work so we need more people; but the deep, reflective kind that asks: how do we build a powerful team that works collectively and creatively while feeling empowered to self-determine? (There go those Kwanzaa principles again.)

I am creating a hiring experience where folks are able to name themselves, shine to their fullest,

and build skills that support them well beyond the work they might do for us. Y'all think I'm playin but this is really my way of changin the world. This revolutionary entrepreneurial practice that centers humanity over productivity is my contribution to the legacy of liberation that grounds me.

SO, WHO ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

Honestly, that is perhaps the hardest thing to articulate. So many of the decisions behind the success of PURPOSE have been in my gut, and that can't always be codified. What I can say is that free-thinking and follow-through is paramount. You need to be able to run your own shit. Experience in marketing and web design is useful, but we can teach that. A comfort with technology is imperative - from Google docs and Hangouts to social media and e-mail (no really, we love e-mail). In fact, if you're really good with technology, you don't even have to live in/near New York to get the job.

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The heart of the matter is if you're interested in supporting artists (particularly Black artists), organizers, and the institutions that support them while working in a community built on trust and self-determination, then we're looking for you.

WHY IS THIS APPLICATION SO LONG?

30 minutes is a lot of time. Like a whole episode of black-ish. Or a really great power nap. So why would we ask you to spend that much time on an application? Because we want to KNOW you as much as we can before you get in the room. How many times have you tried to write the perfect cover letter and then walked into an interview and felt like, "These mofos don't know me from who-shot-John"? Yea, we're not about that life. Our Assessing Skills section allows you to name your own expertise. Our Understanding Values section lets us know how you might integrate into our way of working. Our Honoring Time section clarifies the commitment you can provide to our work. Your resume - well that's just icing on the cake and confirmation for what you've already named. We trust you. We want you to tell us who you be and what you're bringing to our space.

WHAT IS THIS 3-DAY TRAINING?

A whole weekend. Again, a lot of time. Let me start with this: every day (July 22-24) will be between 5-8 hours, not starting earlier than 11am, with food provided. Yes, I always believe in feeding people! Through the process on July 22, we will select our team. We'll spend the next two days diving deeply into purpose-full practices with our staff alongside guests who will have

paid for the training experience.

WHAT WILL WE BE DOING?

I am creating a space for building and thriving. I am creating an experience where you begin to understand my vision for PURPOSE as a lifestyle. This training develops skills applicable to any and all work you might do. It's about building folk up so they can do their best work in every space they enter.

A FEW OF THE THINGS WE'LL INVESTIGATE:

Liberated entrepreneurial practices rooted in collective thriving - We are not capitalists, but we do need to eat. Throughout the training, I'll offer various tools and strategies that have guided the rapid growth of PURPOSE and allowed me to feed my family AND my friends. Most importantly, we will invite folk to vision their own entrepreneurial practice because we believe when you thrive in your freedom, we are all stronger.

Clear communication skills - Seems simple right? Kind of like common sense. Well my grandma told me common sense ain't common. We're offering our communication habits and processes in hopes that your conversations, phone calls, and e-mails lead to successful work and positive relationships. We'll spend a good deal of time challenging and questioning so that even our most difficult dialogues leave us feeling like we've spoken our peace.

Marketing as a storytelling tradition - While PURPOSE offers a wide range of services, the current majority of our work is marketing-focused. We define marketing as storytelling and we will guide you in our philosophies and strategies that support this value. We'll also share skills around specific marketing tools including social media, e-mail, graphic design, websites, and more.

Understanding child care as people care - We watch babies (and toddlers and children and teenagers) and we learn from them constantly. They tell us when we are not clear. They express emotion without hesitation. They love in ways we have sometimes forgotten. We believe in caring for everyone, from staff to sojourners, the way we care for our children.

SEE WHY WE NEED SOME TIME? WE'RE TRYING TO DO A LOT!

On July 25, we will schedule hour-long conversations with each team member to exchange mutual feedback on the experience. Then THE WORK BEGINS. You'll take your tools and run, with some checkpoints along the way of course. We can only hope that your daily life will be informed and invigorated by our purpose-full practice.

Some may think that all of this is a lot to ask, especially for a max annual salary of $8k. Real change is always a lot. It's composed of radical vision, shifts in thinking, and growing pains.

We're asking you to grow with us and trust that the financial opportunities and compensation will as well. After all, we've doubled our income every year since 2013.

Now that we've named all that, we're extending our application deadline ONE WEEK to June 29. We will still notify everyone by July 12, and hopefully what I've shared makes the process clearer to folks who are debating their interest.

I gotta take a moment to acknowledge the folks that helped me bring this to life. Even though we've had a team for over a year, this is our FIRST application process. Numero uno, my Baba who opened the way when he said, "I can train some people. Remember? I know how to do that." He continues to offer guidance and challenge me to be clear every step of the way. My partner and Associate Director, Tim, who constantly reminds me that this crazy way we do things is not only possible, but necessary. My sista squad - Veleda, Kendra, Sydnie, and many more - who talked through ideas, read words, gave feedback, told me to go back and try again, and continue to share knowledge about this process. And you, every one of you who shared, read, applied, thought about it...I am learning from each of you.

See, my business is a creative process. I am making a poetic dance about purpose-full living. I am constantly learning through the building. There is improvisation and there are steps. There is movement and there are characters. There is language and there is feeling. And I am so grateful to anyone who dances this dance with us. I know that I am because we are, and because we are therefore PURPOSE is.

A. Nia Austin-Edwards

This writing was originally published on the PURPOSE Productions blog at http://www.purposeproductions.org/purpose-full-hiring.

About the Author: **A. Nia Austin-Edwards** *is the founder of PURPOSE Productions – a company that supports artists and organizers in the manifestation of PURPOSE-full work that seeks to unify and develop our world community. She was a John R. Munger Research Fellow for Dance/USA. Her performing career began in her mother's womb, developed in Atlanta, GA at Total Dance / Dancical Productions, Inc., and was further formalized through Tri-Cities Visual and Performing Arts Magnet High School and New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Since her transition from Marketing & Communications Director at BAX/Brooklyn Arts Exchange, PURPOSE Productions has supported dance artists such as Adia Tamar Whitaker and Marjani Forte-Saunders, theater artists such as dear Ella Turenne and Latonia Phipps, organizations such as 651 ARTS and STooPS, initiatives such as Paloma McGregor's Dancing While Black and Camille A. Brown's The Gathering, among others.*

DANCING WHILE /BLACK/ LIVES MATTER

PALOMA MCGREGOR

When I started Dancing While Black (DWB) in 2012, it was both out of a sense of frustration with what I saw as the limited imagination and will of the dominant white dance landscape -- its inability to even perceive the range of what Black dance makers were visioning -- AND out of a sense that my communities of practice, values and visions could find our own ways to validate and illuminate our work.

In a one-page manifesto penned that Spring, I called DWB an "artist-led liberation project" - aimed to liberate my practice as well as to invite others into dialogue about how we might be agents of one another's liberation. I wondered how Black movement artists' making had been impacted by the ways we must consciously choreograph our daily navigation, our every step in a colonized landscape – whether we come in so-called passable bodies like mine or more visibly Black bodies.

That same year, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin had just been killed. What did this violence – what I see now as the tipping point into the race war where we currently find ourselves – what did this mean to the making and being of Black folks whose bodies house our life's work?

Around the same time, I was in the early stages of developing Building a Better Fishtrap – a project rooted in my 90-year-old father's vanishing fishing tradition. The iterative project – which I've developed with groups and as solo work -- explores what we take with us, leave behind and return to reclaim. For me, it was becoming a way to find agency outside the values systems centered by the New York dance landscape and within my particular cultural and personal history. I probably couldn't have articulated it at the time, but I desperately needed a new rubric with which to measure my work – one that felt connected to communities in which dance is valued by the majority of people, and one that felt Black.

So that was where my creative impulses were in 2012, four short years ago. I could not have predicted the place we find ourselves in now, the numbing violence being carried out on Black bodies and mass distributed in what my colleague Rasu Jilani critiqued as the Black Pain Economy. As I feel the peculiar pain of this moment, I also know this is not a departure or anomaly, but rather a continuation of a longstanding practice of terrorism on Black bodies.

And this current escalation – particularly in the cases of violence carried out and sanctioned by the state – has a constant question feeling all the more critical: Of what use is the work I'm doing?

DWB was created to support dialogue, process, performance and documentation among Black dance makers. The initiative centers Black voices in a field in which we are often pushed to the periphery, amplifying both our connections and our multiplicity. We focus particularly on artists

whose practices do not fit neatly into the reductive labels often offered to us by the field. So far we've hosted five public conversations, created online communities that have attracted more than 1,000 members and presented the work of more than 20 artists - in various stages of development. In 2015-16, with the help of significant grant support, we created a 6-month fellowship for emerging NYC dance artists to be in exchange with one another and master artists, including Ishmael Houston-Jones, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Onye Ozuzu. We also collaborated with New Orleans-based Junebug productions to bring 4 women artists, who represent 3 generations of Black experimentation, to teach, share work and engage with the rich NOLA artistic landscape.

Still, to what end? As part of what long-range strategy? For whose benefit? To whose exclusion? I know some of the answers, but must continue asking the questions as time and circumstance make such inquiry imperative.

I know the power of the gatherings we host for those who are present – across a spectrum of race and generation. But how are the shifts in the field at large manifesting? Cultivating this community always brings up what isn't being done in addition to what is. And I am listening. In an era of overstimulation and the crudely overt, how can I pay attention to and value the subtle and durational impacts in order to both value what has been done and continue to make necessary shifts?

Fishtrap, too, has been a way into agency for communities of participants and a liberatory work for myself. How can the creative practices and the central questions of the work extend beyond the reach of my own choreographic voice to provide platforms for the underlying traditions that have supported the work and the visions of other seekers like me?

Last year when I was at this convening, I felt very rooted in ideas of Sankofa. I referenced the 50th anniversaries of civil rights triumphs as well as my wide-eyed vision for the year ahead.

But this year I feel a little more weary. I see the ways in which white institutions are taking on the mantle of diversity and know that they often don't have a clue what they mean by that, much less would be willing to give up power in a way that would allow them to truly achieve equity. I'm being called upon for my "expertise" but not valued monetarily or given credit for my contributions. I see folks claiming ownership of language and ideas I've been central to creating. And though I see myself as a vessel for work that is much bigger than me, I also want lineages of ideas that I have shepherded – made possible by my ancestors, mentors and teachers – to be made visible.

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This is where my creative practice – especially the practice of cultivating community and the ways it informs all that I do – becomes imperative to my survival. I know that the processes that lead to real impact, thoughtful visioning, meaningful performance take time. I have and will continue to devote the time. That is my life's work.

And this kind of process-based, community centered work is imperative now. Given all the circumstances we have to respond and react to – and we must – we are in desperate need of creatives who work with integrity as part of communities to vision and enact transformational processes.

This is where my creative practices – and my necessary sense of hope – are finding their roots. A focus on the power of equitable, collaborative process is what I'm striving to continue cultivating, slowly and deliberately, despite doubts. From those roots, I hope we can grow in a direction beyond our current circumstance toward liberation.

Paloma McGregor

About the Author: Paloma McGregor *is a choreographer, writer and organizer. She lives in Harlem. She has structured improvisation for a floating platform in the Bronx River and choreographed Afro-futuristic pop opera at The Kitchen. She is director of Angela's Pulse which creates and produces collaborative performance work dedicated to building community and illuminating bold new stories. She was an AIR at NYU's Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics from 2013-15, where she developed an initative entitled Dancing While Black as well as her iterative performance project "Building a Better Fishtrap," which in 2016 received support from MAP fund. She is first generation American from the Caribbean who has lived all over the U.S. She was originally a newspaper journalist who left a thriving career for the uncertainty of dance! She performed with Urban Bush Women for six years. Paloma is the recipient of a generous grant from the Surdna Foundation's "Artists Engaging in Social Change Initiative" that will provide her with funding that expands the DANCING WHILE BLACK platform. It will build access and exploration for Black experimental dance in order to expand a community, develop agency and shift both the artistic and cultural landscapes. Several components of this initiative took place at BAX (Brooklyn Artists Exchange).*

POSITION PAPER

RISA SHOUP

I have now worked for over ten years to connect people with access to the resources they need to create both great works of art and great spaces in which to present this work to the public.

I began my professional life as the Program Director at chashama where I learned as much about curating and the artistic process as I did about managing property and negotiating with New York City landlords. As Programming Director, I saw how transforming vacant commercial and industrial real estate into workspace for artists didn't just enhance the work of the artists who used these spaces – but this act of changing the appearance of otherwise uninviting buildings also improved the level of engagement from residents and inspired a stronger feeling of ownership over their community.

I found immense creative fulfillment in transforming vacant commercial and industrial real estate into subsidized workspace for artists. I have remained dedicated to increasing our access to rigorous, compelling, transgressive performance, and in so doing, creating a stronger, more responsive community of artists, cultural workers, supporters, and audience members.

But that's not really enough. Nor is it even the point.

That is, I no longer think "more" programming is the answer.

We operate in an untenable, if also infinitely engaging, 52-week season.

If we are meant to be programming that much, then how could we possibly deliver resources in such a way that is both equitable and responsive to the needs of the artist and audience alike?

I no longer believe that increased volume should be the primary response to questions of equity. We must learn to work in a generous, collaborative, deeper way. As a white curator, I think this means I have to listen more and do less.

In 2006, chashama opened a new space on 126th street near Amsterdam Avenue. We made a decision to work with local Harlem arts orgs and residents to find local artists to fill the studios. We might be interlopers, but the artists we served would not be.

I think this was the first instance when I realized I must set aside my taste, my preference, when organizing a space. This has become a hallmark of my white privilege as someone who works in the arts: in my life time I have the utmost confidence that I will not cease to find opportunities to experience white artists working in the distinctly form-based, Euro-centric style that I unabashedly love. To put it another way: there will always be more Keeresmaker. Therefore, I can put my taste aside when I have the opportunity to curate; I can use my position of power

to elevate the discourse, aesthetics, and forms of those who are otherwise banished to the margins. In so doing, I think I must accept a moment of obsolescence: asking for accolades because I was so benevolent in my inclusive curation pretty much negates the effort. But just as the work of white artists that I might personally gravitate towards isn't going to stop being produced, I can also rest assured that I am going to gain many more opportunities – to work, to collaborate, to learn, even to lead – than I would otherwise.

I no longer believe that increased volume should be the primary response to questions of equity. We must learn to work in a generous, collaborative, deeper way. As a white curator, I think this means I have to listen more and do less.

I currently run an arts services organization on the Lower East Side called Fourth Arts Block, or FAB. At FAB, I co-curate our season of educational, public art and engagement programs with my staff. We also run a subsidized rehearsal space program open to all non-commerical, non-student dancemakers who wish to use our spaces. I wanted to share a few of the goals we put together in a visioning session earlier this year:

- Reflect our community in all that we do.
- develop safer spaces within programs and operations for POC to lead;
- develop platforms that encourage whites to collectivize and educate themselves about racial violence and envision racial equity in our community in such a way that COC come first;
- respond to stated community needs with creativity; do not problem solve in a vacuum;
- to develop our audience / attendees such that our Lower East Side constituents that we are representing are also present in the participation and feedback of our programs.
- Transform our mission into a point of view.
- co-create messaging that explains how all programs support our mission;
- maintain and edit this messaging over time;
- place the LES at the center of all of our activities;
- relay community concerns to other stakeholders, including elected officials and funders;
- articulate and activate what advocacy means in FAB's capacity and actual activities.
- Stay visible.

- maintain consistent availability to listen to community concerns (ED must attend community board meetings at least 6 times/year);
- attend member events regularly;
- speak to members regularly;
- require FAB inhabits a street-level store-front office space;
- promote local events, merchants, and spaces; ensure that there are clear mechanisms through which community members can communicate event and project details to FAB staff;
- encourage community members to embrace FAB as a switchboard;
- be a presence/representative in citywide initiatives;
- enlist more FAB 'ambassadors' that have authentic relationships with FAB to share with their community and their people of influence of FAB as a model of engagement.

Over the next year, we're trying to infuse more of our historic advocacy work and progressive politics into our discreet programmatic initiatives in a more explicit way. For example, every year we host a variety of education and engagement workshops that respond to stated needs of our member organizations and the broader concerns of the LES cultural community. This past year we focused on real estate development and civic engagement. Next year we're focusing on infrastructure and capacity building. So. We're a service organization. We're understaffed and overcommitted and we have more passion than we know what to do with. To maximize our capacity, to further reflect the diverse community in which we work, and to try to elevate the position of POC, particularly women, in arts administration, we decided that the workshops on infrastructure and capacity must also be a platform for POC to lead. So we are working with 4 women of color (one of whom is with us here in the group – Nia Austin-Edwards). It's not just our concept of rigor and aesthetics that needs to be dismantled and rebuilt in an inclusive way – it's our understanding of marketing, fundraising, and leadership as well. The very language that we use to talk to one another about our work must be more reflective of the people with whom we are working. And we're not going to achieve this if the only people telling us what is/is not successful/acceptable language are all of one type.

But why? Because my politics said so isn't a sustainable answer. White artists, predominantly white institutions, white curators, have been appropriating aesthetics and cultural tropes from POC forever. It is not out of some penance that we must cede space to artists of color – no it's because we must honor the source of so many of the aesthetics and forms and techniques that we love. And, in so doing, we will engage in culture, in performance, in human relationships, in a more authentic way. And we will build a more inclusive model for our curatorial pursuits.

Of course, this isn't easy. It isn't comfortable. But now is not the time to be comfortable. How can we find true, sustaining comfort in this time of overwhelming, ongoing racial violence?

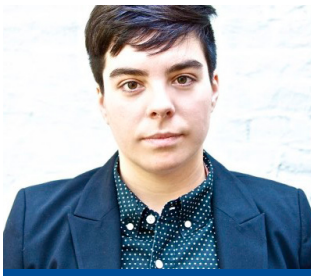
I do think that collaboration is the key to our survival and to aesthetic advancement. I am racist because it is in my best interest to be so. In a financial system that values scarcity, we must create a rigid, thuggish method for deciding who gets the best and who goes without – ergo, racism. So to dismantle this system we must:

Set aside our taste; make space for the people whose culture we have heretofore exploited and appropriated.

Share and share radically; play to your strengths, give full credit to those who did more/different; if you're white don't worry, you'll always get your turn, so keep passing it on.

Redefine our understanding of rigor to be one that isn't inherently valuing a certain level of access to resources that are systematically and all too frequently unavailable to COC.

Use a different metric: instead of demanding that the form match your sense of clarity and intensity try to measure against time and space with consideration for the artist's intention (which will require additional research; towards a more genuine social relationship). And so even if the artist's intention might be to exclude you, then you will meet them in their work rather than where you want them to be.



Risa Shoup

About the Author: **Risa Shoup** *is Executive Director of Spaceworks, a New York City arts organization. Shoup previously served as Executive Director at FOURTH ARTS BLOCK (FABnyc), a neighborhood nonprofit founded in 2001 by cultural and community groups on New York's Lower East Side to purchase eight properties from the City of New York and secure them as permanently affordable spaces for nonprofit arts and cultural organizations. Previously, she worked at The Invisible Dog Arts Center as served as the Residency Manager of the BRIC House Fireworks Residency Program, a collaborative artists' residency at BRIC Arts|Media|Bklyn. Recently, she co-curated The Bricoleurs at the BRIC Rotunda Gallery with Christian Fuller, BRIC's Associate Director of Contemporary Art. Shoup also serves as a development consultant for The Wassaic Project, where she co-curated an exhibition of environmental installations with curator, Ryan Frank, this past summer. As the Programming Director for Recession Art, Shoup produces events in all disciplines at RAC, Recession Art's new permanent location on the Lower East Side. She will also curate two exhibitions there in 2012. Shoup has spoken about nontraditional artspaces at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, NYU, the CUNY Graduate Center, and at Harvard University.*

SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURES: THOUGHTS ON MOVEMENT RESEARCH'S PROGRAMMING

TARA AISHA WILLIS

As a performer and dance-maker, I count myself amongst the artists I write about in my scholarly research and dance writing, and who I aim to support in my administrative and curatorial work. These artists move through black experimentation, often operating in an NYC-focused, historically white "post-modern" or "avant-garde" dance scene financially structured around particular ideas of what aesthetic and conceptual innovation looks like. Since Black Lives Matter placed race squarely into mainstream discourse two years ago, I feel both appreciative and wary: it seems more acceptable and less out of the ordinary to have shared bills with more than just token artists of color; organizations are asking for advice from their poc constituents about how to hold the discourse around race in their programming; public forums on the state of the field take on race and diversity questions as central topics rather than merely a bullet point on the list of things that should be discussed in a given season. But for those of us who've been thinking about this stuff all along, the sudden attention to practicing anti-racism might feel untrustworthy: Will it have longevity? Will it last past the next news cycle that makes some of us sit and worry about the lives of our own family members or ourselves? Why has it taken this for my dance community to start getting its act together?

I am a black, biracial woman who's had access to private and higher education and formal training, who is highly accustomed to inhabiting white spaces in which my presence has held varying degrees of visibility and invisibility, and in which whiteness (including my own access to white privilege) has held various degrees of visibility and invisibility. As the coordinator for Movement Research's diversity initiatives, I facilitate 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. In my research and writing, I hope to archive, describe, and presence within the primarily white, often anti-dance academic landscape the ways my peers navigate choreographic forms, somatic practices, and racial identity. I'm constantly asking myself how we can prioritize the growth of artists, their work, and the people in their audiences through how we language aesthetics and politics in both the curation and critical analysis of dance. I'm becoming the dancer in largely white casts who speaks up and asks the choreographer questions about race even though I'm tired of being the only one in the room to do so. I do all these things because 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 be at those tables, to circulate with relative ease in the spaces where these conversations happen.

MR is committed to a communal, progressive politics, and to supporting artists in multifaceted ways. But artists of color have regularly felt unaccepted in its programs, understanding their work

to be inapplicable to the kinds of movement aesthetics and choreographic approaches desirable or considered "experimental" to MR. The organization's fall and spring festivals are each produced by new teams of 2–4 artist curators each year, its Studies Project discussion events are artist-instigated, its Judson Church performance series and Artist-in-Residence applicants are seen by a completely new artist panel each year. These curators are collectively selected by MR's staff, itself intentionally made up of working artists. This model is intended to be more egalitarian and to allow MR's programs to grow with the voices of its communities, giving artists outlets to develop their curatorial thinking. But the question constantly came up in my two years as MR's Program Associate: Can we afford to include more than the token poc artists on this panel or that festival team, for fear of running out of pocs? In conversations with the Artists of Color Council, I am reminded that we might instead operate from a place of abundance rather than lack: What if MR always created the panels that the artists we serve (and those we have yet to serve sufficiently) deserve to have reading their applications? The panels our artists should get, rather than the panels we think we can afford? How do we create consistency in the efforts toward diversity and integration when the curators are constantly rotating out? How to create structural change with longevity?

The Artists of Color Council recently settled on a budding mission statement:

> *The Council is a cohort of artists of color addressing cultural diversity, equity, and sustainable structural integration in MR's operations, programming, outreach, and throughout its extended communities. The council aspires to increase visibility, opportunities, and engagement with resources for artists of color within the field.*

Facilitator Tina Vasquez brought us the idea of "supplication" vs. "integration": the difference between creating supplemental, add-on spaces for structurally excluded people vs. the slower process of root analysis of how people fit into spaces. We arrived at the crucial phrase, "sustainable structural integration." Since 2002, MR has invited an artist of color each fall and spring season to curate three artists of color into the MR at Judson Church series, bypassing the application process. But this is a supplemental, Band-Aid measure, as is the Council itself. Supplemental spaces tend to require extra labor which inevitably falls to the pocs held within it: the Council core members are doing work for MR that's born of their lived experience, that cannot be accounted for in time or money (though we're excited to have stipend money for their ongoing involvement!). The Council aims to create a structure that supports its poc artists and promotes structural change: core members will advise MR staff and board, influence MR's programs, policies, and operations, while other artists might participate in its activities as a resource for solidarity, career support, etc. We are working towards public aspects to existing MR programs, such as publishing in MR's Performance Journal and Critical Correspondence blog, Studies Project events, internship funding for college students of color, etc. Staff and board will be undergoing anti-racism trainings, hopefully consistently. The goal is two-way transparency: enabling artists alienated from MR to feel more welcome to its resources and for MR and its

communities to see their own structural racisms more clearly.

What do our curatorial efforts do within and beyond the institutional structures we're offered? This past year I got to serve as one of four curators for the Movement Research Festival Spring 2016: Hand Written Note(s). My co-curators, Aretha Aoki, Elliott Jenetopulos, Eleanor Smith, and I set out to create a festival focused around healing and poetic labor, inspired by Audre Lorde's notion of poetry as the "skeleton architecture of our lives" in her essay, "Poetry Is Not A Luxury," alongside her declaration that self-care is radical, resistive action. Our self-assigned mission was to curate a week-long festival of primarily queer, trans, and/or poc artists, and through our themes around healing, lineage and history, lasting action, and the structures below the dominant surface, to influence how the festival held its participating artists. We constantly redirected our efforts toward curating for artists as much as for audiences. How can we think of curatorial outlets as providing support and space for artists trying to sustain their careers before and beyond the moment of performance? How can I help sustain a presenting culture willing to think creatively to provide support within and outside of the expected structures for performance? What if a show is more than a product-driven chance to perform? What do artists need to feed their creative lives? What does their work need? Feedback? Mentorship? Time and space in the studio? Time and space away from the city? Time and space in the venue? Unfamiliar parameters or instigating prompts from the curators? What's needed for poetic labor to take place often feels like a luxury. But on a very limited budget and through our connections we provided a short residency out of state for two choreographers, held an artist's dinner, included as many artists as we could in events while ensuring that almost all of them were involved in more than one event or role, even down to the brochure designer, who also improvised on opening night. As we structured less-traditional events, like a reading group discussion inside a sculpture installation in conversation with four performers, we tried to offer those structures to artists as propositions—productive experiences for them and their craft. Such tactics are healing for our dance infrastructure both within and outside of institutions.

How can we think of curatorial outlets as providing support and space for artists trying to sustain their careers before and beyond the moment of performance? How can I help sustain a presenting culture willing to think creatively to provide support within and outside of the expected structures for performance? What if a show is more than a product-driven chance to perform? What do artists need to feed their creative lives?

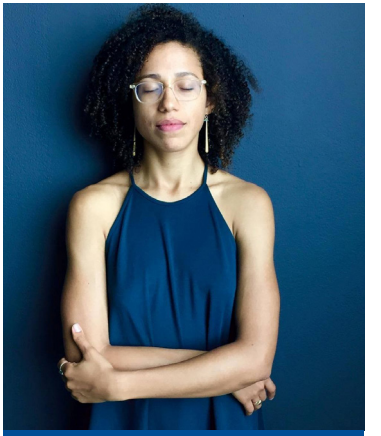
VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Who literally holds the keys to the physical spaces in which we do our work as performers, administrators, audiences, and writers? Our festival crossed six venues: the presence of white cis-men came in the form of owners and directors of performance spaces. Until we dramatically change the makeup of who provides access to spaces, even our most racially nuanced programming remains partially dependent on

the endorsement of largely white, often male-identified institutional gatekeepers. I would like to see more sustainable two-way transparency and accountability for our existing white-dominated arts organizations, and more sustainable infrastructures for our poc-led organizations, including, I hope, those that find ways to put down material roots and provide physical space to dance artists and educators.

Even more spaces for solidarity between scholars, writers, administrators, and artists of color: more dialogues that do not buy into practice/language, artist/administrator, artist/critic divides. "Research" is something we do with archives and theories, with analysis, critical thinking, and the craft of writing, and with our bodies in motion, with movement practices and choreographic forms, in studios, performance spaces, and both public and private social spaces. These are all potent actions.

In our various roles within the field, how can we build connections grounded in our relationships to each other, in how we are resources to each other? It already happens out of necessity as people in the arts, and as people of color. But to create and feed an ongoing culture of care is crucial for our sustenance.



Tara Aisha Willis

About the Author: **Tara Aisha Willis** *is a dance artist and PhD candidate in Performance Studies at NYU, where she researches black experimentation in contemporary dance. A member of the Women & Performance's Editorial Board, she has served as Co-Managing Editor of TDR, and co-edited a special issue of The Black Scholar with Thomas F. DeFrantz entitled "Black Moves: New Research in Black Dance Studies." In addition to her contributions to those journals, Tara's writing and interviews also appear in Movement Research Performance Journal, The Brooklyn Rail, and Magazin im August. As Movement Research's Program Advisor, she coordinates their diversity initiatives, including the Artist of Color Council, and programs the Studies Project series, a platform for artist-initiated discursive events. She has recently danced in projects by Kim Brandt, Megan Byrne, Yanira Castro, and Anna Sperber. Her own choreography has been shown at Movement Research at Judson Church, BAX/Brooklyn Arts Exchange, Roulette, THROW at The Chocolate Factory, Dixon Place, The Painting Center, AUNTS (Abrons Art Center, The Ace Hotel, Jam Handy), and the CURRENT SESSIONS at Wild Project. She was a 2009 Dance Theater Workshop Van Lier Fellow and a 2016 Chez Bushwick Artist in Residence.*

WITH AND FOR: AN APPROACH TO CURATORIAL PRACTICE, ARCHIVING, AND COMMUNITY CARE

TEMPESTT HAZEL

Please note: This essay was written to be spoken during the convening.

I'm a curator, writer, advocate, and founding editor of an online publication called Sixty Inches From Center (Sixty for short). I recently stepped away from my position as Curator and Arts Program Manager for the Arts + Public Life Initiative at the University of Chicago in order to focus on my curatorial practice and writing, and to reimagine how Sixty operates in the world. I needed time and space to clarify for myself exactly where my energy and efforts need to be focused, which is made more urgent for me now as a Black women who concerns herself with erasure, community building, and maintaining ownership and authorship of our cultural narratives.

If I take a step back to the formative moments of my curatorial practice and archival work, the experience that helped me to define my approach came by way of a fellowship with the Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC), a member-based network of Black archives that provided research opportunities. They gave me the chance to visualize and physically place my research within the geographic context I was digging into. At the time, I was working on a project that charted the ways in which the 1930s/40's Black Metropolis radiated out in the world, and, over time, influenced and informed contemporary culture, architecture, and the present-day Bronzeville landscape. Through that project, I became aware of the limitations of physical archives housed in libraries, and in the back rooms and basements of pilar Black institutions. I realized, too, that the embodied archive, the one living in the memories and memorabilia of residents and elders, is absolutely crucial to pulling it all together. It's the people holding the memories who are the heart and skin of any body of history. As a result, I changed my project and made a central space for those stories to be collected, and for community voice to be heard. This was a pivotal shift in the way I understood and approached my work across the board. I moved away from curating, archiving, and creating for people, to building and developing with people.

This all came at around the same time that I was developing Sixty Inches From Center with my partner. Sixty is an online arts publication and archiving initiative that supports art and writing in and about Chicago, and as it resonates and appears around the world, paying special attention to the artists and art that are often omitted from art historical narratives. We started in 2010 and since then we've archived over 700 pieces of writing (essays, interview, videos, audio) and even more ephemera by Chicago artists in partnership with the Chicago Public Library's physical archives, which serves as a compliment our digital ones. We work hard to reshape Chicago's art history by making space for the work and voices of artists who may not make it in to most history books nor are on the radar of many historians or curators. In five years we have partnered with over 50 organizations—large orgs like Chicago Public Media/WBEZ (NPR Affiliate), and smaller

operations like apartment galleries, grassroots festivals, and artist collaboratives.

What you don't hear in that mission or in that work is that although we are grounded in arts writing and archiving, we are a shapeshifting organization that changes according to the needs of our cultural communities at any given moment. Each year we reevaluate and go back to our long-standing relationships and discuss how we can be better partners. That means, sometimes we change from a promotional support tool for our partners to a co-presenter, sometimes we make quiet moves by providing connections and resources to help make things happen.

What you also don't hear in that mission is that most of our artists and writers are of color, queer, women-identified, and all in between. Again, those people often overlooked in western art historical canons. What you don't hear is that from day one we started working toward paying for 100% of our content when many publications in Chicago make it hard to survive as a writer—even with our tiny operating budget, we want to challenge organizations larger than ourselves by demonstrating how putting your money where your mouth is isn't as hard as it may seem. It's often a matter of prioritizing those things. What you don't hear is our frustration with problematic practices and the diminishing support of arts writing as a field and how difficult it is for platforms like mine—and arts writers individually—to sustain themselves, while also hearing funders, institutions and others in the arts talk about the importance of writing and the importance of the archive.

What you don't hear in that mission is that we work hard to function independently, and since 2011 we have operated solely on donations and ticket revenue from individuals. Although that's something I'm proud of, it makes growth a bit of a challenge, which is why I recently left UChicago. I now want to focus on alternative funding models, rethink our non-profit status, and deepen our advocacy for the field of arts writing and archiving.

Right now I'm at the very early stages of thinking through how Sixty can be not just a platform for writing and archiving, but how it can also be a re-granting organization, an arts media group, or be an organization that identifies the recurring challenges of our field and addresses them—funding, audience cultivating and nurturing, critical yet accessible writing, and contextualizing the work within our cultural continuum.

All of these things were coming up in my mind as I was working for the University of Chicago, realizing that I was producing and helping to produce so many things and it wasn't getting proper documentation. It wasn't getting written about. My sense of urgency within the field of arts writing and archiving was often refueled due to the scale and the amount of output I was creating that was fading into the ether.

Arts + Public Life (APL) is an initiative of the University of Chicago located in Washington Park on the South Side of Chicago, outside of its main campus, which is in Hyde Park. APL is charged with thinking through the role that art and culture plays in community and economic

Participants discuss curatorial and performance practice. Photo: Roxanne Campbell

development. We asked, how can art impact a community in measurable ways? Can a model for that work be made? Then, can that model be shared and adapted in other locations, starting with Chicago as the pilot? It's one big experiment that includes artists, activists, performers, scholars, advocates, architects, designers, caretakers, parents, teens, grandparents, business owners, policy makers, spiritual leaders, etc.

Outside of this mission, my work there has been largely determined by our location—Washington Park, South Side Chicago, and us as an extension of the University of Chicago campus. But, I also felt it important to consider the ideas and challenges that come with contemporary practice not just locally, but regionally, nationally, and globally.

APL is deeply influenced by the complexity of the audiences we served. From our neighbors, all ages, all income levels, to the campus community, students and faculty of a private institution, as well as our artists—South Side, city wide, and beyond. I wanted to honor the knowledge, needs, and growth opportunities of all of these constituencies and create a space where it all could collide in deep and thoughtful ways.

Although performance plays a big role, a successful curatorial practice and programming in that space required a dynamic approach. I must consider many disciplines, demographics, and needs all at once. To address all of these ideas, I directed and helped shape many programs—residencies, exhibitions, education, public programs, and a key holder program. I know that sounds like quite a bit. When I walked into my position two years ago, APL was presenting about 125 events per year. I cut that nearly in half because I wanted our focus to be quality, not quantity.

It was still a lot of work but what it taught me was that having a birds eye view of things in this way allowed for a kind of understanding, thoughtfulness I couldn't have achieved otherwise. And once I could see all of these things and how they could connect, I was able to experiment with a kind of expanded, yet hyper local curatorial practice.

Rather than operate as an art space that primarily focuses on presenting work, I worked from the inside out and tried to create a model that would make the challenge of audience, experimentation, and civic engagement much more manageable when tasked to a very small team of people.

One of the strongest examples of this was the Key Holder program I established with our home base space, the Arts Incubator in Washington Park. I established a program that gave a few key organizations access to our space and resources, which initially got some push back. But eventually, our space became home to the Washington Park Camera Club and activist organizations like the Chicago chapter of Black Youth Project 100, and Assata's Daughters.

Rather than operate as an art space that primarily focuses on presenting work, I worked from the inside out and tried to create a model that would make the challenge of audience, experimentation, and civic engagement much more manageable when tasked to a very small team of people.

Having them as key holders allowed me to witness their work on a regular basis and up close. Sharing a space with them meant I could advocate for the work that they're doing, provide financial and people-power support, and also find connections between their ideas and what scholars and students on campus were doing, what I had planned in exhibitions, what our artists-in-residence were thinking, and how they could be incorporated into the long-term plans of community and economic development of our neighborhood over time. And in exchange, they pretty naturally became or helped create audience for our events, and acted as ambassadors for our work by being ambassadors of their own work.

I spend much of my time thinking about intersections. Not just intersections of ideas, but also intersections of the necessary tools we need to produce the work. Even with all the contention and complicated history that comes with a place like University of Chicago, it became important to me while I was there to use my position within the institution to think critically about the pitfalls, blindspots, and problematic practices within community development, economic development, and the thing we call placemaking. I wanted to be a door for the community to give feedback and interrogate the rapid changes they were seeing in their neighborhoods. I wanted to do right by my communities, most importantly my neighbors since I am of that community as a Bronzeville resident. I wanted to make sure that I was not an agent of gentrification, but rather someone who uses my position to be an economic stimulant for not just artists, and definitely not just for the University, which arguably doesn't really need it. But again, for my neighbors—like purchasing as much as I could from local Black businesses, hiring teens as our street team, collaborators, and volunteers. When possible, I questioned and challenged people from the University to hire from our immediate community for adaptive reuse projects and building rehabilitations. I paid all artists and performers, and made sure that a substantial amount of what

we presented was by and created with people in the area, and not just the University community.

This is only a small glimpse of the work. And all of this happened as a result of a small change in the language I was using to describe what I wanted to do. When I talk about curating, I say that I curate with and for communities of color because although my community is my audience, I also see them as collaborators and co-conspirators in the work that I do. This is a better way to describe all that must be considered when, as a curator, writer, or organizer, you attempt to wrap your arms around the colossal material that makes up a cultural legacy and recognize the wealth of knowledge and value that already exists throughout communities of color.

LINKS:

- http://sixtyinchesfromcenter.org
- http://www.tempestthazel.com
- https://futurespastchicago.wordpress.com
- https://arts.uchicago.edu/artsandpubliclife
- http://www.assatasdaughters.org/#home
- http://byp00.org
- http://washingtonparkcameraclub.org

Tempestt Hazel

About the Author: **Tempestt Hazel** *is a curator, writer, artist advocate and founding editor of Sixty Inches From Center, a Chicago-based archiving initiative. Her curatorial practice often uses collections and deep collaborations as a starting point to draw connections between a variety of histories and the work of contemporary artists. Her exhibitions and research have been produced with the University of North Texas, South Side Community Art Center, Terrain Exhibitions, Contemporary Arts Council, Black Metropolis Research Consortium, and University of Chicago, with upcoming projects at the DuSable Museum of African American History and the Smart Museum of Art. Hazel's writing has been published in the books Support Networks: Chicago Social Practice History Series (UChicago Press), Institutions and Imaginaries: Chicago Social Practice History Series (UChicago Press), Contact Sheet: Light Work Annual, Unfurling: Explorations In Art, Activism and Archiving, The Shape of Spilled Milk (Candor Arts), In the Company of Black (Candor Arts), and for Artslant, Hyde Park Art Center, the Broad Museum and Duke University.*

...we hold these truths...

thomas f. defrantz

What do we believe about live art curation, audiences, experimental artistry, and our roles in these systems of exchange? Placing people of color at the center of conversations about artmaking and curatorial practice might mean placing imperatives of artmaking by people of color at the center of those conversations. For that to happen, we have to know something about those imperatives. What do people of color value about performance and art? What sorts of creativity convey strategies of social possibility and transcendence? How do people of color re-imagine possibilities of becoming audiences or participating in performance in ways that might be particular and important?

Even though we'll have to generalize to address any of these grand questions, it seems crucial to give it a go. At issue here are the assumptions that any of us might bring to thinking-through how art-going communities form, and what they might consider to be important. We'll assume that Euro-American traditions of attending performances quietly, sitting singly in the dark to consider action unfolding in front of us, are not the only ways that communities of color value live art. We assume that connections to the histories of performance are not always singular or obvious; that program notes that won't necessarily provide the most useful modes of encounter to precede or follow a production. We assume that performances intended to "speak to everyone" might have limited deep appeal for people of color who assemble, partly, in order to recognize that we are a community of color, with varied and particular relationships to concepts of citizenry, politics, faith, emotionality, and the bitter irony of having to claim our collective space again and again and again.

Yes, there was a Black Arts Movement, and there was a Negro Ensemble Company, and there is an Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and an Urban Bush Women, and there were always artists of color working outside of our own mainstream traditions of performance. And yes, black forms of creative expression seem to arrive at the inventive heart of most American performance. But now we're called on here, in this gathering, to again re-imagine ways that our assembly proves a radical possibility of artmaking for communities of color, a possibility that allows us to speak to each other through live art, without having to constantly explain or justify ourselves to others in the process.

So I offer three actions/strategies that I deploy regularly as I try to shift toward unexpected and diverse configurations of communities in motion around live art. I offer these ideas based on conversations and exchanges of the last ten years with audiences, artists, funders, presenters, board members, and the like. In some ways, these are "common sense" sorts of assertions, that I hope can open us back into discussion across our different levels of interest and expertise in curating for communities of color.

1. WORK TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD OF THE WORK

Creative work arrives in vibrant conversation with many sources: its collaborating artists' ambitions; their histories and memories; influences from their teachers and mentors; borrowings and influences from other works that approached similar themes or creative methods. Our opportunity is to learn and discover as many of those sources as we can. In this, we can build connectivities out for our audiences and for our funders, boards, and artist-collaborators as well. The work will contain information that might be unknown even to its creators: earlier theater experiments or dances that addressed themes or, say, racism in blackface minstrelsy, or misogyny, or migrations across the Mediterranean or the Middle East. Of course, the new work will have its own lessons to offer, and its creative exercise will galvanize thinking differently than anything that came before. Still, we are called upon to help draw a complex web of connections that surround the work in the world and its emergence now.

Yes, we are all sleuths and researchers in our quests to present new work effectively. Whether offering up a "world premiere" or contending with work that is "new to us," we have homework to do in order to build out a successful context for appreciating its emergence. Even if that research is done only for ourselves and our closest allies, it still needs to be done. In my experience, it's never enough to quote press releases or word-of-mouth from other art-world professionals. We have to go deeper. We get into the worlds of the work to try to effectively bring it forward. This means getting to know the artists, of course, and figuring out how to appreciate their concerns and histories. But it also means "digging into the crates" to understand how lines of creative exploration have led to this particular project. For example, it helps to know something about Katherine Dunham and her research in Martinique and her affiliations in Haiti in order to understand how a project by an emerging artist in New York aligns with that history. It might help to know something about contentious "tiger mother" rhetorics surrounding some Asian American-inspired artistry made by younger creators concerned with family, home, and personal narrative.

Creative work always arrives already in conversation with inventions that came before it as well as work that will come after it. Our opportunity is to understand something about those worlds - what came before it; what sorts of similar creations are circulating now; and what might come in the wake of each performance. If we can pay attention to these threads of connectivity, we can start to understand how we, as curators, are also participating in the construction of memories of live art. Yes, we ask questions of the artists, and yes, we start by doing our own research and reaching well past "intuition" to better understand the world of the work. We dig deep into the possibilities suggested by the performance, and its process, and its collaborating artists, and its effects in the world.

Yes, we are all sleuths and researchers in our quests to present new work effectively. Whether offering up a "world premiere" or contending with work that is "new to us," we have homework to do in order to build out a successful context for appreciating its emergence. Even if that research is done only for ourselves and our closest allies, it still needs to be done.

2. RETHINK ENGAGEMENT, AND ADMIRE THAT NEW AUDIENCES DO EMERGE

We don't always understand how performance registers with audiences that are different from us. Here, I need 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 I am 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. It seems to me that art by particular populations of people of color used to be slotted into "multicultural" presentation slots, and generally intended to teach a generic Euro-American audience about diversity in some weird way. But now, more and more, performance speaks to its allies, and those of us inclined to be in relationship to its themes. Work has its own worlds, whether those worlds show up in the pre-show documents, or in the personal contacts of its performers, or in the construction of a social possibility through social media that produces an unexpected audience. Again, 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.

Sometimes work draws forward an audience quite unlike any we've seen before. This might be an audience seldom considered, drawn together by the possibility of the performance. Maybe it's a piece about queer black trans lives, and seemingly suddenly, a young, curious audience gathers for a 10pm or midnight performance. That audience may treat the encounter of performance differently than others; we might hoot and holler at various unexpected moments, or sing along while texting a friend about the experience. Creative work might attract audiences who are already inclined to wonder at its contents, and those audiences might be different from those who usually

come to see performances.

As example, a recent performance by Philadanco at North Carolina Central University, a Historically Black University (HBCU) in Durham, NC, felt as much like a family reunion as a modern dance concert. Of course, it operated along both of those lines. Audiences arrived and left as well throughout the show; parents or cousins or uncles with babies walked in and out in an endless stream, from the back of the theater to the seats in the front. We audience cheered a particular moment here and there, but maintained a steady, audible buzz throughout, asking questions, commenting on the action, checking in on our neighbors. "Did you see that? Ummm. Look at her!"

We felt comfortable here, enjoying and reveling in the expertise of the dancers, but also recognizing each other in the audience. How we had assembled was part of what the show was for. The performance wasn't only for us to see the choreography on stage. It was also an opportunity for us to see each other. Of course, we all went because it was Philadanco, and we wanted to be in the presence of an accomplished company with an expert reputation. But we also went because of the timing and place of the performance; its presenters had considered well, when and where to stage the event, and how to allow us all to be in its presence.

We felt comfortable here, enjoying and reveling in the expertise of the dancers, but also recognizing each other in the audience. How we had assembled was part of what the show was for. The performance wasn't only for us to see the choreography on stage. It was also an opportunity for us to see each other.

3. GET OUT OF THE WAY

Too often, we try to insert our "taste" into the encounter between audiences and artworks or performance experiences. We are experienced tastemakers, we think; we spend our days and nights enjoying performances; going out of our way to see them; chatting up artists and other presenters; considering what would be best for our audience or our venue or our funding. We work really really hard, we think, and our labor qualifies us to know more than the people we hire or the people we sell to.

But audiences and artists will attract each other, and works of performance will not be denied just because we don't understand them or appreciate them. Our largest task might be making space for the unanticipated encounter, and holding that space open for unexpected things to happen. We might allow artists and audiences to find their way, growing one alongside the other. What if we rethink our task not as promoting, or convincing artists or audiences, but rather as caring for the encounter among people? In this, we might focus much less on our own egos and our own opinions of work or its [or our] reputation, and more on the possibilities among the people we

meet. We can become so focused on our own challenges that we forget the generosity that lies at the heart of working in arts administration. How can we be more generous?

As example, convening the 2015 and 2016 curating group that this document represents were creative leaps of faith for me. I didn't have any overarching agenda, but I certainly hoped for new information and connections that could enliven my own thinking and working. The surprise that a group of engaged artists-activists-social engineers would want to discuss how communities of color gather and constitute themselves became an affirmation of giving-it-a-go; the bit of funding that we managed to put together to allow for these events circled back around to us all in stronger relationships and unexpected affiliations. For me, this lower-stakes model of opening up space can feed into larger projects that might allow people to come into contact, and share ideas and ways of being. Different voices offered divergent perspectives at our meetings: examples of curatorial projects that had surprised by their popularity; recounting of relationships burnished by time spent among presenters and artists; historical narratives of curating as a creative practice. We gained in inspiration by listening carefully to each other. To do that, though, we each had to be willing to make space for others to come forward. We had to get out of each other's way, confident that we would each find places to land in our gathering.

And this is what I would hope for Configurations In Motion: a reconsideration of curating as a profession that might be generous, smart, humble, feminist, anti-racist, and queer affirming. Intentional and awake. Committed to growing encounters and expanding possibilities. What if we were to begin here, with these truths, self-evident ....?

Thomas F. DeFrantz

About the Author: **Thomas F. DeFrantz** *is Professor and Chair of African and African American Studies at Duke University, and director of SLIPPAGE: Performance, Culture, Technology, a research group that explores emerging technology in live performance applications. Books:* Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance *(University of Wisconsin Press, 2002),* Dancing Revelations Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture *(Oxford University Press, 2004),* Black Performance Theory*, co-edited with Anita Gonzalez (Duke University Press, 2014),* Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion*, co-edited with Philipa Rothfield (Palgrave, 2016).* Creative: Queer Theory! An Academic Travesty *commissioned by the Theater Offensive of Boston and the Flynn Center for the Arts;* Monk's Mood: A Performance Meditation on the Life and Music of Thelonious Monk*, performed in Botswana, France, South Africa, and New York City;* 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. He convenes the Black Performance Theory working group. In 2013, working with Takiyah Nur Amin, he founded the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance.*

CONFIGURATIONS IN MOTION 2016: OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Rasu Jilani is an independent curator, cultural producer and social sculptor, which allows him the privilege to investigate the intersections between art, culture and civic engagement as a method of raising critical consciousness. The main objective of his work is to catalyze interaction between artists, cultural institutions, the local community and the wider public, in order to promote cultural awareness and artistic literacy to diverse communities through exhibitions, public programs, community dialogues and festivals. Milani recently joined the NEW INC staff as Consulting Director of Cultural Diversity and Strategic Partnerships for the creative incubator at New Museum. From 2013 through 2016, Jilani worked at MAPP International Productions as the Director of Community Programs. Prior to Joining MAPP, he served two years as the Senior Fellow of Arts, Culture and Sustainability at the Pratt Center for Community Development at Pratt Institute. Milani is also co-founder of the art and socially responsible brand, Coup d'etat Brooklyn. Rasu co-facilitated a mass incarceration course at New School, Spring 2016.

Rasu Jilani

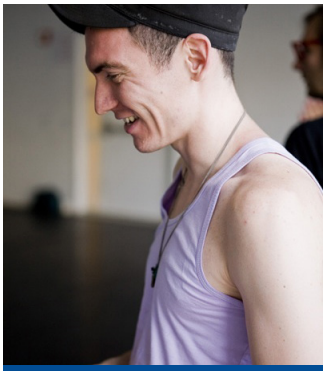
Joseph Jordan

Joseph F. Jordan has been Director of the Sonja H. Stone Center for Black Culture and History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill since 2001. He is also Adjunct Associate Professor, African/African-American Studies, an affiliate faculty member in the curriculum in Global Studies, and Director of the Venezuela Aspects of the African Diaspora Study Abroad Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His current work focuses on the cultural politics of race, identity and artistic production in the diaspora. He currently serves as a Board member of the National Council for Black Studies as a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of The Black Scholar Journal of Black Studies and Research; as a member of the Editorial Board of PALARA – Publication of the Afro-Latin American Research Association; and as co-chair of

TransAfrica Forum's Scholar's Council. He is a founding member of the Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network, and a member of the coordinating team of the Future of Minority Studies Research Project. Jackson is a graduate of Norfolk State University (BA), Ohio State University (MA, MS) and Howard University (PhD).

Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor (Ben Pryor)

is an independent curator and producer operating under the moniker tbspMGMT. He has produced and toured contemporary performance works by Miguel Gutierrez, Trajal Harrell, Ishmael Houston-Jones/ Dennis Cooper/Chris Cochrane, Yvonne Meier, Wally Cardona/Jennifer Lacey/Jonathan Bepler and Deborah Hay throughout the United States and internationally. In 2010, Pryor created American Realness, an annual festival of contemporary performance at Abrons Arts Center in New York City. The program has been cited as "New York's preeminent sampler of boundary-pushing performance bordering on dance" by the New Yorker and was featured as #1 in ArtForum's Best of Dance 2010. Previously Ben worked as Director of Operations for Center for Performance Research, an Artist Representative at Pentacle, a project manager for Chez Bushwick and in the Planning and Development department at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Ben is a former chair of the Agents Council and Trustee for Dance USA.



Ben Pryor

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To learn more about Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation and Communities of Color, please visit sites.duke.edu/configurationsinmotion, or contact Thomas F. DeFrantz at t.defrantz@duke.edu.

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