

# LOST AND FOUND

*Dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, Then and Now*







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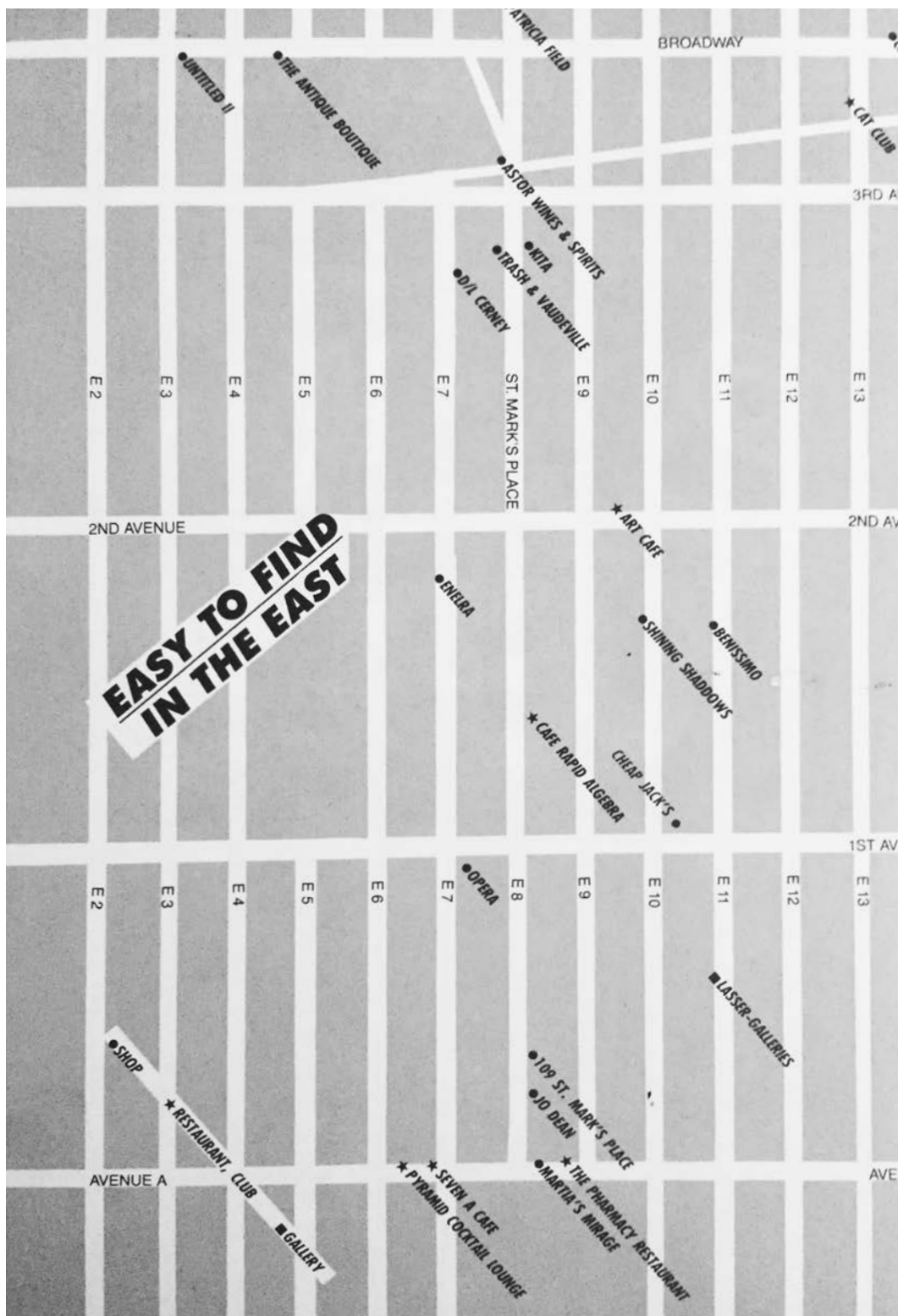
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# Table of Contents

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## FOREWORD

Judy Hussie-Taylor **7**

## CURATOR ESSAYS

Ishmael Houston-Jones, *A Personal Reflection On John Bernd's Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life* **10**

Will Rawls, *Letters and Numbers* **18**

## MEMORY PALACE

Tseng Kwong Chi, Muna Tseng, iele paloumpis, Denise Roberts Hurlin, Stephen Petronio, Tim Miller, Arthur Avilés, Peter Cramer & Jack Waters, Deborah Jowitt, David Thomson, Eileen Myles, Jen Rosenblit, Larissa Velez-Jackson, Lesley Farlow, AUNTS, Eiko Otake, Julie Tolentino, Lucy Sexton, Jeff Weinstein, Niall Noel Jones, Marissa Perel, Joshua Lubin-Levy, Reggie Wilson, Miguel Gutierrez, Dan Fishback, Nicky Paraiso, Talya Epstein, Linda Simpson, Tyler Ashley **29–64**

## ESSAYS

Theodore Kerr, *The Sailor's Daughter: AIDS before AIDS in the Present* [2016] **82**

Kia Labeija, *Mimi's Last Dance* [2016] **141**

Nan Goldin, *In the Valley of the Shadow* [1989] **146**

Douglas Crimp, *Introduction to AIDS:*

*Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* [1987] **164**

C. Carr, *Radical Shriek* [1990] **186**

Marc Arthur, *Biopharmaceutical Werewolves* [2016] **188**

Sarah Schulman, *Selection from The Gentrification of the Mind* [2012] **218**

Penny Arcade, *No Retreat. No Surrender.* [2016] **230**

Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *rainbow kids* [2016] **251**

niv Acosta, *sbe, alive* [2016] **255**

Pamela Sneed, *All Black/An Invitation* [2016] **258**

Eva Yaa Asantewaa, *the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds* [2016] **259**

## LIFE DRAWINGS

Ethyl Eichelberger / Raja Feather Kelly **72**

Alvin Ailey / Narcissister **74**

Assotto Saint / Mariana Valencia **76**

Greer Lankton / Katy Pyle **78**

## POEMS

DarkMatter, *rewind my body* **17**

Eduardo C. Corral, *Acquired Immune Deficiency Disease* **69**

Danez Smith, *1 in 2* **135–138**; *this strange dowry* **139**

Pamela Sneed, *For Donald Woods* **157**; *On the Orlando Shooting* **158**; *Rope-a-Dope: For Sandra Bland* **161**

Joan Retallack, *AID/I/SAPPEARANCE* **183**

Karen Finley, *The Black Sheep* **199**

Ishmael Houston-Jones, *Prologue to the End of Everything* **227**

## JOHN BERND ZINE

Reproduction of original zine with contributions by Carol Mullins, Tim Miller, Jennifer Monson, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Lucy Sexton, Johnny Walker, Linda Austin, Michael Stiller, Jeff McMahon and Lori Seid [1998] **89–131**

## PORTFOLIO: WILLI NINJA

Sally Sommer, *Willi Ninja* [2016] **150**

## PORTFOLIO: THEM

Travis Chamberlain, *THEM AND NOW: An Oral History of a Performance Reconstructed* [2016] **173**

## PORTFOLIO: BILL T. JONES

*A duet, an argument, an inheritance: Bill T. Jones and Will Rawls in conversation* [2016] **207**

## PORTFOLIO: NEIL GREENBERG

Jaime Shearn Coan, *"I don't know what made this 'private' in the first place."* Neil Greenberg's *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* [2016] **235**

John Kelly, *Journal Entry* [1993] **248**

## COLOR IMAGES

Tseng Kwong Chi **26–27**

Tyler Ashley **65**

Kia Labeija **142–143**

Jacobly Satterwhite **191, 192–193**

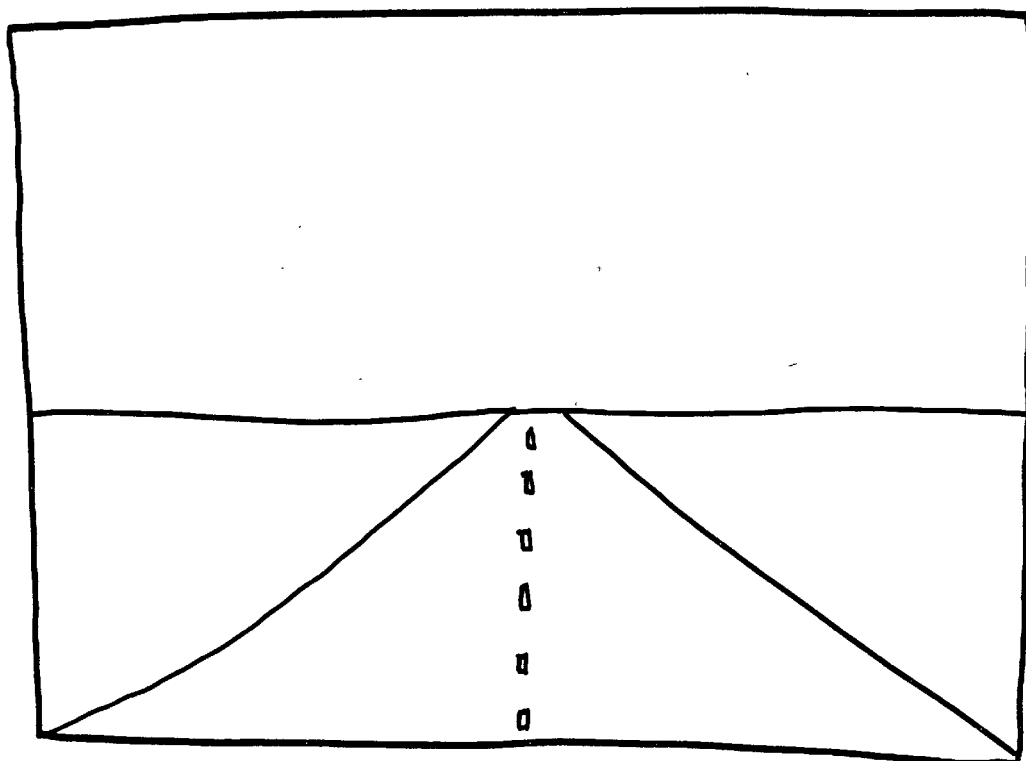
TM Davy **194**

## PLATFORM 2016

Schedule of Events **260**

Biographies **262**





## Foreword

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*When it comes to HIV/AIDS, we have a lot of history but not enough stories. We need more of both, and we need to ensure the stories circulate—because history will always be limited in its reach. —Theodore Kerr*

While designing Danspace Project's Platform series in 2008, I knew I wanted to work with artists as curators to formally frame relationships between artists of different generations. That's where, I believe, there is productive tension, and where there's friction, there's always a generative spark or two.

From the first Platform in 2010 curated by Ralph Lemon, through the present Platform curated by Ishmael Houston-Jones and Will Rawls, artists, curators, and writers have activated intergenerational networks to contribute to our re-imagining of how we contextualize and present time-based art today.

Platform 2016: *Lost and Found* is the 11<sup>th</sup> Danspace Platform and catalogue. It is also our second Platform in collaboration with artist curator Houston-Jones. And, with over 112 artists and writers contributing, it is Danspace Project's largest Platform to date.

In 2013 Houston-Jones came across a zine published by a group of caregiver friends of choreographer John Bernd on the 10th anniversary of Bernd's death from AIDS in 1988. Ish wanted to talk to me about John Bernd and the zine and that conversation evolved into this Platform.

The Platform's title, *Lost and Found*, was inspired by Bernd's trilogy of that name, which he created and performed as his illness progressed. Bernd has the heartbreaking distinction of being perhaps the first choreographer to make his illness the subject of his work. He insistently performed while ill, at one point escaping his hospital bed to take a cab to Danspace at St. Mark's Church to perform his latest piece. Bernd performed two of his three *Lost and Found* dances at Danspace Project. In the 1980s and 1990s, Danspace was the site of many memorials and was the first home of the marathon memorials of Dancers Responding to AIDS (DRA).

Houston-Jones instigated an intergenerational dialogue by inviting choreographer and writer Will Rawls, thirty years his junior, to join him in this curatorial endeavor. Each brought distinct perspectives and critical sensibilities to the process. They interrogated ideas, histories, stereotypes, and assumptions, ultimately creating a finely embroidered Platform, necessarily and exquisitely complex.

One of their early ideas was to compile files or "dossiers" of artists who died



of AIDS and give them to younger artists to interpret in some way. Recuperating lost voices and having them be found by younger artists became the pulse of the Platform. This project is now called "Life Drawings" (one of several poetic titles credited to Rawls in this Platform). Rawls also developed the concept of the "Memory Palace," a place for artists of all generations to remember a person or place associated with AIDS. A section of this catalogue has become a Memory Palace gallery and includes brief texts or images from more than 25 artists. There will be a Memory Palace vigil and reading at Danspace Project on November 15.

Given the original inspiration for the Platform, a DIY zine sensibility was an inevitable organizing principle. Our curatorial team meetings often had the same creative energy I remember from zine making during the 1990s.

There are several essays here, including some reprints, by writers whose research and first-hand accounts of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s are historically important and still resonant. We are honored to include texts by Douglas Crimp, C.Carr, Nan Goldin, Deborah Jowitt, and Brenda Dixon Gottschild. Newly commissioned essays by a younger generation of writers and artists, such as niv Acosta, Kia Labeija, Theodore Kerr, and Marc Arthur, contribute new research, stories, and questions as necessary counterpoints to nostalgic or oft-repeated narratives of HIV/AIDS as impacting predominantly white, gay middle class men during the 1980s. HIV/AIDS devastated men, women, and transpersons of color in the early days of the disease and continues to do so. Statistics bear this out. It's shameful, shocking, and tragic.

This Platform, like all Danspace Platforms since 2010, is fueled by artistic inquiry and open-ended conversation in real time. Years of intellectual, emotional, and artistic exchanges occur before inviting the public into the conversation.

It is a privilege to work closely with curators and artists, writers, scholars, and interns who contribute so much to the process. I am grateful to our Curatorial Fellow, Jaime Shearn Coan, who generously and sensitively offered his extensive knowledge. We were all thrilled to be able to work, once again, with the gifted and generous designer Judith Walker on her ninth catalogue for Danspace. And kudos must go to the brilliant, dedicated Danspace Project administrative staff – Lydia Bell, Jodi Bender, Peggy Cheng, Lily Cohen, Michael DiPietro, and Kirsten Schnitker - whose ideas and solutions to the mind-bending problems each Platform proposes go above and beyond the call of duty. Many thanks to our Board of Directors for their trust and unwavering support for the Platforms. We are very grateful to all the artists, writers, partners, supporters, interns, and members. Thanks to our Technical Director, Leo Janks and all front of house staff and volunteers for



their ongoing commitment to Danspace's productions. Finally, I continue to be inspired by Will's and Ishmael's care, commitment, curiosity, and collaboration. No words can adequately express my gratitude to them.

During the two and a half years we've worked on this Platform, we've heard stories and memories every day from people whose friends, lovers, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, colleagues, collaborators, and neighbors died of AIDS. Every day our hearts were heavy with another story of loss. And every day we had the joy of learning about forgotten artists whose work has contributed so much to our culture. This Platform is dedicated to all those who died, and to all those living with HIV who teach us to live with grace, creativity, and courage. We mourn for those *lost* in hopes that their shimmering traces will be *found* by current and future generations.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor**

*Executive Director & Chief Curator, Danspace Project*

*Editor-in-chief, Danspace Project Catalogue Series*

Image on page 6: Line drawing by John Bernd.

# A Personal Reflection On John Bernd's Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life

Ismael Houston-Jones

## PROLOGUE

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.

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.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>, 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.”<sup>3</sup>*

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.

—IH-J

[1] Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “HIV Among African Americans,” <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/raciaethnic/africanamericans/>. Accessed May 1, 2015.

[2] Lawrence K. Altman, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Individuals.” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1981.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “1996 HIV/AIDS Trends Provide Evidence of Success in HIV Prevention and Treatment” <http://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/aids-d1.htm> Accessed March 8, 2015.

[3] Elizabeth Alexander, *The Light of the World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2015), 166.

*"The present does not resemble the past ... the gay dead, locked in their youth, their youth is now locked in the past. Eighties haircuts, ACT UP demonstrations, tentative first novels from defunct presses. I find that my memories fade..."*

—Sarah Schulman<sup>4</sup>

Rummaging through some old file folders I came upon a photocopied zine of essays, photos and simple line drawings. A group of comrades and I had put this together in August 1998 to commemorate the ten years since John Bernd had died at age 35. John's life and John's death held such complex meanings and intense emotions for us then. He was an artist, a contrarian, a lover, a broken-hearted soul. When he performed he danced loose-limbed and lithe, he stomped forceful rhythms, his singing was a plaintive keening. He was queer before it was hip to be queer. In our small, insular, bunkered village of downtown dance and theater John Bernd was both a sheltering guardian angel and the most bedeviling of devil's advocates. John was the first person most of us knew in this community who had contracted a terrifying disease that was attacking gay men, intravenous drug users, hemophiliacs, and Haitians. It didn't have a name yet but its effects were horrific and very often deadly. I remember improvising at the weekly Open Movement at Performance Space 122 one Tuesday when John arrived later than usual; he was typically there before anyone else to help set up. He came in saying he had gone to his dentist for a routine cleaning but his gums would not stop bleeding. I'm not sure if memory is rearranging sequences but the next image I have is of him phoning from a hospital as perplexed doctors suggested removing his spleen. He declined and left.

This was in 1981, shortly after his very public breakup (very public in our little world at least), with fellow performance artist Tim Miller. John responded to the heartache and the illness the following year with the performance piece *Surviving Love and Death*, presented at PS122, which David Gere asserts is "arguably the first performance to address the epidemic in the first person."<sup>5</sup> Linda Small describes "[h]is black jeans cling to a slender, vulnerable frame. His curly mop of hair and sketchy facial hair create a scroungy look. ... He is war-weary; he has lost his lover; he has spent time in the

hospital battling a blood disease."<sup>6</sup> At one point in the show John says that his doctors "wonder if he has the 'new gay cancer' but ultimately decide no... because he does not have. ... the two accepted markers for what at the time was being called GRID, or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency."<sup>7</sup> During the piece he passed around a smooth chocolate colored rock for each audience member to hold for a few seconds. On the night I attended I was one of the last people to grasp it and it was so hot, really hot, from the body heat of all of us witnesses. I still have that rock on my headboard.

Of course John *did* have "the new gay cancer." In 1992 Jennifer Dunning wrote in the *New York Times*:

*"The subject of AIDS has become so entwined with the politics of sexuality that, in reflecting upon the subject, one instinctively tends to start with the comparatively few expressions of gay sexuality in the dance of a decade or so ago. John Bernd, who died of AIDS in 1988, was one of the earliest New York choreographers to treat gay sexuality and the disease explicitly."*<sup>8</sup>

In the next decade and a half, John and many others in our world would succumb to it. We were baffled. We were angry. We were terrified. We were wary of sharing a glass of water. But we also learned how to nurture and care for the sick and the dying. We made art, those of us who were dying and those of us who survived. Surviving love and death. Clearly, in the end, no one survives either of these. We all surrender to both. But so many in our tiny sphere died before they and we could garner the full harvest of their artistry.

Danspace Project at Saint Mark's Church, The Joyce Theater, and Performance Space 122 became sites where we mourned the young as well as applauded their shows. But we also rallied; we shouted; we marched in the streets. Today, a new wave of queer dancers and performance artists is making work without the dreadful firsthand knowledge of the living nightmare that left so many of us devastated. "PTSD," one of my colleagues said a short time ago, "after all these years we are still suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." How is one able to, or can one, explain the pain, confusion, rage, and fear that HIV/AIDS caused a

[4] Sarah Schulman, "Through the Looking Glass" in *Loss Within Lost: Artists in the Age of AIDS*. Edmund White, Ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 13.

[5] David Gere, Introduction to the Estate Project website. Accessed June 8, 2015.

[6] Linda Small, "Review of *Surviving Love and Death*, by John Bernd." *Other Stages*, January 28, 1982

[7] David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 31.

[8] Jennifer Dunning, "Choreographing Deaths of the Heart In a Singular Age." *The New York Times*, March 22, 1992.



whole generation? And for those of us who are artists of that era, how do we measure the damage but, yes, also the vision and resolve that such trauma wrought?

Discussing this Platform with choreographer Jennifer Monson, I asked if HIV/AIDS had in any way shaped the work she made in the 1980s and 90s. She wondered aloud, “How could it not? Anyone living and creating artwork in this community at that time had to have been influenced by AIDS.” She then considered that because of the large concentration of “out” HIV-positive people in the Downtown dance communities, there were three significant factors that informed pieces like her own *Tackle Rock* (1993) along with the work of her contemporaries. First, there was an atmosphere of loss, mourning, and grief that permeated many of those dances. Additionally, she and many choreographers were inspired by their participation in AIDS protests and rallies. And finally, there was the close physical contact, the sharing of sweat in dances, which in the context of the epidemic had become a risky provocation. Loss, activism and bodily contact: “These three elements colored much of the choreography created at that time, in that place.”

As for myself, would I have wrestled a cinderblock in *Without Hope* (1988) or a goat carcass in *THEM* (1986) without AIDS to prompt me to do so? Obviously AIDS has given rise to dances with images that are seared in my memory: the bloody prints on paper towels in Ron Athey’s *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* (1994), Da-

vid Rousseve’s naked silent scream in *Colored Children Flying By* (1990), and the gallons of stage blood poured over Anne Jobst’s and Lucy Sexton’s nude bodies in the many DANCENOISE pieces come immediately to mind. While AIDS was never mentioned in the text of Bill T. Jones’ *Still Here* (1994), it deeply shaded its aura. Neil Greenberg’s *Not About AIDS Dance* (1994) was definitely about his relationship to both dance and AIDS. And Ethyl Eichelberger’s signature song “(We are) Women who Survive,” accompanied by accordion as a finale to many pieces, took on a more heart-rending meaning after Ethyl’s AIDS-related suicide.

David Gere, in his book *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS*, writes of pieces made for the concert stage as a response to the plague by artists Bernd, Jones, Miller, Rousseve, Arnie Zane, Joe Goode, Rodney Price, Tracy Rhoades, and others. He also describes site-specific street interventions by Keith Hennessy and ensembles such as The High Risk Group. But Gere also describes (as performance) the ceremonial unfurling of the AIDS Quilt, the tactical choreography of AIDS protests, the strategic placement of AIDS galas, the theatricality of AIDS funerals, as well as rituals of healing. What are the rituals of healing today?

Are there young LGBTQ artists who are making work today unconsciously under the influence of John Bernd and all the others who died before they were born? Is there an authentic way to prove what the loss of so



L to R: James Del Priore, Irving Gregory, Donald Fleming, Joseph Pupello, John Bernd, Chris Burside, (out of frame, Ishmael Houston-Jones). Photo by Dona Ann McAdams.

many from one age group has had on the next? How do I quantify a negative; how do I curate an absence? How can I tell the innumerable untold stories of artists lost to AIDS? How in this current cultural moment can I raise awareness as well as mark the historic trajectory of the crisis? Today, the current generation of dance artists, including many voices from queer communities, has inherited this profound absence, activism and public outcry has quietly waned, the urgency around this continuing crisis has diminished.

But AIDS was and is a global pandemic. Here in the developed world this is often forgotten. Access to effective, yet costly, drugs with innumerable side effects has branded the disease “manageable.” But in developing countries a diagnosis of AIDS can still be catastrophic, much as it was in the 1980s and 90s here. And it was here in the downtown Manhattan performance art scene in the 80s and 90s that I saw my first premature deaths by a virulent affliction and the society that would be too slow to attack it.

I can visualize men vanished from my own dance and performance world: Arnie Zane, Arthur Armijo, Barry Davison, Bob Reese, Carey Erickson, Charles Ludlam, Chris Komar, David Wojnarowicz, Demian Acquavella, Ethyl Eichelberger, Frank Maya, Harry Whitaker Sheppard, Jim Tyler, John Bernd, John Sex, Manuel Alum, Michael Bennett, Michael Schwartz, Reza Abdoh, Robert Kovich, Ron Vawter, Tracy Rhoades, Ulysses Dove, and Woody McGriff. Add to these the visual artists Keith Haring, Kirk Winslow, and Huck Snyder who designed sets for Bill T. Jones, John Bernd, and John Kelly and me, respectively. Add to these, photographer Tseng Kwong Chi who chronicled, through portraiture, many of the key players on our stage. Add to him, men who contributed to the soundtrack of my life: composer/cellist Arthur Russell who improvised with Bernd, Donald Fleming and me on the lawn of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum; accordionist Billie Swindler who played in my *Adolfo und Maria*; musician, author, and AIDS activist Michael Callen of the Flirtations who testified before the President’s Commission on AIDS and before Congress; singer, songwriter Freddie Mercury from the rock band Queen; Klaus Nomi, a singer known for his bizarrely visionary theatrical performances; Eazy-E, “The God-Father of Gangsta Rap,” who performed in the group N.W.A. Add to these, African-American gay rights activists: poets Assotto Saint and Essex Hemphill and filmmaker Marlon Riggs. And there were so many more. These were all men I admired as choreographers, dancers, writers, directors, musicians or other types of artists. Each died between

the years 1987 and 1996. Each was under 50 years old when he died. I knew some personally, some intimately, some I appreciated only through their work. Add to these, three more well-established choreographers in their 50s who died during this same period: Alvin Ailey, Robert Joffrey, and Rudolf Nureyev, plus the incalculable myriad of women and transpeople lost and one begins to understand activist/author Sarah Schulman’s account of those years:

*“I am talking about the Plague. . . the years from 1981 to 1996. When there was a mass death experience of young people. Where folks my age watched in horror as our friends, their lovers, cultural heroes, influences, buddies, the people who witnessed our lives as we witnessed theirs, as these folks sickened and died consistently for fifteen years.”*<sup>9</sup>

The streets of my city were crowded with ghosts.

I danced in all three iterations of John Bernd’s *Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life*. *Part Two* was performed at Dance Theater Workshop and *Part One* and *Part Three* were done at Danspace Project at Saint Mark’s Church (where I would later speak at his memorial service). The three parts of *Lost and Found* coincidentally track the development of John’s illness, which is to say, they track the early evolution of AIDS in the consciousness of this community.

In *Part One* (1982), John had some patches of dry skin due to psoriasis but he was seemingly robust and healthy. He whirled agilely around David Alan Harris, Tom Keegan, Erin Matthiessen, and me, shaking his trade-mark mop of curly hair, stomping assuredly in his hiking boots, and singing wordless songs to the church’s vaulted ceiling.

In *Part Two* (1983), Chris Burnside and Joseph Pupello joined the ensemble. This section was darker in both physical ambiance and underlying mood. Throughout the piece at the rear of the stage, details from Caravaggio paintings or of John’s own simple line drawings of shrines and roadways were projected on the cyclorama. His curls had been shorn; he was thinner. There was a voiceover that played during his singing; he was reciting a hypnotic prose poem about travel to nowhere:

*“One, then two, then one again. Then it’s three or four but it always comes back to one. To the same place; because something happened, something changed. . .”*<sup>10</sup>

[9] Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 45.

[10] John Bernd, *Lost and Found* (Scenes from a Life, part II). Transcribed

Even in the more exuberant dance sections of *Part Two* there was an air of desperation and anxiety, as though we all were rushing to complete this thing before it was too late.

*Part Three* (1985), was darker still. John and I, now joined by Yvonne Meier and Stephanie Skura, were back at Danspace. But the space was lit by a solitary light this time. John was visibly ill, as noted by the late Burt Supree reviewing the piece in the *Village Voice*: “Only six days out of the hospital, and John Bernd was dancing - plainly and softly, but dancing. There was respect and welcome in the setup he arranged for the sanctuary of St. Mark’s in-the-Bowery.... And as a result of the caring that went into it, the evening had grace.”<sup>11</sup>

This was December 1985. John would go on to make and perform in more pieces but it was obvious to all of us that he was getting weaker. Schulman describes seeing his last show, *Two on the loose*, in 1988, months before he died:

“I saw him perform many times with his beloved red chair, for which he built a custom carrying case. I remember his final performance with choreographer Jennifer Monson, he was so disoriented he could barely follow her... I went to his funeral. There, Meredith Monk sang his favorite of her songs. His mother said, ‘John very much wanted to live...’”<sup>12</sup>

But what do John Bernd’s life and death signify? So many others like him died so prematurely and their work has been lost or forgotten. A younger performance artist recently remarked to me, “My friends and I keep hearing about John Bernd, but none of us know who he was.” In reality there are hundreds, there are thousands, of John Bernds, who were killed by a virus and governmental neglect before their art fulfilled its promise, but who nevertheless laid the foundation for work being performed today. These are the lost unknown ghosts of AIDS.

If on August 28, 1988 John Bernd had been miraculously cured and lived on, what consequence would that have had on art that is being produced in 2016? Focusing on the time elapsed between the initial AIDS crisis to the present, how can we bridge this expanse? We can theorize, but can we ever really know? I think not. To quote bell hooks: “The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is – it’s to imagine what is possible.”<sup>13</sup>

So this is a platform for dreaming, for fantasizing, for conjuring what has been lost. And through evoking that loss, we will grasp at that which may be found.

*In the end, truth will be found in his work, the corporeal body of the artist. It will not fall away. Man cannot judge it. For art sings of God, and ultimately belongs to him.*<sup>14</sup> —Patti Smith

[May 8, 2016]

by Ishmael Houston-Jones from a video recording. ([https://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/12172133052907\\_lost\\_and\\_found\\_\(scenes\\_from\\_a\\_life\)#bib\\_info](https://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/12172133052907_lost_and_found_(scenes_from_a_life)#bib_info)) Accessed August 1998.

[11] Burt Supree, “A Space of Grace: Review of *Lost and Found (Scenes from a Life, Part ii)*, by John Bernd,” *The Village Voice*, December 17, 1985.

[12] Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind*, 59.

[13] bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York:

Routledge, 1994), 281.

[14] Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2010), Dedication.





Melanie Greene courtesy of EmergeNYC.



DarkMatter. Photo by Barbara Anastacio.

## rewind my body

rewind my body  
rewind my body

there is something i need to show you  
there is something i need to show you

i am only here because my people survived  
i am only here because my people survived

before voice there was riot  
after riot there is voice

before stage there was movement  
after movement there is stage

before art there was culture  
after culture there is art

before capital there was abundance  
after abundance there is capital

rewind my body  
rewind my body

before house there was holocaust  
after holocaust there is house

before profit there was slavery  
after slavery there is profit

before immigrant there was settler  
after settler there is immigrant

before hometown there was homeland  
after homeland there is hometown

before diaspora there was war  
after war there is diaspora

rewind my body  
rewind my body

before brown there was ocean  
after ocean there is brown

before border there was trust  
after trust there is border

before police there was peace  
after peace there is police

before nation there was god  
after god there is nation

before us there was blood  
after us there is blood

rewind my body  
rewind my body

before marriage there was empathy  
after empathy there is marriage

before sex there was pleasure  
after pleasure there is sex

before gender there was people  
after people there is gender

before me there was us  
after us there is us

before planet there was space  
after space there is planet

before universe there was riot  
bang  
bang  
bang

rewind my body  
rewind your body

until there is nothing left  
but the darkmatter  
that gave birth to us



# Letters and Numbers

Will Rawls

*Don't be afraid of the clocks, they are our time, time has been so generous to us. . . We conquered fate by meeting at a certain TIME in a certain space. We are a product of the time. Therefore we give back credit where credit is due: time. We are synchronized, now forever. I love you. —Félix González-Torres<sup>1</sup>*

I am either a very late Gen Xer or a very early Millennial, depends on who's counting. Looking for clues on how the *Lost and Found* Platform might spark conversations among artists with vastly different experiences of the AIDS crisis, friend and curator Amanda Hunt recently connected me to Lucas Michael, an artist member of Visual AIDS. I described myself as floating in a "bridge generation" between Michael, who was born in 1965, and the Millennials. I grew up as a gay kid in the 80s and 90s, absorbing the AIDS crisis mostly through the news media and later when the film *And the Band Played On* premiered on HBO on September 11, 1993. When I read the date again, September 11, I realize how different moments of American cultural trauma can form a palimpsest of letters and numbers. This Platform has been a process of decoding this stacked metonym that is drawn out over decades and compressed into instances of death.

In retrospect, my relationship to the AIDS crisis was a luxury afforded by the timing of my birth—birth and class—even though so many others of my age were and are not as lucky. Lucas Michael said two things, "You must be traumatized," and, "I've been spared." The tables felt flipped; I was projecting a trauma onto him that was not felt in the way I imagined. He projected a certain unresolved angst onto me. He suggested that indirectly internalizing the AIDS crisis, as a visceral weather pattern, might be more insidious now than his head-on experience of it as a direct witness. In 1996, Michael contracted HIV, just as the antiretroviral cocktail appeared. He feels spared by the timing.

As the tables turn again, what is a younger generation consciously aware of in their own weather patterns,

having been born after the arrival of antiretrovirals? These conversations about generations can tend towards consumer metrics, branding and accusation—useful for corporations and historians while producing abstract pressure on either side of the date line to rep one's native territory. But I think there are real, non-accusatory, non-superior differences among us, worthy of speculation, that include the experience of time and the body as allusive and collective, a porous process.

In terms of new collectivity, the creative output of women, people of color and queers is on the rise in this dialogue about decolonizing cultural access to history and its expression. It seems obvious to me that we no longer have the option to live in linear or straight time. We circle back to retrieve, stay here to stake claim and move forward to imagine all at once. It requires new physics; at every stage a prognosis, an intervention is required. In the poem they contributed to this catalogue, the trans, South Asian performance art duo DarkMatter iterates:

*before stage there was movement  
after movement there is stage*

*before art there was culture  
after culture there is art*

*before capital there was abundance  
after abundance there is capital*

*rewind my body  
rewind my body<sup>2</sup>*

As DarkMatter flips the pages of history and metaphor back and forth, the contingency of different perspectives converge, tenses blur into queer reinterpretations. In the context of both the *Lost and Found* Platform programming and this catalogue, we ask how performing artists can exchange the cultural genius of a generation that was lost to AIDS and the genius of one that was not. Admittedly, this polarity is as flawed as Michael's and my mutual projections of trauma, but flawed thinking can be a starting point rather than a shut down valve. Could we also exchange a renewed sense of possibility? I can't quite remember when in my adult life the word "positive" started reclaiming its former meaning of optimistic. This optimism now shares space in my lexicon with

[1] Félix González-Torres, *Lovers*, 1988. Dedicated to his lover, Ross.

[2] DarkMatter, "rewind my body."

the fretful possibility of a positive HIV diagnosis and the beneficial presence of drugs that can mitigate the side effects of HIV seroconversion. In the spirit of DarkMatter, the Platform flips back and forth to rewind our bodies forward. In all this page-turning, the metaphor of zines has been on my mind—an apt container for the dense stack-up of names, dates and references we've been trying to collect, as best we can. For every name mentioned there are thousands left out. The accumulated and silent absent are a staggering number. When I read certain queer zines I get a sense of numbers that is productive when sensing a silent invisible majority. A zine demonstrates what's calling from an elsewhere (or right around the corner), a compact *anima* of underrepresented voices pointing out how many mics we still need to pass around. The analogy of the zine contains a certain promise of this trans-historical weave we're spooling.

Speaking of analogue, zines were born in the 20th century and are commonly defined as grassroots, non-profit, self-published endeavors. Often a handmade collage of original and appropriated texts and images, zines have served as a serious or gleeful alternative to the reductive reality of mainstream magazine publishing. Instead of plastic they serve plasticity. In attitude, tone, and visual punch, zines seem to presage the truncated, mashed-up sentiments of today's infographics like bitmojis and gifs (the latter technically an invention of the 80s). However, in their limited print runs, zines cannot achieve the standardized fungibility of emoji and perhaps this is a good thing. Limited circulation of terms leaves room for additions to the dictionary. In any case, could this current emotional economy of emoji be instructive in conversation with the epic poetry of our predecessors—some of whom are also our contemporaries? Or could we all be more long-winded?

*Queer zinesters are people of color, gender-fuckers, economically disadvantaged, young, old, disabled... There is urgency in the air, fresh challenges rooted in old causes that force us to take up our pens and glue sticks or fire up our computer's graphic design programs.*<sup>3</sup>

Zines have been a locale where fandom, rage and sex can meet feminist, minority and queer politics and history. In the case of the zine commemorating dancer

John Bernd's death, it was a place for Ishmael Houston-Jones and other artists to assemble their grief in 1998, a singular gesture in the landslide of AIDS losses. In the case of Linda/Les Simpson's *My Comrade*, the zine offered a leftist, campy take on the actively queer art and performance subculture in NYC in the 80s and 90s. Partially included in the pages that follow, *My Comrade* proclaimed itself as "the court jester of the queer press,"<sup>4</sup> using a mashup of gossip, horoscopes and biography to lend focus and infamy to local celebrities. There is an arch naïveté to the content of many zines, an oops I did it again *manoeuvre*.

Embedded in this *manoeuvre* (whose etymology includes manual labor, troop deployment, tactic, trick and manipulation), the personas and bodies that are laid out in zines are magnetically and strategically static-active—evasive and charged like dancers. The small booklet that contains these bodies becomes a species of choreography, assembling information, movements, meaning and resistance. The sum message of a zine can be quite entropic, like a little smart-bomb has detonated in your frontal lobe. In my mind, this resembles the entropic effect of dance on the senses; it resembles the entropic effect of AIDS on our history and present. Again, we need a nimbler physics to traverse these effects. In very different ways, dance, AIDS and zines furnish the temporal drift and delayed promise of "then and there,"<sup>5</sup> to borrow from the late queer theorist, José Esteban Muñoz. More dance and zines can be made in response to AIDS, and through their unruly relationship to meaning perhaps other narratives can be told. Zines are much less familiar to me than dance as a means to identify how, in particular, queer people and bodies cross historical borders to convene in a collective, temporal schism. But the zine's unfamiliarity as a metaphor may lend some perspective. Perhaps this is ultimately what this moment is about: less-intimate familiarity in exchange for more.

In their exuberant, two-volume compendium *Queer Zines*, AA Bronson and Philip Aarons note:

*While strikingly personal, zines in general, and*

[4] "My Comrade." *Wikipedia*. Accessed August 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Comrade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Comrade)

[5] "We must vacate the here and now for a then and there. Individual transports are insufficient. We need to engage in a collective temporal distortion. We need to step out of the rigid conceptualization that is a straight present. In this book I have argued that queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality." José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 185.

[3] Christopher Wilde, "From Ephemera to Eternity: The Queer Zine Continuum," *Queer Zines 2*. (New York: Printed Matter, Inc., 2014), 246-7.

## **HAPI PHACE-**

THOSE LIP-SYNCHING SHE-MALES;  
HE-SHES THAT SING AND DANCE  
AND MINCE AND PRANCE; LADIES  
WHO SHAVE; THE INTRIGUING  
EXISTANCE OF MEN WHO DARE TO  
BE LIKE WOMEN, THAT IS WHAT  
THIS COLUMN IS ALL ABOUT.  
I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT YOUR  
AVERAGE AMATEUR HALLOWEEN  
DRAGSTER. I AM TALKING THE  
BIG TIME, HONEY!!! AS M.C.  
AND GRAND HOSTESS OF NEW YORK  
CITY'S PREMIER QUEEN SCENE,  
"WHISPERS", THE WEEKLY SUN-  
DAY NIGHT CABARET AT THE  
PYRAMID CLUB, I HAVE HAD  
THE UNIQUE FORTUNE TO  
MEET, GREET, AND GET TO  
KNOW THESE SPECIAL SOULS,  
AND I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE  
THESE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL  
FRIENDS WITH YOU. HERE IS JUST  
A SAMPLING OF A FEW OF THE LOVELY "LADIES" YOU  
MIGHT SEE WORKING IT ON THE STREETS OR THE STAGE  
OR WHEREVER SISTERS ARE MAKING THE SCENE.  
LET'S DISH....



### **TABBOO**

This Aquarius never ends. How does she do it? (Coffee!!) Does she ever wear the same thing twice? (Smells like it.) I am insanely jealous of her thigh-high, 7-inch heel go-go boots.

### **BUNNY**

That firey Leo is too royal. Leona Helmsley watch out, because Bunny has deluded herself and Michael Musto into believing that she is the queen of New York. But then, Bunny gets my vote over Leona any day. The lady deserves a medal for putting together Wigstock every year. Wigstock, for those of you couch potatoes who never venture off the sofa, is the most fabulous Labor Day rock concert/love-in, wigfest in Tompkins Square Park, featuring many of the celebrities you are reading about now.

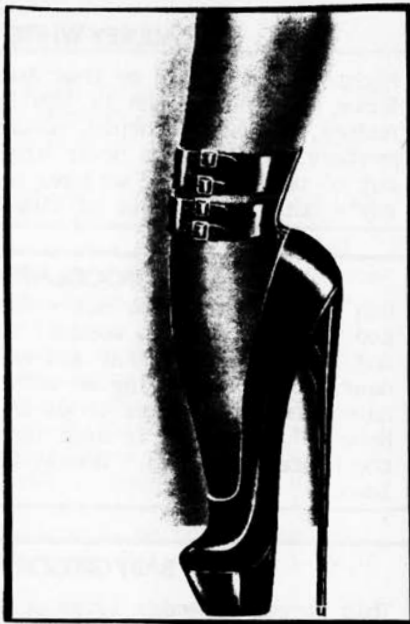


### SISTER DIMENSION

The ultimate dancing queen, when sister spins, queens twirl. This disco Virgo is resident Whispers D.J., and I want her record collection. But where would I put it? A special sissie who wears a hat better than anyone.

### OLYMPIA

She is a big girl. Did you know she is an amateur photog? I think she is a Libra. There is the story about the New Year's Eve when Limpy got real sauced and slept through all the festivities on the dressing room floor. But that was years ago so we won't mention it now, will we?



## EXOTIC AND BIZARRE

### ALEXIS DE LAGO

Still yet another Scorpio, Alexis makes me proud to be a Scorpio and a queen. (Yes, yours truly was born on Halloween, sun in Scorpio.) Alexis put the ook in kook, and she rides a mean bike (with her face on), and you'll never see her sweating, but you might see some razor stubble sticking through her base. Why you should see her apartment! Wall to wall mirrors and she has more bottles of perfume than Bergdorf's.

### TANGELLA

Another sister Scorpio, this spicy dish hails from Texas. A never-ending bundle of energy (nerves?), she has got to be the best little bar-dancer, and she is so sweet - even if she does still owe you money.





*queer zines in particular, were most important for how they served to create and foster a community through shared content and their highly personal means of distribution.”<sup>6</sup>*

The zines collected in *Queers Zines 2* seem to relish the effect of being oh so wrong that it’s right. They trade on the risk of being off color, off topic and allergic to silence, in order to get at something like a truth. Zines often take more effort in hours and person-power to make than they could possibly hope to retrieve in sales. Zines strike me as quixotic and determined, a necessarily illogical money-making adventure whose precarious value in the market also reminds me of dance. After stumbling off the radar, following its Y2K showdown with internet blogs, zines are now having a resurgence. *My Comrade* began republication in 2004 after a 10 year hiatus. Organizations like Printed Matter Inc., MoMA PS1’s Book Fair, The Barnard College Zine Library and QZAP (Queer Zine Archive Project) among many others, continue to produce, distribute or archive zines that represent a radical multitude of positions in relationship to the printed letter and “being read” anew.

Inside of the Platform we are producing two zine-making projects led by Allied Productions/Le Petit Versailles and AUNTS. As self-organized collectives intent on alternative presenting models (Le Petit Versailles offers a public garden, AUNTS occupies clubs, lofts and festivals), they widen the scope of visibility to artists and performers who may not have typical access to presenting their work. With access to residency space during our program, LPV and AUNTS will invite contributors to their zine projects, compiling a limited edition of zines for distribution during the Platform. In hopes of translating the two organizations’ missions and holding this metaphor of zine-as-history, these two, artistic bodies will have the chance to beget other bodies. In their bio, AUNTS claims:

*AUNTS is about having dance happen. The dance you’ve already seen, that pops into your head, that is known and expected and unknown and unexpected. Dance that seeps into the cracks of street lights, subway commotion, magazine myth, drunk nights at the bar, the family album, and the couch where you lay and softly glance at the afternoon light coming*

*in through the window. AUNTS constantly tests a model of producing dance/performance/parties. A model that supports the development of current, present, and contemporary dancing. A model that expects to be adopted, adapted, replicated, and perpetuated by any person who would like to use it. Where performing can last five seconds or five hours; never a “work in progress.” Where the work of performing is backed by the “land of plenty” rather than “there is not enough.”<sup>7</sup>*

The LPV website quotes founding member Peter Cramer:

*One of the nice things that happened when we first started the garden was someone threw a note over the fence and the note said, “I’ve been living here a number of years and seen this blossom.” I don’t remember the exact words, but just that they really appreciated that someone was taking the trouble.<sup>8</sup>*

And so we take the time and take on the trouble of bringing the letters and numbers together, indexing what must be said and what is left out. We don’t expect a comprehensive result, as this would, in some ways defeat the very potential of filling in the gaps with other kinds of narrative.

For our purposes, this catalogue has to a greater or lesser extent been shaped by the aesthetics of the zine. We offer a tumble of texts and images from our generous contributors—reprints, originals, poems, photos and slogans. As this book shifts vernacular from choreography to theory to poetry to image, our hope is that the bindings of collective memory will also shift and multiply, into limited and mass editions.

**[August 26, 2016]**

[6] AA Bronson and Philip Aarons, *Queer Zines 2*, (New York: Printed Matter, Inc., 2014)

[7] <http://auntsisdance.com>

[8] “History.” <http://alliedproductions.org/le-petit-versailles/>

# TABBOO - LIKE TOTALLY RADICAL!



It's a new look for Tabboo - Terrorist Chic, armed with exciting slogans of gay and personal liberation.

In the form of a powerfully worded communique accompanied by dramatic black and white snapshots, the bold, new viewpoints of Tabboo were recently delivered exclusively to My Comrade, a magazine always eager to report new and controversial opinions.

Patty Hearst's classic underground portrayal of Tania, heiress turned radical, obviously inspired Tabboo's manifesto.

In it, Tabboo, like Tania, proposes ideas and attitudes for coping with an often oppressive and frustrating society.

Tabboo, however, inspires a sincerity Tania never conveyed.

For all of Tania's rhetoric, the role of terrorist turned out to be an inconvenient detour on her way to becoming a rich, dull Connecticut housewife, while the terrorist persona adapted by Tabboo is a lifelong occupation. Tabboo is always offering radical, daring alternatives and undermining the status quo. A public political awakening is just the latest chapter of Tabboo's revolutionary lifestyle.

Once again Tabboo's unique presentation of intriguing ideas sets the pace for modern gay comrades everywhere. Tabboo's message of pride, in not just a communique, but in an entire way of living, is nothing less than a brave new example for a modern gay world. Tabboo assumes the role of general field marshall, ready to lead the troops in sexy guerilla warfare.

Tabboo is quite simply liberation personified. How refreshing that must feel! One can almost hear the roar of the troops now, poised to combat an army of prejudice and ignorance - "Tabboo is independence!" "Tabboo is broken chains!" "Tabboo is - The Future!"





Angie Pittman. Photo by Jessie Young.













## MEMORY PALACE

Historically, the Memory Palace is a technique for both memory and imagination practiced by the ancient Greeks. By committing to memory the details of a location, a person can take an imaginary walk through an invisible city, reviving impressions and persons associated with this place. The reconstruction is both deeply imaginary and based on the salient details of lived experience. Both memory and imagination are vehicles of transport and projection, always operational. In the Memory Palace, they traverse the terrain of the present together, offering holograms and sensations as raw material for the other's spectral productions. It is a form of creative recall that spins facts and fiction together, getting closer to the places and people who once were—ferrying them into the present with hopes of referring to them into the future.

The voices in this Memory Palace offer something directly or indirectly related to the impact of AIDS/HIV on their past or present. Some are compressions of a family history, or portraits of a lost city while others are stand-ins for the artists themselves. This is an experiment to create a conversation, to collect what can be remembered at this particular intersection in time, to see what sort of architecture might hold what is inevitably left out. It is an unfinished building. —**Will Rawls**



# **Brother: Tseng Kwong Chi, born 1950 Hong Kong, died 1990 New York.**

**Apollo 11 was the first spaceflight that landed humans on the Moon. Americans Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on July 20, 1969. My family had landed in Vancouver, Canada from Hong Kong three years before. I remember watching the historic landing on the big television set in our suburban living room and missing my older brother Kwong Chi, who would have been amazed. He had already left home, or had gotten kicked out rather, after a fist fight with my dad when he declared his homosexuality in the wood-paneled basement rec room. I always thought of it after that night as the “wreck” room. My brother was seventeen when he stomped out into the damp Vancouver night, defiant. I remember feeling very confused as I watch my dad’s shoulders slumped in anger and defeat.**

**In 1985, Tseng Kwong Chi, the artist, would dress in the Chinese official uniform, the “Mao” suit, calling himself the “Ambiguous Ambassador,” and photograph himself with Apollo 11 and an astronaut at Cape Canaveral, Florida. These images became part of his oeuvre which he put together over a decade—from 1979-1989—all over the world, first in America, then in Europe, Japan. But he never made it to China. I’m certain his next destination would have been to space. He rejected nationalities and dreamed of universal passports that would allow us to go anywhere and do anything.**

**His vision was large and his appetite huge and ferocious—he taught me that there was a world out there, and it was ripe for the taking. He wanted more than what Hong Kong, Vancouver, or even Paris could offer, so it was natural that he landed in New York in 1978. He found his true family in East Village, he had fun, found his true self and welcomed his doppelganger.**

**The 1980s in downtown New York did not seem to be so much about careerism, or money. Of course there was plenty of ambition around, but paramount to that was creativity and the spirit of “doing it,” making things happen with two planks and a passion, THE SHOW MUST GO ON! Nike took the phrase “Just do it” from us. After doing it for a decade, he succumbed to AIDS complications, and died in his home at 14 Maiden Lane on March 10, 1990, at age 39.**

**Perhaps he had to take in too much too fast in order to catch up on lost time.**

**Kwong Chi would be 66 this year, a grandfather sort of age. I understand now why my father was so angry—the Chinese ancestral line would be broken by his first born son, and then again by my younger brother and I.**

**What he did not know was that his son would leave behind a legacy in photographs and be called the “grandfather of selfies” by a new generation of neophyte-photographer iphone addicts who have never seen a light meter or handled a silver gelatin print, and who instead send digital images into a nebulous cloud. I think Kwong Chi would be thrilled.**

Last April, a gay elder I didn't know died of cancer. His far-away cousin hoped I'd accompany him as a doula in his final days. Neglected and abused in his nursing home, he had no nearby family or visitors and died before I could reach him.

I imagine him often.

"We are family," as they say.

What happened to his blood and chosen families?

How many loved ones did he lose to AIDS or old age? His stories and theirs, gone.

For every person who dies alone, a keeper of memories, how many others die a second death of disappearance?

# **Dancers Responding to AIDS (DRA)**

**December 1, 1995 I was lost.... my community was lost in despair over so many of our friends, colleagues and family who died horrible deaths from HIV/AIDS. THE REMEMBER PROJECT was produced by and benefited Dancers Responding to AIDS, a program of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS as a vigil for our dance community to have a place to mourn collectively and share the beautiful spirit of those lost through what we know best – dance. Laurie Uprichard, Executive Director of Danspace Project at the time gave us her blessing for what would become an annual event. At that first Remember Project in 1995 Richard Camron-Wolfe played Erik Satie's VEXATIONS 840 times which meant he never left the piano from Midnight–Midnight. Dancers came and left the space over the course of the 24 hours; they improvised or danced to VEXATIONS what normally would be performed to other music.**

**In 1997 we changed the format from a vigil to a more celebratory tone that honored those living with HIV/AIDS as well as those in memoriam. Dancers from all genres and styles performed short works from noon to midnight to music of their choice. We usually presented a minimum of 85 different companies and over 450 dancers. This was the first year we began to see light out of a very dark tunnel. Protease inhibitors had entered the market in 1996 so lives began to change.**

**Born out of grief, THE REMEMBER PROJECT became a seminal moment for many dancers who were mostly from New York City. This event was not a benefit or gala presentation for a wealthy audience. It was a visceral experience to present work and dance in the sanctuary – the distinct home of Danspace Project, for someone who was no longer able to perform. It offered the dancer a way to remember how the person who died had moved or was a performance for a loved one or friend who was very ill and close to passing.**

**Throughout the course of the twelve hours various hosts would read names aloud in honor or in memory of someone requested by a donor. The host would then go over to the REMEMBER PROJECT Mural on the altar and write the name of the donor and the name of who they wanted to acknowledge.**

**Each year we would bring back the REMEMBER PROJECT murals and display them in the Parish Hall, which acted as a gathering place for the audience before and after entering the sanctuary. The dancers entered the space at the back of the church to sign in and bring along any donations.**

**They were then ushered upstairs to the balcony that acted as the green room. There a stage manager would retrieve their music and tell them where to warm up and wait to perform. Social workers from The Actors Fund spent long hours in the green room, counseling and offering advice about free services for dancers– a health clinic, a women's health initiative, emergency financial assistance, The HIV/AIDS Initiative and more because of events such as THE REMEMBER PROJECT.**



**Dancers from every genre imaginable performed at THE REMEMBER PROJECT. Established companies such as The Paul Taylor Dance Company, American Ballet Theatre, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Martha Graham Dance Company, MOMIX, Pilobolus, Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, Limón Dance Company, Mark Morris Dance Company, The Bang Group, Stephen Petronio Company as well as “then” emerging artists – Kyle Abraham, Monica Bill Barnes, Ivy Baldwin, Tina Finkelmann Berkett and Larry Keigwin to name a few.**

**I will never forget the first year Merce Cunningham made a MinEvent for THE REMEMBER PROJECT and the overwhelming sense of community we felt because Chris Komar had passed away the summer before. The collective burst of emotion from all of us in the audience as the counterpoint of Merce’s movement came to a stunning conclusion all at the same time.....brilliant and powerful.**

**Ronald K. Brown offered many poignant moments with his performances in honor of those close to him who died of HIV/AIDS and Susan Marshall had 10 couples surrounding her as VEXATIONS played, all performing her duet ARMS while she was alone in the center, missing her dance partner – Arthur Armijo who passed away at 33 years of age in 1993.**

**Community is the common theme for THE REMEMBER PROJECT as well as HIV/AIDS. Never before have dancers come together in such a way with ballet dancers performing after modern compa-**

**nies that considered Danspace “uptown.” This event was such a tremendous showcase of strength and unity.**

**2004 marked the last Remember Project – the need to come together in this same spiritual way was not necessary. Suddenly the face of AIDS was not as self-evident – living with HIV/AIDS was the task, mourning our loss was not.**

**DRA and Broadway Cares help to ensure that those in need have access to lifesaving medication, health care, counseling, nutritious meals and emergency financial assistance.**

**The commitment and determination to make a difference in the world still is as strong today with performing artists as it was in the lower depths of the crisis.**

**The HIV infection rate remains steady in the United States. DRA and Broadway Cares are still here serving our community through the social service programs of The Actors Fund as well as funding more than 450 AIDS and family service organizations nationwide through our National Grants Program. Over \$12 million dollars in grants were awarded in 2015. This work continues because performing artists in dance and theater work very hard on our behalf. So the next time you are at a performance where an appeal is made for DRA and a volunteer with a red bucket appears as you exit Danspace Project....REMEMBER so much started here in this sacred space and so much continues.**

*—Denise Roberts Hurlin,  
Founding Director, Dancers Responding to AIDS*



## **KLAUS NOMI**

**He drifts down the north side of my block every morning, a brooding, alien waif. His New Wave Vaudeville is performance legend. I set my clock by his Goth opera charm—vacuum black head to toe, yes cape too, jet black widow’s peak/lips—daunting the sunlight. It’s morning on St Mark’s Place.**

**We only ever exchange the shyest of greetings, but I come to count on him as an essential element of my early 80s East Village life. He lifts me in the morning, reminds me where I live. His disappearance is sudden and harsh, an air sucked out that leaves the neighborhood gasping in confusion and rumor. And just like that, AIDS arrives.**







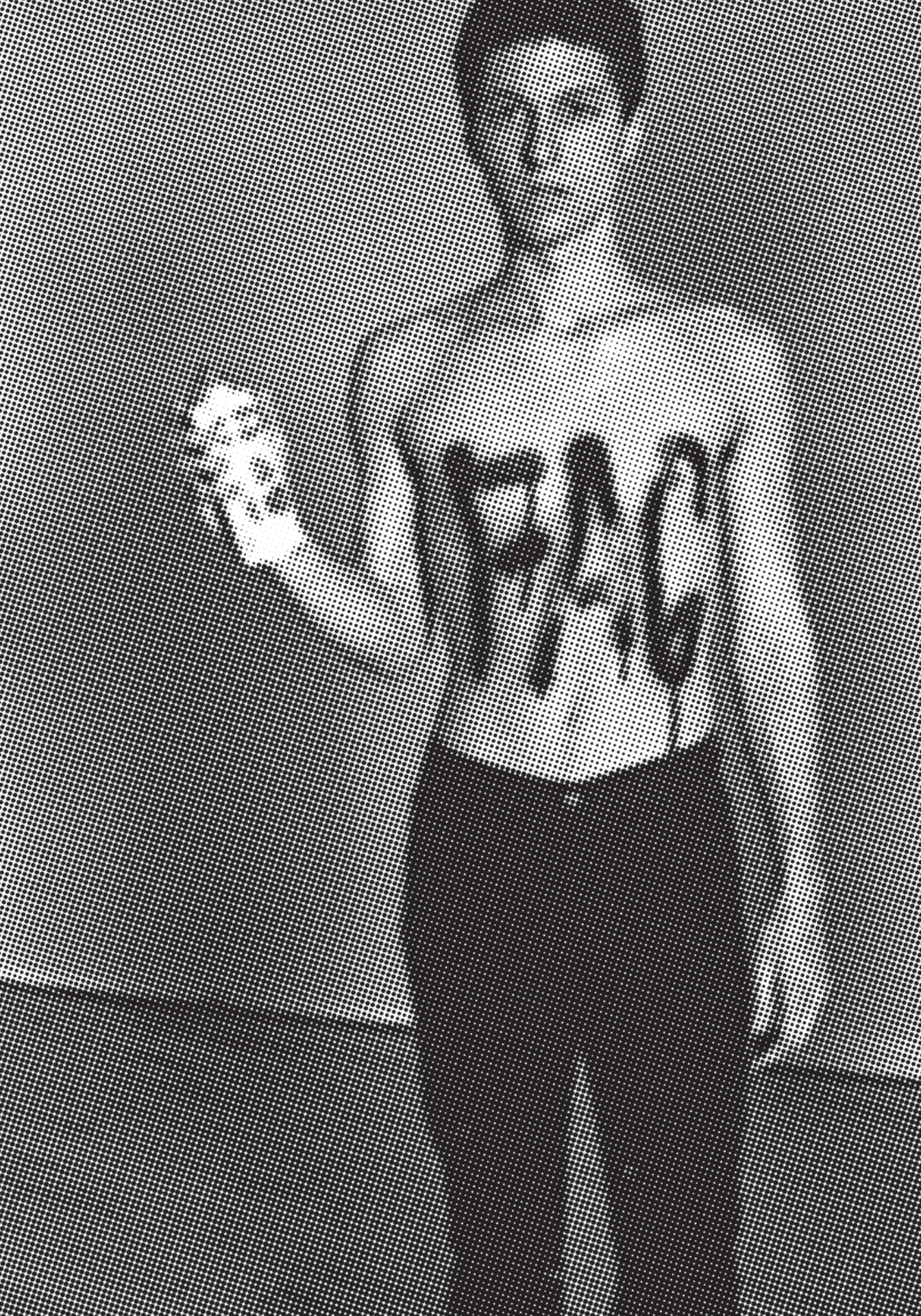






Image: *The Gift/No God Logic*. Choreographed by Arnie Zane, Sean Curran, Heidi Latsky, Demian Acquavella & Arthur Aviles. Photo © Lois Greenfield.



## **DO YOU REMEMBER ARNIE?**

**When photographer/choreographer/dancer Arnie Zane died of AIDS-related Lymphoma in 1988 at the age of 39, I was a relatively new member to the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Company. Arnie never stopped choreographing. He created at least three or four dances between March '87 and his death on March 30, 1988. One dance I loved performing in particular was the beautiful, beguiling, pristine and meaningful, THE GIFT/NO GOD LOGIC. Even though my interaction with Arnie was brief, my memories are fond. We shared a love for photography and Barbra Streisand. We saw NUTS together. After a particularly tiring day, after he slept on the dance floor in the rehearsal studio as we rehearsed, he got up to make a doctor's appointment. As he exited the studio he slowly sashayed toward the doorway as he sang a few lines from a Streisand classic. As he approached the door his right arm slid up the edge of the doorway. He sang "Have I stayed too lo-----hong at the fair-----." His imitation was right on, especially when he hit the high note, fit for a coloratura on the word "lo-----hong." In a moment ripe with the possibility of tears (and make no mistake the tears were there), the room instead burst out laughing as he slung the arm of his sweater around his neck and, with a quick look in the direction he was going in, he disappeared! That's the way Arnie left me—fabulous, powerful and oh so funny!**

1981.

think of dance

spaces

in between

counts

each drop of sweat

tears

blood

of our hearts

A loss

I feel

D earth

S pain

Ibiza

Barcelona

Strasbourg

Cologne

New York

tracing & trekking thru to uncrossable borders to realize you had already left us

yet dances remain transferred to magnetic strips that spin inside hollow boxes

B oh B oh T oh out out damn foot note

go to <http://alliedproductions.org/brian-taylor-a-celebration-of-his-life-and-art-2/>

Notes to foot to thigh to back to arms to hands to neck to lips to eyes

3 in blue dresses caress the stream to live side by side you still abide in our dreams.

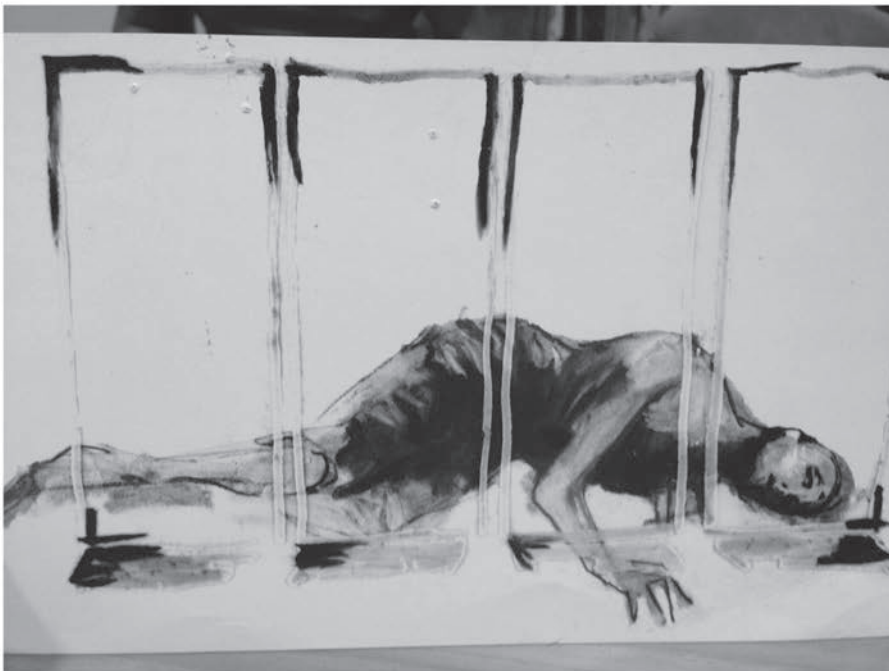


Illustration of Brian Taylor by Gordon Kurtti for POOL - "Foho Tells Dreams" at Danspace Project 1985

**In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it seemed as if I was—too often and always in tears— writing obituaries for dancers and choreographers who had died of AIDS. Demian Acquavella, too weak to dance, being carried onstage by his colleagues in Bill T. Jones’s D-MAN IN THE WATERS. Twenty-three-year old, greatly gifted Edward Stierle, thin and pale, helped onstage to accept the applause for his EMPYREAN DANCES, made for the Joffrey Ballet he had graced as a dancer. So many more. Finding words to honor them in obituaries in the VILLAGE VOICE became a mission, and I was always falling short. The slow decline of artists who had been so strong and vibrant was brought home with particular force when my husband told me of having helped John Wilson (dancer, choreographer, musician, friend of over forty years) into his own apartment, after having sighted him trying to climb the steps from the street to the front door. How do you write about devastation like that?**





Left to right: Grisha Coleman, Talvin Wilks, Earnie Stevenson © David Thomson

## **MARION'S CONTINENTAL BAR & LOUNGE ON THE BOWERY IN THE MID-90'S.**

A cosmopolitan watering hole and cabaret spot for artists—retro, elegant, campy and louche where I was first introduced to the likes of:

Kiki & Herb  
Scotty the Blue Bunny  
the World Famous Pontani Sisters  
Murray Hill  
Julie Atlas Muz doing burlesque  
and others

For me, it was this liminal place of revelry and memory during a time of recovery and hopefulness.

It had its own sense of belonging and community, mostly because of all of downtown artists who worked, drank and played there—so many good memories.

*—David Thomson*

**John Bernd running around, arms outstretched, wearing pale blue  
workshirt, at Danspace, at that big theater on 11th street, him being the  
spirit of his age.**

*—Eileen Myles*

**Back to your paintings:**

**You use autumnal colours though this is not your palette.**

**You begin to adopt this as your palette. In preparation for dinner you explore various combinations of white wine and gin. Again with the smoke imagery but this time it is steam. The chair that sits by the lamp is now a bit closer to the window near the fire escape. You have moved your bed into the middle of its room. The sole purpose of this room is just to rest, nothing touching the walls. In fact, most things are free standing.**



**A distinct memory of a letter I received from my father in prison in northern NJ, 1993. I was a junior in high school. It explains how his heart was broken because his young son had recently passed away. I found out that my half brother died in a children's orphanage hospital in Jersey City of AIDS. He was there because his mother also passed that year of the disease. My father's life was consumed by the grief, loss and his drug addiction that led to homelessness and eventually prison. I thought for sure he wouldn't survive. My father, Reinaldo Velez, resurfaced five years later, had completed his Bachelor's degree and was working toward a Master's in social work through prison-time. He's now a drug counselor and runs a methadone clinic in Newark, NJ. He's a survivor.**

*—Larissa Velez-Jackson*

**Breathing heavily, Reynaldo dropped into a chair in my Stuyvesant Town apartment. He was visiting from Syracuse and had just been chasing a truck through the warren of Stuy Town roads, tracking down the cooler that held several days' supply of his "cocktail" in round glass containers. He found the truck and the cooler. That day we began our conversations. Twice daily, we sat down together for his two-hour infusion of AIDS drugs and talked. About dance. About what might have been. About choreography and teaching. About death. "When I'm gone," he asked, "would you save these glass containers? They'd make great Christmas ornaments."**



*The Missing Performer* © AUNTS

Don't call up my person. I am absent.  
Live in my absence as if in a house.  
Absence is a house so vast  
that inside you will pass through its walls  
and hang pictures in the air.

—Pablo Neruda, from *Sonnet XCIV*





Bob Carroll in *The Salmon Show*. Photo by Phil Arnault.

**Bob was a multidisciplinary, activist artist. For a couple of years, he, Koma and I were a trio, visiting the Iowa Theater Lab and Charlotte (with the cheapest wine). We almost signed a lease to run a cultural and political salon called Dirt Shop. As Dirt Band's lead vocalist, Bob sang Allen Ginsberg's composition/William Blake's poem for our NURSE'S SONG (1981). Bob went back to SF, where he became sick. He was blind when we talked with him last. When I perform, I think of Bob, who so loved performing. Spitting and sweating, he sang, "To the spawning grounds." Bob died on April 7, 1988.**

—Eiko Otake

# TRACING A.L.

---

A: found him in the rearview  
Like a mirror on a horizon  
A different point of view<sup>1</sup>

Arrived as a dancer in eighty-nine, ninety  
Ran these short-lived streets as a skinny twenty-five  
Filled with eros desire delusion dream  
Gone before his dancing, class, performance or audition crystalized

Never shared his score. Didn't amend, nor construct  
An archive.  
Left no vhs.  
*Never saw your work, Reader.*

To reach back towards *his* body. Like RN, his lover, I lay supine on the floor & trace a rib bone in the terrestrial shadow of so-many others, while reading RB.

*Wait. I should trace my chin instead. Our shared distinction. Inner thoughts seep out as silent jaw protrudes, cheeks sucking in your direction. The art of "reading" - a street-worn épaulement, serving angle, pursed lips, & cocked brow. Born & lost in mixed heritage, androgynous-ID, hand-made queer kin. Seeing through thick-lensed glasses, our oft-clumsy dancer bodies careen in the (then) pblegmatic dance crowd. The language of brown queen code. Big brown leather dance bags touch the body at the level of the back ribs' inhale.*

Rib under fingers—steady, even slow—because it is not like then, when things moved too fast. The discovered weight / width / trail of bone that cannot be reached is *him*.  
Italics are mine & within RB:

"For a long time I kept this fragment of myself *him* in a drawer, a kind of body ... analogous to the end of a rib chop, not knowing quite what to do with it, *him* not daring to get rid of it *him* lest I do some harm to my person, though it was utterly useless to me to shut *him* up in a desk among "precious" objects ... And then, one day, realizing that the function of any drawer is to ease, to acclimate the death of objects by causing them to pass through a sort of pious site, a dusty chapel, *a rib cage*, where, in the guise of keeping them alive, we allow them a decent interval of dim agony, but not going so far as to dare cast this bit of myself *him* into the common refuse bin of my building, I flung the rib *him* and its *his gauze gaze, gait, gains, gone-ness* from my balcony, as if I were romantically scattering my own ashes, into ~~the rue~~ *Servandoni, Tompkins Park*, where some dog would come and sniff them out." <sup>2</sup>

And then, back again, and into the street. Press play: <https://vimeo.com/25898303> <sup>3 4</sup>

*With thanks to Debra Levine and Aldo Hernandez*

[1] Title of Anthony Ledesma's work premiered at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1988.

[2] "La côtelette – The rib chop." Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, 1977, p. 61.

[3] *Soul II Soul, Back to Life*, Vimeo link by Don Avetta.

[4] "A breakbeat isn't just a steady rhythm or even a pattern, it's a time-loop. It gains a lot of its power from the combination of the illusion of humanity (the sample coming from real drummers) and the comfort of inhuman steadiness." Tom Ewing, *Freaky Trigger*, 2010.



A painting by Tom Rubnitz

# Celebrate

THE LIFE OF  
**TOM  
RUBNITZ**

1955-1992



Monday, September 14, 1992, 7:00-9:00 P.M.  
The Kitchen 512 West 19th Street, NY, NY 10011  
212.255.5793 Please RSVP

## **TOM RUBNITZ 1955-1992**

**Tom's memorial was at The Kitchen and Lady Bunny was the celebrant. There was nothing not beautiful about it: lots of performances, a showing of Tom's films which were so fucking funny, Bunny complaining the whole time about her mascara running.**

**And then it happened—the moment when the earth opened up underneath us, a moment so piercing it threatened to sever us from the ground that held us. Tom's dad got up to speak. He didn't say much—you could tell he was a reserved man and the emotion was dangerously close to overwhelming him. He said he wanted us to know he was proud of his son. There was an involuntary sound, half gasp, half wail, from the audience. I felt Joe next to me, whose own father had threatened to kill him, levitate from his seat as he struggled not to run from the room.**

**The Midwestern families of other friends had either ignored their dying sons, or worse yet, tortured them with 700 Club bullshit about their certain descent into hell, but Tom's whole family had come from Chicago to be there. And when Bunny announced that during her final song—something by Sylvester—any tips she collected would go toward preserving Tom's video archive, Tom's mom lined up all the nieces and nephews in their dresses and little suits giving each of them dollars to go tip Bunny with.**



## ONE JOHN, THEN ANOTHER, AND MICHAEL, AND SCOTT: A MEMORY OF JOHN BERND

*I have been losing all my life. All my life I've lost everything dear to me again and again and again and I lost my best friend when we moved and I lost a teenage boyfriend to leukemia and I lost my first pet of my very own to the gypsies who lived next door and I lost the big race to my big rival again and again and again and again and it all started, it all started, when I won everything. . . —John Bernd, 1981*

Yes, he was tall, at least from my vantage, and had wide, impassive eyes. When he shook his head as he talked, his sable, sun-burnished hair grazed his brows. I am trying to recall his form—sleek, smooth and no doubt muscular, still or in motion, but I'm surprised that I actually can't.

I should be able to because I saw this dedicated, convincing, body dance and perform, with *Live Boys*—and-bed partner Tim Miller, and then by himself, when he became as much an actor as a mover. Yet what I most remember about my neighbor and then friend John Bernd was how he told surprising and elaborate stories in and out of performance.

I just found out that John's middle name was Jeffery.

In the early '80s, as—the cliché has it—his career in amalgamated dance and performance was “taking off,” John became ill with fearfully itchy skin and other symptoms that resisted diagnosis. Standing on my stoop on East 7th Street or on his around the corner, he told me that he was taking infrared treatments at some uptown hospital, probably Mt. Sinai. “I feel better after them,” he admitted, but his skin became an angry scarlet and he was concerned that none of this was really helping. He said that, I recall, with a puzzled smile. He was still beaming, so beautiful.

This was the time that the term GRID, Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, was used to corral these inexplicable symptoms—and the sudden, shocking deaths.

Kansas-born John Jeffery Bernd, riveting dancer and pioneering artist, died on August 28, 1988 in an NYU hospital at the age of 35 from complications of AIDS. “He began performing his own work in 1978 and received a Bessie, the New York Dance and Performance Award, in 1986,” his *New York Times* obit reads, leaving out, inexplicably, the date of his passing.

*So John spent quite a few years, eons really, living and struggling with his disease, working and performing all the way through. This is the time we were watching our friends, colleagues and lovers fail, sicken and expire. It was a profound misery, but even more so because so many of those around us—our families, friends, elected representatives and officials—ignored and denied those deaths. So many refused to look at and care for emaciated gay bodies. Yes, some of us were fighting back because no one would fight for us, and, as artists like John knew, every AIDS corpse could prefigure our own.*

This is why I have such trouble remembering John Bernd's lithe and healthy body.

But I have a solution that I think he would approve, and that is to tell a story, one that may not seem at first as if it should connect. I'll leave any possible connection to you.

**Recently, I met a lovely man named Scott.** We each lost our husbands not too long ago—not from AIDS—and found we could give each other comfort. My guy's name was John.

Scott, trained as a healthcare administrator, told me that in the early '80s he founded and directed three nonprofit health centers in Cape Cod that served, among others, patients with HIV and AIDS because none of the hospitals

in the area was doing so. This queer activist rattled cages and got results.

His first contact with AIDS came earlier, he said, when, just out of school, he became a patient advocate in a New York hospital. Beds were being filled with horribly sick men, some with KS lesions, many with pneumonia and other infections, almost all headed for the morgue. Scott had to force, literally force, nurses and doctors to care for these patients and at the same time cajole scared and gay-hating families to visit and say goodbye. He didn't always succeed.

So I told Scott about my earliest friend with AIDS, John the dancer. And I also recalled to him one of my first loves: "He was a brilliant guy I met in college named Michael, Michael Gass. One day I got a call from a stranger who got my number from Michael's Rolodex. She said she had some sad news: Michael had gone into the hospital with pneumonia just a week ago, and he died."

Scott's face turned ghost-white: "Did Michael work at ABC-TV?"

"Yes, he was their first digital design director. He was famous for his *Monday Night Football* logo, of all things."

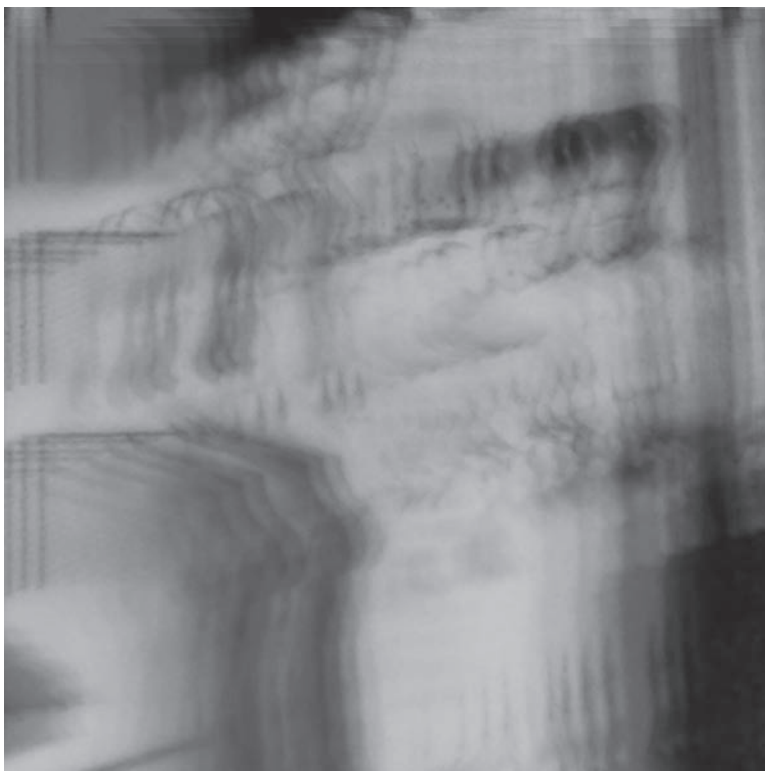
My Michael had been Scott's patient. Scott remembered wide-eyed, winsome Michael as if it were yesterday. More than three decades ago, my new friend saw my old lover's covered body get wheeled into an elevator and disappear.

I met John Bernd after I reviewed his brilliant and brave P.S. 122 performance called *Surviving Love and Death* for the Jan. 27, 1982 issue of *The Village Voice*<sup>1</sup>. Very little of the *Voice* from back then is digitized and online, so, in memory of John and all those performers who danced and died, I'll type it out from the yellowing tear sheet in my rotting files. Here's an excerpt taken from the end of the piece—and now my stiff fingers will do their post-Judson strut:

*Though it is modern, it is certainly not new to exhibit vulnerability as strength, but Bernd has managed not only to derive personal succor from his work but also to share it. He does this through the clapping and chanting, perceived as ritualistic and communal. He does it because his story is clearly the result of self-revelation, more engaging than strictly rational discourse or speaking through an invented character. He does it because he shows how he regains control, even just tentative control, over his so-called fate.*

X   X   X

[1] Jeff Weinstein, "Loves, Labor, Lost." *Village Voice*, Jan. 27-Feb. 2, 1982.



*untitled hallucination* by Niall Noel Jones.

—*Niall Noel Jones*

Marissa Perel with Gregg Bordowitz: dialogue excerpt from collaborative performance

GB: I'm part of a generation of people with HIV who lived in New York in the 80's and 90's through the epidemic. I'm a person who's been living with HIV for over 25 years. I lived and survived whereas many of the people I knew did not. I think about whether or not I have responsibilities to the dead and if so, what are they?

MP: I inhabit a world in your legacy and the artists you were among, which I can only access by traces of what has been left. When I moved to New York, I started working in the West Village seeing no signs of this history. I had to search for clues as to what the neighborhood used to be.

GB: I belonged to a queer, drug, anarchist crowd in the East Village that rejected the clone culture of the West Village. At the same time, I had to go over to the West Village in order to get HIV information because it wasn't really traveling in my circles. The information had reached me that I was possibly exposed to a virus because of the unprotected sex I was having—anal, unprotected sex. So I went to the gay community center and was welcomed there. It was really the only place where I could get information and talk comfortably about how I possibly contracted HIV.



**The blacked-out black box theater filled with fog and narrow beams of light. The DIY ether of DEATH ASSHOLE RAVE (2015), in which Jeremy Wade guides us through an ecstatic visualization of our own cremation. Different from when he unpacks the many meanings of “bottom” (a word that, if it doesn’t mean more than one thing to you already, probably won’t make sense). Different but not wholly separate—is the bottom a crematorium? When is the choice to be cremated made for you? How often do we let others decide what to do with our bodies?**



Reggie Wilson. Courtesy of Reggie Wilson

—*Reggie Wilson*

In June 1994 I was in the middle of a rehearsal with Joe Goode at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco when I suddenly realized it was a year to the day after I'd found out that my friend, brief lover, and fellow dancer Mark died of AIDS. I disassociated completely, ran out of the building without explanation, and wandered the streets of the Mission, hyperventilating with grief. He had barely told anyone he was sick, and I had only found out about his death a month afterwards. I saw a friend sitting in a café and I walked in and told her I was having a panic attack. We sat on the street until I could breathe normally again.

—*Miguel Gutierrez*



**A month after I moved to NYC in 2003, a visiting friend brought me to a place she'd heard about, Pyramid Club. It was right across the street from Sidewalk Cafe, where I was quickly joining the mostly heterosexual anti-folk music scene. We went to Pyramid on "80s night." There were three other people there. My friend danced. I drank whiskey at the bar, watching Siouxsie Sioux videos on the TV screens. I was 21 years old, and I wouldn't really make a bunch of queer friends for another three years.**

## FOR MEMORY PALACE

David Underwood, the first love of my life, passed away from AIDS on Memorial Day 1994. I was completing my first full-length solo performance work called *Asian Boys*, which premiered that June at Performance Space 122, part of a festival commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall. David knew I was working on *Asian Boys* and encouraged and supported me to the bitter end of his all-too-brief life on this earth.

Two other men who influenced my life and art, Ron Vawter, the great actor of the Wooster Group, and Paul Walker, one of my actor-colleagues from the Theatre Program at NYU School of the Arts, also died of AIDS around that very time.

I learned so much from all three men. I learned so much as well, working with the still-living composer and visual artist Richard C. Martinez and his partner, the great actor/playwright Jeff Weiss, working as a performer in the various incarnations of Richard and Jeff's *Hot Keys* (a sprawling epic play written in response to the AIDS time).

I wrote a song for the premiere of *Asian Boys*, a tribute to David, Ron, and Paul, which in its small way was also a tribute to the scores of gay men who were dying of AIDS during that mournful, confusing, sad time. This is for the Memory Palace.

### *Song: Requiem*

Ronnie was an actor  
He was the best I ever saw  
He said, "Let's go down to the disco,  
    We'll cruise the boys  
    And we'll dance  
    We'll dance the night away!"  
And he said, "You see those old queens  
    Sitting at the end of the bar  
    Well, I want to grow up and be like them someday"

David was a traveler  
He loved to travel to the East  
And he loved us Asian boys  
And David, he was a master of the eight-ball  
And he turned to me and he said,  
"I can teach you about love  
Love complete and full and without bounds  
Baby, take a chance with me!"

### Refrain:

I do not really understand these times  
But I will live the next day through  
Oh Lord why do you take the ones I love?

Paul was a teacher  
He was a pied-piper of the imagination  
And he loved to laugh through his eyes  
With voices of Joyce and Chekhov he dreamed

And let us run wild

Time is a tyrant  
And memory, a healer  
Oh fisher of souls  
Help us unlock the door to this mystery:

Refrain:

I do not really understand these times  
But I will see the next day through  
Oh Lord why do you take the ones I love  
Why do you take my friends so soon?  
Oh Lord why do you take the ones we love  
Why do you take our friends so soon?

Ronnie was an actor  
He was the best I ever saw  
And we danced the night away....

Music and lyrics by Nicky Paraiso, from *Asian Boys*, c. 1994.

**[Friday July 29<sup>th</sup> 2016]**

**1993, 8 yrs. old**

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**on the school bus paralyzed  
with fear of Michael's  
bloody  
nose unable to hand him a tissue**



# MY COMRADE



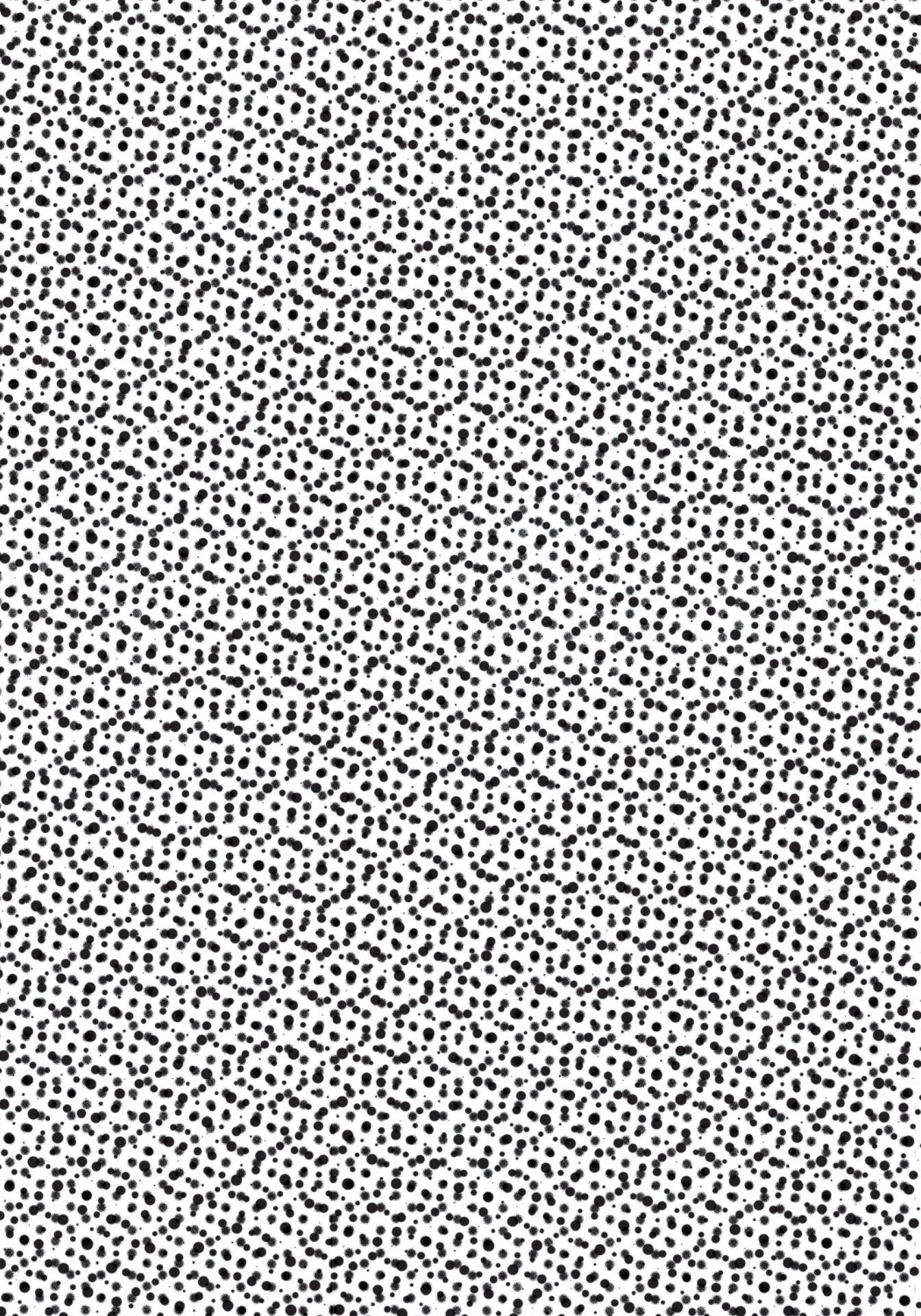
Premiere Issue!

\$ 1.00

GAY LIB!

—Linda Simpson







MY MEMORY IS GOING TO SEE THE NAMES PROJECT AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT WHEN I WAS IN GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

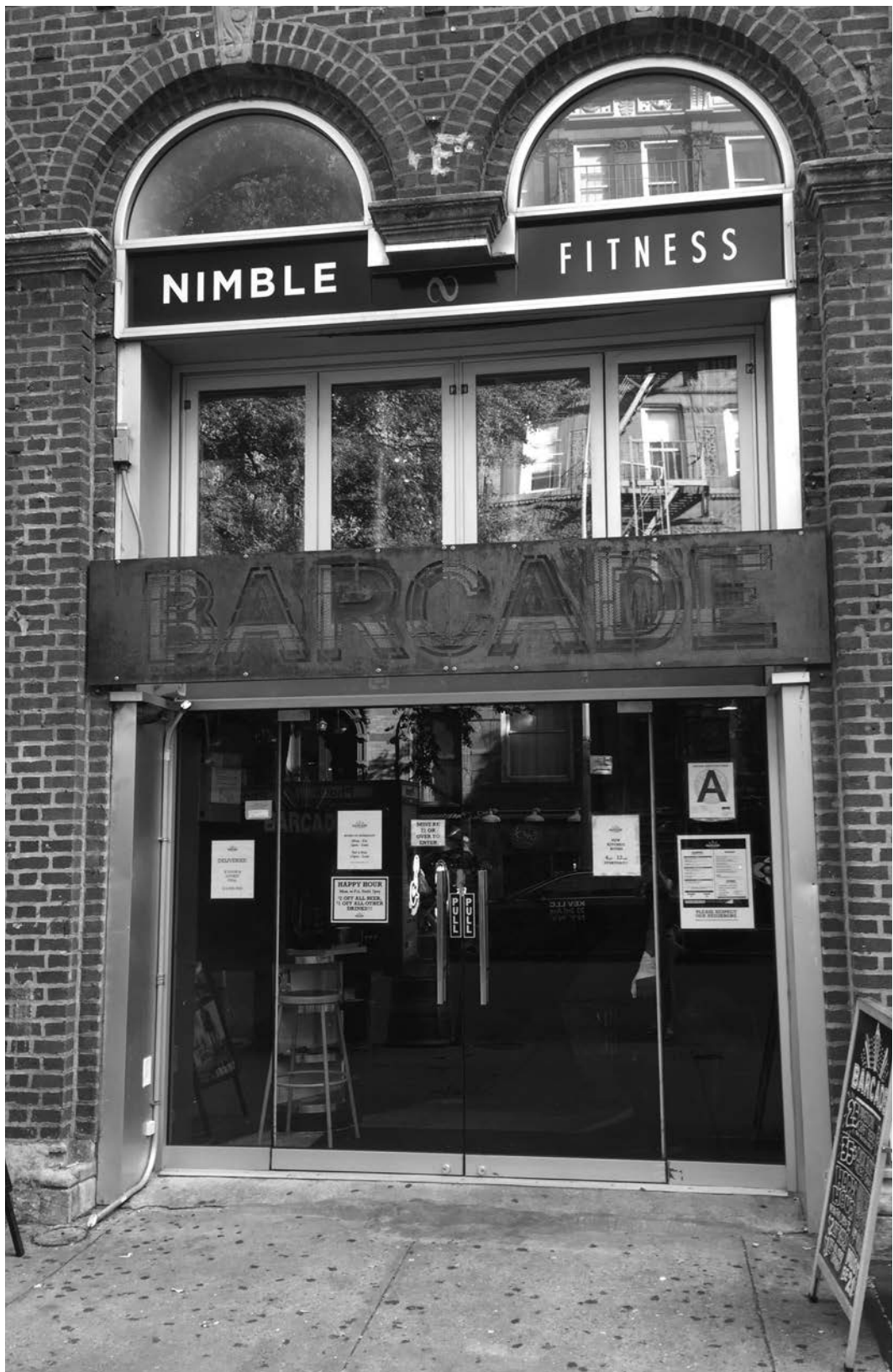
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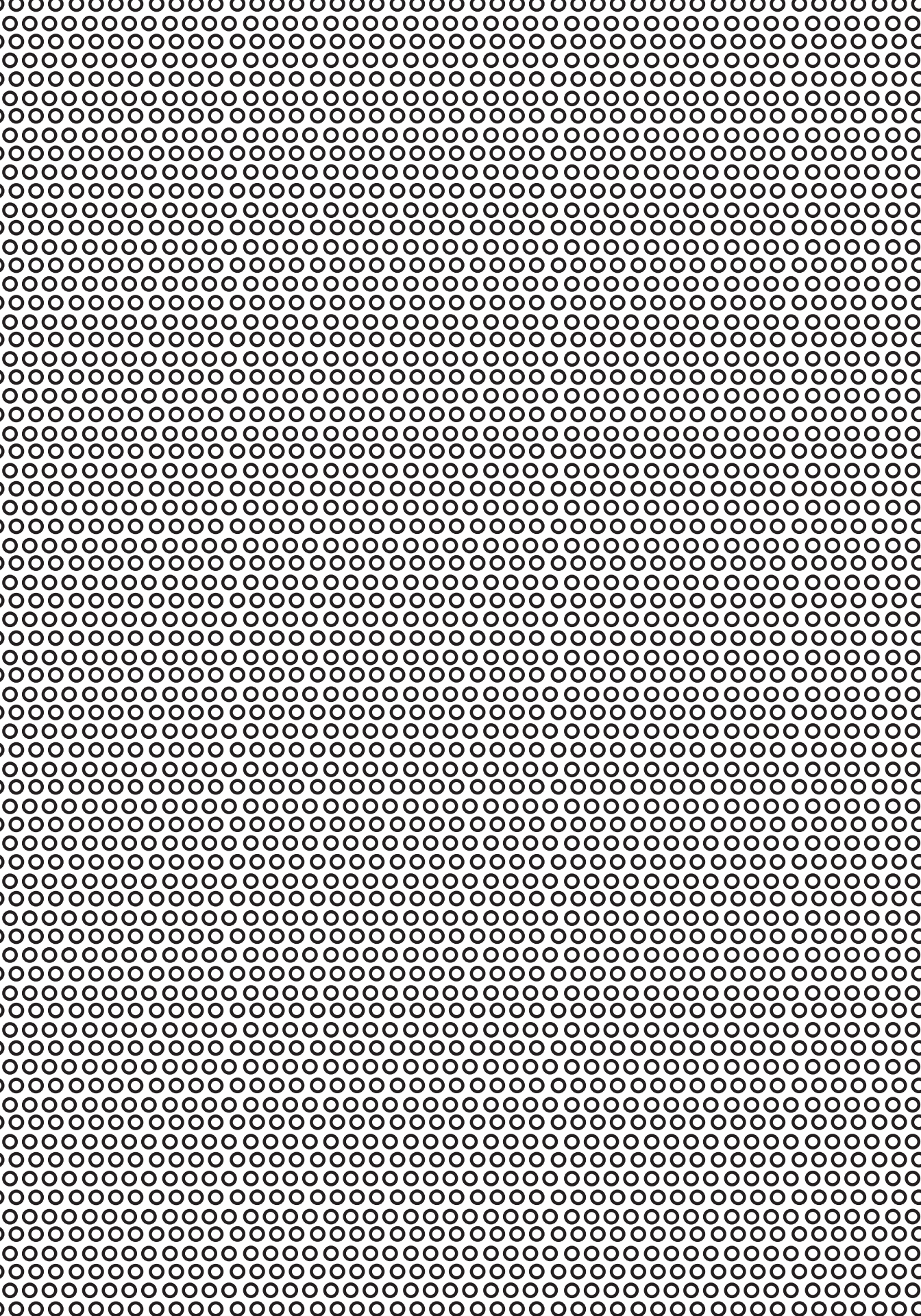
—Tyler Ashley







*Former location of Saint Mark's Baths*



## Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

I approach a harp  
abandoned  
in a harvested field.  
A deer  
leaps out of the brush  
and follows me

in the rain, a scarlet  
snake wound  
in its dark antlers.  
My fingers  
curled around a shard  
of glass—

it's like holding the hand  
of a child.  
I'll cut the harp strings  
for my mandolin,  
use the frame as a window  
in a chapel  
yet to be built. I'll scrape

off its blue  
lacquer, melt the flakes  
down with  
a candle and ladle  
and paint  
the inner curve  
of my soup bowl.

The deer passes me.  
I lower my head,  
stick out my tongue  
to taste  
the honey smeared  
on its hind leg.

In the field's center,  
I crouch near  
a boulder engraved  
with a number  
and stare at a gazelle's  
blue ghost,  
the rain falling through it.

*From Slow Lightning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Reprinted with permission of the author.



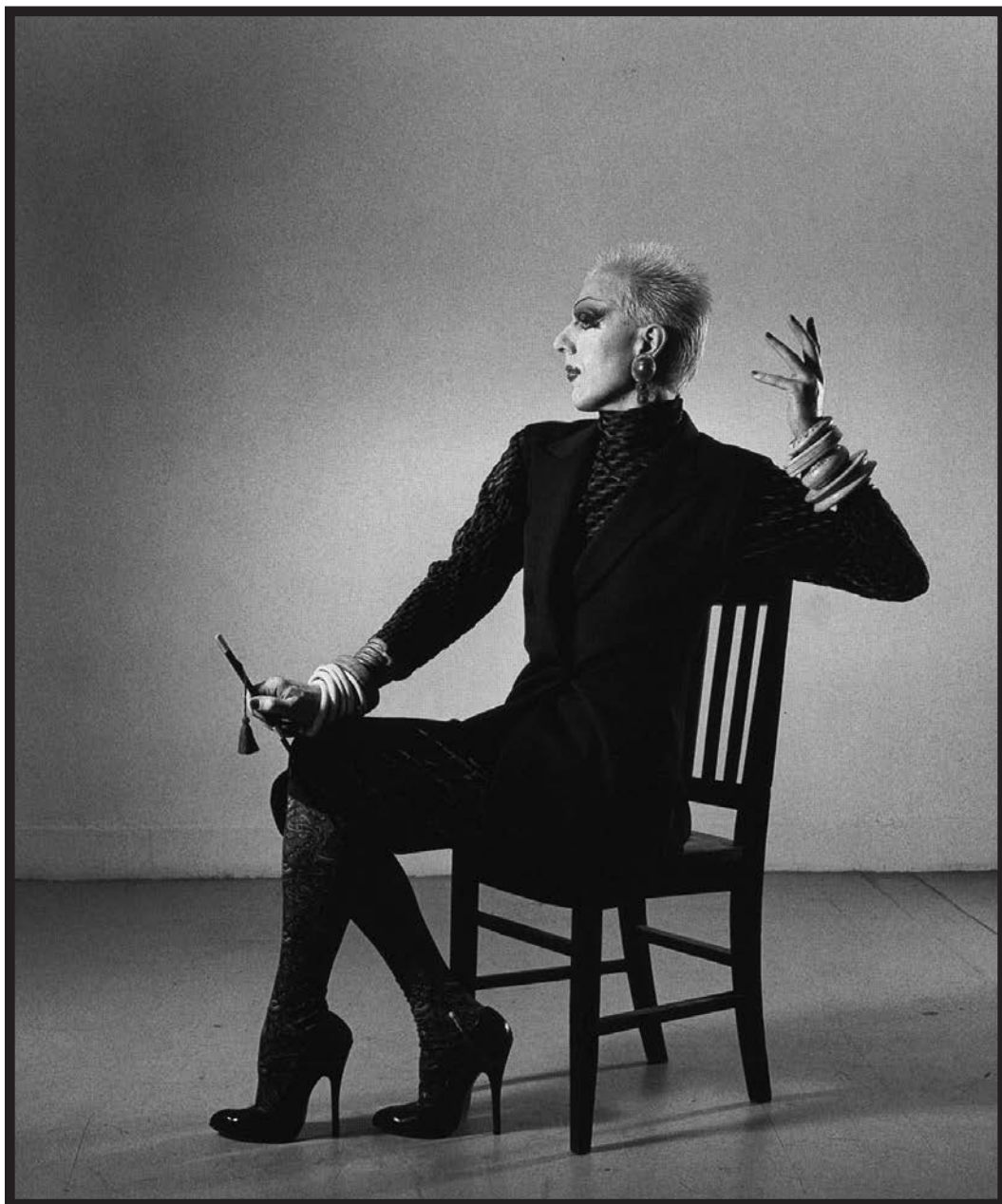


*Former location of The Palladium*



## LIFE DRAWINGS

In search of an intergenerational discussion around artistic influence, portraiture and performed history, *Lost and Found* has provided four performers with “dossiers” on the work of artists who have passed away. These dossiers, comprised of archival materials, were compiled by Janet Werther, Mellon Research Fellow from the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center. Responding to images, flyers, biographies, documentation and other ephemera, Raja Kelly, Mariana Valencia, Narcissister and Katy Pyle explore the act of reconstructing or responding to the life, work and mythology of Ethyl Eichelberger, Assotto Saint, Alvin Ailey and Greer Lankton. Considering these live events as a hybrid of performance and presentation, the Platform encourages these artists to approach the embodiment of widely known or unsung artists in their own aesthetics. —**Will Rawls**



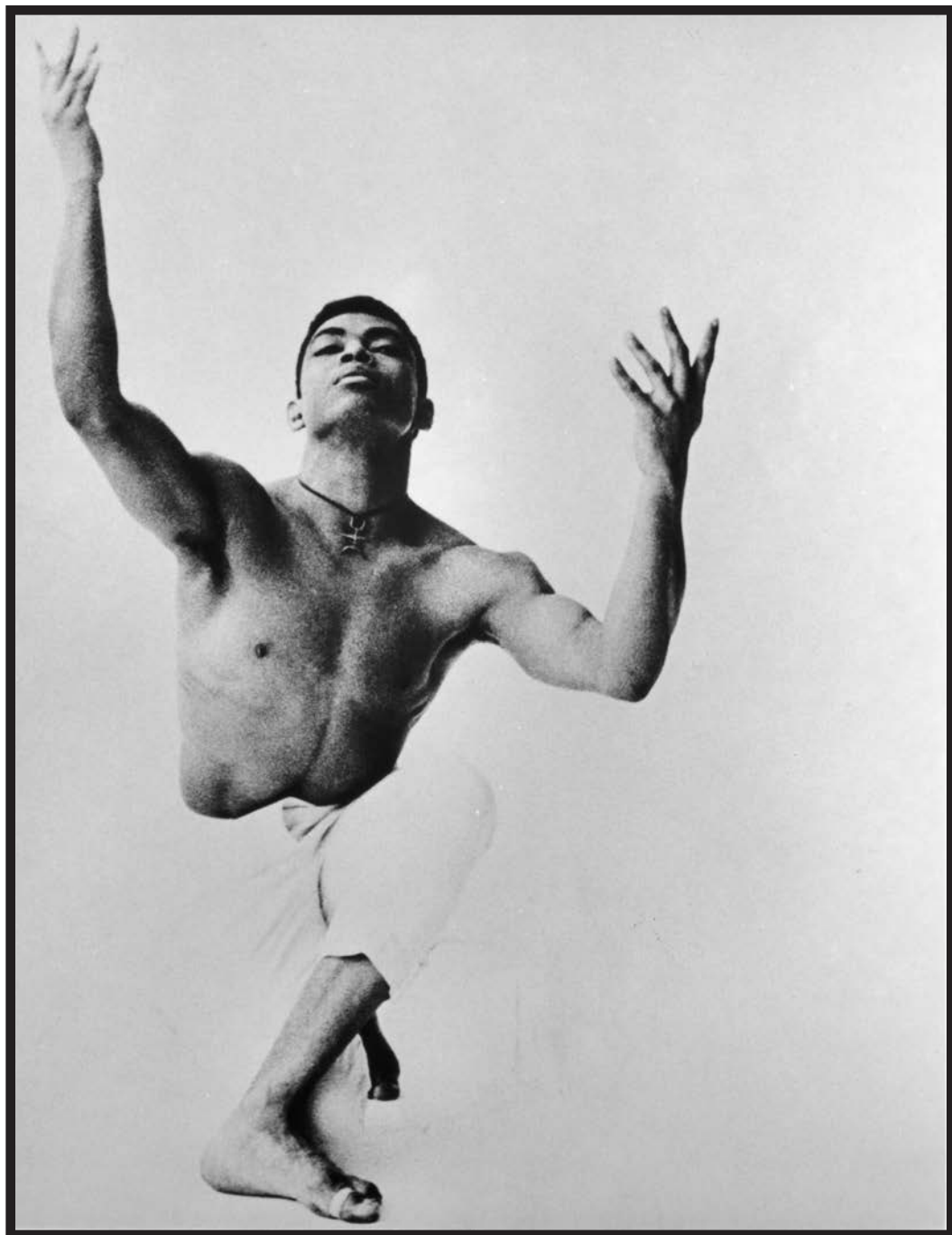
Ethyl Eichelberger in a Fashion Pose, 1981. Photo by Peter Hujar. © 1987 The Peter Hujar Archive LLC; Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York and Fraenkel.

*Ethyl Eichelberger*



Raja Feather Kelly as Andy Warhol's DRELLA at Invisible Dog © Aitor Mendilibar





Alvin Ailey. Photo by Normand Maxon.

*Alvin Ailey*





Narcissister, *Untitled (Spanish Shawl)*, Self-Portrait Series, 2012-Present.

### No More Metaphors (Part Three)

*(Statement delivered at the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on 4/28/93)*

Your Honor, I am very grateful for the chance to make this statement to the Court on why I felt it was necessary to block traffic on the Capitol grounds. It resulted in my arrest, along with 46 other people, on obstructing & impeding charges. The subject of the demonstration, as you well know, concerned health care.

I know something about health care on a professional level. From July 1978, I worked for the New York City Health & Hospitals Corporation until my pensioned retirement in October 1991, due to AIDS-related disability.

I also know a lot more about health care on a personal level. Since April 1983 — an entire decade now — I have taken care of my closest friends: Counsel Wright, Jose Caballero, Dr. Michael Evans (aka M. E. Fuller), Redvers JeanMarie, & David Frechette. I have also taken care of my dear 13-year life-partner, Jan Urban Holmgren. They have all died of AIDS. Jan died on March 29, 1993, a month to the day tomorrow. No word could describe the helplessness, violation, & hopelessness that I felt as I watched him take his last breaths. I would have given my own life if that could have saved his.

I want to mention that I have also lost to AIDS many other close friends who lived outside of New York City, hundreds of acquaintances all over the world, & 21 neighbors in my building on West 22nd Street in New York City. I have watched all of them disintegrate — some faster than others. Many lost their jobs, apartments, belongings, friends, families, self-control, good looks, minds, & of course, their faith.

In March 1990, I spent five days & nights with my life-partner, I repeat FIVE DAYS & NIGHTS, in the Emergency Room of NYU Medical Center, waiting for a bed on a medical ward to become available for Jan. NYU Medical Center is one of the most prestigious institutions in the world & our affiliated doctors number among the best.

Three years later, in March 1993, I again spent five days & nights with my life-partner in the same Emergency Room, waiting for a bed on a medical ward to become available for Jan. Besides a few cosmetic changes here & there, nothing had much changed. Business as usual. This waiting game is a crying shame.

Your Honor, my life-partner & I had a combined income of \$85,000. We were hardworking, tax-paying, & law-abiding. We were both foreigners — Jan was born in Sweden, & I was born in Haiti — who cherished the concept of the American Dream. Jan & I had very good medical insurance, which covered us for the rest of our lives. We both strongly believed that every individual in this country, no matter what socioeconomic background he or she belonged to, deserves access to the best health care.

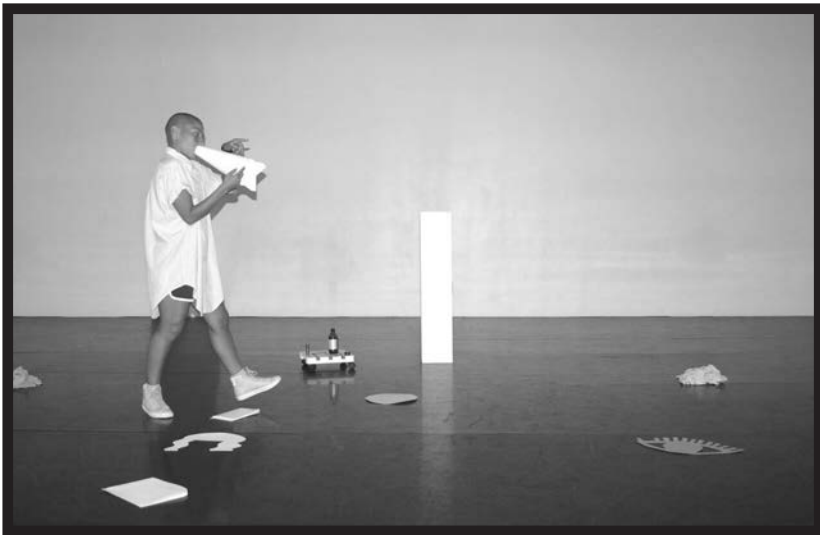
My illegal yet constitutional action this past Monday morning, to which I unashamedly plead guilty, was done on behalf of all the HIV-positive Haitians, who have been granted political asylum in the United States, but are being detained unlawfully & immorally at Guantanamo Bay. It was done on behalf of my late activist friend Ortez Alderson. It was done on behalf of my life-partner, Jan Urban Holmgren.

May the memory of their suffering, due to the inadequacy, greed, & stupidity of bureaucrats, finally bring much-needed transformation to our health care system. May it have helped to save my own life.

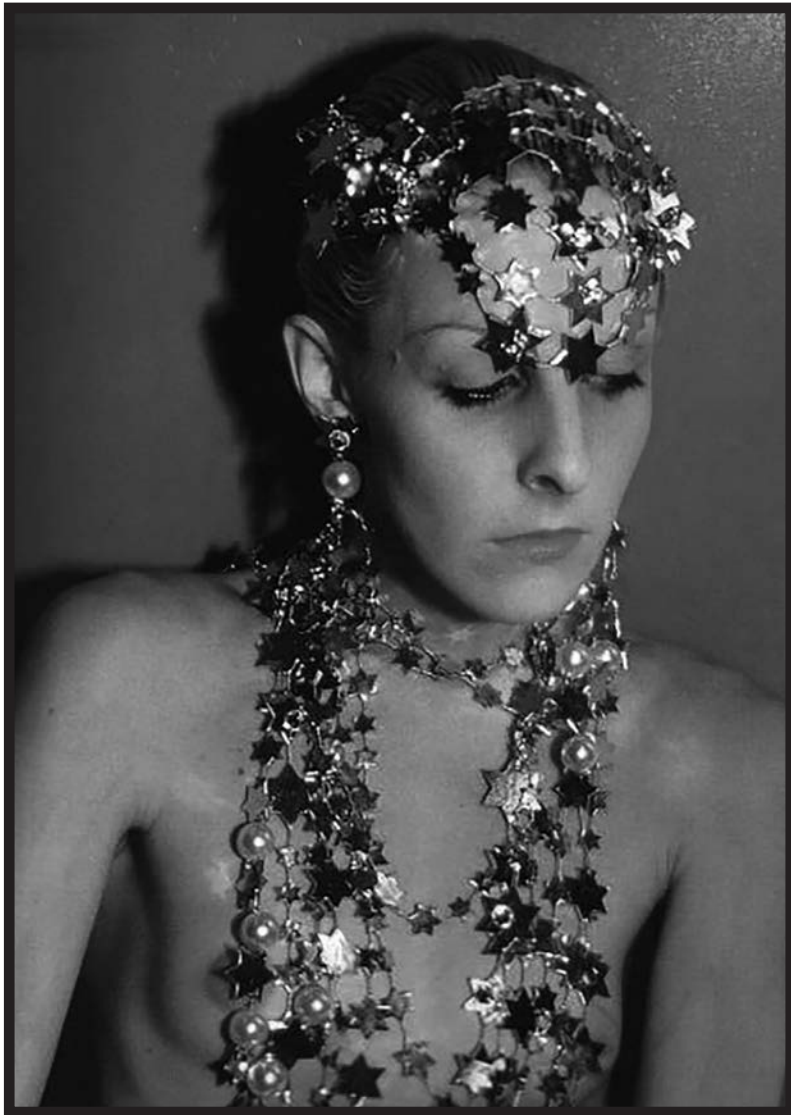
So, I hope.



Assotto Saint, *Wishing for Wings* (New York: Galien Press, 1994). Reprinted with permission of Assotto Saint's Literary Executor Michele Karlsberg @ me.com.

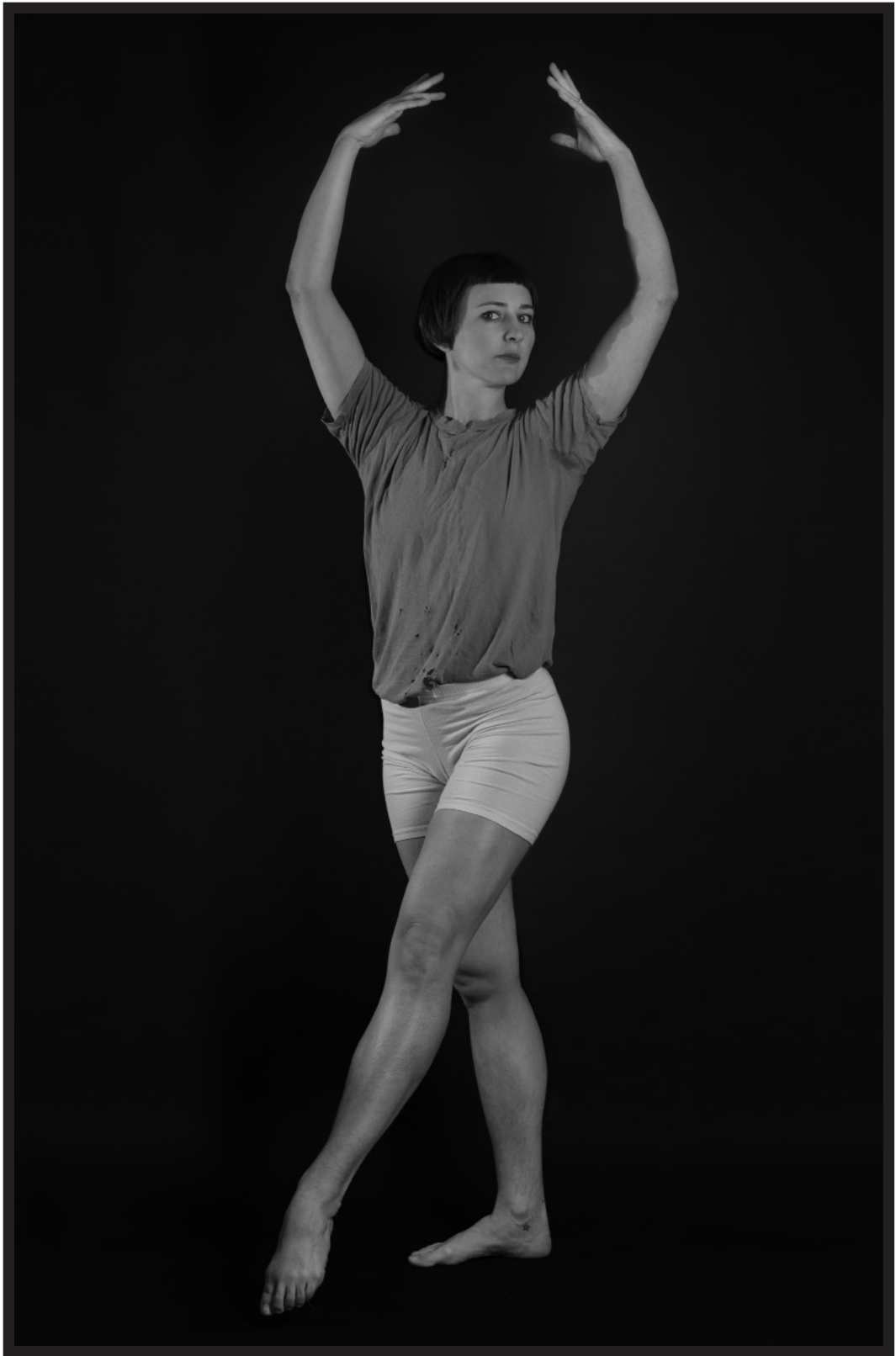


Mariana Valencia. Photo by Charlotte Curtis.



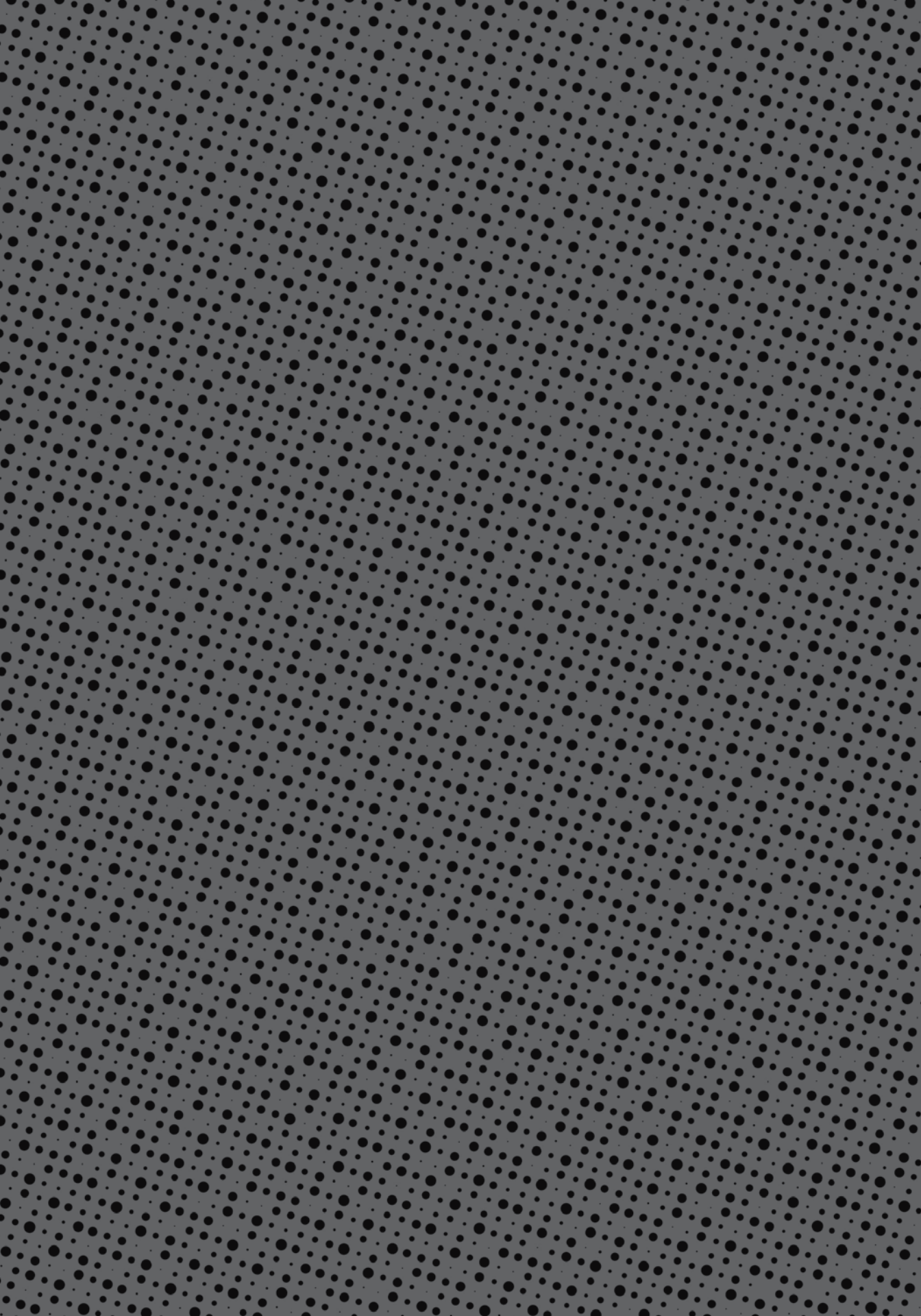
Greer Lankton. Courtesy of the Greer Lankton Archives Museum.





Katy Pyle. Photo by Julie Mack of THEY Bklyn.

*Katy Pyle*





# The Sailor's Daughter: AIDS before AIDS in the Present

Theodore Kerr

On my flight back to NYC from Oslo I was supposed to sit in 16D, an aisle seat. But upon reaching it, a doe-eyed dad and his daughter looked up at me. A woman reached over from her middle seat across the aisle, asking if I would switch. How could I say no?

I settled into the middle seat. On the aisle was a man in his early 50s. For the hour we waited for take-off he switched between watching *Madame Secretary*, the CBS drama starring Téa Leoni, and checking his Bloomberg portfolio page—an ongoing toggle on his iPad between fantasy and catastrophe. On the other side of me nestled, in the crux of the window, was a younger man, all limbs and big sunglasses. It was an early morning flight and he smelled like a good night: cologne, liquor and cigarettes. An hour later he would wake up, take some pills, order a sandwich—all in a slightly agitated and sleepy state—then eventually relax into his seat, open his laptop, and begin to type, as I was already doing. His skin was a ruddy olive, and his hair the kind that can never really be out of place.

Sitting close, it was impossible not to look at each other's screens. From his, I deciphered he was learning French, behind on a few deadlines, and possibly going to Montreal soon to visit a friend. From mine he gleamed the focus of my work. His first words to me, pointing his head in the direction of my screen without averting his eyes from his, were, "I have that." The "that" being HIV.

After a few jokes about how we had been reading each other's screens, he asked if I was positive. "No," I said, aware this could change the dynamic. But it didn't. Instead, with my laptop screen as jumping off point, Benoit and I dove into a conversation around how intense HIV criminalization was in Nordic countries.<sup>1</sup> He told me how in Sweden there is *informa-*

*tionsplikt* (information duty), which, when it comes to HIV, puts the burden of the public's health on people living with the virus. "Why is it our responsibility alone to disclose our status to medical staff and people we might have sex with?" he said, "Even if there is no risk of transmission."<sup>2</sup>

For enforcement, there is the *smittskyddslagen* (Communicable Disease Act)<sup>3</sup> that allows for the monitoring of people in Sweden for dangerous behavior. After he was diagnosed, Benoit went to a presentation to learn more. Telling me about it, he said he and others who were there walked away feeling as if they had sat in a room for two hours where strangers yelled at them: "Not only are you sick, but you are criminals in waiting." As a result of this kind of treatment he sees how within poz networks and beyond, there is this idea circulating that the majority of people living with HIV in the Nordic region are immigrants. Regardless of facts, Benoit thinks this is a way white Nords (regardless of their status) can distance themselves from a virus popularly understood as a problem of the past, i.e. not their problem, an illness of the other.

All of this sounded familiar to me, almost in the reverse. I launched into a monologue where I told him how I see the story of HIV in the US and Canada as both whitewashed and pinkwashed, resulting in the erasure of black people, women, people of color, people living in poverty, people who do drugs, and others from both the history of HIV and the ongoing crisis.<sup>4</sup>

membership organization that works with issues involving the violation of human rights for people living with HIV/AIDS. It can be downloaded: <http://hiv-norden.org/Documents/crime%20brochure.pdf>.

[2] Only recently have courts begun taking risk of transmission into consideration. Admissible now in Swedish courts are letters from a positive person's doctor that state their patient has an undetectable viral load and no sexually transmitted illnesses. We both understood this not as a victory, but a stopgap until criminalization was abolished. And, as Benoit explained, it is conditional. If he finds himself with chlamydia for example, then all of the burden is back on him. To see how people living with HIV are criminalized where you live, visit: <http://www.hivjustice.net/site/countries>.

[3] This legislation is currently under review. For some background, visit: <http://www.hivjustice.net/news/sweden-court-of-appeal-acquits-hiv-exposure-case-recognises-national-board-of-health-and-welfare-endorsement-of-swiss-statement/>. To learn more, visit a website from "Sweden's county councils and regions" that provides information on health and wellbeing: <http://www.1177.se/Regler-och-rattigheter/Smittskyddslagen/>. While the page is about infectious diseases in general, HIV is singled out as an illness that can lead to criminalization, along with Hepatitis B or Syphilis.

[4] A lot of activism, art and academic work has been done on the subject of representation, care and HIV/AIDS. In 1993, activists in the US were successful in getting the government to change the definition of AIDS to include women. For the story on how this was done, watch the Women of ACT UP panel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLNrFy982vQ>. In the last few years there has been an increased focus on HIV/AIDS and the black community. The CDC reports: "Blacks/African Americans have the

[1] Recognizing the criminalization of people living with HIV as a growing concern, in 2012 an updated version of the report, "Q & A: HIV and the criminal code in the Nordic countries" was released by HIV-Nordic, a



In a white supremacist and patriarchal culture, it is an illness of the unseen other here too, and within that, there is struggle among the oppressed for resources and recognition. I told him about how rare it is for folks other than white gay men to be represented in AIDS discourse. Except when it comes to criminalization, then they are overrepresented, with black men and sex workers (of diverse genders and backgrounds)<sup>5</sup> most often being criminalized for their HIV positive status, frequently in conjunction with other criminal justice system entanglements.

Like Sweden, I explained, in Canada and the US people living with HIV are criminalized and similarly, these laws and high court rulings are inhumane, unjust and increase HIV-related stigma, thus hurting treatment and prevention efforts for those living with HIV and those made most at risk.<sup>6</sup> But, unlike in Sweden, I pointed out how courts in the US do not usually take into consideration someone's viral load, nor do they consider other medical advancements such as the availability of PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) or PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis). In trying to make sense of the laws, people often say that they were passed at a different time. But as I said to Benoit, "I call bullshit. That kind of thinking fails to remember that people vocally opposed the laws at the time,<sup>7</sup> and that the laws and rulings have been revisited, updated, and reinforced over the last 10 years."<sup>8</sup>

most severe burden of HIV of all racial/ethnic groups in the United States. Compared with other races and ethnicities, African Americans account for a higher proportion of new HIV diagnoses, those living with HIV, and those ever diagnosed with AIDS." The CDC goes on to state: "In 2014, 44% (19,540) of estimated new HIV diagnoses in the United States were among African Americans, who comprise 12% of the US population." See: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/raciaethnic/africanamericans/>. For more on this, read, "Antiblack Racism and the AIDS Epidemic: State Intimacies" (2016) by Adam Geary.

[5] "Overall, a comparatively greater risk of conviction was observed for black men with female partners and white women overall," is one of the findings available in Trevor Hoppe's paper, "Disparate risks of conviction under Michigan's felony HIV disclosure law," which can be read online: <http://pun.sagepub.com/content/17/1/73.abstract>. More about HIV criminalization related to sex work, see the Williams Institute's report: "HIV Criminalization in California: Penal Implications for People living with HIV/AIDS": <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/health-and-hiv-aids/hiv-criminalization-in-california-penal-implications-for-people-living-with-hiv-aids/>.

[6] To learn more about the criminalization of people living with HIV in the US, visit: <http://www.hivlawandpolicy.org/>; to learn more about the criminalization of people living with HIV in Canada, visit: <http://www.aidslaw.ca/site/>.

[7] While doing research in St. Louis I came across many news reports indicating the very vocal opposition mounted by citizens against the criminalization of people living with HIV, including anti-criminalization editorials in the mainstream press. I wrote about these findings for *POZ magazine*: <https://www.poz.com/article/theodore-kerr-27923-9019>.

[8] At the 2016 International AIDS Conference in Durban, the HIV Justice Network released the following statement: "HIV criminalization is a

After we whipped ourselves into a shared righteous frenzy of frustration and anger we sat still for a minute. It is one thing to sit next to someone with whom you have something in common, but it is another to bond with someone within the AIDS movement who is also against criminalization. For reasons I can't understand, it is rare. As we resumed our conversation, we got closer. We closed our laptops, put our trays up and turned our bodies towards each other. When his body passed over mine on his way to the restroom I hoped for turbulence, an opportunity for our bodies to collide in the air.

I went to Oslo to speak at a symposium on art and activism,<sup>9</sup> and to visit the final resting place of a family who died of AIDS-related complications in 1976. They join Robert Rayford: a teenager born and raised in St. Louis, who died in 1969 of HIV-related causes, in being among the earliest known people to die in the ongoing epidemic.<sup>10</sup> I spent the last summer in St. Louis trying to learn more about Rayford. But without much luck. His mother died in 2011, his brother died in 2007, I could not find any other living family or friends, and his school records were in purgatory due to a real estate deal that involved the building where the Board of Education's archives are stored. What I did have was the address where he grew up. From his birth certificate and an interview his mother and brother gave, I pieced together that the family home was on Delmar, the long-serving dividing line

growing, global phenomenon that is seldom given the attention it deserves considering its impact on both public health and human rights, undermining the HIV response. In many instances, HIV criminalization laws are exceedingly broad – either in their explicit wording, or in the way they have been interpreted and applied – making people living with HIV (and those perceived by authorities to be at risk of HIV) extremely vulnerable to a wide range of human rights violations. Seventy-two countries currently have HIV-specific laws, rising to 101 jurisdictions when individual US states are included. Notably, 30 countries in Africa have such laws, including new overly-broad laws in Uganda (2014) and Nigeria (2015). At least 61 countries have reported HIV-related criminal cases. This total increases to 105 jurisdictions when individual US states and Australian states/territories are counted separately." Learn more: <http://www.hivjustice.net/news/hiv-justice-network-presents-important-new-hiv-criminalisation-data-today-at-aids-2016/>.

[9] The First Supper Symposium (FSS) is a Oslo based project of Gidsken Braadlie, Lisa Pacini and Camilla Dahl which began in 2012 that explores issues of art, activism, feminism and politics through public conversation, gatherings and publications. I was invited to participate in 2016 to discuss ideas around the theme of "White Cube vs. Public Space" along with curator Juan Puentes, Professor Mikkel Bolt, and artist Zanele Muholi. Learn more about the project: <http://www.thefirstsuppersymposium.org/index.php/en/>.

[10] Information on Rayford is scarce. There is a 1988 article that confirms his HIV+ status in the *Journal of American Medicine Association*, and a handful of articles including: <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/28/us/boy-s-1969-death-suggests-aids-invaded-us-several-times.html>.

of St. Louis between black and white, between the under-resourced and the supported.<sup>11</sup>

The townhouse the Rayford family lived in is gone, replaced by a new one. Walking around the area I did the friendly head nod and exchanged words with young families that lived on the block as they walked from their cars to their homes in the hot August air. I wondered what the area was like more than four decades ago. Now it is a trapped triangle of neglected domesticity with hungry business improvement districts slowly encroaching from all sides. Long after Rayford died, a bathhouse opened up at the end of his street. The patrons, like the families in the area, had not heard of Rayford, nor did they know that the earliest confirmed HIV-related death was in their backyard. Downhill from the house on Delmar is the iconic Gateway Arch, which was built in the years Rayford grew up. I wonder if he and his brother watched it get made from a nearby porch or rooftop.

All this uncertainty around Rayford's life made the journey I had planned in Norway that feel much more urgent. Before the symposium I would travel to Borre, Norway, 77 km outside of Oslo, where the Røed family is buried. They are understood to be the earliest confirmed cases of HIV in Europe. In the 1960s, Arne Vidar Røed, the father, worked as a kitchen-hand on a Norwegian merchant vessel in West Africa and then later as a truck driver in the same region.<sup>12</sup> It is during one of those times he contracted HIV and subsequently returned to Norway where he shared the virus with his wife Solveig Oline Røed and she in turn shared it, in utero, with the youngest of their three daughters, Bente Vivian Røed.

The morning I boarded the train from Oslo the sky was a threatening grey. As I walked the 20 minutes along the highway from Skoppum, where the train stopped, to Borre, I bargained with the sky. I figured all I needed was 30 minutes. I would find the grave, take a picture and sprint back to town where I would catch the train, hopefully all before the rain

began. But that was not to be. Instead, as I reached the city limits of Borre I began to feel drops on my arms. The path ended in an intersection with the sea in front, a church on one side, a historical center on the other, and a fruit stand in the middle. Minding the fruit stand was a young boy who looked up from his phone and smiled at me as I started to get wet. I stood there like a dummy trying to figure out which way to go.

In the research I did before I left, I understood Røed's grave to be part of the Borre Mounds, a historical site where Vikings, kings and others were buried in large mounds along with their earthly trappings ensuring they had what they needed in the afterlife. In my (I guess) biased mind it made sense to me that the first family of HIV in Europe would be buried in such an auspicious place. While I understood that the church would be a logical place to go for information about where someone was buried, I was drawn to the historical center. I ran there from the fruit stand where a grey-haired, strong looking woman greeted me, asking if I needed help.

"Yes, I am hoping you can point in the direction of a specific grave." At the time I thought I was just looking for the father's grave—while his wife and daughter were listed in the literature, it was often just a line or footnote.

The woman looked at me with bemusement in her eyes that I could not track. "Do you have more information?" I pulled out my laptop where I had saved a PDF from the cemetery website that showed a very basic map of where Røed's grave was located. Although it was not clear if he was buried at Field 17, Row 3, Plot 6 or Field 17, Row 3, Plot 7. I was not sure why were two graves marked off?

She pulled out a pair of glasses from her vest pocket and looked at the screen. "He is not here. He died too late." Sensitive to AIDS-related stigma I often can't always hear what people are actually saying. Rather, I hear what I fear they are saying. At first listen I heard her offer a refusal of sorts, rooted in a disbelief that someone living with HIV was buried at her workplace. So in response I said, "I assure you, he is here. He was the first confirmed person to die of HIV in Europe."

Without a beat, she responded, "That very well might be true, but everyone here died centuries before AIDS." Her reply certainly knocked me out of my defensive mindset. She continued: "The place you are looking for is across the way." She pointed behind me. It was then I became aware of the puddle

[11] In 2012, two years before Michael Brown was murdered by a Ferguson police officer, in a county north of Delmar, the BBC produced a much watched and discussed video that popularized the term, 'the Delmar Divide': <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17361995/>.

[12] Unlike with Rayford, there has been a handful of medical literature produced about the Røed family over the years: Frøland, SS et al., "HIV-1 infection in Norwegian Family before 1970," *Lancet*. 1(8598) (1988): 1344-5.; Hopper, "Sailors and star-bursts, and the arrival of HIV," *BMJ* 315(7123) (1997): 1689-91.; Lindboe CF et al., "Autopsy findings in three family members with a presumably acquired immunodeficiency syndrome of unknown etiology," *Acta Pathol Microbiol Immunol Scand A*. 94(1986):117-23.



Grave plot of Arne and Bente Reed, June 2016, Courtesy of the author.

Borre Kirkegård, felt 017

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Screenshot of research. Accessed July 2016. [horten.kirken.no/gravplass](http://horten.kirken.no/gravplass)

I was leaving on the museum floor, and how strange I must have appeared, this little white foreign man speaking a tentative English, coming in looking for a dead man from an epoch beyond his purview, so sure of himself, yet so unaware of his surroundings.

"Thank you." I smiled.

"No problem," she responded, "I will call the church and see if they can help you." And with that, she went into the back. I could hear her speaking in Norwegian. Upon returning she said, "There is no one at the church today. I called the one the next town over. They have no idea what you are talking about but I gave them the grave coordinates you showed me and they said, 'It is on the right hand side of the church when looking at the sea.'"

My planned 30 minutes had long since run out and it was now pouring outside. The woman went back to the office and returned with an umbrella. "People leave these here all the time." With that, I sprinted away from the museum, past the boy on his phone selling fruit and on to the church property, aware that the sea was to my left. I spent the next three hours in the rain in a nearly empty cemetery in a coastal town in Norway looking for the grave of a man I thought was the first confirmed European to die of HIV. I stood in various places near the church with the sea to my right, looking for *Field 17, Row 3, Plot 6 or Field 17, Row 3, Plot 7* with no luck. Spotting a construction worker coming out of a shed near the church I asked for help. He had no English. I had no Norwegian. Seeing people paying respects to loved ones, I waited for the right moment to ask for any insight on how the cemetery was laid out. Like the construction worker before them, they were all very kind but unable to help. The ones who spoke English were unimpressed or unmoved by having such an important figure in AIDS history buried nearby. Maybe to them all dead people were special. Then I tried

being more systematic. I walked up and down rows of graves looking for Røed. But soon this too proved ineffectual, as much of the text on the tombstones had been weathered into indecipherability.

Doubt was dampening my spirits as the rain soaked through my clothes, bag, shoes, and socks. I found reprieve under the overhang of the church roof where I ate a cheese bagel I had bought before I got on the train in Oslo. I wanted to give up. I began to think I should come back on a day with sun and when the church would open. But my time in Norway was short and I wanted to share my findings at the symposium. My sense was that most folks in Norway did not know their country's connection to AIDS history and I wanted to illustrate it with a story and a picture.

Under the church roof I regained my resolve and went back out, deciding this time to look for tombstones I thought were cute, or funny, or gave off an air of allure. This too was unsuccessful. In the end, I found the grave by following a piece of trash. I was kneeling down trying to decipher the name on a tombstone and a black plastic bag skipped past me and got stuck on a twig. I thought about *American Beauty*, laughed and decided to go to the plastic bag,<sup>13</sup> hoping that the twig was on the grave I was looking for. It wasn't. I was not crestfallen—I was just annoyed and tired. I stuffed the plastic bag in my hand and decided to keep the twig as a memento of the day, a stand-in for the elusiveness of pre-epidemic AIDS. But then I turned around—with the sea to my right—and, as if a joke, as if trailing me one step behind all day, in slightly obscured letters was a tombstone that read RØED on it, not once, but twice: "Arne Vidar Røed, 23 – 7 – 1948 to 24 – 4 – 1976" and "Bente Viviann Røed, 31 – 12 – 1967 to 4 – 1 – 1976."

[13] In an infamous scene in the film, a young man shows a video recording he made of a plastic bag blowing in the wind as he narrates, "Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world I feel like can't take it." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGWU4QhJ4L8>.

The reason the online map had marked out plot 6 and 7 was because the father was not buried alone. He was buried with his daughter, who had died three months earlier than he did. Within a gust of wind I went from not being able to find Mr. Røed's grave to finding the final resting place of he and his daughter (his wife and mother rested in the same row, a few plots down), learning that the first HIV related death in Europe was not the Norwegian sailor, but rather it was the nine year old sailor's daughter.

In previous writings I have addressed the damage I see in the US response to AIDS by the silence that surrounds the life and death of Robert Rayford.<sup>14</sup> It is no accident that the crisis we see manifested early in the life of a black teenager, which then only seemed to garner attention once white men starting to get sick, is still a health issue where for the most part the impacts of a positive HIV diagnosis on a black person is worse than on a white person. The stories we tell and don't tell affect the work that does and doesn't get done.

In my work I come across a lot of people who do not see themselves represented in the stories we tell about HIV. There are underground AIDS movements, intimate in scale and mighty in effectiveness. They include activists raising bail money for sex workers, and Facebook groups where people can crowdsource medication when they run low. They include black youth coming together to demand institutions represent them better, and young women telling their best friends that one of their parents died of HIV. They include people making themselves available to the newly diagnosed so that they don't call the cops on whoever may have shared their virus with them, and people coming together to think about how community can play a renewed role in the ongoing response. When it comes to HIV/AIDS, we have a lot of history but not enough stories. We need more of both, and we need to ensure the stories circulate—because history will always be limited in its reach.

"Can I kiss you?" he asked, as the plane began its descent. A few moments before I had put my hand on his thigh. We had been talking about our dating lives: about me and my new boyfriend, and about how he was dating again after a breakup.

"Yes," I said, not sure it was a good idea, but unwilling to say no. After a few moments we pulled back to look at each other. His face was softer, relaxed. "Now why didn't we do that earlier?" he grinned. We both looked out the window. It was not a smooth landing, but a successful one nonetheless. He insisted that he walk me to my gate. A sweet gesture I accepted by holding out my hand once we deplaned. The mother who had asked me to switch seats caught up to me, her young daughter and husband in tow, eyes still wide. She thanked me. I shook my head, blushed and said, "No, thank you."

When the epidemic was first being recognized, people only had each other. As the response grew, so too did the death toll, and by the time health was being stabilized for many, folks were tired—wanting and needing to move on. There was not a lot of desire to go back and see what was missed, or what was being forgotten. But there is now. There is an opportunity to care for each other and to go back to learn and tell the stories of AIDS before AIDS, and to connect them to the present. In the same way I think that telling people about the life and death of Robert Rayford can effect the work we do when it comes to HIV, perceptions, race and sexuality in the US, I wonder what it would mean to those in Nordic countries living with and deeply impacted by HIV if people spoke about Bente Viviann Røed and her family.

What does it do to the public imagination around HIV to understand that the first confirmed HIV-related death in Europe was a 9 year-old girl? For me, it is not about changing or encouraging new sympathies for people living with HIV per se, rather it is about challenging embedded ideas around what we think we know about HIV, and then looking at how those ideas have calcified into how we think and react to HIV. In mainstream conversation around HIV/AIDS, women and girls are rarely mentioned. Yet, as of 2014, 1,819 women are living with HIV in Norway. What is the quality of their lives? How many have a robust community of support? How many have to manage other people's ignorance upon disclosure? If it is hard for Benoit to hear about criminalization, what is it like for others, such as women living with HIV, to hear? Could the story of Bente Viviann Røed make life better for women living with HIV in Norway and beyond? Make them feel less alone?

Additionally, how could the story of the Røed family impact conversations around innocence, guilt and culpability that Benoit's experiences tell us about?

[14] I have written about Rayford in relation to representation on three occasions: in an interview for the Visual AIDS blog with writer Joss Barton: <https://www.visualaids.org/blog/detail/ted-kerr-st-louis>; for an article I wrote for Hyperallergic after the Tacoma Action Collective protested the lack of black representation in the exhibition Art AIDS America: <http://hyperallergic.com/264934/a-history-of-erasing-black-artists-and-bodies-from-the-aids-conversation/>; and most recently in the forthcoming AIDS and Memory issue of Drain: <http://drainmag.com>.



While the Røed's story is rooted in AIDS before AIDS, it is one that is current in its themes of migrant workers, complex sexual relations, and HIV in the family. Their past makes space for us to talk about the present. It is a tough thing to think about, but in reconciling their deaths, they make possible better futures for those living now. To not consider this is a missed opportunity, and an affront to the dead.

Talking with each other about HIV (past and present), we make space in the public sphere for HIV to be the porous and complex topic that it is. We don't need to sequester it to the past or pretend that it only affects some communities. Decades into the epidemic, we not only have each other, we have the vast sea of the past—waiting to be witnessed, re-witnessed, and welcomed onto the shore of the present.

*The author would like to thank Lisa, Gidsken and Camilla of Oslo for the invitation to be part of First Supper symposium and hospitality; Anna at the Midgard Historical Centre in Borre for going above and beyond to help a lost sailor; Benoit and Nicklas for the information on the criminalization of people living with HIV in Sweden; Trevor for pointing me in the right direction of US-related information on HIV criminalization; Visual AIDS for their ongoing support; Doorways and the fine City of St. Louis; Jaime for the opportunity and editing skills; and Sean for being wonderful. This essay is dedicated to the Rayford family, the Røed family and the many others whose lives have been impacted by HIV/AIDS—past, present, and ongoing.*

AT HOME  
BY THE WATER  
THROUGH THE WINDOW  
IN THE LIGHT.

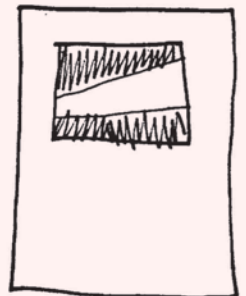
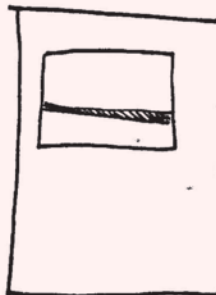
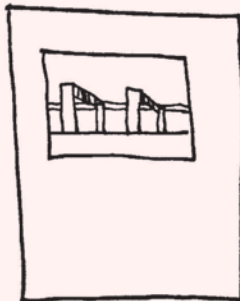
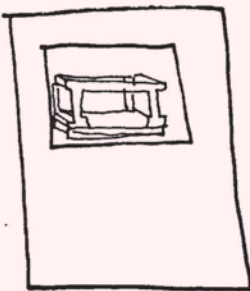
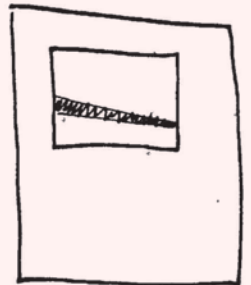
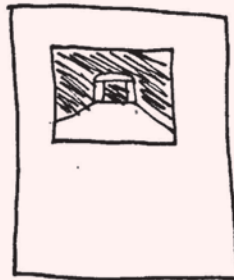
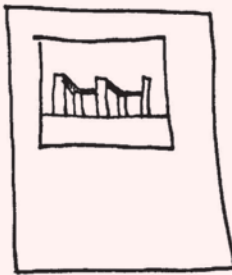
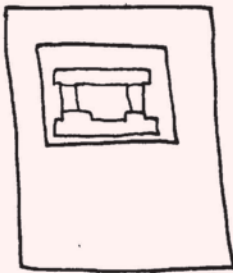
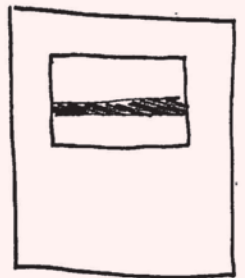
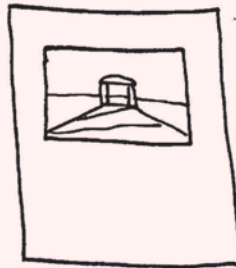
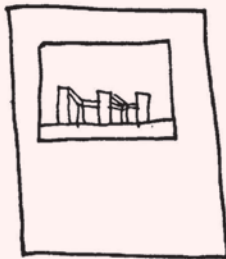
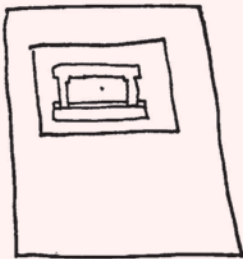
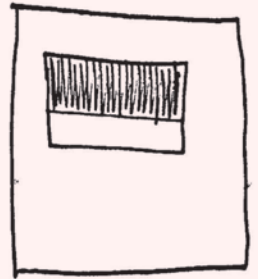
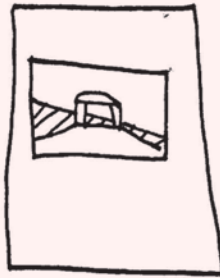
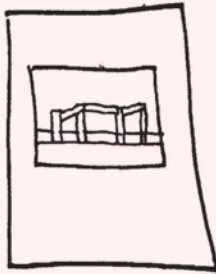
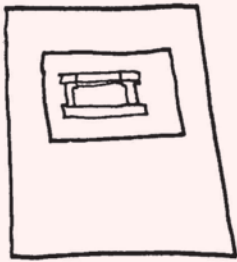
-JOHN BERND  
1981

## JOHN BERND ZINE

In August 1998 a group of friends and I decided to have a dinner together. It had been ten years since August 28, 1988 when another friend, choreographer John Bernd, had died of AIDS complications. John was the first person most of us knew who had contracted the disease; we took care of him as we watched his decline and ultimate death from it.

We decided to put this zine together in his memory. Some of us wrote essays, and we invited others from his life to do so also. We collected photographs, old posters, postcards, the hand written schedule for us in his support group, an uncashed check from the NEA and some of John's own line drawings. Rediscovering this zine provoked Platform 2016: *Lost and Found*.

*Note: because this zine was originally put together for a small group of friends, several of the essays mention people by first name only. They are Jim Neu, Elena Alexander, Mimi Gross, Annie Iobst, Youngblood Emanuel, Fred Holland, Jeannie Hutchins, Maria Muñoz, Pep Ramis, Pablo Vela, Joan Stamm, Gail Turner, René Wintcentsen, Cindy Fraley, Yvonne Meier, Richard Elovich, Dorothy Williams (John's mom), David Alan Harris, Tom Keegan, Erin Matthiessen, Stephanie Skura, Meredith Monk, Penny Arcade, and Dan Froot. —Ishmael Houston-Jones*





**transcribed from Lost and Found (Scenes from a Life, part II) by  
John Bernd**

One, then two, then one again. Then it's three or four but it always comes back to one. To the same place; because something happened, something changed.

Then he said, he said well maybe. Yes maybe.

Then I said well maybe yes, maybe no, you know. You know I said. Yes I said. Then I said, I don't know.

I know he said.

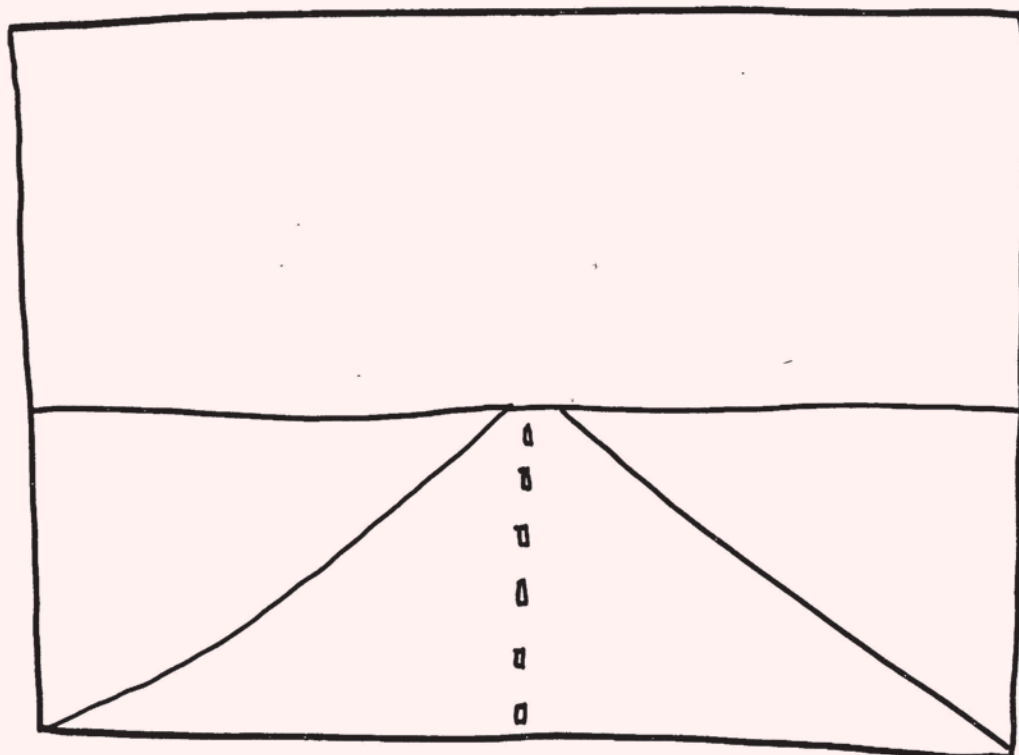
Then I said, why not? Because something happened. It always comes back to one, then two, to one. Then I said, well maybe. Maybe yes, maybe no.

I know he said.

Yes I said.

Then he said, I don't know. I know. Then he said, why not.

So I tried this, then I tried that, then I tried real hard but it'd move on to something else, thinking that this or that wouldn't do, so I tried the other which may or may not have worked had I given it the chance. But maybe I did, but it didn't work. So I gave it up only to replace it with something that may or may not have been better. I'm not sure. I'm never sure, you know. Depending on what I wasn't or was doing before, you know. But I just keep trying. Like sometimes I think it's just like riding in a car across the desert. You just keep going, but it's the same picture. Eighty, now fifty-five, I used to push a hundred. But it's all the same. You just sit there in the same position. Dotted line right down the middle and you cover hundreds of miles not going nowhere. You know what I mean. I mean it's like this sometimes. I know.



**from Carol Mullins**

Dear Ishmael,

Thanks for your postcards from exotic places. And now I'm far away. Here I am in a cabin on Mt. Saint John high above the neat vineyards (and traffic) below. Jim and I will be here in California until September 8th, so I'm likely to get to the reading Elena is organizing. But I'll miss your gathering and I'll be thinking of you and friends meeting and sharing food and stories and wishing I could be there with you. And I'll be thinking of John. I met John at Byrd Hoffman, I guess he was cleaning there too. Did he wind up on the Einstein tour? I don't think so, although he, after all, could sing unlike many of us who had auditioned for Phil Glass somehow believing that God would strike us with the instantaneous ability to sing. Anyway, everyone liked him and soon he was at parties on the scene with George Ashley, Jane Yockel, Mimi and others. Sharing good food and conversation as you described. I remember a conversation we had was about having and raising children. He surprised me with his many opinions on how to raise a child and said he wanted to have kids. He was very young and very beautiful. As my connections to Byrd Hoffman lessened, I saw very little of him for years. I always saw his work when I could. For a little while before you guys organized his care group, I'd stop by, pick up his laundry, take it to the laundromat sit around and talk a bit. His apartment held a variety of objects collected from pieces past and for pieces future. He gave me a wooden dowel an inch thick and about 7 feet long, which is still holding up a curtain separating two rooms in my apartment in Brooklyn. Thanks for reminding me to remember.

Carol



Postcard from *Evidence*, 1980. Photo by William Garrett.



**from SHIRTS & SKIN, Tim Miller**

In 1980 I began to see a man, this guy named John. I met John because I saw a postcard up in the Laundromat on Second Avenue for a performance art piece he was doing. It caught my eye during my spin cycle. John was so beautiful with his mess of androgynous curls glowing in the photo. His dancer's arm was held extended out to the side, fingers reaching all the way to New Jersey. I had to meet him. I got his phone number.

"Yes, in Manhattan," I said to the telephone operator. "I'd like the number for the attractive man on this postcard doing minimalist dance." (Directory assistance is amazing!)

I called John up. "You don't know me," I said, "but I think we should get together and talk about the new directions for gay men's performance in the '80s. I'm putting a festival together at PS 122." Okay, so it's been a recurrent pickup line in my life. "It sounds interesting," John said cautiously. "Why don't you come over and we can talk about it."

On my way to John's apartment in the East Village, I walked down East 6th between First and Second. This is the block with all the Indian restaurants. Shagorika. Kismoth. Taste of India. Passage to India. The Gastronome Ghandi. Ghandi to Go. They're all there! I used to imagine that they all these restaurants shared the same kitchen. I was sure there were block-long conveyer belts delivering huge piles of poori and papadam like stacks of laundry to each small restaurant. In those soon-to-arrive delusional paranoid days with the election of Ronald Reagan, I was convinced that one of his operatives (Ollie North, perhaps) was going to sneak back there with his clutch purse full of plutonium and dump it into the common vat of mulligatawny soup. In one fell swoop he would wipe out all the queer performers in the East Village because these cheap restaurants were where we ate.

I got to John's house, 306 East Sixth Street. He buzzed me in.

"How many flights is it?" I shouted as I climbed the many stairs leading to John's apartment.

"Just keep on coming," John called down. "You've almost made it."

"Whew," I gasped, "That's quite a hike."

John extended his hand.

We had tea. We ate cashew chicken from the one Chinese takeout restaurant on the block. I was very drawn to John, so I cast my net wide and tried to pull him to my shore. John resisted me. I think he knew I was going to be big emotional trouble, so he

struggled to avoid the coastline of my side, to miss the shoals of my chest, not to get pulled down by the undertow to my dick and butt.

John tried, but it didn't work. Sorry.

Who's the fish and who's the lure really in all of this?

I don't know. I know we sat on wood boxes. John and I shifted near each other, and the inevitable thing happened, the only thing that could have happened between John and me: We began to fall toward each other, obeying the law of gravity and the even greater law that governs falling bodies. It was like when NASA's Sky Lab was going to fall from outer space and crash to earth. They could try with all their might to keep it from falling, but down it came anyway. Nobody really knew who the debris would hit when it plunged into Western Australia. What if a big piece had hit my future boyfriend Alistair, then a little boy in Perth dressed in Catholic boys school uniform. I didn't care as long as it didn't hit me or anyone I love personally in the head.

That kiss with John happened as we hit the earth's atmosphere. Then came the opening of clothes and the rush of feeling as we entered each other's undiscovered countries.

"Can we go into your bedroom?" I asked, a little uncomfortable on the wood boxes.

"You want to?" John asked, rubbing my close-cropped hair.

"I think so."

There was a voice inside of me that was telling me to wait.

I wasn't sure if I had a passport for this journey. My papers probably aren't in order. I'd better turn back. I'll just leave now. Well, on second thought, maybe John and I can just sneak over the frontier at night. Hope for the best. So we kissed. And ate each other's butt holes, of course. And fucked each other.

That night as I slept next to John, I dreamed so vividly the dream came with specially composed dream-sequence music. I dreamed I was in a graceful world, rolling fields of grass extending as far as the eye can see. Feeling John in bed next to me, it seemed that this was a world we might get to live in together. On these fields of grass was humanly designed architecture, like the perfect college campus, the University of Iowa, maybe. It was all the colleges I never got to go to. I walked through this grassy dream looking for John while strange and beautiful music played from hidden speakers in my head.

John didn't want to love me. He had been burned by men before and was cautious about opening himself to me. But I forced him to. For a while it gave him a lot of pleasure. Later it would give him a lot of pain. But for now, for a few powerful months together, how we loved to fuck each other.



# LIVE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

LIVE BOYS is a performance work by JOHN BERND and TIM MILLER being presented March 5,6, and 7 & March 12,13, and 14 at P.S. 122 in the East Village at 1st Ave. & 9th St. All performances at 9:00 P.M. \$4.00 or T.D.F. Reservations:228-4104

This piece is about us.about pizza. about sex. about biallys. about love. about our life in the neighborhood. about the boys.

This piece is about moving.  
about talking.  
about gesture.  
about images.

information: John Bernd 228-4104  
Tim Miller 473-0546

# BOYS

**from Jennifer Monson  
John Bernd memories**

The first piece I made with John was Be Good to Me with Annie and Youngblood. I remember Sunday afternoon rehearsals at PS 122,( the sunlight, the emptiness....) I have a memory of a sense of time in John's process. He had a journey to complete and we were in on part of the ride. In one of our first rehearsals John asked us to tell stories about hitchhiking. I was embarrassed because I had never been hitchhiking before. I told stories of a bus ride with soldiers in Montenegro when I was 14- their heads persistently sliding on to my lap as we jostled through the mountains at night. In the piece I ended up speaking Norwegian in a corner. I also remember loping, exhilarating, traveling phrases on a diagonal in unison. It was my first experience dancing in combat boots. And jumping on to Annie's back.

John asked me to dance at a PS 122 benefit once. We didn't rehearse and I was incredibly nervous, neophyte that I was. I had to stare at the audience for the length of a song. I thought about the desert to keep myself concentrating and then just danced my heart out- his long body extending and foiling mine. That's the thing about John he encouraged me to dance my heart out. He was a campy queen somewhere and that part of me was indulged, highlighted, and extracted from my nature girl California self. Later John spent time at my desert and that's a strong part of our connection. We shared that spiritual place- the dry, inhospitable, emptiness that made our imaginations thrive.

I was hardly out as a lesbian when I first met John. Hardly knew what it meant. It was fortunate for me that John became my friend at that time. He made me feel included and that it was cool to be a dyke- be his young dyke friend, cruise with the gay boys. I remember sitting on St. Mark's place with a beer late on a summer evening getting up the courage to ask him about the baths and gay sex. I took for granted that dyke/ gay boy love that was safe and creative and distant and joking.

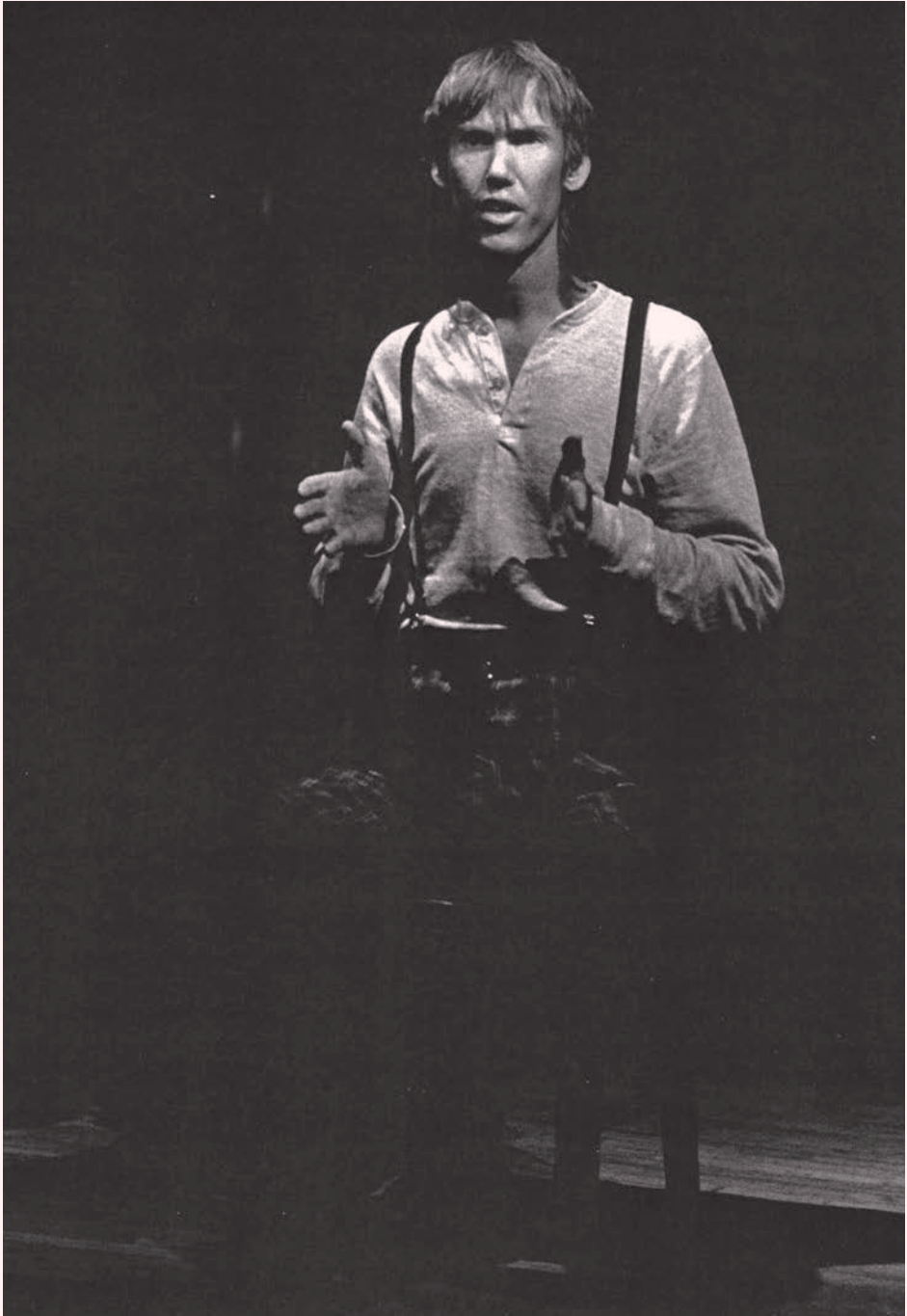
I liked staying in John's house. Made me feel like a grown up artist to be in the East Village with his black box for his red chair. He made a good breakfast. Years later he got stuck in his tub and took a shit. I felt like a mom- terrified and not strong enough to haul him out by myself. How to take care of him?



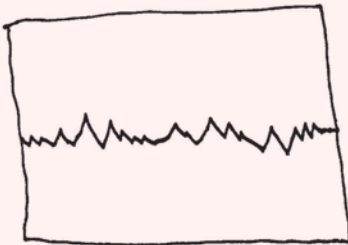
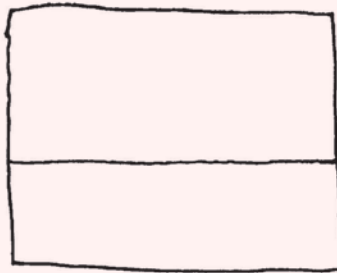


Photo by Dona Ann McAdams.

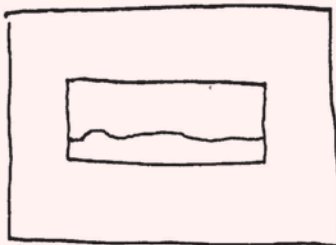
I needed the melodrama of performing with him. Looking back that capacity to rush headlong into his dances seems risky and naive. But he asked for it so absolutely, especially in Two on the Loose -- washing his back with a wash cloth dipped into a white basin; our bodies humming in Carol McDowell's lighting; his bony back against the nubbily, dripping cloth and my hot hand. It was so life and death. I could never really deal with it and then there I was on stage running a circle for his life -- finding a few of his gestures and rhythms to resurrect him in the space.



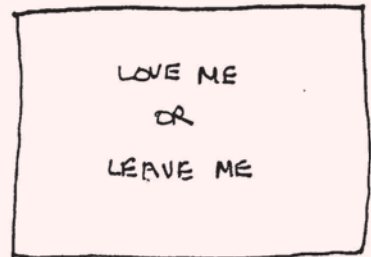
*Two on the Loose*, 1988. Photo by Dona Ann McAdams.



MY HEART



THE BED



MY HEART

THE BEGINNING  
ILLNESS

WHERE WAS I ?  
I WAS NOT WHERE I WANTED TO BE .

EITHER LOVE ME  
OR LEAVE ME  
BUT PLEASE  
DON'T HANG AROUND



**from Dad Stories, Ishmael Houston-Jones**

So there I was in Spain feeling comfortably alone and detached from any world beyond Mediterranean food and eccentric architecture. I dreamt I took an elevator to the 13th floor of a hospital to visit my friend and once sometimes lover, John who was then, in reality, very sick in a hospital back in New York. But when the doors of the elevator parted it was Daddy, not John, in the bed in the center of an enormous and empty room. I mentioned this dream to Fred and Jeannie and the young Spanish guy who'd been Jeannie's and my lighting designer. I hardly knew this man but he made a serious face and said, "I do not like your dream." When I asked him why, he told me gravely that "13 is a bad number. Very bad."

The next day I walked by Maria's building. The whole week I'd been in Barcelona I'd not been able to reach her because her father had been ill and she'd been staying with him at his place. I thought since I was leaving for Amsterdam in a few days I'd try her once more. For the first time she answered her buzzer. I climbed to her attic apartment. She and Pep were in bed for siesta or ... Anyway, she told me I should call my mother which was baffling because Mom had no way of knowing where on the continent I was. I was perplexed and said I'd call later. Maria insisted that I call right then saying, "It's something with your father." After I talked with Mom I said to Maria and Pep, "Él murió." They were great. They found a place that had cheap flights. Because it was the height of the tourist season I anticipated problems getting a booking on such short notice. All the way to the travel agency I practiced saying in Spanish, "My papá has just died. He had cancer. He suffered a stroke. I must return to North America for the funeral. My mother wants me to come." This was a travel agent whom Maria used a lot and I easily got a reservation for two days from then with absolutely no explanations. I'd make the funeral but miss the wake which was fine with me.

*Momentous moments of great change.* Becoming fatherless was supposed to be like that. There I was on my own in Barcelona while back in Harrisburg "P.A." on the hottest fourth of July in a decade Daddy left us. This time for good I mean. I mean he left to never come back, except in vague, somewhat disturbing dreams. In any real sense he had left years before. The distance between us was like smoked glass. Some things we

knew about each other, recognized even. Some things I saw in him frightened me when I saw them in myself. Other parts of our separate lives seemed to hold no apparent interest or importance for the other at all. Or they amused or repulsed or, as I said, frightened.

Jeannie and Fred had spent this, their last day in Barcelona sightseeing. I went to the train station to see them off to Paris. When they saw me running down the platform they joked that I'd changed my mind and had decided to join them after all. Then I told them what had happened. I don't remember the words I used, but they wanted to stay with me for the two days 'til I got the plane. I said no, that was ridiculous and I would be all right. I went to a rehearsal of Maria's that night and out to dinner with a group of Catalan-speaking people I didn't know. What I remember most about those two days was that I continued being a tourist. Wandering the Ramblas. Lighting candles in churches. Going to a Joel Pieter Witkin exhibition. Buying a Spanish biography of Frida Kahlo and a new dictionary. Going to the park. Reading the Herald-Tribune at cafes.

On the train to Madrid I shared a sleeping car with three rowdy businessmen who went out to the corridor to smoke cigars and who gave me shots of their whiskey just to be friendly. I wanted to say to them, "Hey you guys, you know what, my dad just died." Not because I had much of a need to feel some emotion connected to those words; I just wanted to experience them coming out of my mouth again. The shapes of those vowels. I said nothing except *gracias* for the drinks. The same thing happened on the plane. I got involved with a baroque scenario of a young Spanish couple needing to trade seats to be able to sit next to each other. The American man and his daughter sitting next to me wouldn't switch; I would if I could gain an aisle seat out of the deal. All I really wanted to do was to interject somewhere into these bilingual negotiations, "Oh, and by the way, my father died two days ago," in Spanish or in English. Of course I didn't.

It wasn't until I got back to New York that I could say those words out loud to someone else. The words that conformed with this supposedly momentous change in my life. I called John in the hospital as I was preparing to leave for the train home to Pennsylvania. He sounded weak but lucid. He was obviously surprised and a bit confused to be hearing from me. He thought I

was in Europe. What is more significant, since I had felt when I was leaving New York that there was a strong probability that he would not be alive when I returned, I'd made a definite decision to say a very definite good-bye to him. Now, just a few weeks later, I was chatting with him on the phone, telling him about my own second-hand relationship to death. He didn't really want to hear this, and just said "oh, I didn't know." John lived six weeks longer. I never saw or spoke with him again.

HOSPITAL

WHERE WAS I

EXILE

WHERE WAS I

HOME

WHERE WAS I

ILLNESS

I wanted to be home  
or in someone's arms

JOURNAL OF THE  
FORGOTTEN LOVER

WHERE I WAS  
was not where I wanted  
to be

RETURN

I wanted to be where  
I knew where I was

LET OUT LET OUT LET OUT LET OUT LET  
EITHER LOVE ME OR LEAVE ME EITHER

LOSS

AWAY GO AWAY GO AWAY GO AWAY  
LET GO LET GO LET GO LET GO LET

LOSS

GO PLEASE GO GO GO PLEASE GO  
GO GO GO GO GO GO GO GO

LOSS

YOU HAVE SOMETHING  
WITHIN YOU

HOW. WHERE.

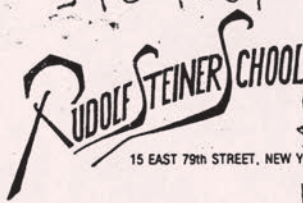
YOU HAVE SOMETHING  
WITHIN YOU

THE HEALING

YOU HAVE SOMETHING  
WITHIN YOU

THE EXORCISM





15 EAST 79th STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 - 212-535-2130

340 1084 - John's Room

NYU Hospital  
Schwartz Bldg  
Coop Care Unit  
550 1st Ave 31st

RM 1084

1st Bldg on Rt. Int. on 14th St

Tues 30

Wed 1

Hospital across from  
MICHAEL Schwartz Gail  
LUCY Bldg JEANNIE

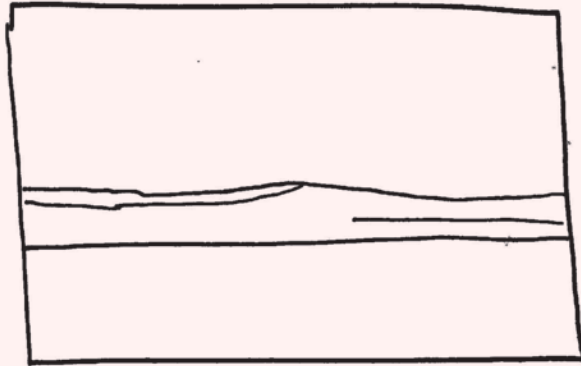
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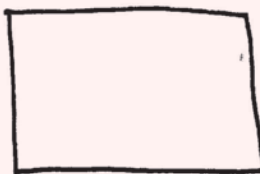
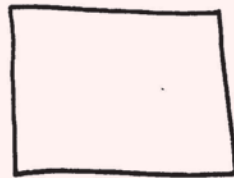
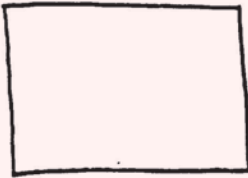
THURS. 2	FRI 3	SAT 4	OCT 5 SUN
PABLO JOHN W	ANNIE Joan (day) (ANNIE TAKES JOHN to DOCTOR AT 4)	JOHN W (LAUNDRY) DONA McADAM	JANE COMFORT (late afternoon)

MON 6	TUE 7	WED 8	THURS 9
DANCENOISE dinner	Michael S JEANNIE	Joan (day) FRED	<del>JANE</del> <del>(dinner)</del>

FRI 10	M	PABLO (718) 622-6272	JEH	220-8298
JEFF	*	GAIL (718) 875-3041	JEFF	677-3214
DONA	L	DONA 982-2005	FRED	925-4012
	L	JANE 226-5109	MJOHN	674-8246
Bob & Ray	*	JOAN 675-9676 (home) 683-1133 (work 3-8)	MICHAEL	473 2629
683 0018		LUCY 989-5262	M JEANNIE	995-0840
		ANNIE 677-8405	MICHAEL	243-5262



THE  
HOSPITAL



**from Lucy Sexton**

I got to know John Bernd when he asked me to tape his show, Be Good To Me, at PS 122. Anne lobst was in it, and Jennifer Monson and a boy named Youngblood. If I tell you it was a mix of rhythmic choreography, quirky improv duets, personal stories, jazz standards sung with tongue half in cheek at a piano, and a great disco finale, you may think it sounds like any number of dance pieces, not so unusual. But this was 1985. John Bernd was one of the first "choreographers" I'd seen to take the liberty of using text, storytelling, singing, whatever seemed to say it best, into a dance piece. John wrote in his journal about the importance of show biz. He wanted to delve into the realm of the personal, but he never forgot people were coming to see a show. He loved to entertain.

John was the caretaker of PS 122 at this time, literally and figuratively. He'd come in every morning at 6 and clean the floors and the toilets in exchange for rehearsal time. After cleaning for a few hours he'd dance for a few more as sun filled the room. The space has never been so clean. He was also one of the PS 122's chief spiritual architects. He formed a bridge from the very first performers to use the space, he and his then boyfriend Tim Miller performed Live Boys and other works there at the very beginning, to what it would become as a renting and then a producing theater. Years later, at a panel-type discussion remembering lost performers, Mark Russell talked about John as a sometimes cranky, always questioning, intuitive and invaluable guide for him as he grew into the role of running this new space. Even later, when PS 122 had changed into a full-fledged presenting organization, he rarely made a decision without running it by John to see if it was right.

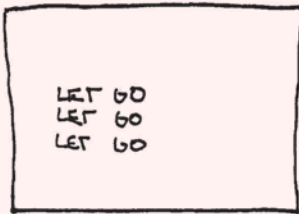
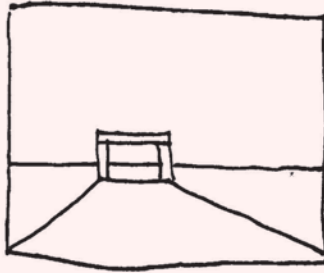
In 1986 I sat in the back of a cab taking John to a doctor's appointment. He had to lie down, his head in my lap, because he was in such pain and experiencing such nausea. In complete frustration he said, "I'm 33 years old, WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME." And the truth was, no one had a fucking clue. First they thought John had AIDS or GRID (gay related immune deficiency). Then they thought he had ARC (AIDS related complex) which was thought to be a less deadly version of the disease. Then maybe he didn't have anything at all. Maybe he just had bad psoriasis.

John never believed he would die from this disease. When we first formed a caregivers' group of about 15 friends who were helping take care of him, I remember one of the big complaints was that John wasn't being realistic. He'd called Norm Frisch from the hospital to ask him to help set up a tour. He arranged gig after gig, performing a final incredible duet at PS 122 with Jennifer Monson when he couldn't have weighed more than 100 pounds. When we finally got him to fill out a living will he said to our dismay that yes, he did want all and any measures taken to keep him alive, at any cost.

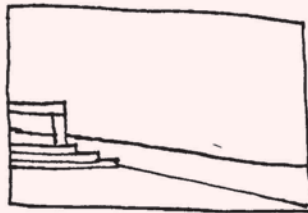
May 8, 1988, was his 35th birthday. It was also Mother's Day. Lori Seid and John and John's mom went out to brunch and then checked him into the hospital for the last time. I left in early July to get married. I went to the hospital to say good-bye to John. He was a skeleton lying in a pile of sheets that looked like they would swallow him. He wished me luck with my wedding and when I was finally leaving he said, "See ya bud."

He lived until August 28, an incredible feat in itself. All the new age and religious beliefs I'd try to tap into to understand this process, this loss, ultimately failed me. John Bernd was not ready to go. It was not his time. He should be with us still.

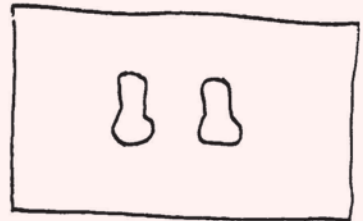




THE VOICE



THE PORCH



THE BOOTS

## EXILE IN MAINE

BETRAYAL  
Journal of the forgotten lover  
HEALING

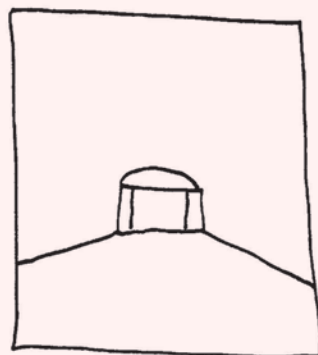
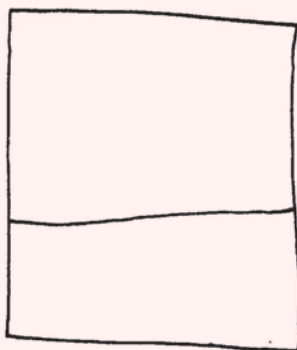
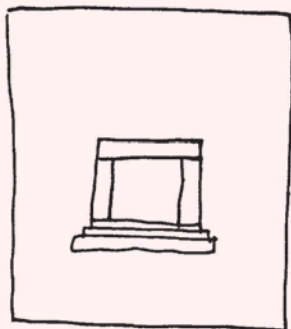
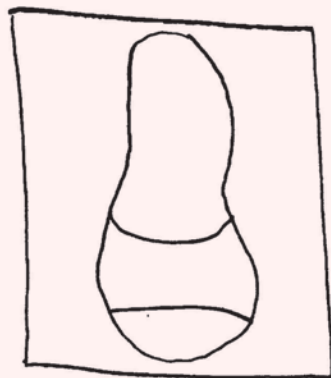
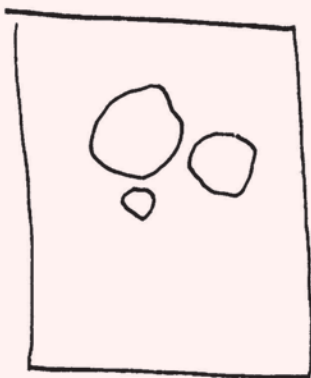
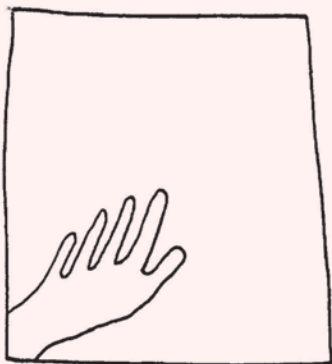
He said let go let go let go  
He said let go let go let go  
He said let go let go let go

AND I said I can't. I can't

the rock. the song.

## **from Johnny Walker**

Let me tell you straight up about my John Bernd thing. I've never told these things to a soul, I tried to be the good caregiver, like everyone else seemed to be doing. First and foremost, I only knew him when he was dealing with a disease and it's flowering evolution. Often he was intolerable to me, inexplicable, demanding, selfish, irritating(an artist). But mainly I was terrified of him. Which certainly meant the disease terrified me but the conscious rendering of that terror was directly related at that time to John, his apartment and the medical facilities he frequented. Going into his building, it's particular odors, climbing the stairs, banging on his door, seeing what monkey business he'd gotten into that particular day, it all made my stomach hurt, made me really really scared. The flaked skin everywhere, the treatments, his mother, his laundry, his breath. I have never since felt such revulsion brought on by fear. Sometimes I'd gag in his bathroom with the door closed. A few times climbing his apartment stairs I wished he was dead and then immediately wished he was well, cursing and hating myself for my cowardice. My own thoughts sickened me, my fear made me angry, my anger caused frustration and my frustration forced me to try and do things which were helpful. It was a painful and circuitous route to care giving which often left me exhausted and terribly lonely. John gave me my baptism by fire, my first AIDS decline and death but more importantly the first decline and death I'd ever been intimately involved with period. I learned so much through him not necessarily as an artist but as someone more hard headed, courageous and bold than I, desperately confronting mortality on his own complex terms and by being a witness to his innumerable trials I gained a small parcel of maturity and perspective which helped me to eventually help others. Since John's death I've had the misfortune to deal with similar circumstances and though I wouldn't say I was good at it, I'd never like to find myself "good at it," I have been able to take the tutoring I got from John and use it to better assist others. My memories of John are not necessarily warm and generous. They are vibrant and sensational, painful, embarrassing, terrifyingly personal. I was frightened of John Bernd but John Bernd's choices during that most difficult passage of his life helped me to understand and cope with my own narrow terrors, maybe not in his lifetime but luckily in my own.



SURVIVING LOVE AND DEATH  
GRACE

**from Linda Austin**

I am sitting with a bunch of other people on the floor at PS 1. Summertime, early 80's? A slim curly-haired young man, whose face, something soft about it, was so constructed as to fall easily into a pout but didn't quite, had us sitting in two parallel lines. He danced up and down the diagonal between the two rows of audience members. I didn't know any of them, nor the dancer. I wasn't a performer then myself, but I wanted to be. I remember this young man, John Bernd, asking if anyone had an elastic to hold up his sweat pants: since there were so many dancers there, somebody must have an elastic. Yes, someone did, of course. The informality and the direct here-I-am quality of the piece was novel to me, one of those I'd-like-to-be-able-to-do-something-like-that moments that accumulated until I did start doing things like that.

I had just turned thirty, "become an adult" as I kept joking, so it must have been in 1984 at a Movement Research event at MR's former home base, the now-disappeared Ethnic Folk Arts Center, when John shook my hand and welcomed me into the decade he had entered shortly before. I was glad I was thirty. I was glad other people were thirty and that one of them was John. Of course now I'm glad when other people are in their forties, fifties, sixties.....And What would a mid-forties version of JB be like? Now he's forever that guy sitting upright in his special little chair, creator of those simple evocative line drawings that suggest journeys, horizon, home, heart.

My ex-boyfriend Rene and John and I sitting on the floor at a party somewhere inside the Public Theater building on Lafayette. It bugs me that I don't remember the occasion of the party, nor what we were talking about, nor which one of us was leaning against a wall, but somehow the moment stuck in my mind as proof you could have an interesting, even intimate, conversation with someone at a party.

Art on the Beach....I was one of the chorus for John's site specific piece based on the Odyssey. He'd been working for a while with his core group of performers. We chorus members came in near the end of the process, but not close enough to the end! Boy did we get frustrated and mad at going down to the Battery Park landfill, warming up, then hanging around for what seemed like an eternity in the hot sun while John tried to figure out what he was doing. Funny I have no memory at all of the performance itself.



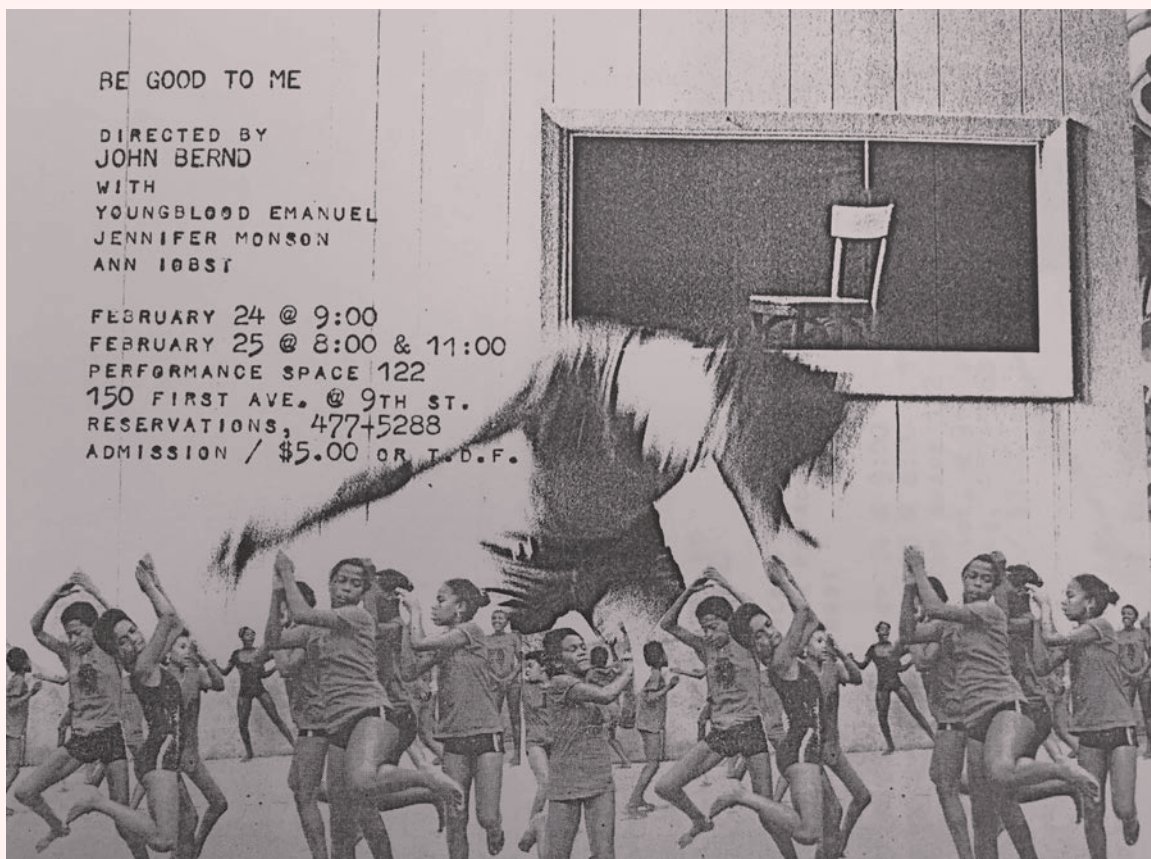
Near the end of his life, John dancing onstage at PS 122 with Jennifer Monson. He suffers from some mental confusion at this point. Jennifer, my roommate at the time, gently guides him through his piece. She was one of those who visited John regularly at the hospital. I never did. I guess I felt like I didn't know him well enough to see him in that vulnerable state, to intrude. And yes, there was fear, too.

And that moment at the memorial service in St. Mark's Church when it was asked of the mourners to join hands. A well-known writer whom I don't personally know was on my left and we two strangers had to pass through that tiny moment of hesitating embarrassment at touching each other to be part of that necessary ritual remembrance.

BE GOOD TO ME

DIRECTED BY  
JOHN BERND  
WITH  
YOUNGBLOOD EMANUEL  
JENNIFER MONSON  
ANN 10BSI

FEBRUARY 24 @ 9:00  
FEBRUARY 25 @ 8:00 & 11:00  
PERFORMANCE SPACE 122  
150 FIRST AVE. @ 9TH ST.  
RESERVATIONS, 477-5288  
ADMISSION / \$5.00 OR T.D.F.





Postcard from *Some things about Some People*, 1979. L to R: Erin Matthiessen, John Bernd, Harry Whittaker Sheppard. Photo by Kirk Winslow..



L to R: Amy Finkel, John Bernd, Gayle Tufts, Robert Flynt, Ishmael Houston-Jones. Photo by Dona Ann McAdams.



### **from Michael Stiller**


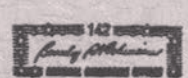
Recently, while moving my office, I came upon a thick folder labeled "J.B." It was full of papers and notes: insurance claims, receipts for hospital room TV rentals, outdated phone numbers for Human Resource Administration caseworkers and the like, that, despite their innocuous nature, brought back a cache of memories from over a decade ago when a group of us came together to care for John Bernd.

We had no idea what we were in for. Four years before, when the symptoms of John's illness first appeared, the words to describe it had not even been conjured. And in 1986 it was still unusual to face losing a friend in his thirties. At twenty-five, with a tendency to project my own fears onto all my relationships, I was scandalized that John, with his ample network of friends and community support, could be in such danger of losing control of his life. So I began to wade through the unanswered collection of paperwork and bills from Blue Cross, The NEA, various hospitals, doctors and medical collection agencies that John had stuffed into a drawer, presumably hoping to forget. My motivation was decidedly impersonal, or so I thought. I imagined I was acting out of political belief. But I had only recently entered into adult life myself, finally responsible for my own well-being. It sounds absurd, but though I was healthy, and perfectly able to make my way in the world, the fact that John had no one to care for him — no lover, no immediate family here in New York — terrified me because I was so afraid of losing control myself, of my own life. And confronting the disarray in John's affairs conveniently allowed me to ignore the confusion in my own.

I never knew John when he was well. In fact, I hardly knew him at all when I first took my turn escorting him to a doctor's appointment. I remember watching for the look on his face as the unsympathetic neurologist prescribed two invasive (and expensive) procedures, a CAT scan and spinal tap. As we walked out, John mumbled something about money. I pressed him, and that afternoon discovered his insurance didn't cover ambulatory tests. John barely had enough to pay for these two, and, obviously, they would not be the last. I had a mission: it was something clear-cut and definable, something I knew I could do. The task, problematic for some, came easily to me. And who knows; perhaps it was because we weren't very close that I was able to pry, that day, into the dire predicament of John's finances and dub myself his personal medical benefits caseworker. At the same time, I was leery of putting myself in a position subject to John's disapproval, such as doing his laundry, helping him clean, or shopping for him on a regular basis. The man was difficult to satisfy. Legion were the stories in which John rejected a heartfelt gesture, or found fault with someone's attempt to please him. I could make dinner for him occasionally, something I generally feel comfortable doing for anyone — not that my attempts were met with uniform favor. No, for the most part, I thought it best to stick to a job that could be measured objectively. I told everyone, "You take care of John, leave the business to me," and I set out to get him onto the roles of Social Security Disability, and to connect the dots between his doctors, the social workers, and whatever helpful city, state, or federal agencies I could. To my way of thinking, I was selfishly volunteering to do the easy part, but no one seemed to mind.

As always, John sent mixed signals. He'd drop hints, but he left it to us to determine what he needed as best as we could, sometimes in spite of him. He became annoyed when I asked some necessary questions after he mentioned that he wasn't sure if his insurance was paid up (it wasn't). When some wealthy friends offered their support, he hinted that I should talk to them. I did, and set up an account in which they could deposit money for his personal use, shielded from the Social Security Administration's view — as they would have reduced his benefits accordingly. I thought he was just too embarrassed to accept their offer himself. But after a while, when he stopped availing himself of the privilege, it

In 1984 JB was awarded a choreographer's fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. It took over a year for us to get him to sign the contract. The check finally came at the end of 1987. He never cashed it.

	<b>United States Treasury</b>		15-51 000	W 018,775,851		
	Month Day Year 10 29 87	73	WASHINGTON, D.C.	Check No. 3007 56713520		
	88177	00	JOHN J BERND	59000002		
	Pay to the order of JOHN J BERND 306 EAST 6TH ST APT 15 NEW YORK NY 10003			NATL ENDOW FOR THE ARTS DOLLARS CTS \$***8000*00		
87-3311-0134						
⑈ 30074 ⑈ ⑆ 000000518 ⑆ 567135206 ⑈						



L to R: John Bernd and Donald Flemming. Photo by Robert Flynt.



was left to me to thank his benefactors and assure them that they didn't need to send any more checks. After all, there was nothing he wanted that we could buy for him. All he wanted was the demonstration of love, the commitment that these friends could express with their willing generosity.

To say that John was ambivalent in his relationship to his disease would be an understatement. Thankfully, he couldn't just succumb; but nor would he acknowledge his condition enough to make a conscious, measured effort to fight it. The result was sometimes maddening, but it probably helped keep him alive. He'd insist that he wasn't ill, even as I (to qualify him for financial support) was trying to assure some agency social worker that, in fact, he had AIDS. John had his own agenda, and was determined to fight it out his own way, however painful. It may be oxymoronic to wish that his relationship to death had been more "healthy," but it was nonetheless difficult to watch him plan his next North American tour, lying in a hospital bed from which it seemed he might never rise. And though I thought I knew the answer at the time, who can say whether it would have been better for John to assume a posture of peaceful acceptance instead of insisting, with his peculiar combination of denial and willfulness, on staying with us for as long as he did.

I often feel I was ill-prepared to give John what he most craved. He was painfully aware that AIDS had made him a physical and a sexual pariah. This was before the days of ubiquitous PWA support groups. Not that John would have allowed himself to take advantage of any of these. He was more interested in attending meetings of debtors anonymous, to help him get back onto his feet financially -- as if he were broke because he had racked up a credit card debt on some pathological shopping spree. But it was only after his death, when I saw Dona McAdams' earlier photos of John, that I came to appreciate how complete his transformation had been. I was stunned. He had been quite beautiful, a far cry from the nearly emaciated, psoriasis-ridden young man I had come to know. I think that what he wanted more than anything was to be touched again. And it was only at the end, when he seemed barely present, his attention dissipated, that I was able to drop my cover for just a moment, to stop trying to organize a dying man's life and allow my hand to wander over his hospital bed, carefully grasping a stray ankle, or foot, just so that he would know I was there.

**from the unpublished draft of SAFE AS HOUSES: One Artist's  
Life in New York City 1980-1990, by Jeff McMahon**

**I.**

While I was retreating, something was advancing. Tim's former boyfriend and performance partner, John, was ill. No one was quite sure what this illness was, but it was beginning to show up in downtown Manhattan; a lingering malaise leaving gay men with severely compromised immune systems. Immune systems? What exactly were they? John was young, beautiful, and talented; what could possibly be wrong with him? Sure, Tim and he had broken up, but that isn't the end of the world, is it? Now John was diagnosed with something called GRID, Gay Related Immune Deficiency. Being an artist, he responded with a piece of art, a solo performance called SURVIVING LOVE AND DEATH, presented at P.S. 122 in the Winter of 81/82. It was John's rumination, sometimes bitter, sometimes sad, sometimes heroic, about finding yourself sick and alone. John was, of course, not alone in his suffering, but he was the only person I knew in our little circle who had become ill from this new disease. How had he gotten it? Who had given it to him? Tim was healthy, and the rest of us around P.S. 122 appeared to be thriving. What was happening? What caused this: poppers, bathhouses, West Village bars, Fire Island vacations? No one knew, but I found myself making mental lists of how John was different from me, things he had done that I had not. Sleeping with Tim was not one of those things; could Tim be a conduit, a source? But Tim was healthy, at least he appeared to be. Might I have had sex with anyone else who had sex with John? Or could it be those antibiotics he had taken? But I had taken a lot of antibiotics too. We knew so little.

There was very little information in the mainstream press. I recall the "Village Voice," which was our paper of record in the early eighties, talking about it, as was the gay press, but "The New York Times" ran only nineteen stories about the growing epidemic during 1981/82 (the paper wrote about the comparatively minor "Tylenol scare" a total of 54 times in early '82). By the end of 1982, when GRID had been renamed AIDS, 1,123 people were known to have died from this new disease, but the President of the United States had never mentioned it. He would say nothing until almost five years later, when at least 25,500 had died.

\* \* \* \* \*



## II.

By 1984, not only was I a choreographer, but a filmmaker as well. Sort of. The NEA, in addition to giving me my first Fellowship, approved a small grant for me and Lucy Hemmendinger to make a dance film together; two grants in one year! But now Lucy, with whom I had collaborated on my prior two projects, wanted to make a film by herself. Having taken a course in Super-8 filmmaking, and finally achieving some technical prowess in the medium I had flirted with for so long, I could do this on my own now too. We agreed to split the project grant, with each of us getting \$2,500, and the NEA was flexible enough to go along with it as long as we came up with two films.

Early in the summer, I shot some footage of John dancing with Kaja Gam, a Danish dancer who was working with Yoshiko Chuma and also performing her own work. John was not doing very well, but the diagnosis of AIDS had not kept him from dancing. Shooting in a small rehearsal studio on Chambers Street, I tried creating a duet in film, released from the time and space limitations of live performance. Duets establish a relationship through sheer physicality, and I wanted this film to hint at such a relationship, but not really spell it out. I was still fascinated with the iconic male/female couple as expressed in opera, poetry, rock songs, pas de deux. About the latter I really knew very little, but thought that John and Kaja would make an attractive and mysterious couple. I shot at least twenty rolls of three-and-a-half minute black and white Super-8 film, the two of them moving and dancing in the gloomy studio, with the final film only eight-and-a-half minutes long.

I needed a male/female couple because I wanted to work with romantic imagery and couldn't yet sustain that dramatically with two men, sure that such pairing would look either aggressively sexy (like that piece I had been in with Ishmael in 1980) and thus not really erotic at all to me, or campy. Or probably both. I wanted to be artistic and subtle, and was not particularly interested in creating "positive gay imagery" because it always had those quotes around it, draining the art right out of it. The idea that perhaps I should meet this challenge fermented quietly in my unconscious.

I gave John and Kaja specific and simple movements; circle around each other, lay heads on each other's shoulders, pick each other up. Their movement was as much about being in a small room as being with each other: rolling against walls, looking out the window, sitting in chairs, pulling each other through the doorway. I wanted a bunch of raw material to play with, alone, in the sanctified privacy of an editing suite, where I could reconfigure space through cutting and splicing. In film, I did not have to worry so much about connecting phrases or remembering movement. I would be able to play with



JB and Kaja Gam, film still from *Tell Me Moving*, 1984, Jeff McMahon.

connections later, although several possibilities were always in my head as we worked. The logic was very different, and one I was sure to be more proficient at. Live dance was just too linear.

Looking at the film now, more than ten years after it was first shown at the P.S. 122 Benefit of 1986 (and ten years after John's death), I feel both sad and foolish. Why did I pair John, a gay man dying of AIDS, with a woman, and then make them do my reductive choreography? Why didn't I let them develop a relationship in movement and then shape that for my film? Was I afraid of something, while shoving John and his illness into some closet tricked-up with art? John looks somewhat vacant and wan, as if he were slightly lost. And indeed he was. I didn't take advantage of (exploit, use; all the verbs that come to me sound like abuse) his illness, the complexity of his actual life. I wanted a particular thing, or thought I did, and ignored what was right in front of me. The final image of the film is Kaja collapsing in John's arms. Shouldn't it have been the other way around? But this film is one of the few images I have to remember John by. I am still pleased with TELL ME MOVING; as art, as my first real film, but as a memory of John it does not work. It is now, by default, a very limited and insufficient memorial of who he was.

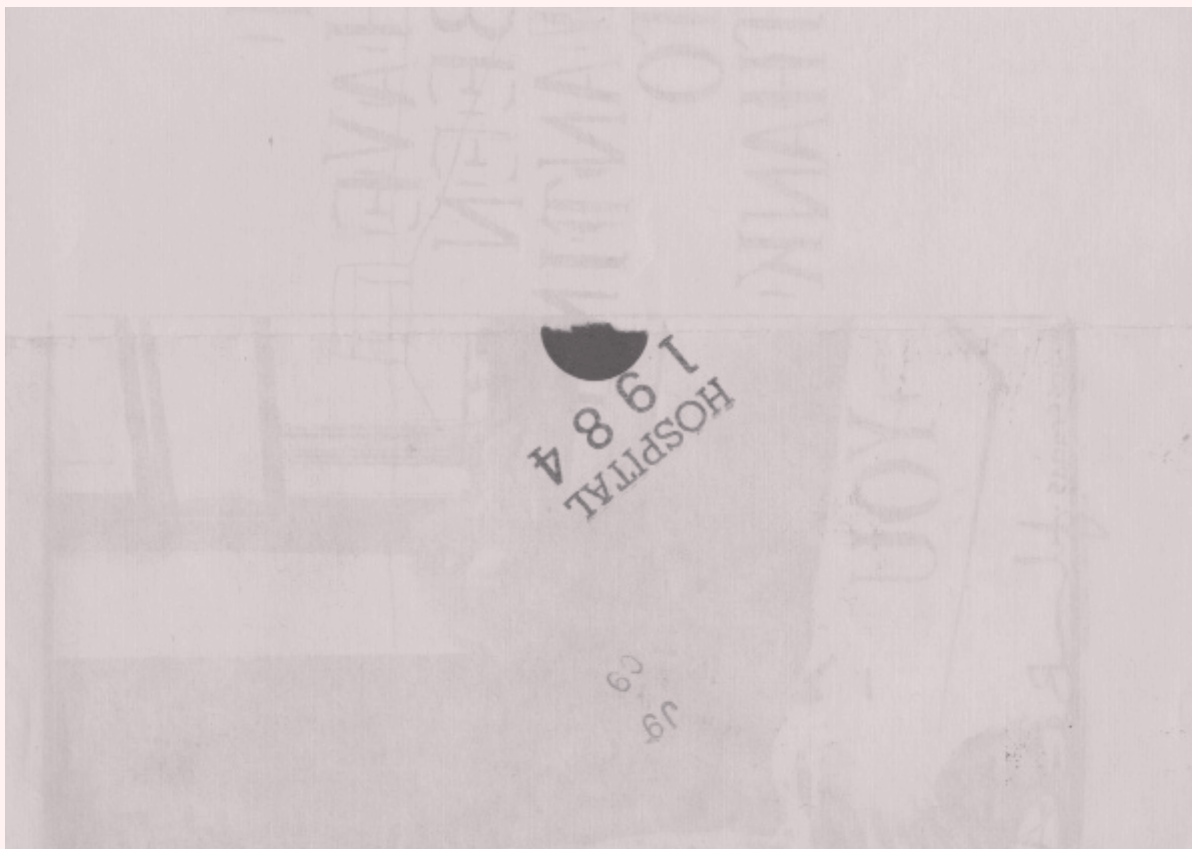
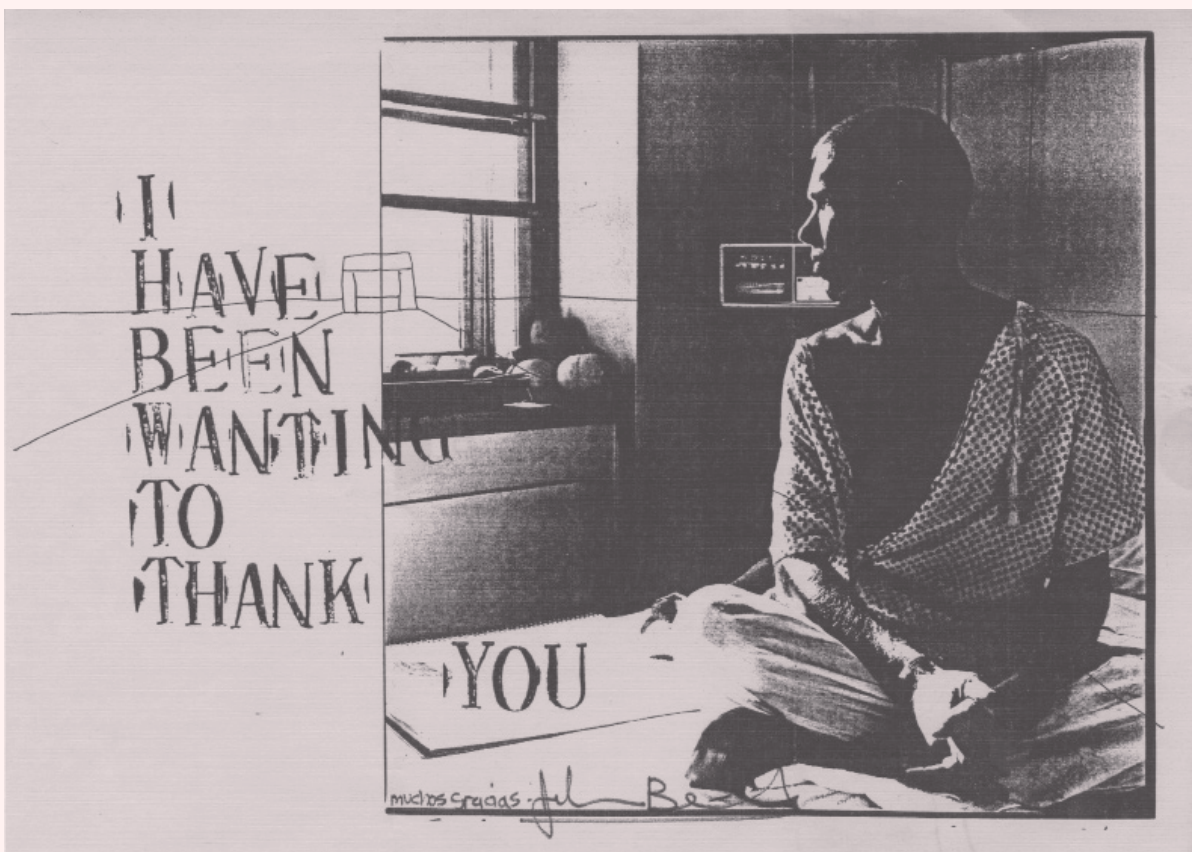
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### III.

Coming home to New York in the summer of 1986 meant coming home to sickness. John was much sicker now, his personality breaking down under the strain of living with this still very stigmatized disease, and complicated by his careening between acceptance and denial of being sick, of having AIDS, of facing death. From the beginning, John had been in the center of the performance and dance community that revolved around P.S. 122. He was one of the pillars. Now he was at the center of his illness, trying to choreograph and control something he did not have a firm enough grasp on himself. He had been sick so long, and survived, that his friends figured he must be doing something right. But he was acting so strangely. Worried friends began phoning each other; what could we do to help John, and keep ourselves from being driven nuts by his constantly shifting requests and schemes? He kept his large community of acquaintances in a frenzy of activity around his illness, but didn't seem to be coping well with the reality of it on a medical or psychological level; there was a lot of activity, but not much movement. Every week he seemed to be pursuing a new cure, a new identity: as a Person With AIDS, an alcoholic (this came out of the blue), or the childhood survivor of a "broken home." How do you help someone who keeps redefining the terms of his illness? We realized that we had to preserve ourselves even as we tried to preserve our friend.

In that late summer, several of us created a support group around John, coordinating the conflicting demands and requests issuing from our disorganized and desperate friend. Initially, we tried to make John admit that things were out of control, that he did in fact have AIDS, and that some order needed to be imposed on his chaotic life. At the weekly meetings that followed, we made schedules to determine who would take John to the doctor, cook dinner, do his laundry. Even friendship and love had to be organized now.





## **from Lori Seid**

28 August 1988

It was the most gorgeous summer day. I mean really gorgeous, like in a movie where they use filters and all those colors and the clouds in the sky are full and vivid and you can't take your eyes off that day.

I want to say it was Sunday because it felt like a Sunday. A day when you get up and do what you feel like and take your time -- not a care in the world. I'm wearing my favorite clothes and I'm getting stoned to read the leisurely big newspaper over a big tall iced something at a quiet table under a happy to share my shade tree.

That kind of day.

But, but that was not my life August 28th 1988 even if I longingly day-dreamed it could be. My life was John and John was this close to death. Since that morning 5 days earlier when me and Michael found Fred standing at the foot of his bed singing that angelic song, tears streaming down his beautiful face, I knew John was finally ready to die.

Fred had been in France and some of us privately thought John wouldn't let go until he saw Fred one more time. As Fred sang silhouetted by the hospital window view of the East River I pictured this postcard he had sent John from Morocco of this beautiful black man in a yellow hat and yellow robes with red beads 1/2 shaded in the half shadow of the hot yellow-white sun against a white stucco wall. I stopped in my tracks and I stood in the doorway, not even breathing listening to Fred sing to an almost coma-like John who was wrapped in a hospital white cotton sheet. He lay there shrinking and curled like a dead rose that was drying up and becoming a beautiful memory of itself.

For those following 5 days I watched as John's skin grew even more taut around his skeleton, his teeth growing bigger as his lips shrunk up, his decaying nails long and yellow digging into his clenched closing hands and as his feet became swollen like abnormal balloons unable to pop.

I sat with John every free second of every day. He was my best friend and I prayed for him to die. And somehow, this time with John was my peace, my leisurely Sunday paper, my place to daydream and think.

He was my shady tree.

28 August 1988.

For some reason, this morning, this very Kodak morning I awoke thinking of a life that afforded me the time to sit over a big tall iced something. But I was meant to take some people, John's friends, to say good-bye to him. It was hard for some to look at John, once the beautiful Adonis dancer everyone loved in the condition he was in. There was a core group of friends that cared for John's every need and to us, to me anyway, John was still beautiful, still an Adonis, a raw and beautiful creature that meant the world to me.

One by one each person I had planned to meet called to tell me, ask me, if I thought it would be alright if they postponed their visit to work in their gardens. By the third call it struck me odd that each

person canceled for exactly the same reason but I knew John would be happier thinking of them in their gardens than at the foot of his bed struggling to accept his fate. Then John's mother called, asking if it was OK to stay in Boston, to work on the farm and to make the first train the next day. I thought about telling her of all the other calls and the absurd coincidence of it all but I was never sure Dorothy caught the subtle ironies of John's life and instead I just answered her like the others.

Well now it felt like I did have time for that iced-something and off I went to the corner cafe. Lazily I took as long as I could just enjoying the air and the rare feeling of having nowhere to go. I decided to stop back home before hopping on the bus to the hospital and was shocked to find so many messages on my machine in such a short time.

The first message was the hospital leaving a nondescript statement but since they never called before it was not hard to guess. Then Michael. Ish. Michael. Jennifer. Michael. Richard. Michael.

John was dead.

He died a little after 10am, the time his first visitor and I were meant to be there but was instead in her garden. The coincidence was no longer absurd but more like John's last directorial decision.

Michael and I met Ishmael in the doorway of John's hospital room and just stared at the empty bed, the clean walls, the stillness of his absence. We had to look at that room one more time. Closure, we told ourselves.

When I got home, Cindy and Jennifer were sitting on my stoop. Annie came by and we all went to Michael's. Ishmael, Johnny, Yvonne, Fred, Richard and Pablo also wandered in. We joked about how amazing it was that we were all in the same city, never mind the same place at the same time. We sat, eating and telling stories just being together relieved but empty. All this time we knew this would happen but nothing could ever really prepare us for the moment. Later into the night, Lucy called from her honeymoon in Ireland for the first time in 3 weeks, something I still cannot figure out. Not only was this the first we had heard from her, but she called Michael's house. Not Annie's, not mine, but Michael's as we all sat there. I kind of remember Dorothy coming in and being with us but by this point it's all a candle lit memory.

28 August 1998

It's been exactly 10 years since that night and I can honestly say there has never been a day since then that I haven't thought of or spoken to John.

My life is what it is because of John. My friends and family are who they are because of him. I never knew him healthy and now I know him twice as long dead as alive. Looking back, from here, I know I wouldn't trade that time with John for anything.

Except for having him around now.



**from Ishmael Houston-Jones**

**Lost and Found, memories of John Bernd at Saint Mark's Church**

He's sitting in the little red chair (the teacher's chair -- "larger than a child's but smaller than a grown-up's.") He's trying to get us four guys, David, Tom, Erin and me, to sing on key to the accompaniment of his Casio plain song. The syllables sound something like "Hy, hy, hy yah hah. Hy, hy, hy yom."

He sneaks out of his room of New York University Hospital's Co-op Care Unit. He takes a taxi down Second Avenue. Does his solo show in the Parish Hall. Takes a cab back up to the hospital and sneaks back in.

He and I are stalking one another in a pool of light. Occasionally he jumps up onto my shoulder or he tackles and pins me to the floor. The sound score is him stomping arrhythmically, recorded super crudely with his Walkman. This is in the first version of Lost and Found. The sound of his feet stomping will follow on to two more versions of the piece.

He's screaming in the dressing room because his skin condition makes the itching intolerable. Yvonne, Stephanie, Fred and I stop rehearsing and are silent. This is the final version of Lost and Found. He has placed the audience on the dance floor of the sanctuary in two large ellipses facing each other, although much of the dancing will happen behind them.

His is the first memorial service I've ever helped plan. The first I've attended at Saint Mark's. The red chair is there, as is the black touring case he had custom made for it. We've asked Meredith and a gospel singer to provide music. Meredith's lullaby reminds me of his own songs. The gospel singer says that we shouldn't just sit there if the spirit moves us. Most of us clap our hands or tap our feet but Penny whips off her skirt and begins running laps around the sanctuary to the confusion of his WASP family. When the service is over I go to find Dan, the tech guy, to ask why the pop song "Be Good to Me" isn't playing as we'd planned. I find Dan sobbing in a corner and I'm struck by the enormity of what we've lost.



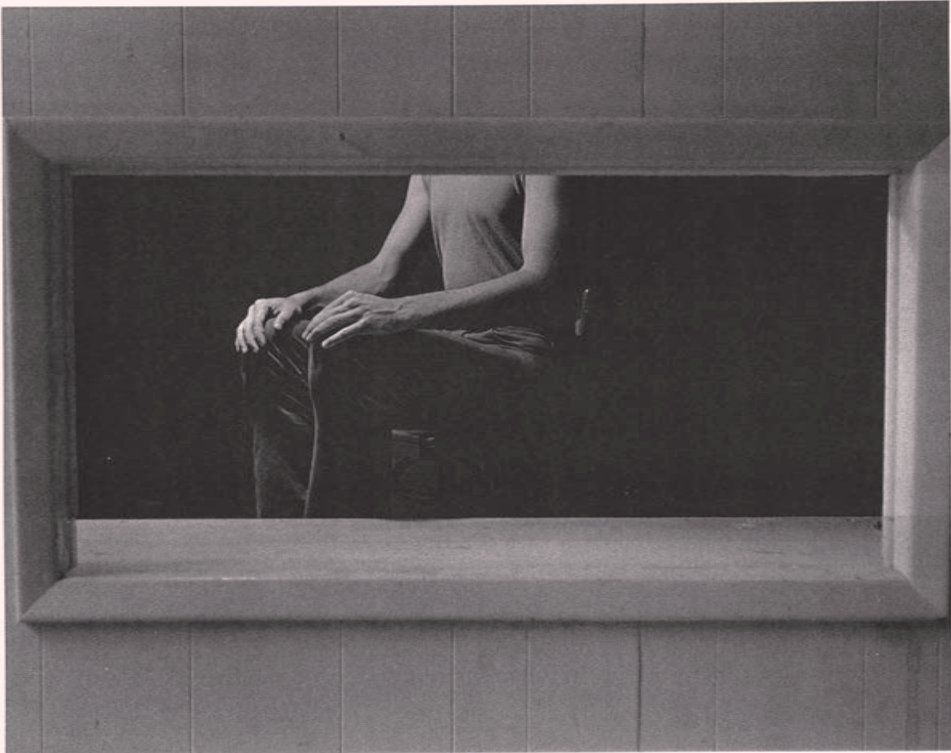
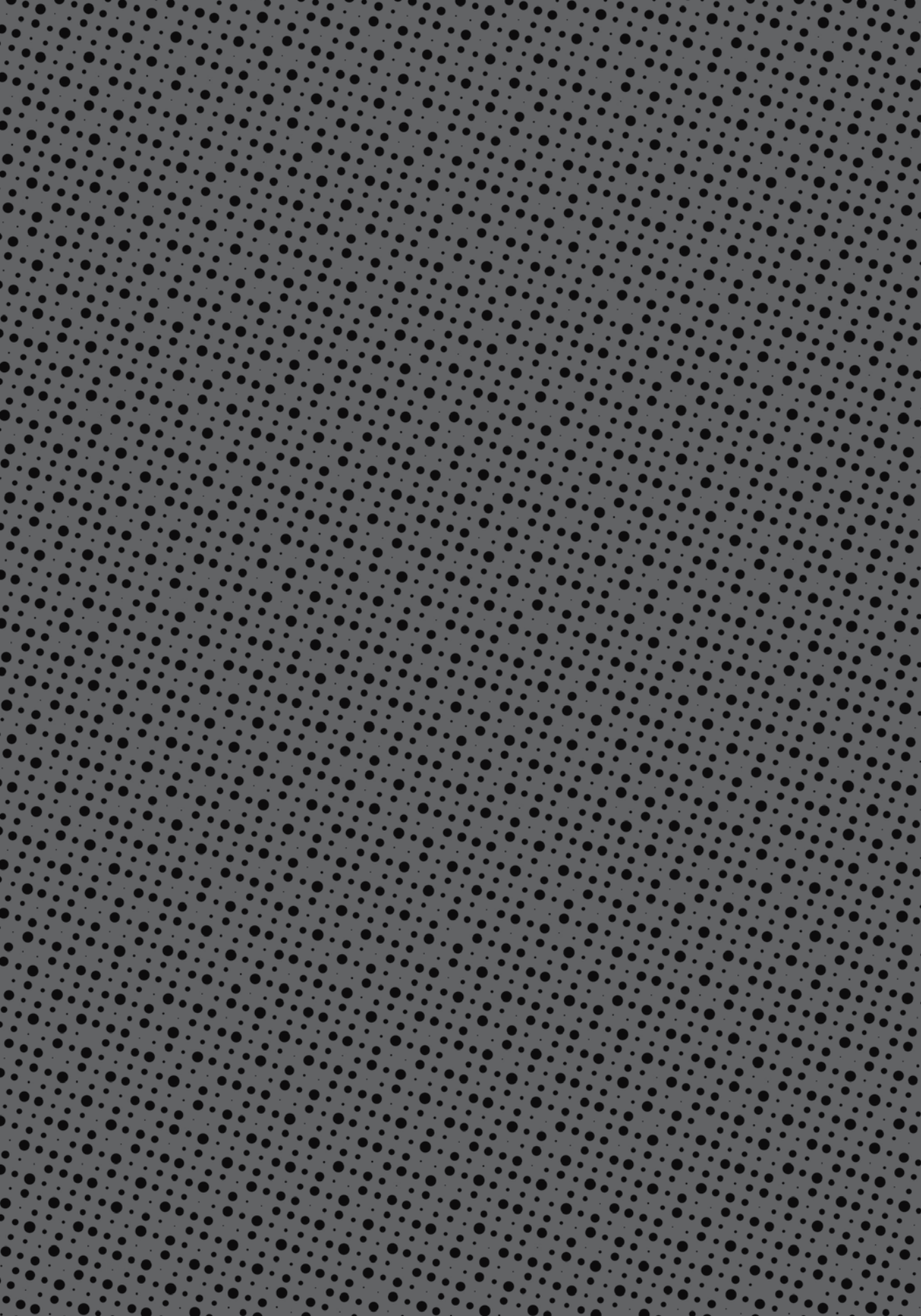


Photo by Dona Ann McAdams.



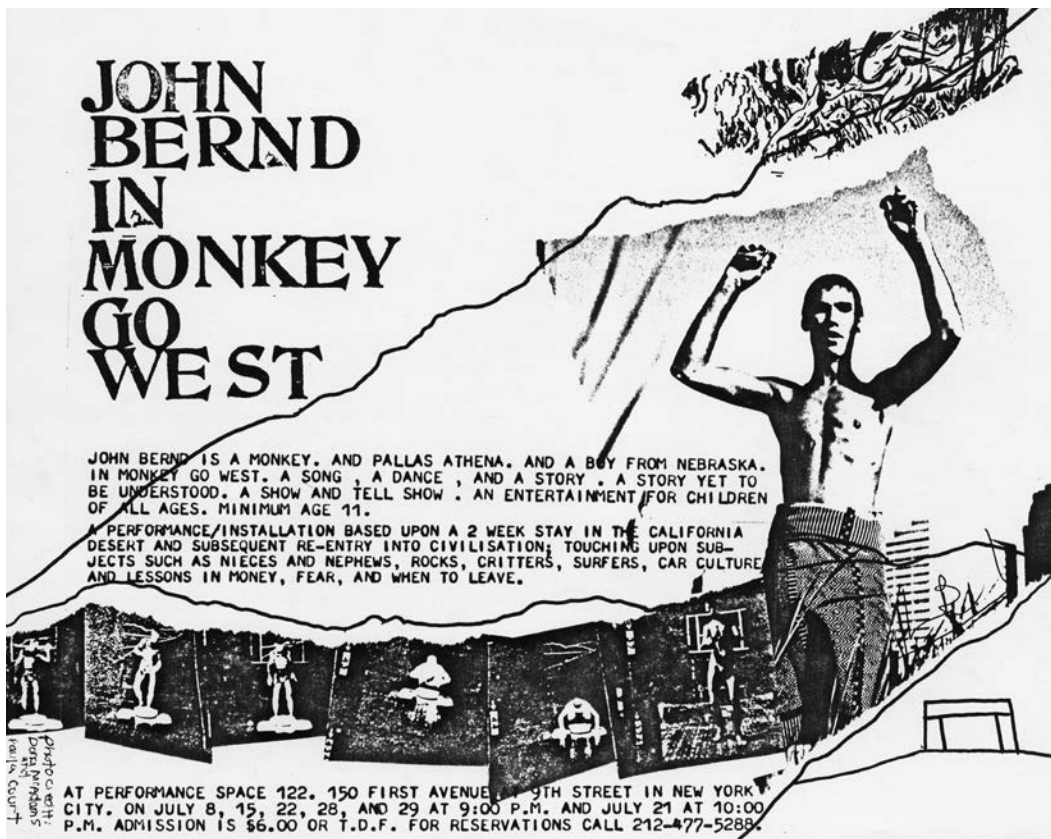
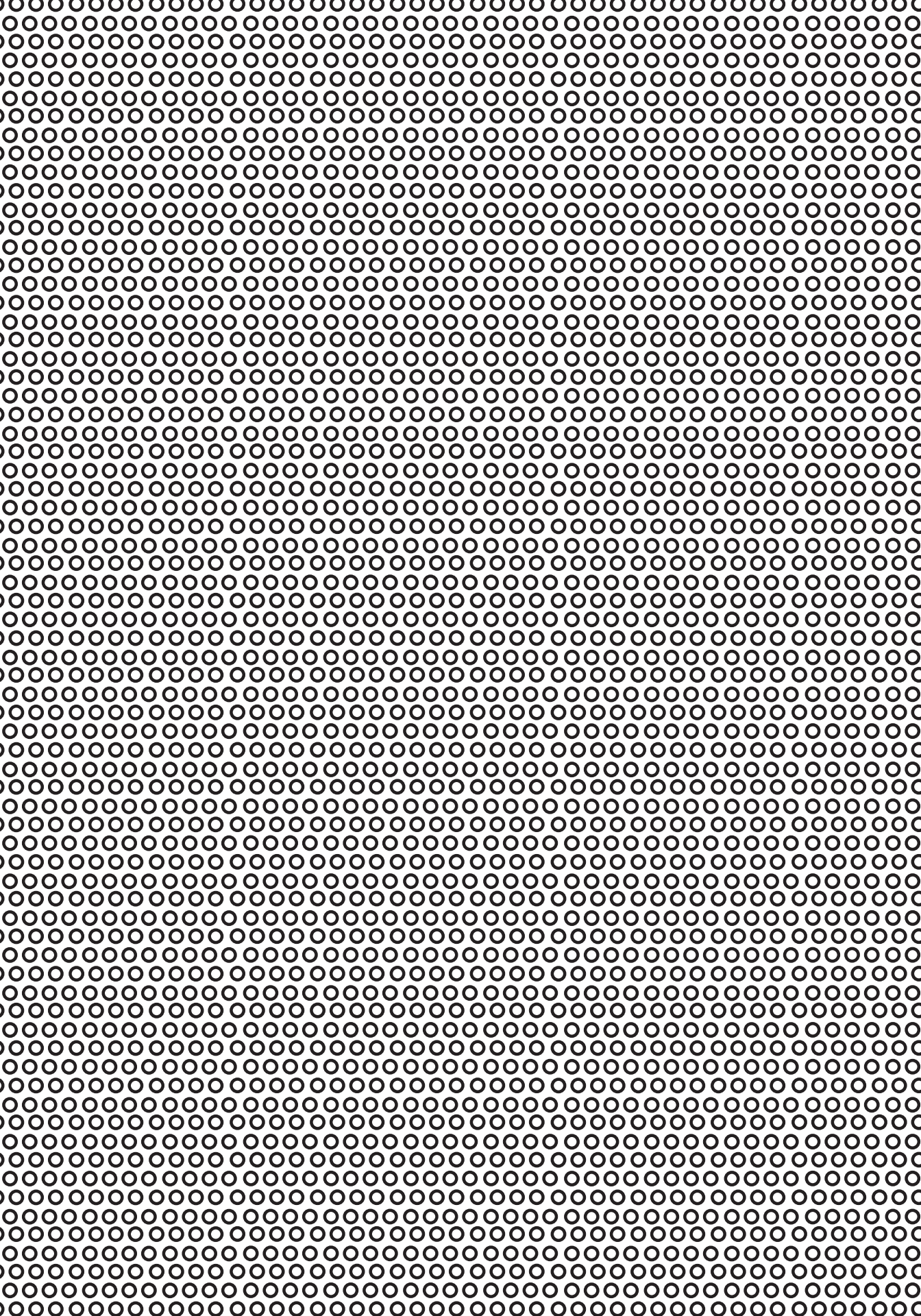


Image courtesy of Lucy Sexton.







## 1 in 2\*

*\*On February 23rd, 2016, the CDC released a study estimating 1 in 2 black men who have sex with men will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime.*

the cells of you heard a tune you could not hear. you memorized & masqueraded, karaoked without knowing. you went in for a routine test & they told you what you were made of:

- honey spoiled into mead
- lemon mold
- broken proofs
- traffic tickets
- unidentified shard
- a shy, red moon
- a book of antonyms
- the book of job
- a lost child unaware of its name

you knew it would come to this, but then it actually came.

## 1 in 2

away to the red lake  
to dance in the red waves

oh sugar boys, my  
choir candy, wade slow

& forever, dip a toe  
& red water will crawl

toward your neck  
come on, dive in

or be swallowed  
the water wants

to meet you, why  
not on such a pretty

night, with the shore's  
burgundy foam

teething towards your feet  
like wine out for blood

& the sky above  
dark as a nigga

who once told you  
*you cute & don't worry*

## 1 in 2

he, who smelled coffee sweet & cigarillo blue,  
entered me, who knew better but \_\_\_\_\_.  
he, who in his wake left shredded tarot,  
threw back his head & spewed light from every opening  
& in me, light fell on a door, & in the door  
a me i didn't know & knew, the now me  
whose blood blacks & curls back like paper  
near an open flame. I walked towards the door  
as I walked away from the door. when i met me  
in the middle, nothing grand happened.  
a rumor made its way around my body.

## 1 in 2

if you trace the word *diagnosis* back enough  
you'll find *destiny*

trace it forwards, find *diaspora*

is there a word for the feeling prey  
feel when the teeth finally sink  
after years of waiting?

*plague & genocide* meet on a line in my body

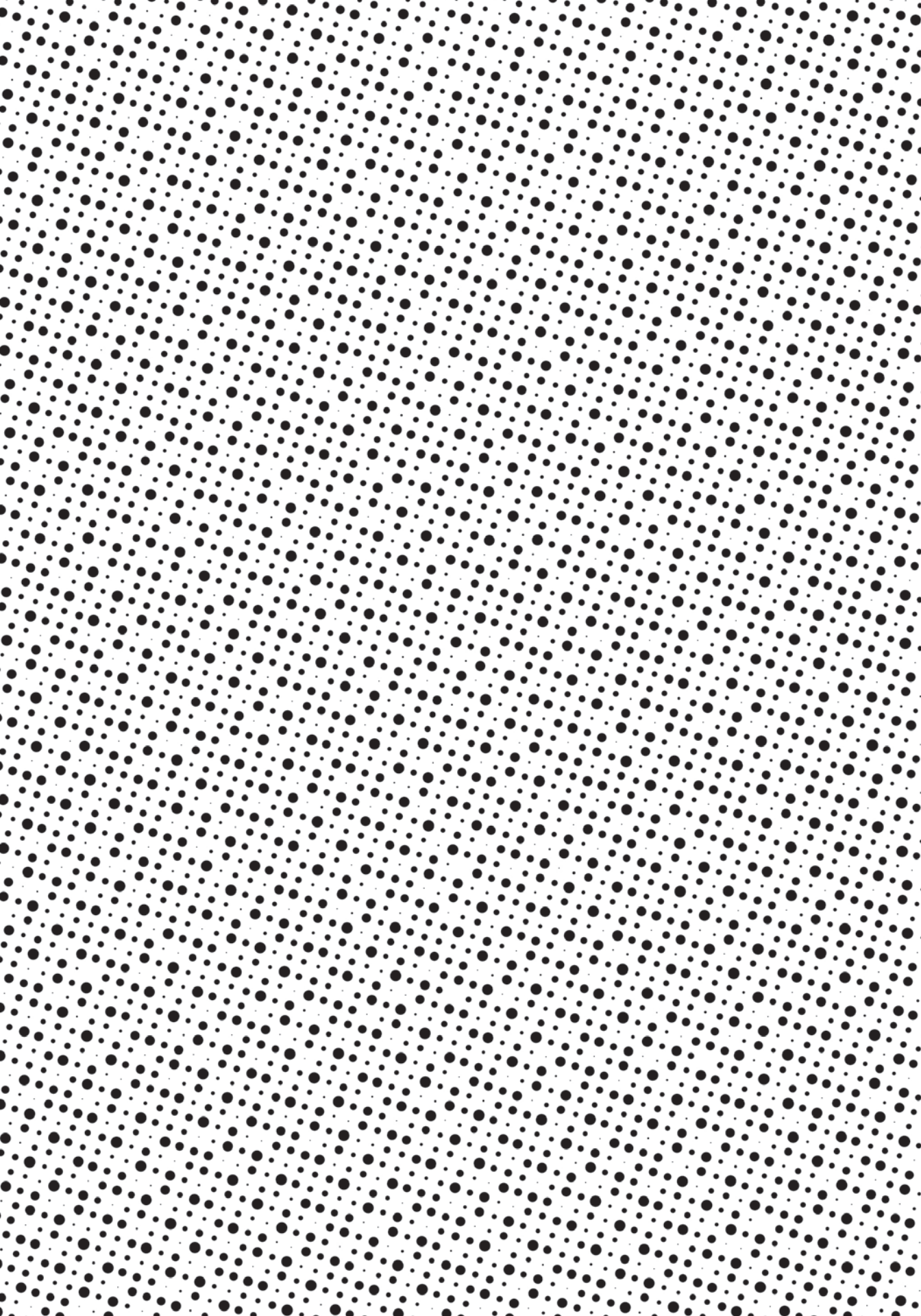
i cut open my leg & it screamed



## this strange dowry

bloodwife they whisper when i raise my hand for another rum coke  
     the ill savior of my veins proceeds me, my digital honesty about what  
 queer bacteria has dotted my blood with snake mist & shatter potions  
     they stare at my body, off the app, unpixelated & poison pretty flesh  
 they leave me be, i dance with the ghost i came here with  
     a boy with 3 piercings above his muddy eyes smiles then disappears into the strobes  
 the light spits him out near my ear, against my slow & practiced grind  
     he could be my honey knight, the hand to break me apart like dry bread  
 there is a dream where we are horses that neither one of us has  
     for fives songs my body years of dust fields, his body rain  
 in my ear he offers me his bed promise live stock meat salt lust brief marriage  
     i tell him the thing i must tell him, of the boy & the blood & the magic trick  
*me too*      his strange dowry      vein brother-wife      partner in death juke  
     what a strange gift to need, the good news that the boy you like is dying too  
 we let the night blur into cum wonder & blood hallelujah  
     in the morning, 7 emails come: meeting, junk, rejection, junk, blood work results  
 i put on a pot of coffee, the boy stirs from whatever he dreams  
     & it's like that for a while. me & that boy lived a good little life for a bit  
 in the mornings, we'd both take a pill, then thrash

*These poems originally appeared in PEN America's PEN Poetry Series, guest edited by TC Tolbert, June 2016.  
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# Mimi's Last Dance

Kia Labelija

*Gazing out at the city from the 24th floor, I sat smoking what little I had left of the shitty weed from primo in my one bitter. It looked like a cigarette; I had bought it at a porn shop in Chelsea seven years ago when I was 19. That day, it was snowing. No it was snowstorm-ing, and school was closed. We all drank hot cocoa and watched the snow fall from the New School dorm on 20th Street, waiting to hear that school was shut down indefinitely, exams cancelled, all transportation delayed. In those days snow meant trekking down one block to the corner store to buy Four Lokos, to have drunken snow fights, make snow angels, and dance blissfully without worries. I remember Chris was there. I remember my only photo of us together was taken on that night. It's blurry and wet, and it's one of the best memories I have. He wrote me a long letter when I left for Europe. A love letter of sorts, the kind of letter only a person like Chris could write. An articulate and profound essay from a liberal arts student who was just getting his bearings on New York City. I still read it from time to time. As the city stares back at me, I remember his face and the sound of his voice, singing, laughing, and making sarcastic jokes. I thought maybe he had followed his dreams of joining the Secret Service. That one day we might meet again in Paris and he would laugh and say he was sorry for all the pain he caused. I take a bit. Eyes closed now, listening to the sweet sounds of the city to ease the mourning of a dear friend.*

In 2003 I was thirteen years old and on the verge of hitting those tough teenage years. I rocked two pigtails, blue velour jumpsuits, black faux-tattoo chokers, and platform Sketchers. Those hot summer days were spent watching and re-watching musicals on DVD. I studied them, recreating all the iconic dance numbers, from *A Chorus Line* to *Fosse*. Every bevel, jazz walk, layout, and shoulder roll, I could copy with ease. When I wasn't pretending to be Ann Reinking or Janet Jackson, I was playing both Romeo and Juliet; yielding to a court full of carefully curated stuffed animals in my Hellz Kitchen apartment. A pool of light peered in from my bedroom window, echoing the indigo blue of the emerging moon. I watched as my city illuminated like the sea reflecting the stars, a phenomenon you learn to love when you're from the middle of Manhattan.

In those days I wanted to be an actress. It seemed as though pretending to be someone else was the best way to

make light of doctor appointments, hospital visits, and my parents' unwillingness to get along. Make-believe became my method of survival. People like to ask me about my life before HIV, and I say with a sour taste in my mouth, "That's something I'll never know." In 1993, my mother had a cold that wouldn't go away; the thrush in her mouth became so alarming that she was administered an HIV test. I have blurry memories of St. Vincent's Hospital where I was born, and where we spent a lot of our time in those earlier years after the diagnosis. I recall singing and dancing down hospital hallways as a way to shield myself from the realities of the sickness that dawned. The day before my twelfth birthday, I glared over my balcony into an infinite abyss of buildings. The image is still so vivid and colorful in my mind. The cool breeze and the reflection of sunlight from thousands of beaming windows. "Tomorrow I am going to turn twelve, which means a year from now I'll be thirteen and everything will change," I said to myself. This is the age where girls begin their journey to womanhood.

As a child of the 90s, advertisements for the musical *RENT* lined 42nd Street in bright colors and decaying letters. It made its Broadway debut in 1996, during the turning point for HIV medications and the Giuliani crackdown that gentrified the city. Times Square began its transition from Peep Show World to Disney Land, moving out the abundance of sex workers, and increasing the numbers of Stop and Frisks. For years this poster titillated my senses. Its raw, avant-garde composition and youthful subjects caught my eye. My curiosity increased when I saw "Seasons of Love" performed live during a free concert exhibiting selected Broadway shows. Unaware of the content, I instantly fell in love with the music. It moved me to tears and I awaited the day that I could sit in the theatre to see the production in full. The following year it was announced that my 7th grade class would be going to see the show on a field trip. Many of my peers almost cried when the permission slips were passed out. They began discussing their favorite moments, reciting lyrics, comparing and contrasting favorite characters. A smile came over my face, as I imagined walking into the theater and hearing the song about love and resilience.

I sat quietly amongst friends and multiple groups of young, bubbling pre-teens during the special school performance. Some months prior, I had read in a small blurb in a magazine that *RENT* was an adaptation of Puccini's *La Bohème*, but that its main characters challenged the average Broadway-goer with the heavy subject matter of HIV/AIDS. In those days my stomach used to turn when I heard those letters, my temperature reflecting that of a woman at the onset of menopause. Unexpectedly, I felt a sense of







relief, thinking that maybe there was a place for me on that stage. As the house lights dimmed, I felt nerves come over me. I knew there would be themes that would pull at my heartstrings. I feared that my classmates would pass judgment, unaware of my status and the traumas that accompanied it. As the cast took the stage a wave of excitement filled the theater and the show started off with a bang. It was obnoxiously loud at first and I was sitting close to a set of speakers that almost blew out my eardrums. In fact I'm almost sure that seeing the show as many times as I did factors into my poor hearing. About halfway through Act I, the female character I had seen for years on the posters made her entrance. She had a confidence about her that caught my attention instantly: a striking beauty and unapologetic fearlessness. She was young, brown, and, surprisingly, was living with HIV. She had cascading curls that oozed an abundance of golden glitter. She wailed and swung dangerously from the set, reminiscent of a city fire escape. I saw myself 24 floors high on my own balcony.

*They call me Mimi*, she said.

I bought *RENT* on cd at Tower Records a few days after seeing the show. It was a two-disk set that came with a beautiful booklet that I studied over and over again. I must have played the show a thousand times in my red Discman. I knew all of Mimi's parts. Her second-hand combat boots, latex dresses, spandex and multitude of cheetah print became the framework of my wardrobe for the next decade. Looking at her I saw myself: a feisty woman of color living with HIV. Running up my father's phone bill, I was gossiping with a friend from school and we reminisced about our field trip to the theater and our newfound obsession. She referenced a moment from the text where some PWA's discussed their experiences in a life support meeting. She recited the lyrics over the phone, "though I find some of what you teach suspect, its because I'm used to relying on intellect, but I try to open up to what I don't know. Because reason says I should have died three years ago." *How sad*, she said. *Can you imagine?* My heart broke into pieces and I hung up.

My parents had done a good job at being careful about how they explained HIV to their young impressionable daughter. My doctor recalls the day we came in as a family and he met a cheerful four-year-old whose parents were in a panic; sobbing, wailing, fearing that their days were limited. That was in 1994. He says it's a scene he can never forget as he stares at me—now a woman who sits in my mother's empty chair. Death was explained to me through weekly counseling meetings by way of a book titled *The Next Place* by Warren Hanson. The book was illustrated with ethereal images of clouds and warm skies. "The next place I go will be peaceful and familiar as a sleepy

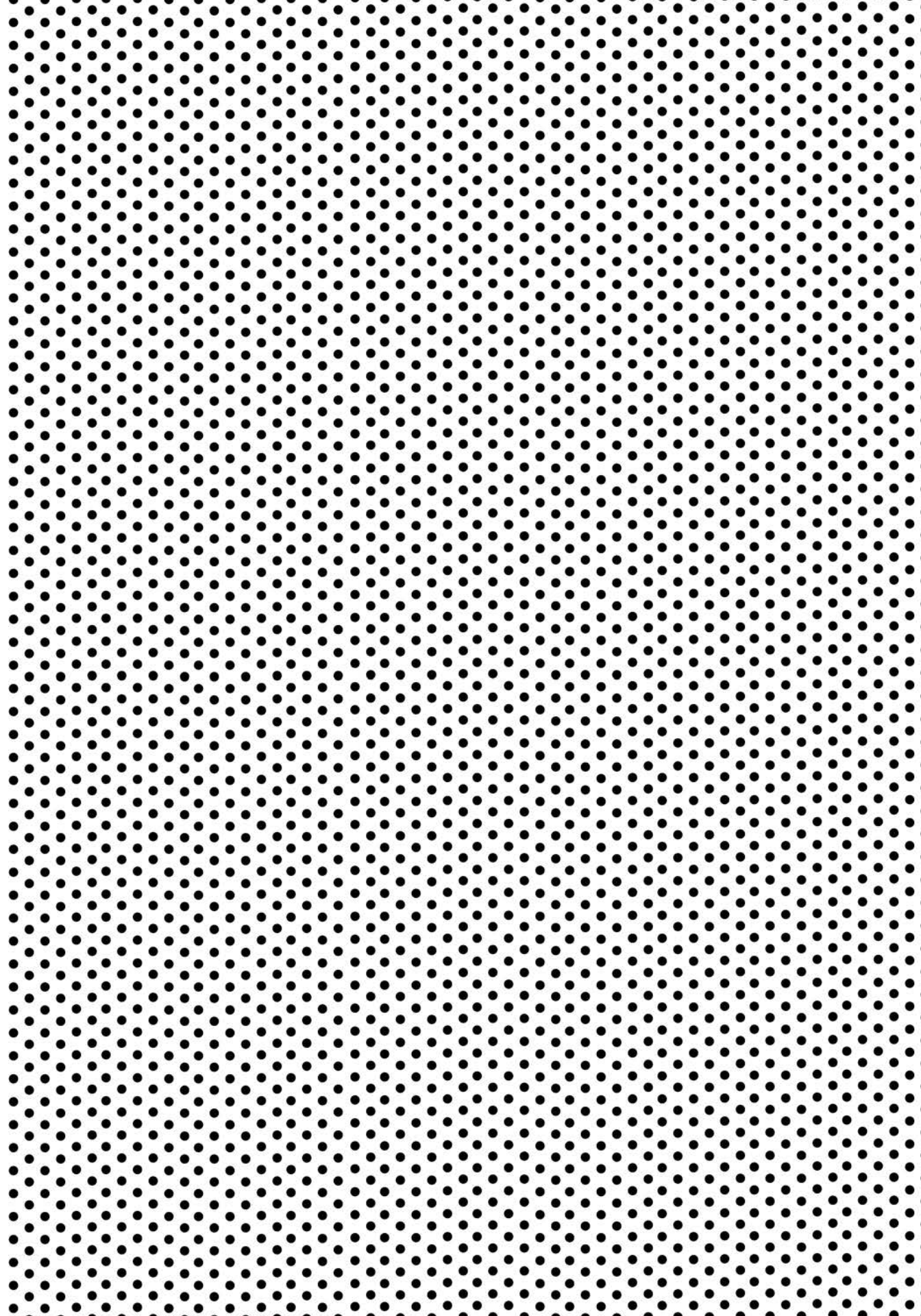
summer Sunday and a sweet, untroubled mind." My mother had a will drawn up, accompanied by boxes filled with ephemera for me in the event that she didn't make it. I finally had the courage to look through the boxes written in red sharpie only one year ago, ten years after her death. I stumbled upon tons of pamphlets for the newly diagnosed on how to put affairs in order. To think that these can be considered antiques today brings tears to my eyes. I wish she could have been here, taking only two pills, once daily, living a full life without fear.

Losing my mother left me without a positive role model.

The subject of HIV became quiet in my house. My father and I had to adjust and talking about her absence was too painful. There were no how-to books on growing up with the virus, so I learned many things the hard way. On days when I felt lonely I listened to *RENT* and immediately felt a sense of community. I related to the artists living with HIV. I felt as if I knew these people intimately. Mimi became my only reference and I developed what I would call *Mimisms*. Looking back on my teens and early twenties I realize how problematic this became. When I started becoming sexually active I had difficulties speaking with my partners about my status, afraid that they would see me as unclean and unpretty. There was no one to give me advice on disclosing, so I spent the majority of my active dating years in fear. Anytime I entered a relationship, it felt like opening up an old wound. I had adopted using my feminine wiles to lure lovers, tragically ending relationships because I was too "broken" to let myself be loved. I had trust issues and dressed overtly sexy to compensate for my positive status. I engaged with multiple lovers at once and started romances that broke up friendships. I had periods of intense clubbing that, although they made me feel free for the first time, also led to vicious blackouts, violent hangovers and irreparable mistakes. At night I sat at my window and gazed over the city and wondered about my own longevity. Chris died at the end of 2011, drowning in shallow water in the East River. He was the first of half a dozen who died the following year at the hands of alcohol, drugs, and suicide. If I was going to live a life of promise I had to put an end to the idea of Mimi, whose unwillingness to give in to love was going to kill me. I needed to be a role model for all the other Mimi's who needed to come up for air.

*This piece is dedicated to all the POZ babies that are still here, and those who are not.*

*Mimi's Last Dance*. Photo © Kia Labeija, 2016.



## IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

*Against Our Vanishing*

is dedicated  
with love to:  
Kenny Angelico,  
Keith Davis,  
Max diCorcia,  
Peter Hujar,  
Mark Morrisroe,  
Vittorio Scarpati,  
Bibi Smith  
and everyone else  
we have lost  
to AIDS.

In the summer of 1988 I left New York for the weekend. Now, one and a half years later, I'm on my way home. In the process of withdrawal from addiction I suffered a kind of amnesia, a profound loss of identity. During early recovery I picked up my camera again. Through my work I began to reconstruct myself, to fit back into my own skin. I discovered the light after years in the dark. I wanted to live. Most of all I wanted to reconnect with my family of friends with whom I'd lost contact in my last few years of isolation and destruction. I was full of a new hope that I wanted to share.

During this period ARTISTS SPACE invited me to curate a show. I wanted to produce an exhibition by, for and about this community of friends, whose lives and work have inspired my life and my work. But when I came back to life, I realized how much had changed, how many of those I most admired were sick or had been killed by AIDS. I have had to face that there could not be all the joyous reunions I'd envisioned when I resurfaced from my own hell. My priority became to formulate an exhibition that would include the whole community, that those who have died would be as much a part of those who still survive, and that would serve to both keep their spirit with us and allow

us to formally say goodbye.

Originally I conceived of a show entitled *Sexuality, Spirituality and Recovery in the age of AIDS*. Its primary purpose was to celebrate the indomitable spirit of our community; to prove that our way of life still exists, that we are being killed by AIDS but our sensibility could not be killed-off. To show how hard we have been hit and at the same time to affirm all that is left.

I feel my own recent recovery from addiction, and that of many of my friends, is directly related to AIDS. With the advent of a fatal illness in our midst, the glorification of self destruction wore thin. We were no longer playing with death -- it was real and among us, and not at all glamorous. We have been forced to make survival, recovery and healing our priorities as individuals and as a community. We realize that we can live the same lifestyle, but in the light. That we can still live fully in the moment but with an awareness of consequences. That we can take pride in the legacy of our past without contrition, regret, or revision, but with a new belief in the possibility of future.

I have intended all along to exhibit work that deals explicitly with sex and sexuality. The outbreak of the Helms controversy and



the new success of government censorship of art in this country has only strengthened my resolve. The influence of the New Morality and the effective use of AIDS as the most powerful tool for sexual repression makes it even more imperative to continue to create and exhibit art that portrays sexuality as a positive force. To prove that a gay aesthetic continues to flourish. To prove that sex=death is a false equation. To show that homoeroticism cannot be disappeared. To show that the strictly demarcated lines between homo and heterosexual cultures can be seamlessly crossed. That the public and private manifestations of all forms of sexuality can still be positive and liberating. That the sexual liberation movement need not become extinct but requires a new responsibility.

Over the past year four more of my most beloved friends have died of AIDS. Two were artists I had selected for this exhibit. One of the writers for this catalogue has become too sick to write. And so the tone of the exhibition has become less theoretical and more personal, from a show about AIDS as an issue to more of a collective memorial.

I am often filled with rage at my sense of powerlessness in the face of this plague. I

want to empower others by providing them a forum to voice their grief and anger in the hope that this public ritual of mourning can be cathartic in the process of recovery, both for those among us who are now ill and those survivors who are left behind.

I have asked each artist to select work that represents their personal responses to AIDS. Most have created new work especially for this exhibit. The focus of the responses vary: out of loss come memory pieces, tributes to friends and lovers who have died; out of anger come explorations of the political cause and effects of this disease. Some work concentrates on the continuum of daily life, relationships and sexuality under the shadow of AIDS, other on the physicality of the disease through the effects on the body and the individual construction of identity. And some respond with work pertaining to death and reclamation of the spirit.

This is not a show for or about the art market. I am not at all concerned here with art as a commodity but as an articulation, as an outcry, and as a mechanism for survival. This is not intended to be a definitive statement about the state of art in the era of AIDS but as a vehicle to explore the effects of this plague on one group of artists in a way that

hopefully will speak to all survivors of this crisis. By its very existence and its volume, this show proves its own premise -- that AIDS has not and will not eliminate our community, or succeed in wiping out our sensibility or silencing our voice.

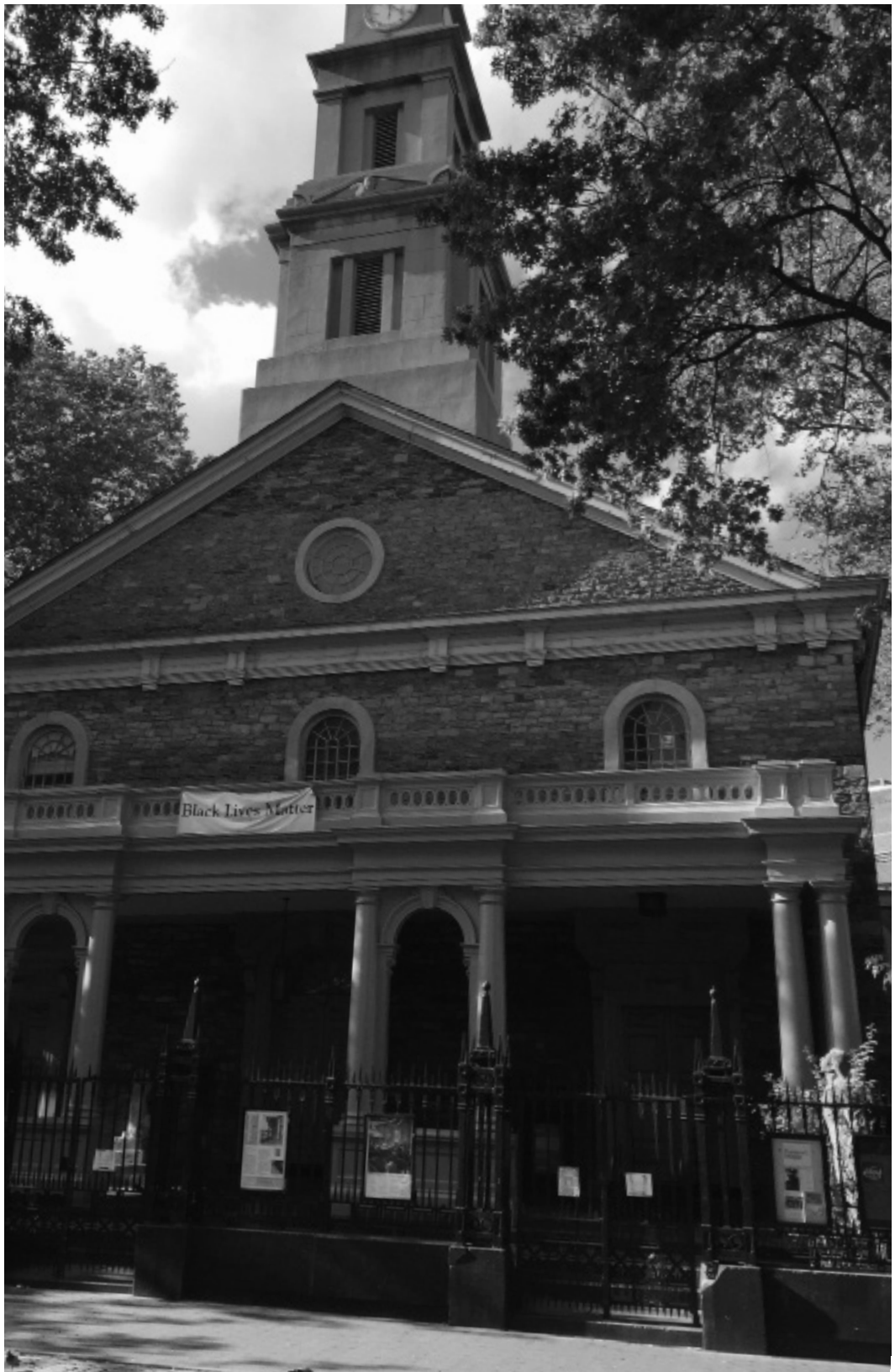
I have sometimes experienced survivors in these times criticizing themselves or one another about appropriate or inappropriate ways of mourning. We are all clumsy in dealing with grief. I do not believe we need to develop a correct etiquette. Every one of our responses is valid, passivity and silence are the gravest dangers. It is not the time to distract ourselves with divisiveness.

I have also witnessed this community take care of its own, nurse its sick, bury its dead, mourn its losses, and continue to fight for each others' lives. We will not vanish.

**NAN GOLDIN**  
Boston, October 1989



Vittorio Scarpati and Cookie Mueller, 1989; photo by Nan Goldin



*Danspace Project at Saint Mark's Church*



## **PORTFOLIO: WILLI NINJA**

# Willi Ninja

Sally Sommer

Stretched out in an open casket, wearing a custom-designed brocaded suit and snakeskin boots, Vogueing “Legend” Willi Ninja looked more magnificent in death than any one of the 300 people who came to his funeral in 2006. Among those who came to pay their respects to this remarkable man were most of New York’s renowned queens, several famous models, a couple of well-known filmmakers, *couture* designers, downtown post-modern choreographers and dancers, and anyone-who-was-anyone from New York’s gay community. Willi would have loved it.

Born in 1961, Willi was a queen out of Queens. He learned to dance on his own, inspired by TV reruns of Fred Astaire musicals, PBS’s *Dance in America*, Harlem’s Apollo Theater Motown shows, and Kung Fu flicks. “I grew up in an Asian neighborhood, so a lot of my influence was from Kung Fu movements and Indian dance. That’s why I like to use my fingers a lot. I’ve been dancing since I first understood music, I guess about two or three years old. I can hear anything and dance to it.” But he adds, “Never had the money for classes, and in the neighborhood I grew up in, there was no such thing as getting caught with a pair of tights or you got the shit beat out of you.”

Willi was the beloved only child of Ester Leake, who worked and raised him from a wheelchair [spinal bifida]. “At first it was kind of hard,” she said. “But you get used to the idea that you have to do it, nobody’s gonna help you. I used to take him on the weekends when I worked overtime at Long Island Jewish Hospital. I put him in one of those [utility] carts while I was doing my [clerical] work. He was a great kid, a little skinny kid, with a little round head and glasses. Willi was a riot. I’ll never forget the time I had a lot of surgery and was in and out of the hospital [c.1967]. I was kind of down in the dumps. And he decided he was going to put a show on for me. So he put this little bandana on his head and had these little skinny arms. I never laughed so hard in all my life. He was doing his ‘African Dance,’ he called it. He was trying to cheer me up all the time. And he learned fast – to do laundry, to cook, he did everything.” Willi in fact helped his mother every day of his life.

William Leake became Willi “Ninja” around 1975-76, when he came out and earned his creds at the Christopher Street piers. There he perfected his “Ninja” style

of Vogueing in combats with New York’s best – the aspiring and seasoned Voguers who battled him at the piers and in the clubs. Although he completed one year at Queens College, he was truly educated “living the life” in the 1970s and ‘80s gay world. Among the primarily poor, young, gay men of color who hung out at the Hudson River piers and survived by their wits and pretty bodies, Willi learned wisdom and sharpened his tongue (he could “read” a rival faster than anyone). In that diverse mix of people, where fast talking and flirting was fueled by music, dancing and desperate circumstances, Willi learned an abiding kindness and honed his distinct *persona*. A self-declared butch queen, he declared, “I’ve always been different. I don’t care what anyone thinks. I don’t even dress like every other gay person. I like my feminine side, I like my masculine side, and I could always-borderline dress. I learned how to develop my own style, on my own, and through friends.” He also learned how to Vogue from an unknown dancer whose moniker was “Hector Vogue” (not to be confused with Hector Extravaganza, another great dancer).

Willi’s handsome androgyny appealed to everyone. Six-foot-three inches tall, he was blessed with dramatic good looks, double jointedness, and incredibly broad shoulders (constantly smacked to make sure they weren’t padded). Willi could clasp his hands at his waist and sweep his arms over his head and behind his back in one smooth move and, without pausing, dip to the floor, strike a pose, then crumple his body so one leg ended up behind his head as he fanned his crotch, cooling the heat. Yet he was funny, not gross. Severe and serious, he attacked each move cleanly, then paused in hard holds after a long string flowing phrases. He traveled the space with small snakelike steps while, up above, he delivered intricate arm twirlings, shoulder bounces and precisely positioned flourishes of hands and fingers. He always danced a specific emotion:

*ferce warrior or an impish kid who’d get over on you, a witty flirt or elegant femme model applying makeup – then twirling, posing, stalking in a long-legged catwalk with a fuck-you attitude. Archie Burnett, the great House and Whacking Legend and friend of Willi, describes voguing best: “Vogueing is like taking pictures and poses from fashion magazines – that’s a two-dimensional source – and then translating it into a three-dimensional movement in a syncopated or metered time.”*





Archie met Willi at Washington Square Park in 1981. "He was unique! I'd never seen moving that fluid in that style — *never, ever!* What Willi could do with his body normal people don't do. Or, if they did, it was always with a certain degree of difficulty. Willi didn't struggle, just smoothly moved through." Archie and friends arrived at the park about 1 PM after a 12-hour dance party at the Loft. "We wanted to continue partying, and Willi was hanging with his friends in the park entrance we called "Fag Alley" [other entrances included "Lesbo-Row" and "Drug-In"]. We were all dancing to music on the boombox, playing together — yeah, it was kinda like a little battle. Willi, of course, was his usual flamboyant self. He used to do this thing of sticking his finger in your face. I remember saying 'I don't know what it is about you that I like. But I like you. But if you stick your finger in my face one more time, I'm going to break it.' From that moment we were friends and started hanging out together." The most important thing Archie noticed about Willi was "family and friendship. That meant a lot to him, it was something he really, really was into."

Archie says, "I was the straight guy raised in the gay scene. Because I was introduced to the scene by Willi, I got to see all of the craziness straight up. I got to see where the love was. I got to see the pain. The struggles between how they were living, and what their choices were. Some just made bad choices. But these were his friends, and in time they became good friends of mine. The one thing we had in common was, we love the dance. Dance gave us (and I know it gave me) *mad* respect." When Archie first met Ester, "The strangest thing happened: His mom said to me, 'You have to help my son.' Till today I find that strangely intuitive because apparently he was carrying on at the house. Not long after, Mama threw him out for more than two months. I think it was maybe his behavior, attitude, maybe bringing people or drugs into the house. I'm not sure. But Willi was wild back then." Ester says, "He went through this phase where he didn't know who Willi was. And I had to *show* him who Willi was. Finally, he decided who Willi really should be and ever since then he's been all right. But I had to stop it." It was a turning point for Willi: "Archie guided me on the right path. I was so wild, so crazy, even my mother didn't know what to do with me. But Archie taught me a lesson: 'If you value our friendship, you'll get your life together. If you don't, then I have no use for you.' So I got my shit together. He's always been there as my brother, my father figure. You know, that strong hand."

Around 1987, the producer, clothing designer, and all-around art impresario, Malcolm McClaren saw Wil-

li and immediately detected his “warrior nobility.” Subsequently, Willi starred in McClaren’s classic 1988 music video, *Deep en Vogue* and in a Ninja-led tour of voguers who toured to European fashion houses under the sponsorship of McClaren. The ripple effects of that cross-pollination are still expanding in 2016. Working on runways and with top designers transformed Willi’s fashion sense into *haute couture*, which he pulled off whether wearing a pink Versace jacket or thrift store swag. McClaren said Willi didn’t “just wear clothes, he acted them.”

*Deep en Vogue* kick-started Willi’s career in mainstream runway work (designers Chanel, Carl Lagerfeld, Jean Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler, Zang Toy, Patricia Fields and many others used Ninja as a model and trainer). He worked with beautiful and famous models, among them, Grace Jones, Iman, and Naomi Campbell, and also taught the raw wannabes how to walk the walk. He was a featured performer in Jennie Livingston’s superb documentary, *Paris is Burning* (1990), about the lives of gay voguers and competitive balls in New York City. In 1990, Madonna blew up House and Vogueing with her video *Vogue*, which featured the real NYC voguers Hector and Louis Extravaganza. Willi was philosophical about Madonna capitalizing on it. “Hey, she’s Madonna! And she took it and brought it to millions of people. Because she was famous, people paid attention and she brought it to a way higher level than I could have.” He also danced in Diane Martel’s 30-minute short, *House of Tres*, and was featured in the Peabody Award-winning 1991 PBS documentary, *Every Body Dance Now!* He performed in music videos with Dee-lite and Queen Latifa and worked with Tony Basil, and with India in *I Can’t Get No Sleep*, produced by Little Louie Vega. Willi became an eloquent spokesman for gay House life, appearing on numerous talk shows and speaking on serious university academic panels (Yale, Duke, Princeton) where scholars struggled to theorize gay culture and identity.

I met Willi in 1989 filming *Everybody Dance Now!* He was the Ninja warrior that day, striking in silver and black. Willi only “played” his looks when he was dancing femme or seriously flirting. I was seduced by his quick humor and generosity — and there was the immediate bond of us both knowing Archie. I soon met Ester. I admired her straightforward manner and resilience and, most especially, her deep love for her son and his accomplishments. Willi said she took all the articles and news information about him to work (by then she was a social worker dealing with disabled children). “She and her co-workers know more about me than I do sometimes,” he observed.

Willi was one of the main reasons I wanted to make my documentary *Check Your Body at the Door*, which I began shooting in 1992 (it was released in 2012). To capture something about him was to capture something about the spirit of those remarkable dancers of the 1990s underground House scene. I also organized House dance tours to Europe in the early 1990s with Check Your Body dancers and DJs — hilarious trips that always began with Willi sleeping under the airport seats. In the hotels he inevitably started spontaneous competitions where everyone catwalked the hallways, mimicking people we had seen that day. Willi loved to borrow clothes, particularly from women, and he perpetually raided the closets of my niece, my daughter and me. In the late 1990s when he worked with postmodern choreographers Doug Elkins, David Neumann, and Karole Armitage, along with creating his own choreography, he moved Vogueing from the clubs to concert stages. He also became a famous iconic doorman in 1999 at the gay club Escuelita, for about 18 months, often wearing my daughter’s iridescent raven-feather jacket.

In early 1990s, the House of Ninja was filled with mature dancers, most of whom were tall gorgeous hunks like Willi and Archie. They were a fierce tribe and took many trophies at the Vogue Balls. Willi commandeered the older Ninjas to help guide the junior Ninjas, particularly the youth without homes. In the era of AIDS, he admonished the kids to play it safe and watch who they went with, and to always use condoms. The Father of the House of Ninja was Archie, of course, charged with keeping order and making everyone show up on time. Willi was particularly affected by the plight of the homeless street kids because he saw too many get beaten — or die. “Kids thrown out on the street because the families thought they were gay! Or maybe they had tendencies. It makes no sense.” In many ways The House of Ninja was something Willi tried to recreate as a home and family in the same way that home and guidance were administered by Ester and Archie. He cautioned and mentored his kids while teaching them to dance. By the end of the 1990s, however, the Ninja “look” had changed. The elder, taller generation had aged out and the new crop of Ninjas were slight, slender, and flexible as pipe cleaners. The *gravitas* of the warriors transmogrified into the fleet and speedy styles that characterize Vogueing today. Javier Ninja, the world’s best Voguer and Champion, is a proud Ninja and inheritor of Willi’s precise musicality and rhythmic style, in which all moves are hard cut and on point.

Archie and Willi attempted to pass on the ethos of

the “club family” which is truly the soul and spirit of House and Vogueing. At today’s huge European and Asian international “House Dance Conferences” attended by thousands, Vogueing and Whacking have evolved into tightly timed routines with no club time. The joy of dancing together only comes from winning and beating the shit out of a rival. Back in the day, dancers clubbed four or five times a week. It was always competitive but in that highly social and interactive context, the “win” came from being able to think on your feet and take down the opposition by topping them at their own game. It was visceral “reading,” Dirty Dozens on the move.

For Willi, “Dancing’s not just about the movement, it’s about bringing out your inner spirit, and letting others enjoy it with you.” Whether dancing in House cipher or in a Vogue Ball, the real competition is about the dancer’s skill in snapping out a quick response. It’s more than being a fabulous queen or bangee boy with crowd-pleasing flash. Vogueing is about liberation and the ability to take on the skin of another while still showing soul.

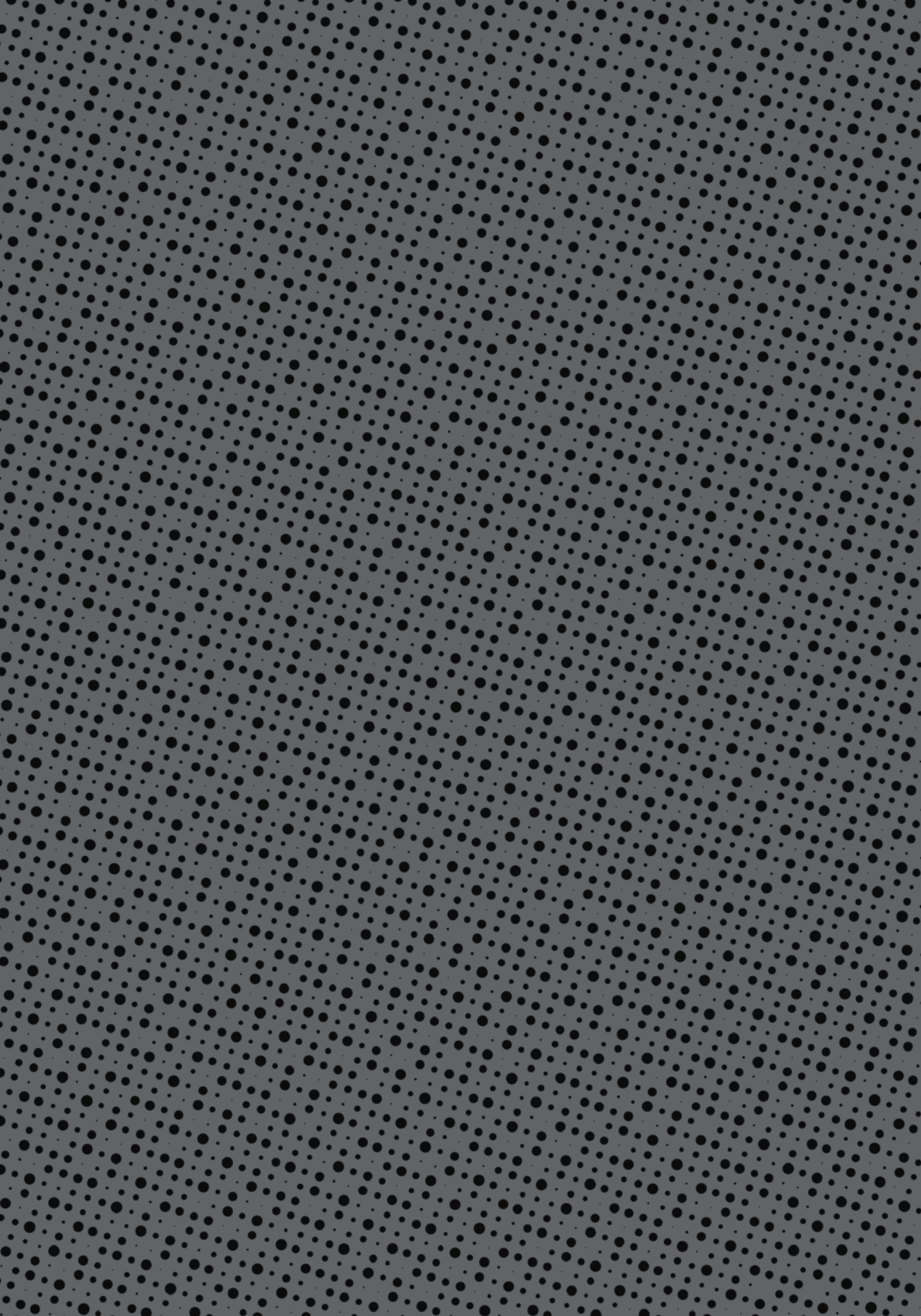
When Willi opened his modeling agency, EON (Elements of Ninja) in 2004, it was obvious he was not well. He was still teaching all over the world, working in videos, and appearing on television spots, and arranging for the Children of the House of Ninja to perform at competitions, social galas, AIDS benefits, and in fashion shows. In a sad ironic twist, however, Willi did not heed his own cautionary advice. He was HIV positive and died of heart-related complications provoked by AIDS on September 2, 2006. Thank god I have him on film and in interviews and got to see him and Archie walking the walk and Archie booming out, “You betta work!” and Willi saying, “Oh, child, you’re fierce!” They liked to do the New York Latin Hustle in the 1980s style, twirling in a fast nonstop flow of motion, circling each other like two spinning stars under the club’s lights. It was a remarkable partnership. Willi was a brilliant high spirit who contributed style and *brio* to the previously dismissed gay Voguers, translocating Vogueing from the Hudson River piers to the worlds of high-fashion, television, YouTube and university courses on gender and identity. As a proud gay man, Willi’s personal dignity helped change public perceptions about Vogue dancers and dancing. And, as a brilliant innovator, Willi Ninja left behind a distinctive style that will forever be synonymous with his name.



Willi Ninja. Courtesy of Archie Burnett.

Note: With the exception of Malcolm McClaren, all quoted material comes from interviews conducted with the people themselves, and recorded by Sally Sommer between 1992 and 2009. An additional conversation and email exchange occurred between Archie and Sally on August 19, 2016.









*The Pyramid Club*



Pamela Sneed, courtesy of the artist.

## For Donald Woods

On the warm spring day Rory Buchanan died his friend  
 a beautiful young Black gay man laid down on the ground  
 outside of the funeral home and let out a gut wrenching scream  
 He just laid down on the ground rolled back and forth as he cried.  
 He did what we all felt but didn't have the courage to do  
 expressed in his actions battle fatigue, weariness  
 of a young community that had lost so many of its own  
 This might have been one month before we lost poet Donald Woods  
 and members of a Black Lesbian and Gay community poured into a packed church  
 hot humid with no outlet  
 Poet Assotto Saint stood more than 6 ft 5 in heels, but on that day  
 he wore a man's suit and performed an act of exorcism and protest  
 when he assailed the pulpit took over said Donald Woods did not die  
 of heart failure, he died of Aids and he was a Proud Black Gay man  
 If you agree with me stand up  
 And so today Whitney Houston is gone, Etta James, my idol,  
 the soul train man who shot himself Don Cornelius, Heavy D, Howard Tate, Michael  
 Jackson, Prince, Muhammad Ali  
 Heath Ledger, Anna Nicole, Amy Winehouse  
 Nelson Mandela  
 so many who helped us know who we are and were  
 but today I don't want any lavish displays of grief and protest  
 to do as they did in the Black church when spirit took hold  
 you could see a weighted 300 pound body fly up and dance  
 Today I want none of what happened with Rory or Donald  
 Today I just want to breathe breath let go past pain grief  
 be the girl I was leap up sing dance not care  
 let my tongue turn blue eating an icy  
 walk down the street carrying a boom box  
 singing Stephanie Mills, "I Feel Good All Over"  
 to feel like I do when snow falls taking that first big gulp  
 of something new  
 the way I feel every time I board the plane to Africa or Europe  
 and I'm racing over images stalls upon stalls  
 filled with beauty and mystery  
 to feel with myself the way students express feeling with me  
 eyes opened it affects everything  
 to feel the way I do walking up the hill to a new school  
 like a traveling preacher filled up with message  
 Today I want to release all the things I could  
 should have said  
 be the student who said I changed everything  
 even at home  
 my teachings made him grow up  
 become a better and new man.

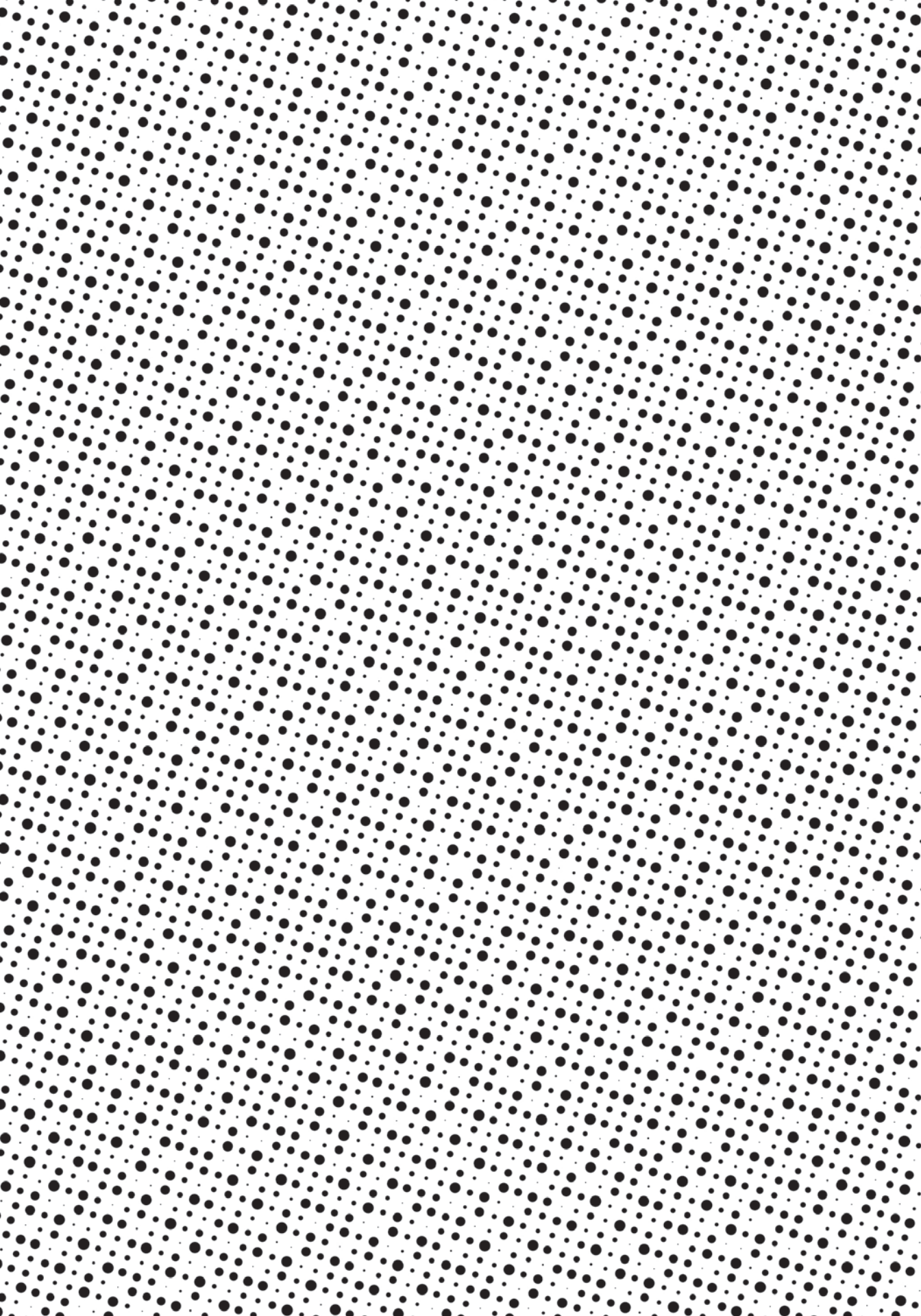
*Originally published in Pamela Sneed's chapbook Lincoln, 2014.*

## On the Orlando Shooting

Let's be clear, it wasn't Isis or Islam  
that licensed that man to walk into a Gay Bar  
and massacre those white and gay men of color  
It was America with her heinous gun laws that allow any white  
or white skinned man with mental health problems  
to purchase weapons of war/machine guns with minimal background check  
Meanwhile black and brown people can't  
walk through a neighborhood to buy candy, survive a routine traffic stop  
without being murdered  
No he wasn't trained in hills of Afghanistan  
didn't learn bomb making techniques from the Taliban  
It was here in America he learned with her apartheid policies  
Separate and unequal  
Separate schools  
Separate bathrooms  
Separate  
Separate  
Separate  
that bred a rampant repressed homophobe  
It was from demagogues like Trump  
that purport building walls and keeping people  
out and inciting fear fear fear  
It was America and the Bush clan  
that proved you could lie and kill and get away with it  
that certain populations were disposable  
I've seen these massacres before,  
it was when black and brown gays were dying rapidly of AIDS  
only then the guns were indifference  
Guns were in hands of every American  
Guns were in hands of politicians  
of doctors  
in a system that hated queers  
I've seen it before this killing  
in the zig zag scars of women poets who died  
of breast cancer  
And institutions that still claim their legacy  
Like many I've searched the hallways for justice  
paced up and down  
begged to be heard  
asked for simple treatment  
for simple problems  
Gas lighted  
Bankrupted  
Run around  
Only to find out in America  
women's wombs are big business  
I've seen this killing before  
It happens every day



reality shows  
teaching us to step on and crush  
each other to get ahead  
A television that shows someone actually slicing  
Gaddafi's jugular  
I've left so many places/ communities  
because of safety concerns  
I could go on but my brother Essex Hemphill  
is calling to me  
telling me/us as he did in the crisis so long ago  
telling us to wrap our arms around each other  
and hold tight  
Hold tight—  
gently



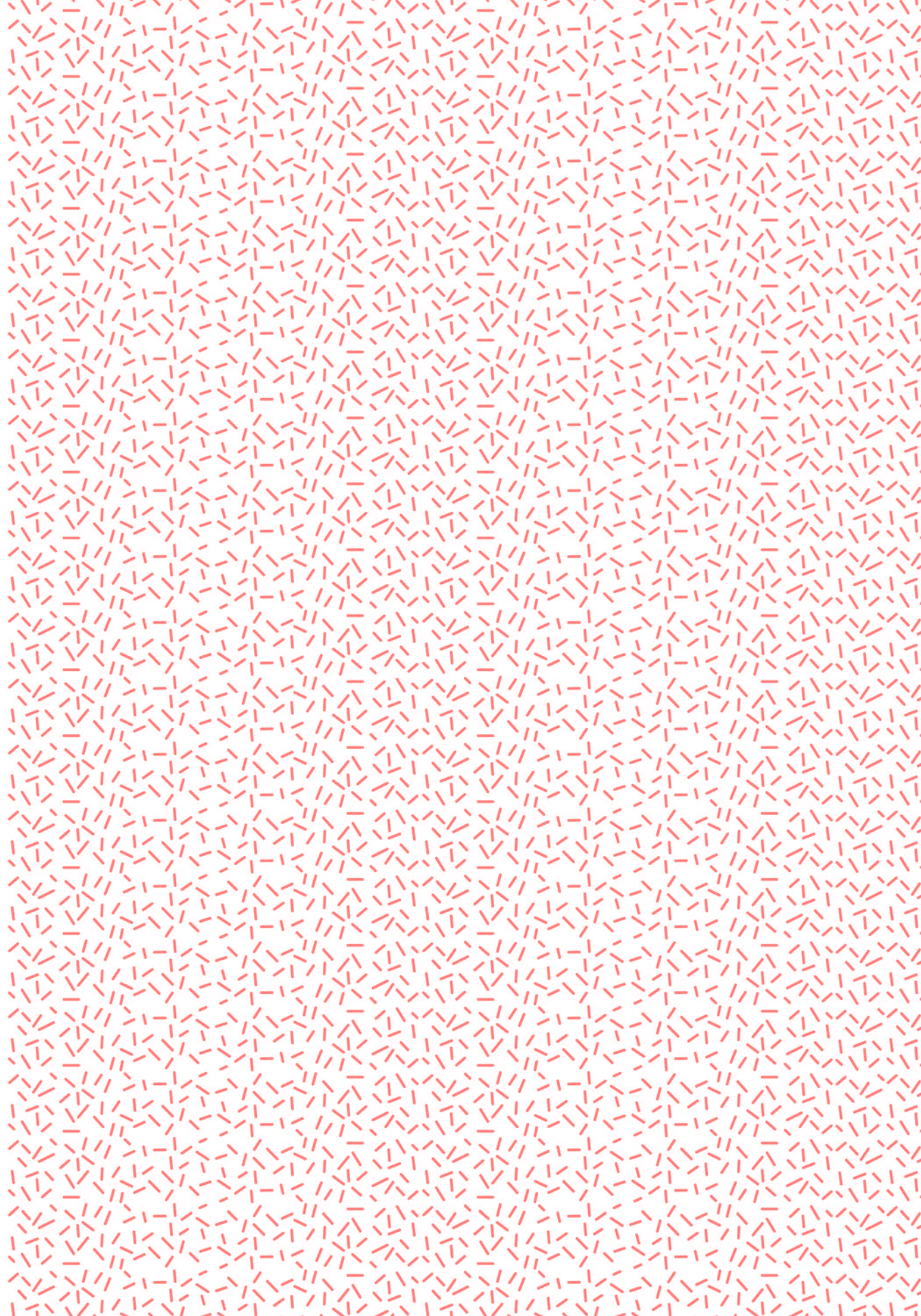
## Rope-a-Dope: For Sandra Bland

I had just begun to relax  
 celebrate the marriage equality ruling  
 I had just begun feeling with Obama I was  
 watching Ali in trouble off the ropes  
 delivering to his opponents the rope-a-dope  
 my father's eyes  
 excitement  
 I was just beginning to breathe air  
 feel exhilarated at images of  
 Joe Biden and President Obama running  
 down halls of the White House with rainbow flags  
 like boys with kites-soaring  
 I was just beginning to forgive deaths of my brothers  
 to Aids  
 not forget  
 there should still be tribunals  
 for them and every woman abused  
 by the medical system  
 I had just begun to turn a corner on Mike Brown, Freddie Gray  
 Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, The massacre at AME  
 not think of it all everyday  
 Then the police kill this young Black girl in custody in Texas  
 claim she committed suicide  
 I remember we're a war nation  
 in war times  
 I imagine how James, Bayard, Nina felt  
 seeing a nation turn its dogs, teeth, gas, hoses, bullets,  
 on children, adults, humans  
 I can't stop thinking about Steve Biko  
 his battered face  
 they say he hung himself too  
 the world's outrage  
 who will pray now  
 for us  
 America



*306 East 6th Street, Apt. 15, last home of John Bernd*





# Introduction to AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism [1987]

Douglas Crimp

"I assert, to begin with, that 'disease' does not exist. It is therefore illusory to think that one can 'develop beliefs' about it to 'respond' to it. What does exist is not disease but practices." Thus begins François Delaporte's investigation of the 1832 cholera epidemic in Paris.<sup>1</sup> It is a statement we may find difficult to swallow, as we witness the ravages of AIDS in the bodies of our friends, our lovers, and ourselves. But it is nevertheless crucial to our understanding of AIDS, because it shatters the myth so central to liberal views of the epidemic: that there are, on the one hand, the scientific facts about AIDS and, on the other hand, ignorance or misrepresentation of those facts standing in the way of a rational response. I will therefore follow Delaporte's assertion: AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it. We know AIDS only in and through those practices. This assertion does not contest the existence of viruses, antibodies, infections, or transmission routes. Least of all does it contest the reality of illness, suffering, and death. What it *does* contest is the notion that there is an underlying reality of AIDS, upon which are constructed the representations, or the culture, or the politics of AIDS. If we recognize that AIDS exists only in and through these constructions, then hopefully we can also recognize the imperative to know them, analyze them, and wrest control of them.

Within the arts, the scientific explanation and management of AIDS is largely taken for granted, and it is therefore assumed that cultural producers can respond to the epidemic in only two ways: by raising money for scientific research and service organizations or by creating works that express the human suffering and loss. In an article for *Horizon* entitled "AIDS: The Creative Response," David Kaufman outlined examples of both, including benefits such as "Music for Life," "Dancing

for Life," and "Art against AIDS," together with descriptions of plays, literature, and paintings that take AIDS as their subject.<sup>2</sup> Regarding these latter "creative responses," Kaufman rehearses the clichés about art's "expressing feelings that are not easily articulated," "shar[ing] experiences and values through catharsis and metaphor," "demonstrating the indomitability of the human spirit," "consciousness raising." Art is what survives, endures, transcends; art constitutes our legacy. In this regard, AIDS is even seen to have a positive value: Kaufman quotes Michael Denny of St. Martin's Press as saying, "We're on the verge of getting a literature out of this that will be a renaissance."<sup>3</sup>

In July 1987, PBS's *McNeill/Lehrer Newshour* devoted a portion of its program to "AIDS in the Arts." The segment opened with the shibboleth about "homosexuals" being "the lifeblood of show business and the arts," and went on to note the AIDS-related deaths of a number of famous artists. Such a pretext for a special report on AIDS is highly problematic, and on a number of counts: First, it reinforces the equation of AIDS and homosexuality, neglecting even to mention the possibility that an artist, like anyone else, might acquire AIDS heterosexually or through shared needles when shooting drugs. Secondly, it suggests that gay people have a *natural* inclination toward the arts, the homophobic flip side of which is the notion that "homosexuals control the arts" (ideas perfectly parallel with anti-Semitic attitudes that see Jews as, on the one hand, "making special contributions to culture," and, on the other, "controlling capital"). But most pernicious of all, it implies that gay people "redeem" themselves by being artists, and therefore that the deaths of other gay people are less tragic.<sup>4</sup> The message is that art, because it is timeless and universal, transcends individual lives, which are time-bound and contingent.

Entirely absent from the news report (and the *Horizon* article) was any mention of *activist* responses to

[1] François Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris, 1832*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, MIT Press, 1986, p. 6.

[2] David Kaufman, "AIDS: The Creative Response," *Horizon*, vol. 30, no. 9 (November 1987), pp. 13-20.

[3] Denny is the editor of Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On*, a discussion of which appears in my essay "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," pp. 237-271.

[4] Redemption, of course, necessitates a prior sin—the sin of homosexuality, of promiscuity, of drug use—and thus a program such as "AIDS in the Arts" contributes to the media's distribution of innocence and guilt according to who you are and how you acquired AIDS. Promiscuous gay men and IV drug users are unquestionably guilty in this construction, but so are all people from poor minority populations. The special attention paid to artists and other celebrities with AIDS is nevertheless contradictory. While a TV program such as "Aids in the Arts" virtually beatifies the stricken artist, for personalities such as Rock Hudson and Liberace the scandal of being found guilty of homosexuality tarnishes the halo of their celebrity status.



AIDS by cultural producers. The focus was instead on the dramatic effect of the epidemic upon the art world, the coping with illness and death. Extended interviews with choreographers Bill T. Jones and his lover Arnie Zane, who has been diagnosed with AIDS, emphasized the “human face” of the disease in a way that was far more palatable than is usual in broadcast television, simply because it allowed the positive self-representations of both a person with AIDS and a gay relationship. Asked whether he thought “the arts are particularly hit by AIDS,” Zane replied, “That’s the controversial question this month, right?” but then went on to say, “Of course I do. I am in the center of this world, the art world. . . . I am losing my colleagues.” Colleen Dewhurst, president of Actors Equity, suggested rather that “AIDS-related deaths are not more common among artists, only more visible,” and continued, “Artists are supposed to represent the human condition . . .” (a condition that is, of course, assumed to be universal).

“Art lives on forever” – this idealist platitude came from Elizabeth Taylor, National Chairman of the American Foundation for AIDS Research, shown addressing the star-studded crowd at the gala to kick off “Art against AIDS.” But strangely it was Richard Goldstein, writer for the *Village Voice* and a committed activist on the subject of AIDS, who contributed the broadcast’s most unabashed statement of faith in art’s transcendence of life: “In an ironic sense, I think that AIDS is good for art. I think it will produce great works that will outlast and transcend the epidemic.”

It would appear from such a statement that what is at stake is not the survival of people with AIDS and those who might now be or eventually become infected with HIV, but rather the survival, even the flourishing, of art. For Goldstein, this is surely less a question of hopelessly confused priorities, however, than of a failure to recognize the alternatives to this desire for transcendence—a failure determined by the intractability of the traditional idealist conception of art, which entirely divorces art from engagement in lived social life.

Writing in the catalogue of “Art against AIDS,” Robert Rosenblum affirms this limited and limiting view of art and the passivity it entails:

*By now, in the 1980s, we are all disenchanted enough to know that no work of art, however much it may fortify the spirit or nourish the eye and mind, has the slightest power to save a life. Only science can do that. But we also know*

*that art does not exist in an ivory tower; that it is made and valued by human beings who live and die, and that it can generate a passionate abundance of solidarity, love, intelligence, and most important, money.*<sup>5</sup>

There could hardly be a clearer declaration of the contradictions inherent in aesthetic idealism than one which blandly accepts art’s inability to intervene in the social and simultaneously praises its commodity value. To recognize this as contradictory is not, however, to object to exploiting that commodity value for the purpose of fundraising for AIDS research and service. Given the failure of government at every level to provide the funding necessary to combat the epidemic, such efforts as “Art against AIDS” have been necessary, even crucial to our survival. I want, nevertheless, to make three caveats.

1. Scientific research, health care, and education are the *responsibility and purpose* of government and not of so-called “private initiative,” an ideological term that excuses and perpetuates the state’s irresponsibility. Therefore, every venture of this nature should make clear that it is necessitated strictly because of criminal negligence on the part of government. What we find, however, is the very opposite:

*Confronting a man-made evil like the war in Vietnam, we could assail a government and the people in charge. But how do we confront a diabolically protean virus that has been killing first those pariahs of grass-roots America, homosexuals and drug addicts, and has then gone on to kill, with far less moral discrimination, even women, children, and heterosexual men? We have recourse only to love and to science, which is what Art against AIDS is all about.*<sup>6</sup>

[5] Robert Rosenblum, “Life Versus Death: The Art World in Crisis,” in *Art against AIDS*, New York, American Foundation for AIDS Research, 1987, p. 32.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 28. I hope we can assume that Rosenblum intends his remarks about “pariahs” and “moral discrimination” ironically, although this is hardly what I would call politically sensitive writing. It could easily be read without irony, since it so faithfully reproduces what is written in the press virtually every day. And the implication of the “even women” in the category distinct from “homosexuals” is, once again, that there’s no such thing as a lesbian. But can we expect political sensitivity from someone who cannot see that AIDS is political? That *science* is political? It was science, after all, that conceptualized AIDS as a gay disease—and wasted precious time scrutinizing our sex lives, theorizing about killer sperm, and giving megadoses of poppers to mice at the CDC—all the while taking little notice of the others who were dying of AIDS, and thus allowing HIV to be injected into the veins of vast numbers of IV drug users, as well as of hemophiliacs and other people requiring blood transfusions.

2. Blind faith in science, as if it were entirely neutral and uncontaminated by politics, is naive and dangerous. It must be the responsibility of everyone contributing to fundraisers to know enough about AIDS to determine whether the beneficiary will put the money to the best possible use. How many artists and dealers contributing to “Art against AIDS,” for example, know precisely what kinds of scientific research are supported by the American Foundation for AIDS Research? How many know the alternatives to AmFAR’s research agenda, alternatives such as the Community Research Initiative, an effort at testing AIDS treatments initiated at the community level by PWAs themselves? As anyone involved in the struggle against AIDS knows from horrendous experience, we cannot afford to leave anything up to the “experts.” We must become our own experts.<sup>7</sup>

3. Raising money is the most passive response of cultural practitioners to social crisis, a response that perpetuates the idea that art itself has no social function (aside from being a commodity), that there is no such thing as an engaged, activist aesthetic practice. It is this third point that I want to underscore by insisting, against Rosenblum, that art *does* have the power to save lives, and it is this very power that must be recognized, fostered, and supported in every way possible. But if we are to do this, we will have to abandon the idealist conception of art. We don’t need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS. We don’t need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it.

What might such a cultural practice be? One example appeared in November 1987 in the window on Broadway of New York’s New Museum of Contemporary Art. Entitled *Let the Record Show . . .*, it is the collective work of ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which is—I repeat what is stated at the beginning of every Monday night meeting—“a nonpartisan group of diverse individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis.” More precisely, *Let the Record Show . . .* is the work of an ad hoc committee within ACT UP that responded to the New Museum’s offer to do the window installation. The offer was tendered by Curator Bill Olander, himself a participant in ACT UP.

*I first became aware of ACT UP, like many*

[7] I do not wish to cast suspicion on AmFAR, but rather to suggest that no organization can be seen as neutral or objective. See, in this regard, the exchange of letters on AmFAR’s rejection of the Community Research Initiative’s funding applications in the *PWA Coalition Newsline*, no. 30 (January 1988), pp. 3-7.

*other New Yorkers, when I saw a poster appear on lower Broadway with the equation: SILENCE=DEATH. Accompanying these words, sited on a black background, was a pink triangle—the symbol of homosexual persecution during the Nazi period and, since the 1960s, the emblem of gay liberation. For anyone conversant with this iconography, there was no question that this was a poster designed to provoke and heighten awareness of the AIDS crisis. To me, it was more than that: it was among the most significant works of art that had yet been done which was inspired and produced within the arms of the crisis.*<sup>8</sup>

That symbol, made of neon, occupied the curved portion of the New Museum’s arched window. Below it, in the background, and bathed in soft, even light, was a photomural of the Nuremberg Trials (in addition to prosecuting Nazi war criminals, those trials established our present-day code of medical ethics, involving such things as informed consent to experimental medical procedures). In front of this giant photo are six life-size, silhouetted photographs of “AIDS criminals” in separate, boxed-in spaces, and below each one the words by which he or she may be judged by history, cast—literally—in concrete. As the light goes on in each of these separate boxed spaces, we can see the face and read the words:

*The logical outcome of testing is a quarantine of those infected. —Jesse Helms, US Senator*

*It is patriotic to have the AIDS test and be negative. —Cory Servaas, Presidential AIDS Commission*

*We used to hate faggots on an emotional basis. Now we have a good reason. —anonymous surgeon*

*AIDS is God’s judgment of a society that does not live by His rules. —Jerry Falwell, televangelist*

*Everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common needle users, and on the buttocks to prevent the victim-*

[8] Bill Olander, “The Window on Broadway by ACT UP,” in *On View* (hand-out), New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987, p. 1. The logo that Olander describes is not the work of ACT UP, but of a design collective called the SILENCE=DEATH Project, which has lent the logo to ACT UP.



ization of other homosexuals.

—William F. Buckley, columnist

And finally, there is a blank slab of concrete, above which is the silhouetted photograph of President Reagan. We look up from this blank slab and see, once again, the neon sign: SILENCE=DEATH.

But there is more. Suspended above this rogues' gallery is an electronic information display programmed with a running text, portions of which read as follows:

*Let the record show . . . William F. Buckley deflects criticism of the government's slow response to the epidemic through calculations: "At most three years were lost . . . Those three years have killed approximately 15,000 people; if we are talking 50 million dead, then the cost of delay is not heavy . . .*

*Let the record show . . . The Pentagon spends in one day more than the government spent in the last five years for AIDS research and education . . .*

*Let the record show . . . In June 1986, \$47 million was allocated for new drug trials to include 10,000 people with AIDS. One year later only 1,000 people are currently enrolled. In that time, over 9,000 Americans have died of AIDS.*

*Let the record show . . . In 1986, Dr. Cory Servaas, editor of the Saturday Evening Post, announced that after working closely with the National Institutes of Health, she had found a cure for AIDS. At the time, the National Institutes of Health officials said that they had never heard of Dr. Cory Servaas. In 1987, President Reagan appointed Dr. Cory Servaas to the Presidential AIDS Commission.*

*Let the record show . . . In October of 1986, \$80 million was allocated for public education about AIDS. 13 months later there is still no national education program. In that time, over 15,000 new cases have been reported.*

*Let the record show . . . 54% of the people with AIDS in New York City are black and Hispanic. The incidence of heterosexually transmitted AIDS is 17 times higher among blacks than whites, 15 times higher among Hispanics than whites. 88% of babies with AIDS are black and Hispanic. 6%*

*of the US AIDS education budget has been targeted for the minority community.*

And finally:

*By Thanksgiving 1981, 244 known dead . . . AIDS . . . no word from the President.*

*By Thanksgiving 1982, 1,123 known dead . . . AIDS . . . no word from the President.*

The text continues like this, always with no word from the President, until finally:

*By Thanksgiving 1987, 25,644 known dead . . . AIDS . . . President Reagan: "I have asked the Department of Health and Human Services to determine as soon as possible the extent to which the AIDS virus has penetrated our society."*

After each of these bits of information, the sign flashes, "Act Up, Fight Back, Fight AIDS," a standard slogan at ACT UP demonstrations. Documentary footage from some of these demonstrations could be seen in the videotape *Testing the Limits: New York*, programmed at the New Museum simultaneously with the window display. The video about AIDS activism in New York City is the work of a collective (also called Testing the Limits) "formed to document emerging forms of activism arising out of people's responses to government inaction in the global AIDS epidemic."

The SILENCE=DEATH Project, the group from ACT UP who made *Let the Record Show . . .*, and *Testing the Limits* share important premises that can teach us much about engaged art practices. First, they are *collective* endeavors. Second, these practices are employed by the collectives' members as an essential part of their AIDS activism. This is not to say that the individuals involved are not artists in the more conventional sense of the word; many of these people work within the precincts of the traditional art world and its institutions. But involvement in the AIDS crisis has not left their relation to that world unaltered. After making *Let the Record Show . . .* for the New Museum, for example, the group from ACT UP reconvened and decided to continue their work. Among the general principles discussed at their first meeting, one was unanimously voiced: "We have to get out of Soho, get out of the art world."

The New Museum has been more hospitable than most art institutions to socially and politically committed art practices, and it was very courageous of the museum to offer space to an activist organization rather

than to an artist. It is also very useful that the museum has a window on lower Broadway that is passed by many people who would never set foot in an art museum. But if we think about art in relation to the AIDS epidemic—in relation, that is, to the communities most drastically affected by AIDS, especially the poor and minority communities where AIDS is spreading much faster than elsewhere—we will realize that no work made within the confines of the art world as it is currently constituted will reach these people. Activist art therefore involves questions not only of the nature of cultural production, but also of the location, or the means of distribution, of that production. *Let the Record Show* . . . was made for an art-world location, and it appears to have been made largely for an art-world audience. By providing information about government inaction and repressive intentions in the context of shocking statistics, its purpose is to inform—and thereby to mobilize—its presumably sophisticated audience (an audience presumed, for example, to be able to recognize a photograph of the Nuremberg Trials).<sup>9</sup> Such information and mobilization *can* (contra Rosenblum) save lives; indeed, until a cure for AIDS is developed, *only* information and mobilization can save lives.

In New York City, virtually every official campaign of highly visible public information about AIDS—whether AIDS education in schools, public service announcements on TV, or posters in the subways—must meet with the approval of, among others, the immensely powerful and reactionary Cardinal John J. O'Connor. This has resulted in a murderous regime of silence and disinformation that virtually guarantees the mounting deaths of sexually active young people—gay and straight—and of IV drug users, their sex partners, and their children, most of them from poor, minority populations. Recognizing this, small coalitions of cultural workers, including a group calling itself the Metropolitan Health Association and the ACT UP committee that created *Let the Record Show* . . . , have taken to the streets and subways to mount education campaigns of their own. Employing sophisticated graphics and explicit information, printed in English and Spanish, these artists and activists are attempting to get the unambiguous word out about how safe sex and clean works can protect people from contracting HIV. Even apart from the possibility of arrest, the difficulties faced by these people are daunting. Their work demands a

total reevaluation of the nature and purpose of cultural practices in conjunction with an understanding of the political goals of AIDS activism. It requires, in addition, a comprehensive knowledge of routes of HIV transmission and means of prevention, as well as a sensitivity to cultural specificity—to, say, the street language of Puerto Ricans as opposed to that of Spanish-speaking immigrants from Central or South America.

Even having adopted new priorities and accumulated new forms of knowledge, the task of cultural producers working within the struggle against AIDS will be difficult. The ignorance and confusion enforced by government and the dominant media; the disenfranchisement and immiseration of many of the people thus far hardest hit by AIDS; and the psychic resistance to confronting sex, disease, and death in a society where those subjects are largely taboo—all of these conditions must be faced by anyone doing work on AIDS. Cultural activism is only now beginning; also just beginning is the recognition and support of this work by art-world institutions.

Among those institutions, apart from the New Museum, I want to mention and credit two. Due to momentum gathering among students and faculty at the California Institute of the Arts in the previous year, the school developed a program of AIDS-related activities for 1987-88. These included a course entitled “Media(ted) AIDS” given by Jan Zita Grover and open to the entire student body; an agreement by the faculty to spend one-tenth of the overall budget for visiting artists and lecturers on presentations about AIDS-related work; a commitment by the library to spend one-quarter of its video acquisition budget on tapes about AIDS; and the inclusion of AIDS information in the monthly student newsletter (this information was also regularly silkscreened onto the school’s walls). The value of such a coordinated program is that students can both receive (but also generate) information that can help them personally *and* begin to reconsider their roles as artists working in a moment of social crisis.

To date, a majority of cultural producers working in the struggle against AIDS have used the video medium. There are a number of explanations for this: Much of the dominant discourse on AIDS has been conveyed through television, and this discourse has generated a critical counter-practice in the same medium; video can sustain a fairly complex array of information; and cable access and the widespread use of VCRs provide the potential of a large audience for this work.<sup>10</sup> In Oc-

[9] Whether or not the audience was also presumed to be able to see a connection between *Let the Record Show* . . . and the procedures and devices of artists such as Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer, and Barbara Kruger is an open question.

[10] For a good overview of both commercial television and independent

tober 1987, the American Film Institute Video Festival included a series entitled “Only Human: Sex, Gender, and Other Misrepresentations,” organized by Bill Horgan and B. Ruby Rich. Of eight programs in the series, three were devoted to videotapes on AIDS. Among the more than twenty videos, a full range of independent work was represented, including tapes made for broadcast TV (*AIDS in the Arts*), AIDS education tapes (*Sex, Drugs, and AIDS*, made for the New York City school system), and “art” tapes (*News from Home*, by Tom Kalin and Stathis Lagoudakis); music videos (*The AIDS Epidemic*, by John Greyson); documentaries (*Testing the Limits*), and critiques of the media (*A Plague on You*, by the Lesbian and Gay Media Group). The intention of the program was not to select work on the basis of aesthetic merit, but rather to show something of the range of representations and counter-representations of AIDS. As B. Ruby Rich stated it in the catalogue:

*To speak of sexuality and the body, and not also speak of AIDS, would be, well, obscene. At the same time, the peculiarly key role being played by the media in this scenario makes it urgent that counter-images and counter-rhetoric be created and articulated. To this end, we have grouped the AIDS tapes together in three special programs to allow the dynamic of their interaction to produce its own discourse—and to allow the inveterate viewer to begin making the aesthetic diagnosis that is quickly becoming every bit as urgent as (particularly in the absence of) the medical one.<sup>11</sup>*

\* \* \*

The preparation of this OCTOBER publication on AIDS stemmed initially from my encounters with several works both in and about the media: Simon Watney’s book *Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography, and the Media*; Stuart Marshall’s video *Bright Eyes*, made for Britain’s Channel 4; and the documentary about AIDS activism in New York, *Testing the Limits*. In addition, I learned that Amber Hollibaugh, of the AIDS Discrimination Unit of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, was at work on *The Second Epidemic*, a documentary about AIDS-related discrimination. From

the beginning my intention was to show, through discussion of these works, that there was a critical, theoretical, activist alternative to the personal, elegiac expressions that appeared to dominate the art-world response to AIDS. What seemed to me essential was a vastly expanded view of culture in relation to crisis. But the full extent to which this view would have to be expanded only became clear through further engagement with the issues. AIDS intersects with and requires a critical rethinking of all of culture: of language and representation, of science and medicine, of health and illness, of sex and death, of the public and private realms. AIDS is a central issue for gay men, of course, but also for lesbians. AIDS is an issue for women generally, but especially for poor and minority women, for child-bearing women, for women working in the health care system. AIDS is an issue for drug users, for prisoners, for sex workers. At some point, even “ordinary” heterosexual men will have to learn that AIDS is an issue for them, and not simply because they might be susceptible to “contagion.”

The unevenness with which these questions are addressed in this publication, the priority given to gay issues (and to gay writers), reflects, in part, the history of organized response to AIDS in the US. Gay men and lesbians joined the struggle first and are still on its front lines. The unevenness is compensated, however, by the involvement of these people (and, increasingly, of straight women) in *all* the issues raised by AIDS, a development that is reflected in the work published here. (A gay friend about to embark on a poster campaign—using the recently released statistic that one in sixty-one babies born in New York City are HIV positive—spoke of the irony of a bunch of faggots trying to educate heterosexuals about safe sex practices.)<sup>12</sup> But there are lacunae that I regret, the most important of which is attention to the cataclysmic problem of AIDS in the Third World, a problem about which one hears only a deafening silence in the dominant media in the US.

\* \* \*

It has taken the work of many people to make this pub-

video productions about AIDS, see Timothy Landers, “Bodies and Anti-Bodies: A Crisis in Representation,” *The Independent*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January-February 1988), pp. 18-24.

[11] B. Ruby Rich, “Only Human: Sex, Gender, and Other Misrepresentations,” in *1987 American Film Institute Video Festival*, Los Angeles, 1987, p. 42.

[12] An even more profound irony is the fact that often only gay people are willing to act as foster parents for HIV-positive children, and at a time when gay parenting is increasingly coming under attack by both federal and state governments. A special commission of the Reagan Administration has recommended against lesbians and gay men as potential foster parents, and several states have passed laws explicitly forbidding gay people to adopt children. In addition, gay parents are often refused custody of their natural children solely on the grounds of sexual orientation.

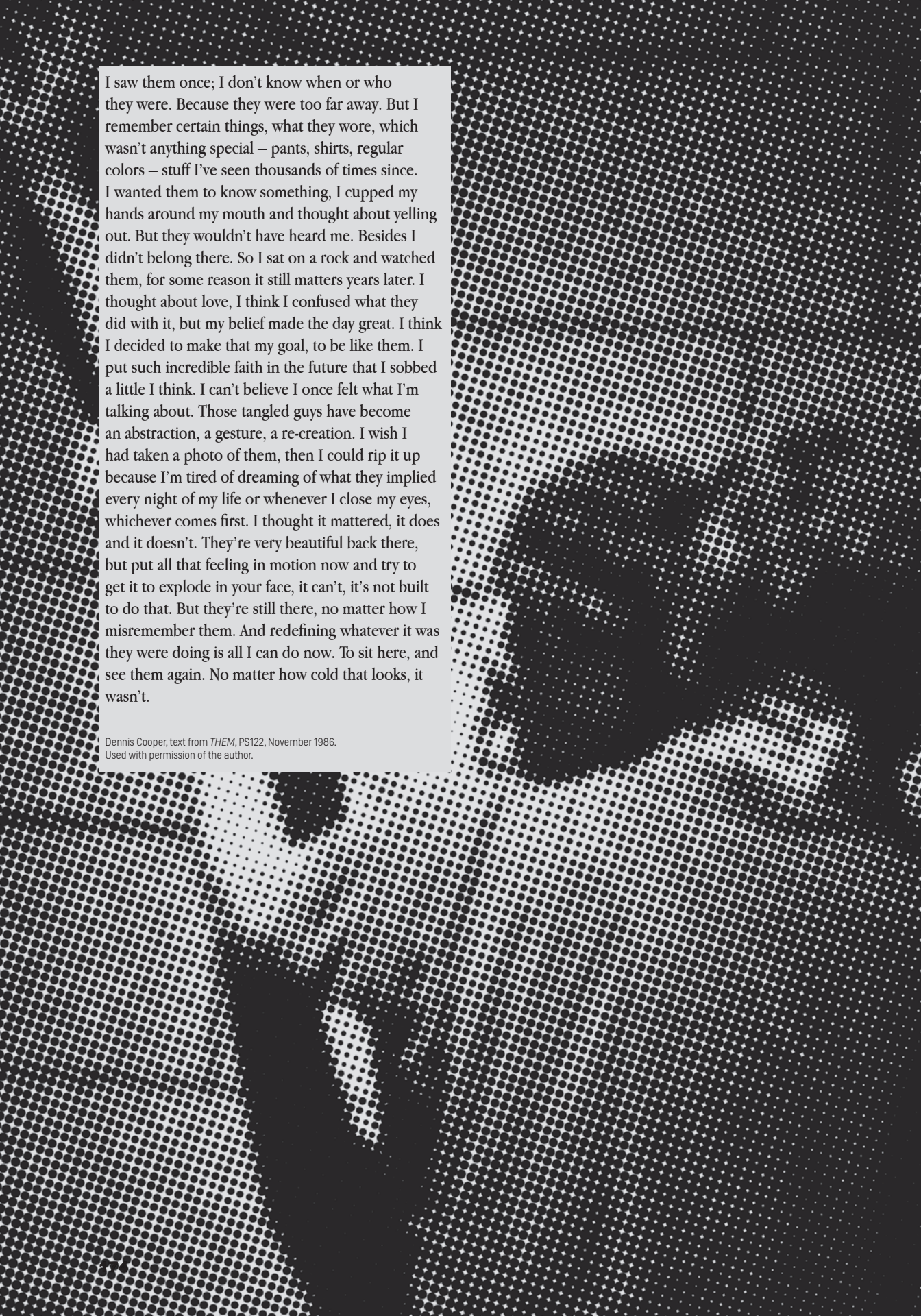
lication what it is. I want to thank all of the contributors, both those who turned their attentions from usual concerns to think and write about AIDS and those activists who found the extra time and energy to write for an academic publication. The People with AIDS Coalition in New York generously put the full run of their *Newsline* at my disposal and granted me a free hand in making selections from it. Information, leads, and illustrational materials were provided by the Gay Men's Health Crisis, Jan Zita Grover, Isaac Julien, Tom Kalin, Diane Neumaier, Jim Steakley, Frank Wagner, and Michael Wessmann; and Terri Cafaro, Joan Copjec, and Cathy Scott helped with various aspects of production.

My own education about AIDS was made considerably easier by the agreement of members of my reading group to spend several months discussing the subject and looking at videotapes, and I therefore want to acknowledge the participation of Terri Cafaro, Carlos Espinosa, Martha Gever, Timothy Landers, Eileen O'Neill, and our short-term guests Lee Quinby and Jane Rubin. Attendance at the regular Monday night meetings of ACT UP provided me with up-to-the-minute information and helped clarify many issues. Finally, I want to acknowledge the sustained involvement of Gregg Bordowitz, who has helped in countless ways.



**PORTFOLIO: THEM**





I saw them once; I don't know when or who they were. Because they were too far away. But I remember certain things, what they wore, which wasn't anything special – pants, shirts, regular colors – stuff I've seen thousands of times since. I wanted them to know something, I cupped my hands around my mouth and thought about yelling out. But they wouldn't have heard me. Besides I didn't belong there. So I sat on a rock and watched them, for some reason it still matters years later. I thought about love, I think I confused what they did with it, but my belief made the day great. I think I decided to make that my goal, to be like them. I put such incredible faith in the future that I sobbed a little I think. I can't believe I once felt what I'm talking about. Those tangled guys have become an abstraction, a gesture, a re-creation. I wish I had taken a photo of them, then I could rip it up because I'm tired of dreaming of what they implied every night of my life or whenever I close my eyes, whichever comes first. I thought it mattered, it does and it doesn't. They're very beautiful back there, but put all that feeling in motion now and try to get it to explode in your face, it can't, it's not built to do that. But they're still there, no matter how I misremember them. And redefining whatever it was they were doing is all I can do now. To sit here, and see them again. No matter how cold that looks, it wasn't.

Dennis Cooper, text from *THEM*, PS122, November 1986.  
Used with permission of the author.

# THEM AND NOW: AN ORAL HISTORY OF A PERFORMANCE RECONSTRUCTED

Compiled and edited by Travis Chamberlain,  
Associate Curator of Performance, New Museum  
Transcribed by Cory Tamler, New Museum R&D Season  
Fellow

*"But they're still there in the distance, no matter how I misremember them. And redefining whatever it was they were doing is all I can do now. To sit here and see them again in the people I love, no matter how cold that looks. It wasn't."*

—Dennis Cooper, text from **THEM**, 1986

*"And then a man comes out and fucks a dead pig."*

—Robert Sandla, review of **THEM** for *The New York Native*, December 29, 1986

## INTRODUCTION

*Made in downtown New York City amidst the rising tides of the AIDS epidemic, THEM is a seminal work of experimental performance mixing improvised dance, metal noise music, and darkly elegiac prose into a visceral, sensual, and occasionally violent composition performed by an all-male ensemble. It was developed in collaboration between director and choreographer Ishmael Houston-Jones, composer Chris Cochrane, and author Dennis Cooper. The premiere of THEM in 1986 at Performance Space 122 famously caused such a fuss for its unsettling climax that rumors of the venue being temporarily shut down have become part of the legend surrounding the work.*

*THEM AND NOW was a four-week rehearsal residency and series of public programs that I organized at the New Museum in partnership with PS122 to support, investigate and further contextualize the reconstruction of THEM in 2010, nearly 25 years after its premiere. I worked with Ishmael, Chris, Dennis, and Ben Pryor, who was the producer of THEM in its reconstructed form, to craft four programs and a series of open re-*

*bearsals as part of the residency and reconstruction process, all of which took place in the New Museum Theater from September 11 - October 14, 2010.*

*What follows is a document of that process, which also doubles as an oral history of the original production and the context in which it was made. The text is compiled from nearly a dozen tapes of auditions, rehearsals, talkbacks, and a public conversation leading up to the 2010 premiere. Beyond Ishmael, Dennis, and Chris, other featured narrators include: Terry Fox, Executive Director of Philadelphia Dance Projects, who had recently curated other reconstructions of Ishmael's work; Mark Russell, the curator of the Under the Radar Festival at the Public Theater, founding Artistic Director of Performance Space 122, and the original curatorial force behind THEM; Lucy Sexton, the producer of the New York Dance and Performance Bessie Awards, a member of the legendary dance performance duo DANCENOISE, and a past collaborator of Ishmael's; Johnny Walker, an actor and original cast member of the early 1985 version of THEM; and Felix Cruz, one of the dancers in the 2010 reconstruction.*

## MOVING TO NYC

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** I moved to New York at the end of '79.

**Terry Fox:** There really was a community around PS122, people would get together and improvise. And Ishmael just fit right in to that community when he moved here.

## OPEN MOVEMENT

**Mark Russell:** One of the core programs at PS122 for many years was a thing called Open Movement, which was on Tuesday nights. And it cost like two bucks. You would come and dance, and there were no rules, no leaders, no music. For the most part.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** There was no structure at all.

**Mark Russell:** Except you were not supposed to watch. You had to participate. It was like church for dancers. People would go there and cast their shows. It formed a heartbeat of that community.

## POLITICS OF CONTACT

**Mark Russell:** You know when I started doing improv—

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** We performed together. I forgot that.



**Mark Russell:** We did. Someone came to me and said, “This is going to change your life.” It’s hard to get at the politics of what contact in some of this movement meant back then. And how connected it was, in a sense, to how a generation was presenting itself to the world and identifying itself. That bravery of just throwing yourself at the floor. We also—I would—we would hate on some of the people that were taking improv, and then trying to make dances out of it. Like: cut the crap. I wonder now how to get back to that. Or how do you tell someone who’s younger [and interested in improv]: “How is this transgression? What is the transgression that’s going to happen within [your] improv?”

#### **FRED AND ISH**

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** [In 1983 there] was a celebration at Danspace Project recognizing Steve Paxton and [his contribution to establishing] contact improvisation. There were several couples who had been doing contact together a lot, and Fred Holland and I were on this evening, as were Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark Smith. And Fred and I developed a score in which we decided to do a contact duet, but to do everything wrong. And [one] of the things that we were doing wrong was that we were black—which in the contact world was something wrong. [Quoting the score] “One, we were black. Two, we wore our street clothes, as opposed to sweats. Three, we wore heavy shoes, construction boots and army boots. Four, we spoke to each other. Five, we fucked with flow, intentionally interrupting ourselves. Six, we used a recorded sound score, which is a loud looping from Kung Fu movies by Allen Larson. And seven, we stayed out of physical contact a lot of the time.”

**Lucy Sexton:** I was recently at a discussion at Movement Research about the politics of improv, and of moving. And it just seems to me that’s exactly the nexus of it right there: being who you are, fully who you are—with your clothes on, with your skin color on, with your full self there, with your friendship there. Talking about it honestly is so inherently a political thing.

#### **ISH, DENNIS, AND CHRIS MEET**

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** Dennis moved here from California, he was this hot new writer, and I heard him read once and I thought: Oh my god, this guy is really scary, I really want to work with him. It was one of the few times where I thought that words, or literature, had actually really made me uneasy and really frightened. And there was something really attractive about that. Similar thing with Chris, I heard him play at Club 8BC,

which was on 8th Street between B and C, which was this burnt-out building that was a great club. I’d never heard that sort of sound come out of an electric guitar before, and I really liked the way he was hunched over the guitar and just squeezing, just wringing the sound out of it.

I asked them both if they wanted to do something. And it was sort of a vague something, that was the spirit around PS122 at the time. You say, “Hey, you want to do something?” It was very, “Let’s put on a show.” Donald Fleming was an incredible dancer and I asked him if he wanted to do something, and John Walker, too, who’s more of an actor than a mover. But, so, we, the five of us just say, “Okay, we’ll do something.” This was before the actual premiere [of THEM]. This was a work-in-progress showing in 1985, which was why the date, the premiere date gets a little blurry. The first version was about [20] minutes long, and we felt it was very good.

#### **WHAT’S THEM ABOUT**

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** It was about sexuality, it was about violence, it was about men together. THEM was about the objective plural, grammatically, and it was also the name of a sci-fi film from the 50s, which is about giant ants. Which I’ve never seen. But I liked it as a title. It was about Dennis’ objectification of the male, and the male as sex object, the male as an object of violence in his work. That was there in the [early] sketch and then it became something bigger when we did it the next year.

**Johnny Walker:** It’s about being on the edge. On the fringe. Being sort of outside. And that not necessarily being chosen by you. It always seemed to me as a performer that you were in a twilight world of some sort. Kind of marginalized without [the audience] thinking of that as being too subjective.

#### **CHOREOGRAPHING THEM**

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** The text and dance and music travel on three parallel tracks. They’re interrelated, interwoven, but they’re not exactly dependent on each other. When they are, they support each other. There are different scores [for movement] throughout the piece that are described in different ways, task-oriented mostly.

**Travis Chamberlain:** And how are they sequenced?

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** I don’t know. That’s sort of what we intuitively did back then. I mean there is a pro-



gression in the piece. But it's not a linear progression. It's also this recurring theme of couples coming together and breaking apart. It's very subtle. There are five people who are in this ever-changing couple thing. They're constantly shifting and changing who they're with.

#### THE IMPACT OF AIDS ON DOWNTOWN DANCE

**Lucy Sexton:** This was '85, and then the actual premiere was '86—but of course, we then have this growing wave, which is really starting to grow by '85—of AIDS marching through that community of dancers that came together every Tuesday night [at PS122 for Open Movement].

**Mark Russell:** I don't know that we knew we were in the center of it at that time completely yet. Our friend John Bernd, who was—had ARC... some of the people with AIDS were going: [Those of] you with ARC are not AIDS victims.

**Lucy Sexton:** The idea was AIDS Related Complex was not going to be as bad as AIDS.<sup>1</sup>

**Mark Russell:** The struggle was just beginning to get formed. GMHC was just beginning, ACT UP was just beginning. [The premiere of THEM] was deeper into it, but still, I don't think that we knew it was going to take away as much as it did.

#### THE IMPACT OF AIDS ON THEM

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** When Mark invited us to come back and do a full evening version, Dennis, Chris and I decided that it was weird—we were in the middle of this epidemic, or this epidemic was beginning to affect friends of ours who were sick and some of them were dying. We were doing this piece about how men related to each other and it would be really odd to do that without any acknowledgement. We didn't want to make an AIDS piece, it's just who we are as artists. I mean, I don't think the three of us, none of us wanted to do that, so we added. Dennis added more text, and Chris added more music, and I added more dance that—we kept referring to it as “the coda.”

[1] When the HIV virus was identified in 1983, the term AIDS-Related Complex, or ARC, emerged to distinguish people with “full-blown” AIDS from people with HIV whose symptoms were less severe. This distinction produced a classification system that determined which people with HIV qualified for certain treatment programs. Source: Professor Edward P. Richards J.D., M.P.H. “The History of AIDS and ARC.” <http://biotech.law.lsu.edu/Books/lbb/x590.htm>

#### THE STORY OF SAMMY THE GOAT

One of the ways AIDS shaped the expanded version of THEM in 1986 manifested with the inclusion of a duet between Ishmael and a dead goat. The dance, which sparked controversy and hearsay that has since become part of the legend surrounding the work, took place on a dirty mattress in the middle of the stage at the climax of the performance. Ishmael was blindfolded. The goat was gutted.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** My friend Richard Elovich told me about a nightmare he'd had. He woke up in bed with his own dead body. He kept trying to throw it out and it kept getting back in bed with him. I thought that was a really powerful image. I had this fear of death in general and dead animals specifically, so I decided I wanted to do a dance with a dead goat. So I did. [The dance] is about struggling with fear of death and really getting in there and trying to cathartically conquer that. Or deal with it. I don't know if conquer is the right word, but really sort of deal with that.

The goat [we used] came from the Meatpacking District, when it used to be a meatpacking district, and I bought it and brought it home with me in a cab. At four o'clock in the morning. The cab driver didn't say anything. It was in garbage bags. But it did look like a body, and no one said anything. And for that evening, because I was living in an overheated New York City tenement—it was November, but the apartment was really hot—so I tied it and hung it outside my window overnight. Seriously. And then the next morning I walked from Suffolk Street to PS122 with it on my shoulders. And then we kept it in a beer cooler of a sushi restaurant on Avenue A. And it had to return every night.

But Sammy the goat didn't last the full two weeks. So we had to get a new carcass and we couldn't find a goat, so the next week it's a sheep. Which changed the Christian mythology imagery [I was working with]. And at that point people had started protesting, people from PETA were protesting, people were calling the ASPCA which said, “Well we can't do anything, it's dead.” And then finally someone—people wrote a letter about them praying for my soul—which, I think I still have that letter somewhere, it's really great. I really liked that people pray for me. And someone decided to call the Board of Health, and this is where the legal problems started happening. Because they called the Board of Health, I got a call from...well, I actually called Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, and they told me

I should just deal with the Board of Health directly. Just explain what I was doing. And I got a bureaucrat from the New York City Board of Health, and I started explaining to him about Christian mythology, and the use of the sheep as the body of Christ, and the goat as sort of a satanic thing, and it was about AIDS and signifiers of AIDS and disease, and the guy's name I think was Bernie Kirschenbaum. And I think he lived in Staten Island, I think he told me this. And it was Thanksgiving Weekend. And he was supposed to come and inspect, but you could tell Bernie did not want to come to the Lower East Side and see some black man rolling around on a mattress with a goat. And finally he said, "Mr. Jones, I'm going to let you go this time. But Mr. Jones, take my advice: find another act." Which is, like, no more dead animals acts. And I told him I would and that was fine. So that's clearing up the mythology of PS122 getting closed down.

#### ON THE RECONSTRUCTION

I first approached Ishmael in 2008 about doing something at the New Museum. Around that same time, Vallejo Gantner, who had taken over Mark Russell's position as the artistic director of PS122, was also talking with Ishmael about doing something for their 30th Anniversary season in 2010. Ishmael was initially interested in the idea of a retrospective evening of excerpts from his past work, as he had recently begun experimenting with

reconstructing other pieces with support from Terry Fox at Philadelphia Dance Projects. This eventually evolved into a decision to reconstruct the full production of *THEM*, about which I'd heard stories many years before while working for a stint at PS122.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** The idea of reconstruction, it's an interesting one for me because I'm not sure if it'll work. I think it's a risk for me because I'm not sure how that's possible, if it is possible, to do this. And I'm interested in that idea, in that possibility, or the possibility of failure—I mean, that it won't work, that I won't be able to translate it.

I've been wary [to show video documentation of the original versions of *THEM* to the new cast] because I don't want people to imi—I don't want it to be imitative. I really want people to find it for themselves and I hesitate to do that, because I don't want people to try to be me. I want people to find their own way into the material, which is more important than someone trying to, you know, put me on their body. Because it's impossible, and it would be stupid.

#### CASTING THEM THEN

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** Originally when [we did *THEM*] at PS122, 25 years ago, it was just people I knew from bars and clubs and dancing around. It was



Donald Fleming, *THEM*, 1986. Photo by Robert Flynt.

like friends, and people who were in the PS122 scene. And you know, people from Open Movement.

I think all of the people in the original cast were somewhat versed in contact improv on some level, there was never any real, like—strictly speaking—contact improv, but people were able to move with each other, move with each other's weight, lift, carry, and not be afraid of that.

For a piece made in the 80s there's surprisingly no nudity in the piece, but [we knew in recasting it for the reconstruction that we would] need people who will be able—guys who can be intimate, close with each other.

#### CASTING THEM NOW

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** We had an audition, which is unusual for me, I usually don't pick dancers that way. But there was an audition here [at the New Museum] on September 11, that was a Saturday. And I was looking for people who like—a couple of things. I wasn't looking for dance technique, per se. That's not something I'm really interested in. People should be comfortable with their bodies and able to move but I'm wary of a lot of style, of a certain closed style. So I was looking for people who had their own individual movement bodies, movement vibes—people who could improvise obviously, since the score's improvised, there's almost no set

movement. People who look like they have some kind of internal life I was interested in hanging around for four weeks with. You know. We're going to be in this closed, intimate room a lot, many hours a week—it should be people whose lives I'm interested in and that I think an audience would be interested in, people who are ready to expose a certain amount of that to a public. It's been 25 years, and dancers are different. I looked for similar qualities, and you know—but I couldn't do a one-to-one match, like oh, he's him, da da da. I'm totally excited. I mean, after two rehearsals, I mean, I just love these guys. Even though the text in this piece was all Dennis's, it's still important that there's an aliveness—I keep looking at them, they're sitting there together—that there's a real interest that will draw people to want to see these bodies moving in this really honest way together.

**Chris Cochrane:** I wonder as we recreate this piece, what does it mean for three men in their mid-fifties and, almost sixty, to be creating a venue for younger men to be improvising in?

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** The opening text is all about Dennis looking back, looking back into his youth, but he was like 33 when he was writing it, which is really funny, I just find it really funny, really interesting actually, because he is going to read it live [again for the reconstruction].



Niall Noel Jones, *THEM*, 2010. Photo by Ian Douglas.

**Dennis Cooper:** [The opening text of THEM] “I saw them once. I don’t know when or who they were because they were too far away. But I remember certain things...”

#### **LYMPH NODE DANCE**

The first dance the new cast learned was actually the last dance in the show, referred to by the creators as the “lymph node dance,” another acknowledgment of AIDS added for the ’86 premiere. The cast performs the dance methodically, repeatedly, at their own pace, as one by one they are randomly targeted, caressed, and tacked to the ground by a looming figure—who is maybe a bully, or a specter of death, or perhaps just another one of them. Vacantly staring, and with little resistance, they writhe under his weight, pinned against the stage floor, for several breathless moments. They eventually yield and do not get back up. The performance ends with only one among them still standing, dancing, as the looming figure approaches...

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** The lymph node dance is based on people checking—because that was sort of a constant thing in the 80s. You would get a cough, and you’d go, oh, it’s like, um...so this dance is based on looking for something.

**Felix Cruz (cast member):** I didn’t know that at the time people would go around checking each other’s lymph nodes as a way to see who was okay and who’s not. That’s a very, like—you don’t do that nowadays, you don’t physically touch someone.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** I don’t know that people actually really touched each other then.

**Felix Cruz:** No, but what I was saying is that you’d be involved with someone and you’d kind of just check a lymph node, and—anyway that was kind of—even if that’s not really what happened it struck me as a kind of invasive way to get to know someone off the bat; the sense of danger that was apparent—

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** It was a sense of danger, people being suspicious of contact... [Giving direction to the group of boys gathered for the audition]: So this is like the, sort of the last image of the piece. You’re looking into a mirror this way, the audience is the mirror. And you check out your lymph nodes on the sides of your head, your armpits, and your groin. And sort of... music, Chris? So let’s do that.

#### **CODA**

Towards the end of the reconstruction process at the New Museum, the camera was left rolling during a post-rehearsal confab between Ishmael, Dennis, and Chris.

**Dennis Cooper:** [It’s great in] this way that’s really innocent, and I don’t know. It’s just like a, it’s very good. It works really well. You don’t really—I don’t see work like that anymore. You certainly don’t see it in Europe. It’s so, like, innocent and stuff. It’s just weird. And so open emotionally. It’s really, really nice that way. I can see why it’s worth [revisiting]. Because it should seem really fresh.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** I think it will.

**Dennis Cooper:** Yeah, I think it will seem fresh. And everything’s really short, I forgot that about it, the parts are all really short.

**Chris Cochrane:** How is that though? The end scene is so open and long, that—I mean I kind of like that...

**Dennis Cooper:** Yeah, I mean, it’s not, it’s [going to be] interesting to see how it will read, though, all that stuff, because, I mean—

**Chris Cochrane:** We were just having a conversation about that.

**Dennis Cooper:** Because people aren’t going to really know. I mean they’ll know, because they’ll go like, “Well, why are they doing that?” It takes so long and that’s why they’ll go like: “Okay, there’s something wrong, their glands,” da da da da da. And that’s all it takes I guess. And everybody knows it’s like during the 80s era and all that, so.

**Chris Cochrane:** Well, that’s how it’s been, you know, sort of discussed. [One of our friends who watched the open rehearsal] felt like he was really nostalgic, but sort of, how there was something else that was going on with truth and power that was established. That all he could think of when he was watching it was the old version. [Dennis: Really?] ...It’s very different with these guys.

**Dennis Cooper:** ... I like these guys, I mean I think it’s better with these guys.



**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** Yeah. I do too.

**Dennis Cooper:** It's less, it's less sort of formal. It feels more real and playful. And more erotic.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** In a weird way.

**Dennis Cooper:** Much more raw. Because the, I mean these guys are much sexier, and I don't know, they're more something, than the first group was. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's just their energy or something.

**Chris Cochrane:** It's silly. I bet we rehearsed this more than we rehearsed the other one. I wonder how much difference that makes, too. Of just them internalizing something.

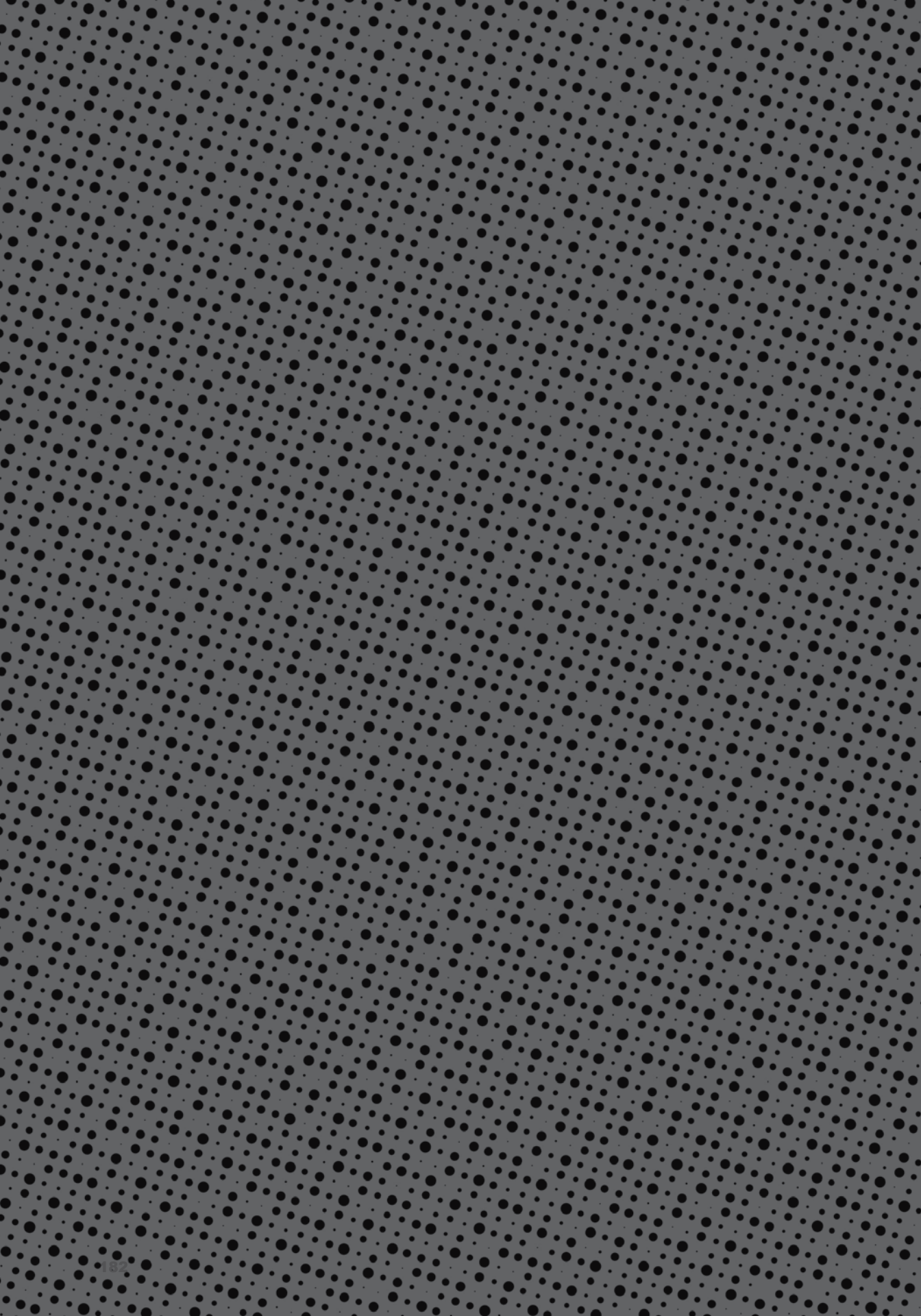
**Dennis Cooper:** But their relationship is really different, they have a different—there's a warmth between them. There's something between them that there wasn't in the old one, [at least in] my memory. It was much more—formal. And this one, they feel like a group of guys. I think it's better.

**Chris Cochrane:** Yeah, you should look at some point at the old [tapes] after you see this, it's pretty stunning.

#### PROLOGUE

**Ishmael Houston-Jones:** We just added [a new] beginning that didn't exist before. I do a very short solo, a sort of "passing on," we've been calling it, at the very top of the piece. It's a different time, and in rehearsals we've been talking about the differences in the time period, and the experiences that these guys had, that most of the community of us [had, including] Chris Cochrane and Dennis Cooper and myself, and we put it together. It's a different time and it sort of felt like it needed something, like an acknowledgment of that, that time passed.

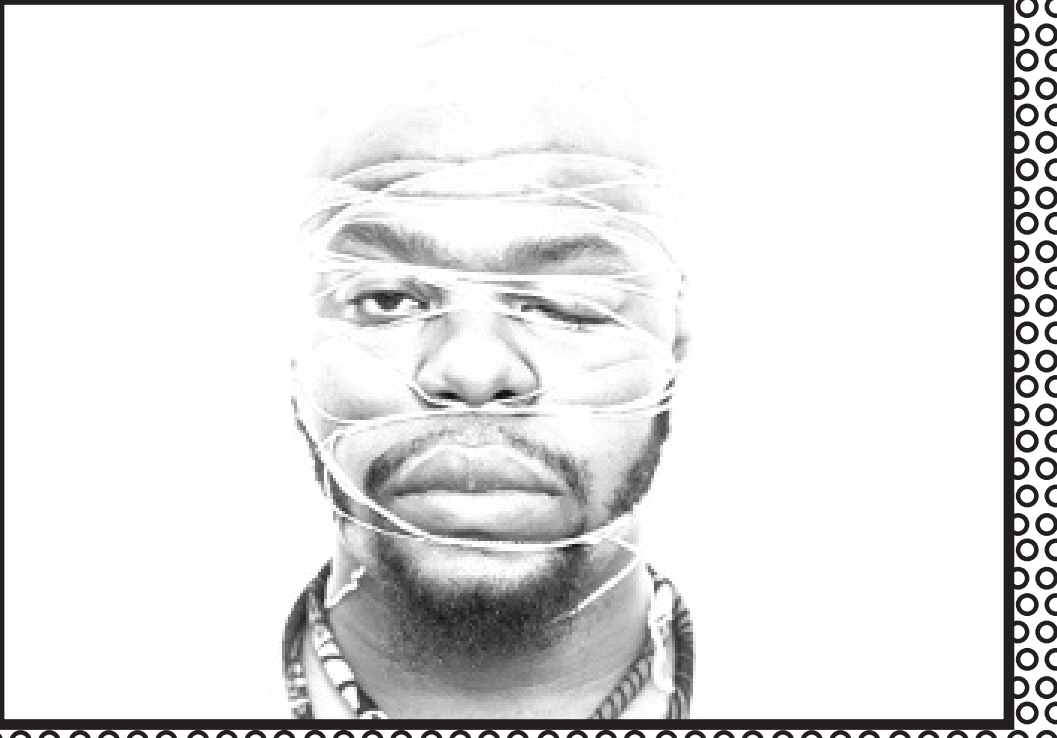
*Following the 2010 premiere of the newly reconstructed version of THEM at PS122, the production went on to tour for three years, including performances at RED-CAT, Los Angeles, USA; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; TAP-Poitiers, Poitiers, France; TanslmAugust, Berlin, Germany; and Springdance, Utrecht, The Netherlands. The production received a 2011 New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Award and was included on Artforum, Time Out New York, and Papermag's lists of the best dance of 2010. The cast included Joey Cannizzaro, Felix Cruz, Niall Noel Jones, Jeremy Pheiffer, Jacob Słominski, Arturo Vidich, and Enrico D. Wey. Joe Levasseur designed lights. The cast of the initial 1985 version of THEM included Donald Flemming and Johnny Walker. Carol McDowell designed lights. The expanded 1986 premiere included Barry Crooks, Donald Fleming, Julyen Hamilton, Daniel McIntosh, and David Zambrano. This version was subsequently presented at The Harbourfront Festival, Toronto, Canada with Barry Crooks, Almon Grimsted, Benoit Lechambre, Daniel McIntosh, and Brian Moran. Michael Stiller designed lights. All three versions featured performances by Chris Cochrane, Dennis Cooper, and Ishmael Houston-Jones.*





*Tompkins Square Park*





Jaamil Olawale Kosoko. Courtesy of the artist.



# A I D // S A P P E A R A N C E

for Stefan Fitterman

1. in contrast with the demand of continuity in the customary description
2. of nature the indivisibility of the quantum of action requires an essential
3. element of discontinuity especially apparent through the discussion of the
4. nature of light she said it's so odd to be dying and laughed still it's early
5. late the beauty of nature as the moon waxes turns to terror when it wanes
6. or during eclipse or when changing seasons change making certain things
7. disappear and there is no place to stand on and strangely we're glad

## A I D S

for tefn Fftermn

1. n contrt with the emn of contnuty n the cutomry ercpton
2. of nture the nvblty of the quntum of cton require n eentl
3. element of contnuty espclly pprent through the cuon of the
4. nture of lght he t o o t be yng n lughe tll t erly
5. lte the beuty of nture the moon wxe turn to terror when t wne
6. or urng eclpe or when chngng eon chnge mkng certn thng
7. pper n there no plce to tn on n trngely we're gl

## B H J C E R T

fo fn Fmn

1. n on w mn of onnuy n uomy pon
2. of nu nvly of qunum of on qu n nl
3. lmn of onnuy plly ppn oug uon of
4. nu og lg o o yng n lug ll ly
5. luy of nu moon wx un o o wn wn
6. o ung lp o wn ngng on ng mkng n ng
7. pp n no pl o n on n ngly w gl

## F G K Q U

o n mn

1. no n w m no on ny no my pon
2. o n nvly o nm o on n nl
3. lm no onny plly pp no on o
4. no l o o yn nl ll ly
5. l y o n moon wx no own wn
6. o n l pow n n no n n mn n n
7. pp n no pl o no n n nly w l

## LPV

o n mn

1. no n w m no on ny no my on
2. o nny o nm o onn n
3. m no onny y no on o
4. no o o y n n y
5. y o n moon wx no own wn
6. o now n n no n n mn n n
7. n no o no n n n y w

## MOW

n

1. nnnnnynyn
2. nnynnnn
3. nnnyyynn
4. nynny
5. ynnxnenn
6. nnnnnnnnn
7. nnnnnny

## NX

1. yy
2. y
3. yy
4. yy
5. y
- 6.
7. y

## Y

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

A I D / I / S A P P E A R A N C E is from *Procedural Elegies / Western Civ Cont'd* / ,  
New York: Roof Books, 2010.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

The disappearance moves through the letters of the alphabet (and the source text) in this way: beginning with letters A I D S, it spreads to adjoining letters B H J C E R T, to F G K Q U, to L P V, to M O W, to N X, to Y.

Part of the text in the first stanza is from "The Atomic Theory and the Fundamental Principles Underlying the Description of Nature" in *The Philosophical Writings of Niels Bohr, Volume 1, Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature*. Woodbridge, Connecticut, 1987.

This poem was composed in 1993-1994 and first published in Object 5 (1995): it was first collected in Retallack's 1998 *How To Do Things With Words*.

# Radical Shriek

## [1990]

C. Carr

Diamanda Galas does not presume to speak for others. But people with AIDS have occasionally told her that she speaks for them. She is an instrument in tune with their rage and despair. And she has a voice trained to explore the emotional extremes, to approach the cultural alarm box and break glass.

Galas calls her music “interveinal song”—straight from the bloodstream. She calls AIDS “homicide.” On-stage, keening into two or more microphones with her wild hair, dramatic makeup, and black clothes, Galas is always a performer of febrile intensity. “I’m not singing about the thing,” she says. “I *am* the thing.” But she’s also someone who will enter St. Patrick’s Cathedral with ACT UP, knowing she’s about to be arrested, thinking: why don’t PWAS have such a beautiful space? Why don’t they have a beautiful ritual? It’s for them that she’s written her three-part plague mass, *Masque of the Red Death*.

Poe’s story of the Red Death had haunted her since she was thirteen. She’d always known that she would create something related to it. What Galas uses is Poe’s central image—a pestilence both devastating and in disguise; it comes as a thief in the night. Her *Masque* has no narrative. She has chosen to address the epidemic’s most uncomfortable aspects—the stigma, the isolation, the grief.

Hers is a high mass for outcasts. Hers is also a mass confronting “those who’ve twisted Christ’s teaching into socially sanctioned condemnation of sexual difference” (as the program notes put it). That makes her a target of the usual right-wing frothers. After a recent performance in Florence, Italy, for example, the Catholic church denounced her and the press labeled her an “evil singer.” Currently, her “Double-Barrel Prayer” video is in rotation on the Christian Broadcasting Network along with Slayer, enforcing the Pat Robertson idea that music is the devil’s plaything. Galas tends to shrug it off: “I’ve been called *witch* in every country I’ve performed in since 1980.” She sees it as part of a timeless conflict: whenever there’s an epidemic, the authorities look for a scapegoat. And the Cardinal O’Connor position is “obviously Inquisitional.”

Still, Galas called her arrest at St. Patrick’s last win-

ter “pretty heavy for someone who’s come up as a Greek Orthodox”—that is, with a background both circumscribed and patriarchal. A Greek American raised “somewhere between Tijuana and Sparta”—that’s San Diego—she began to study piano at five and later played the Beethoven piano concertos with symphony orchestras. But she was forbidden to sing at home. “My father didn’t like it. I think for him it was immoral. I trained myself to listen for his foot on the steps.”

Though she also went on to play jazz piano with the likes of Butch Morris and David Murray, for Galas, voice was always “the most direct signal, the most visceral.” While a college student in San Diego, she used to lock herself into an anechoic chamber—a padded cell—to do “vocal stuff.” It was like getting permission to speak: “The singing is just an extension of that basic desire to break out of a limited communication structure.” In college, by the way, she was majoring in biochemistry with a special interest in immunology and hematology.

While still a “misbegotten student” she saw Jimi Hendrix in *Monterey Pop*. “Hendrix I consider a divine inspiration,” Galas says. “When I saw him, I just knew something—that I was going to have to do this shit myself.” And that calling, as she once put it, is “burning the stage to the ground.”

Now classically and rigorously trained, Galas’s voice can only be called Herculean. She has a three-and-a-half-octave range but hates being described as an opera singer. “That’s bullshit. My approach to the voice is like Mike Tyson when he goes into the ring. It’s live or die.”

Such talk is less hyperbole than urgency. “Half my friends are HIV-positive. Women, men, IV users—which I used to be myself, so it’s not like an academic curiosity.” Her brother, the playwright Philip-Dimitri Galas, died of AIDS in 1986. “When I think of my brother, I never think of him sleeping. I think of him as screaming, snarling, raising his fist. The murdered do not rest in peace.”

As she began composing *Masque of the Red Death* in 1984, she was unaware that her brother—her “earthly twin”—had been diagnosed. She simply decided it was time to start when, one day at a friend’s house in San Francisco, she opened the Bible at random to Psalm 88: “I am counted with them that go down into the pit. I am as a man that hath no strength. Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more.” Shortly after, she visited a dying friend, Tom Hopkins, who told her—through



an amplifier connected to his single remaining vocal chord—how his Southern Baptist family had disowned him when they learned of his diagnosis.

To Hopkins, then, Galas dedicated *The Divine Punishment*, first part in the *Masque* trilogy. It incorporates God's law on "the unclean" found in Leviticus and what Galas calls "cries to a God invented by despair," like the language of Psalm 88. The music, though, is far from liturgical. Chanted harangues, wordless croaks, eerie screeches and whispers—it sounds like the voice of one possessed. Galas stands in the fire and brimstone and outburns it.

The trilogy as a whole is about redemption. Most masses are, I suppose. But this one also questions traditional notions of sacred and profane. The first record Galas ever released was *The Litanies of Satan* (1982). Naturally, she's been called a satanist. But *Litanies*, based on the Baudelaire poem, is about alienation and oppression, not devil worship. Galas says, "I'm talking about people crucified by society, people considered outlaws who are really modern-day saints."

She will always see her brother that way, and it's him she's talking about in the second part of the trilogy, *Saint of the Pit*. She'd just begun working on it at the time of his death. "I didn't share my grief about my brother for about three or four years, because a Greek family is a very closed unit, and it's considered almost sacrilege to discuss the family. I'll be mourning my brother for the rest of my life, but at least I'm stronger now.

"My brother and I used to read—when we were young—de Sade and Nietzsche and Artaud, Poe, Nerval. This was more my climate for the beginning of a lot of my work." When she started working on *Saint of the Pit*, he gave her a favorite book of French poetry, and she read it by his bedside after he'd gone into a coma. There she found poems by Gerard Nerval and Tristan Corbière she turned into dirges for him.

Galas sees herself as part of the Greek tradition of ritual mourning specific to the Mani area of southern Greece. "The Maniots are always described as the women screaming and tearing their hair. That's a comfortably innocuous description meant to make them 'hysterical women.' It's a radical performance tradition." In Greece, says Galas, men never preside at funerals. It's a moment of female empowerment, and they use it to inspire revenge. The women sing directly to the dead. In a sense, they accompany the dead. That is the journey made in *Saint of the Pit*.

The last section of the trilogy recasts the Old Testament decrees of "divine punishment" into contempo-

rary Bible Belt lingo. *You Must Be Certain of the Devil* ("because he's certain of you") is an attempt, again, to identify the enemy, and, says the program, "a call to the damned to arm themselves." These songs are built on the rhythms and themes of gospel, "the music of an oppressed people. It's military music."

Galas feels she's had little encouragement, except from her friends, to perform or even complete *Masque of the Red Death*. "People say, 'When is the funeral over, Galas? When are you going to do something else?' In Europe, it's too funny. They say, 'What are you going to do after the cure?' Well, the funeral *isn't* over. And I said I'd work from 1984 till the end of the epidemic. Anything else I do will have to transpire alongside it."

Originally appeared in *The Village Voice*, Oct 1990. Reprinted with permission.

# Biopharmaceutical Werewolves

Marc Arthur

Over the rainbow is not a future but the psychedelic present made visible by the side effects of memory. I feel the invisible safety of biomedical compounds transforming and freeing each movement I make. I'd like you to imagine you're here with me on the dance floor. We're at Berghain, at a house party, at Aunt Charlie's, at Spectrum, with our best friends or maybe with ghosts.

This is not the movement of uninhibited sexual and cultural freedom. Growing up in the shadow of the early AIDS crisis meant that my sexuality as a gay man was formed in relation to stigmatization and fear of the HIV virus. 80s and 90s discourses of AIDS, such as the virus as a moral crisis or a negligent system of representation, have brought light to these fears but have also been obscured by the fact that HIV and the threat of infection can now be mitigated. Those once-profound theoretical and political frameworks appear to have lost traction as other histories, like the gay liberation movement of the 70s, are magnified—especially in light of the marriage equality movement.

Certainly there are other histories and narratives that inform queer people of what some might call the “millennial” generation. But what feels particularly absorbing to me right now is nostalgia for 70s GLBTQ culture simultaneous with the forces of HIV stigmatization that remain quietly present, surfacing in the bedroom, in blood tests, and disproportionately affecting minority populations. What is needed is an account that addresses the tensions of embodying pre-AIDS sexual freedoms alongside deeply lodged HIV/AIDS trauma, fear and intolerance.

As bodies are at the root of lived experience, “dance works with the same materials from which the organizing social force of ideology must be drawn,”<sup>1</sup> writes the dance theorist Mark Franko. Dance then is an ideal form to reflect on this paradoxical tension between the pre- and early AIDS crisis, which has brought me to the work of Jacolby Satterwhite, an artist who uses digital animation software to create videos that portray him dancing in virtual space among an array of CGI figures and elements. While dance is often overlooked in his work, it seems to me that dance is precisely what

allows him to interpolate his body into the pulse of social forces that surround him as an African-American gay male artist. Sexuality energized by queer lifestyles of the 70s, the virtual and biomedical realities of HIV/AIDS, and racial discrimination and objectification—these are all bodily expressions that can be found in his dancing and work. His unique position at this intersection provides a glimpse into emerging conceptualizations of HIV/AIDS, particularly the ways that memory and history are negotiated through augmented realities and bodies, for the generation of gay men to come of age after the initial outbreak of AIDS.

## PARTYING WITH GRACE JONES ON FIRE ISLAND

Glitter and moss exist symbiotically on Fire Island. Off of Long Island and less than two hours from New York City, gay men, lesbians and other queer people often escape to its beaches and cedar bungalows during the summer.

It's a sweltering afternoon and I'm here for the weekend, feeling disoriented by the flowering delirium that fills me with unquenchable desire.

Satterwhite seems to be dancing everywhere from the club to the boardwalk while he is here. Moves evolve from his hips and project out of his limbs in the vocabulary of *Paris is Burning*. But he's not voguing. It looks more like the latent wisdom of a disco ball inhabits his muscles, guiding him through a catatonic ballet and pushing speculative floor patterns through restraint into havoc.

At a poolside performance series organized by the artist Stewart Uoo,<sup>2</sup> Satterwhite reads from the “Disco” chapter of Grace Jones' autobiography: “The blend of space, light, and sound, the hot mess of bodies... constantly released this feeling that anything was possible. You could dance on your own just for the hell of it.”<sup>3</sup> The text reproduces the feeling of Satterwhite dancing with his friends in hedonistic isolation together on the pool deck right now. Their stylized flitting and grinding is exacerbated by the oversaturated chaos of high summer. For a moment it's like it's the 70s and I'm with Jones on Fire Island and anything is possible.

As liberating as Jones' lifestyle appears to have been, she still felt limited by the predominantly white spaces she occupied. As a Jamaican-born black woman living in the United States, Jones found that embracing a myriad of identities was a useful tool to disrupt racial and gendered discrimination. In her autobiography she writes that the experience of shaving her head for the first time made her “less tied to a specific race or sex or tribe, but was also a way of moving across

those things, belonging while at the same time not belonging. I was black, but not black; women, but not women; American, but Jamaican; African, but science fiction.”<sup>4</sup> Satterwhite often dances in public wearing space-looking suits, and draws from multiple online sites to influence his aesthetic and identity, allowing him to confuse distinctions and signifiers that would otherwise be mapped onto him. Perhaps, like Jones, capacious aesthetics allow Satterwhite to negotiate white spaces like Fire Island, or the art world, where, for him, race is “the problem I’ve never not known.”<sup>5</sup>

But Satterwhite is not wearing one of the elaborate body suits that he dances through the city in. He’s in simple black short shorts as he sexualizes a box of flowers. I feel like a voyeur with the other gay men who are in sardonic bemusement as the performances blend seamlessly into the performers just having fun. I think about how in Jones’ autobiography she was able to locate pleasure in objectification. She writes that in addition to a transgression of identity, she felt her shaved head was a blunt embodiment of blackness, and because it revealed more of her black skin, it made her feel more like a thing than a person. She was able to take this feeling of objectification into her own hands and generate pleasure. Her shaved head, she says, eventually led directly to her first orgasm.<sup>6</sup>

African American and Gender and Sexuality Studies Scholar Jennifer Nash has drawn on an archive of 70s and 80s pornography to theorize black female sexuality as a site of pleasure that can create new spaces of potentiality within dominant racist frameworks. In one instance in her book *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, Nash interprets a hyper-sexualized black female porn performance in the 1972 film *Sexworld* not as an instance of a racialized gaze inflicting violence on the black woman’s body, but rather as a lexicon of pleasure that is re-authored by black women.<sup>7</sup>

Body drops are punctuated by sustained bends, sloppy fall, bungee, wire, crossed legs, poised stare, collapse, then reverse. All the while Satterwhite’s clothes come completely off—like a toddler tearing away to naked freedom. His hyper-visible black male sexuality at the performance feels in line with Jones and with Nash’s theory. It could be a tonic for racist stigma and normalizing respectability, an occasion of pleasure that originates a new arousing intensity in opposition to racial stereotypes. Though maybe it’s a lot to transpose Nash’s black feminist theory to Satterwhite on Fire Island, or to even try and speak for Satterwhite’s experience here.

The discomfort I feel in the audience isn’t only a result of feeling like a voyeur. Part of me wants to get up and dance. My leg bounces to the thumping music and I start to get out of my chair, feeling dread and elation—just then Satterwhite leaps out of a brutalist spinning sequence into the pool. Everyone immediately rushes in to the rescue as he struggles in the water. He doesn’t know how to swim, I overhear. Something feels off in this moment. He looks visibly shocked, like the water isn’t supposed to give way to the weight of his body.

#### BIOMEDICAL CHOREOGRAPHY

In his video *Reifying Desire 3* (2013), Satterwhite dances in glassine bubbles that bounce off throbbing organs and refract incoming molecular debris—all in a digitally animated, anti-gravitational world.<sup>8</sup> These prophylactic transparent casings might have allowed him to bounce off the pool. I cannot help but think that Satterwhite’s artwork reflects advancements in pharmaceuticals that protect users during a variety of risky sexual acts. At least from a molecular perspective, these pharmaceutical compounds look a lot like the gelatinous casings that appear in Satterwhite’s videos.

The CGI rendered forms that encase Satterwhite resemble, for example, the protective spheres around human T-cells that are visualized in the FDA’s public service announcement for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a pharmaceutical regime that is up to 99% effective at stopping the transmission of HIV. People on PrEP take a blue pill daily, which interferes with HIV’s ability to copy itself in the body.<sup>9</sup> A popular PSA, sponsored by Gilead, the producer of PrEP, depicts the medication as mutating, transparent spheres that protect T-cells and cause the HIV virus to explode on contact.<sup>10</sup> Satterwhite’s spheres share the same prophylactic function of PrEP, allowing him to dance through a world of raw sexual fluids and organs that might otherwise pose danger.

When I imagine his euphoric dancing imported into the safety of a 3-D world, the sepia 70s feeling I had starts to look like an Instagram filter. If he restores a pre-AIDS bodily presence from Jones’ Disco period, that invocation seems reliant on the augmentation of reality evidenced in his videos. This is made clear in his *Reifying Desire 6: Island of Treasure* (2014), a video in which the artist sexually engages with a porn star that works for a studio known for unprotected sex.<sup>11</sup> Liquid and solid psychotoxic objects are messily exchanged in the air as they dance and hump within radioactive landscapes of giant amorphous bodies and undulating

genitalia. Though they never actually have sex, they appear to be unaffected by the biomedical implications of the vulnerable fluid exchange that is being depicted on screen.

Another instance of gay male bodily expression that appears detached from the threat of HIV infection was a recent party, sponsored by the gay dating app Grindr, that Satterwhite was invited to do an art project for. Satterwhite had set up a green screen that he and his friends performed in front of while wearing leather fetish gear, in order to, “recreate the experience of gay cruising.” When it is finished the green screen backdrop will be replaced by an image, from the year 1980, of *The Rambles*, a gay cruising spot in Central Park.<sup>12</sup> Within virtual space, Satterwhite performs movement and sexuality that characterizes the period before the early AIDS crisis in the United States: cruising, unprotected fluid exchange, and dance inflected with disco’s exuberance.

Certainly by the late 80s, these behaviors of sexual and social freedom that Satterwhite seems attuned to had imploded into fear and devastation. The queer scene in New York was transformed into a war-like zone, and across the United States AIDS claimed more lives than the Vietnam War. Searching for a metaphor to encompass this pervasive devastation, the art historian Douglas Crimp asserted in 1987, “AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it.”<sup>13</sup> If Satterwhite’s work is an artistic reflection of AIDS today, it conceptualizes the syndrome primarily through the protective safety of PrEP. Satterwhite’s work represents a new corporality resistant to HIV infection that relives the past through the software of the present. While the gymnastic erotics with which Satterwhite journeys across Fire Island strike me as a necessary reclaiming of the pornographic fantasy of race, they also evidence a suspension of time which PrEP makes possible. This reality manifests as unrestrained bodily expression, distant from the threats that characterized HIV/AIDS in the 80s and 90s, when the gay cruising culture of the 70s disappeared and AIDS loomed large, when the government shut down discos and bathhouses, when unprotected sex became taboo.

By identifying this fissure in Satterwhite’s work, I don’t intend to elicit moralizing undertones about the artist’s relation to HIV/AIDS. There is no reason that the generation of gay men who grew up in the painful aftermath of the initial outbreak should not be entitled to celebrate sexual intimacies they never knew. Rather, I’m interested in how his work and dancing

manifests the paradoxical tension between ongoing AIDS crisis trauma and 70s gay cultural nostalgia that feels so prevalent today. Perhaps the emergence of this prophylactic time-warping that Satterwhite pictures is additionally a result of inconsistent vectors of communication through which AIDS history has been passed along. Murky sex education, homophobia, whispered bedroom talks, stories of militant activism, pornography, and stigmatizing news profiles are the ways in which my sexuality was formed in relation to a disease I was meant to fear.

I remember seeing an HIV-positive man when I was ten. He had lesions from Kaposi sarcoma on his body and I thought he was a supernatural creature, something out of the B horror films my sister would watch. I only got a glimpse of him as my mother rushed us by. It was just like when I would pass my sister’s room and hear screaming voices. Bones glitch, intimate density hollows. It’s getting dark out and they are turning down the music. I still haven’t gotten up and danced. I close my eyes and feel the color blue.

Sitting next to me, as part of the audience, is my friend who has not looked up from his phone once during the performances. He has been cruising on Scruff, another gay dating app. I peek over his head and notice he has checked the “on PrEP” box on his profile. In some ways, Satterwhite’s work mirrors apps like Scruff and Grindr—both create digital spaces for uninhibited behavior to exist. It is through the synthesis of online profiles and pharmaceutical compounds that new identities spawn within these apps that are protected from the health risks of HIV infection. But these apps risk conflating gay, white male identity with PrEP use, while omitting or even creating hostile environments for minorities, especially black men, who, as studies have shown, are most at risk of HIV infection.<sup>14</sup>

The scholar and curator Paul B. Preciado (formerly known as Beatriz Preciado) articulates the function of biotechnologies like PrEP with his theory of the “pharmacopornographic” which narrates the history of the biomedical industry as a project that manages identity and agency through the materiality of the body.<sup>15</sup> In Preciado’s analysis of pharmaceutical and pornographic institutions, he identifies the genesis of strict gender and reproduction control taking place in the 50s, when hormone therapy and birth control were developed. He argues that surveillance, capitalism and other regimes of power began to act on a microscopic level, leading to “soft technologies of micro-control that adopt the form of the body they control and become part of it until they are inseparable and indis-





Jacolby Satterwhite, *Reifying Desire 3*, 2012. HD digital video, color 3-D animation 17:00. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff, Los Angeles.



A Level-testing Bed!

A Cock's House

Cock's House



A Levitating Bed  
and Car





TM Davy, *AA in the Magic Forest*, 2012. Oil on linen. Courtesy the artist and 11R Gallery.

Image on previous page: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Reifying Desire 6*, 2014. HD digital video, color 3-D animation 24:08. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff, Los Angeles.



tinguishable from it, ending up as techno-soma-subjectivities.”<sup>16</sup> In this light, the re-inhabited freedoms of movement and sexuality that this essay is concerned with also function within the cells of our body. Drugs directly engage, moderate, and control our blood, forming new relations to HIV that are braided with the interests of biopharmaceutical conglomerates.

The poet Andrew Durbin is reading now at the performance. Perhaps this is what he means when he writes, “The future has erased the need for us to consider our bodies in terms of their need.”<sup>17</sup> As data engineers transform our actions into information that gets fed to algorithms, constructing molecules and plastics to fulfill us, bodies start dancing this information, replacing the vulnerability of our needs with a bionic invincibility.

### THE FOREST AND THE DANCE FLOOR

We are deep in the forest on Fire Island in what is known as the Meat Rack. Darkness falls through the flesh and city light has turned to ash. I am covered in mud and pinecone must, deer peer out as we feel each other to find our way to Cherry Grove and to the Ice Palace to dance in a disorienting room that endlessly expands into darkness. Satterwhite is here with his friends. I see him drop to a split as the strobe light flicks and confuses light and dark, subject and object. I begin to hear the homosexual men from Andrew Holleran’s novel *Dancer From The Dance* describe Fire Island, “Nowhere else on earth was natural and human beauty fused, and nowhere else on earth could you dance in quite the same atmosphere.”<sup>18</sup> This order yields the more I writhe through the crowd in night vision.

During a class I took with Tavia Nyong’o and José Esteban Muñoz in 2013, we investigated the idea of “wildness” by connecting coordinates among schools of queer, ecological, and critical race studies. In class, I hypothesized about the chaotic potential of werewolves, a supernatural locus that seems to be sparking around me on dance floor right now. I imagined a politics of medial identity that could negotiate temporality, contagion, nature, technology, race and gender. If today we are moved by reverberations from the traumatic period of the early AIDS crisis *and* the sexually-free ethos of a pre-AIDS-period, and if that identity means we must come into contact with forces that control how these histories move through our bodies in the present, then shifting between incongruous, imaginary identities can be a kind of political activity, a strategy to circumvent the virtual and pharmaceutical

forces that would delimit us.

Right now Satterwhite is lying on his stomach on the dance floor with one leg bent up in a misshapen arabesque. He is dancing but also crawling, converting his body and slipping out of sight. I don’t know if he is a werewolf.

There is something involuntarily carnal, a submission to the incident of subjectivity that occurs in the hallucination and terror of the dark here, especially right now as I spin in a circle until I’m so dizzy I fall.

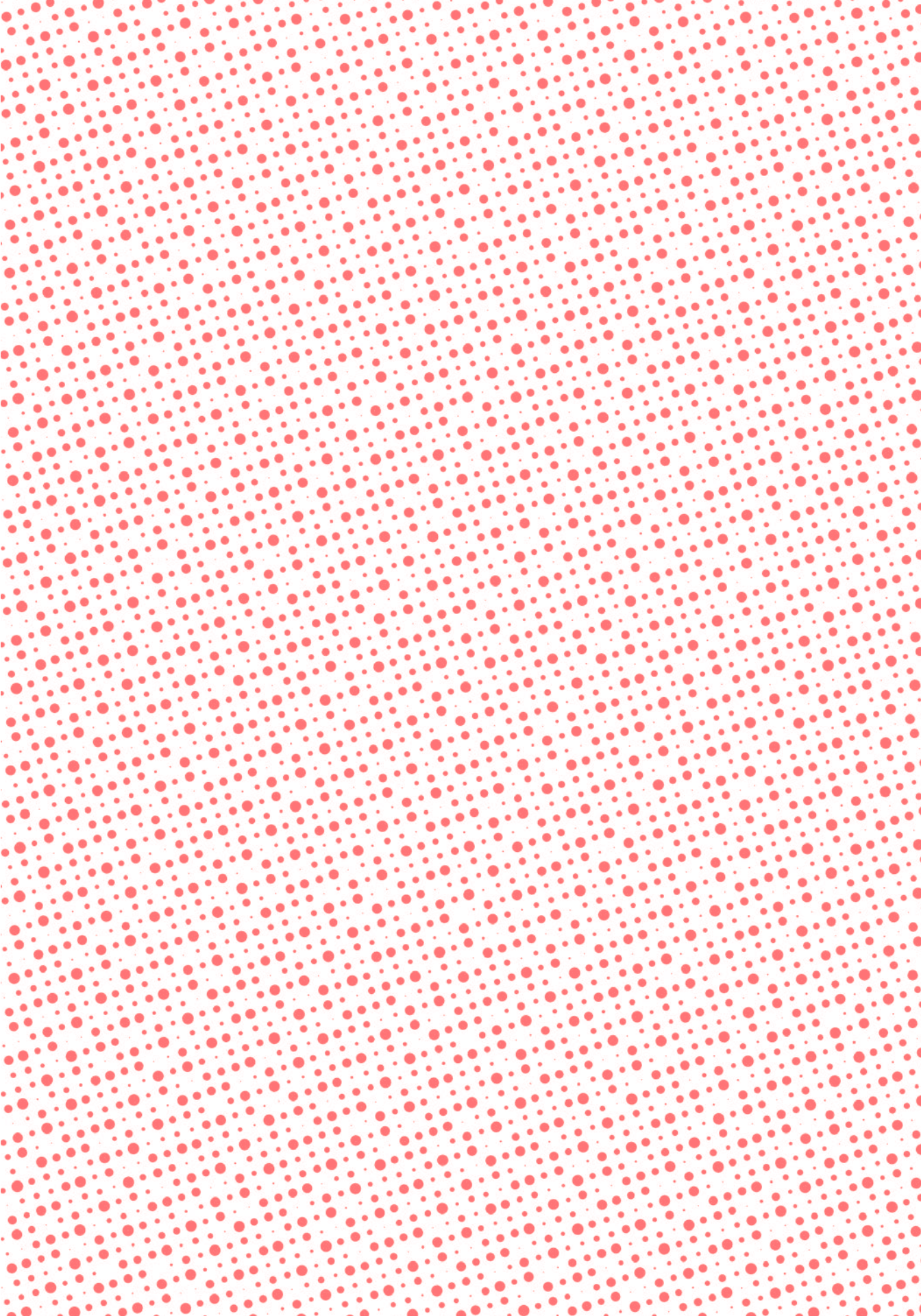
With this I am mutating, escaping the reassurances of the collective “Dance Dance Revolution” machine. Recombinant blue codes hit my bloodstream, and I flaunt myself in their blazing image. I imagine myself in one of Satterwhite’s videos, dancing in techno-organic compounds towards the chaotic potential of multiple bodies and signifiers. Meaning starts to disorder and I feel close to everyone in the animal language of sweat as we rumble into gestures that survive death’s shadow.

Suddenly everything is quiet and still. Where there should be a moon is a disco ball that has never stopped spinning, reflecting light through the creepy trees. This is all part of the process I tell myself as I struggle to feel my body and notice the HIV-positive man I saw when I was ten lurking in the brush. There is something calming about the medical warmth of the night. Like that painting by TM Davy of AA Bronson looking out at the Meat Rack, where the ashes of his friends who died during the early AIDS crisis have been spread.<sup>19</sup> The flawlessly handsome protagonist in *Dancer from the Dance*, Malone, also stumbles with me through the darkness of the Meat Rack. He becomes bitter and despondent from endless nights of dance, drugs, and anonymous encounters, going so far as to call his sexuality a cancer, and at the end of the book he dies in a bathhouse fire—events that eerily capture the conflation of queer sexual promiscuity, violence, and grief that would arrive with AIDS shortly after the book’s 1978 publication.

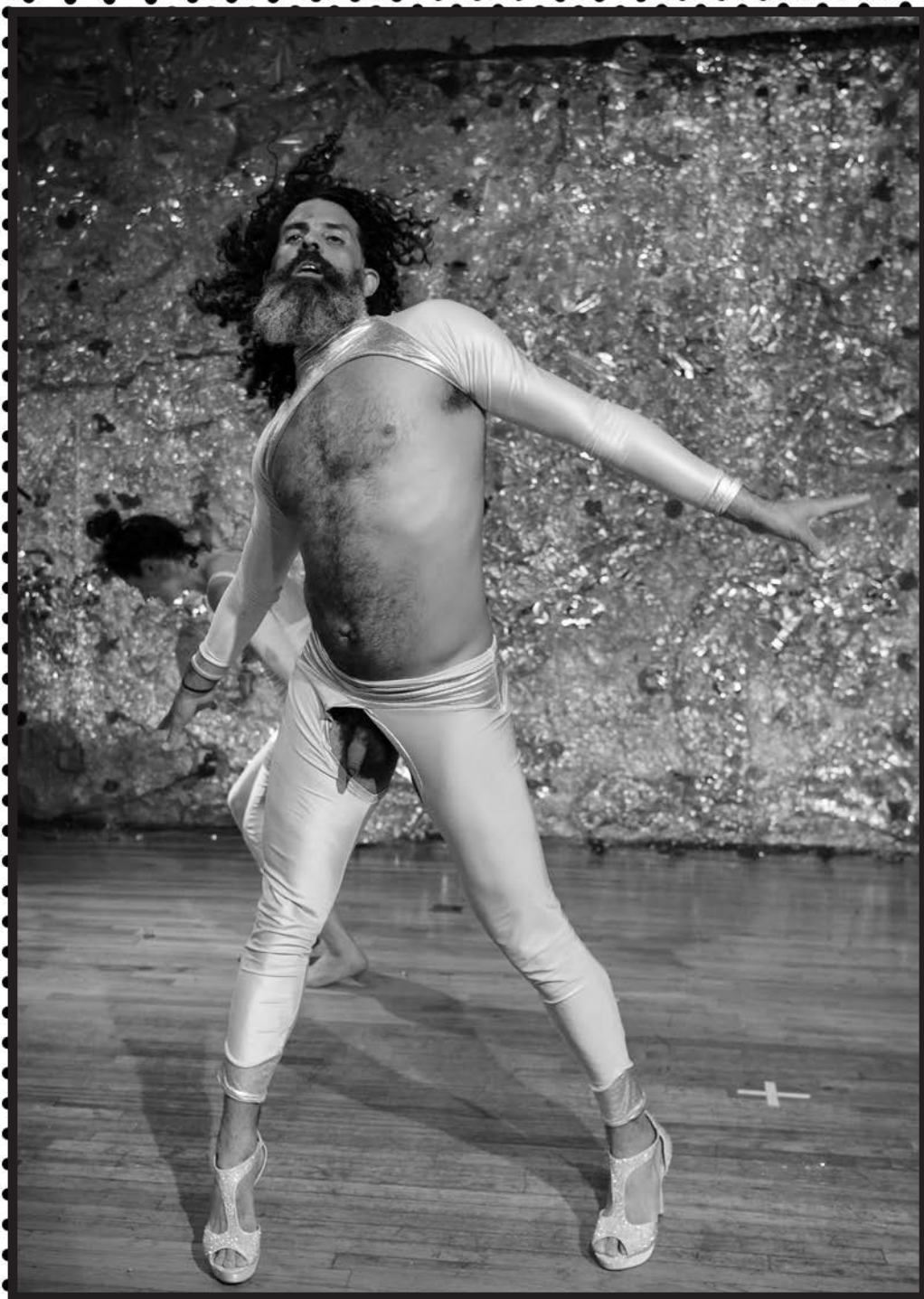
As I fully transform into a werewolf, a stray nausea takes over, like the feeling of time traveling between bodies. Maybe 70s Fire Island was also empty and dark, and perhaps there was radiant stillness amidst the initial outbreak of AIDS. Those periods are conceivable right now as an ineffable geography of disorder that clings to me in the night, making me into a mongrel of loss and ecstasy.

## NOTES

- [1] Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s*. (Wesleyan, 2002), 59.
- [2] This iteration of Uoo's performance series, "It's Gets Better," was presented by Boffo on Saturday June 16th, 2016.
- [3] Grace Jones and Paul Morely, *I'll Never Write My Memoirs* (Gallery Books, 2015), 158.
- [4] This and preceding two sentences from, *Ibid.*, 82.
- [5] Andrew Durbin, "Privilege and Its Discontents," *OUT*, March 11th, 2015, accessed July 30th, 2016, <http://www.out.com/art-books/2015/3/11/art-jacoby-satterwhite>.
- [6] This and preceding sentence are citations from, Jones, 82.
- [7] This and preceding sentence are citations from Jennifer Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Duke University Press, 2014), 106, and 83 – 106.
- [8] Jacoby Satterwhite, *Reifying Desire Three*, 2013. <https://vimeo.com/44403442>, 9:40 - 10:56.
- [9] This and preceding sentence are citations from, "Treatment to Prevent HIV Infection," The AIDS Info Net, accessed August 7th, 2016, [http://aidsinfonet.org/fact\\_sheets/view/160](http://aidsinfonet.org/fact_sheets/view/160).
- [10] "What is PrEP," PrEP REP project, accessed August 7th, 2016, <http://www.whatisprep.org>.
- [11] Durbin.
- [12] This and preceding sentence are citations from "Cruising, BDSM, and Grindr: An Interview with Artist Jacoby Satterwhite," *The Standard Culture*, July 8th, 2016, accessed July 30th, 2016, <https://www.standard-hotels.com/culture/jacoby-satterwhite-grindr>.
- [13] Douglas Crimp and Leo Bersani, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 3.
- [14] The Black AIDS Institute. *Black Lives Matter: What's PrEP Got to Do with It*, (Los Angeles, CA, 2016), 15. This undergirding racist bias can also be seen as a continuation of the absence of life saving HIV medications in countries and communities across the globe. <https://www.blackaids.org/images/reports/16%20prep%20report.pdf> (accessed July 30th, 2016).
- [15] Preciado, Paul B, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), 23 – 54.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 79.
- [17] Andrew Durbin, *Mature Themes* (Nightboat Books, 2014), 17.
- [18] Andrew Holleran, *Dancer From The Dance*, (William Morrow, 1978), 207.
- [19] AA Bronson, interview by Stuart Comer, "AA Bronson on Queer Collaborations, Shamanism, and Korean History," *Hyperallergic*, October 9th, 2014, accessed July 30th, 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/154311/aa-bronson-on-queer-collaborations-shamanism-and-korean-history/>.







Antonio Ramos. Photo by Ian Douglas.



## The Black Sheep [1990]

After a funeral someone said to me  
 You know I only see you at funerals  
 it's been 3 since June—  
 been 5 since June for me.  
 He said I've made a vow—  
 I only go to death parties if I know someone  
 before they were sick.  
 Why?

cause—cause—cause I feel I feel so  
 sad cause I never knew their lives  
 and now I only know their deaths  
 And because we are members of the  
 Black Sheep family.

We are sheep with no shepherd  
 We are sheep with no straight and narrow  
 We are sheep with no meadow  
 We are sheep who take the dangerous pathway through  
 the mountain range  
 to get to the other side of our soul.  
 We are the black sheep of the family  
 called Black Sheep folk.

We always speak our mind.  
     appreciate differences in culture  
     believe in sexual preferences  
     believe in no racism  
     no sexism  
     no religionism

and we'll fight for what we believe  
 but usually we're pagans.  
 There's always one in every family.  
 Even when we're surrounded by bodies  
 we're always alone.  
 You're born alone  
 and you die alone—  
 written by a black sheep.  
 You can't take it with you—  
 written by a former black sheep.

Black Sheep folk look different from their families—  
 The way we look at the world.  
 We're a quirk of nature—  
 We're a quirk of fate.  
 Usually our family, our city,  
 our country doesn't understand us—  
 We knew this from when we were very young  
 that we weren't meant to be understood.

That's right. That's our job.  
Usually we're not appreciated until the next generation.  
That's our life. That's our story.  
Usually we're outcasts, outsiders in our own family.  
Don't worry—get used to it.  
My sister says—I don't understand you!  
But I have many sisters with me tonight.  
My brother says—I don't want you!  
But I have many brothers with me here tonight!  
My mother says—I don't know how to love  
someone like you!  
You're so different from the rest!  
But I have many mamas with me here tonight!  
My father says—I don't know how to hold you!  
But I have many daddies with me here tonight!  
We're related to people we love who can't say  
    I love you Black Sheep daughter  
    I love you Black Sheep son  
    I love you outcast, I love you outsider.  
But tonight we love each other  
That's why we're here—  
to be around others like ourselves—  
So it doesn't hurt quite so much.  
In our world, our temple of difference  
I am at my loneliest when I have something to celebrate  
and try to share it with those I love  
who don't love me back.  
There's always silence at the end  
of the phone.  
There's always silence at the end  
of the phone.

Sister—congratulate me!  
NO I CAN'T YOU'RE TOO LOUD—  
Grandma—love me!  
NO I DON'T KNOW HOW TO LOVE  
SOMEONE LIKE YOU  
Sometimes the Black Sheep is a soothsayer,  
a psychic, a magician of sorts.  
Black Sheep see the invisible—  
We know each other's thoughts—  
We feel fear and hatred.

Sometimes some sheep are chosen to be sick  
    to finally have average, flat, boring people say  
    I love you.  
Sometimes, Black Sheep are chosen to be sick  
    so families can finally come together and say

I love you.  
 Sometimes, some Black Sheep are chosen to die  
     so loved ones and families can finally say  
     Your life was worth living  
     Your life meant something to me!  
 Black Sheeps' destinies are not necessarily in having families,  
 having prescribed existences—  
     like the American Dream.  
 Black Sheeps' Destinies are to give meaning in life  
     to be angels,  
     to be conscience  
     to be nightmares  
     to be actors in dreams.

Black Sheep can be family to strangers  
 We can love each other like MOTHER  
 FATHER SISTER BROTHER CHILD  
 We understand universal love  
 We understand unconditional love.  
 We feel a unique responsibility  
 a human responsibility, for feelings for others  
 We can be all things to all people  
 We are there at 3: 30AM when you call  
 We are here tonight cause I just can't go to sleep.  
 I have nowhere else to go.  
 I'm a creature of the night—  
 I travel in your dreams—  
 I feel your nightmares—

We are your holding hand  
 We are your pillow, your receiver,  
 your cuddly toy.  
 I feel your pain.  
 I wish I could relieve you of your suffering.  
 I wish I could relieve you of your pain.  
 I wish I could relieve you of your death.  
 But it's always  
 Silence at the end of the phone.  
 Silence at the end of the phone.  
 Silence at the end of the phone.

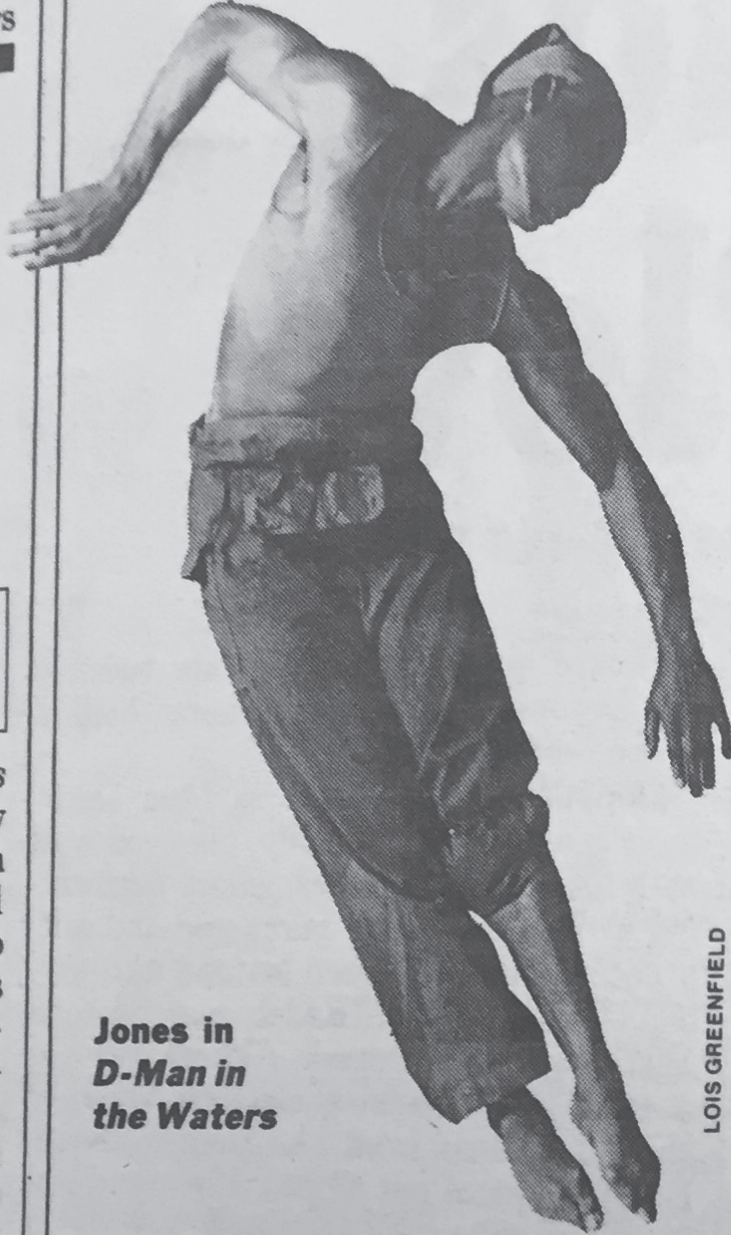


*Sidewalk Cafe*



**PORTFOLIO: BILL T. JONES**





**Jones in  
D-Man in  
the Waters**

LOIS GREENFIELD

# Bill T. Jones Duet for One

BY BURT SUPREE

**A**rniece Zane died last March, but the company that still bears

administrative and financial head then. By last July, the company was facing complete closedown. It was behind in tax payments to the IRS about \$73,000 plus a further \$40,000. But a benefit of the company's work was that it had pulled them pretty much out of the hole. "That's something Arnie was trouble doing," says Jones, "the phone and asking for things. I've had to learn how to do it." "It was encouraging to see that he did care about us. I've not always been sure about how we were perceived. The dancers have been exempt from the senior dancers have stepped in and helped when I've fallen. They've given me a lot of rock and emotionalism."

The dancers' sense of responsibility, their solicitousness and generosity are constantly evident in rehearsal ways, particularly with Janet Curran, Sean Curran, Jones's good friend. Dancers are in the habit of giving themselves over to someone else's needs. There's something particular about the way they are operating here. I suppose that during the long period of Zane's death and Jones's mourning, the company went through a lot together, together. Jones, too, surprises me. Fatherly he sometimes is with the dancers. Well, he says, "Take Arthur [Arnie] Zane. In 1973 he was 10 years old. Arnie had been living together for a year and was making dances."

Though some dancers have left, there are a few new company members. Jones feels "the dancers really care about the stakes are. We relied on





*Still/Here*, 1994.  
Photos by Beatriz Schiller.

By Deborah Jowitt

**Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane  
Dance Company**

Brooklyn Academy of Music  
November 30 through  
December 3

**Amy Pivar Dances**

P.S. 122  
November 17 through 20

I remember years ago when I had to fight the impulse to scrunch down in my seat at anything Bill T. Jones was performing. Who knew when he might decide to mention your name, talk to you, talk about you? The nervousness wouldn't quit (nor would the fascination).

Personal revelation and political argument have always been vital to Jones's work, beginning in 1979 with the smart, impeccable duet games he and his late partner, Arnie Zane, played with their family histories and their relationship as lovers. Political themes crammed Jones's *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* (1990). In that vivid, sprawling epic, ideas like the common ground beneath racism and oppression of women, or paradoxes such as a benevolent God who traffics in human affliction, jostled each other in a rich theatrical goulash. During the years between, and with a variety of collaborators, Jones's beautiful, wily dancing and powerful speech raged and purred and posed hard questions about gender, homosexuality, race, family, pornography, art, disease.

*Still/Here*, perhaps his most mature and shapely composition to date, has a single defiant theme: accepting, and then fighting with any means at hand, the diagnosis of possibly terminal illness.

(Thanks to a recent flood of publicity, Jones is probably the most famous HIV-positive gay black man in America.) Jones has gleaned material from "survival workshops" conducted in 11 American cities. The faces of workshop participants gaze from the big screens that advance between black pillars, glide in from the wings, or descend from above (Gretchen Bender's somber but spectacular environment suggests a temple of the media). The gestures of this other, half-hidden cast rise up in the dancers' bodies. We hear their voices; dancers speak their words, say their names; Kenneth Frazelle sets their sentiments to music, and Odetta sings them on tape—wisdom cracking her voice. "My illness is not me," says one woman. Another remembers reading the bad news in the eyes of a nurse. Another: "Tell me how to fight this disease, because *I am going to win!*"

The media's magical surgery dissolves, dissects, and re-forms the survivors' images. At one point, white swirls resolve into human figures and fly apart. In a horrific sequence, to a chant of "slash, poison, and burn," tall, shaven-headed Odile Reine-Ade-laide dances cupping her breast, while colored films of mouths, eyes, limbs pour so rapidly onto the screen that one image's lipstick spatters blood over the next. Gordon F. White dances beneath a filmed image of the same solo, but something's subtly wrong: is the filmed dance being run backward or has its flow been altered?

Jones does not perform, although his voice is heard questioning and guiding workshop members ("take us to your death"), and near the end, he appears on a small monitor that Larry Goldhuber wheels around through a frenzy of guitar by Vernon Reid. Enamored though I am

of Jones as a performer, I was glad not to have him as the charismatic mediator he would inevitably have been.

And what do the dancers do? They group and regroup into supportive frames and tableaux. They form arches and dive beneath them. They fall and are caught, catch and embrace. They are a community, *there* for one another. Yet because they are so beautiful, dauntless, daring, we don't really see them as those dangerously ill warriors whose words and faces burn into our hearts. Whether wearing Liz Prince's white, gray, and pale blue outfits in "Still" or identical costumes in red in the more affirmative "Here," they're like angels setting examples—passion channeled, cooled, no matter how wrenching or arduous the dancing. Their only close personal identification with the subject comes in bulky Goldhuber's wry and moving account of his mother's terminal illness.

They dance and dance and dance. Gorgeously. Streaking through a vocabulary that tosses the odd ballet step in with distinctive gestures and bold contemporary moves. Arthur Aviles, Josie Coyoc, Torrin Cummings, Gabri Christa, Rosalynde LeBlanc, Daniel Russell, Maya Saffrin, in addition to those already mentioned, are individually vibrant and collectively dazzling. Jones, I think, intends their dancing as a metaphor for life, for unquenchable spirit. I can see it. But I also shudder at the irony: those bodies and spirits looking out from the screens, speaking out on tape, are under siege. And these incredibly fit and glowing people are their messengers, witnesses, and surrogates?



# A duet, an argument, an inheritance: Bill T. Jones and Will Rawls in conversation

*On June 20, 2016, Bill T. Jones sat down for an interview with Will Rawls, whose goal was to discuss Jones' duets with Arnie Zane: Blauvelt Mountain, Monkey Run Road and Valley Cottage. These three seminal duets from the 1980s marked a moment in the artists' careers where formalism, gay sensibility, intimacy and questions of interracial love met the public eye to claim new territory in postmodern dance. Premiering just at the start of the AIDS crisis, these duets felt like relevant subject matter for the discussions in this catalogue. What ensues below, however, veers immediately away from these duets into a broader intergenerational conversation in which they attempt to hammer out a language they can share. The stakes become more about visibility, the accrued labels of a long career and the spiritual dimensions of how younger artists might be attentive to legacies that have opened up new ground.*

**Bill T. Jones:** Now that I have your attention—I never thought that I would know Will Rawls. I never thought that there would be a Will Rawls. The world that those pieces were made in—there was Ishmael [Houston-Jones], but there was no Will Rawls.

**Will Rawls:** Let's talk about these duets with Arnie Zane: *Blauvelt Mountain* and *Monkey Run Road*. I know that *Blauvelt*, as you said in our conversation in January, was made in a time pre-AIDS—

**BTJ:** Oh, we didn't know we were pre-AIDS, is that what you mean?

**WR:** You said, "You don't know you're in a moment like that until it's over."

**BTJ:** Oh no. You don't know.

**WR:** So I'm interested to know about *Blauvelt* retrospectively, what the time in your life felt like.

**BTJ:** Do we know we're in a Black Lives Matter era? Do we know we're in an era of Hamilton now? Everybody wants to be up to the moment. Trans. Right? We're hyperaware now, aren't we?

**WR:** Try to be, yes.

**BTJ:** I don't know, are we? How can we know it in the way we know, "Oh, that's what Bill and Arnie were working on. They're dancing right at the cusp of the AIDS epidemic. Did they know what was happening?" I know we were going to the baths and fucking our brains out on the weekends, that's for sure, everybody was doing it.

**WR:** For me, it's not so much how that work was a "pre-AIDS" work, but just how New York City felt at the time, given that once the AIDS crisis arrived things changed so drastically.

**BTJ:** Well, what can I say? I think there were people working, like we mentioned Tim Miller and John Bernd. Their "boy pieces"—what did they call them? I think they were called "boy pieces." That's what I would take to be the aftershock of the gay liberation movement. Stonewall was '69, a lot of stuff happened during the 70s, that was all about taking those ideas and moving them forward into the brave new world. That's what I thought those works were about. Identity. Where people were already saying, "I'm framing my artistic output in my homosexuality." Arnie and I weren't in fact doing that. We were saying our homosexuality is a part of who we are. Also, looking back to the 20s and 30s—Constructivism! Not to mention avant-garde film of the 60s.

We were doing formalism, but it was always going to be inflected. I daresay that Bill was probably leading this inflection, because I was always talking in my head, doing formal things, but then trying to break it.

**WR:** I read the recent *T Magazine* interview with you and there was something you said that really struck me, "I'm not gonna spare the audience from my pre-occupations even though I'm going to be jumping and leaving the ground."

**BTJ:** "Why don't you just allow us to enjoy you leaving the ground so we can identify with flying?" Yes, I'm going to leave the ground, but we're going to talk about 1942 at the same time. So there was this fight always.

This has been the leitmotif of today. Talking to those students over there [rehearsing in a studio next door], who want to ask very big questions. They want, “Give us the real deal of what you were thinking.” Artists, and I’m one, we tend to be perverse. But I mean perverse in the sense that James Joyce was perverse, in writing *Ulysses*. Why is it so obtuse? Why is it so dense? It’s almost impossible to read. Why are you doing this to us? Art is perverse. A lot of what we were doing, a lot of what I was doing, that was a kind of volcanic response to any received notions of what artmaking should be. You’ve read Doris Humphrey’s *The Art of Making Dances*?

**WR:** Yes—the symbolism of stage diagonals, the inherent narrative force of that.

**BTJ:** I guess she wasn’t a fan of Merce Cunningham.

**WR:** It’s funny to a return to a text like that now because that’s not what I grew up on. I inherited research-based choreography as my starting point for making work. When I return to Humphrey, it feels so concrete and so self-assured in a way that’s actually very interesting to me. It becomes like a useful stake in the ground around which to kind of turn these current, associative free-form—

**BTJ:** —for you

**WR:** Yeah, interesting for me.

So for your generation, you were casting off things like that in order to bring language in, to bring sound in, to bring your lives into the work in a certain sense. Whether or not you wanted to be easily identified as living one kind of life or another.

**BTJ:** Is it too corny to say let’s blame it on mind-expanding drugs? When you come down from acid or mescaline, you’ve had this experience. Yes, you remember dancing naked, and rolling around, and eating dinner, having ice cream, you remember all that. But there was another sense of reality, “Oh, how could my performance do that, how could I mash up the inner world and the physical world that happened to me when I was having this experience? How can it be represented in the dance that I make?”

**WR:** I feel that whenever I’ve tripped, it’s been about getting lost. I never end up getting lost in the way that

I think I’m going to get lost. I always end up in some other corner in my mind and body.

**BTJ:** Interesting. What about the black church model then? There is an impulse, that what you’re going to do is actually going to take you to a level of consciousness that usually only happens in sacred spaces. That’s what I was often doing. And now if you make the point that the audience is primarily white people, and you’ve grown up with them, and you sleep with a white man every night, but there’s something about being onstage and knowing that you aren’t a real dancer, that you aren’t on the cover of *Dance Magazine* (which mattered at that time), but you know you’re not in Alvin Ailey. They know that you and this white boy are sucking each other, fucking each other. OK. Alright, now, with that consciousness, yours, and theirs, now go.

I’m trying to—this is a very important conversation we’re having—I’m trying to stomp out the dimensions of the area, the arena that we’re going to try to inhabit, and hopefully not only in one conversation.

**WR:** How do we stomp out this territory? It has been one of the biggest questions we’ve been trying to deal with in the *Lost and Found* Platform. Often times the question of sexual practice gets conflated with the performing body in a way that’s detrimental to the reading of the work. Possibly. And then other times it’s very much what the work is about.

**BTJ:** Did Tim Miller and John Bernd call their work dance?

**WR:** I’m talking more about identity as a frame through which the audience is looking at the piece. All that fucking and sucking has been around for years, and certain audiences accept it to an extent.

**BTJ:** They’re used to seeing black men onstage now.

**WR:** Yes, and on TV, to a certain extent.

**BTJ:** Well hold on, let’s slow down.

**WR:** (Laughs)

**BTJ:** In the world that you and I are talking about, they’re used to us being there. And who is they?

**WR:** Primarily white audiences, I would say.

**BTJ:** Your generation is almost post-racial.

**WR:** No.

**BTJ:** In the precincts you travel in—

**WR:** I wouldn't say that we are. I don't fully understand what that means.

**BTJ:** I know, none of us do, but it's just like you said, all of that fucking and sucking has been around—we all know about it now. Do they really know?

**WR:** That doesn't mean it's past. It means that it has a different kind of currency, a different kind of visibility and urgency.

**BTJ:** But it does still have currency?

**WR:** Why shouldn't it?

**BTJ:** Are we post-homosexual? We all know what gay men are like onstage now. We've seen interracial relationships, we know what sex is now, we're past that.

What I was doing at that time was so that you can an-

swer that question any way you want to right now. You don't have to be without color, and still you can break my heart about the nature of life and death. You can be a black woman doing it. You can talk about income inequality without having to be a black person doing it. That's what I think my legacy is. And that's what it meant to survive. And I ain't dead yet.

**WR:** No, you're not. You are very much alive.

**BTJ:** Yes, I am. And I'm full of all the piss and vinegar that was always there, but mellowed now by the super awareness of mortality. What do you, Bill, want to do and say? And I'm assuming that's the same thing you're asking, right?

**WR:** Yeah. It's funny, when you said, "What do you, Bill, want to say?" I thought you said "Will."

**BTJ:** Well then you take it. You don't have to answer.

I don't know if this is an interview or a conversation. We're stomping out, right?

**WR:** I came in here with an agenda of wanting to talk about something in relationship to the Platform.

**BTJ:** Well, let's try to pull it back a bit if you like. I won't be so discursive.



*Analogy/Lance: Pretty aka The Escape Artist, 2016. Photo by Paul B Goode.*

**WR:** I think it's great.

**BTJ:** We must never take it for granted that there will be other opportunities.

**WR:** I know. An interview is a conversation. It's not only me firing things at you, obviously. It doesn't seem like that's your M.O. anyway.

**BTJ:** No, it isn't actually. How important is your own body to your work?

**WR:** It's crucial. Especially recently, I've been making a lot of solo work, where I've been singing, and dancing, and emoting, and making guttural sounds. I'm interested in flesh that speaks.

**BTJ:** That will be very interesting when you don't trust the body as much. Either the work will change a lot or you will need a Will Rawls doppelgänger.

There's something conservatizing that happens with the passage of time if that's your method, if your body is central to it. Either that or your body is going to have to move over and be replaced by what? Formalism.

**WR:** Eek.

**BTJ:** Yes, well. You've gotta have the form and somebody—

**WR:** Or do you?

**BTJ:** I don't know if you do.

**WR:** If we're thinking about this divide—we're talking about: body being central, then body moving over and using formalisms as a way of crossing that bridge. But can the bridge be built by other means?

**BTJ:** That's interesting. That's why I think your generation is interesting to me. The way you've taken the network, what can I call it, community-building. Modulating what we mean poetic to be—I call it testifying. When a performance comes down, and you feel like it was a good performance, how do you feel?

**WR:** I feel moved. I see a lot of work that that has my brain working the whole time, that has my brain surprised, but I keep hearing myself say, I liked it but I felt nothing. So for me it's about feeling in tandem with ideas and structure, in order for the work to rise to the cream of the cream of the crop. What is it for you? What's yours?

**BTJ:** Who are you talking to, my brother? I wanna go to church. I don't need God, but I want it to matter



*Still/Here*, 1994. Photo by Beatriz Schiller.



that much. I've seen my mother's face streaming with tears on Christmas morning just because of incanting a prayer, and pulling the whole fucking world into it, spinning it, until she is out, completely exhausted, and then she pulls it back in, exhausted. OK. That's the black, prophetic experience—I'm not that. But I have been trying to do that for a long time. And, I wanted to be respected by Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown.

**WR:** Well, Merce Cunningham—

**BTJ:** I have too many complex, conflicting ideas about the cosmos. But there is something about that clarion call, that I have seen the real deal. And if you wanna go there, you had better go there with respect. Because it's not there for you to use, it will use you. I don't do it very much because it's very expensive. It burns you. And if you have the courage or strength to get up, and literally set yourself on fire in front of a room full of strangers—for what? It's not your church. You're doing this for artistic discourse? You trust artistic discourse? You want artistic discourse at the moment of death? I don't know what I'm doing, Will, but I'm reaching for your heart, my man.

**WR:** My dad is a southern Baptist or was a southern Baptist and I spent a lot of time in the church there on family reunions and I saw my aunties jump up and dance, and heard the incantations.

**BTJ:** You saw them get happy.

**WR:** But I also went to an Anglican, Episcopal Church in Boston, where I grew up. And that was a lot of pomp and circumstance, and it was loud in a different way. A lot of my work has some element of social ritual.

**BTJ:** All art is ritual, but it only starts being art when it ceases being ritual, says Stravinsky.

**WR:** OK. Now we've stomped out grounds between early twentieth century and the near future. I do want to talk more specifically. You're working on this piece about Lance right now [*Analogy/Lance: Pretty aka The Escape Artist*, a live conversation between Jones and his nephew]. You are, right at this current moment, dealing with the narrative of a relative who is afflicted with AIDS. And how does it feel now to be constructing a narrative like that given that this particular historical moment is erroneously considered as "post" the AIDS crisis?

**BTJ:** Well child, the only thing I would stop you and say—for me, AIDS is not the center of it.

**WR:** It's not the center of it?

**BTJ:** Drug addiction would be enough, wouldn't it? Wouldn't that be enough? He could be in jail for any number of reasons as a black man. You hear someone say he's a black gay man you wouldn't be surprised he's HIV positive, would you?

I'm an out, HIV-positive man. When my mother died, we tried to add up all her nieces and—all of her grands and great-grands—we stopped at 200. It's a big group. And Uncle Bill is a famous HIV-positive homosexual. That's quite a mouthful isn't it?

**WR:** And do you like saying that about yourself?

**BTJ:** Do I like saying it?

**WR:** Do you like titling yourself in such a way?

**BTJ:** I hate it.

**WR:** Why?

**BTJ:** I don't hate it, but no—how do you feel? Do you title yourself lately?

**WR:** No, I don't. I'm interested in avoiding and complicating that.

**BTJ:** I don't have to avoid it, because it's on record. It's a statement of fact. If I choose to speak the language of the culture, well, that's how you talk about me.

**WR:** Once we name ourselves publicly, in whatever ways the culture provides as labels—like a sound bite—

**BTJ:** —and the culture will do that to you—

**WR:** —yeah absolutely. And does—

**BTJ:** You didn't finish your statement. Once we do that—are we not conspiring with the culture? Is that where you're going?

**WR:** Once you have made a statement as a public figure, like yourself, how do you unravel that?

**BTJ:** What do you mean unravel it? There is no unraveling it.

**WR:** How do you stay mobile?

**BTJ:** How do you stay sane? How do you stay balanced?

**WR:** So the stakes are sanity/insanity, and not so much reinterpreting that label to maybe choose different ways of identifying?

**BTJ:** There's something about being the only one. You know? The only one. Which as I'm saying to my nephew—all of your pain about the family doesn't love you, da da da da da. And maybe now's the time we should actually be trying to be allies. And maybe we should start being honest with each other now, my shit is out there. He's a drug addict. Furtive. Furtive. No, I'm not furtive.

**WR:** No, you're not.

**BTJ:** No, I'm not. It's a strategy. What does it mean? You ask how do you unravel it? This is how you unravel it. Deal with it, motherfuckers.

**WR:** Can he adopt your strategy and have the same results now?

**BTJ:** The piece is about two men talking to each other. They asked me today, who are you making your work for? Damn lady, who are you making yours for?

**WR:** Well, for yourself at least—

**BTJ:** Well, that's definitely one place that it starts. And I'm an ambitious motherfucker as well. Who are you making your work for? Siobhan Burke? Gia Kourlas? Brian Seibert?<sup>1</sup>

**WR:** No. I don't think I've ever made a work for *The New York Times*. There are a handful of people that have passed through my life, some artists, some not, that I make my work for, whether they will see it, whether they are living, whether they are dead.

**BTJ:** That's nice.

**WR:** They are the guideposts for what I consider valuable, good, interesting, worth going deeper into. I

mean in terms of this larger conversation about the pitfalls and leaps of ambition—

**BTJ:** —yes, what about them?

(both laugh)

**BTJ:** What are they?

**WR:** I don't know.

**BTJ:** You may fail.

**WR:** Yeah, you may fail, but you might also become over defined or overdetermined in a way that feels—

**BTJ:**—Ooooooh, terrible, “over defined.” Oh, come on.

**WR:** Or, possibly more detrimentally, stuck in repeating a kind of narrative about yourself that's no longer current.

**BTJ:** You feel like I'm doing that?

**WR:** I don't know.

**BTJ:** You do know. You have opinions about it. That's why you have to see this new work. And go over the last ten works.

**WR:** Will you send me videos?

**BTJ:** No. You can find videos. That's what comes with being so well-educated. And you know how to research. No, no, no, no, no, no. That's lazy on the part of people to say that. This is a motherfucker who has been asking questions every time and trying to find another way while making the business of dance work. Why should Trisha and Merce and Mark Morris be the last people who are allowed to have companies? No, no, no, no, no. I can do it, too. I can do it on my terms. Right? But, there's a business of dance, as well. You have to know how to make something that can actually have a market value. That's what big kids do; that's what adults do. My academic credentials are not going to keep me in the game and I am in the fucking game. I'm talking to you in a really, I believe—a loving way. Maybe you will understand someday what I'm trying to do right now. You're not talking to an icon, you're talking to a man. And I think, talking to a man who has something to do with

[1] Principal dance reviewers for *The New York Times*.

you. That's the rich part. I think we're related but we're talking through language. So I'll turn the heat down a little bit.

**WR:** I'm comfortable with heat.

**BTJ:** Are you?

**WR:** Yes. I have a different style, Bill. So you know—that's just gonna be how it is.

**BTJ:** Oh I know. This is all about style isn't it? This is the discourse. This is what it's about. We should celebrate the differences, right?

**WR:** Our careers, our fields and the different time periods in which we've made works have actually forced different things out of us and forced different things into us. And I feel because of artists like you, because of artists like Ralph [Lemon], because of artists like Merce—

**BTJ:**—in theory—

**WR:**—because of Judson artists and my contemporaries—I find that I have more options. And can ask different questions. And that's an inheritance. But what do we inherit? And you're talking about manhood as a kind of stepping up to stake a goddamn claim for your art, and your business, and your—

**BTJ:** We are not invisible men.

**WR:** Absolutely not.

**BTJ:** Is that ancient history? Or was that yesterday? Can you love who you want to love?

**WR:** Yes.

**BTJ:** Can you walk down the street with who you want to walk down the street with?

**WR:** Yes.

**BTJ:** Do you have to furtively hide—

**WR:** —Sometimes. Sometimes yeah.

**BTJ:** Oh, wow. Well I guess I've been out of the game for a while now.

**WR:** We're talking now, one week after Orlando,<sup>2</sup> you know. And all of the violence against queers that has happened recently. Safe spaces exist and disappear from moment to moment. It's like the temperature being turned up and down in the room. There's not an absolute safe space.

**BTJ:** OK, I don't know about absolutes either.

Now those duets that I know you and Ishmael [Houston-Jones] wanted to get at—the reason I think I might be talking to you in this way is—they are also a way for me, with you, to process what they were.

Well, how do you see that conversation unfolding—is that something we could talk about now?

**WR:** I don't think that we have time to talk about that now. Honestly. But I would love to. This conversation was ideally going to be a way to help me prepare for those conversations.

**BTJ:** How will they see the duets? Because we're not able to perform them.

**WR:** We could show film footage.

**BTJ & WR:** [Simultaneously] *Whosedebabedoll? Baby Doll?*

**WR:** You knew I was going to bring that piece up.

**BTJ:** Oh God that's like—

**WR:** —I know, it's completely gone. But it seems unfinished in a way that feels worthwhile to focus on.

**BTJ:** It would be a fantasy.

**WR:** Could we fantasize, on stage, a duet that you never fully made? Or that you made and has disappeared? I'm interested in that. I'm interested in not only historical specificity but also fantasy and fiction and how to bridge these gaps. It is maybe the way in which we survive as artists. Creating fictions around ourselves. So this is why *Babe Doll?* is interesting to me because it could be a way of reinventing—

[2] On June 12, 2016, 49 people were killed by a gunman on Latin Night at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, FL.

**BTJ:** It would be very interesting to hear you spin your fantasy about it. I'm less interested in the fantasy about it.

**WR:** I would need a teeny bit more information about what you think it was.

**BTJ:** Two men in a line. In chinos, with no belt loops—it was made for them. And they're moving on this line toward—just moving. Moving on this line and punctuated with repeating poses.

You know one thing you should know about me naming myself a very famous, gay, HIV-positive black man? I'm always saying that I'm an artist first. Artist. What is that class of individuals? For me it's just next to a priestly class. Artmaking is not a vocation, it's an avocation. It's something else. It is a calling. That's my highfalutin answer.

This is the same person talking about making a living, staying in the game, all that. But there's secretly, there is something ecstatic, transcendental about it. And I think that's what the heat in our conversation has been. This is the religion I'm trying to touch. Jesus has got nothing to do with it.

**WR:** Do you think younger artists are atheists?

**BTJ:** I have no idea. I don't know if they are. Quite frankly I think a lot of them are not. That's one of the things—it's going to be the next thing—they're going to be coming out.

**WR:** We're going to be coming out as religious.

**BTJ:** Which will be kind of wonderful. What does religious mean? Or is it spiritual that I believe that there is a force, an intelligence in the universe, of which I am a part? As opposed to the modernist one, a fractured, meaningless universe, where everything is an accident? When I finish a performance, I want sacred tears.



# Does My Answer Match Your Question?

By Deborah Jowitt

BILL T. JONES AND ARNIE ZANE. At American Theatre Lab (Tuesdays in February). *Blauvelt Mountain*.

One of the many vital things about the dance upheaval of the '60s was that choreographers began to think about perception and to goad (often with alarming literalness) audiences into seeing dance differently. I doubt if—pre-Judson—we would have known what to make of a piece like *Blauvelt Mountain*, made and performed by Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane. Now when we sit in the open, dimly lit space of A.T.L., looking at an uneven wall of cinder blocks and the figures of two men in black huddled in front of it, we are prepared for—well, perhaps, anything. That the dimness has been provided by William C. Yehle's skill with lights, that William Katz has designed the cinder block wall, that the quiet mutter of sound (at first, a voice quietly discussing an accident) is being created by Helen Thorington, that Jones and Zane have well-trained bodies—all this reassures us of professionalism at work; yet we still perceive, and relish, this event as a process, something these two men are working at together. The theatre becomes an urban clearing in which some rite inexplicably vital to us all is taking place. We do not demand to understand the "meaning" of what they're doing at every second or strain to hear a sotto voce conversation the way we might in a large proscenium theatre; we do not sigh over repetition or wonder if carrying bricks is dancing. We do delight in noticing that we can never see the "same" movement twice, that it is always changing either because of context or because of humanness. And we see the performers at close range—close to eyes, minds, hearts.

There is something immaculate about the rhythm of Jones and Zane together. In a move-stop, move-stop sequence of beautifully chosen simple poses on the floor, they make their changes with such economy that you see no extra little preparations or adjustments. Suddenly they have moved. But not with shrillness or mechanical precision—with the power and control of big cats. Jones, with his long limbs and lithe body, is a master of flashing through space and yet seeming to caress the place he lands, as if he can invisibly grade down and refocus his own impetus.

One of the things that the two appear to be most interested in is the changing appearances of things that are superficially the same. Jones's move-poses sequence is one thing when he performs it while Zane is running through another phrase, another thing when he performs it with Zane's complementary floor sequence, another thing when the two separate in space, another when he is faster and tired. And with each alteration, the movement becomes more interesting; by the end of the evening it could be famous.

But repetitions like these never happen in a block; they stud the piece, crop up here and almost crop up there. It's the same with the phrases each man can perform on a stool; they acquire a special coherence when seen at the same time. Once when Jones flicks his hand across Zane's back, he might be brushing dust away; another time the gesture is more like a token massage.

Through the first half of *Blauvelt Mountain*, called "A Fiction," the two men work at their dance tasks intently and thoughtfully, whether the tasks are small hand gestures, playful supports, talking, or acrobatic feats. Always you are aware of

them as partners, even when they are dancing alone.

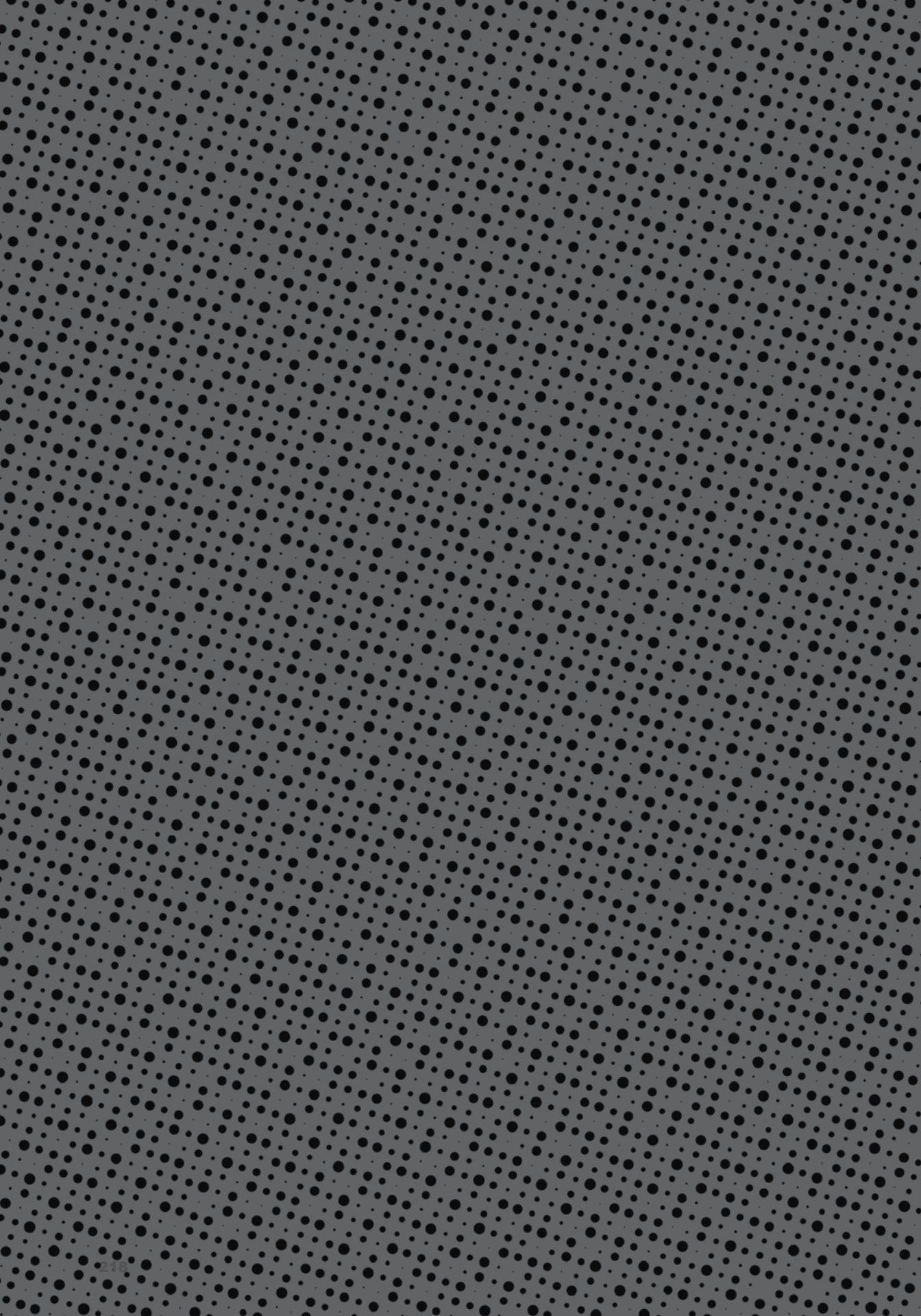
In the second act, "An Interview," they underscore with words their concern with juxtaposing two elements to create a third meaning out of the union, or perhaps "the complete" meaning. Instead of Thorington's softly stirring sounds, we have voices, first Jones's, then Zane's on two cassette recorders. Each recites a litany of questions and/or responses that don't make linear sense. Toward the end, we get a dialogue: now Jones's cryptic "what will she look like?" is a logical response to Zane's remark that his friend Jacqueline will probably meet them (at the station, airport).

During this section, Zane, wearing big gloves, builds a new pyramidal wall, brick by brick, perpendicular to the old one—dismantling one to make the other. He pauses from time to time, always keeping track of Jones, who dances and dances up and down along the wall that's being built, back and forth across it to perhaps bang himself on the side walls of the room, or do his banging motions *not* against the wall. Once Jones walks out to reappear some time later from another door, carrying one brick, which he solemnly offers Zane. This isn't exactly a parable of a worker and a drone, but, I suspect, an example of the same thing built differently—a brick wall, a dance wall. Then Jones begins a speech (improvised, I think) that mounts in speed and intensity until the words jumble around each other to create startling new sense. References to dance pioneers "Ted," "Ruth," "Martha" blend curiously with "they got me pregnant" (not untrue). During Jones's fit, Zane follows him quietly, singing "Hey, ho, anybody home . . ." in Dutch, a thing they did together in canon at the start of Act II. At some peak of passion, darkness and silence descend so suddenly that the packed theater sits stupefied for what seems a long time. Then it takes another long time for us to flood them with all the applause we want them to have.



Bill T. Jones: a master of flashing through space

Deborah Jowitt, Review of *Blauvelt Mountain*, *The Village Voice*, March 10, 1980.  
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*Former location of Trash and Vaudeville*

# from

## **The Gentrification of the Mind [2012]**

### **Chapter Four: The Gentrification of Creation**

*Sarah Schulman*

Why do artists move to cities? Because they want to be part of the creation of new ways of thinking. One of the reasons I have always loved being an artist in New York City is that we get to hear some kinds of ideas before they are widely available. We get to invent and hear new approaches as they are rawly, freshly born. And then we get to be part of the development of those ideas through conversations in living rooms, on subways, in the audiences of live presentations, in artists' studios, looking at works in progress, watching rough cuts of films, hearing workshops of plays, and over dinner. By the time the book is written, able to find a publisher, actually printed, possibly distributed, and finally available at the mall, about two to six years have passed. By the time those books are purchased and finally read, two generations of subsequent, newer discoveries have already taken place. But in order for us to gather together for this purpose certain preconditions are required: (1) affordable places for unrecognized practitioners to live, have work space, and find time to make their work; (2) diversity of thought and experience that produces a dynamic mutual exposure to varied points of view; (3) stimulation, unlimited raw material; (4) some kind of pleasure in difference; (5) regular, direct access to great artists and their work.

Under gentrification, what is possible for young artists, hence how they see themselves, is dramatically different. They cannot afford to live or work. They are faced with conformity of aesthetics and values in their neighborhoods. Conventional bourgeois behavior becomes a requirement for surviving socially, developing professionally, and earning a living. By necessity, their goals are altered. Reimagining the world becomes far more difficult, and reflecting back what power brokers and institutional administrators think about themselves

feels essential to survival. This is a much more difficult environment in which to imagine one's self as an artist, negotiate the expense of art-making, and—most challenging of all—to be allowed, by the tight fist of the prevailing institutions, to emerge without losing one's soul. There seems to be no other game in town. Right now. I believe, of course, that this can, will and must change. But that would only be possible with consciousness. And so I want to talk about how gentrification and AIDS have created the loss and replacement of the community-based artist—who responds to people and their aesthetic complexities, instead of to power institutions.

People also move to cities to invent new political movements. Gay liberation, like all explosive visions that transform the world of possibility, required urbanity. It was not born in Scarsdale, Levittown, Syosset, or Great Neck. It required freedom, oppositionality, imagination, rebellion, and interaction with difference. In order for radical queer culture to thrive, there must be diverse, dynamic cities in which we can hide/flaunt/learn/influence—in which there is room for variation and discovery. If people who are not wealthy are going to become artists and revolutionaries, they need affordable rents and workspaces, ways to learn their craft without paying tuitions, and a process of development that is not systematized. They need ways of being seen and helped by those in power behind the scenes, without having to be professionalized facsimiles to get help. Most importantly, real artists—people who invent instead of replicate—need counterculture as a playing field.

Most plays that get produced these days are kind of like live-TV. If they involve complex social dynamics, they usually argue, in the end, that people are resilient and good prevails after all. But most often, rewarded plays involve the small concerns of recognizable bourgeois types, and may have some formal innovation for their own sake. I've experienced two talented theater directors telling me explicitly that they don't care about what a play is saying or what happens in a play, they are only interested in how it says it. But formal invention is not inherently progressive, as we have learned from video clips, computer graphics, and sampling. Formal invention has a radical purpose when used to convey unconventional points of view, that is to say when it is used to expand what is conveyed about human experience. Even though many heterosexuals avoid the fate/destiny of romance/marriage/parenthood, it is a well worn and instantly recognizable structure upon which most mainstream representations are based. In other words, most bourgeois straight people already know the storyline their lives are supposed to follow before their lives are



even begun. For preassimilation queers, this was not the case. Our lives were strangely structured singular works without predetermination, unknown stories that had never before been heard. The dominant culture told us we were outcasts and alone and then did everything they could to make that come true. Out of the conflict between our determination to truly exist fully as ourselves, and our clash with highly propagandized false stories and even more powerful silences, came queer culture, the marvel that produced many of the great art ideas of the twentieth century.

The artful AIDS dead, of course, included some very successful and high-earning celebrity artists like Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe. But the vast majority were rank-and-file artists who didn't live long enough to become known, or to quit, or to become teachers or heads of institutions. They didn't live long enough to influence. I could list names like Gordon Kurrli, Brian Taylor, John Sex, Huck Snyder, Paul Walker, Paul Walker (there were two of them), Harry Whittaker Sheppard, and on and on forever. But what would be the point? Since many of them worked before video was a regular part of life, there is little documentation of what they did. In a sense they only live on in the memories of the living. Penny Arcade's brilliant play *Invitation to the End of the World* featured a heartbreaking scene in which Penny imagines the mother of Rita Redd, a drag artist who died of AIDS, standing on a street corner in the East Village stopping passersby and asking if they'd ever heard of her son.

"He did shows!" she insists. "He put on lots of shows."

She can't understand why none of the recent yuppie arrivals know who he was. She doesn't realize that his audience has also died.

These dead and their friends pioneered new art ideas including performance, installation, the intersection of new technologies and live performance, improvisational new music and improvisational dance, drag, expansions of materials and techniques. They came to New York or grew up in New York and lived in low-income areas, hustled legally and illegally for a living, made art for low-income audiences, and had an interactive relationship with urban life. They did not live long enough to be able to object to the professionalization of the arts, which might not have been so thorough had they lived. They did not mature. When they died, their practice of creating new paradigms outside of institutional structures was removed from sight.

A recent issue of the *New Yorker* [August 10, 2009] included a short profile of John Kelly, one of the survivors of the lost generation of radical gay male artists.

The author was talking to him about his many years of performing the works of Joni Mitchell, and at one point she asked John why he "did not want" to be part of a recent Joni Mitchell tribute album. "I wasn't invited," John replied. It was such an amazing moment. The *New Yorker* reporter, who by definition has power and access, projected that this important senior artist would have the same. She assumed that he had "made it." And that the only reason he was not being included would be because of his own refusal. She projected power onto this gay experimental artist that he cannot possibly have because of his cultural position. I would have understood from the first second that of course he was excluded, that inclusion in the Joni Mitchell tribute album was not based on talent, understanding, merit, or having something to say. But this reporter, believing that things are different that they actually are, believed that he was now normal.

About a week later I had a Facebook conversation with a reporter from *New York Magazine*. She said she had "read somewhere" that I argued that gay people should have nothing to do with their homophobic families. I informed her that my belief was, in fact, the opposite of that. I told her that my book on familial homophobia argued that third parties should intervene and create consequences for homophobic families so that they could not get away with marginalizing and shunning their gay family members. Again, she skewed reality to create a false but comfortable illusion in which it is the gay person who has the power and who refuses to participate, when the truth is that we are the ones who are excluded.

In light of this contemporary redrawing of reality, I want to try to show what it is like to be a queer artist of the disappeared generation, what kinds of emblematic experiences are at play, and how our values have been formed. So, let me try to piece together that process by looking at some of my favorite survivors. First I want to introduce you to Jack and Peter. And then let you in on a bit of my conversation with Jim.

Jack Waters and Peter Cramer met on stage in the 1970s and have shared the spotlight ever since. The history of their love and work crosses paths with the most marginal and occasionally the mainstream. They move in and out. It's a history of cheekiness, haphazard decision making, and incredible risk-taking. Long-term AIDS survivors, they live in a squat on the Lower Eastside that they have shared for decades with Kembra Phfaler (of the cult band The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black) and filmmaker Carl George, plus a never-ending assortment of homeless and/or wandering gay kids needing a place to be an artist for a little while.

Peter was a straight white ballerina, performing in *Giselle* and *The Nutcracker*. Jack was a gay Black modern dancer in the tradition of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. They met while performing in a middlebrow dance company for Wall Street white-collar workers needing entertainment on their lunch hour. A friend begged them to never do bland work like that again, and so, newly in love, they fled the mainstream dance world forever.

Peter had been a club kid in the seventies, working at the No Name Club (run by Eric Goode and Shawn Hausman), a renegade place, constantly shifting its location. He also worked at the A Salon with Charlotte Moorman (an iconic sixties pioneer of the Fluxus movement, collaborator of Nam June Paik, and notoriously arrested on decency charge for playing the cello without concealing her breasts) and Michael Keane, part of a group called Des Refuses. They worked in an interdisciplinary voice crossing between visual art, ballet, butoh, and performance in nightspots where “club” and “art” were synonymous.

“Neither of us had ever been interested in the authoritarian way of art-making,” Jack said. “We’re very social.” And so were the times.

Both men were heavily influenced by the historic Times Square Show in 1980, put on by Co-Lab (Collaborative Projects), a nonprofit collective of artists including Kiki Smith, her late sister Bebe (who died of AIDS), and David Hammons, producing work in divergent places in response to the dead world of blue-chip galleries, still selling pop art and abstract expressionists. This pioneering show, which is widely seen as emblematic of the new era, was set in abandoned buildings in a Midtown Manhattan that was full of abandoned buildings, as New York City had almost defaulted into bankruptcy. Real estate then was undesirable, so artists had shells of buildings in the Times Square area in which to do their work. Co-Lab was not looking at their art as product but rather for social impact. There were no labels or tags, no commercial intent. In many ways this show was a model for Peter and Jack’s sense of what an artistic community could be and do.

With the late Brian Taylor, who died of AIDS, they established a collective called Pool that became the resident company of the Pyramid Club, a drag/performance club on Avenue A where I had my first play, at 2 a.m. in 1979. “There was a lot happening at the same time,” Jack says. “And that was our steady paying gig. Forty dollars a night and drinks to your heart’s content.” Fellow Pyramid performers, many of whom died of AIDS, included the late John Sex, the late Ethyl Eichel-

berger, John Jesurun (with his legendary *Chang In A Void Moon*—a performance serial), John Kelly, the late Frank Maya, the late John Bernd, the late Huck Snyder, and of course drag queens galore like Tanya Ransom, the late Rita Redd, and the late Bobby Bradley, “this really cute pervert Mormon.” The late Ann Craig was the emcee. In the early eighties the Pyramid was a few blocks down from Ela Troyano and Uzi Parnes’s illegal Chandelier Club, where the windows were blacked out to keep the fire department from noticing, Dennis and Cornelius’s 8BC Club, and Club 57, where Ann Magnuson performed. But the gentrifiers were coming.

“As the Pyramid became more successful, the bridge and tunnel crowd started showing up,” Jack says. “So, then we got our own place.”

“Bridge and tunnel” was New York-speak for tourists from New Jersey and the suburbs. Later, when rich Europeans started flocking to the East Village and were quickly followed by a bevy of four-dollar cappuccino places, it got amended to “B&T&A” (“bridge and tunnel and airplane”).

Some Co-Lab artists like Bobby G, Alan Moore, and Rebecca Howland had established a gallery space in an abandoned building on Rivington Street called ABC No Rio (derived from the half effaced sign of the previous tenant, a Spanish-speaking *Notorio*) and were looking for new directors to take on operating responsibilities. By this time the boys had hooked up with their collaborators: Carl George, the late Gordon Kurrty, Brad Taylor and his brother the late Brian Taylor, Edgar Oliver, and Erotic Psyche (Aline Mare and Bradley Eros), so they had an extended community of artists to work with. Jack and Peter moved into the basement at No Rio and a new art energy was born.

For the next four years they ran ABC No Rio with a dizzying revolving door of visual arts, music, and performance. Literally thousands of artists moved through. Then Mathew Courtney started the influential open mike at No Rio, the precursor to the spoken word/slam scene later to come to fruition at the Nuyorican Poets Café. They also housed Amica Bunker, a seminal music series founded in 1984 by Chris Cochrane and Cinnie Cole, with pioneer artists like John Zorn, Zeena Parkins, Shelley Hirsch, and Christian Marclay.

“It wasn’t a *space*, it was a *place*,” Jack says. “Everyone from Michelle Shocked to Keith Haring to Nick Zedd and Lydia Lunch. It wasn’t *curated*. People could just come and draw if they wanted to. It was available. It was there.”

One of the aesthetic shifts Jack noticed that came with gentrification was the sudden popularity of solo

performance, a kind of alternative stand-up. “To us,” he said “that was too normal.” The elaborate epic ritual pieces that Ping Chong or Meredith Monk or Erotic Psyche would do were replaced by a single person standing in front of a mike. This was, of course, the influence of television—instead of inventing forms from outside of corporate culture, the newly arriving crew of professionalized artists were using forms from *The Tonight Show*. Stand up and solo were a much more commodifiable form to work in. Later, solo performance became the curateable, acceptable expression for minority voices in mainstream theaters, as multi-character *plays* with gravitas, or elaborate works with large casts, remained the arena of the white male. Lesbians, Latinos, and experimentalists were marginalized into the vaudeville solo niche.

Another sign of gentrification was the opening of what was called “performance clubs” like Area in 1985.

“We thought *it’s a new club, we all going to get work there*,” Jack remembers. “But when Area opened it was about *display*. It was heralded as a *performance club*, but they put artists into display cases to be looked at as background, not to be heard.”

Thinking about this insight, I can see that this was the shift from a neighborhood focused on artistic production into a destination neighborhood for tourists who wished to drink and socialize surrounded by artists as the background scenery. Their primary task was the reproduction of status through sexual, social, and business networking. The class interest came first, and art was its Muzak.

“Looking back,” Jack says, “at Area there was less and less interruption of the beat. The beat couldn’t stop for performance because the beat was hypnotic and the beat makes you drink and the beat makes you want to stay. If you did a performance that people didn’t like and they would boo or walk out, they didn’t drink. When the emphasis is on the bottom line, you don’t want anyone to walk out.”

Here we see a really pivotal moment of change, when art must become something that does not make people uncomfortable, so that they will spend money. The kind of person who is expected to consume art is transformed in the mind of the producer. The people who might very possibly love being expanded by what they see are never given the chance. They’re trained to be narcissistic and unimaginative, even if they could be productive creative thinkers. Drawing a connection between the art they see and the world in which they live becomes less available. The long-term effect of such a condition is that gatekeepers (producers/agents/pub-

lishers/editors/programmers/critics, etc.) become narrower and narrower in terms of what they are willing to present, living in a state of projected fear of ever presenting anything that could make someone uncomfortable. There is a dialogic relationship with the culture—when consumers learn that uncomfortable = bad instead of expansive, they develop an equation of passivity with the art-going experience. In the end, the definition of what is “good” becomes what does not challenge, and the entire endeavor of art-making is undermined. Profit-making institutions then become committed to producing what the Disney-funded design programs call “Imagineers,” the craftsman version of Mouseketeers, workers trained to churn out acceptable product, while thinking of themselves as “artists.”

In 1997, I was assigned by the *New York Times* Arts and Leisure section to do a piece on the new theater scene springing up below Houston, centered on Ludlow Street. For thirty days and nights I went to see plays and performances and slowly tried to piece together what this new wave’s aesthetic and social concerns seemed to be. At that point, I did not fully understand the new phenomenon of replacement artists from professionalization programs, and was kind of shocked to hear the sorts of things the new theater artists were saying and doing. When I realized, and articulated in the article some of the values this new movement stood for, the piece was killed. But what I only came to understand years later when preparing this volume, is that the new artists had no awareness at all of the existence of the dead people who had lived and worked—just a few years before—on the very streets where they were now working and paying high rents.

“Theater is the new rock and roll for a new audience,” Ludlow Street’s undisputed impresario, Aaron Beall, told me in 1997. “People who just got out of college want a theater that is fast and funny at the pace at which they live their lives.” An energetic optimist, he pioneered the Ludlow Street scene by opening Theater Nada in a basement in 1988. Then he started up House of Candles around the corner on Stanton, the Piano Store down the block, and the Pink Pony Café Theater across the street. The year he and I sat down to talk, he inaugurated the first annual Fringe Festival, which has since gone on to become a huge phenomenon, whether offering out-of-town companies their “New York debut” or serving as a platform for fundraising for the Broadway musical *Urinetown*.

David Cote, who is now a theater critic for *Time Out New York* and television’s *On Stage*, at that time edited *OFF*, a monthly newspaper devoted to alternative the-

ater. "The majority of young directors, downtown, are right out of school," he said in 1997. "Anne Bogart in particular has a lot of influence because she's taught at Columbia and NYU."

In this new scene, the formal concerns of the erased generation were no longer relevant. Some young artists vehemently insisted to me that they were not interested in theatrical innovation. "Formal invention has reached a level of exhaustion," said Trav S.D., artistic director of Mountebanks Theater. According to Beall, more important than innovation was "the desire to participate in the theatrical experience. It's fun, deep in a pop sensibility of monsters and robots, Nintendo and Gameboy." And in fact, consistent theatergoing revealed little new formal territory—either, as Beall noted, using ideas from television, consumer goods, and marketing, or very frequent quoting of the avant-garde masters, in a way that rendered their discoveries status quo. Integrated video monitors and the use of handheld mikes in the style of the Wooster Group, choreographed musical sequences influenced by Bogart, and especially pithy one-liners delivered in Richard Foreman's performance style abounded. "Everyone," said Beall, "is derivative of him rather than creating their own theatrical environment, which he did for so long."

While I did hear some pro-and anti-Mayor Giuliani routines at various stand-up open mikes, generally younger companies told me that they hesitated to be politically engaged.

"Issues are for television," said Jocelyn Cramer of the Ground Floor Theater Company in residence at the Clemente Soto Velez Center on Rivington. "We don't want to do disease-of-the-week."

"People come to the theater to be entertained," added her colleague Matt England. "If you make being political a priority, you might find that people won't come back."

"Many artists today don't have to suffer like they did in the fifties," said Montebanks' Robert Pinnock. "They have enough intelligence to avoid it."

Despite an unwillingness to take on social issues, real estate was a major factor in the lives of these artists. Beall's annual rent payments for his spaces came to one hundred thousand dollars. But company members often took responsibility to keep prices low. At Collective Unconscious, a black box theater on Ludlow, the monthly rent of \$2,100 was paid out of the members' pockets, filled by full-time jobs at such serious places as CNN.

There were still two Latino theaters in the neighborhood, which was still heavily Dominican by the end of the 1990s. The Milagro was a naturalistic political theater with a focus on neighborhood life, such as Ed Ve-

ga's drama *Spanish Roulette*, about a Puerto Rican poet living on the Lower Eastside, performed in Spanish and English. Company member Carlos Espina told me that the newly arrived white residents received a higher level of city services than their displaced Latino predecessors including "picked up trash, fixed sidewalks, and better streetlights."

"It's ironically sad," said company member Martha Garcia. "We would be happier if there was more affinity with the new theater groups coming in."

Over and over it struck me how straight the late nineties scene was compared to the eighties. There was a kind of Deadwood feeling, a distinct absence of young queer energy. After all, an entire generation of us had died, while straights had continued to live. What was happening with the new generation of queers seemed to be in the clubs, solo performers behind mikes. Justin [Vivian] Bond was the reigning queen of the East Village late nightclub scene in [v's] persona of Kiki, an ageing cabaret singer who squandered her fortune on Canadian Club Whiskey, touring the country with her broken down accompanist Herb. Bond's Marianne Faithfullesque persona was packing the Flamingo East on Sunday nights. Also evolving at that time was the early stage of the drag king scene, which also happened on Sunday nights, at Club Casanova at Velvet on Avenue A where a young, shy, Haitian woman, Mildred Gerestant, emerged as Dred, the drag king version of a macho blaxploitation antihero. But there was no interaction between the straight theater companies below Houston and the late-night queer cabarets above. They simply co-existed in ignorance, only one knowing clearly what it had and what it had lost.

In this scramble period, those who were to live had to restart living. And for artists of the AIDS generation, that meant finding a way to represent their own disappeared context, without being locked in nostalgia. My collaborator of twenty-six years, Jim Hubbard, was one of the artists who took on this burden and responsibility, artistically.

On November 10, 1977, at the sixty-fourth birthday party of gay experimental filmmaker James Broughton, Jim met his lover Roger Jacoby, who died of AIDS in 1985. Jim also got blown that night by Curt McDowell (maker of the great gay classic *Loads*, who also died of AIDS) and he met Roger's other lover, Ondine, the Warhol superstar of *Chelsea Girls*. So, it was a big moment in his life, and in the future of gay experimental cinema. Roger was a transitional figure in the history of gay experimental film, bridging from makers who preceded gay liberation, like Kenneth Anger, Broughton, Warhol,



George Kuchar, Gregory Markopoulos, and others, to younger makers like Jim and Jerry Tartaglia, whose entire worldview was forged by gay liberation. Roger's work, to a large extent, satirized and criticized heterosexuality, but did not at first deal openly with homosexuality. He was influenced by Ondine and his work was highly operatic, owing a great deal to Maria Callas.

Roger was a master of a procedure known as "hand processing"—in which filmmakers develop their own 16 mm and Super-8 film, using chemical balances to control color and contrast in the final product. With the advent of digital, video, and computer graphics, this technique has disappeared along with Super-8 film itself.

"He taught me," Jim says, "what it meant to be a filmmaker, to devote one's life to a medium and to self-expression. In retrospect, I don't know how good a model it was. It was a life filled with uncertainty and lack of security, but it was a model that produced great work, expressive of itself in every frame, without *decorative elements*, as Roger would say. That is, without unnecessary moments."

Four years after Roger's death, Jim made his most important experimental film, *Elegy in the Streets*, completed in 1989. It was his attempt to articulate a notion that every person who came to an ACT UP demonstration did so for a personal reason. Either they were HIV-positive and fighting for their lives, or they had someone close to them—a friend, a lover, a brother—who had died. "Roger was that person for me. He was the first person I was really close to who died."

"I'm not sure when I decided to make a film about AIDS," Jim told me. "But certainly by August 1984 when Roger was diagnosed, I already had. I first started filming a guy named Billy, a PWA I met around the time of Roger's diagnosis. He did not like me hanging around with my camera and the filming did not go well. He was a gardener and I filmed his garden." When Roger died, Jim inherited his outtakes. At the time of Roger's death, Jim felt that Roger's work was very different from his own. He could instantly tell which footage Roger had shot and which he had shot himself. But after all those years, it started to feel blended. And he decided to use Roger's footage in his own work.

Jim was the first film artist to systematically chronicle gay and lesbian street rebellions, including demonstrations against the making of the movie *Cruising* and protests following a police raid on a Black gay bar called *Blues*. Often, he'd be the only person on site with a camera. So, it was inevitable that when AIDS activism happened, it would come into his work as it came onto the scene he was already documenting. ACT UP demonstra-

tions included in *Elegy in the Streets* are the Second Wall Street Action (March 1988), Gay Pride (1987 and 1988), Target City Hall (March 1989), another Wall Street demo, Seize Control of the FDA (October 1988), the Shea Stadium Action (May 1988).

Sometime in 1988, he started editing. There were no appropriate structures available from the formulas of narrative filmmaking, so he looked to literature, specifically poetry, and started reading a lot of pastoral elegies—a form first developed in the second and third century—especially Milton's "Lycidas." *Elegy in the Streets* translates the elements of classical elegy to film. It is silent, forcing the viewer to really look at what there is to see, and not rely on music to convey the emotion. Among the elements he took from the pastoral elegy were the catalog of flowers (symbols of beauty and the brevity of life). The lilacs are a reference to Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd." There is a pan of the vine growing on a tenement where Billy had his garden. Certainly this is an evocation of life abiding in the cruelest of environments. There is a procession of mourners, a visit to the underworld (shot by Roger Jacoby) which features negative footage of the gay street icon Rollerena (Charles Stanley) as the archangel mourning or praying over the body, as in Milton's "Look homeward angel now." And finally the film ends with ACT UP's action at Shea Stadium and "those wonderful kids who are a symbol of hope and renewal." Again, Milton's "tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new."

*Elegy in the Streets* is a film about memory, and the images of Roger usually occur when triggered by an image in a demonstration: when someone looks like him, or the eyes in the Reagan poster evoke Roger's eyes in footage shown in negative. A couple of times he comes out of nowhere, like a memory that suddenly hits you for no reason. Jim tries to present Roger's range of interests—piano playing and filming. But there is no footage of his anger.

Today Jack Waters, Peter Cramer, and Jim Hubbard are still carrying on the old-school values of building arts communities that are open, intergenerational, and not based on caste. Jim is still in the leadership of the MIX Festival, now in its twenty-fourth year, which continues to show new and emerging artists, including those who were not yet born when MIX started. Current artistic director Stephen Kent Jusick continues the vision that, rather than fostering elite columns of producers of passive entertainment, instead art collectives and institutions can actively *create* queer artists by presenting queer work, maintaining venues, and staying grassroots. The goal of the organization is to get the work to mar-

ginalized people so that they can imagine themselves making art. And history has shown that open door, welcoming, community-based policies produce both high profile and under-the-radar artists. Not only have many well-known successful makers come out of MIX, but the inclusivity has also resulted in the early development of young curators of color like Shari Frilot of Sundance and Rajendra Roy, now film/video curator at the Museum of Modern Art. Both started as grassroots curators at MIX and have grown to be influential leaders with the knowledge and values of inclusion that come only when one is developed in the community.

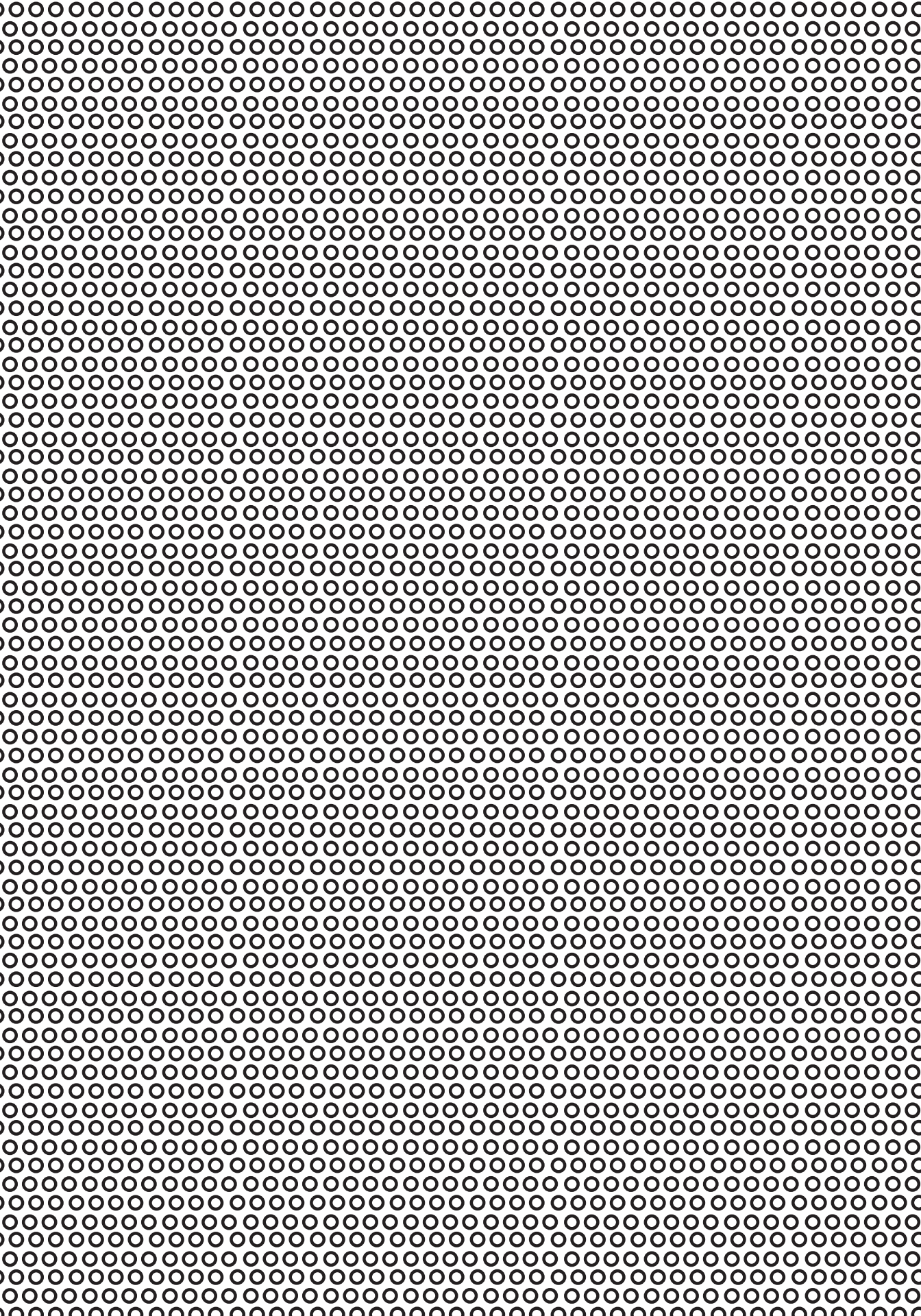
Jack and Peter now devote a great deal of their time to Peter's Le Petit Versailles, a squatted community garden, which for the last fifteen years has offered a venue to emerging and senior marginalized artists from the neighborhood and the world. In the summer months there are events almost every night, from films projected onto the side of their building to a wide and wild array of performance. Jack, Peter, and Jim have maintained the old-school value of respecting and welcoming artists, taking them seriously, regardless of their point of view or social position. Today they are, in a sense, living museums of values of the past, but their personal efforts still allow new artists to be heard and seen and to develop. What kind of world the new artists develop into, is sadly, out of our hands.

\* \* \*



Jasmine Hearn. Photo by Ian Douglas.







## Prologue to the End of Everything

*In the early 1980s I traveled to teach in Nicaragua during the war with the US-backed Contras. Back home in New York several of my friends, lovers and colleagues had contracted a mysterious new and often deadly disease. This is what I wrote.*

The airport had been closed for almost two weeks; there was a ban on exit visas; Matt sleeps and dreams of iguanas calling him from a vacant lot; of strawberries the size of babies' red fists; of women in damp blouses, denim skirts and pink plastic sandals. He dreams of sucking on ice cubes. And the busboy's eyelashes.

1. He wakes up, a wrestler defeated by his own sweaty sheet.
2. He wakes up, reassured by the sounds of lizards on his screens and parrots in the trees.
3. He wakes up, takes a piss in a green plastic bucket, takes a short look at two unhealing sores, spits out some red foamy toothpaste, rinses his mouth with rum, takes a painful, watery rotten-eggy shit, checks for blood, sprinkles some pine oil into the bucket...
4. Matt heads for the cafe.  
     He never liked this cafe.  
     It's in the bourgie quarter across from the Palace Hotel.  
     It's the only one that's still open.
5. He steps over a few new bodies.
6. The heat is bearable, but just.
7. His toes curl up under, inside his boots.
8. There are more bodies than yesterday.
9. And a few left over from the day before.
10. The squads are getting sloppy.  
     Or overworked.
11. He gets to the Palace.
12. The same woman and little girl are begging on the corner.
13. The woman is dead.
14. The girl holds a cup. Stares straight ahead.
15. A sign in her language is taped to her T-shirt.
16. It reads -- "Blessed Mother, protect my precious one."
17. He drops some sweat-crumpled bills into the cup.
18. About 25 and a half cents U.S.
19. The girl doesn't say thank you, not even automatically.
20. He thinks, this is unusual, he thinks.
21. He thinks -- she'll probably be dead by nightfall.
22. At the cafe, his favorite waitress tells him a nephew died last evening.
23. That's four people in her family this month.
24. He expresses his sorrow and orders a rum.
25. He orders a rum.
26. There's an attractive university student reading Franz Fanon at the next table.
27. There are listless parrots in huge cages.
28. There's the busboy he always overtips.

29. He orders a rum.
30. He orders a rum.  
This one with a bottle of Coke.  
With the cap still on please.  
And he adds needlessly —  
Of course without ice.
31. He strains to see the headlines on the cute student's newspaper.
32. Death toll, as always, in the upper right corner.  
And assurances that scientific help is coming from the outside.  
A message from the First Lady.  
Something about the World Futbol Cup.
33. And a factory nearby that manufactures binary chemical weapons has been  
taken over by...
34. But the attractive student's nose has begun to bleed.
35. Badly.
36. And people are running down the street past the Palace Hotel.  
Ripping up shrubbery.  
Throwing paving stones.
37. It's a lot like TV.
38. The waitress gives the attractive student a kitchen rag and tilts his head  
back.
39. More people are running screaming in the streets.
40. The parrots wake up to beat their wings against the bars of their cages.
41. He hears what could be firecrackers or gunshots or mortar fire and he  
thinks he really should learn the difference.
42. He thinks out loud—"What I should do is get my black ass back to New York  
and fast."
43. Paving stones are being thrown at the cafe. Tables overturned.
44. The busboy says, "Follow me, you'll be safe," and leads him into the walk-in  
box.
45. All he can hear is the sound of the motor.  
All he can feel is cool air.  
All he can smell is fresh clean blood.
46. The busboy says in his language, "We'll be safe here."
47. The busboy sticks his tongue in his mouth.
48. Matt thinks of Elizabeth's latest letter asking why he doesn't come home and  
take that teaching job.
49. The busboy unbuttons Matt's pants, pulls them down and spins him around  
180.
50. He thinks of his father teaching him to ride a two-wheeler.
51. He supports himself holding onto the cold slimy carcasses of two calves  
hanging from meat hooks—skinny as dogs.
52. He hears the busboy's pants unzip behind him and he thinks of paintings by  
Francis Bacon.
53. The busboy slaps his ass.

54. He hears a loud explosion out beyond the heavy metal door and the cool.  
More screams.  
More breaking glass.  
More parrot squawks and firecrackers.
55. “Your legs are very beautiful but what are those marks?” asks the bus  
boy in his language.
56. “It’s the end,” Matt answers.
57. Then, “No, it’s not the end.”
58. His fingers dig into the fat and muscle of the two hanging calves.
59. The busboy orders, “Relax!”
60. It’s not the end.  
It’s the beginning.  
The beginning of the end of everything.

# No Retreat. No Surrender.

*Penny Arcade*

In 2009, while being interviewed for the film, *Let The Record Show*, a documentary on AIDS activism by artists in the 1980s – 1990s, that centered around the organization Visual AIDS, I found myself slipping down into an tunnel as I explained what my neighborhood the East Village was like in the mid 1980s. Trance-like, I entered a vortex where visual information from the past merged with my understanding in the present and as if in a time machine, I hovered over Avenue A, Christopher St., Chelsea, Midtown and the Upper East and West Side, and almost mechanically reported what I saw in my mind's eye: Men, both young and middle aged, walking with canes, with blank stares and hollow faces, the walking dead that only I and people like me noticed as they snail-paced, shuffling their feet in slow motion in the racing city. The passing public took no notice of them, just another faltering figure in the busy urban landscape, where the vitality of myself and the passing strangers created a stark relief around the stumbling, staggering figures, many of their faces pockmarked with Kaposi Sarcoma, the purple lesions, still visible under attempts to mask them—multiple bandages or make-up really hid nothing—and as they sickened, their attempts to masquerade stopped. I saw each and everyone as somehow dear to me, because they were on the same conveyor belt that my closest friends and lovers were on and always, always a cold, metal fear gripped my chest and made me hold my breath, so fragile were they, and so terribly, terribly alone, even when accompanied, like moths that only live a day and cannot alight but only move in ever-slowing motion till they stop dead. The walking dead. This is what dying in public looks like.

As my words stopped and I emerged, shaken and drained from my trance, Rebekah Dewald, who had been videotaping me, gasped. “Oh my god, you have never mourned.” My eyes felt like rocks, so rigid were they with the seeing. An ugly hiss came out of my mouth, I didn't even try to stop it. I was too tired, too raw, and I spit out, “And when would there have been time for that?” I asked her, “When was there any time to mourn? With everyone dying, with everyone needing so much?” I slumped in my chair stunned and

stayed that way for three weeks until I had to present an excerpt at Dixon Place for the HOT! Festival from my commission *Old Queen*. Deeply haunted and disturbed by my experience, I created and performed a monologue recreating my interviewed words. Later that night, at the bar of Dixon Place, the artist John Kelly came over to me and blurted, “Oh my god, you are right, I have never mourned.” “No,” I said shaking my head, “We are all suffering from PTSD and we don't even know it.” I could see the relief in his eyes, there was a name for the burden we shared.

In 2014 The Museum of Art and Design showed a film from the video project my long time collaborator Steve Zehentner made. Steve and I have co-directed *Stemming The Tide of Cultural Amnesia: The Lower East side Biography Project*, which has broadcast weekly in Manhattan for 17 years. MAD showed a documentary film of a performance Quentin Crisp and I did in Vienna for the Vienna Festival in 1995 in Mozart's Theatre in front of 1,700 people. Afterwards I ventured upstairs to see the Museum's restaurant. Dr. Brian Saltzman, an infectious disease doctor who took care of many of my friends with AIDS, some of them still alive, is a partial owner. Already sitting upstairs were friends and colleagues, some of whom had participated in my theatre pieces for years, who had come to support the film: painter/performer Chris Tanner, actor & burlesque star James “Tigger” Ferguson, and burlesque star Dirty Martini. I looked around at the elegant restaurant and thought how many miles away it was from all the suffering Dr. Saltzman had witnessed. As I was standing there with Chris, Dirty and Tigger, a good-looking man with silver hair and a bright, boyish face came into the room. As he entered, facing me, he exclaimed, “Penny Arcade! I can't believe it! You don't remember me but I am one of the few men in your audience from the 1980s who didn't die!” He turned to Chris, Dirty and Tigger and said, “In the 80s she was the best artist by far but her entire audience died!” I was completely stunned.

For 20 years I have had to deal with people calling me “New York's best kept secret” and overhearing people discussing why they feel my career stayed resolutely underground in the USA. When they would ask me directly to my face, I have always answered “My audience died.” In the days before the Internet there was something called mailings and artists assiduously developed mailing lists like people develop email rosters now. By 1989 after four years of pretty much constant performing in NY, between two to five times a week,



and after my four-month run of five nights a week at University of The Streets above 7A on Ave A and East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, I had a very large mailing list. I used to send out postcards to the list using the tedious but inexpensive Not For Profit bulk mailing permits of Performance Space 122, La MaMa, Dixon Place and Theater For The New City. I was one of the few artists who worked in all of those theaters at once. Because, between not having my work reviewed and my somewhat adversarial relationship with some arts administrators because of my political stance as a self-appointed Artists' Advocate, I did not tour. I had no one in power promoting my work but I did have a large and loyal New York audience. Between 1986 and 1990, over 700 of my mailers with men's names came back to me stamped "Deceased" or "Unknown." Sometimes my mailbox would have several flyers returned each day. Yeah, I know—some of these men moved with no forwarding address, but a lot of them just moved permanently off this planet. They died.

The silver-haired man smiled at me and glanced around the restaurant. He said, "You look great!" I replied, "I remember you." He shook his head and said, "No, you don't." I said, "I do! You make jewelry. You and your friends used to come to my shows in drag with glitter in your beards and mustaches. One of your friends was HIV positive. He decided not to take medicine and he moved to Boston." "My God!" he cried out. "You do remember!" We were both quiet for 15 seconds and he said, "I can't believe you remember him. Yes, he moved to Boston. He just died a few months ago. He didn't take medicine all these years." The jeweler's name was Larry Vrba. A banner of his jewelry ran down the side of MAD, promoting the exhibition of his work there that month.

Many things make sense to me now, all these years later as I recover from the power of PTSD over my life. First the PTSD of sexual abuse, bullying and shunning from my early teen years and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> PTSD, the terror of AIDS, watching everyone die, the government do nothing, the right wing using the scourge of AIDS for their own agenda, waiting to be struck down next after lovers died, the guilt of surviving and then the wholesale forgetting in the culture as younger people moved forward to fill the vacuum left by the dead, the shift in power in the gay world from libertine gay men to politically correct gay women. Those of us who were left in the Downtown art scene represented different tribes of queers and different lineages of artists, barely enough to have a presence, and as the 1990s rolled in we were left marooned in a gay world and an art

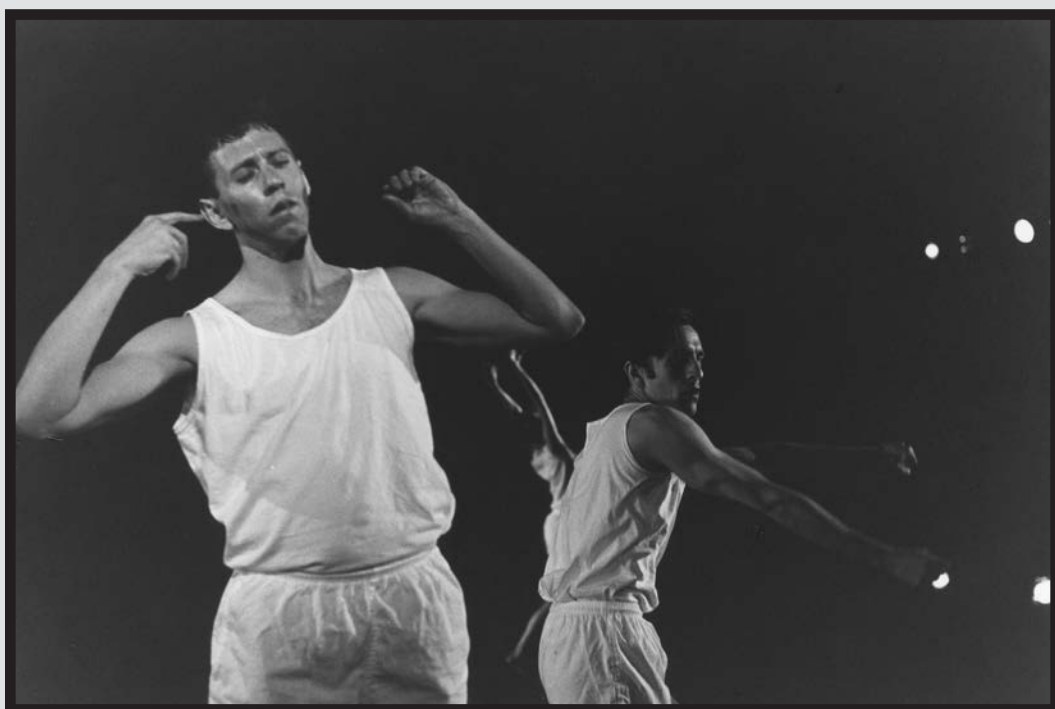
world increasingly ruled by middle class and bourgeois values. By 1990, Downtown NY and its art scene were nothing like what I had entered as a teenager in the late 1960s, nor were our neighborhoods or anything else. The people who came into the scene in the 1990s naturally had experienced elements of the horror of the AIDS epidemic in American culture as children in the previous decade, but arriving in one's 20's in the early to mid 1990s in the aftermath of the spiritual, physical and cultural destruction of the 1980s is far different than living through it as an adult. Identifying with an event is not the same as experiencing it. And so it came to pass that a repetition of certain art practices were taken up, but not by the people who had created them—their names were forgotten by most people. There are only a few of us still reciting that litany of names now long gone.

The AIDS epidemic brought me many losses: my youth spent in sick rooms, hospitals and cemeteries, losses to my work and career where a world of independent, entrepreneurial artists and their highly cultured audiences were replaced by a bloated system of academic art, emerging artists, and funders and critics frightened of aging who place potential over achievement. An art world that promotes theory over ability. Like in the rest of society, the dumbing down of the art world since the apex of the AIDS epidemic has been colossal. The erasure of the history of art and its lineages throws the one place in our society where truth was at least a component into a chaos of market trends, political alliances and popularity contests. Each night before I perform I stand in the wings and call out by name all my friends and colleagues who died of AIDS, I share my stage with them. I began doing this in 1983. I like to think of them observing the progress of my work, of my development as an artist. I never forget. I cannot forget.



Neil Greenberg, *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, 1994. Photo by Paula Court.

**PORTFOLIO: NEIL GREENBERG**



*Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, 1994. L-R. Neil Greenberg, Justine Lynch, Christopher Batenhorst. Photo by Tom Brazil.



# “I don’t know what made this ‘private’ in the first place.”

## Neil Greenberg’s Not-About-AIDS Dance

Jaime Shearn Coan

### LOST AND FOUND (“BEGIN AGAIN AND THEN BEGIN AGAIN AGAIN” —D.A. POWELL)

There is so much work behind the work. So many versions that might have been. I took up this project over two years ago, intending to submit it as a graduate seminar paper. I planned to look at the work of the poet D.A. Powell as a reflection of the shifting discourse of AIDS—from *Tea* (1998), which responds to the loss of the speaker’s friends and the lifeworlds they made together in the early years of the AIDS crisis to *Chronic* (2009), which places AIDS alongside other managed illnesses—including cancer and climate change. I can’t remember now when Neil Greenberg’s *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* (1994)<sup>1</sup> entered the project, or even how it first came into my awareness.

I do remember that it was the title of Greenberg’s dance and the prologue of *Tea*, which begins: “This is not a book about AIDS,” that caught my attention—something about that “no” that was also a “yes.” Dance and poetry were the two things I wrote about (and *did*) but so far the two had kept to their own discrete circles. I resolved to bring together Powell and Greenberg, who did not know of each other but were both openly HIV+ survivors of the AIDS crisis who made, and continue to make, significant bodies of work, while also serving as teachers and mentors to younger artists and writers. I felt drawn to these two gay male artists from the generation before me—in that queer

way in which the quest for guidance overlaps with a more nebulous form of desire.

Despite my enthusiasm, I didn’t finish the paper by the due date. I stuffed all of my research into a white folder. Summer came. I took the folder to Fire Island for a birthday vacation in July. Never opened the folder. From Fire Island, I was heading to California, thanks to a travel grant, to spend three weeks writing poems, muddling through the archives of the poet Thom Gunn, and trying to materialize some facts, or at least gossip, about the queer nature of my father’s life and his death from AIDS. I planned on bringing the folder—why not? The problem was, I’d left my backpack on the LIRR on the way back from Fire Island. In the backpack was my laptop, toiletries, wallet, books (including a library copy of the out-of-print *Tea*), journals, and, of course, the folder. No luck at Lost and Found. I called every day for weeks and then months. It was too overwhelming to even think about recreating the contents of that folder.

In San Francisco I met with D.A. Powell, who, aside from being one of my favorite poets, had been my teacher for a weeklong workshop a couple years prior. I told him I was writing an essay about *Tea* and *N-A-A-D*. He’d never heard of Neil Greenberg, the downtown New York choreographer who started out dancing with Merce Cunningham in 1979 before forming his own company in 1986. I talked to him about the poems I wanted to write and the frequent rejection of the poems I’d already written; about the ethics of exposing my father’s life; about how to write about difficult things with lightness and humor—which is so much of what I admire in his work. I was nervous talking to him and desperately seeking some sort of assurance. A week later I got an email from him: “I hope the rest of your time in SF went smoothly and that it fed your writing and continues to feed it. You will feed others in ways you cannot know, but you have to keep writing. I believe in you.”

I was researching Thom Gunn’s archives at Berkeley for a poetry archival initiative at the Graduate Center called Lost & Found. I was interested in Gunn because he was a bad boy, like my father. A habitué, we’ll say, of hard drugs and sex. I wanted to highlight a version of Gunn distinct from the canonized AIDS elegist of *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992); I wanted to see more of the chaps and speed. The more time I spent with his things, the more attached to him I became. But then it was time to seek out my biological father, who, unlike Gunn, was never “out” and, more devastatingly, had left no paper trail behind. In Southern California, I met with my father’s best friend, my half-sister, neighbors,

[1] *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, 1994. Choreography and Text: Neil Greenberg. Lighting Design: Michael Stiller. Music fragments compiled and arranged by: Zeena Parkins. Projections design by: John Masterson. Projectionist: Melissa Arra. Performed by: Ellen Barnaby, Christopher Batenhorst, Neil Greenberg, Justine Lynch, Jo McKendry. Recorded December 15, 1994 at The Kitchen, NYC by High Risk Productions, Steve Brown, Director. Running Time: 50 minutes.

**This is what my brother Jon looked like in his coma.**

**He was in a coma 2 days before he died of AIDS.**

**I'm HIV+.**

**But this part of the dance isn't meant to be about me.**

visited his house, the hospital, the hospice, obtained the death certificate with the word AIDS typed loudly into the space for “cause of death,” and, beyond chasing his ghost, chased a lot of boys around. I wrote a few poems about all that.

In the fall, I returned to school. I bought a new laptop. I tried not to think about my incomplete. Then one day I received a call from the LIRR Lost and Found. They had my backpack, two months later. All that was missing was my laptop and cash. The folder remained intact. It was a minor miracle. Unfortunately, it didn’t result in me writing the paper. I started many times. I’d pick up the Xeroxed copy of Powell’s book, read a few poems. I’d rewatch *N-A-A-D*. I’d enter due dates in my calendar. But other things always felt more pressing.

A couple years ago, I’d begun writing dance reviews regularly for *The Brooklyn Rail* and last fall started as a Curatorial Fellow at Danspace Project. Part of the reason I was interested in the position was that one of the projects that I’d be working on was this Platform, which would activate archives from artists who died of AIDS in the 80s and 90s and investigate the gaps and fissures created in queer performance lineage by the AIDS crisis. The Platform, interestingly enough, is called *Lost and Found*, after a series of three dances made by John Bernd, from 1982-1985.

In February, Judy Hussie-Taylor mentioned in a meeting that Neil Greenberg was going to be reactivating material from *N-A-A-D* in an upcoming performance at Danspace, part of Eiko Otake’s Platform, *A Body in Places*. I have seen Greenberg perform a couple times and have been an audience member alongside him countless times. But I have only seen *N-A-A-D* on video. I asked Judy to introduce us. Shortly thereafter, I got an email from the other Lost & Found, checking in with me about a timeline for publishing my Thom Gunn project. I’ve heard that finding connections between everything is an early sign of schizophrenia. That may be true, but it’s also what poets do. Perhaps that’s why I’m more interested in placement (choreography) than argument (meaning).

Writing this prologue, it feels a little like I’m waiting for the right time to jump in. I’m scared. I’m procrastinating. Performance Studies scholar Peggy Phelan cautions away from descriptive and representational modes of writing, suggesting, instead, that the writing “enact the affective force of the performance event again.”<sup>2</sup> But how to do it? Especially if I wasn’t there to begin with. The historical representation of the AIDS

crisis, its public archive, is fraught terrain. My own position, as a familial and cultural inheritor, is of one who is haunted. Avery Gordon, in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, speaks precisely to the dangers, pleasures, and possibilities of writing from within this realm:

*To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and blindneses. Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counteremory for the future.*<sup>3</sup>

There is a reparative instinct that drives this quest—it is for us, now, where we are, perhaps a little too confident in the narratives we’ve absorbed about queer history and the history of AIDS. There are always more stories than we will ever know. This is what pushes me forward, in my particular gait and at my ambling speed. Calling attention to the relation between the seeker and what is sought, Avery Gordon writes: “we are part of the story, for better or worse: the ghost must speak to *me* in some way sometimes similar to, sometimes distinct from how it may be speaking to the others.”<sup>4</sup> I want something particular out of this encounter, even though I’m not quite sure yet what it is. It has something to do with the gaps between my generation and the previous one. It surely involves nostalgia and yearning, and grieving. At the end of one of the oral history tapes Neil Greenberg recorded with Susan Kraft in 1994, he says, “Why do we do what we do? Because we need to do it. Whatever it is. You need to be doing this interview in some weird way.”<sup>5</sup>

While Powell’s work has been an initiating force for

[3] Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd Ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22.

[4] *Ibid.*, 24.

[5] Kraft, Susan. “Interview with Neil Greenberg [sound recording],” Jerome Robbins Dance Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. 7 sound cassettes (9 hr., 30 min.) + 1 transcript (164 leaves), 1995, 150.

[2] Phelan, Peggy. *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 12.

this project, this particular essay focuses on Greenberg's *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, paying special attention to how Greenberg negotiates the politics of representation by including (auto)biographical content (including the disclosure of his HIV+ status and the steady progression of deaths of those around him), along with the (non-HIV/AIDS related) life events of the other dancers. Additionally, his practice of transmitting "choreographic quotations" between bodies and across time challenges the then-reigning societal fears of contagion that centered around bodies marked as vehicles for the transmission of HIV: gay men, IV drug users, and Haitians. Greenberg performs an embodied archive that exposes the very material effects (personal and collective) of the AIDS crisis on the making of dance performance, so that, in relation to the work, AIDS functions more as context than content. Bringing his life-events into his dance making, he also reveals his dance as a life-event. In doing so, Greenberg offers a more expansive depiction of the experience of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

#### HAUNTING THE ARCHIVES

I start with a video. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* premiered in 1994, when I was only fourteen. I first watch it at the Performing Arts Library,<sup>6</sup> not realizing that it's on Neil Greenberg's *Vimeo* in full. I rewatch it several times. This video is a haunting; it captures the ghost of a performance. An archive of a single iteration, it performs as a distillation of the whole run. I see what the camera lets me see—which is very often the stage as a field; for the most part, composition in space is privileged over the movements of the individual dancers, their facial expressions, gestural details. The slides projected on the back wall become superimposed text at the top of my screen. My relationship to the performance is made private via the video—I don't share time and space with the performers and the audience, I don't experience it as part of a group, what Jacques Rancière refers to as *metexis*, or *partaking*.<sup>7</sup> Not all of my senses are engaged, I am *seeing* more than *feeling* the performance. But certainly, there are advantages to this type of viewing as well.

David Gere, citing the dance historian Marcia Siegel's

embrace of and reliance on video documentation in her 1979 book *The Shapes of Change: Images of American Dance*, writes: "These forms of documentation offer a perfect response to the epistemic ephemerality of dance: On tape we can watch a dance again and again, until it has impressed itself firmly on our retinas and memories."<sup>8</sup> While I agree that consulting video is crucial, I would hesitate to call video documentation "perfect," as the very nature of dance is time-based and ephemeral. At the very least, video documentation must be acknowledged as flawed and constructed. Diana Taylor, in her foundational text *The Archive and the Repertoire*, attempts to undo the idea of the archive as fixed and "unmediated."<sup>9</sup> "The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive," she writes. "Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it."<sup>10</sup> The archive is not comprehensive, nor is it stable—every time I watch a recording, I have a different experience. There is no possibility of repetition when it comes to performance or its reception. Joseph Roach reminds us that "no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance. In this improvisational behavioral space, memory reveals itself as imagination."<sup>11</sup> The tension between memory and imagination is at the heart of Neil Greenberg's *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*.

#### NONFICTION COMPOSITION

Neil Greenberg refers to *N-A-A-D*, along with his subsequent works, *The Disco Project*<sup>12</sup> and (the three-part) Part 3: (*My Fair Lady*), (*Judy Garland*), and (*Luck*), as his "nonfiction project." While he did not set out to make a trilogy (while making *N-A-A-D*, he was not sure if he would live to make another project), what holds the trilogy together is its (auto)biographical textual component, which does not appear in his later works. Starting with *N-A-A-D*, Greenberg wrote text and projected it on the wall behind the dancers. The text refers largely to

[6] Many of Greenberg's works are archived, along with a six-hour oral history, at the NYPL Jerome Robbins Dance Division as part of the AIDS Oral History Project, a subproject of the Dance Collection's Oral History Project which was initiated by Lesley Farlow in 1988. Farlow's predecessor, Susan Kraft, conducted Greenberg's interviews.

[7] Rancière, Jacques. "Ten Theses on Politics." *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Ed and Trans. Steven Concoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 28.

[8] Gere, David. *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 27.

[9] Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2007), 19.

[10] *Ibid.*, 20.

[11] Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), 29.

[12] *The Disco Project*, 1995. Choreography and Text: Neil Greenberg. Lighting Design: Michael Stiller. Musical Advisor: Zeena Parkins. Costumes: Suzanne Gallo. Performed by: Ellen Barnaby, Christopher Batenhorst, Neil Greenberg, Justine Lynch, Paige Martin. Commissioned by P.S. 122 with funds from the Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation. Running Time: 44 minutes. Recorded by Sathya Production Services at the Joyce Theater, January 17, 1997.



**Jon died in July.**

**I went away in August.**

**When I came back I learned Ed Hartmann and John Falabella had died.**

**On Labor Day Richard Wolcott died.**

**When I came back from Richard's funeral I learned David Hagen had died.**

**Within a week Donald Greenhill died.**

**It was quieter then for a while.**

events that happened over the course of the making of the dance, but also extends prior to that period and into the present. Greenberg had already begun to utilize a process of movement composition in which he would improvise in front of a camera and then learn the material verbatim from the videotape. In an article published shortly after *N-A-A-D* premiered, Greenberg stated: "I'm not making work as cerebrally as I used to. I'm improvising now. The metamorphosis of my movement has involved my learning a lot more about gravity, which I think translates well into the issue of mortality. Gravity is a submission to fate; it is something present in our lives, whether we want it to be or not."<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in *N-A-A-D*, Greenberg ties the improvisations, using text, to the context in which they were made. For instance, at the beginning of *N-A-A-D*, a slide reads: *This is the first material I made after my brother died*. This has the function of fixing time and recording it corporeally. It also shows the temporal connection between the timeline of personal loss and the timeline of making work. Noting that the vocabulary in *N-A-A-D* emphasizes weight and gravity, Leigh Witchel calls attention to how "Phrases seem determined by the natural fall of the body; they flail, stumble, and stagger, walks become falls but then are suddenly balanced, prancing or twisting into renversés."<sup>14</sup> The improvisations that Greenberg recorded while he was grieving for his brother and other friends does not *represent* loss or a struggle with mortality, rather, they function as a direct enactment of it. In his own words: "The physical realities of my body were creating what I was doing."<sup>15</sup>

Alongside this process, a need emerged for Greenberg during this project to include personal information about the performers (particularly but not exclusively himself) that arose during the making of the piece. In that way, he records the extra-dance conditions of the dance being made, linking it both to the individual lives of the performers and to the larger historical and cultural ecosystem that it is made (and viewed) within. Diana Taylor refers to performance as "simultaneously 'real' and 'constructed.'"<sup>16</sup> While these terms seem to be antithetical, "the constructed is recognized as coterminous with the real."<sup>17</sup>

As *N-A-A-D* is a nonfiction work, nothing is "made

up" when it comes to the content of the projected text. The music selections that come in and out are sometimes tied to the specific events and people referenced in the text. The performance as a whole, in terms of the dramaturgy, the staging, and the lighting, certainly moves beyond the documentary. While traditionally, in a Western context, a performance is designed to evoke the transcendence of time, so that the temporality of performance is outside of reality, *N-A-A-D*, through alluding to specific historical moments, slides in and out of that temporality. As the dance critic Leigh Witchel puts it, through the use of the projected text, "the work is moved out of the eternal present of classical dance into specific, desperate moments."<sup>18</sup> Jack Anderson, writing for *The New York Times*, also comments on the two types of time functioning in the work, contrasting "theatrical time (the choreography) [which] is repeatable...[with the] autobiographical statements in the slide projections."<sup>19</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF SIGNIFICATION

What gets tricky though, is the simultaneous nonfiction quality of the performance and the refusal to let the content or the about-ness take precedence over the non-semantic elements of the performance, namely, dance. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*. It's a title that messes with you. "I chose a title that might provide an arena within which a viewer's thoughts might play (or even battle)... something to involve the viewer's mind, perhaps providing the false-confidence that something concrete is being represented."<sup>20</sup> Those four capitalized letters scream off the page, nearly bursting out of the hyphens that frame them. And yet, Greenberg is asking us to look beyond and around this word, and, therefore, to see AIDS as part of the terrain, along with other things. David Román notes that "In Greenberg's trilogy, AIDS is not just a theme; it is a constraint placed on the dance itself. It informs and conditions the process of the dance in its creation, rehearsal, and performance."<sup>21</sup>

[18] Witchel, 1998, 63.

[19] Anderson, Jack. "Writing a Diary with Choreography," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1996.

[20] Greenberg, Neil. "Writing and Performance," *100th Issue: Performance New York. A Journal of Performance and Art (PAJ)* 34:1, 2012, 136.

[21] Román, David. "Not-about-AIDS," in *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 74.

Román's first book, *Acts of Intervention*, focuses on performance that deals with HIV/AIDS but does not include any dance (or mention of Greenberg). His second book looks at contemporary performance in the US and does include dance in one chapter where he looks at Greenberg's work alongside the work of choreographer Bill T. Jones. His primary focus here, although he looks at *N-A-A-D* and *TDP*, is to address

[13] Harris, William. "Gravity is a Submission to Fate," *Dance Ink* 5:4, 1994, 33.

[14] Witchel, Leigh. "Neil Greenberg's Trilogy: A Survivor's Tale," *Ballet Review*, Fall 1998, 62 – 63.

[15] Kraft, 1995, 97.

[16] Taylor, 2007, 3.

[17] *Ibid.*, 3.

Greenberg says in his 1995 oral history interview, "This is not 'about' anything, this just is, whatever it is."<sup>22</sup> "About" also connotes a system of meaning, of sense-making, and there is not much meaning to be found in the senseless losses that are documented within this piece or around it.

To think through the title a bit more, as well as Greenberg's motives for including, along with the death of his brother and several friends, the disclosure of his own seropositive status, it is necessary to consider the stigma of the body marked by HIV/AIDS in the years leading up to the show's premiere in 1994. By including the word 'AIDS' in the title, Greenberg is also challenging his own complicity in the silence of not being "out" as HIV+. In interviews and writings, he has called attention to the fact that the project involved the very personal need that motivated the work:

*It was important to me to come out as being gay and being HIV+ in the text that is part of the work, and to make clear that the deaths of my friends mentioned in the piece were from AIDS. There is political motive there. But more than political motive, there was personal need. I think I included my HIV status in the piece, for example, because I felt the need to break my own denial of it, a much stronger need than any desire I had to politicize the issue.*<sup>23 24</sup>

Mark Franko addresses the particular interplay of dance and politics that Greenberg struggles to articulate from within the turmoil of the mid-90s: "It is justifiable and necessary to speak of dance as political in circumstanc-

the challenges of addressing AIDS in performance in what some referred to as a "post-AIDS" era—which correlated to the development of protease inhibitors in 1996. Because the trilogy spans that period of increasing life-chances but begins before it, that contextualization feels only somewhat appropriate to me.

[22] Kraft, 1995, 94.

[23] Greenberg, Neil. "Unbearable and Inescapable." *Movement Research Performance Journal*. Issue 10, 1995

[24] The issue of the political nature of *N-A-A-D* is taken up by reviewer Allan Ulrich who wonders about the small audience that Greenberg drew in San Francisco: "Could this work be too subtle for San Francisco?" Ulrich, Allan. "A Dance That's Not 'Not-About AIDS,'" *San Francisco Examiner*, October 18, 1996.

See also: Gere's *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*, where Gere expands the concept of choreography to include activist events. One of the examples he chooses is the ACT UP political funeral for Greenberg's brother, Jon Greenberg, which he reads as a performance. Although he cites Neil's role in the funeral, includes his quotes, and conducts personal correspondence with him, the focus is squarely on the event. He mentions only in passing that Neil is "an openly HIV-positive choreographer with highly developed skills in the art of bodily action." (161), later describing him as "a prominent participant in his activist brother's political funeral."

es that are conjunctural; that is, in circumstances where forms of movement and socio-political life take shape simultaneously if apparently independently. Dance frequently attains heightened cultural visibility at such moments."<sup>25</sup> Certainly the AIDS crisis is one of these circumstances, and the date markers and nonfictional content in *N-A-A-D* serve to explicitly mark its relationship to sociopolitical life. Further, Franko reminds us that "Politics are not located directly 'in' dance, but the way dance manages to occupy (cultural) space."<sup>26</sup> While *N-A-A-D* takes place in a theater, it also circulates in discourse.

The "personal" need that Greenberg speaks of is inseparable from the public discourses around HIV/AIDS. Greenberg himself alludes to this in the slide that follows his questioning of his compulsion to disclose, which reads, *I don't know what made this 'private' in the first place*. What makes it private of course, is stigma. Much has been written about the signification of the gay male body as the embodiment of AIDS by pioneering theorists of the AIDS crisis, writing in the 1980s, such as Simon Watney and Douglas Crimp. Watney exposes the forces at work that result in "the faces and bodies of individuals who clearly disclose the stigmata of their guilt... The principal target of this sadistically punitive gaze is the body of the 'homosexual.'"<sup>27 28</sup> Crimp in turn, reveals the AIDS crisis to be an "epidemic of stigmatization rooted in homophobia."<sup>29</sup> Paula Trencher's "epidemic of signification"<sup>30</sup> called attention early on to the power exercised by the language put forth by mainstream media outlets in shaping the public's understanding of AIDS more than medical professionals. Finally, Tim Dean, pointing out that the "S" in the acronym AIDS stands for syndrome, maintains: "therefore AIDS is to be understood not as a specific disease (it is not in itself contagious or communicable) but rather as a condition of the body, an index of the body's vulnerability to disease, to its surround, and to itself."<sup>31</sup> Since it is impossible to separate out the indi-

[25] Franko, 1995, 12.

[26] *Ibid.*, 13.

[27] Román, 1998, xviii.

[28] This dynamic can also be carried over into the relationship between homophobia and disco: "In April 1979 a *Rolling Stone* article described the Village People as 'the face of disco.'" Frank, 2007, 290.

[29] Román, 1998, xviv.

[30] "The name AIDS in part *constructs* the disease and helps make it intelligible. We cannot therefore look 'through' language to determine what AIDS 'really' is. Rather, we must explore the site where such determinations really occur and intervene at the point where meaning is created: in language." Treichler, Paula A. "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, Ed. Douglas Crimp (Boston: October Books/MIT press, 1987), 31.

[31] Dean, Tim, "The Psychoanalysis of AIDS," *October* 63, 1993, 86.

vidual from their society, or the private from the public, it follows that we must understand AIDS as “a condition of the *body politic*.”<sup>32</sup>

In placing his already-marked-as-homosexual but also healthy-looking and highly skilled dancer body on a stage and identifying it with AIDS, Greenberg creates a disruption and a contradiction, and also fuels assumptions all at once. Two strategies in particular work to subvert the emphasis on the (gay, HIV+) individual, however, and that is the use of projected text behind the dancing (rather than emitting from his body for example), and the integration of disclosures on the parts of the other dancers (although it should be noted that the perspective is always Greenberg’s, who speaks for them, using third person narration). *N-A-A-D* is not a solo after all.

### TEXT AND TIME

Greenberg, early-on in his career a dancer with Cunningham, cites his experience of working with Merce Cunningham (a pioneer of abstract, non narrative movement dating back to the 1950s) and watching performers that he knew well: “I think with *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, I was using the self-revelations of the performers as a tactic, thinking that maybe if the audience knew something about the dancers, they’d be able to connect to the dancing, and all the particular kinds of meaningfulness that dance can provide.”<sup>33</sup> So one function of the text, which may seem counter-intuitive, is to really see the dancing, and not in a representational way.

*[When text is read or audible], the text is tied to time and a word with a movement, practically. And you take it literally. And this is more spatial. It actually brings your focus up. It opens the skies, if anything, because of where we’ve placed it. But more importantly it just isn’t tied to time.*<sup>34</sup>

*With written text, there’s sufficient disconnect from the dancer(s) and stage-picture, in both time and space. The viewer is therefore challenged to hold these two different media together simultaneously—the dancing and the written text—and negotiate the poetics of perhaps not being able to connect them or separate them, but nevertheless to experience them. There are the poetics that interest me, far more than any “about.”*<sup>35</sup>

This open and spatialized approach to time creates an environment where the “about” and the “not-about” can coexist, where the theater can hold but not absorb the nonfictional worlds that are hailed within its walls, where AIDS doesn’t become sensationalized, but is not kept hidden either.

While the temporality of the performance remains unfixed, the making of the work (usually not visible to an audience) marks and memorializes loss. Another way to consider the inclusion of private information from the other performers is that it emphasizes that the presence of grief and loss, large and small, are universal experiences. And yet, they are particularized. For instance, one slide reads, *At this point in making the dance Ellen’s mother died*. Referring to a point in the making of the dance when one of the dancers Jo left to choreograph an opera in Australia, a slide reads, *Sydney music critics said Jo’s work on the opera was banal, silly, unnecessary and her dancing weak*. Greenberg makes sure to remind the audience not to make too easy of a connection between confessional text and dance, however, nor to attach too much meaning to the movement, with slides such as: *Christopher wants his dancing to speak for itself*.

Diana Taylor reminds us that “The dominance of language and writing has come to stand in for *meaning* itself.”<sup>36</sup> Greenberg is aware that the meaning attributed to language is often antithetical to the types of meaning that can be accessed through dance, including “perceptual, sensual, ontological.”<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, even though Greenberg does include biographical text, two critics read his movement as narrative or representational, when in fact it is often entirely abstract. Jack Anderson, reviewing the trilogy in 1996, selects the title: “Writing a Diary with Choreography.” And Allan Ulrich, writing for the *SF Examiner*, refers to the work as a “kinetic diary.” Lucy Sexton perhaps comes closest to realizing Greenberg’s intentions when she describes her experience as a spectator as agential and dialectic: “what is most striking and truly extraordinary is Neil’s generosity and sense of inclusion with respect to us, the audience... I am, as viewer, left free to construct the intersection between the intimate information I’m being told and the balletically elegant movement being done in front of me.”<sup>38</sup>

Greenberg’s fear of foregrounding the “about” was weighed against the realization that, in previous works he had made, audiences weren’t “getting” the meaning

[32] Ibid.

[33] Greenberg, 2012, 137.

[34] Kraft, 1995, 113.

[35] Greenberg, 2012, 137.

[36] Taylor, 2007, 25.

[37] Greenberg, 2012, 136.

[38] Sexton, 1994.



he was intending to express. In the context of the losses he was experiencing due to AIDS, the balance tipped more towards meaning: "I think I turned to language to make sure this struggle was explicitly addressed."<sup>39</sup> Which returns us to the title. It's important that AIDS is *present*. The genesis of the title is actually very relevant here. When Greenberg's brother Jon, an active member of ACT UP, was in the hospital, someone hung on the wall behind his bed a series of papers that together spelled out the sentence, "This-is-not-about-you." Greenberg noticed one day that the "you" had dropped off, so that it read, "This-is-not-about."<sup>40</sup> The removal of the "you" resonates on various levels—a warning against the narcissistic needs of the loved ones, a swift reminder of mortality, or it could also serve as a reminder that the individual, in the context of a larger political struggle, cannot be the primary focus.

### TRANSMISSIONS

In addition to including text that refers to his brother's death, Greenberg performs a solo, which, unlike the other material, doesn't come from taped improvisations, but from a close observation of his brother in a coma in his hospital bed as he was dying. As he tells his interviewer in 1995, "I don't think I had any conscious idea of doing that even, but for some reason, when he was in a coma, I remembered the way his arms were. One was internally and one was externally rotated."<sup>41</sup>

*Viewing Notes:* Neil enters at 19:44, walks to center, far upstage (close to the audience), gets into posture: eyes closed, raising arms to almost shoulder height, head, upper body slightly bent to right side, arms bent at elbows, one hand turned in, one out. His mouth slightly open, slow breathing, he lifts eyebrows as if trying to open his eyes. Repeats. Right finger points to head.

*Slide:* This is what my brother Jon looked like in his coma. He walks backwards, stops. *Slide:* He was in a coma 2 days before he died of AIDS. Repeats sequence, lifts eyebrows with eyes closed.

*Slide:* I'm HIV+. Lifts eyebrows, reactivates the finger pointing (it had dropped and suddenly becomes rigid again). He begins to sway his hips, brings arms over to left side, makes a series of turns, very fast movements. His back is facing the audience, one leg extended and both arms flung out. *Slide:* But this part of the dance isn't

meant to be about me. *Walks backwards to the front of the stage, turns, returns to Jon pose. Leans over to side, repeats eyebrows. Others walk on.*

Greenberg embodies his brother's posture without first orienting the audience. A brother's death has been mentioned, but this is the first time proper names have entered: Jon and AIDS. From identifying his brother's death as AIDS-related, he moves to the disclosure of his HIV+ status. From the still posture of his brother's coma, he explodes into movement briefly, and then returns. *Not about me.* While Greenberg mentions that he didn't intend to include his brother's movement, when it came to making *N-A-A-D*, in retrospect, he said, "I can see the whole dance as an expression of my need to find a context for this moment."<sup>42</sup>

In this solo, Greenberg conjures his dead brother through his own living body. The audience sees an imagined imprint of what he has seen. Memory, already an "incorporating practice... is sedimented, or amassed, in the body."<sup>43</sup> Greenberg works creatively with this memory in a manner in line with Joseph Roach's concept of "kinesthetic imagination":

*The kinesthetic imagination, however, inhabits the realm of the virtual. Its truth is the truth of simulation, of fantasy, or of daydreams, but its effect on human action may have material consequences of the most tangible and of the widest scope. This faculty, which flourishes in that mental space where imagination and memory converge, is a way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable, just as dance is often said to be a way of expressing the unspeakable.*<sup>44</sup>

It is Greenberg's dance that activates and transforms his memory, and perhaps allows him to more fully participate in addressing his own mortality in the present. Diana Taylor's discussion of ephemeral archives, or as she terms them, "the repertoire,"<sup>45</sup> is useful to consider: "The repertoire required presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by

[39] Greenberg, 2012, 137.

[40] Personal interview with the author, Feb. 15, 2016.

[41] Kraft, 1995, 100.

[42] Greenberg, 1995.

[43] Paul Connerton qtd. in Roach, 1996, 27.

[44] Roach, 1996, 27.

[45] Taylor, 2007, 20: The Repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge."

**I've known I'm HIV+ since 1987.**

**I don't know why I'm now revealing this publicly.**

**I don't know what made this "private" in the first place.**

**I'm asymptomatic today.**

'being there,' being a part of the transmission."<sup>46</sup> Transmission is apt word to employ here. What connects the two bodies is kinship and bloodlines, but also the shared proximity to HIV/AIDS. Addressing the struggle with his own mortality which was inextricable from his grief over his brother's death, Greenberg writes, "Watching Jon die, and die of AIDS, was for me like watching myself die, and die from AIDS."<sup>47</sup>

While Greenberg's encounters with loss and his own mortality related to AIDS set him apart from the other members of his cast, the fact that the same (dance) material passes through his body and theirs, suggests another example of transmission (versus the hysterical fear of contagion) that shrinks the distance between his body as marked and theirs as not. If we return to the beginning of the performance, it is clear that Greenberg is calling attention to this process of transmission:

*Viewing Notes, opening of N-A-A-D: The sound of footfalls a couple seconds before the backlights come on. Neil and the youngest dancer, Justine (behind) are dancing. First slide: This is the first material I made after my brother died. Neil walks off, others enter, all doing same material, different timing. Fragment of song appears, dissipates. Slide: Jo is doing that same material again. Stiff leg, kneeling in a lunge, arm extended. Another song fragment. Quartet + 1 dancer alone. Slide: Ellen is dancing that same material again. Front lunge, back leg moves a few times, getting footing.*

While it is a common inquiry in dance to consider the relationship between choreographed material and individual bodies, the fact that the other dancers perform the material that has originally emerged from Greenberg's body and has been linked to Greenberg's loss feels especially striking. David Román has noted how "the work builds meaning through self-referential systems that reflect on the physical process of Greenberg's HIV status and the artistic process of his choreography."<sup>48</sup> Greenberg and the other members of the company "perform the kinesthetic memory of their past lived experience,"<sup>49</sup> both through the already-mentioned learning of set material that originated as improvisation as well as the performance of excerpts from previous pieces that they danced with Greenberg. As

the trilogy continues, the material travels and gathers new resonances and contexts.

In a 2006 interview, Greenberg reflects back on the loss of his brother as well as many friends:

*it was "the" life-changing event, one of the big ones, bringing mortality as something close to me, something real, for the first time. That is what went into the making of the piece, and as we made the piece, more friends died. It just happened that way. That was a year in my life when nine people died—some of them really close to me, some of them people from the support group.*<sup>50</sup>

And back in 1995, he said, "It's in N-A-A-D, my feelings about my mortality, having to grieve others, and grieve it from a special place of knowing that this could be my end."<sup>51</sup> One of the other ways that Greenberg specifically addresses the AIDS crisis in this piece is in the naming of nine people he knew who died while the dance was being made. Each death is marked according to where it happened in relation to the making of the piece. After each death is announced, all the dancers clear off of the stage and stand on the sides briefly before returning and beginning to dance again (Greenberg is already off the stage). Another death is announced and they evacuate once more, and then return. Throughout the piece, solos turn into quartets, which split into two duets, dancers drop out, occasionally everyone enters into unison. There are no wings, the dancers always gravitate back to the sides of the stage and stand, waiting. In a 1995 article for *POZ Magazine*, Greenberg reflects:

*The rhythms I came up with, the spatial arrangements that took shape seem to reflect my experience. I can point to certain things in the dance now and see how they deaccumulate. They're about loss. Instead of structures accumulating, they'd disintegrate over and over. That seems to be the pattern I came up with quite unconsciously.*<sup>52</sup>

[46] Ibid.

[47] Greenberg, 1995.

[48] Román, 2005, 72.

[49] Ibid., 77.

[50] Greenberg, Neil and Miguel Gutierrez. "Neil Greenberg and Miguel Gutierrez in conversation, Parts 1 and 2," *critical correspondence*, May 2006. <http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=534>

[51] Kraft, 1995, 163.

[52] Kaplan, Larry. "My Brother, My Self: Choreographer Neil Greenberg touches nerve with AIDS work," *POZ Magazine*, May 12, 1995. <https://www.poz.com/article/Neil-Greenberg-HIV-20782-7528>

There is no sense of closure at the end of the piece. As Leigh Witchel remarks, “When it seems as if this chilling litany might repeat *ad infinitum* . . . there is a blackout and the dance is over.”<sup>53</sup> The ending speaks to the ongoing-ness of AIDS-related deaths and seems to allude to an earlier slide, which is at once a pointed reference to Greenberg’s unnaturally finite experience of time as well as to the material conditions of the making of a performance. *There is more I wanted to do with this dance, but there wasn’t time.*

\* \* \*

*This essay is excerpted from an essay originally published online in Drain’s September 2016 Issue: AIDS and Memory, edited by Ricky Varghese. Reprinted with permission of the author and Drain.*

[53] Witchel, 1998, 64.





**"I don't want an angry political funeral.  
I just want you to burn me in the street  
and eat my flesh."**

—Jon M. Greenberg  
Announced to all of his friends on many occasions,  
especially in crowded elevators  
and in the presence of small children.

born: February 22, 1956  
died of AIDS: July 12, 1993



NY 7.13

TOM (GREENBERG) IS DEAD. HE DIED LAST NIGHT AT 10 PM — I DIDN'T KNOW, AND WAS PROBABLY AT THAT MOMENT ON STAGE AS JONI MITCHELL WHICH IS PERFECT, AS HE LOVED JONI. I DON'T FIND OUT UNTIL LATE TODAY — THERE WERE 2 MESSAGES — BUT I WAS OUT, AND BUSY FIGHTING, WHICH WENT WELL.

BUT LAST NIGHT I AWOKED FROM A DREAM — CRYING, SOBING, QUITE INTENSE. I THINK IN THE DREAM THERE WAS MY FATHER.

BUT MAYBE IT WAS TOM SAYING GOODBYE.

Pleurem mes yeux

→ G INTERPRETED VERSION — GOOD

P

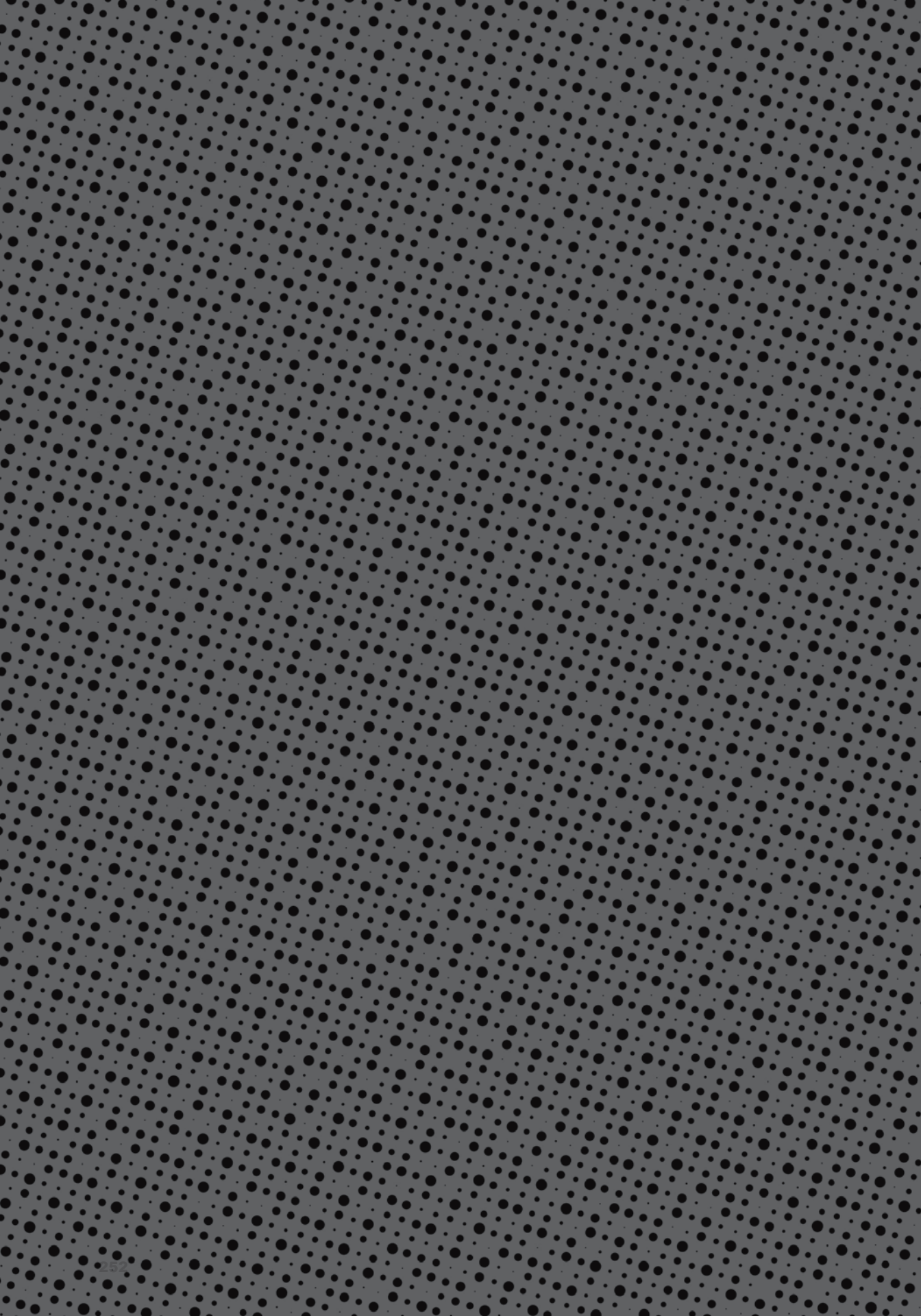
7-16

MEMORIAL FOR TOM GREENBERG.

PEOPLE GATHERED AT HULSTON ST. AND 5TH ST. ONE GUY CAME UP TO ME AND ASKED ME IF IT WAS A BUS TO FIRE ISLAND — I DIDN'T KNOW ~~WAS~~ UNWILLING TO BE INSULTED OR AMUSED — LOTUS CANDLES WITH TOM'S PICTURE AND SOME OF HIS WORDS ABOUT AIDS WERE PASSED OUT —



AS WERE ROSES. THE COFFIN WAS HOISTED,  
AND WE PROCEEDED UP 1<sup>ST</sup> AVE, RUSH  
HOUR, FRIDAY. THE MARSHALLS FROM APT UP  
JOINED HANDS TO PREVENT THRU TRAFFIC  
FROM PASSING. DRUMS BEAT IN A DIRGE.  
A PHOTO OF TON SURROUNDED BY FLOWERS  
WAS HELD HIGH. I WAS IN A SAD AND  
TEARFUL STATE. AT ONE POINT A HAND  
SLIPPED INTO MINE - IT WAS JENNIFER  
MONSON. WE WALKED INTO TOMPKINS SQUARE  
PARK, AND THE COFFIN WAS PLACED DOWN,  
AND OPENED. CANDLES WERE LIT, AND  
PLACED IN A CIRCLE. PEOPLE SAT ON THE  
GROUND. TON'S BROTHERS, INCLUDING RELL,  
SPOKE. HIS FATHER CRIED. HIS MOTHER  
WAS SILENT WITH HER HUSBAND. I WAS PULLED  
OUT OF THE CROWD - GOT TO THE MIC AND  
COULDN'T SPEAK - FINALLY COULD, DID, AND  
SANG UNBROKEN. CHANGED MORE WORDS:  
"I HAVE COME HERE TO LOSE THE HATE, AND  
I FEEL TO HAVE A DATE WITH SOMETHING TURNING."  
TON LOOKED BEAUTIFUL, HANDSOME, WEARING  
A BRIGHT COLORED PRINT SHIRT, AND  
LOOS OF BEADS AROUND HIS NECK.





# rainbow kids

Brenda Dixon Gottschild

*a while back, i began pondering how i could write a song dedicated to "the children." if you're reading this and you didn't know, this is a term of affection coined by some members of the gay community used to describe themselves. it was upon bearing this term for the first time from a close friend that the idea of writing a song as a tribute was born. children. the word evokes innocence, vulnerability, light, purity. i began imagining what the childhoods of some of my gay friends looked like. i wondered if they'd had loving parents, an accepting family, close friends. i wondered if they'd felt it was safe to be themselves in any space. if they'd been made to feel like they were good. . . .*

Those are the words of my daughter, vocalist/songwriter Amel Larrieux, and the opening salvo of her June 28, 2016 blog in memory of the children who were exterminated in the Orlando Massacre on June 12.<sup>1</sup> Like her mother and so many other women, Amel is once again bearing witness. We are witnesses for the defense, plain and simple. Amel comes at it as the consummate artist, pondering the pain of this senseless carnage as well as how to honor a large contingent of her fans. As a woman devoting my practice (research, scholarship, discourse, writing) to the cause of social justice, my task is to chronicle injustice, using dance as my lens. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, so they say.

Witness. Witnessing. Bearing witness: I want to talk about AIDS, dance, and continuity in terms of "faithful witnessing," a concept explored by Yomaira C. Figueroa<sup>2</sup>. As Figueroa explains in her online Abstract, ". . . faithful witnessing is an act of aligning oneself with oppressed peoples against the grain of power and recognizing their humanity, oppression, and resistance despite the lack of institutional endorsement."<sup>3</sup>

When I was invited to contribute to this Danspace Catalog, I pulled up an example of me bearing witness: a memorial that I wrote in 2004 for that year's World

AIDS Day (December 1), at the request of longtime AIDS activist David Gere, Professor, Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA. Here's what I wrote back then:

*"Love letters straight from the heart*

*Keep us so near, while apart . . ."*

*So say the words of the song. This one is for Billy and Gene, Doug and Leon, Joshua and Jeff—six men felled by what Chuck Davis calls "the plague": three black, three white, all greatly missed. I knew none of them personally, privately, but I carry somatic snapshots of who they are, and I speak of them in the present tense.*

*Billy Wilson—suave, physically gorgeous, self-assured. He is almost chivalrous upon meeting me in the lush lounge of a Philadelphia hotel around 1986. (My interviews with Wilson and Gene Hill Sagan were arranged by Joan Myers Brown, founder and director of the Philadelphia Dance Company—Philadanco). He makes me feel valued for who I am and what I am doing, and I suspect that the dancers he works with get the same treatment. As we talk about his time studying dance in Philadelphia with Anthony Tudor, Wilson is disarmingly frank, with little bitterness about the entrenched racism that prevented him and Brown from pursuing ballet careers. He has a full, rich life that includes parenthood (he has brought his pre-teen son to the interview), marriage, and a successful career, in spite of the odds. Gene Hill Sagan—quiet, reserved (at least, with me), intense, he is Philadanco's resident choreographer, and his demanding works fit this company like a glove. The aura of protection and guardianship offered by Brown's school and company seem to nurture his choreographic talents, and dances like La Valse, one of his signature works, are alive and well in Danco's repertory.*

*Jeffrey Groff—a lovely young dancer with Ann Vachon's Dance Conduit, he is tall, thin, and sweet-tempered. I remember him telling pre-postmodern jokes: not ironic or cruel or risqué, but ones that tickled our sophmoric rib. He is in his early twenties: his whole life is ahead of him. . . .*

*Douglas James—undergraduate dance major at Temple University, Doug is wiry, black Irish, intense in a city-smart way: he's been around.*

[1] <http://smarturl.it/616note>

[2] Yomaira C. Figueroa, "Faithful Witnessing as Practice: Decolonial Readings of *Shadows of Your Black Memory* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *Hypatia* 30, no. 4 (2015): 641–656.

[3] <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hypa.12183/abstract>

*The last time I see him is at a noonday mass at a church in midtown Philly. He looks fit and strong, is doing AIDS advocacy work: I think to myself, "he's recovering". . . .*

*Joshua Cabot—full of energy and enthusiasm, for years he has been a full-time faculty member at a New Jersey college while performing with Dance Conduit and pursuing a doctorate degree at Temple University. Josh has a light but persistent touch, a quick, flickering energy that shone in his dancing and in his approach to research. He has an abiding interest in dance history and preservation and has collected a voluminous archive of 35mm dance slides. One person he inspires is Mary Edsall, his former student and founder-curator of the Philadelphia Dance Archives.*

*Leon Evans—to be young, gifted, and black—Leon had a dream for grassroots black Philadelphia youth: a dance-theater company that would frame their talents for the concert stage. With Jaye Allison, he formed the Leja Dance Company that celebrates and affirms the nurturing power of African American culture. It helps to think of these people in the present tense, to keep their beingness alive.*

This is an intimate handful of the many thousands gone—and so many dancers! As Joan Myers Brown (founder/Artistic Director, Philadanco) said, “It was as though somebody came in here with a broom and just swept everybody away.” She lost a host of incredible Black male dancers, including Kevin Brown and Carlos Shorty, key soloists in her ensemble. She’d introduced me to Wilson and Sagan because in 1982, soon after I was hired at Temple University and moved to Philly from Manhattan, I’d intended to write a book about this city’s Black dance community. But this was also the era of the culture wars, and “revising the canon” as a *modus operandi* was not lost on this writer who had witnessed for too long the “invisibilization” (my coinage) of Africanist aesthetic presences in the dance world. Thus, other more urgent projects intervened, resulting in my first, second, and third solo books, plus a textbook. Nevertheless, I held onto those 1980s tapes and transcripts, and in 2010-2011 I finally wrote the Philadelphia book, including information from the Wilson and Sagan interviews.

As for the other artists memorialized in that AIDS eu-

logy, Leon Evans and Jaye Allison actually parted ways by 1996, and he formed the Eleone Dance Theater.<sup>4</sup> According to Jaye Allison’s online bio, and keeping its original name, Leja was incorporated in 1999 and subsequently became a production company in 2006.<sup>5</sup> Shawn-Lamere Williams has continued the Eleone Dance Theatre/Eleone Connection, a lively local ensemble, so the legacy of Leon Evans lives on. Regretfully, I have no follow-up information on Cabot, James, or Groff. It’s so easy to lose track, so devastating to realize that the memories can fade, over time. . . .

Tracing our way back to the present, where are we? A June 13, 2016 *New York Times* Editorial Board opinion piece announced, “The World Could End AIDS if It Tried.”<sup>6</sup> So what’s holding us back? The article states that, “While still high, deaths attributable to AIDS are down 36 percent from 2010. That is largely because many more people are receiving antiretroviral drugs—17 million people in 2015, compared with 7.5 million five years earlier.” That’s the good news, but the same old culprits still curtail progress: institutional budget constraints; unwillingness on the part of victims to reveal their disease due to fear of “. . . being ostracized, or worse because they are gay, use drugs, or are engaged in sex work.” So the stigma remains for the LGBT community, regardless of individual health status, which is why safe havens like Pulse in Orlando, or ICandy in Philadelphia, are so important. The fact that someone with AIDS is ashamed to seek help is like being African American but embarrassed to admit that your relatives were enslaved. How terrible when victims decide they’re guilty and assume the mantle of inferiority contrived by their oppressors! Take Omar Mateen, for example. Evidence points to this man being a homophobic homosexual (yes: oxymorons are real). He was a frequent visitor to Pulse. He saw people dancing with joy and freedom—and we must look at social dancing as a significant sociocultural marker and mode of aesthetic expression. Mateen wants to join them. Instead of killing himself, he kills them, and concocts a cockamamie reason to conceal his closeted motive. As a writer for *Psychology Today* said, “Whether it’s the football player bullying the gay kid at school, the politician on Capitol Hill mandating anti-gay legislation, or the married man shooting people in a gay nightclub who are openly living the life he’s too ashamed to live, as long as we, as parents and as cultures, continue to judge others because of who they are or who they love,

[4] [articles.philly.com/1996-10-12/entertainment/25666128\\_1](http://articles.philly.com/1996-10-12/entertainment/25666128_1)

[5] [www.jayeallison.com/bio.htm](http://www.jayeallison.com/bio.htm)

[6] <http://nyti.ms/1rkUV6J>

people will continue denigrating and harming the very community they wish they had the courage to join.”<sup>7</sup>

Which brings us back to witnessing. Figueroa asks how long we have been faithful witnesses and for what, and how we interpret what we witness. My favorite choreography by Ronald Brown and his Evidence Dance Company is a work created originally on and for Philadanco, and here are Ron Brown’s words from the videotaped prologue section of the original performance in 2000, marking Philadanco’s thirtieth anniversary. He speaks of God, of work, of witnessing and, finally, of the children. His faithful witnesses are the gatekeepers:

*Gate Keepers is about the gate keepers of heaven, kind of a reminder to all of us to be mindful of our duty and service to God, and always focused on work. Politically and socially it’s connected to Eleo Pomare. . . always challenging us on the political and social, and the spirit always being there because that’s what sustains us; and Audre Lorde who was an incredible poet and would always challenge and ask you, “Are you doing your work?”—just on this planet—are you focused on your work. . . . So I think of the two of them. . . . [Gate Keepers] is [pause] kind of like some children running to the gate of heaven to wait for themselves.”<sup>8</sup>*

The children. Yes: what about the children? Who will save the children?

There’s no way to bring the dead back to this side of heaven; we can never make up for lost lives. Whether we can turn the tide of the depraved xenophobia, racism, sexism, and homophobia that’s destroying our planet is an open question. So what’s the point of witnessing? I can’t answer my question in words, because witnessing ultimately requires and points to action. I only know that I/we witnesses do what we do because we have to: make noise, speak truth to power, and act on our beliefs. With so much having been lost, we faithful witnesses must act as though we have nothing to lose. Axé.

[7] Joye Swan, Ph.D. “The Orlando Shooter Doth Protest Too Much, Me Thinks.” ([www.psychologytoday.com/blog/close-and-personal/2016](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/close-and-personal/2016))

[8] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body – A Geography from Coon to Cool*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 270.

## **TWELVE STEPS TO LIVING WITH HIV**

1. Do everything you've always wanted to do.
2. Take care of your body.
3. Fall in love with a movie star.
4. Quit your job.
5. Get credit cards and use wisely. [Example: Charge plane ticket (rt) to L.A. Rent a car. Get a friend. Drive up the coast to SF. Take friends out to dinner. Drive back to L.A. Spend a week there. Don't forget to charge all gasoline!]
6. Move to the opposite coast.
7. Charge a plane ticket to Paris, then go!
8. Eat healthy, but don't deny yourself treats (Haagen Dazs, yay; hot dogs, burp).
9. Fall in love with a film director.
10. File for bankruptcy.
11. Listen to your inner voice. Let your conscience be your guide.
12. Do everything you've always wanted to do.



# she, alive

*niv Acosta*

“don’t write anything down you don’t want to be read.”

she met my bio daddy at 15 years old on holidays in nyc from the dominican republic.

she went back to living in a convent and had a virgin birth 9 months later.

“i never had sex with your daddy before you were born.”

i tore her from front to back. a natural birth accompanied by an outer body experience & 17 stitches later she had the girl of her dreams. she was rosy cheeked and fine haired just like that star mom wished on agreed.

she died for a moment there, while having me. watched herself above the bed.

her curiosity to touch her dying body made her draw breath again.

she fell for her first little one three days later because babies having babies was frowned upon and no one could teach the lessons of parenting to a teenager in a crash course. i held my chest tight then and still do now. i have painful hiccups. she noticed i needed her.

mom gave birth to her pain. it me.

i was raised to mourn her death. family members and doctors alike were convinced there was “not much time left,” taught me to let her go. they said i should learn to. they felt sorry for me. they brought me into their homes and let me sit by the phone for any news. i pined for her. i was never sure how long i would have to stay away from my home this time.

she survived, and is surviving.

mom lived through much violence and displacement. growing up female, of haitian descent and dark skinned in the dominican republic almost debunked her invincibility. she was assaulted by men whose toxic masculinity lead to their hyper fragility and subsequent hatred of women’s bodies—to the point they could not separate a child’s body from a mature body. she was violated, regularly, and contracted the virus this way.

i was born with the virus and for the first few months that was my tiny body’s reality. i don’t remember being hiv positive.

nothing about how i came into this world was saintly.

sometimes we jest about immaculate conception and eventual immunity as miraculous etc... but i’d rather not.

i’d rather speak about her magic and how it sheltered me and her. mom is a bruja. she stirs and fabricates love and laughter everywhere she goes while maintaining a comfortable hold on the dark past she’d rather not speak of. according to the doctors, mom’s most magical trick is that she ain’t dead yet. in fact so much of what being hiv positive has been for us is a sustained relationship to various medical practitioners and medical buildings.

my mom is so magical she still alive. my mom is so magical she’s at the hospital many times a week to be studied for her survivability. they draw blood from her like vamps to solve one of the world’s biggest mysteries. why is she still alive?

when she is ready to let you into her history it is such a heartbreaking gift. her stance shifts along with her demeanor which indicates gravity, a polar comparison to her usual brilliance. she easily turned these flashbacks into educational experiences for me. “don’t repeat what i did.”

this is her special recipe for survival within herself and for her legacy.

you see, being a part of a mainly melanated & queer/trans community of aids positive people in nyc was magical for me growing up. how can one go wrong with this community showing up and out to their highest capability for all the right reasons and mainly to live for those moments and flex what life meant to us. montefiore hospital in the south bronx threw regularly scheduled events throughout the year. all with various seasonal themes, but we consistently turned it into the best parts of a vogue ballroom. no categories and not a chop, just movement, sound and vibes. vogue cyphers for days.

there was clearly a sense of unspoken mortality that mingled with the fluorescent lights of the rooms we celebrated in. there were less and new people who showed up at each event. i can remember the collective attitude of gratitude that overwhelmed my mother and i, smiles and cheers simply because we were still alive. our friends' deaths served as a reminder to keep living for ourselves and each other.

we are still alive.

we were all survivors, passed and present.

have you ever turned up to a function with survivors?

then you've never been to ball, a drag show, a qtpoc dance club, a party full of voguers.

hiv/aids was/is one of many things plaguing the queer and trans communities of color.

we've lost many to the virus. we've also lost many to transphobia, racism, homophobia and more.

there was/is no division among us, especially as it relates to finding and creating joy through shared space and movement.

when we shared space we shared it with a deep knowledge of our collective survival.

**PLATFORM 2016:  
PROGRAMS & PARTICIPANTS**

# All Black/An Invitation: A spoken word and performance tribute to artists who died of AIDS

[Thursday, October 20, 2016, at 8pm]

Curated by Pamela Sneed

I never thought I would sit down to write a piece about HIV/AIDS and I would experience joy. Yes, the word that surges in my heart today and leaps forward is joy. I say this because as a poet, performer, someone who was very much shaped by the poets and the artists of the late 80s and 90s, someone who is still haunted by their deaths, who can still see their smiling baby faces at 23 and 33 years old, who sees us dancing at the Paradise Garage, in our lives before computers, crammed into a room upstairs at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center reciting poetry, the untimely deaths, who still sees the headlines, also, the neglect and injustice of it all... For me, for one moment, on one evening, on this occasion of *All Black/An Invitation: A spoken word and performance tribute to artists who died of AIDS*, I/we will get to go home again. It's been so long. I will get to see all the artists who shaped me and a generation. Once again, I will see them in spirit. I will get to see poets Essex Hemphill, Craig Harris, Donald Woods, Don Reid, Assotto Saint, Bert Hunter, David Frechette, Rory Buchanan, Alan Williams, Roy Gonsalves... In spirit, I will get to see my mothers and sisters felled by cancer whose words carried us through the time. I will get to hear again the wit of poet Pat Parker who declared, "Straights are ok but why must they be so blatant!" I will hear June Jordan who saw us stumble and fall, bury best friends and lovers, overcome with grief and rage, who shouted at us in dialect to "G'WAN G'WAN." She will repeat the line I first heard from her and say as challenge, "This country needs a revolution." I will get to see Audre Lorde once again spread the wings of her dashiki as she did in 1992 and envelop us, declaring, "I began this journey as a coward." I will get to hear her say aloud again, "Your silence will not protect you," and, "It is better to speak knowing we were never meant to survive," urging us to make the

world we want. In spirit, we will hear them all. We will get to sit together and through the word/the poets/performance we will get to commune and break bread. We will cry, laugh, celebrate, remember and envision. We will also meet new people, ones we have never heard of. We will get to hear from a new generation, those living with HIV and those not. We will talk about the work that is left for us all to do. The AIDS crisis is still not over. I have assembled a stellar line-up of intergenerational poets and performers. I'm so glad that I have lived long enough and have enough experience as an artist to tell this story/that through PLATFORM 2016: *Lost and Found* at Danspace, the perspectives of Queer artists/dancers and People of Color are being valued. We will write on pages that have been purposefully left blank/that say we do not and did not exist. On the occasion of *All Black/An Invitation* we will get to shout our Queer selves and brothers lost to AIDS into history.

—PS



# the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds

[Saturday, October 22, 2016, at 8pm]

Curated by Eva Yaa Asantewaa

*In folk magic and mythology, crossroads may represent a location “between the worlds”...a site where supernatural spirits can be contacted and paranormal events can take place...a locality where two realms touch...liminality, a place literally “neither here nor there,” “betwixt and between.”*

*In conjure, rootwork, and hoodoo, a form of African American magical spirituality, in order to acquire facility at various manual and body skills, such as playing a musical instrument, throwing dice, or dancing.... —from Wikipedia*

*You got to make your own worlds. You got to write yourself in. —Octavia Butler*

\* \* \*

*the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds* has been conceived in response to an invitation from Ishmael Houston-Jones and Will Rawls, curators of Danspace Project’s *Platform 2016: Lost and Found*, to join their curatorial team. Houston-Jones wrote that *Lost and Found* will “interrogate the effects that deaths from AIDS in the 1980-90s in the downtown dance community has had on work, (queer work), being created today.” Among other interests, he invited works that address healing.

Sparked by Audre Lorde’s essay, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” *the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds* connects to *Platform 2016: Lost and Found* through rituals of healing within and beyond linear time and a desire to highlight the power of Black women within community.

This evening imagines and activates St. Mark’s as a site of InterSections—like crossroads, places of high-stakes risk as well as magic.

*These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power; of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman’s place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep. —Audre Lorde*

*The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us—the poet-whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. —Audre Lorde*

Over two hours, 20 Black women dancers from different generations and dance genres channel and manifest InterSections, crossroads sites within the church sanctuary, responding, in improvisation, to the following prompts:

- \* *the walk*
- \* *the sermon*
- \* *the flood*
- \* *the haunt*
- \* *the planting*

These InterSections are “places of possibility” visited and energized by the “black mothers in each of us.” Each InterSection can represent Place in past, present, future or time beyond time. These spaces are altars that focus energies for sacred work. They challenge, and they exhilarate.

—EYA

# Schedule of Events



Brother(hood) Dance! Photo by Ricardo Valentine.

## **THURS, OCT 6, 7PM**

Readings from *Lost and Found: A Preview of Platform 2016* at The New Museum (235 Bowery) with readers Ishmael Houston-Jones, Theodore Kerr, Linda Simpson, and Julie Tolentino. A conversation moderated by Judy Hussie-Taylor will follow.

## **THURS, OCT 13, 8PM**

An Evening with Bill T. Jones: Screening and conversation with Will Rawls and Ishmael Houston-Jones.

## **FRI, OCT 14, 8PM**

An Evening with Neil Greenberg: Performance, screening, and conversation with Jaime Shearn Coan.

## **SAT, OCT 15, 11AM**

Archie Burnett workshop

## **SAT, OCT 15, 1:30-6PM**

Conversation Without Walls: One of Two with Ishmael Houston-Jones, Will Rawls, Judy Hussie-Taylor, Heidi Dorow, Muna Tseng, Lucy Sexton, Eva Yaa Asantewaa, Mar'ya Wethers, and Darrell Jones. "Life Drawing" Response #1: Mariana Valencia responding to the work of Assotto Saint and "Life Drawing" Response #2: Raja Feather Kelly responding to the work of Ethyl Eichelberger.

## **SAT, OCT 15, 8PM**

An Evening with Archie Burnett: Celebrating the Legacy of Willi Ninja. Performances by House of Ninja, screening, and conversation.

## **WED, OCT 19, 7PM**

Film Screening: Charles Atlas's *Son of Sam* and *Delilah at Howl!* Happening: An Arturo Vega Project (6 East 1st Street). A discussion with Atlas and Stuart Comer will follow.

## **THURS, OCT 20, 8PM**

All Black/An Invitation: An evening of poetry curated by Pamela Sneed with Timothy DuWhite, Kia Labeija, Yaya McKoy, Terence Taylor, and Carmelita Tropicana.

## **FRI, OCT 21, 8PM**

An Evening with Ni'Ja Whitson, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Jonathan Gonzalez, and Jasmine Hearn.

## **SAT, OCT 22, 8PM**

the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds curated by Eva Yaa Asantewaa with Angie Pittman, Charmaine Warren, Davalois Fearon, Edisa Weeks, Jasmine Hearn, Kayla Hamilton, Leslie Parker, Marguerite Hemmings, Marjani Forté-Saunders, Maria Bauman, Mar'ya Wethers, Melanie Greene, Nia Love, Ninja Whitson, Paloma McGregor, Rakiya Orange, Samantha Speis, Sydnie L. Mosley, Sidra Bell, Grace Osborne, and Tara Aisha Willis.



DANCENOISE, 1988. Photo by Jim Moore.

**TUES, OCT 25, 4PM**

I Don't Remember: A Reading by Hilton Als at the Museum of Modern Art, Celeste Bartos Theater (4 West 54th Street). A discussion with Als and Thomas Beard will follow.

**THURS, OCT 27, 6:30-8:30PM**

Interventions in the Narrativization of the AIDS Crisis at The Graduate Center, CUNY (365 5th Avenue). With Tara Burk, Lesley Farlow, Thomas F. DeFrantz, David Román, and Janet Werther, moderated by Jaime Shearn Coan.

**THURS, NOV 3 - SAT, NOV 5, 8PM**

Variations on Themes from *Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life* and other works by John Bernd. Directed by Ishmael Houston-Jones in collaboration with Miguel Gutierrez, Jennifer Monson, and Nick Hallett.

**MON, NOV 7, 7PM**

Modern Mondays: An Evening with Ishmael Houston-Jones and Dennis Cooper at the Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2 (11 West 53rd Street)

**TUES, NOV 8, 7PM**

The Zine Project: AUNTS at Arts On Site (12 Saint Marks Place).

**THURS, NOV 10, 6:30-8:30PM**

A Matter of Urgency and Agency: HIV/AIDS Now at The Graduate Center, CUNY (365 5th Avenue) with Jawanza James Williams, Theodore (ted) Kerr, Kenyon Farrow, Robert Sember, and iele paloumpis.

**TUES, NOV 15, 6-10PM**

Memory Palace: A Vigil, in partnership with Visual AIDS, Dancers Responding to AIDS (DRA), and St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery.

**THURS, NOV 17 - SAT, NOV 19, 8PM**

An Evening with DANCENOISE, Antonio Ramos, and Brother(hood) Dance!

**SAT, NOV 19, 1:30-6PM**

Conversation Without Walls: Two of Two with Jack Waters, Peter Kramer, Sarah Schulman, Alex Fialho, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Jaime Shearn Coan, Ali Rosa-Salas, DonChristian, and Larissa Velez-Jackson. "Life Drawing" Response #3: Katy Pyle responding to the work of Greer Lankton and "Life Drawing" Response #4: Narcissister responding to the work of Alvin Ailey.

**Alvin Ailey** (1931-1989) founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York in 1958. He choreographed 79 works in total for his internationally touring company, including his signature work *Revelations* (1960). He died on Dec 1, 1989 from AIDS-related complications. His company and school continue to be central NYC institutions.

**niv Acosta** is a dance artist, educator, black Dominican, transsexual, queer native New Yorker. He has presented his work at venues including Live Arts, BAX, Danspace Project, CPR, Judson Memorial Church, MOMA PS1, Abrons, and Human Resources, and has collaborated with artists Malik Gaines, Alexandro Segade, Andrea Geyer, A.K. Burns, and Ralph Lemon.

**Hilton Als** is a writer, editor, curator and friend.

**Penny Arcade** aka Susana Ventura is an internationally respected performance artist, writer, poet, spoken word artist, and theater maker. Her work investigates the boundaries between traditional theatre and performance. An Andy Warhol Factory Superstar, featured in the film *Women In Revolt*, Penny occupies a unique position in the American avant-garde.  
<http://pennycastle.com/>

**Marc Arthur** is an artist and scholar based in Brooklyn and currently completing a PhD in performance studies at NYU. He is also the Head of Research and Archives at Performa.

**Tyler Ashley** is a choreographer and performer based in Brooklyn, NY. Ashley has had the pleasure of working with Elizabeth Streb, Walter Dunder-vill, Larissa Velez-Jackson, Biba Bell among others. Ashley's own work has shown at venues including Art Basel Miami, The Knockdown Center, The Chocolate Factory, Danspace, JACK, and Gina Gibney.

**Charles Atlas** is an artist and filmmaker who has been producing film and video works

since the mid-1970s: pioneering media/dance works, multi-channel video installations, feature-length documentaries, and live electronic performances. He has been described as "one of the premier interpreters of dance, theatre and performance on video."

**AUNTS** was founded by James Kidd and Rebecca Brooks in 2005 and is currently organized by Laurie Berg and Liliana Dirks-Goodman. Guided by core principles of collectivity, cooperation, and sharing, AUNTS generates a constantly shifting environment where artists negotiate the simultaneous production and/or presentation of their work in relationship to one another.

**Arthur Avilés** is a Gay New York-Rican with a personal movement practice through which he's developing his technique, Swift/Flow. He was a member of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company from 1987 to 1995 founded Arthur Avilés Typical Theatre in 1996. In 1998, co-founded BAAD! (The Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance) with Charles Rice-González.

**Maria Bauman** is a dance artist and community organizer. Her MBDance, showcased in the U.S., Singapore, and South Africa, is based on physical and emotional power, pursuit of equity, and fascination with intimacy, and is currently creating *dying and dying and dying*. Bauman is co-founder of ACRE (Artists Co-creating Real Equity).  
[vimeo.com/mbdance](http://vimeo.com/mbdance)

**Sidra Bell** Dance New York, is a boutique brand of prolific movement artists based in New York City that presents and fosters innovative and progressive dance theater.  
[www.sidrabelldance.org](http://www.sidrabelldance.org)

**John Bernd** (1953-1988), one of the first persons with AIDS in the Downtown Dance scene, was a "Bessie" Award-winning choreographer, performer, and "ethical guiding light." He performed his work at PS 122, Danspace Project, and Dance

Theater Workshop. He died in New York on August 28, 1988 of AIDS-related complications, at the age of 35.

**Brother(hood) Dance!** is an interdisciplinary duo that seeks to inform its audiences on the socio-political and environmental injustices from a global perspective, bringing clarity to the same-gender-loving African-American experience in the 21st century. Brother(hood) Dance! was formed in April 2014 by Orlando Zane Hunter, Jr. and Ricarrdo Valentine.

**Tara Burk** is a Philadelphia-based art historian who holds a doctorate from The Graduate Center, CUNY. Her dissertation, "Let the Record Show: Mapping Queer Art and Activism in New York City, 1986-1995," examines the activist art collectives Silence = Death Project, Gran Fury, and fierce pussy. Tara is a lecturer at Rutgers University.

**Archie Burnett** is a well-respected force in the underground dance world. He has performed and taught his craft in various parts of the world. His bodies of work range from music videos, to features in dance magazines like *Dance Ink*, and the *Village Voice* dance section feature, to performance coaching for up-and-coming recording artists.

**C.Carr** (Cynthia Carr) was an arts writer for *The Village Voice* from 1984 until 2003 and is the author of three books—most recently, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz*. Her work has also appeared in *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, and other publications.

**Travis Chamberlain** is a director and curator based in New York City. His work in performance is interdisciplinary, spanning contemporary theater, dance, cabaret, and performance art practices. As the Associate Curator of Performance at the New Museum, Chamberlain has organized multiple residencies, often with an emphasis on the exhibition of rehearsal-based research

produced through open studio formats.

**Tseng Kwong Chi** (1950 – 1990) was a key participant in the downtown 1980s New York art and club culture, capturing on camera his contemporaries Keith Haring, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf, Philip Taaffe, Madonna, Grace Jones, Ann Magnuson, the B-52's, and others. He is best known for his *East Meets West Self-Portrait Series 1979-1989*.

**Jaime Shearn Coan** is a writer and PhD Candidate in English at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Recent and forthcoming critical writing can be found in *TDR (The Drama Review)*, *Drain*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Jacket2*, and *Women + Performance: a journal of feminist theory*. He is the 2015-2016 Danspace Project Curatorial Fellow.

**Stuart Comer** is Chief Curator of the Department of Media and Performance Art at The Museum of Modern Art. His current exhibitions at MoMA include *Tony Oursler: Imponderable* (2016); the retrospective *Bruce Conner: It's All True* (2016); and a forthcoming survey of Mark Leckey's work at MoMA PS1.

**Dennis Cooper** is the author of ten novels as well as several collections of poetry and non-fiction. His books have been translated into 19 languages. He is a regular collaborator with the French theater director, Gisele Vienne, and a Contributing Editor of *Artforum*. He lives in Paris and Los Angeles.

**Eduardo C. Corral** is the author of *Slow Lightning*, which won the 2011 Yale Series of Younger Poets competition. He's the recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award, an NEA Fellowship, and the Holmes National Poetry Prize.

**Peter Cramer and Jack Waters** are founder-directors of Le Petit Versailles garden and Allied Productions, Inc. They have collaborated in over three decades of international collectivist culture & practice as filmmakers, artists, performers, activists, archivists, teachers, and mentors among



groups such as: POOL, ABC No Rio, DanceTube, Collaborative Projects, Inc., Queeruption, MIX NYC, Visual AIDS, and Film-Makers' Cooperative.

**Douglas Crimp** is Fanny Knapp Allen Professor of Art History at the University of Rochester and the author of *On the Museum's Ruins*, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*, "*Our Kind of Movie*": *The Films of Andy Warhol*, and *Before Pictures*. In 1987, he edited the special issue of *October*, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*.

**DANCENOISE** is Anne Iobst and Lucy Sexton. They began making dance-based performance work in 1983, performing in New York nightclubs and theaters including WOW Café, the Pyramid, Performance Space 122, Franklin Furnace, and The Kitchen. In 2015 DANCENOISE was invited to create and perform a retrospective at the Whitney Museum.

**DarkMatter** is a trans south asian performance art duo comprised of Alok Vaid-Menon and Janani Balasubramanian.

**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. Pub: *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (Oxford University Press); Creative: *Queer Theory! An Academic Travesty* commissioned by the Theater Offensive of Boston and the Flynn Center for the Arts.

**DonChristian** is a Philadelphia-born visual artist, performer, and producer. His work spans musical performance, rap mixtapes, painting installations, and public murals. *The Quietus* named his 2014 mixtape *Renzo Piano* one of the best albums of the year. His work blends the genres of painting and hip hop, referencing both classical and contemporary.

**Brenda Dixon Gottschild**—Professor Emerita, Dance Studies, Temple University. Author of *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*; *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era*; *The Black Dancing Body—A Geography from Coon to Cool*; and *Joan Myers Brown and The Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina—A Biobistory of American Performance*. www.bdxiongotschild.com

**Heidi Dorow** lives and works in NYC and tries very hard to love everybody.

**Timothy DuWhite** identifies as a writer, poet, playwright, performer, freelance journalist, advocate, thinker, believer, lover, friend, son, brother, and brown boi. Currently DuWhite is obsessed with teaching their community about the connections of the state and the violence inflicted on the black body through their writing workshop "HIV & The State: Coalition Building Beyond The Condom."

**Ethyl Eichelberger** (1945-1990) was a Downtown drag performer, a musician, playwright, and actor. Ethyl acted for The Ridiculous Theatre Company and Trinity Repertory Company, and his plays were staged at venues including The Pyramid Club, King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, and 8 B.C. He was unable to tolerate AZT and died from AIDS-related suicide.

**Talya Epstein** is originally from Massachusetts. Collaborators include Anna Azrieli, Isabel Lewis, Juliana May, Will Rawls, Melinda Ring, Tatyana Tenenbaum, & Larissa Velez-Jackson. Her work has been supported by the New England Foundation for the Arts, Movement Research, Dancepace Project's DraftWork series, AUNTS, Dixon Place, CPR, and The Bushwick Starr.

**Lesley Farlow** is a choreographer, dancer, and actress. She has worked as a dance historian and ran the Oral History Project at the Library for Performing Arts (NYPL) for nine years, where she started the AIDS

Oral History Project. Lesley is Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance faculty at Trinity College.

**Kenyon Farrow**, writer, activist, and public speaker, is the US & Global Health Policy Director for Treatment Action Group, an independent AIDS research and policy think tank. Kenyon has a long track record of community organizing work on criminalization, mass imprisonment, homelessness and HIV issues. <http://kenyonfarrow.com/>

**Davalois Fearon**, a critically acclaimed dancer/choreographer, is a featured dancer with the Stephen Petronio Company, which she joined in 2005 while a senior at SUNY Purchase. Her own company, Davalois Fearon Dance, will have its Joyce Theater debut as part of the American Dance Platform on January 5th and 7th, 2017.

**Alex Fialho**, Programs Director at Visual AIDS, has facilitated projects and conversations around both the history and immediacy of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, utilizing art to maintain HIV/AIDS visibility, consider its legacy, and galvanize contemporary response. He also curates exhibitions for Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and is a frequent contributor to *Artforum*.

**Karen Finley** is a multi-media artist who works in performance, visual culture, installation, text, sound, and film. *Shock Treatment* (City Lights) just had a 25th anniversary edition. Her most recent performance is *Unicorn, Gratitude, Mystery*. Finley performs and exhibits internationally and is an arts professor at Tisch School of the Arts, NYU.

**Dan Fishback** is director of The Helix Queer Performance Network. His musical *The Material World* made *Time Out New York's* Top 10 Plays list in 2012. His solo performance *thirtynothing* (2011) explored the queer generation gap created by early AIDS. Fishback curates the annual intergenerational queer series La MaMa's Squirts.

**Marjani Forté-Saunders** traveled as a performer with UBW and is now an independent artist and co-founder with Nia Love, of LOVE|FORTÉ. She is an LMCC Extended Life Residency participant and is a 2014 Princess Grace Awardee. Forté-Saunders' research and practice includes community organizing/partnership, choreography, contemporary technique, and improvisation. [www.marjaniforte.org](http://www.marjaniforte.org)

**Nan Goldin** (b. 1953) is an American photographer whose deeply personal images of her family, friends, lovers, and herself, document a visual record of love and loss. In 1979, she began presenting her first and most acclaimed body of work, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependence*, in New York nightclubs.

**Jonathan Gonzalez** is an artist and performer native to New York. He is preoccupied with wildness and illustration as they relate to performance in the theater. He has most recently been a NYLA Fresh Tracks artist, BAX/Dancing While Black Fellow, and Diebold Award recipient in Choreography & Performance.

**Neil Greenberg**: Merce Cunningham Dance Company 1979-1986; choreographies include *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* (1994), which employs his use of projected text as a layering strategy that provides doors into "meanings" in the dance, while raising questions about the nature of meaning-making; teaches at Eugene Lang College, The New School.

**Melanie Greene** is a movement artist swirling along the edges of the impossible and swimming in the sea of the minority. She was a recipient of a Gibney Dance boo-koo Space Grant, 2015/16 New York Live Arts Fresh Tracks residency, and 2016 Actors Fund Summer Push Grant. Stay tuned.

**Miguel Gutierrez**, a 2016 Doris Duke Artist, lives in Brooklyn and makes performances, music, and poetry. His work *Age & Beauty* was recently presented at AMERICAN REALNESS in

France. His book *WHEN YOU RISE UP* is available from 53<sup>rd</sup> State Press. He invented DEEP AEROBICS, and he is a Feldenkrais Method® practitioner. [www.miguelgutierrez.org](http://www.miguelgutierrez.org)

**Nick Hallett** is a composer, vocalist, and cultural producer. His work has been presented in recent years by the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, The Kitchen, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Public Theater/Joe's Pub, among others.

**Kayla Hamilton** hails from Texarkana, Texas. She earned a B.A. in Dance from Texas Woman's University and a M.Ed., Special Education from Hunter College. Kayla collaborates with Sydnie L. Mosley and Gesel Mason. Her multimedia solo project, *Nearly Sighted* (April 21-22, 2017, BAAD!), shares the stories of black female choreographers.

**Jasmine Hearn** is a choreographer and dancer. A native Houstonian, she graduated magna cum laude from Point Park University with her B.A. in Dance. A 2016 Movement Research Van Lier Fellow, Jasmine is a collaborator and performer with Marjani Forté, David Dorfman Dance, Helen Simoneau Dance, and Tara Aisha Willis.

**Marguerite Hemmings** is Jamaican-born, New Jersey raised, and lives in NYC. She subverts and creates with youth and fellow teaching artists. As a dancer, she specializes in street styles, social dances, hip hop, and dancehall, and is training in modern and West African. Her current project is *we free*.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones** is a curator, author, choreographer, and teacher. He was the curator for Platform 2012: *Parallels* and curates the DraftWork series, both at Dancespace Project. He has received two New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Awards, as well as Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Doris Duke, and Herb Alpert Awards.

**Denise Roberts Hurlin** is founding director of Dancers

Responding to AIDS, a program of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. DRA supports more than 450 AIDS and family service organizations in all 50 states ensuring that those in need have access to lifesaving medication, health care, counseling, nutritious meals, and emergency financial assistance.

**Judy Hussie-Taylor** is Executive Director and Chief Curator of Dancespace Project. She serves as a faculty member and advisor to the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance (ICPP) at Wesleyan University. Since taking the helm at Dancespace Project in 2008 she has developed the critically-acclaimed Platform series, which features new contexts for dance presenting.

**Bill T. Jones**, a critically acclaimed dancer/choreographer, is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company and Artistic Director of New York Live Arts. Jones has received major honors ranging from a 1994 MacArthur Genius Award to a 2010 Kennedy Center Honor to a 2013 National Medal of Arts named "An Irreplaceable Dance Treasure" by the Dance Heritage Coalition. [www.newyorklivearts.org](http://www.newyorklivearts.org)

**Darrell Jones** has researched with a variety of choreographers and companies such as Urban Bush Women, Ralph Lemon, Min Tanaka and Bebe Miller. Darrell is presently an Associate Professor at the Columbia College Chicago Dance Center.

**Niall Noel Jones** is a dance artist working in New York City and Philadelphia. Niall's research slips between performance and visual art practices engaging disorientation, pleasure, and materiality to consider structures of time in relation to impermanence and persistence. Niall teaches and is Creative Producer for the School of Dance at the University of the Arts.

**Deborah Jowitt** wrote for *The Village Voice* from 1967 to 2011 and publishes criticism at [artsjournal.com](http://artsjournal.com). Her books in-

clude *The Dance in Mind, Time and the Dancing Image*, and *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance*. She taught at NYU/Tisch until 2016 and has lectured worldwide.

**John Kelly**, performance and visual artist, recently completed his first graphic novel, and is working on a memoir based on 40 years of handwritten journals. He is developing a new solo work at Gibney Dance (through DiP), to premiere at La MaMa in Spring, 2017. He just released a studio recording, *Beauty Kills Me*.

**Raja Feather Kelly**, recipient of the 2016 Solange MacArthur Award for New Choreography, and 2016 NYFA Fellowship for Choreography, is the first and only choreographer to dedicate the entirety of his company's work to Andy Warhol. In search of the connections between popular culture and humanity, Kelly choreographs, writes, and directs his own work as Artistic Director of the feath3r theory.

**Theodore Kerr** is a Canadian-born, Brooklyn-based writer and organizer whose work focuses on HIV/AIDS. He was the programs manager at Visual AIDS. He has his Masters from Union Theological Seminary where he researched Christian Ethics and HIV.

**Jamil Olawale Kosoko**, co-director of anonymous bodies, is a Nigerian American performance and humanities curator, cultural strategist, and artist. He performs, teaches, lectures, and facilitates workshops in performance and healing practices internationally. Kosoko is a 2016 Gibney Dance boo-koo resident artist and a recipient of a 2016 USArtists International Award from the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation.

**Kia Labeija** is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Hellz Kitchen. Her work explores the intersections of community, politics, fine art and activism. Labeija, a former member of the Iconic House of Labeija, is an advocate for underrepresented communities living HIV positive including

long term survivors, women, minorities and children born with the virus.

**Greer Lankton** (1958-1996) was a key figure in the East Village in the 80s, a transgender artist known for making dolls that represented the "freaks" of the world along with "portrait dolls." A year before her death from a drug overdose, she showed at The Whitney Biennial, The Venice Biennale, and The Mattress Factory.

**Thomas J. Lax** is Associate Curator of Media and Performance Art at the Museum of Modern Art.

**Nia Love** is an artist, activist, choreographer, educator, installation artist, mother/grandmother, and co-founder of LOVE | FORTÉ. She has received Suitcase Fund, Fullbright, and CUNY Dance Initiative awards and was a BAX AIR twice. She is currently a MR AIR, AIR Advisor for BAX, and Assistant Professor at Queens College and Hunter College.

**Joshua Lubin-Levy** is a writer, dramaturg, and curator working at the intersection of contemporary choreography, underground performance and queer materialism. He is a current PhD candidate in the Department of Performance Studies at NYU, with a dissertation focused on the work of artist Jack Smith.

**Yaya McKoy** is a performance artist and poet using the Internet, social networks, and memes as art mediums. Their current work focuses on the medicalization of depression and the implications of filtering our creations, identities, and spiritualities through the white gaze.

**Paloma McGregor** is a New York-based, Caribbean-born choreographer whose work focuses on centering Black voices through collaborative, process-based art-making, teaching and organizing. Director, Angela's Pulse/Dancing While Black; Residencies include: 2016-17 NYLA; 2014-16 BAX; 2013-14 Hemispheric Institute of Performance and

Politics; Grants include: 2015 Surdna Foundation, Dance/USA; 2016 MAP Fund.

**Tim Miller** is an internationally acclaimed solo performer whose work has appeared in venues including the London ICA, The Walker Art Center, and The Brooklyn Academy of Music. He is the author of *SHIRTS & SKIN*, *BODY BLOWS*, and *1001 BEDS*, and a co-founder of PS122 and Highways Performance Space.

**Jennifer Monson** met John Bernd in 1982. He was performing at an exhibit of performance artists at Sarah Lawrence College curated by Tony Whitfield. She danced with John until his death, performing in PS122 Benefits, *Be Good to Me* (1985) and *Two on The Loose* (1988).

**Sydney L. Mosley** is an artist-activist-educator who produces experiential dance works with her all-woman company Sydney L. Mosley Dances. Her dances respond to street harassment, respectability politics, the economics of NYC dance, and more. Current recognitions include: The Field Leadership Fund, CUNY Dance Initiative, and the Dancing While Black Fellowship.

**Eileen Myles** is the author of nineteen books including *I Must Be Living Twice: New & Selected Poems*, and a 2015 reissue of *Chelsea Girls*. In 2016 Myles received a grant from Creative Capital and the Clark Prize for excellence in art writing. They live in New York and Marfa, Texas.

**Narcissister** is a Brooklyn-based artist and performer. Wearing mask and merkin, she works at the intersection of performance, dance, art, and activism. She actively integrates her prior experience as a professional dancer and commercial artist with her art practice in a range of media including photography, video art, and experimental music.

**Willi Ninja** (1961-2006) was a dancer and choreographer raised in Queens. A key figure in the New York ball scene, he's often credited with bringing

vogueing to international attention, through appearances in music videos and films, touring, and teaching. He died of AIDS-related heart failure in New York City on September 2, 2006.

**Rakiya Orange**, a Baltimore native, makes work through a personal lens that embraces the complexity of identity – real and unreal, material and metaphorical, imagined and performed. She holds a MFA in Dance from Hollins University. As a mover, maker, and educator, Rakiya is interested in ways to explore, expose, and explode sociocultural constructions.

**Grace Osborne** is a musician, sound artist, and practitioner of the healing arts from Los Angeles, California. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from Mills College with a B.A. in Music. Currently, she is a doctoral student at New York University. Her dissertation explores vibrational healing modalities, practitioners, and spaces.

**Eiko Otake**, born and raised in Japan, and New York-based since 1976, is a movement-based multidisciplinary performing artist. For over forty years, she has performed worldwide as Eiko & Koma. Eiko now directs and performs her solo project, *A Body in Places*, the subject of Danspace's Winter 2016 Platform. [www.eikoand-koma.org](http://www.eikoand-koma.org)

**iele paloupis** is a dance artist, educator, intuitive healer, and death doula. Their work is rooted within a trauma-informed framework that centers social justice. iele is a member of the Time Is Not A Line collective, a community from across the HIV spectrum responding to the ongoing AIDS crisis.

**Nicky Paraiso** (actor, curator, musician, performance artist, writer) has been Director of Programming at The Club at La MaMa since 2001 and is also Curator for the annual La MaMa Moves! Dance Festival. He has been an actor/performer in the NY downtown theater, dance and performance scene since 1979.

**Leslie Parker**, an independent dance artist, is a St. Paul, MN native based in Brooklyn, NY. As a current MFA in dance candidate at Hollins University, Parker continues her extensive research of dances derived from the African Diaspora from a feminine perspective. Parker facilitates movement workshops for Broadway Women's House Shelter.

**Marissa Perel** is an artist and writer based in New York. She was recently commissioned by the Americans with Disabilities Act to create a work for its 25th Anniversary, for which she collaborated with artist, activist, and scholar, Gregg Bordowitz. Their performance dialogue, *Bodies At The Center*, is excerpted here.

**Stephen Petronio** has honed a unique language of movement that speaks to the intuitive and complex possibilities of the body informed by its shifting cultural context for over 30 years. He continues to create a haven for dancers with a keen interest in the history of contemporary movement and an appetite for the unknown.

**Angie Pittman** is a dance artist, educator, and choreographer. A 2016 AIR with Movement Research, she has danced with Ralph Lemon, Jennifer Lacey and Wally Cordona, Tere O'Connor, and Jennifer Monson, and others. Angie's work investigates how her body moves through ballad, groove, sparkle, spirit, spirituals, ancestry, vulnerability, and power.

**Katy Pyle** seeks to insert the stories, bodies, and fantasies of lesbian, transgender, and queer people into the ballet canon, through her work as the creator and Artistic Director of the Ballez, which she founded in 2011. [Ballez.org](http://Ballez.org)

**Antonio Ramos** is a dancer, choreographer and certified bodywork practitioner from Puerto Rico whose work has been presented at American Realness, CPR, Jack, and El Museo del Barrio. He is currently a resident artist at Gibney Dance. Ramos is the artistic director

and choreographer for Antonio Ramos & the Gang Bangers. [antoniodance.com](http://antoniodance.com)

**Will Rawls** is a choreographer, writer and performer based in Brooklyn. He curated two film programs for Platform 12: *Parallels* and continues to write and curate on a freelance basis. He is recipient of the 2015 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Award and a 2017 Robert Rauschenberg Residency.

**Joan Retallack's** poetry is in recent and upcoming issues of *BOMB Magazine* and *Lana Turner*. She is author of *The Poetical Wager* and *Procedural Elegies / Western Civ Cont'd / – an Artforum Best Book of 2010*. *MUSICAGE*, her conversations with John Cage, is published by Wesleyan. She writes often, with pleasure, on Gertrude Stein.

**David Román** is Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Southern California. He has published several books on American theatre and performance including *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (1998). He has been teaching courses on AIDS and the Arts for over twenty-five years.

**Ali Rosa-Salas** is an independent curator from Brooklyn, NY. She has curated exhibitions and public programs for AFROPUNK, Barnard Center for Research on Women, Danspace Project, Knockdown Center, MoCADA, TOP RANK Magazine, and Weeksville Heritage Center. Ali is currently an MA candidate at the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University.

**Jen Rosenblit** currently makes performance between NYC and Berlin. Rosenblit's work unpacks the problematic spaces surrounding togetherness and autonomy, the contradictions around maintaining ourselves as we enter a kind of proximity with others. Rosenblit has collaborated Simone Aughtlerlony, Miguel Gutierrez, AK Burns, Kerry Downey, and Sasa Asentic among others.

**Assotto Saint** (1957-1994) was a poet, playwright, performer, editor, publisher, and activist, born in Haiti and raised in Queens. He formed Metamorphosis Theater, the band Xotica, along with Galiens Press, publishing two books of his own poetry and three anthologies of poetry by black gay men.

**Sarah Schulman** is a novelist, playwright, nonfiction writer, journalist, screenplay writer, and AIDS historian. Her most recent books are *Conflict Is Not Abuse*, and the novel *The Cosmopolitans*, which *Kirkus* called "a modern classic."

**Robert Sember** works at the intersection of art and public health. He is Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts at The New School's Eugene Lang College, a Senior Associate with the Center for Social Innovation, and a member of the sound-art collective, Ultra-red, which helped establish the Arbert Santana Ballroom Archive and Oral History Project.

**Lucy Sexton** works in dance, theatre and film. Beginning in the 1980s, she and Anne Iobst created, performed and toured with the seminal dance-performance group DANCENOISE. She also performs as The Factress. She is currently the Executive Director of the NY Dance and Performance Awards, The Bessies.

**Linda Simpson** has been a drag queen for almost 30 years as a performer, writer, playwright, and documentarian, including her slideshow *The Drag Explosion* documenting NYC's remarkable drag craze from the 1980s to the mid '90s. Her website is LindaSimpson.org.

**Sally Sommer**, Ph.D. is a writer, historian, and filmmaker whose articles and reviews on dance and popular culture have appeared widely. She is a Professor in American Dance Studies at Florida State University and produced and directed *Check Your Body at the Door* (2012) about dancers in the 1990s underground club scene in NYC.

**Danez Smith** is the 2016 winner of the Kate Tufts Poetry Award, 2016 Hopwood Awardee, winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry, and a founding member of the Dark Noise Collective. Smith's 2nd full-length collection will be published by Graywolf Press in 2017. Smith is from St. Paul, MN.

**Pamela Sneed** is a New York based poet, writer and actress. She has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Time Out*, *BOMB*, and on the cover of *New York Magazine*. In 2015, she published the chaplet *Gift* with Belladonna. She appears in Nikki Giovanni's *The 100 Best African American Poems*.

**Samantha Speis** is a movement artist based in New York. Along with working with others and creating her own work, she is currently a performer and the Associate Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women. Speis' solo, *The Way it Was, and Now*, was performed at Danspace Project for the *Parallels* Platform.

**Terence Taylor** (terencetaylor.com) is an award-winning children's television writer who turned to scaring their parents with his short story "Plaything," published in *Dark Dreams*. He's also author of the first two volumes of his *Vampire Testaments* trilogy: *Bite Marks* and *Blood Pressure*, and is working on *Past Life*, the conclusion.

**David Thomson** has worked since the 80s as a collaborative artist in the fields of music, dance, theater, and performance with a wide range of artists including Bebe Miller, Hot Mouth, Trisha Brown, Marina Abramovic, Yvonne Rainer, and Ralph Lemon among many others.

**Julie Tolentino** creates movement based-performance installation. Currently she is re-staging Ellen Cantor's COMING TO POWER at Maccarone; co-editor of TDR Provocation; developing a Clit Club book, GUARD YOUR DAUGHTERS. Her work is on view at Abrons Art Center, and Glasshouse.

**Carmelita Tropicana** is an Obie award winning performer and writer. Her work has been produced/presented nationally and internationally at INTAR Theatre, Performance Space 122, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo, Sevilla, El Museo del Barrio, NYC.

**Muna Tseng**, (born Hong Kong, lives and works in New York), is a choreographer and performer and Founder and Artistic Director of Muna Tseng Dance Projects, and serves on the Bessies: New York Dance & Performance Award committee. She has won prestigious awards in contemporary performance and choreography and lectures globally.

**Mariana Valencia**, dance artist, has held residencies at BAX, ISSUE Project Room, NYLA, Chez Bushwick, Pieter Pasd, Showbox LA and AUNTS-camp. Valencia is co-editor of Movement Research's *Critical Correspondence* and she is a member of the No Total reading group. She loves dance art and her friends, more info at [www.marianavalencia.work](http://www.marianavalencia.work).

**Larissa Velez-Jackson** is a NYC-based choreographer/multimedia artist. She is a 2016 Bessie award nominee for Outstanding Emerging Choreographer and a Foundation for Contemporary Art's Grant to Artists awardee. She choreographs a new work for her marital-art-pop collaborative Yackez at New York Live Arts, March 2017.

**Charmaine Warren** (B.A/M.A./PhD) is on faculty at Hunter College and Empire State College, and former faculty at Alvin Ailey/Fordham University, Kean University, and Joffrey Ballet School's Trainee Program. She performs, lectures, writes, and teaches dance. Charmaine curates for EMoves, The Wassai Project and founded "Dance on the Lawn:" Montclair's Dance Festival.

**Edisa Weeks** is a Brooklyn, NY based dance artist and educator who creates multimedia interdisciplinary work. [www.deliriousdances.com](http://www.deliriousdances.com)

**Janet Werther** is a Level II Ph.D student in Theatre at The Graduate Center, CUNY. She is also a research fellow through the CUNY Center for Humanities, collaborating with Danspace Project. Janet teaches Theatre at Baruch College and maintains a performance practice with the Ballez Company.

**Mariya Wethers** is a dancer based in NYC since 1997. She is currently dancing with iele paloupis and has performed with many other incredible artists over the years. She also works as an Independent Manager, Producer, and Curator.

**Jeff Weinstein** has edited and written about the arts, LGBTQ issues, food and style for the *Village Voice*, *Artforum*, the *New Yorker* and many other publications. His short story "A Jean-Marie Cookbook" was awarded a Pushcart Prize in 1982. In 2013 and '14, he was a juror for the Pulitzer Prize in criticism.

**Tara Aisha Willis** is Movement Research's Program Advisor, a 2016 Chez Bushwick AIR, and currently dances for Kim Brandt, Megan Byrne, Yanira Castro, and Anna Sperber. A PhD candidate in Performance Studies, NYU, she co-edited an issue of *The Black Scholar* with Thomas F. DeFrantz and sits on *Women & Performance's* Editorial Board.

**Ni'Ja Whitson** is an award-winning interdisciplinary artist, performer and writer. They have been referred to as "majestic" and "powerful" by *the New York Times*, winning dozens of recognitions across disciplines. Recent nods include an LMCC Process Space Residency, Bogliasco Fellowship, Brooklyn Arts Exchange Artist Residency, and two-time Creative Capital "On Our Radar" award.

**Jawanza James Williams** (pronouns, He, Him, They, Them) is a Black, radical Queer, Prison Abolitionist, Socialist, Community Organizer. He is a native of Beaumont, Texas. He received a BA in English from Schreiner University in 2012. He currently lives in NY and works with



Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL-NY).

**Reggie Wilson** is Executive and Artistic Director, Choreographer, and Performer of Reggie Wilson/Fist and Heel Performance Group. His work draws from the cultures of Africans in the Americas and is combined with post-modern elements and his own personal movement style to create what he sometimes refers to as “post-African/Neo-Hoodoo Modern dances.”

**Eva Yaa Asantewaa**’s writing has appeared in *Dance Magazine*, *The Village Voice*, *SoHo Weekly News*, *Gay City News* and other venues since 1976. Ms. Yaa Asantewaa writes the popular *InfiniteBody* arts blog (<http://infinitebody.blogspot.com>), founded in 2007, and was a WBAI broadcaster on the arts, LGBTQ issues, and spirituality (1987-89).

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Thank you to Reverend Allison Moore and St. Mark's Church.

A large and heartfelt thanks to the artists lost, only a fraction of whom are mentioned in these pages. You give our work meaning.

—*Lost & Found* Editorial Team  
(Judy Hussie-Taylor, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Will Rawls, Jaime Shearn Coan, Lydia Bell)

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