



DANSACE PROJECT PLATFORM 2012

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1982

Danspace Project
presents *Parallels*
with Blondell
Cummings, Fred
Holland, Rrata
Christine Jones,
Ishmael Houston-
Jones, Ralph Lemon,
Bebe Miller, Harry
Sheppard and Gus
Solomons jr.

1987

The American Center
in Paris, Dance
Umbrella in London
and Salle Patino
in Geneva present
Parallels in Black
with Blondell
Cummings, Fred
Holland, Ishmael
Houston-Jones, Ralph
Lemon, Bebe Miller
and Jawole Willa Jo
Zollar.

2012

Danspace Project
presents PLATFORM
2012: *Parallels* with
Kyle Abraham, niv
Acosta, Laylah Ali,
Souleymane Badolo,
Kevin Beasley,
Hunter Carter,
Nora Chipaumire,
Blondell Cummings,
Thomas F. DeFrantz,
Marjani A. Forté,
James Hannaham, Fred
Holland, Ishmael
Houston-Jones,
Pedro Jiménez,
Darrell Jones,
Niall Noel Jones,
Young Jean Lee,
Nicholas Lichter,
Ralph Lemon, Isabel
Lewis, Gesel Mason,
April Matthis, Bebe
Miller, Dean Moss,
Wangechi Mutu,
Okwui Okpokwasili,
Cynthia Oliver,
Omagbitse Omagbemi,
Will Rawls, Regina
Rocke, Gus Solomons
jr., Samantha Speis,
Stacy Spence, David
Thomson, Nari Ward,
Maryá Wethers,
Reggie Wilson, Ann
Liv Young and Jawole
Willa Jo Zollar.

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Ralph Lemon
Isabel Lewis
Gesel Mason



DANSPLACE PROJECT PLATFORM 2012

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Stacy Spence
David Thomson
Nari Ward
María Wethers
Reggie Wilson
Harry Sheppard
Ann Liv Young
Jawole Willa Jo Zollar



Pictured, left to right, top to bottom: (image one, 1982) Harry Sheppard, Rrata Christine Jones, Fred Holland, Ralph Lemon, Ishmael Houston-Jones (image two, 2012) Ishmael Houston-Jones, Ralph Lemon, Fred Holland, Rrata Christine Jones, Harry Sheppard (image three, 2012) Fred Holland, Dean Moss, Thomas F. DeFrantz, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Nora Chipaumire, Souleymane Badolo, Samantha Speis, Houston-Jones (image four, 2012) Regina Rocke, Stacy Spence, Blondell Cummings, Niall Noel Jones, Marjani Forté, David Thomson, Gus Solomons jr., Reggie Wilson (image five, 2012) Jones, Spence, Rocke (image six, 2012) Rocke, Spence, Cummings, Jones, Forté, Thomson, Solomons jr., Wilson

Not pictured: Kyle Abraham, niv Acosta, Laylah Ali, Kevin Beasley, Hunter Carter, James Hannaham, Pedro Jiménez, Darrell Jones, Young Jean Lee, Nicholas Leichter, Ralph Lemon, Isabel Lewis, Gesel Mason, April Matthis, Bebe Miller, Wangechi Mutu, Okwui Okpokwasili, Cynthia Oliver, Omagbitse Omagbemi, Will Rawls, Nari Ward, Marýa Wethers, Ann Liv Young

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* Davis poem continues pages 27, 50, 60, 80, 88

¹ Working in new forms, stepping outside tradition is like taking a solo...





Introduction

JUDY HUSSIE-TAYLOR

The Danspace Project PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels*, curated by Ishmael Houston-Jones, marks the 30th anniversary of the original *Parallels* curated by Ishmael at Danspace Project in 1982. It also marks the sixth chapter in Danspace Project's Choreographic Center Without Walls Platform series, made possible with lead support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

In his essay, Ishmael wonders whether there is currently a mainstream against which to position oneself. His is an increasingly complicated question artistically and politically as demonstrated by our current Occupy-everything moment. In her essay for the 2010 exhibition *Move. Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s* Peggy Phelan indirectly addresses the issue in the following passage:

The unexamined shadows of women and people of non-white cultures are abundant ghosts in the history of Western art: rather than list and measure all these missing bodies (of work and lack of work) here we may simply note that one of the center's most consistent habits is making margins. Bodies of work that take movement as their subject and form are perhaps especially neglected since they can tell us so much about centering, and the function of centers, as ethical practice.ⁱ

Ishmael's inclusion of a diverse range of African, Caribbean and African-American experimental artists, most of whom work and live in New York City today, represents an ethics driven by a need to move against a fixed center. His artistic and curatorial practices mirror one another; he embraces ambiguity and resists over-simplification and easy categorization. As a master improviser, his aesthetic is agency in action. To see him improvise is to watch his mind in motion; his unpredictability charges the space.

Ishmael has been rediscovered today by a younger generation of artists, and he is just as interested in their work as they are in his. He is committed to teaching them as well as seeing and showing their work. Last year's Performance Space 122 reprisal of his 1985 evening-length piece *THEM*, in collaboration with Chris Cochrane and Dennis Cooper, garnered a 2011 Bessie Dance & Performance Award. The work included a cast of some of the most remarkable young performers in dance today. A second thrilling discovery for me was the archival footage of Ishmael and Fred Holland's 1983 performance in which they set out to break all the rules of contact improvisation. The first rule broken was, according to Ishmael, "we were black." Both pieces are historical yet exude a remarkably contemporary urgency.

Ishmael's work—urgent, intelligent, sly and generous—also characterizes his curation of the present Platform. This intergenerational group of artists spanning five decades represents a 21st century kinesthetic force. It is

our hope that this publication will provide context and history but that the performances will provide a snapshot of this moment. These eight weeks of performance will be the latest contributions to the palimpsest that is Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church.

Parallels evolved and grew over two years. Some of the original artists joined the curatorial team and have organized evenings and events of their own. Some have contributed to the catalogue. But it was important to Ishmael that the Platform be forward-looking and for that reason he has included many emerging artists and designed weekends that allow for multiple voices rather than weeks devoted to the works of single choreographers.

The Platform's structure is rhizomic with simultaneous connections moving in many directions at once while being deeply connected underground. These connections extend to organizations as well as individual artists and move from Brooklyn and the East Village uptown to The Studio Museum in Harlem where we are co-presenting *The Artist's Voice*, a conversation about Ishmael's work moderated by visual artist Wangechi Mutu. *Parallels* also marks a major partnership between Danspace Project and Wesleyan University's new Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance (ICPP) with support from The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Last year, *Parallels* was a case study in the ICPP curriculum with Ishmael, Ralph Lemon and Kyle Abraham participating as guest artists. We discussed the original *Parallels* program, Ishmael's curatorial process and the role of the artist as curator. ICPP students read a draft version of Ishmael's essay and viewed footage of Ishmael and Fred Holland performing at Danspace Project in the early 80s. In addition, ICPP student Lydia Bell is a Curatorial Fellow at Danspace Project and is the managing editor of this catalogue. Her contributions have been invaluable.

The connective web of these eight weeks of performances, residencies, installations, durational performances and film showings reflects Ishmael's choreographic mind. *Parallels* is a complex structured improvisation that allows for multiple voices, ideas and histories. As with any curatorial project there are unavoidable omissions, some due simply to the complicated, nomadic lives of busy artists. Ishmael presents no grand narrative here but his gestures are large.

JUDY HUSSIE-TAYLOR is Executive Director of Danspace Project, where she has developed the Choreographic Center Without Walls (CW²) and its acclaimed PLATFORM series. She was formerly Director of the Colorado Dance Festival, Artistic Director for Performance Programs at the Boulder Museum for Contemporary Art and Deputy Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver. From 2000-2004, she taught in the Department of Art & Art History at the University of Colorado-Boulder and currently serves as an adviser and faculty for the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University.

ENDNOTE

¹ Peggy Phelan in *Move. Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s*, ed. Stephanie Rosenthal. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).







CURATORIAL STATEMENT

ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES

PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels* begins for me with a question—with a series of questions. In her groundbreaking book on the eponymous subject, *The Black Dancing Body*, Brenda Dixon Gottschild interviewed a wide range of people in the field including Bebe Miller, Bill T. Jones, Gus Solomons jr., Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Meredith Monk, Ralph Lemon, Ronald K. Brown, and Wendy Perron. Dixon Gottschild asked them to use “memory, fantasy, dreams, mythology...” to answer the question: “what images come to the mind’s eye when the term ‘black dance’ is said?”ⁱ This has been my conundrum while curating this platform. How would I have answered her question? For me does “Black Dance” even exist? And assuming it does, what defines it? Is the term “mainstream Black Dance” an oxymoron? What would it mean to push beyond its mainstream if it does exist?

In *Terminology of Difference: Making the Case for Black Dance in the 21st Century and Beyond*, Dr. Takiyah Nur Amin, Department of Dance, University of North Carolina at Charlotte references several designations:

- Katherine Dunham, in the foreword to Lynne Fauley Emery’s 1988 *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today* defines Black Dance as simply “the dance forms of people of African origin.”
- In the February 2008 issue of *Dance Magazine* Theresa Ruth Howard openly challenged and ultimately dismissed the significance of Black Dance as a useful term of any kind: “Black dance is a term that sets the doers apart as separate and unequal in artistic validity” and “the work created by African Americans is too diverse to be compartmentalized and uniformly labeled.”
- Zita Allen’s 1988 article, *What is Black Dance?* probed the various definitions of the term and exposed it as not only a haphazard label employed by critics but as a perfunctory funding mechanism utilized to secure grant dollars for Black choreographers as well.
- Choreographer Bill T. Jones provides a concise definition of Black Dance as “any dance that a person who is black happens to make.”ⁱⁱ

But there is an oblique lineage; there is an implied genealogy. In another section of her book Dixon Gottschild discusses the dances of William Henry Lane in the mid-1800s. Dance historian Marian Hannah Winter characterized Lane, whose stage name was Master Juba, as the “most influential single performer of nineteenth-century American dance.”ⁱⁱⁱ Dixon Gottschild surmises that Lane’s contribution to the form “was forging an original, innovative merger of Africanist-based torso articulations, footwork, and rhythmic syncopation with Europeanist steps characteristic of the Irish jig... In merging these two streams Lane laid the groundwork for twentieth-century pop culture and its seamless

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fusion of black and white forms that is so definitively American.”^{iv} And he did this performing in blackface.

In the 1920s, Josephine Baker was enthralling the Parisian public with her comic and erotic vaudeville routines such as *Danse sauvage*, in which she famously wore a costume consisting of a skirt made of a string of artificial bananas. Meanwhile back in the States the Theater Owners Booking Association, or T.O.B.A., was the vaudeville circuit for African-American performers such as dancers Walter Batie and Earl “Snakehips” Tucker. American audiences could see incredible tap performances by African-American professional tappers like Buster Brown, John Bubbles, Charles “Honi” Coles, James Cross and Harold Cromer (a.k.a. Stump and Stumpy), and the world-famous Bill “Bojangles” Robinson.

In her book *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* Susan Manning makes the case that there was much cross-pollination and “borrowing” between the two milieus in the early days of the twentieth century, but she does observe that “During the years when (White choreographers) Helen Tamiris and Ted Shawn performed their *Negro Spirituals* dozens of times in New York City, Negro dancers presented their danced spirituals no more than twenty times...”^v Manning cites Edna Guy and Hemsley Winfield’s “First Negro Dance Recital in America” on April 29, 1931 as being at “the intersection of the little theater movement in Harlem, leftist culture and the white dance establishment.”^{vi} She elaborates, “Guy and Winfield intended nothing less than to break with precedent and to start anew. Following their logic, the rich tradition of jazz dancing on the American stage did not count as ‘Negro Dance’ ... not Bill Robinson, not Josephine Baker.”^{vii} So, in the 1930s there was already a debate as to what legitimately constituted “Black Dance” in America.

In the 1930s and 40s two dancer/anthropologists, Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, were to change the field of Black Dance and Black Dance scholarship in significant ways. While doing graduate work at the University of Chicago majoring in anthropology with emphasis on dance and its relation to cultures, Dunham researched popular Black dance forms like the Cake Walk, the Lindy Hop and the Black Bottom. This is echoed in the work of African-American choreographers today whose work is informed by contemporary Black social dances. Dunham received a 1935 Guggenheim Fellowship to study dances in the Caribbean, particularly Haiti. This would inform her performing and teaching for decades. In 1945 she opened the Dunham School of Dance and Theatre. The following year the school expanded becoming the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research (incorporating the Dunham School of Arts and Theatre, the Department of Cultural Studies, and the Institute for Caribbean Research). Pearl Primus, Dunham’s contemporary, whose first evening of dance was performed at the 92nd Street “Y” in 1943, was given a Rosenwald Fellowship in 1948 to spend 18 months studying the dances of West Africa. Her research there influenced her subsequent choreography, including “Fanga,” a dance of welcome that became her signature. The work of these two women did much to change the perception and study of Black dance in America. Several of the American participants of PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels* have chosen to study and do research in Africa and the Caribbean.

From the official Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater website we learn that:

Ailey was born on January 5, 1931 in Rogers, Texas... At age 12, he moved with his mother to Los Angeles, where he was introduced to dance by performances of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. His formal dance training began with an introduction to Lester Horton's classes... Horton, the founder of the first racially integrated dance company in the United States, became a mentor for Mr. Ailey... After Horton's death in 1953, Mr. Ailey became director of the Lester Horton Dance Theater and began to choreograph his own works.^{viii}

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was founded in 1958, and the group presented its inaugural concert on March 30, of that year.

In his *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, Ailey wrote of racial discrimination when he was a young dancer: "In the 1940s and 1950s the American dance world practiced a pervasive racism. For a variety of reasons: Our feet weren't shaped right, our butts were too big, our legs wouldn't turn out correctly... The people who ran the major and minor ballet and modern dance companies coldly rejected, and broke the hearts of, many aspiring young black dancers."^x Thomas F. DeFrantz writes in his book *Dancing Revelations*:

Ailey created his company with three goals in mind: he wanted to employ the scores of excellent black dancers in New York who had no performing homes; he wanted to create a racially integrated repertory company that could perform both modern dance classics and new works by himself and other young choreographers; and he wanted to give artistic voice to African American experience in terms of concert dance. His most obvious success came in this last, as early performances of *Blues Suite* and *Revelations* established Ailey's company as the foremost dance interpreter of African American experience.

But of the first dozen dances Ailey made, only these two dealt with African American cultural history. Still Ailey was consistently reviewed as a Negro dancer, and by extension, someone suited to make dances only on Negro themes.^x

Another complexity of the Ailey Company was that in 1961 race relations in the United States were in a state of turmoil. In that year mob violence flared as Black students desegregated the University of Georgia and other colleges; student protesters were jailed for conducting sit-ins at southern lunch counters and other public accommodations; Black and White freedom riders were beaten while trying to integrate interstate public transportation; Blacks were prevented from voting in several states spawning the Voter Registration movement and the violent, and often deadly, resistance to it. But also, as DeFrantz writes, "The active relationship between government sponsorship and Ailey's choreographic creativity began in the fall of 1961 when the State Department invited Alvin Ailey Dance Theater to tour Southeast Asia and Australia."^{xi} DeFrantz further writes, "The Ailey Company's unique status as the sole exponent of an emerging standard of African-American concert dance during this period complicates an assessment of racial politics and the delineation of "official" black culture. As the U.S. government sanctioned the Ailey



company, producing its tours, it took a covert hand in molding what became the signature style of Afro-American concert dance.”^{xii}

By the early 1980s the Ailey Company had toured to Southeast Asia, Australia, Brazil, 10 countries in Africa, Mexico, and the USSR (where they received a 20 minute standing ovation in Moscow), as well as performing at the White House for Presidents Johnson and Carter. At a time when the fires for full equality for Blacks in the United States were burning the United States government was exporting this racially integrated, (but mostly Black), dance company headed by a Black man as an exemplar of American art.

This is all to say that there is an extensive and diverse and complicated legacy of dance artists of African ancestry making work here in the United States. But that lineage, like any cultural family tree, might have common roots but many branches spreading in a multitude of directions. And culture is not static. Styles, fashions, definitions, allegiances, commonalities, and inspirations shift over time.

So it was in 1982 when I was newly arrived in New York from Philadelphia where I'd performed with Group Motion Media Theater (a company led by two former members of the Mary Wigman ensemble in Berlin) and studied improvisation with Terry Fox, African at The Arthur Hall Afro American Dance Ensemble, modern (Horton) with Joan Kerr as well as contact improvisation and one semester of ballet. I asked Cynthia Hedstrom, the director of Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, if I could curate a series composed of a group of "Black" choreographers who were working outside the Mainstream of Modern Dance. All those definitions seemed so simple to me then. To me "Blacks" were the descendants of West Africans who were brought to the Americas as slaves in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. They may or may not have voluntarily intermarried with Native Americans or less voluntarily interbred with the majority population. They were all "freed" by the end of the 19th century but suffered discrimination in the form of Jim Crow laws, the inability to vote, or to use the same public facilities or acquire equal education as the majority population. They could not marry whomever they wanted, and they suffered real violence and death in the struggle to correct these inequities. They also invented Spirituals, Gospel, Blues, Jazz and Rap. That's who "Black" folk were to me then. I did not consider folks from other parts of the Diaspora: not the Caribbean and no, not Africa.

What was "beyond the mainstream" was somewhat trickier to define. The Judson Dance Theater (1962-64) is usually cited as the watershed moment in Dance History when traditional concert modern dance gave way to a period of more experimental post-modern dance with Merce Cunningham seen as the intermediary figure. However, most often in the history of the Judson era the contributions of Black experimentalists are either invisible or relegated to a footnote of the more "serious" post-modern choreographers. In her book *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*, Danielle Goldman discusses two examples of this. Judith Dunn, a White dancer with the Cunningham Dance Company and the

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Judson Dance Theater, formed an ongoing artistic collaboration with Black trumpeter, writer, visual artist Bill Dixon. Goldman writes, “In addition to creating striking improvised works, their collaborations explored and openly acknowledged relations between what has been deemed a black, masculine tradition of improvised music and the rather white, feminine world of post-modern dance.”^{xiii} But these “striking” improvisations are rarely mentioned in the written histories of the Judson era. Goldman goes on to discuss the work of Dianne McIntyre. McIntyre, a contemporary of Judith Dunn, who in “many ways received the same modernist training as Dunn. But as a black woman, she fit into the tradition differently. McIntyre worked with a number of musicians throughout her career, including Cecil Taylor, Olin Dara, Butch Morris, and Abbey Lincoln. She also studied with dancers from Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom, “demonstrating ... the deep relations between the mid-century dance hall and the concert stage... in 1972 McIntyre formed an ensemble of improvising musicians and dancers called Sound in Motion.”^{xiv} In Merrill Brockway’s 1980 Dance in America PBS special *Beyond the Mainstream* the only non-white person who appears in the hour is Kei Takei. Were there no African-Americans working beyond Brockway’s mainstream? Ditto for Michael Blackwood’s 1981 documentary, *Making Dances*, featuring the work of Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs, David Gordon, et al. (Blondell Cummings is seen performing in a clip of Monk’s *Education of the Girlchild*.) This same cast of choreographers, with a few variations, shows up in Sally Banes’ 1982 book *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. Apparently, in a dance movement that began in the impassioned defiant days of the 1960s and proclaimed from the stage and in manifestos that dance was a democratic form for everyone, “everyone” was a rather limited concept.

What I think I meant when I approached Cynthia Hedstrom, was that as a Black dance maker, I didn’t feel the same spiritual connection with Alvin Ailey that I did with people doing contact improvisation or folks dancing at the Palladium and the Pyramid Clubs or b-boys and girls break dancing on cardboard in the streets, or those bizarre New Wave Drag performers or even many graffiti artists, or punk musicians. Of course seeing Judith Jamison performing Ailey’s *Cry* was one of the events that made me want to dance in the first place and I could come to my feet and clap along with the finale of his *Revelations*. But aesthetically what I wanted to make and perform was as far away from those classics as were *Giselle* or *Les Sylphide*. So I brought together two weekends of shared programming to declare, as I did in my program notes, “I chose the name *Parallels* for the series because while all the choreographers participating are Black and in some ways relate to the rich tradition of Afro-American dance, each has chosen a form outside of that tradition and even outside the tradition of mainstream modern dance... this new generation of black artists—who exist in the parallel worlds of Black America and of new dance—is producing work that is richly diverse.”

It’s been thirty years since Blondell Cummings, Fred Holland, Rrata Christine Jones, Ralph Lemon, Bebe Miller, the late Harry Sheppard, Gus Solomons jr. and I performed on the first *Parallels* series at Danspace Project. It’s been twenty-five since Jawole Willa Jo Zollar joined us on

the *Parallels in Black* tour to Paris, Geneva and London. Now Bebe, Gus, Jawole along with David Rousseve, Cynthia Oliver, myself and others are on the faculties of major university dance departments. In the first *Parallels* series I was making the case that to be a contemporary Black dance maker, one did not have to be a direct descendant of Ailey. We were coming from Cunningham, Nina Weiner, Monk, Contact Improvisation as well as African and American Black Dance traditions. Now many of those traditions are part of the Modern Dance canon; dance students have been exposed to those forms and to us as teachers.

So here we are, 2012; it's a new century. The President of the United States is the son of a White American woman and a Kenyan man. He was raised partly in the Kansas heartland, partly in the diverse state of Hawaii and partly in Indonesia. He does not share the history of having his ancestors being bought and sold in this country. He was elected in his forties and has not suffered the direct effects of Jim Crow, and violence. Still, most Americans, of whatever ethnicity, refer to him as "the first Black President" though no one can deny that were it not for his job title and the security with which it comes, in many circumstances, in many localities, he would be treated like just another "Brother" on the street. This is to say; the definition of who is "Black" has changed. Who has the right to claim "Blackness?" What it is, and what it ain't? But in some ways it is still the same.

Again, that "mainstream" designation is still thornier. After the rebellion of Judson in the 60s and the maturing of some of those artists making their experiments in choreography fit opera house stages, there was a shift away from New York to France and Belgium and Austria. Then it was Asia, then new dance coming out of Africa. Then a swing back to New York or was it Eastern Europe? And to who knows where it is now. Is there a "mainstream" to be beyond any more? As the African-American choreographers of my generation have continued using their progressive ideas to make new works and to disrupt the canon, whom can we identify as the next generation who will wreak havoc on the status quo? In the age of Obama does it mean anything to be either, or both, a post-modern dance maker or an Black dance maker? Is there a group of young Black choreographers breaking away from whatever the mainstream is now?

For PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels*, I want to keep looking forward, while remaining cognizant of our shared pasts (plural). Of course, it goes without saying, that all platforms, no matter how comprehensive a curator tries to be, will always exclude more than it includes. Some of those choices were determined by factors as banal as time and money—never enough of either in the arts, particularly with dance. Having lived and worked in Lower Manhattan for most of the last 30 years, I admit to a New York bias in what I've seen and thus chosen. And again (lack of) funds for travel determined some choices. But I forced myself to make some challenging decisions that reflect back on what my dance interests are and what I see as work that is advancing the form onward.

I met Will Rawls through his curation of Movement Research's Spring

Festival in 2009. I know he's a young man of ideas and concepts. He has an interest in many things, among them dance and film. After his work curating video screenings for Movement Research and producing a documentary for that organization, I was eager to have him curate two film programs for this Platform. Our ideas meshed around using both archival and current video forms and that all the works screened did not have to be "dance" films per se. Will is also a intriguing dance maker and a gifted mover. His pieces work both on a deeply visceral and intellectual level. I am excited to see what he makes for *Parallels*.

For the first week of the Platform I have paired Will with current American ex-pat Isabel Lewis. I missed Isabel's fractured family drama *Lewis Forever* when it was presented at Performance Space 122, but I have seen other works of hers. Often she treads a line between dance and theater. She often disarms her audiences with casual throwaway delivery followed by fierce hotness in her dance and body. I am thinking of specific moments in her collaborations in the work of provocateur Ann Liv Young where Isabel's clarity of focus while performing the most transgressive material was staggering. And in her own work, I've seen her start calmly delivering a lecture on the history of head banging that suddenly develops into a full out demonstration that feels riveting and dangerous.

In the second weekend of the Platform I've solicited the expertise of three influential dance makers of my generation. I've asked them to curate three distinct evenings to give a variety of views of what they see as innovative works being made by Black choreographers today. Both Bebe Miller and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar were important participants with *Parallels* in the 1980s. Bebe Miller, the artistic director of Bebe Miller Company and professor at Ohio State University was on the original 1982 *Parallels* series; Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the founder of Urban Bush Women and professor at Florida State University joined Bebe and me and others for the *Parallels in Black* European tour in 1987; Dean Moss, founder of Gametophyte Inc., in his long-time role as Curator of Dance at the Kitchen brought many ground-breaking artists to that venue. I let them shape their evenings with few restrictions. Jawole's focus is on the many ways in which improvisation is a part of the Black Dance vernacular and Bebe has chosen to look at the lineage of Black Dance through the work of three female dance makers. Meanwhile, Dean has chosen to trouble the very meaning of "Black" and is using it in a more metaphoric signification that is sure to provoke thoughts and comments.

For the weekend *From the streets, From the clubs, From the houses: Work inspired by Urban Dance Forms* I chose artists whose work is deeply informed by Hip-Hop, Vogueing, and other forms of Black-instigated popular dance. I have seen Niall Noel Jones, Regina Rocke, Nicholas Leichter and Darrell Jones all do work that recalls club and social dancing and at times I've seen them do work that is formal and almost classical. I am interested in how they negotiate, (or don't negotiate), those two parallel lines of investigation. We will present pre-show screenings of an excerpt from Sally Sommer's film *Check your Body at the Door*, the most thorough history of voguing and club dancing to date.

I've already written of Dean Moss as a curator; he is a gifted and ingenious choreographer as well. I am often struck by his collaborations with visual artists such as Laylah Ali. He has used audience participation, language and tropes of cultural difference to amplify the impact of the work. Reggie Wilson is a 21st century dance anthropologist. He has traveled the Caribbean, the American South and Africa to find inspiration and material for what he calls "post-African/Neo-Hoodoo Modern dances." In this work he will be working in collaboration with Souleymane Badolo who is a contemporary dancer and dance-maker from Burkina Faso who last appeared at Danspace Project in his work *Yaado* on the Platform *i get lost*.

I am very pleased that the goddess of schedules allowed the following week to happen. Two strong, powerful, and stunningly beautiful daughters of Africa will be performing separately and together in collaboration. I first saw Zimbabwe-born Nora Chipaumire in her tour de force solo, *Chimurenga*. I then saw her in *Les écailles de la mémoire* (*The scales of memory*), a collaboration with the dancers of Compagnie Jant-Bi and Urban Bush Women, where she stood out among all the very fine dancers of both troupes. I feel very fortunate she can be a part of this Platform. Okwui Okpokwasili is a native New Yorker, born in the Bronx to parents from Nigeria. Okwui had been a highlight in the downtown theater scene, performing in the works of Richard Foreman, Young Jean Lee and others. But it is in the dance work of Ralph Lemon that I really began to be captivated by her presence as a mover onstage. Then I saw her own *Pent-Up: A Revenge Dance* and I became a permanent fan. What these women will produce has left me filled with anticipation.

The following week brings compelling work from three younger choreographers. I had never seen Marjani Forté before her solo, *Ego*, on a shared program. The power of her presence in her confrontation with the audience and herself made me eager to see more. I have been following Samantha Speis' work since she was a student at the American Dance Festival. Upon her arrival in New York I programmed her in both a DraftWork and a Food for Thought at Danspace Project. I was glad when I heard that she had joined Urban Bush Women and was overjoyed at her performances with that company. She is definitely one to watch. Kyle Abraham's lightening quick moves reference crumping and other forms of Urban Dance battles. On video sometimes he dances so rapidly that viewers are convinced that the images have been sped up. He then contrasts these high-speed solo works with elegant group dances as he challenges himself to fashion his movements onto other bodies.

The final week of the Platform brings another evening of films curated by Will Rawls, a performed lecture by Dr. Thomas F. DeFrantz, a three hour long durational performance by Stacy Spence, a panel discussion with Blondell Cummings, Henry Pillsbury and Barbara Watson, the producers of the *Parallels in Black* European tour and a performance installation designed by Ralph Lemon with Jamaican-born artist Nari Ward. I became aware of Nari's work when he made the stage design for Ralph's first installment of *The Geography Trilogy*, a wall of bare bedsprings that confined the space floor to ceiling. Ralph has asked him to make a simple construction for

which Ralph will choose a series of people to interact with over the course of a day. This fits well with Ralph’s aesthetic and conceptual concerns that were evident even in 1982 when, during the first *Parallels*, he covered the floor of St. Mark’s sanctuary with about 100 red apples, each of which had one bite taken out, and he danced in a green linen skirt as two saxophonists (Chris Hyams-Hart and Carla Brownlee) played live and moved around the space.

So is there such a thing as Black Dance in America? Is there “mainstream” Black Dance? And if it does exist, who is pushing the boundaries of that mainstream now? PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels* was my attempt to answer these questions.

ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES’ first performance in New York as a New Yorker was a duet with Daniel Lepkoff in the Parish Hall of Saint Mark’s Church, presented by Danspace Project. Since then he has performed numerous times at Danspace Project and has served on the board of directors, curated for Dive-In and Food for Thought and is currently curator for the DraftWork Series. He lives and makes work in New York.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography From Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2003), 47.

ⁱⁱ Excerpts from Takiyah Nur Amin, “A Terminology of Difference: Making the Case for Black Dance in the 21st Century and Beyond.” *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 4, no. 6, (Sept. 2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography From Coon to Cool*, 110.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Susan Manning, *Modern Dance Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 30.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} “Biography,” accessed October 12, 2011, <http://www.alvinailey.org/about/people>.

^{ix} Alvin Ailey with A. Peter Bailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*. (Secaucus, New Jersey: Carol Pub Group, 1995), 51.

^x Thomas F. DeFrantz. *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid., 59

^{xiii} Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 24.

^{xiv} Ibid., 25.



² The artist breathes
in a heap of air, the
chords, tones, and
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DANSPACE PROJECT

PRESENTS

PARALLELS

with

BLONDELL CUMMINGS

FRED HOLLAND

RRATA CHRISTINE JONES

ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES

RALPH LEMON

BEBE MILLER

HARRY SHEPPARD

GUS SOLOMONS JR.

St. Mark's Church
New York, New York

Oct. 27, 28, 29 1982

PARALLELS

Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church

Parallels was chosen as the name for this series because while all the choreographers participating are black and in some ways relate to the rich tradition of Afro-American dance, each has chosen a form outside of that tradition, and even outside of the tradition of mainstream modern dance, to express his or her unique and personal art. Several of the choreographers have studied traditional African dance forms; others have not. Some have been members of traditional modern dance companies; others come to their art through contact improvisation, jazz collaborations, and performance art. If there is an implicit "message" to be gotten from this series, it is that this new generation of black artists - who exist in the parallel worlds of Black America and of new dance - is producing work that is richly diverse.

Ishmael Houston-Jones
Series Coordinator

Lighting Design by Carol Mullins
Program Director: Cynthia Hedstrom
Assistant to the Director: M.J. Becker
Technical Coordinator: Dan Froot
Technical Assistant: Christine Hopkins

EMERGENCE (Premiere)

Performed by RRATA DANCE ETC. ENSEMBLE
Collaborative Work by Rrata Christine Jones
and Jeanne Lee
Choreography by Rrata Christine Jones
Dancers: Cheryl Banks, Rrata Christine Jones,
Gayle Loftis Malcolm
Music: Jeanne Lee (poetry, vocals, co-composer)
Amina Claudine Myers (piano, vocals, co-composer)
Costumes: Rrata
Special thanks to Pat Cruz
Donors: Earthforms Rituals, Inc., Universal Jazz
Coalition, Executive Director, Cobi Narita,
Dancerschool, Donald Sanders & Vanessa James,
Anthony Barboza, Ruzi

* Intermission *

CHICKEN SOUP (1981)

Conceived & Performed by Blondell Cummings
The first in a developing series of portraits dealing with personal food attitudes to be premiered in February, 1983, at DTW.
Texts: "The Long Distance Runner" and "Enormous Changes at the Last Moment" by Grace Paley;
"Kitchens 1970" by Pat Steir; "Chicken Soup Recipe" from The Settlement Cookbook.
Music: Brian Eno, Meredith Monk, Colin Walcott
The scene takes place in the character's home.
Special thanks to P.S. 1, Jane Comfort, Bill Dunas, Marjorie Gamso, Improvisational Art Ensemble, Inc.

PART 2: RELATIVES (excerpt) (1980)

Dance by Ishmael Houston-Jones
Text Improvised by Ishmael Houston-Jones &
Pauline Jones

- 1) Mothy-Mothy, Din-Din
- 2) In the Dark (rhythm section)
- 3) The Generations Litany
- 4) Relativity
- 5) 2 Solos

Part 2: Relatives is the middle panel of a triptych entitled The Generation of Heat, the three parts of which are being developed simultaneously and independently. This weekend's performance is for all people trying to find their way Home.

Nov. 4, 5, 6 1982

SUPPLE BURDEN (work in progress)

A Work in Two Sections: Photo/Drawing
Concept by Fred Holland
Realized & Performed by Trinket Monsad &
Fred Holland
Film by Friede Butzmann

STEPS VI: PARTICLE DIMINISH (preview performance)

Choreographed & Performed by Gus Solomons, Jr.
Music by Mio Morales

VESPERS (premiere)

Choreographed & Performed by Bebe Miller
Music Based on Gregorian Chants, Sung by
Linda Gibbs


Special thanks to Jack Robinson & Dana Reitz

* Intermission *

WANDA IN THE AWKWARD AGE (1982)

By Ralph Lemon
Performed by Carla Brownlee (sax), Mary Good,
Simone Van Den Ende, Chris Hyams (sax),
Ralph Lemon, Greg Williams (bass)
Film by Thomas Frantzen & Ralph Lemon
Confessions taped by Ralph Lemon & David Scher
Green Costume by Kay Stuntz
Projectionist: Carol Ruthberg

Special thanks to Phil Lee, Julie Finch, David
Scher, Carla Dill

" (the Mother Tongue) (premiere)

Choreography & Solos by Harry Whittaker Sheppard
Music from a recording of Bibayak Pygmies
Movement Ensemble: Joyce deMoose, Jennifer
Everhard, Dan Froot, Judy Grodowitz, David
Harris, David Hurwith, Jennifer Lane, DJ
McDonald

Special thanks to Gail Donnenfeld, Wendy Perron,
Ron de Koning

BIOGRAPHIES

BLONDELL CUMMINGS is a performer, choreographer, and lecturer who has just returned from her second tour to the Orient. Her first tour included a presentation of her own work and a master class to the Shanghai Ballet Academy in the People's Republic of China. Choreographing since 1978, her works have been presented at the Festival Mondial du Theatre, the Vienna Festival, Paranarrative Series at P.S. 1, Black Theater Alliance, Art on the Beach, among others. A recipient of CAPS and an NEA Choreography Fellowship, Ms. Cummings is on the faculty of the Lincoln Center Institute. Ms. Cummings is an original member of Meredith Monk's "House". Her future plans include a collaboration with Senga Nengudi, a visual artist, and Yasunao Tone, a composer, at the White Dog Performance Studio this November and a tour to Europe. She is seeking new management; if interested, contact Cycle Arts Foundation: 212-861-4305.

FRED HOLLAND is from Ohio, has lived and worked in West Berlin, and is the co-founder of Moving Target. Since moving to NYC in 1981, he has worked with Ishmael Houston-Jones, Meredith Monk, Steve Staso, and Christine Vilardo.


RRATA CHRISTINE JONES: Former CAPS recipient for choreography (1979). A choreographer concerned with collaging poetry, music, acting, sculpture, and design with dance. This coming together of the various art forms is the characteristic of her work. The RRATA DANCE ETC. ENSEMBLE has recently completed a tour of Northern Italy.

Some major concerns of ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES's work are the use of spoken and movement improvisation in performance, the use of autobiographical facts, artistic facts and fiction as a source for dance material, the belief in the collaborative process to undercut ego and to make the very personal more universal, and lessening the importance of the purely visual perception of dance. In addition to his own solo work, he collaborates with Fred Holland, Daniel Lepkoff, and Stephanie Skura and performs in the work of John Bernd, Ping Chong, and Alice Eve Cohen. He will be performing sections of The Generation of Heat and the premiere of Babble: First Impressions of the White Man (a collaboration with Fred Holland) at DTW in March 1983.

JEANNE LEE: Vocalist, poet, sound environmentalist, she is equally at home in Gunter Hampel's Galaxie Dream Band, in John Cage's "Renga and Apartment Building", or setting her poems to ritualized theatre events. Since 1962, she has recorded more than thirty albums and performed with leading composers, poets, dancers, improvisers and visual artists. In 1978 she founded EARTHFORMS RITUALS, INC., a non-profit performing and visual arts organization.

RALPH LEMON is from Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he studied dance, theater, and film. He is a former member of the Nancy Hauser Dance Co., Meredith Monk's "House", and he has also performed with Michael Sullivan and Dana Reitz. He has been making dances since 1975.

BEBE MILLER is a former member of Nina Wiener and Dancers. Her own choreography has been seen at the Kitchen Center and DTW. This year she will again be produced by DTW as part of their Winter Events 1983 and has been commissioned for a new work by Common Ground, a New York based company, to be performed this January.

" HARRY SHEPPARD's Tongue) is the fourth presentation from an ongoing work-in-progress with an overall title of "The Cantering Dances". Other sections from this work, already produced since June 1981, are "Lord Let The Train Run Easy", "800K" (NYC), and "dog day dances" (Paris, France). In the planning stages, "HARRY SHEPPARDANCING", is the next portion of this open-ended dance collage that will be shown soon in New York.

IGUS SOLOMONS, JR., director of his own company for ten years has recently become obsessed with patterns and number progressions in a process called "Steps", which has already gone through several permutations on several companies besides his own. His architectural training is finally asserting itself on his choreography in an active way. The Solomons Company/Dance will next be seen in New York at the Emanu-El Y, 14th Street, on Nov. 20, and 21 of this year, performing "Differences of Need", an experiment in combining minimalist structure with high-energy movement.

Danspace wishes to thank Joyce deMoose, Karen Einbund, Jennifer Everhard, Lee Katz, Thulani Davis, and Mabou Mines. Also, John Bernd, Mary Anne Capehart, Paul Kazanoff, Hope Gillerman, Yvonne Meier.

"Working in new forms, stepping outside tradition is like taking a solo. The artist breathes in a heap of air, the chords, tones, and even the structure of his or her world and then in one concentrated moment moves and breathes out. The sound becomes a shape, a dance, a configuration of what we know that we have not seen or heard that way. The black artist makes this happen out of the most rigid traditions, in a society where our crafts are often not honored, but still with that sensibility that taught the world how to solo - solitary yet communal, disciplined and free."

Thulani Davis

Danspace Project is an arts project of St. Mark's Church. Its activities are funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. Danspace also receives support from Consolidated Edison and Mobil Foundation.

This event is also made possible with the support from Poets and Writers, Inc. which is funded by the Literature Program of the New York State Council on the Arts.

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DANSPACE PROJECT PRESENTS

PARALLELS

October 28, 29, 30 8:30pm

BLONDELL CUMMINGS

ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES

RRATA CHRISTINE JONES



**November 4, 5, 6 8:30pm
FRED HOLLAND**

**RALPH LEMON
BEBE MILLER
HARRY SHEPPARD
GUS SOLOMONS JR**

**St. Mark's Church
2nd AVE & 10th ST
contribution \$4/TDF
reservations 674-8112**



These concerts are funded in part by the NYSCA and the NFA

photo: Aaron Siskind

What Flag Do You Band Beneath?



VOICE NOVEMBER 23, 1992

LOIS GREENFIELD

Harry Sheppard: out in the cold

By Deborah Jowitt

PARALLELS. At Danspace, St. Mark's Church (October 27 to 29), *Emergence*, *Chicken Soup*, *Relatives*, *Supple Burden*, *Steps VI: Particle Diminish*, *Vespers*, *Wanda in the Awkward Age*, and *(the Mother Tongue)*.

DANCES. At White Dog Studio (October 5, 12, 19, 26), *Natural Histories*, *School Figures*, *Stitch Song*, *Pinkie*, and *Manos Inquietas* (Part 2).

Ishmael Houston-Jones, series coordinator for Danspace Project's "Parallels," built two programs around the talents of black choreographers whom he sees as working outside the black dance/modern dance mainstream. Most of the notable black mavericks were included, with the exception of Bill T. Jones and Sheryl Sutton, who were too busy.

When choreographers group for a performance under the rubric of gender, race, nationality, political sympathies, I worry that I'll start fishing out evidence of, say, feminist concerns or Balkan heritages or, in this case, black issues, when the choreographers are not stressing these at all. In one section of his terrific *Part 2: Relatives* (an excerpt from a longer work), Houston-Jones dances in the dark up and down the flight of steps at the rear of St. Mark's. I immediately think of Bill Robinson's stair routine in *The Little Colonel* and of how his great gifts were always kept "in the dark" by Hollywood, how in this case he was made to play second fiddle to Little Miss Shirley Temple tapping beside him. But Houston-Jones may not have been thinking this.

In a dance titled with comic strip curse symbols and punctuation marks and subtitled *(the Mother Tongue)*, nimble Harry Whittaker Sheppard darts busily around a crowd of less agile but also busy people dressed like him in pants, shirts, and knitted caps. They have something going that he doesn't quite understand—certain prosaic rites, like pairing up to mirror each other's gestures, or pacing off some sort of appointed paths while staring into the distance. He peers at them, attempts to communicate with them like a frustrated anthropologist confronted with a difficult tribe. At the end, they all balance long sticks on their heads, and then he's really out in the cold. The music is the voices of Bibayak pygmies, but this tribe happens to be all white. So is this Harry Sheppard's witty statement of the position of the black man in a society of his

white peers? Or is it simply about the outsider versus the insider, about subtle difficulties in communication between human beings?

Some of the dances struck me as lying securely in various vanguardist traditions (if that isn't a contradiction in terms, it ought to be). In her *Vespers*, Bebe Miller simply dances and dances—stunningly—in the richly modulated style I've loved when I've watched her in Nina Wiener's pieces. She's one of the rare ones who can make dancing seem the most profound thing in the world. What structure is visible seems related to the singing of Linda Gibbs, whose voice, hinting at Gregorian chant, floats remarkably in the vaulted space of the church.

In a preview performance of *Steps VI: Particle Diminish*, to a score by Mio Morales, Gus Solomons paces off the nave in some private numerical system of his own—so many steps to each right-angle path. Solomons often plays the role of choreographer commenting wryly on his own activity: the dance is about figuring out the dance—oh yeah, seven steps here, no, wait... say his intent face and waving fingers. As usual he plays the dry post-Cunninghamer with unique savagery.

Houston-Jones investigates his family history, combining concreteness and obliqueness in ways that link him with such disparate choreographers as Meredith Monk and Bill T. Jones. Bringing the past out of storage, he paces the area in blackness, strewing a high-smelling trail of what turn out to be mothballs, while calling, "Here mothy, mothy, mothy, din-din" in a variety of tones. He recites the names in a family tree, indicates points in space while explaining that "they" came from here and went down "there," where "they" met "them." He walks over to the audience, and from the second row, a woman tidily hurls herself over his shoulder into fireman's carry position. It's his mother. Imagine lugging your mother into your performance, in her pretty blouse and skirt, her nylons and maroon pumps!

Pauline Jones takes to the limelight with matter-of-fact charm. Houston-Jones embarks on some loose, wild, tumbling dancing—asking her to tell him when 15 minutes are up. She chats about the family: "Chuck" (ah ha, Ishmael!) and

the VOICE DANCE

his childhood adventures, while dyeing eggs red (her son can't abide white eggs). Sometimes he pants an answer to a question. She's got quite a few wise remarks, "If you don't know where you're going, go back to where you started." After a fruitless period of telling Houston-Jones his time is up, she remarks that he never did come when he was called. And that's how it ends: she calling him, he jumping and jumping as if he'll never stop.

Blondell Cummings's wonderful solo, *Chicken Soup*, evokes generations of housewives, black only in that she happens to be black. To bits of music by Eno, Monk, Walcott, to excerpts from some of Grace Paley's stories, a recipe, and so on, Cummings goes through precise actions which are drawn out to bizarre proportions by repetition or stylization. Sitting on a chair, she creates a pattern out of chatting silently, eating, and rocking. At one point, she kneels on the floor emitting a terrible silent howl. Most of her time is spent frantically shaking an iron skillet: life as a marathon of meal preparing, with floor scrubbing for a change of pace.

A few of the works on the programs are impenetrable, even though Ralph Lemon's *Wanda in the Awkward Age* contains some arresting images: like Lemon dancing gravely in a skirt, or musicians lying on the floor while playing their instruments, or Chris Hyams and Carla Brownlee reaching across to blow each other's saxes. Mary Good is the tough, wild, vulnerable kid that the taped confessions reveal; we can tell it by her dancing. We see her on film too, pacing and waiting, at cross-purposes with another pacing, waiting woman (a teacher?) on what looks like the steps of a school. But what are these people to each other?

Fred Holland's *Supple Burden*, a work in progress, begins startlingly with a man (Holland) sitting on a chair, his face in shadow, while a woman (Trinket Monsad) rearranges herself into crumpled positions on the floor. She looks horribly damaged. There is a movie—blue—with a woman violently tossing her head against her pillow. Later Monsad and Holland dance alone at the same time as if they were coming apart. Together

Choreographers at St. Mark's



Jack Mitchell

The Danspace Project of St. Mark's Church will present a two-weekend series of works by black choreographers beginning Thursday. Among the participating choreographers are, left to right, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Blondell Cummings, Harry Sheppard, Rrata Christine Jones and Ralph Lemon.

Ishmael Houston-Jones
159 Second Avenue, Apt. 1
New York, New York 10003
(service)
18 February 1982

Cynthia Hedstrom, Director
Danspace
St. Mark's Church in the Bowery
Second Avenue and Tenth Street
New York, New York 10003

Dear Cynthia:

Regarding our phone conversation about the possibility of a series or festival of black or third world post-modern dancers being presented in the Fall-Winter program at Danspace, I had the following thoughts. First, I find the idea of such a series or festival to be extremely intriguing and exciting. As Bebe Miller said in the interview in *Other Stages*, the public's expectation of what black choreographers create is extremely limited to a few popular images. I feel that by presenting a festival of work by black choreographers, Danspace would be helping to broaden the expectations of both members of the black/third world community and of the larger dance community of what kinds of work is possible from new black choreographers. Second, I know from myself, being black and being outside of the mainstream of traditional modern dance, has given my own work the unique perspective of being doubly isolated. I feel and often express this isolation from blacks who expect me to be Ailey and dance audiences who either also expect me to be a little-avant-garde-Ailey or "another Bill T. Jones" or devoid of any racial expression. This isolation has created a kind of healthschizophrenia in me and my art that I think must be shared by those others coming from similar backgrounds. So while the idea of affinity shows or festivals often turns me off, I think to see the work of artists in this context would be very revealing. Also, I don't think such a gathering has ever taken place so there is also the importance in terms of dance history.

Specific ideas: I am personally and artistically opposed to the one-shot-everybody-has-ten-minutes type of programs. They're too much like high school talent nights and they weaken the integrity of the work. I am not opposed to having two artists share an evening if necessary or possibly share a weekend. Those choreographers mentioned in the *Other Stages* article were Blondell Cummings, Bill T. Jones, Bebe Miller, Gus Solomons Jr., Sheryl Sutton and myself. Others who have been recommended to me are Manuel Alum, Fred Holland, and Harry Sheppard. There are probably some more that I haven't yet heard of. Given that schedules often don't jive let's say that there were eight choreographers who could participate. It seems that if two choreographers shared two weekend evenings (Thursday-Friday or Saturday-Sunday) they could be accommodated in two weekends. I have no idea of when or if any of these people are available next season, if you give me the go ahead I would start contacting them to see if there are two weekends when enough of them are around. I have other questions for you about Danspace's role of producer and I have some ideas about getting money for video documentation. I also need to know from you if you see a direct conflict in my possible role as curator and my own participation in the series. I will bring this up tomorrow when we speak.

Just wanted to get some of this down on paper. Thank you for calling me.

Sincerely,



AMERICAN CENTER
261 BOULEVARD RASPAIL
75014 PARIS

TEL: 335.21.50
NOUVEAU TEL:
335.21.50

Barbara Watson Mazars
Adjointe au Directeur

Ishmael Houston-Jones
159 Second Ave., n°1
New York, NY 10003

June 7, 1985

Dear Ishmael,

I saw your performance at the Harlem Dancemobile in February 1985 and liked your work very much. The American Center in Paris programs dance, theater, and music and we are currently looking into a project for the early fall 1986.

Although you danced alone, some friends of mine told me that you and Fred Holland also work together. The Center would like to organize a performance including several young black choreographers. There is a chance that the Dance Umbrella in London might be interested as well. Do you have your plans for this period of the year? Would you consider this proposition please. I would also like to know if you are interested in teaching a workshop.

I am writing to Fred as well and would greatly appreciate hearing your thoughts on the subject. Thank you very much. I'm looking forward to meeting you.

Sincerely yours,

Barbara Watson Mazars
Assistant to the Director

PARALLELS
CHOREOGRAPHERS

BELGIUM
PERFORMERS

CREATION - AMERICAN CENTER - PARIS

Reprises à Genève et à Londres
Respectivement les 20 et 21 février
et les 23, 24, 27 et 28 février

1

PROGRAMME

LES 11, 13, 17 FEVRIER 1987 A 21H00
ET LE 15 FEVRIER A 15H00

Bebe MILLER :

Spending Time Doing Things (1985).

Musique : "Solitude", interprétée par Duke Ellington, avec son autorisation.

Jawole WILLA JO ZOLLAR

"Life Dance ... The Fool's Journey" (1984). Les "Life Dances" font partie d'une oeuvre qui sera en 22 tableaux. Ces danses autobiographiques traitent de la métamorphose et de l'épanouissement.(extrait de "Xpujla"). Musique : Carl Riley; Costumes : Theresa Cousar

Ralph LEMON :

"Civilian" (1980)

"Civilian" est la base physique et intuitive de la plupart, sinon de toute mon oeuvre; oeuvre avec un personnage qui est à la fois le mien et un autre, "projeté", le "Citoyen". L'action se déroule le long d'une seule ligne diagonale, à l'intérieur d'un rai de lumière diagonal, en silence.

ENTR'ACTE

Ralph LEMON :

"Wanda in the Awkward Age" (1982)

Musique : Hector Berlioz; Costumes : Theresa Cousar

"Wanda" est à l'opposé de "Civilian" : lyrique, romantique et compatissant. Wanda est un adolescent et porte une robe.

Jawole WILLA JO ZOLLAR

"Life Dance II ... The Papess (Mirror in the Waters)"(1986)

Musique: Tlye Giraud et Edwina Lee Tyler

Bebe MILLER Ralph LEMON :

"Two" (1986) Musique : C.Hyams-Hart; Costume : Robin Klingensmith

Ambiance familiale. Les allées et venues répétées d'un homme et d'une femme. Une étude des compatibilités et des conflits entre homme et femme, entre culture et amour. Cette chorégraphie a été commandée par le "First Light" du Dance Theater Workshop (New York City), grâce à une subvention de la Jerome Foundation (Saint Paul, Minnesota).

Durée : environ 60 minutes

2

PROGRAMME

LES 12, 14, 16 ET 18 FEVRIER A 21H00

Ishmael. HOUSTON-JONES

"Three Folk Dances" (1986)

Musique : Angling (Chris Cochrane, guitare; Zeena Parkins, accordéoniste; George Cartwright, saxo; Fred Chulenor, basse).

Fred HOLLAND

"Delicate Prey"

Musique : The Last Poets

Blondell CUMMINGS

"Excerpts from Excerpts"

a) "Whole world in His Hands", extraits de "The Ladies and Me, A Visual Diary" (1980)

Musique : Odetta / Commande du Modern Dance Theater de Hong Kong

b) "Moving Pictures" (1984), une oeuvre combinant l'image photographique et l'énergie cinématique. (1984)

c) "In the Dark" et "Aerobics USA", extrait de "Talking Diaries" (1985)

d) "The No No Song" extrait de "The Art of War" (1984). The Art of War a été commandé par le Dance Theater Workshop et le Basement Workshop, New York City.

Remerciements particuliers au Festival de Danse Jacob Pillow et à la Harkness Foundation.

ENTR'ACTE

Fred HOLLAND et Ishmael HOUSTON-JONES

"How to Pray for 21" (1986). Musique : Einsturzenende Neubauten et Mahmoud Ahmed. Textes extraits de : "The Biography of Frida Kahlo" par Hayden Herrera et "The Scorpion" par Paul Bowles.*

Blondell CUMMINGS :

"Chicken Soup" (1981)

Musique : Brian Eno, Meredith Monk et Colin Walcott

Textes : "The Long Distance Runner" et "Enormous Changes at the Last Moment", écrit par Grace Paley; Kitchens 1970, de Pat Steini; "Chicken Soup Recipe" extrait de "The Settlement Cookbook".

Cette pièce fut commandée par l'"Institute for Art and Urban Resources (P.S. 1)" New York City.

Durée : environ 70 minutes

Conception des éclairages : Stan Pressner;

Régie générale: BERNARD JOLY assisté d'ERIC TENCÉ;

régie son : TIBURCE DE LUMBEE

*Extrait de : "The Biography of Frida Kahlo", par Hayden Herrera (extraits)

Sa colonne vertébrale était cassée en trois endroits dans la région lombaire. Sa clavicule était rompue ainsi que sa troisième et quatrième côte. Sa jambe droite avait onze fractures et son pied droit était disloqué et broyé. Son épaule gauche était déboîtée, son bassin était cassé en trois endroits. La rambarde d'acier avait littéralement embroché son corps au niveau de son abdomen, entrant par le côté gauche, pour ressortir par son vagin."

Extrait du "Scorpion" par Paul Bowles :

"Une vieille femme vit seule dans une cave infestée de scorpions. Ses fils l'ont quittée pour habiter en ville. Un jour, l'un d'entre eux retourne pour la ramener avec lui,

mais elle ne veut pas partir. Finalement, elle accepte, mais dit qu'elle doit dormir d'abord. Elle dort et rêve qu'elle va en ville, part à la recherche de ses fils. A la ville, elle est projetée dans une pièce et la porte se referme sur elle. Elle devient une petite fille seule, n'est plus dans une cave, mais dans une chambre, en pleurs. Un seul scorpion vient en rampant, de la cave vers elle. Elle tente de repousser le scorpion mais celui-ci lui saisit les doigts entre ses pinces. Alors elle réalisa qu'il n'allait pas la piquer. Un grand sentiment de bonheur l'envahit. Elle mit son doigt sur les lèvres et embrassa le scorpion ... Lentement, dans la paix qui commençait le scorpion entra dans sa bouche. Elle sentit sa carapace dure et ses petites pattes passant sur ses lèvres et sur sa langue. Il rampa lentement dans sa gorge et fut avalé. Elle se réveilla et hurla."

SOLO CHOREOGRAPHERS FROM NEW YORK

1987 Winter Dance Project

Proposal by the AMERICAN CENTER

BLONDELL CUMMINGS, BEBE MILLER, RALPH LEMON, FRED HOLLAND,
ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES, JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR

In February 1987 the American Center plans to present six black choreographers in two alternating programs for a week and a half. There will be solo and some collaborative work by rising choreographers and performance artists - fairly short pieces combined into two different evening-length performances.

Since 1978 the Center has been instrumental in providing for the exposure of American choreographers to French artists, audiences and impresari. Acting as a display case we have presented, either in concerts or workshops, such masters as Merce Cunningham and David Gordon as well as many post-modern choreographers of the 1960's and 70's: Molissa Fenley, Karole Armitage, Stephanie Skura, Trisha Brown and Tim Miller, to cite just a few. The emerging black choreographers should now follow.

Located in Paris, we are surrounded by a rapidly developing French choreography which has gained its reputation through experimentation in theatrical dance. As we continue to initiate this two-way exposure between French and American choreographers we will select those dancers who are central to what is happening in New York and whose work, from the point of view of content, will be all the more enriching for the professional public here. The narrative and sometimes autobiographical quality of the proposed dancers' work will also facilitate reaching a larger and more generalized audience attracted to theater as well as dance. The cultural significance of this project suggests linking up with the black community in Paris as well. While these artists - black, postmodern, American choreographers - may share an identity, their motivations, approaches, and styles cover a broad spectrum.

Inasmuch as this project is meant to travel to other European cities, the impact upon other audiences and communities remains key to the overall worth of the project. To date, Paris, Geneva, London, and the Regions will participate.



March 10, 1987

Henry Pillsbury
Barbara Mazars
American Center
261 Boulevard Raspail
75014 Paris

Dear Henry and Barbara;

I want to sincerely thank you for making my stay during the "Parallels In Black" Tour a warm and memorable one.

The American Center is an unique institution that really gives the artist respect and genuine hospitality. The way you extended yourselves is so far beyond the scope of what most producers do for a tour group. I was very happy that you showed a sincere and keen interest in not just bringing us in for a "gig", but to facilitate and foster potential cultural exchanges. I am especially grateful for the opportunity of having studied West African Dance with Cisse. It was really quite nice that you made not only his class available to us but also any of the classes that were taking place at the center.

The technical crew was fantastic! Please give them my regards. Thank you again and I know I will be back!

Sincerely,

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar
Artistic Director

URBAN BUSH WOMEN
110 E 176th St #E2
Bronx, New York 10453
212 731-5534



Blondell CUMMINGS

« I AM CONCERNED WITH... »

Je m'intéresse aux questions politiques sociales et personnelles contemporaines, comment elles agissent sur la condition humaine. Je présente une multiplicité de significations au travers de personnages identifiables, en alliant le mouvement naturaliste (geste et langage par signe), le théâtre, le récit, la musique et les images visuelles.

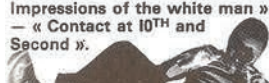
Chorégraphe, performer et directeur artistique de « Cycle Art Foundation », organisation qui s'ordonne sur les collaborations entre écrivains, compositeurs et artistes visuels. Références : Meredith Monk / The House, Joanne Akalaitis (Mabou Mines), Phil Glass, George Lewis, Shirley Clarke, Michael Reisman, Le Festival Mondial de Theatre de Nancy. (1981)

Fred HOLLAND

« WHAT GOES ON IN THE STREETS... »

Mon travail implique la fusion d'une sensibilité picturale, lyrique et maîtrisée, et d'une explosion proche de la violence. Des créations antérieures ont mis en présence les questions de race, de génération et de conventions sociales. Ce qui se passe dans les rues est tout aussi important que ma solitude en studio.

Chorégraphe, performer, artiste visuel (formation de peintre) Références : Festival de Jacob's Pillow, l'American Dance Festival (Caroline du Nord), P. S. 122, la Kitchen, le Dance Theater Workshop (DTW), Meredith Monk, Anne Bogart. Collaboration artistique avec Ishmael Houston-Jones : « Cowboys, Dreams and Ladders » — « Babble : First Impressions of the white man » — « Contact at 10th and Second ».



Ishmael HOUSTON-JONES

« CALL ME ISHMAEL... »

L'improvisation est une méthode chorégraphique de première importance. Je vois en particulier dans le « contact-improvisation » une forme de danse politique dans la mesure où elle dépend entièrement d'un échange libre, spontané et mutuel.

Loin de placer le danseur dans une catégorie supérieure (où il serait coupé du spectateur), je privilégie le style personnel sur une stratification d'éléments chorégraphiques ou scénographiques.

Tourné essentiellement vers le travail d'improvisation et la collaboration aux créations d'artistes du monde de la danse/performance et du théâtre.

Références : Ping Chong, Stephanie Skura, la Kitchen, le DTW, Franklin Furnace,

YOU WONDER WHAT'S NEW IN AMERICAN DANCE? VOUS VOUS DEMANDEZ S'IL Y A DU NOUVEAU DANS LA DANSE AMERICAINE?

tournées au Nicaragua, au Canada, en Allemagne de l'Ouest (Berlin : Tanzfabrik et aux Pays-Bas.



Ralph LEMON

« POSSIBLE MEANINGS PLAYING A GAME... »

Mon travail de chorégraphe porte sur nombre de choses. Parfois, je le vois comme un assemblage de sens possibles jouant un jeu entre eux, pour déterminer le plus signifiant à n'importe quel moment donné. C'est en tout cas au plus fort de son abstraction que mon travail semble être le plus évident. Quelque soit l'usage que je pourrais en faire, la matière d'inspiration elle-même

est toujours en transition, du moment vers le mouvement, de l'action vers la réaction et de l'évocation vers la provocation.

Originaire de Minneapolis, a été formé auprès de Viola Farber.

Références : Blondell Cummings, Dana Reitz, Meredith Monk, DTW, la Kitchen, PS 122.

Le Spoleto USA Festival, le New Dance Ensemble de Minneapolis, le Ballet Hispanico, the American Dance Festival et le Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

Bebe MILLER

« THE FOCUS OF MY WORK IS A VITAL KINESTHETIC... »

Le centre de mon travail s'ordonne autour d'un principe vital de cinétique, recherchant une communication et une reconnaissance de l'expérience de chacun.

La balance inégale entre un



En tant que danseuse soliste des ensembles Nina Wiener ou Dana Reitz : tournées en Europe et aux Etats-Unis (BAM, Next Wave Festival 1983) — Chorégraphe depuis 1978, avec sa propre compagnie depuis 1984. Saison DTW en 1986.

Jawole WILLA JO ZOLLAR

« MYTH AND FEELINGS »

Soit en solo, soit avec ma compagnie « URBAN BUSH WOMEN », mes créations sont inspirées du folklore et des traditions religieuses des Africains-Américains et des Africains à travers la Diaspora. En utilisant les formes contemporaines, selon un langage simple (présence d'une musique vivante qui mêle les mots parlés et les cris de la terre), je questionne la lutte, le développement et la transformation de l'esprit humain... « Une mère peigne les cheveux de sa fille — une femme prestidigitatrice mi-sorcière, mi-guérisseuse, « déballe » sa magie — soudain un enfant meurt, pleuré dans le silence » (New York Times)

Originaire de Kansas City — nourrie de l'essence du bebop, du blues, des gospels, des negro spirituals. Auprès de musiciens de jazz entreprend à New York une recherche chorégraphique où apparaissent ses affinités avec les formes de danse africaines. Fonde sa propre compagnie : « URBAN BUSH WOMEN » (un ensemble de 6 à 10 femmes).









Parallels in 1982

GUS SOLOMONS JR.

I remember thinking at the time of the first *Parallels* that it was nice being acknowledged for being a black choreographer who was working outside the “black mainstream”—read Alvin Ailey heritage—instead of being criticized for not being “black enough,” as I often was back then. I tried not to categorize myself or to attach any political agenda to my work other than movement as the medium.

My interests lay in exploring site-specificity, collaboration with composers (Mio Morales, Kenneth Schafer, Jr., Tobi Twining, Walter Thompson, Chris Lancaster), visual artists (Michael Russo, Tobi Kahn), video artists (Michael Schwartz, Mark Robison, Jason Somma), and architects (Scott De Vere).

Over the years, my work became more about the people in it and the emotions their kinetic interactions aroused than about so-called “pure movement.” With PARADIGM (founded in 1996-8 for dance notables over age 50), that notion of exploring the individual in relation to the medium rather than the medium itself became primary. Works like *A Thin Frost*, *Gray Study*, and *No Ice in Poland* I created for the original PARADIGM trio, Carmen deLavallade, Dudley Williams, and me. With this evolution from pure motion to emotion has come my increasing interest in dramatic theater, where emotion is the medium. And now that I am physically unable to dance that transference to theater will likely become the primary focus of my performing life.

GUS SOLOMONS JR. makes dances (Solomons Company/Dance, Ailey II, et al), teaches dance (Arts Professor at NYU/Tisch School of the Arts, and worldwide), writes about dance (Dance Magazine, Gay City News, solomons-says.com); loves pockets, puzzles, and structures (architecture degree from M.I.T.); danced in companies of Pearl Lang, Donald McKayle, Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham; bicycles everywhere.

³ And then in one
concentrated
moment moves
and breathes
out...





Remembering Harry Sheppard

WENDY PERRON

Harry took one drag on a cigarette, blew a long stream of smoke, and danced through it in his quirky, light-as-a-feather, utterly natural way. This was for a performance at SummerStage in Central Park with Yoshiko Chuma's School of Hard Knocks. I felt the way I often did about his dancing: watching him improvise was like watching a fish in water.

Harry was not a bravura dancer—no barrel chest, no sturdy virile presence, no astounding leaps. What he had was a beguiling kind of continuity. He was a born dancer. He once told me that he learned to dance in his mother's arms.

Harry's dance energy was endless. His "Stamping Dance" was an ongoing meditation that appeared in many of his dances, including the one for *Parallels*. It would evolve before your eyes in a way that was both exciting and soothing. He started his feet going in a steady rhythm that would take him to other psychic landscapes, other characters. He would pass through being a child, a flamenco dancer, a Cunningham dancer. It never seemed like he was making a decision but rather that he was carried on the current of his own rhythm, his own thoughts.

Harry was also great in character roles. I once did a dance play for children in Central Park based on Dr. Seuss's *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, in which Harry played the Royal Trumpeter. When Harry stuck his fingers inside the trumpet and pulled out gooey oobleck, making yucky noises and shaking the oobleck off his fingers, the kids screamed with laughter.

Harry and I went to Bennington College together in the 60s, and we danced in each other's pieces there. We developed an ongoing conversation about choreography that went on for decades. Once, when I was talking to Harry about a thorny choreographic problem, he said, "That's what I call making. Making dances." Choreography was just part of life, both sacred and ordinary. It wasn't a "career." It wasn't for purposes of advancing yourself or even your art. It was just part of life.

Harry was the kindest person I knew. He would help a friend out, whether it was helping you clean your dance floor, helping you in your choreography, or lending a shoulder to cry on. And that was right up until the end, when he was facing the slow devastation from AIDS. He never called attention to his own medical disaster. Instead, he would discuss any problem you had; in fact, during his last days he was reading a book about a different disease in hopes of helping a mutual friend of ours.

His kindness showed—glowed—in his dancing. I think of Harry still dancing, disappearing through the smoke rings of time.

WENDY PERRON has performed her own work at Danspace Project at least once in each decade of 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. She is now editor in chief of *Dance Magazine*.

HARRY SHEPPARD was a Bessie Award-winning dance artist active in New York in the 70s and 80s. He danced with Yoshiko Chuma/School of Hard Knocks, Andrew deGroat, Risa Jaroslow, Bill T. Jones, Wendy Perron, Sally Silvers and Elaine Shipman. He died in 1992 in The Netherlands while on a dance job with Chuma and is remembered fondly by many friends and artists.





Complet tous les soirs

HENRY PILLSBURY & BARBARA WATSON

American Center, Paris, February 1987: the six performances of *Parallels in Black* sell out before we open the doors. Nothing like this had ever happened during Henry Pillsbury's twenty years with the place. Single performance sell-outs? Yes, very occasionally, like an Archie Shepp concert in 1969. But not half a dozen shows.

Barbara Watson, assistant director, had returned from New York the previous fall with an implausible idea—the presentation in Paris of no less than six black choreographers. Henry objected: no budget for six dance companies was feasible; and any emphasis on *black art* was already old hat. Barbara dismissed these concerns. She did not mean six companies: each choreographer would perform alone or in duo. And, of the new dance she had seen in New York, on this trip and previously, nothing touched the work of a generation of black artists creating on fresh ground beyond both abstraction and agitprop. Their authenticity and originality, she insisted, would rouse our Paris audiences from their complacencies about American dance. And would thrill. And sell.

Her optimism was vouchsafed by timely results obtained for co-production. The Suitcase Fund was brought to bear on a European swing. London's Dance Umbrella and Geneva's Salle Patino got on board. And private funders, some new ones seduced by the vitality of the idea, pledged support.

The American Center had been presenting contemporary dance from the United States, France, and indeed from around the world, for some time, culminating in a particularly intense agenda of performances, workshops, and classes, triggered in part by two Rockefeller Foundation Grants between 1979 and 1985. Almost every large space in the Welles Bosworth building had been converted into studios for performing arts, mostly dance, including the former swimming pool, the gym, and the living room. Our working hypothesis held that Paris served as the critical meeting place between artists in Europe, and that the Center could be its heart. Choreographer-dancers like Susan Buirge and Harry Sheppard from the United States, Gabriella Martinez from Argentina, Elsa Wolliaston from Kenya had given permanent courses, while dancers performing at the Center or elsewhere in the city—Douglas Dunn, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Brigitte Lefèvre, Odile Duboc—gave brief workshops to afford some insight into their inspiration and methods.

Parisians had grown accustomed to finding contemporary dance at the Center. The artistic offerings of the Center in 1987 were largely white, though is nonetheless worth adding that Parisians also encountered the presence, still slightly exotic to them, of African-Americans. Since 1968, Africans and African-Americans had constituted a substantial part of

Center regulars. Many were artists—percussionists like Guem (Guinea) & Philly Jo Jones, composers like Anthony Braxton, dancers like Elsa Wolliaston, Harry Sheppard and Lucky Zebila (Congo).

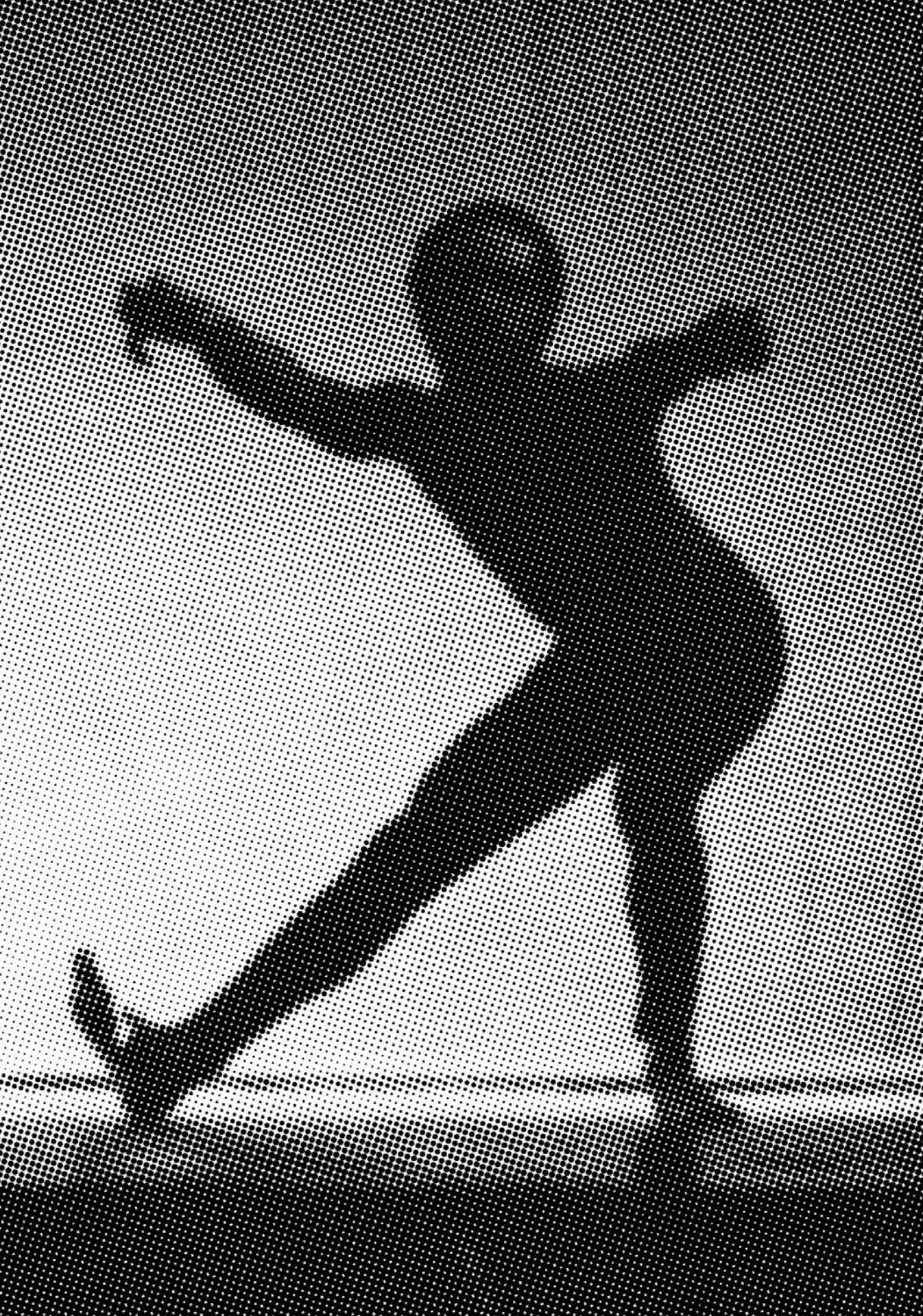
Such was the setting that awaited Bebe Miller, Blondell Cummings, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Fred Holland, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Ralph Lemon. The performances were separated into two separate programs, offered four times. Each choreographer gave at least one solo. In addition, Bebe and Ralph paired for the opening dance, as did Fred and Ishmael for the finale. Right off, Jawole uttered a premonitory remark, “Hopefully, we shall be remembered not just for energy—but for tone and texture.” Time has blurred for us most specifics of the performances at the Center (they were not video-taped), but *energy*, *tone*, and *texture* dominate our memories of what we witnessed: energy in each piece, abounding to burst the seams of the theater; tone in a vast spread over the lean perfections of Ralph and Bebe, Jawole’s infectious raucousness, the soul-stirring moments with Blondell, Fred’s unsoundable puzzle, Ishmael’s combative virility; and the texture of each artist “speaking” utterly personally, whether with displacement (Ralph’s bespectacled gent, Bebe’s molten confidence, Ishmael’s and Fred’s “western fighters”) or with bluntness as with Jawole and Blondell.

We conclude our recollection of *Parallels in Black* with an ironic reflection: the American Center closed a few weeks after these shows. What a way to go out.

In retrospect, we invaluablely came to know these dancers individually. Not as part of a tendency, movement, or school. Now, having looked back, we are inhabited by a hunger to look ahead with these very people. Based on recent contacts with Ralph and Ishmael, we suspect that the fulfillment of *Parallels* both in Paris/Europe and New York/USA deserves commitment and awaits a catalyst. May the *Parallels* Platform at Danspace Project provide the trigger.

HENRY PILLSBURY & BARBARA WATSON have worked together since their years at the American Center in Paris, starting in 1978. Barbara, dance curator and production manager, culminated as Assistant Director of the Center where Henry was Executive Director. Subsequently Barbara undertook a New York City mission for the Ballet National de l’Opéra de Paris and then became Line Producer for Lieurac Productions, Paris, making films primarily on contemporary dance. Henry, Officer in the French National Order of Arts and Letters, has acted, directed, translated, and produced in France since 1969. Married in 1998, they co-founded and now co-direct King’s Fountain, a counseling and production unit for humanitarian causes and the performing arts with more than seventy completed projects to its credit.

⁴ The sound becomes
a shape, a dance, a
configuration of what
we know that we have
not seen or heard that
way...



the complex path to 21st century black live art

THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ

“black dance” proceeds from an engagement with africanist aesthetics: a constellation of formal concerns that underscore the ability of performance to fulfill itself. a generation of scholars and artists have pinpointed features of african-derived performance to encompass, at least, a percussive attack; an exploration of concurrent, highly complex rhythmic meters; an engagement of call-and-response between dancers and audiences; sophisticated structures of derision that are simultaneously personal and political; and above all, an overarching cool, palpably spiritual dimension to the performance. these hallmarks—africanisms—provide a theoretical framework for the identification and interpretation of diasporic traditions of art-making, including something recognizable as black dance.

when artists dip into these compositional|performative wellsprings, we feel blackness emerge, no matter the artist’s preferred racial identity. indeed, africanist aesthetics are imperatives that may be engaged by african diaspora artists and, significantly, by others following this tradition. in other words, black dance is available to any who would approach its complexities as artists, scholars, or audience members.

nota bene: black artists aren’t always interested in these aesthetic strategies, and don’t always make black dance or black live art.

for many, the awkward everyday experiences of being black in majority-white communities incite an unavoidably political outlook on how life is; that outlook becomes a primary marker of black art in general. as artists reference the **shared memories and experiences of black people**, they remind us, above all, of how we endure. the impulse to perform black presence—an oppositional, resistant, dissident social presence in relation to a white mainstream—has historical moorings: in other eras, black performing artists would “sing the master,” taking derisive pleasure in embellishing their slaveholders’ songs with extravagant harmonies; or dance the cakewalk, a stylized and exaggerated social dance that mocked the imported manners of southern whites. when these performance practices became popular in the commercial venues of broadway and hollywood, the political dimension of **performance as derision** that marked them as black fell away. but whether audiences recognized the parody underlying these performances or not hardly lessened their impact. the aesthetic structures endured, black artists engaged them to dance in the tradition. many others followed suit.

in time, black artists stretched these aesthetic constellations, and resisted the seeming requisite to “dance black” on public stages. an experimental black dance performance tradition came into view, one that imbricated itself into postmodern dance, and by 2012, one that underscores the vital live art scene. press rewind.

THIRTY YEARS AGO,

black was less porous, more territorialized, less expansive, more powerful, more and less chic.



by 1982, it may have been great to be black and in the large companies of african-american dance artists who claimed space on the facts of their excellence and assembly (think ailey, dance theater of harlem, philadanco); experimental live artists who resisted the labeling of work as black art, even if they sometimes identified as artists who happened to be black, withstood the double pressure of claiming an outside space to an identity that was already outside the mainstream. the nascent audience for experimental work by black artists formed slowly and inconsistently, and there was little to be gained by calling work black without the support of a committed black audience. mostly, the audience and critical record for any experimental work were white folks, and the level of exoticism surrounding black art staggered the imagination. then, folks still talked about **ethnic dance**, which was, for black artists, code for dance that actually mattered to people outside the circumstance of concert performance. postmodern dance in 1982 tended to be work that valorized the (white) individual or small (white) group as they solved a problem that mattered, mostly, to them. ethnic dance—like **BLACK ART**—lived in the world, and could speak effectively to familial affiliations, political disenfranchisement, articulations of sexuality, group communion, social movement across geographies, the pressing need for the staging of beauty. the 1982 PARALLELS artists spoke to these concerns, even when working in oblique, obscure manner; recognizing that the audience was a mix of some sympathetic folks of color, and mostly, white folks who had little idea of the complex strands of creative recovery operating in the worlds of this work. for black artists, even task-based postmodern dance conveyed a political sensibility, as it demonstrated the possibility to align a visibly-circumscribed identity and social history to the public performance of, say, walking in a straight line, or telling obscure family histories. bluntly: black artists engaged in postmodern work were always **representing the race**, even at the outer banks of creative downtown new york performance.

evidence: according to the critical record, **THIRTY YEARS AGO**, it seemed to matter that the artists of the PARALLELS series had all gone to college (gasp!). the reading lists for these artists were surely the Western great works, peppered with leading Harlem Renaissance and Civil Rights era monographs: langston hughes, zora neale hurston, eldridge cleaver, gwendolyn brooks, amiri baraka, maybe even frantz fanon amid the keats, eliot, woolf, whitman. thirty years ago, references to black popular culture in terms of music and/or attitude were unusual for experimental artists hoping to be respected for their particular, personal work.

NOW, by 2012, we would be hard-pressed to locate experimental artists who hadn't found their way to live art through undergraduate or graduate work, and many of the younger artists studied with the older artists included in this platform. the standard reading list for live artists now includes european cultural theorists, phenomenologists, and philosophers, and a handful of americans (alphabetical grab-bag: bourriaud, deleuze, foucault, heidegger, merleau-ponty, noë, phelan, žižek), but fewer of the oppositional narratives that previously defined the possibility of identifiable black presence in the world. meaning: younger artists don't have to know anything about w.e.b. dubois or bell hooks in order to make work. still, they probably do. but they

sure better have an opinion about kanye and beyoncé. and they probably do.

THEN, as NOW, something inspiring and precious happens when **africandiaspora live artists** gather. shared experience is a powerful aggregator; survivors in any area see each other with curious and sympathetic eyes. for black artists, that seeing is combined with surviving the strangeness of being a dance artist from a community that values dance very highly (yes, black people dance, dance well, and value dance), and being a live artist who tells personal stories that are multivalent, complex, and at times inscrutable. a willingness to “do our own thing” is at the bottom line of appreciation for performance in the africanist grain; that thing can go where it needs to so long as its performance and execution are finely honed, honest, and make some passing reference to africanist aesthetics, even if only to resist their cultural pull.

BY NOW, dance may have shifted its own identity toward live art, to distance itself from the most flagrantly commodified visions of the hollywood-cablevision-youtube-gameverse. THIRTY YEARS FROM NOW, i imagine that lots of people will wonder what the fuss was around work by black artists, eternally distinguished from work by others. **BLACK LIVE ART** is particular work that makes reference to black identity, and all of us on the planet are connected to black identity: hook or crook, friends or foes, lovers or disinterested capitalists. black art has always executed an important task: eventually, it encouraged the colorless post-modern dance sensibility of the seventies and eighties to claim its race, gender, and sexual politics. by now, we can all recognize that it matters when white work makes no reference to its whiteness, misogyny, homophobia, or disinterest in disability. the worldview that allowed for parallel understandings of dance, performance, and live art has already diminished considerably; thirty years from now, any audience might be grateful for the work of any artist that is committed, focused, or interesting, no matter its theme or identity of origin. black live artists may number in the minority of experimental creators, and yet, **africandiaspora artists** will surely continue to push against the seemingly inevitable whiteness of performance, to make something unexpected and vital happen; to call on the spirits, yes we still do that, and i daresay artists of an african diaspora always will.

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The Protagonists: Documents of Dance and Debate

CURATED BY WILL RAWLS

FEBRUARY 4TH [SAT] 3:00PM

The *Parallels* showcases of 1982 presented eight black choreographers working within the “parallel worlds of black America and new dance.”ⁱ Hosted and presented by Danspace Project, the intermediary plane inscribed by these two parallel worlds was a stage. And in framing this stage, the lines of black America and new dance were coordinated into mutual relation. The results were proof of charged cultural space with irrefutably complex intersections and rough boundaries. Some of these artists were operating within the lineage of analytic or pedestrian action and others embraced a virtuosic or expressionistic approach to dance; most layered objects, sound and other media over their movement. These dances were not dualistic, but multifaceted hybrids, denying the clear demarcations of their periphery.

If *Parallels* served as a pivotal affirmation of new black choreographers, it is also a compelling event because these dances denied easy categorizations, even if the choreographers, as representatives of a black avant-garde, could not avoid shouldering certain categories themselves. This is not to say that these choreographers did not resist being labeled against their will; some claimed black identity as central to their experience while others did not. The allure of regarding these artists as figures in a larger cultural discussion is impossible to avoid, and crucial to explore. It is a procedure that raises questions about the efficacy of a framework to illuminate an artist’s work, to render it more visible, and the attendant disappearance of an artist’s autonomy when this frame is presented before an audience. As a vehicle and a platform in the dance marketplace, *Parallels* elevated this work in front of its dance community, and reflected back images that were fragmentary and constitutive, elliptical and expansive, intensely personal and broadly social. Looking at this work on the eve of PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels* provides a timely reference for artists of color working so variously in dance and performance.

In *The Protagonists*, the first of two film nights for PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels*, I will screen four selected works from the original series, while discussing the overall series as a collective action that complicated experimental dance’s relationship to itself, to its community and to its protagonists. These dance works will be counterbalanced by documentation of a debate that happened a year later, in December 1983, between two post-modern dance figureheads, Steve Paxton and Bill T. Jones. Their impassioned exchange over matters of aesthetics and personal politics serves as a schema for further discussion of *Parallels*, and the implicit and explicit stakes of self-representation.

In 1982, Blondell Cummings, Fred Holland, Rrata Christine Jones, Ishmael

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Houston-Jones, Ralph Lemon, Bebe Miller, Harry Sheppard and Gus Solomons jr. choreographed and performed in their own work during *Parallels*. This is significant in that the artists constructed and embodied the content of the concerts, playing a conscious role in the portrayal and use of their bodies. Citing influences as varied as architecture, film, text, minimalism, Meredith Monk, Merce Cunningham and movement improvisation, they established an irreducible aesthetic diversity. This diversity is one that, according to Carl Paris, “parallels the evolving sociological, philosophical, and aesthetic shifts in the broader postmodern scene when the analytical, minimalist performance model ceased to dominate.”ⁱⁱⁱ The performances themselves contained non-narrative structures, highly choreographed, scored and improvised dancing, narration of personal history and personal fiction, live and recorded music, and a wide range of objects, from cookware (Cummings), mothballs (Houston-Jones) and a projection screen (Lemon) to long wooden poles (Sheppard) and a singer used, arguably, as a set element (Miller). In watching these dances, I have the strong impression that movement for movement’s sake would not suffice to encapsulate each body’s potential for meaning. It is an historical moment when the purity of post-modern dance is diluted by an influx of strategies and objects that break it open; this fracturing coincides with the appearance of a black avant-garde. One has to consider these *Parallels* objects as part of a new black subjectivity in dance, but the treatment of these objects is capricious, as is the medium of this “new dance” that had not yet been consolidated into tradition. In some works the object took flight alongside the dancer, in others the object and dancer simply shared space but were nonetheless thrown into dialogue. The varied use of objects complicates a spectator’s understanding of the works holistically, akin to the difficulties of gathering the *Parallels* artists into a single unified representation of a new black aesthetics.

What holds *Parallels* together, and pulls it apart, is the junction of these heterogeneous performance methods in tandem with a consolidated, identity-based structure. It brings up the possibility of an Aesthetics of Inconsistency that constitutes the *Parallels* frame. Dance’s ability to transmit meaning in performance is only as strong as the audience’s ability to comprehend its terms: object-performer, performer-choreography, performer-audience. And as these terms shift, so do the means for understanding, becoming inconsistent over time and through space. For a framework that proposes a new black aesthetics, the diversity of these works produces a crisis for identifying these dancers, and identifying oneself in relation to them. Randy Martin incisively states that this crisis “entails an ambiguity as to the attitude of representation to reference, for dance this instability of meaning and thing, of movement’s significance and its animating motion, if a fundamental feature of dance’s own specificity.”ⁱⁱⁱ The destabilizing effect of dance on the apprehension of representations is further complicated, and further activated, by the format of a showcase that ostensibly puts forward black performers as a collective. The frame of *Parallels* comes together only to be perforated by the artists within it. Martin’s discussion of the breakdown of the classical function of theater is helpful here. If “the protagonistic function”^{iv} through which an audience recognizes not only the representational and societal significance of a

single, heroic figure has splintered and decayed through the development of theories of gender, race and class, then, “in that public act of attendance,”^v the audience’s means for incorporating the moral of the story, and identifying itself and its role within larger national narratives of identity and citizenship, also fails. As the *Parallels* artists manifested their visions they *did* something to the measure of identity politics, rendering it tenuous by tying it to too many objects, objectives and subjective perspectives to produce a whole politics. The *Parallels* artists materialized as the “new” black dancers and as something more ambivalent than this moniker. In watching this work, I had the feeling of seeing them become the black dancers that they are and the black dancers that they are not. In speaking through dance, they hovered between abstraction and individuality in an obsolescent relationship to representations of blackness. These works were protagonistic in nature but resisted the role of a protagonist, thus the process of identifying them, or identifying with them, was confronted with the fiction of its own accuracy.

Of the *Parallels* group, both Solomons jr.’s and Sheppard’s pieces fall most cleanly within the tropes of task-oriented movement, anti-spectacular events and an archly understated performance quality. Solomons jr.’s solo, *Steps VI: Particle Diminish*, is comprised of his walking and turning at sharp right angles, in diminishing spatial patterns, punctuated by short full-bodied dance phrases. I can only approximate the title of Harry Sheppard’s group piece here, “)’@*#[=!0/,:%?” (*the Mother Tongue*). It was a formal exploration presenting Sheppard in a series of solo movements (from walking and squatting to balletic or Cunningham-like phrase work), set against the configurations of eight other dancers. Though Sheppard’s title suggests a poetics that is more elaborate than a postmodern purist might employ, the dance itself generates meaning from the continuous and altering patterns of bodies—his piece is focused on the process of the choreography itself.

For the other artists, the objects and bodies they bring on stage with them are meant to carry larger cultural associations or fictions within them. In a self-conscious gesture, these choreographers used these fictions to address the fiction of their own identities—none of which are wholly reducible to a black American experience, none of which can be wholly separate from it either. These fictions serve to complicate each artist’s protagonistic function. *The Protagonists: Documents of Dance and Debate* will focus on the work of Cummings, Houston-Jones, Lemon and Miller, whose pieces cast them as embodied agents of their own ideas and complex channels of wider cultural memes.

In *Chicken Soup*, Blondell Cummings moves like a cubist painting come to life. The piece is set “in the character’s home,”^{vi} and unfolds in episodes of quotidian activities that are splintered into eerie, physical fractals. Costumed in a white dress, Cummings progresses in perseverating fashion from walking with a paper bag, to scrubbing the floor, to dancing with an iron skillet. An enunciated solitude follows her through space, emphasized at one point by recorded readings of Grace Paley’s and Pat Steir’s writing conjuring memories of people once gathered in a kitchen. Throughout,

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Cummings demonstrates a grim dignity as one series of edgy movements abuts the next. She is caught in a chain of physical loops that disrupts narrative flow and echoes the repetitive, spacious music by Brian Eno, Meredith Monk and Collin Walcott. Cummings' body works like a dowsing rod, calling up a history of women from the ground on which she dances, plucking their actions out of the air as she cradles an invisible baby, rocking trance-like in a chair. During this extended rocking sequence the text mentions an abortion, health and food. The solitude that marks Cummings' performance cuts her loose from a history that might, with a more celebratory performance style, empower her. *Chicken Soup* brings to my mind an animated version of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, crossed with an outtake from the last scene in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*, in which the women of the company mime a gossipy sociability. Cummings would be out of place in Ailey's mirthful and triumphant finale—the social scene of her imaginary kitchen belongs to many women but is also solo experience. This dance hyperventilates under the weight of an iron skillet and chafes the gaze with a desiccated humility, like rumpled paper.

While Cummings' dance is entrenched in the restive and profane, Bebe Miller's *Vespers* harbors holy aspirations. The work begins with vocalist, Linda Gibbs, standing still and alone on stage, delivering the austere tones of Gregorian chant. Even on video, these sounds bring to life the luminous expanse of the sanctuary in St. Mark's Church. Gibbs' presence accrues the weight of orthodoxy; she introduces a physical quietude that sets the scene for a kind of ritual. Miller appears next and advances on a strict diagonal across the stage, wiping and flicking the air with her arms, implying a tense disquiet ricocheting within her body. Miller's youth is apparent in her physicality and her looks, which are a dissonant pairing with the archaic music and older singer. At one point both stop and reset in space, as if the imbalanced equation of youth and age grinds them both to a halt. However, in the next passage Miller releases her body into a kind of controlled abandon; Gibbs remains still and continues to sing. Jumping, spiraling and balancing, Miller tosses her weight and limbs through space, articulating an elastic and deft relationship with gravity. This performance is a congregation of many dualities: austere and sensual, airborne and grounded, still and kinetic, vocal and physical, archaic and contemporary. Miller is black and Gibbs is white, another comparison that cannot be overlooked. In this context it raises questions about history and difference and the lofty appeal of redefining them. Miller's dancing operates as a kind of contemporary liturgical dance that exists neither in the traditions of the black or white church. The choreography fundamentally tries to speak through the ineffable medium of presence, a texture that might not be divided into binaries and could potentially be taken in whole. Near the end of the work, the church bells chime resonantly overhead, momentarily joining Miller and Gibbs in the architecture of the present moment. It is hard to know if this was a pre-arranged musical cue or divine intervention.

Ishmael Houston-Jones' work, *Relatives*, might be best captured in a stream of conscious writing exercise or by a to do-list written in a dream. It is an active and agitated piece. He scatters mothballs around himself,

stomps and calls out repeatedly, gallops playfully to and fro, recites a litany of names (presumably of his relatives), decorates a table with photographs and other objects, acts out a family portrait and eventually carries his real live mother on stage. Pauline Jones settles at the table and tells us that she will give “Chuck a few minutes to do something” (Charles was Ishmael’s given name). What he’s already done is to put forth his own theory of relativity. It has evolved into a group of interrelated elements, the sum of which gropes within the labyrinth of family identity. At times, Houston-Jones’ movement and speech carry a childlike loudness, wide-eyed and seductively un-self-conscious, the use of space deliberately haphazard at times. At other moments, he haltingly searches for memories of faces and names, his own being one that he has actually, in real life, left behind. Context is everything but sometimes it can’t be dependably assembled. It is like watching a student improvise an assignment in history class, but a student who has an arch sense of timing, a rich compositional eye and a flair for combining fact and fiction. Once given permission by his mother to “do something,” Houston-Jones embarks on an extended dance improvisation. Glimpses of Houston-Jones’ development and inner life emerge as Mrs. Jones tells stories about him—his biography is molded through her memories of him. Though her speaking inflects his improvisation with meaning, Houston-Jones seems detached from his mother’s voice, wrapped up in his own physical experience. The program notes for this piece state that Pauline Jones is improvising her text, which further emphasizes the instability of the always-already delicate nature of oral tradition. This improvisation of oral tradition can be read as a departure from this tradition as an historic touchstone for black experience and identity. In a sense, *Relatives* offers the black experience as a representation that can be improvised, at least in part. This reading might call up a kind of crisis that Randy Martin postulates in representation’s ambiguous relationship to its own points of reference, in this case, mother and son, language and body, history and present, fact and fiction, memory and experience. Houston-Jones enacts a personalized transition from an oral tradition into a kinetic one that is in its nascent stages of development. His dancing takes on a mesmerized self-awareness, as if it were only one’s moving body that could reveal the truth—however inconsistent—about oneself.

Ralph Lemon’s contribution to *Parallels*, *Wanda in the Awkward Age*, was an elaborate interlacing of dance, live saxophone, voiceovers and an extended film sequence. In the first of three sections, Lemon dances with Mary Good in a suite of short duets, accompanied by two saxophonists. The duets are urgent and virtuosic. Lemon and Good accumulate the troubled air of romantic partners who cannot stay connected no matter how many times they collide. The voiceover of a young woman with a thick urban accent describes a routine of teeth brushing, going to school, returning home and later, having a fight with her boyfriend. In the middle section, Good appears with Simone van den Ende in a black and white film projected onto a large screen. Good and van den Ende circle each other slowly and then dart pensively around a small table, cramped into what resembles a small Manhattan apartment. In the fragmentary sound-score, two women have a suggestive conversation about mutual attraction—the accents are different here, carrying an urbane, cosmopolitan cadence that could be all too easily





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assigned to the two white women dancing on screen. The fact that Good and van den Ende are playing out a drama on screen also points towards a new layer of visibility, or even filmic glamour, for the white subjects of Lemon's choreography. The young, urban female voice is missing here—the differing levels of racial, gendered and cultural experience, representation and absence circulate ever more strongly. Near the end of the film the saxophones start up again and Lemon dances behind the screen, becoming a shadowy interloper in the film. In the final section of the dance Lemon appears in a voluminous, green dress, moving dynamically through space accompanied by the saxophones. From another voiceover, we can piece together a violent event as the first young woman talks about a mugging to another. Phrases like “this ‘Rican girl,” “she stabbed me,” “green eyes,” “dark skin” and “high fashion” emerge through the choppy edit. Throughout the piece a multi-layered and metropolitan New York City has emerged (the saxophones, the various narrators, the film's setting, a heavy emphasis on appearances). But in the end, the personas and places of this dance are elided into Lemon's dancing. Though he is performing a solo, the accumulation of so many other presences complicates Lemon's status as the protagonist of the stories he is transmitting.

Though these *Parallels* dances were explicitly edged by questions of blackness within new choreographic idioms, not all of the choreographers could or would identify with this framework. They ferried their own bodies across a divide that could be reduced to the distance between black dance aesthetics and the new dance avant-garde, a predominantly white community at the time. While the worlds of black and white dance do contour each other's existence, they are not consistent enough references for univocal identity. In an interview much later, Solomons jr. states “I never thought of myself in terms of being black. Whatever comes out is what is. I make dances about the design of body, speeds, shapes, and energies without reference to anything outside that.”^{vii} His stance as a dance maker is well taken, and he determines his *Parallels* solo through kinetics and spatial concerns rather than his individual story. But as my father, Oree Rawls has said to me, “No one ever just happens to be black.” Though this might be an out of date view of racial difference, it is one that *Parallels* brings up through these performances—blackness is something that can be performed, is made to perform in this context. The interface of *Parallels* between these artists and their audiences required that race be a medium for interpretation for the public. *Parallels* curator Ishmael Houston-Jones addresses this tricky status in his program notes for the 1982 series, describing choreographers who exist in an outside, beyond the shelter of African-American and modern dance tropes. He writes, “If there is any implicit ‘message’ to be gotten from this series it is that this new generation of black artists... is producing work that is richly diverse.”^{viii} The array of aesthetic choices was more important to Houston-Jones than how an audience might apprehend their identity as a collective. On the other hand this collectivity cannot be avoided, and Houston-Jones would be the first to admit it, no performance ever just happens to be in front of other people.

The audience for *Parallels*, often made up of other dancers and dance

makers, was confronted with artists that were both recognizable and newly contextualized. But when *Parallels* toured to Europe in 1987 (in a slightly different configuration—minus Solomons jr., Jones and Sheppard, plus Jawole Willa Jo Zollar), an expanded audience and more exposure proved to be troubling conditions for some. In an interview with Elizabeth Zimmer, Cummings sums up the problem for herself, “I’m a child of history, a part of history, trying to figure out what’s going to happen in dance because of the media and the money aspects... A lot of hype is necessary for the making of careers; the rises and falls are much faster; people have to compete with themselves.”^{ix} In 1982, Cummings also presented *Chicken Soup* in the Dance Black America program at The Brooklyn Academy of Music—it is notable that this program also presented work by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. In an excellent discussion of the issues surrounding this development in Cummings’ career and aesthetics, Ann Cooper Albright suggests, “Cummings embraces the strategic essentialism of that identity... [her] solo could be seen as encompassing one aspect of that multidimensional [African-American] experience.”^x Cummings’ *Chicken Soup* was also presented in 1988, by the television program, *Alive from Off Center*. The setting for this version of the dance was a problematically literal interpretation of the dance’s content. Albright notes, the “television producer had Cummings performing the dance in a generic formica kitchen, wearing a housedress and a flowered apron... removing the wonderful ambivalence of Cummings’ earlier version of this dance.”^{xi}

The reductive setting of a particular kitchen more literally aligns Cummings, as a black woman, to the particularity of black womanhood and a history of domestic labor. Though this is an important history to make visible, the ambivalent medium of the stage produced a fluidity of possible settings and identities for Cummings that is lost in the translation to popular appeal. This issue of appeal, of the compassionate or sympathetic process of audience identification, is one that Albright acknowledges as Cummings desire, this management of “audience’s responsiveness to her work.”^{xii}

As these artists moved into greater visibility their blackness was processed through wider circles of interpretation and cultural use, threatening to erase the complexity of the work. In the face of these forces, blackness increasingly becomes a strategy, a frame to be breached or maintained, depending on where the work appears and what is at stake for each artist. In 2001, Lemon and Miller, “attest to being more comfortable with the notion of choosing *when* and *how* they create works relevant to their experiences as African Americans.”^{xiii} These strategies of blackness are too numerous for me to cover here, but it will be interesting to see how PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels* facilitates artists in constructing their own approach to the uses and limitations of the framing of identity. How do the contemporary protagonists of back identity upset this process of recognition and identification? How might artists that are non-white, or perhaps, alternatively, non-black, claim the threshold of *Parallels* as a means to comment on its efficacy or obsolescence within the architecture of identity?

As a contemporary of the *Parallels* artists, Bill T. Jones is known for dealing

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with the charged territory of race in conjunction with postmodern or hybrid aesthetics. His career has spanned the worlds of opera, Broadway and the avant-garde “downtown scene.” As Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes, “He often speaks about himself in the third person, in the manner of athletes or Presidential candidates.”^{xiv} This third person status indicates Jones’ consciousness of maneuvering not only oneself but also one’s image through the realms of cultural apperception. At the time of *Parallels*, in 1982, Jones was an up and coming choreographer in his own right, who enjoyed applying pressure to divisions of color, aesthetics, performer, audience and marketplace.

“The postmoderns don’t care that I am here.”^{xv} On December 4, 1983, Bill T. Jones lodges this complaint to Steve Paxton, Mary Overlie and an audience packed into the Parish Hall at St. Mark’s Church in-the-Bowery. Paxton and Jones had each just presented solo dance works and then sat down to have a tête-à-tête, moderated by Overlie. At the time, Paxton was the widely recognized ambassador of contact improvisation. Mary Overlie was one of several founding members of Movement Research, a mainstay for experimental choreographers and dance teachers re-defining research within the fields of movement study and choreographic practice. Jones rounded out this trio and, with his complaint, declared himself an unwelcome anti-hero, leveling a critique at the figures with which experimental dance was identifying itself. In this rhetorically bold gesture, Jones invokes the blind spots and shortcomings of postmodern dance and induces a face off with fellow iconoclast, Steve Paxton. It is a conversation that swirls headily and heatedly around differences in approach to research and career, and implicitly around the absence of black artists in the white-dominated field of experimental dance.

The occasion was the ongoing series in Movement Research’s programming, Studies Projects, in which topics in dance are taken up by choreographers and dancers and processed communally through lectures, performances and discussions. Danspace Project had stepped forward to house a number of these Studies Projects. And in this particular instance, Danspace Project hosted this prickly stand off between two artists working in opposing ways within postmodern dance. Jones comes prepared to the Studies Project, ready to broadcast a hard truth, which is that, no matter how much postmodern dance had distanced itself from modern dance and from limitations of the proscenium stage, there still remain real gaps between who belongs, who matters, who gets to make and be seen in this burgeoning new context, and who does not. In a white-dominated field, Jones’ complaint carries implicit references to the race differential in experimental dance and to the luxury of disowning the stage as a site for self-expression, a refusal that black choreographers historically could not necessarily afford. According to Carl Paris, mastering certain modern dance techniques “demonstrated that blacks were worthy of serious consideration as dance artists” or alternatively, “the medium of concert dance [served] as a metaphor for cultural autonomy, survival (or rage).”^{xvi} This suggests that certain aspects of white privileged access (even the access to a denial of tradition) are sublimated in Paxton’s investigation of his body’s “infinitesimal”^{xvii} movements. In Paxton’s demonstration

earlier in the evening, he amplified a minute menagerie of movement coursing through his body, framed in a conversational, mirage-like performance. The difference in aesthetic taste is exacerbated here, when comparing Paxton's presentation to Jones', an expansive, musical and virtuosic display of classical dancing skill paired with an archly theatrical monologue. Paxton's postmodernism takes the form of an "unlearning" of modern dance training and a refutation of the presentational mandates of performance, while Jones' postmodernism demonstrates a collagist's hand adept at manipulating symbols and skills, shifting chimera-like through representations. Visibility is at stake here, on several levels.

However, Jones' issue with the experimental dance field cannot be construed as solely a racial one; it also calls into question the limited distribution of knowledge within and outside the dance field that Paxton defends as the research branch of dance. It is expressly not being packaged for theatrical consumption. Jones speaks of sitting on panels where he is asked to represent the face of postmodern dance as a fungible endeavor; Paxton balks at the very idea of applying for grants. The two fall squarely on either side of a concern (or lack thereof) for the marketplace and, by extension, for an audience—pressures and realities that Jones, steadily advancing in his career as a professional, could not afford to ignore, pressures and realities that Paxton considers would depreciate the research. If postmodernism hails the collapse of all grand narratives, then it shows up here, in dance, as a new catalog of strategies that seem to break along somatic, economic and color lines. The discussion escalates to a point in which Paxton and Jones both end up representing much larger ideas than themselves and also grappling with the hair-splitting of what research-in-dance actually looks like. And, for that matter, what a researcher-in-dance looks like. For the audience gathered, this event had the salient quality of history in the making, "a bracing departure from the deadly politesse that characterizes these events."^{xviii}

As an ensemble of documentation the original *Parallels* performances and the Paxton-Jones debate provide a rich entry point for the drawing of new parallels in 2012.

At the time of this writing it is unsure whether I will have access to the original footage of the Paxton-Jones debate. The usage of the footage is pending authorization by the three participants who appear on screen: Jones, Overlie and Paxton. This is a stipulation put forth by Movement Research that indicates a characteristic element of the organization's *ethos*: that its archives and body of knowledge belong first and foremost to the artists that produced it. For whatever limitations experimental dance artists may impose upon themselves to produce innovations in movement, in a place of inconsistent visibility, these same dance practitioners must rely on each other to maintain, distribute and propagate dance histories. This kind of self-reliance is what can make new dance ideas so rarefied and so crucially unique as ideas that must be devoted to their own production and historical progress. In addition, I have to mention that the *Parallels* works of Fred Holland and Rrata Christine Jones are not available for review, so I do not write about them—at this point, no documentation can be found.

This also speaks of the precariousness of the material of dance and leads my thoughts on *Parallels* to an inconsistent, incomplete finishing point. These curatorial dilemmas are indicative of the importance of an endeavor such as PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels* that takes up the questions of dance's past and present and attempts to bring them to light.

Coining: An Evening of On-Screen Performance

CURATED BY WILL RAWLS

MARCH 27TH [TUES] 8:00PM

In the second night of screenings, I will present performances that have been made for film, video or projection formats. These performance films might include dance or choreography, but also take a broader view of performance, to include fictionalized self-portraiture, music videos and web “television” serials. Questions about self-representation in relationship to black identity will continue to circulate here, branching into areas of gender, sexuality, queerness, economics, pop culture and politics. Central to these works is the nature of the two-sided coin—they are channels for entertainment and audience building but also devices for reflection and critical engagement. The videos will not be announced here, but the figure of Hennessy Youngman and his Internet serial, *Art Thoughtz*, serves as a reference point for the rest of the evening. Youngman (played by Jayson Musson), is a hip hop beat head who compiles advice for viewers on issues that are prevalent in the art world, from “How To Be a Successful Black Artist” and “Post-Structuralism” to “Curators.” As he navigates the ins and out of these topics, he also subversively paints a portrait of how artists might approach themselves inside of their work. The character of Hennessy Youngman is an agent of productively confusing behavior that won't line up with expectation—his rough-hewn delivery belies his soigné, critical fluency in the politics of the art market. In an online interview with *Art in America* writer, Brian Boucher, Youngman states:

Artists are not real people. There's this Jerry Saltz lecture somewhere online where he's talking about the sublime and during the lecture he makes an analogy about how non-artists are like dogs in that they deal directly with the world: you ask a dog to come to you and it will. Whereas artists are like cats, y'know, you call for a cat and that cat is not fucking coming to you; they'll take a stroll around the fucking room, rub up on a bunch of shit, then rub your tiny ankle and be off. And the Saltzer, he said artists are like that in that they have an indirect way of dealing with the real world, through the making of art, artists create this system of occupying the world in this indirect, yet very distinct way.^{xix}

As an outro for PLATFORM 2012: *Parallels*, I hope to take these thoughts and apply them to the diverse methods of artists who are working in performance, at times using themselves as subject matter. These performative projections carve out spaces that provide a distinct destination for these artists and for the people who encounter their work, an encounter that is sophisticated, arch and circuitous in its behavior. Once

engaged, a viewer might find that the two-sided coin of entertainment and criticality begins to spin on its edge, becoming a revolving door for reflections of all kinds.

My gratitude goes out to the dancemakers and writers on whose work this essay is built. Many thanks to Moriah Evans for her many readings, and her advice and critique of the Protagonists essay—she's right, Euclid has nothing to do with Parallels. Also, a huge shout out to Lydia Bell for her tenacious, patient and rigorous wrangling of the various drafts.

WILL RAWLS is a performer, choreographer, writer and curator based in New York City. His choreographies explore dance as a physical confluence of fantasy, history, personal narrative, real and unreal time. Rawls is a graduate of the Art History Department at Williams College and was a 2008 danceWEB scholar at ImPulsTanz in Vienna.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Ishmael Houston-Jones, *Parallels* program notes (1982).

ⁱⁱ Carl Paris, "Defining the African American Presence in Postmodern Dance from the Judson Era to the 1990s," in *34th Annual Cord Conference Proceedings*, ed. Janice LaPointe-Crump. (New York: New York University, 2001), 237.

ⁱⁱⁱ Randy Martin, "Dance and Its Others: Theory, State, Nation and Socialism," in *Of The Presence of the Body*, ed. Andre Lepecki. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 48.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 51.

^v *Ibid.*, 48.

^{vi} Blondell Cummings, *Parallels* program notes (1982).

^{vii} Paris, "Defining the African American Presence," 236.

^{viii} Ishmael Houston-Jones, *Parallels* program notes (1982).

^{ix} Elizabeth Zimmer, "Parallels in Black," *Dance Theatre Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 5.

^x Ann Cooper Albright, "Dancing Bodies and the Stories They Tell," in *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 133.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, 132.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, 133.

^{xiii} Paris, "Defining the African American Presence," 239.

^{xiv} Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Body Politic," *The New Yorker*, v. 70, n. 39 (November 1994): 114.

^{xv} Bill T. Jones, Movement Research Studies Project discussion with Bill T. Jones and Steve Paxton, moderated by Mary Overlie, videotaped at Danspace Project/St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery on December 4, 1983.

^{xvi} Paris, "Defining the African American Presence," 235.

^{xvii} Steve Paxton, Movement Research Studies Project discussion with Bill T. Jones and Steve Paxton, 1983.

^{xviii} Elizabeth Zimmer, "Working the Room," *Village Voice*, December 1983.

^{xix} Brian Boucher, "Ali G with an MFA: Q+A with Hennessy Youngman," *Art in America* website, March 24, 2011, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2011-03-24/hennessey-youngman-youtube/>.

⁵ The black artist
makes this happen
out of the most rigid
traditions, in a society
where our crafts are
often not honored...



Black Jam

CURATED BY JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR
FEBRUARY 16TH [THURS] 8:00PM

Dance improvisation is spontaneous choreographic creation. What does it mean to come to the stage to interrogate that which you do not know and cannot predict? Increasingly this question has become a driving force in the “third decade” of my professional creative life. Improvisation drives new creation, new practices and new questions. The unknown possibilities of “becoming” require mystery, mastery, intuition, rigor and wit. While “contact improvisation” has been a driver in contemporary dance, other social environments such as dance clubs, the Capoeira “roda” and playgrounds provide additional contexts for improvisation. What if rhythm and vernacular movement are part of the palette of investigation? What if the idea is not to make contact but to “jam” together through a series of timed tasks? What does a group of African-American improvisers bring to the table that will be different? Will it be different? Does it matter?

The group of improvisers I have chosen for this evening reflect a diverse approach to improvisation. The performers are Hunter Carter, Samantha Speis and Marýa Wethers plus a few surprises just to keep it all real.

JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri and trained with Joseph Stevenson, a student of the legendary Katherine Dunham. She founded Urban Bush Women in 1984 as a performance ensemble dedicated to exploring the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change. In 1997 she joined the dance faculty of Florida State University (FSU) and she is the Nancy Smith Fichter Professor in FSU's Department of Dance. In 2011 she became the Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor, the highest honor bestowed by the FSU faculty on one of its own.





Where We're Calling From

CURATED BY BEBE MILLER

FEBRUARY 17TH [FRI] 8:00PM

Legacy is complicated. In acknowledging my own roots—artistic, political, what have you—I've recognized a tendency of saying too little (or too much) about lines of influence, perhaps to underscore my independence in getting to be who I've gotten to be. Truth be told, it took a village; it always does. I've asked this particular group of women to consider legacy—where you from, girl? —as mentorship, place, and personal journey. Gesel Mason, Cynthia Oliver, and Mar'ya Wethers are astonishing artists with a deep reveal to their work. They move us through what they've been told, by what needs telling, and by what has brought us to listen.

BEBE MILLER, a native New Yorker, first performed her own choreography in 1978 at Dance Theater Workshop. Her interest in finding a physical language for the human condition is a connecting thread throughout her work, and, in order to further a process of group inquiry, she formed Bebe Miller Company in 1985. In recent years, she has been investigating a mix of theatrical narrative, performance and media to expand this language. Miller has been a Full Professor in Dance at The Ohio State University since 2000.

⁶ ... but still with
that sensibility that
taught the world how
to solo—solitary
yet communal,
disciplined and free.



Black Dance

CURATED BY DEAN MOSS

FEBRUARY 18TH [SAT] 8:00PM

I'm interested in "Black" identity as it pertains to otherness and its association with the outsider. Pedro Jiménez, Young Jean Lee, and Ann Liv Young are amazing artists with sincere and slippery relationships to identity. Each of them is extreme in a way that defines them as other, not only to a general audience but even within their own artistic communities. Each of them creates work that brilliantly pushes the boundaries of what is and is not performance, what is and is not the self. None of them are African-American but all of them are Black.

DEAN MOSS is a director, choreographer, and video artist who produces multidisciplinary performance works through his company Gametophyte Inc. He was the Curator of Dance and Performance at The Kitchen (1999-2004) and is honored to have served many rigorously innovative artists very early in their careers. He recently lectured for two years in the department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University, and is currently a Visiting Professor in the graduate programs of Art, Dance, and Intermedia Studies at Hunter College.







An All Day Event. The End.

CONCEIVED BY RALPH LEMON

MARCH 31ST [SAT] 11:00AM-10:00PM

"Describe it. Whatever it is, describe it. If you can describe it, you may be able to control it. You may be able to answer the tyranny of what seems to be external."

—James Baldwin

Baldwin, a hero of mine, speaks here, in part, of the need to become visible (empowered) from an imposed invisible existence, as a racial and sexual being in a fraught time in America, most of his 20th century.

I shared some of that fraught 20th century with Baldwin, and continue to observe my interesting times and battles, as they morph...my questions of visibility and invisibility. It is a different time, and that may mean nothing at all. My questions become vital creative material. Is that enough?

Baldwin was an unapologetic activist and artist. I think about what it might mean to be just an artist, describing only the tension and or harmony of a thing, whatever that might mean, in a global time politic that seems to demand more than that, whatever that might mean. Ludwig Wittgenstein, on the other hand, from a family of Christians, who considered himself a Jew, "my people," he called them, who no doubt had little practical use for jargon-words like race, sexuality, culture, and rage—offered that there is no equivalent between what seems to be the case and what is the case, only the tension prevails.

What shape to give this tension was of great interest to me for many years. It became a sort of mantra. Now I think, what shape not to give this tension may be a better use of my time. An interest beyond identity, visibility and invisibility, cultural politics (art?) and maybe even rage, which seems very much aligned with love, in how they both have aspects of the divine. Although love is supposed to transcend empathic curiosity. Is supposed to.

What am I trying to say?

Okay, so let's say that art, performance, as most of us like to consider it, is beyond the mire of a soul's unfiltered messiness. But art, as I appreciate it, is also not confined to transformation; it does not triumph over all. Sometimes, at its best, it sits in shit, nonfiction. And poor. Also possibly fake.

But then what is it?

Meaning is always constituted. Basically, whatever it is it should have a beginning and an ending that allows an audience, a witness like you, to come and to go, to walk away appreciating or not appreciating an experience clearly not your own, which is why you can love it or hate it or feel nothing at all.

Otherwise it's desk art, faultlessly private, or a luminous and barely seen "living

room dance,” absolute and incontrovertible acts. Sub Rosa. Or audaciously bold and inversely defined:

After the 9/11 attacks I told a friend I thought those jumping from the buildings were like dancers. She was outraged and I explained. “Dancers,” I said, that’s how I identify with them. Bodies, unbounded, in space, giant space and the unknown. None of them, black, brown, white, yellow, red, green, purple...

I spend a lot of time thinking about what it is I can’t do, what would not be possible. And then there is the doing, which seems to have some inherent requirement that is about form, and or a container. The form/container becomes a thing that is knowable, ultimately, even as it feels fresh, new...

We see what we know. Neuroscientists have recently, or not so recently discovered that our consciousness sees a world in a way that is far less complex than all the other inexplicable work that is happening in the brain, neuronal and electric, energetic activity that plays out non-stop, that maybe we are not capable, evolved enough to acknowledge, seeing all the other elements that are part of our human universe, stuff right in front of us, inside of us. Of course most religions have said this all along.

So I think about form (and race) as a kind of tyranny. And how to create a personal anarchy to that tyranny, kindly, without hurting myself or anyone else.

And in what time? Paul Virillio has said, “The pursuit of form is only a technical pursuit of time.”

So back to Baldwin, and the fraught black/sexual body experience, and to something I wrote not so long ago: I begin with the body, no way around it. The body as place, memory, culture, and as a vehicle for a cultural language.

And so of course I’m in a current state of wonderment at the politics of form. That I can feel both emotional outrageousness with my body as a memory map, an emotional geography of a particular American identity, and that I can reflect on empirical design. How mining a charged history can be in contradiction to a formalist art process and the separation that has to happen, transforming a culturally inherited abstract rage (a primary activating energy) into art (play), a sharing, love? Changing the fundamental natures of identity, art and my body’s movement activation(s) as I understand them...a perceptual shift, if nothing more.

I would like to describe love.

I probably felt this same way 30 years ago, but didn’t have these same words, when I met an avatar teenager named Wanda, a brown Hispanic girl in Washington Square Park in 1981. I became her, her confessions, and wore a green linen skirt, something she would never wear, while Carla Brownlee and Chris Hyams Hart played their saxophones...apples all over the Danspace floor.

I also made a dance I called Civilian, it was 10 minutes long and took me a whole year to make, where I channeled Malcolm X, as a Minnesotan.

I wasn't thinking about a parallel existence to the other dance makers in "downtown" New York City who didn't look like me, not at all. I was thinking some about Meredith Monk, her multi-media proclivities, and perhaps on some unfathomable unconscious level, in a small cove in my hard head, I was wishing she were black? But I doubt it. I also had no idea who Ishmael Houston-Jones was, what he danced, not in 1982. Now he is another one of my heroes, along with Blondell Cummings, Fred Holland, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Bebe Miller, Gus Solomons jr. and the late Harry Sheppard. Obliviousness can be useful and sometimes sublime!

Baldwin too, was interested in the sublime, as he was ensconced in race matters, when he said, in what I imagine was a more quiet moment...I wish us to become equal to ourselves.

Not sure how relevant that (sublime) statement is today but I will curate, with the help of Nari Ward, Jim Findlay, Rick Murray, and a line-up of spectacular movement artists, a marathon day at the very end of this broad re-Parallels event that I hope generates an illusory erasure of equality, an illusory erasure of ourselves, an erasure of 30 years ago, a disappearance into all day play and love, if only for a day.

RALPH LEMON is a dancer, choreographer, writer and visual artist. He currently serves as the Artistic Director of Cross Performance, a company dedicated to the creation of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary performance and presentation

.....
KYLE ABRAHAM.	CHRISTINA JONES. Formerly: RRATA	OGBITSE OMAGBEMI.
Born: Pittsburgh, PA, 1977.	CHRISTINE JONES. Born: Chicago, IL,	Born: New York, NY, 1973.
Lives in Brooklyn, NY.	1952. Lives in San Diego County, CA.	Lives in New York, NY.
.....
NIV ACOSTA. Born: New York,	DARRELL JONES.	WILL RAWLS.
NY, 1988. Lives in Brooklyn,	Born Washington, DC, 1969.	Born: Boston, MA, 1978.
NY.	Lives in Chicago, IL.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.
.....
LAYLAH ALI. Born: Buffalo,	NIALL NOEL JONES.	REGINA ROCKE. Born:
NY, 1968. Lives in	Born: Richmond, VA, 1984.	Englewood, NJ, 1981. Lives in
Williamstown, MA.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.	Brooklyn, NY.
.....
SOULEYMANE BADOLO. Born:	YOUNG JEAN LEE.	HARRY SHEPPARD. Born:
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.	Born: Daegu, Korea, 1974.	Wilmington, DE, 1945. Died:
Lives in Brooklyn, NY.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.	1992, Arnhem, Netherlands.
.....
KEVIN BEASLEY. Born:	NICHOLAS LEICHTER.	GUS SOLOMONS JR.
Lynchburg, VA, 1985. Lives in	Born: Mount Vernon, NY, 1971.	Born: Boston, MA, 1938.
New Haven, CT.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.	Lives in New York, NY.
.....
HUNTER CARTER.	RALPH LEMON.	SAMANTHA SPEIS.
Born: Washington, DC, 1983.	Born: Cincinnati, OH, 1952.	Born: Oahu, HI, 1982. Lives
Lives: New York, NY.	Lives in New York, NY.	in Brooklyn, NY.
.....
NORA CHIPAUMIRE.	ISABEL LEWIS. Born: Santo Domingo,	STACY SPENCE.
Born: Mutare, Zimbabwe, 1965.	Dominican Republic, 1981. Lives in	Born: Lake Charles, LA, 1966.
Lives in Brooklyn, NY.	Berlin, Germany & Brooklyn, NY.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.
.....
BLONDELL CUMMINGS.	GESEL MASON.	DAVID THOMSON.
Born: Effingham, SC.	Born: New Orleans, LA. Lives	Born: Bronx, NY, 1959.
Lives in New York, NY.	in Boulder, CO.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.
.....
THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ. Born:	APRIL MATTHIS.	NARI WARD.
Munice, IN, 1969. Lives in	Born: Texarkana, TX, 1976.	Born: St. Andrews, Jamaica,
Durham, NC & Shushan, NY.	Lives in New York, NY.	1963. Lives in New York, NY.
.....
MARJANI A. FORTÉ.	BEBE MILLER.	MARYA WETHERS. Born: 1975. Family from
Born: Pasadena, CA, 1984.	Born: Brooklyn, NY, 1950.	New Orleans, LA. Raised in Scottsdale,
Lives in New York, NY.	Lives in Columbus, OH.	AZ. Lives in Brooklyn, NY.
.....
JAMES HANNAHAM.	DEAN MOSS.	REGGIE WILSON.
Born: Bronx, NY, 1968. Lives	Born: Tacoma, WA, 1954. Lives	Born: Milwaukee, WI, 1967.
in Brooklyn, NY.	in Brooklyn, NY.	Lives in Brooklyn, NY.
.....
FRED HOLLAND.	WANGECHI MUTU.	ANN LIV YOUNG. Born:
Born: Columbus, OH. 1951.	Born: Nairobi, Kenya, 1972. Lives	Elizabeth City, NC, 1981.
Lives in New York, NY.	in Brooklyn, NY.	Lives in Jersey City, NJ.
.....
ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES.	CYNTHIA OLIVER. Born: Boogie Down	JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR. Born:
Born: Harrisburg, PA, 1951.	Bronx, 1961. Raised: St. Croix US	Kansas City, MI, 1950. Lives in
Lives in New York, NY.	VI. Lives in Urbana, IL.	Brooklyn, NY & Tallahassee, FL.
.....
PEDRO JIMÉNEZ.	OKWUI OKPOKWASILI. Born:	
Born: Upstate NY, 1983. Lives	Bronx, NY, 1972. Lives in	
in Bronx, NY.	Brooklyn, NY.	





February 2 [Thur]
7:00PM
The Artist's Voice with
Ishmael Houston-Jones
in conversation with
Wangechi Mutu
Location: The Studio Museum
in Harlem, 144 West 125th
Street, New York, NY
.....

February 4 [Sat]
3:00PM
*The Protagonists: Documents
of Dance and Debate*
Curated by Will Rawls
with Blondell Cummings and
Ishmael Houston-Jones
Location: Douglas Dunn
Studio, 541 Broadway, 3rd
Floor, New York, NY
.....

February 9-11 [Thur-Sat]
8:00PM
Isabel Lewis,
SYNTHETIC ACTION
Will Rawls,
Collected Fictions
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

February 16 [Thur]
8:00PM
Black Jam
Curated by
Jawole Willa Jo Zollar
Artists: Hunter Carter,
Samantha Speis, Marya
Wethers
.....

February 17 [Fri]
8:00PM
Where We're Calling From
Curated by Bebe Miller
Artists: Gesel Mason,
Cynthia Oliver, Marya
Wethers
.....

February 18 [Sat]
8:00PM
Black Dance
Curated by Dean Moss
Artists: Pedro Jiménez,
Young Jean Lee, and Ann Liv
Young
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY

February 23-25 [Thur-Sat]
8:00PM
*From the Streets, From the
Clubs, From the Houses*
Artists: Darrell Jones,
Niall Noel Jones, Nick
Leichter, Regina Rocke
(7:45PM pre-show
screening of *Check Your
Body at the Door*)
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 8-10 [Thur-Sat]
8:00PM
Dean Moss, *some elements
new, re-purposed,
in-process*
Reggie Wilson, *Solo's Solo/
«Basic II» – a study on
how NOT to go so low or
too deep (with changes in
direction)*
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 15-17 [Thur-Sat]
8:00PM
Nora Chipaumire,
The Last Heifer
Okwui Okpokwasili,
Bronx Gothic
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 16 [Fri] post-show
Discussion with Wangechi
Mutu
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery
131 East 10th Street, New
York, NY
.....

March 22-24 [Thur-Sat]
8:00PM
Kyle Abraham, *Boyz N' The
Hood* (excerpt)
Marjani Forté, *Here...*
Samantha Speis, *The Way it
Was, and Now*
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY

March 27 [Tue]
5:00-8:00PM
Stacy Spence, *Trekking*
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 27 [Tue]
5:30PM
Thomas F. DeFrantz,
Performing Black
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 27 [Tue] [6:00PM]
Parallels on Tour
Discussion with Ishmael
Houston-Jones, Blondell
Cummings, Henry Pillsbury,
Barbara Watson
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 27 [Tue]
8:00PM
*Coining: An Evening of
On-Screen Performance*
Curated by Will Rawls
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY
.....

March 31 [Sat]
11:00AM-10:00PM
An ALL Day Event. The End.
Framework conceived
by Ralph Lemon with
collaborators Nari Ward,
Roderick Murray, Jim
Findlay.

Artists: niv Acosta, Kevin
Beasley, James Hanaham,
Ishmael Houston-Jones,
April Matthis, Okwui
Okpokwasili, Omagbitse
Omagbemi, David Thomson
Location: Danspace Project
St. Mark's Church in-the-
Bowery, 131 East 10th
Street, New York, NY

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www.wesleyan.edu/icpp.

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KING'S FOUNTAIN

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Ishmael Houston-Jones and
Judy Hussie-Taylor



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