UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Black Minimalisms: Subterfuge, Pastiche, and Task in Choreographies of Routine Violence

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6059q55q

Author

Plasencia, Marisa

Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Black Minimalisms: Subterfuge, Pastiche, and Task in Choreographies of Routine Violence

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

by

Marisa Plasencia

Committee in charge:

Professor Ninotchka D. Bennahum, Chair

Professor Stephanie L. Batiste

Linda Murray

June 2022

This dissertation of Marisa Plasencia is approved.

_____
Stephanie L. Batiste

_____
Linda Murray

_____
Ninotchka D. Bennahum, Committee Chair

June 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank the members of my committee for their support and feedback. Linda Murray, chief curator at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, pointed me to invaluable archival resources. Thank you, Linda, for your clarity and help in drawing connections across dance artists through an attention to primary sources. Stephanie Batiste also helped me expand the breadth of my dissertation, offering the lens of literary traditions in my research on black popular dance forms and introducing me to contemporary artists that aligned with my interests in postmodern dance. Thank you, Stephanie, for connecting me to multiple writing groups that helped me find and build community with other students as I wrote my dissertation. Finally, Ninotchka Bennahum taught me the importance of deep historical research in dance studies. Thank you for always encouraging me to apply for and seize opportunities in practice and research that came my way. You have connected me to artists that have changed how I see and think about dance. I hope to pass on these lessons through teaching in the future.

The Dance Department at UCSB also helped me maintain artistic practice as a graduate student, welcoming me into their studio courses. I am grateful for the access to training offered by the department that fostered my commitment to integrating theory and practice as a dance scholar. Thank you, Nancy Colahan, for your mentorship. I experienced liberating moments in class through your choreography, surprised by what my body could remember and energized to take these lessons to my research in dance. Thank you for showing me these possibilities. Thank you, Brandon Whited, for your mentorship in studio classes and graduate seminars. Your perspective as an artist-scholar serves as a model for

how I hope to encourage students to pursue the questions in dance and research that motivate them.

Thank you to faculty, staff, and peers on campus that further helped me along the way: Mary Tench, Christina McCarthy, Letty García, and the members of my wonderful writing group, Maite and Sage! I would also like to thank mentors from my undergraduate studies that encouraged me to connect my interests in disparate fields: Stacey Connelly, Kyle Gillette, and Peter O'Brien. Thank you, Katsuo Nishikawa, for your continued encouragement over the years. Finally, thank you to my partner and family that provide me with endless support.

This research was assisted by a Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies and funding from the Department of Theater and Dance at UCSB.

VITA OF MARISA PLASENCIA

JUNE 2022

EDUCATION

University of California, Santa Barbara, Spring 2022
MA/PhD in Theater, Dance & Performance Studies (MA in Theater Studies awarded Fall 2018)

Dissertation:
Black Minimalisms: Subterfuge, Pastiche, and Task in Choreographies of Routine Violence

Master's Thesis:
Memory in Dislocation: Reading Lines, Histories, and Bodies in the Work of Ralph Lemon

Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, August 2009-May 2013
BA in Political Science (Comparative Politics) and International Studies (Latin American & Latino Studies)
Minor in Drama

AWARDS AND HONORS

2021-2022	American Council of Learned Societies/Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellowship Award
2016-2022:	Doctoral Scholars Fellowship, University of California, Santa Barbara
Spring 2018:	Departmental Grad Essay Contest Award Recipient Carol M. Press & Nicholas Tingle Graduate Studies in Dance Scholarship
2013-2014:	Fulbright Research Scholar, Seville, Spain

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of California, Santa Barbara
Teaching Associateship, Instructor of Record

- Race, Gender, and Performance (Fall 2020, upper division)
- Introduction to Acting (Summer 2019 and 2021)

Teaching Assistant, Summer 2016 to 2021

- Introduction to Acting (Winter 2021, Spring 2021, Winter 2019)
- Performance in Global Contexts: Europe (Spring 2019)
- Performance in Global Contexts: Asia (Fall 2018)
- History and Appreciation of Dance (Spring 2019)
- History of Modern Dance (Winter 2018)
- European Theatre (Fall 2017)
- History of Modern Dance, Online Summer Course, (Summer 2017, Summer 2018)

RESEARCH

Doctoral Candidate, UC Santa Barbara, 2018-2022

Research examined the relationship between minimalism, black social dance traditions, and postmodern dance in masked protest.

- Consulted installations created by black feminist visual artists
- Compiled a list of postmodern choreographic strategies linked to visual art
- Tracked the evolution of protest activities in Black U.S. history with an attention to plantation dances, the Civil Rights Movement, and contemporary resistance efforts that lack a centralized leader

Graduate Student, UC Santa Barbara, 2016-2018
Research examined the role of disorientation in reenactments of racial violence in performance

- Compiled a historical overview on the formation of postmodern dance on the East Coast and West Coast of the United States
- Conducted research at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, looking for dance archives of postmodern choreographers of color
- Defined the relationship between history and memory in postmodern choreography centered on historical research

Trinity University, Department of Political Science, San Antonio, Texas
Research Assistant for Dr. Katsuo Nishikawa, July 2014-December 2014
Research examined the political socialization of Mexican immigrant population in the U.S.

The Fulbright Program, Seville, Spain
Fulbright Research Scholar, September 2013-June 2014
Research examined the impact of information communication technologies (ICTs) on youth protest movements

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS/PERFORMANCES/WORKING GROUPS

RE: ATHE, Association for Theater in Higher Education, Austin Texas
Panel Accepted, August 5-8, 2021

Panel: Revisit, Reframe, Resist: Diffusions of Black Performativity as a Site of Multiplicity, Paper: Plasencia M. Warnings from the Chorus: Self-Defense and Discretion in the Soul Train Line

UCLA Theater and Performance Studies Conference
Presentation, Participant in Working Session led by Daphne A. Brooks, February 19-21, 2021

Plasencia, M. Warnings from the Chorus: Reconstructing a Collapse of Citations on the Collective Body

Dance Studies Association Conference, Evanston, Illinois
Presentation, August 8-11, 2019

Plasencia, M. Proximity to the Past: Accessing History and Memory in the Work of Ralph Lemon

American Society for Theater Research (ASTR)

Working Group Participant, November 17, 2018

Plasencia, M. Memory in Dislocation: Reading Lines, Histories, and Bodies in the Work of Ralph Lemon

Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers, San Francisco, California
Performance, November 9-11, 2018

Sort: a performance piece by Marisa and Maribel Plasencia

Cause and Affect: Inciting Change through Performance, Santa Barbara California
Performance, May 5, 2018

Sort: a performance piece by Marisa and Maribel Plasencia

Dance Under Construction: Doing Dance and Dances that Do
Performance, April 6-8, 2018

Sort: a performance piece by Marisa and Maribel Plasencia

American Political Science Association Conference, San Francisco, California
Presentation, September 3, 2015

McCann J., Nishikawa K., **Plasencia M.,** & Otawka H. Pushing for Inclusion: Assessing Mobilization into the Immigrant Rights Movement

Western Political Science Association Conference, Los Angeles, California
Poster Session, March 29, 2013

Plasencia, M. Rising Information Communication Technologies: Implications for Protest Activity and Political Participation in a Digital Age

PUBLICATIONS

McCann, J., Nishikawa Chávez, K., **Plasencia, M.,** et al. (2016). The Changing Contours of the Immigrant Rights Protest Movement in the United States: Who Demonstrates Now? *The Forum*, 14(2), pp. 169-190. Retrieved 17 Oct. 2016, from doi:10.1515/for-2016-0018

SERVICE

Judge, Corwin Choreography in Excellence Award, UC Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance, Spring 2022

Member, Dance Studies Committee, UC Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance, 2021-2022

Panelist, "Dear Future Grad Student: First-Gen Edition," UC Santa Barbara, November 9, 2021

Discussion Leader, "Thriving, Not Surviving: Navigating Higher Education as a First-Generation College Student," UC Santa Barbara, August 3, 2021

Moderator, "Media and Material Environments" Panel, Graduate Student Symposium hosted by the Department of Theater and Dance at UC Santa Barbara, May 8, 2021

Graduate Student Representative, Department of Theater and Dance at UC Santa Barbara, 2017-2018 Academic Year

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Dance History
- Black Studies
- History and Memory
- Latin American Studies

SKILLS

- Spanish: Advanced in Writing, Reading, and Conversation

ABSTRACT

Black Minimalisms: Subterfuge, Pastiche, and Task in Choreographies of Routine Violence

By

Marisa Plasencia

This dissertation analyzes choreography and visual art that use discretion in performance to reflect on racial violence. The project recognizes distinct concepts of black minimalisms, theories and practices in historiography that stem from traditions of masked protest on slave plantations and fuse with the restraint of expression in postmodern dance. To build this framework, three recurring strategies used by black postmodern choreographer Ralph Lemon are analyzed: subterfuge, pastiche, and task. This research then deconstructs each element in a comparison of Lemon's work to that of three feminist visual artists of color: Ana Mendieta, Alison Saar, and Nicole Miller. In their focus on the aftermath of violence, they turn to archaeological ruins, found materials and objects, and fragments of oral histories to reconstitute what has been destroyed. Each comparison produces its own version of black minimalism shaped by the artists' relationship to postmodern dance genealogies, the African diaspora, and the Civil Rights Movement. The manner in which these artists deploy subterfuge, pastiche, and task-based choreography creates spaces to pause and reflect on violence. These approaches respond to communities that grieve losses that occur in rapid succession.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: A Theory and Practice of Black Minimalisms…….1

Chapter One: A Chorus of Masked Resistance: Observations from the *Soul Train* Line.…..19

Chapter Two: The Hare in the Moon: Silhouettes and Subterfuge in Ana Mendieta's Earth Body Art……...65

Chapter Three: Practices in Pastiche: Distilling Blue in Alison Saar's Material Bodies..…100

Conclusion: The Task to Rebuild After Loss……119

Bibliography……..127

Introduction: A Theory and Practice of Black Minimalisms

In *Come home Charley Patton* (2004) conceived by choreographer, visual artist, and writer Ralph Lemon, an explicit depiction of racial violence occurs through dance.[1] Lemon walks onto a platform mounted on top of the main stage of the Harvey Theater at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in New York and begins a buck dance. His bare feet slide on the floor to create a soft rhythm. The buck dance, therefore, surrenders its sharp percussive force. According to dramaturg Katherine Profeta, Lemon wanted *Come home Charley Patton* to contain the "imperfect memories" of a buck dance, an exploration of historical inaccuracy and the complex survival of cultural traditions through the body.[2] As Lemon dances, another performer walks onto the main stage and points a high-pressure water hose at Lemon, who falls against the force of water, rises, and continues to dance. A glimmering stage curtain serves as his backdrop. Okwui Okpokwasili, a dancer in *Come home Charley Patton,* turns into a spectator as she watches the scene from a row of chairs positioned on stage. The moment reconstructs an image of violence with Okpokwasili and the audience at BAM as observers.

The graphic scene references the use of fire hoses against protestors during the Birmingham Campaign in Alabama in 1963.[3] In his documentation of *Come home Charley Patton*, Lemon revealed that he intended to make the performance even more explicit. He

[1] Ralph Lemon, *Come home Charley Patton*, DVD (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Academy of Music Harvey Theater, 2004).
[2] Katherine Profeta, *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 78-79.
[3] Davi Johnson, "Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 1 (2007), 10, 16. Scholar of communication studies Davi Johnson argues that Martin Luther King Jr. understood how his writing interacted with photos of protest activity, and crafted rhetorical devices in tandem with these images to tap into the moral consciousness of the nation. In addition, Johnson points to the routine spaces captured by photographers in which atrocities occurred: on streets, near stores, and along sidewalks.

tried but failed to secure trained professionals to stand on stage with dogs on leashes. Email communications suggest that dog trainers feared the performance would paint animals as aggressive.[4] To recreate the events of 1963 in all of their specificity with fire hoses and attack dogs presents a clear set of dilemmas: what an artist can and cannot stage in performance and the degrees to which reconstructions of violence through dance are possible. *Come home Charley Patton*, therefore, asks how close a person can get to the memory of acts of racism.

While the reference to attacks against protesters in 1963 comes into view—the force and sound of water, the power of the hose as a weapon that pushes a body to the ground—Lemon often avoids such clear messaging in performance. Given his preference for misdirection in performance, this moment presents an opportunity to consider abstractions of physical injury obscured by vivid references to the Birmingham Campaign, to break down an image and find elements beneath its surface. The dance becomes a riddle. Upon close inspection, choreographic details of this moment reveal the material elements that contribute to a body's loss of control in the efforts to dance against water and reconstruct the past. Water disrupts the rhythms and musicality of the buck dance. Initially cool, smooth, and low to the ground, water uproots dance steps and eradicates their fluidity. The pressure of Lemon's feet on the floor, which move in an increasing frenzy once water rushes into the scene, intensifies this moment. Encased in the impact of water, the dancing body gains an aura on stage that exacerbates the spectacular dimensions of performance. The gleaming curtain behind Lemon billows, receiving the shock of the fire hose. Lemon slips as he tries to get up and struggles to stand on his two feet, an act in repetition that transforms the stage into

[4] Ralph Lemon, *Come home Charley Patton* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 154.

a site of injury. The surge of water as a jolt, an increase in volume, appears interminable as the one-minute dance presents itself in sound, colors, space, and time.

This dissertation acknowledges the weight of this moment in Lemon's career, but largely focuses on the breadth of strategies in which Lemon's references to violence avoid explicit representation. In this manner, it looks beyond the introduction of the fire hose on stage in *Come home Charley Patton* to understand the subtleties of Lemon's work. His minimalism does not necessarily manifest as an economy of movement, but rather, a lack of clarity in narrative structures that attests to the shapeless structures of historical memory. As Lemon dances, he avoids facial expressions to convey suffering or sadness. He braces for the water and relies on the action of the movements to bear the physical dimensions and materiality of violence. A form of emotional restraint through the cool mask draws upon African spiritual philosophies that arrived on U.S. soil through the Transatlantic Slave Trade and form part of Lemon's dance. Cultural historian Robert Farris Thompson's study of meanings of cool in Africa reveal the value of the "cool tongue," a verbal and physical act of "withholding information for the purposes of higher deliberation."[5] To see the dance, an embodied three-dimensional image of 1963, in its silence and ambiguity, releases the body from the confines of its violent depiction.

Three Elements of Black Minimalism

This dissertation highlights three recurring performance strategies in Lemon's work—subterfuge, pastiche, and task—that build a framework in which violence, loss, and regeneration battle the tensions carried by the spectacle of performance. These elements contain a relationship to events in Black U.S. History and Lemon's postmodern dance

[5] Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 41–91, https://doi.org/10.2307/3334749, 41.

genealogy. Subterfuge manifests in various forms through Lemon's elusive choreography, but appears in plain sight through a character that materializes in his writing, performances, and sketches: Brer Rabbit. As a trickster figure of African-American folklore, Brer Rabbit creates riddles and tricks that deceive the audience. When Lemon dresses as the hare, he creates chaos and misdirection. As he conveys unreliable information in performance, Lemon disrupts the search for a single truth. In a connection to postmodern dance genealogies, Brer Rabbit allows multiple truths to exist at once without aims to thrust upon the audience a single view, narrative, or interpretation of the events it witnesses. Dances turn into questions, rather than claims.

Pastiche occurs through form. Lemon samples music, the words of famous black thinkers including James Baldwin, plantation dances, popular black dance forms of the mid-to-late twentieth century, and oral histories that weave intricate narratives in storytelling. This method disrupts the authority of the artistic creator and shows how dancers can repurpose and reinvent material without claiming territories upon which genealogies rely.[6] As Lemon uses words rooted in nonviolence, quotes postmodern dancers,[7] and dresses as Brer Rabbit, he amasses the wisdom of the Civil Rights Movement, postmodern dance vocabularies, and traditions in folklore. This process in layering found materials and dances, also clarifies the pitfalls of protest activity of the 1960s, including social movements and experimentations in postmodern dance.

---

[6] Richard L. Schur, "Defining Hip-Hop Aesthetics," in *Parodies of Ownership* (University of Michigan Press), 42–67, accessed August 8, 2020, https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/3405, 48. Richard Schur argues that sampling, an integral element of hip-hop aesthetics, does not merely copy another person's work. Schur writes, "if a new perspective, beat, or take on something old is created, then it is sampling."

[7] Ralph Lemon, "Circling Around Postmodernism Like Weather" (Artist Talk, Radical Bodies Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, January 27, 2017). In a lecture Ralph Lemon gave at a conference on postmodern dance on the West Coast, he weaved in a quote used by Simone Forti on the significance of time and duration in performance that allow audiences to look at and absorb the contents of dance.

Finally, Lemon's use of task in performance brings attention to ordinary movement.[8] When Lemon travels to a lynching site, dances against water, or reads a story about Brer Rabbit on stage, he carries out concrete actions to work through memory. Task-based movement, utilized by postmodern dancers in the 1960s as a basis for improvisation, propelled exploration and a re-examination of ordinary gestures. [9] These activities determined the length of a dance sequence. In a similar manner, the task Lemon takes on to immerse the body in historical events becomes a lifelong journey.

In order to break down images of racial violence and build sites of memory that commemorate human loss, this dissertation examines subterfuge, pastiche, and task used by three feminist visual artists of color: Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), Alison Saar, and Nicole Miller. Mendieta, Saar, and Miller, present unique entry points to deconstruct race and violence through their photographs, prints, sculptures, films, and site-specific earth-body art. These artists connect to Lemon in their focus on the aftermath of violence; they turn to rubble, found materials and objects, and fragments of oral histories to reconstitute what has been destroyed. Each chapter produces its own version of black minimalism shaped by the artists' relationship to Lemon's dance genealogy, the African diaspora, and the Civil Rights Movement. Mendieta, a Cuban-American performance artist, repeatedly traveled to ruins in Mexico and used subterfuge to blend in with landscapes in the environment.[10] She created

---

[8] Rachel Kaplan and Anna Halprin, *Making Dances That Matter: Resources for Community Creativity* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66074, 13. Anna Halprin urged dancers to tune into ordinary, quotidian movements and gestures as an act of "resistance to routine disregard of the body." This perspective focuses on the potential rooted in bodies to make change through dance.
[9] Ninotchka Bennahum and Bruce Robertson, "Introduction," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (University of California Press, 2017), 29.
[10] Jane Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (Duke University Press, 1999), 92. Art historian Jane Blocker notes that Mendieta's path to U.S. citizenship, which she received in 1970, resulted in the artist's extensive travels. Mendieta made five trips to Mexico out of a total of eleven international trips during her lifetime.

her own visual riddles as she photographed her body, covered in mud or resting beneath piles of stone. Mendieta conceived of the body as material that dies and regenerates in a process of renewal dependent upon destruction. Saar, a mixed-race artist, sculpts bodies of black women, building figures with discarded objects. She imbues her sculptural figures in dissent with blue colors, discretion, and the cool mask.[11] Miller's Afrofuturist video installations draw attention to task, including laughter and gestures in storytelling that proliferate once activated. Through the juxtaposition of three short films, Miller magnifies small movements used by ordinary individuals that collectively compose an image of restoration.[12]

A theory and practice of black minimalisms, rooted in discretion, stems from traditions of masked protest in black history. Through the Transatlantic Slave Trade and African diaspora, dances of dissent and syncretic practices of worship provided avenues for collective forms of resistance, spirituality, and liberation. Dance historian Constance Valis Hill locates an interplay of music, dance, and ritual within the "relative seclusion of the slave quarters" where "field slaves could pray in their native tongues through the shuffling steps of the Ring Shout."[13] The Ring Shout, performed in a circle, utilized duration and repetition in its structure as shuffling steps masked spiritual practices.[14] Other forms of discretion in religious practice retained African spiritual philosophies throughout Latin America. In Cuba,

---

[11] Kitty McManus Zurko and John M. Barry, *Alison Saar: Breach* (Easton: Lafayette College Art Galleries, 2017). The exhibition *Alison Saar: Breach* in 2016 and 2017 was organized around Saar's interest in water as a source of strength and hardship. In the catalog published in conjunction with the exhibit, Kitty McManus Zurko and John M. Barry discuss the impact of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and deities of water from the African diaspora that enter Saar's work.

[12] *Martine Syms, S7 E1: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otUJvQhCjJ0.* 20:35, 24:04. In the "Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto," Nicole Miller discusses her films as creative spaces, or mirrors, that hold the power to affect how the body and mind perceive the environment.

[13] Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 33.

[14] Jennifer L. Campbell, "Ring Shout," Grove Music Online, October 29, 2019, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-90000363087.

followers of Santería worshipped Yoruba deities or *orishas* that they apportioned to Catholic saints.[15] María Teresa Vélez attests to the fundamental integration of drums and spirituality in Santería, as "each oricha possesses a body of chant and a repertoire of drum rhythms and dance movements."[16] Syncretism and obfuscation, two elements central to histories of masked protest, constitute core tactics in historiography created by Black and Latina artists in performance.

Because the visual documentation of lynchings through photographs and postcards continues to propel and pose challenges to Lemon's creative process, the methods developed by visual artists aids to deconstruct dances of terror and pause to notice bodies in all of their components, past a moment of harm.[17] Dance historian Susan Rosenburg's writing, which frames postmodern dancer Trisha Brown as a visual artist, grounds her movements in their durability, and subsequently informs this methodology.[18] In an opposite turn, this dissertation frames visual artists as postmodern dancers. Lemon, Saar, Mendieta, and Miller create a bridge in their respective aims to present the body in dance, indigo, ruins, and film. Postmodern dance as a lens to understand their work enhances interpretations of visual art to show how seemingly durable, material objects contain nuanced, kinetic meaning.

Minimalism and Postmodern Dance

Minimalism reflected a shift in the aesthetic principles of visual artists that reacted against abstract expressionism.[19] Articles, reviews, and essays published by art critics in the

---

[15] María Teresa Vélez, *Drumming for the Gods: The Life and Times of Felipe García Villamil, Santero, Palero, and Abakuá* (Temple University Press, 2000), 11.
[16] Vélez, *Drumming for the Gods*, 12.
[17] Rennie McDougall, "Ralph Lemon on Coming Apart, and Piecing Himself Back Together," *Frieze*, October 23, 2019, https://www.frieze.com/article/ralph-lemon-coming-apart-and-piecing-himself-back-together. Rennie McDougall's article on Ralph Lemon published in 2019 shows that long after the creation of *Patton*, Lemon continues to contemplate the placement and role of violent images of lynchings in performance.
[18] Susan Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 5-6.
[19] James Sampson Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (Yale University Press, 2004), 81.

1960s recognized trends that began to permeate museum spaces as an artistic movement. Samuel J. Wagstaff, for example, reviewed the exhibition "Black White, and Gray" at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1964 and noted that the monochromatic tones in the collection aimed to "keep the viewer from being distracted by the emotionalism of color."[20] While minimalism took many forms and definitions, including the muted color schemes noted by Wagstaff, Donald Judd synthesized his observations of spatial components of minimalism. Judd described a reciprocity within minimalism where the material body stood in direct relationship to self-referential and ordinary art objects.[21] In 1967 art critic Michael Fried argued that objecthood turned visual art into performance, "a new genre of theater," and lost the formalist qualities that constitute the mediums of painting and sculpture.[22] While Fried's argument resisted the performative qualities of minimalist objects, Wagstaff, Judd's, and Fried's observations elucidate the various dimensions of an unstable term in visual art.

Minimalism links visual artists and postmodern dancers that collaborated during the 1960s, discarded expressive, narrative structures of modern dance, and incorporated non-trained dancers in performance.[23] Simone Forti, for example, created dance constructions in which she executed a series of tasks with wooden carts on wheels, see-saws, ropes, and platforms. Trisha Brown also turned to visual art to draw grids for her dances, described by

---

[20] Samuel J. Wagstaff, "Paintings to Think About (1964)," in *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 202.
[21] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects (1965)," in *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 209.
[22] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood (1967)," in *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 235.
[23] Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson, "Radical Bodies: An Overview," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (University of California Press, 2017), 36.; Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (University of California Press, 2007), 104. Robert Morris constructed the physical set pieces for Simone Forti's dance constructions and Lawrence Halprin built Anna Halprin's dance deck. These examples in collaboration demonstrate the interdependence between various artists to realize their democratic visions in artmaking.

Susan Rosenburg as "graphic acts" that represented movement in a series of lines and shapes.[24] Yvonne Rainer compared minimalist sculpture to dance in a call to remove virtuosity from performance and treat "movement-as-object."[25]

Why turn to a postmodern dance genealogy that performance studies scholar Uri McMillan critiques as "of the predominantly white avant-garde" to understand routine violence?[26] Dance scholar Jose L. Reynoso echoes these remarks in a critique of Sally Banes's study of Judson Dance Theater. He highlights the paradox of postmodern dance as a vehicle for social change:

> Although both movements, the dance avant-garde and the civil rights struggles, were fueled by similar impetus for freedom, openness, and inclusiveness as parallel social phenomena during the same period of time, Banes's somewhat segregated history reproduced seemingly contradictory notions of a selective democracy that excludes.[27]

When Lemon recuperates democratic methods established by his predecessors in a study of the black body in U.S. history, he takes on the task of dancing through the philosophies of civil rights activists in an embodied use, critique, and reinvention of postmodern experimentation. This methodology responds to exclusion without rejecting the exploratory, nonlinear, and pedestrian elements deployed by Lemon's mentors. This approach also accepts the complex interactions of racial identities and artistic training as components that build a choreographic approach or style.

---

[24] Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art,* 125.
[25] Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A [1968]," in *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 234.
[26] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (NYU Press, 2015), 121.
[27] Jose L. Reynoso, "Democracy's Body, Neoliberalism's Body: The Ambivalent Search for Egalitarianism Within the Contemporary Post/Modern Dance Tradition," *Dance Research Journal* 51, no. 1 (2019), 50.

Lemon's training further supports this dissertation's embrace of creative practices in postmodern dance that spilled into other artistic fields. In 1979 Lemon moved to New York[28] and collaborated with artists in the downtown dance scene: a label that crystalized in the 1970s.[29] In contrast to uptown, commercial, established dance companies, downtown dancers—experimental and highly conceptual in their processes—drew upon pedestrian movement, valued untrained bodies, and often operated on low budgets.[30] Lemon once described the downtown dance environment as white, "with a handful of black artists who did not seem to care where and what they were."[31] Bebe Miller, Ishmael Houston Jones, and Blondell Cummings, a few of the dancers that worked in this area, broke from the predominance of Alvin Ailey's black modernism.[32]

Lemon later participated in Meredith Monk's *Ellis Island* (1982),[33] a film in which Monk, part of the second wave of postmodern dancers, inserted the immigrant experience into a postmodern multimedia work.[34] Monk used film to play with scale and haunt the stage with voices of the past, a method that bear similarities to Lemon's use of multiple mediums

---

[28] Jennifer Dunning, "When Disbanding Is the Only Logical Step," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1995, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/06/arts/dance-when-disbanding-is-the-only-logical-step.html.
[29] Sally Banes, "Choreographing Community: Dancing in the Kitchen," *Dance Chronicle* 25, no. 1 (2002): 146.
[30] Wendy Perron, *Through the Eyes of a Dancer: Selected Writings* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 36, 202.
[31] Ralph Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile* (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 35.
[32] Kristin Eliasberg, "Race Matters," *The Village Voice*, 1999, https://www.villagevoice.com/1999/05/04/race-matters-2/; Tara Aisha Willis, "Introduction," in *Relations: Bebe Miller, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Ralph Lemon (Program Notes)* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2018), 1–5, https://media.mcachicago.org/pdf/JRMMZDHT/ishmael-houston-jones.pdf?_ga=2.153419448.109467201.1653609687-399315567.1653609687, 1-2. In the program for *Relations*, dance scholar and curator Tara Aisha Willis links the aesthetic practices of black downtown dance artists that experimented with form and departed from the modern dance traditions of Alvin Ailey.
[33] Meredith Monk, *Ellis Island*, videorecording (West Germany: ZDF, 1982), https://browse.nypl.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb12159723__Smeredith%20ellis%20island__P0%2C4__Orightresult__U__X2?lang=eng&suite=def.
[34] Jack Anderson, "How the Judson Theater Changed American Dance," *The New York Times*, January 31, 1982, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/1982/01/31/arts/how-the-judson-theater-changed-american-dance.html. Jack Anderson notes that in 1966, a new generation of dancers, including Meredith Monk, presented work at Judson Memorial Church, and marked a new era in the trajectory of postmodern dance.

in performance.[35] Lemon, however, did not immediately emulate Monk's style: he created a modern dance company in 1985 that integrated his formalist modern dance training with Nancy Hauser,[36] and then dissolved that company in 1993.[37] In a *New York Times* article published in 1995, Lemon remarked upon the restrictive dance company model, a format that hindered creative exploration through its dependence upon institutional support.[38] This comment echoes the aspirations of collaborative downtown dancers that used dance to think through concepts with movement rather than profit from their explorations.

Three distinct phases in Lemon's career show an evolving trajectory with artistic experimentation. In a review of his company's final performance in 1995, dance critic Anna Kisselgoff announced a new phase in Lemon's choreography that spectators could anticipate: an exploration of dance and various forms of media in performance.[39] *The Geography Trilogy,* Lemon's decade-long exploration of identity through auto-ethnography, broke with continuity of dance movements on stage. Lemon traveled to West Africa, Southeast Asia, and

---

[35] Meredith Monk, "Meredith Monk: The Kitchen Summer Institute Public Talks," videorecording, *Meredith Monk Archive, 1959-2006*, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 1999.
[36] "Collection: Nancy Hauser Dance Company and School Records," University of Minnesota Archival Collections Guides, Collection: Nancy Hauser, https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/9/resources/5343.
[37] Adrienne Edwards and Thomas J. Lax, "Easter Eggs: A Narrative Chronology," in *Ralph Lemon: Modern Dance*, ed. David Velasco (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2016), 72.; "Ralph Lemon: Solo," *Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive* (blog), accessed May 29, 2020, https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ralph-lemon/solo/.; Amy Strahler Holzapfel, "From Landscape to Climatescape in Contemporary Dance-Theater: Meredith Monk, The Wooster Group, and The Team," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*, ed. Nadine George-Graves (Oxford University Press, 2015), 401–28. While Lemon received his first formal modern dance training with Nancy Hauser, he also co-founded Mixed Blood Theater Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota. See "Easter Eggs: A Narrative Chronology" for a detailed timeline of his collaborations with theater practitioners. It is also significant to note Monk's affinity with postmodern theater companies such as The Wooster Group. Amy Strahler Holzapfel specifically analyzes their compatible use of landscape in performance. Holzapfel defines landscape as a framed, theatrical vision conjured by the spectator that brings an attention to the relationship between artistic mediums in performance that include the body. See "Ralph Lemon: Solo," a video recording from 1991, for an example of a performance that contains modern dance techniques in its choreography and placement on a stage.
[38] Jennifer Dunning, "When Disbanding Is the Only Logical Step," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/06/arts/dance-when-disbanding-is-the-only-logical-step.html.
[39] Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance Review: Ralph Lemon Troupe Opens Its Final Season," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1995, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/05/arts/dance-review-ralph-lemon-troupe-opens-its-final-season.html.

throughout the United States to uncover the trajectory of the African diaspora and Buddhist spiritual practices.[40] This work demonstrated a shift from his use of modern dance vocabularies in the 1980s and early 1990s, but still occurred in a proscenium theater.[41] Lecture-demonstrations later allowed Lemon to speak directly to the audience, blending personal reflections in performance. Dramaturg Katherine Profeta described the ways in which lecture-demonstrations accommodated Lemon's "fascination with history and privacy."[42] In this manner, Lemon created spaces in performance with the right to discretion. In the gradual manifestation of these techniques, Lemon's performances challenged the circulation of images of racial violence.

Context and Significance

Because Lemon, Mendieta, Saar, and Miller do not react to events as they occur in real time, their work creates a model in historiography that can inform conversations and journalistic practices that quickly respond to or summarize violent events. Despite the increasing democratization of news reporting that may occur through grassroots practices of citizen journalism, the technological platforms through which journalism circulates can affect the exchange of information. Scholar Jason Whittaker argues that the proliferation of misinformation creates a perpetual state of skepticism.[43] The rapid rates at which news can reach a public audience also leads to what journalist Susan D. Moeller describes as

---

[40] Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile*; *Come home Charley Patton*; *Tree: Belief/Culture/Balance* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004). *Come home Charley Patton, Tree: Belief/Culture/Balance,* and *Geography: Art, Race, Exile,* three books written in conjunction with Lemon's performances, detail the locations that he visited through a series of journal entries, photographs, and drawings.

[41] Kisselgoff, "Dance Review"; Ralph Lemon, "Solo." See Ralph Lemon's *Solo* (1991) for an example of Lemon's early choreographic use of modern dance movement. Anna Kisselgoff's article on Lemon clearly labels his performances as modern dance.

[42] Katherine Profeta, *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 106.

[43] Jason Whittaker, *Tech Giants, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of Journalism*, (Routledge, 2019), 72-73.

"compassion fatigue," a lack of empathy in the midst of information inundation.[44] In a book that deals largely with U.S. news coverage during the 1990s, Moeller writes, "minimalist reporting" results from a "constant restriction of time and space."[45] In this manner, Moeller equates the term "minimalist" with limited space for text on a page. The brevity of information and efficiency of communication technologies, therefore, contribute to a repetitive, empty landscape of content.[46]

These findings echo a crisis in communication expressed by German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin in 1936 who argued that news, increasingly void of meaningful content, reduced the exchange of human experiences into information.[47] Benjamin's enduring reflections expose a friction between storytelling and news reporting. In opposition to the brevity of news media, Lemon, Mendieta, Miller, and Saar play with duration and repetition to make routine gestures appear worthy of scrutiny and attention. While they use minimalist strategies, their tactics deepen space and extend time to resist the routine display of wounded bodies in news media.

Mapping Various forms of Black Minimalisms

Each chapter in this dissertation generates a distinct form of minimalism, dictated by the artists' methodologies and genealogies. In chapter two, a comparison between Mendieta's self-portraits in Zapotec tombs and Lemon's visits to lynching sites shows a preoccupation with the location of death. Pioneers in postmodern dance, however, interject in this juxtaposition. Anna Halprin's and Forti's grounded work in the natural environment

[44] Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (Routledge, 2002), 29-32.
[45] Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*, 29.
[46] Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*, 29-32.
[47] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 27.

aesthetically align with Mendieta's earth-body art and animate a faith in regeneration after the body's departure from earth. Firmly situated within Lemon's artistic lineage in postmodern dance, Halprin's and Forti's artistic philosophies connect Lemon to Mendieta. In addition, Mendieta's enrollment in the first intermedia program in the United States and study with Elaine Summers in 1973 indicates that Mendieta absorbed ideas tied to dance practice.[48] Summers, a founder of Judson Dance Theater and pioneer in intermedia studies, described intermedia as a rainbow that "needs two elements to create a third."[49] The juxtaposition of genealogies in postmodern dance and visual art similarly creates a spectrum that reveals connections across color lines and artistic disciplines.

The mission to contest boundaries and borders also applies to Mendieta's practices in subterfuge examined in chapter two. The section compares Mendieta's references to the Mayan moon goddess Ixchel that disappears with the new moon to Eshu,[50] a deity of West Africa from which Brer Rabbit derives.[51] As a Cuban artist that appropriated rituals in Santería and made earth-body art in Zapotec tombs, Mendieta's work deconstructs race and shows the complex process through which individuals form their identities. In consideration of scholar Genevieve Hyacinthe's discussion of Mendieta's earth-body art within the context of the African diaspora, this chapter posits that Mendieta's silhouettes illuminate a compounding syncretism in dance genealogies that link her to Lemon's intercultural performance practices.[52]

---

[48] Olga M. Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 43.
[49] Babette Mangolte et al., "Being Contemporary," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, no. 1 (2012): 100.
[50] Noemí Cruz Cortés, *Las señoras de la luna* (UNAM, 2005), 22.
[51] Emily Zobel Marshall, *American Trickster: Trauma, Tradition and Brer Rabbit* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 18-20.
[52] Genevieve Hyacinthe, *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic* (MIT Press, 2019).

A comparison of Lemon and Saar in chapter three lands within the realm of minimalism in visual art, as Saar uses the term minimalist to describe her sculptures that contain color and found materials.[53] This chapter considers the use of indigo and distillation in Saar's work. In her formation of bodies with found objects painted in blues, Saar presents black women and children in moments of dissent and tranquility. In consideration of how indigo manifests through a process in distillation,[54] this chapter examines how the production of pigments mirror minimalist strategies that reduce excess and spectacle in performance.[55] While Saar chips away at material objects, she compiles stories in this process. Saar creates a pastiche of folklore, mythologies, theologies, and events in U.S. history that presents forms of knowledge-making in a constellation within a gallery. As she follows in artistic traditions built through syncretism,[56] she finds "spirits, deities—run through all of those cultures" that include Candomblé, Santería, and Greek and Roman mythology.[57] This amalgamation of belief systems disrupts the search for origins in artwork that liberates her sculptures from racial scrutiny. As visual artists, Mendieta and Forti also intervene in a discussion of Lemon

---

[53] Alison Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word," Southern California Institute of Architecture, October 20, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHbA9jRHUc8, 14:41-15:33.
[54] Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo* (British Museum Press, 1998), 103. Jenny Balfour-Paul points to methods in indigo extraction in India that depend on fermentation to create a block of dye.
[55] Bruce Robertson, "Dance Is Hard to See: Yvonne Rainer and the Visual Arts," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (University of California Press, 2017), 122. Art historian Bruce Robertson views minimalism as a lens through which a spectator might analyze a work rather than a term with a definitive meaning.
[56] María A. Castro-Sethness, "Frida Kahlo's Spiritual World: The Influence of Mexican Retablo and Ex-Voto Paintings on Her Art," *Woman's Art Journal* 25, no. 2 (2004): 21–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/3566513, 21; Susana Vargas Cervantes, "Retablos: emociones, afectos y cuerpos en subversión," *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad*, no. 4 (2010): 22-23. Whitney Museum of American Art, "Skin/Deep" Whitney Museum of American Art, Accessed March 2, 2022, https://whitney.org/collection/works/8362. Saar has made sculptures in the style of Mexican *retablos*; see *Skin/Deep* (1993) for an example of this practice. As a tradition that emerged in the nineteenth century in Mexico, *retablos*, often housed in a church, depicted a saint on tin or wood. Smaller versions of the *retablos,* made by self-taught artists provided churchgoers with tactile items for their private altars at home. These works, containing the influence of Spanish Catholicism, depicted an amalgamation of theological traditions.
[57] Alison Saar and Irene Tsatsos, "Between What We See," in *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020), 69.

and Saar. Mendieta's syncretic earth-body art and Forti's sculptural dances enhance an attention to ritual and movement in Saar's still sculptures.

In a final coda, this dissertation examines the process through which Miller films and distills moments of resilience among black communities in California. Miller's experimentation with sculpture, laser-light installation, dance, and film results in exhibitions that reach the audience through various angles and sensory processes.[58] Miller's *The Borrowers* (2014) juxtaposes three films of black men and women that share stories of loss and recuperation.[59] Through gestures, they bring attention to hands as sites that rebuild after destruction. The installation enacts the traditions of black speculative fiction, a genre that literary scholar Hortense J. Spillers summarizes in the claim that "space exploration owes as much to poetry and the range of the imaginative arts as to the initiatives of science and technology."[60] Imagination, therefore, becomes necessary for invention and reinvention. Miller takes the possibilities presented by creative practice to highlight task rooted in the physical actions of the body. *The Borrowers* activates the principles of black speculative fiction through the documentation of gestures. Laughter surfaces in the simultaneous presentation of three stories as one participant recounts the loss of his arm to gun violence. Unexpected glimpses of survival, including the body's ability to manifest laughter, flash through the juxtaposition of these filmed vignettes, extending the expanse of the imagination to the collective group. Both Miller and Lemon, therefore, take literary traditions to

---

[58] SFMOMA, "Nicole Miller," SFMOMA, accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.sfmoma.org/artist/nicole-miller/; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *Nicole Miller: To the Stars*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwF1Pu2h9ls.

[59] KCET, *S7 E1: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otUJvQhCjJ0. *The Borrowers* is featured in *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto* and shows clips of the installation along with Nicole Miller's commentary on how her work uses representation to produce concrete forms of healing.

[60] Hortense J. Spillers, "Imaginative Encounters," in *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*, ed. Marleen S. Barr (Ohio State University Press, 2008), 3.

performance. Lemon's use of Brer Rabbit shows the power of proliferation and anonymity to subvert oppression. Miller's documentation of self-proliferating laughter and mimicry shows how tricks contain the potential to heal.

Each of these artists draw attention to the materiality of minimalisms. In efforts to locate minimalist practices in choreography, a dynamic space in which these building blocks become harder to see, this dissertation opens with a focus on masks of discretion in a chorus of dancers. The first chapter analyzes Lemon's direct address to Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer through an artist talk that Lemon presented at a conference in 2017. This lecture placed black dance traditions in a dialectal relationship to postmodern dance.[61] Lemon presented his dance film *Chorus* at the end of his artist talk which sampled movements from *Soul Train*, the dance television program that premiered in 1971.[62] The chorus's movements cite protest strategies used by Dr. Martin Luther King, the NAACP, and the Black Panther Party. With a mask of neutrality, the chorus challenges the relationship between hyper-visibility and acts of resistance. Evidence of subterfuge, pastiche, and task occur in subtle movements and gestures carried out by the dancers. Through a sequence of sampled movements and protest philosophies, *Chorus* shows how each member of the chorus distills their own versions of activism, finding their way through dance steps and social movement ideologies.

In building multiple definitions of black minimalisms through subterfuge, pastiche and task, this dissertation moves across artistic disciplines in dance, visual art, theater, and

[61] Ralph Lemon, "Circling Around Postmodernism Like Weather" (Artist Talk, Radical Bodies Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, January 27, 2017).
[62] Ralph Lemon, "Circling"; "Rr16__Chorus-RalphLemon_Oculus_DS_020," LMCC, accessed April 9, 2022, https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/rr16__Chorus-RalphLemon_Oculus_DS_020.jpg. The link above contains a photo of the *Chorus*, that indicates that the filmed version of the dance was recorded in 2016.

performance studies to illuminate intersecting strategies of masked protest. In a comparison of black, mixed-race, and Latina artists within and against postmodern dance genealogies, I draw upon performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification. This process consists of a "third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology."[63] Munoz's seminal study speaks to the ways in which artists of color, including black dancers in postmodern dance, failed to completely identify with the creative circles in which they worked. While the extraction of subterfuge, pastiche, and task in choreographic strategies participates in a form of codification, a practice that postmodern dancers reacted against, this dissertation presents concrete strategies for reflections on racial violence in performance that can move beyond performance spaces. Through the dances, rituals, earth-body art, and community-building exhibited by Lemon, Mendieta, Saar and Miller, black minimalisms privilege steady and varied forms of action to commemorate and reconstruct loss.

[63] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 11.

Chapter One

A Chorus of Masked Resistance: Observations from the *Soul Train* Line

In 1971, joyful images of Black Power circulated the premiere of *Soul Train* in Chicago, Illinois. The music-dance syndicated television program conceived, produced, and hosted by black entrepreneur and radio host Don Cornelius featured local talent from the inner city of Chicago.[64] Eager to dance, participants of at least sixteen years of age fashioned their own dance wear and auditioned in hopes of securing a spot on the program.[65] Known for his authoritative presence, Cornelius judiciously granted the best dancers access to the production studio. Once on set, dancers moved to the music of famous musicians including Gladys Knight and the Pips, The Jackson Five, and David Bowie.[66] Performers of different socioeconomic classes and levels of fame filled the dance floor while viewers watched the show from home.[67] Praised for their energy and inventiveness, dancers personalized movements that started dance trends across the country, all accessible through the television screen.

In addition to creating a space for the free exchange of movement, Cornelius worked with various degrees of calculation and implemented rules that would allow *Soul Train* to maintain a polished outward image. A predominantly African American cast of dancers entered the performance space as couples, adhered to dress codes, and sampled permissible dance styles, all designated by Cornelius.[68] While the show aired from 1971 to 2006, and

---

[64] Christopher P. Lehman, *A Critical History of Soul Train on Television* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 30.
[65] Lehman, *Critical History*, 30.
[66] Lehman, *Critical History*, 119, 199, 200. Christopher Lehman's appendix in *A Critical History of Soul Train on Television* lists artists that appeared multiple times on the show. He notes the differences in dancing prompted by Bowie's music and image that Lehman describes as "toned down."
[67] Nelson George, *The Hippest Trip in America* (William Morrow & Co., 2014), 178; Lehman, *Critical History*, 101.
[68] Lehman, *Critical History*, 30-31.

significantly transformed across the thirty-five years of its production, the program's position within a Saturday morning line-up made *Soul Train* a family viewing activity.[69] Cornelius's inviting atmosphere can be seen in clips that date back to the first decade of its syndication during *Soul Train's* peak success.[70] The dancers appear confident and liberated in their movements, but maintain a clear distance from one another. Cultural historian Christopher P. Lehman's historical overview of *Soul Train* confirms practical and economic reasons for these aesthetic details. Lehman notes that "dancing on the show had to be extroverted and draw in audiences instead of keeping them at a distance."[71] Cornelius, accordingly, crafted his show to draw in viewership, rather than alienate spectators at home. Dancers, thus, moved within the parameters set by the domain of public broadcasting.[72]

The host's preference for a glamorous, elite, and curated aesthetic drove many of his decisions as a producer. This classism surfaced in Cornelius's initial rejection of hip-hop and rap music on *Soul Train*, although he later accepted cultural shifts in music beyond his control.[73] Cultural critic Nelson George argues that the "stripped-down look coming out of New York's hip-hop scene" threatened to dismantle the "clean-sounding, self-conscious sophistication that was reflected in clothing as well as sound" on the show.[74] While formal elements in production maintained Cornelius's vision, the dance trends he showcased contained a life of their own.

---

[69] Lehman, *Critical History*, 77, 87, 183; Luc Sante, "Land of a Thousand Dances," *Dance Index*, Eakins Press Foundation, 11, no. 2 (Fall 2020), 1.
[70] Ralph, Laurence, "'Love, Peace, and Soul'" *Transition*, no. 108 (2012): 19. https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.108.19, 24. Laurence Ralph brackets *Soul Train's* "golden era" between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s.
[71] Lehman, *Critical History*, 55.
[72] George, *Hippest Trip*, 148-149.
[73] George, *Hippest Trip,* 148-149.
[74] George, *Hippest Trip,* 149.

Consider that in *Soul Train's* inaugural year, Don Campbell, a dancer from the West Coast, performed his signature "Cambellock" on the show.[75] The movement created a legacy for dancers that followed in Campbell's footsteps. In his performances, Campbell's body would come to a sudden halt before proceeding with fluid movement. Damita Jo Freeman who frequently danced with Campbell described one of their performances as a "mix between 'The Breakdown' and 'The Rubber Band,'" which indicated how dancers sampled and named popular dance steps as they created their own combinations of movement patterns.[76] In a YouTube clip that showcases the dynamic pair, Freeman jumps three times with one hand on her hip, pounds the floor with a fist, and fluidly rises, freezing in position before repeating the phrase. Campbell and Freeman dance toward one another as they show off their movements in front of the camera.

Dancers on *Soul Train* quickly replicated the style, creating similar illusions with their bodies. They upheld a lineage through the homage they paid to the legendary Campbell. In 1979, for example, Jeffrey Daniel performed a version of "The Boogaloo" on *Soul Train.* He formally introduced the dance to the audience, joined two other performers on stage, and danced to Michael Jackson's *Workin' Day and Night*.[77] In a short interview with Cornelius,

---

[75] Daniel E. Slotnik, "Don Campbell, Hip-Hop Dance Innovator, Is Dead at 69," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/23/arts/dance/don-campbell-dead.html?smid=em-share.
Don Campbell began to experiment with locking in 1970. After his first appearance on *Soul Train* in 1971, locking gained popularity among dancers on the show.

[76] cep10, *Don Campbellock Campbell & Damita Jo Freeman Interview with Don Cornelius*, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoH1VGA9-oE; Nelson George, *The Hippest Trip in America* (William Morrow & Co., 2014), 33-34. In contrast to most of the dancers on *Soul Train*, Damita Jo Freeman was formally trained in ballet. In the YouTube clip, Freeman's movements blend in with the other dancers' energies.

[77] *Jeffrey Daniel Performs Boogaloo @ Soul Train*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6McuBTJy4Gk.
See Jeffrey Daniel's performance for an example of the role of acknowledgements in borrowing and reinventing dance styles.

Daniel described the dance as "popping" and attributed the dance style to Long Beach, California, and Campbell.[78]

The cycle of paying tribute to Campbell continues in contemporary choreography. Rennie Harris and Ephrat Asherie, for example, cite Campbell as an enduring presence and influence on their work.[79] Movement, therefore, circulates and finds its reinvention in the bodies of subsequent dancers and choreographers. Dance scholar Katrina Hazzard-Donald finds evidence of these cycles in Waaking, which contains locking popularized by Campbell, and marks the first stage in the development of hip hop dance.[80] While Hazzard-Donald constructs a dance genealogy in her description of Waaking, she affirms that all black social dance traditions are "cyclical."[81] This pattern suggests that, while dancers make conscious choices to sample movements of the past, dances are bound to resurface in the future.

Given the invitation to dance and borrow steps extended by the program, one might not expect to encounter a live, contemporary, dance performance inspired by *Soul Train* that emphatically alienates the audience. *Chorus* (2017), a ten-minute film created by postmodern black protest artist and site-specific choreographer Ralph Lemon strikingly dissolves the vibrancy that once swept through Cornelius's dance-music television program.[82] Performed

---

[78] George, *Hippest*, 95-96; *Jeffrey Daniel Performs Boogaloo @ Soul Train*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6McuBTJy4Gk; Megan Pugh, *America Dancing: From the Cakewalk to the Moonwalk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 262.
[79] Gia Kourlas. "Catch the Vibe: Club Culture Comes to Life at Lincoln Center." *The New York Times*, November 15, 2020, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/15/arts/dance/ephrat-asherie-underscore-works-and-process.html; Rennie Harris, Rennie Harris Pure Movement, "Founder," Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.rhpm.org/founder/.
[80] Katrina Hazzard-Donald, "Dance in Hip Hop Culture," in *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William E. Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 221.
[81] Hazzard-Donald, "Dance in Hip Hop Culture," 220.
[82] Roderick Murray, "Ralph Lemon Scaffold Room Performance at The Kitchen (November 3, 2015)" Vimeo, 2020, https://vimeo.com/433678872.; Stedelijk Museum, "*Chorus*: *Soul Train* as Music Theatre Experience," accessed April 17, 2021, https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/events/chorus-2.; "The Kitchen: About," The Kitchen, accessed June 22, 2021, https://thekitchen.org/about. "2018 Year in Review - LMCC," accessed April 17, 2021, https://lmcc.net/2018-year-in-review/; "Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Presents the 15th Annual River to River Festival: June 16-26," April 27, 2016, accessed June 4, 2021, program, https://lmcc.net/wp-

within a four-billion-dollar structure designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava,[83] a chorus of five dancers locate their performance in the World Trade Center Transportation Hub in New York City.[84] They dance in the Oculus Plaza, constructed in memory of the events that occurred on September 11, 2001. The plaza appears luminous, vast, and transitory—a space of commerce and commuting. Large fashion advertisements on tall glass windows form a wall of the first floor of the Oculus and create the backdrop for dancers' performance. In the film, the dancers casually walk into a performance space at the main plaza. Against the stark white walls and spectacular dimensions of this vast, bustling, public space of transit, Malcolm Low, Paul Hamilton, Angie Pittman, Marcus Williams, and Whitney V. Hunter converge to form a straight line, standing side by side. The dancers face the audience gathered around the pop-up performance and begin moving to Amy Winehouse's blues-and-soul-inspired track "Back to Black" (2006). They start with a simple step-touch and perform variations of this basic step for ten minutes. Against the bright energy of the dance steps and subtle traces of seventies fashion, the performance appears ominous. With set choreography, the dancers do not spontaneously improvise, nor do they smile or

content/uploads/2020/06/2016-R2R.pdf. *Chorus* exists in many forms. A recording of Lemon's "lecture-performance-musical" *Scaffold Room* (2014) uploaded to Vimeo, for example, shows three dancers performing *Chorus* in the lobby of The Kitchen, a performance venue and non-profit organization in New York, on November 3, 2015. The Kitchen emphasizes an enduring commitment to showcasing interdisciplinary art and performance in the organization's Mission and History Statements. Ralph Lemon and Kevin Beasley—an artist that mixed music for *Chorus*—are both members of the Advisory Board. The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council website contains a professional photo of *Chorus* at the River-to-River Festival in 2016 in New York, although the performance is not mentioned in the official program for that year. The website for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam also indicates that Lemon created a unique version of *Chorus* tailored to the entrance of the museum. Few recordings of the dance in these various locations have additionally surfaced on social media sites. For the purposes of this essay, I focus on the professional filming of *Chorus,* presented at a dance conference in 2017 that matches the 2016 River-to-River Festival photo posted online.

[83] David W. Dunlap, "How Cost of Train Station at World Trade Center Swelled to $4 Billion," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/nyregion/the-4-billion-train-station-at-the-world-trade-center.html.

[84] "Daniel Libeskind," Studio Libeskind, accessed May 29, 2020, https://libeskind.com/people/daniel-libeskind/. Daniel Liebeskind, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1946 from Poland, completed the Jewish Museum in Berlin in 2001, and designs spaces with a focus on cultural memory.

socialize with the public. They jump and pound the floor with their fists eight times in the performance, citing Freeman's movements and Campbell's locking.[85] The absence of their enthusiasm, however, emanates through the dance. With this incongruous energy, Lemon manipulates black entertainment to disrupt nostalgia associated with *Soul Train*.

Notwithstanding the positive effects of nostalgia in political activism,[86] *Chorus* references a dance-music genre that Hazzard-Donald describes as the "apolitical, slick dance and music called disco."[87] A disk jockey, Kevin Beasley, replaces *Soul Train's* use of a live band as Hamilton, Hunter, Low, Pittman, and Williams dance to prerecorded music that recalls the rise of discotheques in Europe.[88] In their reference to disco of the 1970s, the chorus pulls the audience into escapism, halted by their gaze. They look out, glaring at spectators that have gathered to watch. Panoramic views of the performance provide opportunities to study the dynamics of class, race, gender, and space in the plaza. The frame jumps to various close-ups of the dancers' faces, torsos, feet, and hands to emphasize the gaze of the spectator—as if the viewer were positioned at different points around the pop-up performance. The film begins to appear invasive, a detailed surveillance of commuters and spectators who smile and laugh. The dancers momentarily smirk at one another before looking out again with an air of contempt. These subtle shifts in expression, detectable

---

[85] "Don Campbell's Signature Moves," November 19, 2019. https://campbellock.dance/about-locking/the-campbellock-aka-locking-moves/. Don Campbell's official website includes a glossary of dances he innovated and their definitions. The movement, "Give the floor 5," in which dancers hit the floor, greets the floor through dance.

[86] William D. J. Rees, "Future Nostalgia? 21st Century Disco," *Dancecult* 13, no. 1 (December 14, 2021): 36–53. https://doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2021.13.01.03. For an in-depth discussion on how nostalgia in disco can be wielded as a powerful tool to envision alternative futures, see William D. J. Rees's "Future Nostalgia? 21st Century Disco" in *Dancecult*.

[87] Hazzard-Donald, "Dance in Hip Hop," 224.

[88] Maristella Johanna Feustle, "Disco," in *The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture*, 738–40. Thousand Oaks,: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2019. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483317731.

through a few close-ups that the film offers, allow the performance to proceed with discord. Just as quickly as the chorus convenes to start its dance, its members disperse through the crowd at the conclusion of their performance without waiting for applause.

Chorus plays with publicity, illegibility, and emotional restraint to illuminate the shifts in approaches to nonviolence taken by Civil Rights activists between the 1950s and 1970s. The dance, composed of movements that Lemon sourced from YouTube clips of *Soul Train*, presents a transhistorical pastiche of black social dance traditions tied to an enduring lineage of masked protest and entertainment used by slaves on plantations.[89] The chorus's expenditure of labor in public space, what appears as arduous task despite their impassive gazes, entertains some audience members and goes unnoticed by others. In a bold act of masked defiance, the dancers repurpose a range of protest strategies rooted in the Black Panther Party's (BPP) stark image of self-defense and *Soul Train's* joyous social dancing. They draw upon practices of nonviolence, dancing peacefully in public space, and yet disassemble their formation without warning. In remarkable contrast to the highly visible entities that included *Soul Train*, the BPP, and charismatic leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, the dancers' public act of protest remains ordinary and discrete in public space. In their combination of these aesthetics, *Chorus* presents a form of oration, minimalist and subdued, that directly contrasts the engrossing rhetoric of male leaders during the Civil Rights Movement and its decline.

[89] Ralph Lemon, "Circling around Postmodernism like Weather," *Radical Bodies Conference*, University of California, Santa Barbara, January 27, 2017, presentation/videorecording, 2:08:18-2:08:33. In a question-and-answer section held after Ralph Lemon's presentation of *Chorus* at the Radical Bodies Conference in 2017, he briefly discussed his sampling of *Soul Train* video clips on YouTube in response to an eager audience that asked about the dance's construction.

Lemon presented the film *Chorus* at the Radical Bodies Conference held at the University of California, Santa Barbara on January 27, 2017. Organized by Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson in honor of Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer, the gathering brought these artists together to examine their contributions to postmodern dance on the West Coast of the United States.[90] In an artist talk "Circling Around Postmodernism like Weather" that preceded the film *Chorus*, Lemon articulated the appropriation of black cultural traditions by white women in modern and postmodern dance. He first described the questionable comparison of his work to Judson choreographer Steve Paxton and legendary African American modern dance choreographer Alvin Ailey. The lecture also covered his close friendships with Forti, Rainer, Meredith Monk, and Viola Farber with whom he trained and danced.[91] Rather than alienate his audience at the conference, Lemon expressed gratitude towards his teachers that he critiqued through the protest film.[92]

When Lemon inserts *Soul Train* into a conference on postmodern dance, he challenges the audience to question what it sees. Is the performance postmodern dance and

---

[90] Ninotchka Bennahum, Bruce Robertson, and Wendy Perron, *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (University of California Press, 2017). The Radical Bodies Catalogue published alongside the exhibition details the many ways in which Halprin, Forti, and Rainer democratized dance through their movement explorations.

[91] Ralph Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile* (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 109; *Tree: Belief/Culture/ Balance* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 33. In his artist talk, Lemon sampled anecdotes and images from his *Geography Trilogy.* Lemon shared a photo of Viola Farber, a black and white image that he embellished with bright orange and yellow flowers. The photo, published in *Tree: Belief/Culture/Balance,* the second book in *The Geography Trilogy,* is preceded by an entry on her passing. Lemon also read a section of *Geography: Art/Race/Exile* where he details why Meredith Monk fired him from her company. "She said technique had destroyed my soul," he explained.

[92] John Brown Society, "An Introduction to the Black Panther Party" (Pamphlet, Ann Arbor, MI, 1969), https://asp6new-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/sixt/sixt.object.details.aspx?id=1003403085&view=dualview&objecturl=BEH4, 2, 20. The Black Panther Party, not excluded from these values, also built alliances with white activists as part of their political strategies listed in their manifesto. Don Cornelius's inclusive messaging as host and emcee of *Soul Train*, the Black Panthers written pamphlet, and Dr. King's methods in nonviolence invited allyship across racial divides. Lemon, in many ways, continues in a tradition of collaboration and gratitude for white postmodern dance pioneers, working with and against their artistic philosophies.

black social dance? With what gaze do dancers and activists look to leaders of the past? Through his artist talk and dance film, Lemon produces a twofold response to these questions, using a discreet critique of nostalgia as a political strategy. In doing so, Lemon diverges from the vigorous and didactic sermons used during the Civil Rights Movement to create a performance with a strength that draws power from its illegibility.

While Lemon constructed the dance, he never appears in the film. He rejects the label "choreographer" and spotlights the five dancers in the performance, taking a step back from his role as narrator.[93] The dance film punctuates Lemon's discourse and challenges dance scholars to decipher meaning in subtle movements of the chorus.[94] When Lemon declares a rejection of "the movement," white postmodernism, perhaps, with "great, great love" at the conclusion of his lecture, he samples rhetoric of nonviolence used by Civil Rights activists during the 1960s and 1970s.[95] The use of the word "love" conveys principles of understanding and collaboration associated with Dr. Martin Luther King, and evokes Don Cornelius's signature phrase "love, peace, and soul" that the host proclaimed at the end of each show.[96] When Lemon ends his poetic address to Forti, Halprin, and Rainer with *Chorus*, a collective, anonymous entity turns into the object of analysis.

---

[93] Lemon, "Circling," 2:08:18-2:08:33. When an audience member took issue with Lemon's suggestion that *Chorus* was not his choreography, but rather, a sequence of sampled movements, Lemon stated, "I would just find certain segments…from YouTube clips and we just put them together, so I don't think of it as my dance" to which the audience member replied: "It is. It's your dance. It is your dance."

[94] Richard Schur, "Haunt or Home? Ethos and African American Literature," *Humanities* 7, no. 3 (September 2018): 80, https://doi.org/10.3390/h7030080, 4-5. In an analysis of Phyllis Wheatley's poetry, Richard Schur concludes that Wheatley's ability to master the form and content of this literary style allowed her to embed a critique of Christians that did not live up to their values. A failure to read Wheatley within the context of these rhetorical traditions would overlook the subversion in her writing. Lemon continues this tradition by using postmodern dance strategies to critique them.

[95] Lemon, "Circling."

[96] Martin Luther King, "'Loving Your Enemies,' Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church," Stanford: The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, February 11, 2015, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church; Ralph, Laurence. ""Love, Peace, and Soul"." *Transition*, no. 108 (2012): 19, 31. https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.108.19, 19. In the sermon, "Loving your Enemies" delivered in 1957, MLK

Organization: An Individual within the Chorus

To demonstrate the degree to which the chorus draws upon mid-to-late twentieth century protest strategies, this research focuses on a Civil Rights leader and activist who moved between various social movement frameworks. Frankye Malika Adams-Johnson studied nonviolence under Medgar Evers (1925-1963)—field officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[97] She later joined the Black Panther Party in 1968, and moved back to her hometown of Jackson, Mississippi in 1971, where she now writes poetry and teaches at Jackson State University.[98] While the NAACP was often framed as a "party of the middle class,"[99] the Black Panther Party sought a complete overthrow of capitalist structures in the U.S. and abroad.[100] The assassinations of prominent political leaders including Malcolm X (d. 1965), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (d. 1968), and Fred Hampton of the BPP (d. 1969), all mentioned in their party pamphlet, proved that their conflicting views on nonviolence could still be met with violence.[101]

---

states, "In the final analysis, love is not this sentimental something that we talk about. It's not merely an emotional something. Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all men. It is the refusal to defeat any individual." Ralph Laurence highlights the unifying message of survival embodied in Don Cornelius's signature phrase and celebratory program.

[97] Frankye Adams-Johnson, Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview conducted by Emilye Crosby, interview by Emilye Crosby, Video, 01:27:28, December 6, 2015, https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655414/.

[98] Adams-Johnson, Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview conducted by Emilye Crosby; Winter Institute, *Frankye Adams-Johnson*, 2013, https://vimeo.com/70746152; Frankye Adams-Johnson, "The Black Panther Party Archives of Frankye Adams-Johnson," 2011, https://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/files/2013/03/Adams-Johnson.pdf.

[99] White, Conrad, "NAACP," https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/naacp-2, WGBH Boston, March 27, 1975. Host Leah Fletcher opens an interview with a variety of perspectives on the NAACP stating, "to the Black militant, it's a bunch of Uncle Toms." She then presses the panel to speak about monetary costs required to join the NAACP. Costs were $4 per year and $500 for a life membership that could be paid in yearly installments over the course of 10 years. Leaders raised funds from their own members to maintain control of their agendas and avoid the political pressures of external funding.

[100] Howard Alk and Mike Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton,* The Film Group, 1971, https://vimeo.com/434141029. A focus on capitalist structures as an underlying mechanism of oppression is discussed by multiple BPP members in *The Murder of Fred Hampton.* Members express global solidarity with other groups facing the same roots of oppression.

[101] John Brown Society, "An Introduction to the Black Panther Party," 10.

Adams-Johnson's story demonstrates how one individual navigated her role in larger resistance efforts, radically changed her approach to political dissent over time, and created her own approach to activism as a committed member of a chorus. Through this two-tier reading of the dance at the intersection of black history and postmodern dance, I link black feminist practices to *Chorus's* composition without omitting the tangible influence of Forti, Halprin, and Rainer on the artist talk and dance film.

The national context surrounding Adams-Johnson's journey includes key events that influenced a spectrum of approaches to political resistance as activists negotiated enduring conflicts between their use of pragmatism, radicalism, violence, and nonviolence. Appearances by Civil Rights leaders and politicians through public broadcasting in the 1960s and 1970s included disjointed representations of Black Power and illuminated various disagreements between organizations that fractured their efforts. The influence of media—news programs including *Meet the Press*, *Say Brother*, and presidential addresses made to the public—painted positive and negative images of the Civil Rights Movement. In contrast to these outlets, *Soul Train* chose to highlight a narrative of progress that reached a wide audience through television.

Against the declining Civil Rights Movement (1967-1973),[102] the Vietnam War that drafted black men in increasing numbers,[103] and artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s, black activists carefully navigated their allegiance to a nation that failed to protect them.

---

[102] Christopher P. Lehman, *Power, Politics, and the Decline of the Civil Rights Movement: A Fragile Coalition, 1967–1973* (Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2014), xi, 318. Historian Christopher P. Lehman specifically attributes electoral success and legislation to the decline of the Civil Rights Movement. He brackets this period from 1967-1973, as legislation and the ascendance of black politicians within the public arena signaled a degree of success that rendered marches and sit-ins unnecessary.

[103] Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (1971), 71. Sociologist Paul T. Murray argues that structures built into the draft system after integration allowed white men and college students to defer the draft.

Notwithstanding the significant political legislation achieved during the 1960s—The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968—protestors adapted to the changing composition of their demands after these political gains.[104] In 1967, Alice Walker published "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" a title that declared a perceived ending to the movement, but affirmed its lasting impact on self-worth with Dr. King's legacy.[105] Amidst conflicting perspectives on the effectiveness of the Civil Rights Movement, Adams-Johnson creates a focal point from which to glean insights on an individual's experiences during this time period and in the present moment. The trajectory of her activism, with shifts, detours, and returns along the way, presents a clear image of activism-in-progress. Adams-Johnson's diversity of experiences, therefore, contextualizes this analysis of *Chorus*.

Acts of Self-Preservation and the Dangers of Publicity during the Civil Rights Movement

The day after the assassination of Evers on June 12, 1963, Adams-Johnson attended a march organized in Evers's honor.[106] Initially drawn to the excitement of protest activity in Jackson, Mississippi, Adams-Johnson recalled the formative quality of this march. She first reflected on the loss of a paternal figure in Evers and subsequent absence of direction that many activists around her felt after his death. Adams-Johnson also experienced a critical turning point in her relationship to the Civil Rights Movement. In an oral history recorded on December 6, 2015, Adams-Johnson recalled her arrest during the march:

[104] Lehman, *Power, Politics*, 318.
[105] Alice Walker, "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" *The American Scholar,* 1967. https://theamericanscholar.org/the-civil-rights-movement-what-good-was-it/.
[106] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview Conducted by Emilye Crosby."

> On this particular day we marched, and I had my writing pad, and I was sitting in the paddy wagon. It was very, very hot. Very, very hot. I was fanning with my writing pad, and I dropped it on the ground and I very naively, I *did* ask the officer if he would pass it to me. He just looked at me, you know, and so I just jumped down to pick it up and as I got back into the paddy wagon, he went *whack* across my back and then he cocked his gun. On that day, I think I realized that it became questionable about whether I really was not violent, because I wanted to fight back, and I *was* going to fight back and I went to fight back at him, and some of the other marchers grabbed me and said, "No, no, no, he's got a gun…."[107]

Reflecting on this moment decades after the experience, Adams-Johnson remembers that she suppressed her impulse to react to the officer with violence in self-defense. During what she described as a routine arrest for protest activity, this day stood out in her memory for multiple reasons. She emphasized the compounding anger and humiliation she felt upon realizing that she could not retaliate. To "fight back," in Adams-Johnson's case, meant further bodily injury. In spite of the anger this forced her to carry, Adams-Johnson made a commitment to nonviolence on that day. Keenly aware that Evers's assassination occurred without warning, her resolution to adhere to nonviolence was significant.

In an obituary on Evers published in *Ebony* magazine in 1963, columnist Francis A. Mitchell emphasized a similar moment of restraint in which Evers chose nonviolence.[108] On a fateful bus ride through Meridian, Mississippi in March of 1963, Evers was physically assaulted after he took a seat at the front of a bus.[109] Mitchell includes a quote made by Evers

---

[107] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview Conducted by Emilye Crosby," 29:00.
[108] Francis A. Mitchell, "In Memoriam," *Ebony*, September 1963.
[109] Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, *My Soul Is a Witness: A Chronology of the Civil Rights Era, 1954-1965* (Macmillan, 2000), 81.

following the event in which he stated, "You can't let your emotions run away with you. If I had retaliated, it would have helped defeat the cause for which I am struggling."[110] In his abstention from violence and warning against reactivity, Evers embodied the ethical core values of nonviolence he sought to instill in others.

Evers's visibility as an African American activist within the segregated state of Mississippi further complicated his relationship to emotional restraint. The same obituary in *Ebony* details the consistent labor involved in keeping the NAACP's image of peaceful protest and cooperation, integral to the recruitment of new allies. Founded in 1909, the NAACP became one of the first associations to promote civil rights in the U.S. following emancipation.[111] Evers's role as a public figure that organized recruitment efforts set him apart from activists that worked covertly, without the recognition that Evers had achieved.[112] His wife Myrlie Evers stated that she routinely envisioned how she would cope with her husband's death, understanding the dangers of publicity when Evers took on the position of field officer in Jackson, Mississippi.[113] In 1963, Evers was shot in the back as he stepped out of his car after returning home from an NAACP meeting. He fell to the ground, managed to stand up again, and walked to the front door, where he collapsed again. His wife and their three children rushed out of their home to find Evers who died shortly after.[114]

---

[110] Mitchell, "In Memoriam," 148.
[111] *Slavery by Another Name: The Creation of the NAACP*, Accessed November 1, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/video/slavery-another-name-creation-naacp/.
[112] Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and The Murder Of Medgar Evers* (Hachette Books, 2009). According to Adam Nossiter, some activists that secretly worked on voting campaigns were later assassinated, demonstrating the risk for activists in the public eye.
[113] Michael Colgan. *Who Was Medgar Evers?* Documentary, Tony Brown Productions, 1982, https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/who-was-medgar-evers, (00:18:25).
[114] Barry J. Balleck, ed. "De La Beckwith, Byron," In *Modern American Extremism and Domestic Terrorism: An Encyclopedia of Extremists and Extremist Groups*, 93–94. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX7484900054/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=73e060e3. Byron de la Beckwith shot Medgar Evers with a rifle and managed to escape conviction until 1994, decades after the assassination.

In "Choreographies of Protest," dance scholar Susan Foster describes what the body physically accomplishes at demonstrations, rallies, and sit-ins. Bodies not only protest the issues at hand, but also interact with a multitude of bodies that continuously make choices about how to react or coexist with others. Foster argues for the significance of physicality that impedes obstruction by law enforcement or creates a unified front, yet carefully distinguishes lunch counter protests from dance performances given the contexts in which protestors placed their lives at risk during the Civil Rights Movement.[115] In Evers's and Adams-Johnson's individual references to emotional restraint, they acknowledged the great challenges of non-reactivity, working against their instincts and committing to the principles of nonviolence. Their changing relationships to visibility and anonymity as activists additionally affected how they maintained a calm and collected energy in their routine activities.

These experiences illuminate the daily, ordinary, and arduous decisions made by activists across the country to engage in legal acts of protest during the Civil Rights Movement. Evers anticipated his death and felt an imminent threat to his safety in the days that lead up to his assassination.[116] In a constant state of alert, he died under the pressures of surveillance and exposure. Adams-Johnson also knew she could face consequences—arrest, injury, and the expenditure of emotional labor—whether she physically retaliated against others or adhered to nonviolence. An ongoing interplay between publicity, illegibility, and emotional restraint in the work taken on by Evers and Adams-Johnson determined how they would enter, take up, and wait in public space. Without the same recognition that Evers

[115] Susan Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 412.
[116] FBI, "Medgar Evers," Folder, Accessed October 22, 2021, https://vault.fbi.gov/Medgar%20Evers.
Part five of Medgar Evers's FBI vault shows a range of complaints he filed for wiretapping in the weeks leading up to his murder.

achieved, Adams-Johnson continued her journey to find a home in other civil rights groups and organizations.

Five years after her consequential encounter with the police officer, Adams-Johnson joined the New York Chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1968. In contrast to the NAACP, the BPP openly displayed weapons in public space. She noted that, unlike other Black Nationalist organizations she found in the state,[117] groups steeped in elite discourse and rhetoric, the Black Panther Party offered a pragmatic community rooted in actionable policies and clear language accessible to its members.[118] The BPP eventually invited Adams-Johnson to start a local chapter in White Plains, New York.[119] After she fought against gentrification in the area, the party asked her to manage an office in Brownsville, Brooklyn.[120] In full acknowledgement of the patriarchal structures and violence that inhibited the party's reach—and difficulties she faced as a mother with young children—Adams-Johnson expressed her gratitude for black activism rooted in concrete actions that yielded significant change. She recalled, for example, taking children to a free breakfast program started by the BPP—a service they viewed as a basic human right, requisite for learning.[121] Essential services organized by the Black Panther Party also included the creation of Black History courses for incarcerated populations in Kansas and California,[122] legal aid, and

[117] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:00:00-1:05:00. While Frankye Adams-Johnson does not specifically name Black Nationalist organizations, she refers to Amina Baraka, a poet tied to the Black Arts Movement. Adams-Johnson describes a group of intellectuals she met, with whom she could not completely identify.
[118] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:00:00.
[119] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:04:18.
[120] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:07:39.
[121] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:15:00.
[122] Lara Leigh Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers: Twentieth-Century U.S. Social Movements and Collective Memory*, Public History in Historical Perspective (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 59-61.

medical care for black communities in New York.[123] Adams-Johnson found a home in the BPP, similar to the community she felt with organizers in Jackson, Mississippi. She eventually encountered dangers that came with her participation in the party and moved back to Jackson, Mississippi in 1971 to "regroup," concerned with her safety for years after.[124] She decided to change her course as an activist as the party entered a tumultuous phase in 1971 that marked its gradual dissolution.[125]

The Black Panther Party: Images of Self-Defense and Masculinities

While Adams-Johnson chose pragmatism when she refrained from retaliating against the armed police officer in 1963, the Black Panther Party that she later joined published the following statements on violence in their brochure in 1968:

> The black panther, as explained by Minister of Defense Huey P. Newton, is an animal who will not attack. If attacked the black panther backs up until he has no more room to back. Then the black panther will strike out at his assailant and wipe him out.[126]

The pamphlet later reads:

> Many people object to the notion of the gun saying that there are other ways to stop violence—that blacks should gain political and economic power, however… it takes power to get power.[127]

These statements paint a masculine image of self-defense, one that relies on the possession or display of weapons to protect a community.

---

[123] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America : From African Roots Through the Civil War* (Rutgers University Press, 2002), 324.
[124] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:17:30-1:22-17.
[125] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:17:30-1:22-17; Andrew Austin, "Black Panthers," in *Encyclopedia of Social Deviance* (Sage, 2014), http://www.library.yorku.ca/e/resolver/id/2538704. Andrew Austin also locates the decline of the Black Panther Party in the 1970s, but affirms that the party experienced its dissolution in 1980s.
[126] John Brown Society, "An Introduction to the Black Panther Party," 1.
[127] John Brown Society, "An Introduction to the Black Panther Party," 11.

In the BPP pamphlet, an interdisciplinary arrangement of sources surrounds these bold declarations. Police officers with attack dogs detain a black man. Four drawings and sketches scattered throughout the document depict protestors, party members, and police officers. A chronology of abuses of power used against the party substantiate the list of demands made by the BPP. The cover of the brochure shows images of the party's cofounders Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton standing in front of the BPP headquarters in Oakland, California. Seale displays a Colt. 45 with his left hand on the weapon, secured at his waist. Newton, armed with a bandoleer, carries a shotgun with two hands, the barrel pointed toward the sky. Both wear black berets, leather jackets, collared shirts, and dark pants. As they stare off into the distance, they squint and create a formidable gaze. Photographs of bodies in powerful poses exude a commitment to masculinist power and self-defense. Together, the sources develop an intertextual aesthetic, an image of preparation and discipline, that asserts the BPP's unyielding resolve to expose systemic violence against black communities.

The BPP's promotional video allows the spectator to see these images of self-defense in action. Interviews with Newton, Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver cut to footage of various BPP rallies.[128] In these clips, a group of men march into an open public space in uniforms that make them indistinguishable from the crowd. Dressed in black pants, jackets, berets, and sunglasses, they create a cohesive image of power in organized formation, intensified by their synchronized footsteps. Individuals that watch the march stare back at the militaristic unit with the same determination, disrupting the division between the marchers and the audience. The men come to a halt and raise white flags that read "Free Huey" into the air.

[128] *Black Panther*, San Francisco Newsreel, 1969. Alexander Street, https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/black-panther, 5:35.

These flags protest the arrest of Newton in 1967. The footage then displays another group of BBP members raising their fists in the air twice, as if in a call-and-response dialogue with the white flags. Together, these angles show how the action—to raise a fist—with or without the flag, communicates a message to liberate Newton.

Another clip reveals a greater diversity of members at a rally, including black women and children. Largely absent from the previous footage of choreographed marching, they sing and chant outside of the Alameda County Jail where the BPP gathered to protest Newton's arrest. A crowd of women engage in another form of call-and-response as they clap and sing:

(*Women sing*) The pigs are gonna get killed.

(*Men respond with raised fists*) Off the pigs!

(Women sing) No more brothers in jail.

(*Response*) Off the pigs!

The police of which they speak exit the jail and shuffle through the crowd of protestors. They mirror the Panthers in their uniformity and representation of law enforcement. Their shields, helmets, and clothing create another image of defense. In a shot that appears for a split second while the police exit the jail, a woman in the BPP appears to try to calm her fellow protestors.[129]

In their use of physical action, these bodies support one another, line up together, dress alike, and wait. They spend their time outside in protest of civil rights violations, sing, march, and clap their hands. They prepare flags, mark their space, and create a physical barricade through which police officers must travel. In the act of filming these rallies, the BPP superimposes an additional layer of dissent to their actions of protest. Digital humanities

[129] *Black Panther*, 8:34.

scholar Matthew Applegate argues that many of the BPP's films situate the viewer in a powerful field of vision: from the inside of party headquarters, at demonstrations, and walking alongside another member in the street, inviting the spectator to join in their daily activities.[130] In an analysis of their films and rallies, Applegate argues that "anonymity emerges in plain sight" through this immersive protest.[131] The performance of the Panthers marching establishes a focus for the rally, and acts as an extension of its environment—a crowd of protestors that surround the spectator. United in their aims to alienate, they also invite the spectator to participate in their cause.

Gender and Discourse

Discourse, language, and oral traditions used by these bodies amplified the BPP's immersive forms of protest. Party leaders exhibited a commanding presence through their oration. In the documentary *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, which covers Hampton's activism and subsequent murder in 1969, the Chairman of the Chicago branch of the BPP stands behind a pulpit and lists out the names of BPP leaders, creating a call-and-response that echoes throughout the space.[132] In speeches, BBP leaders described the party as an integrated army ready to combat the "police state."[133] Cautious of rhetorical practices upheld by racist ideologies, Hampton articulated a desire to start a revolution with anyone who wanted to join his cause:

> There are white people that are for the same things that we are for. We will form a coalition with anybody that has revolution on their mind. We are not a racist

[130] Matthew Applegate, *Guerrilla Theory: Political Concepts, Critical Digital Humanities* (Northwestern University Press, 2019), 131.
[131] Applegate, *Guerilla Theory*, 118, 124.
[132] Howard Alk and Mike Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton,* The Film Group, 1971, https://vimeo.com/434141029, 7:30.
[133] Alk and Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton,* 4:44.

organization, because we understand that racism is an excuse used for capitalism, racism is a byproduct of capitalism.[134]

Hampton's emphasis on the failures of capitalism that perpetuate racial inequality in the U.S. created an inclusive agenda for anyone that suffered from structural inequalities. Hampton reiterated that any individual could repeat racist practices, including members of the BPP, if they failed to understand the mechanisms through which capitalism operates.

This stance is evidenced in the documentary when Hampton rejects a proposal submitted by an allying organization because it lacks an educational program. He states that without this component, "you might get people caught up in their emotions" and replicate the racist practices that the BPP strove to combat.[135] Hampton's use of the word "emotions" once again, demands pause. The Panthers displayed an image of defense and protection, galvanized energetic crowds, and yet still articulated the dangers of emotion in leadership, change, and social movement organization. Just as Evers and Adams-Johnson practiced emotional restraint, the BPP shared a similar concern against reactivity and feeling in the process of gaining power. They, too, grew wary of anger that might cloud judgement.

Fractured Movements

The amalgamation of movements in *Chorus* not only contains a striking tension between nostalgia and resistance, but bears large implications for the role of emotion, inclusion, and exclusion in contemporary social movements articulated by Evers, Adams-Johnson, and Hampton. Adams-Johnson, for example, faced multiple obstacles in her role as an activist. She experienced tensions within the male-dominated Black Power Movement, a

[134] Alk and Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, 15:00.
[135] Alk and Gray, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, 15:00. Fred Hampton cites François Duvalier's oppressive regime in Haiti as an example of the political consequences that result from a lack of education and unlimited power.

lack of intersectionality within Second Wave Feminism of the 1960s and 1970s,[136] and obfuscating language used by Black Nationalists.[137] These examples demonstrate the propensity with which individuals firmly aligned with and yet still felt excluded from the organizations they had joined. They also indicate how this exclusion created frustration among groups fighting for similar causes.

Conflicts among Civil Rights leaders presented clearly in public broadcasting in the 1960s and 1970s. In an episode of "Meet the Press" that aired on August 21, 1966, a round table discussion included Dr. King, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Whitney M. Young of the National Urban League, Floyd B. McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Stokley Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), and James H. Meredith, a student in law school at the time of the interview. As the reporters interviewed these leaders, they pushed a narrative of division in three clear attacks. One reporter prefaced his question to King with a description of a "crisis of leadership… warring civil rights groups each pursuing its own special interests."[138] Reporters repeatedly asked Wilkins and Kissick to clarify their conflicts as activists. Both stated that while their strategies might differ, they ultimately stood united in their goals. In another moment, a reporter described how the SNCC once described the NAACP as "Uncle Toms."[139] Wilkins rejected the antagonism

---

[136] hooks, bell, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (Pluto Press), 2000, 24. See bell hooks's *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* for a discussion of the women's liberation movement that failed to acknowledge the experiences of black women.
[137] Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:02:30-1:05:00. John Brown Society, "An Introduction to the Black Panther Party," 6. The 1969 pamphlet distributed by the Black Panthers specifically focuses on the assassinations and silencing of male black political leaders. Frankye Adams-Johnson initially gravitated towards the Black Panther Party because of their action-oriented policies. She rejected the "semantics" of groups in New York that focused on cultural traditions in their discourse and approach to protest activity.
[138] *Meet the Press, August 21, 1966, Part 1*, Accessed October 28, 2021, https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/meet-the-press-august-21-1966-part-1, 13:50.
[139] *Meet the Press*, 12:35.

painted by the reporter by stating that one person's comments did not represent the philosophy or ideologies of the whole. The interview, therefore, included the voices of these leaders, but framed them as at war with one another.

Ebony also covered the complex fracturing of the Civil Rights Movement within individual organizations. Even within the nonviolent NAACP, members of its Youth Council branched off into a group known as the commandos.[140] Wearing berets and boots, they proclaimed their readiness to use self-defense to protect themselves at demonstrations. A spread in *Ebony* spotlights the Youth Council in Milwaukee lead by Father John Groppi. An image of young children dancing in church is captioned with the following:

> Hey, Sock it to Me, Black Power! Ooo ah!... the chant and a variation of the Boogaloo and Funky Broadway is the freedom dance that happens at the beginning of every rally in St. Boniface church. The Milwaukee movement is given stimulus by the involvement of young children and teenagers as well as adults.[141]

The "Boogaloo" and the "Funky Chicken," both featured on *Soul Train*, compose a longer lineage of dance traditions tied to protest activity before the premiere of Cornelius's program. This example shows the degree to which activists could refashion movements, attire, and educational outreach to their own ends. The commandos defied the NAACP's image of cooperation, even as the Youth Council initially associated with the organization known for its diplomacy.

The chorus in the film resolves these disparate ideologies as it alienates the audience but avoids totalizing verbal declarations of protest. Lemon's film mirrors the BPP's

---

[140] "Commandos, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Youth Council | March on Milwaukee - Libraries Digital Collection," accessed September 17, 2021, https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/keyterms/commandos-naacp-youthcouncil/.
[141] David Llorens, "Miracle in Milwaukee," *Ebony*, November 1967, 31.

immersive guerilla tactics from their promotional videos. The camera in *Chorus*, however, takes on a quality of surveillance. Rather than include the spectator, the film encourages the viewer to consider what space they might occupy in this configuration of bodies. This technique keeps the observer at a distance, blocked from full immersion in the space, and results in a distancing effect in emotion. In the absence of protest signs and slogans, *Chorus* provides a glimpse at an assembly of bodies that mercilessly labor through dance. Even as Pittman, the performer at the center of the chorus, stands out in her commanding, fixed facial expression, she appears unmoved by the audience's enthusiasm. The dancers embody the ordinary, arduous work of activism that ensues before an audience of commuters that rush by and fail to see this labor. Without the ability to pinpoint the intentions and goals of the dancers, the chorus's masked protest allows members to fluidly affiliate with and break away from various protest groups, identities, and ideologies. They remain anonymous in public space. The chorus combats legibility even as it is recorded, captured, and archived in the film.

Chorus, in many ways, captures the fracturing of social movements that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement, the dissolution of the BPP, and may anticipate the trajectory of contemporary forms of protest activity that respond to racial oppression. In consideration of Black Lives Matter, described as "an inclusive and spacious movement" on its website, BLM securely defends a commitment to diversity within its makeup.[142] That scholar Myisha Cherry, author of *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle,* aims to clarify BLM's constructive uses of anger indicates that the movement is misunderstood by its audience. In defense of the particularities of anger, Cherry proposes that

[142] "About," Black Lives Matter, accessed June 18, 2021, https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

the public read Lordean rage in 2020 protests against the murder of black citizens in the U.S., a type of constructive, non-performative anger that avoids grandstanding, aspires for change, and does not intend to harm others.[143] In an article published in *The Atlantic* in 2021, the author writes:

> The anger we are witnessing at Black Lives Matter protests is more than emotional identity politics. Protesters' anger signals that Black folks have moral worth and should be respected. It says that while the system may not hold Black people in high regard, those risking psychological discomfort, infection, and arrest do.[144]

A consideration of Adams-Johnson's, Evers's, and Hampton's caution against emotion in activism does not discount the Lordean rage proposed by Cherry, but raises questions regarding discontent that may not easily be registered, witnessed in public space, or captured through news media. While Adams-Johnson, Evers, and Hampton validated their own anger, they also found a recurring benefit in remaining calm and collected. Their attention to economic liberation also invited collaboration with a broad base. Scholar Adam Szetela, for example, contrasts BLM's strategies to those used by Dr. King. Szetela points to the effectiveness of Dr. King's final campaign, the Poor People's Campaign (1968), which encouraged the economic liberation of all oppressed communities, even as he qualified his stance by stating that Black Americans faced disproportionate rates of unemployment.[145] Dr.

---

[143] Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 23-31.
[144] Myisha Cherry, "Anger Can Build a Better World," *The Atlantic*, August 25, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/how-anger-can-build-better-world/615625/.
[145] Adam Szetela, "Black Lives Matter at Five: Limits and Possibilities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 8 (June 20, 2020): 1358–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1638955. Adam Szetela writes, "one might argue that Black Lives Matter will reduce its potential to reform society if its leadership continues to overlook the problems of state and capitalist violence experienced by other racial groups." Szetela frames this as a divisive strategy.

King, consequently, invited a larger population to fight for economic concerns at the root of racial inequality.

Reconstructing Fractured Movements in the Chorus

Amidst these internal and external conflicts in activism created by the media, or formed from within a coalition, *Chorus* taps into the individuality of each member as a strength. The dancers reflect improvisation through their energies, distinct in their interpretation of the same set of movements. Subtle differences in personality diversify the chorus. Williams appears balletic, graceful, and upright in his posture and movements of his arms. His dancing, acutely symmetrical, highlights the basic structure of the step-touch that repeats throughout the dance. With his shoulders relaxed in a tall posture, he seamlessly glides in a series of turns toward the audience. Low, the performer with the least resistance to the audience, enjoys the dance from the beginning of the film. Although inaudible, he sings along to "Back to Black" on camera, not unlike the original *Soul Train* dancers who sang along to music in a dance hall. Low dances with a looseness in his upper body and arms that more closely exudes the *Soul Train* atmosphere. Hamilton, in contrast, stares over the audience with a severe gaze that he holds firmly throughout the dance. He taunts and confronts the audience through this expression that juxtaposes his expansive and energetic movements. Hamilton, uninhibited, takes up space as he dances. Hunter, relaxed and collected, keeps a few of his movements closer to his body. When the dancers toss their heads back, he is the only person who looks directly up at the ceiling of the Oculus, taking in the space above his body. Hunter and Low, standing at opposite ends of the chorus line, enjoy a few short sections of choreography that differ from and frame the three dancers in the center. Pittman, disciplined in her task to carry out the sampled movement, maintains a stoic

facial expression throughout the entire dance. She displays the clearest apathy toward the audience. Pittman is the only dancer that in two moments in *Chorus* stands in the center, apart from the others, and at the end, dances alone for forty seconds. When Lemon builds a dance of self-defense, he places Pittman at the center of the chorus, and gives representation to the intersectional identities that navigated and moved through the Civil Rights Movement.[146] When Pittman walks off, she ignores the applause that erupts from the audience. In their varying degrees of energy and presence, the dancers redefine improvisation to encompass a way of existing within the chorus. In their rejection of the audience, evidenced by the pedestrian act of walking off stage without expression, the neutral face of postmodern expression merges with the cool face of masked protest.[147]

The space in which the dancers perform, a memorial for 9/11, contains nationalist symbols, strictly intended to convey a sense of unity. The final shot in the film captures, seemingly by chance, an American flag hanging from the second floor of the plaza. As the chorus labors through the spectacular space, and remains anonymous to those who walk past, their bodies interact with emblems of nationalism, imperialism, and capitalism. Andreas Huyssen, a scholar of comparative literature and cultural memory, considers the complications of building memorials that fail to engage the public. In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* he asks, "how can one reconcile the desire to rebuild

[146] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (December 7, 2015). https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8. For a detailed discussion of how race and gender have been overlooked in legal proceedings on discriminatory practices against black women in the workplace, see Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational text on intersectional identities.
[147] Wendy Perron, "DANCE; The Face Can Say As Much as the Legs," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2002, https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/13/arts/dance-the-face-can-say-as-much-as-the-legs.html. Dance scholar Wendy Perron associates the neutral expression used by dancers at Judson Dance Theater with an impetus to draw attention to movements of the body.

a prime site of real estate with the need to commemorate the dead…?"[148] These factors infiltrate *Chorus* as dancing bodies also commemorate the deaths of Civil Rights activists through their movements—leaders that fought to combat the capitalist structures that perpetuate racial inequality. In their citation of *Soul Train* movements, carried out before nationalist imagery, they also cite histories of foreign expansion that placed black bodies on the frontlines of the Vietnam War, fighting for a nation that failed to live up to the democratic ideals it sought to spread throughout the world. If cities reflect the values of those in power, designers who make decisions regarding the center, the outskirts, or entities left entirely off the map, *Chorus* gives a face to the bodies that make up the city below.[149] In *Chorus*, the body as ordinary matter, a constant center of support, carves out a space to move within the boundaries of the plaza.

Institutional Pressures: Negotiating Nationalism during the Vietnam War

Hours before the reverberating murder of Evers in 1963, John F. Kennedy delivered the "Report to the American People on Civil Rights."[150] In the address, he responded to acts of discrimination that had occurred against black students at the University of Alabama. In his focus on equality, he advocated for the rights of all Americans to attend public universities. He declared: "when Americans are sent to Vietnam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only."[151] Kennedy carefully highlighted the moral obligations that the American people owed to an integrated army that fought for their freedom. While Kennedy

[148] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (Stanford University Press, 2003), 158.
[149] Christine M. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (MIT Press, 1996).
[150] John F. Kennedy, *Excerpt, Report to the American People on Civil Rights*, Radio and Television Report (Columbia Broadcasting System, 1963), https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/TNC/TNC-262-EX/TNC-262-EX.
[151] Kennedy, *Excerpt, Report to the American People on Civil Rights*, 1:35.

articulated a message of unity and proposed Civil Rights legislation, his statement contained a contradiction, emblematic of systems that extracted labor from African Americans in the U.S. In Kennedy's decision to pursue an anti-Communist agenda, increase military presence in Vietnam, and advance U.S. policies of containment during his presidency, he asked soldiers to fight for ideals that many groups, including the BPP and Dr. King vehemently opposed. Civil rights advocacy on U.S. soil, thus, conflicted with the implementation of imperialist policies abroad.[152] As the U.S. began to draft black men to fight in the Vietnam War, soldiers, artists, and ordinary citizens found themselves forced to take a stance on their allegiance to the country. Men who resisted the draft risked imprisonment, their failure to comply with federal law framed at odds with loyalty to the nation.[153] At risk of dying on the frontlines, black men left their families and homes to serve a country that failed to grant them equal protection at home.[154]

Many artists vocalized support for soldiers at war and applauded the progress that an integrated army signaled for racial equality. Sammy Davis Jr. spoke highly of military service. Despite the discrimination and abuse he faced as a veteran who participated in the draft during World War II, Davis performed for troops in Vietnam in 1972. He recognized that while problems existed within the military, great progress had been made:

> Is it gonna be a drag on the average cat that's on the street whether he be black or white, to get into the military? I say, yes, it is, because we live in a society that

[152] "Civil Rights Act (1964)," National Archives, October 5, 2021, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act. After Kennedy's public assassination in Dallas, Texas in 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, introduced by the former president.
[153] Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[154] Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (1971): 57–76; "African-Americans In Combat," PBS, accessed June 25, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/african-americans-in-combat/.

promotes total freedom, but everybody better thank god that the military has its head where it is and is trying to improve itself.[155]

Struck by the camaraderie among soldiers during his visit, Davis supported policies of integration in the military.

Davis was among many artists of color that traveled to Vietnam as entertainers including Harold Lloyd Nicholas and Fayard Antonio Nicholas, known as The Nicholas Brothers, James Brown, and Lola Falana. Through comedy, dance, and music, artists provided an escape and diversion for enlisted soldiers. The Nicholas Brothers, for example, performed in Vietnam with Bob Hope in 1965. Through a comedic sketch, they brought levity to the battleground. Laughter erupted from the audience as Hope attempted to keep up with the invincible brothers that danced on stage.[156] The participation of these artists in United Service Organization (USO) tours demonstrated the extent to which opposition to the war might still include support for soldiers through entertainment, and in turn, be promoted by those entertainers to boost national morale.

Other artists staunchly opposed the administration despite narratives of progress and democratic ideals vocalized by its supporters. During the 1960s and 1970s actresses, poets, and blues singers inserted anti-war sentiments into their work. The Black Arts Movement valued the power of artistic and cultural production as forms of direct activism that would bring forth change.[157] In 1974, June Jordan wrote a poem to jazz musician Ethel Ennis, who sang the national anthem at President Nixon's inauguration. In the poem, Jordan ties images

---

[155] *Peace, Togetherness, and Sammy*, Reel America, 1972, https://www.c-span.org/video/?509077-1/peace-togetherness-sammy. 3:17.
[156] Nicholas Brothers Official Videos, *Nicholas Brothers with Bob Hope in Vietnam Filmed in 1965*, accessed July 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNEG_wLis2E.
[157] Samuel W. Black, *Soul Soldiers* (Pittsburgh: Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center, 2006), 68.

of war—bombs, blood, and bodies—to the national flag. She questions Ennis's decision to sing the "Star Spangled Banner" amidst the violence brought upon other countries through U.S. imperialism.[158]

Cornelius, a veteran who served in the Korean War and became a police officer before his career as a radio host, had a long history of working with institutions.[159] As such, he allowed some of his guests to offer their political stance on the Vietnam War through music and interviews. Some artists performed anti-war songs, which "ran their course" by 1973.[160] Other performers supported troops that came home from the war.[161] *Soul Train*, therefore, aimed to increase positive representations of Black Power and artistry via public broadcasting.[162] The variation in these choices—to serve in the war or resist the draft, perform for troops in Vietnam, mix black musical entertainment with civil rights advocacy, or sing the national anthem—complicated civic efficacy at the height of the war. The juxtaposition between Jordan's poem and Sammy Davis Jr.'s tour in Vietnam placed art and performance at the core of political affiliation. Cornelius's spotlight on and subsequent retirement of anti-war songs on the program exemplified the ways in which citizens navigated their relationships to the nation and the institutions that they sought to defend or rebuild.

Black Liberalism: Roots in Chicago

Historian Jefferey Helgeson refers to the battle between pragmatism and radicalism—to work with or against institutions—as a tradition of black liberalism. He specifically locates

[158] Samuel W. Black, *Soul Soldiers*, 68.
[159] Ralph, "'Love, Peace, and Soul,'" *Transition*, no. 108 (2012), https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.108.19, 20.
[160] Lehman, *Critical History*, 33, 65, 97.
[161] Lehman, *Critical History*, 33.
[162] Ralph, "Love, Peace, and Soul," 28.

traditions of black liberalism in Chicago, a city he refers to as "a crucible of black power and a city of destruction."[163] Chicago, the birthplace of Cornelius and *Soul Train*, produced multiple political leaders, including former President Barack Obama. He achieved the highest political office in the U.S. by working with institutions to ultimately lead them. Harold Washington's election in 1983 as the first black mayor of Chicago also proved that Black Americans could work with governmental structures rather than conduct a complete overthrow of their framework.[164]

In Helgeson's analysis of community organizing by black women in Chicago, he recovers their significant role in advancing the quality of life for their communities. Helgeson argues that the excavation of their stories challenges dominant narratives that claim a "shift from class to racial concerns after World War II."[165] In an analysis of coalition building, particularly that of labor union leader Addie Wyatt, Helgeson considers the balance that black families and women struck in their navigation of selfhood and community organization:

> All of these eras saw a new kind of politics of home with different dynamics of class, gender, and race. What they all shared was a pragmatic interest in the quality of life in local communities, as well as a fundamentally liberal belief in the importance of voluntary and government institutions in ensuring individual opportunity and community welfare.[166]

---

[163] Jeffrey Helgeson, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago's Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington*, (University of Chicago Press, 2014), https://www-degruyter-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/chicago/view/title/560006, 24.
[164] Helgeson, *Crucibles*, 241.
[165] Helgeson, *Crucibles*, 22.
[166] Helgeson, *Crucibles*, 47.

Black pragmatism, then, included daily efforts and tasks that women executed in hopes of constructing a better future for their families. Wyatt, for example, understood that strong families, tied to larger networks or communities, could participate in formal political processes, such as elections, to gain political power. The politics of the home, sustained in the daily practices performed by black women, ultimately wielded enormous power in public space. Wyatt's focus on the intersection of race, gender, and class in relationship to economic mobility made her a critical to the formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women in 1974.[167] In a similar approach to that of the Black Panthers, Wyatt's focus on economic concerns remained crucial to the eradication of racism and inequity.

Black Liberalism: Relationships to Postmodern Dance and Progress

Soul Train similarly incorporated traditions of black liberalism as the program entered the private spaces of families through public broadcasting. *Soul Train* materialized five years after the establishment of Judson Dance Theater (1962-1966).[168] After its initial production in Cornelius's hometown of Chicago, the program moved to other cities in California, Alabama, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Texas. With the ability to showcase local talent on television, "the train" reached an expansive audience far beyond the geographical boundaries of its original filming location and democratized dance in a way that

[167] Marcia Walker-McWilliams, *Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality* (University of Illinois Press, 2016). Marcia Walker-McWilliams's overview of Addie Wyatt's life and activism notes Wyatt's journey from Mississippi to Chicago in 1930 as one that would expose her family to forms of economic hardship distinct from their lives in Brookhaven.

[168] Sally Banes, "Grand Union," in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspective Foundation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0722; Siobhan Burke, "Take Me to Church and Let Me Dance," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/arts/dance/reggie-wilson-dancing-platform-praying-grounds-danspace.html. In 1971, the same year that *Soul Train* premiered, Grand Union, a dance collective organized by former members of Judson Dance Theater, performed three shows in support of the Committee to Defend the Black Panthers. In addition to the support offered to the party through the benefit concert, The Black Panthers used Judson Memorial Church in 1970 as a space to hold meetings.

Judson Dance Theater failed to achieve in practice.[169] Dancers from Chicago, with and without professional training, socialized and performed on public television. Through representation, fashion, and commercials catered to black communities, Cornelius incorporated the "black is beautiful" movement into mainstream television programming.[170] Cornelius managed to capitalize on black dancers as a businessman from Chicago.[171] Their performances created radical breaks in Cornelius's discussions with activists on the state of social and economic issues affecting Black Americans. Broadcast across the U.S., the program inserted black identities into the national consciousness.

As a political strategy, Cornelius worked with the capitalist institutions he challenged through interviews with local activists. In addition to the celebratory aesthetic of Cornelius's dance party, the host articulated clear social commentary through the content he showcased on *Soul Train* in its early years. In one section of the program, for example, Cornelius described influential black figures "whose name(s) you should know"—a comment directed at dancers and viewers at home.[172] Through a dynamic educational format, Cornelius also inserted brief interviews with Civil Rights activists.[173] In an episode recorded in the 1980s, Reverend Jesse Jackson stated:

---

[169] Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Duke University Press, 1993), 78-80. Performance theorist and cultural historian Sally Banes describes a paradox in the communal aspirations of 1960s avant-garde art making. Intellectual artists in New York worked in spaces inhabited by local communities that formed social groups based on traditional factors of kinship, religion, and cultural background. While Judson dancers used democratic forms of decision-making in practice, the members of this collective did not reflect communities of color in the local area.

[170] Leslie Asako Gladjo and Jamila Wignot, *"Black Is Beautiful" and Soul Train*, Video, The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross, PBS, 2013, https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/black-is-beautiful/.

[171] George, *Hippest Trip*, 2-3.

[172] *Soul Train Scramble Board [Leslie & Chris] Cameo - Word Up (Soul Train 1986)*, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWPxmT-Rvtw.

[173] Lehman, *Critical History*, 66-67. When *Soul Train* expanded from Chicago to Los Angeles and entered syndication, the program lost its explicit focus on activism.

> The energy of young people of course makes the soul train run, but it also makes the military train run, it also makes the athletic industry run, it also makes the educational industry run… if this generation of young people can somehow balance soul and science, beat and balance, and creatively use this energy to vote and to use our dollar scientifically, then just as the generation twenty years ago brought us public accommodations and the right to vote, this generation of young people can salvage us economically, politically, and spiritually as well.[174]

With a focus on the next generation of black activists, Jackson outlined a message of progress, a train built by the Civil Rights Movement that moved forward, towards the future, with energy and momentum. In a recent issue of *Dance Index*, dance scholar Luc Sante confirms that the primary audience that watched *Soul Train* on the weekends included adolescents and teenagers. Sante similarly described the significance of the *Soul Train* line as a metaphor for progress:

> The line was Young Black America on the move, boogalooing its way into the future, its hard-won self-confidence borrowed from or boosted by the music, showing the entire world that effective forward motion did not entail jackboot monotony but allowed for and even required a back step and a side-to-side and a dip and a roll and a drop on the one.[175]

In Sante's description, progress develops along a winding path, with setbacks and detours along the way. His objection to linear explanations of resistance ties black social dance traditions to jazz aesthetics and postmodern definitions of time: nonlinearity, repetition and

---

[174] Jesse Jackson, Jesse Jackson On Soul Train 1981, interview by Don Cornelius, Film Clip, accessed April 17, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pt7kD2ednrU.
[175] Sante, "Land of a Thousand Dances," 28.

revision, improvisation, and syncopation. Sante's overview of the program reveals a profound affection for these techniques, the past, and old school dance steps that instilled values of self-worth and optimism among its viewers.[176]

Artistic Institutions and Exclusion

In the same way that Cornelius voiced political critique within the *Soul Train* dance hall, Lemon uses the language of postmodern dance to critique his mentors. *Chorus* takes advantage of an affection for *Soul Train* to warn against the dangers of looking longingly to the past with regard to dance genealogies. To illustrate these complexities, Lemon began his artist talk "Circling Around Postmodernism like Weather" with a recording of Mary Wigman's *Hexentanz* (1926) edited with the song "Don't Destroy Me" by Carol Jones (1968).[177] Wigman wears a mask and cloak and makes sharp exoticizing gestures with her arms. This layering of modern dance and soul music mirrors Beasley's work in *Chorus*. He also crafts a soundscape for the dancers by layering prerecorded songs. The process of sampling Winehouse and Bowie's "Space Oddity"—just as Lemon samples *Soul Train*—spawns a pastiche, a collage of dance and music, that presents a nonlinear constellation of citations. *Chorus's* contemporary soundtrack branches out to multiple time periods: house music of the 70s and 80s, with roots in Chicago, the blues of the Mississippi Delta popularized by Charley Patton, and jazz aesthetics of repetition and revision. Beasley's sound arrangement for *Chorus* also nods to Don Cornelius's legacy as a radio host who adapted his

[176] "How 'Soul Train' Shaped A Generation," *NPR*, April 3, 2014, sec. Author Interviews, https://www.npr.org/2014/04/03/298736685/how-soul-train-shaped-a-generation; Sante, "Land," 1-2. Multiple books on *Soul Train* begin with a description of an author viewing the show on Saturday mornings with friends and family. As indicated by the NPR interview and *Dance Index* article, the show evokes a strong sense of nostalgia from the authors that have written about the program.

[177] Wendy Perron, "The Halprin-Forti-Rainer Postmodern Sweep," Wendy Perron, February 2017, https://wendyperron.com/the-halprin-forti-rainer-sweep-of-postmodern-dance/. Wendy Perron's reflections on the Radical Bodies Conference clarify that Ralph Lemon used Carol Jones's "funk-soul" track.

visions for broadcasting to a dance and performance format. Lemon and Beasley both assume the role of editors as they construct a larger argument on appropriation through samples of music and dance.

Through his collage, Beasley creates an endless citation of Winehouse's song; its rhythm persists as an underlying structure throughout the entire dance. A desire to emulate blackness permeates *Chorus* through what scholar Daphne Brooks terms "sonic bluesface."[178] Winehouse engages in a vocal practice that recalls the strategies used by white minstrel performers who carefully studied the plantation life they sought to depict on stage.[179] Winehouse and Bowie present an ambiguity in their appropriation of cultural traditions. Among the first few white musicians to perform on *Soul Train* in 1975, Bowie earned the approval of Cornelius and the dancers.[180] The iconic voices of Winehouse and Bowie, both from England, simultaneously cite histories of imperialism embedded in Lemon's dance construction. In *Chorus*, dance performs a similar function that reveals a tension between black dancers that studied under the mentorship of white postmodern artists in the New York downtown dance scene.

In his subsequent references to white men and women in modern dance—Cunningham and Graham—and discussion of comparisons to Ailey, Lemon never mentions Katherine Dunham, whose absence is conspicuous. As a civil rights activists and dance pioneer, Dunham's autoethnographic work resulted in concert dances that also featured a

---

[178] Daphne A. Brooks, "'This Voice Which Is Not One': Amy Winehouse Sings the Ballad of Sonic Blue(s)Face Culture," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20, no. 1 (March 2010): 37–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/07407701003589337.

[179] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 50-54. See Eric Lott's descriptions of Billy Whitlock, Ben Cotton, and F.C. Wemyss who not only studied Black men to "inherit the cool," but also, sometimes took their personas offstage.

[180] *Rolling Stone*, "12 Mind-Blowing 'Soul Train' Performances," *Rolling Stone*, February 5, 2014, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/12-mind-blowing-soul-train-performances-11385/.

chorus. According to dance scholar Joanna Dee Das, Dunham's *Southland* (1951), a dance work based on lynching in the U.S., set up a sharp juxtaposition in its set design. Standing on what Das describes as "a bucolic Southern landscape" a chorus anticipates violence at the beginning of the dance when they ask if the sun always shines in Dixie.[181] The chorus defies the tone of the setting in which they ask their question. Dunham, a black feminist choreographer who organized outreach efforts in New York for Vietnam veterans impacts the genealogy that Lemon constructs as he discusses his mentorship.[182] As the bodies in the chorus reach the end of the dance, they perform undulations similar to the Yonvalou, a Haitian Vodou dance tradition in which the torso mimics the fluid movements of snakes and waves.[183] The citation of the Yonvalou interlocks with the Dunham Technique of fall and recovery evidenced in the dancers' rippling spines. These movements not only cite Dunham's codification of these dance techniques, but also carry the choreographer's own political struggle as a dancer whose body and work faced racialization in the press.

Lemon's presentation of the film at a dance conference creates a unique dialogue regarding the intersection of Black U.S. History and Dance History. The chorus inserts its enduring presence in a public space in New York City—a city designated as the artistic hub for the development of postmodern dance. Dance scholar Sally Banes's seminal study *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* roots the beginnings of postmodernism in the alternative communities created by artists who moved to

---

[181] Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*. (Oxford University Press, 2017), 123.
[182] Jennifer Dunning, "Katherine Dunham's Mission: Giving Children a Gift of Dance," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1991, sec, Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/19/arts/katherine-dunham-s-mission-giving-children-a-gift-of-dance.html.
[183] "Dunham Technique: 'Yonvalou,'" Library of Congress, accessed June 12, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200003869/.

Greenwich Village in the 1960s. Banes writes, "the artists' commonwealth was no ordinary community nostalgically reconstituted. These artists reinvented the village, but squarely in the city."[184] The sampling of *Soul Train,* in contrast, affirms that Banes's concept of the village had always existed in the city.

The significance of their movement in the plaza echoes historian Tera W. Hunter's commentary on public dance halls at the turn of the century. Adverse reactions to these spaces, which sometimes led to their closure, equated black dance with immorality.[185] The chorus utilizes the foundation established by Cornelius's popular dance hall. Their act of protest—a combination of self-defense, discretion, and dance in public space—requires skill, endurance, and calculation. The physical movement of the body in this public space defies the regulation of black bodies in history. As they delineate their own performance space, they confidently control their bodies and surroundings. They insert a dance hall in the middle of a train station and draw in a crowd of spectators to witness their direct action in the plaza.

Nostalgia Refashioned

The bold, yet illegible movements of the dancers make the performance remarkably enigmatic in the brilliant plaza. They reference rituals of masked protest that emerged on U.S. soil through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Without drums, prohibited under the Slave Code, slaves used the body as a percussive instrument in the Juba and Ring Shout to keep spiritual practices alive.[186] In the coded cakewalk, slaves mocked the etiquette of white slaveholders who judged their ability to gracefully move as they danced.[187] In Sante's writing

[184] Banes, *Greenwich Village,* 14, 39.
[185] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 169.
[186] Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.
[187] Katrina Dyonne Thompson, *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery* (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 109.

on *Soul Train*, the writer compares the *Soul Train* line to the cakewalk, but also draws attention to African line dances such as the yaké of Niger, a West African dance where men compete for a partner.[188] Men of the Gerewol tribe prepare for the pageant: they line up, face the crowd, and smile to show their teeth and widen their eyes.[189] They slowly sway back and forth and rise in a collective motion. The event, with details unannounced until the day of the event, antedates avant-garde pop-up performances.

Renowned dance scholar Constance Valis Hill writes that "although the cakewalk was a retention of African festival dances," evidenced by the yaké, for example, "so too, could it be a parody of white mannerisms."[190] In the repetition and transformation of pageantry dances, characterized by display and entertainment, slaves participated in the cakewalk that appealed to slaveholders. By the mid 1800s, the cakewalk constituted a core section in the third act of blackface minstrel shows of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[191] These shows sourced feelings of nostalgia, a longing for the slavery as an institution, after emancipation.[192]

An issue of *Ebony* in 1961, ten years before the premiere of *Soul Train*, reveals the trajectory of these dance steps, also rooting them on plantations. Leon James and Al Minns, famous dancers of the Savoy Ballroom demonstrate "The Shimmy," "The Cakewalk," "The Mess Around," "The Snake Hips," and "The Camel Walk." These dances, of course, spread throughout dance halls and night clubs in New York during the 1920s including the Cotton

---

[188] Sante, "Land of a Thousand Dances," 8.
[189] "In Pictures: The Men Competing for Love in the Deserts of Chad." *BBC News*, February 27, 2017, sec. Africa. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39070587;
[190] Hill, *Tap Dancing America,* 33.
[191] Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 34.
[192] Katrina Dyonne Thompson, *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery* (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 1, 5, 196. Katrina Dyonne Thompson argues that "slave society fostered the first American entertainment venue." As such, Thompson suggests that contemporary iterations of racial stereotypes in media hold connections not only to minstrelsy, but to the institution of slavery.

Club and Connie's Inn.[193] Caught in motion, James's and Minns's still images create a collection of movements that marked the turn of the century and drew upon dances developed on plantations.[194] In the article, James and Minns call Americans "great faddists" eager to "try something new."[195] Through the sampling and revision of plantation dances, an abundance of transformations result. In some of these dances, James and Minns express joy, smiling widely for the camera. In others, they resemble Hamilton in *Chorus*, taunting the spectator. As Minns models the "Snake Hips," he thrusts his pelvis to the right, holds out his arms, and looks straight out with a deadpan expression.

Chorus uses postmodern dance movement exploration and jazz aesthetics to reveal that all movements, improvised or choreographed, draw upon a previous set of knowledge within the confines of physical boundaries. The chorus utilizes the framework built by *Soul Train* dancers that spontaneously responded to their environment to generate movement based on their personal repertoires and Cornelius's rules. This intervention, once again, challenges the linear codification of dance traditions as sites of protest. Dance scholar Jonathan David Jackson critiques the Eurocentric perspective that arises with the dichotomization of improvisation and choreography.[196] Jackson cites the improvisational dance strategies of feminist, Anglo-American modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan whose transcendentalist philosophy embraced the union of the body and the natural environment. While Duncan countered ethereal representations of women within rigid balletic technique, she held a vision for dance that looked down upon movements that she perceived to be

---

[193] "Nightclubs and Other Venues." In *Grove Music Online*, 2003. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000330000#omo-9781561592630-e-2000330000.
[194] Leon James and Al Minns, "Popular Dances from the Cakewalk to the Watusi," *Ebony*, 1961.
[195] James and Minns, "Popular Dances," 32.
[196] Jonathan David Jackson, "Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing," *Dance Research Journal*, Social and Popular Dance, 33, no. 2 (Winter 2001), 44.

unrefined. An entry in her autobiography *My Life* reads as a travel narrative as she tries to reconstruct a Greek Chorus in Hymettus and train "inhabitants to sing and dance…celebrate the Greek gods and give up their terrible modern costumes."[197] Duncan's perspective, representative of larger genealogical structures of modernity, distinguished her experiments in dance-making as innovative: a rejection of regulated movement in ballet and a distinction from existing jazz dance traditions.

To then describe *Chorus* as a postmodern dance construction draws attention to the colonization and appropriation of cultural traditions. *Chorus* moves beyond Homi Bhabha's "almost the same, but not quite" through its racialization.[198] Marked as black social dance traditions with subtle traces of white postmodernism at first sight, *Chorus* uses the repetition of the two-step to question this visual assumption. If the dancers' unrelenting gaze fails to alienate an eager audience, Lemon still manages to articulate a critique of the mechanisms of appropriation. The chorus, as trickster, turns into spectator, and analyzes the movements of individuals who walk past the dance. As Pittman, Williams, Hamilton, Low, and Hunter dance in the plaza, the bodies that move through the transportation hub form another chorus: the public. Their behavior—to watch, applaud, look away, pass, or enjoy—generates its own diversity in acts of looking. The film then presents another chorus: the dancers and audience in their totality that includes spectators of the film that observe from their seats. The intertextuality of these components, thus, implicates the viewer, who forms part of the chorus in this grand scheme.

[197] Duncan, Isadora, *My Life*, (W. W. Norton & Company), 1995, 92-93.
[198] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.

Beyond the boundaries of their offering, the dancers in *Chorus* issue a warning. The duration of the performance displays the multiplicity of the step touch, a movement that happens again and again, each time with a difference. The basic step amplifies a repetitive, rhythmic structure and renders movement patterns banal. As duration compounds with the step touch as the structural dimension that builds *Chorus*, the dance's architectural design gains a menacing quality and the dancers show signs of exhaustion. Against the backdrop of the monumental Wedge of Light Plaza, the American flag that hangs from the ceiling of the Oculus, and the political landscape of the 2016 U.S. elections, the year in which the dance was performed, the chorus cautions the viewer to look closely at these signs, monuments, and public spaces to question their appearances. Through repetition, they critique the grandiosity of performative and symbolic gestures, again and again.

Coda

In consideration of what Dr. King describes as the myth of time—"the notion that only time can solve the problem of racial injustice"—we can revisit contemporary challenges faced by Civil Rights advocates who now hold leadership roles in the U.S.[199] As a poet and professor, Adams-Johnson continues to disseminate her knowledge through multiple oral history projects.[200] In 2010, she donated a personal collection of papers to the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University that shed light on her experiences as a member of the Black Panther Party.[201] While she has worked with institutions to share her story as an activist, she confronted a difficult decision to reject an invitation to the inauguration of the

[199] King, "The Other America," 26:32-28:23. During his career, King continually asserted that time was neutral and must be seized by the right hands to avoid further destruction.
[200] Frankye Adams-Johnson, "The Black Panther Party Archives of Frankye Adams-Johnson," 2011, https://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/files/2013/03/Adams-Johnson.pdf, 1-2.
[201] Adams-Johnson, "The Black Panther Party Archives of Frankye Adams-Johnson," 1-2.

new Civil Rights Museum in Jackson, Mississippi in 2016. The museum currently honors the work of activists in Jackson, including Adams-Johnson.

In light of former President Donald J. Trump's decision to make a speech at the opening, a decision he announced five days before the event, Adams-Johnson, along with former U.S. representative John Lewis, refused to attend.[202] Lewis, who was arrested in Jackson, Mississippi in 1961 as one of the original thirteen Freedom Riders, publicly released the following statement: "President Trump's attendance and his hurtful policies are an insult to the people portrayed in this civil rights museum."[203] Flonzie Brown-Wright, on the other hand, attended the inauguration. As the first black woman elected to the position of Election Commissioner in Canton, Mississippi after Reconstruction, Brown-Wright wanted to celebrate the museum's history despite Trump's presence.[204] Activists who attended or refused to attend the opening of the Civil Rights Museum in Mississippi in 2016 continued to deploy and calculate protest strategies decades after their initial participation in the Civil Rights Movement.

How might these actions impart knowledge to institutions and dance scholars that gather at a Radical Bodies Conference, for example, and grapple with issues of diversity? In two interviews, Adams-Johnson implored young activists to understand their relationship to the activism of the 1960s and 1970s.[205] She expressed gratitude toward interviewers and

---

[202] Marc Fisher, "More Activists, Officials Boycott Civil Rights Event Because of Trump: President's Decision to Attend Opening of Mississippi Museum Leads to Protests and Debates," *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C., United States: WP Company LLC, December 8, 2017), http://search.proquest.com/news/docview/1974503920/citation/B387882323C84853PQ/1.
[203] John Lewis, "Twitter Post," Tweet. *@repjohnlewis* (blog), December 8, 2017. https://twitter.com/repjohnlewis/status/939155450297274368.
[204] Fisher, "More Activists Boycott," *The Washington Post*.
[205] Frankye Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1: 26:00; Winter Institute, *Frankye Adams-Johnson*, 2013, https://vimeo.com/70746152, 32:15.

students who studied this history, but hesitated, on both occasions, to fully support trends she witnessed in activists. She stated:

> One of the things I discourage, not to blindly follow. A lot of young people, particularly when it comes to the Panthers, a lot of young people want to know about the Panthers, but there's the romanticism. So basically, I want them to know the good, the bad, and the ugly. I advise young people, when studying the movement… be open, be open to new ideas, but to also find what really works for you.[206]

Romanticization, described by Adams-Johnson as the tendency to idealize past protest strategies, deters the astute re-envisioning of tactics used by the BPP, the NAACP, and dancers on *Soul Train*. Her advice positions protest as an evolving, complex process without one rigid form or style where activists continually navigate their surroundings and critically think about the information that they see. She asks that activists find their way through the movement.

Lemon's twofold approach to protest at a dance conference—a speech and a dance—draws upon the complexities exhibited in Adams-Johnson's suggestions. His presentation includes the oratory power of activists that preceded him: Hampton, Dr. King, and Evers. The dance retains the physical component of civil disobedience in public space—a commitment to action evidenced by Adams-Johnson and her peers in Jackson, Mississippi. With a critical approach to emotion and nostalgia in the film, Lemon simultaneously critiques dance genealogies that romanticize women and mentors in positions of power in dance studios—spaces that profoundly lacked diversity—during his training. Instead, ordinary bodies in *Chorus* utilize duration, critique nostalgia, and invite a multitude of approaches to

[206] Frankye Adams-Johnson, "Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview," 1:26:00.

resistance through their dance. The performers repeat and revise their steps in an ongoing struggle that will continue to transform or syncopate over time. Each member confidently applies their individual strengths to the dance. In their totality, they establish a forceful presence and contribute to a choral effort of black resistance.

Chapter Two

The Hare in the Moon: Silhouettes and Subterfuge in Ana Mendieta's Earth Body Art

Between 1977 and 1982, Cuban-born visual artist Ana Mendieta made multiple earth-body works inspired by moon goddesses of pre-Columbian Cuba and Mesoamerica. Exiled from Havana in 1961 and unable to return to the island after Fidel Castro's rise to power, Mendieta also appropriated images of *orishas*, or deities, of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. By molding sacred deities in the image of her own silhouette, Mendieta collapsed belief systems and temporalities into a single body. When she finally returned to her birthplace in 1981, Mendieta celebrated Maroya, the moon goddess of the Taíno peoples indigenous to the island before the arrival of the Spanish in 1492.[207] She engraved silhouettes of Taíno gods and goddesses on the walls of a cave in Jaruco, Cuba.[208] Writer and curator Laura Roulet contextualizes Mendieta's exhibit of deities in nature, denoting that Mendieta felt a proximity to the Taíno community's "dislocation and near decimation within a generation of the Spanish conquest."[209] Mendieta's homage to their gods through earth-body art appeared as vertical impressions, lines, and curves in the landscape. They followed in the tradition of Mendieta's *siluetas*, or silhouettes, rough outlines of her body in the ground.

---

[207] Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, Alfredo Prieto, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Duke University Press, 2019). 7-9. The editors of *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, and Politics* state that archeology has provided one avenue to understand the "Ciboney inhabitants of the island and their replacement by the Taíno prior to 1492." I consider Mendieta's excavation of sites in Cuba as a method through which she attempts to understand these histories.

[208] Ivan Rodríguez López, "Antillean Islander Space: On the Religious Beliefs and Representations of the Taíno People," *Journal of Religious History* 40, no. 4 (December 2016): 453–74, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12329, 459; Olga M. Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body : Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 89, 96. Ivan Rodríguez Lopez argues that a study of Taíno spiritual practices is complicated by the fact that other indigenous groups that preceded them may have influenced their belief systems.

[209] Laura Roulet, "Ana Mendieta as Cultural Connector with Cuba," *American Art* 26, no. 2 (June 2012): 21–27, https://doi.org/10.1086/667947, 24.

Through this aesthetic practice, Mendieta became a trace, an impression, negative space, and part of the earth, like the deities she traced in Cuban terrain.

In another image that Mendieta named *Black Ixchell*, a reference to the Mayan moon goddess, she photographed her body tightly wrapped from head to toe in dark cloth with a candle on her chest. The history of the name Ixchel reveals two meanings: "white skin" or "rainbow."[210] In the name *Black Ixchell*, Mendieta utilized a color that indicated the lunar phase of the new moon in total darkness.[211] Cosmology, integral to Mayan agricultural processes in Cozumel, understood the moon goddess in her multiple phases as critical to survival.[212] Ixchel's manifestations across Mayan codices show her as a young moon goddess of fertility with a rabbit at her side.[213] Scholar Mary Miller, however, rejects this interpretation and describes Ixchel in older-age, unable to have children.[214] A more consistent explanation of Ixchel as a weaver, in an act of writing and storytelling, perhaps, occurs across multiple accounts.[215] While Miller contends that Ixchel is not a young moon goddess, Noemí Cruz Cortes accepts that these various depictions may pertain to the same Mayan deity and represent her in distinct lunar phases.[216] The confusion created through this array of

---

[210] Noemí Cruz Cortés, *Las señoras de la luna* (UNAM, 2005), 13-14.
[211] Ivan Šprajc, "Archaeological Sites on the Island of Cozumel: The Role of Astronomy in Architectural and Urban Planning," in *The Role of Archaeoastronomy in the Maya World: The Case Study of the Island of Cozumel* (Mexico: UNESCO, 2016), 58–83, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244721, 71.
[212] Stanislaw Iwaniszewski, "Time and the Moon in Maya Culture: The Case of Cozumel," in *The Role of Archaeoastronomy in the Maya World: The Case Study of the Island of Cozumel* (Mexico: UNESCO, 2016), 39–55, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244721, 44.
[213] Aleksandar Bošković, "The Meaning of Maya Myths," in *Mesoamerican Religions and Archaeology*, Essays in Pre-Columbian Civilizations (Archaeopress, 2017), 42–54, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pzk1t8.17, 207-208; "Figurilla de Ixchel, con conejo," Mediateca - Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, accessed May 5, 2022, https://mediateca.inah.gob.mx/islandora_74/islandora/object/objetoprehispanico%3A1337; Mary Miller, "Ixchel," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures* (Oxford University Press, 2001), http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195108156.001.0001/acref-9780195108156-e-300.
[214] Mary Ellen Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (Thames and Hudson, 1997), 101; Miller, "Ixchel."
[215] Bošković, "The Meaning of Maya Myths," 208; Cruz Cortés, *Las señoras de la luna*, 6; Miller and Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary*, 101.
[216] Cruz Cortés, *Las señoras de la luna*, 22.

interpretations makes uncertainty a central component of tracing Ixchel. The goddess's enduring associations with the moon also necessitates an understanding of the significance of this celestial body on Mesoamerican belief systems and the moon's association with rabbits. Historian Alfredo López Austin confirms that "a whole complex of beliefs and practices included the idea that a small mammal, or its image, was on the moon" in Mayan civilization.[217] A rabbit, he continues, was "associated with the cold nature of things," seen on a moon that was "related to intoxication…to menstruation, and to pregnancy."[218] The rabbit and the moon goddess in youth, therefore, shared descriptors and space in the night sky.

Mendieta's minimalist constructions of goddesses, stripped of their singular signifiers and recreated in her image, imbues the simplicity of her lines drawn in sand and caves with cultural significance, with goddesses that bestowed strategies of survival upon others. Art historian Genevieve Hyacinthe notes Mendieta's turn to Ixchel as "a statement of her hybrid identity."[219] Exiled from Cuba in 1961, Mendieta worked in Mexico to create her renowned *Silueta Series* between 1973 and 1980. Mendieta's fascination with the moon goddess in multiple forms points to the possibility that a trace can carry, and perhaps even transcend, cultural hybridity. The goddess Ixchel serves as a vehicle to understand the presence of a celestial body not always visible to the human eye, the memory of a human body in its absence, and the integral role of disappearance in knowledge-making. Like the impressions of craters on the moon, Mendieta's silhouettes carry the fact of her presence.

Mapping Mendieta and Lemon's Methods

[217] Alfredo López Austin, *The Rabbit on the Face of the Moon: Mythology in the Mesoamerican Tradition* (University of Utah Press, 1996), 5.
[218] López Austin, *The Rabbit on the Face of the Moon,* 5.
[219] Genevieve Hyacinthe, *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic* (MIT Press, 2019), 154.

Mendieta presented the moon goddess in her full life cycle in *Black Ixchell*, with disappearance as a necessary phase in renewal. Accordingly, Mendieta's earth-body art contributes to a theory and practice of black minimalism through subterfuge. Her experimentation with elusiveness mirrors the form through which black postmodern choreographer and visual artist Ralph Lemon commemorates victims of racial violence in performance. I first link Mendieta to Lemon in his reference to the hare-in-the-moon in Buddhist philosophy—a story that follows an act of self-sacrifice—as he shows footage of physical injury against black communities.[220] In this manner, Lemon also collapses mythologies in storytelling and presents cultural crossings as integral to pondering the specificity of lynching events. In this process, Lemon accepts the failures of recuperating loss. He pushes and experiments with various ways to view images of racial violence and remember these events. Mendieta's work, in contrast, uses deception—her body hidden in a tree trunk or resting as the new moon—in an act of subterfuge that communicates a certainty in the body's endurance after its material destruction. The presentation of regeneration after destruction bears implications for the memory of lynching victims in the photos that haunt Lemon's performances. Mendieta offers new ways to remember individuals in their death.

Together, these artists create an active language in historiography. Lemon invokes the hare explicitly and Mendieta references the hare implicitly as they hide, deceive, and evade the spectator's gaze in performance through subterfuge. Both artists embody a trickster figure—that of the rabbit common to intercultural myths of creation—to narrate their

[220] Ralph Lemon, *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*, Videorecording (Seattle, Washington: On the Board TV, 2010), 3:04.

personal histories in performance. They turn into the hare-as-scribe[221] or the moon goddess-as-weaver,[222] diligently documenting their creative process as they independently travel to understand what their bodies signify in different spaces. Difficult to locate and pin down in performance, Lemon and Mendieta also become unreliable narrators, testing the stability of linear documentations of history.[223] Through their acts of disappearance, Lemon and Mendieta disrupt the periodization of time that separates their stories: prehistory, pre-Colombian history, Black U.S. history, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Cuban Revolution. A comparison of their work forges an interdependence between swaths of time and places responsibility on interconnected actors, governments, and mass media for the losses that Mendieta and Lemon investigate.

By placing Mendieta alongside Lemon, I follow in the mission articulated by scholars in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* published in 2018. Scholars Roquinaldo Ferreira and Tatiana Seija open the edited volume of essays with data that support their approach to the integration of academic disciplines: "ten to eleven million people forcibly migrated to the Americas from Africa. From fifty to sixty percent of these individuals were forced to disembark in Latin America."[224] These numbers contextualize the influence of Afro-Cuban spiritual beliefs on Mendieta's work. Mendieta was exposed to Santería, a syncretic

[221] John Bierhorst, *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 180. In an image from Florentine Codex, the rabbit is depicted as a record keeper, writing down details of the larger scene that ensues in its presence.
[222] *Moon Goddess Ixchel Weaving Late Classic Period*, accessed May 5, 2022, https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001434776. The image of a sculpture of the Moon Goddess Ixchel made from terracotta shows her in the act of weaving.
[223] Katherine Profeta, *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 43-44. Katherine Profeta explicitly states that the unreliable narrator as a literary technique was deployed in Lemon's performances in response to the elusive nature of historical events and memory.
[224] Roquinaldo Ferreira and Tatiana Seijas, "The Slave Trade to Latin America: A Historiographical Assessment," in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 28-29.

religion, through the domestic workers employed by her family.[225] Emerging from the Transatlantic Slave Trade that brought African peoples to Cuba between the early sixteenth and late nineteenth centuries,[226] practitioners of Santería assigned a Yoruba deity to a Catholic Saint, allowing the followers of the religion to openly practice in secret.[227] Scholars Eugene Gallagher and Lydia Willsky note that Santería allowed slaves to maintain a spiritual connection to their homeland in spite of their surveillance by others.[228] Within the context of Afro-Latin American studies, Mendieta's silhouettes carry forms of masked protest embedded in an amalgamation of theological traditions.

Art historian Genevieve Hyacinthe's *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic* offers critical connections between Santería and ritual in Mendieta's works of art. Hyacinthe writes:

> Mendieta suggests two general modes for entering into her collaborative performative structures—*árbitra* (witnessing) and *serio* (embodiment), two modes of indoctrinating an aspirant into the Black Atlantic ritual of Santería.[229]

When Mendieta disappears in landscapes, covering her body in mud, sinking into a creek, or covering her body with flowers, she experiments with communication in performance art that conjures the African deities invoked by the geographic location in which she grew up,

---

[225] Olga M. Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 63.
[226] Megan D. Daigle, *From Cuba with Love: Sex and Money in the Twenty-First Century* (University of California Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520958838-004, 28.
[227] Eugene V. Gallagher and Lydia Willsky-Ciollo, *New Religions: Emerging Faiths and Religious Cultures in the Modern World [2 Volumes]* (Santa Barbara, UNITED STATES: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2021), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsb-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6475179, 534.
[228] Gallagher and Willsky-Ciollo, *New Religions*, 534.
[229] Genevieve Hyacinthe, *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic* (MIT Press, 2019), 10, 55, 81; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso, 1993), 4, 17. Genevieve Hyacinthe's in-depth examination of Ana Mendieta's relationship to Santería draws upon Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic. Gilroy theorizes the Atlantic Ocean as a body of water that connects geographic peripheries, and through its relationship to the Middle Passage, provides "a means to reconceptualize the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for prehistory."

Havana. In particular, she invokes Eleggua, or Eshu, a master of the crossroads venerated by followers of Santería.[230] As a god, deity, *loa*, and *orisha* found in Cuba, Haiti, and West Africa, Eshu's presence also looms over the Atlantic.

As intermediaries of communication that play with subterfuge, Eshu, Ixchel, and the hare intersect in Mendieta's constructions of *siluetas* in Mexico. Mendieta's positionality as a Cuban artist that worked closely with land and bodies of water in central Mexico, Cuba, and the U.S.—and turned to creative practice as a means to study her own exilic state—puts political borders and their porous boundaries at the center of black minimalism. Mendieta's ephemeral outlines in sand, water, and rubble that cede to the natural forces of erosion and wind pose a series of questions on the form and content of Mendieta's minimalism. What makes her work Latin American? What signals an Afro-Cuban or black aesthetic? Mendieta's Latinidad, a capacious category, immediately presents a difficulty in locating her practice, complicated further by her physical separation from her place of birth. She often returned to specific sites that she deemed sacred—internationally recognized cultural centers such as Zapotec ruins in Mexico—or spaces that she sanctified without recourse to her place of birth, such as a creek in Iowa. These rituals encourage the viewer to construct new cartographies: to return to maps, pinpoint where she traveled, and understand how she formed her identity through this process.

Within the context of U.S. history and foreign policy, this chapter also investigates key political events between the mid-to-late twentieth century, including the Vietnam War and the Cuban Revolution. Mendieta's perspective of these events sheds light on black

[230] Maya Deren et al., *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti/Cherel Ito* (Montauk, NY: Mystic Fire Video, 2005). In Maya Deren's *Divine Horesmen of Haiti*, Papa Legba acts as a gatekeeper; the deity must be recognized through ritual, a cross drawn in the earth or in air before practitioners of Voudoun can speak to other deities.

resistance efforts during the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Era, particularly those of the Black Panther Party that looked to Cuba as an example of a successful economic revolution. As Mendieta was rushed out of the country by her family in 1961, Fidel Castro granted asylum to BPP members.[231] While the BPP eventually expressed their disillusionment with the political measures taken by Castro—measures that failed to address racial hierarchies within the country—they had built their party on communist principles.[232] Mendieta's fall from the elite in Cuba to a minority in the U.S., a shift that made her a target of a racial slur, shows the impact that patriarchal and colonial structures had on Mendieta, forced to move across bodies of waters and borders at the hands of male leaders.[233]

Eshu and Lemon's Explicit Use of the Hare

In *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro American Art and Philosophy*, cultural historian Robert Farris Thompson describes Eshu as a messenger of the Gods, associated with communication. Eshu imparts critical lessons by posing riddles:

> …one must cultivate the art of recognizing significant communications, knowing what is truth and what is falsehood, or else the lessons of the crossroads—the point

[231] Jessie Lafrance Dunbar, "Where Diaspora Meets Disillusionment: Panther Politics in Castro's Cuba," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 19, no. 3 (2017): 299–319, https://doi.org/10.5325/intelitestud.19.3.0299, 306.
[232] *Black Panther* (California Newsreel, 1969), https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/black-panther, 10:55. In a video produced by the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton sits by the book *Venceremos!: The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*. The camera narrows in on the cover of the book as Newton discusses how students concerned with foreign policy in the U.S., including the Vietnam War, should devote equal attention to issues of racism in the U.S.
[233] Leticia Alvarado, "'…Towards A Personal Will To Continue Being "Other"': Ana Mendieta's Abject Performances," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 65–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569325.2014.994092, 70; Nereyda García-Ferraz, Kate Horsfield, and Branda Miller, *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*, DVD, Documentary, 1987, 11:46. Leticia Alvarado locates "two different racial ideologies, both haunted by the specter of blackness" in a portrait that Mendieta painted of her mother with tones darker than that of her mother's skin. Alvarado attributes the portrait's representation to the racism that Mendieta experienced in the U.S. In a documentary that traces Ana Mendieta's arrival to the U.S., her sister emphasizes the impact that racism had on Mendieta in high school. "I would say that was one of the worst times of our stay in this country," she states.

where doors open or close, where persons have to make decisions that may forever after affect their lives—will be lost.[234]

Tales of Eshu's expeditions in mischief, then, create fictional spaces to confront the crossroads and develop a practice in critical analysis. Eshu wields the trick of the multi-colored cap, black on one side and red on the other.[235] This adornment disrupts the certainty of a single truth because the cap is both black and red. Versed in riddles and deception, Eshu's exponential powers to transform in appearances and proliferate aid his excursions to trick others.[236]

Brer Rabbit, another trickster figure in African-American folktales of the U.S. South, derives from the playful Eshu of Yoruba folklore.[237] In 1870, Joel Chandler Harris wrote nostalgic tales that evoked life on plantations in the U.S. South and followed a narrative arc at the expense of the mischievous, deceptive rabbit.[238] While Harris turned Brer Rabbit into a caricature of enslaved Africans, Brer Rabbit was a significant figure in African-American folklore, a character that upended social order and found creative ways to mock slave owners in plain sight.

Lemon directly references the rabbit that outwits his oppressor in the performance *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* (2010), a title presented in the form of a riddle. The hare's presence brings the lesson of the crossroads to the inter-media performance. In *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*

---

[234] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (Vintage Books, 1984), 19.
[235] J. Lorand Matory, "Collecting and Exhibiting at the Crossroads: In Honor of Eshu," *Material Religion* 12, no. 3 (July 27, 2016): 378–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2016.1192156, 378.
[236] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (Vintage Books, 1984), 18-20.
[237] Emily Zobel Marshall, *American Trickster: Trauma, Tradition and Brer Rabbit* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 18-20.
[238] Marshall, *American Trickster*, 5.

Lemon sits in a chair on stage, directly facing the audience, and becomes a storyteller that bestows the wisdom of folktales upon others. As he narrates a film that plays behind him on stage, he discloses challenges he encountered as he created *Come home Charley Patton* (2004), a performance based on his research on lynchings in the U.S., even as far North as Minnesota.[239] Lemon acknowledges *Patton's* shortcomings—a performance that materialized with dancers gasping for air, running across the stage, falling down, and getting back up again. As he reflects on *Patton* and its embodied reflections on lynchings, Lemon takes issue with the dance's "excess," what then comes across as "an old-fashioned experiment, argument."[240] To strip away at excess subsequently becomes a part of Lemon's endeavors in minimalism.

Lemon tackles the challenge to engage with histories of violence again in *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* with an understanding that the task will fall short of his expectations. This makes his process—attempts, failures, revisions—a centerpiece of his performance practice. First, Lemon creates a tale of historical fiction: a film shows dancer Okwui Okpokwasili on screen, dressed in a white rabbit suit with shiny pink ears. Okpokwasili sits and stares at the camera, which displays her face and upper body, leaned against a white wall. If this rabbit succeeds in blending into the white wall, the shadows that her rabbit ears cast behind her suggest that the rabbit is, in fact, present. The frame then shifts to a close-up of another person's nose and mouth. As the camera zooms out, it reveals Lemon, not Okpokwasili, dressed as the hare. He sits on a couch against a brown

[239] Michael Fedo, *The Lynchings in Duluth: Second Edition* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016). Michael Fredo investigated the Duluth lynchings from the perspective that the northern state of Minnesota attempted to erase the memory of the event in its history.
[240] Ralph Lemon, *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* Videorecording. Seattle, Washington: On the Board TV, 2010, 14:12-14:32.

wooden wall, looks directly into the camera, and slowly blinks, innocent and devoid of expression. This section demonstrates that subterfuge can occur through formal elements in creative practice as the dancers' costumes allow them to blend into their surroundings. The use of film to suddenly shift narrators also destabilizes the central storyteller.

Lemon presumably sits in Walter Carter's (1907-2009) house—a former sharecropper from Yazoo County, Mississippi. Lemon met Carter in 2002 when he took a tour of the Freedom Riders route to create *Patton*.[241] Carter provided Lemon with memories of his life in the U.S. South. These included his recollection of a lynching that took place by a plum tree, where a man named Gary was hung.[242] Lemon's voice narrates the film in which Okpokwasili, Carter, and Lemon appear:

> This is Okwui, an actress, as the hare, the hare of unfathomable generosity, the acme of almsgiving. Sometimes also Brer Rabbit, the unreliable storyteller and a threat to Walter's legitimacy. A threat because the truth cannot really be mentioned, and so the hare creates exquisite lies in order to share something mentionable to an unsuspecting world.

With the audience engrossed in the playful tale, Lemon undermines the viewers' experience of *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* when he shows footage of physical injury against black bodies in U.S. history. The film jumps to black and white footage of a black man and woman that are struck to the ground, pinned down by police officers. When Lemon suggests that the hare's riddles make an unspeakable truth palatable to the world, he makes explicit references to racial violence, all within the world of the theatrical performance.

---

[241] Ralph Lemon, *Come Home Charley Patton* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 172.
[242] Lemon, *Patton*, 133.

The Trickster in Intercultural Mythologies

While the performance appears to be about racial violence in the U.S., it contains threads that branch out to a larger universe. Visual references to protests and police brutality in the 1960s become entangled with the hare in Buddhist spiritual thought.[243] Lemon seamlessly incorporates another time and cultural context altogether in his reflections on violence on U.S. soil. In the didactic Indian Jataka tales, a hare encounters a hungry Brahman in search of food.[244] Without resources to offer his new companion, the hare prepares to throw himself into a blazing fire, offering his body as sustenance. The Brahman spares the rabbit, inspired by his act of bravery, and gives him a celestial reward: he imprints the hare's outline in the moon, an eternal sight for all on earth to see. Lemon, therefore, allows Brer Rabbit and the hare of the Jataka tales to coexist at once, speaking to the multiplicity of the trickster figure, a defining characteristic of Eshu. The sacrificial element in this tale informs Lemon's mission to learn from events in which lives have been taken.

The facility with which Lemon combines these tales speaks to the extensive site-specific memorials he created during his travels across three continents that led to the creation of *Patton*. The breadth of excursions he embarked on and the mythologies that subsequently entered his work reflect a diasporic wandering that began after he disbanded his dance company in 1995, and traveled to Haiti, the Ivory Coast, and Ghana to create the first installment of his renowned *Geography Trilogy*.[245] The second performance *Tree* (2000)

---

[243] Lemon, Ralph. "'Program Notes' for *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*" REDCAT, 2010. https://www.redcat.org/sites/redcat.org/files/event/linked-files/2012-07/11.10.10_Lemon.pdf, 5. The program notes for *How Can You…?* include two tales of the hare-in-the-moon and Brer Rabbit.
[244] Arthid Sheravanichkul, "Self-Sacrifice of the Bodhisatta in the Paññāsa Jātaka," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008): 769–87, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00095.x, 774, 777. Arhid Sheravanichkul describes multiple accounts of self-sacrifice in the Jataka tales, including the hare-in-the-moon story.
[245] Jennifer Dunning, "When Disbanding Is the Only Logical Step," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1995, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/06/arts/dance-when-disbanding-is-the-only-logical-step.html; Ralph Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile* (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 7. Lemon opens *Geography:*

materialized in response to his travels to India, Indonesia, China, and Japan, where he traversed the route along which Buddhism spread.[246]

Lemon's *Geography Trilogy* becomes a travelogue, a word that Brenda Dixon-Gottschild uses in *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* to show how dancers perceive blackness in performance, soliciting their "uncensored feedback."[247] In an embrace of travel narratives, Gottschild acknowledges the importance of confronting the construction of stereotypes, images, and adjectives that choreographers associate with white and black dancing bodies.[248] A similar approach arises in Lemon attempts to understand how his own body signifies, or fails to signify, blackness in different parts of the world. In *Geography: Art/Race/Exile*, Lemon wrote his own travel narratives with an attention to race and blackness as he positioned himself as an outsider in Haiti.[249]

Within the context of dance history, Lemon's postmodern dance explorations in movement chronologically follow that of his predecessor Katherine Dunham. As a dancer, Dunham demonstrated a similar curiosity to investigate her cultural identity through fieldwork. Trained in anthropology at the University of Chicago, an institution she enrolled in alongside her brother in 1928, she joined efforts on campus to explore black art through an integrated community.[250] Dance historian Joanna Dee Das uncovers Dunham's work at The

---

Art/Race/Exile with a direct acknowledgment of his aims for the trilogy, which included an examination of his misconceptions of Africa from afar. The project required extensive travel to address questions on race and nationhood in performance.

[246] Ralph Lemon, *Tree: Belief/Culture/Balance*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2004). A note in the cover of *Tree: Belief/Culture/Balance* describes Lemon as a sociologist in his study of Buddhism through travel.

[247] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography From Coon to Cool* (Springer, 2016), 47.

[248] Gottschild, *Black Dancing Body*, 47.

[249] Ralph Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile*, 9. A section in Lemon's book *Geography: Art/Race/Exile* is entitled "Haiti, the second time that I had seen real black people" followed by journal entries and reflections of his travels to the country.

[250] Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 18.

Cube Theater where she worked with a racially diverse group of writers, directors, and choreographers.[251]

Dunham's interest in making art within and beyond the confines of racial categories surfaced in her field work. Literary and performance scholar Stephanie Batiste suggests that Dunham's performance practice "gestures toward an ahistoricity of the black cultures outside of the US that seem to have maintained a closer relationship to past cultural practice and memory."[252] Acknowledging imperialist structures within the field of anthropology, Batiste argues that Dunham managed to become an active participant in the communities she studied.[253] Dunham traveled to the Caribbean islands including Jamaica, Haiti, Martinique, and Trinidad.[254] The confluence of cultural transmissions that she encountered throughout her lifetime shaped her choreography and teaching. She codified dance traditions she witnessed—known as the Dunham Technique—and placed these movements on stage, in concert dance. Das terms Dunham's methods as a "politics of diaspora" that "resists notions of cultural purity" and allows "dancers to embrace diaspora within their bodies."[255] Evidenced in her career through her codified technique, Dunham thought of blackness as multiple. The Dunham Technique, which consists of isolations, polycentrism, and call-and-response, embodies the spiritual philosophies in Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's schematic list of West African dance traditions.[256]

---

[251] Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*, 19-20.
[252] Stephanie Leigh Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance* (Duke University Press, 2011), 173.
[253] Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors*, 175.
[254] "Special Presentation: Katherine Dunham Timeline," Database, The Library of Congress, July 30, 2013, https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/dunham/dunham-timeline.html.
[255] Das, *Katherine Dunham*, 3, 5.
[256] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Greenwood Press, 1996), 11-17; Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*, 110. Das lists the holistic components of Katherine Dunham's approach to studio classes that included training in music, history, and ballet.

Dunham, too, found herself reflecting on her own tourism as a black American and referred to one of her performances as a "travelogue" of Cuban, Haitian, and plantation dances from the American South.[257] In an interview with dance scholar Constance Valis Hill conducted in 1999 and 2000, toward the end of Dunham's life, she reflected on why she started to stage plantations dances and performances based on Brer Rabbit after gaining recognition for her work in Haiti:

> I think that my sense of injustice with my sense of correctness made me realize that even though I might be archeologically or historically correct in bringing these exotic things into our performances, as a part of our technique, I shouldn't forget that we were black. We were not African, but black Americans, and black Americans have never been clearly defined. It's why "Afro American" is such a letdown. It's not quite true.[258]

Dunham acknowledged a tension in her identity, even as the techniques she appropriated and codified embraced the African diaspora. In an analysis of Dunham's own anthropological writing in *Island Possessed*, literary scholar Marina Magloire writes that Dunham accepts an "ethics of discomfort" where she "refuses to embrace a sense of belonging she does not feel, to sink into the comfort of an oversimplified Afrocentric kinship."[259] This tension surfaces in Dunham's disagreement with the term "Afro-American." As Dunham grew older, she increasingly rejected the label of black dance and, in a

---

[257] Katherine Dunham, *Kaiso!: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2005). The date of this performance is not stated in Dunham's writings but was broadcast on PBS while Dunham was in New York.
[258] Dunham, *Kaiso!*, 241.
[259] Marina Magloire, "An Ethics of Discomfort: Katherine Dunham's Vodou Belonging," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 23, no. 3 (60) (November 1, 2019): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-7912346, 23.

controversial claim, declared that her technique moved beyond racial categories.[260] More importantly, Dunham demonstrated in this comment that she felt free to change her opinion of her work over time, even if it contradicted her previous reflections. Dunham's own revisions to her perspectives on black dance show the instability of categories bestowed on a female modern dance pioneer in black dance.[261]

Mendieta and Lemon, like Dunham, attempt to become observers of their liminal identities through site-specific research. Without a proscenium stage, Mendieta took her work to public outdoor spaces and diverged from Dunham's modernism. She often noted that her *siluetas* served as a means to leave her mark in the earth and take a step back to notice herself from a distance.[262] Her syncretic environment, where Yemaya and Eshu Eleggua are called upon on a daily basis,[263] drew Dunham to the island in the 1950s.[264] Cuban music and rhythms integral to Dunham's performance practice, in dance and in the studio, formed Mendieta's lifelong landscape.[265] On her relationship to Afro-Cuban music, one of Mendieta's colleagues Juan Sánchez, whose work explores Afro-Latin experiences, stated that she took "great pleasure in dancing and singing," activities not captured, but embedded in core of her earth-body art.[266] Mendieta's *siluetas* attest to the vitality of cultural histories tied to land and geography.

---

[260] Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*, 6.
[261] Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*, 6.
[262] Linda M. Montano, "Interview with Ana Mendieta," in *Ana Mendieta: She Got Love* (Italy: Skira, 2013), 200.
[263] Daigle, *From Cuba with Love,* 6. Megan D. Daigle's study of Cuban economic history opens with an anecdote that reveals the ubiquity of deities on the island. Daigle recalls "a friend beseeching Yemaya to calm the sea for our beach trip" during Daigle's field research on the island.
[264] Harmony Bench and Kate Elswit, "Datasets Are Research," *Dunham's Data* (blog), September 5, 2019, https://www.dunhamsdata.org/blog/datasets-are-research.
[265] Joyce Aschenbrenner, "Dunham Technique Seminars," in *Kaiso!: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 482.
[266] Nereyda García-Ferraz, Kate Horsfield, and Branda Miller, *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*, DVD, Documentary, 1987, 35:20.

The Search for Rubble

How, then, might Lemon's nomadic performance research illuminate a black diasporic aesthetic in Mendieta's minimalist earth-body art? While the particularities of Cuban history contextualize Mendieta's experimentations with subterfuge, her exile from Havana and subsequent desire to engage with land mirrors Lemon's inclination to create embodied rituals at innocuous sites where violence once occurred. Their interaction with land, and the folklore that arises from these geographies, unearths the past. Anthropologist Gastón Gordillo illuminates the significance of these acts of immersion in his study of Argentinean ruins in *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction.* Gordillo writes, "modernity's concern with decay and, especially, with the attempt to overcome decay through transcendence turns ruins into fetishes that ought to be preserved and revered."[267] Mendieta and Lemon, in turn, freely play with rubble and fall out of the periodization of modernity to which Gordillo refers. In *Come home Charley Patton* (2004), Lemon danced against a high-pressure water hose in a theater, referencing the events of the Birmingham Campaign and subjecting his body to the force of weaponized water.[268] He also visited a lynching site where the evidence of rubble no longer exists and created a dance ritual.[269] Mendieta's confrontation with the past takes a different approach through her solitary interactions with nature. Unlike Lemon, Mendieta used fewer words, carving outlines of her body into earth in alignment with prehistoric artifacts that continue to spark inquiry.

Mendieta rejected a hierarchy in physical matter during her lifetime, which included the human body. She took photos, for example, against a sheet of glass that distorted her face

[267] Gastón R. Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (Duke University Press, 2014), 8.
[268] Ralph Lemon, *Come Home Charley Patton*, DVD (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Academy of Music Harvey Theater, 2004).
[269] Ralph Lemon, *Come Home Charley Patton* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 158.

and upper body. Marsha Pels, one of Mendieta's closest friends reflected on how the artist conceived of the materials she worked with:

> She was my personal connection to an understanding of Minimalism for which I am grateful: to a deeper level of transformation of matter where nothing is sacred. To Ana it was all the same.[270]

Mendieta stepped right into sacred ruins, in fact, during her repeated trips to Mexico between 1972 and 1980. She visited Guerrero, Oaxaca, and San Juan Teotihuacán in 1972,[271] and later traveled to Chichén Itzá and Uxmal in the Yucatan peninsula in 1977.[272] In 1980, she returned to Oaxaca, and visited La Ventosa, Chiapas, San Cristobal de las Casas, and San Felipe.[273] Mendieta routinely immersed herself in Mexican landscapes. In *Imagen de Yagul* (1974) from the *Silueta Series* she lies in a Zapotec tomb in Yagul, Oaxaca, with flowers springing from her body. The archeological site, approximately thirty miles from Monte Albán, Oaxaca may have inspired *Imagen de Yagul*. Within the larger *Silueta Series*, *Imagen de Yagul* forms parts of a sequence of silhouettes that Mendieta carved in Mexico, including *Silueta del Laberinto* (1974) which she completed at Monte Albán.[274] Mendieta would have been familiar with the site through her travels and a class she took on Mexican art that covered the great pyramids and city structures of Mesoamerica.[275] Monte Albán contains a display of enigmatic *danzantes*, or dancers, engraved in large stone walls. Caught in motion

---

[270] Bryce Kroll, "Sculptor Marsha Pels Talks Shop and Remembers Her Friend Louise Bourgeois," Brooklyn Magazine, January 28, 2021, https://www.bkmag.com/2021/01/28/sculptor-marsha-pels-talks-shop-and-remembers-her-friend-louise-bourgeois/; Marsha Pels, "Ana Mendieta Was a Rare, Visionary...," *Sulfur*, no. 22 (1988): 84. See "Marsha Pels Talks Shop" for more details regarding Mendieta's influence on Pels's work.
[271] Laura Roulet, "Ana Mendieta: A Life in Context," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body* (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 230.
[272] Roulet, "A Life in Context," 233.
[273] Roulet, "A Life in Context," 235.
[274] Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?*, 97-98.
[275] Michael Rush, "Eros, Death, and Life: The Films of Ana Mendieta," in *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, ed. Howard Oransky (University of California Press, 2015), 20.

with closed eyes, water and nature sprout from their orifices.[276] The *danzantes* are known as one of Mexico's greatest mysteries—their meaning still debated by archeologists today. Anthropologist Marcus Winter contends that the *danzantes* may symbolize respected male elders, mutilated prisoners, sacrificial rites, or celebratory processions.[277]

When Mendieta lies in the tomb, she becomes an active, breathing artifact, an image that continues to spark questions rather than answers. Her face, completely covered in bright green stems and small white flowers, becomes obscured by the foliage. Her feet, arms, and legs remain visible. Mendieta lies on her back in the tomb and invokes rebirth through a direct confrontation with death. A guide to Monte Albán published by the National Institute of Anthropology in Mexico states that the Aztecs infiltrated the Zapotec region in the fifteenth century, which later fell to the Spanish empire.[278] This may explain why Mendieta refers to her first *silueta* as one that occurred in an Aztec tomb, despite the confluence of indigenous communities that inhabited Oaxaca before the Aztec's rise to power.[279] Histories of conquest, destruction, and rebirth add additional intercultural complexities to her image.

As Mendieta blends into her surroundings and submerges herself into earth in a position of self-sacrifice, the spirit of the hare in the moon and Ixchel the moon goddess in an image of fertility emerges once again. Stories about the rabbit in the moon multiply within Mexican mythologies. The rabbit, in one tale, is associated with *pulque*, an elixir that leads to inebriation.[280] In another tale of ancient Oaxaca, the twins Sun and Moon scare a rabbit that

---

[276] Bradley Smith, *Mexico: A History in Art* (Harper & Row, 1968), 42-43.
[277] Marcus Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Alban," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 22, no. 2 (2011): 406-407.
[278] Ignacio Bernal, *Official Guide of Monte Alban Mitla*, trans. Pablo Martínez de Rio (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1962), 6.
[279] Linda M. Montano, "Interview with Ana Mendieta," in *Ana Mendieta: She Got Love* (Italy: Skira, 2013), 200.
[280] Taladoire, Eric. "¿En la olla o en la Luna? El conejo entre los mexicas." *Anales de Antropología* 52, no. 2 (September 24, 2018): 95–109, 99.

leaps in fear and leaves its mark on Moon's face.[281] Anthropologist Eric Taladoire notes that the rabbit in the moon surfaces in tales and cuisine of the Mexica people, but not in their ruins.[282] The implicit rabbit allows Mendieta's work to show how the body maintains a presence in performance, despite her intention to produce invisibility within her photography. To see the hare in and through Mendieta's silhouettes opens possibilities for rebirth even as she plays with subterfuge.

Bodies Born from Water

In addition to visiting Zapotec ruins in Oaxaca that stand as a testament to the passage of time, Mendieta submerged herself in more transient landscapes, bodies of water in fluctuation. To create *Creek* (1974), for example, she traveled to Rio San Felipe in Oaxaca.[283] In the short film, Mendieta lies in a shallow body of water with her chest toward the ground. Her nude body creates a straight diagonal line in the frame with her feet positioned at the top left corner of the aerial shot. Mendieta's arms, one outstretched and the other bent at the elbow, rest above her head as she looks over her left shoulder, away from the camera. Her hands ground her body. With light that reflects on small ripples of water created by the current, the creek glistens and gains warmth. Mendieta accepts the stream that rushes in from the top of her head. The film bears a tranquility that diverges from Mendieta's work with fire, blood, and gunpowder. The cool colors in *Creek*—white, grey, and blue water framed by dark

[281] John Bierhorst, *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 102.
[282] Taladoire, "¿En la olla o en la Luna?," 95. Taladoire argues that the multitude of folktales that include the hare dispel a search for a given story's origin, and instead prompt a search for themes and elements that overlap across these stories.
[283] *Creek*, San Felipe Creek, Oaxaca, Mexico, 1974; Super 8 film transferred to Blu-ray; color, silent; 3:11 mins; Laura Wertheim Joseph, "Filmography," in *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, ed. Raquel Cecilia Mendieta (University of California Press, 2015), 205–57; Terra Luna Films, *Ana Mendieta Au Jeu de Paume*, 2018, https://vimeo.com/301884218. Portions of Ana Mendieta's *Creek* can be previewed in Terra Luna Film's overview of her exhibition *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*. A full list of her films is included in the exhibition's catalog.

wet rocks and green foliage—lose the fervor of her fire silhouettes. The gentle, rhythmic flow of water leaves Mendieta at the whim of the current and its contents. Plants and foliage spring from the left portion of the frame, while mud and rock occupy space at the right top of the frame. When placed next to her other films on shores and creeks, the water seems to reflect, continue, or mimic the steady ripples of water in a series of disparate locations. Howard Oransky, who edited a catalog based on Mendieta's digitized films, locates "vulnerability and safety" in the film.[284] Because her face looks away from the camera, the subtleties of Mendieta's stillness become the focal point of the film. She remains close to the ground, weighted, but floating. Her body and the natural elements seem to gain visibility, rather than recede, in *Creek*.

The fluidity of *Creek* shows Mendieta's commitment to submit the self to various forces, including water, which provoke different energies in and images of a body or corpse. The same holds true for her submission to belief systems. As Mendieta appropriated rituals in Santería and took photos in tombs in Oaxaca, her work focused on a larger creation myth. Mendieta moved between spaces, borders, and cultural contexts, invoking deities in Santería and drawing upon Mexican imagery of life and death, understanding how her own displacement led her to identify with these places. In one of her often-cited quotations that appears on the artist's website managed by her estate,[285] she directly samples phrases from the Mexican poet Octavio Paz,[286] who discussed death as a return to the womb, a liminal

[284] Howard Oransky, "Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta." In *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, 168–81 (University of California Press, 2015), 98.
[285] Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 26; Deborah K. Ultan, "From the Personal to the Transpersonal: Self Reclamation Through Ritual-in-Performance," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 20, no. 2 (2001): 33; Galerie Lelong, "About," Ana Mendieta Artist, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.anamendietaartist.com/about. Mendieta's quotation regarding her return to earth appears across the sources listed above.
[286] Olga M. Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 47.

state in which binaries, such as night and day, cease to exist in opposition to one another.[287] Mendieta writes:

> I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this to be a direct result of my having been torn away from my homeland during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that tie me to the universe.[288]

She diverges from Paz, however, with respect to his bleak readings of mimicry, what he characterizes as an act of retreat and silence. Paz continues:

> The Indian blends into the landscape until he is an indistinguishable part of the white wall against which he leans at twilight, of the dark earth on which he stretches out to rest at midday, of the silence that surrounds him. He disguises his human singularity to such an extent that he finally annihilates it and turns into stone, a tree, a wall, silence, and space.[289]

Mendieta assumes these positions, blending into her surroundings under the bright sun of the Oaxaca Valley, entering desolate creeks in Iowa, and playing with sand on beaches of Havana, but fails to disappear entirely. Instead, her performances of mimicry cite acts of erasure that share, rather than conceal, her vulnerabilities—a body subject to the will of the elements. She aligns with parts of Paz's theorization of the body-as-environment and challenges Paz's statements regarding "the Indian" that becomes nothing. Her work disagrees

---

[287] Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, ed. Anthony Stanton (Manchester University Press, 2008), 201.
[288] Ana Mendieta, "A Selection of Statements and Notes," *Sulfur* 22 (Spring 1988): 71.
[289] Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude; The Other Mexico; Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude; Mexico and the United States; The Philanthropic Ogre*, Translated by Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Phillips Belash (Grove Press, 1985), 44.

with Paz's conception of masked protest under Spanish rule as fearful in nature.[290] If Mendieta pulls from Paz's discussion of returning to the womb, she does so by also finding an affinity with indigenous rituals that conceive of the earth as sacred. These distinctions open new ways of reading Mendieta, not just as a student informed by Paz, but as an artist that challenged his writings.

A counter to Paz's conceptualization of indigeneity emerges in Mendieta's work entitled *La Venus Negra* (1980) or *Black Venus*. Mendieta created another silhouette based on a story of a black female slave, held captive in the city of Cienfuegos in Cuba in 1817.[291] In Mendieta's own summary of the story, she describes Black Venus as a woman associated with the sea who chose not to speak or accept orders from her captors.[292] Instead, she engaged in "passive protests" and "refused to be colonized."[293] Art historian Jane Blocker notes that while Mendieta presents a problematic identification with the black enslaved female body, she also conceives of race beyond color lines through her physical construction of *La Venus Negra*.[294] Blocker notes that Mendieta "does not express a desire for inclusion, which would mean racial and cultural assimilation, but for difference."[295] Mendieta's interest in prehistory, and the mythical qualities of *La Venus Negra*, further allowed Mendieta to think about silhouettes and race in stories that blur the setting, time, and place of their own genesis.

Mendieta's Exile: The Cuban Revolution, Operation Peter Pan, and Myths of Salvation

[290] Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 44.
[291] Mendieta, "A Selection of Statements and Notes," 72-73.
[292] Mendieta, "A Selection of Statements and Notes," 72-73
[293] Mendieta, "A Selection of Statements and Notes," 72-73.
[294] Jane Blocker, "Ana Mendieta and the Politics of The Venus Negra," *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 1998): 31–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/095023898335609, 46.
[295] Blocker, "Ana Mendieta and the Politics of The Venus Negra," 46.

Born to a distinguished family of politicians, lawyers, and military officials that directly shaped the course of Cuban political history, Mendieta developed a complex relationship to Cuban politics. Dating back to her family's participation in the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898), male leaders in the Mendieta household engaged in public and covert operations against multiple heads of state.[296] Carlos Mendieta, for example, rose to prominence as the editor for *El Heraldo de Cuba* in 1919, a local Cuban newspaper.[297] Before the pivotal election of 1920, with results ultimately resolved by a U.S. ambassador, Carlos Mendieta published an article entitled "¡Adiós dictadura!" that painted a scathing critique of President Mario García Menocal.[298] In an exhaustive list of the crimes committed by Menocal, Carlos Mendieta enumerated the government's long-standing internal corruption and reinforcement of a caste system in Cuba through which Menocal maintained power.[299] Through the article's dissemination across a country that censored political dissent, Carlos Mendieta's writing signaled a firm commitment to protest and risk—a routine assessment seized by multiple members of the Mendieta family in their resistance efforts.[300]

Against a series of violent insurgencies in Cuba, Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959 prolonged decades of turbulent government formation. Upon Castro's government takeover,

---

[296] Jane Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (Duke University Press, 1999), 50; José M. Hernández, "Mendieta y Montefur, Carlos (1873–1960)," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, ed. Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008), 474–75, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3078903559/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=72f79ff8.

[297] Hernández, "Mendieta y Montefur," 474–75.

[298] Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), http://muse.jhu.edu/book/68974, 25; Miguel de Marcos Suarez and Carlos Mendieta y Montefur, "Carlos Mendieta Personalidad, Vida y Hechos, Ideas y Cualidades Caracteristicas de Una Gran Cubano de Quien La Patria Espera Su Salvacion" (Talleres Tipográficos de "El Magazine de la Raza," 1923), University of Florida Digital Collections, https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/UF00074122/00001/128j, 129.

[299] de Marcos Suarez, "Carlos Mendieta Personalidad," 130.

[300] de Marcos Suarez, "Carlos Mendieta Personalidad," 129. In Miguel de Marcos Suarez's overview of Carlos Mendieta's life, the author highlights the courage that Mendieta had to share his ideas without fear under an oppressive regime. This commentary is followed by a reprint of Carlos Mendieta's article "¡Adios dictadura!"

the everyday lives of Cuban citizens drastically transformed. Among the many changes implemented by Castro, the government outlawed religious practice, modified public curriculum, and seized property for redistribution.[301] Ana Mendieta's father Ignacio Alberto Mendieta met Fidel Castro as a law student at the University of Havana and initially worked for his administration.[302] He shifted his loyalties, however, in response to increasing restrictions on Catholic religious practice.[303] Mendieta's father would later receive a twenty-year sentence in Cuba for his cooperation with the U.S. government and participation in the Bay of Pigs Invasion of 1961,[304] an event that initiated the eighteen-year separation between him and his family.[305]

Operation Peter Pan addressed the concerns of wealthy Cuban families regarding their children's futures under a new political system. Between 1960-1962, the United States created a program that temporarily waived visas for children of counter-revolutionists, individuals and families that secretly worked against Castro in Cuba.[306] As two out of 14,000 unaccompanied minors that left Cuba, Ana and Raquelín Mendieta flew to the United States on September 11, 1961 and landed in Dubuque, Iowa. No longer a part of the wealthy political elite in Havana, they experienced new forms of racial discrimination. Their transfer

[301] Medea Benjamin, Joseph Collins, and Michael Scott, "The Agrarian Revolution," in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Aviva Chomsky et al., Second Edition, History, Culture, Politics (Duke University Press, 2019), 352; Deborah Shnookal, *Operation Pedro Pan and the Exodus of Cuba's Children* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020), http://muse.jhu.edu/book/76630, 51-52, 57.
[302] Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 37.
[303] Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?*, 50-51.
[304] Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?*, 50.
[305] Roulet, "A Life in Context," 224–39.
[306] Shnookal, *Operation Pedro Pan,* 127-131.

to an orphanage in Iowa further destabilized an arduous adjustment to their new lives in the Midwest.[307]

Mendieta's stance toward Castro's regime created a unique dilemma for the artist in the U.S. In a rare interview conducted during her visit to Cuba in 1980, after nineteen years in exile, she stated:

> During the war in Vietnam, I was against the American intervention, and in the University I participated in strikes against the war, and the Americans used to tell me, "You are against the Vietnam War, why don't you take a stand with respect to Cuba, if it's the same over there?" It has been a long process, and very painful, but I have never stopped feeling for Cuba, really.[308]

Firmly positioned against U.S. intervention in Vietnam and processing the same imperialist practices in Cuba, Mendieta expressed a nuanced political perspective. Blocker describes Mendieta as "pro-Castro," but Mendieta's statement in the moment of the interview appears to stand at a distance from a firm political alignment.[309] Her statement critiques the ease with which her peers viewed U.S. intervention, that directly affected her family, from afar. Decades of U.S. control over Cuba under the Platt Amendment of 1901, the imprisonment of her father by Castro for his cooperation with the U.S. government, Ana Mendieta's separation from her family during her adolescence, and the violence that her family contributed to and suffered as politicians made it difficult to assess her family's entanglement in this historical record. Art and performance allowed Mendieta to vocalize her opposition to

---

[307] Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?*, 50. Roulet, "A Life in Context," 227. Laura Roulet lists two locations that Ana and Raquelín Mendieta settled into in Miami and Iowa while Jane Blocker mentions that they were transferred to multiple homes and orphanages.
[308] Nereyda García-Ferraz, Kate Horsfield, and Branda Miller, *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*, DVD, Documentary, 1987, 31:45-32:30. This interview excerpt can be found in *Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra* with captions that translate Mendieta's words from the original Spanish by Alejandro Velasco.
[309] Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?*,19.

U.S. intervention. Acutely aware of the dangers of symbolism in the formation of nationalism, imperialism, and war, she distanced herself from conceptual artworks that could be "explained away."[310] Through subterfuge, Mendieta concealed totalizing messages in her process-based works.

Because Mendieta created performance art that incorporated her subjective body and its physical limitations, her personal reflections and contradictions must inform the theorization of her work that used blood, fire, water, and earth to think through experiences in exile. Her displacement at a young age, the physical relocation of her body determined by her parents who calculated the risks involved in keeping their children in Havana, changed the course of Mendieta's relationship to her family.[311] Mendieta's recollection of her journey, however, communicated the betrayal that accompanied nearly two decades of separation from her homeland and demonstrated a profound sense of loyalty, pride, and connection to her birthplace. In the same video recording in *Fuego de Tierra*, Mendieta is filmed during a visit to a school in Cuba. Surrounded by children, Mendieta presents a drastic contrast in energy. When asked about her feelings toward Cuba, she affirms that the children are the best part of the country.[312] A student hands her a flower that she graciously accepts. These moments reveal Mendieta as an individual that navigated her re-encounter with her homeland with optimism.

Mendieta's Connections to Intermedia, Minimalism, and Postmodern Dance

---

[310] Mendieta, Ana. Interview with Ana Mendieta conducted by Judith Wilson for "Ana Mendieta Plants Her Garden," Village Voice, 1980 May 27. Interview by Judith Wilson. Audiorecording, May 27, 1980. Smithsonian Archives of American Art. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/interview-ana-mendieta-conducted-judith-wilson-ana-mendieta-plants-her-garden-village-voice-18993, 01:24:50.
[311] García-Ferraz, Horsfield, and Miller, *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*, 8:45-9:11. As she continued to investigate her sense of citizenship and belonging to the country, Mendieta took time to ponder her experience, recalling the young age at which she was forced to leave Cuba.
[312] García-Ferraz, Horsfield, and Miller, *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*, 31:10.

As a child, Mendieta carved out shapes of her body on the beaches of Havana, testing the concepts she would later explore as an adult.[313] These playful experimentations constituted foundational practices in Mendieta's approach to earth-body art. Mendieta received an undergraduate degree in Art in 1969[314] and a Master of Fine Arts in 1972,[315] but grew dissatisfied with what she perceived to be static representations of life that were "not real enough."[316] To recuperate what she perceived to be a loss of ritual on a two-dimensional canvas, Mendieta enrolled in the first Intermedia Program in Iowa, under the mentorship of Hans Breder, and received an MFA in 1977.[317] These degrees signaled her understanding and rejection of artistic conventions that characterized Breder's program. Breder described the lively experimentation in art forms—including minimalism and happenings in New York in 1965—as invigorating to his own aesthetic, which he later developed in an intermedia program.[318] Intermedia, he argued, transformed knowledge-making, creating a "liminal space where the interplay of two or more media propagate new ideas, new forms, new ways of seeing and being."[319] New ways of seeing, therefore, required a crossroads, intersections, and interdisciplinary structures.

Mendieta moved to New York in 1978, twelve years after the genesis of Judson Dance Theater and a year before Lemon moved to the city to work with artists in the

[313] García-Ferraz, Horsfield, and Miller, *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*, 3:15-3:56.
[314] "Collection Online: Ana Mendieta," The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, accessed January 6, 2022, https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/ana-mendieta.
[315] Laura Roulet, "Ana Mendieta: A Life in Context," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body* (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 230.
[316] Mendieta, Interview with Ana Mendieta conducted by Judith Wilson.
[317] Roulet, "Ana Mendieta: A Life in Context," 233.
[318] Hans Breder, "Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal," *Performing Arts Journal* 17, no. 2/3 (1995): 112–20, https://doi.org/10.2307/3245784, 113-114.
[319] Breder, "Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal," 113-114.

downtown dance scene.[320] The gallery that brought Mendieta to New York, a women's collective named Artists-in-Residence, Inc (A.I.R.) established in 1973 was located on 97 Wooster Street.[321] While the values of A.I.R. were focused on representation—to increase the visibility of female artists—the collective also wanted to challenge commercial forms of art making with goals similar to that of downtown dance artists.[322] Mendieta was one of the few women of color in A.I.R. and expressed tensions with self-proclaimed feminists that failed to put their commitment to inclusivity in practice.[323] In an interview with art historian Judith Wilson recorded in 1980, she referred to a "double problem," that of intersectionality,[324] that the majority of women in A.I.R. failed to understand. She stated, "I think women have, I mean white women have, broken barriers, except that I don't like what they are doing. Most of what they've done is come up with a style, come up with a woman's style, and have pushed that, and I'm not sure that that's an honest kind of thing to do."[325] Mendieta, in many ways, felt distant from the women who granted her access to A.I.R.

In reflecting upon Mendieta's uses of submersion in an Aztec tomb and within a creek in Oaxaca, Mendieta draws a direct line to Simone Forti, who also utilized grounded

---

[320] Jack Anderson, "How the Judson Theater Changed American Dance." *The New York Times*, January 31, 1982, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/1982/01/31/arts/how-the-judson-theater-changed-american-dance.html. Dance scholar, artist, and journalist Wendy Perron brackets Judson Dance Theater's genesis from 1962-1966 before original members of the collective branched off to pursue other projects and a new generation of members entered the collective.

[321] Kat Griefen, "Ana Mendieta at A.I.R. Gallery, 1977–82," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 21, no. 2 (July 2011): 171–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2011.607595, 171. Kat Griefen's article on Mendieta's time at A.I.R. lists the locations of the gallery space, and describes goals similar to the downtown dance scene including the mission to produce work that could not be sold.

[322] Hyacinthe, *Radical Virtuosity*, 50. Genevieve Hyacinthe lists the shortcomings of representation at A.I.R., noting that Mendieta was one of the few women of color at the gallery.

[323] Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 71

[324] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (December 7, 2015), https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

[325] Mendieta, "Interview with Ana Mendieta conducted by Judith Wilson," 4:34.

movement in performance and failed to identify with the feminist label.[326] Forti positioned the body as art object, an extension of the natural environment. Dance scholar Wendy Perron describes Forti's minimalism as one that contains emotion, a departure from the mathematical, scientific language that male minimalist artists used in discussions of their works during the 1960s.[327] In contrast to Mendieta, however, Forti holds strong ties to the postmodern dance movement, known for her dance constructions where bodies become the architectural foundation of an art piece.[328] Forti was forced to leave Italy before Mussolini's rise to power and turned to performance as a grounding practice, observing animals in their natural environments and mimicking their movements.[329] She also became fascinated with the movements of children, unrestricted by formal artistic training.[330] Mendieta, who became an art teacher at Henry Sabin Elementary School in Iowa, shared a similar perspective on the possibilities embedded within play. She created a series of videos in collaboration with her students in 1973. In these films, Mendieta asks a group of children to participate in a series of

[326] Simone Forti, Simone Forti with Claudia La Rocco, interview by Claudia La Rocco, April 2010, Brooklyn Rail, https://brooklynrail.org/2010/04/dance/simone-forti-with-claudia-la-rocco; Steve Marsh, "The Dance of Ralph Lemon," Mpls.St.Paul Magazine, January 10, 2021, https://mspmag.com/api/content/5ac64728-2b84-11eb-8e8c-1244d5f7c7c6/. In Claudia La Rocco's interview with Simone Forti, Forti hesitates to accept the feminist label placed on her works. The comment bears a similarity to Ralph Lemon's own distance from the label of "a pure activist" in his interview with Steve Marsh. These two interviews, placed side by side, show a tension in what artists perceive their work to accomplish and the activism that others might bestow upon their performance practice.

[327] Wendy Perron, "Simone Forti: Bodynatureartmovementbody," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*, ed. Ninotchka Bennahum, Bruce Robertson, and Wendy Perron (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 108.

[328] Sally Banes, "Terpsichore in Sneakers" in *Dance: Documents of Contemporary Art*, (Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT Press: Cambridge and London), 46. Performance theorist and dance historian Sally Banes notes Simone Forti's focus on spatial relationships in dance as a visual artist. Banes highlights Forti's turn to art galleries to present work and states that Forti was not a member of Judson Dance Theater.

[329] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo," *October* 152 (2015), 28, 35.

[330] Simone Forti, "Dear Ann: Letters from Forti to Halprin, Fall 1960-Winter 1961," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*, ed. Ninotchka Bennahum, Bruce Robertson, and Wendy Perron (University of California Press, 2017), 156-157. In her letters to Anna Halprin, Forti recalls watching children play outside, and suggests that their task to create a snowball contained a novelty that aligned with her interest in movement and dance through play.

tasks, denoted in the film titles that include *Freeze*, *Parachute*, and *Mask Dance*. Similarly, Forti created a series of task dances in the 1960s entitled *Huddle, See-Saw, Rollers,* and *Slant Board*. These titles directly reference physical tasks and place value on games in performance. *Huddle*, which Forti describes as a shelter where bodies help and rely on one another for physical support, allows task to gain a function.[331] In her reflections on her games with children Mendieta similarly states, "when a concern for time is primary, an experience, not an art object may result."[332] Together, these artworks create an alternative space where support, rather than competition, facilitates play. Their experiences in exile and use of artmaking to connect to earth and build community, therefore, expand a postmodern dance lineage to include Mendieta.

Dance historian Janice Ross links Mendieta to Anna Halprin in her article "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals," where Ross refers to the likeness between Mendieta's *Silueta Series* and Halprin's *Still Dance* (1997-2001).[333] Halprin, a pioneer of postmodern dance on the West Coast, led her famous Summer Dance Workshop in 1960 in Marin County in San Francisco.[334] Mendieta would have been eleven years old at the time, still residing in Cuba. Halprin's dance deck, enveloped by nature, provided a space for dancers to generate choreography and engage in a series of task-based activities. Dancers used objects from the environment such as stones and branches to accompany their movements or dictate the shapes in which they would mold their bodies.[335] Through improvisation, Halprin

---

[331] The High Line, "Simone Forti Huddle Performance on the High Line," 1:01.
[332] Howard Oransky and Laura Wertheim Joseph, *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta* (Univ of California Press, 2015), 209.
[333] Janice Ross, "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals." *TDR,* 48, no. 2 (2004), 62.
[334] Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson, "Radical Bodies: An Overview," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (University of California Press, 2017), 31.
[335] Bennahum, Perron, and Robertson, "Radical Bodies: An Overview," 35; Perron, "Simone Forti: Bodynatureartmovementbody," 107.

encouraged the dancers to release the body from habits and interact with other dancers in the space, rather than engage in solipsistic personal discovery.[336]

In her analysis, Ross creates a binary between Mendieta and Halprin. She describes Halprin at the age of seventy-seven in a "moist embrace of soft earth" in *Still Dance*.[337] Ross also locates a similarity in Mendieta's and Halprin's conceptual earth-body images that point to the body's decay, enmeshed in foliage and plants that spring around their corporeal figures. Ross argues that Halprin's *Still Dance* is "more muted" in its protest and commentary on decomposition.[338] The words used in conjunction with Mendieta's work in the same article include desire, sexuality, aggression, and "sexual and social violation."[339] The conceptualization of Halprin as "more muted" than Mendieta risks losing the significance of her masked protest, central to both black and indigenous survival under surveillance.

These descriptions gloss over the complexities of Mendieta's race, gender, age, and identity. While both Halprin and Mendieta placed the female body in nature and made works focused on rebirth, I find greater alignment with Amelia Jones's perspective on initiating analysis through biography. On Mendieta's exile, Amelia Jones writes, "this particular experience of identity has no 'essential' meaning in relation to her work: on the contrary, I read her particularity through the works…."[340] Through such interpretations, Mendieta's silhouettes gain a rigor and complexity. Mendieta's identity as a Cuban-born artist in exile

---

[336] Yvonne Rainer and Ann Halprin, "Yvonne Rainer Interviews Ann Halprin," *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 142–67, https://doi.org/10.2307/1125241,143. In an interview with Yvonne Rainer published in 1965, Halprin states clear goals for her work in improvisation: "The purpose of the improvisation was not self-expression. I was trying to get at subconscious areas, so things would happen in an unpredictable way."
[337] Ross, "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals," 62.
[338] Ross, "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals," 62.
[339] Ross, "Anna Halprin's Urban Rituals," 62.
[340] Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 27.

working alongside Spanish-speaking communities in land she could access interjects in her films and photographs. A failure to recognize restraint, discretion, and coolness in Mendieta's *siluetas* denies her of a full life experience. Like the goddess Ixchel who not only appears as youthful in Mayan vases, but also surfaces as a goddess in older age, crouched and close to the ground, Mendieta's commitment to the earth and the past embody various stages of life. Color, blood, and fire form part of her minimalism. In addition, Mendieta, who died at the age of thirty-six, was unable to create an earth-body work in older age.

Mendieta's protest in her time-based works are further enriched by Rosemary Candelario's analysis of slowness in choreography that uses the environment as a model for regrowth.[341] Candelario writes:

> Slowness as choreographic method provides the time to learn how to develop alternative ways of working in the world including tactics that may allow one to pass outside of visibility of subjective violence, reveal the functioning of objective violence, and create alliances that could prove effective in countering objective violence.[342]

Mendieta's silhouettes depend upon her subjective body placed in earth, but allow her to keep parts of her identity anonymous as she conceals her face. This maintains a space for privacy amidst the exposure of the body within tombs, fire, and phases of destruction in life cycles.

---

[341] Rosemary Candelario, *Flowers Cracking Concrete: Eiko & Koma's Asian/American Choreographies* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 8. While Rosemary Candelario's analysis focuses on Japanese-American choreographers Eiko and Koma, a duo trained in Japanese dance traditions distant from Mendieta's Cuban lineage, Candelario's study deconstructs imperceptible movements in Eiko and Koma's work that, over time, become political and consequential forces.
[342] Candelario, *Flowers Cracking Concrete*, 8.

Returning to Eshu, Ixchel, the hare, and the crossroads, Mendieta's sacred rituals endure long after her death. The image of her silhouette that rests in ruins allows her to become a channel, a form of communication.[343] Her absence through black minimalism objects to simple readings of aggression in her silhouettes that contain flowers springing from a tomb. Mendieta's earth body art, then, turns the body into an art object, into its materiality that provides a passage to those that are not physically, but spiritually alive. As Mendieta and Lemon reach for memories of the deceased, thinking about individuals in history as more than the violence of their deaths, these artists strike a balance. Lemon acknowledges that impossibility embedded in the task to create performance on lynchings and death, but he continues to attempt it. Mendieta's images, in turn, show how the past inevitably endures.

In her eminent act of self-sacrifice, *Silueta de cohetes* (Fireworks Silhouette), Mendieta collaborated with a Mexican artisan in Oaxaca to carefully plan, control, and predict the size and direction of flames before lighting a wooden fixture built in her dimensions on fire.[344] As her silhouette burns and disappears in *Silueta de cohetes*, Mendieta illuminates how flames can melt narrow readings of images frozen in violence. In what follows, I consider the uses of color, particularly indigo, in visual art that contemplates racial violence. A single pigment produces a range of tones: tranquility, rebellion, and coolness, all at the center of masked protest. Like the creeks that Mendieta floats in and water that Lemon

[343] Mardith K. Schuetz-Miller, "Spider Grandmother and Other Avatars of the Moon Goddess in New World Sacred Architecture," *Journal of the Southwest* 54, no. 2 (2012): 375. Meredith K. Schultz-Miller describes the predominance of the "cosmic cross" in Mayan civilization and architecture, sites that drew Mendieta to Mexico.
[344] Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 103-104. Jane Blocker mentions that a *cohetero* in Mexico, an artisan that worked with fireworks, created the frame for Mendieta to burn. Blocker locates Mexico as a place of "transition" for Mendieta. This detail also shows the degree to which Mendieta was willing to relinquish control over the works that she usually made privately. In this example, she entrusted the expertise of others to safely execute her task.

dances against, these colors create a spectrum of ways to see the body against natural elements and in survival.

Chapter Three

Practices in Pastiche: Distilling Blue in Alison Saar's Material Bodies

In a lecture entitled "The Thread that Leads to the Word" that visual artist Alison Saar presented at the Southern California Institute of Architecture on October 20, 2021, she described her artistic process as one that aimed to understand the underlying mechanisms of racism through the use of distilleries in sculpture.[345] Saar showed a slide with an image of *50 Proof* (2012) that responded to former President Barack Obama's election and the scrutiny he received as a mixed-race candidate seeking public office in the U.S.[346] The sculpture incorporated glass-blowing techniques, uncommon in Saar's work that often repurposes found materials and objects.[347] Saar constructed a clear glass head of a black woman with short hair: a face that looks straight ahead, without pupils, and matches the aesthetic of many of her sculptures of black women.[348] The head hangs in its transparent construction, what offers a look inside Saar's three-dimensional mold. Drawn to glass because of its ability to resist harsh elements and simultaneous capacity to fracture, Saar placed her sculpture in a precarious position: although a metal bar secures the floating glass in place, it hovers over a basin.[349]

---

[345] Alison Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word," Southern California Institute of Architecture, October 20, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHbA9jRHUc8, 14:00-14:10.
[346] Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (Crown Publishing Group (NY), 2020), 131. In former President Barack Obama's autobiography, *A Promised Land*, he writes, "I had wrestled with the meaning of my mixed-race status and the fact of racial discrimination. Yet at no point had I ever questioned—or had others question—my fundamental American-ness." Obama demonstrates how his visibility in the public eye came with unrelenting public discussions on his identity. The quote also shows how abstract concepts of national belonging and identity were leveraged against him.
[347] Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word," 14:00-14:10.
[348] "Alison Saar: Feallan and Fallow," Artsy, accessed March 11, 2022, https://www.artsy.net/show/madison-square-park-alison-saar-feallan-and-fallow.; Rebecca McGrew and Irene Tsatsos, *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020). Saar often makes sculptures with short hair, evidenced in the works that she created in the summer of 2010 as part of the "Feallan and Fallow" exhibition in New York. Other sculptures that bear similarities to the figure in *50 Proof* include *Equinox Study* (2008) and *Brood* (2008).
[349] Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word," 14:17-14:34.

50 Proof reveals the careful measures taken by the alchemist of this experiment, as if a scientist could control the identity of this figure. The head contains a black liquid that drains into a sink. A multi-layered process of distillation emerges in three parts. First, the liquid passes through a tube that lands in a glass heart, positioned just below the head. The liquid then passes through a pump. From this location, it pushes its way down a winding tube that deposits into a basin. At this destination, Saar introduces domestic objects: two bars of soap, one black and the other white, sit on a long dish, creating a scale.[350] On the sides of the basin hang two white napkins.

Together these materials point to a particular form of scrutiny, a head dissected in an experiment that aims to produce order, distill, and sanitize. Saar felt that distillation managed to capture the criticism Obama faced as a person that "was not black enough for the black community and… not white enough for the white community."[351] These remarks simultaneously commented on Saar's own background. As a mixed-race artist with a BA and MFA in Art, Saar received negative reviews early on in her career for making black folk art in the style of self-taught artists. *50 Proof*, therefore, deconstructs the backlash of visibility, the realities of achieving political and artistic representation in public view.

The descriptors that *50 Proof* incites are key to Saar's contributions to black minimalism: floating heads, liquids, and receptacles form part of her artistic lexicon. These words generate a distinct language that forces viewers to speak of racism in terms of materiality. In describing the piece, Saar uses the term minimalist as a point of departure. She

[350] Rebecca McGrew and Irene Tsatsos, *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020), 91. The materials for *50 Proof* included in the catalog *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* list the following: "glass, copper, rubber, steel, soap, cotton, textiles, enamel basin, colored water."
[351] LA Louver, "Alison Saar 'Still...' at Otis College Ends Sat, Nov. 17," Tumblr, November 16, 2012. https://blog.lalouver.com/post/35881093754/alison-saar-still-at-otis-college-ends-sat#.YmWbdG7MKqk.

specifically refers to her encounter with online caricatures of Obama in the White House that made her consider how minimalism might combat the spectacle of these images:

> …looking back at… those early disturbing cartoons of watermelons on the white house lawn… it was really a frightening and disturbing experience…. I really kind of just had to sit down and say, what does it take to break down bigotry and racism, and I said, well I think what we need to do is to basically get to the essence of it and understand what it is in its barest, minimalist essence.[352]

When Saar mentions a stripped down "minimalist essence," she aligns with an artistic movement that aimed to chip away at surplus in artworks. Donald Judd's essay "Specific Objects" published in 1965, for example, described a trend in museums that positioned art objects as "a space to move into…that which is open and extended, more or less environmental."[353] While minimalism has produced a multitude of definitions as a category, art historian Bruce Robertson argues that the term directs attention to a form of analysis: "Minimalism invites us to inspect the visible formal aspects of a work, as though the essential point is to carve away any excess of form to get to an irreducible core of meaning."[354] Robertson's observations can, therefore, apply to both Saar's methods and the audience's interpretation of her work.

Because Saar assembles ordinary objects into the shape of human bodies, Saar's minimalist sculptures reference prominent and lesser-known figures in U.S. history. The immersive environment Saar creates incorporates the human figure. Her life-size sculptures

---

[352] Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word," 14:41-15:33.
[353] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects (1965)," in *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 209.
[354] Bruce Robertson, "Dance Is Hard to See: Yvonne Rainer and the Visual Arts," in *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (University of California Press, 2017), 122.

become bodies amongst visitors in a given museum or gallery. In the case of Saar's public memorial in New York completed in 2008, *Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial* stands at an impressive thirteen feet.[355] Saar's sculptures, therefore, engage the public directly, inside a museum and outdoor spaces. Reciprocity characterizes Saar's mission to "educate not alienate" her audience.[356] In this manner, *Swing Low* counters the language around minimalist art of the 1960's. Historian Anna C. Chave critiqued these descriptive trends as efforts to frame art objects as "aloof from politics and commerce and above personal feeling."[357] *Swing Low* and *50 Proof* reject a complete depersonalization of the body. With *Swing Low* placed in the middle of Harlem and *50 Proof* built to contemplate Obama's identity, these works engage in a web of politics, commerce, feeling, and education.[358]

Not unlike black postmodern choreographer Ralph Lemon's discomfort with spectacles created in his dances based on lynchings in the U.S. South, and Cuban-American performance artist Ana Mendieta's decision to work with natural materials in earth to explore her own materiality, Saar shares the goal to strip her artwork down to the necessary elements. Her search for essence—a word with intangible meanings—sets Saar off on a tangible process: the creation of distilleries. If Saar aims to remove superfluous materials from sculptural work, the elements that remain merit close analysis, from her choices in color and scale, to her careful selection of raw materials. While the term assemblage, which points to a

[355] Allison Roberts, "Alison Saar Swings Low in Harlem: The Harriet Tubman Memorial," accessed March 11, 2022, https://persimmontree.org/spring-2017/alison-saar-swings-low-in-harlem-the-harriet-tubman-memorial/.
[356] Roberts, "Alison Saar Swings Low in Harlem."
[357] Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine*, January 1990, 44.
[358] New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial," nycgovparks, 2010, https://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/historical-signs/listings?id=19666. Information posted next to the Harriet Tubman Memorial in New York City can be found on the city's Department of Parks and Recreation webpage.

tradition of rearranging abandoned objects, could describe Saar's process, she prefers to think in terms of carving, chipping away at the discarded objects she compiles.[359]

Indigo: Distillation, Extraction, and Spectrums of Color

Saar's use of color and materials—indigo and found objects—constitutes irreducible elements in her work. As a pigment, indigo is extracted through distillation. A fabric dipped in indigo dye first emerges as green or yellow, and with time in open air, turns into various shades of blue. An understanding of how this global commodity, which turned into a slave crop in the eighteenth century in South Carolina, materializes through distillation, reveals the importance of ritual and care in producing the color.[360] In her use of blue tones from a minimalist pigment, Saar shows how a color can carry the creative practices and rituals developed by dyers that discovered indigo before, during, and after the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Film director and producer Mary Lance captures the complexities of indigo production in *Blue Alchemy: Stories of Indigo* (2011). The film traces efforts to move away from synthetic production, a process that risks losing the methods and rituals used to cultivate the color. In Tamil Nadu, India a group of men gather leaves that they steep in a large cement vat full of water.[361] The men enter the vat in water up to their arms and stomp to add oxygen to the liquid. It then falls into a second square vat that, under the heat of the sun, produces an indigo sediment. Straining the color, they create blocks of dye. Multiple artisans

---

[359] Judith Wilson, "Down to the Crossroads: The Art of Alison Saar," in *Secrets, Dialogues, Revelations: The Art of Betye and Alison Saar*, ed. Elizabeth Shepherd (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1990), 46. In an interview with Judith Wilson, Saar directly addresses the distinctions between carving and assemblage, aligning her work with the former.

[360] Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo* (British Museum Press, 1998), 66, 68; John J. Winberry, "Indigo in South Carolina: A Historical Geography," *Southeastern Geographer* 19, no. 2 (1979): 91–102.

[361] Mary Lance, *Blue Alchemy: Stories of Indigo* (Newdeal Films, 2011), https://vimeo.com/ondemand/bluealchemyindigo, 01:19:36.

in Lance's documentary express a constant care and attention that indigo requires to create rich shades, often describing indigo as a living, breathing element.[362] In Mexico, women stir their own concoction in a large vat, blessing the pot with the gesture of a cross before they attempt to make a particular shade of blue.[363] The treatment of objects as dynamic materials that respond to elements including heat and oxygen create an interdependence between the product and creator. Spiritual practices, labor, commodification, and experimentation directly affect the production of color. These patterns create an intercultural network of ideas and strategies that frame Saar's work.

In *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, art historian Darby English wrestles with the racialization of color, primarily the association of blue with black art. He asks critics to move "beyond the tendency to limit the significance of works assignable to black artists to what can be illuminated by reference to a work's purportedly racial character."[364] In consideration of English's observations on the importance of looking beyond color, I consider sources of light in Saar's sculptural narratives. In *Sea of Serenity*, a name that references a region of craters on the moon, a blue sculpture of a woman stands covered in moths. If moths seek light sources, *Sea of Serenity* offers a source of refuge. The sculpture's dissonance, a woman at peace and consumed by insects, shows a figure in its multiple dimensions. This duality complicates and enriches the relationships that Saar builds between moths and bodies, objects and subjects that share material properties.

Artistic Training and Appropriation

[362] Lance, *Blue Alchemy,* 15:26-15:42.
[363] Lance, *Blue Alchemy,* 24:30.
[364] Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (MIT Press, 2010), 1, 6. Darby English specifically considers David Hammons's *Concerto in Black and Blue* (2002) in this commentary, focusing on the composition of the piece as spectators navigate a dark space with blue flashlights.

Saar seamlessly incorporates multiple artistic traditions of the African diaspora into her works and samples European aesthetics in visual art.[365] Saar's training, education, and background as a member of a family of artists fostered her diverse interests. Saar received a BA in Studio and Art History in 1978 from Scripps College and an MFA in 1981 from Otis College of Art and Design.[366] As the daughter of black visual artist Betye Saar and Anglo-American ceramicist Richard Saar, who dedicated his life to art conservation, Alison and her sisters grew up in and around art spaces.[367] Saar learned to preserve works that came into her father's studio.[368] Tracye Saar-Cavanaugh, Alison Saar's sister, noted that through her father's work in conservation, the family developed a "lingering inner reassurance that we can fix anything if it breaks."[369] Early on in life, Saar found inspiration in materials that others left behind, old pieces of ceiling tin or wood, and embraced the constraints of their size, weight, and density. Saar practiced conservation, giving new life to materials that had been tossed out by their previous owners.

Saar's upbringing within a family of accomplished artists produced a tension with critics that initially believed Saar's education was incompatible with her construction of folk art. In *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, black feminist writer bell hooks, a personal friend of Saar, addressed this dilemma, and placed the topic of appropriation at the forefront of their

---

[365] Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, "2021 Mirror, Mirror: The Prints of Alison Saar," Washington State University, Accessed March 2, 2022. https://museum.wsu.edu/events/exhibit/2021-mirror-mirror-the-prints-of-alison-saar/. Alison Saar's biography on the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art website lists many of Saar's intercultural influences.

[366] Rebecca McGrew, "Alison Saar's Radical Art of Sustenance," in *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020), 13–40, 19-20. During Saar's studies at Scripps, she took classes in art and art history from a range of instructors specialized in different regional areas. This education directly affected how Saar viewed her own work as drawing upon various forms of knowledge-making.

[367] Jessica Dallow, "The Art of Creating a Legacy," in *Family Legacies: The Art of Betye, Lezley and Alison Saar* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 8.

[368] Dallow, "The Art of Creating a Legacy," 8; Wilson, "Down to the Crossroads," 37.

[369] Tracye Saar-Cavanaugh, "A Family Business," in *Family Legacies: The Art of Betye, Lezley and Alison Saar* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 5.

discussion.[370] hooks expressed her dismay with the fact that Saar received a number of negative reviews in the press in the early 1990s after her exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum of Art. She narrowed in on one critic's issue with Saar's homage to self-taught artists.[371] In the original review that hooks also quotes, critic Hank Burchard writes that Saar: "'dumbs down' her first-class craft skills in imitation of the rude execution of folk art."[372] This review contradicts Saar's own statements, which point to her degree programs' focus on art history, rather than formal training in sculpture.[373] Appropriation, thus, sits at odds with Saar's creative process, in which objects with dimensions and unique limitations dictate the shape of the work. Equipped with knowledge and training in art history, Saar molds imperfect bodies and reflects the diversity of the real world.

Saar and Lemon: Efforts to Shed Formal Artistic Training

The reviews that Saar received parallel the ways in which other artists of color, including Lemon, were initially perceived by critics that found their racial identity and artistic training incongruous. Lemon, for example, enumerated a range of critiques he encountered before he made the *Geography Trilogy*, a work in which he incorporated dance traditions from West Africa, Southeast Asia, and the U.S. South. Before he created the trilogy, Lemon had an all-white company, noted by critics in reviews.[374] Members of various Alvin Ailey companies across the U.S. were discouraged from watching Lemon's work.[375] In

[370] bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New Press, 1995), 14-15.
[371] hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 14-15, 27; Hank Burchard, "Alison Saar's Mis-'Directions'," *Washington Post*, April 9, 1993, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/04/09/alison-saars-mis-directions/08108237-ec0c-4a50-acb0-a2d9448ef028/.
[372] Burchard, "Alison Saar's Mis-Directions."
[373] Alison Saar and Irene Tsatsos, "Between What We See," in *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020), 74-76.
[374] Laura Van Tuyl, "Dance That Is Never 'Finished': For Choreographer Ralph Lemon, Modern Dance Remains an Open and Abstract Medium," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 3, 1991, sec. The Arts.
[375] Ralph Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile* (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 35-37.

two interviews from 1991 and 1995, Lemon expressed no interest in making "black dance" and stated that white artists did not face the same scrutiny for hiring black dancers in their companies.[376]

How does an artist wield the technique that they have been taught, particularly when that technique seeks to un-train the body? Experimentations in postmodern dance at Judson Dance Theater, where Lemon's mentors flourished, called for "no hierarchy based on technical ability" according to dance scholar Sally Banes.[377] Burchard's critique of Saar's turn to folk art would seemingly also limit that dances a choreographer could create. Lemon's work, which samples popular black dance forms and draws upon elements in postmodern dance, rejects the exclusivity of technique imparted in dance studios. Unable to appease critics that subject their work to the same scrutiny captured in *50 Proof*, Saar and Lemon continue to experiment with a range of styles in their distinct artistic communities of dance and visual art. Their inclusion of African American folklore and methods in folk art repurpose enduring forms of storytelling.

Understanding Saar's and Lemon's work through pastiche generates new avenues that resist the limits set upon their work by critics. Banes uses the term pastiche to describe Lemon's *Folktales* (1985), a performance that combined African American folklore and fairytales to ground source material in a historical context:

> …taken individually, the tales are small gems, seamless and spellbinding… But when we start to put them together, as the pivotal tale of the Tar Baby—with its explicit commentary on tales as socializing agents—instructs us to do, we also begin to ask

[376] Laura Van Tuyl, "Dance That Is Never 'Finished'"; Jennifer Dunning, "New Dance Myths Cut from the Everyday," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*, May 7, 1991, sec. C.
[377] Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Duke University Press, 1993), 112.

questions about these traditional, seemingly timeless, seemingly universal repositories of wisdom.[378]

While Banes framed pastiche as a tool Lemon used to deconstruct folktales and fairytales and critique their construction, Saar uses pastiche to amass the wisdom of concrete objects that contain multiple belief systems. In a single exhibit by Saar, a visitor may find references to Harriet Beech Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Yemaya, the Yoruba goddess of water. In the case of re-envisioning Stowe's characters, Saar paints a group of young girls on a plantation in shades of blue. Positioned across from Yemaya, children that grow up with folktales and fairytales form part of a new narrative in which they wield collective forms of power.

Flesh, Weight, and Gravity

By turning to the body, built back up again through found materials, Saar's sculptural figures evoke literary scholar Hortense Spillers's discussion of bodies aboard slave ships. Spillers writes, "before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse…."[379] The distinction Spillers makes between flesh and body exposes a process of injury and mutilation, bodies reduced to their dimensions on ships. As Saar builds bodies, she replaces flesh with wood, liquids, and ceiling tin. When these found materials combine to form a body, they reject illusionism through their weight and course textures.

The technique to show material composition bears an aesthetic similarity to the goals of postmodern dancers of the 1960s that wanted to remove illusion in dance, an act Banes describes as "refusing to be seduced by mere skill."[380] Virginia B. Spivey argues that

[378] Sally Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 284.
[379] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/464747, 67.
[380] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 16,17.

postmodern dancer Simone Forti's minimalist dance constructions, a term that alluded to a body's likeness to sculpture, revealed "a real person, made of flesh and bone, subject to gravity's pull."[381] As dancers cast technique aside, other formal elements in composition gained value in performance, reacting against metaphor.[382] Dance scholar Ramsay Burt contrasts postmodern dance to modern dance traditions that "expressed the universality of feeling that transcended individual experience."[383] Postmodern dancers sought to remove the sublime from both movement and narrative structures in performance to highlight the possibilities and limitations of individual anatomies.

Saar's figures also reveal their weight as she secures heavy objects in place. Saar has referred to the ease with which artists can paint illusions of suspension with brush strokes on canvas, which becomes impossible in sculpture.[384] *Inheritance* (2003) and *Breach* (2016) overcome this obstacle as they depict black women in sculptural form bearing the weight of heavy objects on their heads: suitcases, chairs, and weighted fabric.[385] While these objects would appear to crush or topple these figures, they remain in balance. Gravity, therefore, enters the language of the materiality of racism that Saar aims to uncover through sculpture. Through malleability, these bodies attest to Uri McMillan's notions that objects "reveal that the borders between subjectivity and objecthood are not nearly as distinct as we pretend they

[381] Virginia B. Spivey, "The Minimal Presence of Simone Forti," *Woman's Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 11–18. 13.
[382] Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (Routledge, 2006), 17.
[383] Burt, *Judson Dance Theater*, 17.
[384] Saar and Tsatsos, "Between What We See," 73.
[385] Rebecca McGrew and Irene Tsatsos, *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020). See the catalog *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* for patterns in Saar's sculptures of black women with short hair that appear to take on Saar's profile.

are."[386] While McMillan's research focuses on bodies that perform objecthood, Saar's focus on turning objects into bodies erects deities from the ground up.

Saar finds a form of liberation in the suspension that her weighted figures achieve. She disagrees with interpretations of her sculptures of women hanging upside down as restrained. In efforts to move away from the implication that they have been lynched, Saar encourages the viewer to consider them as "self-lynchings…surrendering to forces."[387] Lemon made a similar statement on suspension in *Come home Charley Patton* (2004) based on lynching events in the U.S. In his decision to dance at a street light in Duluth, Minnesota where three black men—Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie—were lynched, Lemon created an active form of commemoration.[388] The list of words Lemon channeled as he danced included "hanging/falling in space, not up or down."[389] Lemon framed his task as an experiment, a similar approach that Saar takes in her use of materials to sculpt bodies that "make dances out of disaster."[390] As Lemon assumed various positions inspired by these words, he initiated a task to move through racial violence in various dimensions and angles. While he stated that "it was all fake finally," a recognition of the limitations of performance, his rituals contain tangible truths.[391] As Lemon dances at a street light, he dedicates time to the memory of Clayton, Jackson, and McGhie. When Lemon dances against the pressure of a fire hose at the end of *Come home Charley Patton*, his body struggles against the force of

[386] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (NYU Press, 2015), 10.
[387] Saar and Tsatsos, "Between What We See," 71.
[388] Katherine Profeta, *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 48. In the creation of *Come home Charley Patton*, Katherine Profeta discussed James Young's concepts of counter-monuments with Ralph Lemon.
[389] Ralph Lemon, *Come home Charley Patton* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 227.
[390] Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word," 21:10. Saar's research on the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 that disproportionately affected black communities resulted in an exhibit that depicted individuals dancing in water. They exude a sense of endurance in the aftermath of ecological and economic devastation.
[391] Lemon, *Patton*, 227.

water. Both Lemon and Saar, therefore, explore the force of gravity and natural elements on bodies. They find possibility in dance, sculptures, and rituals that look to new forms of liberation.

The Multiple Dimensions of Topsy Turvy

While Saar avoids illusion in her focus on materiality, she enters fictitious worlds through the stories that her figures reference. Her rejection of artifice in assembling found materials and objects coexists with an embrace of story and myth as creative inspiration. Saar's exhibit *Topsy Turvy* (2018), for example, included a set of sculptures and paintings inspired by the young female character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Topsy enters the care of Miss Ophelia, positioned as a savior in the novel.[392] In Topsy, Stowe fabricates a character with "wicked eyes" and excessive emotions and sounds that take the form of "sobbing," "tears and groans," and "a face of woeful earnest."[393] James Baldwin articulated a critique of Stowe's sanctimonious rhetoric, arguing that the author's "sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty."[394] Saar's depictions of Topsy, therefore, reject the melodramatic narratives of Stowe's novel that manufacture a formulaic story of liberation.

In this regard, Saar aligns with scholar Saidiya V. Hartman's analysis of terror in the mundane in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Hartman outlines the ways in which melodrama entered minstrelsy and novels, crossing the boundaries of dance and writing. Hartman uncovers how Stowe turned violence against Topsy into a source of comedic pleasure and writes that "melodrama provided the

[392] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Applewood Books, 2001), 37.
[393] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 33, 37, 39, 42, 129.
[394] James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Beacon Press, 2012), 14.

dramatic frame that made the experience of slavery meaningful."[395] Because Saar sculpts Topsy at peace and in power, she removes melodramatic structures in visual art. This radical act counters animated drawings of Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

In various shades of blue, Topsy multiplies in Saar's collection and turns into a group of girls on a plantation. Saar assembles five bodies armed with tools in their hands. They stand on blocks, wearing dresses made of metal that fall at their knees. Their blue lips stand out among the uniform colors of their weapons, dresses, and bodies. They hold found objects available to them on plantations, and cast a shadow on the gallery floor, expanding their presence. Cotton protrudes from their hair, which allows them to hide within a field of cotton. In unison, this chorus requests a degree of distance from the spectator that might walk around, but not between these figures. The five bodies reject the spectator's gaze as their blank eyes, without pupils, provide nothing to look into. In this way, they refuse the voyeurism of Stowe's novel, and allow viewers to see and understand Topsy in her ingenuity. Saar's commentary on *Topsy Turvy* further indicates the clever uses of subterfuge as this band of girls finds a unique way to remain concealed. Saar states:

> these girls range from 5 to maybe…10 or 11 and what they've done is they've tied cotton bolls in their hair so that when they come through the fields it serves as camouflage and you can't see them creeping up on you and they're ready to basically bring down the master's house with the master's tools.[396]

The quote references writer Audre Lorde's statement, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," a phrase that points to the limitations of combating violence

[395] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997). 26-27.
[396] Saar, "The Thread That Leads to the Word".

with violence.[397] The context of Lorde's statement enriches Saar's work. Lorde's critique of feminist thought that failed to acknowledge the distinct hardships faced by women of color called for a dismantling of patriarchal structures. Saar diverges from Lorde in giving the chorus tools to temporarily combat the oppressor, but also contains Lorde's sentiments in shedding light on the specificity of the black female experience on plantations. Working directly with tools as a sculptor, Saar channels her frustrations into the artwork, arming the girls and giving agency to younger individuals that grow up in fields of violence. The artwork remains a still sculpture, and therefore, contains the sentiment of a rebellion that allows a viewer to absorb the information contained in the chorus from afar. In this respect, they adhere to art historian Robert Farris Thompson's notion of "an aesthetic of the cool," that refers to discretion and silence in languages of East, West, and Central Africa.[398] Saar's sculptures in blue embody the nuance of silence in various shades: black, indigo, light blue, and white.

In consideration of Saar's mother's own commentary on the uses of violence in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), an assemblage in which Betye Saar sculpted the figure of Aunt Jemima with a rifle in her left hand and a broom in the other, *Topsy Turvy* reinvents Betye's expression of protest.[399] Betye, who was part of the Black Arts Movement,[400]

---

[397] Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (Penguin Books Limited, 2018).
[398] hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 30.; Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 41–91, https://doi.org/10.2307/3334749, 41. Saar directly refers to Robert Farris Thompson's scholarship as an influence on her artistic practice.
[399] Betye Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar," *Frieze*, September 27, 2016, https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar. See "Influences: Betye Saar" for an image of *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*.
[400] Nadja Sayej, "Betye Saar: The Artist Who Helped Spark the Black Women's Movement," *The Guardian*, October 30, 2018, sec. Art and design, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/30/betye-saar-art-exhibit-racism-new-york-historical-society.

disagreed with the Black Panther Party's masculine image of defense.[401] Still, she united domestic objects and dissent to expand images of protest, converting Aunt Jemima into a figure of revolution.[402] Alison Saar repurposes aesthetics of defense without mimicking the BPP's use of guns in their widely disseminated images.[403] She does not include the rifle that Betye incorporates in her work, but retains domestic objects: sickles and hoes. Saar's sculptures, therefore, appear less rooted in iconography—the enduring images of the Panthers or Aunt Jemima—and instead, unearth a lesser-known character from a literary work. The chorus of girls also combats individualism within their masked protest as they work together without a centralized leader. They, too, can topple a power structure without the same recognition that charismatic male black leaders, integral to the BPP's image of defense, achieved in their social movement organization.

High Cotton (2017), the study for *Topsy Turvy*, exists as a print on a two-dimensional piece of fabric, composed of smaller pieces of material stitched together. This work raises a different set of themes and questions regarding subterfuge because it relies on colors and negative space to distinguish bodies from their surroundings, whereas the sculptures show five bodies in three dimensions. The fabric contains an array of textures pinned to the gallery wall that measures a wide 84 by 102 inches.[404] Across this large surface area, each body stands side by side. Shades of color—navy, teal, grey, royal blue—give dimension and depth

[401] Erika Doss, "Imaging the Panthers: Representing Black Power and Masculinity, 1960s–1990s," *Prospects* 23 (October 1998): 483–516, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0361233300006438.
[402] Betye Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar," *Frieze*, September 27, 2016, https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar.
[403] John Brown Society, "An Introduction to the Black Panther Party" (Pamphlet, Ann Arbor, MI, 1969), https://asp6new-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/sixt/sixt.object.details.aspx?id=1003403085&view=dualview&objecturl=BEH4. See the Black Panther Party Pamphlet for images of Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton with guns in hand in front of the BPP office in California.
[404] "Alison Saar," accessed March 11, 2022, https://lalouver.com/artist.cfm?tArtist_id=263. The dimensions of *High Cotton* are listed on the artist's website with the LA Louver.

to the image, creating positive and negative space, a foreground and background. Blue hair, barely discernible against a darker blue background, contrasts with their teal dresses. The figures' hollow eyes, in a shade of light blue, match the color of the cotton bolls that protrude from their hair. Small details become visible: a cross, stitched in the upper right corner. Wrinkled jean pockets and holes in the fabric show signs of age and wear. Unlike the chorus of physical sculptures, *High Cotton* allows the viewer to step closer to the artwork and see these bodies flattened, as they might appear within a book. The imprint of these figures challenges illustrations of Topsy in Stowe's original novel.[405] In the original sketches in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Topsy holds her arms open, animated in tattered clothing.[406] She later appears on her knees crying or restrained by Miss Ophelia who exclaims, "I cannot be plagued with this child any longer."[407] Saar's exhibit revisits the visuality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, suggesting that images and sculpture, a holistic form of critique, should accompany literary analyses of the novel.[408]

In *Of Aether and Earthe,* Saar's 2021 exhibit at the Benton Museum of Art in Claremont, California, *High Cotton* hung opposite *Afro-di(e)ty* (2000) an installation of Yemaya, the Yoruba *orisha* or deity of the sea.[409] Blue tones changed from that of suspense

---

[405] Jo-Ann Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture* (University of Missouri Press, 2007), 2.
[406] "Topsy." (Illustration, The New York Public Library, 1897), Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-e550-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.
[407] "I Cannot Be Plagued by This Child Any Longer" (Illustration, The New York Public Library, 1897), Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-e550-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99; "She Began to Sob Vehemently." (Illustration, The New York Public Library, 1897), Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-e550-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.
[408] Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture*, 19. See Jo-Ann Morgan's extensive analysis of images from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* integral to the perpetuation of stereotypes in a literary work.
[409] Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (SUNY Press, 2013), xv. The authors of *Yemoja: Gender Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* list three spelling of the Yoruba deity of the waters: Yemayá, Iemanjá and Yemoja.

in *High Cotton*, to that of pacification in *Afro-di(e)ty*. The statue invokes the Greek Goddess Aphrodite, associated with the sea, reimagined in sculptural form. Darkness, suspense, and tranquility, through shades of indigo, offer entry points for viewing the works collectively. The boundless, omnipotent goddess/orisha emerging from water adds dimension to the narratives communicated in the Topsys of *High Cotton*, squarely situated in black history and Stowe's novel.

Afrodi(e)ty holds a cloth with splashes of indigo dyed by Saar that trails along the floor. The fabric falls to her feet and leads to five basins full of water that sit on piles of salt. In the catalog *Of Aether and Earthe*, Saar discusses the power of Yemaya's duality, commanding and healing at once, a sculpture that counters a gendered image of defense.[410] A seashell hovers in the backdrop, originally from the earth-bound sea, and radiates light upon the figure. All grounded elements, seashells and water, float in the installation. Saar connects African deities of Yoruba spiritual beliefs to the American plantation through the exhibition that shows an overlap in color. In a monochromatic call-and-response, it appears as if Yemaya could summon other goddesses from each of the five basins of water, to convert the five Topsys into a deity. This configuration dispels the image of Topsy as abandoned as the sea and night sky generate places of refuge.[411] In communication with one another, Topsy and Yemaya use subterfuge in a range of tones: rebellion, collective strength, healing, and transition. Once Saar creates a language to speak of racism in terms of materiality, she repurposes that material into a language of dissent that does not aim to exclude, but rather,

---

They indicate that these variations in spelling reflect the diaspora through which Yemayá spread across the Americas.

[410] Rebecca McGrew, "Alison Saar's Radical Art of Sustenance," in *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe* (Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020), 13–40, 23.

[411] Saar and Tsatsos, "Between What We See," 69.

include the spectator. Bodies in protest appear in their quiet image, standing in power and resting in tranquility.

Conclusion

The Task to Rebuild After Loss

"The more they know, the more they see when they're watching me."[412] –Anthony Aquarius

In the above quotation Anthony Aquarius, a Jimi Hendrix impersonator based in Los Angeles, refers to how an audience's experience of his musical performances changes according to what they know about Hendrix. If they recognize a cultural icon, Hendrix, in Aquarius, and see a guitarist that quickly rose to prominence in the 1960s in Great Britain and passed away in 1970,[413] they might notice reenactments in Aquarius's act: the way that he mimics Hendrix in strumming a left-handed guitar, his use of ruffled fabrics that evoke Hendrix's own fashion, and how Aquarius picks at strings with his teeth.[414] Without any previous knowledge about Hendrix, other reference points might emerge through Aquarius's music: funk, Soul, rock and roll, blues, or the work of black musicians including Nina Simone, whose lyrics "Ain't Got No/I Got Life" Aquarius sings as Hendrix. In the installation *The Borrowers* (2014), contemporary visual artist Nicole Miller films Aquarius amidst a haze of purple and red lighting.[415] The intricacies of masquerade allow Hendrix's enduring iconicity to preside over the performance. Manipulating his appearance and voice to gain access to Hendrix's image, Aquarius concedes his individual identity to entertain others.

---

[412] Bob Pool, "Out There; He's Quite the Plug-in for Hendrix; Anthony Aquarius Has the '60s Guitar Legend Wired -- the Hair, the Clothes, the Right-Hand Ax Held Upside Down.," *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 2009, sec. Main News; Part A; Metro Desk.

[413] Jas Obrecht, *Stone Free: Jimi Hendrix in London, September 1966–June 1967* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), http://muse.jhu.edu/book/62333. For an overview of Hendrix fast-paced rise to fame, see Jas Obrecht's *Stone Free: Jimi Hendrix in London, September 1966-June 1967.*

[414] Jimi Hendrix, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience - Foxey Lady (Live In Maui, 1970)*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv97c3W6lw8, 2:38.

[415] Martine Syms, *S7 E1: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otUJvQhCjJ0,16:41. Nicole Miller, *The Borrowers*, Film, 2014. For clips of *The Borrowers*, see "The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto," which includes a clip of Anthony Aquarius playing the song "Ain't Got No/I Got Life."

The unexpected alignment of disparate stories characterizes *The Borrowers*, an installation composed of three separate videos of black men and women that share a part of their lives with the audience. David, a man who lost his left arm to a gunshot in Chicago, and Ndinda, a practitioner of Hasyayoga (laughing yoga), are featured in two separate films. As the stories of these individuals intertwine, injury and healing become a part of Aquarius's entertainment. Music constitutes another strategy of survival. A central storyteller, however, emerges as Miller records a testimony: David recalls details surrounding the day he lost his arm during a routine drive along his neighborhood in the early 1970s.[416] Amidst Ndinda's laughter and Aquarius's performance that loop without audio, Miller transports the audience to the scene of a violent event. David frames his account within the context of an ordinary day. He then narrows in on fear: not his, but that of the young person that pulled up next to his car with a shotgun. He shares the rest of his experience in a straightforward tone and laughs at various points, appearing calm and collected.

Gestures come to the forefront in *The Borrowers*. David moves his right arm in front of a mirror as he tells his story. Miller had previously researched this technique developed by a neuroscientist to treat phantom limbs that cause pain to a body that adjusts to its material loss.[417] The process aligned with Miller's interest in the power of illusion to affect reality.[418] Notwithstanding the healing effects of this technique on David's pain, which is not discussed in the film, *The Borrowers* reveals intimate details regarding how one recalls and articulates an experience of violence. In a single, steady shot, the video focuses on David's hands. They

[416] Artbound Staff, "Nicole Miller: Mirror Images and the Power to Create Reality," KCET, November 16, 2015, https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/nicole-miller-mirror-images-and-the-power-to-create-reality.
[417] Artbound Staff, "Nicole Miller: Mirror Images and the Power to Create Reality."
[418] Syms, *S7 E1: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*.

occasionally trail in front of the mirror as he gestures. David places his hand on his chin, scratches his head, adjusts his cap, and extends his arm to motion with his right hand as the story progresses. His face and eyes rarely enter the frame. The spectator can only see the body deconstructed and multiplied by the mirror. *The Borrowers* spotlights a story of survival through ordinary gestures.

The simultaneous presentation of the three videos highlights small actions used by all participants filmed through single close-ups. Miller's installation deconstructs a single still image of violence for these nuances. As Aquarius/Hendrix plays a song with his left hand amidst David's narration, the installation brings the eye's focus to parts of the body. Aquarius plays five minutes of music that includes a cover of "Ain't Got No, I Got Life" by Simone. The original lyrics of the song, include:

> I got my arms, I got my hands
>
> I got my fingers, got my legs
>
> I got my feet, I got my toes
>
> I got my liver, got my blood
>
> Got life, I got my life

A sense of perseverance, to endure after loss, manifests through Simone's lyrics. Ndinda uses her hands to facilitate a therapeutic laughing exercise, showing that she too, has life in this tool. Her hands move up, down, and in circles as they illustrate the rise and fall of her laughter. Her uninhibited sounds that build over the duration of four minutes appear celebratory, frantic, generate exhaustion, and end in a peaceful release. Ndinda presides as a healer over these stories, showing a range of emotions that exist within the task at hand. Ndinda highlights laughter in David's testimony. With a laugh toward the end of his story,

David exclaims, "Hey, I ain't dead yet!"[419] As laughter leaps out of the installation, a fuller picture of survival emerges and echoes Simone's lyrics, "got life, I got my life."

This dissertation concludes with an attention to Miller's *The Borrowers* because the installation shows the power of juxtaposition. Without these three videos placed side by side, important commonalities disappear, including movements, sounds, and physical reactions that unite these individuals. *The Borrowers* illuminates small tasks—to laugh, to strum a guitar, to gesture—that confront various forms of absence. When Miller narrows in on the everyday lives of black communities in and around Los Angeles, she brings attention to hardship and community-building that hold these two realities in balance. In an artist talk recorded in 2022, Miller identified herself as a filmmaker and editor of stories through cinematography.[420] This method in curation relinquishes ownership of the testimonies and narratives Miller has combined. Viewers encounter David's physical and personal loss through duration and repetition as each film loops. Aquarius loses himself to Hendrix's persona. In Ndinda's video, a loss of control emanates as her laughter enables itself to spread, multiply, and result in an exhalation. Aquarius, David, and Ndinda share their experiences in linear sentences that loop, fragment, and return to the beginning of their stories.

In its attention to gestures, *The Borrowers* reflects on loss without reproducing spectacles of violence in performance and offers a connection to postmodern dance strategies. Trained in ballet, with which Miller has "a very complicated relationship," Miller comes from a tradition that privileges movement and has made performances that consider

[419] Syms, *S7 E1: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, 21:28.
[420] Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, *Artist Talk: Nicole Miller*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8sGX3J3W4A. 44:05

the interaction between formal dance training and black popular dance forms.[421] Miller finds a utility in "repositioning" previous artistic practices, citing Marcel Duchamp's readymade sculptures as innovations that caused spectators to view objects in a new light.[422] Miller embraces these lineages to revise them in her work. *The Borrowers*, therefore, can also shed light on postmodern dance traditions that turned to task dance in performance. Ordinary action formed an important building block for Judson choreographers in New York in the 1960s.[423] As dance scholars Sally Banes and Noël Carroll articulate, task showed the extraordinary capability of the body to carry out "the engineering 'feats' of everyday existence."[424] *The Borrowers* captures the important uses of task within the context of Black History that demonstrate how ordinary individuals move through loss.

Literary and performance scholar Stephanie Leigh Batiste's analysis of black surrealism in the play *Dreamscape*, which reenacts a murder over and over again, suggests that performance creates spaces for sharing stories that opens possibilities for change.[425] Batiste analyzes spectrums of violence and ordinary life that close in on one another in the performance as "gaps become no longer chasms of absence, longing, and stultification, but rather these spaces between one state and another are forged into spaces of potential."[426] In *The Borrowers,* David's re-telling of his story in silence, his video muted as the audio of

---

[421] Alonso King Lines Ballet, "SFMOMA Screens 'To the Stars,'" *LINESConnected* (blog), September 9, 2020, https://blog.linesballet.org/2020/09/09/to-the-stars/; Anna-Lisa Sherfose, *Nicole Miller: Daggering (Videowalk)*, Videorecording (KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2014), https://vimeo.com/92145992; FILM @ RICE, *Nicole Miller: Fall 2020 Visiting Artist Lecture Series*, 2020, https://vimeo.com/475114218, 32:23. The videowalk tour of Nicole Miller's *Daggering* shows Miller dancing in a ballet studio, which contrasts the film of street dancing opposite of her choreography.
[422] Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, *Artist Talk: Nicole Miller*, 37:38.
[423] Sally Banes and Noël Carroll, "Cunningham, Balanchine, and Postmodern Dance," *Dance Chronicle* 29, no. 1 (2006), 60.
[424] Banes and Carroll, "Cunningham, Balanchine, and Postmodern Dance," 62.
[425] Stephanie Leigh Batiste, "My's Silent Scream: Memory, Traumatic Time, and the Embodiment of the Black Surreal in Rickerby Hinds's Dreamscape," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 117–56.
[426] Batiste, "My's Silent Scream," 140.

Ndinda's laughter or Aquarius's music takes over, activates the power in storytelling with recourse to a community of movements that surround him. Laughter reverberates in Ndinda's video and unexpectedly presents moments of sadness. As the videos loop in silence and with audio, Anthony, David, and Ndinda can be viewed as moving images with and without voices. This strategy allows the audience to consider how this absence alters their perception of each story. A single photograph of the installation might reduce the information contained in *The Borrowers* even further. By replaying each film, Miller extends their duration to share trauma, joy, and music, and allow viewers to see these elements contained in cinematic portraits without audio. Miller states that her work aims to use illusion as a space of experimentation "by making work that people view and take on."[427] If performance presents the conditions in which artists can envision their own realities, it uses creation in an act of recuperation that includes the audience in this mission.

In this dissertation, I have juxtaposed artists that fail to neatly fit into a range of genealogies and disciplines including visual art, performance art, postmodern dance, Black Studies, and Latin American Studies. In crossing the boundaries of these disciplines to unite artists of various racial identities that each contemplate violent events through art—exile, bodily injury, and historical erasure—Ralph Lemon, Ana Mendieta, Alison Saar, and Miller create a web of experimentation. They each investigate different moments in history that, upon closer inspection, bind these artists in a network. Mendieta holds an interest in prehistory, visiting ruins in Oaxaca, Mexico and placing her body in sacred tombs. Lemon's work spans multiple time periods, haunted by lynchings that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States. Saar investigates ordinary life on plantations in the

[427] Artbound Staff, "Nicole Miller: Mirror Images and the Power to Create Reality."

U.S., but displaces time with her references to African deities that arrive to the U.S. through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Miller turns to her local community to showcase stories that might otherwise escape historical documentation.

Task, pastiche, and subterfuge, the formal creative elements carried out by Lemon, Mendieta, Saar, and Miller dismantle a language of longing and nostalgia that have long been wielded as tools of racial oppression. In conversation with one another, these artists explore ways to piece together missing artifacts, ruins, and history. Lemon turns to poetry, theater, dance, writing, and lectures to explore history and memory. Mendieta outlines her silhouette in the earth, the weight of the body altering the topographies of various landscapes. Saar shapes tactile objects into bodies. Miller films gestures to reconfigure fragmented stories. These artists embrace a reconsideration of their methods. They experiment with explicit depictions of bodily injury and then find ways to maintain privacy in the stories they share.

Lemon's dance in front of a high-pressure water hose pushes this process of revision. He graphically cites the violence that occurred against protesters during the Birmingham Campaign by dancing against water and later describes dances from *Come home Charley Patton* as excessive.[428] Writer Rennie McDougall articulates a critical element in Lemon's methods, that "doesn't mind being indelicate," because artistic experimentation requires risks that lead to discovery.[429] Lemon's pursuit, then—to try, fail, and try again—shows that mistakes can and should occur in contemplating and creating art that centers on violent histories. A generosity emerges from an imperfect process in creativity that dares to confront these events. And yet, Lemon holds a skepticism toward the over-politicization of his work,

[428] Ralph Lemon, *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*, Videorecording (Seattle, Washington: On the Board TV, 2010), 14:12-14:32.
[429] Rennie McDougall, "Ralph Lemon on Coming Apart, and Piecing Himself Back Together," *Frieze* (blog), October 23, 2019, https://www.frieze.com/article/ralph-lemon-coming-apart-and-piecing-himself-back-together.

which pushes the audience to see beyond the appearances of his performances.[430] To recognize the limits of performance as an agent for social change combats the optimism that Mendieta, Saar, and Miller hold as they spotlight regeneration.

A view of these artists through dance methodologies reconciles these perspectives on destruction and renewal. Performance theorist André Lepecki describes a "mournful energy behind dance."[431] He continues, "the problem dance puts before writing is of how movement and words can be placed under arrest."[432] Lepecki's analysis of death and movement suggests that dance description in writing carries a political weight. As this project has privileged a deep description of artworks produced by Lemon, Mendieta, Saar, and Miller, it offers one way to view these works. Through a focus on task and materiality, words that arise from a postmodern dance vocabulary, this project avoids a language of loss that relies on brevity that reduces violence to the reproduction of images of injury. It demonstrates the need to think across the boundaries of writing, dance, and racial categories as an organizational framework as suffering occurs in three-dimensions. In consideration of the life-long careers that Lemon, Mendieta, Saar, and Miller embark on as they contemplate violence, they bounce between writing and dance, between forms, and create an immersive space in which an audience can also confront loss.

[430] McDougall, "Ralph Lemon on Coming Apart."
[431] André Lepecki, "Inscribing Dance," in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 129.
[432] Lepecki, "Inscribing Dance," 129.

Bibliography

"2018 Year in Review - LMCC." Accessed April 17, 2021. https://lmcc.net/2018-year-in-review/.

Adams-Johnson, Frankye. "The Black Panther Party Archives of Frankye Adams-Johnson," 2011. https://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/files/2013/03/Adams-Johnson.pdf.

———. Frankye Adams Johnson Oral History Interview conducted by Emilye Crosby. Interview by Emilye Crosby. Video, 01:27:28, December 6, 2015. https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655414/.

Alk, Howard, and Mike Gray. *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. The Film Group, 1971. https://vimeo.com/434141029.

"Alison Saar." Accessed March 11, 2022. https://lalouver.com/artist.cfm?tArtist_id=263.

Alonso King Lines Ballet. "SFMOMA Screens 'To the Stars.'" *LINESConnected* (blog), September 9, 2020. https://blog.linesballet.org/2020/09/09/to-the-stars/.

Alvarado, Leticia. "'…Towards A Personal Will To Continue Being "Other"': Ana Mendieta's Abject Performances." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 65–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569325.2014.994092.

Anderson, Jack. "How the Judson Theater Changed American Dance." *The New York Times*, January 31, 1982, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/1982/01/31/arts/how-the-judson-theater-changed-american-dance.html.

Applegate, Matthew. *Guerrilla Theory: Political Concepts, Critical Digital Humanities*. Northwestern University Press, 2019.

Artbound Staff. “Nicole Miller: Mirror Images and the Power to Create Reality.” KCET, November 16, 2015. https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/nicole-miller-mirror-images-and-the-power-to-create-reality.

Artsy. “Alison Saar: Feallan and Fallow.” Accessed March 11, 2022. https://www.artsy.net/show/madison-square-park-alison-saar-feallan-and-fallow.

Asako Gladjo, Leslie, and Jamila Wignot. *“Black Is Beautiful” and Soul Train*. Video. The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross, PBS, 2013. https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/black-is-beautiful/.

Aschenbrenner, Joyce. “Dunham Technique Seminars.” In *Kaiso!: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, 481–87. University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Austin, Alfredo López. *The Rabbit on the Face of the Moon: Mythology in the Mesoamerican Tradition*. University of Utah Press, 1996.

Austin, Andrew. “Black Panthers.” In *Encyclopedia of Social Deviance*, 65–68. Sage, 2014. http://www.library.yorku.ca/e/resolver/id/2538704.

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. Beacon Press, 2012.

Balfour-Paul, Jenny. *Indigo*. British Museum Press, 1998.

Balleck, Barry J., ed. “De La Beckwith, Byron.” In *Modern American Extremism and Domestic Terrorism: An Encyclopedia of Extremists and Extremist Groups*, 93–94. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX7484900054/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=73e060e3.

Banes, Sally. “Choreographing Community: Dancing in the Kitchen.” *Dance Chronicle* 25, no. 1 (2002): 143–61.

———. “Grand Union.” In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspective Foundation. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0722.

———. “Grand Union: The Presentation of Everyday Life as Dance.” *Dance Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (1978): 43–49. https://doi.org/10.2307/1478002.

———. *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*. Duke University Press, 1993.

———. *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*. Wesleyan University Press, 2011.

———. *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism*. Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

Banes, Sally, and Noël Carroll. “Cunningham, Balanchine, and Postmodern Dance.” *Dance Chronicle* 29, no. 1 (2006): 49–68.

Batiste, Stephanie Leigh. *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance*. Duke University Press, 2011.

———. “My’s Silent Scream: Memory, Traumatic Time, and the Embodiment of the Black Surreal in Rickerby Hinds’s Dreamscape.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 117–56.

BBC News. “In Pictures: The Men Competing for Love in the Deserts of Chad,” February 27, 2017, sec. Africa. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39070587.

Bench, Harmony, and Kate Elswit. “Datasets Are Research.” *Dunham’s Data* (blog), September 5, 2019. https://www.dunhamsdata.org/blog/datasets-are-research.

Benjamin, Medea, Joseph Collins, and Michael Scott. “The Agrarian Revolution.” In *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, Alfredo Prieto, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, Second Edition., 352–59. History, Culture, Politics. Duke University Press, 2019.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

Bennahum, Ninotchka, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson. “Radical Bodies: An Overview.” In *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*, 30–54. University of California Press, 2017.

———. *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*. University of California Press, 2017.

Bennahum, Ninotchka, and Bruce Robertson. “Introduction.” In *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*, 16–29. University of California Press, 2017.

Bernal, Ignacio. *Official Guide of Monte Alban Mitla*. Translated by Pablo Martínez de Rio. Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1962.

Bhabha, Homi. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *October* 28 (1984): 125–33. https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.

Bierhorst, John. *The Mythology of Mexico and Central America*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Black Lives Matter. "About." Accessed June 18, 2021. https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

Black Panther. California Newsreel, 1969. https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/black-panther.

Black, Samuel W. *Soul Soldiers: African Americans and the Vietnam Era*. Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center, 2006.

Blocker, Jane. "Ana Mendieta and the Politics of The Venus Negra." *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 1998): 31–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/095023898335609.

———. *Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*. Duke University Press, 1999.

Bošković, Aleksandar. "The Meaning of Maya Myths." In *Mesoamerican Religions and Archaeology*, 42–54. Essays in Pre-Columbian Civilizations. Archaeopress, 2017. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pzk1t8.17.

Boyer, M. Christine. *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. MIT Press, 1996.

Breder, Hans. "Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal." *Performing Arts Journal* 17, no. 2/3 (1995): 112–20. https://doi.org/10.2307/3245784.

Brooks, Daphne A. "'This Voice Which Is Not One': Amy Winehouse Sings the Ballad of Sonic Blue(s)Face Culture." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20, no. 1 (March 2010): 37–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/07407701003589337.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo." *October* 152 (2015): 26–52.

Burchard, Hank. "Alison Saar's Mis-'Directions'." *Washington Post*, April 9, 1993. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/04/09/alison-saars-mis-directions/08108237-ec0c-4a50-acb0-a2d9448ef028/.

Burke, Siobhan. “Take Me to Church and Let Me Dance.” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/arts/dance/reggie-wilson-dancing-platform-praying-grounds-danspace.html.

Burt, Ramsay. *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces*. Routledge, 2006.

Campbell, Jennifer L. “Ring Shout.” Grove Music Online, October 29, 2019. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-90000363087.

Candelario, Rosemary. *Flowers Cracking Concrete: Eiko & Koma’s Asian/American Choreographies*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2016.

Castro-Sethness, María A. “Frida Kahlo’s Spiritual World: The Influence of Mexican Retablo and Ex-Voto Paintings on Her Art.” *Woman’s Art Journal* 25, no. 2 (2004): 21–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/3566513.

cep10. *Don Campbellock Campbell & Damita Jo Freeman Interview with Don Cornelius*, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoH1VGA9-oE.

Cervantes, Susana Vargas. “Retablos: emociones, afectos y cuerpos en subversión.” *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad*, no. 4 (2010): 18–28.

Chave, Anna C. “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power.” *Arts Magazine*, January 1990.

Cherry, Myisha. “Anger Can Build a Better World.” The Atlantic, August 25, 2020. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/how-anger-can-build-better-world/615625/.

———. *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Chomsky, Aviva, Barry Carr, Alfredo Prieto, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff. *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Duke University Press, 2019.

Colgan, Michael. *Who Was Medgar Evers?* Documentary. Tony Brown Productions, 1982. https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/who-was-medgar-evers.

University of Minnesota Archival Collections Guides. "Collection: Nancy Hauser Dance Company and School Records." Accessed April 30, 2022. https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/9/resources/5343.

Collier-Thomas, Bettye, and V. P. Franklin. *My Soul Is a Witness: A Chronology of the Civil Rights Era, 1954-1965*. Macmillan, 2000.

"Commandos, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Youth Council | March on Milwaukee - Libraries Digital Collection." Accessed September 17, 2021. https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/keyterms/commandos-naacp-youthcouncil/.

Cortés, Noemí Cruz. *Las señoras de la luna*. UNAM, 2005.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (December 7, 2015). https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

Daigle, Megan D. *From Cuba with Love: Sex and Money in the Twenty-First Century*. University of California Press, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520958838-004.

Dallow, Jessica. "The Art of Creating a Legacy." In *Family Legacies: The Art of Betye, Lezley and Alison Saar*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.

Das, Joanna Dee. *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Deren, Maya, Cherel Ito, Teiji Itō, and Inc Mystic Fire Video. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti / Cherel Ito*. Montauk, NY: Mystic Fire Video, 2005.

"Don Campbell's Signature Moves," November 19, 2019. https://campbellock.dance/about-locking/the-campbellock-aka-locking-moves/.

Doss, Erika. "Imaging the Panthers: Representing Black Power and Masculinity, 1960s–1990s." *Prospects* 23 (October 1998): 483–516. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0361233300006438.

Dunbar, Jessie Lafrance. "Where Diaspora Meets Disillusionment: Panther Politics in Castro's Cuba." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 19, no. 3 (2017): 299–319. https://doi.org/10.5325/intelitestud.19.3.0299.

Duncan, Isadora. *My Life*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Dunham, Katherine. *Kaiso!: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*. Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Dunlap, David W. "How Cost of Train Station at World Trade Center Swelled to $4 Billion." *The New York Times*, December 2, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/nyregion/the-4-billion-train-station-at-the-world-trade-center.html.

Dunning, Jennifer. "Katherine Dunham's Mission: Giving Children a Gift of Dance." *The New York Times*, August 19, 1991, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/19/arts/katherine-dunham-s-mission-giving-children-a-gift-of-dance.html.

———. “New Dance Myths Cut from the Everyday.” *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*. May 7, 1991, sec. C.

———. “When Disbanding Is the Only Logical Step.” *The New York Times*, August 6, 1995, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/06/arts/dance-when-disbanding-is-the-only-logical-step.html.

Edwards, Adrienne, and Thomas J. Lax. “Easter Eggs: A Narrative Chronology.” In *Ralph Lemon: Modern Dance*, edited by David Velasco. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2016.

Eliasberg, Kristin. “Race Matters.” The Village Voice, 1999. https://www.villagevoice.com/1999/05/04/race-matters-2/.

English, Darby. *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*. MIT Press, 2010.

FBI. “Medgar Evers.” Folder. Accessed October 22, 2021. https://vault.fbi.gov/Medgar%20Evers.

Fedo, Michael. *The Lynchings in Duluth: Second Edition*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016.

Ferreira, Roquinaldo, and Tatiana Seijas. “The Slave Trade to Latin America: A Historiographical Assessment.” In *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, edited by Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews. Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Feustle, Maristella Johanna. “Disco.” In *The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture*, 738–40. Thousand Oaks,: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2019. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483317731.

FILM @ RICE. *Nicole Miller: Fall 2020 Visiting Artist Lecture Series*, 2020. https://vimeo.com/475114218.

Fisher, Marc. "More Activists, Officials Boycott Civil Rights Event Because of Trump: President's Decision to Attend Opening of Mississippi Museum Leads to Protests and Debates." The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., United States: WP Company LLC, December 8, 2017. http://search.proquest.com/news/docview/1974503920/citation/B387882323C84853PQ/1.

Foley, Michael S. *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Forti, Simone. "Dear Ann: Letters from Forti to Halprin, Fall 1960-Winter 1961." In *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*, edited by Ninotchka Bennahum, Bruce Robertson, and Wendy Perron, 148–57. University of California Press, 2017.

———. Simone Forti with Claudia La Rocco. Interview by Claudia La Rocco, April 2010. Brooklyn Rail. https://brooklynrail.org/2010/04/dance/simone-forti-with-claudia-la-rocco.

Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395–412.

Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood (1967)." In *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, edited by James Meyer, 234–35. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000.

Galerie Lelong. "About." Ana Mendieta Artist. Accessed May 14, 2022. https://www.anamendietaartist.com/about.

Gallagher, Eugene V., and Lydia Willsky-Ciollo. *New Religions: Emerging Faiths and Religious Cultures in the Modern World [2 Volumes]*. Santa Barbara, UNITED STATES: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2021. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsb-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6475179.

García-Ferraz, Nereyda, Kate Horsfield, and Branda Miller. *Ana Mendieta: Fuego De Tierra*. DVD, Documentary, 1987.

George, Nelson. *The Hippest Trip in America*. William Morrow & Co., 2014.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

Gordillo, Gastón R. *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. Greenwood Press, 1996.

———. *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography From Coon to Cool*. Springer, 2016.

Griefen, Kat. "Ana Mendieta at A.I.R. Gallery, 1977–82." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 21, no. 2 (July 2011): 171–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2011.607595.

Harris, Rennie. "Founder." Rennie Harris Pure Movement. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.rhpm.org/founder/.

Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hazzard-Donald, Katrina. "Dance in Hip Hop Culture." In *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, edited by William E. Perkins, 220–35. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

Helgeson, Jeffrey. *Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago's Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington*. *Crucibles of Black Empowerment*. University of Chicago Press, 2014. https://www-degruyter-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/chicago/view/title/560006.

Hendrix, Jimi. *The Jimi Hendrix Experience - Foxey Lady (Live In Maui, 1970)*, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv97c3W6lw8.

Hernández, José M. "Mendieta y Montefur, Carlos (1873–1960)." In *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, edited by Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer, 2nd ed., 4:474–75. Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008. http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3078903559/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=72f79ff8.

Hill, Constance Valis. *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Holzapfel, Amy Strahler. "From Landscape to Climatescape in Contemporary Dance-Theater: Meredith Monk, The Wooster Group, and The Team." In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*, edited by Nadine George-Graves, 401–28. Oxford University Press, 2015.

hooks, bell. *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*. New Press, 1995.

———. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Pluto Press, 2000.

Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton. *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America : From African Roots Through the Civil War*. Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Hunter, Tera W. *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford University Press, 2003.

Hyacinthe, Genevieve. *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic*. MIT Press, 2019.

"I Cannot Be Plagued by This Child Any Longer." Illustration. The New York Public Library, 1897. Archives and Rare Books Division. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-e550-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

Iwaniszewski, Stanislaw. "Time and the Moon in Maya Culture: The Case of Cozumel." In *The Role of Archaeoastronomy in the Maya World: The Case Study of the Island of Cozumel*, 39–55. Mexico: UNESCO, 2016. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244721.

Jackson, Jonathan David. "Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing." *Dance Research Journal*, Social and Popular Dance, 33, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 40–53.

Jackson, Jesse. Jesse Jackson On Soul Train 1981. Interview by Don Cornelius. Film Clip posted by Jamarkus Hall. Accessed April 17, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pt7kD2ednrU.

James, Leon, and Al Minns. "Popular Dances from the Cakewalk to the Watusi." *Ebony*, 1961.

Jeffrey Daniel Performs Boogaloo @ Soul Train, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6McuBTJy4Gk.

John Brown Society. “An Introduction to the Black Panther Party.” Pamphlet. Ann Arbor, MI, 1969. https://asp6new-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/sixt/sixt.object.details.aspx?id=1003403085&view=dualview&objecturl=BEH4.

John Lewis. “Twitter Post.” Tweet. *@repjohnlewis* (blog), December 8, 2017. https://twitter.com/repjohnlewis/status/939155450297274368.

Johnson, Davi. “Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event.” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 1 (2007): 1–25.

Jones, Amelia. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. “2021 Mirror, Mirror: The Prints of Alison Saar.” Washington State University. Accessed March 2, 2022. https://museum.wsu.edu/events/exhibit/2021-mirror-mirror-the-prints-of-alison-saar/.

Joseph, Laura Wertheim. “Filmography.” In *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, edited by Raquel Cecilia Mendieta, 205–57. University of California Press, 2015.

Judd, Donald. “Specific Objects (1965).” In *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, edited by James Meyer, 207–10. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000.

Kaplan, Rachel, and Anna Halprin. *Making Dances That Matter: Resources for Community Creativity*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66074.

Kelland, Lara Leigh. *Clio’s Foot Soldiers: Twentieth-Century U.S. Social Movements and Collective Memory*. Public History in Historical Perspective. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018.

Kennedy, John F. *Excerpt, Report to the American People on Civil Rights*. Radio and Television Report. Columbia Broadcasting System, 1963. https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/TNC/TNC-262-EX/TNC-262-EX.

King, Martin Luther. "'Loving Your Enemies,' Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church." Stanford: The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, February 11, 2015. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church.

———. *The Other America*. Speech delivered at Stanford University in 1967. Stanford: Stanford University Libraries, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYK9xGALPrU.

Kisselgoff, Anna. "Dance Review: Ralph Lemon Troupe Opens Its Final Season." *The New York Times*, October 5, 1995, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/05/arts/dance-review-ralph-lemon-troupe-opens-its-final-season.html.

Kourlas, Gia. "Catch the Vibe: Club Culture Comes to Life at Lincoln Center." *The New York Times*, November 15, 2020, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/15/arts/dance/ephrat-asherie-underscore-works-and-process.html.

Kroll, Bryce. "Sculptor Marsha Pels Talks Shop and Remembers Her Friend Louise Bourgeois." Brooklyn Magazine, January 28, 2021. https://www.bkmag.com/2021/01/28/sculptor-marsha-pels-talks-shop-and-remembers-her-friend-louise-bourgeois/.

LA Louver. “Alison Saar ‘Still...’ at Otis College Ends Sat, Nov. 17.” Tumblr, November 16, 2012. https://blog.lalouver.com/post/35881093754/alison-saar-still-at-otis-college-ends-sat#.YmWbdG7MKqk.

Lambe, Ariel Mae. *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. http://muse.jhu.edu/book/68974.

Lance, Mary. *Blue Alchemy: Stories of Indigo*. Newdeal Films, 2011. https://vimeo.com/ondemand/bluealchemyindigo.

Lehman, Christopher P. *A Critical History of Soul Train on Television*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2008.

———. *Power, Politics, and the Decline of the Civil Rights Movement: A Fragile Coalition, 1967-1973*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014.

Lemon, Ralph. “Circling Around Postmodernism Like Weather.” Artist Talk presented at the Radical Bodies Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, January 27, 2017.

———. *Come Home Charley Patton*. DVD. Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Academy of Music Harvey Theater, 2004.

———. *Come Home Charley Patton*. Wesleyan University Press, 2013.

———. *Geography: Art, Race, Exile*. Wesleyan University Press, 2000.

———. *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* Videorecording. Seattle, Washington: On the Board TV, 2010.

———. "'Program Notes' for How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?" REDCAT, 2010. https://www.redcat.org/sites/redcat.org/files/event/linked-files/2012-07/11.10.10_Lemon.pdf.

———. "Solo." Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive, 1991. https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ralph-lemon/solo/.

———. *Tree: Belief/Culture/Balance*. Wesleyan University Press, 2004.

Lepecki, André. "Inscribing Dance." In *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, 124–39. Wesleyan University Press, 2004.

Library of Congress. "Dunham Technique: 'Yonvalou.'" Accessed June 12, 2022. https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200003869/.

Llorens, David. "Miracle in Milwaukee." *Ebony*, November 1967.

LMCC. "Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Presents the 15th Annual River to River Festival: June 16-26." Program, April 27, 2016. https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2016-R2R.pdf.

———. "Rr16__Chorus-RalphLemon_Oculus_DS_020." Accessed April 9, 2022. https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/rr16__Chorus-RalphLemon_Oculus_DS_020.jpg.

Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Penguin Books Limited, 2018.

Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

Magloire, Marina. “An Ethics of Discomfort: Katherine Dunham’s Vodou Belonging.” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 23, no. 3 (60) (November 1, 2019): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-7912346.

Mangolte, Babette, Joan Jonas, Claire Bishop, Helen Shaw, Herbert Blau, Han Ong, Abigail Child, et al. “Being Contemporary.” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, no. 1 (2012): 43–59.

Marcos Suarez, Miguel de, and Carlos Mendieta y Montefur. “Carlos Mendieta Personalidad, Vida y Hechos, Ideas y Cualidades Caracteristicas de Una Gran Cubano de Quien La Patria Espera Su Salvacion.” Talleres Tipográficos de “El Magazine de la Raza,” 1923. University of Florida Digital Collections. https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/UF00074122/00001/128j.

Marsh, Steve. “The Dance of Ralph Lemon.” Mpls.St.Paul Magazine, January 10, 2021. https://mspmag.com/api/content/5ac64728-2b84-11eb-8e8c-1244d5f7c7c6/.

Marshall, Emily Zobel. *American Trickster: Trauma, Tradition and Brer Rabbit*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Matory, J. Lorand. “Collecting and Exhibiting at the Crossroads: In Honor of Eshu.” *Material Religion* 12, no. 3 (July 27, 2016): 378–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2016.1192156.

McDougall, Rennie. “Ralph Lemon on Coming Apart, and Piecing Himself Back Together.” *Frieze*, October 23, 2019. https://www.frieze.com/article/ralph-lemon-coming-apart-and-piecing-himself-back-together.

McGrew, Rebecca. “Alison Saar’s Radical Art of Sustenance.” In *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe*, 13–40. Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020.

McGrew, Rebecca, and Irene Tsatsos. *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe*. Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020.

McManus Zurko, Kitty, and John M. Barry. *Alison Saar: Breach*. Easton: Lafayette College Art Galleries, 2017.

McMillan, Uri. *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*. NYU Press, 2015.

Mediateca - Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. "Figurilla de Ixchel, con conejo." Accessed May 5, 2022. https://mediateca.inah.gob.mx/islandora_74/islandora/object/objetoprehispanico%3A1337.

Meet the Press, August 21, 1966, Part 1. Accessed October 28, 2021. https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/meet-the-press-august-21-1966-part-1.

Mendieta, Ana. "A Selection of Statements and Notes." *Sulfur* 22 (Spring 1988): 54.

———. Interview with Ana Mendieta conducted by Judith Wilson for "Ana Mendieta Plants Her Garden," Village Voice, 1980 May 27. Interview by Judith Wilson. Audiorecording, May 27, 1980. Smithsonian Archives of American Art. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/interview-ana-mendieta-conducted-judith-wilson-ana-mendieta-plants-her-garden-village-voice-18993.

Meyer, James Sampson. *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. Yale University Press, 2004.

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. *Artist Talk: Nicole Miller*, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8sGX3J3W4A.

Miller, Mary. "Ixchel." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*. Oxford University Press, 2001. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195108156.001.0001/acref-9780195108156-e-300.

Miller, Mary Ellen, and Karl Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. Thames and Hudson, 1997.

Miller, Nicole. *The Borrowers*. Film, 2014.

Mitchell, Francis A. "In Memoriam." *Ebony*, September 1963.

Moeller, Susan D. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. Routledge, 2002.

Monk, Meredith. *Ellis Island*. Videorecording. West Germany: ZDF, 1982. https://browse.nypl.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb12159723__Smeredith%20ellis%20island__P0%2C4__Orightresult__U__X2?lang=eng&suite=def.

———. *Meredith Monk: The Kitchen Summer Institute Public Talks*. DVD. New York, 1999.

Montano, Linda M. "Interview with Ana Mendieta." In *Ana Mendieta: She Got Love*. Italy: Skira, 2013.

Moon Goddess Ixchel Weaving Late Classic Period. Accessed May 5, 2022. https://doi.org/10.2307/artstor.13755038.

Morgan, Jo-Ann. *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture*. University of Missouri Press, 2007.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Murray, Paul T. "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism." *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (1971): 57–76.

Murray, Roderick. *Ralph Lemon Scaffold Room - Performance at The Kitchen (November 3, 2015)*, 2020. https://vimeo.com/433678872.

National Archives. "Civil Rights Act (1964)," October 5, 2021. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act.

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. "Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial." nycgovparks, 2010. https://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/historical-signs/listings?id=19666.

Nicholas Brothers Official Videos. *Nicholas Brothers with Bob Hope in Vietnam Filmed in 1965*. Accessed July 10, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNEG_wLis2E.

"Nightclubs and Other Venues." In *Grove Music Online*, 2003. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000330000#omo-9781561592630-e-2000330000.

Nossiter, Adam. *Of Long Memory: Mississippi And The Murder Of Medgar Evers*. Hachette Books, 2009.

NPR. "How 'Soul Train' Shaped A Generation," April 3, 2014, sec. Author Interviews. https://www.npr.org/2014/04/03/298736685/how-soul-train-shaped-a-generation.

Obama, Barack. *A Promised Land*. Crown Publishing Group (NY), 2020.

Obrecht, Jas. *Stone Free: Jimi Hendrix in London, September 1966–June 1967*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018. http://muse.jhu.edu/book/62333.

Oransky, Howard. “Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta.” In *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, 168–81. University of California Press, 2015.

Oransky, Howard, and Laura Wertheim Joseph. *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*. Univ of California Press, 2015.

Otero, Solimar, and Toyin Falola. *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*. SUNY Press, 2013.

Paz, Octavio. *El laberinto de la soledad*. Edited by Anthony Stanton. Manchester University Press, 2008.

———. *The Labyrinth of Solitude; The Other Mexico; Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude; Mexico and the United States; The Philanthropic Ogre*. Translated by Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Phillips Belash. Grove Press, 1985.

PBS. “African-Americans In Combat.” Accessed June 25, 2021. https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/african-americans-in-combat/.

Peace, Togetherness, and Sammy. Reel America, 1972. https://www.c-span.org/video/?509077-1/peace-togetherness-sammy.

Pels, Marsha. “Ana Mendieta Was a Rare, Visionary...” *Sulfur*, no. 22 (1988): 84–88.

Perron, Wendy. “DANCE; The Face Can Say As Much as the Legs.” *The New York Times*, January 13, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/13/arts/dance-the-face-can-say-as-much-as-the-legs.html.

———. “Simone Forti: Bodynatureartmovementbody.” In *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*,

edited by Ninotchka Bennahum, Bruce Robertson, and Wendy Perron. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

———. "The Halprin-Forti-Rainer Postmodern Sweep." *Wendy Perron* (blog), February 9, 2017. https://wendyperron.com/the-halprin-forti-rainer-sweep-of-postmodern-dance/.

———. *Through the Eyes of a Dancer: Selected Writings*. Wesleyan University Press, 2013.

Pool, Bob. "Out There; He's Quite the Plug-in for Hendrix; Anthony Aquarius Has the '60s Guitar Legend Wired -- the Hair, the Clothes, the Right-Hand Ax Held Upside Down." *Los Angeles Times*. May 26, 2009, sec. Main News; Part A; Metro Desk.

Profeta, Katherine. *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2015.

Pugh, Megan. *America Dancing: From the Cakewalk to the Moonwalk*. Yale University Press, 2015.

Rainer, Yvonne. "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A [1968]." In *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, edited by James Meyer, 234–35. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000.

Rainer, Yvonne, and Ann Halprin. "Yvonne Rainer Interviews Ann Halprin." *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 142–67. https://doi.org/10.2307/1125241.

Ralph, Laurence. ""Love, Peace, and Soul"." *Transition*, no. 108 (2012): 19. https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.108.19.

Rees, William D. J. “Future Nostalgia? 21st Century Disco.” *Dancecult* 13, no. 1 (December 14, 2021): 36–53. https://doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2021.13.01.03.

Reynoso, Jose L. “Democracy’s Body, Neoliberalism’s Body: The Ambivalent Search for Egalitarianism Within the Contemporary Post/Modern Dance Tradition.” *Dance Research Journal* 51, no. 1 (2019): 47–65.

Roberts, Allison. “Alison Saar Swings Low in Harlem: The Harriet Tubman Memorial.” Accessed March 11, 2022. https://persimmontree.org/spring-2017/alison-saar-swings-low-in-harlem-the-harriet-tubman-memorial/.

Robertson, Bruce. “Dance Is Hard to See: Yvonne Rainer and the Visual Arts.” In *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972*, 120–47. University of California Press, 2017.

Rodríguez López, Ivan. “Antillean Islander Space: On the Religious Beliefs and Representations of the Taíno People.” *Journal of Religious History* 40, no. 4 (December 2016): 453–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12329.

Rolling Stone. “12 Mind-Blowing ‘Soul Train’ Performances,” February 5, 2014. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/12-mind-blowing-soul-train-performances-11385/.

Rosenberg, Susan. *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art*. Wesleyan University Press, 2016.

Ross, Janice. *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*. University of California Press, 2007.

———. “Anna Halprin’s Urban Rituals.” *TDR (1988-)* 48, no. 2 (2004): 49–67.

Roulet, Laura. “Ana Mendieta: A Life in Context.” In *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 224–39. Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004.

———. “Ana Mendieta as Cultural Connector with Cuba.” *American Art* 26, no. 2 (June 2012): 21–27. https://doi.org/10.1086/667947.

Rush, Michael. “Eros, Death, and Life: The Films of Ana Mendieta.” In *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, edited by Howard Oransky, 16–23. University of California Press, 2015.

Saar, Alison. “The Thread That Leads to the Word.” Southern California Institute of Architecture, October 20, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHbA9jRHUc8.

Saar, Alison, and Irene Tsatsos. “Between What We See.” In *Alison Saar: Of Aether and Earthe*, 69–90. Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, 2020.

Saar, Betye. “Influences: Betye Saar.” *Frieze*, September 27, 2016. https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar.

Saar-Cavanaugh, Tracye. “A Family Business.” In *Family Legacies: The Art of Betye, Lezley and Alison Saar*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. *Nicole Miller: To the Stars*, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwF1Pu2h9ls.

Sante, Luc. “Land of a Thousand Dances.” *Eakins Press Foundation*, Dance Index, 11, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 28.

Sayej, Nadja. “Betye Saar: The Artist Who Helped Spark the Black Women’s Movement.” *The Guardian*, October 30, 2018, sec. Art and design. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/30/betye-saar-art-exhibit-racism-new-york-historical-society.

Schuetz-Miller, Mardith K. “Spider Grandmother and Other Avatars of the Moon Goddess in New World Sacred Architecture.” *Journal of the Southwest* 54, no. 2 (2012): 283–435.

Schur, Richard. “Haunt or Home? Ethos and African American Literature.” *Humanities* 7, no. 3 (September 2018): 80. https://doi.org/10.3390/h7030080.

Schur, Richard L. “Defining Hip-Hop Aesthetics.” In *Parodies of Ownership*, 42–67. University of Michigan Press. Accessed August 8, 2020. https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/3405.

SFMOMA. “Nicole Miller.” SFMOMA. Accessed June 6, 2022. https://www.sfmoma.org/artist/nicole-miller/.

“She Began to Sob Vehemently.” Illustration. The New York Public Library, 1897. Archives and Rare Books Division. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-e550-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

Sheravanichkul, Arthid. “Self-Sacrifice of the Bodhisatta in the Paññāsa Jātaka.” *Religion Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008): 769–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00095.x.

Sherfose, Anna-Lisa. *Nicole Miller: Daggering (Videowalk)*. Videorecording. KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2014. https://vimeo.com/92145992.

Shnookal, Deborah. *Operation Pedro Pan and the Exodus of Cuba’s Children*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020. http://muse.jhu.edu/book/76630.

Slavery by Another Name: The Creation of the NAACP. Accessed November 1, 2021. https://www.pbs.org/video/slavery-another-name-creation-naacp/.

Slotnik, Daniel E. “Don Campbell, Hip-Hop Dance Innovator, Is Dead at 69.” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/23/arts/dance/don-campbell-dead.html?smid=em-share.

Smith, Bradley. *Mexico: A History in Art*. Harper & Row, 1968.

Soul Train Scramble Board [Leslie & Chris] Cameo - Word Up (Soul Train 1986), 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWPxmT-Rvtw.

The Library of Congress. “Special Presentation: Katherine Dunham Timeline.” Database, July 30, 2013. https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/dunham/dunham-timeline.html.

Spillers, Hortense J. “Imaginative Encounters.” In *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction’s Newest New-Wave Trajectory*, edited by Marleen S. Barr, 3–5. Ohio State University Press, 2008.

———. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.

Spivey, Virginia B. “The Minimal Presence of Simone Forti.” *Woman’s Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 11–18.

Šprajc, Ivan. “Archaeological Sites on the Island of Cozumel: The Role of Astronomy in Architectural and Urban Planning.” In *The Role of Archaeoastronomy in the Maya World: The Case Study of the Island of Cozumel*, 58–83. Mexico: UNESCO, 2016. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244721.

Stedelijk Museum. “Chorus: Soul Train as Music Theatre Experience.” Accessed April 17, 2021. https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/events/chorus-2.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Applewood Books, 2001.

Studio Libeskind. “Daniel Libeskind.” Accessed May 29, 2020. https://libeskind.com/people/daniel-libeskind/.

Syms, Martine. *S7 E1: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otUJvQhCjJ0.

Szetela, Adam. “Black Lives Matter at Five: Limits and Possibilities.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 8 (June 20, 2020): 1358–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1638955.

Taladoire, Eric. “¿En la olla o en la Luna? El conejo entre los mexicas.” *Anales de Antropología* 52, no. 2 (September 24, 2018): 95–109.

Terra Luna Films. *Ana Mendieta Au Jeu de Paume*, 2018. https://vimeo.com/301884218.

The Guggenheim Museum and Foundation. “Collection Online: Ana Mendieta.” Accessed January 6, 2022. https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/ana-mendieta.

The High Line. “Simone Forti Huddle Performance on the High Line.” Accessed October 25, 2021. https://www.thehighline.org/videos/high-line-art/simone-forti-huddle-performance-on-the-high-line/.

The Kitchen. “The Kitchen: About.” Accessed June 22, 2021. https://thekitchen.org/about.

Thompson, Katrina Dyonne. *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery*. University of Illinois Press, 2014.

Thompson, Robert Farris. “An Aesthetic of the Cool.” *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 41–91. https://doi.org/10.2307/3334749.

———. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. Vintage Books, 1984.

"Topsy." Illustration. The New York Public Library, 1897. Archives and Rare Books Division. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-e550-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

Ultan, Deborah K. "From the Personal to the Transpersonal: Self Reclamation Through Ritual-in-Performance." *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 20, no. 2 (2001): 30–36.

Van Tuyl, Laura. "Dance That Is Never 'Finished': For Choreographer Ralph Lemon, Modern Dance Remains an Open and Abstract Medium." *The Christian Science Monitor*. September 3, 1991, sec. The Arts.

Vélez, María Teresa. *Drumming for the Gods: The Life and Times of Felipe García Villamil, Santero, Palero, and Abakuá*. Temple University Press, 2000.

Viso, Olga M. "The Memory of History." In *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985*, 35–136. Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004.

Viso, Olga M., Ana Mendieta, Guy Brett, Julia P. Herzberg, Chrissie Iles, Laura Roulet, Des Moines Art Center, and Miami Art Museum. *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body : Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985*. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 2004.

Wagstaff, Samuel J. "Paintings to Think About (1964)." In *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, edited by James Meyer, 202–3. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000.

Walker, Alice. "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" The American Scholar, 1967. https://theamericanscholar.org/the-civil-rights-movement-what-good-was-it/.

Walker-McWilliams, Marcia. *Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality*. University of Illinois Press, 2016.

White, Conrad. “NAACP.” https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/naacp-2. WGBH Boston, March 27, 1975.

Whitney Museum of American Art. “Skin/Deep.” Whitney Museum of American Art. Accessed March 2, 2022. https://whitney.org/collection/works/8362.

Whittaker, Jason. *Tech Giants, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of Journalism*. Routledge, 2019.

Willis, Tara Aisha. “Introduction.” In *Relations: Bebe Miller, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Ralph Lemon (Program Notes)*, 1–5. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2018. https://media.mcachicago.org/pdf/JRMMZDHT/ishmael-houston-jones.pdf?_ga=2.153419448.109467201.1653609687-399315567.1653609687.

Wilson, Judith. “Down to the Crossroads: The Art of Alison Saar.” In *Secrets, Dialogues, Revelations: The Art of Betye and Alison Saar*, edited by Elizabeth Shepherd, 31–46. Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1990.

———. “Down to The Crossroads: The Art of Alison Saar.” *Callaloo* 14, no. 1 (1991): 107–23. https://doi.org/10.2307/2931444.

Winberry, John J. “Indigo in South Carolina: A Historical Geography.” *Southeastern Geographer* 19, no. 2 (1979): 91–102.

Winter Institute. *Frankye Adams-Johnson*, 2013. https://vimeo.com/70746152.

Winter, Marcus. “Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Alban.” *Ancient Mesoamerica* 22, no. 2 (2011): 393–409.