



Write Your Future

collected essays from 2021-2022

PEPATIÁN: Bronx Arts Collaborative
NEW YORK





Write Your Future



Write Your Future, the literary companion piece to Dancing Futures: Artist & Mentor Collaborative Residency, offers emerging dance artists additional creative documentation and shines a spotlight on The Bronx as a creative incubator of new work.

Write Your Future

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“Dancing Futures” *Editor’s Note by Makeda Thomas* *August 2022*

“We’re Getting Closer”, opens the epigraph of “offerings through the portal” by Bhumi B Patel, on Alexander Diaz’s work of the same title. Thoughts on intimacy, relationship, and the space between selves - living and ancestral - also move through Benedict Nguyễn and Ninoska M’bewe Escobar’s essays for Pepatián’s Dancing Futures: Artist & Mentor Collaborative Residency 2021 (8th annual) presented in partnership with BAAD!. The artists whose work the writers engage - Alexander Diaz, Oluwadamilare (Dare) Ayorinde, and Rebecca Gual, respectively - center the multiplicities of their selves, and the realities of making work in a pandemic with a generosity that accounts for the depth of meanings in their processes. The phases of the moon, Yoruba culture, and questions of decolonial ‘gestures’ and what it means to work through grief, exhaustion and transformation are all cited.

When Ninoska M’bewe Escobar (University of New Mexico) writes of the “connective tissue between the superlunary and women’s earth-reality”, it is both a question and writing back of “what it means to seek/create pleasure during the time of a pandemic, or in Black women’s everyday lives.” Rebecca Gual’s duet, “Hum in the Hollow” is performed with lifelong friend, dancer Morgan Bryant. Escobar cites Gual and Bryant’s relationship to one other - as performers and as friends; together and apart - as a “performance genealogy”, rich with Gual’s Afro-Caribbean and Bryant’s American southern cultural roots. As with the moments of transformation Gual pushes towards with “Hum in the Hollow,” Escobar’s writing makes space “for a movement language that will exist.”

This kind of inscription of the performances into the writing are “offerings through the portal”, as Patel writes. Benedict Nguyễn’s “Images and Intimacy: On three new works by Oluwadamilare (Dare) Ayorinde” offers a way through a triptych of new films: “Patient not serene”, “Sopaccush”, and “ND@Tilden”. With no formal background in film or video, Dare’s process of “making mistakes” transforms into an organic aesthetic of choreographic layering, juxtaposition and repetition of images. How much can someone see someone else? How much can we see of ourselves? What does it mean to “dance together” via the

screen? It is apt that these questions are asked via the mediated screen, as much of the work of the artists was considered by the writers through conversations via the screen (as attending performances, showings, and in-person talks were limited due to the pandemic), as our most intimate moments through the pandemic - the passing of a loved one, the wedding of another, seeing a dear friend - were mitigated by the screen. Yet in many dynamic and unexpected ways these circumstances are what made us closer - to one another, to ourselves, to our future.

BENEDICT NGUYỄN

How is closeness and understanding created between people?

NINOSKA M'BEWE ESCOBAR

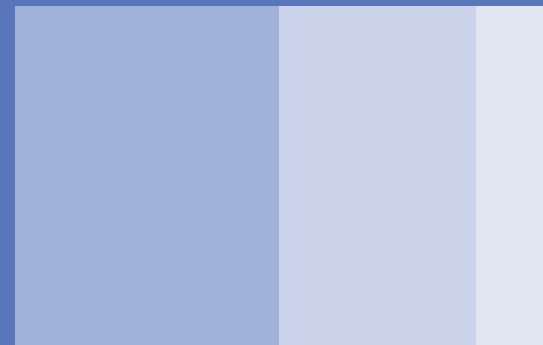
Postures that suggest historical epochs, repositioning and self-questioning.

BHUMI PATEL

Maybe we're all just time travellers moving through time and space, bundled together past present future selves reaching out to find home.

Forward Ever.

*“Dancing Futures”
Editor’s Note by Makeda Thomas
August 2022*



“for a movement language that will exist”

By Ninoska M'bewe Escobar
dance artist: Rebecca Gual



On May 13, 2022, the night of the *Hum in the Hollow* (hereafter *Hum*) premiere, the moon was “waxing gibbous” - its light large and luminous while making way to its next phase, Full Flower Moon. This would be a “supermoon,” described by the Old Farmer’s Almanac as a full moon that appears larger and is closer to Earth than normally.¹ Folkloric knowledge of moons and their phases attributes particular connection to women’s psyche; starting April 30th, the influence of moon energy would have been exerting a powerful sense of urgency for being grounded and of longing for pleasure. These states of being, elusive or absent for many since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, frame the approach taken by Rebecca Gual as she developed *Hum* in collaboration with dancer Morgan Bryant. Gual and Bryant have known each other since childhood, which renders the work biographical and therapeutic. *Hum* situates Gual and Bryant in an otherworld illuminated by numerous sculptural moons where movement functions as connective tissue between the superlunary and women’s earth-reality.

What does it mean to work through grief, exhaustion and transformation as aesthetics of dancemaking?² Gual’s work on *Hum* in part responds to the pandemic’s negative impact on her body and health, to what she witnessed as the number of dead rose like sky-scraped ghosts, and the toll she experienced as she labored outside of dance in order to survive financially. Her “Dancing Futures” residency at BAAD! imagined creating dance works in/with various media, able to live on past its presentation on a proscenium stage, and that need not be made for or presented as concert dance. Though Gual resists being packaged as a “product” - she questions the necessity of a “show” that follows the end of a creative period - she nonetheless appreciates the presence of an audience to respond to. A/In seeking after pleasure that is philosophical as well as sensual, Gual’s dance work is an offering made so that others can connect with her.³

Gual’s choreographic aesthetics is shaped by salsa, dancehall, and wining up transmitted

1 See [A Jewel on the Flower Moon](#) for discussion and definition of the moon’s phases.

2 In conversations with Gual as she rehearsed for the May premiere, I sought to learn what matters to her. I wanted to know how Gual defines herself as a dancemaker, whether her work process was guided by a particular theme, vision, or problem, what dancemaking offers that can’t be had in another way or form, who Gual makes dances for and why, what questions she asks before and after rehearsals, and what her goals were for the May concert.

3 Rebecca Gual, telephone interview, 8 April 2022.

by elders and ancestors of her Dominican-Jamaican-Puerto Rican heritage, to which she brings her training in Euro-American forms.⁴ She cites twentieth century Black dance pioneers Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, significant for their social activism and development of research-to-performance methodologies.⁵ For Gual, Dunham and Primus were “scholars and movers who looked towards community and from aesthetics and cultural knowing.” Their example reminds Gual of the “...importance to always shine a light on those that came before us...through teaching and codifying, making it ingrained in what we know about learning dance and learning movement, always understanding who it’s coming from...”⁶ Gual dances “to express what words cannot, to access her body and connection to ancestors”; while in previous efforts Gual considered her dance making selfishly self-focused, *Hum* represents an attempt to uncover “inherent value in doing this

4 For discussion of methodologies, researching self and others, and perspectives on subjects of cultural analyses see Daniel, Yvonne. “Dance Ethnography.” *The Bloomsbury Companion to Dance Studies*, edited by Sherril Dodds, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, pp. 245–74 and Sklar, Deidre. “On Dance Ethnography.” *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, Apr. 1991, pp. 6–10.

5 Both Dunham and Primus were influenced by the anthropology of the Black diaspora, producing innovative and influential movement vocabularies and techniques of performance that inspired identity and agency. Their practices and contributions are important in understanding the choreographic aesthetics of later dance artists such as Donald McKayle, Alvin Ailey, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and others who followed them. See Clark, VêVê. “Performing the Memory of Difference in Afro-Caribbean Dance: Katherine Dunham’s Choreography, 1938-1987.” *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, edited by Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 188–204; Schwartz, Peggy, and Murray Schwartz. *The Dance Claimed Me: A Biography of Pearl Primus*. Yale University Press, 2011.

6 Rebecca Gual, telephone interview, 24 February 2022.



(c) Marisol Diaz-Gordon, 2022

work, not just poking at a scab, but that is transformative at the end.”⁷

Originally, Gual intended *Hum* to be performed outdoors on the grounds of the cemetery adjacent to the Gothic Revival building that houses the BAAD! performance space. Gual felt “called” to the cemetery site and believed there was “a particular energy there informing the work...”⁸ This impulse correlates with Gual’s emphasis on what she calls “living memory,” in which her artistic process engages her personal history and memory as she looks back into her creative archive. Combined with Gual’s pursuit of reinvention/transformation and use of the duet form, this “living memory” potentially yields a performance genealogy that promotes the durability and endurance of performance work beyond its presumed ephemerality.⁹ In this case, Gual pulled on choreographic material she began to develop in late 2019 and early 2020. That work involved a trio, rather than a duet, but according to Gual, “delves into a similar process and questions regarding what it means to be exhausted and how to perform that,” which then informed the deeper conversations Gual had with Bryant as they developed the work over the next two years, especially questions about “grief and atrophy of the limbs...and how that affects presence and perspective in the moment.”¹⁰

Though *Hum* ultimately premiered in BAAD!’s indoor performance space,¹¹ Gual’s sensitivity to the metaphysical potential of the cemetery reflects a dance aesthetics attuned to ancestral worlds of knowledge.¹² Gual’s sense of vulnerability and risk as she de-emphasized the codified techniques of her formal dance training involved an experimental and layered approach to generating movement and the world of *Hum*. Gual sought to re-create her sense of the cemetery vibration for her indoor performance setting, working with her set designer to include found objects – stones, rocks, dirt, clay - and fabricated soft sculptures resembling moon-like orbs of light that were dispersed in the performance space as well as suspended from the ceiling.

Gual framed her weekly rehearsal process as preparation “for the movement language that will exist,” in which conversation, moving meditation and movement text inspired by breathing patterns were central. Interestingly, in Yoruba culture breath and breathing, or *emi*, is an essential component of the human spirit, and Gual’s process reflects a concern and humanity for herself, Bryant and others in the space of the rehearsal room. Her use of greetings and verbal check-ins at the start of rehearsals allowed them “to bring optimism into the room,”¹³ followed by moving meditation that involved improvisation, and move-

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 According to performance scholar Joseph Roach, performance genealogies “document—and suspect—the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations” and “excavate the past that is necessary to account for how we got here and the past that is useful for conceiving alternatives to our present condition.” See *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. Columbia University Press, 1996. (25)

10 Rebecca Gual, telephone interview, 8 April 2022.

11 Gual was excited to present *Hum in the Hollow* in BAAD!’s adjacent cemetery space. The previous spring, outdoor stages had been set up there for BAAD! performances. However, necessary grounds maintenance made the cemetery unavailable for Gual’s May 2022 premiere.

12 See Sklar, Deidre. “Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance” in *Dils, Ann, and Ann Cooper Albright. Moving History / Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*. Wesleyan University Press, 2001. This essay argues for the necessity of a wide lens in understanding and analyzing dance in its cultural contexts.

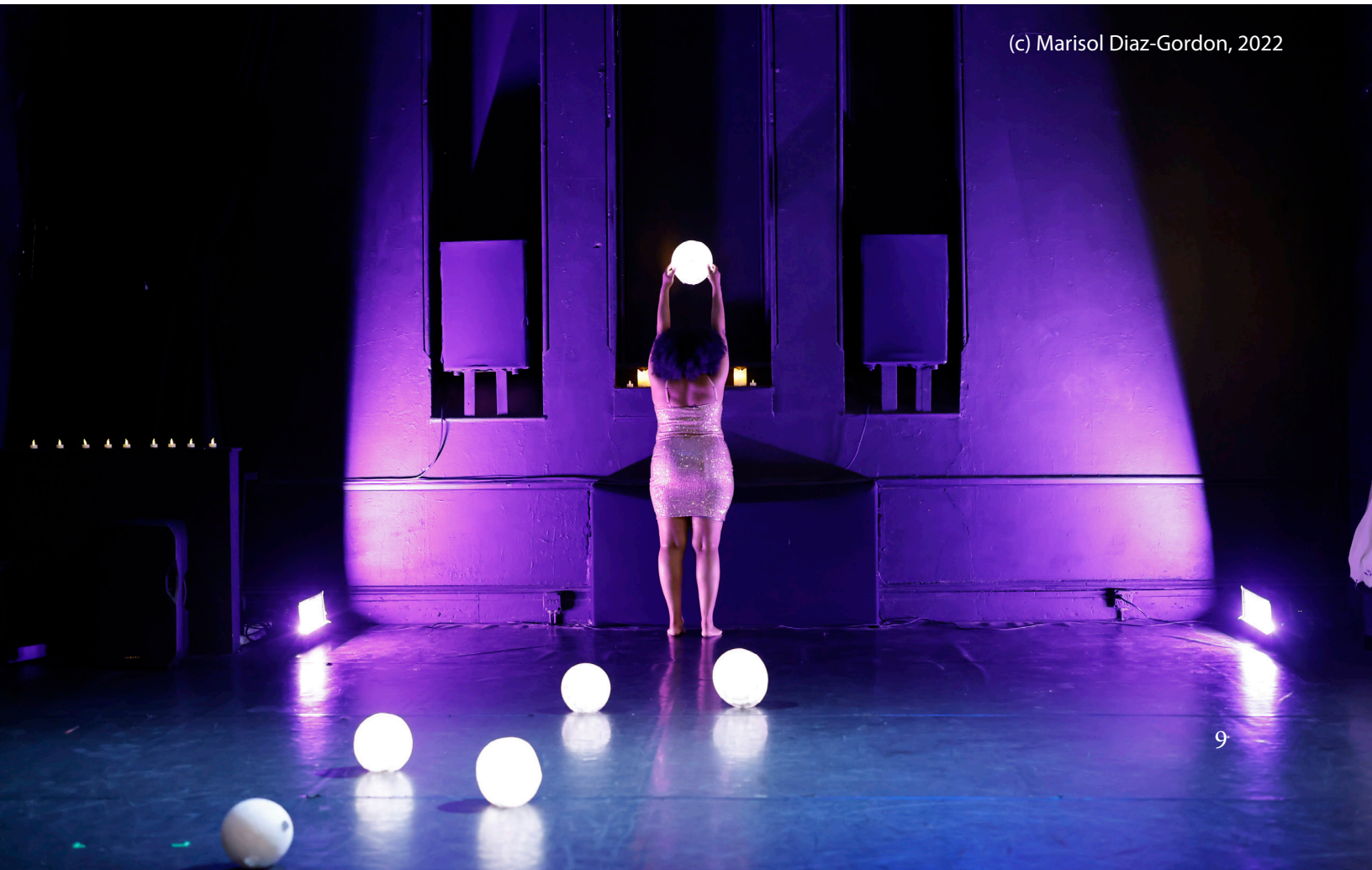
13 Ibid.

ment invention incorporating Gual's archive, new movement material, prompts related to grief, and weekly tasks.

Gual's use of breathing techniques evokes neo-Yoruba culture and arts in the Black diaspora and BIPOC healing practices influenced by Yoruba spirituality. In Yoruba culture ancestors are venerated and involved in daily life - dead but not gone, gone but not forgotten. The people are closely bonded to their divinities, or orisas, who direct them on how to live and grow in balance as individuals and community. The orisa goddess Oya, in particular, holds special relevance to women.¹⁴ She is a protector of women and master of masquerade, her element is the wind, and her fierceness and confidence so great that she is comfortable everywhere, including the realm of the dead. Significantly, this orisa ignites radical change and transformation. In this context, the "call" of the cemetery, sumptuous billowing of the draped windows to evoke "something coming from outside into the performance space,"¹⁵ and the dancers' intermittent private whispers to the illuminated sculptural moons on the floor and suspended above it all suggest an Oya-like influence on *Hum*.

14 For interpretive analyses of the *orisas* and Oya in the Black world see Asante, Molefi Kete, and Ama Mazama. *Encyclopedia of African Religion*. 1st ed., SAGE Publications, Incorporated, 2008; Daniel, Yvonne. *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé*. University of Illinois Press, 20005; Gleason, J. Oya in the Company of Saints. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, [s. l.], v. 68, n. 2, p. 265, 2000.

15 Rebecca Gual, telephone interview, 8 April 2022.



(c) Marisol Diaz-Gordon, 2022

At thirty-two minutes in length, *Hum* unfolds through several sections marked by the on and off (but mostly on) accompaniment of the electronic/percussive soundtrack and shifting registers of intensity. *Hum*'s audience was situated in a semi-circle on the same level as the performers.

The duet is structured in roughly five sections: the first and fourth sections, which feature both dancers, bracket the second and third shorter solo sections. Dressed in form-fitting attire, Gual appeared in silvery metallic-colored shorts and long-sleeved top, her hair sporting three grand pompadour sections, while Bryant wore lavender-colored shorts and sleeveless top with hair styled in short twists. Gual and Bryant move nearly continuously together in the same space, but their relationship signifies both separate and interdependent experience, motivation and attention: they are themselves and each other. The final section is pivotal and the only section in which the dancers touch each other. Standing behind Gual, Bryant extends her arms under Gual's and grasps her shoulders intimately; they move closely together, steps defined by bent knees and the rhythmic movement of the hips as they step front-step back, step front-step back, step side-step center, step side-step center. When Gual suddenly collapses forward, she balances Bryant on her back. When Bryant lifts her up, she again grasps Gual from behind. Somewhat indifferently, they move together in place, just hips, from side to side before Gual begins to pull away.

(c) Marisol Diaz-Gordon, 2022



The encounter ends when Gual descends to the floor and Bryant looks down on her with resignation.

What does it mean to seek/create pleasure during the time of a pandemic, or in Black women's everyday lives? The movement vocabulary in *Hum* draws on the dancers' diverse dance training in service to a ritualistic exploration of grief, exhaustion and transformation, fortified by "those deep modes, emotion, and experiences"¹⁶ of Gual's Afro-Caribbean and Bryant's American southern cultural backgrounds. Gual's seeking after pleasure comes through transformation and makes *Hum* a container and a witness to this process: there is [a deliberate, mirroring] slowness of the work. Gual and Bryant's sculptural, expansive, inventive, undulatory, weighted moments of stillness are luxurious and seemingly effortless, despite the nearly continuous movement in *Hum*.¹⁷ Here, there is time to consider intention and meaning. As I watched the dancers, I noticed the sound of the buzz-drone-hum – intermittently subtle, soothing or jarring - does not distract; rather, it serves to anchor the viewer's attention to the scope of the choreography – in which the dancers' passage and pivots through the space, the postures that suggest historical epochs, repositioning and self-questioning, and the geometry of the work reinforces a sense of purpose and solidity in Gual and Bryant's relationship to each other and the experience they have in the space, both together and apart.

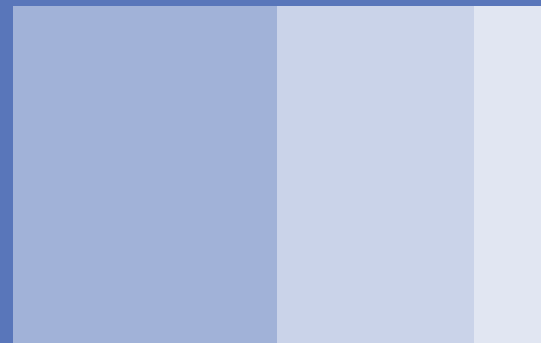
Ninoska M'bewe Escobar
University of New Mexico
June 2022

16 Rebecca Gual, telephone interview, 24 February 2022.

17 See Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. 1st ed., Random House, 1983 for discussion of the Yoruba aesthetic of the "cool."

"for a movement language that will exist"

By Ninoska M'bewe Escobar
dance artist: Rebecca Gual



Images and Intimacy: On three new works by Oluwadamilare (Dare) Ayorinde

*By Benedict Nguyễn
dance artist: Dare Ayorinde*



Oluwadamilare (Dare) Ayorinde's been contemplating the nature of intimacy and honestly, who hasn't? Of the many pandemic re-orientations and undoings I've been tending to, the mediations of intimacy and the plurality of forms has seeped into every dimension of my life. From the personal to the professional, how is closeness and understanding created between people? What level of autonomy do people have over it? How much can someone see someone else?

In a triptych of new films presented at BAAD! February 2022, Dare presents different iterations to the question. Of course, they're about more than intimacy in the abstract. As my relationship to writing about artists' work has deepened, the more I resist saying anything is about anything. "Patient not serene" depicts uneven fields and train platforms, flashes of neon pink and green between a hazy orange filter. "Sopaccush" shows layers of windows and mirrors placed atop each other, an image replicating and kaleidoscoping through narrow gaps. Finally "ND@Tilden" uses a similar editing to suggest a duet at the beach against a buttery gray sky and the muted echoey trumpet of Natsuki Tamura.

In addition to listening to Dare's talk with Alicia Raquel Morales, I also met with him on zoom in March 2021. His thoughts on film editing, rhythm, and color inform this essay. I think of the first conversations I've had with people since the pandemic started, how it takes a few more awkward conversational dances before settling into an old rhythm. Of course, it's a new rhythm and I'm more sensitive, more attuned to different microdynamics than I was before.

At this stage of the pandemic, the screen is one of the last places I look for intimacy. FaceTimes long ago became phone calls and I don't know how to tweet anymore. And yet, experience these new works was prompting questions of closeness, even before hearing Dare talk about it.

I often joke about Instagram being my 11th favorite application. Don't ask me what 1 through 10 are, I have no idea. As I'm writing this essay, I'm in a phase

where my little dabbles on it feel innocent and wholesome enough. I'm entertained by my friends' photos, I don't click on very many stories, and I move on.

The feed scrolls like so many oblique windows into strangers' lives. It allows users to feel like they know something about the object behind the glass, enabling voyeurism and exhibitionism in equal measure.

A middle section of "Sopaccush" brought up these reflections through a more physical orientation. The camera is placed between two narrow wooden posts. In front of a mound of snow, Dare bounces slowly, his arms raised still and then waving. The viewer perceives Dare not just at a distance but through a window. And then the mound of snow becomes a window, its outline framing a translucent curtain, filmed in grainy black and white. Behind that image, light streams forward, revealing a close up of a face. Later in the work, the hazy black and white becomes a video of a gently rumbling ocean—a site where so many have pondered the unknowable.

As "Sopaccush" adds and removes layers below and atop one another, the abruptness of these edits become the choreography. At one point, another sepia-toned filter adorns a screen recording of video footage being edited in iMovie. The metacinematic choice draws my attention to my own viewing, to the artist's labor of compiling so many pixels to portray the right combinations of pixels to form the moving images intended for viewing.

Despite all of the separate source materials and their potentials for obfuscation,



film felt in some ways riskier and more vulnerable than performance. While live performance lends itself to happenstance, to the errant humanness of being in physical space whether as a performer and/or spectator, all choices seem more permanent, more deliberate in mp4. It's hard to view a such an intricately edited video file, even one that may have been informed by improvisational chance, and not feel that the version presented to us wasn't predetermined before it arrived at our sensory fields.

Before the pandemic, Dare had never worked with video and has no formal background in film. "Patient not serene" was a first experiment in the medium to tell a story separate from live, physical movement. For that he recalls borrowing a friend's camera to learn more. Then, as he describes, "[Sopaccush] moved away into something else."

But in the early experiments of "Patient not serene," discoveries came from exploration and play in iMovie. He had collaborated with a professional as a sample but found the result too neat, too perfect. As in Legacy Russell's concept of glitch feminism, it was in the process of making mistakes that Dare uncovered aesthetic inclinations within the interface, techniques uncovered organically within the pre-determined setting. In laminating layer after layer, an accidental export (that smushes them into one discrete file) made him realize he had to keep track of his process.

While "Sopaccush" features the most layers of the triptych, "Patient not serene" is perhaps the luminous. Sometimes superlatives make for useful distinctions.



Video still, courtesy of the artist

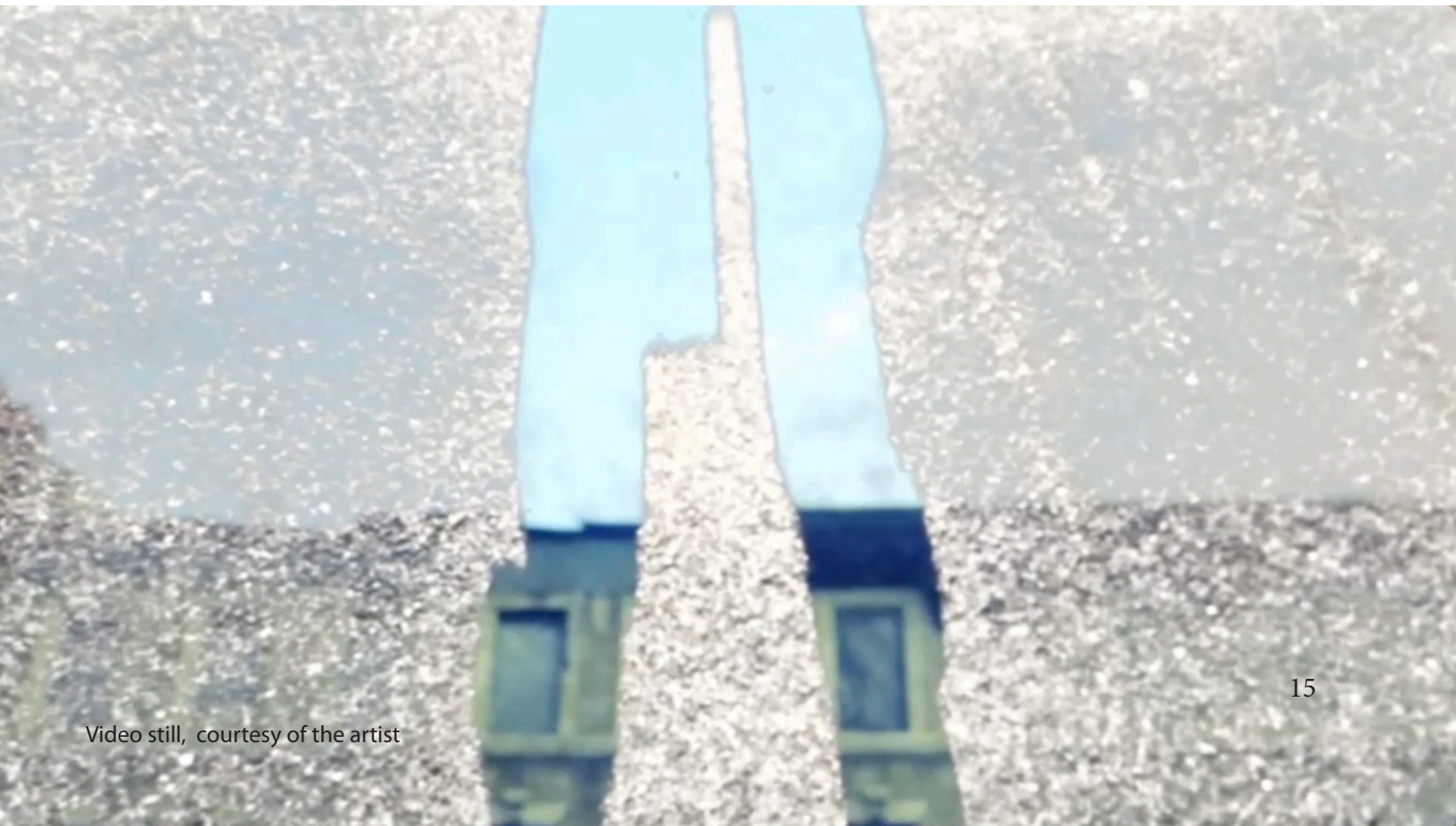
Through the orange thru haze gets brighter and stays just a shade short from washing out completely. These qualities too were uncovered in experimentation. He recalls, "When I got the right angle, it wouldn't create a streak. The color would actually blend into the rest of the image." As the border around the footage expands and contracts, the scale of what's depicted shifts from a train platform to wide shots and close up of collaborator Sienna Blaw to footage of shadows on pavement.

A voiceover reads, "Rareness forms composition, blunt and bent out of shape."

In his experiments, Dare mentioned lowering the shutter speed to create the haziest image possible. "I'm interested in when things are not clear." But he then reflected on not feeling clear about himself and his process. To represent that distance, that misunderstanding invites proximity while resisting neat legibility. It invites a multiplicity and simultaneity that feels real.

In "ND@Tilden," glimmering lights fade to muted tans and grays. The boundary between the sandy beach and overcast sky is a blurry one. As with the first two works in this presentation, Dare layers footage atop itself but here, the unified color palette allows the insertions to feel smoother, almost disorienting in the different planes they create.

Dare spoke of French theorist Gaston Bachelard's work on images and meaning making. He paraphrased, "Reading something once is like nothing. But seeing it over letting an image emerge and then placing your image on top of it."



Interpreting this reference one way, the juxtaposition and repetition of the same images could be an invitation to consider what meanings are available in a first viewing of the same image. In so many seconds, what images can a viewer project back onto the film and what will remain hazy?

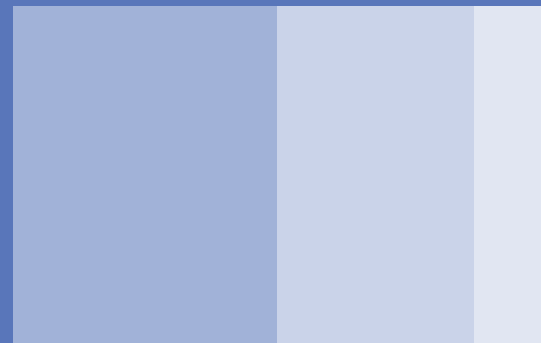
To consider Bachelard and Dare's work another way, I reflect on the process of making and crafting work to be viewed. Taken out of ephemera, film and video acquire a permanence, and with several artists I've talked to, a degree of pressure. I think on my own archives, the hours and hours of videos and thousands of stills of my own evolving dance practices. How to even begin assembling pieces and clips for public consumption when I've barely seen anything enough times to make sense of it myself?

In our conversation, Dare also cited Arthur Jaffa, who was "always taking images that already exist so that you can't control what it signifies. Of course, I already know this implicitly. Even if one eschewed all social media, how could one have lived through the last decade without an awareness of people's repeated failures to control the narratives around their own images? Even within the most curated networks, there's always someone ready to willfully misread intention. And yet, people share images everyday.

Near the end of "ND@Tilden," the video zooms out and refracted images of Nik and Dare rotate, revealing a cube of their figures rotating, going nowhere but in motion. I could see this editing device questioning the tensions between isolation and togetherness one could presume in seeing the two figures dance together, sort of. We know they aren't but in the work as it's presented, aren't they?

*Images and Intimacy: On three new works by
Oluwadamilare (Dare) Ayorinde*

*By Benedict Nguyễn
dance artist: Dare Ayorinde*





offerings through the portal

By bhumi b patel
dance artist: Alexander Diaz



Epigraph:

We're Getting Closer

to feeling.
to decision.
to awareness.

here is where I can panic,
unravel, cry, hum, love.

I feel it all here.

we are the wild ones,
no longer fixated on taming.
this is who we are.

we change, we return, we disappear, but we return.
we return
knowing more than we did before

we feel, but not to feel alone.

we fall within the uncertain
going further through the darkness to understand where the powers truly lie
fables and myths are reconstructed where we are

your being is important.
you belong.
here.

we are here.
this place is you.

- Alexander Diaz

*the past, present, and future exist together, on top of one another, at the same time,
in a nonlinear discontinuous polytemporal here and now.
for people who experience marginalization, time is polytemporal.
time is polytemporal.
time is many times at the same time.
what are we getting closer to?
what does that require us to move away from?*

Choreographer Alexander Diaz's "We're Getting Closer," which premiered in November 2021, twenty months into the blurry global COVID-19 pandemic, is a reconceptualization of historical time. The work of reimagining linear time has been at the forefront of our public discourses. We frequently talk about the "before times" and what life will be like when we "get back to normal" or "when COVID is over." Yet, there is no back to return

(c) Loreto Jamlig, 2022



to. At least not for those of us at the margins.

The performance unfolded an ever-growing sense of a nonlinear history, a tripping over the logics of linear time, that afforded the past and present the opportunity to touch, if even just for a moment. I watched the dancers traverse the space as they moved back and forth, side to side in lanes from my vantage point in the space. I see the future first, then the past. Finally the present is with us. I see this temporal representation in each dancer on stage. I return to the sense that time is polytemporal. Repetition builds longing and urgency. Repetition allows me to lose sense of time passing linearly. The passage of time becomes cosmic. The passage of time becomes geologic. The passage of time allows space to find our wishes for the past and the future right here in the present moment. It allows us, as viewers, to get in *touch*.

Diaz challenges hegemonic histories of marginalization as a singular, forward-progressing trajectory that is divided into movements or waves or phases. Often this leads to hegemonic viewpoints of timelines of liberation. This, in turn, misrepresents and curtails the ways in which liberatory practices and activisms can be related, conceptualized, and mobilized toward a point at which we never arrive. This performance work centers the relationship between liberatory practices and activisms, moving us toward the unarrivable horizon. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed suggests that when we are dismissed, “we experience the world as all the more sensational; what is ordinarily overlooked or looked over appears striking” and that the “past is magnified when it is no longer shrunk” (40). Nothing has been discovered or rediscovered, it is just there and constant; in the work Diaz allows space for magnifying a past that is acutely relevant. The past that is embodied in the work is experienced on a scale that is present and real in the here and now. It is magnified because it is no longer held back. [Liberation.] The scale is shifted, and thus we are shifted with it.

As I continue to reflect on time, I wonder how artists at the margins exist outside of linear structures of time and what that looks like in performance praxis. Diaz’s work offers us repetition, geologic speed, and continuous weight shifting to challenge linearity. What else is possible to transgress structures of time? In *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*, Uri McMillan argues “time recuts, reverberates, and exceeds artificial distinctions between the past and the present. Time is polytemporal; what has come before is not contained in the past, but is continually erupting” (13) and that “black performance culture is ‘propagated by unpredictable means in non-linear patterns’” (200). These patterns are necessary as coding the process(es) of decolonial approaches to creating movement-based performance that pushes back against the structures of power that dictate so much of our ways of being and knowing.

Suzette Sagisi reflects on decolonizing the body by building off questions asked in the rehearsal process to outline her experiences with embodied feeling, intentionality, and decolonizing movement and what it felt like. She proposes that the body “decolonizes itself when it sheds what’s been forced upon it” and that “Black and brown movers decolonize themselves when they care for and center themselves, take up space, and move

so that they may exist freely and fully” outlining what she holds to be at the center of decolonization of the body (Sagisi 2020). This performance work takes a clear decolonial approach to movement making and world-creation. Walter Mignolo, in “Looking for the Meaning of ‘Decolonial Gesture’” postulates that if we can understand gestures as movements of the body or limbs that are meant to be expressive, then a decolonial gesture “is a body movement which carries [...] a decolonial intention” (2014). For the purpose of this performance, there is importance in the distinction offered by Mignolo: decoloniality is “a complementary mode” of working. Within this understanding, “decolonization movements aim to overturn a system of colonial rule; decoloniality, by contrast, is an ongoing praxis that unmakes and reinvents techniques, institutions, and logics” (Spatz 2019, 16). The creation of this performance that reveals its own decolonial approach demonstrates that the intention of decoloniality *is* the ongoing praxis to unmake logics that tell us how we should move, and how we understand time itself. If it is ongoing praxis, I must have ongoing inquiries.

What does it mean to have a decolonial body?
What does it mean to change clothing, as the dancers do?
What is being put on and what is being shed?
How do we tell the stories of our lives?



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*i am falling into this world
dancer in all black
dancer wears a hood
dancer moves
shadowy hooded dancer begins to remove coverings
there are three now
slow moving toward one side, where are they going, what is pulling them,
how can they get there?
i am still getting acclimated to this world
breath and flight
whimsical
romantic
weighted
hybridities
hybridity of language
hybridity of form
cascading and flooding and continuation*

E. Patrick Johnson, in *Black Queer Studies*, offers that “because much of queer theory critically interrogates notions of selfhood, agency, and experience, it is often unable to accommodate the issues faced by gays and lesbians of color who come from ‘raced’ communities” (126-127).

As this performance work continues to sit in my body, I feel it deeply and I am struck by its utter *queerness*. Queer as in “being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live” (hooks 2014). The work is queer in how it moves and creates relationships about one another and self through a multitude of modalities. I tread lightly on calling this *queer dance* because, as Gloria Anzaldúa cautions against, queer can be homogenizing and fail to recognize racial different and I witness the agency of the performers in creating the space we witness, inviting us into it, and going on a journey through a portal and to overlapping worlds (Johnson 2005, 127). In this there is a tension that continues to evolve and at times dissipate, reflecting the tensions between our experiences themselves and the way in which the impacts of experiences change over time.

*i'm left with this call to action:
let me love you
let me love you
let me love you
let me love you
don't try to fight, don't let me go
you've gone too far from what i know
i lost my heart in the dark with you*

*there's something about all the objects that feel like ancestral offerings
did these offerings open a portal to another realm in which we can live in the waters of
our own discontinuous nonlinear times?*

Their arms reach out to the side, their chests open up toward the sky. Then they collapse inward, closing off the vulnerable organs from harm. Motif, repeated gesture. It comes and goes, yet keeps me in the work, wondering what they are aching for up above. I wonder if there is a wildness to being free to open your chest to the sky and ask to be carried through the portal toward liberation. I wonder if this performance work allows us to imagine how the orientations of time can shift and evolve with us over our, as Mary Oliver says, “one wild and precious life.”

Maybe we're all just time travellers moving through time and space, bundled together past present future selves reaching out to find home.

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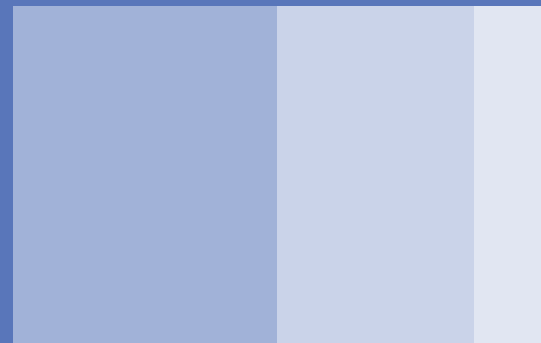
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offerings through the portal

*By bhumi b patel
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Background



Dancing Futures: Artist & Mentor Collaborative

Pepatián's Dancing Futures: Artist & Mentor Collaborative Residency helps further engage and strengthen the borough's dance-making and performance scene and centers The Bronx as a unique source for challenging dance works by emerging artists of color and/or Bronx-based artists.

This residency offers three artists of color and/or Bronx-based artists with opportunities to create evening length culminating residency works at BAAD! The Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, with access to rehearsal space, mentorship support, and other professional development opportunities.

Pepatián also offers residency project alumni access to workshops and other resources to support the continued development of their work and creative processes as well as mentorship for three additional applicants from Pepatián's Dance your Bronx UP ancillary project, begun in 2018.

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Pepatián:Bronx Arts COLLABorative is a non-profit, South Bronx-based arts organization founded in 1983 by choreographer Merián Soto, visual artist/MacArthur Fellow Pepón Osorio, and educator/director Patti Bradshaw. Directed by Jane Gabriels, Ph.D. since 1999 in collaboration with multiple artist consultants/co-directors, Pepatián:Bronx Arts COLLABorative is dedicated to creating, producing and supporting contemporary multidisciplinary art by Latina/o/x and Bronx-based artists. pepatian.org



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