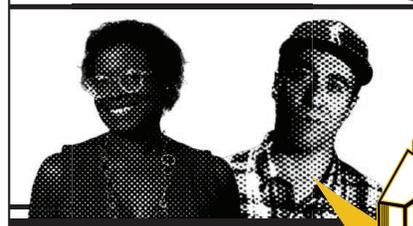




Liner Notes:



Nadine George-Graves
Serouj "Midus" Aprahamian

Liner Notes:



Joseph Schloss
Jesse Mills
Imani Kai Johnson

ASX Conversations

Across the Field of Dance Studies



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Street Dance Activism & Black Liberation—Spatial Affirmation: Shamell Bell & d. Sabela Grimes



Dr. Shamell Bell

Street Dance Activism



d. Sabela Grimes

USC/Street Dance Activism

Street Dance Activism & Black Liberation, a conversation with Shamell Bell and d. Sabela Grimes. Video recorded and edited by MiRi Park and grace jun, May 24, 2021. Watch the full video here: <https://youtu.be/2rAnSU1NATo>

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Good morning, welcome, we are here with Dr. Shamell Bell and Sabela Grimes. Inviting these two wonderful amazing scholar practitioners to talk about their work in hip hop and beyond, and I'm like really thinking about just all the work that both of you do like outside,¹ you know. Sabela the clips you were putting up during the meditation² of you outside

1. Literally dance in the streets.

2. Street Dance Activism Global Dance Meditation August 2020. <https://www.streetdanceactivism.com/>

I mean you just mentioned, you [Shamell Bell: best part] going to Leimert,³ so [. . .]

MiRi Park: I think we're really interested in understanding your points of arrival to activism, which I think has been an ongoing practice, I would presume, throughout your lives. But how that really informs the work that you do today [. . .] but that Imani⁴ also sets out this thing in her dissertation where she's talking about her last chapter towards a cypher theory and to think about what cypher theory is⁵ and in that she talks about, is Sabela your section, where we look at the cypher is being half in real life and half in the digital space and so, so I'm thinking about the fact that you know Street Dance Activism in what we did last year was everything was online because there was a pandemic, we were all connecting with each other from wherever we were physically to each other in the digital space. And those spaces also open up to other struggles and. . .

Shamell Bell: Thank you for having us. So Sabela I'm gonna have you start us off.

d. Sabela Grimes: [Smiles.] Okay. So yeah I think we should just go ahead and just dive in the, some of the [Shamell Bell: Let's go, we family] MiRi and Grace brought up a lot of good juicy nuggets for us to think about. One is you know if it's cool with you Shamell, I just want to just give a shout out to some of the people that made me think about what I do with deeper intention. A is just living in South Africa and toyi-toyi'ing⁶ the street with everyday folk, right? And living there during the apartheid shout out then

3. Leimert Park, South Central Los Angeles, CA.

4. Imani Kai Johnson, hip hop scholar and Assistant Professor, Critical Dance Studies at UC Riverside.

5. See Suggested List of Readings in the Back Matter of this issue.

6. Toyi-toyi is a South African protest dance consisting of the stomping of feet and chants performed at protests and marches. <https://theculturetrip.com/africa/south-africa/articles/toyi-toyi-south-africas-spirited-dance-of-protest/>

moving to Philly and working with Mama Kariamu Welsh,⁷ who's piece *Raahmonaaah*⁸ literally changed my life and I wasn't even a quote unquote dancer then, I was, you know, I'm like most Black folks, I dance. Like I just go to the party and dance. I dance trying to impress somebody. I danced to, you know, link up with people that have new friends. I dance for, for so many different reasons. So this is way before I began to be identified as a dancer or choreographer. But I was actually dating someone in the dance department in Temple and was invited in to work on a project that Mama Kariamu was doing and it was about Ramona, Africa.

And it was the first time I got a chance, at least in the context of Philly, to hear the full story of the Move Organization. Right? "Move," the name of the organization is "MOVE," like, just think about how profound that it is to then be invited in to do a piece on Ramona, Africa, and it started with [sings "Raaamonaaa!"]. And to be invited into, to just move and do poetry, and what have you and still be—and this was my first time doing quote-unquote concert dance. Right?! I think it's really important for me to share that because a lot of people connect me to Pure-movement as if that was my beginnings. And even though Pure-movement is really important in my life, Mama Kariamu Welsh is paramount and also at the time my sister, my elder sister-mother would let me just sit in her class. How come, I'm just like, I can see Mama Kariamu, Sonia Sanchez. Right? And I don't know if you've ever seen Sonia Sanchez recite poetry but she's, she be [vocalization], she be in it, like the body, like really paying attention to the body, and so where I also met Spady,⁹ who is a mentor to H. Samy Alim.¹⁰

7. Dr. Kariamu Welsh, founder of Kariamu and Company and the Umfundalai technique. Professor Emerita at Temple University.

8. *Raahmonaaah* by Dr. Kariamu Welsh <https://vimeo.com/107057124>

9. James G. Spady, scholar, historian, and journalist.

10. H. Samy Alim, scholar and Professor, Anthropology and African American Studies at UCLA.

So the whole concept of hiphopography I got from Spady. Spady was just a kat that I would see around on the train. I built with Spady in so many different spaces. So this idea of us being in the community and for people to invest in us, even though you know that time I was young, and these people were with the institution or I would see them on the block. And Homer Jackson, who I really began to chop my teet with, chop my teet, I think teet, there's difference between teeth [points to his teeth]. Anyway, yeah. Homer Jackson—I just want to honor the folks that invited me in, and continue to nourish my root system, cause I feel like what you and I do is really grounded, right?! It's like there's a root system to what we do. And it's really complicated because there's ideas of what we supposed to do at a protest, at least in the American context, and what we're not supposed to do at a protest. You feel me. So just a shout out to all those people. We'll circle back around to in real life and in the digital space, go ahead and say your piece Shamelly-Mell. Dr. Shamelly-Mell.

Shamell Bell: Yeah, no, that was really powerful. Always thinking back to roots and you know that's why I asked you to go first. I wasn't gonna put you like, "Oh, you the ol' head," you know. [Both laughing] But I was—I—that's exactly what I was thinking. I was like, "Go ahead and start us off." "This idea of Street Dance Activism" being founded by me is something that I, like y'all know, I push back on that. We're at the LAPD headquarters. "I didn't know how to be a core leader." I read so much about social movements, through my training with Robin D. G. Kelley, through having [an] American Studies and Ethnicity/African American Studies degree from USC and then I was currently in my PhD program in Ethnic Studies, so "I had all of this knowledge" written knowledge about what social justice movements should look like and I can't tell you where it came from in the physical because I actually didn't know up until that point that there—I knew in my body that we always danced for liberation. That's what liberated me, you know.

I like to say that I'm one of the freest people that I know, and someone told it to me, and then I started to claim it. And in that, you know, organizing the LAPD occupation [air quotes], I was just wanting to dance in the space and do choreography. And I think what's important about that moment is that I fell back onto what reminded me of living. And I—and it wasn't this idea of curating anything. It was just—I wanted people to come in, social media blast it, to just come in and live in the space but—I guess what I'm saying now while we're thinking, and I'm just looking up to the ancestors for that work that they put in the ring shout, all of those things that literally channeling through me, and it shifts. I love how, I think it was Sarah from *Street Dance Activism* that called me a visionary instigator and I'll never let that go, you know this idea of founders. I'm like, "No, Sabela go, go first, talk about what brought you here." I haven't actually thought about outside of an academic sense in kind of graining against it, what made me dance in this space of having so much knowledge about social movements and what it should look like. I like how you said that: What is this supposed to look like?

And that contrariness, if that's a word, in myself that always tends to—I'm not going to necessarily do what they say, society says I'm supposed to do, I'm going to feel into it. And honestly I wanted to live in a space, I wanted to lift people's morals. I wanted to not consistently be—the anger was righteous and in our anger—but I was holding on to so much. So my dance background is very much just people in the street, and so I wish I had these markers I can tell you in dance, like, this is the person that helped me to do what I do. I still am working through my own imposter syndrome, where I can go and live—live dance when I'm dancing for myself, but as soon as you start to critique me, or I think that you're critiquing me, my body kind of shuts down because that's not what I dance for. I dance as a, as a praise, as a, as worship, to the Divine, the Most High, to God, in—I'm looking to those people, you know?

I had, for me—if wasn't you know, Miss Prissys in the street, the Tommy the Clowns in the streets, the people that were in the dance organization that I had when I was a preteen, that I was finding literally people on the streets. Sabela if you was out here in Leimert, back when I—We would've [brings hands together]. I'm like, yo, you trying to be a part of this, and you would have taught me, just like you teach me now, you know? So I am, as far as my roots and my legacy—my roots are so heavily in street dance culture and my peoples. I learn so much through you all, and just being in community with you, so I want to go back to just honoring those before me that have continued to do this work and just making it known that the work that we do here in Street Dance Activism is more of like community and so I wanted to, before I stop rambling because I listened to your answer and how you talked, I was like yo, I don't have those moments of this person, there's no dance person that took me under their wing, you know? It was always like, "Shamell's out in the streets," and "Shamell's getting people together," just exactly what you see in Street Dance Activism, me just gathering people. I've always been the person to gather. I've always been the person to see something and say hey I can break that down into an easier form for folks so they can, so it can be translated to folks who are not dancers, whatever.

But I guess where I want us—bring us right now with Street Dance Activism—I just looked over and it just reminded me, and MiRi will love this, my student has this line that he made out of my class and it's called the "freedom dreamer dreamers." I guess his—what do they call these? [pauses] Seasons? What do you call clothing lines, when you have—like a season, I guess. So based out of my class he has this line of "freedom dreamers" and I think that is honestly what I continue to do through my body and dance, you know?

I remember I was talking to you grace about this that when we were writing, I wrote you all in some conference, the ASTR¹¹

11. American Society for Theatre Research <https://www.astr.org/>

conference, and you're all facilitators cuz I put all your names in it, and I was talking about the body as an eccentric container of knowledge that generates possibilities to defy or transcend time, space, and reality. And I think that that's what we do together and when thinking about freedom dreams, this quote that we say over and over and over again, which I think we're dancing collective freedom dreaming together is, I should memorize it by now, I think I do have it memorized "without new visions, we don't know what to build only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics but a process that can and must transform us."¹²

And I just consistently go back to that: a process that can and must transform us, and the maneuvers that we are doing in dance and moving our bodies is something that really provides this space of possibility, I love that rebellious possibility that we do within our bodies, and I just like that's what I want to offer to what I envision we are doing in the future with Street Dance Activism. We're collecting everyone's embodied freedom dream and living it out collectively and shifting. Yeah, so I don't know. That was a rant. I don't know where I came from, but . . . [Sabela is talking but muted]

I don't know if you have anything to say [Sabela: yeah] about, because you do this so well. This idea of how we defy, transcend, time-space reality, the quantum activism you do. I think that that is where Street Dance Activism is this liberatory time-space of radical resistance and I just wanted to hear your thoughts on some of that . . . this idea of using our collective freedom dreaming and moving together and kind of defying the time, space, and reality and kind of, this sounds so weird, but when I am with you all energetically or not—like, Sabela, you don't have to be around me energetically for me to feel you.

12. Kelley, R.D. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Beacon Press. p. xii

And I know you're going to call me sometimes, or I kind of joke because I'm like, "Oh, okay you checking in." But what is it that we have tapped into through our bodies that I feel like I do transcend or transport or go to another realm when we are, you know, even if we're talking in space together? So I don't know that transcendence and transformation that shifts us to this new, not even new, vision—like a new space. I feel like if I was a quantum physicist and I were to study us energetically, there's something that happens. And you can't tell me that there's not something that happens. So yeah, what are your thoughts on that?

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah, I mean—Well, so many thoughts. I think about when we tune in, when we, what we tap into, what we have an opportunity to do through what we do, the doingness of what we do, the beingness of how we be, is that [pauses] yeah, I feel like we get a chance to celebrate the uncelebrated.

Shamell Bell: That's it.

d. Sabela Grimes: Right?! And I think about—I'm so sick and tired of you so concerned about being the founder or whatever [laughs]. It is, it's really, it's, it speaks to, it speaks to intention. You know some people want to be the founder in a very linear way and within a certain paradigm, where access or resources can be funneled to this individual, right? Because they're the founder, they're the godhead, they're the mind behind whatever.

And there is just something different that really dispersed the accountability, the responsibilities, the praise, the labor, the joy. It's the different sort of approach. You're so much of a connector [Shamell: yeah], and you're a connector within a continuum that—I think we're more concerned with being a part of a continuum, as opposed to being a point on the linear sort of historical timeline, right?

Shamell Bell: Yeah, it just stresses me out.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** Yeah yeah yeah and it's like if we do that, and we're thinking about the spirit work of it all, it opens us up to be able to be attuned to a wider energy field. Right? Instead of me, and this is all respect to people that we consider pioneers or what have you, but when I talk about Mama Kariam, I'm talking about she invited in a knucklehead that was snooping all around the dance program at Temple and he wasn't even a student, right?! I'm just a community person, like literally I'm just someone that lives in the community in North Philly, that gets invited in.

That's huge yo. It's—I'm not enrolled in anything, what have you, and that really inspired me and this is—You're part of that continuum. This is the work that you're doing, the work that I'm doing. We're inviting people in. And it's a—the invitation has already been written, right? It's not like I'm sitting down writing these invitations and so we just get a chance to change the perspective on what we do anyway.

When we go to the clubs, people think when I frame what I do in Leimert Park, I have to frame it a certain way and people think of it as site specific or whatever whatever. But I've been going to Leimert Park and dancing since I was in my late teens. Which is a long time ago, you know what I mean? And not as a dancer, not as an activating space, because movement lives there, music lives there. So for me it's like, I don't even go and do an activation. I am with—I am in this sort of experience. This place is already activated, it's already got an energy field and it's really complex, it's really complicated, it's really dense, it's really deep. There's all kinds of characters and players and that's the sort of energy field that I like to tap into and what feels right about when we do maybe a "protest", a protest right? It's something that's a different type of gathering, but it is a protest. I like Leimert Park because Black folks with their bodies, right, that have been codified, that have been marked, find joy.

I'm not looking for dancers. I'm—we dance. And we dance because we feel like it. Like, why is there music in the alley?! Like really, why they just set up the music in the alley? How come they don't take it in one of those places and do it properly? It's literally in the alley. Why does Harun¹³ open up one of the doors to his coffee shop and just got the DJ blasting? Why in front of KAOS Network,¹⁴ you know what I mean, like there's something about that and we're part of that continuum and we, we, we are intentional and deliberate about bringing that to a variety of different spaces, that energy.

Shamell Bell: I have a question. You brought up something: so inviting people in was so key and you just—I saw in my head when you said, “Why, why is the music in the alley?” I just saw the vision of inviting people in. I wanted to you a little bit about Leimert in specific—in particular, because Leimert is where I was studying and, not even studying, that's, Leimert was where I was dancing and then when I was studying, so krumping, jerkin' and then protesting, like they're all in the same space, you know? Doing artistic work in Leimert, like all of them, I noticed that I continue to—anytime I create, anytime I do interviews, anytime, I'm always heading back to Leimert. And there is some type of vortex there that I feel like, you know, it's you in particular when you dance. And this may be too, you know I be going off into crazy stuff crazyville, but I think that when you go there with those costumes, when you go there with your ancestors, when you go there, you're protecting a particular space and that's why they're always trying to like gentrify, or attack, or stop the drum circle, or whatever they're always trying to stop what's happening in Leimert. Because I feel like Leimert is this, you know people call it the hotbed of art and resistance and you know, Black, you know our little, you know, Little Tokyo or our Black community and

13. Harun, owner of Harun Coffee Shop located in Leimert Park. <https://harunintl.com/>

14. KAOS Network art center located in Leimert Park. <https://kaos-network.business.site/>

neighborhood but it's so much more than just geographically Black folks in concentration in a space.

There's something that's going on energetically in Leimert that draws people in, that invites people who are ready, and you sometimes don't be ready, you're just in it, you're in the flow, you're being invited in with the music, and then there's healing that happens. So many of my most transformative moments and cries, even Nipsey [Hussle] passing so close—so Leimert—I was sitting in Leimert.

This is the most crazy thing. I didn't even live—I was at UCLA and so I was living in UCLA family housing but the day that Nipsey passed, I just was driving to Leimert and I had a meeting that was in the Slauson/La Brea type area I believe. But I just stopped in Leimert Park and sat in my car and was talking on the phone and then heard all of the chaos when I was driving to go to my meeting. I saw that the streets were blocked off and I checked and then TMZ told me that Nipsey passed. And it's something about literally sitting in Leimert as Nipsey transcends this reality that I wanted to talk about Leimert and its capacity to be the space where you're able to dance, where you're able to be invited in, where you're able to heal, where you're able to protest, where you're able to do workshops, where you're able to workshop yourself. I don't know. It's just something in there and something that you do in particular by dancing in it, as some kind of like—I see you as a steward of that area when you go in. I don't know if that's the right word, but what it—Does that bring up anything to you? When you were talking, those are the things that kind of came through. And I love that you say that we invite people in with Street Dance Activism because that's all I ever wanted to do. You don't have to be co-signed by any choreographer. You don't have to be a trained classical dancer or anything. You just have to show up and you just have to know that you're invited. All are welcome. And so yeah, I love, I love what you just said. I don't know if I sparked anything.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah, I know you want me to answer your question, but I'm really curious. Yo, when I was listening to you talk I think about—So it seems like we have this thing about being invited in, which I think is really important for Black folks, right, to extend an invitation and to be invited in. Especially when there's, yeah, I don't know, I'm just thinking about that—Maybe we'll circle back to another conversation around that and also think about—you know I love Tommy the Clown's whole outfit. And I don't mean like what he's wearing. I mean like this is what 20 years—20 years, right?—and I think about, and I don't want to romanticize it but at least there's enough. There's a long enough history where when I look at the clips now on Instagram or when I see them, like, they were down the block. And with my ignorant self talking about being invited—you know it's a little kid's party literally on my block, and I wanted—I was driving by slow, walk down, just wait for someone to come up, "Ay boy. You keep showing up." But it's a little creepy too because I think the kid was like seven, but anyway, it's like—[pause] the movement vocabulary, like what the body is doing, is so hood, it's so Black [Shamell: Yes]. It's—and the space that's created for the whole dialogue and discourse, and the back and forth, and the competition, and the conversations and the clowning on multiple levels of the clowning, not just the clown dancing but just like clowning [Shamell: yes]. There is—I love that shit. [Shamell: I love it] I love it.

Shamell Bell: I saw his van driving on the freeway and I'm behind him being creepy like, "Yo, I see you, I'm behind you, let's get up," this was just like two weeks ago, I'm like, "Hey, let's hook up." Tommy's still this force that, yes, keep going.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah and when he show up at Leimert, it literally takes the energy higher. I don't know what like—You know I'm in different places. I know very few people that when they show up in "concert dance" when they show up the energy literally goes

[gestures hands moving up] and most importantly amongst the youth, yo.

Shamell Bell: Yeah, yeah, so here you go, thank you. So I mentioned Tommy earlier as with clowning as far as Miss Prissy and then the whole situation—Let’s even go back to—I tend to shy away from the things that I did in the commercial area and I need to not do that but, Tommy the Clown is who really gave me an opportunity to be a “professional” dancer. Being in close proximity to some of his earlier formations of dancing with him and then we getting into Christina Aguilera’s “Dirty,”¹⁵ and them seeing us clowning. I was a clown dancing extra in Christina Aguilera’s “Dirty” and then David LaChapelle¹⁶ saying, “We need to do a documentary on that.” So a lot of people don’t know that before *Rize*¹⁷ had such a focus on krump, it was Tommy and some of us that were just in conversation with David LaChapelle. That is a really pivotal moment where I was kind of thrust into something that I wasn’t—I don’t think I was necessarily prepared to go into the professional career in that way. I was still very much wanting to study.

But I think that Tommy’s presence in, and I will say even more so than we give credit to to this day, I think we’re coming back around to saying how Tommy the Clown, in particular, how we were dancing at parties, clowning in in South Central, that joy that he brought, you know? I don’t know anybody from my high school experience that didn’t have a Tommy the Clown party. We was always going to the battles and that really gave us a safe recreational space. So there is, folks that were in the performing arts group that I had—so it was about 20 of us, and most of them were with Tommy, so I would have to have my rehearsals around when they were going, doing things with Tommy. And they would bring

15. Music video for the 2002 song by Christina Aguilera.

16. Director of the krump and clown dancing documentary *Rize*.

17. *Rize*, 2005, is a documentary on the street dance culture of clowning and krumping featuring Tommy the Clown.

back the moves and such that they were doing with Tommy to me. So yes, a lot of my early training came by proxy to folks who are in direct relationship and doing work with Tommy.

And so yeah, I give a lot of credit to even the things that I was doing and choreography and my organization because I would be like, "Oh what's that move? Teach us all. Okay, let's all put this together." And it's also something that there was not at that time. You didn't have to be a direct Tommy the Clown's dancer, Tommy the Clown dancer, but you took on that movement vocabulary in the hood. That's just what we were doing if you weren't stripper dancing, if you weren't doing a wobble and all of these things together. That's what we were doing.

So I just cut you off because it did bring me back. I'm thankful for this conversation because it does tie me into you know a space in a, in a, in a home that I was finding myself just be like, "Oh, I just dance in the streets," or "Oh, you know. I just danced with my friends." No, but I am a part of the legacy in South Central Los Angeles and thank you for like pointing that back to Tommy and Tommy's energy. And know that that opportunity for *Rize*, that I wouldn't be here as a scholar if not for that opportunity for *Rize* being played in a classroom. So, absolutely. So foundational.

It just keeps going back to that, yes, Tommy the Clown. Yes *Rize*. Yes, the stripper dance section. Yes. Now I get to be Dr. Shamell Bell and live my life in congruency where I can dance for my life, but dance for protest, but dance for transcendence and transformation, but dance for collective visioning, and dance for liberation. Thank you, Tommy.

- d. Sabela Grimes:** And when I'm—Yo—And what I'm saying is when I'm talking about continuum right when I'm talking about circular progress, so these are the things I love to talk about. There's linear progress and we're inundated with these ideas, especially if you've come through these institutions: linear product. You do

this, you take this class [indicating with his hand going down a line], yeah, linear, boom. What we do in our communities is a circular progress. Right, there's a, you know when you think about sankofa,¹⁸ like when you think about the circle in a really deep and dimensional way, right? And we think about spherical, if we think about spiraling, if we think about beginning to end and ending to begin, when I think about Tommy and I think about continuum, and I think of Dr. Shamell Bell, I think about Tommy the Clown is still in his flow.

Rize is a point, it's a point, it's a marker, it has a platform because it's a film, right? And it becomes a reference point, but what I witnessed—what I bear witness to is that the continuum of Tommy's work expands and has a different type of life because it's literally in the streets. This is street dance activism! You're going to tell me going to bring little black kids joy is not street dance activism? Y'all not, y'all playing with me this morning. Let me—Look. That's not street dance activism?! And we supposed to be in conversation with people about what real "activism"—Sit down, yo! Twenty years—whether you like him or not, whether you think the movement is sophisticated, whatever—that's 20 years. And I'm supposed to sit up in someone's lecture hall and they goin' tell—

I'm saying yo, this dude right here in this neighborhood where I live at, like literally I mean way up, his little spot, people don't know Tommy from a "studio." Where studio at? Where the Tommy, who references his studio? You said his van. This shit is mobile! He in them streets. [Shamell laughing: I'm out there following his van]. You know the van. Yo that's—there's a model there that we don't talk about enough and I think it's directly connected to what we do as street dance activists.

18. *Sankofa* is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The literal translation of the word and the symbol is "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind." <https://www.berea.edu/cgwc/the-power-of-sankofa/>

There's the model in what we talked about the people that invite us in, right?

And when I think about the Good Life¹⁹ right—So when I was younger the Good Life was everything to me. I'm talking about the Good Life before it moves to Leimert, it was on Crenshaw [Blvd] and Exposition [Blvd] and that was Miss, Miss B. Hall. I'll never forget her because she's the first person ever tryin' to have me drink some wheat grass. I remember back then before I was all conscious and health conscious, I was like, "These Negroes is in here drinking grass juice." They talking all, you know what I mean, like they trippin', but inviting in a bunch of young MCs to just come do your thing, and at the same time you can see a Steve Cokely.²⁰ I saw frickin' OJ Simpson talk real extra Black. You can find the clip on YouTube. Yes. These spaces, right? And there's, there's—it's these corrugated spaces to think about how Spady to bring Spady and Alim back in the mix. The folds like Spady used to talk about the corrugated spaces.²¹ We always look at surface level things, he would talk about what's in the folds [hand gestures] like you know what I mean. Like what's in there. I didn't mean to do that, my bad, that's a whole 'nother corrugated space.

Sorry, MiRi and grace, we keeping it real raw wit y'all today, my bad.

Shamell: Listen. We up in here going back in the akashic records like. . .

Dr. grace shinhae jun: No. [d. Sabela Grimes: Oh grace up in the mix. what's up?] Just keep going. This is amazing. It's just really amazing what you are all doing.

19. The Good Life Cafe was a health food market and cafe in Los Angeles, California, known for its open mic nights. https://hip-hop-music.fandom.com/wiki/Good_Life_Cafe

20. Steve Cokely, researcher and lecturer. <http://www.stevcocokely.com/>

21. Spady, J.G. and Lee, C.G., 1995. *Twisted Tales: In the Hip Hop Streets of Philly*. UMUM/LOH Publishers.

Shamell Bell: So grace. Do you know that Sabela didn't, remember that abstract that we were doing for the ASTR and we were trying to figure out how to get repetition and talk about the circle. And it's so funny cause Sabela just starts talking about it right now but we were—Like, I was looking at Tommy DeFrantz, thinking of another Tommy, and he was talking about how the body so easily contains narratives of transcendence through dances of physical eccentricity and then we were talking about how we transcend and alter the linear and cyclical patterns of repetition, and Sabela just—

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Circular progress. MiRi are texting to each other, so, keep going.

Shamell Bell: Wow that's crazy. [d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah yeah yeah.] Okay go ahead. No, I was, you don't know that I—I put you in an abstract for a conference and I put everybody that worked on the Global Dance Meditation and their affiliation. So I put Street Dance Activism or their university or whatever they call it, just so they can be published in and have it on their CVs and stuff. But I called grace like, "Yo, what am I gonna do with this abstract?" and we were talking about exactly what you just brought up so we're always so in line and in sync. Go ahead.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah I appreciate it. I appreciate it. It's funny because also going back to, I'm gonna talk about MiRi bringing in hiphopography²² and I think about street scholar, which was another thing that Spady would talk about a lot. You know, MiRi you might want to jump in this MiRi. MiRi like Alim's work at UCLA with—I was a part of it—what's the name of the group that we had? Used to read books and shit.

22. See Spady, J. G., Alim, H.S. & Meghelli, S. (2006). *Tha Global Cipa: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness*. Philadelphia: Black History Museum Press.

MiRi Park: The Hip Hop Studies Working Group.

d. Sabela Grimes: The Hip Hop Studies Working Group, right.

Shamell Bell: “We used to read books and shit.” Oh, let me take a sip of my Capri Sun.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yes, Capri Sun. So when you’re in grad school and you can meet with other people across campus and get a chance to be in dialogue, that shit is huge, and it’s community, right? It’s such a simple thing like let’s read a book together. And we’re going to come—I’m with you know this group of people from sociology, from linguistics, from . . . I’m coming from WAC/D.²³ [Shamell Bell: WAC/D] And it gives you an opportunity to really flesh out and get out of your little silo, right?

And I feel like just those simple organizational, community activate- like really being intentional about having community—And Alim’s been doing that for a minute, you know. But that comes out of Spady talking about what it means to be a skreet—street scholar. I said “skreet.” My bad—street scholar, street scholar.

So what does that mean if we’re talking about street dance activism? How do we affirm ourselves in these streets? [Shamell Bell: In these streets.] How do we see ourselves, who are we there? Who am I in the streets, as opposed to who I am in the halls of one of these institutions [Shamell Bell: Institutions.] and most importantly, who can I be?

I was in Leimert yesterday morning, as I was sharing with y’all, and what I love about it is, yo- I’m full-on quantum suit, in the new quantum suit, [Shamell Bell: Love it.] and I have, I just, like, spirit led—Yesterday spirit was like I’m just going to go down—and I’ve done this before, there’s a pathway, it’s yellow dividing line down Degnan [Blvd]—and I’m going down the the line and I’m just like, I got my headphones in and then I could

23. UCLA’s World Arts and Culture/Dance Program

turn it off but there's music and I'm just like my—I'm dedicated to just this pathway. What throws me off the pathway? A young sista—she had to be about six—and she just was going [waves right hand].



Sabela in his quantum suit. Photo courtesy of Sabela Grimes' personal collection.

And so I'm in the zone [vocalizes to indicate movement of body], I'm feeling [continues vocalization] and then I look over again she's going [waves right hand], so I wave [waves left hand], right? So in that moment I experienced like this, this, this [pause] like it's literally a transformative moment. I'm already locked in spirit in a certain way and then spirit says, "Pay attention to this." [Shamell Bell: Her.] Right? Boom. And then transition, boom into a deep—a deeper level of the transformative experience.

Shamell Bell: I'm telling you, you be doing stuff in Leimert.

d. Sabela Grimes: Right. And the thing is, [pauses] what is it to be affirmed for me in a moment like that? I'm full—y'all seen the mask, this is the mask I'm wearing, right? [pulls out mask to show] Right.

Shamell Bell: Is it COVID-safe?

d. Sabela Grimes: Listen. I made this out of them damn COVID shields. [Shamell Bell: That's—No. Can you talk about the brilliance of that?] I'm about to signify on all of this, I'm about to signify on all of this right here.

Shamell Bell: Brilliance. Don't, don't [d. Sabela Grimes: Right.] move away from that, you built that [d. Sabela Grimes: This is two.] on the COVID mask, during COVID, still out in spaces. [d. Sabela Grimes: Talk to me.] That's a rebellious act in itself and you go in as spirit-filled with your COVID mask turned into something else that you signify on to it aesthetically and went in. Ahhhh! They ain't ready!

d. Sabela Grimes: Yo. But it's like, what I was going to say is, in that moment, I felt affirmed and then just this [waves right hand] as this sort of being [gestures to his body], I can say, "Yo, I see you." [Shamell Bell: I was just gonna say that.] "I see you sis, I see you seeing me. I see you seeing me. I see you."

And for me that's, like, that's it. Dr. Katrina Hazzard Gordon [Shamell Bell: Yep.] says that. By the end of the day, it's Black people be like, "I see you." That shit is huge. It's really important. [Shamell Bell: Yeah] Right.

Shamell Bell: I see you seeing me, so not just [d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah.] I see you, I see you, seeing me, that same circle we're talking about [both make circles with their fingers]. I see you seeing me, and I think that's why like I say when we come together even across the Internet as Street Dance Activism where we just get

to witness each other. We get to see each other, see each other, and I think that that is something far greater than I thought, but I know that that's where I'm able to keep going. There is a bit of, not to get too dark about it, but there's a bit of hopelessness that I feel sometimes when I'm not connected, like you all are like helping me be connected into source. I don't know like I just had this visual, I see in images. And I saw you all as kind of like a power cord like when—I don't know if that makes sense to you, but I don't know. Anyway, I was just riffing off of you.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah yeah yeah, I'm gonna keep riffing, power cord.

I think about when you look at a rope and it's got all those different strands that make the rope right, you feel me?

MiRi, what are you talking about circles and digital space. I'm trying to connect, I'm trying to make sure we answer some of y'all's questions, cause we "been on our own" [sings it].

Shamell Bell: "On our own" [sings it].

MiRi Park: I think you're already talking about it because I was just referring to how you redrew what a cypher can look like, that it is half in real, in-person, but also half in the digital space. I think that was kind of the point of you focusing on Soulja Boy²⁴ as being, not necessarily trying to quantify the importance of it, but that there are communities that are interacting both with the video in real time and that it keeps going. That the cypher is not always at a jam per se, but it's also kind of made me realize that what we think about as a jam also kind of works as a metaphor too because it, as hip hop studies—I feel like individually, people have worked on different aspects of what hip hop studies, what hip hop is doing, in the form and like the sociology cypher, in the

24. MiRi is referencing Sabela's blog post on hip hop artist Soulja Boy. <http://socialdancemedia.blogspot.com/2008/08/street-scholar-sampler.html>

dance cypher, in the history cypher. But I was just thinking about going to a House Dance Conference, back in the day. And you walk in and you're just enveloped by the whole thing and you're going from place to place. You're going to—and it's kind of like you were talking about, Sabela, going to Leimert Park, just walking down the street with different DJs. You've got different elements that are all coming together but as a whole, it functions as a collective space to be in community with one another. But I think the way that you talk about the meeting space, of the digital divide in real life is being the URL, like the meeting spot, I think you talked about.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah and it's also like—it's funny, because at that time when I was at UCLA and I say I want to do my thesis project on Soulja Boy who at the time was a teenager, [Shamell Bell: I love it,] right, and had some little pop thing on this thing called YouTube, right? And [clears throat] you know Soulja Boy, it's just all about how we frame things right or how people's point of reference [Shamell Bell: They need to give that man his roses and stop playing.]

He—I was [Shamell Bell: [intonates]] I was reading Diana Taylor's what's it Archive Repertoire,²⁵ what else? [Shamell Bell: Yeah.] Forgive me, [Shamell Bell: Yeah I know what you're talking about] you know I'm talking about, and I was reading, I was thinking like, "Okay, cool I'm really into this new thing called YouTube which is—" and there was other platforms before YouTube, there was, but I'm like, "Oh, user generated this shit. . ." like what we do, already, right? Hyperlinks. So I don't know if y'all know people, but linear, like circularity and linearity, right? I'll give you an example.

When I used to go to church, the preacher would start a sermon, there'd be a tangent, he would circle back, there'd be another tangent, they would circle back, [Shamell Bell: Yes!] right?

25. Taylor, D., 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sister so-and-so or brother so-and-so would start a song, there'd be a tangent. [Shamell Bell: Still singing that song.] The musician would go, right—the musician you know, they, some of the tangents sometimes would even bring in quote unquote secular songs. [Shamell Bell: [laughs]] I remember one moment there was—Tina Turner had “What’s Love Got To Do With It” and someone was singing a gospel song, they talking about, “What’s love got to do it, Jesus got the answer” [sings], you know what I mean? What, what’s the hyperlink? What’s the hyperlink?

So people were trying to convince me that time that you would that—Oh, when I first started, as a side note, speaking of a tangent, when I first started at USC, the lecture course, one of the comments about Professor G was, “He’s literally quote king of the tangents unquote.”

But when I first started at USC I was, like, I’m curious to know they’re like, “He’s king of the tangents,” and it really warmed my heart. [Shamell Bell: [expresses vocally]] I was like, “Yo, that shit is real.” And so then I started, when students would be like “you know you go off on a tangent,” I’d be like, “Okay cool.” When you read a blog post and there’s hyperlinks, do you read the whole post and then go back to the hyperlink and click it or do you read it, there’s a hyperlink, you click it then you go off on to this other, right, webpage and you read a little bit and then you come back? Come on man, stop playing.

So the circularity makes sense so the, in real life, in the digital space is so similar to how we think about spiritual life, how we think about our material selves, [Shamell: Ooo.] always being in communion with our immaterial selves. [Shamell: Oh my god.] Right?

Shamell Bell: Right.

d. Sabela Grimes: Try to wrap their heads around it. What my earth suit is nothing but an avatar so when I’m quantum, I’m an avatar. This [touches his arms] is nothing but an avatar body.

Shamell Bell: Yeah absolutely. You know you're opening up so much for me and giving me the permission to do what I do because I am the queen of tangents like but it's because I'm bi—I thought it was because I was "bipolar." I literally have racing thoughts, a million connections. You say this, I can give you a book that goes there and [rattles] that's just how my mind works. So I often kind of hedge and say, "Hey, you know I may go off on a tangent but just let me know and I can go back to what you're saying."

But what you're explaining to me is so much of just how we're able to, like you said hyperlink, bring it back. It's the church—you're singing that same song throughout, you go into the sermon, you go back, you go in another direction, then you go back to the beginning of what the point of the sermon is like absolutely that's us and it reminds me of this. I love how you did your UCLA on Soulja Boy on YouTube and I'm not sure what the years are, but I was doing YouTube in jerks.²⁶ I didn't know you, but literally my undergraduate thesis was on social media YouTube with these kids called the Rangers²⁷ that helped to make jerkin' an international phenomenon.

So it was something that we were hitting there and for me and and also like the idea of Soulja Boy having these dances that went viral—the idea of the Rangers or all the different jerks reclaiming space, taking up space and dancing in the streets. And what that means for me doing my summer undergraduate research fellowship at Yale and to walk outside and see boys jerkin' and trying to raise money for their skinny jeans. I'm like, "Oh, do you know you know who the Rangers are?" and they're like, "Yeah, yeah." And for people in Yale to know who the Rangers are you know from South Central Los Angeles, these are Leimert boys. They were dancing in Leimert. I was in Leimert every week doing ethno

26. Jerkin' is a west coast street dance.

27. Rangers are a rap/dance crew known for jerkin'.

“autoethnography” but just living, so that, there’s something key about everything you just said, and what the digital—

d. **Sabela Grimes:** And they were viral, and they were viral without social media. Of course, they were they were—social media was around YouTube whatever, whatever, but these trends, these dance trends literally catch on, people catch on and then it’s always about what the body’s doing and how the body is adorned.

Cause the skinny jeans remember—You go to the swap meet²⁸ right now—I’ma tell you there’s a—I don’t know now because I don’t know what’s going on Slauson, but I was at the swap meet. I bought some [of] my costume elements from the swap meet, [Shamell Bell: Of course the Slauson.] just to have the energy. Side note, did you know that the Slauson is literally set up like how they do that in Korea. [Shamell Bell: Yeah.]

This just, like, yo, I took my homegirl she wants to do this film on the uprising in ‘92 and I was like yeah you ain’t never been to the Slauson and she’s Korean, when she walked in and she was like, “Yo, this shit is just like in Korea,” and I was like, “What are you talking about?” For me it’s the Slauson—like this is the Blackest shit ever. She’s like, “Yo, the whole setup.” And it’s just anyway, that has nothing to do [with] what we’re talking about. Going back to the Rangers, go.

Shamell Bell: No, no I’m laughing because I literally would use the word “adorn,” skinny jeans, I wish I—I wonder where it was—I kind of did a poem of my first time actually seeing the Rangers and what it brought up for me in it, I use the word “adorned in skinny jeans” and I talked about the aesthetics, and this is my undergraduate thesis, and it’s so, you’re using the same word, let me see if I can, I’m just gonna do a quick—a search to see if I can find it cause you’re going to laugh that—Yes, here it is. This

28. Slauson Swap Meet in South Central Los Angeles.

is June 2009. Okay, flashback to June 2009, a YouTube entitled, a YouTube video entire, why can't read, okay I got it. So here it is:

June 2009

A YouTube video entitled, "The Ranger\$ Jerkin' in JerkVille" demands my attention and I'm glued to the computer screen as I watch adolescent Black boys adorned in tight, brightly colored jeans, beanies and multicolored flannel shirts, engaged in acrobatic and gymnastics moves. They are using walls as catapults, backflips off of playground equipment and the rooftops of homes and schools, taking leaps of faith, plummeting to their knees with elasticity akin to circus performers or performing simulated baseball plays during freestyle dance routines, dancing wildly in the middle of the street intersections as cars attempt to drive by, street corners, parking lots, alleys, and everywhere else you name it, it was their stage. Skinny jeans on a Black teenage boy, could there be more to their attention grabbing style and movements? For starters, their style is distinct from the typical baggy jeans we are familiar with in hyper masculine hip hop culture. Backpacks on their backs all day during any occasion as an accessory, not for educational purposes, noticeably artistic, bold and radiating radiating confidence as they dance around with friendly disposition and welcoming, inviting the presence of others, these kids are in direct opposition to the stereotypical images youth in being dismal because of their environment. Who are those kids? I was hooked. I wish I were that young again dancing in the streets, in the malls, and hallways at school, teachers pass by as it was the norm. Free spirits asking complete strangers, "Can you jerk?" I had just been introduced to the jerkin' movement.

So that was my field notes for my first, for my undergraduate thesis. That's what I was just writing, and I kept that journal from June 2019, I mean June 2009. Look I said 20—, 2019 is when I graduated with my PhD, June 2019. [d. Sabela Grimes: Eyyy.] Wow.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** So you's—around the same time, it was around the same time, cause I—I was 2008 and I started working on it 2007ish, whatever, like early YouTube days²⁹ which is crazy. And jerkin' and krumpin'—It's really fascinating about how—I don't know if you remember in the early days so called "real" street dancers were dissin' krumpin. A lot of kats—I was just talking to Toyin [Sogunro] and K'niin and Tatiana [Desardouin] about this last night—it's funny to just reflect on there was a moment—they're like, "They're spastic. What are these guys doing?" And then all of a sudden—

Shamell Bell: They all krumpin.

[Both laugh]

d. **Sabela Grimes:** And jerkin' was the same thing. "How are they wearin' these skinny jeans?"

Shamell Bell: The krumpers we're talking about the clowns, the jerks was talking about like, "Why are y'all beefing? Just get out there and move."

d. **Sabela Grimes:** And it's—that tension is always interesting to me and sometimes the tension is actually generative but that's a whole different sort of, that's a whole 'nother conversation right? It—Like, literally you get, [clenches his fists tightly] you just get like, [Shamell Bell: Yeah.] Bol—like, "Yo, jerkin's where it's at," whatever whatever, and people are so in they thing thing, [Shamell Bell: Thing.] that they not trippin. Anyway what's up? They done pop back up so it must be the end of our conversation.

Shamell Bell: Well the thing that I thought was so fascinating it did remind me of you know I'm gang-adjacent, is like what I call it. [everyone laughs] Gang-adjacent.

29. YouTube launched in February 2005.

d. Sabela Grimes: Aren't we all.

Shamell Bell: You know, it reminded me of this, the gang culture like street dance, jerkin', krumpin' all of that, like it felt like home to me. I told you I was around a whole bunch of gang members and didn't know. They was just my peoples, you know? But this idea that you are put into these different—and that's what we do in Street Dance Activism too when we do the workshops: we break out into these different groups who create their own intention, who create their own dance piece of liberation, built off of our, all of our movement vocabulary of our social dances. So yeah, [I] know that that was another tangent but I definitely see the link so, that's so South Central.

I mean, but that's so "urban", right, of gang culture and I—you remember my dissertation, I still had—I held the documentary—but so much of it was me really trying to transcend the pathologizing narratives of gangs and I think that that's also you know what we're doing in Street Dance Activism and I—That's why it's so important. No, you put the street dance there, because it provides the glimpses of us actually transcending those you know pathologizing narratives of gangs. And what does it mean to have these set of people that are, they're maybe consider[ed] the "misfits" or othered in certain contexts? And then you have them inviting more, inviting people across different sets. That's what was dangerous about Nip [Nipsey Hussle].

That, that video last time that I had checked, you remember that? The red and the blue and them wearing the red and the blue and them going in and out, he wasn't alive too much longer after that inviting across where we're supposed to be [clenches fist and teeth] Brilliant.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yeah Nip. I remember when that was March, end of March being in Leimert Park, how you talking about Leimert Park, being Leimert Park after Nipsey was killed, and every car

that drove by, every car then drove by, not only a couple, every car that drove by was playing Nipsey. Every car. Two days later, you in Leimert Park, every car.

Shamell Bell: Every car. I just got goosebumps.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** This year, yo. This year I was in Leimert Park on the anniversary and they had a go-go band out there, which was crazy, and they had these kats cyphering up, doing beat your feet like go-go dances. And you wanna talk about being transported, I was like, “Where am I? Am I in DC right now, or am [I] in Leimert Park?” and that’s how Leimert Park is like a vortex, fam. [Shamell Bell: I said it.] Listen, it was so dope and then of course, the kat from the go-go band starts talking about Nipsey moment of si—, like stop. Okay, we going on a whole different, don’t get me started.

Shamell Bell: I think that that is important like what you were saying about bringing Nipsey, we can talk about it offline, but I do want to have a conversation cause that’s the opening to my dissertation. I recut and did a lot of work—that was April and I graduated June, May/June. In the whole first half of my dissertation documentary I, not whole first half, but like you know the first intro I did a dedication to Nipsey. And what that meant and what does it mean to kind of have him be a bit of a hood Messiah and yeah no, so I think that. . .

d. **Sabela Grimes:** And a street scholar. And a street scholar.

Shamell Bell: Definitely.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** This dude—there’s very few—I mean there’s other—I think I can think of other people like him, but no one like him, you feel me? Like, there’s other models, I think about certain people, but talking about Nipsey, you’re talking about his

business acumen, [Shamell Bell: Yes.] Street. How many people do we know like that? [Shamell Bell: It's profound.] They got it from the streets right.

What he was reading, who was putting him on game about a variety of—? It's like when I think about the street scholar and I think about what I literally when I think about these institutions or UCLA and no shade, [Shamell Bell: No shade.] but what my knowledge and my ability to navigate space has everything to do with the scholars I met on the. . .

Together: Streets.

d. Sabela Grimes: Not in your lil' lecture room.

Shamell Bell: Lil'.

d. Sabela Grimes: Yo. Listen, any professor, including me, that'd be thinking that you putting people—it's only people that don't have that access to [Shamell Bell: The streets.] these, like yo, you know how much game I got in the streets?!

Shamell Bell: All of it. So before we go cause I know Sejani—I forgot Sejani got class at twelve. But I wanted to ask you about, so when I first started to do my work on street dance as activism in my undergraduate thesis because they just saw it as like young hoodlums all dancing in the street and I said that is a form of activism. And there was like a little bit of gatekeeping about what exactly activism is, and so I just wanted to before we you know leave is to explain how from your brilliance how is street dance, activism? You know? Cause people were saying like Tommy ain't activism, they're saying these jerks that are jerkin' here and then able to go all over the world and spread a certain message that that ain't activism. I wanted to hear your thoughts on that/for as it relates to street dance activism.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** Yeah I mean you know it's I feel like they're absolutely right. And they're right with—from their point of reference in the way they're framing it and I'm okay with them being right. I'm not even interested in the back and forth.

Shamell Bell: Okay.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** When let's let's keep it South Central.

Shamell Bell: Always.

d. **Sabela Grimes:** Bunchy Carter.³⁰ Let's talk about Bunchy Carter. There's literal stories about Bunchy Carter, being at a party, like—you talking about with Black Panther Movement of whatever—he'd be at a party, he'd be dancing at a party, he—[pauses] We don't think about Bunchy Carter just as this is the person would [puts hands close together off to the side], you follow me?

Like, this is part of what we do, there's a fullness to the way we approach things, and any, any—and I'm going to speak specifically about Black folk, I don't care about what non-Black people will consider act- like I ain't worried, I'm hearing none of that, that's a non-factor for me. No one's going to be able to, outside the Black community, tell me what I'm supposed to be like. I had enough of that, what's appropriate, what's prop—like, stop. Sit yo—sit down.

But if Black folks being in a Black ass body don't understand or allow themselves to depart from how important it is for my son to dance in the aisle of Trader Joe's, and not understand that me allowing space for that and not policing his body about he, how he's supposed to appropriately behaving, when my son is having

30. Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter was a member of the Slauson street gang and started the Southern California chapter of Black Panther Party. <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/remembering-black-panthers-bunchy-carter-and-john-huggins-who-were-assassinated-on-ucla-campus>

joy because he got his little airpods in and he feel—and then that extends to me not policing the jerkers that are on the corner that said—you follow me? So if we're not having that conversation? Now if my son's bumping into auntie when she trying to reach over and get her ve—, that's something different.

But when it comes down to policing Blackness and Black bodies, that's where I stop, that's very simple for me. And when we need to show up you're going to tell me, looking at the continuum of Black protest from a global sense, so my point of reference also with I lived in South Africa, and people toyi toyi'd. You can feel the energy of the floor yo and you—I'm supposed to come back to the American context, and all we can do is march?! [Shamell Bell: And yell.] Right?! And march, right?!

Well we know people go to the club to get they life. To be affirmed. To raise their spirit. [Shamell Bell: To be welcomed.] To block the bullshit out. And then when we get to a protest, we can't do whatever? A line dance?! And you mad?! I'm supposed to carry this placard and we supposed to do this sort of performance that our foremothers and fathers were doing umpteen years ago, you betta go somewhere. Stop.

Shamell Bell: Thank you so much and all I hear is "sit yo ass down."
[Everyone laughs]

d. Sabela Grimes: Exactly. You know they be trying online, they be like, "'Oh you know I can't believe these people are dancing at a protest. There's a time and place for everything'".

Shamell Bell: Yeah.

d. Sabela Grimes: Where did you get this notion that there's a time and place? That's the real question. [Shamell Bell: This is the time and place.] Where did you get that notion from? How was this not it? Anyway now if I'm handing, if I'm handing police

Pepsis like your girl Kylie Jenner, ya know what I mean? [Shamell Bell: Don't do that, don't do that.] With my phone, I'm handing a Pepsi and I got a phone like this [holding phone out away from the body] and I'm Instagram live, then you can check me. I'm okay with that. [Shamell Bell: I'm, I'm {shaking her head} Anyway Sejani got a class.]

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Well I wanted to say, you know it talks about like what's appropriate and what's not appropriate and who's the holder of what what deems that but also the like what I think a lot about is the legibility and illegibility of Black bodies, right? And where where people are pushing up against what notions of that is and that's really like systemic racism and white supremacy so—

Shamell Bell: Beautiful.

d. Sabela Grimes: Right, that we internalize on each other. [Dr. grace shinhae jun: Yeah yeah.] We are literally thinking, "What are they gonna think about us if we're out here dancing?" And this has a long history and legacy about us policing our own bodies.

Shamell Bell: Respectability politics. I am not here for it.

Dr. grace shinhae jun: This is why the work that you two both do, is so important and so necessary and and needs to be seen, shared and or maybe not—maybe it's not for people to be a part of but, you know.

Shamell Bell: I hope it's just that show, people to show up in their authenticity and really getting to [be] who they really are at a soul level and just live, you know I mean that's what you all allow me space to do. You give me permission to be in my body and live, as resistance, as in that joy being that radical possibility, that's what y'all do for me. And I just, I'm grateful, thank you for seeing me and I see you seeing me.

MiRi Park: Thank you so much.

d. Sabela Grimes: I appreciate y'all. MiRi this is crazy, it's like I'm looking at you all, I think about, I'm so grateful to have these relationships, over time which is really beautiful. I'm just grateful. Thank you Dr. grace, thank you Dr. Park.

MiRi Park: Not yet.

Shamell Bell: Listen.

d. Sabela Grimes: I'm affirming it. I'm affirming it. Thank you Dr. Park.

Shamell Bell: grace you need to get a new picture because

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Ok you ready?

d. Sabela Grimes: Thank you Dr. Bell

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Everyone smile. Ready 1-2-3. [Click. Everyone laughs] Sabela!



MiRi, Shamell, grace and Sabela posing for a picture during their zoom conversation session. grace's personal collection.

d. Sabela Grimes: Alright y'all big blessings.

MiRi Park: Thank you so much.

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Thank you.

d. Sabela Grimes: Appreciate y'all.

Shamell Bell: Bye.

d. Sabela Grimes: Bye.

Shamell Bell: Love you.

Dr. grace shinhae jun: Love you.

d. Sabela Grimes: Love you. Bye.

Shamell Bell: Bye.

Contributors

Shamell Bell is a mother, community organizer, dancer/choreographer, and documentary filmmaker who received her PhD in Culture and Performance from the University of California, Los Angeles's World Arts and Cultures/Dance department. Dr. Bell is currently a lecturer of Somatic Practices and Global Performance at Harvard University. Bell received her MA in Ethnic Studies from UC San Diego and BA with Honors in American Studies and Ethnicity, specializing in African American Studies at USC. Her work on what she calls "street dance activism" situates street dance as grassroots political action from her perspectives as a dancer, choreographer, healer, and scholar. Shamell's research examines street dance movements in South Central Los Angeles through an ethnographic and performance studies lens.

d. Sabela Grimes, a 2014 United States Artists Rockefeller Fellow, is a choreographer, writer, composer, and educator whose interdisciplinary performance work and pedagogical approach reveal a vested interest in the physical and meta-physical efficacies of Afro-Diasporic cultural practices. His AfroFuturistic dance theater projects like *World War WhatEver*, *40 Acres & A Microchip*, *BulletProof Deli*, and *ELECTROGYNOUS* consider invisibilized histories and grapple with constructed notions of masculinity and manhood while conceiving a womynist consciousness. He created and continues to cultivate a movement system called Funkamentals that focuses on the methodical dance training and community- building elements evident in Black vernacular and street dance forms. Previously, Grimes co-authored and performed as a principal dancer in Rennie Harris Puremovement's award-winning *Rome & Jewels*. He received a BA in English and an MFA in dance and choreography from the University of California, Los Angeles.

grace shinhae jun is a mother, wife, artist, scholar, organizer, and mover who creates and educates on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation. A child of a South Korean immigrant, a North Korean refugee, and Hip Hop culture, she values a movement practice that is infused with historical and contextual education and focuses on community, compassion, and empowerment to encourage rhythm and expression. grace is a choreographer who directs bkSOUL, an award-winning performance company that merges movement, poetry, and live music. She is a founding core member of Asian Solidarity Collective and collaborator with Street Dance Activism. grace received an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and a PhD through the joint doctoral program at UCSD/UCI. Her scholarship on Asian Americans and hip hop dance is forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies*. grace teaches at UCSD, San Diego City College, and with transcENDANCE Youth Arts Project.

MiRi "seoulsonyk" Park is a b-girl, choreographer, performer, producer, scholar, activist, teacher, and mother based in Southern

California. She reps New York City, where she spent her formative adult years and learned the art of b-girling and other underground dance forms. MiRi was the associate choreographer of the 20th Anniversary tour of RENT and a lecturer in the newly formed CSUCI Dance Studies program where she teaches dance history and hip hop dance. She is currently a doctoral student at UCLA WAC/D focusing on Asian American corporealities in hip hop dance. MiRi is a recipient of the UCR Christena Lindborg Schlundt Lecture Series in Dance Studies and the CSU Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award. Her writing will appear in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies*. She is a co-editor of a special issue about dance and protest for IASPM and a producer/dramaturg/dancer for *This One Then*, a screen-dance directed by Charlotte Griffin, MA American Studies, Columbia, and BFA Dance and BA Journalism, UMass Amherst. Crews: Breaking in Style (BIS), Tru Essencia Cru (TEC), Fox Force Five (FF5).

Selected Glossary of Terms

Cat/Kat: a slang term used for “person.”

Cypher: dance scholar Imani Kai Johnson has articulated multiple definitions of “cypher” in her scholarship. First and foremost, it is the physical formation of a dance circle in which breakin’ or other social dances take place. There is a spiritual aspect to it in which the act of “cyphering” refers to an energy exchange between dancers and/or dancer and spectator, or, in her words, “the act of building collectively through the back and forth exchange in the circle.”³¹ She makes clear that not all dance circles are cyphers. The notion of cyphers and cyphering can also be applied to other aspects of knowledge and energy exchange.

31. Johnson, Imani Kai. *Dark matter in b-boying cyphers: Race and global connection in hip hop*. PhD dissertation. University of Southern California, 2009. p. 5. For an extended discussion of the etymology of the term, refer to pp. 4–5.

Liner Notes: Nadine George-Graves

Our obsession with locations of embodied knowledge and influence is an important topic in the conversation between Shamell Bell and d. Sabela Grimes. They interrogate hegemonic tools of institutional legitimacy and challenge sites of affirmation by centering on street dance activism and Black liberation. They ask, “Who am I in the street? Who am I in the institution?” “How do we affirm ourselves in the streets?” I come away from this conversation reminded that rejecting the identity crisis the academy wants us to have is a daily practice of decolonizing our minds.

I am reminded that the academy is just the white hood. Likewise is the studio. The creative and intellectual gatekeepers in these spaces make up the rules of engagement, just as much as we do in a cypher. (They just pay themselves more.)

This conversation honors people who dismantle institutions. Kariamu Welsh, Tommy the Clown, Sonia Sanchez, Shamell Bell, and others create spaces for people to show up and put their bodies on the line. They invite us into spaces where we are not “supposed” to be and insist on the importance of spaces too easily dismissed. Terms, labels, and structures come and go. And they usually don’t work in our favor anyway, so we just keep doing the work. While it is important to resist labels that institutions try to place on us, we should also be proud of our accomplishments. All four people involved in this conversation have or will soon have terminal degrees. But I’m confident they will not let academic institutions kill them. My words here are just part of the conversation—another hyperlink. They are the “they” that say. They will continue to affirm our right to define ourselves, locate meaning, and produce knowledge on our own terms. We see each other, no matter our experiences. Black people see each other. I see them seeing each other, and me. We know there is transformational Black magic in all our corrugated dance spaces—as long as we keep it moving.

Author Biographies

Nadine George-Graves is the Naomi Willie Pollard Professor at Northwestern University, where she chairs the Performance Studies Department and has a joint appointment in the Theatre Department. She also serves as Executive Co-editor of *Dance Research Journal*. Her work is situated at the intersections of African American studies, critical gender studies, performance studies, theatre history, and dance history. She is the author of *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville: The Whitman Sisters and the Negotiation of Race, Gender, and Class in African American Theater, 1900–1940* and *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of Dance Theater, Community Engagement and Working It Out*, as well as of numerous articles on African American performance. She is the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*. She is a past president of the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) and former chair of the Department of Dance at the Ohio State University (OSU) and the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). George-Graves is also an artist, and her creative work is part and parcel of her research. She is an adapter, director, and dance theatre maker.