



HAND WRITTEN NOTE(S)



Togetherring

 **Tara Aisha Willis** (<http://old.movementresearch.org/festival/handwrittennotes/author/tara-aisha-willis/>)

 June 9, 2016

 **Festival Writings**

(<http://old.movementresearch.org/festival/handwrittennotes/category/writings/>)

I have so many thank you's to give to this festival, to the artists who are making it come into existence at each moment of performance in ways that exceed forethought, to all the rooms that hold us, to the networks of people and bodies of thought that hold these spaces' walls together; and to my fellow curators and MR staff who have each helped build a stable/shifting structure around our imaginings of what this festival could be.

Today I spent a lot of time arranging bouquets in vases around Brooklyn Studios for Dance, planting flowers outside Cadman Congregational Church, and talking to Eleanor Smith and Aretha Aoki about what we would say to introduce the performance that evening. After a day spent seeing dance-makers Mariana Valencia and Jumatatu Poe wandering around the church and moving through their rehearsal rituals while others scrubbed and shoveled elsewhere in the building, I'm reminded of the multiple kinds of work that go on in my dancing community: the material changes we bring to spaces and institutions by showing up, putting in elbow grease, tending to the structures that support us, making our presence known as part of a community; and the less easy to pinpoint transformations that occur when we dance, when we structure our actions for an audience in an intricate or unexpected design of idea/shape/space/flesh/perception/emotion.

Mariana and Jumatatu gave me a gift yesterday evening: this festival has taken nearly a year to plan and coordinate, and last night (halfway through the week of activities) it felt for the first time fully real, like I understood in my bones and muscles the importance of creating a shape through which these two brilliant performers' actions could resonate through us all. They will be brilliant and their work will glow out with difficult/beautiful intensity regardless of this festival or anything I might have done to help it unfold. But we're all in this together. Or, it takes a village. However you want to put it. We hold each other with gratitude.

Mariana slouches across the stage, chatting us up, withholding information and delaying punchlines as we release further and further into the palm of her hand without realizing it: at once gawky, irreverent, earnest, and elegant, she leaves us suddenly dangling in silence as her arm raises with the potent peaking of Nina Simone's "Wild is the Wind" over the speakers. What the gesture will become is uncertain and I feel the walls drop away from my vision for a moment as she holds the song in her arm, and then maintains a tight relationship to its drama even as she gives a thumbs up, a wild smile, a goofy expression, all in slow motion. It's funny. It's grotesque. It's gorgeous. We don't really laugh anymore because it's real, which is to say it's all of those things.

Jumatatu and his fellow dancer, William Robinson, push us against and alongside the soothing/unsettling/regular structure of an Antony & the Johnsons ballad. Juma has already reminded me that I'm one of a couple black folks in the room besides the two of them, let alone people of color, as per usual. But I rest easy knowing there are 15-20 of Juma's black friends projected on the back wall of the stage, reacting to the piece. They each sit in their own little box in the video, too far away in the long room for me to make out their expressions. But of course, I'm not one of the people in the room who needs to check in with them, Juma reminds us. They are there in case the white folks aren't sure when or whether to laugh during the piece. Familiar as it is to me to be one of a few in the room (if not the only one), the reminder triangulates me with the performers and the projected images, and I adore the feeling: each year I'm less and less capable of sustaining the suspension of disbelief required of me for smooth participation in some of my more lovingly colorblind, primarily white communities. I feel my attention turn inward and outward at once. I can't take my eyes off them, each crafted J-Setting gesture shining dark and golden and laced with shadows in the frontal lighting, breaking down with muscular exhaustion, punctuated by departures to acknowledge/straddle/grind upon the walls or by shifts in sound. I can't take my eyes off my own desire to snap my fingers in appreciation, for a "Yes" or a "Mmhm" or a "Work" to escape my mouth as they execute complex rhythms in perfect accord/discord with the music. I can't take my eyes off my own bodily response to the melancholy location they inhabit, grinning with devotion to the craft of their bodies, within the Antony song. I finally let a quiet "Ok!" loose and it is a relief to be one of the ones not holding uncertain silence, at least.

I have to repost **the below video** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4CbuE6--as>) because around 1:40 Nina Simone feels a large-scale version of the feeling in my heart and it moves her. She moves herself.

Thank you for making your presences known.

NINA SIMONE - I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Fre...



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Tara Aisha Willis

1 COMMENT

Mariana Valencia on Dance Circles « Critical Correspondence

June 17, 2016 at 6:53 pm

REPLY (HTTP://OLD.MOVEMENTRESEARCH.ORG/FESTIVAL/HANDWRITTENNOTES/2016/06/09/TOGETHERING/?REF

[...] Juma treads the line of humor and tragedy as he proposes to the Movement Research dance community to think about what we are actually enacting with this experience in this evening of togethering. [...]

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- **July 2016** (<http://old.movementresearch.org/festival/handwrittennotes/2016/07/>)
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