



indance

September 2014



(top) **NAKA Dance Theater**, Sep 19–21 / Photo by Steven Sanchez, (bottom) **Hope Mohr Dance**, Pictured: **Simone Forti**, Sep 26–27 / Photo by Jason Underhill



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Welcome

WHILE TACKLING DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES, I multi-task, listening on the radio to music, news, game shows, and the wonderful tales presented on programs like *This American Life*. A few weeks ago, while paying bills, I heard a story about how much our culture enjoys making lists. The researcher described that even when something has accomplished, list-makers like myself will write down the task—optometry appointment, gas for the car, renew membership to Dancers' Group—just so we can cross off the task on a list. It's so completely satisfying. Ever since the story ran, I've been observing how I concoct lists—and how others' list-making skills make me envious—and the question arose: where did writing down things to do, to chronicle, to dream about, originate?

In my research I found an intriguing piece by the novelist Umberto Eco about the making of lists in which he stated, "The list is the origin of culture. It's part of the history of art and literature. What does culture want? To make infinity comprehensible. It also wants to create order — not always, but often." The quote comes from *Eco's The Infinity of Lists: An Illustrated Essay*, now on my list to read.

Making lists has such a yin and yang appeal to me: they can be practical, such as a shopping list, or fantastical, like dancing on the Paris Opera House stage, or being featured on page one of the NY Times. Then there are the private lists, like accounting for sexual partners, and I cannot reveal the length of mine. To make a list is to categorize the times of our lives, a simple way to acknowledge them, and create order.

By way of introduction to the engaging articles featured this month, I've made a list of quotes from contributors, hoping to intrigue you into making your own list, or to copy mine. It represents works that range in theme from fantasy, to connection and sharing, to the stories of homeless older women, to gentrification, to police brutality.

Carolina Lugo's & Carolé Acuña's Ballet Flamenco, Sep 6–28 / Photo courtesy of Carolé & Carolina



It's a partial list; see the calendar for additional performances to add to yours.

"Their creative process is careful to not knife along the same wounds the young artists experience on the streets of San Diego, Mexico and East Oakland." —Marvin K. White

"Will it scare, delight, or intrigue? Will it expand them [the audience] or make them feel limited?" —Jo Kreiter

"How can one integrate his or her life and everyday experiences into the world of performance?" —Lenora Lee

"Performance for me is all about a sense of community." —Charles Moulton

"It is an occasion to increase your knowledge base—building time in the theater, building knowledge about how each system works, and most important, building relationships." —Mary Armentrout

"Collaborations enable me to challenge my own, and ultimately the audience's, pre-conceived notions of these traditions [Kathak and Flamenco]." —Pandit Chitresh Das

Eco also has an existential thought, "We like lists because we don't want to die."

I concur! The creative impulse reflects our strong will to give back, to survive, to create a connection to our past, present and future; so please, keep making work and, lists.

—Wayne Hazzard

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A ROVING ELEGY: *The Anastasio Project*

by MARVIN K. WHITE

AT THE EASTSIDE ARTS ALLIANCE’S REHEARSAL of *The Anastasio Project*, a multidisciplinary mobile public performance, young people are engaged in improvisational work that will eventually be a public offering. “Raw” is too cliché a word to use to describe the depths of movement and narrative the performers are being led through and toward. For José Navarrete and Debby Kajiyama, NAKA Dance Theater founders and collaborators on the upcoming *The Anastasio Project*, their creative process is careful to not knife along the same wounds the young artists experience on the streets of San Diego, Mexico and East Oakland. Navarrete and Kajiyama’s deep training in the issues of racial equity, race and shame, the prison industrial complex, and gentrification, as well as intersectional conversations of race and media, make them gentle guides—in the way that Harriet Tubman was a gentle guide. What the rehearsal and its activities, discussion and experiments do so beautifully is not retraumatize black and brown bodies, nor reinforce systemic oppressions, but give the artists distance from the racism, state-sanctioned brutality, and border violence they themselves have experienced. Here at the Eastside Arts Alliance rehearsal they are working the stories through their bodies. Their trials will become witnesses to the project’s namesake, Anastasio Hernández-Rojas.

The artists are being asked to use their crafts to take creative responsibility for the story of Anastasio Hernández-Rojas’ death. In their hands, out of their mouths, through their performance and retelling of his story, the Mexico-born Hernández-Rojas, who lost his life at the hands of United States Border Patrol agents in May 2010, becomes not a saint or martyr but a cousin named Oscar Grant or an uncle named Rodney King, whose truth would not lay in or be lost to the reporting of corrupt police, agents, forces and agencies that allow the dehumanization of black and brown people. Navarrete and Kajiyama work with the artists to find their personal border stories, their stories of being patrolled and policed, and ultimately to find their boundaries and decide if they will honor them, stay within them, or recognize what they keep them from. Are borders to be danced across, or can a poet send a word, a cry for help through? Are the boundaries political, personal, self- or state-imposed? Do you know your place? How do we make whole our lives when we are asked to leave our homes, expend our physical and mental capital on a job that barely pays, then return home under threat and empty? How do we remember joy?

Simone, a dancer, is playing and finding her way through a course of ropes tied around two poles that are spread about 15 feet apart. The only instruction is to improv for 10 minutes and not to think. The room is full of thoughts: sex trafficking, police harassment, dreamless families, gun violence, truth and reconciliation. It is quickly understood that improvisational dance and survival both require instinct. We must always trust our gut. We must not think twice about whether there is enough space to go under, between or through. We must trust that we know our way even when laws, redlining, gentrification or reduced infrastructure have tried to erase our paths. The metaphors come easily. If the strings are an entanglement, a thread in fabric, a weave, how will you unknot your body? If the strings are a fence, laundry lines, musical measures to add notes to, Simone might have to be able to scale barbed wire, use a clothespin as protection, or dance. Maybe in the face of ropes that section off families, blocks, communities and generations from economic and employment opportunities, Simone is a jazz dancer. Maybe this Chinese jump rope and cat’s cradle is her riff that she has to imagine herself climbing through.

Kevin, a spoken word artist, enters into *The Anastasio Project’s* rehearsal space where Simone’s improvisational piece still lingers. “I am not here to entertain you,” Kevin shouts, then begins his poem. He quickly makes the poetic case that the slanted news coverage depicting black and brown bodies at



Photo by Steven Sanchez

the receiving end of police brutality as uncontrollable, rowdy or resistant creates a culture of voyeurism. The televised brutalities against black and brown bodies become “The CNN Hip Hop of the ‘hood,” Kevin says. People are not moved so much as they are entertained. But “I AM NOT HERE TO ENTERTAIN YOU!” he shouts. Kevin makes physical the consciousness of the poem. This poem knows that it is being watched. The poem knows that it is suspect. The poem carries a bat and the poem paces the floor erratically. The poem is looking for an outlet for its rage and the only people that will look a black or brown person’s poem in the eye are the police. Kevin’s border poem recalls the ways in which we are not listless people, that we have destinations and people expecting and praying for our safe returns. Kevin’s poem insists that he will not become the monster that he is seen as or portrayed as.

This is surely what this social justice inquiry, what this voicing made physical, and this physical made voice, this poetic and dance work, is ramping up its energy for: a spellbinding performance of *The Anastasio Project*. We are not afraid of our dead. We are not afraid to speak truth to power. We are not afraid to stand on our front porches, stand on BART platforms, stand on either side of the Mexican border, stand in solidarity with victims of police brutality and call the names of the dead. *The Anastasio Project* is shaping up to be a ceremony, a stations of the cross, Días de los Muertos. There is a creative accounting of all of the systematically broken people in *The Anastasio Project*. There is also a holding accountable the police state perpetuation of crimes against peoples whose brokenness will signal their demise.

[A hush falls across the room. The energy particles are scattered and attention is on the man who has entered the Eastside Arts Alliance. He walks across the room and disappears through another door in the rear. When our brain and blood cells realign, someone asks, “Do you know who that is? It’s Bobby Seale.” The same Bobby Seale that, along with Huey P. Newton, founded the Black Panther Party for self-defense in Oakland. Radical,

righteous and revolutionary sign that *The Anastasio Project* is being called forth from the past, present and future? Check.]

The Anastasio Project, with the guidance of Navarrete and Kajiyama, is surely the embodied outcry and the poetic testimony. It is the cell phone video that signals the police brutality. It is testimonies from mothers of dead sons entered into evidence that refute the lies that black and brown bodies are worthless. *The Anastasio Project* is a roving elegy that does what only art can do: transcend borders.

The Anastasio Project is a multidisciplinary mobile public performance that kickstarts an investigation of race relations, state brutality and border violence. NAKA Dance Theater created *The Anastasio Project* in collaboration with Eastside Arts Alliance muralist Leslie Lopez and video artist Steven Sanchez, as well as a cast of youth and adults from East Oakland and San Francisco. The work includes stories from the East Oakland community, a sound and video system on wheels, dance, theater, murals and a topic that is relevant to all of us!

The Anastasio Project will take place at the Eastside Cultural Center September 19-21 at 8pm. Additional mobile performances will happen October 26 & 28 and November 2 & 4, 2014 at four main sites in Oakland:

- Taco Track Sinaloa, 22nd Ave and International Blvd
- Super Mercado “Mi Pueblo,” 29th Ave and International Blvd
- Clinica de La Raza, Fruitvale and East 16th St
- Fruitvale Plaza near the Fruitvale BART Station

More information at nkdancetheater.com

Marvin K. White, author of four collections of poetry (redbonepress.com); Our Name Be Witness, Status, last rights and nothin’ ugly fly. He is currently pursuing a MDiv at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

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Images (background) Livermore Valley Performing Arts Center; Bankhead Theater; (front, from top) Alonzo King LINES Dance Center, Campbell Heritage Theatre, The Ashby Stage.