

Graphing a Movement (R)Evolution: An Archival Study of Faustin Linyekula, Germaine Acogny, and Beatrice Kombe

JOAN FROSCH

“Perhaps my body is my only true country.”

- Faustin Linyekula (“Movement (R)Evolution Africa: A Story of an Art Form in Four Acts”)

Over the last decade a wave of experimental choreographers in and of Africa have re-imaged African pasts and present, and configured a new landscape of contemporary performance. The artists whose works and words have contoured this landscape have not only contributed to the dynamic interplay of the arts and globalization but have cleared a space for performance in advancing human aspirations in the 21st century. Among these artists are experimentalists Faustin Linyekula, Germaine Acogny, and Béatrice Kombé (1974-2007), to whom the work is dedicated. This research will position these choreographers not only as artists, but as philosophers and historians, who have—through the body—theorized love, historicized absence and loss, interrogated war, problematized memory, and challenged the wearisome persistence of the ontological specters of essentialism. Their practices have also contributed to the splintering of prevalently held views of experimental dance as a mostly “Western” and mostly white domain of artistic production. Indeed, the study of these artists’ investigational dialogues with contemporary life has the potential to situate African experimentalism as a wellspring of 21st century knowledge and innovation.

In contrast to their growing continental and global presence, African experimental choreographers rarely have been acknowledged in the English language literature to date. However, the movement they have engendered has evoked enthusiastic aesthetic responses from a growing number of global artists. I am one. From 2004 to 2007, I directed and produced the documentary feature “Movement (R)Evolution Africa: A Story of an Art Form in Four Acts.” Featured artists of the film have used the film to educate their audiences and students, and it has been screened in over 200 international festival



screenings and television broadcasts to date. Documentary Education Resources published the film for international distribution in 2009. Yet the film’s vast archives of primary materials, housed in the University of Florida Belknap Collection for the Performing Arts, has yet to be theorized. The one-of-a-kind archival data include: interviews with artists, artists’ public presentations, rehearsals, and public performances of choreography, among other categories, other artists’ writings and resources, including reviews and dramaturgies.

The goal of the research is to address the significant historical gap in the literature on African experimental dance practices. Using the diverse lenses of Linyekula, Acogny, and Kombé’s pedagogy, creative practices, and theoretical discussions, I intend to mine the archive’s 123 hours of primary

materials to create an interdisciplinary and integrated path of theory, art, and culture in a forward movement toward our shared future - a path quickened and inspired by the contributions of African experimental choreographers. In so doing, the research proposes the first full-length English-language study theorizing the burgeoning contemporary African dance movement.

Joan Frosch is professor of dance in the Department of Theatre and Dance, Co-Director of the Center for World Arts, and affiliate faculty with the Center for African Studies. The documentary, “Movement (R)Evolution Africa: A Story of an Art Form in Four Acts”, was supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Center for African Studies, the Harn Museum of Art, the University of Florida Center for Performing Arts, and the UF Fine Arts Scholarship Enhancement Fund.