



"Breakin' the Rules": Eleo Pomare and the Transcultural Choreographies of Black Modernity

Rachel Fensham

The radical innovations of African-American artists with artistic form during the 1960s and 1970s, according to black performance theorist Fred Moten (2003), led to a new theorization of the avant-garde.¹ His book, *In the Break: The Radical Aesthetics of the Black Tradition*, discusses the poetry and jazz music of artists, from Amiri Baraka and Billie Holiday to Charles Mingus, and extols their radical experimentation with the structures and conventions of aurality, visuality, literature, and performance dominant in European art and aesthetics. In this essay, I consider the implications of these processes of resignification in relation to the choreographic legacy of the artist, Eleo Pomare, whose work and career during this period was both experimental and radical and, I will suggest, critical to the formation of a transnational, multiracial conception of modern dance.

Although Pomare is best known for his work as a black choreographer and leading figure in the black arts movement in New York (DeFrantz 1999, Perpener 2001), this essay examines lesser known aspects of his career including his early education, his collaborative time working in Europe (particularly in Amsterdam during the early 1960s), and the impact of his visit to Australia for the Adelaide Festival in 1972. I was privileged to interview Pomare at length just six months before he passed away in May 2008, and I will make extensive use of his own representation of these activities. My research also includes consultation of archives in New York, Amsterdam, Canberra; the examination of newspaper accounts; and interviews and correspondence with some of Pomare's artistic collaborators.² While this approach adds to the historiography of black modern dance, my interests are specifically located in analysis of his choreographic projects, and to the ways in which his influence has contributed—beyond the United States—to the transnational circulation of modern dance concepts and practices. This circulation involves interaction with, and embodied transmission of, ideas about the performing body, narrative forms, dance genres, and the politics of expression. Pomare's work in different continents was also significantly extended by the many artists who danced with him, as well as by his repeated displacement from any singular artistic or intellectual milieu.

Rachel Fensham is head of the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, and formerly a professor of dance and theatre studies at the University of Surrey (UK). Her research interests focus on theories of corporeality and spectatorship in histories of movement and performance, with current projects on perception, movement analysis, and archive technologies (<http://www.dance-archives.ac.uk>). Her recent publications include *To Watch Theatre: Essays in Genre and Corporeality* (2009) and *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth Century Dance* (2011). She will be co-editor of a forthcoming Palgrave book series, *New World Choreographies*. In 2003, she enjoyed a period as a visiting professor at the Dance History and Theory Program at the University of California–Riverside and has presented keynote addresses on dance research in Taiwan, Korea, Australia, and the United States.

This essay aims, therefore, to consider how theorization of the avant-garde within the black tradition might extend an understanding of modern dance's specific modalities of aesthetic intervention.³ It is for this reason that I have found Moten's complex book to be a productive starting place for analysis, and I have attempted to use strands from Moten's argument that provide new concepts for thinking about a radical performance tradition. He generatively stresses the interdependence of a black radical aesthetic with conceptual shifts taking place in twentieth century European philosophy, particularly linguistics, that have variously regarded language as a game, a syntactical system, or an apparatus of deferral and repetition, producing genres, subjectivities, and ideologies.

Moten, in particular, uses semiotics to dismantle and decode linguistic or musical signs, symbols, and sounds, as well as the deconstructive philosophy of Derrida to unravel the effects of absence and presence in the politics of black performance practices. In the first instance, however, he develops a close analysis of selected works by positing a model of semiotics that builds upon the logic of Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of first order iconicity, in which a sign or icon is identified by analogy with an object or subject of discourse (Moten 2003, 91–2). In second-order iconicity, according to Moten, the space between orders of meaning becomes the sign of an effect, or a "mechanism" that admits of the fullness of the sign because it recodes black experience as both temporal and ontological (2003, 92–3). The semiotics of this second-order iconicity uses structures of the poem, the song, the dance, and recombines them—perhaps like an Eisenstein-style montage—in order to reformulate semantic units and endlessly attend to the ways in which an artwork reflects or represents a totality. Aesthetic tactics, such as improvisation, montage, recombination, and a refusal to explain, therefore replace the neat equivalence of sign with meaning applied to conventional interpretations of black music, poetry, or art.

A number of key terms or concepts circulate in this book, and they include the notion of "the cut," whereby the relationship between any specific singularity of the artwork—such as vocalization, rhythmic polyphony, visual icons, anecdotal narrative, or duration—and its meaning are intercepted and actively replayed by the radical aesthetics of the black tradition. For the purposes of this essay, I focus on "the cut" because of the way in which it reconfigures the avant-garde notion of aesthetic rupture.⁴ For Moten, a cut, which is the quasi-instantaneous experience of a new perception, applies not only to the formal logics of a work of art and its ordering of form and expression, but also admits to the work of art the gendered, racial, geographic, and economic interventions of historical experience. The advent and action of the cut, with their restructuring of relations between the intervals that make up the second-order iconicity of new musical and poetic structures, therefore have a force and dynamism that give shape and meaning to "the ensemble of the social and of the senses" within which black artists must, and do, create (Moten 2003, 223). Part of Moten's argument appears to be that the fullness of a concatenated performance sign never exists in black experience, so that the objectivity of actions—syncopation, stuttering, cutting—stand in for the failed realization of the utopian future proposed in the work of art, as well as for a subjectivity that can never have full presence in orders of representation given by white, Western cultural aesthetics.

Unlike European theories of the avant-garde, where rupture has been identified with modern aesthetics in the work of certain key figures and values, Moten proposes that a black avant-garde constitutes a wider aesthetic and social set of practices. The persuasive force of his argument, in my view, is that his approach includes artists across music, poetry, and the visual arts (although noticeably not dance), and thus suggests that the historical avant-gardes were always interdisciplinary and transcultural. As the product of a particular set of social and historical conditions that emerged for black artists in America after the Second World War, his reading of an avant-garde aesthetic within the black community notwithstanding the experimentation of a parallel, but largely autonomous, generation of white avant-garde postmodernists, adds, I would suggest, to a more carefully historicized understanding of the (de)formations of modern dance aesthetics that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. Through analogy with Moten's concept of the cut, I intend, therefore, to examine

how Moten's theory of black aesthetics might help us to evaluate the significance of Pomare's artistic project and its importance within this wider conception of a transnational aesthetics of dance modernity.

My argument about Pomare's expanded legacy, in Europe and Australia, also draws upon Paul Gilroy's discussion of black modernity in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) as a continuously "mobile" project motivating an economy of intellectual and cultural exchange between Europe and the Americas over several hundred years. For Gilroy, the more black scholars, writers, and musicians became acutely aware of the cultural heterogeneity of their history, the more traffic there was between the knowledge systems of European philosophy, history, and politics and the lived experience of life in the "new world." From these encounters, a "double consciousness" emerges to interpret the historical conditions that split being as "a product of Western civilization" from having a "racialized identity" created and conditioned by that same civilization.⁵ For Gilroy, the articulation of these concepts becomes a necessary precondition of modernity that runs counter to European claims for the emancipation of individual subjectivity. In the context of this article, I will suggest that the geographical movement across the Atlantic also becomes a defining hermeneutical shift for Pomare that puts into relief his idealized European heritage in relation to slave histories in the Americas.

A parallel movement between Australia and Europe constitutes another set of translations between colonial and imperial histories that shape individual subjects, artistic development, and modernity. The geographical coordinates of this study in transcultural mobility include the expatriation and return of dance artists traveling, yet not on "tour," between America, Australia, and Europe; their displaced encounters with each other function through the shared experience of being "strangers": a "body out of place" (Ahmed 2000, 55). Moving beyond Gilroy's conception of a traffic between Europe and America in the formation of black consciousness, I want to suggest these interactions become what Moten calls "encountering migrations," because they activate a "politico-economic, ontological and aesthetic surplus" productive for dance aesthetics (2003, 41). The work of the integrated dance company, Eleo Pomare Modern Dance Company (1960–1963), in the Netherlands, and his formative collaboration with artists (in particular the modern dancer, teacher, and choreographer, Elizabeth Cameron Dalman [née Wilson] from Australia), become residual—and lingering—cuts in a radical black aesthetic tradition.⁶ What derives from the hybridity of his encounters with modern dance are, therefore, alternative forms of production—ensemblic, improvised, inter-racial, cross-gendered, and "unfinished"—that reconstitute the transnationalism of modern dance.

From shifts to cuts, to incisions and breaks, Moten maps out and negotiates the coordinates of this mixed-up terrain of cultural production that he calls the "vast asylum of the West" (2003, 41). Undertaking then a "paradoxical duration or contextualization" of both Gilroy and Moten's theories in relation to Pomare represents a rupture within the circularity of meanings, which situate modern dance in Pomare's New York and "Black history" identity, and leads to an experimental approach towards a black aesthetic that cannot be aligned with one geographic location (Moten 2003, 54). In what follows, I develop an archaeology of "cuts" that exemplify this aesthetic formation, folding back and forth temporally and spatially between specific events. Excavating Pomare's life and work in this way has, I contend, implications for a more racially hybrid historiography of choreographic ideas in modern and postmodern dance, particularly those relating to abstraction, collaborative art-making, experimental sites of performance, and the relationship between visual art, sound scores, and dance.

Cut 1: "Breakin' the Rules"

Born in Cartagena, Columbia, and raised in Panama, Eleo Pomare moved to New York when he was a child to live with his aunt and uncle after World War II. From 1949–1953, Pomare attended

the High School of Performing Arts in New York City, whose school curriculum included acting, modern dance, art history, and musical studies.⁷ One of few black pupils, Pomare often felt like “a fly in a bowl of milk” because of his middle class Colombian-Panamanian background; he did not identify with Afro-American histories of the slave or Negro, and he refused to act as a second-class citizen (Pomare 2007). He remembers, however, his teachers providing a formidable training in the two dominant modern dance styles of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, with the latter his preferred method. Pedagogic relationships engendered in the composition classes became critical to his education:

I had one teacher, Louis Horst, whose theory I lived by. He said, you learn all of this, you learn it perfectly—so that means you’ve learned rules—but if you’re to create—if you’re creative—you learn the rules so that you can break them with consciousness. And if you dare break the rule, then it has to be replaced by another perfection—your own—and you have to be willing to suffer the pain for having broken the rule. (Pomare 2007)

Breakin’ the rules is a concept that engenders for Pomare a “consciousness” of his difference, that is critical for Gilroy—as is “experimentation” for Moten—in modern, black, and avant-garde identities and practices.

After graduating in 1953, Pomare continued his studies with individual teachers in order to progress as a choreographer, although there were limited options available to him as an artist. His alienation from prevalent dance culture was mirrored in a “postwar consensus” that dominated during the Cold War period, according to dance historian Susan Manning, for “modern dance and Negro dance enacted the contradictions of the postwar consensus: . . . [including] the tension between civil rights activism and the persistence of racial hierarchy” (2004, 184). Having inherited the traditions of modern dance from his education in the works of Martha Graham, Helen Tamiris, Doris Humphrey, Lester Horton, and Merce Cunningham, Pomare was familiar with the touring and teaching schedules of their companies. Although they mostly employed white dancers and performed for white audiences, new opportunities for study and work in integrated settings had begun to emerge.

Both Graham and Cunningham had employed their first black dancers by the mid-1950s, and African-American artists Pearl Primus and Alvin Ailey ran their own companies, while Katharine Dunham was employed in Hollywood. Other African-American performances were enjoyed by an expanding dance audience, although the representation of black experience differed considerably. Dunham was immersed in Caribbean dance forms and ritual practices; Primus had combined jazz forms, such as the blues, with primitive dances from Africa; Ailey was elevating the spirituals and stories of the deep American South into choreo-poems. According to Manning, black dancers were, however, often suspected of being aligned with Communists, and representational politics was polarized: “Whiteness became equated with (universal) or unmarked (abstract) bodies, while blackness became identified with culturally marked bodies” (Manning 2004, 180). If modern dance aesthetics allowed white choreographers to utilize a repertoire of abstract forms that gave shape to mythic or archetypal themes, an emergent black choreography was restricted to dramatization of Negro narratives. The representation of Negro life (or the identification of black dance with Africa) conflicted with Pomare’s appreciation of classical music and other forms of dramatic performance. He regarded rituals and affirmations of tribal identity, whether related to African or Christian beliefs, as dramatically interesting, but insufficient, as representations of black experience—a position affirming Gilroy’s subsequent view that Africa cannot represent “authentic, purity and origin” in the circulation of popular music (1993, 199).

During this period, Pomare was fortunate to share a downtown studio with choreographers, such as Anna Sokolow and Talley Beatty, who were making new works—both solos and political pieces. By

1957, Pomare had formed his own company, Corybantes, and they presented an evening length recital for a junior high school; this mixed program outlines a choreographic vision that continued throughout his career.⁸ All original pieces, they included a provocative social commentary about insanity (*The Pit*), a piece about redemption through humor (*Just for Fun*), another placed in a lived community (*Corner Church*), shaped by the inspiration of classical or evocative music—from Bartok to Les Baxter’s “exotica” and traditional hymns, and two pieces about ritual practices (*Invocation* and *Moontrance*). The closing work of the evening, *The Wind and Quicksand*, derived its title from a poem by the Spanish-American writer Doris Meyer, in which “The Wind tastes of a different life, a life all free, all wild, all unstepped on and unimprinted.”⁹ Pomare played The Boy, Janice Burlekoff played The Mother, and the chorus represented “foreboding, belonging to the wind, and wind blown.”¹⁰ In semi-autobiographical format, the reference to the wind contains an allegorical interpretation of Latino history, in which a poetic form of justice is shaped by the elements of music, literature, and dance, since the mistral that blows between Africa and Southern Europe was believed by South American writers—such as Meyer—to blow in its wake artistic influences from South America to Europe. These literary inspirations form part of a wider pan-Latino culture that was significant in shaping Pomare’s artistic identity, as is evident in one of his most famous works, *Las Desenamoras* (*The Unlovely/Unloved*, 1967), a full-length choreography inspired by Garcia Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba*, but based on memories of his Columbian grandmother and her many daughters.¹¹

In the final scene of *The Wind and Quicksand*, danced to a score by Béla Bartók, Pomare danced the distorted protestations of a broken priest-like figure, staggering diagonally across the floor.¹² Pomare’s description of this scene resembles the last section of his work *Cantos from a Monastery* (1956), which was performed to the music of Armenian-American composer Alan Hovhannes and developed during the previous year under the tutelage of Horst. Whether it is *Wind and Quicksand* or *Cantos*, Pomare’s account of this dance was embedded in a powerful corporeal memory. Acknowledging the modern dance rule, that what falls must rise, he created an extended sequence with the dancer on his knees, not rising up. Symbolically and structurally, he was opposed to the uplifting image of Negro spirituality so admired in the Ailey aesthetic. While he enjoyed the beauty of Humphrey’s sweeping gestures, Pomare saw no benefit in providing the spectator with a falling and rising motif, because such actions could appear to redeem the effects of suffering. Instead he showed the ethnically marked body of the black religious man crawling on his hands and knees, sustained only by the droning long notes of the Eastern European music.

This early example given by Pomare of “breakin’ the rules” of modern dance may be important to note. Whether this cut sufficiently represents Pomare’s corporeal style is difficult to argue; however, in the context of a resistant patterning that occurs in later works—forcing the body to carry on with a broken spinal attitude—this semi-upright motif, unresponsive to the lingering effects of gravity, makes space for a feverish mobility: a moment between the rising and the falling that includes throwing back the leg, keeping the shoulders lifted, staying up on that elbow.¹³ “Breakin,’” in symbolic terms, includes Pomare’s rejection of the redemption offered to the downcast, or “black soul,” and a more fulsome refusal of the Christian mission (Pomare 2007). The endurance of crawling articulates a break from narrative design, and a corporeal logic, which previously required the graceful and completed inhalation and exhalation of a modern upward gesture. This oppositional positionality, visible in both performer and choreographer, rebels against patronizing white expectations that the black artist will perform as supplicant. And a radical reordering of the spiritual sublime, such as this, has been a distinctive characteristic of the black avant-garde tradition.

Cut 2: Not Dancing “Primitive”

Pomare’s own trajectory departs from the bipolarities of American dance culture with a journey to Europe. Having won the John Hay Whitney Fellowship for study abroad, Pomare joined Kurt

Jooss's Dance Department in the Folkwangschule Für Musik, Tanz und Sprechen in Essen, Germany, in 1959.¹⁴ Inspired by the political content of Jooss's *The Green Table*, which depicts diplomats bargaining for the territorial spoils of war and shadowed by the specter of death, Pomare hoped to escape the stereotyping of a "Negro Zionism" that he felt constrained him in the United States.¹⁵ However, Pomare found European race consciousness constructed on another set of binaries: a colonial mentality configured through the anthropological distinction between civilized white and primitive native. Manifestations of binarism—critiqued by postcolonial scholars, including Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak—construct the language, politics, and identity of others as inferior to the subjects of European culture. Just as W. E. B. Du Bois, sixty years earlier than Gilroy's study, realized the profound ambivalence of European modernity toward the non-white races, so was Pomare to confront "the continuing practice of white supremacy" in some aspects of European thought (Gilroy 1993, 113).

At the Folkwangschule, Pomare studied modern dance, ballet, and choreography. However, since the European dance community had little exposure to the variety of American modern dance, Pomare offered classes outside the scheduled program to his fellow international students. Eventually, a small group of dancers from the school began to perform his repertoire for an audience of American soldiers, as well as at the U.S. Embassy. Within the first year, however, a critical incident led to a clash between Pomare and Jooss over the values of modern dance pedagogy, which was particularly striking since Jooss had re-established himself as a choreographer creating new balletic works and teacher of an advanced dance curriculum (Walther 1993, 15). In 1960, the British choreographer and American ballet teacher, Antony Tudor, was employed to teach some repertoire for an end of term concert at the Folkwangschule. Tudor wanted Pomare to perform with bare chest and bare feet, while a young female dancer remained fully clothed, but Pomare refused to cooperate, insisting that he too would perform in dance costume. When challenged, Jooss backed Tudor's vision and insisted that Pomare dress as requested. Moreover, Jooss forbade Pomare to participate in more external teaching or performances, since this student's autonomy was in conflict with his own authority in the school. The gap between Pomare's sense of choreographic entitlement had been forged in the American tradition, and Tudor's construction of black and white dancing bodies as an exclusionary difference therefore had to be challenged. Pomare refused to compliantly perform "the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body" that he felt was endorsed by Jooss, and which required preservation of a racialized hierarchy within dance (Bhabha 1986, xvi). Jooss's artistic conception of European modernism seemed in conflict with other modernist principles of expressive flexibility and ensemble performance that Pomare valued. Moreover, he could not perpetuate a logic of submission between white man and black that had previously been the condition of the slave.

Pragmatically, Pomare regarded Jooss's approach as unreasonable and racist, and he decided to leave: "I had a scholarship to learn, and if I wasn't learning in a school, I could learn from dancing and working with others" (Pomare 2007). Without providing details about the antagonistic relationship with Tudor, the black dance scholar John O. Perpener gives a similarly negative account of Pomare's departure from Jooss's school—"I couldn't take that dogmatic bull"—however Perpener does not expand upon the next, more productive, phase of Pomare's European career (2001, 209). To Jooss's surprise, all the dancers in Pomare's group boycotted the concert and left Essen with Pomare for Amsterdam. His colleague and friend, the Australian dancer Elizabeth Dalman (then Wilson), who had performed with the Ballet de Lage Landen (a touring Dutch ballet company) and in the Dutch production of *My Fair Lady* in Amsterdam, provided vital links in this bold move. In addition to being a member of the Eleo Pomare Modern Dance Company, Dalman became the new company manager, and, with a small group of dancers, this ensemble was the crucible for Pomare's intensive experimentation with modern art and modern dance.

The company also had to earn a living; one performance contract in the summer of 1962 involved regular weekend shows called *The Dance and Music of Africa* at the Tropenmuseum which, as its

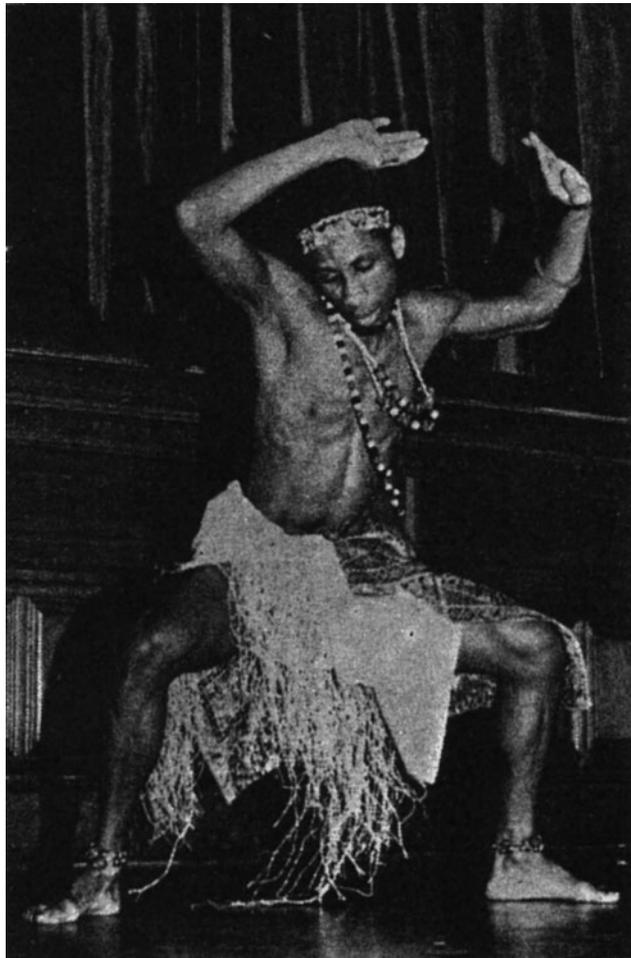
name suggests, was the museum holding the tropical artifacts of former Dutch colonies. Instead of showing African dance, which none of them were trained in, Pomare's company presented a mixed program of modern dance, including abstract and more comic pieces, although the promoters requested more black dancers, wearing grass skirts and dancing barefoot (Pomare 2007).

Mindful of the potent value of primitive representations in European modernity, Pomare devised a test for his audience, as he explains:

[W]e used to perform a *Construction in Green* to a selection of Bach Suites, but I decided "Ok these are the primitives, these Europeans are the primitives." What I did for the next performance was dance barefooted, but I got African drummers and, instead of doing it to Bach's music, I did the exact same choreography to African music and suddenly they loved it. (Pomare 2007)

By aligning the visual with the aural, Pomare created the illusion of a generic African choreography, in spite of the inter-racial ensemble. With this distorting of the European gaze and its desire, Pomare fine-tuned his double consciousness of modernity as a corporeal fiction: on the one

Photo 1. Eleo Pomare "dancing primitive" at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, 1962. Foto-reportage by Gerhard Herbert, "Vrije Expressidans von Eleo Pomare," magazine clipping, from the archive of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company (with permission).



hand, he understood that Africa was a construction of the colonial gaze whose last possession of the African body was distributed across museums, art houses, and in the fascination of dance companies (including the Nederlands Dance Theatre) with “primitive” vocabularies of movement. On the other, he understood that the performance of “Africa” participated in an endless circulation of aesthetic ideas, based on the analysis of rhythmic structures, barefoot dancing, and grass skirts. By reinserting his black American corporeality into this mimetic chain as a form of pun, he inverts the passive image of a black man dancing to the desires of the observer. Working with mixed race dancers, the “Africanist aesthetic” becomes a second-order syntax in which the gaps between corporeal presence and musicality challenge and recode white perceptions of the “primitive.”

Cut 3: Making Art, Not Entertainment

Pomare began by renting a studio for rehearsals and teaching. He was the only American modern dance teacher in Amsterdam, and, with the establishment of the Nederlands Dance Theatre in 1961, there was growing interest in modern dance in arts colleges and with local companies.¹⁶ The vibrant 1960s Dutch arts scene became a kind of “mecca” for artists, encouraging action painting, Fluxus, synthesized sound, environmental theater, *arte povera*, and other forms of experimental collaboration (Eversmann 1994). These new approaches to artistic form had an impact on Pomare and his dance group, as he reflects: “We were all looking for some other space then—the [other dancers] wouldn’t define it as such, but I would define it as the white aesthetics. Some of them were aware of the fact that it’s not all pink toed shoes and tutus but—art and work” (Pomare 2007). If Pomare had felt marginalized in Germany, and within mainstream European culture, the cosmopolitan environment of Amsterdam proved more receptive to new ways of working and living as an artist.

In association with the company dancers, Pomare reconstructed much of his early choreographic repertoire and began making new work. When Dalman was chosen to perform *Angels Watching over Me*, she recalls sitting for hours listening to gospel singers in a music shop, watching how they would clap and become possessed by the spirit (Dalman 1994). Back in the studio, Pomare deconstructed the gestural codes and embodiments observed by the dancers, isolating phrases in order to develop a movement language for each individual regardless of skin color, size, or gender. This process shaped *Harlem Moods*, which premiered in Amsterdam in 1962, as “Harlem, black man’s ghetto, dirty tenements, violent world of love, hate, racial prejudice.”¹⁷ Each section involved detailed studies in dramatic character, not just a copying of the imagined movements of black migration and slavery. The resulting three-part work—*Underworld*, *From Prison Walls*, and *Dat Day*—was later expanded into his signature piece, *Blues for the Jungle* (1966), although the original title of *Harlem Moods* makes an ironic link between Haarlem, The Netherlands, and Harlem, New York, that is quite explicitly trans-Atlantic; according to Pomare, the Dutch preferred their dancing to be moody rather than modal.¹⁸

In a project sponsored by Philips, the Dutch electrical goods company, Pomare performed under the structures of giant steel plant turbines (see [Photo 2](#)). In a series of photos, his outstretched body appears dwarfed by the scale of the equipment, but equally as tensile as the wheels and shafts around him; the film cameras documenting this performance suggest the lithe angularity of Pomare’s poses might have been imagined as striking images for a promotional film.

And in a program at the Nieuwe de la Mar Theater, Pomare constructed *Blues for Two* to the music of Alfred Katz (Herbert 1962); see [Photo 3](#). In one image from this two-part work, Elfrun Boscini’s backwards lean lies in awkward tension with Pomare’s extended arm, and her half-closed eyes trust her weight to his careful cradling. The twisting torsos and simple leotards, abstracted from character, reveal an intimate corporeality in the black man holding the white woman. According to Dalman, Pomare always responded to individual specificity in order to generate a powerful affective

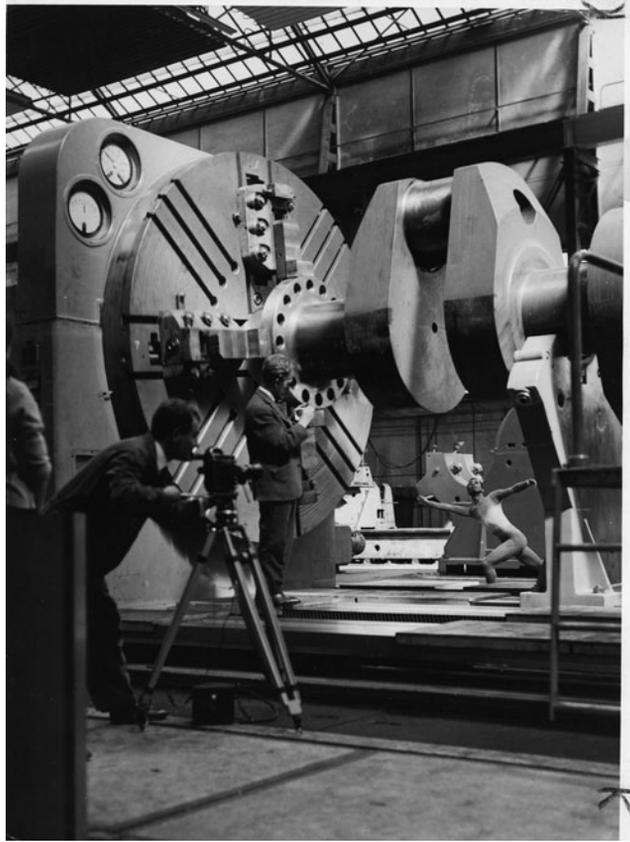


Photo 2. *Eleo Pomare solo, 4 a.m.*, filmed by electronics manufacturer Philips, Amsterdam, 1962. No attribution, photo from the archive of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company (with permission).

response from his audience, and this cross-racial duet shows a tender coupling that Tudor had earlier failed to recognize (Dalman 2011).

The most significant Dutch performance was a collaboration with the electronic composer Ton Bruynèl, Japanese-American sculptor Shikiji Tajiri, and African-American painter Sam Middleton, and was presented at the Theater De Lantaren in Rotterdam in November 1962 (it was also presented in Aarnhem, Eindhoven, and Leewarden). Under the title of the principal work, *Resonance*, the mixed program included *Jazz Impressions*, the solo *4 a.m.*, and several improvisations, but it was through *Resonance* that “the public was confronted with the collectivism of the contemporary arts.”¹⁹

Middleton, who still lives in the Netherlands, has produced a body of paintings that continues to be colorfully inspired by the musicality of African-American jazz rhythms and structures. The set for *Resonance* showed vivid slashes, spirals, and geometric shapes, and included a metal Tajiri “bird” sculpture mounted on a spire (see Photo 4). With microphones attached to the sculpture, the Pomare dancers improvised in this abstract landscape “like living sculptures,” triggering prepared sounds.

Bruynèl was the first Dutch artist to establish a recording studio for a new generation of electronic composers and became the first lecturer in sound technology at the University of Utrecht. For *Resonance*, his experimentation with electronic sound included a prepared sound score that responded to the “slow motion mobile-like movements of the dancers” with an eerie amplification



Photo 3. Eleo Pomare and Elfrun Bouscein in *Blues for Two*, Rotterdam, 1962. Foto-reportage by Gerhard Herbert, "Vrieje Expressidans von Eleo Pomare," magazine clipping, from the archive of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company (with permission).

in "long, echoing sounds."²⁰ At the forefront of avant-garde experimental performance in the Netherlands in the early 1960s, this multimedia ensemble work was described by critics as "dance in an electric storm" and a "crazy figurative echo of Dadaism" (Dalman 1962, 6).

In order to reverse the logics of reproduction in white aesthetics, Moten deconstructs ontology (the given-ness of identity and form), and proposes instead that materials transfer across the bridge of an oppositional encounter: "shaped by a step away that calls such positions radically into question" (2003, 21). In Pomare's hybridized performance work, and the collaboration with artists themselves, who are multiracial, displaced, and abstracted, Pomare begins a recoding of modern art practices through his choreography of shape, tone, and rhythmic elements. He also establishes models of artistic experimentation that radicalize the black artist as an outsider in relation to previous hierarchies of modern dance in America. Through improvised action, the eloquent bodies deliver a break with tradition that is both particular to its historical moment, while at the same time redrawing the lineaments of jazz, black experience, and performed sound. The resonance between dancers of different nationalities moving in a syncopated tempo across a striated visual horizon produces therefore a new radical expressive tradition based on travel, community, and experimentation.

Cut 4: A Space to Be Seen

If the first generation of African-American artists during the post-war period fought hard against racial segregation, dance scholar Gay Morris (2006) argues that their critical inclusion in modern dance historiography required the sort of resistance that Pomare undertook in Europe to contest "ethnic" demarcation of choreography. Artists who asserted virtuosity as performers and creators of abstract dance, such as Gus Solomons (who danced with Merce Cunningham and later briefly with the Judson Church postmoderns), achieved general acceptance in an integrated arts scene.

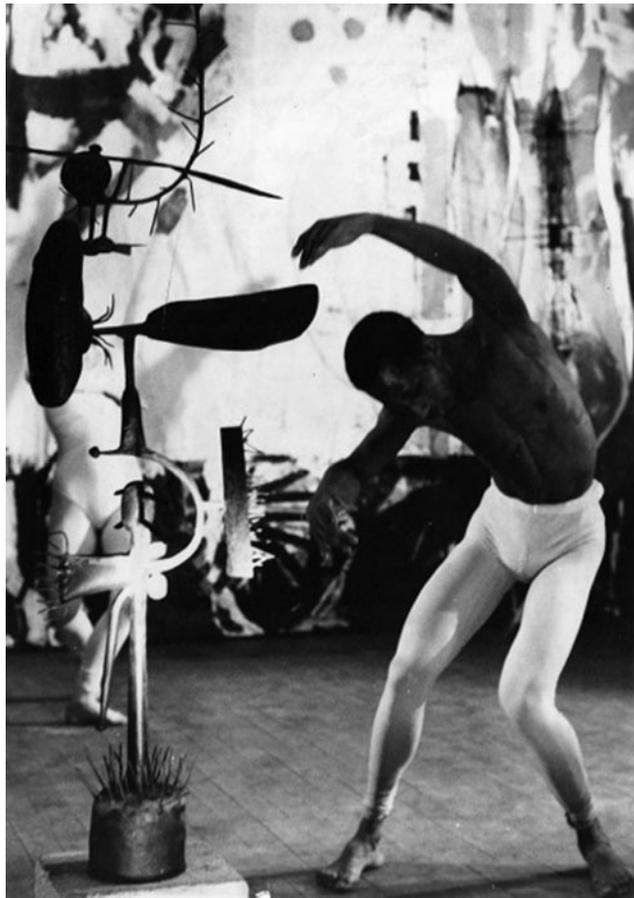


Photo 4. Eleo Pomare, Elizabeth Wilson (Dalman), and Marie-Christine de Monyé in *Resonance*, Rotterdam, 1962. Dekkinga Studios. Photo from the archive of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company (with permission).

The incorporation of black artists into the mainstream, however, was regarded as a “double-edged sword,” since it often privileged qualities such as sheer energy or detached display in exchange for silence on issues of race or discrimination: “While it marked a new level of equality, it did so at the risk of blunting black choreographers’ ability to use dance as a weapon of protest” (Morris 2006, 164).

When Pomare returned to the United States in 1963 (during the height of the civil rights marches), it was a time of protest, and he found concepts of Black Power liberating older stereotypes. Black subjectivity came to be constituted as an ensemble of effects forged out of the desire for freedom, and the translation and manipulation of elements from the African-American experience. Blackness became identified with being “cool,” with Afro haircuts, Black Power in politics, and the celebration of “black is beautiful.” Tommy DeFrantz argues that “black dance” became defined by “its artists as work that was explicitly engaged in the act of black self-identification” (2002, 11). Gilroy also identifies “double consciousness” with a duality, and self-awareness articulated by African-Americans who identified as Negro as well as American. However, he also argues that the movement between black people across the Atlantic produced “a dream of global co-operation among peoples of colour” (Gilroy 1993, 126). For Pomare, his return to the United States gave him the encouragement to become a black activist, and his profile and choreography asserted new found freedoms of self-expression, as DeFrantz attests.²¹ However, an international manifestation of his double

consciousness became critically activated in a subsequent encounter with indigenous Australians, which was initiated by his ongoing association with Dalman.

As they were invited to be guest artists at the fledgling Adelaide International Festival for the Arts in 1972, the Eleo Pomare Modern Dance Company instigated a visibility for modern dance, and also for black experience in a context widely different from post-war Europe or civil rights America. Since her own return to Australia, Dalman had formed a new company, the Australian Dance Theatre (ADT) based in South Australia in 1965; Dalman had performed parts of Pomare's repertoire in their touring seasons. The Festival invitation was designed to increase Pomare's profile for the local dance community and audience.²² Mainstream Australia, however, proved resistant to the radical intentions of Pomare's art. Regarded as the most Anglophone of Australia's capital cities, Adelaide's late colonial development had attracted mostly aristocratic and professional classes; its post-war immigration scheme had privileged British workers apart from an influx of Italian and Greek migrants in the 1960s. Arguably closer than other cities to indigenous communities in the desert, the local Aboriginal population had been decimated through the resettlement that was a byproduct of nuclear testing in the 1950s and the expansion of the mining industry. By 1972, the local Aboriginal population was barely visible, except perhaps in the riverbeds of Elder Park surrounding the newly built Festival Centre. Modeled on the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, the biennial Adelaide International Arts Festival saw itself as a "beacon" of the arts by importing world class culture, and was to become a key fixture of the national arts landscape.²³

Pomare's visit crystallized the white hegemony of cultural values in the Australia of this period, however—in particular, in its representation of non-white performers and politics. Presented by artistic director Louis Van Eyssen, the 1972 Festival program included the West Australian Ballet Company, a small "electronic ballet," a Russian Folk Ensemble, and a "South East Asian Dance Spectacular."²⁴ Notably, the schedule reiterated a hierarchy that saw white concert dance as universal and artistic while, as with the Smithsonian Folkways recordings of music, promoting all other dance forms as ethnically other; Pomare and his "Negro dancers" thus presenting a double-bill showing "Negro experience" (Tideman 1972). Pomare's longstanding rejection of this nomenclature, and indeed its outmoded use in the United States by this date, sits particularly uncomfortably with Pomare's then-reputation with New York critics as an "angry black choreographer," or, the Malcolm X of the dance world.²⁵

His company's marginalization from the Festival mainstream was further exacerbated by the choice of venue. A map in the Festival program shows a small arrow on the bottom right margin pointing towards Chequers, an out-of-town bingo hall. When Pomare arrived to set up and rehearse, the Philippines Dance Company was still relocating from a room that was "small, like from that chair to the window"; because his "modern dance, complete with 18 dancers" and integrated lighting design needed "a space to be seen," he refused to perform (Pomare 2007). See [Photo 5](#). Active in the previous decade with fellow artists in the civil rights agenda, he outed the Festival administration with their segregation by racial stereotype:

It was ridiculous . . . the owner of this theater said "it was okay for the Brazilians," and I said "well the Brazilians were in Brazil and they know now that you're only interested in their butt shaking and tits, but this company doesn't work that way." So they had to refurbish a whole theater, put in seats and fix up the stage, and put up the sets in a day—everywhere they turned. (Pomare 2007)²⁶

Miscast as "Negro," Pomare's insistence upon the right venue was a declaration of visibility—in geographic, artistic, and media representations—for his integrated, "modern" company. Assumptions that had preserved the cultural category of "folk" for any non-European dance for the Festival committee were to be unsettled by his actions. Indeed, Pomare's commitment to aesthetic formalism depended upon concepts that were well-established in American and European



Photo 5. "Dancers Ban SA Theatre," Newspaper clipping, The Adelaide Advertiser, March 20, 1972, no page.

modern dance, such as choreographic authorship (including set designs and trained modern dancers) and individual subjectivity (complex choreographic principles and a professional work ethic), which he was proud to own.

Cut 5: Causing a Scandal

Having protested against his company's marginalization, Pomare recalls another political intervention during the Festival:

The Mayor—was it of Adelaide—came to my dressing room and begged me, because the newspapers and television were after me to say something—political things—about what really was going down, such as property rights in Australia. He begged me not to make it an international scandal—please don't make a scandal. He was the one who had this whole movie house that had been condemned, refixed, and made into a workable theatre in two days. (Pomare 2007)

Since not on a United States state-sponsored visit, the risks of an "international scandal" may seem exaggerated. However, a series of violent clashes between police and protestors had dominated anti-apartheid demonstrations in Adelaide during the South African rugby team's Springbok tour, only six months earlier. Anxious not to attract media attention, the mayor appeared ignorant of the black artist's involvement with American modernity's claim for equality, justice, and franchise. With

these censorious events surrounding the visit and the media focus on the company, a mixed reception to the opening night was almost inevitable. *The Adelaide Advertiser* shouted affirmatively, “Brilliant!” However, the *Advertiser* also praised local artist Dalman’s role in preparing the audience for the “vitality” and “abstract shapes” of modern dance (Tideman 1972). In *Missa Luba*, a story-dance work that examines the hypocrisy of the African church in its support for slavery and missionary activity, the reviewer praises—with no irony—“the tradition of Western Christianity and ancient tribal Africa” that is fused by “the spirit and vitality of the troupe.” And although impressed by “unending interest in the speed and agility” of the abstract work, *Movement for Two*, the reviewer finds the music of Morton Subotnick “pounding unmercifully on the ears” (Tideman 1972). The confused politeness of the critics barely registers the balance between the theatrical abstraction and political satire that shaped Pomare’s repertoire.

The program concluded with the completed *Blues for the Jungle*, set to music by Charles Mingus and others, which begins with a slave auction and enters, as DeFrantz explains, “a dysfunctional black community peopled by drug addicts, prostitutes and various denizens” (2002, 86). Notably, the syncopated steps of the dancers, strutting around the stage in a series of longish riffs, are continuously interrupted by lunges, stretches, and other offbeat interventions from dancing bodies wearing an assortment of tight pants, beanies, and short skirts. In the solo, *Junkie*, performed by Pomare, his body transmits the twitches and desperation of an addict’s shattered nervous system. Risky in conception, the dancer’s corporeality pursues a simultaneously violent and terrified reality, spinning upside down on a swivel chair.

Moten’s description of the black avant-garde as a spatial politics offers a potential reading of *Blues for the Jungle* as “a choreographic play of encounter . . . making certain folks meet in the city . . . where the absent presence becomes the absent and structuring center of perspectival urban space” (2003, 40). The absent presence Pomare creates is the movement of black folks living in the city, where gaps in history and representation are contested by an idiomatic, pedestrian, yet exaggerated and disjunctive corporeality. With its radically asymptomatic temporal structures, Pomare’s dystopic “jungle” relocates the sound of the blues—of a recycled black consciousness (as I have suggested)—from the restless energies of trading ports such as old Haarlem (where the slave trade began to circulate) to a representation of the streets of New Amsterdam, 1960s New York. The cosmopolitan energies of the dancing, even when now viewed on video, significantly prefigure recent choreography, such as that produced by Belgian company Ballets C de la B, whose *Iets Op Bach* (1998) depicts the spasmodic and flamboyant embodiments of an urban tenement. Butted against the cool alarm of Mingus’s bass playing, the present absence of black bodies in Pomare’s *Jungle* intensifies the complex matrix of urban space; however, the choreography never descends into chaos but holds its people aloof, conceptual, and detached.

Reflecting upon the impact of that first Adelaide season, Carole Johnson (then the leading Pomare dancer) suggests that Pomare’s choreography provoked an extreme response: “Establishment ‘white’ Australia was totally uninterested, in fact many were revolted, by the content and method of Eleo’s art” (Johnson 1974, 70). However, the ensuing scandal, the performance shock value, and its disruptive force extended beyond its effect on white audiences and a mainstream media to an interruption of the status quo between indigenous art and white cultural hegemony.

Cut 6: Distributing Tickets

The 1960s saw the end of an official immigration policy for “white Australia” and a national referendum that gave Aboriginal people franchise. However, a white and English heritage remained the “natural model” for Australian society (Stratton 1998). Connections between ethnic or racial groups were less developed than within the United States, and the radicalization of Aboriginal groups emerged more fully only in the following decades. Johnson, who was both a skilled dancer and a

leading advocate within the Black Dance movement, went to teach in Adelaide before the concerts, and met some indigenous elders whom she invited to the Pomare performance.²⁷ Given the marginality of indigenous communities from mainstream cultural production, this Aboriginal presence in the audience produced another rupture, as Pomare explains:

On opening night when they finally—when I finally approved the venue—someone came back stage and said the manager of the theater would like to see [me]. So I said, “Go out and bring them back,” and he said, “It’s several people and they can’t come backstage. Would you come out and meet them?” So I walked out, and there were these Aboriginal people. I’d never seen them before, but one guy who spoke English with a click-like language said, “Well, you’re the first black company, and we wanted to buy tickets to get in and we can’t get tickets. Can you arrange for us to get tickets?” So I said, “Well why can’t you get tickets? I mean there’s a ticket box.” Then I said, “I have lots of tickets,” and I told the manager . . . and these were prime tickets. I said, “Can I have my batch of tickets?” and I gave them away, and this guy went berserk because I’d given these people I’d never seen the orchestra seats. I said, “May I also have tomorrow night?” or, as a matter of fact, I’ll keep my tickets and send the people to the box office. Well, after that we had some black audiences who knew what we were talking about when we performed, and then after the performance they had these small things—throwing interesting little rocks, instead of flowers. . . . (Pomare 2007)

According to Gilroy, the “double consciousness” of a global black modernity is a reasoned transaction, expressing solidarity with excluded, or racialized, others; it is not surprising that Pomare and his dancers belong in solidarity with the indigenous people. The “intercultural encounter,” in Pomare’s terms, not only contests discriminatory policies, it also ensures transmission of modern dance to those “who knew what we were talking about.” And the Aboriginal leaders (un-named) who demand to see the “first black company” are constructing an alternative social economy.²⁸ Rejecting the white capitalist consumption of art, a connectedness between black cultures was thus understood through the reciprocity of gifts—dances and “little rocks”—in an encounter that might never have happened: “It would have been fairly hidden from us, the Aboriginal people would have been hidden, if we went and did just the festival and all of the socials and everything” (Pomare 2007). But, as Johnson explains, *Blues for the Jungle* “really excited the blacks who saw for the first time how the contemporary arts could be used to convey relevant social messages” (1974, 70). This excitement contributed to subsequent changes, with Johnson’s support, within indigenous dance practices over the following decades.

Cut 7: Educating the Audience

In this section, I offer a more detailed analysis of one of Pomare’s works from this period that exemplifies the transgressive, racial, and formal cutting up of signification in his choreography. Structured in three parts to the songs of Bessie Smith, *Gin. Woman. Distress.* is a solo dance that depicts the slow collapse of a woman, living on the streets, who has been drinking—with and without love. Choreographed by Pomare for Dalman in New York during 1966, this work was then taught to Johnson, who performed the work in Adelaide in 1972, and was extensively toured by Dalman between 1966 and 1987 in Europe and Australia.²⁹ Dressed in a short black evening dress, gaudy jewelry, and high-heeled shoes, the dancer appears mostly off-balance; she is cast into relief by a single spotlight “creating the effect of two people dancing on the stage” (Warren 1969); see [Photo 6](#).

On one level, the work represents an abstraction of Bessie Smith’s story of drowning herself in alcohol—of being a feminist who said “I’m a strong woman, don’t mess with me”—or, as Pomare recalls her death after a tragic car accident: “When you know that story, you go—oh, shit!” (Pomare 2007).³⁰ As an excavation of the “sad, sad story” of the *Gin House Blues* (1926), the choreography



Photo 6. Elizabeth Cameron Dalman in *Gin. Woman. Distress*. Australian Dance Theatre, c. 1967. Photographer: Jan W. Dalman with permission of E. C. Dalman.

scrutinizes the physical vernacular of being abused, gazed upon, and rotted by drink.³¹ Gestures range from a lopsided reaching and swinging of arms to a sideways shuffling and wiggling—step side, side, spin, spin—while push-away lunges produce the rhythmic stresses of Part One. Still semi-coherent, the woman begs for recognition—“your honor hear my pleas”—but cannot help removing her shoes. With bent arms and hollowed back, the dancer’s orientation is indirect, attenuated.

In Part Two, she appears to seek an embrace, but frequently the dancer stares blankly forward, rejecting points of contact between the viewer and herself. At other times she turns her back, sits on her haunches, and lifts her body with difficulty from side to side. Her butt is like a well-worn heel scraping the floor. When she turns back, her arm is across her face, hiding from view any possible bruises. The averted downward gaze brings the focal energy to the navel, distorting the sexy “come hither” of the temptress. Toward the end, the woman turns her body full frontal and stretches her legs open (as if revealing the split, or splits, of the feminine). Within seconds, the remains of this powerful active gesture falter, and the dancer leans sideways into the floor, collapsing through the elbow.

In the introduction to this essay, I explained that Moten posits a signification that is troubled, messed up, cut up, and replayed by black performance: “this old-new thing . . . this old-new language—tragic, hopeful, fallen—of the broken ensemble, the phenomenal object” (2003, 124). For Pomare, the woman’s corporeality in *Gin. Woman. Distress* is an old-new thing to be broken, yet any movement must resist falling into tragedy by retaining the dynamic efforts of self-presentation. The phrasing of material such as “contraction and release” involves the fiber of muscles drawing upon knowledge of precise “internal movements” in order to extend awkwardly

across the floor. These contradictory gestural patterns, therefore, retain reference to a form of corporeal narrative that accumulates, as singer Smith expresses, in the state of “being down and out.” Having been chosen to portray this character, Dalman suffered from the physical effects of rehearsal: “My body was in such turmoil, and he would say, ‘push the leg more, the arm more,’ . . . the shape being the feeling for the viewer” (Dalman 1992). The staggered use of weight and the disjointed gestures were stripped of their primary emotion, so that the vocabulary becomes gestic in the Brechtian sense, by showing how a social attitude is historically realized in the body. In the dancer’s final turn towards the audience, blame is placed upon the spectator, as Pomare says, “Any woman can be on alcohol, and woman is woman—distress they both share—they’re sharing the same events, and treating what they had for breakfast differently. It’s an education for the audience” (2007). Beyond the mournful singing, the dance contends that a woman’s suffering is an abject condition, made of social ignorance and brutalizing actions. And for the spectator, the degraded phenomenology of the “woman” (whether black or white) lacks a redeeming beauty or moral code, showing that there are no rewards for good behavior. Rather, these recodifications have generated corporeal signs that replay old wounds and lacerate crazy riffs of expectation. According to Moten, the vocality of the blues holds a resistant materiality, while in Pomare’s choreography the messed up materiality of a painful gesture demonstrates how hard it is to reproduce another’s suffering (Moten 2003, 18).

Cut 8: Black and White and a Gray Situation

For Moten, the black avant-garde can be theorized through the event, or a “slice” that represents the temporal and phenomenological rupture of artistic conventions. These art breaks (or events) exist as experimental performances that create different economies of surplus value. Bound by collective interests, black artists in the 1960s used different devices to re-inscribe the condition of their objectification: one strategy was through constituting an ensemble, another was through the play of improvisation, and yet another was a form of lingering, which proved resistant to the onward progression of space and time in the event. This form of lingering localizes the spatiotemporal logics, so that, in Moten’s terms, the improvisation of the black artist articulates particularities or singularities, which negate the conditions of a “reproducible reproduction” (2003, 18). What does this mean? If reproducible reproduction is the formulaic exchange value given in the performing arts, so that the predictability of a performance is its value to promoter, critics, and audience, then stasis results. In this formula, reproduction, for the most part, leaves the black artist as an object, defined by the reliability of his representation of black identity along a spectrum of more or less black, or more or less radical.

In December 1966, both Dalman and Johnson presented *Gin. Woman. Distress.* at the Choreographic Workshop Series of the Association of Black Choreographers. Although the structure and steps were set for both dancers, the expressive delivery of the choreography was also, as dance theorist Laurence Louppe suggests, “a means of investigating the material and oneself, the productive potential of each person and the field of potential in the . . . community which gives it life” (2010, 160). The different physical characteristics of the two dancers would, according to both Dalman and Johnson, reveal the “humanitarian elements” of the choreography (Dalman 2011). Small changes, however, make a large difference to the signification: Dalman wore no wig and her heels were steeper, while Johnson tore off a curled black wig and pendant earrings (DeFrantz 1999, 87). On the one hand, Dalman’s gin-swallowing shows a white woman imploding against the sterility of domestic rituals that prop up a hostile world, whereas Johnson seems to depict a black woman whose rage, slowly and regretfully, has dissipated with alcohol. The promise of contemporary dance, according to Louppe, is that each dancer invents “new or unanticipated arrangements” in the dancing body, even where pre-established relationships, exchanges, agreements, and duplications might exist; this promise seems borne out in this unusual pairing (2010, 160).

Pomare explains the qualitative difference between the dancers in terms of temperature: “When Lizzie does it, it’s as if she swallows the heat and you feel that the heat is burning from the inside out, that she’s not going to let it explode. Carole ices it; she’s like a block of ice until you see the cracks when it starts melting, but the gin . . . woman . . . distress” (2007). Perhaps the poetics of this choreography lies, therefore, somewhere between hot and cool jazz—combining the speed of interrupted modal changes with that of a sonorous bass melody. In the performance, Pomare explicitly framed the two solos like an abstract expressionist action painting:

I had made a duet for myself and another dancer where we wreck the studio. In a strange way, it began with one person with a pail of white acrylic paint . . . and one person with black acrylic paint, and we proceed to just throw it at one another until it becomes this ugly shade of black and white. This work was followed on another level with Carole doing the Bessie Smith and then, right after, Liz does it. So you have black and white paint, you have black and white women, and you have a gray situation. (Pomare 2007)

While asserting the ambivalence of a black man dealing with the shadows in a history of black bodies, Pomare’s “gray situation” also represents the heat of deconstructive forces shaping all bodies that, in Moten’s terms, aims to articulate a negation of a negative—the absence of racial (in)difference (Moten 2003) (See [Photo 7](#)). Gray and grayness suggest the absence of feeling. However, in the appositional aesthetics of Pomare, there is no guarantee of loss or forgetting through art, or music, because he releases the shattered intensity of women’s bodies as a challenge to any lack of difference.

In 2008, Dalman passed on the choreography of *Gin. Woman. Distress.* to an Australian indigenous dancer (Tammi Gissell) and, together with Johnson, the three of them re-presented the work at a dance concert for the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA). In Australian English, “gin” is a derogatory term for an Aboriginal woman, so the corporeal substitution of white for black, black for white, of indigenous for black, continues to scramble the codes of race and gender signified in *Gin. Woman. Distress.* When I described this latest

Photo 7. Black and white composite photo of Eleo Pomare and other dancers, Amsterdam, c. 1960s, from the archive of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company (with permission).



manifestation of his choreography in Australia, Pomare was excited that a new embodiment of Bessie's voice would "give power" to the pain of black experience, however messy and complicated that might be (Pomare 2007).

Conclusion

Eleo Pomare died in New York City in August 2008. Since then his legacy has been celebrated with an exhibition *The Man, The Artist, The Maker of Artists* at the National Museum of Dance from 2011 to 2012. Born in Colombia; educated as a dancer in New York and Germany; with an early career working and touring in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark; and with tours and repertoire performed in Australia and Taiwan, his reputation as an "angry black choreographer" must be contested.³² His artistic innovations precede many concepts later introduced in postmodern dance, with their pedestrian vocabularies, improvisational structures, visual design, and electronic music, and yet he continued important lines of radical modern dance that cross ideological codes, dance conventions, and social rules.

Moten stresses that an "appositional aesthetics" provokes an encounter between two modes of perception, which can be understood both within the form of a work as much as in its content (2003, 22), for instance, within a poem whose lyrical rhythm might include additional stresses or beats. The formal design of Pomare's technique, which evolved throughout his career, includes (at this time) distinct body part isolations, long extensions to compensate for his body height, a wide leg stance, and exaggerated—sometimes sudden—rhythmic turns. In more dramatic works, by his own admission sometimes "very raw" with content, the corporeal style could also be elegiac, witty, and abstract (Pomare 2007). *The New York Times* critic Jennifer Dunning was a sympathetic reviewer during the 1980s, and she describes watching sixteen of his dancers in *Back to Bach* with "lyrical arms; open, surging torsos . . . (which) look columnar. There, dancers in elegant apposition pivot in on themselves and bend to one another, like heavy-branched, resilient willows, with the lightness of a sigh" (Dunning 1983). Pomare, however, was always concerned with deconstructing a "spiritual core" or "essence" in his choreography; his use of atonality, a de-centering through the spring in the floor, and a twisted up-lifting of the torso suggest an aesthetics that Moten has connoted as "nimble and full of fiery and delectable shapes" (2003, 55). What seems striking here is that Pomare's lifelong engagement with corporeal contradiction—and with the musicality of syncopation whether in Bach or jazz music—gave him the capacity to make an art that resonates as a humanity located in diverse bodies, across different contexts and geographies.

If one of the conditions of modernity is that subjects can participate in artistic or intellectual experimentation as individuals, yet make claims to the rights of a universal social and political franchise, then Pomare's personal history makes a significant contribution to the recognition of African-American creators as modern dance artists in the mid- to late twentieth century. In this sense, aesthetic modernity, as Gilroy (1993) has indicated, is made possible by a mobility of class, race, gender, and geography. It arises from the productive interaction and cross-fertilization between people who recognize, as Moten argues, that the "opposition between the vernacular and the modern, the black and the white, is to be thought precisely in that they are both, if they are real, the product of a miscegenative encounter that exists as a function of the difference between the actors and the internal difference of the encounter" (2003, 71). Miscegenation produces a difference that incorporates the internal structuring of an encounter between Pomare and his teachers. It does this in the recoding of oppositions between the American and the European with the Negro and the primitive, in a lifelong duet with Dalman as absent and present—a white female collaborator—and in the unexpected marginal meetings of Pomare with indigenous Australia. Miscegenation could be the motor of a creative invention that remains acutely responsive to the singularities of each corporeal event as it happens. In this essay, I have identified eight cuts that activate racial and cultural encounters, which might be considered critical to a process of transgressive art-making. The sensible

appreciation of each cut, or event, resituates an understanding of modern dance as the “productive transferences, carryings or crossings over, that take place on the bridge” of a radical black aesthetics, as constructed by Pomare in his journeys to Europe and Australia (Moten 2003, 18).

Revisionist histories, as DeFrantz acknowledges, are producing a “conceptual complexity” in the interplay between “black dance” and “African-American dance” that suggest diverse audiences and critical strategies (2002, 17). Pomare’s “integrated” company and intermedial arts practice suggests, however, a more radical possibility for the black avant-garde that makes the circulation of choreography subject to post-colonial readings of race, experimental art, and modernity in the late 1960s and 1970s. In Pomare’s visit to Australia, the “double consciousness” of the transatlantic subject encounters white blindness, colonial stereotypes, and an indigenous community demanding change. However, his conception of modern dance as an expressive ensemble also introduces indigenous Australians to artistic ideas which, as Pomare explains, are partly the “rebellion [t]hat started Bangarra,” the contemporary Aboriginal Dance Theatre (2007). When Johnson remains in Australia and helps create NAISDA in 1975, Pomare’s legacy remains an influence in the formation of Bangarra Dance Theatre in 1989.³³ The stones thrown by the Aboriginal audience mark, therefore, an indigenous incorporation of a black radical aesthetics, which in turn signals a localized gesture in a new assemblage of modernity, race, and dance.

For Moten, “lingering in the cut” involves staying with the syncopation of intervals that have been cut and reconfigured, and allowing what is felt in the moment of a jazz improvisation—or a poetic diegesis to be asserted—an effect that cannot be located by deconstruction, but that remains part of the phenomenology of a semiotic system. According to Moten, to linger in the cut is to shuttle between the singularity of recoding and the totality of the newly realized event as “a generative space that fills and erases itself. That space is, is the site of, *ensemble*: the improvisation of singularity and totality and *through* their opposition” (2003, 89). This paradox of an improvisation taking place simultaneously through the oppositionality of the singular event to the totality, and in, or through, the experience of ensemble, constitutes a nondialectical dialectics that remains critical to Moten’s sense of the potency of avant-garde intervention during the 1960s and 1970s. There is no singular moment in which the novelty of black art reflects or replaces other modes of expression, although it is the cut between white and black aesthetics that defines the expanded significance of the artwork and its social relations. The lingering and “breaking open” also involve something hitherto unexpressed or negated—often tragic—that remains the residual content of that cut.

Cutting into the transcultural experimentation of this era involves shuttling between the felt sense of radical participation through art, and the simultaneous exclusion of black dance artists from the promises of historical fulfillment or future emancipation; this refrain becomes trumpeted, growled, and remixed (according to Moten) in the black art of the 1960s. A rethinking of this aesthetic project has much to say about the radical potential of a dance aesthetics that departs from the borders of nationalist, and individualist, cultural readings of choreography. Pomare, ever the visionary and protagonist, of a choreographic project yet to be fulfilled, in the distribution of resources, representation, and recognition given to artists across cultural and economic borders, asserts that: “What the artist should do is be an instigator, or a forecaster, of things to come” (2007). As a forecast, the syncopations of a corporeal vernacular felt between the gaps in Pomare’s choreography (from its classical to its jazz combinations) contribute, I am suggesting, to an open—hopefully lingering—understanding of global modernity.

Notes

1. This article is indebted to an extended interview with Pomare conducted at his home in New York in November 2007 and to interviews with Elizabeth Cameron Dalman (Wilson) and Carole Johnson, both former dancers with Pomare. Their collective generosity and the insightful

support of Pomare's manager, Glenn Conner, informs my reading of the historical narrative presented here.

2. Research project, "Transnational and Cross-Cultural Histories of Australian Dance: 1970 to 2000." Monash University, funded by the Australian Research Council.

3. Taylor (2010) provides a useful overview of what might constitute a black aesthetics and its relationship to changing definitions of "blackness" and aesthetics relating to politics in the United States. See also DeFrantz (2005) for extending the question of black aesthetics to dance.

4. Theories of aesthetic rupture propose interruptions in artistic and political regimes by "opening up a gap" and "undoing" a previous order, for instance in Jacques Rancière's *Dissensus* (2010, 16).

5. Gilroy discusses both Du Bois and Douglas Wright's contribution to the notion of "double consciousness" (1993, 116, 161–2).

6. The Company seems to have had various names during this period in the Netherlands, including Dansgroep Eleo Pomare and Eleo Pomare and Dancers.

7. With a birth name of Forbes, the young Eleo lived with a Colombian uncle and aunt, called Pomare.

8. *The Third Annual Dance Recital*, The Parents Teachers Association of Andrew Draper Jr. H. S., Benjamin Franklin Auditorium, East 116th St. N.Y., June 8, 1957, Mixed Materials file in New York Public Library Dance Collection (NYPY857004027-A).

9. Although the full reference to this poem is not given, I'm attributing the link to the author from an early piece of writing by Doris Meyer, who later became professor of hispanic studies at Connecticut College and wrote a book on the "first lady of Argentine letters" called *Victoria Ocampo: Against the Wind and the Tide* (1979), in which she develops the thesis about the mistral in Hispanic literature. During Pomare's time in New York, she was teaching at CUNY and may well have been known to him personally.

10. Program note, *The Third Annual Dance Recital*, op. cit., Mixed Materials file in New York Public Library Dance Collection (NYPY857004027-A).

11. Choreographed to John Coltrane's *Olé*.

12. Pomare's explanation of this solo resembles that of *Cantos*, choreographed a year earlier under the tutelage of Horst, to music by American composer Alan Hovhaness, suggesting this sequence may have been reworked to different music for this concert.

13. Pomare (2007) regards Dalman as taking the details of his style and formalizing the codes in her teaching; in archival film of Dalman teaching repertoire to students these movement qualities can be carefully observed and identified in other footage showing Pomare's work (National Film and Sound Archive, Australia, 1991).

14. Pomare's father was killed in Panama during the Second World War by a German torpedo, so there is a sense of psychological restitution in this narrative.

15. This concept of Negro Zionism he equates with a kind of triumphal view of the Negro's ascendancy in the United States (Dalman 1962).

16. In 1962, the Netherlands Dance Theatre were formed in Rotterdam, so there was growing consciousness of modern dance and choreography. In the Harlem Cultural Council Dancemobile program, Pomare's biography includes reference to teaching for the Het National Ballet of Holland and the Scapino Ballet Company and School.

17. *An Evening of Contemporary Dance*, program note, Nieuwe de la Mar Theatre, Amsterdam, March 24, 1962.

18. *Blues for the Jungle*, presented in New York in 1966 involved six vignettes rather than three (Perpener 2001, 210). The revised title seems to be a riff on dance artists who had appropriated the blues (such as Ailey) with his *Blues Suite* (1958), rendering it more classical. Pomare, on the other hand, twists the musical reference to reconfigure the association between blacks and the primitive as a reality portrait of the urban ghetto.

19. In Dalman. 1962. *Eleo Pomare in Holland*. Miscellaneous Typed Notes, 1–6.

20. Anonymous reviewer cited in Dalman 1962, 6.

21. Perpener (2001) identifies Pomare as militant, while DeFrantz notes that black dance became an “art of protest” (2002, 86).

22. Australian Dance Theatre (ADT) was the first full-time professional modern dance ensemble in Australia.

23. The 1970 Festival had been curated by expatriate Royal Ballet choreographer and dancer Robert Helpmann, including Thai Classical dancers (recalling the popular film *The King and I*), the Georgian Folk Ensemble (representing the Russian exotic of the Ballets Russes), and Helpmann’s own choreography for the Australian Ballet; his influence helped establish a profile for dance in subsequent festivals. The opening event of the Helpmann festival also included possibly the first multimedia installation-cum-happening in Australia staged by contemporary composers, photographers, film makers, and the Australian Dance Theatre.

24. Adelaide International Festival of the Arts, 1972, program in personal collection.

25. The frequency with which the epithet “angry” follows Pomare is worthy of longer discussion; it appears in magazine articles, newspaper criticism, and film excerpts, from the 1960s to the 1980s in the United States. Perhaps the first reference comes from the review by prominent critic Marcia Siegel when *Blues for the Jungle* was presented as a full-length work in 1966 shortly after his return from Europe. She concludes the review: “He has most successfully translated anger into choreographic expression” (1985, 236). If this is so, what value might be placed on that anger?

26. Two theaters were regarded as suitable for Pomare’s company—the first was about to premiere *King Lear*, while the other, a cinema called Her Majesty’s, had to be immediately refurbished.

27. DeFrantz also provides an account of Johnson’s work for *Move*, the black dance magazine and organization (DeFrantz 2002).

28. Exposure to black dance artists had existed but in a limited context. For instance, Ailey performed in Sydney in 1962 and 1964 funded by the U.S. State Department, while touring musicals and jazz dance groups featuring black dancers had visited Australia during and after the Second World War (Prevots 1998, 93).

29. Most United States accounts of the dance attribute the solo to Johnson (including DeFrantz 1999). Filmed at the Foundation for Fine Arts on October 11, 1973, by Jonathan Atkin (with Carole Johnson as dancer), *GWD* features a moving solo. (Videotaped in studio rehearsal at the Vital Arts Center, New York, NY, in 1973, viewed at New York Public Library, NYPY05-F10009, in November 2007). Probably her most significant solo, Dalman performed *GWD* throughout Australia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and France in the 1980s, and on the Lloyd Triestino liner, *Marconi*, while traveling to Europe in 1968. Further discussion of Dalman’s history as a choreographer, and her relationship with Pomare, exists in Dalman’s doctoral thesis (Dalman 2011).

30. Pomare subscribed to the popular view in the black community that Smith died because she did not get proper treatment from the racially divided hospitals and ambulance service in Clarksdale, Mississippi: “Finally a refusal of admission to a hospital and a physical death” (Pomare 1967). This contested version of events also featured in Edward Albee’s 1959 one-act play *The Death of Bessie Smith*.

31. My analysis is based on the Johnson film above (see note 36), as well as watching a rehearsal by both Johnson and Dalman, and their performance of *GWD* for a concert at NAISDA, Gosford, 2008.

32. An exhibition called *Eleo Pomare: The Man. The Artist. The Maker of Artists* at The National Museum of Dance opened in Saratoga Springs, NY, on June 12, 2011.

33. After the Pomare tour, Johnson taught modern dance classes to Aboriginal people in Redfern, Sydney, in the Aboriginal Theatre Workshops of 1972 and 1973; in 1976, she became founding director of the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA), which trained young Aboriginal dancers.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality*. London: Routledge.

- Bhabha, Homi. 1986. "Remembering Fanon" Introduction to the English edition of Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press.
- Dalman, Elizabeth Cameron. 1962. *Eleo Pomare in Holland*. Miscellaneous Notes.
- . 1992. *Oral History Interview by Nanette Hassall*, Ref. 396134, National Film and Sound Archive. Canberra: Australia.
- . 1994. Interview for *A Vision for Australian Dance*, incomplete documentary, National Film and Sound Archive. Canberra: Australia.
- . 2011. "The Quest for an Australian Dance Theatre." Ph.D. diss., University of Western Sydney, Australia.
- DeFrantz, Thomas. 1999. "To Make Black Bodies Strange: Social Critiques in Concert Dance of the Black Arts Movement (1998)." In *A Sourcebook of African-American Performance: Plays, People, Movements*, edited by Annemarie Bean, 83–93. London: Routledge.
- . 2002. *Dancing Many Drums*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- . 2005. "African American Dance—Philosophy, Aesthetics, and 'Beauty'." *Topoi* 24: 93–102.
- Dunning, Jennifer. 1983. "Dance: Celebration for Eleo Pomare." *The New York Times*, November 17, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/11/17/arts/dance-celebration-for-eleo-pomare.html?ref=jenniferdunning> (accessed 2/11/2007).
- Eversmann, Peter. 1994. "Theatre on Location in the Netherlands." *WESTERN European Stages*. Special Issue: Theatre in the Netherlands. Center for Advanced Study in Theatre Arts, City University of New York. Summer 6(2): 35–48.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Herbert, Gerard. c. 1962. *Vrije Expressidans*, Photographic Essay. Magazine publication, no title.
- Johnson, Carole. 1974. "What's with the White Australia Policy?" Rough Notes. In Raymond Robinson, "Dreaming Tracks: History of the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme," 1972–. Master's thesis, University of Western Sydney, n.d.
- Loupe, Laurence. 2010. *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*. Translated by Sally Gardner. Alton, Surrey, UK: Dance Books.
- Manning, Susan. 2004. *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Meyer, Doris. 1979. *Victoria Ocampo: Against the Wind and the Tide*. New York: George Braziller.
- Morris, Gay. 2006. *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945–60*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Moten, Fred. 2003. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Perpener, John O. 2001. *African-American Concert Dance: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Pomare, Eleo. 1967. "The Art of Two Choreographers." Program, Upper Manhattan Branch Adult Department, YWCA, New York, May 5.
- . 2007. Interview with Rachel Fensham. November, New York.
- Prevots, Naima. 1998. *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2010. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London: Continuum.
- Siegel, Marcia. 1985. *The Shapes of Change: Images of American Dance*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Stratton, John. 1998. *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*. Annandale, NSW, Australia: Pluto.
- Taylor, Paul. 2010. "Black Aesthetics." *Philosophy Compass* May 1: 1–15.
- Tideman, Harold. 1972. "U.S. Dance Company Brilliant." *The Adelaide Advertiser*, March 23.
- Warren, Joy. 1969. "A Moveable Feast." *The Canberra Times*, October 23.
- Walther, Suzanne K. 1993. "Kurt Jooss: The Evolution of an Artist." *Choreography and Dance* 3(2): 7–24.