

designers. I don't know what *haptic visuality* means, but I'm pretty sure the term doesn't illuminate *After Ghostcatching's* extreme 3D illusions. That work dangles the promise of touch before you, but then snatches it away: when you reach for a line about to graze your forehead, you find your fingers go right through it; the chasm between looking and touching gapes before you—as it constantly does for ghosts, who by tradition can see but cannot touch (and can smell but cannot eat). Obviously this goes straight to the heart of *After Ghostcatching*; its illusions of embodiment are even more treacherous than in the prior work.

The simpler word *touch* is also the richer in meaning; it would have led Barber down a more profitable path. For the seemingly "hand-drawn" figures that our collaborator Shelley Eshkar so brilliantly devised both evoked and called into question the very idea of the artist's touch—for whose touch was it? Was it the touch of his mouse and stylus? The touch of Bill's moving body? The touch of Marc Downie's algorithms rendering each frame? (This

loops back to the question of collaboration raised in my first point.)

3. Here, as an artist, I'd like to briefly and fruitlessly register my larger objection to scholars' standard operating procedure, which resembles the children's game of telephone: errors accrue along the way and garble the final output. Scholars are obliged to cite prior scholarship, so once one has described an artwork, that description becomes part of the next account, which becomes part of the next, and before long the artwork is reduced to the filtered sum of these scholars' accounts, with never a clean sweep to start over and see anew.

Come to think of it, though, this sad situation isn't a million miles away from the enslaving loops of the two works in question.

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Note

1. In writing, one states things more bluntly than one would in person, so let me express my gratitude to Tiffany Barber for taking such deep and sustained interest in these two works of ours.

Response to Paul Kaiser's Letter to the Editor

I have been an admirer of Bill T. Jones's work for many years. I discovered his unique way of working when I was finding my own way as a dancer. Known for his rigorous engagement with identity politics, Jones has used improvised dance to investigate the nuances of human difference, interracial love, and the potential of pure movement. The OpenEndedGroup has explored similar topics in its varied collaborations with choreographers over the past twenty years. In recent years, Jones has spurned reductive, racially specific readings of his work, advocating for more expansive modes of criticism. Like

Jones, I question categories of movement, identity, and aesthetic criticism in my research on the political efficacy of contemporary black art and performance in a putatively post-racial moment. It is from this perspective that I analyze *Ghostcatching* (1999) and *After Ghostcatching* (2010) in my *Dance Research Journal* essay.

Both pieces are the result of collaborations between Shelley Eshkar, Jones, and Paul Kaiser with Marc Downie joining the team for *After Ghostcatching*. As Kaiser and Jones both point out in their responses to my essay, the artists

bring their own concerns and preoccupations to the works just as my own motivations inform my reading, opening up each piece to myriad interpretations, of which mine is just one. Central to my claim is the idea of mediation in exploring the relation between art's engagement with social life. In my view, *Ghostcatching* and *After Ghostcatching* bookend the first decade of what many consider to be a period of unprecedented racial progress accompanied by rhetorical fervor surrounding national security.

The digital dance works make clear the routine machinations of race and technology, which I argue threaten to render both unintelligible. Thus, "why race now" and the question of technology demands that we recognize the urgent, ongoing antagonisms and conditions of vulnerability under which we now exist. Body scanning, data collection, surveillance and policing, and the imbrication of race, space, and mobility become more sinister or at least more politically charged once black bodies—or even the suggestion of them—enter the frame because they bring issues of power to the fore. This is especially true of someone as iconic as Jones, as evidenced in my review of the pieces' reception. Hence, I focus on Jones and the place of *Ghostcatching* and *After Ghostcatching* in his oeuvre.

In light of a putatively progressive turn and Jones's formal concerns, it is crucial that the artist's racially marked body appears "virtually absent" in a time of technological innovation specific to the fields of dance and so-called racial advancement, or transcendence. In this frame, the two pieces alert us to the ways in which the obfuscation of race and racism vis-à-vis technology that promises more transparency and freedom are intimately tied to the destruction or absenting of racialized bodies—a prominent feature of our political milieu from 1999 to 2010 to now. The last sequence in particular—digital bodies bound by apparatuses such as drawn lines, algorithms, and computer-generated commands that determine and thereby constrain the subjects' mobility—stages collective struggle resonant with the challenges of our time. As a result, the works resist

attenuation as well as the redemptive ethos of triumph and progress, therefore generating new ways of understanding racialization as a visceral experience in our political present.

The works' complex layers call our attention to these dimensions and more. On the topic of collaboration, I agree that it is worthy of analysis; indeed many scholars have written about it. But as Kaiser points out, all parties involved bring their own histories, proclivities, and bodies to the work. In this case, it happens to be Jones's racially marked body generating the improvised movement to which the digital artists respond with their drawings and stereoscopic manipulations. So does the art of collaboration enhance this dialogue or steer us away from it? What are the ethics of collaboration given these conditions? Is there an assumptive logic to collaboration that the works themselves expose and test? These are questions I would have loved to pursue in my essay but there just wasn't enough space. My hope is that other scholars will take up these inquiries and further contribute to the discussion of collaboration and improvisation toward which Kaiser and Jones draw us.

As for the specialized language I employ, "haptic visuality" is a term introduced by the important film scholar Laura A. Marks; I define it in my essay, so I won't rehash it here. But Jones and Kaiser raise valid concerns that I take to heart as an academic, namely that political effects exceed artistic intention. These effects open up the terms of engagement with works of art to highlight the realities of our contemporary moment and teach us something new about the world in which we live.

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Clip : 2399-1 - 0_02_50_06

Photographer : Issa 'Amro

Location : Hebron

Date : 17/07/2008

Description : Hebron - two settler teens practicing
throwing stones.

