

# **Performing the Americas in the Metropole: Talk Abstracts**

## **"ImagiNation:Our Nation"**

Inspired by Derek Walcott's quote 'The only nation I have now is my imagination' Ali will take us through 10 years of Kinetika's work. This is an exploration of people on the move and a collective expression of their journeys through the art form of carnival.

## **"Sonic Diaspora and Identities: Sound Systems and Bass Culture at Notting Hill Carnival"**

This presentation considers the Reggae sound systems in the centre of the Notting Hill carnival as an example of the diasporic spread of Caribbean music and culture to the metropolis. It suggested that many of the characteristics of diaspora are best understood by thinking through the qualities of sounding, its bass line in particular. Music making, musical memories and performance traditions carry and are carried by a culture's diasporic spread in different ways to images, physical objects like CDs or digital MP3 files. To understand how this is so, the idea of a specifically sonic diaspora is developed. Sonic diaspora are modelled on the connections, beats, rhythms, propagations and diffusions of auditory energies of sound waves, further than the conventional idea of diaspora as flows, migrations or circulations of products and peoples and the habitual visual metaphors dividing viewer from viewed. The idea of sonic diaspora gives a rich, deep and layered understanding of embodied subjectivities and identities in similar ways to how the musical medium of sounding is valued for the resonating qualities of its feel, tone and texture. The visceral intensities of the embodying bass line of sound systems sessions in Jamaica and in London are one example of this. Another is the musical practice of the versioning of a single "riddim" track. Also the hugely influential form of reggae dub music, pioneered by King Tubby and Lee 'Scratch' Perry in the 1970's, is an instance of the "excavation" of the qualities of the sonic medium. Studio dub mixing production techniques of echo, delay, reverb and drop out of all but drum and bass, originating in the sound system sessions, are all exploited to intensify listeners' engagement with the music, themselves and each other. This suggests ways of thinking about diasporic identity in terms of phonographic absences, difference and versions rather than presence, similitude and mirror images.

## **"Tropical Interference: Portuguese/Brazilian Conflict on Parade"**

Home to an established community of Portuguese immigrants and a more recently-arrived population of Brazilian newcomers, Newark, New Jersey's "Ironbound" neighborhood is an animated staging ground for intense Portuguese-Brazilian contact. Despite a shared language, a long history of cultural interchange, compatible local interests and intertwined residential settlement, the Portuguese and Brazilian communities of Newark experience more conflict than cooperation. Simmering tensions over dialect, race and sexuality bubble over during public performances of ethnicity—in the context of sports spectatorship, religious celebrations, and street parades. Drawing on several years of fieldwork and ethnographic interviews, this paper examines the contours of post-colonial conflict against discourses of Newark's cultural renaissance—post-riot regeneration which is presented as the product of a multicultural arts scene and cross-cultural tolerance. Examining performative productions of ethnic identity with particular attention given to the transformation of the Portugal Day Parade, this paper documents

the charged narratives of difference and misunderstanding which inflect Portuguese-Brazilian relationships despite a city's dogged attempts to portray the Ironbound as a unified enclave of exotic cuisine and vibrant lusophone tradition.

### **"Embracing Difference: Salsa Fever in New Jersey"**

Studio-based salsa dance in Northern New Jersey has succeeded in creating a hybrid social space in which Latin style represents an alternative identity that encompasses and embraces difference. The universal appeal of the dance rests in its dramatic and provocative display of gendered interactions. Attention to dancers' subjective understandings of their own practice provides a female-centered perspective on the emerging cultural scene, which, in turn, demands a reassessment of the dynamics of partner dancing.

**" 'O Herói': Ambivalent Heroism in Urban Brazilian Party Culture"** This lecture will depart from an analysis of Caetano Veloso's song, "O Herói," from the recent album, "Cê". The song cites, both musically and lyrically, the work of contemporary Black Brazilian recording artists such as MV Bill, musicians who take both aesthetic and political cues from US politically inflected hip hop and urban party music. At least superficially, these artists might seem to be taking on wholesale the aesthetics as well as the political postures of their US counterparts, but Veloso's lyric ambiguously suggests a more complex relation, and certain particularities regarding the case of at least some Brazilian rap.

The ambiguity of Brazil's appropriation of Black American cultural expressions have been further highlighted by the recent controversy surrounding the film "Tropa de Elite," in which both urban party culture (baile funk) and the counterposed policing of that culture have been read simultaneously as heroic and antiheroic to different audiences. The heroization of an often brutal military police force is further complicated by efforts on the part of at least some of that force to "rechoreograph" the relationship of the police to underclass communities through music and dance. As beats, vocal styles and political postures (both superficial and profound) travel, how do their meanings change?

### **"Transnational Actors in the Brooklyn Carnival"**

Much has been written about Brooklyn and other similar Carnival celebrations in North America and Europe, and their implications for and connections with the issues of diaspora, transnationalism and globalization. Scher (2003) notes that the rise of the Trinidad-style Carnival in Brooklyn provides an excellent opportunity for observing how cultural forms and the meanings that surround them may change in a diasporic situation. Further, Cohen (1997) states that the social behavior of Caribbean people in their places of sojourn and settlement provides telling evidence of the creation of a cultural diaspora, and he suggest that sustained empirical work needs to be done on this issue, in order to answer some of the following pertinent questions: How did the Caribbean carnival evolve into a circuit, linking the archipelago to the metropolitan cities or New York, Toronto, London and elsewhere? Who were the principal actors and social organizations involved? How were the enterprises financed? What was the role of the Caribbean governments in cementing these ties? In this paper I seek to answer some of these questions. In particular, I will focus on some of the actors who are presently involved in the

production of aspects of the Brooklyn Labor Day Carnival, and how their activity intersects and interrogates these notions of Diaspora and transnationalism. In so doing I aim to contribute to this evolving area of scholarly discourse

### **"Translating Danza de las Tijeras: The Contemporary Transnational Scene"**

Until the early 20th century, the Peruvian scissors dance (danza de las tijeras) was associated with demonic possession by Catholic authorities and was largely unknown outside of the local festivals in which it was an integral ritual. In the 1940s and 1950s, as a series of dramatic transformations in the relations between the Andean countryside, Coastal urban centers, and an expanding global economy were emerging, a group of nationally recognized intellectuals began to claim the dance as national heritage. As national and transnational recognition of the dance as embodying a timeless Andean authenticity have increased, a talented and privileged group of scissors dancers have emerged as important cultural mediators in their own right. Living a highly mobile existence, whether in Lima, New York, Miami, Los Angeles, London, or Toronto these dancers retain vital links to their rural villages of origin as well as a dizzying array of NGOs, migrant associations, international indigenous organizations, cultural institutions, the tourist industry, and the mass media. Contemporary Peruvian artists working in a variety of genres are using the dance as an evocative symbol in order to express the Andean "spirit" in their work. Drawing on newspaper articles, television news reports and talk shows, performance propaganda, commercial cds and dvds, Web sites, and especially ethnographic interviews, I analyze the routes and roots of these contemporary manifestations of danza de las tijeras as Andean heritage. I argue that the contradictory discourse of heritage has allowed the dance to function in urban and transnational arenas simultaneously as an exchangeable commodity enacting a connection to an imagined past, and an expression of a loss of sense of place in a rapidly globalizing world.

### **"Learning to be Natural: Re-valuing Women's Bodies through Middle Eastern Dance"**

Between February and April 2005, I conducted in-depth interviews with white women in Columbus, Ohio who performed and/or practiced in classroom settings Middle Eastern dance, sometimes referred to as belly dance. Drawing upon these conversations in which they reflect on both their experiences of and motivations for dancing, I argue that for these women, this type of dance creates a metacommunicative frame in which critiques of conventional expectations of female forms and movements in the United States are made. Paying particular attention to their references to the dance as it originated and is currently performed in the Middle East, I explore how ideas of "otherness" are invoked, revalued, and rearticulated in order to question and subvert conventional expectations of women's bodies.

### **"Over, Under, Around, and Through the Embargo: The Cultural Trading of the United States and Cuba"**

Just last November, a Manhattan public school principal was fired for performing Santeria rituals on school property; in June, the Los Angeles Times reported on Santeria's presence among the Latin American Major League baseball players; and the 1997 recording of the Buena Vista Social Club generated a renewed interest in traditional Cuban music, influenced by Santeria, that

continues today. The United States/Cuba trade embargo established in 1959 has clearly not blocked the exchange of ideas between the two countries and reports show that Santeria is a major draw for the increasing number of tourists to Cuba. As a professional rhythm tap dancer, I have seen a similar trend in the ways Cuban folklore has affected modern, ballet, and tap styles and choreography. As a member of the New York-based company Rumba Tap, I had the opportunity to study Cuban music and dance in Havana in January 2007. I gathered 10 hours of footage over the course of the two-week workshop, from dance and percussion classes to rumbas to discussions with Cuban artists about the very topics mentioned above. I am currently in the process of compiling this material, supplementing it with additional textual information, and exhibiting it in DVD format. This subject is rich in content on both specific and expansive scales and spans many areas of Arts and Humanities such as dance, music, folklore, anthropology, religion, and postcolonial identities.

**Carnival in Calcutta** documents the tour of Ali Pretty's Kinetika group to perform at the first Carnival in Kolkata, India, with a focus on the experience of British performers descended from Indian indentured laborers in Trinidad.

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### **Biographies of Presenters**

**Katherine Borland** is Associate Professor, Department of Comparative Studies in the Humanities at The Ohio State University and Assistant Dean of the Newark Campus. She is the author of *Unmasking Class, Gender and Sexuality in Nicaraguan Festival* (2006), *Creating Community: Hispanic Migration to Rural Delaware* (2001) as well as several articles on festival, women's oral narrative, and literacy. Currently, she is embarking on a critical examination of voluntourism.

**Barbara Browning** is the author of *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Indiana University Press, 1995, winner of the De la Torre Bueno Prize) and *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture* (Routledge, 1998). She has taught since 1995 in the Department of Performance Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Her scholarly work deals with religion, music and dance in the African diaspora, and particularly in Brazil.

**Julian Henriques** is a screenwriter, film director and researcher. He studied Psychology at Bristol University and worked as a policy researcher and journalist before becoming a television producer and director making documentaries for London Weekend Television, BBC Television Music and Arts Department, on the *Arena* and *Omnibus* series, and with his own production company Formation Films, for Channel 4 Television. His fiction credits as writer-director include his feature film *Babymother*, and improvised drama *We the Ragamuffin*. His television documentary credits as producer and director include *Rouch in Reverse*, *Derek Walcott: Poet of the Island*, and *States of Exile* and *Dictating Terms* in the *Made in Latin America* series. Julian is one of the authors of *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* and was a founding editor of the journal *Ideology and Consciousness*. Recent publications include: "Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session" in *Back, L and Ball, M Auditory*

Culture Reader, "The Jamaican Dancehall Sound System as a Commercial and Social Apparatus" in Bloustein, G et al, *Sonic Synergies* and "Situating Sound: the Space and Time of the Dancehall Session" in Marijke, J and Mieskowski, S, *Sonic Interventions*. Currently Julian is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communications, at Goldsmiths, University of London, convening the MA in Script Writing programme and leading the BA Music as Communication and Creativity.

**Kimberly DaCosta Holton** is associate professor and director of the Portuguese and Lusophone World Studies Program at Rutgers University Newark. She is also a member of the graduate faculty in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Rutgers New Brunswick and the American Studies PhD program at Rutgers Newark. She holds a doctorate in Performance Studies from Northwestern University. Holton's research has centered on questions of politics, performance and immigration in the Portuguese-speaking world. She is the author of *Performing Folklore: Ranchos Folclóricos from Lisbon to Newark* (Indiana UP 2005) and co-editor with Andrea Klimt of a book on Portuguese, Brazilian and Cape Verdean Immigration to the US, due out in 2008. Holton's research on performance forms in Iberia and Brazil have appeared in academic journals such as *The Journal of American Folklore*, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Etnográfica*, *Portuguese Studies Review* and *Luso-Brazilian Review* as well as in several edited volumes. Holton is founder and director of the Ironbound Oral History Project which comprises a collection of over 300 life history interviews with Portuguese and Brazilian immigrants in New Jersey.

**Ali Pretty** is the founding member and artistic director of Kinetika. She is a carnival designer and director, currently developing her skills in theatre direction. She is working on developing two large scale carnival shows: *Imagination: Our Nation* and *Din Shuru*. Ali has designed and directed numerous productions for Kinetika, including *Tiger Out East!*, *Roads To Freedom*, *Din Shuru*, *The Olympic Torch Relay Schools Project 2004*, *Yemanjá 2002*, *People on The Move for Celebrate South Africa*. Ali has worked internationally with many arts organisations including WOMAD , Trinidad Carnival working with Peter Minshall to create winning costumes for The Callaloo Company, The Atlanta Olympics Opening Ceremonies costumes commissioned by Peter Minshall, *Parade of the Circle -The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio*, *The Carnival of Human Rights in Johannesburg*, *Kumasi Carnival, Ghana*, *The Solstice Parade in Seattle*, and *Cortejo Afro, Salvador Carnival, Brasil*. At home she designed 3 winning bands for Notting Hill Carnival in 1998, 1999 and 2004, as well as designing costumes for The Millennium Dome Opening Ceremonies. She has produced commissioned work for The Greenwich and Docklands Festival and The Thames Festival and Salisbury Festival. Ali's work has been exhibited in *Acknowledged Sources*, Exhibition at Nottingham Castle in 2001 and in the current touring exhibition *Midnight Robbers, The Artists of Notting Hill Carnival*

**Adela Ruth Tompsett** is principal lecturer in drama and performing arts at Middlesex University. She introduced Carnival Studies to the B.A.P.A. degree programme at Middlesex in 1986 and has established a widely used Carnival Archive and Study Resource there. She organized the "Catch the Spirit: A Carnival Arts Conference" at the Museum of London in 1997 and co-organized the Black Theatre in Britain Conference at the University of London two years earlier. She is a long-standing adviser on carnival arts with Arts Council England and recently served on the Mayor of London's Carnival Review at the Greater London Authority. She has

published writing on both black theatre and carnival arts and has contributed in an advisory capacity to a number of carnival-related exhibitions and performances.

- [Dorothy Noyes](#)
- [Ulises Juan Zevallos-Aguilar](#)
- [Lesley Ferris](#)
- [Richard Gordon](#)