

# Wild Mind

A collaborative project.

Show Box LA + The  
Gesture & The Citizen

READER 1

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WILD MIND, DISCUSSION 1

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## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
How I describe it and What I call it by Cari Ann Shim Sham* .....	4
Four Things by David Roussève.....	5
Screened Socializing or Society by Scrim by Anna B. Scott .....	6
Back Cover.....	11

# Introduction

## A gesture and a box

Welcome to an experiment. By now, you have likely had a transformative experience watching a video on the internet. Excited, ready to go out and change the world, you look around you, ready to go, and realize that you had several questions while watching that incredibly smart person speak or that cute kid start a business, or that sharp as a tack piece of performance art rock your world. You have questions. You have ideas. You ponder, then wonder, then meander and before you recognize it, you no longer have momentum. Next video!

### What if you could ask?

I'll admit it: as a life long learner I am addicted to knowledge, especially knowledge from far away places from people I would never otherwise meet were it not for the internet. I will sign up for just about anything. I have a free digital report download habit that might make the porn-addicted blush. Folders cached in folders, if someone bothered to make a PDF and load it up, I likely bothered to sign up and download. But most of these documents solve very specific problems, or create big enough ones that make the reader want to sign up for the very expensive course.

And then, there is all that inspiration from those cool videos. No course there. No one to talk to unless you belong to the community; difficult time getting into one of those communities if you don't know any one. Further complicate this with your desire to think with your whole body, not just your head, or your heart strings or your guts; the entire thing, mobilized, shifting weight, making changes! All those gestures of open learning, ideas worth sharing, conferences channeled to your private screen and what you really need are some people to talk to, some items to read and study. You need a push to keep the momentum going.

### Focused preparation

So, here we are. After some discussions with Meg Wolfe of Show Box LA, we decided to make a go of it: let's create a speaker's series with outrageous minds in the dance world talking about incredible things to an audience informed enough to engage in the moment and go out and do something with the knowledge. Yes, this is an experiment. Rather than show up cold for our live gatherings, we would like you to warm up your bodyminds in an on-line course room. We are fortunate to be able to use BigMarker.com, a collaboration space still in beta. This means we are getting a lot of personal attention.

Sign up on the course site to reserve your spot in the course rooms. I also host a chat each week called, The Weekly Stroll. For now, the course box is free and the live discussions are by donations. Things may shift, and we hope that you will move along with us as we grow this exciting new venture.

step-ball-change,

-Anna B. Scott

## How I describe it and what I call it.

There are many genres of filmmaking. Film that involves dance is one of those genres.

First let's look at these two definitions of Cinema:

cinema - Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48 :

cinema \cinema\ n.

1. the art of creating *motion* pictures;

cinema - WordNet (r) 2.1 (2005) :

- cinema

n 1: a medium that disseminates *moving* pictures;

In these two definitions of cinema we find the words "motion" and "moving" at the heart of the matter. Cinema is the movement of a sequence of images in order to tell a story, which is also a form of dance. So film is a dance, and dance is at the heart of filmmaking. Video Dance, Screen Dance, Dance For Camera, Dance Film...there so many ways to try and capture what we all know and love as a genre of cinema that I choose to refer to as Dance Film.

Dance Film is a genre of cinema that deals with movement and rhythm. The dance of life is performed every day by every one of us, in our daily negotiations of space, trajectory, rhythm and timing. This dance of life can be captured through staged performance and through image based explorations including film and photography.

To define myself, I am an experimental filmmaker that is interested in movement so I tend to make films that are about dance, that capture dance and dancers and finally i make films that dance and create a sense of movement in my viewer.

I'm currently concerned that the dance field is trying to claim, rename and reinvent the wheel of Dance Film through the now popular Dance For Camera movement. I hope that dance makers and filmmakers alike will realize that the form has been with us from the beginning of and continues to be a Cinematic genre. It is not a new form.

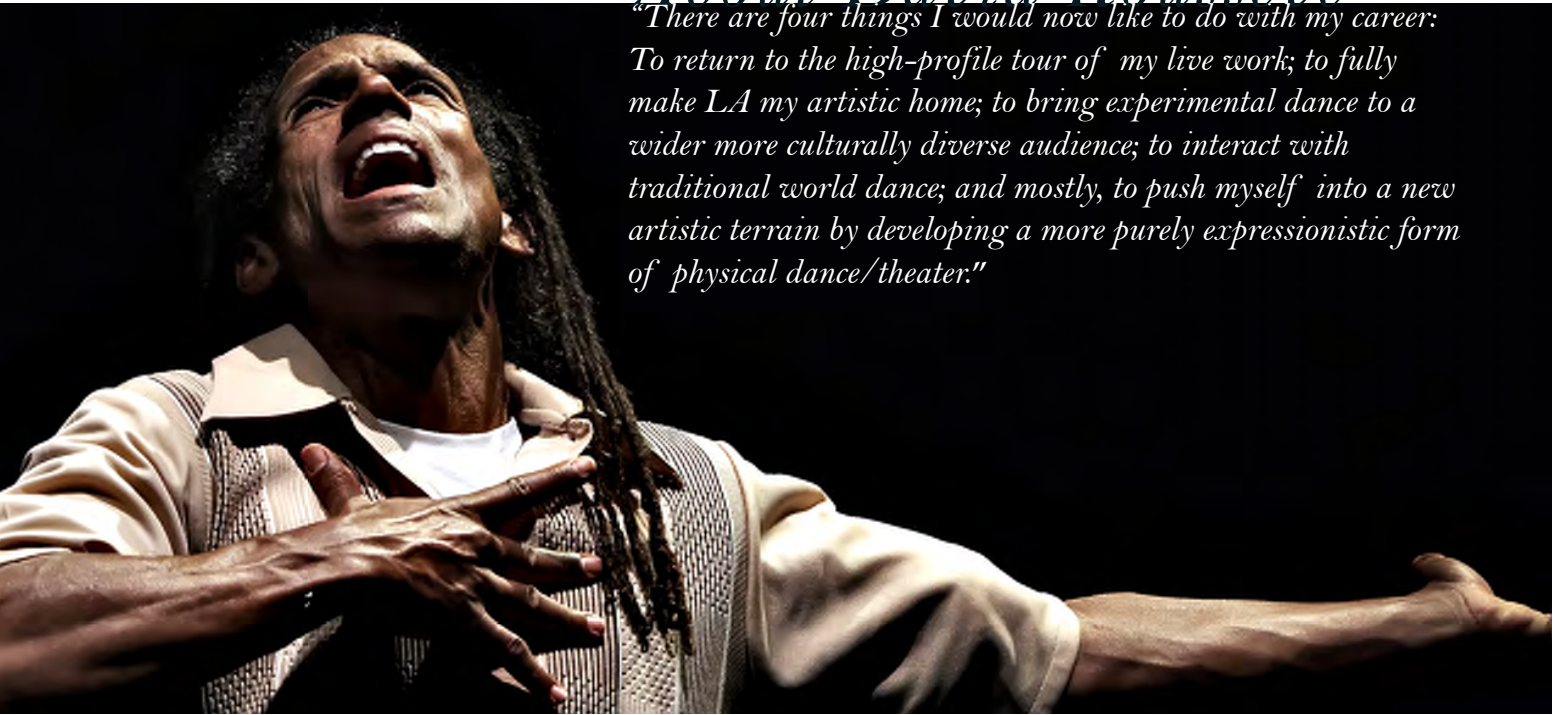
From Charlie Chaplin (comic actor and film director of the silent film era), Buster Keaton(a physical comedy and stunt actor and filmmaker of the silent film era), Busby Berkely (a highly influential Hollywood movie director and musical choreographer), Maya Deren (an experimental film maker), to current works by Mitchell Rose (comedic short filmmaker), Alla Kovgan (documentary filmmaker), Victoria Marks (Choreographer) and Margarette Williams (filmmaker)...they all made films that involved movement which can also be referred to as "a dance". I think there are too many names out there for this popular style of filmmaking that I think of simply as Dancefilm, all one word, because it is film and dance colliding to create something else entirely.

Having seen many dance films I often find myself faced with a reoccurring question. Why? Why did this individual make this film? Why are they dancing? Why are we in this location? Why is this important? Why should I continue watching? Why is this a film?

## About David Roussève

*"There are four things I would now like to do with my career:*

*To return to the high-profile tour of my live work; to fully make LA my artistic home; to bring experimental dance to a wider more culturally diverse audience; to interact with traditional world dance; and mostly, to push myself into a new artistic terrain by developing a more purely expressionistic form of physical dance/theater."*



As Artistic Director/Choreographer for David Roussève/REALITY -- a unique multi-racial dance/theater ensemble -- David Roussève became one of the most important voices in contemporary American dance during the late 1990's and early 2000's. REALITY toured extensively throughout the U.S., Europe, and South America, and Roussève created eleven full-length works for the company, including three critically and popularly successful commissions for BAM's Next Wave Festival: collaborations with Sweet Honey in the Rock's Ysaye Barnwell (*Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams*, '92), jazz/hip hop Grammy nominee Me'Shell N'degeOcello (*The Whispers of Angels*, '95), and Tony-winning lighting designer Beverly Emmons (*Love Songs*, '99). *Love Songs* was awarded a "Bessie" Award for Choreography. Roussève's 2001 solo work, *The Ten Year Chat*, was named by The LA Weekly as "One of the Ten Best Performance Events of 2001" and received a Horton Award for Best Individual Performance. His other awards include the CalArts/Alpert Award in Dance, two Irvine Foundation fellowships, seven consecutive NEA fellowships, and First Place Screen Choreography at the IMZ International Dance Film Festival.

In 2004, Roussève received a Guggenheim Fellowship for his first dance-on-camera work, *Bittersweet*, which played at LA's Dance Camera West and in a sold-out engagement at NY's Dance on Camera Festival. In 2005, Roussève created *Walking on Clouds*, which was commissioned and performed by two Cleveland companies: Dancing Wheels ("stand up" and "sit down" dancers) and Cleveland Contemporary; and he created *Jumping the Broom* as part of Giselle Mason's "No Boundaries Project." He also choreographed a new work, *Disappearance*, for Ilkhom Theater Company of Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Other commissions include two works for Denver's Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Theater, two for Ballet Hispanico in NYC (one with salsa great Eddie Palmieri), and a work for Atlanta Ballet with a live performance by the 100-member Morehouse College Glee Club.

In addition to *Bittersweet*, Roussève's work for film and video include *Pull Your Head to the Moon... tales of Creole Women* (in collaboration with director Ayoka Chenzira, commissioned and aired nationally by PBS' Alive TV), the documentary *Brothermen* (by director Demetria Royals and aired nationally on PBS), and the choreography for *Positive: Life With HIV* (five hour-long segments aired on PBS). He wrote the book for the Billy Strayhorn/Luther Henderson Musical *Rose Colored Glasses* and the full-length screenplay version of his dance/theater work *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* (supported by Sundance Institute's Feature Film Development Labs, where Roussève was twice a fellow).

In 1996, Roussève joined UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures, where he is Professor of Choreography. He served as Chair from 2003-2006. He has also served on the faculties of Princeton, Bates Dance Festival, Columbia College, Randolph-Macon, and UC-Berkeley extension.

# Screened Socializing or Society by Scrim: The Case of Bill T Jones' *Blind Date*:

by Anna Beatrice Scott, 2007

<http://flowtv.org/2007/10/screenifying-choreography-the-new-parameters-of-social-interaction-as-envisioned-by-bill-t-jones-blind-date/>

## Opening Credits

Get all your ducks in a row. Everything is just ducky. We are sitting ducks.



Thoughts bubble as I contemplate the 5 screens of various sizes, a large hanging frame, and a narrow, long canvas/scrim painted with what appear to be a row of rubber duckies. *Blind Date* has not officially started, yet it has. The curtain is open and text scrolls, flashes and dissolves across the screens; but the ducks do not change. Smiling, they waddle irresponsibly. Danger, duck crossing. But they never do. Static, they are magnified and embodied as the piece continues. A dude forced to make a living selling Ducky burgers and three large carnival-ride looking plywood ducks began to proliferate the duck motif. Dancers enter and exit the stage in precision marches that meander and loose count of bodies. The ducks hang just in the balance, sitting. "ME!" yells a falling body on stage. Other dancers scramble to catch that person before she hits; before he hits; before they hit. Feathers are flying figuratively, but the ducks are still, jolly.

Screens fly out, scrimms fly in and one panel stays; faces dissolve high middle stage. They look like anyone. The audience is left wondering whether or not these are not faces of people but victims. Grotesques now, the ducks have waddled off. A soldier is talking to the business man figure (played by Bill T. himself) about never-ending, borderless, indistinguishable war. I am jolted: we are all sitting ducks pretending that everything is just ducky, thinking that we have our ducks in a row so we'll be fine when our turn comes to yell "ME!" We recite screenified platitudes, aping knowing gestures about war mongering as if that is all the social interaction required to make it stop. "Couch potato" is a thing of the past. There is agency in accepting one's reality from a screen when one is a dumb ass sitting duck and it is an inability to figure out the choreography required of screenified interaction.

The screen has become a prerequisite facilitator of daily movement for the allegedly productive 21st century lifestyle. Screens are mobile, and increasingly tied to microprocessors. While there is a growing body of work analyzing screens and their ubiquitous presence in our lives, the work of [Heidi Cooley](#) is not to be missed, I'm interested in their musculature: their work, placement, messaging, and activity. I will attempt to think about the CPU, the message (image/data), and the messenger (corporation, person) as the appendage to the screen. Moving alongside *Blind Date* and a series of mundane tasks, I draw attention to the terpsichore set by the parameters of the tech's body in conflation and contact with our own: the screenifying of movement.



<http://www.myspace.com/video/anne-greffe/bill-t-jones/7119514>

## Why is it not Mediation?

Simply put, screenified interaction is a non-experience of subtle adjustments to the spinal column and weight distribution driven by the presence of screens. Human contact becomes exertion positioned in close proximity to a CPU and screen. The screen is meant to simplify the event. However, it situates avoidance and neglect as the baseline for social choreography by augmenting the transactional over the inter-relational. Absorbed into the calculations of a cash register while pacified by a video panel at the check-out line or mesmerized by a self-illuminating TV



**The screened machine: [Pump as it plays.](#)**

at the gas pump, the person inside the physiological expanse of the body quickly fights or accepts its new role: sitting duck. The helpful intrusion of the CPU's lack-flesh and self-control-feints individual acknowledgment. "And by the grace of God, one day I will give this up!" howls Bill T Jones' business man character, holding up his cigarette, cursing and pleading with God to rid him of his sumptuous curse.

It could be argued that the human-cum-consumer also has little if any self-control in "the point of decision making" when confronted with the mosh of "content" emblazoned across nifty panels owned and "fed" by companies like [SignStory](#), and [Gas Station TV](#). *Blind Date* shows that in the living room, the point of decision making about major political issues, people encounter difficulty with foreclosed choices offered as "selections." The particular mixture of advertising and alleged news reporting makes it quite difficult to see the gun barrel pointing out of the duck blind. Crafting elegant and satisfying ways to have interaction during a transaction involving screens has become a time-consuming venture.

Enter a big box or major grocery store and a battalion of screens are deployed across the space. They look official and exude authority reminiscent of transportation terminals, but destinations are purposefully obscured. Seeking direction, you stand in front of a messaging screen waiting for an answer to a question you've long since forgotten.



Unsettled, you find calm by meandering. Rediscovering “shopping event,” more things land in the cart, echoing their representations on screen. Time to pay: person or kiosk? Checkers are surrounded by screens, is there really a difference? The panel above the conveyor belt is rigged with a feed offering “news,” lest you notice the passage of time in your body. Your screens allow you to pay without cash and extend the panopticon around the checker who is conducting real-time inventory through a recessed screen. Her key pad often sits to her right, underscoring the assumption that the scanners are infallible. I can hear you laughing.

Multitasked and screenified, the checker’s focus and body are split across space, through time, and with rhythm. What was once a simple algorithmic march that closed face to face with heart muscles aligned, is now a dilemma that engenders passivity or malevolence. Quack. The video panels offer no real options: zone-out to the media feed; become agitated by the frequency range of small speakers; or rage against the distraction/intrusion from/into one’s own life. Isn’t it just ducky?

### **Well then . . .**

Screens are encapsulations and projections. They are limits, boundaries beyond which we dare not imagine a passing image. Drawn in so close to something that feels exactly right, we instead adjust our neck in a futile attempt to avert our gaze, but the screen has swallowed us whole, not sutured us, or hemmed us in, but we could continue to think about stitches in order to make sense of the machine’s body copulating with our own. A quadrangle, the screen creates neat order, our muscles, and therefore our emotions, adjust accordingly. Our desires have absolutely no bearing on the cartography of the screen. Though we might struggle against its certitude at different junctures because we should know better, ultimately, it is the force of four corners which indicates that there is no need to run, and scant little space for hiding. Submersion is perhaps the only act permissible with the screen.



Paul B. Goode



They highlight the fact that a screen is an entrapment, an encasement, a casket, a parameter, a box, just a couple of meaningless lines unless something is projected across it. Sitting ducks, the bodies whirl and toss themselves in clockwork precision gone askance, tuning back in with popular dances and formations one would see on YouTube. The dancers, in counterbalanced extremities, reach just beyond the frame for contact more meaningful than the gesture itself. Mining habitual movement, movement meant to heal like yoga asana, cohesive movement like marches and line dances, Bill T. Jones reveals a culture deliberating itself, but under the mistaken idea that it can be done on a screen, without acknowledging the programmers ensconced in the feed, the code, lingering in the CPU's fleshless body.

*Blind Date* investigates what it means to assume one's ducks are lined up, ready for action. Even if/when the action appears preempted by the projections, momentum redirects to the messaging flesh. No newcomer to screened dance, Bill T. Jones very early in his career harnessed the choreographic power of projected and televisual images. Indeed, a great deal of his work investigates the corpo-reality engendered by long stretches of TV watching. That he now positions this body as a very active force in our social landscape should come as no surprise. In fact, it is quite masterful as he leads the audience in the theatric space deeper into the cosmos of the "dummy box."

Several rooms, empty spaces, echo chambers are effected by the screens. The lines on the floor which demarcate their absences as they fly in and out become screens, too.

#### **Image Credits:**

1. [Dancing Duck](#), photograph by Paul B. Goode
2. [Blind Date](#): video montage by Anne Greffe
3. [Gas Station TV](#)
4. [Ensemble number](#), photograph by Paul B. Goode
5. [Screen text](#), photograph by Paul B. Goode



### **About Show Box LA**

Show Box LA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting the needs of a burgeoning Los Angeles experimental dance community in a grass-roots way. Founded by independent choreographer Meg Wolfe, Show Box LA is the umbrella for artist- and community-development initiatives initiated in response to a perceived need for a forum for sharing work, ideas, and resources among the dance community, to raise the level of critical dialogue in Los Angeles about dance as an art form, and contribute to the larger conversation about the art and legacy of dance. For more information contact Meg Wolfe at [info@showboxla.org](mailto:info@showboxla.org) or go to [www.showboxla.org](http://www.showboxla.org).

### **About The Gesture & The Citizen**

The Gesture & The Citizen is a project of Vita Vibrare, an Arts-In-Action firm founded by Anna Beatrice Scott. Both a blog and a course, The Gesture & The Citizen is an opportunity for anyone interested in how the world moves and mobilizes itself to meet makers, authors, and theorists for deep, focused discussions about society and the culture of dancing. For more information, contact Anna B. Scott at [anna@vitavibrare.com](mailto:anna@vitavibrare.com) or go to <http://onepagerapp.com/thegesturethecitizen>