



**CQ**

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## In Unison

### Writings from the Catalog for The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People



WXPT members in an image created during and exhibited at the installation of The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), fall/winter of 2015.

The following texts were created collectively by the founding members of dance company WXPT, including artistic director taisha paggett and visual art collaborators Ashley Hunt and Kim Zumpfe.

**T**he School for the Movement of the Technicolor People began with a series of conversations between taisha paggett and artists Rodney McMillian and Cauleen Smith in 2014, with support from Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions curator Robert Couch. They discussed relationships between the Black body, nature, the urban environment, and the historical movement of Black communities in Los Angeles. In 2015, paggett formed WXPT (*We Are The Paper, We Are The Trees*), a one-year dance company project. Intended to shift the ways people of color and queer individuals are positioned within the dance field, the project seeks to forge new economies of resistance and togetherness through the medium of a dance company.

After WXPT's inaugural 2015 performance, *evereachmore*, presented by Clockshop along the LA River, the next step was what dance companies often do: form a school in order to teach the company's techniques and ideas—training its own community as well as new dancers and extending its practice into a curriculum.

All photographs were taken by visual art collaborator Ashley Hunt and produced as part of three residencies and installations of The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in fall/winter of 2015; the Fusebox Festival in Austin, TX, in April 2016; and *DiverseWorks* in Houston, TX, in May 2016. Residency activities included wanderings, gatherings, dispersions, lifting the weight of others, processions, demonstrations, the staging of images, and other embodied practices whose traces accumulated into a visual archive and temporary installation.

Seeking a dance school centered on the concerns and experiences of queer dancers of color, and inspired by research into radical pedagogical platforms—such as the curriculum of the '64 Freedom School and a "school for colored youth" (believed to have been founded by members of paggett's family in early twentieth-century Kilgore, Texas)—this School is shaped by the question, What is a Black dance curriculum today? At a time when the U.S. is again confronted with the regular mediated deaths of Black bodies, the School seeks to excavate, dismantle, exhume, and reflect—and to both seek and deny recognition of—these mediated representations.

Working with these themes, artists Ashley Hunt and Kim Zumpfe collaborated with paggett and WXPT to transform the gallery of Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) into the School's temporary home—providing architecture for the curriculum and a space in which roles of artist and viewer, dancing and non-dancing body, art and learning, coalesce.

## WXPT: Embodiment and Experience

1. Company: A group of dancers or performers gathered under a shared identity across multiple projects.

2. Company: The company we seek, the company we keep, from Old French *compagnie* "society, friendship, intimacy;" from Late Latin—*companionem*, combining *com*—"with"—and *panis*—"bread"—people who break bread together.

**W**XPT is a process. When we first met as a group—mostly of strangers—we sat around an extinguished fire pit and began. We had come together to form a temporary dance company, and for whatever reasons, in that moment, we chose to proceed with vulnerability and a faith in process. taisha had conceived of a dance company as an experiment in intentional community building, and she initiated our conversation with a simple prompt: "Why are you here?"

We responded with deeply felt stories—about identity, movement, desire for connection, and seeking personal expansion. It was six months after the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner by police and the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement in Ferguson, Missouri. The vulnerability of Black bodies and routine violence against them filled the air around us, and we sought community organized by acknowledgment of and resistance to that.

We agreed to be together for one year, without knowing exactly what we were committing to. Our time in company together feels like walking in and out of the dark, a cycle of unknowing and discovery. We have dance rehearsals that are all discussion. We make movement material that goes unperformed. We convene in a park, a backyard, a warehouse, a theater, or, less frequently, in a dance studio. We sometimes meet without our choreographer and are tasked with leading ourselves. Where are we going with this? never seems to be the right question. Instead, we ask, What is this experience teaching us?

For our first performance, *evereachmore*, we spent months together developing movement phrases, gestures, and language, which taisha, as choreographer, then threaded into a larger work along the LA River. For the School for the Movement of the Technicolor People, taisha invited us into a new layer of the creative process: developing a curriculum together. She began by asking each of us what we would like to teach. The School was to be "an extension of WXPT's praxis," and that would mean teaching not only our techniques and ideas but inviting others into our experience of process, our process of being and becoming-company.

An essential element of our process is how we practice unison. taisha, who signs her emails "in unison," intentionally centralizes Black, queer people in our process, and she assembled us as a group of queer people of color and allies. Among us are people of varying life stages and occupations—media makers, designers, directors, healers, curators, organizers, dancers, and actors. We were formed to stand together in difference, while unison is typically thought of as two or more people doing the same movement simultaneously—"in unison." It is a technical term but also a metaphor—a metaphor for how cultural things (language, identity, patterns of movement) hold different people together, in step, in time, able to unify or identify with one another.

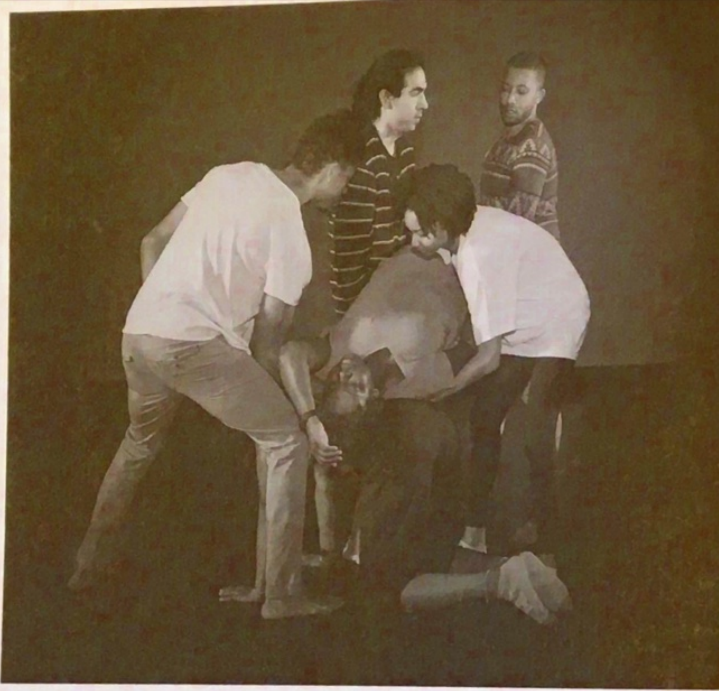
In our dancing, our unison contains our individual differences as well. In *evereachmore*, for example,



WXPT dancers and local community members in a procession action as part of The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People at the Fusebox Festival, Austin, TX, April 2016.

we repeat an arm phrase in the round: we all do the same movements, in the same order, but we retain the unique ways that our bodies hold that movement rather than erase those differences or train them out of our bodies. At another point in the performance, we travel close to a mile while always retaining contact with at least one other person. How we maintain contact and move forward is negotiated in the moment; our choreography is simply to remain in contact. We don't know how, but we are certain we will move forward together.





WXPT members participating in the installation of The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People at DiverseWorks in Houston, TX, May 2016. The School's curriculum there included wanderings, gatherings, dispersals, the lifting of people, the staging of images...and developing scores to be taken out into different communities throughout Houston.

photos by Ashley Hunt

Similarly, our community takes place among the realities of our own personal lives. Members who are students and those living farther away can only attend weekend rehearsals. Members who learn of illness in their family must reduce their attendance. All must weigh this commitment against personal projects, work obligations, and the need to earn their living. In building the School, our original group of 16 has often been 5 or 6 at a time. Here we balance the deeper commitment some of us are able to maintain with graciousness for the reentry of others—the personal integrated into the communal. As a learning community, we need to “offer ourselves,” and we lay that simple idea at the base of our school.

The curriculum is what each of us wants to teach, shaped in conversation with the others, and again, bringing our differences into a unison. “Offering ourselves” is not a declaration of teaching qualifications—some of us teach what we know deeply, others

what we want to learn more about. We acknowledge that small, honest exchanges, beginning from where we ourselves are, are powerful tools for change. This is central to our collective view of what it now means to bring teaching into this project.

We want our school to be a space for movement-based experiences that model ways to stand together in difference, to explore and share personal stories, to develop our capacities for “listening in the dark” through stillness and silence, and to cultivate awareness of how and when to assert oneself for the advancement of the community. We also want our school to make space for explicit and direct discussion of issues related to Black life, anti-blackness, and queer people of color, and we bring the material of each class back to the question:

**What is a Black Dance curriculum today?**

## The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People Class Descriptions

(excerpted and adapted)

The School offered an open program of events, workshops, classes, and performance, during which an accumulative score was built, culminating in *Meadow*, a performance and “collective movement choir” produced for the conclusion of the exhibition.

**Ditch Plains (2013)** Screening and conversation  
Facilitator: Erin Christovale in conversation with scholars Imani Kai Johnson and Jaye Austin Williams

Shot in Brooklyn around the time of Hurricane Sandy, *Ditch Plains* is a dystopian sci-fi street dance film by Loretta Fahrenholz, featuring members of Ringmasters Crew. We will engage in conversation around narratives of Black resistance, the intention of Black bodies on screen, socioeconomic privilege in the height of the apocalypse, stop and frisk, and the history of the flexing/bone-breaking dance style that originated out of Brooklyn.

### Dream Shapes

Facilitator: Heyward Bracey  
Through socially and somatically inspired movement, we’ll look for the tension between “demonstrating” and “embodying” an experience.

### Everything but the Burden + Movement

Facilitator: Suné Woods  
This workshop will engage excerpts from Greg Tate’s book *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s book *Between the World and Me* through discussion and physical exercises of weight exchange—giving, sharing, and holding the weight of other bodies.

### The Gaze / Silent Moving Sculpture

Facilitator: Maria Garcia  
Silently, this class will take up various eye-contact exercises. The idea is to create a nonverbal, energetic space that will allow participants to reflect on the complicated experience of seeing and being seen.

### Ghost Dance History and Other Banned Dances

Facilitator: Joy Anderson & WXPT Company Members  
Banned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for fear of inciting an uprising, the *Ghost Dance* was a dance of revitalization and renewal that re-energized community and strengthened solidarity. In discussion and movement, this class will take up the *Ghost Dance* and other banned dances in history, including contemporary local public school policies that prohibit such acts of embodied gathering and solidarity amongst young people.

**Explorations in Contact Improvisation**  
Facilitator: Kloii “Hummingbird” Hollis  
Exploring the fundamentals of Contact Improvisation, we will look at how the form takes up Newton’s Laws of Motion as well as practices of healthy touch and community building.

### How I Move: An Exploration in Identity, Poetry, and Dance/Movement

Facilitator: Turay Turay  
Inspired by Marc Bamuthi Joseph’s signature practice of integrating text and movement, we will begin with a poetry exercise that leads into explorative dance and conclude with open discussion. How do our individual identities relate to the “dancer” identity? Who are you when you dance? Suggested reading: “Who Am I Where? ¿Quién soy dónde?: A Map of Contingent Identities,” by Rebecca Solnit and Guillermo Gomez-Peña.

### In Rhythmic Dialogue with Black Brilliance

Facilitator: Meena Murugesan  
This is a space to learn from, honor, and invoke Black radical thinkers and artists who have shaped me—and maybe you. We will read a selection of Black radical creative thinkers and then create personal rhythms with our feet in

conversation and in gratitude, accumulating our actions into a collective polyrhythmic ritual.

### Movement and Sequence

Facilitator: Kristianne Salcines  
How does YOUR body move? This workshop will provide structures for identifying different forms of sequencing and intuitive movement pathways.

### Open Rehearsal for Meadow

Facilitator: taisha paggett  
This is a five-part class and open rehearsal for *Meadow*, a collective dance that is a movement choir; that is the taking up of time, space, and togetherness. The work will involve weight exchange, moving together in and out of unison, and differing degrees of proximity.

### Reflections on the Human Ferris Wheel

Facilitator: Rebecca Bruno  
This class is as much an offering as it is a question about collective forms of action and difference. It is an invitation to share space together and alone in silence; to imagine, retreat, draw, think, breathe, write, and observe.

### ReMix: Shared Dance Practice

Facilitator: Devika Wickremesinghe  
This class offers a way to create dance

collectively in a setting in which the roles of teacher and student change fluidly.

### The Social Behavior of Chairs

Facilitator: Sebastian Peters-Lazaro  
Using chairs as a mutable interior architecture, we will create patterns and environments, and observe and discuss their effect on the space and how a group functions. How are we taught to fit into social structures by containing our physicality through the use of a chair? How do we sit differently in different situations? How are we taught to sit based on our different bodies? How are these experiences affirmed in everyday life?

### Spell-Casting/Un-Casting & Dream Interpretation

Facilitator: Joy Anderson and Charmaine Bee  
We will explore movement that co-creates ritual space to support, invoke, and activate our individual and collective spells and dreams. In this class, we will ask: *What might it look like to uncast what feels like a spell characterized as oppressive? What might it look like to cast spells individually and collectively, to instigate change? How can we use our dream world to activate our intentions? What is the embodiment of belief?*

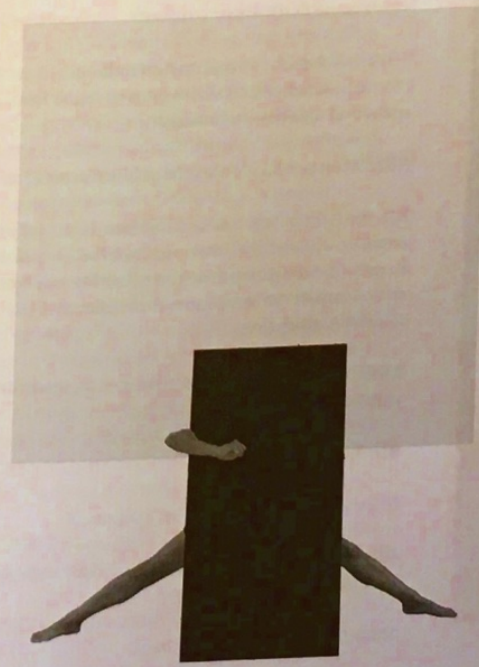
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**To contact the artistic director of WXPT and The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People:**  
taisha paggett, [info@taishapaggett.net](mailto:info@taishapaggett.net)

### Endnotes:

Additional founding WXPT members not mentioned above include Loren Fenton, Alfonso Cervera, and Jas Wade.

Guests to the School’s curriculum at LACE included Anna Martine Whitehead, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Lynnée Denise, and NIC Kay.

In 2016, the School was reimaged for Houston, TX, through a four-week installation at Diverseworks (curated by Rachel Cook). Company members there included Britanni Broussard, Adam Castaneda, Caleb Fields, Celestina Billington, Kenneth Owens, Norola Morgan, Rosine Kouamen, and Eternal Lokumbe, with additional participation from Autumn Knight.



WXPT member in an image created during and exhibited at the installation of The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), fall/winter of 2015.