SOMETHING FRAGILE

A Project Proposal

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by

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SOMETHING FRAGILE

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DEDICATION/THANK YOU

last night Goddess
bathe me in moonlight
she offered me ambrosia and
nectar to sup on.

an olive branch and white
doves sat on her wrists
as she told me the secrets
of the gods. . . .

This body of work is dedicated to all people who have been silenced. It is a vocalization of the human spirit. To all the dead kids that Tupac sheds tattoo tears for; to all women who have ever been called a bitch or a ’ho and believed it; to all the men who have been castrated with the lack of dead presidents in pocket, this is, all of it, for you.

Nanna, you my momma, the only momma I got. I want to thank you for saving my life from time to time; especially the first, when you asked me what book I was reading in your math class. I love you.

My heart felt thanks to my committee, ‘Nine, Beth, and “DocHill.” Thank you for listening, clarifying, and believing in a dream. Because of you, individually and as unit, I have tomorrows I never before, could envision. Thank you for embracing me, shaking me with such patience, tenderness, and compassion. I am, and thus, the world is enriched because of you.

Janice, Sarah, Gina, Atrie, Rhain -- my girls; thank you for always reminding me of who I say I am. Because of you, I am, and there is nothing more precious than myself. Thank you for giving her to me. And thanks for taking care of her/me when I couldn’t; and doing so with such grace and selflessness. I love you.

Lastly I want to yield a hollar to my ladies; the women who have inspired, taught,
consoled, counseled, created me, and a space for me in this world: Dianne McIntyre, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Ntozake Shange, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Rosa Guy, Marita Bonner, Lorna Simpson, Judith Jackson, Tracy Chapman, Sweet Honey in the Rock, all Urban Bush Women, Julie Dash, Nina Simone, Jeanine Thompson, Mahalia Jackson, Oprah Winfrey, Debra Wicks, Rhodessa Jones, Tina Turner, Barbra Smith, Toni Morrison, Barbra Christian. And all mommas, aunts, grand mommas, and sisters who told us that what we had to say mattered, so go out and blaze; forge our own horizons with our own voice.
WHY THIS
PROJECT
In the old days
folks would sing a song
stamp a foot
clap a hand . . .
all was right in the world
'cause we had each other. . . .

In Baltimore Maryland, there is a southern church on Milton Avenue named Mount Calvary Star Baptist Church. Doctor Reverend Young was the pastor. I went back to visit that church after my first couple of years in college. I was angry and perplexed about the idea of God. I wanted Reverend Young to explain to me how he could preach the lessons of the bible, with his knowledge of science and discovered evidence, which obviously rendered the entire premise of faith in a God one can not see, false. I went with new found knowledge in hand and righteous indignation in heart, prepared to do spiritual battle. I walked into the Mount Calvary with my grown up high heels and my citified New York dress, and I had to stop. Was it me, or did the worship hall get smaller? How come the elderly were more in number and regally ancient and the youths were crying or screaming behind pouty lips or nodding heads? I didn’t know.

There is a ritual in southern Black churches, and it may very well be in any number of other denominations, which is this: after the church announcements, the pastor requests the visitors to stand and introduce themselves. This may happen during any section of the service, this time it was after Reverend Young had preached. His sermon was on the book of Revelation -- that these were the last and evil days before the Judgement and that you better be ready ‘cause God is about to rain down fire. He was speaking about how the Devil was running rampant in the world, that’s why it wasn’t safe to walk the streets at night. Crime was the devil making mischief in the hearts of man and Hell was the destination for those who did not repent and accept the
Lord Jesus as her/his personal savior. I started to shift in my seat. I was furious. See, I thought, this is the problem with the Black race. We keep blaming the Devil and hoping God, like the good wise father in the long robe and soft white beard, is going to come and save us. Rev. Young is a doctor. He knows that poverty, lack of jobs, and internalized racism is the catalyst for Black on Black crimes, not some little red man with horns and a pitch fork. Why is he perpetuating the same lies that Whites used to enslave every single group of people they encountered, specifically African Americans? Why preach punishment instead of community and self reliance? Why, why? WHY!? Why send me, a young girl, into the world thinking that if I pray hard enough and wait on the Lord, everything will work out just fine? I don’t know, but I intended to find out.

Reverend Young was standing in the pulpit. He asked all visitors to please stand. I stood. He asked us to, one by one, come up front, say your name, who/what brought you here this Sunday, and where your home church is. I waited until everyone else had spoken, then I walked from the back of the church up the center lane, to reach the alter. My stride was practiced and confident in my new grown up two and one half inch heels. My sleek dress gave me the air of one who knows, I hoped, as I walked up the aisle. I reached the alter, and I turned and looked at the congregation. I looked into this sea of people, I fell into eyes, varying eyes, like the stars that light up the night sky, all looking the same but each extremely different. There was Mrs. Jordan, the mother of the church, who sat in the same seat every Sunday since the church was built; deacon Smith, in his earth brown jacket and spit shine shoes in row two, who smiled with his eyes since his face mouth was always wearing a scowl; and Mrs. Young, the first Lady of Mount
Calvary, who presided over Sunday service much like Jackie Kennedy must have presided over tea with foreign officials -- with dignity, composure and grace.

As I stood there just standing, my shoes too new, and my dress too sportin’ for these humble dwellings, life shifted. Faith became yesterday, prayer became today, and hope became tomorrow. I looked into faces and saw ships crammed with human cargo. I saw hands bleeding from cutting sugar cane and backs permanently stooped from pickin’ cotton. I saw mother’s tears because babies had been sold, and men’s eyes dropped in shame because they couldn’t/can’t/don’t protect or keep what’s theirs. I saw young girls crying behind big ear rings, different color hair, and a first child by the age of fifteen. And I saw young boys dying; hanging from trees, hanging around the corner liquor store, hangin’ with the hommies on their turf. I saw a river of blood with me and mine drowning in it and then I saw a mountain. I think it was mother Jordan. She was waving her fan at me with a smile on her face. She was telling me, encouraging me to speak. The congregation at Mount Calvary was just a nodding and smiling and waving fans -- for me, for us. Deacon Smith passed the word ‘round that I wasn’t no visitor. I used to come to church when I was a wee thing and that I was a “college girl” now doing real good too. Reverend Young said amen. Then Mrs. Young said child tell us about school and what had I learned. And I began to cry. Everybody kept saying “praise the Lord,” or “Thank you Jesus, testify... share.” I opened my eyes again and I looked out and I saw what I never knew, never been taught. For every thousand that died from diarrhea or starvation during the Middle passage; for every hundred black boys hung because some white women yelled rape; for every fifty mothers who were whipped to death while carrying my next child into this God forsaken world; for every twenty-five teen aggers who were spat upon because they tried to go to school; and for every
Black person in America who has been stepped on, cut down, lied to, manipulated, scorned, ridiculed, disgraced, abused, and destroy -- I am here.

I am not myself. I do not belong to me. I am. I am a legacy that people have died for. I am a community of spirits, forever interlocking, forever blooming; a magnificent array of colors shapes and voice causing what is to come since the dawn of time. I am just the mouth piece of all of those of me, who have come before me, who have been silenced. I am the one who survives to tell the story. So let the record show, and let it be written, goddamn it! That we were here and if nothing else, we had each other.

This project is just the beginning. *Something Fragile* is an installment in a solo performance work series entitled *Pieces of Reality*. This series will evolve into one acts, full length plays, short stories, critical essays, historical text, anthologies, workshops, consultations, and novels. This is my life’s project. This is the crux of my existence.
INTRODUCTION
The plight of the human condition is a topic which is quite alluring to me. I postulate that every human being has known some variation of pain. Pain, loss, desertion, and or violation is a by-product of existing in the world as we know it. Pain is universal as well as indiscriminate. It infiltrates the lives of the rich, the poor, the old, the young, the white, the black, the male, the female, the heterosexual, the homosexual, the educated as well as the layman, with equal sinuosity and rigor. Furthermore, by virtue of embarrassment, shame, or self preservation, human beings avoid addressing this issue by undertaking a code of silence. We do not talk about things which hurt. It appears that human beings do not realize silence only perpetuates abusive cycles and fester inflammation of the human spirit.

Within the very fabric of the United States of America, there is a segment of humanity I choose to signify. This group consists of people who, I say, have been forsaken, abandoned, and/or devastated by hegemonic culture. Inside of society there are generally two groups: people who have power, whether it be social, economical, political, age or gender, and people who are at the effect of those in power-- the "other." The "other" is the underdog, the unheard: the child who has been molested but no one believes; the woman who has been beaten by her husband but who can not leave; the old man who has worked hard his whole life to care for his family but is ignored because he is no longer useful. It is of utmost importance to me that their voices get heard; that their stories get told. Often, if people are not
considered valuable, interesting, or most importantly, marketable, their song goes unsung. And if it is, that song is manipulated and distorted to suit the needs of hegemonic culture. I am not willing. As long as there is breath in my body, ears for me to listen, my memory to recall, and an opportunity for me to speak, their voices will get heard.

Thus being, I have created monologues, poetry, and movement studies which explore extreme cases of suffering and misconceptions to serve as a vehicle for this communication. The title of this work in progress is "Pieces of Reality."

It takes incredible courage to tell the truth. Especially a truth which may not always be welcomed by different people for different reasons. All of my life I have observed, tolerated, or experienced lie after lie. They take many forms. Pretending to be happy when one is not is a lie. Ignoring a situation which is obviously detrimental is a lie. Silence for fear of being ostracized or reprimanded is a lie. A lie is anything which is untrue. I profoundly believe that every illness, every problem, every war, everything which plagues our society, has its root in some lie which has not been acknowledged. From racism to the national deficit, there is some unspoken untruth which if could be acknowledged, would begin the cycle of healing.

I have taken on the privilege of telling the "truth," however painful, uncomfortable, or shocking. I believe in the dignity of humanity. I believe that if I speak the truth, others will too and together, we will restore that dignity to all people. I have chosen people, I say, who traditionally
do not get heard because of social, economical, and/or political barriers simply because I understand them. Being a young African/Native American female performance artist, who has known poverty, pain, and isolation intimately affords me a unique perspective on this topic. As a poet, as an artist I can bring to the world the voices which I say have been ignored, belittled, forgotten and/or distorted by the hegemonic culture. The poet Victor Hernandez Cruz quoted in Ntozage Shange's address to the National Afro-American Writers Conference at Howard University in 1977, which is printed in her book *See No Evil*, best articulates what I am committed to. She writes:

the poet sees & hears the world. & there are many worlds.
people live in different worlds/ got different bags
humans talk/ dance & make noise/ a poet must
make poetry
out of that/ or make poetry out of his mind/ which took form in the world
words & music travel.
god wd not make anything bad or dirty. some people make dirty things happen tho.
i see what's in the world & sing it like a god. (28)

This is who I am. This is what I do. This is what you can count on -- I promise.

Given that I am the creator of this material, one of my fundamental concerns is making sure my material is accessible to different audiences in different venues (i.e., performance,
educational, movement theatre, womanist, African-American, etc.) When I say accessible, I am referring to how people interpret and are effected by what I have created. My key form of methodology is to show my work whenever and wherever I can. I have, and continue to attend poetry readings at least twice a month. I create and show movement studies in various dance and choreography classes I am and have taken. I have other playwrights, authors, and poets read my material and offer feedback. The same with the movement studies. Because of the nature of my material, I have to make certain, especially in the writings, that my language is not accusatory, except when that is a conscious choice. I am also aware of the need of humor in order to offer an outlet for the audience when experiencing my work.

Given that I do not have a strong commitment to comedy, I make use of the comedy device of exaggeration, the humor of recognition, and wit to balance my work. Another chief concern of mine is crafting the underlying universal theme of humanness in all of my creations. My primary vehicles for accomplishing this component is reading everything, talking to everyone, listening and observing. More specifically, I read psychology, sociology, and anthropology books; I have also taken classes in these subjects. I read and am I still reading Ntozake Shange's works as well as articles written about her work. Of all the books, plays, novels, and journals I have ever read, Shange's voice is closest to my own. I hold her in high esteem because she has the courage to tell the truth as she perceives it. I hold the same
opinion of Adrienne Kennedy, so I read a lot of her plays. My methodology for research is reading and viewing the works of female artists, with particular attention to African-American women who create their own material. Not just playwrights or poets, I follow novelist Jewelle Gomez; creator, director, performer, and choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, artistic director of Urban Bush Women; Anna Deavere Smith, historian and performance artist; Queen Brooks, visual artist; Dianne McIntyre choreographer, creator of Sounds-In-Motion Dance Company, performer, and former teacher of Shange as well as Zollar.

This past winter, I studied with McIntyre. The experience was life altering; I am a more enriched person and artist because of it. I am of the opinion that artists need to experience other artists work in order to encourage the creative process. The more one is exposed to, artistic as well as pedestrian, the richer one becomes. Thus the material one creates becomes more universal. I am, moment to moment, always in the process of creating. I write new pieces in my head every day. I remember something which stimulates me to create a dance about it.

Creating, honing, and rehearsal walk hand in hand in my life. My methodology for rehearsing is a little tricky. Given that I am creating works, even as I type, I spend an extensive amount of "rehearsal time" thinking and rethinking what it is I am trying to say. I have, for this project, selected nine pieces which are set. However, I have, since beginning this project, created a number of other works which more clearly communicate what I have to say. Therefore, my rehearsal process is the
clarification of my intention. I realize this is an ongoing process and at some time I will have to finalize my script. I will do that and also create a rehearsal schedule which will have clear structure and purpose. However, until that time, I shall continue to create. Around early June, I shall begin to hone, choose, and shape my final product.

In the introduction of *Out from Under: Text by Women Performance Artists*, the editor Lenora Champagne comments on the nature of the text in this collection. Champagne writes:

Beneath the powerful writing is the under-the-skin experience of oppression for being "other" - a Jew, a black, a lesbian, and always, a woman. But these are not the stories of victims. These women are fighters in red dresses. Anger, in the guise of rage or irony, fuels the work; compassion and insight temper it. The artists express, with urgency, visions of the possible that are sometimes hopeful, often frightening. (X)

The entire notion of the "other" is the premise of my work. Not the meek and humble "other" who patiently waits for a god who appears to be to distracted to hear their whispered prayers to come and save the day. No. I am referring to the "other" which shakes an angry fist at the heavens and demands to be heard. I suppose this is the reason I am so strongly drawn to Shange's and Kennedy's work; they, in different voices, are forces to be reckoned with. Vivid, rich, sometimes angry, often misunderstood, but always raw,
their works are unapologetic. This is what I strive for in my own work; the courage to tell the truth as it occurs to me. As an African/Native American female performance artist, or "to be young, gifted, and Black," I face a very interesting challenge which is: the right to speak and be heard in a world which has trained me as well as everybody else, that what I have to say does not matter. Meaning that my thoughts and experiences must have an intent in order to be valid. Redgrave's *Shakespeare with My Father* does not have value other than a White woman sharing memorable experiences with her father. Very often, artistry created by African Americans must have an aim or target in order for it to be sold commercially. In *Black Woman Writers at Work*, Shange states:

Black and Latin writers have to start demanding that the fact that we are alive is enough! Half the plays in the *New York Times* today don't have a point. *Babes in Toyland* doesn't have a point. *Sugar Babies* doesn't have a point. *Bent* doesn't have a point. *Elephant Man* doesn't have a point. They're just people - white people. They're people and we experience their lives. That is the point. But being black people, our being alive is not enough of a point. Well, it's enough of a point for me. (171)

I agree with Shange. I am tired of apologizing for my existence. I am tired of having to feign appreciation for Whites allowing me the privilege of breathing the same air they do. I am tired of having to explain myself to people.
I have had a person tell me that my work is as oppressive as the types of people a speak out about. This person was White. By virtue of my skin tone, the world views me as Black. Thus my experiences have been determined by being born a Black woman. My voice, my background, my environment, the sway of my hips, are all Black. I am committed to exposing the universality of the human condition. By revealing the humanity, the humanness of people who are so often ignored or distorted by hegenoic culture, all people will see themselves in my work. And my voice is Black. Thus, my Blackness, is the filter my work comes through. And I am not apologizing or making a point.

In the forward of Black Women Writers at Work, Tillie Olsen writes:

Women of color, daughters and granddaughters-often blood kin still-of working people whose lives were, are, consumed mostly by the struggle for maintaining human life, they have a based closeness to what Toni Cade Bambara calls "the truth about human nature, about the human potential." (X)

With this in mind, I have created these pieces to serve as a vehicle to explore "the truth" about the human condition. The title of this work in progress is "Pieces of Reality."


September 19, 1994
11:00 p.m.

My Lady, My Goddess,

Once more behold me on this earth and lend me your ear. It’s been so long since I’ve allowed myself the freedom of the pen. ‘Tis a blessing to utilize the gift of writ. I know the reason for not writing has been fear. I’ve been afraid to see where I am and what I have become. Not anymore. I feel saturated with uncommunicated verse and prose; so much that my mind works thrice as fast as my pen. I don’t know exactly what I have to say, but I’m sure the words will come. . . .

Let’s start with: I SO LOVE MY LIFE!!! I thank you Goddess for an extraordinary life. I thank you for all of the generous glorious gifts you have bestowed on me. Thank you Yusan for providing me with everything I could possibly want or need. You always give me whatever I half way think I want, and I thank you for this. I thank you God for loving me
so purely and more importantly, for surrounding me with and in you love. I am so clear that the beauty, the harmony, the brilliance of my life is you flowing through me. Thank you for honoring me with the presence of your love. Thank you for deeming me worthy of being a temple where your immense dwells and shines. I love you God. To you Universe, I give all thanks and praise.

Today I unconealed how I am going to live my life. I was having difficulty distinguishing how I wanted my career to unfurl and flourish. I can see just from being here in graduate school, that I don’t want to live my life as an administrative/management theatre person. I don’t want the responsibility. I like the idea of teaching but there is no glory. I have come to the clear decision that I am indeed a performer. I need an audience. Plus, I like starting and finishing new projects. What I see Kathleen Conlin doing seems to work. I realize that I am a good actor and by the time I graduate in three years from here, I will be a superb actress. However, being an excellent actress is not all I want to be. I’m not interested in pursuing my career as an entertainer in the classic sense. I don’t want to live my life hoping some agent or casting director sees something or worse feel sorry for me and gives me a job. That has never been my aim. Working solely in a university setting is too restrictive and only get’s so much recognition from the Entertainment world at large. I want more. Much more. I want to make this place famous because they had the good sense to bring me here and cultivate my unique blend of talents. I want to create. I want my stuff to be completely self sufficient. I want my own one woman show.

Goddess, Lady, I am committed to leaving this planet having made a significant known contribution to mankind. I want and am going to have this world HEAR MY VOICE. I have so much to share. I look through plays and I don’t hear my voice. So since no one can speak what I have to say to the world, I get the most privileged opportunity in the world. I get to invent a
structure which will create opportunities into existence to share myself, my special kind of genius with the world. And I’ve figured out how. Today I was talking with Jeanine, my movement teacher -- turns out that for the past ten years she has earned her living by performing her own one person act!!! Imagine that! And her thing is movement theatre, acting, dancing, and mime. So you see Yusae, I have exactly the right person available to help me work this. Not to mention the three person committee who supports us in creating our solo pieces. Jeanine wants me to take (next year) graduate choreography classes to support me in my act. I think this is great! Because I plan on using everything I can do (acting, singing, dancing, transformation, being with and for people) to carve my space in the entertainment industry.

I am committed to leaving OSU with either one full act performance or a set of different forty minute pieces that I can go on tour with. I’ll tour the states then go abroad, get international recognition and acclaim -- then HIT Broadway with my show. Have rave reviews and win a Tony for best performance and best first work for choreography and directing. After I have made my name through my solo act, I want to change areas completely and go and cut a record, tour, and make a film. Have them both be awesomely successful. Then I might come back to school and get my D. F. A. or Ph. D. I am going to finish graduate school because it’s what’s going to have my career happen. And OSU is exactly what I need to have what I envision come into existence - now! I’m going to get all the expertise they are so generously offering. And what I am focusing on is becoming the very best actor, dancer, singer, I can be and developing and honing and shaping my solo work to springboard out of grad school. That’s it! I’m not going to join any committees. I’m going to use whatever opportunities that come along to perform my own stuff. Poems, singing, dance, acting, and I’m creating my own stuff (with the
exception of songs. I'll just do the arrangement). Going to openings, performances, lectures --
everything that moves my career forward. Developing my own work!!! Thank you Goddess.
Now let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, my
strength and my redeemer. In your precious name I pray, amen and thank God . . . love you,
Venus.
BACKGROUND
RESEARCH
Feminism and Deconstruction: A Womanistic Critique

Let Southern oppressors tremble—let their Northern apologists tremble—let all the enemies of the persecuted Blacks tremble....Urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest— I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard.

William Lloyd Garrison

There are people who might say that the institution of slavery ended January 1, 1863, when Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. However, there are a number of folks who argue that slavery, in a more subtle, psychological form, is like the proverbial serpent in the placid homogeneous garden of Eden: always hovering, waiting for an opportunity, an opening, a weakness, ready to lash out at any moment, to strike. I agree with both observations. In theory, people of African descent were legally "freed" from the institutionalized slavery and their White masters in 1863. Yes, we know that document only applied to the slaves which lived in the states that seceded from the Union, thus eliminating their force of free labor, which the slaves unwittingly provided. We are not addressing the other 800,000 people who remained enslaved in the states that bordered
the seceded South. That's a different paper. For now, let it suffice that 1863 was the year in which institutionalized slavery was abolished. Let it also suffice that slavery still exists today in different, less obvious forms. Welfare, in which African Americans in the lower social economical level are still dependent on "massa" for the basic necessities of survival; the "glass ceiling" which faces many middle-class African Americans in pursuit of the "American Dream;" and the exoticism, ostracism, and/or the eradication of African Americans in the upper class, are such forms. Add the component of being a female and the problems and prejudices of this situation are compounded. While the institution of slavery has been abolished, its "residue" remains potent.

I am aware that some people may wonder why I deem this a topic worthy of examination. Why do I think/feel/believe that the aftermath of slavery and its eventual permeation into the psyche and culture of African American women needs to be addressed? My answer is two-fold. First, I believe in documenting an elided history. Women, especially African American women, have not been valued as momentous historical subjects. Secondly, the subject of African American women performing artists merits its own attention.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word "residue" as: the remainder of something after removal of a part. This term applies to slavery if one considers how the structure as well as
the dehumanizing aspects of slavery conditioned people of African
descent to think of "self," both collectively and individually.
Envision the average daily life of a slave in order to examine
this notion in some detail. Have the eyes you envision from be
that of a woman.

It's dawn, the smile of the sun is just peaking over the
horizon, sprinkling the sky with the whispers of indigo, crimson,
and violet. You are up starting the day's work; you take just a
moment to admire and appreciate God's handy work when suddenly,
you are back handed across the face. Your head is reeling from
the actual force of the blow, and your eyes are smarting from the
unexpectedness of the violence. You can hear him telling you
what a lazy nigger you are, and that you do not have time to
stand around and day dream. You drop your eyes and don't say a
word in order not to rouse his wrath more. You hear him commend
you to get to work and you quickly utter a "yessu" relieved to
get out of harms way—for a time.

You start a pot to boiling for breakfast. You go and make
sure everyone is up preparing for the day's work. They are,
including the children. After eating, you watch your people go
to work in the fields while you stay near the house to cook,
clean, and look after the children too young to work.

The day passes from morn to noon. There is a disturbance in
the back. Some lawmen have just returned a runaway. All of the
slaves are gathered to watch the whipping in order to deter future loss of free labor. You stand there silently watching your man get beat. He looks you in the eye each time he takes a whip. You hold his stare, silently giving him your strength and help the only way that you can. Then you look down at his pants; he has peed on himself. You quickly return your eyes to his face but he will not look at you. You realize that you have hurt him by looking down.

Afternoon turns evening. You have already tended the wounds of your man’s back. No words are spoken. You go to take the cleaned clothes back to the house. "Yessa" is standing in the shadows, waiting. He knocks the clothes from your hand and tells you to pick them up. You bend over at the waist, he says no; on your knees. You get on your hands and knees, and he tells you to stay there. You do as you are told. He lifts your skirts, pulls down your panties and enters your body from behind, as if you are nothing more than a bitch in heat. He pulls your hair, forcing your head back with each thrust as he exercises his authority. He goes still as he Shoots his seed into your body. He gets up and tells you to go and re-wash those clothes that you have dropped and make sure they are here before morn. You get up, pick up the clothes and go. After washing the clothes, you go back to where your man is. He touches your face in the dark and you know that he knows. No one ever says a word.
Weeks becomes months. You give birth to a child. Your child is the complexion of french roasted coffee diluted with the most expensive, the purest cream. You look down at the infant in yours arms. You are beset and besotted with tender emotions. This is your baby. Your very first; your only one. You look in your baby’s hazel eyes while you breast feed; you vow to nurture and protect your baby with every breath of your body. Your baby with the clear untroubled trusting eyes who loves you, special. One day while you are nursing your baby, He comes in carrying a child. He tells you to stop nursing that nigger and breast feed his child. You do as you are told. It works out that you are able to nurse both children. However, you often have to feed your baby goats milk when your body can not produce food for both.

Months becomes years. Your baby has grown into a beautiful little girl. She helps you with the washing and preparation of the meals. You keep her away from the house because his wife hates her. One day you take the wash up to the house. You are sent to work at a nearby plantation overnight, to help prepare food for a wedding. You return home the next day. You can not find your little girl. She has been sold. For the first time in your sixteen years of life, you break down and cry.

Someone who is reading this paper may be wondering how this picture painted ties into “residue,” and in particular African American performing artists. The answer is quite simple.
History is interlocking. “Residue” is the aftermath that is born of the institution of slavery. In her book, Talking Back: think feminist, thinking black, bell hooks writes:

Despite civil rights struggle, the many reforms that have made it possible for us to study and teach at universities throughout the United States, we continue to live in a white-supremacist country. While we no longer live within the rigid structures of racial apartheid that characterized earlier moments in our history, we live within a culture of domination, surrounded by institutions—religious, educational, etc.—which reinforce the values, beliefs, and underlying assumption of white supremacy. More than ever before educated black people internalize many of these assumptions, acting in complicity with the very forces of domination that actively oppress, exploit, and deny the vast majority of us access to a life that is not marred by brutal poverty, dehumanization, extreme alienation, and despair.

(63)

These “underlying assumptions” that African Americans have “internalized,” are what I term residue. Refer back to a day in the life of the African American woman who was previously mentioned. If one acknowledges the implied amount of physical labor she actually performed in a day (i.e., raising before dawn, cooking and cleaning for a mass of people, caring for small
children, tending wounds of severe magnitude, etc.), the assumption that African American women are the workhorses of humanity is born. Women of African descent existence only to be of service to others. This is not a spoken idea; it is a taught way of being for the sake of survival. The stereotypes of "mammy," "mother earth," and "big momma," all have their roots in the before mentioned inference. But that's just addressing the stereotypes. What about how African American women internalize this "assumption?" How do we allow this "residue," born of necessity for the sake of survival, to infiltrate and dominate our lives? By becoming "strong" women. The super woman complex is every African American woman’s nemesis. Since the dawn of slavery in the United States up to and including the present day, African American women have equated self worth with: how much pain we can endure; how much work we can get done; how many children we can raise; how many men we can save; how much education we can obtain; and how much money we can generate. This is the expectation and culture African American women are born into. Until these unspoken "assumptions" are addressed, this is all we will ever have; a life of service deriving from habit, not free will or desire. The super woman complex is just one example of how the residue of slavery exists in the psyche of modern African American women.
How does this notion tie into establishing a womanistic critique of African American performing artists? There are some who might say that womanism is a part of the "second wave" of the feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's. But the relationship between womanism and feminism is complicated by history. There are a number of prominent African American scholars who choose to be considered a feminist or a Black feminist; not womanist. For the purpose of my exploration and research, the term womanist is used in relation to these African American women.

Woman's Suffrage movement is considered the precursor or the "first wave" of modern feminism. The creation of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the Seneca Falls Convention, and the National Convention on Women's Rights all exemplify the commitment mid-nineteenth century White had to reform. This same commitment has been passed down to modern day feminists. However, with any custom, philosophy, or organization, specific biases and prejudices were also part of the "first wave."

Elitism and racism characterized aspects of the Suffrage movement. Working class and African American women, both yoked by exploitation and oppression, were often ignored and abandoned by suffragists. Working-class women were denounced because they were more concerned with putting food on their tables than supporting a cause. African American women were abandoned because their presence problematized the potential for Suffrage in
the South. In her book, *Women, Race, and Class*, Angela Y. Davis writes:

Black women had been more than willing to contribute...

"clear powers of observation and judgement "toward the creation of a multi-racial movement for women’s political rights. But at every turn, they were betrayed, and rejected by the leaders of the lily white women suffrage movement. For suffragists...Black women were simply expendable entities when it came time to woo...support with a white complexion. (148)

This same elision is exemplified in certain present-day feminist theory as well. Marueen Ash’s book, *The Story of the Women’s Movement*, chronicles the efforts of white women trying to obtain the same rights as white men, including but not limited to, "the right to own property, keep money they earned, vote, get an education, or get custody of their children" (5). Ash, though, does not include the concerns of African Americans. The only acknowledgment of African Americans in this text, is to further Ash’s argument for white women. She writes:

It was through working to end the slavery of black people in American that women learned to work for themselves. Anti-slavery societies began to form in the
1830's and some began to speak in public for the rights of black people. The women's anti-slavery societies sent so many petitions to Congress to end slavery that a law was introduced to make it illegal for women to petition Congress. (11-12)

It would appear that Ash is implying that black people were a worthy cause that gave white women the opportunity to stand for something, an idea, they believed in. However, Ash is unable to document any direct support from suffragists on behalf of African American to obtain the same rights and privilege of white women. Ash examines the struggle for women's rights, but these rights do not seem related to the African American experience, especially considering the conditions of the 1800's.

African American women artists are just that; African American and women and effected by status or class. As such, race, gender, and class are essential points to be considered. Feminism has had a tendency to be a gender centered critique. The experience of being a woman has been identified as the common denominator to fuse women as a community. Charlette Canning, in "Constructing Experience: Theorizing a Feminist Theatre History," notes how this idea was used in "consciousness-raising" groups:

Testimony was positioned as the truth unmediated by material circumstances and "experience" became mainly a
trope for commonality. The unstated and unspoken was that any experience would be pervasive, instantly identifiable, and a way for women to bond with one another. (531)

The accomplishments of the modern feminist movement are staggering and ground breaking: the valuation of “action/experience;” the idea that the oppression of women is so ingrained that women do not even sense it; and the creation of a historical methodology grounded in women’s experiences instead of patriarchal standards. All of these ideas are significant. However, other steps and concerns must be advanced: creation of stratagems, methodologies, strategies, tactics, and critiques which generate support for women of various ethnicities, economic stations, and sexual orientations. Only from these various angles can the personal truly become political, in the most extended sense.

In order to examine and explore the creative aspects of African American women, a distinctive criteria, in which the politics of gender, race, and class are of equal importance, must be developed. In her book, Toward a Black Feminist Criticism, Barbara Smith asserts:

A black feminist approach...that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking
factors in the works of Black women...is an absolute necessity. Until a Black feminist criticism exists we will not even know what these writers mean. (3) Although Smith speaks primarily about writers, the same can be said of artists.

The "residue" of slavery has infiltrated the psyche of all people of African descent in America. Extensive research is needed on how African Americans notion of "self" derives from institutionalized apartheid. Some of these notions include but are not limited to: taught helplessness; taught submissiveness; breakdown of the family nucleus; hiding emotions; loss of dignity and respect between African American women and men; inferiority and self hate.

The question I now ponder is: how do African American women performing artists, in particular, actively resist this kind of culture? How does one create possibility in the face of impossibility, or opportunity in the face of non-opportunity? How does one exist in a world where everything one does is assumed inferior, or credited as an accident or a freak of nature? In short, how does one continue to dream, to give breath to one's individual voice? Furthermore, how does one honor one's heritage, without fitting into one of the assigned slots or stereotypes which white-supremacist patriarchal capitalistic society maintain?
In the early 1920's, W. E. B. Du Bois, in his article "Criteria of Negro Art," asked an extremely essential question: "Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans?" (296). This question frightens and haunts me. It frightens me as an African American woman concerned with how the children of my race will perceive themselves. Even in the 1990's, white America paints images of African Americans in books, television, cinema, newspapers, radio, and plays that are demeaning and dis-empowering. In response, African American artists celebrate the beauty as well as the ugliness of being African American, and not being ashamed of or apologizing for our color or the residue of slavery. Du Bois asserts:

There has come to us . . . a realization of that past, of which for long years we have been ashamed, for which we have apologized. We thought nothing could come out of that past which we wanted to remember; which we wanted to hand down to our children. Suddenly, this same past is taking on form, color, and in a half shamed-faced way we are beginning to be proud of it. (292)

Since then, especially in the 1960's and 1970's, "we" have celebrated who we are. And not in a "half shamed-faced way." No. More like a riotous explosion of saxophones wailing Miles
and bright red ribbons of delight and pain pouring from the
tongue. Like tambourines and jimbay drums in the swing of hips
and making love at dawn with God. No shame and no apologizes.

The African American performing artist who best exemplifies
this sentiment, this boldness, this break from shame in the
unspoken of “what’s White must be better so let’s imitate it and
not draw attention to our Blackness,” is Ntozake Shange. Poet,
novelist, teacher, mother, performer, playwright, and creator of
the art form “choropoem,” Ntozake (which means “she who brings
her own things”) Shange (“she who walks with lions”) should be
identified as a “revolutionary” artist, both in content and form.
In his article, “the Revolutionary Theatre,” Amiri Baraka
asserts:

The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE! Show up the
insides of these humans, look into black skulls... . It must
crake their faces open to see the mad cries of
the poor. It must teach them about silence and the
truths... .The Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and
give them a reality... .The Revolutionary Theatre is shaped
by the world, and moves to reshapes the world,
using as its force the natural force and perpetual
vibrations of the mind in the world. We are history and
desire, what we are, and what any experience can make us.
(559)
Shange's work does all these, actively resisting White supremacy, as well as cleansing "residue."

Deconstruction of narrative is one of Shange's fundamental strategies. In her article, "Rethinking Brecht: Deconstruction, Feminism, and the politics of Form," Janelle Reinelt's definition of deconstruction is, "to interrupt...the habitual performance codes of the majority culture...to make art which dismantles the political and artistic status quo" (791). Shange's insistence on using lower case lettering as well as creating her own form of punctuation which is not traditional, establishes her writing as deconstructive.

During an interview printed in the book *Conversations Black Women Writers*, Shange stated that she writes the way African Americans talk. I equate this to Paul Lawrence Dunbar documenting Southern dialects in his poetry. In Shange's theatrical piece *Spell #7*, Lou, a practicing magician, exemplifies this linguistic strategy:

YES YES YES 3 wishes is all you get

scarlet ribbons for yr hair

a farm in mississippi

someone to love you madly

all things are possible

but aint no colored magician in his right mind
gonna make you white
I mean

this is black magic

you lookin at

& i'm fixin you up good/fixin you up good & colored

& you gonna be colored all yr life

& you gonna love it/bein colored/all yr life/colored &

love it

love it/being colored. spell #7!

In Conversations with Black Women Writers, Shange stated that she writes in this fashion because she needed to see something interesting on the page. This visibly texturized form would have her, as well as others who read her work, remain actively engaged.

Shange's work is deconstructive and revolutionary, from another perspective as well. Shange has transformed herself from object to subject. She speaks/writes/creates with her own voice. She actively resisted the inherent objectivity of being born an African American woman. She is not measuring her worth in relation to capitalism and yet, year after year, she continues to create ways to live in America without having to whore her soul. In short, Shange is an active subject. I am not implying that Shange has a perfect life or that she is a latter day saint to whom we must all pay homage. However, she is, to me, an inspiration; a living example of how an African American woman
performing artist does not accept racism and sexism. Reinelt’s reiterates this notion:

It is now apparent that the role of the subject in the production of meaning is precisely what is at stake for...feminism. The requirements of the active subject, capable of surpassing a give ideological grid cannot be subsumed under either Althusserian Marxism of Grench feminism. In practice...the texts of feminist artists reassert a female I, not only by “fixing the not-but” which is a negative relationship but also by staging female experience and appealing to a political practice aimed at ideological struggle. Agency is assumed here, too. (795)

Shange’s content and form are clear examples of active resistance, active subject, and “residue” cleansing - this is the negative relationship to culture and the struggle for agency.

In closing, it is important to acknowledge other African American women performing artist who have and are resisting unspoken assumptions living in a white spermist patriarchal capitalistic society. Women like: Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Anna Deavere Smith, Robbie McCauley, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Toshi Reagon, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Diane McIntyre, Urban Bush Women, Angela Basset, Patti LaBelle, as well as your truly. These women and others command attention. And people, White or African American, do not have to approve in order for us
to continue being who we are. In his article, The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes eloquently expresses the essence of what we, and what women like us, have in common. Hughes writes:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express out individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. We build out temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (86)

Herein lies the truth, the beauty, the power: to be “free within ourselves.” For within this freedom, the ability and space to cherish the whole self, to embrace the world, abides.
ESSAY/JOURNAL ENTRY #2

little chubby hands
all soft with dream . . . .
catch a tear on trembling lips
momma whisper’s
while papa cajoles
and teaches what’s been . . . .
  baby girl lost,
give me your hand
and we will find
our way home . . . .

February 1996
11:26 p.m.

Great Spirit, Topaz,

Today Carlyle Brown talked to me about my solo performance piece he had read. He said that I had an original voice and that I should just do it. He thinks that some of my pieces are over written, which I can see. He said that I should not rewrite. I should just do it and listen to the feed back I receive and use what I thought supports my vision. He also suggested I get a director or dramaturg to support me in crystalizing what I have to say. He said if he did not think it was interesting and if he did not think it had a leg to stand on, he wouldn’t be suggesting that I put it out in the world. He said that because it is so honest, genuine, that it will captivate. People like imperfection, so I should not worry about getting it right. He also let me know that artistry, like life, is a process not a destination and that I should be thankful for being an artist in a world where most people don’t know what they were put on this planet for. So stop feeling sorry for myself because no one put a gun to my head and made me choose my life’s work. I could have been an accountant. He’s right. And even if it does take twenty years to get my voice heard in the world
I will not stop until I realize my dreams. I love him for his wisdom, compassion, and honesty.

I'm learning so much from him. I'm learning so much about my craft and myself by doing *Yellow Moon Rising*. I thank you God.

Thank you Goddess for my *Yellow Moon* family. We take care of each other. I feel very safe. So safe that today I became my honest, sensitive, spoiled, playful, childlike, uncertain, five year old self. I love Carl. I want him to be my father. I want him to see me as his daughter to support and guide through my career. I can see this with him and Diane. My Lord, this is my prayer. I know I can and will satisfy my destiny, these people who have done what I dream of are right in my space and I think it is for a reason. I love you Topaz and I thank you and give you all the praise.

Thank you Goddess for Bonnie and the rest of the chorus in *Yellow Moon Rising*. Thank you for their support and love. Thank you Topaz for Carl. He's the closest thing I have ever had to a father. He's always there, ever watchful, yet allowing me room to grow. He is a committed stand for my greatness, yet he is always compassionate, honest, and gentle in his dealings with me. I do hope he will continue being an active part of my life once this show is complete.

God, I am afraid I am coming unhinged. I was in the shower, with the music up loud and I couldn't make a sound. I was afraid someone would hear me and then come knock on the door and say keep it down because I was disturbing them. When I got out of the shower, I saw great sadness in every pore of my skin. I thought to myself that I couldn't do this play. Carl has picked the wrong person. What did I know about a mother's love? My first one didn't want me. Then I thought what do I know about great sacrifice? I left them! I didn't sacrifice anything. I ran away. So who am I kidding. I am the wrong person to be *Yellow Moon*, honestly. Then I
looked in the mirror again. And I saw me fighting down wave after wave of sadness and pain and thought I was wrong. I’m perfect for Yellow Moon. I do know unexpressible sorrow. And it’s not screaming. It’s worse. It’s silence. I realize I have been looking in the wrong place.

Sorrow, unbelievable sorrow, is what I am fighting off with every ounce of energy I have.

Because in my mind if I let it flow that means I haven’t really moved forward. That I am still this little, frightened, girl, powerless in the world, wanting desperately to be loved and wanted. And that makes a mockery of everything I have accomplished and will -- if I don’t kill myself first. I keep wanting to die. I have an iron hand controlling the workings of my mind so that I don’t forget who I am, and I fear that if I relax my grasp, I’ll go away and never make it back again.

Yusan, Diane McIntyre and I spent time together Thursday and she agreed to come see Yellow Moon Rising and read “Pieces of Reality” as well as give me information and assistance in developing my work. This is truly a blessing just to have her support is going to open doors faster than any I could alone. I’m very excited. She also suggested that I just get out and do it and the backing will come. My work is excellent, it is unique, and it speaks to people. I know that it makes a difference on the planet and I know I’m going directly to the top. Please Goddess keep me and guide me along the way. I love you.

Universe, my beloved, Diane McIntyre auditioned me for her piece which is going up mid-march! Can you stand it! I can feel everything getting into alignment for my success. And I’m ready. Step by step. And I’m thankful. Life works. I feel like we are making history. Yellow Moon Rising is the take off point of my professional career. My integrity is in and I can see that is what’s creating the space for my dreams to get fulfilled. All I have to do is keep telling the
truth, do excellent work, listen, always say thank you, acknowledge the source of gifts/support and stay focused.

God I just want to thank you for such a privileged life which is bountiful in blessings. I have been acknowledging Marsha for my inevitable success. I realize that what makes me, my work magical, my ability to empathize, even my subject matter in my writings all derive from my early life. What’s going to make me famous will be all the things I create which come from Marsha and my childhood environment. What’s more, is - it’s perfectly okay with me! In fact I rejoice, because I can now celebrate who I am and where I come from, instead of hiding, denying, ignoring, suppressing, being embarrassed and ashamed of my past. I see so clearly that what makes me strange, an odd ball, unique is also what makes me beautiful. This is my magic. And I celebrate that now. I’m no longer apologizing for my existence Goddess. I am now basking in it. Thank you Universe for this knowledge.

Most Holy and Ever Wise, Diane read "Pieces" and she said it was beautiful. She suggested that some of the monologues, at the beginning, do not need the commentary and that I can develop my own unique pen voice. In short, she said pretty much the same thing Carlyle Brown said which is I do not have to spell out everything I am trying to say. She said that I do not have to stick with conversational talk; that I could go into my own voice, not what I have been taught. Ursula Paine told Diane about me when they both were in New York, so Diane came here to Columbus, Ohio with me in her mind. Thank you Jesus for an extraordinary life. Even if I don’t get into her piece, just the fact that she would consider me is important. She is thinking about me. There is always tomorrow. It’s flowing topaz. It’s coming, unfurling just as it should. I’m on my way to fulfilling my dreams. And God please know that I so love you and
thank you for creating opportunities, giving the courage and ability to take and fulfill them.

Thank you for all the love, nurturing, guidance, gentleness, support, and patience which is causing and propelling me into the stars. Great Spirit, I love you; to you I give goes all praise and thanks. God, my heart still pure, my soul forever yours, my flesh unclean, I give them back to you. To be used to give your love away and to be used as you instruct. I love you Goddess. I'm going to sleep now.
INTERDISCIPLINARY?
the wind is the breath of god
the hills are the breasts of the divine
water becomes air
and air becomes flesh torn away the sky

smell the dawn of time

bathe me in dirt
wash me with
rocks and stones . . .
and rip away the husks
that hide

make me new old gods
make me me
from bones and ash
fire and smoke

born of the pain
the world spit me into existence
from your bowls
I fell in the shape of rubies

opal is my middle name
goddess is my first
I was born in this world
yet fashioned by old souls
utterances only I can hear

they talk to me at twilight
and whisper
never mind the jeers
isolation
disbelief
mistrust
fear

take yourself
inside
yourself
and make you jesus . . .

I will be there.
It makes me angry. It makes me mad. Real mad. Not mad like I want to cut out someone’s motherfuckin’ heart. No. More like enraged -- in a quite silent tight rope walk; just waiting for the right tung or wrong wind to knock me off kilter, so that I will have to tear someone a new ass hole. I don’t like being categorized.

I know that it is human natural to fit everything, especially something that may look similar to something previous into that specific box. The only problem with that is something or someone will be measured in accordance to the conventions and rules of that box. Thus the new comer, the one that kind of sort of fits into that pre-exiting box, can not, will not survive. People hurt and destroy what they do not understand.

The rules of the pre-existing box only apply to those people or things which belong to that box. Anything that deviates from the expectation of the box will, logically get invalidated and annihilated. Very seldom does new, innovative, ideas/art forms/beliefs distinguished from preexisting notions meet with warmth and cheer. From Jesus to Gandhi, who both embodied the idea of passivity as a form of power in paradigms where force was the common law; from Galileo to St Joan, who both suffered greatly for believing in what could not be seen with the naked eye in a world where what was real was touchable; from Sojourner Truth to Anita Hill who both spoke in a singular voice while actually speaking for all women in a patriotic society which punished women for talking back. For these reasons, and many others, I resent my work being described as interdisciplinary. I get annoyed.

How did I deal with the interdisciplinary aspects of Something Fragile? Quite frankly, I didn’t. They ‘dealt with themselves. I shall take this opportunity to clarify the three primary artistic forms used in Something fragile and in so doing, distinguish the intricacies, the
intermingling of the art forms. In my work, there is no such thing as interdisciplinary, rather, full body expression.

In the 1970's, Ntozake Shange wrote *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enough*, thus creating a new art form rooted in the African American experience, and steeped in African tradition. This new art form was termed choreopoem. Unlike Euro-American tradition which segments art into individual disciplines, Shange's choreopoem approaches performance with all the senses interlocking. Words become music, dance becomes words, and music becomes dance. There isn't a separation at all; rather a shifting of focus for performer and audience as well. African American art has historically had this very same interweaving of multiple forms. Romare Bearden did it with collages, Dr. King did it with church, and Josephine Baker did it with entertainment. This is the premise of my work.

I am an artist, a creator if you will. I make stuff out of what I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, believe. *Something Fragile* is a wonderful microcosm of what I dream one day will be a teachable art form. The way in which I approached the creation of *Something Fragile* formatted in the senses. The senses give way to thought and the thought translates itself into words. Words give way to poetry and poetry, when shared, gives way to acting.

I need to stop here and speak plain. I am a trained actor, dancer, singer and mime artist. Which in very honest, very basic terms means I took some classes. I know that most people who read this or who see my work will call me a trained performer. But they are wrong. Listen and understand, at least try to comprehend. Let me put it to you this way: what if every class I have every taken did not train or teach but rather made available and unconcealed what already was? This is how I see myself. I have not learned how to act. Or dance. Or sing. At best my
schooling gave me a language to what has always been me. If I had gone to law school, I say I would be doing the same things just with a different vocabulary.

Education does not give one a self; it provides a space, structure and language for what is already there. With each class, each lecture, each book, each new bit of information, I have and continue to become more myself. And not the self that I have been born into as an African American female. Or the self which people expect. Or the self I always hoped I would be, with enough education, of course. I mean the true self; the one underneath all the fears, assumptions, hopes, compensations, prejudices, and expectations we all are born in to. The trick is not to become trained, but to get out of the way. Then instead of listening to (and that does not mean not being informed by) religion, parents, gender, race, class, location, or feelings, you start to hear yourself. Your self. And there is no song more sweet than your own voice.

I have been trained as an actor in the Stanislavsky method. Sense memory is one of my fundamental tools for developing characters as well as Chekhov’s psychological gestures. When it comes to character development, I equally depend on my ability to personalize through my memory and physical-ize through observations. My ultimate aim is for truth, moment by moment, manifested in the physical which then communicates to an audience.

This same aim for truth, for full commitment to the moment applies to my movement as well. I no longer (if I ever had) consider myself a dancer, primarily because I do not follow a specific school of dance. Because my background, which is richly endowed with stark poverty, I did not have access or money to take a dance class until I was in college. And even then, I had to take what I could get with what I had. Meaning that even if I could pay or barter for a class, because of my lack of “training,” I was not allowed in. So I learned to dance in the night clubs of
the getthos of Baltimore, the churches of Texas, and the backyard Bar BQ’s in Virginia. Once I entered college, I was introduced to West African dance. The use of weight, the pelvis being the center, wide parallel position, and connection with the earth are fundamental aspects of my movement.

Dance has transformed into movement during my three years in graduate school. Laban’s efforts have given me a vocabulary for what was developed in the streets. Anger has evolved into slash and wring, fun has translated into flick and dab, numbness has mutated into glide and love, well love has ascended to float.

While Laban has given me a language for movement, Marcel Marceau has given me a voice for mime. Transformation is essential to my work, whether mime or transition from moment to moment or discipline to discipline. Whole body emotion is also key to my work. I have adapted Marceau’s coloration/decoloration not only to mime, but to my movement and acting as well.

Just like Diane McIntyre, whose “Sounds in Motion” dance and musician company, which elevated improvisation to the level of performance or Jawole Willa Jo Zollar’s dance theatre company Urban Bush Women which incorporates dance, text, and vocal percussion, I utilize breath impulse as music. Both Shange and Zollar have been trained by McIntyre, which only supports the essential truth that great minds are nurtured by greater spirits.

I use either vocal percussion or a capella singing in my work. The premise of this aspect of my work is that voice, the breath, is music. Nothing else is needed. So the music, the breath, the need to breathe for the sake of survival, becomes the words. It is not singing. It is not song.
At best, it is unfinished thoughts which never got spoken so they never got a language. Only the very primitive part of man can understand these utterances.

In closing, I would like to summate with how I have merged the varying aspects of my work, the different shades of me. I use the mime playwrighting style of multi-character narrative. By so doing, I am able to give snap shots into the lives of a number of people in varying artistic forms. It is my fondest dream to someday integrate acting, movement, mime, and vocal percussion into an art form which can be taught and performed, not just by me, but for generations to come.
PROCESS

JOURNAL ENTRIES
To: Thesis and Graduate Studies Committee
From: Venus Opal Reese
Re: Project Calendar
Date: 23 May 1996

I shall began my formal rehearsal 17 June 1996. Using a weekly structure based around summer courses, work and travel, here is my schedule:

Monday 10:00am - 1:00pm run lines
Tuesday 10:00am - 1:00pm character development
Wednesday 10:00am - 1:00pm work movement studies
Thursday 10:00am - 1:00pm run lines
Friday 10:00am - 1:00pm research character topics

I look forward to taking various dance, play writing, African-American, Womanism, and gymnastic courses during the summer to further enrich my work. Depending on the availability of courses, my rehearsal time is subject to change. However, I will be working on "Pieces of Reality" three hours a day, Monday through Friday, ill regard of the time of day.

I also look forward to weekly poetry readings as well as other unforeseeable opportunities in churches, at picnics, art openings, and anywhere else in the community, to present my work. This practice affords me an a chance to hear how people are effected by my work. Also because of the feedback, and performing in front of an audience, I learn what needs to be edited.
Beginning 12 August 1996, I shall began having full run throughs three times a week, up to the week of 25 September 1996. Depending on studio space, courses for the Fall, as well as rehearsals for the Company show, I will look to see which times best support my preparation for showing "Pieces of Reality". However, I do plan to run through "Pieces" at least one a week once class began.

11 October 1996  Showing of second draft of "Pieces"
October/November Individual rehearsals. My set up
October/November Production Meeting
09 December 1996 Performance of "Pieces of Reality"
10 December 1996 Performance of "Pieces of Reality"
11 December 1996 Performance of "Pieces of Reality"
12 December 1996 Performance of "Pieces of Reality"
fall away life . . . . 
things fall apart/ are reborn
into what, unknowingly,
have always been . . .

sweet beauty, me touch you/
promise to handle with care.
delicate love,
speak, release, embrace.
me hold you/
hold me and alas
you/we/I
come into
our own.

December 1996
12:11 p.m.

I have decided to shift the focus of this work. Instead of focusing on character work, dialects, mime, dance, singing, and vocal percussion, which is what Piece of Reality entails, I’ve decided to create a new piece born of all my others. It shall be called Something Fragile and it is beautiful my Lord. It is about how something so delicate (a spirit, a dream, an idea, hope, or love) gets broken. And it makes me want to weep.

Lady, I’ve decided on this route because of what Jawole as well as my committee members said to me at my last showing. They said it looks like I’m trying to be, do, act someone else’s work and not my own. They were right. I have been so busy trying to show that I know the technique, that I can do different accents, that I can sing, and act, and dance -- in short that I am good enough, that people saw my effort. Not my art.

So I have decided that I am good enough; that I am interesting enough; that my work is good. I realize that I am never going to be a “pure” artist. Meaning that, I’m not a dancer,
singer, actor, or mime. I ignore rules or break them -- and it's okay. My work has a voice of her own. And that voice is heartbreakingly sweet.

So Goddess, I give up the right to imitate and take up the privilege of my own self expression; however flawed, untrained, elementary, ridiculous and raw I may consider it to be. It is mine and I thank the heavens for it. Now let the words of my heart, and the sweet communion of the holy spirit, rest, rule, and abide here, now, and forevermore. . . .

January 15, 1997

Dear Topaz,

I talked with Ryan Bundy (the lighting designer for *Something Fragile*) today, and I feel great. He understands exactly where I'm coming from. This is what we have decided:

*The Meaning of Me*    house lights up, general wash

*On my Own*            isolated center spot

*A Mother's Grief*     downstream left in red spot

*In One Word*          diagonal back lights walk back with me

*Memories*             isolation, upstage right

*The Promise*         dance soft wash (blue?); silhouetted body, lights on my feet

*Business as Usual*   general red wash

*A Mother's Love*     dark isolated

*Rest for the Weary*  red spot downstream right

*Among the Gods*      mysterious and changing.
I'm very excited. It's a little tricky shifting from creator to performer. I hadn’t calculated that adjustment. It's okay. I'm memorized, now I just have to figure out transitions. I'm not using any props and I've decided to wear my black unitard as a costume. It's all good - much love. Peace out.

January 18, 1997

Goddess,

A good friend of mine suggested I use live drums for the last piece Among the Gods. I became antsy. I don’t want to depend on temperamental musicians who might come late or worse, demand some artistic input. I hate working with other people. Particularly when it comes to my work. I’m okay with scenes and in class work and other people’s plays. But I’m not remotely interested with anyone fucking up my shit. I know that’s not nice or good workmanship. God know’s my whole graduate career at The Ohio State University has been laden with multi-cultural, team effort and that collaboration bull shit. I’m not remotely interested.

January 23, 1997

Q: What does it take for a Black Woman to win in America?

A: Kiss white people’s ass.

NOT.

Although that’s what they secretly desire.
The bigots, the racist, and the liberals
The liberals are the worst

They’re so busy trying to appease their guilt by helping that poor, dumb nigger
They don’t even see the racist shit they be doing

Liberals silently say “I’m not really one of the Bad Whites, I understand your plight - I’m here to help little dumb nigger - girl.”

Yea right -

Liberals are only “tolerant” as long as you don’t question them, inconvenience them, ignore them (God forbid I don’t put on my mistral smile and say “How are you doing today?” - then I’m an ungrateful Negro who needs to remember how good these Liberal Whites have been to little o’black me

White folk are hilarious.

January 28, 1997
11:32 p. m.

Dear God,
I’m toying with the idea of wearing layers of clothes and shedding them with each piece. I’m thinking about the symbolism, y’know? Becoming vulnerable, becoming fragile. Part of me thinks it’s clever, another part of me thinks it’s cliché and messy. I don’t know. I’ve also decided to come out of the audience, then have the house lights go down. I like the idea of the person/performer emerging from the masses. That is, I could/am one of them. I speak for me/them and they/ the masses are them/me. Anyone could have said or expressed what *Something Fragile* is saying or that everyone is fragile. I like this idea Lady!

February 1, 1997
12:06 a.m.

Great Spirit,

I’ve decide to edit *Something Fragile*. I was running lines with a friend and talking about the work in general, and after talking I realize that some of the pieces were redundant. I was a little hurt. So I went and talked with Jeanine and she understood exactly how I felt. They had cut out one of her solo’s in *Interior Day*, not because it wasn’t good work, but because it was extra. She said when doing excellent work, or cleaning work, nothing can be precious. She’s right.

And if I want, I can always restore stuff later. So I’m cutting “On My Own”, because “A Mother’s Grief” says the same thing, just in mime. I’m also cutting “A Mother’s Love” and replacing “Among the Gods” with “New World” because it is up beat and inclusive.

February 5, 1997
4:14 p.m.
Yusan,

I am trying to think of a phase to put on my posters for publicity. I want something which is catchy and provocative, yet honest to the work this is what I've come up with so far:

After the hurt, the only thing to do is tell the truth...

Little black girl with dead eyes,
Little black boy broken hearted
please stop listening to the lies.

The lies they told you before you were even born.

I can't hear nothing

That's all I got for now. I was talking to my friend who is designing my poster, for free, about the phases and he thought anyone would work. I felt stupid talking about it. I do not know why. He was kind. I trust he will come up with something perfect for my posters. I told him about the show and he understand completely where I'm coming from. It's all good.

Jonathan Jackson hook me up with my publicity stuff including the fella who's making my poster. Jonathan also sat down and wrote with me a press release and synopsis of Something Fragile. Yusan, I am so blessed and privilege to be so supported and taken care of. Different friends are just coming out of the wood work to make my show the best it can be and I am so thankful.

February 10, 1997
5:40 p.m.

Goddess,
I am restoring “On My Own.” Am I crazy? “On My Own” is the only piece in the whole entire show which actually uses and explains the title!!! Gold figure. And I am not working with rumors at all. Ron Hope and Ron Thunderberg are being real casual about this whole thing. And although I have rehearsed with them twice, I feel more insecure than I have during my whole process of putting up this work. So they are out. They are wonderful men and great friends, but I am becoming anxious and nervous not peaceful and calm. It’s not worth the stress. My work is excellent and I do not need music to enhance my performance. My breath will be the music. Given that this is all about the words and moves, I don’t want anything, props, sets, costumes, live musicians, anything to distract from the work. And in all honesty, I believe I have always felt this way, I was just nervous that I would need something like live drums to make my work interesting. But that’s not me. That would be me hiding behind the drums. Everybody, thought it was a cool idea, so I figured they might be right. I was wrong. I have to realize that I know what I am doing. I have to trust my own gut and ideas. And me. My work is about stripping away the extemporaneous, the comfort zones, the ways we hide to get to the truth. That’s what this work is about. That’s what I’m about. And I may be wrong or get slammed or not, but I know that I’m about saying, addressing, confronting all the things we as human beings try to hide from. So that means, I myself don’t get to hide; even if it is entertaining. I am enough.

I’ve decided to wear my burgundy and black unitard wit my burgundy body warmer. Real basic, real simple and honest. Also I like the burgundy instead of solid black because the burgundy to me is more feminine. Plus it’s one of my favorite colors. No more layers coming off to expose. That’s just smoke screen. Let’s just get to it. Let’s just get to the truth. Much love God, my thanks, I’m out. Venus.
POETRY BLUES/
ODES TO MY
LADIES
mamma can you hear me
a black steak across
a red sky...

So so so so gone
i'm still... 'cause
of blues
blue lady
red, orange, green,
locked
braided
twisted
fro or bald

refuse to be blue always.

I want my purple flower NOW!

Let's talk
speak of love / of peace
my sistas guide me to
next reality
they have
for eons and eons
with breath sweat and pride

strange trees bear even stranger fruit

you/me/one
my own sister
birth me

the dreams only a
little black girl can dream... . .
wrap in plastic
too hot/melt
too cold/crack

what can you do punchy-nello
funny fellow

would you dance for me.

one begat the other
the other became the next
the next forgot
and the forgot became herself
became all

i love you
for who you had to be
to keep me alive
for so many lifetimes. . . .

You taught me how to dance/
you taught me how to dream
you gave me song
you gave me voice

you rocked and cooed
and kissed my bruised ideas

when there was no one you were
my consent company
although I never met you.

I found you in the dark

remember sweet whispers brother rush
or
rosa/the friends
hear my cry, that roll of thunder
and remember how you taught me
to let the circle be unbroken
on that road to memphis . . . .

Than you started singin’ to me
while I was still in the womb . . . .
big wheels
do indeed keep on turnin’
and be proud mary/marsha/marie

your eyes are watching God,
good
i’m glad

no drinkin’ again
vextations to the spirit
take a look at this bitter earth
and enjoy being an evil gal
ha!’
what ever happen to that banana dance

    You know where i'm at.
dance on dianne
and make it up as you go
with yo' bad self.

    See ya next life time.
CONCLUSION
VENUS OPAL REESE
Solo Performance Artist

Statement of Purpose

...I see what's in the world and sing it like a god.

Victor Hernandez Cruz

I have a profound desire to give voice to people, topics, and situations that address contemporary concerns and experiences. I achieve this goal by using a number of performance expressions. From poetry to mime, movement theatre to sounds in motion, monologues to character work, I utilize performance as an opportunity to create an opening and atmosphere for exploring the universality and dignity of the human spirit. I wholehearted and adamantly believe that with honesty, communication, and compassion, unity through diversity can be achieved on a global scale; starting with me. This is who I am. This is what I do. This is my promise.
VENUS OPAL REESE
ACTOR

AGE RANGE: 17-30
HEIGHT: 5'8"
WEIGHT: 125

Current Address:
364 W. Lane Ave
Columbus, OH 43201
(614) 291-7317

Permanent Address:
3 Heatherton Court
Woodlawn, MD 21244
(410) 265-1949

THEATRE

1997 Fanny  Wedding Band  Stadium II Theatre
1996 YellowMoon  Yellow Moon Rising  Stadium II Theatre
1995 Marie  Woyzeck  Mt. Hall Theatre
1995 Juror#2  12 Angry Jurors  Mt. Hall Theatre
1995 Lucy  The Country Wife  Thurber Theatre
1994 Louise  The Great Nebula In Orion  Mt. Hall Theatre
1994 Pompey  Measure For Measure  Olmstead Theatre
1993 Philaminte  The Learned Ladies  Olmstead Theatre
1992 Maxine  Postcards  Blackbox Theatre
1991 Adam  As You Like It  Olmstead Theatre

RELATED EXPERIENCE

1996 Collaborator  Jawole Willa Jo Zollar  Sullivant Theatre
1996 Creator/Performer  When We Were Frogs  The Wexner Center
1996 Performer  Carlyle Brown  Stadium II Theatre
1996 Movement Improv  Dianne McIntyre  Sullivant Theatre
1996 Choreographer  Short Stop Drum Ensemble  Third Avenue Performance Space
1996 Assistant Performer  Hannibal Lokumbe  Sullivant Theatre
1995 Creator/Performer  Pieces of Reality  The Wexner Center
1995 Dance Composition  Vicki Blaine  Sullivant Theatre
1995-1996 Recitation Instructor  Theatre 100  The Ohio State University
1994-1996 Acting Instructor  MLK Cultural Arts Center  Columbus
1993-1995 Creator/Performer  Aspects of A People  Solo performance
1990-1994 Singer/arranger  Forever Divas  New York City
1993 Writer/Director  Ntozake's Voice  Olmstead Theatre

EDUCATION

M.F.A.: Candidate (exp:1997)  The Ohio State University  Columbus

RESIDENCIES, MASTER CLASSES, AND SPECIALTY TRAINING

Mime: Marcel Marceau
Dancing: Urban Bush Women; Judith Jamison; Gregory Hines.
Dialects: Standard British, Cockney, Southern American, Spanish
Acting: Vanessa Redgrave; Blair Underwood; Christopher Reeves; James E. Olmos.
Movement Theatre: Jeanine Thompson
VENUS OPAL REESE
Solo Performance Artist

Performance Works and Titles

Pieces Of Reality: An evening length theatrical experience which incorporates the acting device of character transformation to explore the quandary of the human condition. Approximately 2 hours.

Titles:

* Remember When
* What TV Tells Me
  * Oak Tree
* Business As Usual
  * Memories
* First Love
* Common Sense
* Alone in the Twilight


Titles:

* Meaning Of Me
* That’s What You Told Me
  * Ain’t I A Saint
  * Black Rain
* Never Say Die
* New World

Color Me, Woman: A series of performance poetry pieces which celebrates love, life, and personal growth from a feminine perspective. Approximately 45 minutes.

Titles:

* I Touched A Queen
* Sweet Communion
* Among The Gods
  * From My Hands
  * In One Word
  * Child's Play

**Echoes:** Specifically for teenage audiences, this collection of poetry addresses the search for self and the celebration of being alive. Approximately 40 minutes.

Titles:

  * Echoes And Echoes
  * The Silence
  * Letting Go/Alas A Whole
  * Gifts

**Love Letters To God:** A spiritual journey from disillusionment to inner peace through a series of writings, music, and dance. Approximately 40 minutes.

Titles:

  * A Prayer Lord
  * Words
  * Emptiness
  * Visions
  * Take Me
  * In My Dreams

**Dark Phases Of Womanhood:** A collection of movement theatre works which gives flight to the female spirit and exemplifies women's triumphs over varied adversities. Approximately 45 minutes.

Titles:

  * A Mother’s Grief
  * Dark Phases
  * Forced
  * When They Sleep I Cry
  * Something Fragile
UTILIZING ALL OF THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED MATERIAL, OTHER PERFORMANCE WORKS CAN BE CONSTRUCTED BY INTERCHANGING TITLES, TO THE INTERESTS AND NEEDS OF THE SPONSOR.

WORKS CAN BE CREATED FOR SPECIFIC TOPICS AND INTEREST IN COLLABORATION WITH SPONSOR

DISCUSSION, QUESTION, AND ANSWER SESSIONS FOLLOWING PERFORMANCE WORKS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.
VENUS OPAL REESE  
Solo Performance Artist

Workshop Series

Sounds in Motion: Using the tools of vocal percussion and physical movement, youths and adults experience the joy and the excitement of working as a team. Approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Reflections: Working within the framework of structured improvisation, participants are offered the opportunity to explore creative problem solving skills, develop self confidence, and discover the joy of performance. Approximately 90 minutes.

Keep on Dancing: This workshop is designed to have everyone get up and boggy! West African, Modern, and Hip-Hop styles are blended to create a dance form that is accessible to all people in all age groups. Approximately 2 hours.

The Poetry of Conversation: Language shapes life. Words travel and land in the reality of the listener. What would become possible if we gained more sensitivity about how we use and experience language? Free-style writing, dialogue, and character work are the tools used to remind us of the beauty and potency of our communication skills. Approximately 2 hours.

ALL WORKSHOPS CAN BE COMBINED WITH EACH OTHER AND/OR WITH PERFORMANCE WORKS.

ALL WORKSHOPS CAN BE ADAPTED TO THE SPECIFIC INTERESTS OF THE SPONSOR.
VENUS OPAL REESE
Solo Performance Artist
Artistic Profile

VENUS OPAL REESE was born in Baltimore Maryland. Ms. Reese has received a B. F. A. in Performance from Adelphi University in Long Island New York and a M. F. A. from The Ohio State University. Ms. Reese looks forward to obtaining a Ph. D. from Stanford University in Directing and Aesthetic Criticism.

Ms. Reese has performed a myriad of diverse roles. Some of her favorites are: Pompey in Measure for Measure, Grace in Wrecked Eggs, and Lucy in The Country Wife, and Fanny in Wedding Band. As a dancer, singer, and choreographer, Ms. Reese has performed independently and with West African rooted, poetry performance group “Advance Party” throughout the state of Ohio. She has also studied and trained with Diane McIntyre, Jawole Zollar and Urban Bush Women.

While in New York, Ms. Reese created, managed, produced, and performed with the a capella quartet “Forever Divas”. For the past eight years, Ms. Reese has been developing and performing a series of her own original work. The title of the series is “Pieces of Reality.” Ms. Reese has performed these works in New York, Texas, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, and Ohio.

Ms. Reese believes that the privilege of the artists life is not only to entertain but also to educate. Unity through diversity can be accomplished on a global scale by way of honesty, integrity, and communication. Ms. Reese has been a graduate instructor at The Ohio State University and The Martin Luther King Jr. Arts Complex in Columbus, Ohio. Ms. Reese has also coordinated a number of workshops and seminars centering around her original works. Ms. Reese welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with other artists and create residency programs that honor the interests of the sponsor and fulfill her artistic vision. Ms. Reese would like to thank God and Nanna for the gifts of life and expression.
March 14, 1997

Ms. Venus Opal Reese  
364 W Lane Ave, Apt 402  
Columbus, OH 43201  

Dear Ms. Reese:

It is a pleasure to follow up our phone call by confirming the offer of admission to the Ph.D. program from the Department of Drama. The following information elaborates some points which you will want to take into consideration while deciding which graduate program would be best for you.

We very much hope that you will decide to come to Stanford. Should you decide to accept our offer, the Graduate Admissions Support Section will mail you an information packet which will answer questions of concern regarding registration, housing, etc. Also, they will send you a separate notification of any conditions which may need to be fulfilled before enrollment. This offer of admission is contingent upon the submission or appropriate final transcripts indicating the satisfactory completion of any course of study (B.A., M.A., or M.F.A.) in which you may now be engaged.

Our award is a fellowship for your first year of study which consists of full tuition (21,300) plus a stipend (11,136), a total of 32,436. The remaining three years are funded by a support package comprised of fellowship, teaching assistantship, and research assistantship payments, with necessary tuition provided. In addition, you will be eligible for one summer of support and tuition. Of course, all financial support is contingent upon your satisfactory progress for each quarter in the program.

Your fellowship is subject to United States tax laws. Such payments to students who are not degree candidates are fully taxable. Payments to degree candidates are tax exempt only to the extent they are used for tuition and fees required for enrollment or attendance, as well as for books, supplies, and equipment required for courses of instruction. Amounts used for other items, such as room and board, are considered taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and state taxing authorities. You have the responsibility for the proper tax reporting of your scholarship or fellowship payment, as well as the liability for any tax payments that may be due.
The four-year plan for the typical student in Drama on fellowship funding will include four (4) quarters of full tuition and fellowship stipends, five (5) quarters with teaching responsibilities (typically in years two and three), and three (3) quarters as a pre-doctoral research affiliate. The plan also includes one (1) summer of support as a pre-doctoral research affiliate, to be taken at the discretion of the student (typically after the first year).

In our opinion, a scholar will not receive anywhere else a more stimulating or fuller or more rigorous training than in the Stanford Ph.D. Program in Drama. It is important, however, to be aware that the completion of a Ph.D. in Drama does not guarantee a career as a university teacher. Our Department will do all we can to help you find a suitable position on the completion of your Ph.D., and our placement record has been extremely strong. Recent graduates are holding positions at Tufts University, Georgia Institute of Technology; University of Georgia; California State University, Los Angeles; College of Wooster; Dartmouth College; to name just a few. Our graduates from the last twenty years are active in the profession in a number of colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Please do not hesitate to call our Department Administrator, Ron Davies, at (415) 725-2396 or write or email (et.jlf@forsythe.stanford.edu) if you need more information in making your decision. We can also put you in touch with individual professors or graduate students.

You will, of course, want to weigh Stanford's offer against others which you may receive, and we are happy that you should take your time within the deadline to do this. If, however, you should make up your mind to accept another offer, it is vital that we should be informed of this as soon as possible so that the opening may be offered to one of the excellent alternate candidates. In any case I will expect to hear from you by the deadline for acceptance of Tuesday, April 15. Congratulations and we look forward to you joining us in the fall.

Sincerely,

Harry J. Elam, Jr., Chair
Graduate Studies Committee
URBAN BUSH WOMEN'S SUMMER DANCE INSTITUTE AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY IN TALLAHASSEE
A NEW DANCER FOR A NEW SOCIETY

THE INSTITUTE
UBW's Summer Dance Institute at Florida State University in Tallahassee is a 4-week intensive training program in dance and community engagement for artists with leadership potential interested in a community focus in their art-making.

CURRICULUM
The curriculum relates research to choreography and choreography to community interest by placing traditional African forms within a social history and context and filtering those forms through modern dance and contemporary performance.

The Institute schedule is rigorous and designed to provide an immersion in dance and community work. Participants will attend daily technique classes in contemporary dance, West African dance and contact improvisation.

Daily seminars, lectures and workshops presented by artists, educators and community activists will correspond with themes of: Cultural Grounding, Power Analysis, Authenticity, Service to Community, Integrity and Collaboration and Community Organizing.

As a core part of the curriculum, participants will also participate in Creative Process Workshops: a two-day intensive workshop entitled "Undoing Racism;" and will organize a 24-Hour Community Arts Festival focusing on AIDS awareness.

FACILITIES AND ACCOMMODATIONS
UBW's Summer Dance Institute will be held on the campus of Florida State University in Tallahassee. Dance facilities include classrooms, four studios with dressing rooms, production shops and a 200-seat theater.

Participants will be housed at the Southgate Campus Centre, a private student residence. Meals will be provided at the on-site food court.

PARTICIPATION AND APPLICATION
Applicants over the age of 18 will be selected based on an individual's background in dance, research and community work, and their potential as leaders and choreographers.

All applicants are required to submit an application form; a written statement or video talk summarizing their reasons for wanting to participate; a video sample of moving/dancing/performing; and two letters of recommendation.

All applications will be reviewed by a panel led by Jawole Zollar and other experts in performance, teaching and community-based work.

COST OF THE PROGRAM
The tuition, room and board cost for attending the four-week Institute is $1,995. For participants local to Tallahassee the cost is $950 (tuition only). Participants will be responsible for all transportation to and from Tallahassee.

Tuition, room, and board costs should not discourage interested participants from applying. A limited number of scholarship/work-study positions are available.

SELECTED DEADLINES
April 21 Application due at UBW
May 1 Notification
May 22 Deposit due
June 19 Final balance due
June 29 Arrival and Orientation
July 27 Closure and Departure

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND APPLICATION, WRITE OR CALL:
Urban Bush Women
Summer Leadership Institute
225 Lafayette Street, # 201
New York, NY 10012
(212) 343-0041, ext. 201; (212) 343-2551 FAX
May 8, 1997

Venus Reese
364 W. Lane Ave., #402
Columbus, OH 43201

Dear Venus,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been selected to attend the UBW Summer Dance Institute: A New Dancer for a New Society. We look forward to working with you and hope that you will find the Institute to be a rewarding experience.

You have been awarded a full scholarship covering room, board and full tuition. Please call me by May 16th at (212) 343-0041 ext. 201, if you are able to accept the scholarship.

Enclosed is a registration form to be completed and mailed to FSU by May 22nd. Upon hearing from you, we will forward preliminary information to facilitate your stay in Tallahassee.

On behalf of Jawole Zollar, the UBW administrative staff and performers, we are enthusiastic about the Institute's potential and hope that you are able to participate.

If I can be of further assistant, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Karen Garrett
Participant Coordinator, UBW Institute
Memorandum

DATE: January 20, 1997

TO: Michelle Cumo, Anne Hannon, Anastasia Koumidou, Joey Landwehr, and

FROM: Ryan James Bundy, MFA THESIS EVENTS PRODUCTION DESIGNER

RE: Groundplans, and Run throughs of your pieces

CC: Melissa McComas, Stage Manager; Jeanine Thompson, Faculty Advisor; Phil Thompson, Faculty Advisor; Kevin Hayes, Event coordinator.

SCENERY: After meeting with all of you about each of your pieces, I formulated what I believed to be a working groundplan for each piece. I have attached a non-scaled drawing of where I believe your scenery to be on the Stadium II Stage (I am hopeful to get 1/2” Scale drawing in your box before our meeting tonight). I have also indicated the major lighting ideas and any specials needs for your piece.

RUN THROUGHS: To date I have seen a run through of Michelle’s piece. In the next 2-weeks it would be ideal to see a couple of run throughs of your pieces. I realize that schedules are weird, so I have attached a copy of my class/GTA schedule. If we can not schedule 2 run throughs seeing your piece at least ONCE! would be great. My Phone # is 486.0988 (home) and 292.4610 (work). I also can be found in Drake 2071 most days 2:30-5:30 P.M.

Below is a note/list of what I believe to be your major technical needs for your piece Something Fragile.

For the most part bare stage, Use of black scrim in the background to take color/ and shifts

Ability to isolate on diagonal areas and move back in transitions will be achieved through the use of the rep plot instruments.

Lighting: Use of Floor mounted fixtures as shins or low lanes of side light for the tight rope walking section.

I would love to see a showing of your piece whenever. I have all the things we talked about in my script. If you have any questions find me. Thanks-- Ryan!
Lighting Specials Anylasis

Something Fragile
Created by Venus Reese

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Special Type</th>
<th>Purpose/Description</th>
<th>Channels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5 x8 Altman</td>
<td>Floor Mount Lane (TIGHTROPE)</td>
<td>570-572</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Center Special Issolation (SAME AS WITCHES)</td>
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THERE ARE TWO DANCE SECTIONS AND ONE MIME PIECE WOVEN THROUGHOUT THIS WORK: "THE PROMISE," "REST FOR THE WEARY," AND "A MOTHER'S GRIEF." "THE PROMISE" FOLLOWS MEMORIES; "REST FOR THE WEARY" FOLLOWS A MOTHER'S LOVE; AND "A MOTHER'S GRIEF" FOLLOWS ON MY OWN.
# MFA Events Calendar

## February 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
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<td></td>
<td>5:00 PM - 5:05 PM Production Meeting- SM Check-in Only</td>
<td>1:30 PM Load In</td>
<td>6:30 PM - 10:30 PM Blue Team Tech</td>
<td>6:30 PM - 10:30 PM Blue Team Tech</td>
<td>12:00 PM - 2:30 PM Red Team Tech Dress</td>
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<td>7:00 PM Red Team Final Dress</td>
<td>7:00 PM Blue Team Final Dress</td>
<td>8:00 PM Red Team Performance</td>
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Created 22 January 1997 by Melissa Villamaras
# MFA EVENTS REVISED CALENDAR

**FEBRUARY 1997**

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Venus,

Excellent first draft. I made corrections on the pages, so carefully look for the pencil marks.

You need to include a header that has page numbers that will correspond with your Table of Contents.

ie. Interdisciplinary page 81

Are you going to add more to your journal entries. You can also include your committee member's comments from your showings.

I think you need to talk a lot more about your creative process, and your process of decision making, the interdisciplinary work, and the discoveries you made.

Who has copies of the photos taken the final night of your show? I want copies!

Good work,
To: Venus Reese  
Date: April 30, 1997  
From: Jeanine Thompson  
RE: General Exam  

I have received responses from all of your committee members. I am happy to inform you that you passed all of your General Exam questions. I am returning any responses that were given to me.

Congratulations!

Next on your agenda will be completing your write-up and passing your Oral Defense. Your Oral Defense will consist of questions from your General Exam and your write-up.

---

Venus -  
Save Thursday  
May 22 1:30 - 3:30  
Only time for Oral Defense  
it is the only time all committee members can be there.

---

To: Venus, Beth and Anthony  
From: Jeanine  
Date: May 15, 1997  
RE: Oral Defense  

This is a reminder that Venus’ Oral Defense is set for Friday, May 23, from 11:30 - 1:00. We may only need one hour, but I include more time just in case the committee needs to talk more before we get started. Please read through her write-up before then. I will leave it in Beth’s box first. If you have questions contact me.
Bibliography


Hill, Errol. "The Revolutionary Tradition of Black Drama."


---, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.
---, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Politics. Boston, MA: South
Hughes, Langston. "The Negro and the Racial Mountain." In The
   Ideology of Blackness. Ed. Raymond F. Betts. Lexington,
Martin, Carol. "Anna Deavere Smith: the Word Becomes You."
Reinelt, Janelle. "Rethinking Brecht: Deconstruction, Feminism,
   and the Politics of Form." Modern Drama. Ed. William B.
Smith, Anna Deavere. Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights
   Brooklyn, and Other Identities. Modern Drama. Ed.
   William B. Worthen. Ft. Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace &
---, Twilight in Los Angels, 1992: on the Road; a Search for
Smith, Barbara. Toward a Black Feminist Criticism. Brooklyn,
Shange, Ntozake. For Colored Girls who have Considered
   Suicide when the Rainbow is Enough. New York: MacMillan


Annotated Bibliography

Champagne, Lenora, ed. Out From Under: Texts by Woman

Performance Artists. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1990. A collection of provocative writings exploring the experience of oppression for being the "other".


---, Nappy Edges. New York: St. Martins Press, 1978. A collection of poems and conversations about being a female and being black. This collection focus on different aspects of being black; the celebration, the fear, the oppression, and the pain.

Ms. Shange's writings which offer a deeper, richer understanding of the women, the writer, and her creative process.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS
contents
VENUS OPAL REESE

Artistic Profile

Solo Performance Artist

VENUS OPAL REESE was born in Baltimore, Maryland. Ms. Reese believes that the privilege of the artist's life is not only to entertain but also to educate. She is driven by diversity and communication. Ms. Reese has been an instructor, administrator, and communicator. She can be accomplished on a global scale by way of honesty.

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NEWS RELEASE

"Something Fragile"
After the Hurt,
The Only Thing Left to Do
Is Tell the Truth

Solo Performance Work!
Theatrical Works
Written, Choreographed and Performed by

VENUS OPAL REESE

WHAT: Original Movement Theatre Performance

WHO: Venus Opal Reese,
writer, actress, dancer,
mime artist, vocal percussionist
and graduate student,
MFA, Theatre, OSU

WHEN: Thursday, February 13th 8:00pm
Saturday, February 15th 8:00 pm

on a shared program
of Theatre Works
by Joey Landwehr and Anne Hannon

WHERE: Ohio State University's
Stadium II Theatre
Drake Union
1849 Cannon Drive
(near the Football Stadium)

Admission is Free!

For more information contact, The Department of Theatre,
The Ohio State University 614 292 5821 or Venus Opal Reese at 614 291 7317
Performance Synopsis:

Venus Opal Reese presents an hour long solo performance work that blends poetry, movement and intense dramatic characterizations. "Something Fragile" reveals the inner journey of a wide range of woman characters: the goal is to acknowledge the triumph of the human spirit in the most adverse situations.

Reese gives voice to her characters with the aid of diverse theatrical techniques. To paint the portrait of a young Spanish prostitute, Reese vocalizes in a hard-edged New York-Rican dialect. In another portrait, Reese dances to the music of "Sweet Honey in the Rock" expressing isolation and inner turmoil. In yet another portrait, Reese embodies the essence of innocence in the guise of a little African-American girl talking jauntily about her best friend. In the final portrait, Reese depicts the sensuality and glory of a redemptive love affair between self and community with the aid of West African percussion.

An African-American Womanist Performance Artist, Venus Opal Reese is committed to multi-disciplinary approaches in the embodiment of human experience.
After the hurt, the only thing to do is tell the truth.
Admission is free
The Ohio State University
1849 Cannon Drive
Duke Union, Stadium II Theatre
8:00 p.m.
Thursday, February 18th, 1997
Saturday, February 20th, 1997
Something Fragile

Admission is free
The Ohio State University
1849 Cannon Drive
Duke Union, Stadium II Theatre
8:00 p.m.
Thursday, February 18th, 1997
Saturday, February 20th, 1997
Something Fragile

Venus Gala Reese

Admission is free
The Ohio State University
1849 Cannon Drive
Duke Union, Stadium II Theatre
8:00 p.m.
Thursday, February 18th, 1997
Saturday, February 20th, 1997
Something Fragile

Admission is free
The Ohio State University
1849 Cannon Drive
Duke Union, Stadium II Theatre
8:00 p.m.
Thursday, February 18th, 1997
Saturday, February 20th, 1997
Something Fragile

Venus Gala Reese
SOMETHING FRAGILE

CREATED BY

VENUS OPAL REESE
© 1997
Contents

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Business as Usual

That's What You Told Me

A Mother's Love

Among the Gods

THERE ARE TWO DANCE SECTIONS AND ONE MIME PIECE WOVEN THROUGHOUT THIS WORK: "THE PROMISE," "REST FOR THE WEARY, AND "A MOTHER'S GRIEF." "THE PROMISE" FOLLOWS MEMORIES; "REST FOR THE WEARY" FOLLOWS A MOTHER'S LOVE; AND "A MOTHER'S GRIEF" FOLLOWS ON MY OWN.
The Meaning of Me

Where are the words to tell my story?
Where are the words that will give flight
to my soul's most thirsted dreams?

Who will give breath to the meaning of me?

I choke, I spit, I vomit my own self
back in my mouth.
The taste of me has yet to be savored
on my own lips - without the remnants of
humiliation, shame, pain, bewilderment and despair.

I die, I faint, I crawl.
I try.

I am so weary of crawling.
Disgraced - honoredless -
with bleeding flesh
torn knee and a forced smile.

What am I suppose to do with the me I never knew?
God please, give me back my breath.
Or give me the courage to take it.

I can't remember what I look like anymore.
I use to be beautiful, I remember someone
telling me that, I think. I don't recall anymore.

I become more and more a fragmented illusion every moment.

I can smell me dying.
Little bits of me just floating away on knowledge.
I keep trying to hold on to me.
Trying to paste and glue me together with knowledge
and tears.
Yet the me I know keeps crumbling with each awakening.

Darkness threatens to over take
every passing instant.
Titanic waves of despair and anger
loom over me like a giant wet mouth,
ready to suck me in if I would only
close my eyes.

My spirit is so sleepy.

Venus Opal Reese
ON MY OWN

This monologue should be done very quietly, straight, without overt emotions. It should be the telling of a story remembered, distant and cool; a memory that no long hurts, but the scars are forever. Whenever another character inside of the monologue speaks, it should be a complete character change from the narrator, who should speak as if numb. Young woman in her early twenties; African head wrap covering her head as well as a match wrap skirt.

I'm not exactly certain what age I was - maybe 13 or 14. And I'm not very clear of the events that where going on around me. I only recall leaving the house to go over Aunt Barbra's to see Debbie and Nichole. I don't know how long I stayed. By the time I returned home it was close to sundown. I remember my heart starting to pound in my chest when I heard her call my name. She was angry again. I didn't know why, but I did know it was directed at me. Girl, she said, where the hell have you been, I told you to clean the kitchen. I went to Aunt Barbra's, I said as softly as I could with still being able to be heard, hoping desperately that my meek and humble stance would lessen her fury. It didn't. I'm not quite sure what happen next. All I remember is her muttering through clenched teeth about how I thought I was cute and how I thought that I was grown. I remember her pushing me up the stairs and her pushing me down on the bed. I was terrified and resigned at the same time. I realized anything I said would have no impact on what ever she intended to do. So I just sat there and said nothing. She came back in the room. She grabbed me by my hair and painfully jerked me close to her. I heard scissors snap.
Within seconds I saw my hair falling in large clumps on the bed in my lap on my arms. I didn’t move. I didn’t cry. She kept cutting. Now no one will look at you she said when she was finished. I didn’t move. I couldn’t feel my limbs. I didn’t know what she was saying but I did know that something in me died that day – something so fragile and precious it would take God come down from heaven to revive life into it. I got up, numb, dazed and spirit – broken. Not because of the hair but because in that short distance from the bedroom to the hall, when I looked in the eyes and said "Good-bye Momma – forever", I knew that I was on my own.
Child’s Play

I remember when we were frogs.
   We used to leap from
   state to state
   trying to catch the high tide
   at twilight.

We would ride the backs
   of otters and seahorses
   and we would blow kisses
   at each other over the
   rainbows in the waves.

You would hold my hand
and I would hug your neck
   until my arms ached
   because I refused to let you go.

Then the archangel Gabriel
   (isn't that a glorious name?)
   Gabriel would sound his horn
   and all the Angels would sing
   a song just to make us giggle.

You and I would walk on
stars in the afternoon and
then go bobsledding off of
the coast of Africa
in the dry season.

We would build sand castles
   of diamonds and pearls
   and lounge at the Pyramids
   wondering where all the
time went.

I remember when we were frogs.
   It was right after you told
   me you loved me
   but not a moment before
   you were my friend
   Forever.

Venus Opal Reese
FIRST LOVE

This whole monologue should be experienced truthfully throughout. It be done slowly and all transitions, including age and gender, should be played out so that the audience goes along for the ride to the very end.

I remember my first lover. He was tall, big, and strong. Beautiful to look at; long lashes, smoky eyes, and a football players's frame. He always smelled like freshly washed clothes. I loved the way he smelled. He always looked so...dapper. He was always cleaned and pressed and shined. I loved everything about him; he was my hero. He could do no wrong. I would just bubble over with delight when he would pull me close with his arms. When he would put those slabs of oak he called arms around me, I always felt safe. Sometimes he would draw me to him and rock back and forth back and forth. He would caress me up and down my back, my arms, my thighs...(smile remembering). And he would whisper in my ear as he embraced me closer, tighter in those iron like arms of his. (start in loving whispers, gradually shift into harsh anger and violence) "My baby...oh my sweet baby, yea I love you and I'm never gonna leave you. You belong to me. Do you hear me bitch? You are mine and that sweet ass of yours is mine too. Say it! Whose pussy is this? Huh? Whose pussy is this?!" And I would say,(in a little girl voice of age five to seven years old) "your pussy Daddy, yours". (pause) And those vice grips coiled around my body would be squeezin' the life out of me till I couldn't breath, couldn't breath...(slow fade).
In One Word

So what do we look like today.
    murr and frankincense
    mingle and sway together
    doing a musky exotic
dance for the pleasure
    of my senses.

The ashen color smoke
ascending from the murr
like the innately beautiful
sensuousity of my sisters hips
hypnotizes me
    Yea, mesmerized by smoky
    hips.
    Now I see why men
    flip
When me and my sisters
    go a walking.

Intoxication when I
    step,
Fascination when I
    stroll

Liberation, Illumination and
Exaltation,
when I
sway my
hips to the drum.

And when I bend
    All the men
    in the room
    stop breathin'
    and begin to
    fantasize
About his head between my
thighs
and the sweet nectar that
    flows from me.

What do I look like today?
    I don't know
but I'm sure your imagination
will tell me
As I
while you watch, stare, fiend
I glide
to my destination.
Your smiles, your winks, your head turns, your whistles, you trying to step with pretty words, blown kisses, and laughter tell me exactly what I look like-

In one word:
   Beautiful.

Venus Opal Reese
Memories

This monologue should be told plain and simple. The only exception to this rule is when actor slips into different characters as the story unfolds. When this occurs, the actor must fully commit and embody the character being undertaken. Otherwise it should be as narrative and soft as possible; with as little emotionality as possible.

The two most difficult questions to answer in the world are: how do you hold on to something that wants to leave and how do you get rid of something that wants to stay? Especially if that "something" is a memory...

Marie was everything I ever wanted to be. She was pretty, she was smart. She could out run all of the kids on the block and all the boys - well all the boys were a little sweet on her. And if they weren't, they looked after her like she was their little sister. I on the other hand was tall, awkward, and shy. I tripped over my own gawky legs and I was so quiet, everybody thought there was something wrong with me. Everyone but Marie. She loved me true. Marie was the favorite and I was the black sheep. But it didn't matter cause I loved Marie more than I loved myself; because Marie was worth loving. Her smile was so beautiful - she would smile at me and I would taste a little bit of heaven. That's how much I loved Marie. We took care of each other. In different ways, yes, but both absolutely necessary. Marie was the oldest. She was momma's right hand. So Marie ran the house. She did most of the cooking while momma worked. I would clean. I like to clean. I like seeing something change from one way
to another through my effort. So Marie and I had a system. As we grew, we had other systems as well. I would cover for Marie when she would slip out to go to a party or meet a boy. In this way I became important, invaluable. I was her protector. In exchange for my loyalty, I would get to wear some of Marie's pretty clothes. By the time Marie was six-teen, she was working, so she had money to buy clothes. I didn't, and momma was dancing at the Tic Toc club to bring in extra money just to get through to the beginning of the month when her check would come in. I was also Marie's and Jesse's, and Christine's protector in another way also. Whenever momma would get mad, I would get her to direct her anger at me instead, which wasn't to hard given that — well you know. I remember this one time momma thought that Marie was pregnant so she started punching Marie in the stomach. I was in the living room. They were in the hallway near the kitchen. I had heard the argument so I was expecting something, cause you could never tell with momma. One moment she's rubbing your back and stroking your hair the next she's beating you in public with a water hose. You never knew. I came into the hallway and saw what she doing to Marie and said, "If you have to hit someone, hit me." That stop her mid-swing. She looked at me and I'm almost certain I saw a reluctant glimmer of respect in her eyes. Then she back handed me into the wall. But it was ok because she wasn't hitting Marie anymore. Once again I had saved her. I know this might sound completely insane, but I believed that I was the only one who could take the pain. I could handle whatever momma did - I would never break; Marie would. You have to understand, Marie was the favorite. She was loved, adored, and pampered by all. She was not accustom to pain; I was. I had been invisible since birth. And the times people would
take notice of me was to either make fun of me or point out what I didn't do right. So pain was my best friend. We walked hand in hand together, always. Marie didn't know pain and as long as I was alive, she never would. Because I was going to protect her and make sure she was happy. She was everything to me. She was my big sister.

One morning Marie was in the kitchen washing dishes. Something wasn't right. I could feel it in the air. I walked over to the sink and said "Marie?" She turned and looked into my eyes. It hit me like a blow. I saw such naked pain, my chest began to ache. I said "Marie, what's wrong?" She said, "I was playing cards with Keith and Eric and Roland and Frank last night at Karen's house, we were in the basement...Keith tied my hands and feet to the...they took turns Keith first then Roland and Frank...when it was Eric's turn he whispered in my ear, "I'm not really going to do it, I'm just going to act like I am, otherwise they will beat me up" and he kissed my cheek and said don't cry Marie, I'm sorry, don't cry...when they were finished, Keith untied me and I spat in his face," she said as I held on to her shivering body. I said, "Let's call the police or tell momma" "NO" she said. The next moment she was drying her face of tears and back washing the dishes as if nothing had happened. But it wasn't that easy for me. I'll tell you something, if you want to know real pain, pain that is beyond description, let someone you love be hurt and you be completely powerless to do anything about it. You keep asking yourself, "What didn't I do! How did I fail?" You're filled with suppressed rage which you can't even give vent to in fear of hurting the one you love. But the worse part about this is: you are always haunted. The memory of Marie's tortured eyes and face won't leave no matter how hard I try or how far I run.
This monologue should be performed with complete brassy and brazen rawness. It should start out completely funny but become more raw and vulnerable as story dictates.

Hey there Daddy, I got somethin' for ya. Don't chu wanna feel o' this brown silk? I can give ya wha chu want. Well forget chu then. Hey there suga', got tha cures fo' all ya aches an ills an it won' cost ya nothin' cep a litol bit o' change. Huh! You look po' anyway! Ragady (she see another perspective client) - Oh ho ho baby - you lookin' fo' a goody, I mean a reeealll good time - I'm yo lady. Honey I can dip ya, flip ya, slap ya, lick ya, kick ya, an anthin' else you desire, ya dig? I'm gettin' all wet just thinkin' about it. You wanna talk to me? Listen man if you a cop, I was jus jokin' about those things I jus said - you look like my cousin Lou an we be kiddin' aroun', dig? And I was no were near tha liquor store tha got knock off las - oh you aint no pig? I knew tha, I was jus see how far yous gonna take. Soooo, ya wanna talk to me huh? Is tha right. Well see, I'm a business woman an my time is my comodity, dig? Its gonna cost ya. You down? Cool. So wha chu wanna talk about? Wha? Huh? Immortal soul? Muthafucka pleeeze, I gotta ya Jesus! Get ya sorry ass out of my face! Is tha ya line fo' gettin' free pussy? Huh? If I feel guilty enough, one fuck from you an I earn entry into the pearly gates? (He advances, she pulls out a blade) Hey! Back tha fuck up or I slit cha gotdam throat. Tha's it, nice an easy. Nice chattin' wit ya. Have a nice day. Hey girl, how ya doin' tonigh? Oh him,, he was nothin', jus anatha weirdo. Come up askin' me my business bout how
come I out here. Lookin' down his nose at me wit one eye while he
takin' off my clothes wit tha otha. Yea girl - well I show him my
blad an' tha was tha end of tha. Tha nerve o' some people, always
passin' judgement, when they aint doin' no betta, only difference is
I honest bout my sit. Anywaay I didnt always do this. I usta have
me a nice pad, a good job, an a good man. Yea girl, I was the envy
of tha whole neighborhood. Had me a young daughta an a fine, strong
baby boy. Lua' Man, tha was my pet name fo' him. Yea girl, had come
into some money too. My man was a numbas runna an he lifted some of
tha top an brough' it home ta me. Girl I was so happy, I didn't know
wha to do! I got's me a car an me and my kids some nice clothes an
all. Did tha apartmen' up real nice. Hell, I was ready now! Felt
like I was on top of the world! An the women in tha neighborhood was
so jealous! Girl, would turn they nozes up at me, talk bout me think
I betta than everybody else. Then trin' ta be my bes friend - you
know how it is girl. Well I said ta myself, if they gonna be like
tha, I jus gonna havta find me some new friends. So thas wha I did.
My new friends had mo' money than I did - all of it was dirty, ya dig-
but they didn't snub me. So I started hangin' wit them, goin' tha
places they would go an tha things they would do. So I started
drinkin' an sniffin' wit them. It was fun an it was free so I didn't
think to much bout it. Well ya know tha story. I got into it deep,
the drinkin' an the sniffin' even though it made my noze bleed. An I
ran through my money. Man left me cause he say I wasn't treatin' him
right, so it was jus me an an my babies. Thas when it happen. I had
been out drinkin' all night an had come home. I was so drunk an so
tired. I wanted to hold Lua' Man, so I took him out of his drawer
which was his crib an hugged him close. He looked just like Jeff his
fatha. I kissed his forehead or his cheek and decide to lay down wit him in my bed fo' a few minutes then I would put him back in his drawer. I went to sleep. I didn't wake up til some time tha next day. Lua' Man was still in my arms. Cept he wasn't breathin'. His face was ash gray. He was dead. In the night he had choked on his own spit up and smotha against my coat. Tha doctors called it crib death. I call it murder. I KILL MY SON!!!(pause) The state took Jessica from me an then her fatha got her. I didn't care anymo' so I hooked up wit one of tha guys tha turned me on to booze an show. I said I needed a job an he said I could work fo' him. He said I would be a natural. An he was right girl! You know how many tricks I can pull an turn in a night. I make big bucks! Enough to support my habself. And send some to Jeff fo' Jessica. I takes care of mine, well at least I trys ta. Hey there Daddy, I got sometin' fo' ya. Don't chu want a feel of this brown silk. I can give ya wha chu want...(lights fade).
That's What You told Me

If I listened to you,
I'd be peddling my pussy
in the name of the Lord.

'Cause that's what
little black girls
are suppose to do.

Our brain is in 'tween
our legs.

That's what you told me.

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the earth

Whether black, yellow, white
they are precious in his sight

Jesus loves...

Jesus only loves you
if you know how to give
good 'head.

That's what you told me.

Don't laugh it's true.

My salvation depends on
how deep my throat and
how tight my hole

And whether or not
I can flex my muscle.

That's what you told me.

Don't you remember...
I was on my knees praying
for forgiveness

when you slapped my face
and entered me from behind.

You whispered in my ear
in between pants and grunts

That I was a servant of the Lord
and that I must obey my master,
for such is the kingdom of Heaven.

Then you took me from my home
and forced your seed in me.

Little black girl
with dead eyes
please stop listening
to the lies.

The lies they told you before you were even born.

Venus Opal Reese
New World

I had a dream last night.
    I dreamt that I
    was a gazelle all long limbs
    and grace.

I dreamt that you were there
pouring love all over me.
    I basked and reveled
    in your warmth
    and I began to
    melt into you.
Light became rays
and rays became moonlight.

I was land and
sea earth and fire
all because you
touched me.
    You.

And I remembered that
I was everything that
could be-
the Godliness
in me in
you was
all.

And we sang and
leaped, and rejoiced
until the Moon
went down and
a new world was
born.

Venus Opal Reese
EXPENDITURES
CONCEPT FOR PRODUCTION/SET CONSIDERATIONS

I envision the production of Pieces of Reality being rather simple. Minimal usage of large set props and space. This theatrical piece should be done with props and set just hinting or suggesting environment and character. For example, if I am wearing a hat backward along with a pair of overalls, and a flannel shirt, I am the young man. By simply turning the hat frontwards and changing my physical posture and voice, I become the old man. This is what I mean by minimal. I would like to have specific areas on the stage to have specific props; a chair and a vanity table and an oak tree stomp. These areas should not have light on them until they are used. The center area, which is the main area used for monologues, should change in lighting each time there is a character change. All of the movement pieces should happen down stage left, bathed in red or soft white light.

SPECIAL NEEDS FOR THIS PRODUCTION

Given that this is a work in progress, which I have created, I would suggest a director participate in this process. Also for promotional purposes, I can easily see this piece being targeted toward the following communities: solo performance art; movement theatre and text work; feminist theatre; and Afro-American historical drama with dance and song. I strongly believe this is an incredibly diverse and marketable creation, which if given sufficient support and shaping, will cause and gain eventual national attention.
My projected budget is less than one hundred dollars. I believe in Minimalism; I do not need a lot. My own wardrobe is where I will obtain my costumes; when the hat is turned forward, I am the old man, when it is turned backward I am the young boy; simple changes like that one. The one hundred dollars will be used for publicity and anything else which happens to come up. I believe in simplicity.

BUDGET BREAK-DOWN

Flyers.................$25.00
Newspaper ads.........$15.00
Radio announcements...$15.00
Programs..............$25.00
Unforesee-ables.......$20.00