Naomi Bragin
Black Power of Hip Hop Dance: On Kinesthetic Politics

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At the height of backlash against black radical movements, Soul Train’s 1971 syndi-cated premiere screened a performance of collective movement sense-ability among black youth. I begin with the landmark black popular music and dance show, using the term kinesthetic politics to attend to the political implications of kines-thesia, the body's "sixth" sense of motion. Kinesthetic politics rejects a mind/body split that secures Enlight-enment conceptions of visual hierarchy and the human, asserting the significance of embodied knowledge production as a practice of illicit seeing. The televising of black youth having fun captures critical terms under which the scene is enacted--subjection to state power ensured by historical denial of the black body's sen-tience. Black folks joined together around TV sets learning improvisation-based dance-rhythms of the break-down, locking, waacking and popping. These trans-located dances generate an intramural conversation on black aesthetics that continues in the Harlem Shake, A-Town Stomp, Nae Nae and Hit Dem Folks. Connecting to a political ontology of stolen bodies, the criminal and black, street dance draws theoretical force from a displacement of humanism proper that transforms notions of property, privacy, authorship and possessive individualism. My research draws from ethno-histories of early Soul Train dancers, street dance pioneers and practitioners, and my background as a street, studio, stage and club dancer since the early 1990s.

Dr. Naomi Bragin is currently an Assistant Professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Science at University of Washington Bothell, and UC President’s Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Riverside

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