

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Carlos Avendaño

SaltSoul, in Dialogue, Ripples Through habitus

by Jonathan Stein

Dear reader,

It is important to us that our content, like everything else we publish, works towards achieving our mission, “to catalyze conversation about dance and to develop the skills of dance writers in the Philadelphia area.” We believe that expanding our range of content naturally enables us to expand the range of voices, messages, and perspectives that we include in our ongoing conversation about dance. And so, with this article, we are trying something new: presenting video content for the first time.

What do you think, dear reader? What does the addition of video content mean for you? Thank you for adding your thoughts to the comments, below, and for helping us to provide the most useful, interesting, thought-provoking, and progressive content we can.

Yours,

Julius Ferraro, editor-in-chief

Consider two large-scale art projects a mile apart having a dialogue that none of their artist creators had imagined when they created their respective work. Such is the serendipitous magic of art to foster the unexpected and the unimagined.

Jungwoong Kim’s *SaltSoul* dance-theater installation and performance was an elegiac meditation on loss and suffering. The multi-media collaboration last fall stirred the floors and street environs of the Asian Arts Initiative (AAI) building with processions, rituals, and reference to the 2014 Sewol ferry sinking and loss of 304 lives in South Korea. TD guest writer Toni Shapiro-Phim [eloquently tracked?](#) *SaltSoul*

's genesis, including two performances, one at the site of the Salvation Army 2013 building collapse at 22nd and Market (witnessed by Kim), and another amidst the random spouting fountains of Dilworth Plaza. Zornitsa Stoyanova added [a thoughtful tD review](#) of the completed performance at AAI.

Across town, Ann Hamilton's *habitus* at Pier 9 on the Delaware River presented a dozen cylindrical, tent-like, nineteen foot high structures made of a synthetic white fabric that floated between states of opening and closure, and rotated in circular dances—activated both by the breezes coming through walls open to the river and by visitors pulling down hard on descending ropes. Actors in this post-industrial space spun mounds of fleece into yarn, and, reversing the process, unraveled yarn from a sweater. Lisa Kraus has addressed *habitus*' states of labor and dreams in [her tD essay](#).

As Kim and fellow *SaltSoul* dancer Marion Ramirez were completing preparation for their early October performances at AAI they saw the Hamilton work. Instantly captivated by its poetics of light and space and uses of fabric in continuous motion, all important elements in *SaltSoul*, they offered to create a structured improvisation within *habitus* for the night of October 9; this was the day after *SaltSoul* ended its run, and the day before *habitus* was taken down.

Kim and Ramirez joined Ann Hamilton for two hours before the performance, receiving an offer of a "mountain of wool" from Hamilton to meet their needs in the performance. Although the structured improvisation in the darkened space, with Bhub Rainey's plaintive saxophone, was unrehearsed, the artists brought their fully developed esthetics and sensibilities of *SaltSoul* to *habitus*. Kim wanted to "respect," in his word, the Hamilton work by creating slow, dream-like movement that would not compete with or overwhelm the installation, yet be in synch with its continuity of fabric movement and presence of ambient sounds. Their *SaltSoul* imported themes of death, loss and body-centered ritual, and found ready soulmates in *habitus*.

Kim and Ramirez's evening performance, weaving dance into *habitus*, so heightened the installation's power and breadth of meanings, that it suggested to me that *habitus* stood until its last day in wait of an animating human connection to its abstract concept of these dozen draped tent structures and related parts. The presence of two "performers" embedded from the beginning in the *habitus* installation, spooling and unspooling wool, was a rather static, unengaging element. Kim and Ramirez's slow, at times immobile, and minimalist movement of rolls and gentle carries, often hugged the central axis of abandoned railroad tracks in the warehouse. At one point their rolls were enveloped by their mountain of wool, rendering them more animal than human. We experienced the flowing, towering fabrics as forces of nature or of some commanding presence, disturbing or titillating our human existence.

The fabric, moving seemingly at random in the breezes, arbitrarily enveloping or revealing the dancers, suggested both aggressive and caressing embraces. The large shadows of the dancers' bodies cast upon the fabric towers conjured the latent spirits of *habitus*, spirits that were readily exorcized and present in the original *SaltSoul* performance and were now revealed in this setting by these *SaltSoul* visitors bringing their stories of loss and bereavement. Having earlier seen the *habitus* installation without these dancers, this performance totally transformed and enriched the experience. I saw those railroad tracks into the cavernous darkness of the towering structures as ones that brought victims into concentration camps. I saw life and death, elation and mystery, compassion and comfort, where before I saw primarily abstraction and concept. Such was the power of dance and these dancers.

The *SaltSoul speaks to habitus* 30-minute video was filmed by Carlos Avendaño, and was edited by Jungwoong Kim in this nine minute version presented here by tD.

[SaltSoul speaks to habitus](#) from [Jungwoong Kim](#) on Vimeo.

Jungwoong Kim, *SaltSoul speaks to habitus*, Municipal Pier 9, 121 N. Columbus Blvd., Oct. 9, co-sponsored by The Fabric Museum & Workshop and the Asian Arts Initiative

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January 20, 2017