ABSTRACT

WHO IS (NOT) HUMAN?

KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND PROVOST’S LECTURE

BY

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Translating Human Imagination, Sensation, Movement, Interaction, and Adaptability

FESTIVAL OF THE MOVING BODY

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The sinister constructions of personhood which fostered genocide and slavery haunt us. From Michael Brown, to Trayvon Martin, to Steven Sotloff, and over 1500 unnamed victims of the Ebola virus, the world appears to wonder: “Who is (not) human”? Whose life is one to value, respect, if not exceptionalize, and... whose life can we stand to lose, if not take? The recognition of humanity is clearly a matter of life and death. What race, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, ability, sexual orientation, nationality, language, or age privileges the status of the human, “who manifests a subjectivity—that is, a consciousness like our own—that would allow us to consider each of them, taken individually, as another self”?¹

During the festival, we will examine the fragility and strength of our shared humanity through the moving body. The container of the human spirit and frequent vehicle of the “ridiculousness of art,”² the body communicates our joy, liveness, power, and irony, but also our pain and vulnerability. Immeasurable atrocities of global contemporary lives are perpetrated upon the body, frequently in an attempt to control, if not destroy the spirit; inspiring such choreographic responses as Ivorian choreographer Nadia Beugré’s “Un Espace Vide—Moi.” Daring to move the body, we courageously assert our wholeness; even liveness in a sea of death, as has choreographer and producer Faustin Linyekula of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Such courage provokes countless others to assert their subjectivity, stimulating the dynamic growth of new centers like Germaine Acogny’s “Ecole de Sables” and global networks of practice such as the Africa Contemporary Arts Consortium (TACAC). Moving, we demonstrate personhood as we articulate our unique voices, manifest our visions of the world, and shape bodies of knowledge. Our individual voices supersede the container of the body, sick or well, Congolese or Palestinian, tattooed or veiled, to declare we are human, indeed.