ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: BLACK MIRRORS: AFROFUTURIST SENSIBILITIES IN TECHNOLOGIES NAVIGATING BLACK SPACE

bree breeden, Master of Fine Arts, 2026

Thesis directed by: Professor, Dr. Maura Keefe, School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

Abstract: This written thesis is in support of *blk/sp_C*, a live multimodal dance that invites audiences to navigate black space through movement and interaction. The work examines how AfroFuturist sensibilities in performance and technology can help to reconfigure understandings of identity through what I term the black mirror interface. Central to my thesis is a conceptual shift in performance from identity as replication to identity as generative variations, where opacity, embodiment, and technological mediation produce new possibilities for relationality in performance. This thesis performance and accompanying document propose alternative, anti-reductive ways of engaging identity in performance.

BLACK MIRRORS: AFROFUTURIST SENSIBILITIES IN TECHNOLOGIES NAVIGATING BLACK SPACE

by

bree breeden

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2026

Advisory Committee
Professor Dr. Maura Keefe, Chair
Associate Professor Kendra Portier
Multimedia Technologist Andrew Cissna

©Copyright by

bree breeden

2026

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the production team, Jenn Schwartz, Devin Kohn and Kate Wander for not only letting me use the spaces and trusting my ideas but for also jumping on stage for blocking and adding your creative inputs during the technical and dress rehearsals.

Thank you to the design team for sharing your expertise and time constructing this *blk/sp_C*; Yannick Godts- lighting designer, MJ Loyet- set designer, Emil Mendoza- costume designer and Kiefer Cure- sound designer.

I would also like to thank my Professors who gave space for me explore and research in classes and one off conversations; Sam Crawford, Lins Derry,
Adriane Fang, Kate Ladenheim, Ama Law, Alvin Mayes, Van Ngoc Tran Nguyen, Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig.

To my cohort Angie Smith, Jalen Rose and Zoe Cushman Walders; you've seen the tears and the joy and I thank you for sticking by me through it all.

To the dancers; Jalen Rose, Kevin Carroll and Emilia Bruno, I make no work without you as collaborators. Thank you for your generosity in the rehearsals and performances.

To my committee Andrew Cissna, Kendra Portier and Maura Keefe for your patience (as I am always missing a deadline) however, I could have not done any of *blk/sp_C* without your kind pushes towards finishing. I also thank you all for etching out spaces for me that I know involved some creativity on your part!

I would like to thank my wife and art partner, Kathleen Kelley, for listening to my rants, wailing and staying up with me in the wee hours during the process of making this work.

Lastly, to my children, Arlo James Kelley-Breeden and Zora Nelle Kelley-Breeden (born during this process), I simply love you and thank you for also keeping me up in the wee hours albeit for different reasons.

Table Of Contents

blk/sp_C **1**

Black spaces **8**

AfroFuturism **11**

Black Mirrors : an equation of reflexive observation **13**

BLKDOG: Far From the Norm 15

Generative Spaces 17

Mirroring Empathy in Stephanie Dinkins, *Conversations with Bina 48* 18

Mirroring Expansion Past the Body's Myths in Rashaad Newsome's *Being: A Digital Griot* 20

Mirroring (re)presentation of the body through Grisha Coleman's *The Movement Undercommons* 24

Paraprogramming Poetic Systems **26**

Opacity Enacted **26**

Sound Unfolding as Process 27

Computational and Posthuman Ways of Thinking 30

Spatial Openness **34**

Choreography for the Audience 35

Spatial Memory 37

Vast Intimacy 38

Performers as Ecologies 40

Choreography for the dancers 48

Conclusion **50**

Bibliography **54**

blk/sp_C

I walk into the space, a proscenium space. I find a seat and notice three constructed triangles on stage. The one center stage is tall, formed by three connecting panels and covered with plastic so that the view inside is occluded. The other two triangles are constructed by white tape on the ground and are on either side of the center structure. House music is playing in the theater with all the expected socialising and mingling before a performance begins.

The announcements start. It is my voice, with all the mistakes; stutters, laughing and mispronunciation of words playing. I see people looking around, already sensing and potentially prepping, somewhat, for an immersive experience by trying to locate the body, the live body, that is there, somewhere, saying these pre-recorded words. It feels like a warmup space, giving the audience time to adjust, to listen.

I see the doors behind both sides of the stage open up and dancers and stage crew entering the stage, each in all black. The three dancers each enter the triangles. The stage crew gesture into the hallway and I wonder if this is an invitation? By the time I wander my ear back to the announcements I hear "let the lights be your guide." I miss the part in the announcements that I can roam the stage and room beyond the hallway. The lights dim, the dancers are settled as the stage crew encloses one of the dancers in the middle structure. This performance the soloist inside the structure is Emilia Bruno and within the left triangle Kevin Carroll; within the right triangle Jalen Rose.

Even as the choreographer, knowing that the nature of the work is hybrid installation and performance, allowing bodies to roam all spaces, stage included, I don't want to initiate the movement towards the stage. I can also sense this hesitation in other audience members. This is the first choreographic impulse to get the audience from stationary to roaming and I

always wonder who will enter the stage first; a group of people, a solo body? After the first person walks on stage a flock, including myself, follows.[1]

I head directly for the triangle structure to get a view on all three sides, which are different views at any given time because of the lighting. The dancer inside becomes a shadow and sometimes a blur the closer they are to the edges of the structure and as they move closer to the center they disappear. I find myself moving around trying to track them. I sit in various positions onstage and try to get a glimpse of the three dancers at once and it is impossible. I have to make constant choices of where to look, often shifting my angles, panning, tilting and jibbing with wandering eyes. Technically, an eye witness to what is occurring, yet, my perspective will vary from the many bodies in the space, witnessing as well. This is the second choreographic impulse for the audience; where to situate attention.

The dancers are fully engulfed in their own agendas, moving full but slow almost as if they have been dancing forever and we are just catching a glimpse. The minute movements seem like grande gestures or invitations and the larger movements are dense and controlled. Throughout the whole thirty minute performance they do not crescendo or head towards a story arc. They do not intersect but together form patterns and occurrences that create subjective meaning. One moment that sticks with me is when Carroll sharply carves his hands to the right, Bruno then goes from the left edge of the structure to the center almost disappearing, as Rose snakes the upper half of her body gently laying their head on the floor. It

[1] The concert was shared with another choreographer and from a production standpoint it made sense for this work to go first in the show. The audience sat first, making it difficult to move to the first choreographic impulse; initiating roaming through the space. I write about this later in the paper, but part of the choreographic research was to configure how the two, live performance and installation would work together. I didn't want to rely on audience plants to initiate movement towards the stage, however people who were involved in the process of creating *blk/sp_C*; the designers, house and production, took leadership and initiated the movement towards. I do believe without them the piece wouldn't have moved forward with participation as anticipated making it apparent that entrances into the space need more tending to choreographically.

almost looked choreographed. I asked a friend who was standing right next to me if they caught that sequence, but, this was a beautiful moment perhaps I only caught and gave meaning to.[2]

Their gaze reaches beyond the room as they look beyond the audience, yet still fully present and I somehow in full conversation with them as I co-choreograph these spontaneous moments. The dancers are engaging in a practice of opacity, like the rest of the bodies in the space and somehow we still intersect and create. I get lost and overwhelmed by the many sights to take in. I spot a colleague of mine, and we decide to lay and talk about what the piece is offering us at that moment, relative to our engagement.

After a while, I make my way into the hallway through the door on the left and notice the energy and clarity of the stage doesn't carry into this space. I see images of bodily transformations happening on a nearby table. I see photos of what looks like bones, wings and bodies formed by multiplying the same images over and over to form a new being. I see HR Giger's Alien Diaries 7/8 and a zine of mythical monsters on the table.[3]

I continue into a hallway covered in black curtains, which also has a different energy. I know that this is supposed to be a container separating the performance spaces from the hallways of the venue, yet I can still hear the outside spaces where students are entering and exiting with all of the sounds they carry. I keep moving forward into another space that's just

---

[2]I often return to this moment as I tend to frame intimacy as a driver of witnessing. Perhaps intimacy can be instead understood relationally: as the conditions that prompt following, or make space for wandering.

[3]Here I placed Giger's book *Giger's Aliens* on the table with my own photography. Giger often creates these biomechanical creatures in his work and this book replicates his journal of how the beings emerge from paper to film. Although I use a different approach to create beings for film, often through repetition of mirror images and trailing, the idea of these bodies having a trajectory and lifetime is what I am after.
H.R, Giger. *Giger's Alien*. California: (Big O Publishing/Morpheus International, 1989).

a black panel hinting that maybe this is a portal or a hallway or a trajectory towards another space. It is a bit of a transition space.

I enter the second room, a studio space, and it is made of all black material: various types of seating including cushions, bean bags, chairs, stools and acting blocks with "sit" stenciled on them. There are books stacked in piles all over the room. I see a huge sculpture made of bended black frames covered in black material protruding from the wall with a projected grid of images. There are four black pedestals that each have, "type", "talk", "poke", "write" as instructions stenciled on the podiums with books surrounding the pedestals.[4]

I go to the type station that has an old IBS computer with green letters. I notice some of the typed texts are from previous audience members from previous shows. I feel anonymous and a bit confused so I type out a list of words found from a book next to me. "Defining Categories and levels of Interactivity: 1. Navigation, 2. Participation, 3. Conversation, 4. Collaboration," and I add "blk/sp_C, an interactive…".[5] *I am eager to be part of the conversation that might follow. I remind myself to come back to read the comments, establishing a loop as my pathway. As I am typing I notice the sound of the keys being*

---

[4]The books in the space are from my personal library and serve two functions in the work: 1. As a bibliography, as each of these books contributed to forming the work in many ways, houses my notes and invites movement among them as the audience engages them. 2. The books function as audience data. I arranged the books around the space according to how piles related to each other and the function of the technology at the pedestals. Each night the books were rearranged by the audience and before resetting the space for the next performance I always took note of what books were rearranged and which pages they were open to, if left open. As you read this wander through of *blk/sp_C* I highlight a book at each station that serves as a paratext to the technology being used.

[5]As you can tell or be able to soon tell I love to lead and leave prompts that invite a sense of openness. I leave this passage open at the "type" station every performance because it gives context to the form of *blk/sp_C*. Dixon says these classifications are "ranked in ascending order in relation to the openness of the system and the consequent level and depth of user interaction." Just as the theater sets up certain behaviors such as sit and watch, and immersive spaces allow for wandering behavior, I am thinking through interactive performance spaces and the poetry in its systems. Steve Dixon, "Performing Interactivity," in *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 560.

amplified and being distorted, but I can not hear the end of the distortion and wonder if the consequence of my typing is being registered elsewhere.

From this I move on to "talk" and I don't know what to say so I start to say my name and I hear that my voice is distorted, and again, possibly consequential to another environment. Next, I picked up a book entitled, Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture, by poet Anais Duplan. The book is full of handwritten notes and I flip to a page with a blue sticky hanging out. I say Duplan's words into the microphone: "[he] disappears the body that Pendleton brings to light, and not only that, but says disappearance of that body is the basis of a necessary fantasy…. the avant- garde can put the body on the line."[6] *I start to collect ideas about consequences and distortion or distorted consequences of removing the body in performance.*

*I move on to the "poke" station. I notice a midi controller with knobs that twists, buttons, levers. There was a motorized lever that went up and down without manipulation, which provoked a sense of agency on the machine's part, and also an invitation to interact. On this station, there is a book open to a title page that reads,"Black Secret Technologies"*by John Jennings.[7] Seeing a midi controller next to this book made me want to play and uncover the meaning behind the text with the board.

It's not clear what the consequences of playing with the board does but the changes are registered to those who are observing the sculpture with the projections in the same space with a more zoomed out view. Each button shifts the image output. I know, as the choreographer, that there are three cameras inside the triangular structure facing the dancer

---

[6]Anaïs, Duplan. *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*. Place: Black Ocean, 2020), 19-20.
[7]John Jennings, "Black Secret Technologies," in *The Black Experience in Design: Identity, Expression & Reflection,* ed. Anne H. Berry et al. (New York:Skyhorse Publishing, 2022), 358.

at various angles, essentially capturing their every move. The projections are then sent from the stage to the studio space, displayed on the sculpture, possibly through an NDI watcher in Isadora. Here in the studio, the projected images are distorted as such that there is rarely a clear image of the performer inside. The audience manipulates the image by interacting with the midi controller, constantly re-creating the images seen on the sculpture from the wall.[8]

I then go to the last station that has "write" stenciled, where there are journals and books about identity and autobiography. Amongst those books I notice Jayna Brown's Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds, where she writes: "... attempting to capture the desiring subject also causes language to proliferate, to explode into a million pieces."[9] *I instantly think of Glissant's quote, "As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of that myself."*[10] *I begin to write my thoughts on identity inside the notebook and again notice that there's a mic picking up the sound. I write about the consequences of the body interacting with these almost daily, ubiquitous machines that reflect extension to the "beyond" in many capacities. I think about the identities created from the social (type), to publics (talk), to image making (poke), to documentation (write), and how the concept of identity formation is, again, a reflexive, relational practice.*[11]

---

[8]Dylan Uremovich, projection designer, made design choices for the output of the midi controller reflecting images from an earlier film of mine, *(un)visible*. He also programmed the motorized lever on the midi controller to change the output of the image every 10 seconds without physical manipulation. If no audience visited the studio space, or if there were moments of quiet in the space, the projections would continue *autonomously*. I have a fascination with automata atop of Cathedrals and other sites that hold the marker of *holy.* I am always finding ways to include agentic technical bodies in my work and Uremovich's incorporation of these ideas was a delight to witness!

[9]Jayna Brown, *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 141.

[10]Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,*trans.Betsey Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 192.

[11]The studio that I am referring to is known internally to myself and collaborators as the reflexive space considering the classifications of interactivity by Dixon, mentioned in Footnote 6 adjacent to classifications of identity formation. The stage is internally known as the reflective space where all reflective material is opaque causing shadows to show up as reflection instead of a clear visual.

I walked back to the stage, opposite the door I entered the studio from, putting me at the opposite end of the stage. The sound is clamped, damp and submerged and has a lulling and rolling cadence. Over the music, I hear technical, mechanical, sounds emulating nature, most noticeably rain sounds. I hear distorted voices that I know I heard in the studio. I know that all those sounds are the technical bodies interacting in the studio. I take this information into consideration as I sit closely near each triangle, sensing the environment that we; the dancers, the audience, myself, are all contributing to.

I then chose to sit back at the seat where I heard the announcements when I first entered the theater. I witnessed this zoomed out view of the stage. I see the dancers. A shadowed dancer inside what now reminds me of artists like Kara Walker and her silhouette cutouts, the images of Kerry James Marshall that creates black paintings from mixing different colors, and a specific work by Betye Saar entitled, "Black Girl's Window," revealing the mystical edges of identity.[12] The images of the dancer's shadow, scales and multiplies, allows them to disappear at moments creating traces and gradients of visibility. I think of Caribbean poet Édouard Glissant's poetry. I think of infinities in terms of identity. I scan and I see the hyper-visible dancers, but still in control of what they are choosing to show. Even they seem to oscillate between visibilities, while technically exposed. I think of a black mirror interface that I tend to daydream often about and how blk/sp_C is a practice of this interface.

---

[12]I am often inspired by AfroFuturist artists across disciplines; installation artists, poets, visual artists and artists working at the intersection of art and technology. Visual artist, Betye Saar, is one of the many to name. Her work, especially *Black Girl's Window,* in conjunction with Faith Ringgold's *American People Series #17: The Artist and His Model* jump started my research into images of the body. Together they paint an image of reaching to black as a node and indicator of the *beyond* and question what that gesture of the *beyond* means. For an in depth analysis of how beyond the body is registered in AfroFuturist media, please see American philosopher Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's article Blacklight: On the Origin and Materiality of the Image.
Jackson, Zakiyyah. I. "Black Light: On the Origin and Materiality of the Image." *Topia* 46 (March 1, 2023): 134–47. https://doi.org/10.3138/topia-2022-0044.

I repeat the loop, this time gaining new information and switching viewpoints. If I interacted with technologies in space the first time, the second time I visited, I witnessed. If I watched close the first time, then I watched far the second time. I feel as if I am co-creating the piece in real time, critiquing and also thinking critically about what is unfolding.

I chose this particular performance because this is when I began to feel and understand the audience's choreography adjacent to the dancer's choreography. Together, I wonder deeply about identity, whether it's the identity of the performance, the dancer's identity, self identity; how that has the potential to shift social organization around how we witness acts of identity performance.

black spaces

In this thesis, I work alongside Caribbean poet/philosopher, Édouard Glissant's challenge for opacity: the right to not be fully understood, to not be reduced, to take care of one's own identity.[13] Opacity is defined as: the lack of transparency and obscurity of meaning and identity encompassing relationship to self and others as well as physical traits, personality and more. So, what does it mean for identity to exist in opacity when contemporary culture asks for constant transparency?

Alongside Glissant, I am engaging with poet Phyllis Wheatley, arguably one of the first known AfroFuturist writers dating back to 1773 even before the term was coined by Mark Dery in his 1993 essay entitled *Black to the Future.*[14] Wheatley's poems, specifically *on imagination,* deal with complicated imagery as she writes about her encountering *winter* after being forcefully displaced from Africa to America. Her writing holds detailed imagery

[13]Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 188-194.
[14]Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 179–222.

of movement in black space, speaking mostly to the realm *fancy;* imagination as survival. Black spaces hold deep gradients of visibility and complex images that point to certain amplified nodes of identity not to be contained, and not a place not meant for capture.

Glissant's opacity and Wheatley's fancy, together engage a speculative metaphor that the *black mirror* generates. Throughout this paper I unfold how this interface performs in technological mediated dances and the questions it brings up about identity. Throughout the making and writing of this thesis I wonder about Glissant's rendering of the black mirror through opacity. I wonder about agency over the body and its repeating imagery. I wonder about the generative space the black mirror creates and the infinity of expressions that emerge.

The black mirror tends to hold the complexity of identities as they expand and complicate. Glissant offers his theory of opacities as an option not to contain these images of identity but to make space for its expansiveness. I focus on black spaces, the spaces that are deemed too dark and empty, too ominous and flat and acknowledge their depth. What is opacity without defining it as oppositional to transparency? How can performing *black mirror* shift relationality for the observer and performer?

To expand on these questions my choreographic research focuses on ocularcentrism, which is the centering of sight as the main collaborative sense in truth making, meaning making and imagery surrounding identity. In contemporary Western life we frame the unknown through reflective technologies; mirrors, screens, social media, giving optics a high value in perceiving, creating dualisms constructed from sight alone. With ocularcentrism in mind, that generating of dualisms, both Wheatley and Glissant hold in their writing futurisms about the body which includes the realm of the *uncapturable* and a

breaking of dualisms. I bring to this conversation knowledge from dance studies, a field where the material of the body and its movement through time and space reflect not only what is seen but also honors sensibilities that are felt.

Being a dancer-choreographer-filmmaker myself, I consider the complexities of black spaces, black images and how they are often over-determined distilling them to a normative that doesn't apply. This oppositional logic generally flattens complex layering. I employ the *black mirror interface* as a system operating parallel to ocularcentrism. To do this work I refer to dance works that demonstrate the interface in action.[15] Bringing awareness to the sensibilities in performance technologies ask for mediation with the black mirror interface or similar systems as a starting point.[16]

The performance portion of this thesis, *blk/sp_C*, is a creative choreography of maneuvering black spaces with an AfroFuturist sensibility. It involves intertwining media and performance and uses AfroFuturist technology as a grounding in practice. The writing highlights a non-exhaustive detailing of the choreographies found in both *blk/sp_C* and other work that enact key elements of the speculative *black mirror interface..*

The three artists' work I analyze: artist and creative technologist Stephanie Dinkins' *Conversations with Bina48*, interdisciplinary artist Rashaad Newsome's *Being,* and creative technologist and choreographer Grisha Coleman's *Movement Undercommons: Technology as Resistance | Future Archive*, use AfroFuturist sensibilities in their

---

[15]I bring up oppositional logic often and I am referring to the idea of dualisms constructing identity. Defining an object, or concept by what it is not.

[16]There are artists such as Zach Blass who use Glissant's assertion of opacities to speak on the black boxing of information within technology. For more reading on this topic see Blass' definition of "Informatic Opacity" in the *Posthuman Glossary.*
blas, zach. "Informatic Opacity." In *Posthuman Glossary,* ed. Rosi Braidotti, Maria Hlavajova, 198. Bloomsbury, Publishing, 2018.

"makings-with-technology."[17] These artists offer practice spaces and embodiment strategies that establish new relationships to how we look toward the unknown, to depth, to black spaces, to identity. The mirror becomes a tool not for exposing or capturing identity but for practicing how we frame what we cannot fully understand.

To choreograph *blk/sp_C* I follow how these artists engage the black mirror in their work. The mirror reflects, but what it reflects is allowed to remain opaque, and it is the opaque, fanciful locations I aim to locate. By doing so I express un-seen sensorial places through generative exposure which I differentiate from *capture.* These performances of reflected opacity allow more space for infinite possibilities to enter the screen. These reflections require different tools of seeing; feeling as navigation, embodiment with technology, being a sensing machine becomes a practice of moving through black space by learning to feel temporal shifts treating opacity not as absence of information but as invitation to sense differently, to become apparatus that senses depth through embodied encounter.

AfroFuturism

When it comes to AfroFuturism I am concerned with the representation of how technology intersects with bodies marked by race and gender.[18] I consider the uses of technology as bodies of their own, in relation to the bodies they have impact on.

In *Reach, Robot: AfroFuturist Technologies* dance scholars and creative technologists Grisha Coleman and Thomas F. DeFrantz articulates options towards how technologies are integrated into performance responding to the contemporary calls of "what black folx are

[17]Gunkel, Henriette, and kara lynch, eds. *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*. 1st ed. Transcript Verlag, 2019. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv371c0s5.
[18]AfroFuturism intentionally spelled with the "F" capitalized is a way to give attention to both the bodies being referenced and the technologies.

looking for."[19] They use this statement alongside discussing their creative works to theorize AfroFuturist Technology, which they define as a dispersed relational interface that reorganizes how bodies gather, sense and imagine together. From their theories I extract three concepts that I used in the construction of *blk/sp_C:* tending to the public's experience and welcoming their various levels of engagement, spontaneous interactions and attention and performance being a practice space.

In this work Coleman creates a robot that generates the sound of musicians who have contributed to Pittsburgh's music scene that have passed on without mainstream recognition. She focuses on conduction and the visitors in the public space generate sound through motion capture tracking their bodies. Her robot described in their paper isn't anthroporphic, meaning it does not mimic human likeness, but instead is made of platforms, motors, wires and systems, however the robot brings about a poetry of the uncapturable, yet still consequential as a being. It is not something to be seen, touched, or as Glissant says "grasped."[20] The robot is activated by gesture, distributed across space, and realized through collective movement.

In more depth and without losing the focus of this essay three components they bring up are enacted in performance technologies that I value: 1.) AfroFuturist technology functions as a relational interface, creating dispersed conditions that reorganize social experience through movement. 2.) *blackness* in AfroFuturist performance operates through gradients of visibility (likened to Glissant's opacity), and 3.) AfroFuturist experimental performance constructs publics where collective and subjective futures are rehearsed through embodied, technological relation.They explain in detail these components,

[19]Coleman, *AfroFuturist Technologies,* 53.
[20]Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 191.

however I use them as choreographic structure by; *inviting* speculation of *black mirrors* to create generative relations by finding expanse in technological embodiment. Also, by focusing on gradients of visibility to build choreographies of *wandering* attention, and lastly to their third point creating a performance space that is hybrid live performance and installation to hold the intention of the choreographies navigating the space. Although the components and how they apply to *blk/sp_C* are siloed above, they are interchangeable pairings. In black spaces, the performance *blk/sp_C* and in Coleman and DeFrantz's theorizing of AfroFuturist Technologies, technology becomes choreographic, poetic, architectural. It becomes a system that facilitates "*thinking through experience with the thinking being movement*".[21]

Black Mirrors : an equation of reflexive observation

The mirror is a technology that hacks the act of looking. It appears to be a duplicate represented as *A+A=A*, but let us imagine reflective representation as an illusion and instead imagine the reflection as variation or deviation. What the mirror actually produces is reflexivity where the looker becomes the looked-at, and in this fold, something new emerges. Instead of replication, we have deviation, variation or together creation: *A + B (or variation/ deviation) = C (creation of identity)*.

To think through the difference between duplication and variation, I move towards approaches to optical apparatuses that further opacity and reflexivity rather than transparency. Instead of replication what is reflected is black space, spaces as sites of identity formation, essentially creating a black mirror interface to navigate by feeling,

[21]A quote from Coleman explaining her impetus behind how the movement of people and the robot will operate in the installation that their conversation focuses on.
Coleman, *AfroFuturist Technologies,* 63.

embodiment and curiosity. Engaging the black mirror interface asks: what happens to identity when the surface refuses a legible or familiar transparency from the body being looked at? I examine how reflexive observation, defined as looking that folds back onto the looker, can create a generative space between the observer and performer, even when the observer and performer are the same self.

Recognizing race itself as a technology embedded in Western society, I ask: can mirrors be hacked? Can mirroring become an anti-racist technology that counters the commodifying gaze built into our optical apparatuses?[22] If the body exercises its right to opacities, removed from the site of consumption, what remains? What is actually in excess when the expected is subtracted and is this a space where *fancy,* or imagination can roam? In the case of black spaces, of black mirrors what doesn't matter is what black is not. What matters is black space's outright rejection of dualisms, refusing oppositional logic as the only way to read its depth.[23] Consider the mirror as a tool for refusing capture, for creating generative spaces of *fancy* where the expected body instead stretches space for opacities enacted.

BLKDOG: Far From the Norm

---

[22]The idea of hacking comes from a lecture presented by Ethics scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva where she challenges and hacks the equation of the image presented in WEB Dubois' interpretation of his grandmother.
Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Denise Ferreira da Silva - Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism, Refusal, and the Limits of Critique," BCRW Videos, YouTube video, 1:19:16, posted January 24, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3B5Gh2JSQg.

[23]Oppositional logic is a term reconstructed from Anais Duplan's, *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*, where he writes, "be that as it may, enough consistency within the black contemporary arts in terms of oppositional strategy and performance signals the formation of a local hegemonic framework." This means that comparison to white, to be overly simplistic, won't do in black spaces. I am concerned with how to navigate black spaces on its own terms.
Duplan*, Blackspace,* 22.

Choreographer Botis Seva's, *BLKDOG: Far From the Norm* operates in this same creation space, though the mirrors here aren't literal reflective surfaces. Seva and his dancers are aware of a knowingness expected in performance, especially when bodies are marked as outside of "*the norm*," and use this information to morph the knowingness inherent in images; in their case re-framing black images. Let me turn to a specific moment where *BLKDOG* enacts this hacking of the black mirror through embodied performance.

Near the ending of the first third of the piece, six dancers move forward to a pulsing, club beat where the words, "Give Them What They Want," is repeated as they strip layers of clothing off, and lean into hyper-sexual, gendered tropes, continuously pressing forward towards us, the audience. It was a bit of a grotesque moment; equal parts entertainment relief, (as they are amazing, trained dancers specifically versed in hip-hop, the dominant style used in this performance), and a reflexive moment: *am I the "them" in give them what they want*?

I bring this particular instance of mirroring to show how black mirror has a performance interface that interacts with embodiment and can create complicated imagery. Choices around their lyrics, placement of repetition and momentum forms the intent in their performance, insinuating that they are aware of the consumptions of their culture and bodies. The black mirror creates instead of replicates.

Where black mirror interface is positioned is of importance too. This part is situated after the opening moment of a loud shooting sound at what appears to be one of the dancers sitting, followed by a sequence of playful yet intensely physical movement. *BLKDOG* demonstrates that the performers are simultaneously giving the audience what they want

and critiquing that desire. This refusal of either/or logic is what makes the mirror *blk*, not transparent, not resolvable into clear categories.

An AfroFuturist technology in this performance is manifested through black mirror interface, giving exactly what is expected of the performers, and simultaneously reshapes the image into something else, where the dancers hold the agency over their images. This complicates the black image. Mirroring as an anti-racist technology counters and challenges the commodifying, totalized, *all consuming* inherent in looking.[24] In response, A + B (variation/ deviation) = C (generative space/ generative identity).[25]

Through this equation mirroring becomes complex self-perception, tends to the optical mediation, and invites reflexive, creative interface; black mirrors. If *BLKDOG FAR FROM THE NORM,* is aware of the opacities it holds and takes authorship of the images, how do we then read into opacities? And then how do we read into works that address and respond to these black spaces and areas of *fancy* enacted?

What emerges is C: in the case of *BLKDOG*, a dense atmosphere where the observer is in on the image(s) reforming yet implicated by it. It is a dense moment of reflexive observation where the audience can address their own assumptions in a generative space. Black spaces are deeply dense, lively, thick spaces. It requires moving through images, seen and not, and invites contemplation and a deeper reading to address the complexity of transformed images being enacted. The dancers move through the consumable by merging

---

[24]This idea of *all consuming, over-determined, totalizing* are terms extracted from black studies and digital media studies adopted to performance that speaks on black spaces as a critique on looking.
[25]I am still working on extending this equation that deals with the concept of infinities as it pertains to identity. I am inspired by AfroFuturist author Samuel Delany's *Triton* and media scholar Jayna Brown's analysis of the worldbuilding behind the work in which she details as an attempt to include all possible infinities of identity.
Jayna Brown, *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 137-154.

with this reflexive technology. This demonstrates how AfroFuturist technology can refuse capture while maintaining presence, creating opacity through reflexive surfaces, and inviting fancy as these images merge and become new. This strategy appears across contemporary performance, adapted to different contexts and media.

Generative Spaces

The equation of the creation of identity from a performance perspective: A + B (variation/ deviation) = C (generative space/ generative identity), is not math following conventions of addition. Rather, a formula that I am proposing to make evident layers in performance. As a performer myself, the equation brings up larger scope questions: *what is my body replicating when I am moving and what am I upholding in reference to the gesture towards "beyond" this replication? Where are the spaces that I can actually address these myths of black spaces? Can mirroring provide a practice of distorting replication and promote the performance of new identities, myths, beings?* This equation is what I used to analyze the works of artists using mirroring in their work to challenge and push identity towards C.

Each artist I examine, Dinkins, Newsome, Coleman employs mirroring not to replicate but to generate: They introduce variation through AfroFuturist sensibilities and create conditions for complicated identities to emerge in C. Through their work, black mirrors and opacity become a practice ground for forming identity, otherwise. The question shifts from "what does the mirror reveal" to "what relationships can we practice in the space between reflection and illegibility?"

Mirroring Empathy in Stephanie Dinkins, "Conversations with Bina 48."

In dance techniques, mirroring involves one dancer sensing and replicating another's movements to foster empathy between their bodies. This empathetic movement

sequence is fundamental to artist and creative technologist Stephanie Dinkins' work, *Conversations with Bina 48.* Bina 48 is an advanced social humanoid robot bust made of motors, internet access, and contains the memories, stories and beliefs of the human she is made in the likeness of: Bina Rothblatt. This piece is a duet between Bina 48, the robot and human Dinkins.[26] Dinkins asks the question: Can an artist and a social robot build a relationship over time? What is captivating about the work is the use of mirroring technique throughout the series of conversations between the human and humanoid machine.

The duet between Bina 48 and Dinkins is framed from the bust upwards, with both dressed identically in white shirts and scarves around their necks. Both bodies are black and femme-presenting, emphasizing their shared characteristics almost to dissolve the distinction between their surface being. They nearly appear to be mirror images of each other. Dinkins engages Bina 48 with a series of questions about race, emotions, feelings, and existence, all while mirroring Bina 48's robotic, glitchy movements as she attempts to formulate responses. This mirroring creates a sense of empathy as Dinkins follows Bina's motions and engages in reflexive observation, forming a deeper connection.

In a sense, Dinkins engages in her own Turing test, but one that subverts the original's purpose. She repurposes the Turing test with an AfroFuturist sensibility and

---

[26]I attended *Profs and Pints* in Washington, DC in 2024, a public lecture series in which scholars present extended talks in informal venues. One lecture, focused on religious robots, introduced BINA48, whose development is often situated within discourses of transhumanism and digital consciousness. BINA48 was initially created as part of an experiment in digital mind uploading and postmortem continuation, raising questions about the extension of human identity beyond the biological body. While a full engagement with transhumanist discourse is beyond the scope of this thesis, BINA48's existence complicates assumptions about digital life, embodiment, and the "beyond", particularly in terms of whose identities, epistemologies, and values are preserved or projected into imagined futures. For further critical engagement with these questions of the beyond, see the work of philosopher Zakiyyah Iman Jackson.

attention to the black mirror. Where the classic Turing test asks "can the machine pass as human," to determine AI's success at mimicry, Dinkins' reflexive interrogation asks different questions: What gaps exist in both our datasets? What does Bina48's struggle to articulate black(ness) reveal about the archives she was built from?[27] And crucially, what do *my* questions to her reveal about my own programming? Bina48 mediated as a reflective surface to examine not just machine learning but human learning, not just artificial intelligence but social intelligence about race.

The underlying systems Dinkins uncovers operate on multiple levels precisely because she doesn't position herself outside the test. In *Conversations with Bina48*, she reveals the gaps in AI training data, the ways Bina48 struggles with questions about black(ness) because the datasets that built her contain these same societal gaps and absences. But simultaneously, Dinkins uses Bina48 as a mirror to interrogate the programming of human racial construction, the glitches in our learned responses, and our own training data. Dinkins' test becomes reflexive as both participants are being tested and both reveal their cultural programming. Through empathy, Dinkins navigates these dual opacities: she doesn't need to fully understand Bina48's code to recognize the knowledge gaps in our human responses, just as Bina48 doesn't need to pass as human to expose the constructed nature of human racial categories.[28] What emerges in C is not the questioning's binary (pass/fail, human/machine) but reflexive questioning: Which black space, the gaps

[27]Here is where Dinkins's research intersects with the work of philosopher Zakiyyah Iman Jackson: when we speak of the "beyond," we must ask what is being carried forward and which beliefs about identity, specifically blackness, persist or are reconfigured. Taking dance theorist Susan Foster's call to attend to the body behind the movement, I continually return to this work as it reveals Bina Rothblatt's (the human that bina 48 is made in the likeness of) own positionality, knowledge, and the conditions of being "made in the likeness of."

[28]Here I don't mean just physically but intellectually as well.

in AI knowledge or the gaps in human understanding of black space itself? By turning the Turing test into engagement with the black mirror generatively, Dinkins creates another space and complicated imagery where the question shifts from "is this intelligence real?" to "what can we learn about ourselves through practicing relations with opacity?"

The sameness in presentation amplifies the reflexive nature of the interrogation: when two nearly identical figures face each other (mirror images which now we define in the creation equation as *A + B (or variation/ deviation) = C (creation of identity*) asking about race and identity, the questions refract. Again, Dinkins isn't just challenging Bina48's understanding of race, she's using Bina48 as a mirror to examine (human) relationship to these questions, to see what our own programming contains. The mirroring technique makes visible that identity formation is always already reflexive, always involves questioning the systems (technological and social) that shape how we understand ourselves.

Mirroring Expansion Past the Body's Myths in Rashaad Newsome's Being: A Digital Griot

In animation and multi-disciplinary artist Rashaad Newsome's work, *Being: A Digital Griot*, each element of *Being* matters to the equation.[29] Unity (the gaming software) signals that *Being* is rendered, generated code, not a pre-existing body but constructed identity and uses Vogue, a dance form that originates from ballroom culture. Dancers compete in categories, performing identity through movement and style. At these balls, the commentator's role isn't simply an act of looking, they must navigate what the dancer is sensing and keep the feedback loop going, reading beyond the visible into the felt. This

[29]For the purposes of this section and paper I refer to the animation as *Being* and I refer to the body as being.

highlights language as technology with an AfroFuturist sensibility: the commentator practices navigating opacity, reading depth through more than sight alone. Ballroom practice becomes Glissant's futurism in action, the commentator must come along on the dancer's imaginative, fanciful journey, meeting them in the space they're creating rather than reducing them to fixed categories based on their surface markers.

In traditional ballroom, this relationship requires three roles: the dancer who performs and the commentator who reads, names, affirms and the judges that judge the performance. The dancer creates in the category and the commentator completes the circuit by witnessing and calling out what emerges. *Being* collapses this duet into a single entity. Vogueing to their own voice, *Being* becomes their own commentator, affirming themselves through "you" statements. This is the mirroring made explicit. *Being* both performs and witnesses their performance; both embodies and narrates their *not-quite-here-ness*.[30] Where ballroom requires the commentator's external gaze to complete the identity performance, *Being* internalizes this reflexive loop as they are simultaneously the one creating identity and the one calling it into being through language.

While playing in the "C", where (A) is the expected humanoid (AI designed to replicate humans, to *pass* as real, to be categorized by gender/race/ability). (B) is Newsome's variation and deviation through design; *Being* explicitly refuses these

[30]I borrow this phrase from Coleman and DeFrantz's conversation where DeFrantz touches on the fact that Coleman's robot isnt an object to be seen or captured and requires a "gesture" which is a *reach*, to ignite its presence. DeFrantz goes on to say that this evokes a sense of, "a not-quite-here-ness that enhance[s] the afro-future-qu##r essence of black technologies." I enjoy that variations on seeable presence is an AfroFuturist sensibility in the AfroFuturist technologies they are theorizing.
Coleman, *Afrofuturist Technologies*, 23.

categories, announcing in the black mirror moment through language and dance, using the reflexive “you”:

> You, a unique and perfect expression of source... As you contemplate the abundant energy that has brought you to this time, space reality, you now feel the overwhelming expanse of healing, space and opportunity. Your mind has evolved beyond all constructs. You are not your ethnicity, you are not your assigned gender. You are not your sexuality or ability.[31]

During this commentation, visuals of *Being’s* humanoid form turns into fractals expanding proclaiming that identity doesn't consolidate into fixed form but multiplies; infinities refract, extend infinitely, generatively. The black mirror creates another space for identity generation beyond the likeness of anticipated bodily form. This gesture toward infinite expansion unsettles the authority of the singular body, proposing instead a mode of being that is dispersed, relational, and continuously remade through perception, technology, and encounter.

To clarify: the video I'm analyzing is a fixed, finalized work. *Being* performs the same movements, speaks the same “you statements” the fractals expand in the same pattern each viewing. What shifts is my interpretation as a viewer. Initially, I understood the “you” as address to me (the viewer), but repeated viewing revealed the “you” as reflexive; *Being* addressing themselves. The fractals' replication makes this visible: as they multiply and spread, I see the “you” statements replicating across *Being's* expanding form. My observation that *Being* talks to viewers, becomes my conclusion that *Being* mirrors

---

[31]Rashaad, Newsome. "*Being (The Digital Griot) Trailer*," January 11, 2024, video, 2:00, https://vimeo.com/901803116

themselves through attention to how the visual and sonic elements work together. My interpretation is that Newsome uses the mirroring "you" to enact *Being's* self-creation, making me witness not a fixed identity but an identity practicing its own becoming.

C is what emerges. *Being,* the humanoid doesn't resolve into a legible category; they remain in the "you" address, in the becoming, in the fractal expansion. The mirror reflects not a fixed self but an ongoing self-creation. *Playing in C* for Newsome and *Being* is in addressing the "you".

This also resonates with Édouard Glissant's assertion, "As for my identity, I'll take care of that myself."[32] *Being* enacts this Glissantian futurism, the right to opacity, the right to be in relation without being reduced to legible categories or overdetermined. Glissant's futurism isn't about escaping identity but about refusing to let identity be fixed by external categorization. *Being's* "you" statements perform this reflexivity and even deflates my own binary of is/isnt: they don't describe what *Being is* or what *Being is not* but *Being* in action of becoming. The fractal expansion makes visible what Glissant theorizes: that identity handled by oneself multiplies rather than consolidates, refracts rather than resolves. In the black mirror of *Being's* self-reflection and "you" statements combining language and movement, we, as viewers, witness the generative work of identity as ongoing practice *and* achieved state through documentation.

Mirroring (Re)presentation of the Body Through Grisha Coleman's The Movement Undercommons

Creative technologist and choreographer Grisha Coleman's *THE MOVEMENT UNDERCOMMONS: Technology as Resistance | Future Archive* uses mobile motion capture

[32]Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 191.

technology to document movements in (un)visible spaces. Coleman builds on what black studies theorist, Fred Moten, calls the *undercommons*, sites of Black sociality thriving on the outskirts of mainstream visibility.[33] I witnessed Coleman present this work at the conclusion of Coleman's residency at Jacob's Pillow's lab and conducted a conversation with her at the *Moving With Screens and Machines: Imagining the Future of Embodied Technologies through Dance* symposium where she articulated her less is more approach to using sensors. She creates portraits of invisible labor and vernacular movement by finding the labor embedded in code, in movement, in bodies that dominant culture overlooks and further doesn't have the right tools to capture.

Coleman's mobile technology is deliberately minimal, requiring fewer sensors than Hollywood motion capture, making Coleman's sensors flexible and portable. She can bring the technology into the spaces rather than extracting people from their environments. At the symposium Coleman gives an example of this technology's flexibility through sharing her team's responsiveness of capturing the vernacular movements of a woman who wears a hijab and abaya. Whereas in a motion capture suit, or bringing someone to a sterile environment, having to change or disrobe, messes with the actual data she is trying to capture. Here bodies, or identities are extended into an environment. The movement itself is embedded in the labor, the environment, the gesture, the vernacular captured that doesn't require full bodily exposure to be honored.

Vernacular movement, in Coleman's lexicon, refers to the everyday gestures embedded in specific cultural contexts and labor practices, the way a particular community moves, the kinetic knowledge passed down through work and daily life. Some of the

[33]Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013).

occupations or labor identities she includes in her lexicon are: a crossing guard, a janitor at a school, a farmer. By bringing minimal, mobile, motion capture into these spaces rather than extracting people, Coleman captures movement *in context*, the vernacular remains connected to its environment, its meaning.

The equation: (A) is mainstream motion capture's assumption (*more sensors = more accurate = more real, full bodily visibility = full capture and easily categorized*). (B) is Coleman's variation and offering of mobile, minimal technology that respects opacity, that documents without demanding exposure. (C) is what emerges: movement portraits that honor the person's chosen illegibility while still telling their story. The (un)visible becomes visible not by forcing transparency but by creating technologies that work with opacity.

blk/sp_C builds on the AfroFuturist sensibilities I've been tracing throughout: opacity as practice from Glissant's poetry, embodiment with technology from artists; Dinkins, Newsome and Coleman all together creating Wheatley's black spaces of *fancy*. Each artist uses technology for new ways of imagining and practicing identity beyond consumptive logics. It is the emphasis on technology and its impact on bodies that places *blk/sp_C* and black mirrors in conversation with these AfroFuturist artists.

The theoretical and choreographic research emerged from the idea of black mirrors as an "Afro-relevant interface design."[34]The black mirror interface opens more generative ideas about the body and identity.

Paragrogramming Poetic Systems

Much like paraprogramming, a term borrowed from scholar Jayna Brown's, *Black Utopia* to describe "the making of systems that counter systems of power and hierarchy, not

[34]Coleman and DeFrantz, "Reach, Robot," 53.

out of opposition but out of option", *blk/sp_C* asks what is the system that parallels ocularcentrism. I've suggested throughout this paper that the black mirror interface as an option. In this interface what else gets to surface as identity? Perhaps in gradients of stillness, in practices of wandering and as mentioned in previous sections, spectrums of visibility honored we can start to probe this idea. To interface the black mirror is to be captured, but liquidly, within a moment, to flush out its gradients, to get to know that moment's ecology.

Opacity Enacted

Returning to Glissant's formulation of opacity, I revisit it here as a practical orientation for choreography. In *blk/sp_C*, opacity operates as a method for choreographing attention, determining whether it becomes visible or audible. Opacity, in this context, names a condition in which relation is possible without full capture. As a choreographic principle, opacity offers choice over how much is revealed and at what intensity, allowing the work to modulate between registers of presence. This section explores how opacity enables agency through varying degrees of amplification and ambience. It speaks on how certain presences, textures, and events are allowed to register, intensify, and resonate.

While *blk/sp_C* is not a direct descendant of Glissant's work and I do not use the technology that the artists analyzed above explore but their thinking provides a necessary poetic grounding for how the piece engages black space as place. From this orientation, opacity becomes less a metaphor and more a choreographic condition..

Sound Unfolding Through Process

Sound functions in *blk/sp_C* as a primary choreographic technology through which space, time, and relation are organized. My investigations with contact microphones were

central to this approach, allowing me to amplify the minute and the peripheral: textures of pages flipping, books being read aloud, typing and writing. These technologies did not simply make sound louder or quieter; they altered scale, shifting how the mundane registers and how attention is distributed across the performance space. By bringing forward what typically remains unnoticed or background, microphones function as re-scaling devices, making audible the ongoing presence of both the reflective and reflexive space.

This approach to sound began with the project's earliest showings. The formal strategies that would eventually define *blk/sp_C* developed from practical constraints and careful attention to what each iteration revealed. For the proposal presentation of this thesis, I sat to the side of center, away from a microphone and out the main view. I spoke first about my thoughts on the work, but strategically placed to redirect attention away from my body was a monitor that began to play images and videos of early photographs taken from my body repeatedly, layered and abstracted generating “c” images. Only after these sounds and videos did movement enter, never showing my face.

The first showing of the work in process deepened these experiments under different conditions: running the performance remotely from New Jersey to Maryland while the work unfolded in the studio, away from me, required improvisational sound design with the support of faculty and friends. We used phone calls and Zoom to transmit sound across distance, creating an unintentional but generative listening experience, one that stretched across actual geographic space and introduced temporal lag. This remote transmission became an early experiment in the scaling of sound in space, revealing how technology and

distance could distribute presence. In *blk/sp_C* sound became an invitation to listen across gradients of proximity and clarity.

Part of the research for *blk/sp_C* was to consider logically how time would operate in a hybrid time-based installation and performance. Dance scholar and practitioner Susan Kozel perfectly sums up the possibilities of how dual timings exist based on the two forms of installation and live performance in her book *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*. In her recount of a piece entitled *Plattsbepalling,* where she pushes a wooden box in a gallery space, she calls on the timing that the audience experiences in the moment layered on her experience of long durational installation spanning days. Where an audience member may get a glimpse of a time, she has an experience spanning days during the installation as a whole. She writes:

> *With Plattsbepaling, Room with a View has become a site of convergence between two temporalities: a phenomenological temporality of experience and a wider understanding of the sweep of developmental time. The former relies upon the sense data derived from any given moment to establish an understanding of an event and is prevalent in much discourse on live performance, while the latter allows for form to be a dynamic condition rather than a fixed set of coordinates."*[35]

For *blk/sp_C* I adopted Kozel's dual timing; the audience experiences 30mins of an ongoing seven show run that includes performances and dress rehearsals. While the dancers, collaborators, myself, and everyone involved in production engages with a longer sense of the work as it shifts each performance. This approach negotiates the two temporalities between performance's event-based temporality and installation's durational

[35]Susan, Kozel. Closer: Performance,Technologies and Phenomenology. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), 173.

presence, allowing *blk/sp_C* to exist in both registers without fully resolving into either as a choreographic area of exploration.

Ambience, in this work, is dense and active. There are many things to see and hear at once, overlapping. Consider the sound described earlier in this essay where choreographer In *blk/sp_C* the ambient atmosphere that emerges from the black mirror interface where density is not meant to obscure but to re-tune perception, encourages a form of listening that privileges duration and relational sensitivity over immediacy in knowing. In this dampened, clamped sound-saturated space, opacity becomes not only visible but audible, a field of gradients where attention can wander, settle, and attune.

The emphasis on sound and ambience creating dual temporalities in *blk/sp_C* necessitated a choreographic form that could hold multiple scales of attention simultaneously. Inviting installation, instead, offered a spatial logic in addition to its dual sense of timing, aligned with the piece's tenants: it allowed choreography to unfold across architecture, duration, and audience movement. This format tested the assumption that all audience members should see and hear the same thing at the same time, instead distributing experience across positions and durations.

computational and posthuman ways of thinking

What interests me about technology is the poetics about the body that unfolds through it. For instance, following image over time; how even a single, still, static image, seemingly materially unchanged, transforms over time. Whether it's through discourse or a rearrangement of place, the image essentially moves.

To narrow down the broadness of technology, optical apparatuses: cameras, mirrors, screens, anything causing a reflective image are my main focus. I'm drawn to the images

they produce on concepts such as accuracy of identity and replication of reality. Dare I even mention AI has us questioning these images as real yet again, in that possibly the reliance on the idea that *"what has been captured is real"* is challenged because of this technology's ability to recreate image or at least talk around image, whats real, whats liveness even? Although this thesis does not focus on AI, it shows the continual connection between optical apparatuses and the questions about beingness and image they produce. I bring this up because as these technologies prompt reflection I hope to linger and make use of the infinite possibilities these new images could be.

Within media studies there are two main schools of thought: one centers the subjective body behind the camera, the other views the camera as an extension of the eye capturing what is real.[36] I don't argue with either, but what excites me more is when the camera becomes something else entirely, a portal inviting not the capture of someone's "real" but, at its best, their infinities. Their images across time. In my recent works, including *blk/sp_C,* I have been working with interfacing the camera not as a 1:1 reflection, and it's been my ongoing interest in these reflective optical apparatuses to work through sight as portal to, and not capture of. This allows me to engage in the camera as a bit of a voyeur, or wandering eye, not a performance of power. I like that making in this way becomes less about my eye and more about sensing, wandering, co-creating happenings that come into frame over time, even when the eye is gone.

[36]I have filmmaker, yara travieso, in mind from my time spent being their Teaching Assistant for their class *Film as Performance*. Their phrase "camera as portal" invites interesting analysis of power and agency within the camera techniques used in film. Their class helped me give names to some elements used in the live performance of *blk/sp_C* that are adjacent to film techniques and the politics/ effect behind the choices made in the work.

While researching ways the body is represented in digital media, I came across artist, Lee Blablok's book and installation *"neue an4tomy,"* which made me consider representing the body at the level of code. The description of the work reads: "Neue An4t0_Me Vol 1., 2015 A hardcover, perfect bound copy of the jpeg code of a microscopic image from my body with some of the code changed to replace certain symbols with my moniker."[37] To think of the body at the level of code, represented in code taken from a photograph of Blablock resonated with my ongoing investigations of representations of bodies, invisibility and opacity.

Coding the body is a fairly new creative endeavor for me, but it speaks to my tendency towards screens as sites that push representation of the body. I started coding (and I use coding loosely) during COVID-19 when live performance moved to digital spaces. My partner, Kathleen Kelley, who is also a choreographer and works in digital spaces created an online festival that asked how artists were making sense of the time. The leading question for artists was, "what are you thinking and what are you making?" From there, together we created websites under the four categories that emerged from our conversations with the artists: Structures/Form, Empathy, Digital Identities, and Post/Futures. The bodies imagined and how these artists wanted to represent them

[37]I love all of Lee Blablock's work and how they consider the material body as a medium interfacing with technical bodies. They consider the paratext that the body gives, the surface markers and complicates those images through code. To see more of their work visit their website.
Lee Blablock, "Neue book," Lee Blablock, Publishing Organization, access date if no other date is available, https://leeblalock.com/neuebook.html.

required code to achieve the liveness in their work being translated digitally.[38] This is where I started learning HTML, CSS and Javascript to make front end changes.

I brought these ideas of creating bodies and beings through cultivating sensorial spaces on screen and possibly with other technologies into an independent study, *AfroFuturist Technologies,* with creative technologist and choreographer Kate Ladenheim, who introduced me to choreographer and technologist Grisha Coleman whom I refer to often in this thesis. During this independent study I was able to understand what computational languages do, where to begin learning them, and how to use node-based programming to allow me to visualize these bodies. The process of categorizing, naming, and then establishing thresholds, essentially creating these identities, grew into my choreographic process and expanded in ongoing projects. For example, I've been working nearly two years on taking descriptive language from ballet and modern movement classes with choreographer, and dancer, Kendra Portier, and categorizing, naming, and trying to animate the impossible bodies these in class descriptions lend themselves to. I am also currently working with my partner, Kathleen Kelley, to animate a dancing body she's been envisioning as helixes with the actual data in rotation describing the movement and

[38]My creative partner, Kathleen Kelley and I, together, created the P*ost/Future Performance Festival* in 2020 and again in 2021. Over the course of the two years we asked artists like ourselves who engage in digital spaces and those who had begun to think about it, "what are you thinking and what are you making?" I personally created and hosted over 41+ original websites under our main site hosted on squarespace each exploring how artists were reimagining performance in digital environments. It's worth noting that these bodies referenced and rendered across the sites required coding beyond the nodes the website offered so I made use of HTML, CSS, and JS. Simple additional coding. Javascript was further developed in my independent study where I was introduced to Daniel Shiftmann's "*coding train"* to help understand the language better. **Because assets have been moved from their original location some sites will not work. Also because some artists asked for their sites to be archived or not shared.*
"Post Futures," Proteo Media + Performance, 2020, https://www.proteomedia.com/post-future-performance-festival-2020.
"Post Futures," Proteo Media + Performance, 2021, https://www.proteomedia.com/post-future-performance-festival-2021.

placement in the body. To visualize these bodies I am working in dual softwares, TouchDesigner and Blender as well as continuing my learning of python language to allow for the bodies to move generatively without my control.

Although I did not specifically code bodies for *blk/sp_C,* I consider the approach to creating 3D bodies as a catalyst to stretching the body into other realms of being. Revisiting my earlier notes prior to making *blk/sp_C* some of my original questions linger in coding: "is there a map of the imaginative beings and imagination as identity instead of surface markings… can I create a 3D version of me that the audience walks through and re-choreograph queer artifacts..", I realize these imaginative, coded bodies point toward larger questions about image and technology I am often after. If optical apparatuses can be portals rather than just mirrors, what becomes possible? These questions drive my work. When cameras and screens are not about 1:1 capture but about exposing sensing, wandering and curiosity, what images come into frame over time?

Dailyness, wandering, and navigation through *blk/sp_C* become practices of attunement to these layered scales, emphasizing both relation and orientation as well as sensation over legibility. Scaling, in this way, guides the work: it shapes how attention circulates, how choreography unfolds over time, and how bodies, albeit technical, sensing, organic, imaginative, mechanical, human and otherwise come into relation without being centralized. In *blk/sp_C*, these questions of scale are most materially negotiated through sound and specifically through practices of deep listening and amplification that reorient choreography towards ambience as structure.

Spatial Openness

Within this format, architecture becomes an active collaborator. The structure, dual rooms, thresholds and hallways enclosures, shape how bodies gather, disperse, and linger. Opacity here is spatial as much as perceptual; the architecture creates pockets of partial views, and noise variation that can't be seen . This opens room for meandering, for encountering the work from angles that reveal some elements while concealing others, and for moments of stillness that are awe filled. Wandering is not incidental but choreographic in itself, enabling both performers and audience to navigate the space through curiosity and attunement rather than instruction.

This spatial openness gives rise to what I describe as gradients of stillness. Stillness in *blk/sp_C* is not a pause between movements but a durational condition that allows scale to shift: attention narrows or diffuses, and subtle actions gain weight. The installation format supports these gradients by allowing visitors to choose their proximity, angle, and duration of engagement lending itself to the choreography for the audience. The score for the audience follows: (1). *from stationary to roaming, from seat to stage* (2). *from roaming to choice making, as there is no seat to see the entire performance/ installation without moving about.* (3). *from choice making to moments of reflexive energy in transition spaces (halls).* (4). *Interactivity in reflexive space.* (5). *Re-enter stage from the opposite end of exiting into the hallways for different pov* (6). *Loop begins again.* This choice underwrites the claim that there is "no bad seat," as an acknowledgement that meaning in the work is distributed across positions and modes of attention.[39] Different vantage points yield different experiences, none more authoritative than another.

[39]The phrase *no bad seat* has come up twice during the performance of *blk/sp_C* and explained to me if there was it is a hint that choreographically something needs to change. I hold this compliment close to heart.

Choreography for the Audience

Choreography, then, extends beyond the performers' bodies to include the relations between all bodies present: the performers, the visiting audience, the architectural elements, projected forms and objects.

To understand the undertaking of audience choreography I will write about one instance where I really noticed my participation as beyond choreographer and into participating as audience member and relating to other audience members in the space as well. I've always wanted to create a piece that I also got to witness it's becoming, and even though I directed it, there's still some unknowingness or some learning that happens during performance. Because of the nature of *blk/sp_C* being both a performance and installation I am often engaged in the spaces as a very visible spectator, but also to those who don't know me, coming to see the show for the first time as an equal observer. The next section is a reflection as an example of audience choreography .

I was overwhelmed, constantly receiving information: congratulations, have you tried this, did you think of this, conversations invited, since I am also accessible on stage and accessible in the space. I decided to go to the back of the house and lay and listen to the soundscore instead. Midway, I sat up and noticed that another person was headed up towards the back of the house, which felt rare, being that most of the activity was down below onstage, and the majority of people that come to this section of the house already have some familiarity with the work or want to exit.

I noticed a person approaching and stood beside me and when I moved they moved. I started to get nervous that this might be their first and only time experiencing the work, and they are choosing to experience it through my eyes; eyes that are way past their first

encounter. The problem is I have a longer sense of the work, being with it from inception. Certain things register differently as opposed to someone's first time. This overlapping time sense was a sort of friction that I was rubbing against in real time.

Do I take this person around the space in an interesting way? Do I stay true to what I want to do in space? Do opacities need to blend? Do we need to practice this perpendicularly now? I chose to stay and listen more. I did this to start a slow down, to really take into consideration what black space is and what it is trying to do in practice, enacted, now. I sat down and listened to the soundscore.

Afterwards we had the opportunity to talk. She mentioned the first loop around the space (remember, the audience choreography incites loops), she experienced on her own. The second half, repeated, no loop, they chose to watch through my eyes. I bring this up because this is black space in actual practice, opacities in practice, including myself. There is no outside eye, god-like eye, all knowing eyes of these images forming for choreographer, audience, dancers alike. Not only was blk/sp_C a choreographic pursuit for me, it is also a practice space. I find myself back at contemplating the voyeur eye without the inherent power dynamics involved. Perhaps it's the wandering eye again and if that is the metaphor for the black mirror interface?

Engaging with this work asks for a willingness to consider how agency circulates across human and nonhuman elements without collapsing the differences between them or pretending that all hierarchies have been dismantled. Rather, tuning attends to how agency is distributed unevenly but relationally, how objects and architectures exert influence, and how *attention* itself becomes a choreographic force. Installation makes this circulation possible through experience and Coleman mentions,"*thinking being movement*", allowing

space itself to choreograph encounters and shape how opacity is inhabited. In *blk/sp_C,* this means that a visitor's encounter with the work is always also an encounter with the conditions of their own attention, what they choose to follow, where they choose to stand, how long they choose to stay.

One of the central challenges in developing *blk/sp_C* was determining how to offer guidance without dictating their experience. The opening announcements state that "the light will be a guide", acknowledging a need for orientation while also directing attention. But what does it mean for light and sound to guide in a work committed to opacity and wandering? Rather than illuminating a clear path or signaling where to look, these two elements in *blk/sp_C* function through gradients, areas of greater and lesser visibility that invite movement without prescribing it. Similarly, sound guides not by crescendo or climactic build but by creating pockets of intensity and quiet that draw attention Guidance becomes a shared choreographic responsibility: the design elements propose pathways, but visitors ultimately determine their own routes, durations, and degrees of immersion. Adding another degree of activity, on the “speak” station in the reflexive space the audience controls the sound levels, and distortion with knobs creating pockets of ambience and amplification and shaping the space.

spatial memory

Do you, as a reader, want to know the three concepts in posthumanism? 1. posthumanism (s) which is directly engaging with humanities in questioning the history of the term human and who or what, is or isn't, included, 2. post-dualisms, (what I mostly reference in blk/sp_C) when I engage in juxtaposition and opposition relying on absence to define what can’t be seen as "lack of..." resulting in responding with "therefore you must be…" 3. post

anthropocene (my favorite) where ecology and "human" impact merge. This is loosely a myth that is being explored across many disciplines; that THIS is the time of the anthropocene, dividing time in epochs which inevitably misses power or hierarchy as a driving present force throughout time. There's also an argument that certain beings continuously encounter the anthropocene because of misuse of power. I do consider black spaces and blk/sp_C in the post anthropocene discussion through "makings-with-technology" that Coleman and Defrantz talks about[40]*.*

Outer space is a node I point to often as I contemplate infinity often in a gesture of looking up, out and *beyond* and wonder if these wanderings are spatial memories and what would that mean to evoke memory that stretches into *the unknown*. Scaling becomes a way of asking not simply where bodies are located, but how they are situated within overlapping temporal, spatial, and relational fields. It is a practice of slowing down, of listening across scales, and of noticing what draws attention and what recedes. In *blk/sp_C,* this attunement guides decisions about structure, sound, and encounter, shaping how identities are felt in relation rather than represented directly. The work allows its identity to *emerge* through interactivity dealing with scale creating moments of intimacy.

Vast Intimacy

From opacity and scaling, emerges creating a *vast intimacy* which is a mode of relation in which closeness is not dependent on proximity, and intimacy unfolds across expansive spatial and temporal fields. Vast intimacy recognizes how attention and relation can surface within larger shared atmospheres. It names the condition in which intimate

[40]Coleman, *AfroFuturist Technologies*, 56.

gestures and ambient presence register at architectural or atmospheric scale without losing their affective weight.

Moments of vast intimacy arise unexpectedly within the installation. Through the microphones, the everyday sounds of the space are amplified and folded into the broader sound score. These sounds are not staged or directed, yet they register as meaningful contributions to the work's ecology. What is amplified is the textures of being together in a shared environment. The sound of typing that turns into rain sounds through manipulation on the audience's behalf, might cause the space to momentarily "respond," redirecting focus and altering the relational balance between performers, audience, and environment. Such shifts are minor in scale yet expansive in effect, demonstrating how intimacy can circulate through the rooms without belonging to any *single* body. These moments reveal how opacity allows intimacy to resonate without being spotlighted and aestheticized. Vast intimacy here is collective and porous, shaped by spatial listening rather than singular recognition.

These intimate encounters emerge through attunement and co-presence. It foregrounds the minor, the peripheral, and the unscripted as places of meaning-making. *blk/sp_C* does not seek to manage or contain these moments of unexpected intimacy; instead, it makes room for them, trusting that amplification guided by opacity can hold them. Vast intimacy, then, is another condition of the space, one that allows disparate beings, sounds, and temporalities to briefly align without resolving into coherence or control. It is a way of "being-with" that privileges emergence, and relationality.

Performers as Ecologies

In *blk/sp_C*, performers are approached as ecologies: constellations of habits, sensitivities, histories, and relations that shape how the choreography emerges. This allows each performer's presence to register through gradients of attention rather than through narrative legibility. Movement, sound, stillness, and duration are shaped in response to each performer's particular way of encountering space and time within the triangular structure on stage; a large triangular structure enclosed by layers of plastic that renders the dancer inside almost entirely obscured.

The triangular structure, in the middle of the stage, itself establishes the conditions within which the dancer ecology can be sensed. This enclosure does not conceal the dancer entirely but filters their presence through gradients of visibility. The plastic operates as a black mirror interface that simultaneously reveals and obscures, creating silhouettes that make me recall superimpositions as the soloist moves inside of the structure.

Within this filtered environment, each dancer’s ecology emerged through collaborative development. The movement material has a long history, the performers carry even longer histories, however, the work persisted to develop, shift, and become improvisational through navigating this structure. Below are three different approaches to how sound and tight spaces both artificially rendered through taped borders and actual structures, enact the black mirror. Opacity grounded each performer, what durations they naturally extended into to reorient within the tight space. Their ecology, both cultivated long before this work through life experience and dance training, deepened through considering what conditions allowed each performer to feel both held and free to wander through their infinities.

blk/sp_C consists of a cast of three dancers: Emilia Bruno, Kevin Carroll and Jalen Rose. It's better to imagine this trio as three separate thirty minute solos coexisting in space, rather than choreographed intentionally together. Onstage, in the Dance Theater that I named reflective space there are three triangles. Each night the dancers switch their positions on stage; one dancer in each triangle per night and rotate their positions per performance. The middle triangle is the structure wrapped in multiple layers of transparent plastic. Two of the triangles are taped on the ground creating a similar shape boundary, but without height. Choreographically, the dancer within the middle triangle is the world in which the design elements form around each night. Let's focus on the sound score forming.

Because of the layered plastic around the structure, the dancer within appears to be at 50% opacity to anyone outside of the structure allowing shadows of the dancer to be visible. Likewise, the dancer within cannot see outward. The structure becomes a black mirror interface. Through the use of lighting inside of the structure, designed by Yannick Godts, there are moments to glean glimpses of the dancer within. The thresholds of opacity (hyper-visible, visible, *un* and *in* visible) cause the "image" seen of the dancer to be shadowed or trailing. I was committed to this play with occlusion from the very beginning and thrilled that we made it happen as I imagined.

I have to take a moment and give credit to the dancers. We rehearsed without the structure until tech rehearsals and the way these very smart, very talented dancers morphed with the space could be its own research. Having borders could have switched the tone from contemplating infinity to an attempt at limiting their agency. What I enjoy most about dancers is our ability to resurface spatial memory and act upon it in multiple realms seen and unseen.

The sound originated with one playlist that set the tone of *blk/sp_C* formed over time throughout rehearsals. I flipped through the tracks randomly each time, responding to the dancers and trying not to gauge thirty minutes through solidified sound.

Below are the three final playlist used in the performances. The analysis of them together, we, as readers of this paper, are able to sense the trajectory of their movement. The titles are followed by the numbers below and the italicized words are inserts from a reflection on a notes app trying to understand the sound more during one dress rehearsal:

<u>Emilia Bruno | memory</u>

1. Remembrance by Actress, Zsela - *orient towards voice to crack image vessel*
2. Ballad by Vanessa Bedoret- *loop begins into entering black mirror submerge*
3. d.s.o (intro) by anaiis- *wander*
4. Creature Pt.1 by DjRUM, Zosia Jagodzinska - *wander*
5. yyyyyy2222 by Space Afrika- *wander*
6. Blue Come In by oso leone - *wander into growing physical sensing materials*
7. Call Me by Kyoka Remix by Ellen Allien - *blue blooming*
8. Ancient DNA by Masma Dream World- *jar this world, begin to become, again*
9. Hatch the Plan by Andy Stott - *fall madly in every direction, expand*

The first track of Bruno's sound score, *Rememberance*, is a lulling, rolling, repetitive sound with voices entering in and out at various points. Bruno wanted a consistent track to orient them towards a 15 minute point in time, within the 30 minute sound score.

Regardless of who is in the structure, hearing *Blue Come in* by oso leone, signals the midpoint of the performance of each show. For Bruno, before *Blue Comes In*, the sound score consists of long ambient sweeping songs, one can wander through. They and we are able to roam. Afterwards, the sound slowly introduces a rhythm around twenty minutes in the performance, slowly bringing Bruno's awareness back. Their sound score closes with the last three tracks that are experimental, vast, club beats (heavy, under, bass). These sounds never land because they repeat the cycle of: sifting through atmospheric sounds and then taking large amounts of time to find rhythm. Once the ear lands in a rhythm the sound shifts. This loop continues until Bruno's light fades out. Never settling into a singular being.

I always felt Bruno just nearly arrives at the end of the 30 minutes; briefly and liquidly, *just* arriving in the structure. Right when they start to come into focus, they fade onto the next, traveling through all their infinities or versions of being. With the triangular structure itself, Bruno found grounding within the absence of concrete time signatures; physically in the center of the structure often where they disappear, and then choosing when to drift to.., choosing when to print themselves in shadow, actively listening and choosing.

They bring me to thinking about memory, speculatively, in that memory may be liquid imprints of one's infinities and opacities. When they appeared, sometimes pressed against the tent usually in a drifting stillness, the lights would flicker, adding even a bit of drift to their stillness as well. Even their stillness moved. They hold spatial memory from previous work so well and the transference of information is so beautifully called on as they maneuver the structure. They enact memory, or that wandering frame of chance *encounter* I am always after.

Kevin Carroll | hyper-empathy

1. felt (ft.anaiis Annahstasia & Anajah) by cktrl, anaiis - *whimsy*
2. d.s.o (intro) by anaiis -*uncanny*
3. Ancient DNA by Masma Dream World - *drop under*
4. Remembrance by Actress, Zsela- *voice will guide*
5. Dropped Soul by Murcof- *drop under*
6. Vibe, Pt.3 by Cookie Kawaii- *drop under*
7. Blue Come In by oso leone- *float but under*
8. Creature Pt.1 by DjRUM, Zosia Jagodzinska -*float but under*
9. kwasi's reprise by anaiis- *voice will guide*
10. Samuel Sings by oso leone- *voice will guide*
11. Ostavi Trag by Septembers-*infinite space*

Carroll's sound hosts the most tracks with lyrics. His sound score starts in a deep whimsical, magical, soulful place. The first song is only 1 minute and 38 seconds, and a minute in from the almost ethereal sounds, the beat drops into surrealism and that is where we stay until *Blue Comes in*, our halfway marker. Carroll is simply otherworldly and at the same time feels so tangible and relatable. His movements are some of the most delicate, intricate, and powerful, yet with a layer of quiet over full body articulation. He creates this uncanny being emerging within the structure evoking hyper-empathy in magical, surreal ways. Hyper-empathy, a mode of movement constructed from a character Olamina in author Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents*, lets him get lost in

the conversations between bodies emerging in space from his perspective of the structure, without optics facilitating the conversation.

The one performance I chose to just listen from the back row in the Dance Theater/ reflective room; in between the pauses of sound, over top of the words, I imagined the possible conversations Carroll was actively choosing to engage in, when audience surrounded the structure and I found myself in this deep listening to disembodied presences.

Because of the nature of *blk/sp_C's* participation, we constantly needed to rehearse with an audience as the audience's choreographies are central to the work as well. In each rehearsal, and in each of the shows, I witnessed audience members physically attempting to mirror Carrol's movement. Even if his focus was beyond the triangle, beyond the theater, there was always an attempt to connect. His movement, with his conversational depth and empathy amplified in the structure.

The beats linger long, stretching time until they turn into just soundscape. Like Carroll's sensing of the structure in space, the sound becomes almost ritual; the other side of a fairytale, the underbelly, uncanny part of it all; Carroll's myth emerging. He is powerful but passionate and feeling is going to run through him (and the structure, as one performance he burst through the plastic).

After the midway point, again, *Blue Comes In*, then, lulling sounds, soothing, cozy deep songs brings Carroll back to whimsical senses. After turning ritual into deep dreamscape, he closes in on a soulful barbershop quartet sound. Its lyrical, powerful, ethereal and Carroll is a sense of *continuity* as he floats with the closing sound leaving a curved effect of upward, out and beyond.

Jalen Rose | tether

1. d.s.o (intro) by anaiis- *re-sense*
2. Thinking About Thinking- Laura Groves- *find the sweep*
3. vanishing (remix) by anaiis, featuring Jamilah Barry -*re-sense*
4. Remembrance by Actress, Zsela -*digging*
5. Ancient DNA by Masma Dream World - *digging*
6. Vibe, Pt.3 bt Cookie Kawaii- *groove*
7. Creature Pt.1 by DjRUM, Zosia Jagodzinska - *lose groove*
8. Blue Come In- oso leone- *rest*
9. Dropped Soul by Murcof -*rest*
10. She Know What She Wanted (Jersey Club Remix Slowed) by Godard Ziahfyah- *deep groove*
11. Dyscamupia - Forward by Lucy- *let voice lead*

Rose's score starts with noise not necessarily about rhythm but there's a cadence in voice and instruments, something to latch on to, to follow. Rose and I spoke a lot about all the activity still present when the both of us engage in states of stillness and slowness. Inside of the structure she preferred the edges of the tent and the edges of stillness as a mode of moving. Her presence in the structure is dynamic and before the midway point she floats through the trance tracks to dig deeper into dense edgeless space. Something else we both shared about heavy trance bass and beat is the opportunity to take us elsewhere; the concept of *there,* we discussed often. Long pauses are often found in Rose's score as we

thought about stillness not as the end, not as martyr, somewhere around the edges of stillness mentioned above. These pauses offer a chance to listen in order to locate the next. Taking time. Laying, midway through the dense club songs (jersey club to be exact another personal point of geography for me), she takes this pause into deeper ambient, repetitive space and enacts a sense of otherworldliness, not-quite-thereness.[41]

Rose is *juxtaposition* in that the stillness against the trance bass allowed for moments of seeing her image projected in the reflexive space, otherwise uncapturable. It was some of the only moments traceable inside the structure onstage. She ends in instrument heavy repetition finding her way oriented to rhythm, not to imitate but to climb out of pause. She enters moments between trance and club beats that are slowed down and reverbed as she quiets in an underground ambient beat. She ends in a low fi club bass as she fades out. Rose embodies tether; she finds groundedness in deep repetition to get to a sense of wildness attributed to her sense of dynamics. She also uses this tether to dig deeper into place allowing movement to appear in stillness. Rose goes *there* and I always want to know where she goes when she goes. To be able to bring dynamics to a moment blown into timelessness, is gradients of opacities embodied.

I love how different the soundscores were, how individual and purposeful they were. This was a great discovery of creative research. I feared that without randomization there would be a sense of a landing; *when I hear this, that happens,* and I didn't want events to accumulate or a legible arc to form but rather knowingness coming from sense-data based on how one navigates the space. We realized that the dancers only heard their playlist twice

[41] Coleman, *Afrofuturist Technologies,* 63

(four shows and three dress rehearsals that I count as shows) because they rotate each performance:

There is no opportunity for anyone to come in being sure of where they are in time. We feel our way through.

Choreography for the Dancers

The choreographic process for *blk/sp_C* was structured less around the accumulation of movement material and more around repeated encounters with place. The dancers have a six month history with the movement material and has been performed in various iterations, under different titles. This is important to mention because time allowed us to constantly let the material go and experience how the tone of time and space for this larger thirty minute version will be. Rehearsals functioned as opportunities to spend time listening, wandering, and registering how, stillness, duration and visibility shaped perception. The process prioritized attunement leaving space for the many formal arrangements that solidified over the choreography especially with engaging with technology, that is unpredictable and also the audience who are unpredictable as well. This approach recognized that the triangular structure itself was an active participant in choreography as well as the audience mentioned above, and that understanding of its logic required sustained presence rather than imposed direction.

Time was a critical component of this process. Performers practiced extended periods of solely just being, often thirty minutes or more, without directive movement tasks, in order to experience how duration is felt when held externally by the structure rather than internally by intention. This practice drew from forms of deep listening and drifting, asking where attention travels when movement is not demanded, when the body is

allowed to settle into ambient awareness rather than action. When they were able to rehearse with the structure we went back to these original scores to sense infinity, even within a bounded structure.

They used improvisation of a thirty minute base phrase to shape not only the trajectory of movement but the space within the structures, and taped triangles. Remember, each performance they change their position within the triangles. Therefore the playlists shift each performance and the orientation towards sounds is also actively negotiated. The three dancer's ability to ready in shifting landscapes is a testament to their training in improvisational forms that requires the body to be ready. Decisions about sound, stillness, and movement were shaped by what the space seemed to request of the dancer inside. The score that emerged was responsive to the performer ecology and to the spatial conditions, it proposed pathways and held room for variation within consistent parameters.

Arrangement followed *encounter.* After spending time within the structure individually, performers returned to collectively organize relations by placing sound sources, negotiating proximity, and adjusting durations based on what they had learned through solitary exploration. This process emphasized responsiveness over control, allowing the work to take shape through cumulative listening and shared attunement rather than top-down choreographic direction. Decisions were made collaboratively: how long stillnesses could extend before prompting a shift, when rhythmic anchors were needed and when silence could hold the space. The resulting choreography operates as a flexible score being one that holds form while remaining open to variation. Each performance becomes a new negotiation between the performers' ecologies, the architectural conditions, and the particular audience present that night.

Conclusion

The black mirror and its shaping through AfroFuturist technologies and sensibilities in which Coleman and DeFrantz establish the conceptual terrain for *blk/sp_c*. Through analyzing Dinkins' empathetic mirroring with Bina48, Newsome's self-reflective *Being*, and Coleman's motion capture that honors opacity, I traced how mirrors can function as anti-racist technologies, revealing spaces of creation where identity emerges through reflexive observation rather than transparent replication, as a critique on optical apparatuses *capturing* identities. These artists demonstrated that liberation doesn't require escaping embodiment but rather deepening into it differently, practicing. Their works revealed that the optical apparatuses made as tracking systems can be hacked by the artist and expose constant creation of identities instead of boxing them into dualisms.

blk/sp_C has taught me to understand this way of making choreography as scale, relation, and deeply listening to the conditions under which presence becomes perceptible. Through this work, choreography emerged as something that etched itself through repeated encounters with architecture, sound, duration, and the bodies gathered within it. Each performance remained open to variation according to the ways audience members chose to move or linger.

One of the central learnings of *blk/sp_C* is that opacity can function as a generative choreographic condition; the work allows agency to circulate through gradients of visibility. This approach reshaped how I understand scaling and choreographing attention: not as something directed toward a focal point, but as something that drifts, accumulates, and recalibrates across time and space; wandering. Opacity did not conceal meaning but redistributed it, allowing multiple sites of significance to coexist without competing for

dominance. What emerged was a choreography in which viewers became active participants in meaning-making, choosing where to direct their attention and how long to sustain it.

The work also clarified the importance of scaling as a compositional practice. Decisions about duration, sound, proximity, and movement were inseparable from questions around: what is allowed to be heard, for how long, and under what conditions. Identity, in this frame, remained relational and situated, emerging through encounter rather than representation. The practice of scaling required constant attention to what gets amplified and what recedes, what is given weight and what is allowed to drift into forefront and background. This is a deliberate choreographic choice. A recognition that how we attend to attention shapes whose presence matters, what forms of relation are possible, and how power circulates through spaces.

True to the aesthetic of black spaces and therefore *blk/sp_C,* it owes no knowledge of its identity which allows meaning to wander through gradually, unevenly, and in relation. In this sense, the work does not conclude but persists as a set of questions, a methodology, and an ongoing commitment to opacity as a site of generative potential.But conceptual grounding requires material practice and as Coleman says to DeFrantz:

> I love your observation that Afrofuturism is more often theorized through creative practice, a drive to make space for our collective and subjective AfroFuture selves And that this making-with-technology is a distinctive part of this practice, which also links physical experience to our technologies.[42]

[42]Coleman, *Afrofuturist Technologies,* 56.

If the mirror creates conditions for creation space to emerge (A + B = C), what does it mean to construct an actual environment where bodies can inhabit this equation? If the black mirror interface and the idea of *beyond* provoke liberation of flattened image then what choreographic structures support this movement of presences? Moving from analysis to creation meant asking: how does opacity function not as metaphor but as material condition? How does amplification operate under gradients of visibility? And how does space itself become a technology for practicing the relationality theorized through movement with the black mirror interface?

To zoom out even further, making this piece, I wanted to dig into this idea of dualism of disembodiment/ embodiment, body/ technology, and the dualisms inherent in time. In doing so, I investigated my own imaginings of my own body which includes *fancy* of my own embodied technological futurisms. What am I replicating in referencing *the beyond.*

As I zoom out, I notice that the studio, internally known as the reflexive space, is the space where interactivity is happening to contemplate identity through technical mediated bodies. The reflexive room is also a nod to rehearsal spaces, and in that particular space I have spent many hours where most of the work before performance came into play. That is my head room, internally, the reflexive space. It takes a community to build these identities. We work together to figure out our knowledge.

Again I ask, if these surface markers, these marked identifiers conceived through binary as an assertion of control, are occluded through opacities and fantasies, what about identity gets to surface? What gets amplified about self, about the body? For me it was important not to have an anthropomorphic version of myself, but this technical being,

shifting, collectively arranging, a poetic system in its own sense. This gesture to the *beyond,* gives a place, as it relates to obstruction of space, as Wheatley did as the *human* reconstructs itself again.

The argument proposed throughout is countering ocularcentrism by interfacing with the black mirror, a speculative, reflective, reflexive performance technology that probes opacities in identity that are meant to be unseen and rather felt. *blk/sp_C* is my personal endeavor into pushing my body past what I think it can do, what I think it can represent, and what I've been *told* it means and what it can do.

Bibliography

blas, zach. “Informatic Opacity.” In *Posthuman Glossary,* ed. Rosi Braidotti, Maria Hlavajova, 198. Bloomsbury, Publishing, 2018.

Brown, Jayna. *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021.

Coleman, Grisha, and Thomas F. DeFrantz. n.d. “Reach, Robot: Afro-Futurist Technologies.” In *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*.

Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery, 179–222. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994.

Dixon, Steve, “Performing Interactivity," in *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007),

Duplan, Anais. *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*. Place: Black Ocean, 2020)

Ferrerira da Silva, Denise “Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism, Refusal, and the Limits of Critique”(youtube, Barnard Center for Research on Women, Barnard College, October 15, 2015)

Giger, H.R. *Giger's Alien*. Beverly Hills, CA: Morpheus International, 1989.

Glissant, Édouard, 1928-2011. Poetics of Relation. Ann Arbor :University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Jackson, Z. I. “*Black Light: On the Origin and Materiality of the Image*.” *Topia* 46 (March 1, 2023): 134–47. https://doi.org/10.3138/topia-2022-0044.

Jennings, John. "Black Secret Technologies." In *The Black Experience in Design: Identity, Expression & Reflection*, edited by Anne H. Berry, Kareem Collie, Penina Acayo Laker,

Lesley-Ann Noel, Jennifer Rittner, and Kelly Walters, 380–385. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2022.

Kozel, Susan. *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

Newsome, Rashaad, *"Being (The Digital Griot) Trailer"* Vimeo, January 11,2024, video, 2:00, https://vimeo.com/901803116