

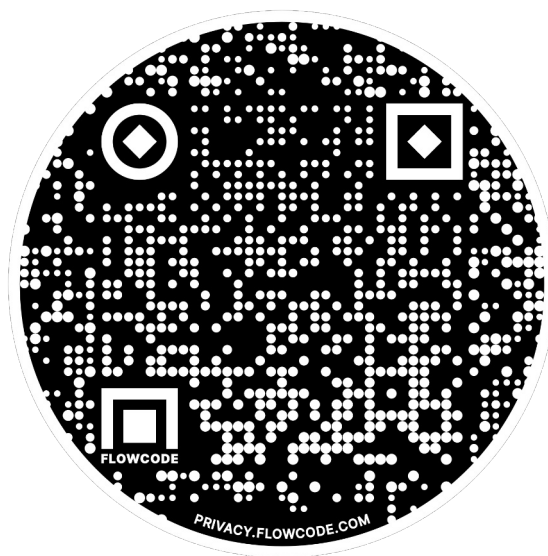


SPACE CADET

Laila J. Franklin

Space Cadet

Laila J. Franklin



Space Cadet investigates black and Asian women's slippery presence in performance through collaboratively devised solos. I am interested in the (in)visibility of lived experience and am curious about the residues of subjugation and erasure in the body. Through this process, I am working to activate a methodology of kinetic imagination that might serve in re-orienting marginalized and oppressed bodies towards new possible futures: I am seeking to activate the body as a living and reflexive archive and a futuring medium. *How might we consciously and strategically tap into our kinesthetically stored and sensation-based memories and present realities and allow them to be generative in our making? How might we support each other in a practice of re-visioning, orienting the knowledge stored within our bodies toward futures that serve ours and our communities' greatest good? How can I position embodied knowledge as a primary source? Considering the institution of academia's history of disavowal of black performance traditions, and the reality that this work was created and produced within that same container, I intervene to ask the question: how might I return to the centrality of the body and its communities' sites of knowledge, situating theory as a means to affirm and name practice?*



and psychoanalysis." When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two—that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other.

Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end. When I was a child, I

revolutionary
v.
evolutionary

3. "Beauty"'s Bits: Black Performance, Narrative, and Movement Lexicons

Black performance allows us to imagine possibilities for social movement, social particularity, social flexibility, and social change. Its evidentiary markers - "black" and "performance" - are each contingent manifestations, deployed according to particular contexts. As a social category, "black" becomes implicitly bound up with "white," "Asian," "Latino," "aboriginal," and other corporeal locations; "black" does not exist without a presumption of other identities. In this, "black" implies particular social referents as well as social movements through those referents towards boundaries supplied by other social categories. The performance of blackness, then, may refer constantly to absent, discarded, and elided performances which form an offstage background to the social category of "black." Black performance emerges as an inflection of social identity in motion, with intimations of movement toward and away from contingent social categories.

Who has the right not to explain themselves? The people who don't have to. The ones whose subjectivities have been naturalized. It enrages me. No, it confuses me. I'm all for being confused, for searching, for having to do a bit of work. But the absence of explanation is somehow ... somehow ... somehow what?

feel your legs merging downward as the ground
is merging upward, back up through them

feel ready to move at any moment, yet still feeling
grounded and connected to gravity

feel your full foot on the ground, soft and wide,
merging through the soles

feel yourself merged through the trunks of
your legs, allowing the bowl of your pelvis to
rest, maybe float lightly, on top

your pelvis is stabilizing you, allowing the energy
to flow up and down and in and through you

your sacrum is floating, like a ghost kick stand,
or an extra leg

feel the curve of your lumbar spine
the air that rests inside it
acknowledge it, caress it, but don't crush or drop it

feel the expansiveness of the back of your ribcage,
attached to your thoracic spine
your lungs live here

feel yourself widening with every inhale

feel yourself emptying out with every exhale

your belly is soft

your deep intrinsic muscles down your back, through your
pelvis, in the trunks of your legs are holding you up

feel yourself releasing the unnecessary tension

feel the rise and fall of your chest with each breath

the expansion and rise of your lungs on the inhaled
the retracing and lowering of your lungs on the exhaled

the drop of your diaphragm on the inhaled
the rise of your diaphragm on the exhaled

allow your collar bones to open on the inhaled
and close on the exhaled

feel your scapulas resting against your back
resting wings

feel your shoulders release and your arms hang
heavy in their sockets

maybe they sway in a soft breeze

let your hands be

maybe your fingertips direct energy into the
ground. maybe into themselves into the palms

feel that warmth radiate in or out

let your neck be free

your spine is stacked just so, so that your head
may balance, like a tension bridge

let your soft palate drop and feel your head
relax into position

feel your jaw release and your breath invest your lips

with your pelvis sending energy downward, allow your
head to send energy upward from the crown of the head

light a light emanating from you

allow your body to be suspended between the two energy
forces

you are shrinking, expanding, floating, and grounding.



notion of meshwork suggests another way of thinking choreography for practitioners who hope to bypass the inevitable use of power by the subject; who want to equitably connect with the other, yet risk objectification rather than collaboration. The notion of meshwork rejects the idea that choreography is the expression of some transcendental power. Meshwork may be discerned in an event which crosses multiple lines of lives. As the following discussion will suggest, it is not only the choreographer who lives a line, but multiple lines of lives weave a mesh in which the choreographer participates, bringing about events which have not been expected by anyone involved, not even by the choreographer. The choreographer no longer moulds her/his own work, but rather functions within a relational field. The choreographer is thus no longer transcendent but immanent within this world of relational becoming.

Big

v.
expansive

a ~~trusting~~ trusting
body

↓
willing to go
along for the
ride

sense
sensitivity
sensory
sensitivity

- Juliet R
et al.



finding
"you"
↓
torso, hips,
twisting, spiraling

finding
freedom
+
lightness
(control?)

REPETITION
"What is
this?"
finding the
movement



to the story of African descent, the Middle Passage becomes one of many diasporas. Diasporic Spidering allows for many different points of intersection and modes of passage to be woven together around a central core—the individual searcher/journeyer. Rather than describing a fixed moment in time, African diaspora (and black identity) in this sense becomes also a contemporary active process—an act, a performative.

Further, Diasporic Spidering assumes an individual with agency (though no one has total control over the elements that define him or her) who creates a life based on experiences. It is a performativity in flux as new information is continually incorporated. This articulation allows for the intercultural complexities of ethnic identities, validating the retentions as well as new information.

not so much a way of being, but also not descriptive

*
-YES
~

2. STOP TRYING TO UNDERSTAND MY BLACKNESS.

This is not about race. Race is shameful; critical race studies confirm this again and again. Race doesn't exist, right, but racism perseveres and continues. Yes and yes; structural white hegemonic patriarchy; institutional racism, yes and yes. Blackness is more complex than race, the thing that doesn't really exist. Blackness has to do with an approach, like this one, to discourse to gesture to art to family to expression. To life, *l'chaim*. Blackness is indeed incomprehensible, and it is entirely real and everyday. It has to do with outsidership in white contexts and nothingness in black spaces; yes, because in black spaces no one is black because we stop being black except in relation to you. Of course. But in black spaces we don't "just exist" without race, because that is not a possibility in the context of this planet or in the context of contemporary performance. There is no outside of race, as there is no outside of history. But race is not blackness. Blackness does; blackness inspires; blackness confirms and consecrates. Race inhibits; it constrains. It shuts down. Blackness allows for. For love. When you talk about race,

where are you?
who is with you?
make them into you
/y'all/
become small ..❤collapse
stay here for a while

become more expansive
→/free you/
body leading mind along
→light groove ...★where is the playing?
★who is playing with you?
where are you?







- why move? unearthing structure and need
- singing while moving
- finding breaks, choreographing directional shifts
- being in community when physically alone
 - ↳ how do I make myself heard?
 - ↳ am I seen? visible?

identity
expression

community
to
moving

learning
about
myself

Early Solo

slow gesture phase
↓ (comping / getting the space)
moving on slow, waiting

* I'm losing a lot
in the covered
face and I'm
not sure where
to place that
emotive output
in the body
↓
the piece feels
right but I
don't know
how it's reading
from the outside

* scoring
the
imaginarium
↓
long form
score for
imagery

SHARED
MATERIAL

① scoop scoop
phase

② slow gesture
phase











I want to be up there

I'm intrigued

I can feel it in my body

We're saying something but the words

CONNECTED

Actually down in

living



4. BLACK REFERENTS ARE EXCEEDINGLY COMPLEX.

Black performance shimmies and careens across perceived boundaries and containers to construct ineffable moments of connection. Hip-hop quotes Walt Whitman and Angela Davis; black competition dancers sample ballet and Hollywood African jungle dancing. The references are always dizzying and impossible to untangle. They mean to be. If you can explain it easily, it probably isn't very good. Black performance resists being "on the nose," but more important, it embraces its emergence from contradictions. Black life is entirely contradictory, and our art amplifies that mode of reality. We



Witnessing = sensory + embodied

- collective moments

↳ breathing

↳ reaching

- mimicking postures to watch closely

- feeling present with and for each other

- supporting, communal structure

- when am I being invasive

↳ "I want this to be your moment ... I don't
want to step in interrupt"

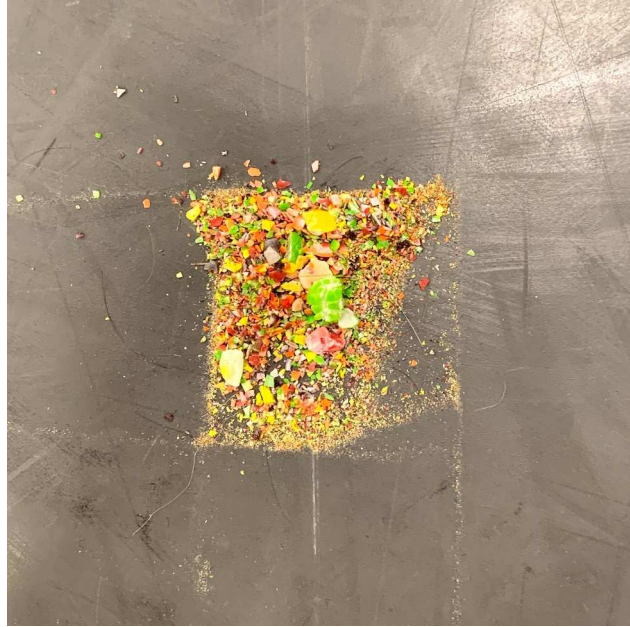
and

↳ am I encroaching on their space

- BREATHE !!! (it's ok)

- breathing checkpoints

grief is
a gift.









All this energy that I had sometimes locked up or ignored during quarantine was being released during this semester's process. At first it was mostly energy but as the process went on, I went from a raging whirlpool of emotions to a river flowing in a backyard.

I emphasized playfulness, breath, and ritual. I especially felt close to the word, breath. I think breathing is a piece of living evidence that proves that one is existing; however, we tend to take granted of breath. As a Chinese woman in this current society, I constantly need to remind myself to breathe so I don't fall into the rabbit hole of this crazy world. At the same time, I need the breath to remind me of being living. As a dancer, I need the breath to balance my body where I don't push myself to the edge where I would get consumed by the industry. As for myself, I need the breath to calm my mind every second.

I have not seen the work, and I don't think I will ever be able to see it. My role as a performer within the work places me at a beautiful disadvantage. My proximity to the material means that I know it deep in my body and from the vantage point of an active participant, but I can't step over to the opposite side of that fourth wall, where the spectator sits.

I could not forget the feeling of where three bodies exist in the same space but at different times. There was an invisible connection between three bodies and three solos. It was a moment I wish could last forever. I felt a community was created, and a ritual was held during the three solos.

How can I do that with the discussion we had the first time, how can I change things that I have done in the past, what new emotions can I explore. I still had more in-depth questions for myself even up to the opening of the show and I had more after I was finished. I would like to continue to think about space under your pelvis. I feel like that would be interesting to continue to explore.

The beauty of this work is that it continues to vibrate, even in its completion. It has legs that extend beyond just a creative practice and has extended into a life practice, encouraging curious and compassionate introspection and deep practices of listening and seeing with the sole purpose of bearing witness to another human being. It is difficult to reflect when the work has not ended but rather shifted into another form that will no doubt continue to shift and morph as time treks on. As I close this current iteration of the work, the edges have made themselves more apparent, but not in ways that I can give language to yet. They are settling into my skin and bones and patiently waiting to be attended to, hopefully in a studio and hopefully in the presence of fellow space cadets.

References

- DeFrantz, Thomas F. "African American Dance - Philosophy, Aesthetics, and 'Beauty'". *Topoi* 24, 93–102 (2005).
- DeFrantz, Thomas F. "I Am Black: (you have to be willing to not know)." *Theater* 1 May 2017; 47 (2). 9-21. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2017.
- George-Graves, Nadine. "Diasporic Spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities." *Black Performance Theory*, edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Gutierrez, Miguel. "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?" *BOMB Magazine*, November 7, 2018, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/miguel-gutierrez-1/>
- hooks, bell. "Theory As A Liberatory Practice." *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. 1994 New York: New York: Routledge.
- Muto, Daisuke. "Choreography as Meshwork: The Production of Motion and the Vernacular." DeFrantz, Thomas, and Philipa Rothfield. 2016. *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion*. London: London: Palgrave Macmillan.

