

Racialized Technics and the Black Virtual in *Random Acts of Flyness*

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ABSTRACT

This article takes up the HBO series *Random Acts of Flyness* to reconsider technicity and race in media theory. Prosthetic theories of media have tended to present an unmarked “human” user, whose capacities are *extended* through technical objects. But how is this relationship altered for racialized subjects whose attachment to the “category of the human” has been historically contested?¹ I claim that *Random Acts*’ aesthetic experimentation formalizes a racialized critique of prosthetic supplementation and “essential technicity.”² Thinking through Beth Coleman’s formulation of “race as technology,” I explore how *Random Acts* reproduces the *circulation* of visual culture across television, cinema, cellphone, and computer screens to render salient the constitutive mediation performed by the black virtual.³ My overarching argument is that the series’ emphasis on collection, curation, and intersection *within* the circulation of visual culture works to model practices of care by way of “noticing” other possibilities for black livingness in the “afterlife of slavery.”⁴

INTRODUCTION: GENRES OF A PHONE CAMERA

Random Acts of Flyness opens with the show’s host, Terrence Nance, addressing his audience through a phone resting on his handlebars. The shot is framed vertically, tilted up at Nance as he cycles through Brooklyn. “Welcome to *Random Acts of Flyness*. A show about the beauty and ugliness of contemporary American life.” The image glitches and pixelates, signaling its being a signal, a virtual stream networked via platforms like HBOGo, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Nance outlines the segments to follow: “We got a whole bunch of flyness.... We got blackface—that’s always dope. We got problem number 437 of a thousand worries that I, as a black man, shouldn’t have to worry about, we got music in the mountains with my brother, we got the sexual proclivities of the black community....” The list rolls by quickly, punctuated by Nance sucking in air to keep cycling. As the variety of segments implies, the program is collaborative. Each episode credits a team of directors, producers, and writers.⁵ Nance’s direct address to the camera at the top of the series positions him as the facilitator of “flyness”; where flyness amounts to the seizure of the “massively potentializing” force of media in order to produce “breach[es] of indetermination,” i.e., *randomness*.⁶ The show promises to be plural, youthful, (obviously) black, and to move at a rapid clip—a point underscored by the fact that Nance is literally on the go.

The tone of the opening scene is playful truancy, redolent of a project slapped together on the way to school. The camera phone complements Nance's levity, superimposing filters over his face—a mummy, an elephant, a monkey. The mummy and elephant gesture vaguely to Africa, but the racist connotations of the final filter along with the images' glitching suggests that Nance and his collaborators do not have complete control over the signal, nor over the "semiotic terrain" their bodies inhabit.⁷ As they work to instantiate breaches of randomness, their work is, itself, subject to disruption.

As Nance rounds a corner, we glimpse a police car in the upper right of the frame. Though Nance is presented as a figure of *technical agency*, being racialized also makes him, in Denise Ferreira da Silva's terms, *affectable*.⁸ That is, Nance's self-extension through technology produces connections, encounters, links, and intimacies with collective viewership *and* makes him more noticeable by antiblack forces. The presence of the cop car in the upper right of the frame, however fleeting, *potentializes* violence; you feel it heavy in the "weather" of the scene.⁹

As Nance continues with his introduction the cops blast their siren, co-opting aural space. Nance tries to press on with the show but is repeatedly interrupted by an older white officer calling for him to "pull over." The sound of the cop car gets louder. Nance tries to swerve. The camera swish pans, blurring the image. And he is rammed by the cop car. As the camera flips to the ground, the vertical framing previously indicative of vloggers cheerily addressing their audience morphs into a totally different emergent form of contemporary audiovisual media: "Facebook Live's nightmare genre" of phone camera footage capturing antiblack police violence.¹⁰

The series' opening scene situates the viewer in *Random Acts*' set of concerns about the relationship between race and technology:

- the non-essential, non-reciprocal, and contested nature of *technical agency*;
- the ongoing negotiation between blackness and the virtual, which concerns both the potentialization of antiblack violence and capacities for presenting "Black art and Black life otherwise;"¹¹
- the formulation of *blackness as circulation* proposed by Aria Dean, and the constitutive mediation performed by screen media circulating the "extra-ontological Black (non)subject" (i.e., blackness).¹²

While black TV studies has tended to frame issues of race and the medium in terms of representation and the deleterious effects of homogenization,¹³ I will be focusing on *Random Acts*' transmedia approach to the image and the ways in which it illustrates that technical agency is contested and complicated by the black virtual.¹⁴ Nance and his collaborators advance a capacious ontology of blackness that aestheticizes indeterminacy. Capaciousness, formalized by the style of *Random Acts*, amounts to an aesthetic of refusal that accretes and ramifies vibrations against the frame. My argument is that this aesthetic practice not only "worries" the apparatus by treating images as "indeterminate, inherently unstable" frequencies, but in the process of circulating images that can't and won't think "straight," concomitantly queers the apparatus, producing visual art that is "structurally and theoretically black."¹⁵



Figure 1. Pan performs the musical number, “Nuncaland.”

To address how *Random Acts* navigates these concerns, I take up Beth Coleman’s essay, “Race As Technology,” to examine how her argument that technical agency may serve racialized subjects as an emancipatory tool is heavily qualified throughout *Random Acts*.¹⁶ I contend that prior to any advocacy of technically supplemented agency, we must first consider how the *de-grammatization* of the black body produced a condition of double-technicity. In other words, the universal and unmarked subject (or “user”) of technical objects discussed in media theory needs to be qualified by race. And, in the case of blackness, more profoundly qualified by the fact that black bodies have historically been subject to the application of technologies, like the hold of the ship, for purposes of de-grammatization so that they might, in turn, serve *as* technologies for the advancement and maintenance of Western modernization and white hegemony.

Having examined Coleman’s formulation of “race as technology,” I contend that the identity she posits between *technics*, or “learned skill,” and an emancipatory agency elides consideration of blackness’s specific proximity to the virtual. Coleman’s “mobile subject” can skirt racist violence and systemic disenfranchisement because, in her argument, the indeterminacy of the virtual is utterly neutralized by the subject’s virtuosic ability to assemble cultural signification to their benefit. Coleman argues that a subject unburdened by “traditional historical constructions” becomes transcendently “light,” an incarnation of pure speed always acting in advance of violence to amalgamate signifiers into a new, emancipatory order.¹⁷ By contrast, I argue that the virtual cannot be neutralized by simply *becoming speed*. At the crux of diverging discourses of Afropessimism and Afrofuturism is a question of how black bodies attune to the potentialization of antiblack violence in the afterlife of slavery *and* the potential for configuring the present to support “black livingness.” Between these discourses is a claim that blackness bears an intimacy with the virtual.¹⁸

By reproducing the *circulation* of visual culture across television, cinema, telephone, and computer screen, *Random Acts* mounts an encounter with a “reservoir” of black image culture that comprises a “field of energies.”¹⁹ The circulating flow of images gestures to a wider totality but resists any claim to comprehensive representation. Blackness and virtuality have been taken up by thinkers

like Avery Gordon and Tavia Nyong'o, whose work on "haunting" and "fabulation" share an emphasis on practices of *noticing* in the sense developed by Katherine McKittrick, for whom this practice attunes bodies to potentials alive in the virtual so that they may be actualized.²⁰

Random Acts is interested in the virtual life of images and blackness, which Aria Dean suggests might be the same thing.²¹ The show is about the circulation of black images and the appropriation and manipulation of these images before they are re-circulated throughout visual culture. Following Dean, the series posits that the "extra-ontological black (non) subject" (i.e., blackness) is a virtual field of images, sounds, concepts, and affects that is constitutively mediating.²² A quiet scene in which Nance and his girlfriend (Dominique Fishback) share a moment in bed is followed by archival footage of Lorraine Hansberry, YouTube videos about beauty routines, and home video of Bruk Up dance. This tendency of the series to "randomly" drift across visual culture illustrates that relationships between images and individuals is ongoing and constitutive: "they are made what they are by the circumstances of their larger body."²³ The series' form illustrates an additive logic in which blackness is never essentialized, but always a matter of intersection, which includes feminist, queer, trans, diasporic, and Latinx identity.²⁴ *Random Acts of Flyness* posits a capacious ontology of blackness, and this capaciousness, I argue, is part and parcel of the series' ethical impetus to model "black care."²⁵

Christina Sharpe and Tiffany Lethabo King have both taken up the subject of care and have advocated for down-tempo practices of *noticing* and *attending* to black livingness. By attending to the pluralization of blacknesses, *Random Acts* models "care as force," producing an expansive vision of black collective being that cannot be contained, fixed, or reduced by the frame. Images are never strictly indexical, perhaps not even solely representational, but vibrate beyond the frame. *Random Acts* lends itself to an ambivalent, oscillating, "extreme presence" of resonances that accrete rather than resolve.²⁶

For Calvin Warren, communicating "boundlessness" is essential to "black care," for the target of antiblackness is always in excess of any single iteration of black being. Warren explains, "affect is a communicative structure, a testimony. For articulating suffering without end. The affective dimension is just as expansive as it is deep."²⁷ My claim is that *Random Acts of Flyness*'s style serves to formalize a communicative structure that is similarly expansive and deep through its reproduction of the circulation of black images. What the series does through its emphasis on collection, curation, and intersection *within* circulation is to aestheticize a practice of care by way of "noticing" other possibilities for black livingness in the "afterlife of slavery."²⁸

THE NON-RECIPROCITY OF TECHNICS

Beth Coleman's essay "Race as Technology" identifies *technical agency* with emancipatory mobility: "technology's embedded function of self-extension may be exploited to liberate race from an inherited position of abjection toward a greater expression of agency."²⁹ Coleman's "mobile subject" is an independent shaper of a noisy reserve of potential signifiers, who does not need collective being because they are, "a dispersed being, one that relies on the action of motion to formulate itself."³⁰ In line with accelerationist discourse, Coleman's subject becomes pure mobility, which is to say, the mobile subject *becomes* the fantasy object of the Italian futurists, "our most contemporary technology: speed."³¹ Through the abstraction of speed, Coleman subordinates the effects of the "semiotic terrain of black bodies" to the power of technical agency.³² The mobile

subject is faster than indeterminacy, adeptly assembling which significations, cultural markers, and historical resonances attach to their body. In Coleman's analogy, the mobile subject utilizing race *as* technology is like one of Joseph Cornell's boxes: "[an] amalgamation of detritus that [has] been preciously assembled into a new order of meaning."³³ Mobility and agency, in Coleman's essay, are bound to the virtual, because the skill required to remain "fluid" in has everything to do with being able to selectively draw down and actualize significations that are potentialized by race. Coleman's curious reference to Cornell's boxes at the end of her essay gets to the heart of the matter: in "Race as Technology," the utilization of race as an emancipatory tool is about curation; it is about the axial position of being defined from without by established sets of signifiers *or* defining oneself by manipulating and assembling signification.

Nearly fifteen years since Coleman invited us to think about race *as* technology, we are able to view Coleman's essay as the forefront of a wider turn in critical thought. By defining race according to its "speed of change" and "sliding value," Coleman's relational approach powerfully reconceptualized race as a topological object rather than a biologically essential cipher binding qualities to bodies.³⁴ Her text is also part of a wider project to shift the register of "knowing race, to doing race," which is reflective of an effort to "remove essences and substitute events" that remains vital in current thinking.³⁵

Coleman's theory of race as technics offers one framework for understanding *Random Acts*' aesthetic project. By constantly shifting across forms of media, creating novel proximities between disparate events in time and distributed spaces, the series represents the perspective of Coleman's mobile subject, constantly re-assembling black visual culture in an expression of agency or "will and movement."³⁶ However, this reading is incomplete. Becoming speed transmutes material bodies into discursive abstractions, eliding the costs exacted on the body by the demands for a ceaseless and virtuosic "fluidity."³⁷ *Random Acts* explores this demand ambivalently, acknowledging that technology extends forms of agency and expression while also addressing the non-neutrality of technologies historically bound to practices enframing, surveilling, and distributing violence to black bodies. The series leads us to think more profoundly about the relationship between technicity for racialized subjects whose attachments to unmarked categories like: subject or user, are not necessarily seamless or reciprocal.

The *Random Acts* segment, "Worry No. 473 of 1000 Worries that a Black Person Should Not Have to Worry About," is shot in grainy black and white, aping documentary film. In the short scene, Nance attends a film, laughs and cries, and while leaving the theater realizes that he has gotten into a "blue jalopy" identical to his own but owned by a white woman. As Nance performs deference and obsequiousness to escape the situation, the blonde woman declares, "I *have* to call the police." The simple injunction, "I *have* to," contains within it a potential alternative, the fact that the cops are not necessary here, but this potential for de-escalation passes. Nance stands in the middle of the street. Lights flash across the scene. The camera tracks in, pushing closer to his face. Nance explains in voice over, "you stare back at the someone, worry etched across your face. The police arrive and you are worried that you will not be able to explain the situation in a way that will preserve your current physical state, i.e., breathing, walking, living, employed, etc." The camera's movement communicates the arrival of the police but also communicates the change in the "weather," the looming potential for violence.



Figure 2. Performative disaffection is used to deflect violent forces impinging from outside the frame.

Nance's face is performatively nonplussed; he presents an affectively neutralized body for fear that any animation might license the police to alter his "current physical state." The combination of camera movement and Nance's performative disaffection implicitly critiques Coleman's claims for emancipatory mobility. Nance cannot physically move, nor even allow himself to put his frustration, terror, and worry on his face. Though he is the host of the show, and though he commands authority by narrating the scene, the camera performs an objectifying movement, extending instead the authority of the police to enframe and objectify Nance's body through the camera.

The issue is that Coleman's effort to "denature" the essentialization of race creates space for "essential technicity" to be situated prior to, or appear more ontologically essential than, racialization. This is not to argue that race ought to be essentialized, but rather to force a confrontation with race and technology that understands their relationship to be constitutive. Borrowing from Marshall McLuhan and Bernard Stiegler, Coleman identifies technical instruments with the prosthetic supplementation of human capacity. What is essential about technology, in this line of thought, is that it *extends* a human subject's "presence, will, and movement," and that technical objects exteriorize human knowledge and learned skill. However, we must ask if technical agency works the same for subjects historically forced into a relationship of nonreciprocity with the category of the human? Can we speak of technical agency as unqualified and universal when black subjects, historically marked by the *application* of technologies like the hold, the plantation, and the prison, have been made to function as *the* constitutive supplement of Western modernity and the category of "the human"?

In Elizabeth Reich's incisive critique of Stiegler's philosophy of technology, blackness is defined by *double-technicity*.³⁸ Being rendered a technology for the supplementation of white hegemony changes, ontologically, blackness's technicity, its forms of extension through technics and whether or not extension is achieved unabated or produces suppressing reactionary responses by white hegemony. This is why technologies appearing in *Random Acts of Flyness* tend to fail their black users. CitiDrive, for example, is an imagined cloud technology that offers black users the

opportunity to upload their consciousness in order to free them from the material exhaustion of their laboring bodies. We see the upload fail part way through, leaving the user's consciousness incomplete and trapped in a kind of lobotomized state. Cameras, CitiDrive and other technologies in *Random Acts* fail because the technical extension of the black self and the seizure of technical agency are never seamless and, more often than not, are contested.

I depart from theorizations of “essential technicity” offered by Stiegler and Mark B. N. Hansen to disentangle black technicity from media theory's traditional formulation of an unmarked human subject *extending* their capacities through a technical object. Though technical objects like cellphones, cameras, and audio recording devices, for example, are mass produced with identical specifications, their modalities of extension are not universal. My aim is to question how technicity is refracted for people whose *natural, biological* extension through the senses was violently circumscribed by technical implements like the darkness of the hold, the optical tyranny of the plantation, the de-vocalizing effects of laws preventing women from providing legal witness.

VIBRATIONS BEYOND THE FRAME

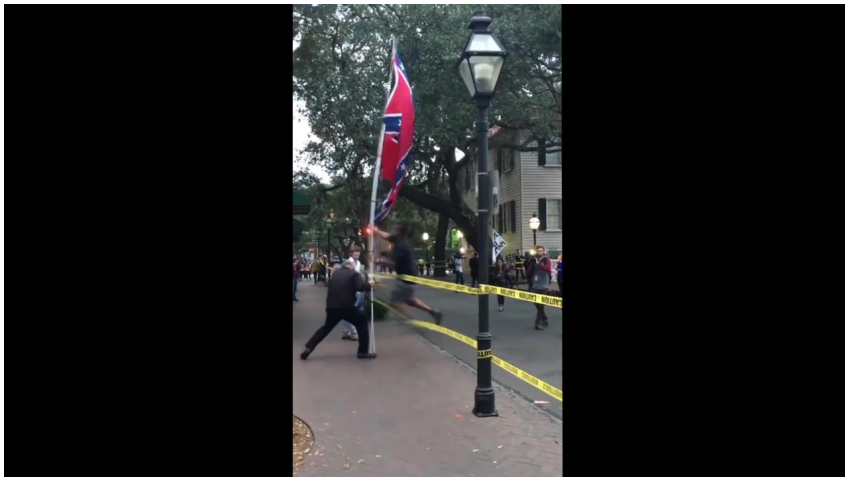


Figure 3. BLM activist Muhiyidin d'Baha leaps through a police barricade to snatch a Confederate flag.

The image that sticks with me most strongly from *Random Acts of Flyness* is phone camera footage of Black Lives Matter activist Muhiyidin d'Baha (identified in the series by his legal name, Muhiyidin El Amin Moye) leaping through police tape to snatch a confederate flag out of the hand of a white supremacist. The image, which circulated widely on social media, appears dramatically slowed down in *Radom Acts*. D'Baha's body holds in the air as his waist and legs hit the police tape. We register the strength of his right hand clasping the plastic flagpole held by a white nationalist. D'Baha, however, is blurred out. His body alone appears smudged and indistinct while the world around him maintains focus. The audio, slowed in pace with the image, redounds to inchoate roars. Playing over the image is the song “four ethers,” performed by serpentwithfeet (Josiah Wise). A chorus of horns sets the tone of the scene, pumping chords with the rhythm of breath. Wise's falsetto floats above the winds, “‘cause I see the depression filling up your eyes....”

The rhythm of the horns subtends the image with harmonized respiration, lending musical cadence to the demand for breath binding the image to the wider context of the Black Lives Matter movement. Wise's lyrics claim to recognize the emotions felt by both D'Baha and, implicitly, by the viewer. Recognition of a collective mood of abjection produced by ongoing extra-judicial murder of black people and the fury of its enablement by increasingly brazen white nationalism winds through the image at once expressing feelings of sorrow and anger, while also collecting a shared affect.³⁹ *Random Acts* is not only appropriating this image circulated across social media, but is also suggesting that the mood of this song and the video played at this speed lend the moment their proper resonance. The image operates beyond the indexical, beyond the mere re-presentation of the pro-filmic event. Played in real time, the clip flies by quickly. The enormity of the event and the depth of its affective charge are not lent enough room to resonate. The manipulation of the audiovisual image, its slowed tempo and adjusted focus, renders an irruptive gesture of refusal against galvanizing forces of antiblackness dramatically salient.⁴⁰ The manipulation of the image doesn't just aestheticize d'Baha's leap but works to properly formalize the depth of its expression. The stylization of the image is reflective of what the artist Arthur Jafa terms "Black Visual Intonation," the manipulation of the image in ways that reveal the "polyventiality" or multiple resonances—rhythms, tones, perspectives, meanings—otherwise neutralized by "normal" playback and framing of an image.⁴¹

FUGITIVE FEELING

In "The Case of Blackness," Fred Moten cautions against an ontology of blackness overdetermined by objecthood. Moten draws upon Heideggerian philosophy to stake a claim that the discursive and representational "enframing" of blackness as an object is always straining against the indomitable *thingliness* of "lived Black experience." This "canted zone or curved span" between the "fact" of blackness, or object-being, and lived experience marks the irreducibility of blackness to objecthood and an inherent resistance to "the protocols of dematerializing representation."⁴² In *Listening to Images*, Tina Campt reorients the "sense ratio" of photographic epistemology. Instructing her reader to "listen" to the "lower frequencies" of archival images, Campt proposes that images of the "lower frequencies" of black quotidian life, such as passport photos and slice-of-life street photography, render salient the ongoing vibrational force of black being against the enframing powers of technical and state apparatuses.⁴³ Querying the dress, postures, and historical context surrounding archival images, Campt identifies and elaborates the ways in which black life, as Fred Moten has it, "vibrates against its frame like a resonator."⁴⁴ From Campt's re-theorization of what it means to listen carefully to photographic images, I draw two guiding principles. First, blackness always exists in non-reciprocity with the apparatuses aiming to enframe it. This is a uniquely contentious formulation when the apparatus in question is not State bureaucracy but the camera, since the camera's claims to objective witness are always overridden by the vibrational force of blackness's resistance to indexical fixity. In sum, Campt's theorization of how we listen to the visual posits a vibrational ontology of black being that is rendered salient through visual media objects. Furthermore, it is through Arthur Jafa's art practice and the image of Muhiyidin d'Baha featured in *Random Acts*, that we may observe how this visual ontology is formalized beyond still image archives, in contemporary digital audiovisual media practice. Second, this non-reciprocity is not, as Campt explains, registered at the level of the oppositional.⁴⁵ In fact, one of Campt's primary arguments in *Listening to Images* is about producing language outside the melodramatic registers of American politics and outside the usual heuristics of liberal subjectivity. In short, Campt notes that her conceptualization of "refusal" functions below the threshold of what might

be recognized as resistance. Campt's focus on the "lower frequencies" of the quotidian is purposefully consonant with Lauren Berlant's efforts to de-dramatize how we think of political activity and works outside American political discourse, which in Elisabeth Anker's description is subsumed under melodrama.⁴⁶

Returning to the concept of *double-technicity*, I turn to Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's work on the "queer Atlantic" to understand how, historically, black extension through technology—*black technicity*—has been refracted in ways unaccounted for in media theory's prosthetic theory. In Tinsley's account, technologies of enslavement produced a kind of sensory fission. Technologies like the hold and the plantation, for example, sought to reshape the human sensorium, curtailing and producing new thresholds for what enslaved subjects were allowed to sense. As Tinsley explains, as they worked to subjectivize slaves, delimiting how bodies move, what they can look at, who they can touch, what they are made to smell, these technologies also engendered *otherwise feeling*, that is, *fugitive* forms of seeing, touching, and expressing and experiencing intimacy.

I take Moten and Tinsley together to be indicating that what escapes the object-being of "the Black," is the biological *thingliness* of the human nervous system. *Thingliness*, Moten claims, may serve as an "informal" source of "Black optimism."⁴⁷ As Tinsley has it, the hold was not only a space of *de-grammatization* of gender, but a queer space in which the rocking of the ship, the darkness of a space without light, the mixture of human bodily fluids, the confinement of chains, and the "monstruous intimacy" forced by all these conditions together created forms of queer intimacy.⁴⁸ Tinsley is speaking of a very literal becoming-viscous of the black body, which was not just the precondition for producing slave subjectivity but was also a testament to the potential for *fugitive* expressions of affect—not *fugitive movement*, as Coleman suggests, but capacities for "erotic resistance"; *fugitive haptics*, *fugitive feeling*. Through this "sensuous contemplation" of the bodies being made hyper-affected in the hold, I am trying to indicate a fundamental divergence between a Western European and a black formulation of sensing as the engine of technical exteriorization and extension.⁴⁹

Fugitive feeling, I contend, calls for a theory of black being that does not abstract away the reality of the nervous system by positing a purely discursive body, but builds upon the gains of work by Frantz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, Orlando Patterson, Saidiya Hartman, Frank B. Wilderson III, and others who have also explored the ontology of objecthood and its conjunction with black experience. So, where Moten says that black livingness "vibrates against its frame like a resonator," I hear Tinsley describing the inevitability of the human sensorium seeking underground passage to sustaining intimacies and kinships.⁵⁰

In film and media studies, black technicity is rendered salient in discourses describing how the film theory concept of *suture*, historically, fails black audiences. The *recalcitrant* and *oppositional* gaze are indicative of a deflected or refracted extension through the cinematic apparatus—both concepts indicating that the black gaze is not seamlessly continuous with the unmarked (white) vision inscribed by the camera.⁵¹ Instances of oblique identifications, such as James Baldwin's attachment to Bette Davis's eyes, which felt "like mine," discloses how identification with images on screen can be oblique, queer, and otherwise not extended in a kind of seamless, frictionless linearity.⁵²

What strikes me about *Random Acts*' construction is the way in which staccato flurries of images bridge narrative scenes, producing a sense of images emerging out of a virtual flow. Narrative

coherence and the consistency of space and time are merely incidental to the whole rather than quintessential to the images' construction. A narrative sequence in which a "Drexciyan"⁵³ woman makes her way to her subaquatic home after work is interrupted by a segment titled, "Worry #2 of 1000 Worries that a Black Person Should Not Have to Worry About," in which we see an older black man (Anthony Chisolm) drowning. We hear a voice explain, "When we came here we weren't human beings," and the image cuts to a black-and-white close-up of the artist Arthur Jafa who goes on, "We were things..." Jafa is cut off by a hard cut to an overhead shot of a group of Black people entwined in a bio-technical apparatus made of tubular flesh and moss arrayed around a glowing green crystal. As the camera pushes in on these figures from an advanced black future, we hear a chorus intone a riff on the refrain to Childish Gambino's "Redbone," "*I stay woke*." Colliding moment to moment: a stereotype, a fragment from a documentary interview, and a speculative vision of blackness to come. Were we to view each of these three images in isolation, we might find a clear sense of situatedness. Instead, the curation of their resonances produces *affective dissonance* by resisting apodictic resolution and ramifying resonances. The point of *Random Acts*' style, I claim, is not to multiply discordant shocks, but to create oscillations across images, signaling that these fragments are all broken off an uncircumscribable whole, what we might call the totality of black audiovisual culture. It is in this way that *Random Acts* mobilizes indeterminacy to produce an intimacy with the virtual.

Random Acts' construction swerves in a queered expression that cannot think "straight." The "canted zone or curved span" of blackness de-coheres or, more accurately "worries" the codification of the transcendental spectator.⁵⁴ Instead of finding isomorphic attunement with the camera's implied representation of natural perception, we have an oscillating gaze that leads the viewer to "vibrate" in an ongoing improvisation of orientation with the images, sussing out a field of resonances that includes the image's narrative content, temporal situation, the affects it produces, its sonic palette, its textures, and so on. But because Nance is interested in collaboration, these associations and juxtapositions stretch farther, going beyond the purview of his own creative potential to ramify an incommensurable community.⁵⁵ I am claiming that this opacity characterizes *Random Acts of Flyness* as "structurally and theoretically" black, precisely by presenting blackness as "an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line."⁵⁶

VIRTUAL PESSIMISM/VIRTUAL OPTIMISM

The divergent discourses of Afro-pessimism and Afro-futurism both frame the virtual as an essential dimension of black being. Afro-pessimism's effort to cement the metaphysics of social death as an ontological fact directs us to understand, as Calvin Warren has pointed out, that the proper object of antiblackness is *metaphysical*.⁵⁷ What antiblackness aims to injure is no single body but, rather, the "soul" or the "spirit," and by extension the collective being of black people through the communication of terror. The incessant impingement of the *potential* for any instance to actualize black death manifests in the body as feelings of compression and wearing. The pressure of antiblack *singularity* is *resonant*; it is haptic and palpable.⁵⁸ Black bodies are uniquely intimate with the virtual because the virtual, suffused as it is with potentialities that could bind the body to death, is a field producing vigilant practices of attunement and mediation.⁵⁹ Consider how often we read reports about potential antiblack energies materializing as *superimpositions* in the white visual field: bird watching becomes suspicious voyeurism, department store toys become guns, an unarmed teenager is transformed into a "grunting" hulk.⁶⁰ In each instance, the intimacy of blackness with a virtual reservoir of "[racist] energies that have not yet been expended" folds space-

time into potentially mortal proximities.⁶¹ Pliable, non-linear temporality, in which “the past that is not past reappears,” grounds the stakes of race as a topological object.⁶² By cementing social death—natal alienation, availability to gratuitous violence, and humiliation imbued in one’s very being—as an ontological fact of blackness, Afro-pessimism frames the field of the virtual as binding black bodies to death; black death is always already *probabilized* by “racial calculus” in the afterlife of slavery.⁶³ When, for instance, Nance types “5-year-old black girl” into Google, the next thing he sees is an article about a black Girl Scout getting shot while selling cookies.⁶⁴ Coded into the search algorithm is the reality that black bodies “magnetize” bullets.⁶⁵

By contrast, Afro-futurism, and adjacent trajectories like Afro-speculation, “black futures,” or Afro-fabulation,⁶⁶ are animated by an effort to cleave to indeterminacy as the locus for extrapolating “otherwise possibilities” for black being. Under the aegis of social death, thinkers like Kara Keeling, Tavia Nyong’o, and C. Riley Snorton have geared into the transitive, transitory, and transversal crossings networking blacknesses to identify, “otherwise being,” “impossible possibilities,” and fabulous potentialities for fostering black life.⁶⁷ We might say that in contrast to Afro-Pessimism’s ontological realism—“the past is not past”—the stakes of afro-futurism are “the new;” some new organization of life sustaining black being.⁶⁸ What is critical is that “black futures” do not disavow the reality of social death, but are “[invested] in the risk that already inheres in social life—an antifragile investment in the errant, the irrational, and the unpredictable, made by a political imagination that posits radical socioeconomic and geopolitical transformations.”⁶⁹ From the Afro-futurist perspective, *attending* is not just a practice of “defending the dead,” as Sharpe has it, but noticing *what else is happening*, and curating different voices and different relations within black livingness.⁷⁰

In both the pessimist and (broadly) futurist discourses the status of the virtual is not just contested, but essential to black experience. How one frames the virtual, as making-probable social death or as a source of radical reorganization of the established order of things, marks a pessimist or futurist investment. *Random Acts* is ambivalent, oscillating across encounters with antiblack violence and imagined configurations supportive of black life.⁷¹ What is essential to the series’ aesthetic experiment is not just the production of an oscillating gaze that is unable to think “straight;” one forced to improvise a sense of orientation within a field of quickly shifting images. What is essential is that the series’ aesthetic is expressive and productive of a “breach of indetermination,” and not only is this indetermination structurally and theoretically black, but it is also structurally and theoretically black because it renders salient black virtuality. In short, the virtual is not an abstract reservoir of potential energies. These energies are tipped, primed, kindled, perhaps even lured into reality by the semiotic terrain efflorescing around raced bodies.

CAPACIOUSNESS

To achieve a uniquely capacious expression of black collective being, *Random Acts* goes beyond reproducing critiques of blackness and indexical capture.⁷² As Michael Gillespie has it, “belief in black film’s indexical tie to the black lifeworld forgoes a focus on nuance and occults the complexity of black film to interpret, render, incite, and speculate.”⁷³ Nance’s style exacerbates “nuance,” “negotiation,” and “speculation” which, in Gillespie’s analysis, is endemic to expression in “the black lifeworld.” If it may be said that Nance’s body of work posits alternative paradigms for organizing experience that present “Black art and Black life otherwise,”⁷⁴ then *Random Acts* performs this task by method of “iterative excess.”⁷⁵

In *Random Acts*, blackness is music in the subway and the tropics; blackness is the drag queen Moi Renee; blackness is male intimacy coded in elaborate handshakes; blackness is a bisexual man; blackness is Dr. Martin Luther King's coalitional dream *and* his nightmares of Black death and suffering; blackness is a videogame;⁷⁶ blackness is a queer Latinx Peter Pan performing the show-stopping number "Nuncaland;" blackness is a trans woman in a rehearsal space smiling into the camera; blackness is Michelle Obama, who is "God." Set amidst the circulation of black audiovisual culture, viewers are called upon to *notice* rhythms, tones, perspectives, meanings, engendering a practice of *attending* to black livingness through a capacious aesthetic that "consent[s] not to be a single being."⁷⁷ This aesthetic of refusal is, as I have indicated, characterized by "polyventuality," which Jafa defines as a source of black pleasure. I would add, as well, that because of Nance's investment in *both* the apparatus and in queer of color representation, the expression of "polyventuality" is decidedly queer as well. The at times disorienting clip of the flow of images reflects "black queerness... a crosscurrent through which to view hybrid, resistant subjectivities."⁷⁸



Figure 4. Intersecting invisibilities.

As Tavia Nyong'o explains, black collective being, like queer collective being, has tended to "prove excessive, disorderly or simply unintelligible to an external gaze," a claim explored in depth in the *Random Acts* segment, "The Invisibility of the Bisexual Black Man."⁷⁹ I would suggest that this "excessive unintelligibility" also characterizes *Random Acts*, which presents blackness as necessarily extra-iconic; that is, drawing in trans, queer, and Latinx subjects to "hack" congealment of a hegemonic and enframing Black perspective.⁸⁰ The aesthetic challenge of *Random Acts* is based in using a medium traditionally overdetermined by vision to express and produce an attentiveness to virtual pressures vibrating against and around the frame of the image. I believe this attentiveness to virtual resonances suffusing racialized subjectivities is achievable through a practice informed by Camp's strategy of "listening to images," and Tinsley's notion of "feeling for." This practice manifests not just through the collection of a plurality of black perspectives, but also through seeing how individuals negotiate the resonances of the black virtual. It is in such negotiations that the co-constitution referred to in Dean's writing between the "extra-ontological black (non)subject" and individual people is rendered salient.

CONCLUSION

As McKittrick and Camp's work illustrates, care doesn't need to operate at the *metaphysical* level described by Calvin Warren. Rather, care can amount to noticing black life on the "lower frequencies," where it may otherwise be rendered invisible. As I have argued, "care as force" is manifest in *Random Acts*' capacious vision of black collective being, which cannot be contained, fixed, or reduced by the frame. Although technical agency may be compromised and proven non-reciprocal, as in the series' opening scene, *Random Acts of Flyness* teaches us about listening to the vibrations beyond the image and attending to the fugitive feelings produced by black technicity.

To conclude, I want to simply describe a moment in which the series slows down to foster a moment of listening, quieting the roiling flow of images and the ongoing negotiations with the virtual stock of energies impinging on the present. The artist Diamond Stingily rides the subway after a long night at work, heading to her sub-aquatic home, "New Drexciya." Along the way the musician Moses Sumney steps onto her car; as though he were virtual, a potential poised to actualize. Accompanied by an electric guitar he sings his song "Doomed:" "Am I vital/ If my heart is idle?/ Am I doomed?/Cradle me/ So I can see/ If I'm doomed...." Sumney's song is of a piece with the episode's emphasis on the aural⁸¹ and his lyrics are consonant with the episode's theme of death and care—asking at once whether "I am doomed?" while also enjoining the listener to "Cradle me," as though touch would disclose reality—"Am I dead or am I vital?"—for the singer. But what rises above these associations is the force of Sumney's falsetto. Warbling in the sonic stratosphere, Sumney's voice inspires rest; the image cutting between a close-up of Stingily listening and shots of her asleep in bed. As the lyrics of the song self-advocate for vitality, their aural coloring is very cool, gliding smoothly between upper pitches ("sadness") and a mid-range cooing. There is care here, in this liminal space, in this vocal altitude, in mutual acts of noticing livingness, in the antifragile beauty of Sumney's voice and the experience of it as a shared and undetermined affect. The lyrics are ambivalent in the sense of "extreme presence," which is appropriate for a collective intimacy that is distributed—Stingily, Sumney, and the viewer—but woven through with sound.⁸²

Random Acts' effort to gather and collect blackness's intersections, its joints and swerves throughout visual culture, is not centripetal. *Random Acts* queers the apparatus so that it may express and produce an "ontological totality" that is unrepresentable in any comprehensive way because its capacity for living is always straining against the forces that enframe it. By "worrying the image," Nance and his collaborators on *Random Acts of Flyness* model a care that is queer and an aesthetic that is "structurally and theoretically black."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ENDNOTES

¹ "The human is a pointless and treacherous category." Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books: 1999), 5.

² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Mark B. N. Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³ Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 177–207.

⁴ I am adopting "noticing" from Tiffany Lethabo King's work in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 30. King, in turn, owes the concept along with "black livingness"—which, to me, signals an ongoing process and speaks to practices rather than ontology, *doing* race as opposed to *knowing* race, in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's terms—to Katherine McKittrick. See "Mathematics of Black Life," *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 16–28; and "Diachronic Loops/Deadweight Tonnage/Bad Made Measure," *Cultural Geographies* 23, no.1 (2016): 3–18. Saidiya Hartman writes, "black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment." Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2007). On "doing" race, see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 8.

⁵ Including Jamund Washington, Frances Bodomo, Naima Ramos-Chapman, and Mariama Diallo. In addition to crediting a lengthy list of collaborators, the series' effort to showcase different black creative professionals is evinced through in-focus segments appearing after each episode, profiling different contributors to the show, from actors to designers to directors.

⁶ Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 43.

⁷ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 57.

⁸ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁹ "In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies." Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 106.

¹⁰ "Facebook Live's nightmare genre: an encounter between a black person and the cops." Emily Nussbaum, "The Raw Trip of 'Random Acts of Flyness,'" *The New Yorker*, August 27, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/08/27/the-raw-trip-of-random-acts-of-flyness>. I will call attention to the aural dimension of this genre which is characterized by the mottled sound of wind blowing through small, portable microphones.

¹¹ "Nance's oeuvre reimagines Black existence: its temporal dimensions; its tactics of visual and aural representation; and its ex/inclusions from ... 'the category of the human.'" Elizabeth Reich, "Documentary Strain, Black Artists, and the Afrofuture: Terence Nance's *The Tryphtich*," *World Records Journal* 3. Article 5 (2020): 46.

¹² Aria Dean, "Rich Meme, Poor Meme," *Real Life* (July 25, 2016), <https://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/>.

¹³ Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, ed., *Watching While Black: Centering the Television of Black Audiences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Raquel Gates, *Double Negative: The Black Image and Popular Culture* (Durham:

Duke University Press, 2018); Kristen Warner, “They Gon’ Think You Loud Regardless: Ratchetness, Reality Television, and Black Womanhood,” *Camera Obscura* 30, no. 1 (2015): 129–53.

¹⁴ I am using *transmedia* in reference to the circulation of audiovisual images across screens and platforms. *Random Acts of Flyness* is invested in mobilizing and examining media objects that move *across* media forms and this fluidity is part of the series’ expression of *polyventiality*, a concept I examine below. In their book *Transmedia Frictions*, Marsha Kinder and Tara MacPherson use the term *transmedia* to replace “interactivity.” Though the term “interactive” may feel dusty if not obsolete, we might understand “interactivity” as sublated under the primacy of post-production in contemporary visual culture. In her widely influential works, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” and “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?,” artist and theorist Hito Steyerl writes about the ways in which circulation rather than image production is the definitive characteristic of contemporary visual culture, “circulationism is not about the art of making an image, but of postproducing, launching, and accelerating it.” I would suggest that “interactivity,” is part of that “launching.” As Rey Chow notes, the *transmediality* of the internet—what Steyerl terms our “all out internet condition”—is a “nonnegligible operator in our thoroughly entangled daily environment.” Which is to say, digging up the forms and modalities of interactivity within the swerve of transmedial flows is part of an ethical imperative to better understand our interconnected and multi-scalar world of pluralized agents. My contribution aims to situate transmedia flows within an embodied history of racialization so that “transmedia” appears less as a totalizing abstraction than as a phenomenon marked by difference. Marsha Kinder and Tara MacPherson, eds., *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), xvi; Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux Journal* 10 (November 2009), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>, and “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?” *e-flux Journal* 49 (November 2013), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/49/60004/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>; Rey Chow, *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 10.

¹⁵ “I’m developing an idea that I call Black Visual Intonation (BVI). What it consists of is the use of irregular, nontempered (nonmetronomic) camera rates and frame replication to prompt filmic movement to function in a manner that approximates Black vocal intonation.... The hand-cranked camera, for example, is a more appropriate instrument with which to create movement that replicates the tendency in Black music to “worry the note”—to treat notes as indeterminate, inherently unstable sonic frequencies rather than the standard Western treatment of notes as fixed phenomena.” Arthur Jafa, “Black Visual Intonation,” *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 267. “A truly black cinema, for Jafa, is not just one populated with black people and black narratives made by black filmmakers, but one that is structurally and theoretically black.” Aria Dean, “Worry the Image,” *Art in America* (May 26, 2017) <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/worry-the-image-63266/>.

¹⁶ Beth Coleman, “Race as Technology,” *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 177–207.

¹⁷ Coleman, “Race as Technology,” 200. Coleman also writes, “In a sense, we end up with a subject designed like a series of Joseph Cornell boxes—amalgamations of detritus that have been preciously assembled into a new order of meaning. Somehow, within the noise and speed of contemporary being, there is yet the silhouette, the dim figure of our mobile agent.” Coleman, “Race as Technology,” 202. We have only the “dim” silhouette because this mobile agent is always already ahead of the present, always already assembling culture into livable configurations before materiality can produce lacerations.

¹⁸ This notion has several influences not included in the body of this essay for the sake of space. Christina Sharpe's concept of *anagrammatical blackness* speaks to the encounter of blackness "again and again with sticking the signification." Anagrammatical blackness refers to "blackness anew, blackness as a/temporal, in and out of place and time putting pressure on meaning and that against which meaning is made." Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 75, 76. Sharpe is drawing on Hortense Spillers's discussion of the de-grammatization of the body: Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, & in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203–29. J. Kameron Carter writes that the "'passage,' then in 'Middle Passage' is sheer possibility and potentiality, while the 'middle' in 'Middle Passage' is ... existence in the middle itself." J. Kameron Carter, "Paratheological Blackness," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 589–611. In addition, Fred Moten writes, "blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line—is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity." Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁹ I am borrowing this definition of the virtual from Steven Shaviro, "The virtual is like a field of energies that have not yet been expended, or a reservoir of potentialities that have not yet been tapped. That is to say, the virtual is not composed of actual entities; but the potential for change that it offers is real in its own way." Steven Shaviro, "Kant, Deleuze, and the Virtual," *The Pinocchio Theory* (May 9, 2007), <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=577>. On black interfacing and black technicity, see Elizabeth Reich, "The Gift of Black Sonics: Interface and Ontology in *Sorry to Bother You* and *Random Acts of Flyness*," in *Cybermedia: Explorations in Science, Sound, and Vision*, eds. Carol Vernallis, Holly Rogers, Selmin Kara, and Jonathan Leal (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2022): 283–310.

²⁰ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2019). I am adopting "noticing" from Tiffany Lethabo King's work in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 30. King, in turn, owes the concept along with "black livingness"—which signals an ongoing process and speaks to practices rather than ontology, *doing* race as opposed to *knowing* race, in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's terms—to Katherine McKittrick. See Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics of Black Life," *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 16–28; and "Diachronic Loops/Deadweight Tonnage/Bad Made Measure," *Cultural Geographies* 23, no.1 (2016): 3–18. Chun, "How to Do Things," 8.

²¹ Aria Dean, "Rich Meme, Poor Meme," *Real Life* (July 25, 2016), <https://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/>.

²² "[My generation] received most of our understandings of the politics of identity and race as a digital signal, as an upload, if you like, of an always-already marked set of structured absences: Fanon, The Panthers, Black Power and so on. So there is a sense in which the founding regime ... came to us as a set of digital simulacra; as traces of moments forever fixed as virtual references, but always deferred and always already there as a signal, a noise, a kind of utopian possibility." John Akomfrah, "Digitopia and the Spectres of the Diaspora," *Journal of Media Practice* 11, no. 1 (2010): 27.

²³ Dean, "Rich Meme."

²⁴ "At the heart of this problem of accurately representing a Black collective is the fact that 'Blackness' does not exist outside of its intersection with other collective identities." Michelle M.

Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 13.

²⁵ Calvin Warren, “Black Care,” *Liquid Blackness* 3, no. 6 (December 2016). Care is also a key topic discussed by Sharpe in *In the Wake*, and by King in *The Black Shoals*. I will note that Warren’s, Sharpe’s, and King’s discussion of practices of care is concomitant with a transdisciplinary focus on care as a heuristic and practice. For example, María Puig de la Bellacasa’s recent book, *Matters of Care*, proposes that care is imperative for critical posthumanism. María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Hil Malatino’s *Trans Care* examines the ways in which care labor reproduce normative gender structures. Hil Malatino, *Trans Care* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020). In addition, recent work in rhetoric and computing has advocated a “research as care” approach; see Maria Novotny and John T. Gagnon, “Research as Care: A Shared Ownership Approach to Rhetorical Research in Trauma Communities,” *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric* 18.1 (2018): 71–101. Lauren E. Cagle, “The Ethics of Researching Unethical Images: A Story of Trying to Do Good Research Without Doing Bad Things,” *Computers and Composition* 61 (2021).

²⁶ Patrick Jagoda, “Network Ambivalence,” *Contemporaneity* 4, no. 1 (2015): 114.

²⁷ Warren, “Black Care,” 38.

²⁸ Saidiya Hartman writes, “black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.” Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2007), 8.

²⁹ Beth Coleman, “Race as Technology,” 177.

³⁰ “In lieu of an inherited formulation of subjectivity, Snead theorizes a dispersed being, one that relies on the action of motion to formulate itself. In a sense, we end up with a subject designed like a series of Joseph Cornell boxes—amalgamations of detritus that have been preciously assembled into a new order of meaning. Somehow, within the noise and speed of contemporary being, there is yet the silhouette, the dim figure of our mobile agent.” Coleman, “Race as Technology,” 202.

³¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 135. Coleman cites the Italian Futurist, Giacomo Balla’s work *Plastic Construction of Noise and Speed* (1915) as a conceptual metaphor for racialized subjectivity. Coleman’s agent of limitless flexibility and adaptability can also be interpreted as a latent reproduction of the prime subject of neoliberal political economy. Aria Dean, “Notes on Blacceleration,” *e-Flux Journal* 87 (December 2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/87/169402/notes-on-blacceleration/>.

³² C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 57.

³³ Coleman, “Race as Technology,” 202.

³⁴ Chun, “How to Do Things,” 14.

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 53. Jasbir Puar offers the prompt, “One productive way of approaching this continental impasse would be to ask not necessarily what assemblages are, but rather, what assemblages do.” Jasbir Puar, “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” *Transversal*

Texts (October, 2012), <https://transversal.at/transversal/0811/puar/en>; Alexander Galloway, "The Swervers" (May 6, 2017), <http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/the-swervers>.

³⁶ Coleman, "Race as Technology," 177.

³⁷ Coleman, "Race as Technology," 189.

³⁸ Reich, "The Gift of Black Sonics," 287.

³⁹ I do not have the space to elaborate on this intersection between critical race theory, media studies, and my gesture to Julia Kristeva's work on abjection. Risking gross reduction, it will have to suffice to say that Kristeva explains that abjection is produced by the removal of a part of the "body" such that it is rendered an "object." Furthermore, this trauma disturbs a cohered/stable/apodictic notion of identity while also unsettling the symbolic order. Both of these aspects of abjection suggest productive consonances and dissonances with a theory of racialized technicity that remains to be explored. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁴⁰ "Having a national identity is still something we're hunting for," says d'Baha. "Unfortunately we can't say we're American if we don't get to experience the freedom, the liberty, and the equity of that." <https://www.cbc.ca/shortdocs/features/meet-muhiyidin-dbaha-the-man-who-grabbed-a-confederate-flag-on-live-tv1>.

⁴¹ Jafa, "Black Visual Intonation."

⁴² Moten, "Case," 205.

⁴³ "Listening to Images explores the lower frequencies of transfiguration enacted at the level of the quotidian, in the everyday traffic of black folks with objects that are both mundane and special: photographs. What are the 'lower frequencies' of these quotidian practices, and how do we engage their transfigurative potential?" Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 7.

⁴⁴ Moten, "Case," 182.

⁴⁵ bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara. (New York: Routledge, 1993): 288–302

⁴⁶ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Elisabeth Robin Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁴⁷ Moten, "Case," 182.

⁴⁸ This queer intimacy is manifest, for instance, in the figure of *mi mati*. "This is the word Creole women use for their female lovers: figuratively *mi mati* is "my girl," but literally it means *mate*, as in *shipmate*—she who survived the Middle Passage with me." Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ* 14, no. 2–3 (2008), 192.

⁴⁹ C. Riley Snorton and Hentyle Yapp, "Sensuous Contemplation:" Thinking Race at its Saturation Points," *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020): 1–12.

⁵⁰ Moten, "Case," 182.

⁵¹ This is a reduction of two seminal concepts in black film and media studies. The first is bell hooks' "oppositional gaze," referenced above. The second is Anna Everett's "recalcitrant gaze," explored in, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909–1949* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁵² I would argue that reading Tinsley into media theory indicates that current discourses analyzing altered and broken states of extension through the apparatus, specifically "post-cinema," the "new audio visual image," "chaos cinema," and "disrelated images," can and should be reframed not

as a break from the reproduction of natural perception, but as expressions of non-reciprocity with what Elizabeth Reich and Scott C. Richmond term the “compensatory illusion of a unified subject” that has always been the supplemented domain of whiteness. In other words, the emergence of aesthetic practices that, for some, feel ravishing and dis-correlated may, alternately, serve as expressions of a racialized perspective that has never existed in reciprocity with categories like “the human,” “the normal,” “the natural,” and other variations on the theme. Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010); Steven Shaviro, “The New Audiovisual Image,” *La Furia Umana* 23, <http://www.lafuriaumana.it/index.php/56-archive/lfu-23/346-steven-shaviro-the-new-audiovisual-image>; Matthias Stork, “Chaos Cinema: Assaultive Action Aesthetics,” *Media Fields Journal* 6 (2013), http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/707453/23561535/1380258173110/Stork_Final.pdf?token=vrV8rxbHd%2FlrJJ6TAqMsAaf5EV8%3D; Shane Denson, *Dis-correlated Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); Elizabeth Reich and Scott C. Richmond, “Introduction: Cinematic Identifications,” *Film Criticism* 39, no. 2 (2014): 3–24.

⁵³ The reference to Drexciya in the episode is exemplary of the series’ intertextuality; its emphasis on swerves *across* media forms. “Detroit electro-techno outfit Drexciya was conceived in 1989, but first came into the public eye in 1994 with “Aquatic Invasion”—the first of a thematic series of releases. Drexciya’s James Stinson and Gerald Donald remained hidden behind their alias for much of the group’s existence, communicating a complex personal mythology of a “Drexciyan” race of underwater dwellers descended from pregnant slave women thrown overboard during trans-Atlantic deportation. Within this fiction, their music—which they claimed was recorded “live in the studio” rather than programmed—was imagined as a “dimensional jumpphole” between their black African roots and the contemporary USA. *Discogs*, <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1172-Drexciya>. Drexciya has recently been re-explored through clipping’s album *The Deep*, which was expanded into a work of literary fiction by Rivers Solomon. Rivers Solomon with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes, *The Deep* (New York: Saga Press, 2019).

⁵⁴ Moten, “Case,” 205; Jafa, “Intonation,” 267. The “transcendental spectator” is a figure taken from Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz’s models of cinematic identification. Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Phillip Rosen. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286–98; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

⁵⁵ Joshua Chambers-Leston, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

⁵⁶ The full quote from Dean’s “Worry the Image” argues for a relationship between formal experimentation and content expressive of black experience that goes beyond discourses adjudicating “good and/or bad” representation: “A truly black cinema, for Jafa, is not just one populated with black people and black narratives made by black filmmakers, but one that is structurally and theoretically black.... By posing the question of what black cinema can or could be, Jafa engaged two different, but interlocking timelines, not only asking what black cinema has always already been—even if it was not seen as such—as well as what it can be in the present and in the future if it is nurtured and cared for.” Dean, “Worry the Image.” Moten writes, “Blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line—is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity.” Moten, *In the Break*, 1.

⁵⁷ Warren, “Black Care,” 37.

⁵⁸ Sharpe, *Wake*, 106.

⁵⁹ On *attunement* see Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 139–42; Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁶⁰ “When he looked at me, he made like a grunting, like aggravated sound.... He was almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad that I’m shooting him....” State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson. Transcript of Grand Jury, Vol. 5 (September 16, 2014), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1370569-grand-jury-volume-5#document/p208/a189404>.

⁶¹ Shaviro, “Kant, Deleuze, and the Virtual.” On blackness and non-linear time see, *Black Quantum Futurism: Theory & Practice*. Ed. Rasheedah Phillips. Afrofuturist Affair, 2015.

⁶² Sharpe, *Wake*, 9.

⁶³ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 8.

⁶⁴ Terence McCoy. “9-Year-Old Girl Shot While Selling Girl Scout Cookies,” *The Washington Post* (February 5, 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/05/9-year-old-girl-shot-while-selling-girl-scout-cookies/>.

⁶⁵ Frank B. Wilderson characterizes the black body as “a body that magnetizes bullets.” Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 77.

⁶⁶ “Black futures” is a term developed by Kara Keeling in *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, 2019). It is also the title of a collection of works edited by Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham exploring black futurity. Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham, *Black Futures* (New York: One World, 2020). Afro-Fabulation is Tavia Nyong’o’s term for projecting a “people to come,” which he develops primarily through Deleuze’s essay on T. E. Lawrence, “The Shame and the Glory.” Tavia Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

⁶⁷ Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 9; Keeling, *Queer Times*; Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations*.

⁶⁸ Brian Massumi identifies the stakes of the virtual as “the new.” Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, 27.

⁶⁹ Keeling, *Queer Times*, 32.

⁷⁰ Sharpe, *Wake*, 38. McKittrick suggests that working through the archive requires us to ask, in addition to what is indexed or recorded, “What else happened?” McKittrick, “Mathematics of Black Life,” 22.

⁷¹ I am using ambivalence in Patrick Jagoda’s sense of “extreme presence,” a stance characterized by an imperative to “slow down thought, oscillate among divergent perspectives, inhabit complex contradictions, and enter into uncertain collective configurations.” Jagoda, “Network Ambivalence,” 114, 117.

⁷² As Elizabeth Reich puts it, black filmmakers have focused on “the failure of moving-image representation to *work*—to generate sufficient awareness and action of the obstacles to Black living; or to produce effective, productive, transformational perspectives and ideology.” Reich, “The Gift of Black Sonics.” Also see, Courtney Baker, *Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁷³ Gillespie, *Film Blackness*, 31.

⁷⁴ “Nance’s oeuvre reimagines Black existence: its temporal dimensions; its tactics of visual and aural representation; and its ex/inclusions from... “the category of the human,” Reich, “Documentary Strain,” 46.

⁷⁵ Dean, “Rich Meme”; Reich, “Documentary Strain.”

⁷⁶ *Kekubian Assassin*, <https://www.kekubianassassin.com/>.

⁷⁷ The phrase is borrowed from the subtitle of Fred Moten’s recent trilogy: *Black and Blur*, *Stolen Life*, and *The Universal Machine*.

⁷⁸ “*Queer* not in the sense of a “gay” or same-sex loving identity waiting to be excavated from the ocean floor but as a praxis of resistance. *Queer* in the sense of marking disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so: connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to.” Tinsley, “Queer Atlantic,” 199.

⁷⁹ Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 4. Nance and Doreen Garner’s interview with Yeleen, a young bisexual black man, aims to make visible black male bisexuality while also folding bisexual male desire into the wider frame of “the sexual proclivities of the black community.” Yeleen discusses the frustration of being on a date with a woman who found his gender “disorderly,” and tried to situate him within gender categories she found recognizable.

⁸⁰ Denis Ferreira Da Silva, “Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal beyond the Limits of Critique,” *philoSOPHIA* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 19–41. “One of the greatest tasks of blackness as collective being has been to hold itself together in something like cohesion, to exhibit some legible character. This cohesion only becomes necessary, perhaps, as the collective being is made visible to nonblack society. When considered on its own, in what to some are the shadows, this collective being is allowed to expand and contract at will. But when society shines a light on it, what is atomized and multiplicitous hardens into the Black.” Aria Dean, “Rich Meme, Poor Meme.” The usage of the lowercase “blackness” throughout this essay is reflective of a distinction being made between the series’ ongoing practice of noticing and assembling a capacious black collective, and the “hardened” “Blackness” made legible for whiteness which Dean describes.

⁸¹ Solange performs her song “Onyx” in this episode, and several segments reproduce the new genre of ASMR videos popularized by YouTube. Jamie Lauren Keiles, “How A.S.M.R. Became a Sensation,” *New York Times Magazine* (April 4, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/magazine/how-asmr-videos-became-a-sensation-youtube.html>.

⁸² “Ambivalence is a crucial critical position from which to think within an uncertain present that is also ongoing.” Patrick Jagoda, “Network Ambivalence,” 114.

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