

Black Dance: A Collage of Embodied Language Systems

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Dance is connected to and an extension of music. It is also safe to say that within the technique and sequential pattern of dance phrases, there is always space for embodied affectations. Several factors determine the specificity of the affectations. For example, the undulations and intentional manipulation of the velocity and timing of the dance phrases of the Wideman Davis Dance performance are tantamount to the flattening or sharpening of the notes within the pentatonic scales. *Migratuse Ataraxia* by Wideman Davis Dance engages the viewers and invites them to participate in the discourse on the African dialectal. For some viewers, the engagement may happen at the point when they enter the actual building vestibule. However, for audiences of African descent, the engagement begins when the estate comes into view before setting foot on the grounds. The very sight of the address can function like ideographic spiritual markings, where a portal for exchanging memory, experiences, processing, and wisdom can occur. The embodied archive comes to life at the intersection of “affect,” “blur,” and Weheliye's “racializing assemblages.” For example, in *Jazz*, the third and seventh notes of the minor pentatonic scale are the notes that are affected. This links to the 2/3 clavé

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rhythm, which is rooted in African rhythms, and is now most known as a part of Latin American music. When one hears the 2/3 clavé, it is the third and seventh space in the series where the pattern's break (the and) occurs. That break is an integral part of the rhythm and is a place where the dancer allows for supplemental reverberations in their body. In both instances, the affectations' specificity adds richness and houses cultural and historical data from the body archive. It is why individuals with similar affectations are so attuned to the experience and why those open to the experiential differences of humanity can become witnesses as opposed to spectators.

The sounds create the soundtrack of the installation while simultaneously echoing the minor pentatonic scale, adding depth to the experience. Ultimately, the viewer realizes they have been in several different sensorial exchanges. The voice, the musical vibration, the embodied languages of dance, and the expressionist art all occur and collate. They all reveal the specificity and intentionality of their cultural pattern. Within the weft of these moments, the space no longer exists, and the resuscitation of the artistic and spiritual organs begins to expand and contract. The viewer becomes the witness while the performers become the griots. The Afro-diasporic languages have become the mother tongue. The beating heart of the space slows and flatlines, yet the souls and experiences of the past become a part of the living. Archival bodies have now become sources of knowledge, broadcasting entities, and Afro-diasporic linguists. All of this occurs because the viewer and the performer spent a moment sharing their "affects" and standing in wonderment of the "blur."

Fred Moten uses the metaphorical concept of the "blur" to describe spaces that are not confined by boundaries. When considering his usage of blurring, it is a space where knowledge production occurs, and the translation of multi-sensory languages is distilled and broadcasted. The human body acquires information through the sensorium and can concurrently respond within the specific language system or through a sister language system. Diana Taylor discusses the importance of embodied memories and how individuals' lived experiences inform the archive. Taylor opines that the living, moving archive can provide a multi-sensorial account of the archival information that no static sources can. The performers, who have the experience of learning and presenting the choreography as a part of the Wideman Davis Dance installation, are multi-sensory archivists of the production. Taylor's argument about embodied archives feeds into the knowledge that the body not only holds historical data but also houses the affectations specific to the experiences of the living body. Taylor's work is echoed in

affect theory. According to Deleuze, Guattari surmised that affect occurs in the time between experience and cognition. It resides in a space where emotion, language, and expression are in the form of stasis, and the affect is experienced solely as an energetic surge within the body. It is tied to movement yet exists within transitional spaces of consciousness. Yet, Weheliye pushes the theoretical lens by including the racialized body in affect theory because he explores how racialized human bodies experience threads of specificity that are unique to their bodies (36). Weheliye's concept of "racializing assemblages" explains how day-to-day occurrences, through the construct of race, create fractured racialized experiences determining their own socio-emotional and historical affectations. In other words, "affect" for the African-descended person appears with a full-bodied archive and an engaged consciousness. When surveying these three points of view, as if they occur simultaneously, affect occurs as an embodied activation.

Social constructs disrupt the archived experiential data while the modes of communication demand that it lives outside the boundaries of human categorization. Even if the conscious body in the present is not actively engaged, the consciousness of the past and the future are passively engaged with experiential data. The experiences held within alternate data centers of the body (nervous system, musculoskeletal system, and chakra energy networks) carry both the memory and processing mechanizations that turn into affect. At the same time, the consciousness of the future collective understands the sequence of affects that was fully informed by the cognition of past experiences. Therefore, the present self must actively engage in the affectations' past, present, and future. It is precisely at the intersection of these concepts where the multilingual and sensorial elements of performance are drawn from the affectations, and where the subtext of racialized experiences are broadcasted.

When the unconscious mind enables our embodied intelligence to lead, the purity of our affectations becomes alive. The exchanges between the unconscious mind and our embodied intelligence inform the many points in which our bodies respond to our immediate experiences of the past. Therefore, within this space of "affect," the "blur" offers an opportunity for absolute engagement and embodied discourse. Call and response are examples of how affect theory occurs beyond the Eurocentric confines of language systems and leads us to understand the multiplicities of African-derived language codification. As spoken language systems include phonology, semantics, and pragmatics, so do embodied language systems. The vernacular of the body archive is composed of physical, oral, and visual art dialects. The human body is a processing center and a technological broadcasting

tool using either a branch of language furcation or the fusion of these differing communicative codices (divine language) to inform the viewer. The audience engages from their point of “affect,” experiencing the raw data linking them to the mainframe of the collective experience. This is where the installation begins, where the start of the “affect” occurs, and the embodied response (a result of the pinging of historical and experiential data points) continues the dialogue. Viewers walk onto the grounds, earth, and terrain pulsing beneath the soles of their feet, with varying levels of adrenaline and understanding.

As the assembled audience members prepare to enter, the structure's temporality syncs with their realities. The shadows of the African ancestors shift into the foreground while welcoming their kin and admonishing the wretched. The Black viewers walk past the threshold of the dwelling, and, in moments of silence, both give and receive the energetic hug of the diasporic collective now imbued upon the construct. The differing scents, the patina and textures of the space, and the breath of the living and lived pasts converge. Then, as if transmitted through a portal, the embodiment of the past descends as the performers glide down the staircase. One can hear the steps from above before seeing the bodies in space. The tangible realities of the interaction begin as the viewer looks upon the melanated skin of the performers and engages with a subtext that they have elected to see but may not have understood the specificity or the depth of the exchange in the present.

To further explore the concept of the blur, I will expand on the articulation of the convergence and the idea of the improvisational space. This space is what jazz musicians refer to as the “silent space”—the break between the notes—where another track of the story is being told. In one vignette, there is a dialogue between two dancers. A couple at a table, engaged in a deep connection with each other, as they focused intensely into the eyes of one another. What appears to be a simple dialogue between two lovers is a significant conversation with the community. It vibrates in such a way that the dancer's stillness becomes a projection in multiplicity. The dancers vacillate between a grounded and core-driven reality and the angular lines of the colonizer's language. The antebellum aspects of the estate, the house, and the room become vestiges as the performers reclaim the liberty of their ancestors; the use of patterns, rhythm, and sonic stillness aids in flipping the lens to one of an African epistemological reality. The antebellum space becomes a shell where new neural patterning and pathways are being created. The creolized embodied language of the dancers suggests a grammar of Eurocentrism and yet reveals the Afrocentrism of their vocabulary.

Performance artist Michaela Pilar Brown marks the interior of a room by claiming and documenting the lives of the nameless, enslaved individuals who once inhabited the halls of the mansion. Tally marks graffiti the space; the performer increases the act of marking with urgency as she builds into a loud shriek. This performative act intensifies as the performer's urgency rises. The Asé takes over, and the topical scribbling appears to be engravings, an energetic carving reaching the depths of consciousness and understanding. Asé a Yoruba spiritual concept that meshes affect, the blur, and the duality of the unconscious and the corporal self as the experiential data downloads and expresses itself. The palpable exchange seemingly functions like cosmogramic symbols of Afro-diasporic spiritual/religious practices. Ultimately, an "affective" transmission occurs through these abstract notchings.

Two men sit proleptically as moving black and white images are projected on the walls behind them. Centering themselves in each other's presence, the men labor to maintain the bonds of brotherhood. They proceed as infantrymen, dancing in their freedom and taking up space with no semblance of confinement or policing. Their weight shifting and balance illustrate the mobility and agility of their lives; the viewer is incarcerated behind the walls of today's social constructs. When freedom is presented in the looking glass, how can you not see your prison of another's making?

The *Migratuse Ataraxia* installation foregrounds the aural nature embedded in the performance. After completing the inscription of the tally marks on the walls, the performer bellows, releasing the distress. The creaking sounds of walking on lived-in wood floors, as the planks exhale the tragedies of housing human defilement, at times matching the irregular breathing pattern of the anxious audience. The intermittent sounds of gospel and soul music display the challenges and hopefulness of life. The melodic affectations within the music and its link to dance and embodied movement become clearer through understanding the function of the pentatonic scale. The melodic sonic pattern which is the basis for the Blues and Jazz is the sound and texture that defines it and allows for the nuanced affect to be embedded. The major pentatonic scale is used for jazz, and the minor pentatonic scale for the blues (Cutting). However, in both scales, specific notes within the scale are sonically flattened and/or sharpened to create a type of dissonance that then defines the genre. It is precisely those flat or sharp notes that are the vibrational representations of the affectations of Black people. They are the "racialized assemblages" that add the subtext to the music and vocalizations of the genre. Therefore, dance is connected to and an extension of music. Within the

technique and sequential pattern of dance phrases, there is always space for embodied affectations.

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