Christina Knight, "Feeling and Falling in Arthur Jafa's Love is the Message, the Message is Death," *The Black Scholar,* July 09, 2019

THE BLACK SCHOLAR

Feeling and Falling in Arthur Jafa's *Love is the Message, the Message is Death*

CHRISTINA KNIGHT

Arthur Jafa's *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* is a video work that charts a path of Black expressive culture and racial violence. The artist employs found footage from popular culture, including police dash-cams, documentary film, and viral YouTube videos, scoring the whole with Kanye West's "Ultralight Beam." Jafa explores, in the words of cultural critic Aria Dean, how "black death and black joy are pinned to each other by the white gaze," particularly online.[1] However, this essay explores the work as an address to Black audiences, for whom white fetishization and state surveillance constitute an everyday racial commonsense. Showcasing Black performers and athletes as well as academics and other non-celebrities, *Love is the Message* offers up an iterative, affective representation of a people collectively managing spectacular pain and communicating that pain through a performative virtuosity. The piece thus mines the subversive power of a shared (viewing) experience that remains unseen to mainstream audiences, even as they endlessly watch and circulate images of Black pleasure and pain. The essay concludes with a meditation on the many falling bodies within the film, suggesting that falling is a technique that Black subjects have developed to survive within white supremacy. Ultimately, I argue that *Love is the Message* demands a reading practice that surpasses the extremes of virtuosity and abjection that dominate representations of Black life, and instead centers all of the living, making, and community building in between.

I. The Affective Edit

Arthur Jafa is a cinematographer best known for his work on Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), but more recently for his contributions to the videos for Solange Knowles's "Don't Touch My Hair" and "Cranes in the Sky" as well as Beyoncé Knowles's "Formation" video. For decades, Jafa has been developing a technique of filmmaking called "Black Visual Intonation" (BVI) that he hopes will reflect the structure of Black culture itself; this process has led the artist to think in particular about the structure of Black music. He describes his process as "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."[2] In other words, in the same way that jazz musicians "worry the note," playing around the beat and outside of the diatonic scale, Jafa experiments with editing practices that disrupt the viewer's experience of time.[3] Tellingly, the filmmaker cites Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" as an influence. In that essay, Baudry discusses editing practices that smooth over the differences captured as the camera moves from frame to frame. According to Baudry, in addition to creating a sense of false continuity, this process also produces a *subject* of that cinema who not only imagines the world to be continuous, but sees herself to be in a

transcendental mastery over that world.[4] Building on Baudry, not only does the cinematic apparatus produce in viewers a distorted feeling of mastery over the world, but in Hollywood cinema that subject position is almost always coded as white.[5]

Part of how Jafa attempts to undermine this racialized tendency toward false objectivity in *Love is the Message* is through the rapid-fire pacing of the compiled videos as well as his approach to editing as an affect-driven process. One powerful effect of the pacing of the video is that it creates a visual experience that denies the viewer full possession of the Black subjects on view. As art historian Huey Copeland argues,

> For one, the brevity of the clips mobilized in *LMMD* means that it holds out only fleeting depictions of individual subjects, as if to hedge against the visual capture of black folks, while throwing light—and shade—on viewers' implication in the digital ecologies through which those images circulate and dis/appear.[6]

In other words, Jafa makes the viewer move on to another image just as the mechanics of the (white) gaze kick in.[7] This refusal to allow Black subjects to be objects of contemplation treads a fine line, however, since images of Blackness already circulate online with such speed. A viewer need not view an image of a Black person for long in order to quickly interpret it within the context of racial stereotype. Indeed, the speed with which Black visual culture circulates on the internet is probably a driver in making such associations happen with greater economy. In that case, *Love is the Message* provides a lens onto this process without necessarily challenging it.

A bigger intervention into the ideology embedded in the cinematic apparatus within *Love is the Message* might be the artist's privileging of feeling over the creation of a

Figure 1: Walter Scott. Image courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome.

narrative through line. Jafa works in a collage process, and he calls his placement of the different elements in the film an exercise in "affective proximity."[8]

For example, in one instance, the figure of Walter Scott runs from the right of the screen to the left before being struck by a police bullet and falling to his death; this is followed by what looks like a black-and-white video of Civil Rights marchers moving *en masse* from the left of the screen to the right, then a dimly lit, back-turned Storyboard P shimmying his arms into the air at the center of the screen. Footage of frenetic and sexualized club dancing ends with a woman being pulled up and to the right out of a near fall. This is followed immediately by a dignified Hortense Spillers walking slowly toward the viewer. The disjuncture that this changing of content creates is reinforced by the fact that the viewer's eye is constantly drawn in different directions and at different paces. Jafa's approach thus forces the viewer to make connections between dissonant moments in these depictions of Black life. What, for instance, does Spillers' contemplative walk have to do with the police assassination of an unarmed man? What does either have to do with the ways Black bodies hold feeling and forge connection through dance? Though the film doesn't tell us explicitly, the viewer begins to sense a link between Black cultural expression, whether individual or communal, and racial terror.

A large part of what drives the effectiveness of this use of affective proximity in *Love is the Message* is that Jafa employs clips from videos that have circulated virally, either as memes or as part of activist efforts to bring attention to the threat of police violence to Black lives.

For example, it is likely that most audience members will have seen Michelle Dobyne comically regaling a news anchor about her realization that "the building is *on fire*," or scrolled past a looping video of a police officer pushing and dragging a bikini-clad

Figure 2: Michelle Dobyne. Image courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome.

teenaged Dajerria Becton at a Texas pool party. In contrast to Jafa's own footage, which also populates *Love is the Message*, these videos are what artist and visual theorist Hito Steyerl calls "poor images"—the kind of image that, through constant sharing, rebranding, and shifting from platform to platform becomes as ubiquitous as it is poor in quality. She says,

> Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.[9]

In other words, the value of such videos shifts away from the high-resolution standards that audiences associate with commercial film. Instead, they become snapshots of both the collective mood and the *collective* that forms through their sharing and distribution. Thus, in *Love is the Message*, Jafa taps into those communities that have sprung up around Blackness online, holding a mirror to the different ways that those groups traffic in Blackness and to what end.[10]

This mirror on the ways that online communities consume Blackness may seem to be Jafa's only intervention with *Love is the Message*, and indeed, this social justice lens dominates many readings of why the film became so popular so soon after Donald Trump's election.[11] Yet, I believe that Jafa's approach to editing is more than simply a critique of the (white, racist) gaze or of those viewers who consume and circulate images of Blackness either for entertainment or for organizing. In addition to offering an indictment of the power structures that visually reproduce Blackness as both love (performative virtuosity) and death (social non-intelligibility or non-being), with *Love is the Message*, Jafa reworks the racialized power structure of the gaze in order to reflect on the lived experience of contemporary Black life.

Though working in affective proximity allows Jafa to disrupt expectations around objectivity and continuity, the more important intervention is to shake up the *subject* of that cinema. For seven minutes, every viewer is offered a small opportunity, if not to see as Black subjects see, then to *feel* what it is like to be seen through a racist optics that demands a spectacle, whether it is of pleasure or pain. Put another way, the film's form itself reflects something about collective Black experiences. This idea rhymes with critic Laur Jackson's assertion that meme culture works in ways that mimic blackness:

> Memes not only contain components of Black language, gravitate towards a Black way of speaking, *but in their survival* latch onto Black cultural modes of improvisation to move through space and subsist in an ultra-competitive visual-verbal environment […] Simply said: the way memes change, adapt, fold into themselves, make old like new … their movement looks very very Black.[12]

As the argument goes, just as African cultural retentions survived the Middle Passage by adapting and combining with Western cultural forms, so online content created by and featuring Black people survives constant appropriation and recontextualization. And further, this process should make us rethink notions of racial authenticity: Blackness (replacing African ethnic identities) emerged during the forced migration of those on slave ships, taking on a different meaning in each place the enslaved landed. In other words, like memes, Blackness has always been a copy without an original, just as it has always been in motion.

Similarly, one might say that *Love is the Message*'s pacing suggests a reflection not just of how whiteness structures Black experience, but of how Blackness adapts. Jafa tells us,

> On the other hand, [*Love is the Message* is] also addressing Black people directly. It's saying, "Yo, keep moving forward; they knocked us down, we turn that shit into an art form. They hit us in the side of the head, we turn that shit into an art form." We can't stop ourselves from being injured, but we can in a sense deflect the sort of insult that's added to the injury.[13]

In other words, Black performative virtuosity is not the exception to Black suffering; instead, it is coterminous with, even produced through, that suffering. If this idea is not wholly original, *Love is the Message* seems to go further, probing how one might tell a different story about Blackness in America if one didn't center whiteness (or Blackness, as it is defined through the narrow lens of white supremacy). As scholar Alexander Weheliye wonders, "what different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain?"[14] Jafa's approach to Black cinema could be summed up as this attention to Black people's ability to take their exclusion from this figure of full humanity and to "turn that shit into an art form."

Describing Jafa's process, Aria Dean tells us that, "If black music treats sound as unstable, so [Jafa's] black cinema treats time as inherently unstable as well";[15] this strategy could be said to reflect the peculiar, nonlinear relationship that contemporary Black people themselves have to time. For example, in *On the Postcolony*, postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe theorizes this relationship as a "time of entanglement." Instead of understanding time to unfold in a neatly linear and homogenous way, Black postcolonial subjects experience it as "an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones."[16] If Jafa suggests that Black people live at "the tempo of emergency,"[17] then a time of entanglement goes further—to describe how, for Black people, past emergencies irrupt into present ones, shaping and contextualizing them. In *Love is the Message*, this feels like Reconstruction and Civil Rights and present-day police brutality all held together in one person's consciousness. In the film, Black people are all the people they've ever been, existing in all places at the same time. If white viewers are

invited to reflect on this experience in *Love is the Message*, they are not the ideal subjects to whom it is addressed.

II. Falling as a State of Grace

Though the form of *Love is the Message* encourages audiences to experience time in an urgent, entangled way, the film also urges a rethinking of how contemporary viewing practices shape the realm of possibility for Black lives. The beginning of *Love is the Message* sets the tone for what will follow. The film starts with a clip of micro-celebrity Charles Ramsey speaking about his rescue of Amanda Berry and two other women from his neighbor Ariel Castro's house in Cleveland, Ohio in 2013.

Though Jafa includes a shortened excerpt of the interview, in the original, Ramsey says,

> Bro, I knew something was wrong when a little pretty white girl ran into a black man's arms. Something is wrong here. Dead giveaway. Dead giveaway. Dead giveaway. Either she's homeless or she got problems —that's the only reason she would run to a black man.[18]

Ramsey's repetition of "dead giveaway" three times drives home a deeply cynical view of race relations at a moment in which the media is repeatedly declaring him a hero.[19] Scoring Ramsey's interview with the first few notes of "Ultralight Beam," the first track on Kanye West's 2016 "gospel" album, Jafa

Figure 3: Charles Ramsey. Image courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome.

subtly highlights the not-so-hidden abjection lurking behind the spectacle of much viral Blackness. Think about the bronchitis Sweet Brown discusses when she famously says, "ain't nobody got time for that," or the attempted rape behind Antoine Dodson's famous plea to "hide yo' kids, hide yo' wife."[20]

Yet, the message of *Love is the Message* is marked by its ending as well as its beginning. The short film concludes with a clip of James Brown performing the song, "Please, Please, Please" live in December of 1964. In this performance, Brown falls to his knees five times during the roughly six-minute song, each time being helped up by a back-up singer, and egged on by the screams of the audience. In fact, falling is a consistent theme in *Love is the Message*. The first fall that we see is Walter Scott, shot in the back by a policeman in 2015; then the scene of club dancing, in which a woman drops so low into a squat that she loses her balance and is pulled up by a friend. Later, mixed in with other clips, we see a woman stumbling in religious ecstasy, a blackface character from a black-and-white film being "struck dumb" and falling out comically, a gravity-defying vogue dip, a football player making a one-handed catch while falling backwards, and a Black person being held down and dragged by several police officers. All of this occurs in the first two minutes, although this theme continues throughout the film's seven-minute run.

The film's movement from an upright, self-deprecating Ramsey to its conclusion with a falling, ecstatic James Brown encourages us to think about what falling has to do with Black expressive culture. In other words, what do Black people stage when we stage falling? One way to begin thinking through this in relationship to *Love is the Message* is by engaging one of Jafa's interlocutors; that is, Alice Sheldon's science fiction short story, "Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death."[21] In that story, an alien arachnid tries to disrupt biological determinism by refusing his predatory nature. He tenderly cares for another being, and this companion grows strong, bears his children, and eventually kills and eats him. The "message" of that work centers on how the protagonist thinks that love will allow him to disrupt "the plan" that orders his life and the life cycles of his kind. Instead, his love for his mate is the vehicle for the so-called plan's execution—in Sheldon's story, the protagonist's performance of love literally enables his own destruction.

On the one hand, one could say that Jafa repurposes this idea to think about how a continuous outpouring of Black expressive culture ("love is the message") is met in the United States with a constant assault on Black bodies and minds ("the message is death"). More broadly, this is the "plan" that has undergirded Black people's position in the United States since we were brought here as slaves. If love is a means of resistance, it is also part of a feedback loop that keeps white supremacy in place. That is, in the best case, white consumers appropriate Black culture while disregarding its creators; in the worst case, white supremacists seek out Black expression in order to destroy it. Think Dylan Roof being invited to pray before killing those nine worshippers in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. As scholar of Black religion Ashon Crawley asks in

Blackpentecostal Breath, "What to do, how to move, in such a world wherein your resistance against violent conditions—resistance as prayer meetings or protests, resistance as simply wishing to breathe—produces the occasion for violence?"[22] It can seem that there is no way out of this violent dynamic: even the highest level of Black performance in any field of measurable achievement fails to result in an attendant recognition of our inherent value. That is to say, even when love is the message, the plan is still death.

Yet, when the film shows image after image of Black people falling, leaning, being held down, it offers a different interpretation to audiences with a more acute viewing practice. First, it is useful to think about the metaphorical register of uprightness in order to engage the power of representing other kinds of postures. In an essay titled simply "Falling," dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright tells us that,

> As a cultural metaphor, falling carries a pretty heavy symbolism in the West. Whether we are talking about the hubris of Icarus or the evil of Satan, the collapse of stock markets or the public stumbling of the latest politician to have lost his integrity on the Internet, falling is generally seen as a failure, a defeat, a loss or a decline.[23]

Albright suggests that uprightness stands in for a larger Western framework for intelligibility, and perhaps more importantly as a gauge of moral capacity: to be "fallen" is to be unworthy of grace. She goes on to ask, by engaging postmodern dancer Nancy Stark Smith, what kinds of new interpretative possibilities might be opened up if we consider falling itself as "a state of grace."[24] In other words, what critical purchase might falling, leaning, or laying low have to offer us? And I would add, how might an attention to falling in Black performance help us think through whose lives register as meaningful in the visual field?

Love is the Message visualizes the Black experience as marking the difference between being upright and downtrodden, between catching the spirit and being cut down by police. More precisely, Jafa tracks the triangulation between falling for (love),[25] falling down (injury), and falling out (ecstasy) in the everyday lives of Black subjects. I read the film as suggesting that falling is a technique that non-normative subjects cultivate to survive in unlivable conditions. In "Expressing Life Through Loss: Queens that Fall with a Freak Technique," choreographer Anna Martine Whitehead argues something similar: she discusses the visible ways that the bodies of queer people of color *hold* loss, and the power inherent in refusing to respond to the physicality of oppression by simply standing up and enduring. She says,

> [The body] carries the burden of danger and grief. There are so many possible outcomes to physically holding that feeling, and only one of those is to continue standing. There are other options, more dynamic and more interesting to me in these moments of disaster: to fall down, to get back up, to fall under the weight of sorrow again, to get back up. To shake to keep from crying. To

> fly to keep from drowning. Freedom is the release of tension under weight paired with the appearance of bearing no weight at all. That is our bold and capricious freedom practice, our freak technique.[26]

Whitehead attends to the dynamism of this physicality, this specialized ability to respond to trauma through a finely tuned improvisation aimed toward the *feeling* of release rather than the *appearance* of freedom. Crawley argues something similar, suggesting that Black performance practices, particularly those deriving from the ring shout, "are about being and sustaining undoneness."[27] Further, he proposes that "these aesthetic practices are about the refusal of being centered, about dispersing with the spatiotemporal geometric logics of Western civil society, a search, a performance, of otherwise directionality."[28] In other words, this refusal of standing, or of uprightness reveals a utopian impulse in Black performance. To picture this as Jafa does is to see Blackness, and Blackness-in-struggle, differently.

I want to go further to suggest that falling in Black performance is important, not simply for the release it offers those falling or the critique it offers those watching, but also because of what it occasions: a falling figure calls a community into being. When James Brown is overcome, when he arches his spine backward only to lunge forward and collapse to his knees, he is always met and assisted by a band mate.

This is, of course, an act that has been rehearsed, from the casting off of Brown's cape to its careful replacement, to his walking toward the wings only to be restored to his proper place in the spotlight. But what is being *staged* here hints at a phenomenon that goes back to the Middle Passage. In an interview with scholar Tina Campt, Jafa noted,

Figure 4: James Brown. Image courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome.

"There's a great quote by Nam June Paik: 'The culture that's going to survive in the future is the culture that you carry around in your head.'" He goes on:

> The Middle Passage is a great example of that. Despite the fact that we came with a full spectrum of incredibly rich traditions of expressivity (both material and immaterial), black people came to be most strong in those spaces where our cultural traditions could be carried in our nervous systems. Architecture, painting, sculpture, those kinds of things, they tended to erode (relatively speaking), in contrast to things like dance, oratory, and music (which could be constantly renewed in the new context in which we found ourselves).[29]

Here, Jafa convincingly argues for the efficacy of performance as a mode of cultural retention for people in the African diaspora. He also suggests that performance was, and continues to be, a means through which Black people enact their belonging to one another.

To conclude, the work that *Love is the Message* does is to call on an audience of Black viewers to see themselves in these improvisations: bearing down, breaking up, going off, and sailing back to verticality. Whitehead tells us:

> The queer folk dance of death, the Africanist dance familiar to all disenfranchised people, though more familiar to some than others, rejects any Western compositional paradigm (beginning-middle-crescendo-dénouement). It is something more like fall-fall-rise-rest-rise-rest-fall or rise-fall-rise-fall-rest-rest-snap, and so on.[30]

In other words, Jafa's film is a notation of an old practice, an Africanist dance that goes back to slave ships, but also marks our stutter steps into the present day. *Love is the Message* argues for a reading practice that sees more than the extremes of virtuosity and abjection in the representation of Black life, instead appealing to all of the living, making, and community building that falls in between. Further, it offers this reorientation as its own strategy for imagining Black survival, a way forward in the midst of impossible conditions. Thus, for audiences who have eyes to see and ears to hear, *Love is the Message* is both a document and a plea—one that begs, as James Brown does, for us to keep falling for, falling down, falling out, but that we *please, please, please* don't go.

Notes

1. Aria Dean, "Poor Meme, Rich Meme," *Real Life*, July 25, 2016: http://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/ (last accessed July 19, 2018).

2. Arthur Jafa, "Black Visual Intonation," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 267.

3. Jafa says, "Most Western music uses a diatonic scale: do re mi fa sol la ti do. A lot of non-Western music uses what's called just intonation, or they use notes that fall in between those notes, which inside of a Western tonal system are not considered legitimate notes. It's not like these notes don't exist, it's just that for whatever reason, those notes were considered inappropriate. What you see in a lot of Black music is a tendency to 'worry' the note. The notational system cannot account for everything that's physically happening in the music that made it work in real time. Black people tend to create notes that are inherently

semi-stable sonic phenomena. There's no such thing as a pure A-sharp or B-flat. It's actually always vibrating. Vibration is the basis of the idea of Black Visual Intonation. I've been developing a system whereby you can take motion in cinema and manipulate it in accordance with these cultural presuppositions of Black vocal intonation." Hans Ulrich Obrist, "I Was That Alien: Filmmaker Arthur Jafa in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist," *O32c*, June 26, 2017: https://032c.com/arthur-jafa/ (last accessed July 19, 2018).

4. Baudry says, "The movability of the camera seems to fulfill the most favorable conditions for the manifestation of the 'transcendental subject.' There is both fantasmatization of an objective reality (images, sounds, colors) and of an objective reality which, limiting its powers of constraint, seems equally to augment the possibilities or the power of the subject." Jean-Louis Baudry and Alan Williams, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974–75), 43.

5. See film scholar Manthia Diawara's essay, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," in which he discusses how (white) directors of Hollywood cinema assume a white viewership by structuring films in ways that produce identification with white protagonists. Diawara also offers a range of Black directors who, like Jafa, respond to this tradition by employing formal strategies that prompt viewers to rethink and resist the racialized ideology embedded in much Hollywood cinema. Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 66–76.

6. Huey Copeland, "Love is the Message, The Message is Death," *ASAP Journal*, June 4, 2018: http://asapjournal.com/love-is-the-message-the-message-is-death-huey-copeland/ (last accessed July 21, 2018).

7. Jafa discusses the idea that the apparatus of the camera itself cannot help but reinforce the white gaze. He says, "If you point a camera at a Black person, on a psychoanalytical level it functions as a White gaze. It therefore triggers a whole set of survival modalities that Black Americans have. It doesn't matter if a Black person is behind the camera or not, because the camera itself functions as an instrument of the White gaze." Obrist, "I Was That Alien."

8. Ibid. Jafa says, "Recently, I was watching another good friend of mine, John Akomfrah, give an interview, and he said something that struck me, because I feel it's at the core of almost everything that I do. He said that essentially what he tries to do is to take things and put them in some sort of affective proximity to one another. That *really* hit me because I think for me, in a nutshell, that's what it really comes down to."

9. Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux* 10 (November 2009): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/ (last accessed July 21, 2018).

10. I can attest to the discomfort that this approach can sometimes create: when I viewed the film at the Met Breuer in the summer of 2017, I noticed audience members laughing out of time, some taking at face value the humor in clips such as the Dobyne, and others taking in the larger critique of the easy consumption of Blackness, whether it was being figured as virtuosic performance or abject suffering.

11. See Nate Freeman, "The Messenger: How a Video by Arthur Jafa Became a Worldwide Sensation—And Described America to Itself," *Art News*, March 27, 2018: http://www.artnews.com/2018/03/27/icons-arthur-jafa/ (last accessed July 20, 2018). Freeman begins his review of *Love is the Message* with an invocation of the political landscape ushered in by President Trump.

12. Laur M. Jackson, "The Blackness of Meme Movement," *Model View Culture*, March 28, 2016, https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/the-blackness-of-meme-movement (last accessed July 19, 2018). Emphasis is Jackson's.

13. Obrist, "I Was That Alien."

14. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.

15. Aria Dean, "Film: Worry the Image," *Art in America*, May 26, 2017: https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/worry-the-image/ (last accessed July 21, 2018).

16. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 16. Emphasis is Mbembe's.

17. Serpentine Cinema, "Lucy Raven in Conversation with Arthur Jafa," YouTube video, 57:34, June 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7xloyY2J7g.

18. CollectiveCheckup, "Charles Ramsey Interview, Cleveland Man That Found Amanda Berry," YouTube Video, 2:53, May 6, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcLSl3oyqhs.

19. The phrase became so iconic that it also became part of the title of Ramsey's subsequent book recounting the events: *Dead Giveaway: The Rescue, Hamburgers, White Folks, and Instant Celebrity … What You Saw on TV Doesn't Begin to Tell the Story …* (2014).

20. Perhaps not coincidentally, each of these incidents has become even more viral when people online have turned the interviews into autotuned songs; the most popular of these can be purchased on iTunes. These comic, catchy anthems further obscure the violence and trauma under discussion in the original interviews.

21. See James Tiptree Jr., "Love Is the Plan, the Plan is Death," *Lightspeed Magazine* 49 (2014). James Tiptree Jr. was a pen name of Sheldon's.

22. Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 23.

23. Ann Cooper Albright, "Falling," *Performance Research* 18 no. 4 (2013): 36.

24. Ibid., 37.

25. I owe this attention to the notion of "falling for" to an exchange with Black performance scholar Hershini Bhana Young.

26. Anna Martine Whitehead, "Expressing Life Through Loss: On Queens that Fall with a Freak Technique," in *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings*, ed. Clare Croft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 286.

27. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 107.

28. Ibid., 107.

29. Arthur Jafa and Tina Campt, "Love is the Message, The Plan is Death," *e-flux* 81 (April 2017): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/126451/love-is-the-message-the-plan-is-death/ (last accessed July 21, 2018).

30. Whitehead, "Expressing Life Through Loss," 288.

Christina Knight is Assistant Professor of Visual Studies at Haverford College, as well as Director of the Visual Studies Program. Knight's work examines the connection between embodied practices and identity, the relationship between race and the visual field, and the queer imaginary. She is currently completing a book manuscript that focuses on representations of the Middle Passage in contemporary American visual art and performance.