

Exploring the Archive of Soul in Paul Stephen Benjamin's 'Black is The Color' - Transcript

Dr. Taryn Jordan - September 28th, 12-1pm CST, 710 N.
Lake Shore Drive, Abbott Hall 206 & Zoom

Dr. Moya Bailey: Welcome everyone who's joining us virtually and also in person. My name is Moya Bailey. I am the founder of the digital apothecary lab. I am a queer black person, sporting an Afro and wearing a green turtleneck, that sort of matches, the colors of our lab. We are recording this with digital devices that travel all over Turtle Island. but many of us and our lab space live in the traditional unseated homelands of the Council of the 3 Fires. The Ojibwe, Ottawa and Potawami nations. Many other tribes, such as the Miami, Hochunk, Minimony, Sac, and Fox also call this area home. We also recognize that land acknowledgments are not enough. You can read more about land acknowledgments on Northwestern's website.

In addition to acknowledging the land that the lab occupies, we also work to make sure our research supports the descendants of those whose enslaved laborer made this space possible. We acknowledged the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants, black Avistonians and Chicagoans, like the founder of Chicago, John Baptiste Point de Sable, who have enriched this region with cultural and economic contributions that can never truly be quantified.

I want to say, I am truly honored today to introduce our speaker, Dr. Taryn Jordan, Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at Colgate University. One of the things about Taryn is that I feel like Taryn and I knew each other before we knew each other. We had a moment of bonding over some sausage biscuit scones that I didn't eat at the time, because I was a very strict vegetarian. Taron has not made them again. And this is something that I think about often, actually that I did not partake at that moment. But food and soul and joy and connection are the things that really brought us together.

I was really moved by a comment that Taryn made in the Colgate University paper, and Taryn said about women's studies, "that it allows me to engage with my feelings, emotions, my experiences, my own history, continental philosophy, poetry, and even cookbooks. What is really compelling about women's studies is that it allows me to bring a certain sense of wholeness to the work. And so when I'm writing or teaching, it feels like there is no subject that is off limits. I think that's exciting as a teacher, as a scholar, as a black woman. If it wasn't for women in sexuality studies, I don't know where I would be as a scholar."

And that to me just sums up so much of what Taryn's friendship has meant to me. I don't know where I would be as a scholar without Taryn. So I am honored to call you my colleague, comrade, and friend. So please folks online and in the room, please help me welcome Dr. Jordan.

Dr. Taryn Jordan: Moya, I didn't think I would feel emotional. I knew I'd be nervous today. But you have me tearing. I'm gonna hold it back for the sake of my own feelings. But thank you for that absolutely beautiful introduction. Moya has been a friend beyond measure, and there are not enough words to talk about the impact that they've had in my life. So thank you.

How are you all doing? I mean, we have a small crowd here in the room. I just wanna take a minute and take a deep breath. You know, we've had a variety of technical difficulties. You know. The University is a strange space we share with other people, and so I just I always start my classes in my talks with this. You know the black calling response of like, How are y'all doing? And I often ask my students, too, who are mostly white, to be like, you need to tell me how you're doing, and you say it at the same time. And so they all are like, 'Okay, Professor Jordan' and I were like, 'it's okay. If it's a mid-day' but anyway, I'm having a really great day, cause I get to be here with you all. So before I kind of open up my broader comments, I wanna say, you know, thank you to Walker Brewer for emailing me and dealing with my long response times and be a wonderful sort of venue to help me get my accommodations here additionally. Thank you to the staff, Edyta Wonjo, for helping me get my accommodations together. Also. Thank you for everyone who's logged on, and in the space for showing up and taking time out of your Thursday afternoon. You can be at a whole lot of places. But you're here with me. So thank you. And last, but not least, I wanna say thank you to those on both sides of the veil of the living in the dead. For helping me arrive here safely today.

So I want to kind of begin, Paul Stephen Benjamin's *Black is The Color* made me realize the importance of the analog to the digital one of the things that I love most about thinking alongside Moya is their sort of obsession and love of digital humanities, the Allied Media Conference and just the Internet at large. And so I, too, wanted to follow in their footsteps and think about media, specifically the digital. But what was really kind of peculiar about my foray into digital humanities is that it didn't quite work. And so what I really want to do here for first part of this talk is, tell a bit of a sort of research-based story about the kind of tensions between the analog and the digital and my work, and how I arrived at this object from Paul Stephen Benjamin, and how I have had to sort of depart from it.

So my talk today is temporally strange, since it's some of the oldest research, some of my oldest research, but it eventually will provide the theoretical framework for my yet to be titled second book project on *Holographic Soul* that engages more closely with feminist science, studies and technology. The holographic soul work moved to the back burner of my research, particularly because I realized the tools I needed to take a history of the present about black holograms didn't quite exist. Hungry to intervene, and scholarly discussions of post-humanism that you know historically, this has shifted a bit. A lighted the history of black folks who are property. Once I realized I had a problem.

My problem was threefold. First, how does one take a history of a feeling? Second, how do I talk about the specificity of not just racialized affect, but the affects emerging from black living and dying on the color line? And third, how do I trace a history through holograms that are black and not black simultaneously? Of these 3 problems I address the first 2 by moving away from the digital towards the analog. Since my talk will be a bit rismatic meaning, it will have multiple entry points that present themselves in a non hierarchical manner. I will first provide a bit of a history of my relationship to the digital and the analog. And second, I will provide a brief overview of where my research lies at the present, and then I'll jump into the more specifics of the talk.

So I kind of approach the first 2 problems through my kind of current research. So I address the issue of method by reconfiguring Michel Foucault's philosophical and historical method of genealogy forthcoming in *Foucault Studies* and Spring 2025. The article titled "Black Foucault and Intellectual Reparations Project" announces a black feminist genealogical method that is able to take a history of those things that are thought to be without a history, like feelings.

Drawing on the example of the Combahee River Collective statement, I co-wrote *Black Foucault* with Dr. Hayley C. Horrell at University of Houston.

The essay mimics the structure and style of Combahee River collective statement to announce our black feminist critique of Continental philosophy's production of a white patriarchal line affiliation between Frederick Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. By showing how WEB Du Bois's *Dusk of Dawn*, An essay toward an autobiography of a race concept, disrupts the intellectual history of genealogy. We ultimately argue that Du Bois is an that absence that makes the history of genealogy possible. We posit that the silences of historical time about the voices, genealogical tracing of a concept of race produces what Foucault and myself and others call a lacunary reserve. Or, more simply: a void that suspends meaning In the history of philosophy's account of genealogy.

The silence of historical time produces a break where Du Bois stands in it, and as a disruption to the line affiliation between Nietzsche and Foucault, which is to say, he disrupts the historical line and story about genealogy's emergence through his autobiography of a race concept. We conclude by arguing a black feminist genealogy is a post-moral method that thinks with these absences and voids that annotate and arrange black life. Ultimately, we investigate this lacuna of race in Foucault's, a genealogical method to argue that the privilege of the black to the archive, which we are very fully aware is sort of counterintuitive to the current claims about history in black studies. So check, Carol and I found a method of capable of taking a history of feeling.

So, following the work on my joint project, I address my second research problem of affects emerging from the peculiarity of living and dying on the color line. Paul Stephen Benjamin's *Black is The Color* helped me to realize how black women's bodies in labor are rendered unrecognizable to sort of the white gaze. As a result, I began to focus on analog techniques of black living with a focus on black men's domestic work for their own kin. And here I want to be clear for the sake of brevity, I use the word women, but I'm really thinking more closely with something that Simone de Beauvoir talks about as the role of the feminine and the masculine; being that it's often reducible to women's work. The care for the home decoration, etc. Thinking analog, the question that arranges all my work is, how do black folks live in the repetition of violence produced by anti-blackness. What is the answer to this question? I don't fully know, but what I do know, for now is found in my current book, manuscript, "Black Taste, the Peculiar Sensation of Black Domesticity."

In my book, I argue, black domesticity is the condition of possibility for a whole lot of black folks to remain, to endure, to live despite the many violent and depressive conditions that arrange our present and historically precede our emergence on this plane of existence.

Strangely, my research question precedes the holographic soul work. My research question has haunted me for a lifetime. Naively as a child I asked this question in a different way. aimlessly fascinated by black history. I would incessantly ask my parents questions, and how it felt to live through major historical moments like, Jim Crow Terror, segregation, the Civil Rights movement black power, and as an aside, my daddy definitely looked like Shaft, and if you know, you know, Reagan's trickled down economics and the war on drugs.

Often, mama would roll her eyes and tell me, go be still. Daddy, sensing that I wouldn't give up that easily, would knowingly say, I don't know, baby, you just got to keep living. Sensing Daddy's frustration, I let my questioning go, and finally left to go be still, and if you are a child who's raised by a black mother, we all know what 'go be still' means.

Not once in my curious series of questions did I ever consider that my parents were trying to shield me from the realities of anti-black violence. Mama's refusal, and Daddy's abstract response to my question about black living through the worst of times has stayed with me for a long time. More specifically, Daddy's response led me to interrogate black living practices by making the mundane, everyday, ordinary aspects of

living strange. Which is to say, Daddy's response undermines the Socratic question, 'how are we to live?' insofar as his refrain is more a demand than an intellectual pursuit of a good life.

Rather the demands seem simple, but the stakes of such refrain are philosophical and life altering. So I shifted my focus away from holograms, and began thinking about tasting history through soul food, curating, soulful home design, to display a hieroglyphics of black history, and collecting black chachkies of angels, my mama and black Marvel Funko pops myself as love. All aspects of black living that are considered unessential, but give a sense of pleasure and respite in the repetition of violence and grief.

These moments, arrested, big and small are the reason and occasion for my ability to peer before you today. Ultimately, my last problem. How do I take a history of holograms that are black and not black will have to be answered another day. I suspect the working through the question required deeper study into the relationship between analog and digital and how black folks, historical transition from technological objects to objects interacting with technology such as artificial intelligence, etc. Will be had another day.

So, I've given a little bit of like a kind of overview of how I sort of arrived at this object, and how it sort of became this sort of fulcrum for me to help me switch from a huge obsession of holograms, and began taking seriously the possibilities that emerge from the black domestic space. And to be sure, and I'm gonna repeat this, this is not talking about black women doing work in white women's homes or domestic labor. In that way I mean domestic labor for their own kin. So, enough about my overall research, I want to jump into the talks that I proposed for today called, "Exploring the Archive of Soul and Paul Stephen Benjamin's 'Black is The Color.'"

I heard it before I saw it. It spilled out of the small room that the curator of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, placed it within the shadows were underscored by an eerie sound emerging from the room. It drew me in stopping me in my tracks. Paul Stephen Benjamin's 'Black is The Color' stunned me. I knew, without knowing that this installation has everything to do with blackness, double consciousness, and soul, and even though those were not the terms I was thinking through. When I saw it, I walked into the room where the installation was placed. Immediately I was enamored. It moved me. The installation caused such stirrings in my soul that I rudely interrupted 2 white teenagers who were using the small room where the installation was staged as a place to coordinate their ride home. I was frankly annoyed. They were giggling and talking loudly. They had no reverence for what stayed before them. They overlooked its sound, its play of shadows, its beauty and the feeling that the object spoke without saying a word.

Perhaps they couldn't hear it. Maybe they couldn't feel it. My loud, "excuse me?" shook the room. The intensity of my words bounced off the walls, joining with the eerie excess of the installation. Immediately it drew me further into its meanings. The teenagers left in a hurry. I had successfully activated my scary black, auntie voice enough for them to know I meant business. I got worried that their dash for the exit meant a security guard would soon follow. Fate that day sided with me, and no such violence occurred. I sat with her, the installation forging a weird kinship. She spoke through vibration. She spoke of my history. She spoke of the struggle my people went through to build a life out of scraps.

She was scraps.

Bits of old technology left behind and forgotten, gathered anew to make a new life out of the old. Each one of the CRT televisions. And if you don't know what those are, because I had to figure it out, are the large TVs with the butts on them? Okay. I grew up with them. I imagine Dr. Bailey grew up with them. But for those of you who might be Gen Z-ers in the room, the TV that might be at your grandma's house.

Each one of the CRT televisions was different. Some had knobs, and some had VCR. Ports, others were large, some were small, some flickered, some shone brightly, as if they were still new, some were, some were black like night, others were gray, or maybe charcoal. Each television was different than the others. Each one spoke in a different voice at a different cadence at a different time, but their speaking was beautiful, and I did not know if I should laugh or cry. perhaps both?

I felt embarrassed, too. I had come to the hide to view the main collection. The notebooks of John Michael Basquiat. Instead, I dragged my partner to an unpopulated floor of the museum to a small room. Once there, I yelled at 2 white teenagers in my aunty voice, so I could cry over old televisions. I lost myself in those vibrations of the installation. The fact that she spoke is all that mattered to me even more, she spoke to me. I cannot say for sure what she said, but I felt it. I knew it matters, and if given the chance, I will honor her by singing her song.

So, Benjamin's 2016, video installation, 'Black is The Color' is made of 41 CRT Televisions stacked in one row of 8 on top of a row of 3, 3 rows of 10 televisions, placed apart from the other TVs, lies another row of 3 very small televisions that sit off to the right. And don't worry. You're going to see it. Just sit with me for a second. Each screen repeats, repeats parts of Nina Simone's song, 'Black is The Color of My True Love's Hair' at slightly different frequencies. Each screen flickers as a video of Simone plays. Her moving image does not take up the entirety of the screen. The circular negative space that surrounds her is black. The installation's floor is made of a massive tangle of television cords, making it impossible to see where one chord starts and another chord ends. Cords are spread over the front of the televisions, not obstructing the view of the screens. They are rather arteries of connection between the televisions. These crawling cords haphazardly lead to the larger piles of cords that cover the ground surrounding the installation. The subtle differences of articulation, of sound between the TVs create an eerie excess that bends Simone's words in the song she sings, 'black is a color' instead of the title of the Song, 'Black is The Color.'

The combined effects of light and sound emerging from the installation render any encounter with it strange. So, building off of this sort of reading of Paul Stephen Benjamin's art installation, this paper is going to sort of stage a conversation between Du Bois and Foucault and through they're discussion of soul which I define loosely as black collective feeling. Pairing these 2 thinkers together, I wanna think more seriously about peculiar sense, an aspect of double consciousness of the black soul and peculiar sense is an under theorized part of double consciousness. It's often sort of thrown out because it's considered to be easily reducible to second sight. And I think sometimes, and this is maybe my personal beef, but I think it's sometimes in our rush to try and make read Du Bois as a through like sort of the dialectics, like antithesis, thesis, synthesis. We forget there's a whole bunch of things going on. And we're really trying to shove a very black conception of consciousness into a sort of Western Continental philosophical frame. And so part of what I'm up to is really wanting to sort of challenge that framing of double consciousness by picking up on what I conceived to be sort of an excess coming out of that formulation which I named peculiar sense.

So, considering Du Bois and coach thinking on Seoul, I ask, How does Paul Stephen Benjamin's 'Black is The Color.' materialize peculiar sense.

Hopefully, in this paper it will become clear to you that pure sense emerges from a combination of Simone's repeating, flickering image, and the differing frequencies of sound which produce a sensory experience akin to airiness. This peculiar sensation functions as a counter archive of black history that cannot be read, translated, or copied, only sensed.

So we will now play the video.

A video recording of 'Black is The Color' by Paul Stephen Benjamin Plays

My experience of 'Black is The Color' echoes Du Bois. Experience of seeing Jubilee Hall at Fisk University for the first time. This building for him was made up of the sorrow songs of blacks that he describes having a message for the world. According to Du Bois, song to the way the soul of slaves spoke to men, and, Du Bois goes,

on that they walked. They walked in the darkness, sing songs in the olden days sorrow songs, for they are weary at heart. And so, before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird, owed songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. Ever since I was a child. These songs stirred in me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine. Then, in after years, when I came to Nashville, I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and the dust of toil. Out of them rose for me the morning, noon, and night bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past.

Jubilee Hall is the oldest academic building on the campus of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. The building was built from the proceeds from the Fisk Jubilee Tour, which began in 1871. During those years of university money was limited, and singers toured the world to raise funds for the university. Presently the building still stands. While the interior of the building has changed, and it's now undergraduate dormitory, The exterior remains the same.

In 1974 the building was placed on a register for historic buildings. I suspect the importance of this building, for Du Bois is twofold. First, the building is a result of those weird songs that stirred in him strongly, and second, the building is a Testament to black perseverance for education after being denied such education through enslavement.

Fisk's building much like 'Black is The Color' is a testament to the capacity of black soul to make a whole world out of scraps. Similar Du Bois, I see Benjamin's 'Black is The Color' as a testament to black soul insofar as the combination of Nina Simone's haunting, repetitive singing and the flickering of old television served my soul so much that I knew before, knowing that it sang a song of what Du Bois calls, peculiar sense. the soul of those who live in the afterlives of slavery's destruction. Benjamin's 'Black is The Color' as a representation of soul that does not rely upon the human to convey its message.

We have lost much, those of us who continue to live in the wake of slavery's aftermath. But we have gained as much as well. My encounter of Benjamin's installation reproduces Du Bois's admiration of his call, with a difference. Each one of the televisions in Benjamin's installation produces a new meaning beyond its original intent. In effect, Benjamin's installation is an archive of leftover scraps that performs the very problem I seek to question. In other words, 'Black is The Color' is an artistic testament to living outside of a human that manifests as soul.

So ultimately in my broader work, and in this paper as well, I take a history of soul to conceive of how blacks usual to endure an anti-black world. And here I'm gonna kinda get a little bit technical for the theory heads in the room or on zoom, bear with me. I love it. So, taking a history of soul requires a method capable of dealing with the absences and gaps that constitute black history.

Genealogy is, quote unquote a 'history of the present,' a phrase Michel Foucault uses to describe his method that is attuned to the murmurs emerging from the breaks, gaps, and absences of history. The genealogist's primary task is to trace a history of events "It must seek them in the most uncompromising of places, and what we tend to feel without history. In sentiments, love, conscience, and instincts," all of which

are aspects of what Foucault calls, 'Soul.' Foucault's genealogical method is critique of traditional history's search for origins. Much of traditional history conceives of an event as a grand occasion, such as a battle, a treaty, or some other such scene. Genealogy, by contrast, records a reversal of an arrangement of forces, a usurpation of power, or an appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who once used it. A feeble domination that grows lax.

In other words, a genealogical event is that which causes the shift in the field of thought, or what Foucault calls an epist- or I'm sorry. What Sylvia Winter calls, 'an epistemic displacement' or transgression. Refusing the search for origins, the genealogist bypasses the problem of metaphysics or essence by esewing the certainty of universal principles or values.

Instead, the genealogist seeks to record the dissent and emergence of events in their disparity. which is to say that this history does not give a sense of forward propulsion in its accounting. Rather genealogy registers events in their discontinuity to reframe our historical present as contingent. So, genealogy requires relentless knowledge of details, patience, and a vast accumulation of source material. Consequently this project uses genealogy as its method and records the descent of emergence of black soul, even instances where there is no evidence of soul.

Obviously I'm not the first person to do a genealogy of soul. If you're familiar with Foucault's writing on "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison," One of his most famous works that are first printed in French in 1975, and followed by an English translation, 1977. Here Foucault describes soul as quote, "the effect, an instrument of political autonomy, anatomy. The soul is the prison of the body." Now we all know this. This is probably the most discursively popular hot take within Continental philosophy. Foucault was definitely what people call now a disrupter.

The soul, Foucault genealogically traces, is not born of sin, as modern theology presents. Rather, the soul he describes is born of the methods of discipline that produce knowledge. And this is a bit of a lengthy quote from Foucault:

This is the historical reality of soul which, unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is rather born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint. This real non-corporal soul is not a substance, it is the element in which you are which are articulated, the effects of a certain type of power, and the reference of a certain type of knowledge. The machinery by which power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.

So, soul, on this, for Foucault, soul then becomes constructed as domains of analysis, carved out of words like Psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, and so on. And they've been built around sort of various scientific technologies and dose courses and moral claims of humanism. And that becomes important later. In short, what Foucault describes as soul is producer, the workings of modern power emerging out of the convergence of penal code and scientific knowledge. Soul is not the remains of a reactivated ideology or substance. Instead, soul and predators the body of those, "one supervises, trains, corrects over madmen, children at home. At school the colonized," end quote.

Foucault describes the production of modern soul through a historical analysis of the transition from the torture of the body to disciplining the soul through a quote, 'a political anatomy of detail' end quote.

and so, Foucault goes on to talk a little bit about sort of what he calls how this transition happens, and part of how that happens is a desire for more humanity, right? This idea that torture was terrible. And so, in order for us to be more humanistic. We needed sort of think of a different way to punish people.

So, their demand was met with a transition towards a mode of punishment that did not focus on the body, but instead focus on the soul. The code designs defines soul as, “the punishment that acts at the depth of the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations.” While there remained a trace of physical torture and more humane forms of punishment, and here we can think about imprisonment and the terrible conditions at which incarcerated people have to endure, Foucault concerns a new form of punishment that make the human into an object of science through a production of a shadow. And shadow, is the word Foucault Uses to describe the judgment of the criminal soul, since soul is not juridically codifiable, which is just a fancy word, for you know, it can't be like. ‘we're gonna punish your soul; and various at Illinois state policy. Right? They're gonna call it something else.

The criminal shadow encompasses. Quote “knowledge of the criminal, one's estimation of him. What is known about relations between him, his past, his crime, and what might be expected of him in the future” end, quote. These estimations of the criminal soul emerged through an interplay between medicine and jurisprudence that occurred since the nineteenth century that seeks to find cause for the crime.

The goal of such a judgment and subsequent punishment is to rehabilitate the criminal right to make them a law-abiding member of society. Vitally, Foucault's geology of a soul offers an important historical transition or sorry, an important tracing of a transition between techniques of punishment from the body to the soul. However, Foucault's tracing of soul cannot account for black spectacular death, he can't right, since he does not take into account the history of the New World in his genealogy. Foucault's conception of soul cannot contend with the ways blacks use soul as a way to endure anti-black. An anti-black world.

Black soul is vital in my present. The last decade of black Lives matters where vigilantes and police officers became judged during executioner all in one, Challenges the workings of disciplinary power insofar as these deaths present emergence of sovereign power and modern disciplinary power which really just means this old form of power and torture is reemerging in our present modern form of power. According to Foucault, sovereign power functions as a set of laws that represent the will of the sovereign. If the king subjects the law, quote the crime, attacks the sovereign, it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign, it attacks him physically, since the force of law is the force of the prince, and so this is how Power worked under the sovereign or the King. If I had a big, dry erase board behind me, I'd put an old king hat on a stick figure. My students often know me for the funny hats I use. Thus sovereign power gives the king the ability to punish at will the king. It acts his will through a public display of power that has a juridical function that intensifies the king's power on the body of the condemned. The killing of black folks challenged the transition of 2 disciplinary power difficult names, since their killers enact a similar form of sovereign power in the present. Even though we cut the head of the king off a long time ago, in the place in the King of the king is the will of whites and non-black people of color to enact sovereign power in response to any explicit and implicit transgression of the color line by blacks.

The emergence of sovereign power shown in the killing of black folks presents a dilemma. Sovereign power emerging and displaying power is accounted for in Foucault's schema of disciplinary power. Yet the repetition of sovereign power's emergence in relation to blacks marks the peculiarity of its emergence. Insofar as black folks are. the limit point of the human, which is this really fancy Foucault speak, or philosophy speak to say, in our understanding of the human, the furthest thought of what constitutes a human is black folks. So it's the furthest limit point of the human that divides the human from the inhuman. The division between these 2 categories is violently policed by the repetition of black spectacular death. Moreover, Foucault's definition of soul cannot account for the unique ways black folks use soul through practices of living in an American context, soul refers to a broad range of black cultural productions, such as music and food.

I trace soul's emergence in the publication of Du Bois's 1903 "Souls of Black Folks," during the period immediately following the Reconstruction. 'Soul's' publication is important, since it historically marks the transition between Reconstruction and Jim Crow. I marked 'Black Soul's' dissent in the 1974 publication of Dick Gregory's "Natural Diet for Folks who Eat; Cooking with Mother Nature." Gregory's manuscript rebukes, black food practices emerging from slavery instead, Gregory's book advocated for a lifestyle that embraced a vegetable-based diet while denouncing soul food's unhealthy reliance on pork to season food. Nonetheless, soul never really went away. Instead, soul is often conceived of as a scholarly discourse on black American music that joins together black gospel music, traditions, and secular musical forms. There are countless stories to be told about soul's music's emergence and dissent. Yet in my experience of soul growing up in Las Vegas, Nevada, soul music was usually accompanied by the delicious flavors of soul food.

My family had many talented cooks, and I was in the kitchen at a very young age, first peeling, then cutting, and later cooking alongside both my parents. My family speaks to each other through food, often beginning and ending each phone call or gathering during a holiday, regaling each other with stories of the last thing we ate in its endearing deliciousness. This also includes fantasies of alternative holiday things. We would do like my dad and I were to do a seafood boil. It never happened. But we'd like to talk about it.

As a result, I build on Foucault's anti-humanist impulse by tracing the many threads between race, gender, and the human by focusing on black domestic work, much of black political struggles emerging from the mid-twentieth century made demands based on the human through gendered terms. Evidence of the human through dreamer terms is shown in such slogans, slogans such as 'I am, a Man' carried by black men in civil rights protests across the South, and desires for a black human is further shown in the complicated histories emerging out of the black power movement that presented contradictory gender politics. As historian, Robert Spencer asserts, "the Black Panther party record on gender is complex, filled with innovative moments of gender progressiveness as well as moments of blatant misogyny and sexism." She published this in 2008. I feel like if she published it later, she would have said *Mysognoir*, just saying. So, similar to anthropological studies that Foucault draws on to conceive of disciplinary power, the blacks, any humanity is shored up through the myth of the black matriarch, which which folks are probably very familiar with. According to Angela Davis, the myth, which was made famous through the dissemination of the 1965 Moynihan Report, and spread in black intellectual history by parts of the Black power movement places the problem of blackness, black inability to assimilate into American culture at the feet of black women. Davis refutes these myths by arguing that black woman's resistance and importance to Black community ensures the survival of her people through the social reproduction of the black slave quarters. And this is an extended quote of Davis, and I'm nearly done.

There is a strange twist of affairs, and the infinite anguish of ministering to the needs of the men and children around her, who are not necessarily members of her immediate family. She was performing the only labor the slave community that could not directly and immediately claim by the oppressor.

Davis's reference to a strange twist of affairs, refers to the black feminine's capacity to use the burdens of gender to her community's advantage. Even more, her twofold role as a valued slave and sexual object allowed her to reproduce social relations, not immediately graspable by the white slave master. Davis's compelling reading of black women's twofold role complicates the figure of woman and contradistinction to white women whose humanity is shored up as the lesser of man. Davis's complicating of woman does not make a distinction between human and inhuman. Instead, she takes woman as a given category that renders black women as a different kind of woman due to the history she was forced to endure.

Simply, black feminism takes up women as a different kind of woman and their discussion of black women. And this is also I have, like a long citation chain which I'll skip over other black feminist theorists conceive of

black women through a discussion of black women's gender as a performance of human. And here, I'm thinking more explicitly, you know, Saidiya Hartman, and as flesh, here, thinking of Professor Hortense Spillers. Curiously, The black woman's strange twist of fate renders black men accomplices in the reproduction of slaves quarters. According to spillers, black men are one of the few groups of men who experience the feminine. However, the historical resentment of the strange gender relation echoes in our historical present. Black critical studies, conceives of this resentment as a refusal of gender as a means to refuse the human. Okay. On the other hand, Nathan Chandler conceives of the black feminine's absence/presence in Du Bois's family line, and Fred Moten conceives of the black feminine through Frederick Douglass's aunt Hester's scream. Both of these scholars make the feminine into a fetish through the abstraction, since their work lacks an investigation of the material conditions from which these figures emerge. As a result, Chandler and Moten's work renders the black feminine ephemeral producing a universal blackness that sidesteps the analytic specificity of black women's lives, that black woman Davis interrogates.

While I'm critical of black studies fetish of black women, I am convinced of their claims to thinking of the black outside. The human, since black claims to humanism have not stopped the repetition of black spectacular death in our present and here humanism can be a metaphor for respectability, you know, desires for black capitalism right, Like we can use that word to put - insert strategy of survival - and see its fail.

So as a way to close out my long talk, thank you for sitting with me, So how do we sense an archive of soul and 'Black is The Color?' I'm kind of jumping here a little, so hang with me. So returning to 'Black as the Color,' Nina Simone's dual performance of human and inhuman in the installation, repeats again and again under different terms. In this instance the black feminine's repeated performance between human and inhuman is a means and a beam, that Lucien Dällenbach describes as being governed by a truly compulsive repetition on mimetic reproduction, and is, in fact, condemned to take a serial form and repeat continually the movement of its own resurgence. So really just in like more simple terms, the ongoing repetition hollows out the image, one image from the next, from the next from the next, producing a lacunary reserve, a fundamental aspect of fucking genealogical method that is often overlooked.

More importantly, the lacunary reserve is a hollow of thought that contains and suspends meaning produced through its memory and repetition in the play between human and inhuman. Okay, so I know that's a really kind of complicated chain of philosophical thought. But what I'm really saying is that this repetition hollows out., it produces this space that can't quite be captured. And it's covered over by the black feminine image. There's this kind of absence hair that's doing really important work for our understanding of modernity, the production of the human. But, most importantly, for us black folks.

So more concretely; the hollow of soul is the underside of modernity, covered over by the black feminine image, making power. The hollow soul produces and destabilizes meaning to those willing to lend an air ear to the murmurings of so souls, hollow.

The black feminine's ability to cover over this hollow through her performance, and suspend and contain meaning, renders her the condition of possibility for history, and, importantly, a figure in which the New World is made. The other world of the black is not a material structure that can be taken, burned down or destroyed. Rather the black soul, as it emerges in black, is the color, is a play of light and sound.

Simone's image plays on medieval Notions of the Female Devil narrative that English travelers used in their production of racial ideology. Simone displays majesty and gracefulness as she plays piano. The viewer is transfixed by her image. The boxy fullness of the CRT television plays with the historical logics that mark black women as untrustworthy and lascivious. Simone's beauty overshadows the fullness of the television

that projects her laboring body. It is not clear what lies behind the screen. Conversely, when opened the CRT television's functions by transferring negative electrons into a moving image focused by an anode or a positive accelerator. The negative electrons are converted into light, a light beam in color televisions. There are 3 different anode accelerators that project blue, green, and red into phosphor coated glass. The coating on the glass is the condition of possibility for light to glow and project an image.

My reading of Simone's image, combined with the fullness of the CRT Television produces what I call a double movement. At first she appears as an image of beauty moving on the screen. Her blackness marks her as exceptionally beautiful. But the fullness of the CRT. Television mimics the fullness of an older black woman's body hiding behind her image. While there are no sagging breasts in the installation. And here I'm referencing Jennifer Morgan's work on 'Some Suckle Over Their Shoulder,' that in a longer version of this talk I go into more detail, while there are no sagging breasts in the installation, the inner workings of CRT Television show nothing at all, the television's internal functions look no different than any other CRT Television. Yet the play of light and sound draws upon medieval European notions of the female devil capable of transforming her abject body into a beautiful form, more attractive to her mortal male prey.

Yet the CRT television is hiding a gift. What du Bois calls second sight. Second sight and 'Black is The Color' is made through a production of light and sound, a whole world unintelligible to those who do not lend an ear. The murmur of black soul gurgles beneath the repeated axis of the encounter and observation, producing a grade of intelligibility through Foucault names, the quadrillage, and I'm so sorry for the French speakers out there. I'm learning. But I'm a black girl from the West Coast. So that's what you're getting today.

The spatial partitioning and subdivision of a population take into an extreme point, so that really describes what Duc calls and quadrillage. The quadrillage depends upon observation, but the image is not dependable in an effort to confine the black through various techniques of exclusion and confinement, such as the slave ship, the plantation, the prison. Something else escapes. Moten theorizes the fugitive capacity of the black feminine as the scream of the black feminine. What he names phonic materiality more easily understood as noise. So, building on this idea of phonic materiality coming out of Moten, and my reading of the historical kind of performance of black femininity, the quadrillage produces this false image, an image that depends upon Positivist secular law emerging in 1482 on the shores of Senegal, that one can only believe it if they see it. The play of light and sound depends upon the combined techniques of observation, encounter, and phonic materiality to produce the veil of the human.

What emerges from this image in the performance of the human is a cloak, a shield, a veil that covers over the dark world, a world that distinctly has the capacity to prop up the human's emergence and modernity. My thinking about soul as an archive and affect, takes up what Foucault describes as a fourth form of excluded language. Vibration, emitting from the soul's murmur, emerges beneath a grid of intelligibility in the dark demonic grounds of the abyss of black soul where a whole world is made. The vibrations, glitches, and fudgy edges of Black is The Color, are produced in the installations. Play of light and sound that covers over the hollow of black soul. And I by hollow, I literally mean the open space inside the TV here, but also the kind of space, of the slaves, quarters, and my mama's house, and your people's houses, where you enjoy and have pleasure.

The only way to encounter these black holes that mark modernity's grid of intelligibility is to feel your way to them using peculiar sense. The mode of affect marked by blackness found in the eerie excesses of Paul Stephen Benjamin's 'Black is The Color,' and, I suspect, in other places as well. Thank you.

Q&A Portion:

Dr. Moya Bailey: Thank you to our audience, our virtual and in-person audience for hanging with us. We'll take time for questions if folks need to go. That is totally fine. We'll read your question here or answer it. Live

Seeing no questions from the virtual audience, but lots of congratulations. And wow! And that talk was amazing. I'm turning it to Denise.

Denise: Thank you. That was a wonderful talk. Thank you. Really appreciate you sharing your work in progress with us. So, what I found really interesting was thinking about cycles that our perception of soul go through, so that the idea of soul cycles like popped in my head right? So thinking about how you kind of set it up historically for us as a departure from transgressions towards the physical body. And then Foucault kind of situates it in terms of prisoners as a new form of punishing people. I'm curious to know. And then your third point was that we've kind of returned to this initial. This initial place where where we originated. I'm curious to know what your idea or where you think the cycle will, how it will change and how it might continue to evolve.

Dr. Taryn Jordan: Yeah, I mean, what's weird about this? And this is something I haven't had a chance to write about. But I think we'll show up in one of these books is that the work is a history of the present right, and part of what made me think about soul was that alongside black lives Matter was also a reemergence of discourses of soul, particularly soul food. And so there's been quite a few soul food cookbooks that have come out so. I don't know if I wanna make a strong claim that there, there's correlation between them. But you've had this kind of renegotiation of soul food that is really kind of walking the line between this binary thinking. So in like the eighties and nineties, you get all these like, 'soul food for diabetic' or 'soul food for cardiovascular,' because it was really kind of a public health approach to wanting black folks to eat their food, but also eat it healthily, and then then you get in the 2000s and 2010s. This kind of like emergence of Vegan soul food, right? Where the only way we can actually enjoy soul food is. We go back to its original roots, which is, we didn't eat meat like that. Right? But it's a deep desire to avoid slavery, right? So it's like this weird re-perpetuation of pathologization of working class black folks. So I'm teaching a class on soul food right now. And what's been really cool, particularly because we're in Chicago, of all places. I just learned this history like 2 weeks ago is that in the 40s. During the great migration there is a big to do between black native Chicagoans and black migrants come from Mississippi, and the kind of food they ate, because black Chicagoans, who had a different class status and class for black folks at that time wasn't so easily measurable by money, but more so about whether you're couth or not, which is a very black English word for respectable, proper, moral, human.

And so a lot of kind of the black bourgeoisie were horrified that these folks from the South would come with all their bits right? So hog head cheese and pig feet, pigtail, you know, rib tips, etc., and enjoyed them on the street. Right? And so I think we're experiencing kind of an interesting repetition of that early 1940s. Migration alongside shifting racial dynamics, the United States. So you have kind of like an educated black elite who are very concerned with health. But sometimes really just want to get down on, you know, stuffing with cranberry sauce out of the can with no bits. Okay, or really really want, you know, fried chicken. And so they do all this like Playdough cooking with like Satan and mushrooms, and putting it on like a wooden bone to deep, fry it, or like, and no shade, like, I find it fascinating to see folks attempt to recreate these flavors for a variety of reasons, but I think there is a connection between our present desire for soul and the kind of 10 plus years of like black repetitions of violence. Guy, I remember, before my dad passed when Trump was elected. He goes, he said to my mom in a moment of like deep trauma. He's like I'm just waiting for the colored water fountain signs to come back again right? And so I think that what's happening with soul presently is that we're having kind of like an ethical dilemma. We need those foods to make us feel better.

We want to eat the things our people eat, particularly if masses of folks moving back to the South, myself included, until I got my academic job in New York right. But we are fully aware that we're not like those black people right who eat the swine. We want to do something different. So it's weird how all these cookbook authors are articulating soul in the present. They're kind of trying to walk an ethical decline line by either pushing all the way to Veganism or being like well, sometimes we do eat the hog, but it's you know it's farm raised, and it's, you know, lived a better life than most of us. Right? So it's interesting. I'm not sure what's gonna happen. But I do think post. Well, I don't want to say Post-COVID those years we spent in our houses I think everybody got to really enjoy these forms of domestic pleasure. And one of the reasons I really like studying black folks other than my own investment, and the stake of our freedom is that we become the kind of canary in the cold mine we become the most extreme end of something that generalizes for the population. And so I think in some ways soul, for black folks has become important again. But I think the kind of pathological moral claims around it are much more conflicting than it has been in the past. yeah, I hope that answers the question.

Dr. Moya Bailey: I have a question. My question is about soul and community, and a lot of your work, when I think of it, It's also about the communal experience eating together. I'm thinking also about music and dance as communal experiences. But it does feel in this new age and this new generation there is less communal gathering. And even in thinking of us being in our homes, there are a lot of people who maybe don't know how to cook. I'm thinking about this generation that did not grow up with learning those skills. So I'm curious what you think about soul collectivity in this moment. and how the digital and analog factor in if they do.

Dr. Taryn Jordan: I love that question cause one of the things that I think about often, and I also feel in my own life. You know the peculiarities of academic labor means that you end up being really far away from the communities you care about. And so I live in Central New York. There's very few black people, let alone black, queer people, let alone radical, queer black people. let alone radical, queer black people, nerves right? And so I spend a lot of time alone. And I spend a lot of time on my phone and the phone has become a source of real survival for me. And I've done things with you and others where we cook together on facetime or zoom, or something. But I also began to find real community on TikTok, and what I mean. My community here is real specific. It was not actually engaging with other people, but I began to really depend upon these blips of black joy that showed up on TikTok, right? Like, I am definitely an elder millennial. And so I feel a little bit like I am like skiving on the kids. But you know, watching like black kids do these dances right like, or watching older black ladies cooking food like, there's this older black woman who is very close to the end of her life. She lives on a farm, and I can't think of her name. I'm sure you've seen her, you probably have similar algorithms. But she will make. She'll just like cut food, and she's out there chopping wood and picking through peas. And what I love about that is, while it's very informal. It's probably someone's grandma or auntie that we're archiving these things through the digital sphere. But, what has become, I think, an issue, particularly as we're more and more lonely, and our desires to become human and assimilate into white American culture, which I think, you know we could see through Hortense Spiller says in that piece that I referenced. You know, black women began showing up in the covers of ebony and jet with their executive husbands and images of their pristine, perfect homes. Right? So in our move to kind of become American and move up and class status we've left behind some of these old techniques and I think the recipes are being lost honestly. And so part of what's really important about the method that I use is that I started collecting bits of soul because it kind of ebbs and flows. And at the time I started this project, which is now 7 years ago I had literally just lost my father, and part of how I kind of came to this question was he signed every single one of his cards to me. I love you of all my heart and soul.

And so I think for me the project is also a desire to collect these bits archivally because it's descending. It's going away. A lot of kids, a lot of the babies aren't interested in cooking. They think it's weird. They think it's unhealthy. And we're losing recipes. And so I think that also, sometimes because it's considered to be

unimportant. You know. So right now, I think there is really cool hope of archiving digitally. but also makes it available to everybody. Also, didn't. This is where you end up getting, you know, non-black people with box braids, or, you know, like someone try to make Jamaican porridge, you know, and so not everybody can be invited to the cookout. Y'all. Yeah. So I think that's why I'm also really interested in and sort of taking this history. Because I think if there is a kind of political claim to my work which I'm hesitant because I, as someone who was an organizer for a long time. And now I sit in the halls of Academia. I don't want to tell anybody what to do, but I do wanna show that we've always produced an alternative or a counter to the human, to American conceptions of family. And I don't want us to forget that. So yeah.

Dr. Moya Bailey: I think that's a beautiful note to end on. I just wanna read one question from the audience. As we close, "do you think domestic pleasure? And it's rejuvenation properties? It's part of a lot of our movements to displace black people from their homes, gentrification, policing, rents as extra astronomical prices, etc." Thanks, Danielle, for that, and we'll just leave that for folks to cogitate on. Thanks so much, everybody. Thank you. Everyone.