

Research Statement – Badewa Ajibade

Reclaiming Black Bodies Through Dance and Movement in Immersive Cinema

My research examines how Black bodies reclaim agency through dance, movement, and immersive cinema, in critical relation to colonial archives and their silences. As a Nigerian-born, queer Black filmmaker and artist-scholar working in Canada, I situate my work at the intersection of Black studies, film studies, dance and movement studies, archival theory, and research-creation. I ask how embodied practices and immersive cinematic technologies can challenge the ways Black lives are documented, misrepresented, or erased, and how they can foster more just, affective engagements with Black histories and ongoing experiences of anti-Black racism.

My doctoral project at Concordia University, *Reclaiming Black Bodies Through Dance and Movement in Immersive Cinema*, responds to institutional approaches such as the Government of Canada's Black Justice Strategy, which risk relegating Black oppression to the past. I instead understand past and present as a continuous narrative across Africa and its diasporas, including Black communities in Canada. Building on the work of scholars such as Pablo Joseph López Oro, Alejandra Deza Moreno, Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, Tina Campt, and Diana Taylor, I conceptualize Black dancing bodies as living, embodied archives—sites where pleasure, pain, trauma, and joy are stored and transmitted beyond the written record.

Methodologically, this research-creation project unfolds in four phases: (1) archival research in Black Canadian collections at Concordia, with a focus on marginalized queer Black figures; (2) the development of narratives through critical fabulation, informed by person-centred archival theory; (3) collaborative creation of a 3D immersive film with queer Black dancers; and (4) an exhibition framework that stages an encounter between Black performers and non-Black audiences. Immersive 3D cinema here is not a mere technological novelty but a critical tool for repositioning spectators within the cinematic space, enabling them to share a symbolic environment with performers and to perceive the vulnerability and strength of Black bodies in ways that conventional 2D cinema often cannot.

The exhibition is designed as a decolonial intervention in archival practice. The performance itself, conceived as repertoire, will remain unrecorded, contesting the supremacy of the colonial archive. Instead, with consent, I document non-Black audience members' affective responses to the performance and return these recordings to them as tools for reflection. These materials form a parallel archive of engagement, demonstrating how immersive Black creative expression can provoke empathy, sustained attention, and potentially transformative shifts in perception.

My doctoral research builds on a decade of treating filmmaking as research. After training at the Toronto Film School, I wrote, directed, produced, and edited award-winning short films such as *Eja Aro*, *Chez Dr. Bello*, *Pied-à-terre* and *Jumper*, and the feature documentary *Colonialism and the Yoruba Traditional Religion: The Deity Osun*, which interrogates colonial disruption and the resilience of Yoruba spiritual practice. Graduate study at Concordia enabled me to address Black queerness explicitly in works like *Pied-à-terre*, *Amelia*, and *Reclaimed* (with queer Black dancer Nickeshia Garrick), which foreground queer Black subjectivity and experiment with the

convergence of dance and cinema. Curatorial roles, teaching experience, SSHRC-funded Black wellness and Black Studies projects, and archival work on queer Black Canadian collections further ground my theoretical and methodological approach.

Looking ahead, I envision a research program with three strands: theorizing the Black embodied archive through written scholarship; extending research-creation projects with Black communities in Canada and across the diaspora; and contributing to the institutionalization of Black research-creation through teaching, workshops, and curatorial initiatives. Situated within the African diaspora and informed by decolonial theory and artistic practice, my work aims to reshape both cinematic practice and archival imagination, honouring, uplifting, and asserting the presence of underrepresented Black bodies while working toward a more inclusive and reparative future.