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The Means to Escape

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THE MEANS TO ESCAPE

By

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The Context of Escape Matters

Beginning to use social media and performance as an avenue to investigate escapism can challenge our current notions of what escapism actually is. Escapism notoriously has had a negative connotation, and in our contemporary moment it is often used as a response to cope with trauma. I am using social media and performance in conversation with each other because of their similarities of passive consumption, and also in an effort to change our current understandings of what escapism can be.

First, to understand what escapism can be, we must understand what it is and what it is currently doing. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of escapism is "habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine."[1] It is often used in conversation with mental health issues or addiction as a coping mechanism. While not everyone who experiences escapism falls under those guises, that is the form of escapism I am interested in interrogating, challenging, and recontextualizing. This research is trying to draw the strong ties between performance and social media and how escapism is ever-present in art and performance. I am interested in the ways social media draws people in and ways that might be encapsulated within a performance. I believe, in many ways, social media is a new art form and the younger generations have begun to transgress the negative stigma surrounding social media usage. Social media can be art and performance. This research is exploring how I can make the audience experience escapism, using technology and active engagement, but also bring into question social media as an art form as well as our relationship and reclaiming the use of escapism.

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[1] "escapism," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary.*

This reclaiming comes from a critique of escapism in its simplest form and the lack of discussion and research about it. I want to clearly prove that my redefining of escapism is anti-capitalist. The escape is most important to think about as an escape from our current human conditions. It becomes a necessity to distract your mind or consider what could be when the circumstances under late-stage capitalism have such a crippling effect on our entire existence. Even just considering what is valued within systems for profit, the financial gain and productivity are far more valued than the physical, mental, and financial well-being of the workers. Though escapism can be used individually as a coping mechanism for trauma, we all can begin to have a collective social trauma. In *Late Escapism and Contemporary Neoliberalism: Alienation, Work and Utopia* by Greg Sharzer he says:

> Those with secure backgrounds are freer to live in this world, even when it does not treat them well, while those without security learn early on that society is a conflictual, dangerous place. In other words, trauma is social; the sum total of ill health, ill housing, crime and insecurity cannot be understood individually. If these experiences cannot be avoided, they must be coped with.[2]

This desire to escape a moment or time that does not provide one anything is in resistance to capitalism and the rhetoric of providing for yourself as the only means of survival. The united social influence could fill those unmet wants and needs. Escapism goes beyond a longing or an unachievable utopia. There is a collective awareness that begins to cultivate through the experience of escapism.

Looking Back

Generation Z and the generations to come after bringing an entirely new perspective and outlook on what social media is and what it could be. There are plenty of

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[2] Greg Sharzer, *Late Escapism and Contemporary Neoliberalism: Alienation, Work and Utopia* (New York, NY, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.), 7.

studies and conversations about the negative effects it has on the youth and their mental and physical health. While this is not entirely wrong, there is a lack of conversation about the generation who were raised by social media and where they are in this contemporary moment. And how these "digital natives"[3] have transgressed and transformed technology and online spaces. There is an ignorance of disconnection and misunderstanding that gets projected onto my generation from older generations.

Being born on the cusp of the 21st century I was raised alongside all types of advancements in technology. Before smartphones came into popularity in my early teens, having the newest and coolest gadget or device was a form of social standing. This created such a clear classist divide growing up without it being vocalized. When I say "technology" I am usually referencing smartphones because of how common and prevalent they are in our lives but keeping in mind that MP3 players, iPods, iPads, game consoles, TVs, laptops, and more are under the umbrella of technology. I want to acknowledge that I had a very privileged upbringing and parents who did their best to accommodate these social standards that continue to develop. It is daunting to reflect on how long technological capitalism has been shaping my life and the social conditions around me. While the powerful grip of capitalism reflects in these waves of technological advances, I find it important to bring attention to the increase in access to the internet and technology in many households that played a significant role in my generations flock to online spaces.

There is a level of complexity when talking about my parents' generation, Generation X, and how they raised my generation amongst the rise and demand for these

[3] John Palfrey and Urs Gasser. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives.* (New York: Basic Books, 2008.) 1

advancing technologies. There is and was a lot of ambiguity about how to raise a child and when to allow them to have access to these things. My upbringing was not the best but growing up with social media as a third guardian made it more complicated. This is the part that I think scares so many adults about young people and their children using the internet because as it advances the less likely they are to be able to keep up with it. I live this experience of exploring and discovering the internet of all the good and bad. There is no doubt that I was exposed to some things that I should not have been but without social media, I would not be the person I am today. Growing up in a small white conservative town I always felt disconnected from that town and my family and others' beliefs. Finding solace in these online communities that reflected my views and made me feel less ostracized made things more bearable.

Beyond the constraints of capitalism, online spaces became an open access to communities and support that many people did not have the luxury of experiencing in "real life." Gen Z was finding exploration on social media and the internet during pivotal identity exploration years of Middle School and High School. Social media became a way of shaping and changing our identity. From simple things like adjusting aesthetics and clothing to bigger things like sexuality and social circles. The diverse and wide variety of communities online made exploring change and questioning things about yourself easier than changing in offline spaces. While the two spaces, online and offline, are not disconnected there was more possibility to explore interests with what felt like endless options and subcultures online. This is a large reason it is vital to bring Gen Z's perspective into current research on social media. Without these online spaces I would have never had a place where I felt accepted or found solace in.

Instagram is one of the most arguably controversial social media platforms. Though each platform has its own issues, Instagram feels like the catalyst of my generation's fixation on their online image and persona. It is known for its artificial and unrealistic standards. As a young teenager, this by far was the most damaging to my mental health and my body image and I tied my self-worth to the likes on a photo. While societal beauty standards are not much better, I developed an unhealthy relationship with how I viewed myself through my social media presence. I was coaxed into thinking my appearance was only as good as my value in how many likes I got. The more I valued my online appearance the worse my mental health got. There is a similar sentiment in dance and tying someone's body to a number (weight, audition numbers, grades, and more) and how damaging and dehumanizing it can potentially be. Having to curate and change my own reality to make it consumable or intriguing for outside viewers made it feel like the current reality was not worth living. There are many critiques about the artificial and damaging nature of Instagram's algorithm and culture. To this day Instagram has done little to combat its play in damaging the mental health of its users.

This is where "digital natives,"[4] specific Gen Z, began to subvert and rebel against these societal norms of internet behavior. One of the most known and common versions of this is a "finsta," which is a fake Instagram. Fake, meaning it is different or separate from one's main Instagram. This concept was formally known as a spam account but finsta has become the most popular usage and in commonly what these accounts are referred to today. Besides being considered a "fake Instagram," we are beginning to see the subversive language Gen Z is cultivating because these accounts are far from fake; if

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[4] Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives,* 1.

anything, they depict a more real portrayal of their life than their main Instagram account might. While often people's main Instagram pages are public and meant to garner more followers over time, finstas are private and usually only the user's closest friends are allowed to access it. Instagram users have begun to make their profiles less curated over the years largely in part due to the creation of finstas.

Covid-19

This contradictory and combative back and forth relationship I have with social media is a similar relationship I have to escapism. I was using social media in ways that did not help me mentally and it was not until the Covid-19 pandemic that I started to truly criticize my understanding of escapism and how I was using social media. After being stuck inside and finding entertainment and connection virtually, I became painstakingly aware that my desire for connection and escape was through a collective and social bond we were all experiencing in isolation.

The outbreak of Covid-19 was a monumental time for digital connection. Never had we all been so plugged in and connected while also being distant and disconnected. The push to make anything and everything virtual was the only choice. The shift as an undergraduate student was so abrupt and traumatic that one moment I was in dance class and the next we were told to get off campus as soon as possible. The initial stages of quarantine were indeed scary because no one knew what this virus was or how we could get it but as a stressed college student it was an extension of a long-needed break, until it was not. Zoom became my reality and though I value my professors' effort, most of them had no time or experience teaching virtually. Having performances in both theatre and dance halted and projects canceled was devastating.

Bo Burnham's self-directed film *Inside* was a film that inspired my intermedia work, as well as set the tone of all artists during the pandemic. His film was a perfect example the potential art can have for awareness through escapism. The shared collective understanding and trauma we all experienced from being in lockdown during 2020 and an anti-capitalistic narrative. But what I find most interesting is the internet's interaction surrounding the film after it came out. This film's popularity is well deserved but I would be remised if I did not mention that many of Gen Z grew up watching Bo Burnham. His rise to fame seemed unconventional at the time but is now a new norm or standard for internet celebrities or often known as "influencers." Started off making music comedy videos in 2006 on YouTube, he quickly gained popularity and not too soon after began a career of live performances doing musical comedy specials.[5]

Much like others, I turned to social media and technology and found a collective in how I was feeling. Aside from the accessibility and availability of art and all forms virtually, Gen Z began to really take over the internet. Short-form video apps were a part of social media history but Covid-19 propelled TikTok's popularity into existence. I had been on the app before the pandemic had started but there was a clear shift in content and intention on the app during and after quarantine. A lot of apps and technology play into consumerism and exploitation of user data and on TikTok, there is a strong algorithm that curates a "for you page" extremely specific to your interests, so specific that there are hundreds of different experiences each individual user can have. This is referred to as what "side" of TikTok you are one. What side dictates what kind of content you see but also there are many intersecting and overlapping sides. To this day there is still a

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[5] Bo Burnham, *Bo Burnham: Inside,* (Los Angeles, CA: Netflix, 2021).

claiming and distinction of being on the straight side of TikTok or gay TikTok. There is a large tie to one's identity and the content that is curated for them and it goes above and beyond any other app I have experienced about understand the multiplicity of identities and interests of each individual user.

This research is not about Big Tech's ability to read our user data and curate specific for you pages based off that. I am interested in how Gen Z paved the way to work against the norms these big technology companies set in place. Much like finsta's, younger generations have found ways to resist the original intentions of TikTok. These users have begun to use this algorithm against itself to supply radical honesty and true representation of their own lived and shared experiences. These acts of resistance are why I believe these actions are anti-capital and why my redefining of escapism subsequently is too. This subversive behavior is in resistance to these companies and databases thinking they have the upper hand by playing into the algorithm's game. Specifically, on TikTok, there had emerged a new coded language that works around the algorithm or using viral songs to get information out that might not get views otherwise and many more examples. This has become immensely helpful for protests but also just bringing awareness about specific things like politics, education, and the news.

We should still hold onto traditional escapism, which I consider pro-capitalism and only exists because of the cruel conditions under capitalism, because we are all going to want to watch that movie on Netflix after a difficult day at work or see a performance that takes you out of the current moment. I do not think it would be helpful for this research to denounce the vital need for those forms of entertainment. I am interested in bringing to light the shift in escapism I am seeing and experiencing.

The way I am currently experiencing and understanding escapism is through a social collective. There is this notion that escapism is an individual experience to escape one's current condition but how I am witnessing it unfold in social media, specifically post-Covid-19 (meaning post-quarantine 2020, Covid-19 is not over), is not always falling into the guise of passive consumption to shut off and shut out the world. There is a substantial increase in social media becoming an active and aware space for people to critique, joke, and challenge our current state of living. A large part of that I think is in reference to art and social media that came out and was popular during the pandemic, like Bo Burnhams *Inside* and TikTok. Awareness through active engagement can lead to a new form of escapism that is share through a social and collective understanding. It resists old ideas of shutting out the world or only turning into oneself.

This research begins to explore how I can bring that experience into art and performance because social media is becoming not only a place for easy access to the arts but transforming into its own artform as well. This exploration of escapism through performance is a very radical and experimental practice because of the nature of this social collective through performance challenges a lot of traditional performance rules and hierarchies. While audience interaction is not new, I am interested in different ways the audience can have agency in their experience as well as breaking down a norm in western-traditional performance viewing of an individual viewing experience. This can manifest in several ways, through changing seating orientation, letting the audience walk through the performance space, having them talk to one another during the performance and so much more. Active awareness through engaging and audience interaction with art and entertainment can provide the audience and performers a socially collective

experience that is resists passivity and silencing. Thus, creating a space that allows us all to escape together into this world or space we have created together. There is agency and shared experience. This is how I am not only redefining escapism but how I am physically reimaging it.

<p align="center">*Previous Works*</p>

Because of the pandemic, I began my adventure and exploration into dance films. I was desiring to explore more site-specific pieces and really started to find my grounding within improv. Once I began experimenting with improv and site-specific work through dance film and editing, I realized there was a sense of control I had over my body and my image. Meaning I was able to control when, where, and how I was being perceived. This was two semesters of undergraduate deep into Covid-19 and though I was on campus, many of my classes were still virtual. I was struggling with my own image physically but also virtually because in all my zoom classes I needed to keep my camera on. I felt I had no control or agency over the space in which I was being perceived. My bedroom is an extremely sacred place for me, and I felt I could not keep it that way because I was forced to let these people see into my world that way. It just was not ideal, and I was struggling with mental health issues because of Covid-19, so exploring dance films really became about control of my story and my narrative, when and where I am able to be seen. My interest in dance films and editing lead me to interrogate technology and social media within dance.

In the summer of 2021, I had taken an Intermedia course with Eliot Gray Fisher over zoom. For the two-week intensive that is a part of Hollins Graduate program, we were tasked with creating any sort of intermedia exploration as a final project. Coming

right out of undergraduate and the era of Covid-19 dance films I was really interested in

pushing the boundaries of my editing abilities. I also was ready to confront this looming

insecurity of my appearance. The piece I created was called *BODY* because was about

being perceived and the different ways I could distort videos of myself to not be able to

recognize it was me. The videos being projected are of moments or times I am insecure

about being viewed and the projection is used as a mask to distort my image (see Figure

1. And Figure 2.). All of this is important to mention because I want to speak to my

experience as a social media user and a "Digital Native."[6]

Figure 1. Screenshot from *BODY*.   Figure 2. Screenshot from *BODY*.

        Covid-19 quarantines were a rough time for many people, and I think the

dependency on technology as our only connection to others plus the forced social

isolation resurfaced those traumas for me. I spoke briefly about Instagram's negative

effects on teenagers and young adults, and that was the mentality I fell back into and felt

deeply insecure which mainly developed alongside the rise of Instagram. My relationship

to social media is very complex and I do not want it to be misconstrued that this research

is arguing that nothing is wrong with it. I find it vital to bring awareness and

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[6] Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives,* 1.

contemporary understandings from a Gen Z social media user and how my current experiences have developed and changed as internet culture has.

DRAFTWORKS

The year residency dance MFA students at Hollins must create a DRAFTWORKS piece which contrasts with our Fall Dance pieces that are performed on the stage and are more formal. While DRAFTWORKS and Fall Dance are both research focused, DRAFTWORKS is different for its informal and intimate setting. I wanted to focus on an aspect of my thesis that was the riskiest and needed more time to develop which was audience interaction.

Much of my research outside of my thesis is centered around dance pedagogy, deconstructing the classroom, and disrupting hierarchies. So, I feel I have begun to question the notions of performances in an analogous way. The same way I want to decenter a classroom, I want to decenter a performance. Often audience members never speak during a performance and there is a layer of disconnect that encourages the fourth wall. Audience members are passively engaging with a performance. In my DRAFTWORKS piece, I was questioning the audience's anonymity through my body and voice as their vehicle. This idea came from interrogating both anonymity as an audience viewer and as a user of social media. I was interested in how I might be able to be more anonymous than the audience or how I can make them known in the performance space.

My DRAFTWORKS piece consisted of multiple layers of technology and audience interactions. This piece was performed in Hollins Botetourt Studio II, and I was particularly inspired to use projections in this space because of the white walls that

consisted of unique geometric shapes and textures. After watching Miguel Gutierrez's *Age & Beauty Part 1: Mid-Career Artist/Suicide Note or &:-/* last semester I had become quite fixed on Miguel's ability as an artist to create a complex narrative and how his unique ways of introducing the audience to his work, as well as the choices within it. As the audience waits before the show begins Miguel and his duet partner Mickey Mahar are in the space warming up while nail polish is being passed throughout the audience for viewers to put on. In the final part of the piece, Miguel is singing and using a loop station to create a sound score which became an inspiration for the use of a microphone and loop station in my piece.

There are three main sections to the piece, all separated by me speaking into the microphone. The piece starts in darkness as I speak to the audience through the microphone and welcome them to the space and invite them to take out their cellphones and make sure that they are on, keep them close by, and wait for further instructions. Once I complete my speech, I use my phone to turn on the lamp arm that is placed in the corner. I lie down on the diagonal from that corner the furthest away I can be and then the music starts. I do a slow crawl and drag my body to the corner. This serves as a moment of attraction and entry into the space and world for both me and the audience. Once I reach the corner, I get off the ground and slowly stand up in front of the light and the projector turns on. The projector is playing a starfield that is expanding from the middle, me standing in front of the light and then turning it off is playing off this idea of consumption. The starfield is then the only thing that is serving as a light and I begin to traverse the space around its perimeter, creating a box or square. I wanted this moment to

work as a transition into the next space by the sense of expanding from the projection and providing a visual layout of the "room" I was building.

In the next section, I approach the microphone and give the audience my phone number and ask them to tell me where they are today, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. This serves as a moment of trust, decision, and action for the audience. Below are responses I received from that first prompt:
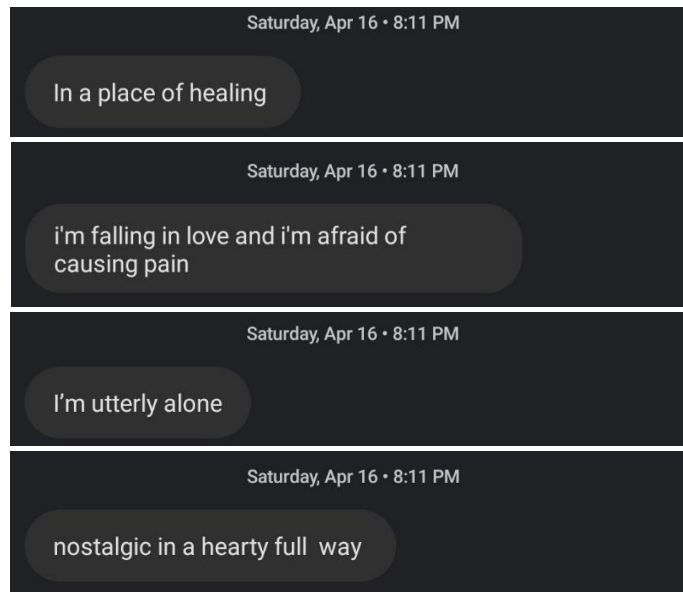
Figures 3. (First), Figure 4. (Second), Figure 5. (Third), and Figure 6. (Fourth) Text messages I received from my performance on April 16th, 2022.
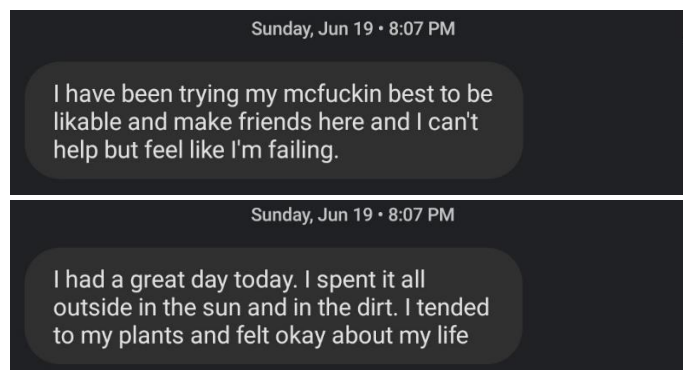

Figure 7. (Top) and Figure 8. (Bottom) Text messages I received from my performance on June 19th, 2022.

While they send me messages their notifications can be heard through the speakers and then becomes a score for my movement. Each time a new message comes in I start my phrase over. This section originally was to critique our current human condition of the impulse response to our cell phones but became more about building trust and connection with the audience. Each person who sends me a text message receives an automated response asking them to share a moment when they have felt secure. This is when the sense of risk begins to build and those willing to partake have been able to get to that sense of trust and curiosity, I wanted this piece to have.
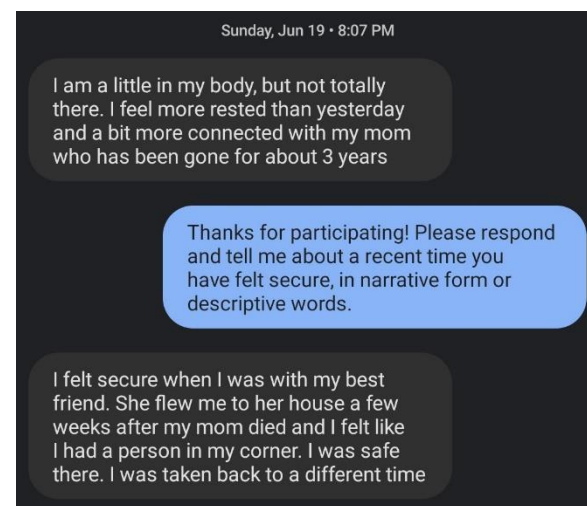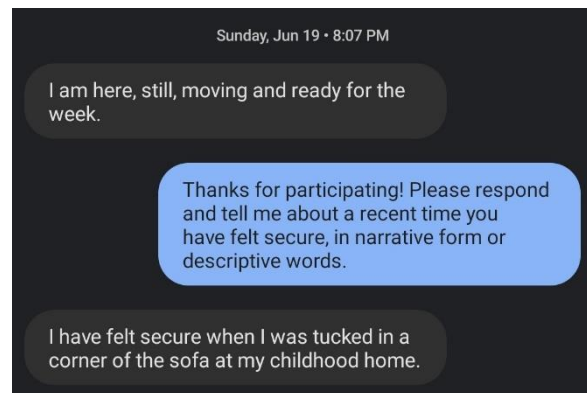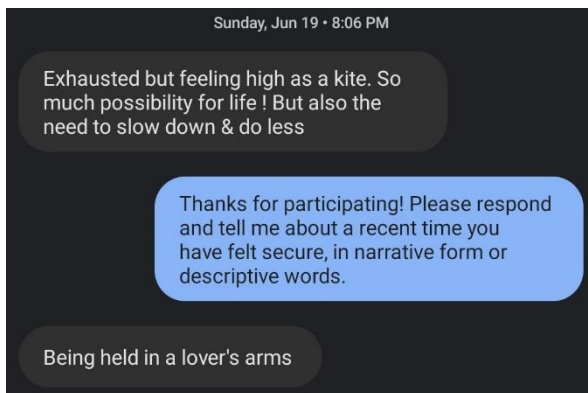

Figure 9. (Top Left), Figure 10. (Top Right), Figure 11. (Bottom Left), and Figure 12. (Bottom Right) Text messages I receive from my performance on June 19th, 2022.
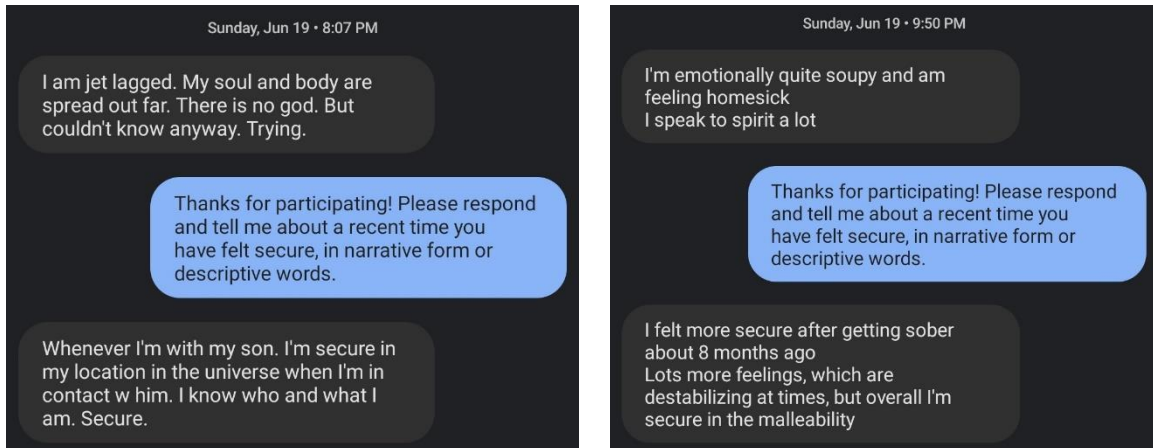
Figure 13. (Left) and Figure 14. (Right) Text messages I receive from my performance on June 19th, 2022.
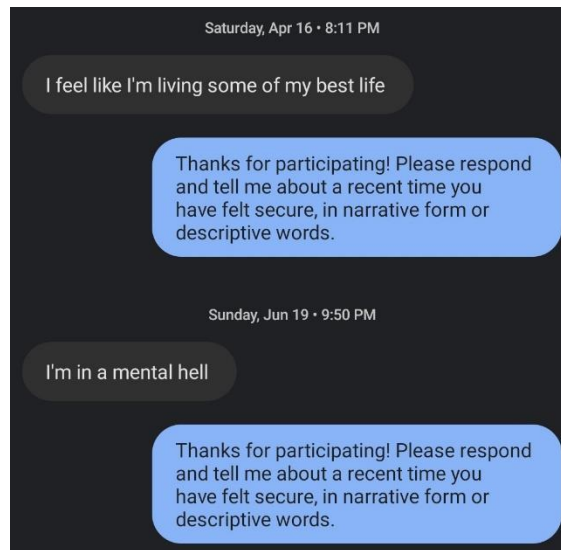
Figure 15. Text messages I receive from the same person at two different performances, April 16th, 2022, and June 19th, 2022.

What begins to break the audience's expectations and makes them more aware is their voice and position in this piece. I read out people's messages through the microphone and start layering the messages over top of one another via the loop station. I was interested in the ways the audience might feel or connect to this moment because I wanted to invoke active participation but also passive action; meaning that though they did the work to send me the message, I was the one reading it. Maybe this would make

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them work harder to listen or resend their message if they felt unheard. As I was considering what this piece's relationship to technology was becoming, I found this section the most puzzling. I became deep in my process and moved away from what it was doing for the audience and more towards what I was experiencing within this piece. In this third section where I read out people's messages, I rehearsed by reading my Twitter feed. I found in those moments that that is how we often experience social media, we read other people's thoughts, ideas, and opinions usually through our own voices.

Figure 16. (Top left) Screenshot from "Incognito" section one from April 16th, 2022, dress rehearsal. Figure 17. (Top right) and Figure 18. (Bottom left) Screenshot from "Incognito" section three from April 16th, 2022, dress rehearsal. Figure 19. (Bottom right) Screenshot from "Incognito" ending from June 19th, 2022.

Creative Manifestation: Escaping Together

My creative manifestation did not come together until the day before I would perform. This is not how I typically work when creating a dance and I had begun to value the feedback and open showing processes that Hollins dance department cultivated during the Fall and Spring semesters. My thesis was originally set to be performed in theatre and my vision was to have the audience sitting on the back of the stage, facing the theatre seats. I was interested in using the theatre seating space as an added performance space as well as on stage. I thought disrupting the seating as well as the range of viewing would begin to get audience to interrogate how they are engaging with the performance, with tools from me to help them question that. I had a lot of budding ideas, but I felt as though I could not set anything in stone because I needed to meet with the production team to talk through what was possible with all my technological needs.

A few days before orientation for the summer session an MFA thesis coordinator reached out to me telling me that it seemed as though performing in the theatre did not seem feasible to what I wanted to for accessibility reasons. While this was an extremely reasonable concern, I was not willing to have the audience members in the theatre seating because I felt that was a conflict to what I was researching, and I was desiring a more intimate performance setting. I knew it had to be in Studio II where DRAFTWORKS was performed. This space has grown dear to my heart and has been the birthplace for most of my pieces I have created at Hollins. At first, I was excited to have the challenge of using this space to perform, it quickly became clear that none of my ideas felt practical within that space. I wanted to use space and distance to help manifest my research and that just was not possible in Studio II. This is when I needed to advocate for myself and request a

later performance date, switching from June 17th to July 2nd. While it does not seem like a lot of extra time, it was exactly what I needed to bring my piece to life.

One of the more difficult things with the studio setting, which is considered a mobile tour, is the lack of technical support and I had to learn that later than I would have liked to. I wanted to use the theatre space because the technological aspects were a large part of my piece, like specific lighting, projections, and live video feed. I was originally offered minimal lighting support for the space, and it was later retracted to no lighting support at all. The change in space did not deter me from pushing the limits with technology and I was determined to have good lighting that fit my vision. The technological aspects became a large reason my thesis was not complete until the day of my dress rehearsal. I was self-producing and running all my tech in my rehearsals while trying to be the performer. I was never able to step back and see how it looked or record myself because all my technological devices were being used to run the various mediums of technology.

Before going into detail about the performance, I want to supply some spatial context. Each section is separated by a curtain that goes from the ceiling to floor, wall to wall, containing each section within itself. Since my thesis was presented in Studio II, I had to have two performances because of the limited seating. Before the audience members enter the space, they are told to take off their shoes, chairs are optional, they will be moving throughout the space, and to sit within the white squares.

Section One

My performance began the minute people entered the space. Though I was not dancing in section one, I was interested in creating an experience that involved the

audience within the performance. When people entered the space, I welcomed them individually and thanked them for coming. We will all be sitting in a circle, being able to see one another. I would provide them my phone number and invited them to arrive in the space and take a few pictures of things that interested them. It could be lighting, architecture, or anything that interested them, and I asked them to send me the photos. I provide them with time and space to explore this photo taking exploration. I contextualize this as pre-section one and to be considered as a part of the open house. See Figure 20. through Figure 25. for the photos I received across both performances. The variety of photos and unexpected capture of moments was something I was not entirely expecting.

Though the performance starts when people enter the space, section one starts when I ask everyone to close their eyes. This section had many iterations and was meant to serve as an auditory experience and would complement a visual section. I wanted to create different experiences within one performance, and I was interested in how I could use various factors of social media or our phones and what mediums they come through, mainly video and sound. The idea to incorporate images is inspired by David Weber-Krebs' piece *the guardians of sleep*, where the performers have series of photos that they have taken from throughout a day in their life and sit with groups of audience members and swipe through each image on an iPad. The performers are swiping and naming what they are seeing, usually in one word, and they gradually pick up the pace. Developing a sense of overstimulation until finally the performers lie in the performance space completely still with only their eyes continuing to move and eventually allowing themselves to fall asleep as the lights take thirty minutes to completely fade out. I was intrigued by Weber-Krebs' experimental performance and how he challenges the

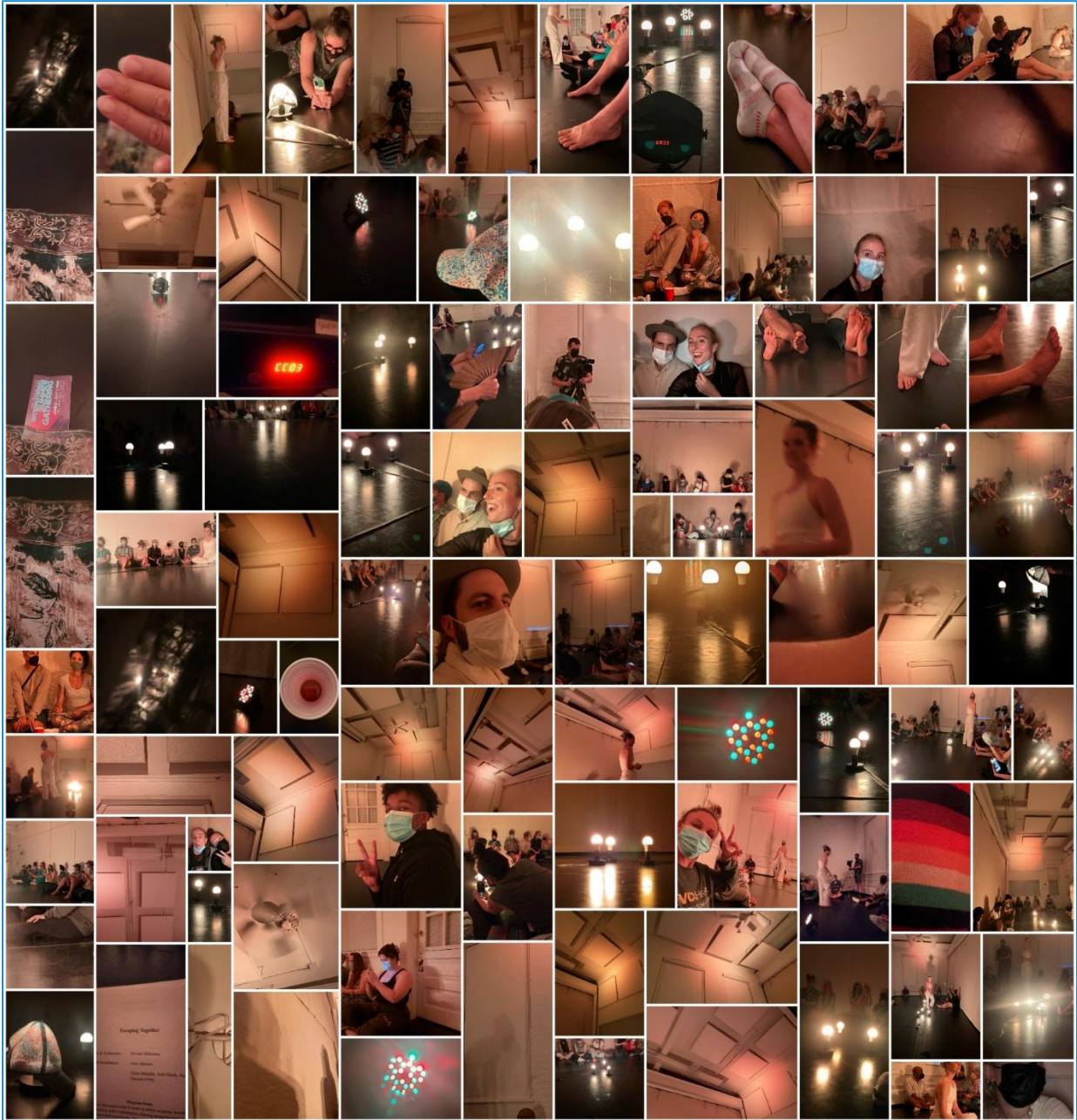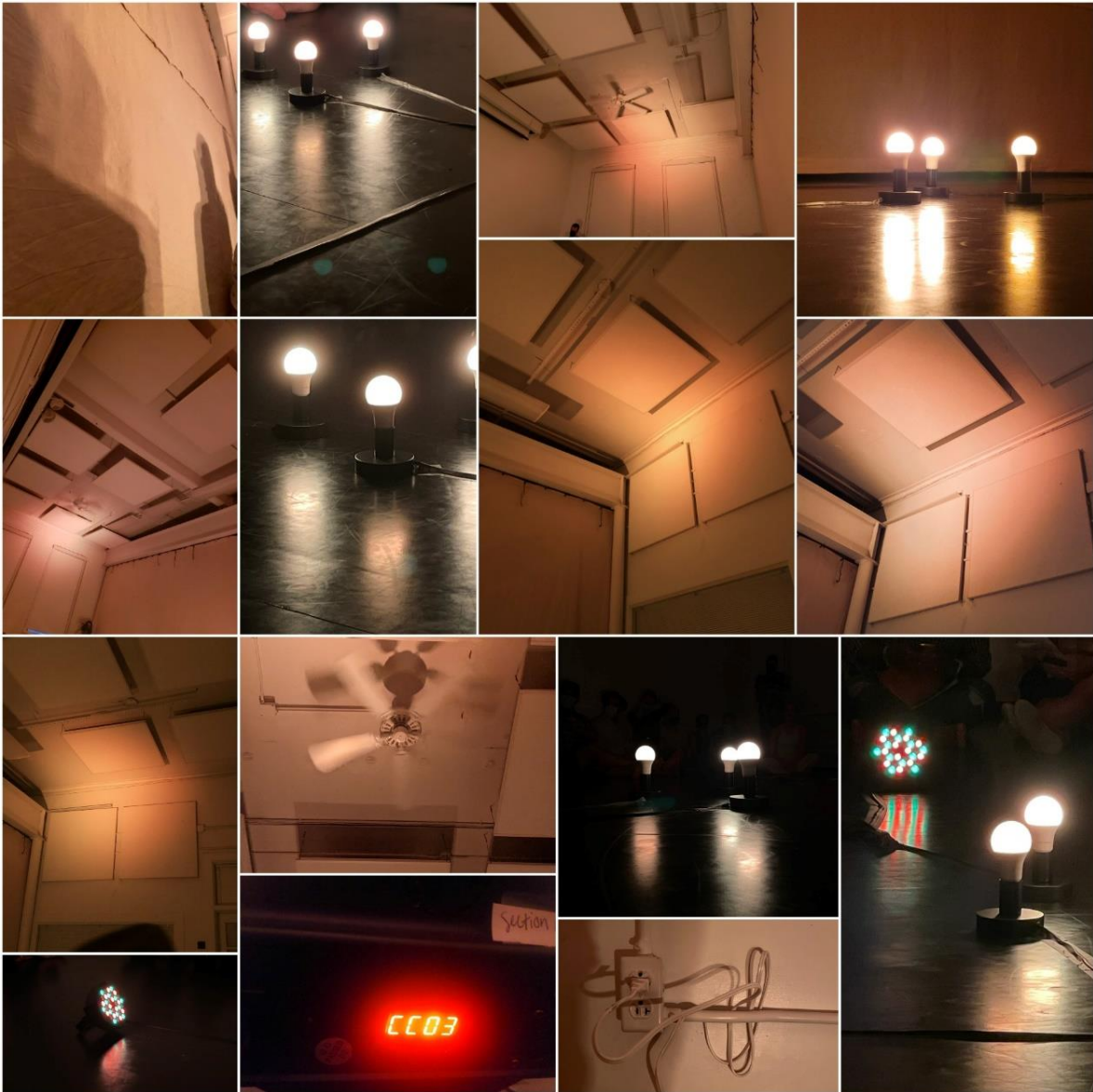Figure 20. Collage of photos received from audience members during thesis.

Figure 21. Collage of images of lighting and architecture taken by the audience.

Figure 22. Collage of selfies and candid's taken by the audience.

Figure 23. Collage of photos of myself taken by the audience.

Figure 24. Photos collage of feet taken by the audience.

Figure 25. Photos caught in act taken by the audience

and agency of the audience members who sit on wide carpeted stairs. The piece questions vulnerability through witnessing someone's days via images and then to watch them fall asleep. The audience can continue this practice of witnessing and holding space or choice to sleep as well, often on accident.

When I ask the audience to close their eyes, I walk them through a grounding practice that I often use to be in the present moment and to calm any worries or anxieties. With all my grounding rituals I often begin with a focus on breath. After a few moments with our breath, I invite them to turn into their senses, starting with their sense of hearing. Then moving to the sense of touch, starting with where their body meets the floor and checking in with the points of contact. In my grounding practice that I share with other's I have specific words and images I come back to. For this one I was interested how to expand their sense of touch without having them touch themselves with their hands, so I asked them to tune into how their clothes laid against their skin and the difference between skin and clothes in contact with the floor. Lastly, without opening their eyes I ask them to become aware sight. As they begin to move their head around, I offer how they might perceive light without opening their eye with just the shifting of their head. This has been a securing discovery that I have made, in allowing me to trust myself even in moments when I cannot fully perceive where I am, there is still a sense of knowing. When this exploration of individual grounding ends, I asked everyone to open their eyes and explore the room with new sight, making new discoveries or reexamine something they saw with "old eyes" (before the grounding began). Taking this internal awareness and shifting it external as I invite them to make eye contact with one another and come into the space together, as a collective. I am interested in individual experience of

audience members with a performance but for my thesis I want to explore the social collective audience experience that has become a key part to redefining escapism in my research. Concluding this section, I ask them to begin to shift into standing while continuing to witness the space and each other. I invite them to transition into the next section as crew members open the curtains to section two.

Section Two

Lighting became an important aspect within this piece and each section had its own distinct color choice. Section two and three would reference the previous sections to help transition and challenge time and space. Section one was entirely orange while section two was a light blue. When entering section two the audience sits within the white squares on the floor facing the curtain hung from the ceiling, past the one they entered through. White squares and rectangles are projected onto the curtain. Once everyone settled the projection of the white squares went out and a slideshow of photos began. These were the photos that the audience members took at the beginning of the show, they randomized into a slideshow along with blank slides. Whenever a blank slide appears, a new arrangement of white squares appears and the disappears. This is a repeated timed score of going through images and white square. The images reference the previous space in a new context and medium. The white squares representing the absence of images and a hint for what is to come. When the final squares appear in an arrangement on the left side of the curtain for the audience, a projection of a live video feed is opened. The first image they see being an up-close shot of my face, reference my piece *BODY* but not quite revealing that the video is live right away. This video feed is of the third section just beyond the curtain the audience is viewing from in section two. In Figure 26. you can see

the point of view from the audience, the camera is placed facing the projection on the curtain creating an overlapping of the projected video feed. The white squares strategically placed upon the blank wall in the video.

Figure 26. Photo taken during these performance July 2nd, 2022.

This is the first time my body begins to move within the performance, though I have been performing the whole time. I execute a set of tasks that interact with various aspects of the live video feed, lighting, projection, and the percussion of my feet against the floor. I create a frame of how I would unfold these tasks but allow for improvisational freedom within them. Most of these tasks reference the use of the space and facing the camera, this leaves time for the audience to take in a switch of visual engagement until I

begin interacting with the curtain. This makes their two-dimensional visual experience turn three-dimensional. At the end of section two I take away the white squares as the blue lights are turned out and the crew opens the curtains for the audience to enter section three. Like section three they sit within the white box.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Section Three*</p>

Once the audience settles into section three, I acknowledge them through eye contact but also the video feed which is referring to the previous section they were in. They can still see the video, just on the other side of the curtain now. I approach the curtain to pull it from the bottom and lifting it high in the air, letting its wind cast over myself and the audience. When I lift the curtain, we are all gazing into the previous section, where they were once sitting, and the only light left from that space is the projector that illuminates me as I peer back at it. Letting the curtain float down, I follow behind it and back into it which triggers the projection to go out. I am beginning to break barriers by interacting with the curtains and revealing the inner workings of my technology. I reveal a space where they once were, but now they are seeing it from a new perspective, and it no longer looks the same.

This concluding section is all a large abstract reference and borrowing from my DRAFTWORKS piece *Incognito*. The peering into the projector as well as my slow crawl to the corner once the video feed goes out are just two of the few moments that I used from that piece in my thesis. As I arrive in the corner, the projector opens one final time to reveal the return of the white squares displayed in the corner of the space now as a magenta light beams through the studio door's blinds (Figure 27.). My final improv score centers around referencing new and old while starting over, repeating, or letting go.

Slowly, one by one the squares disappear behind me. Until me and the audience are left with just the looming vibrant light through the door. I slowly approach it and exit through the door. Hoping I leave the audience with a desire to follow me like they had through each of the previous sections.
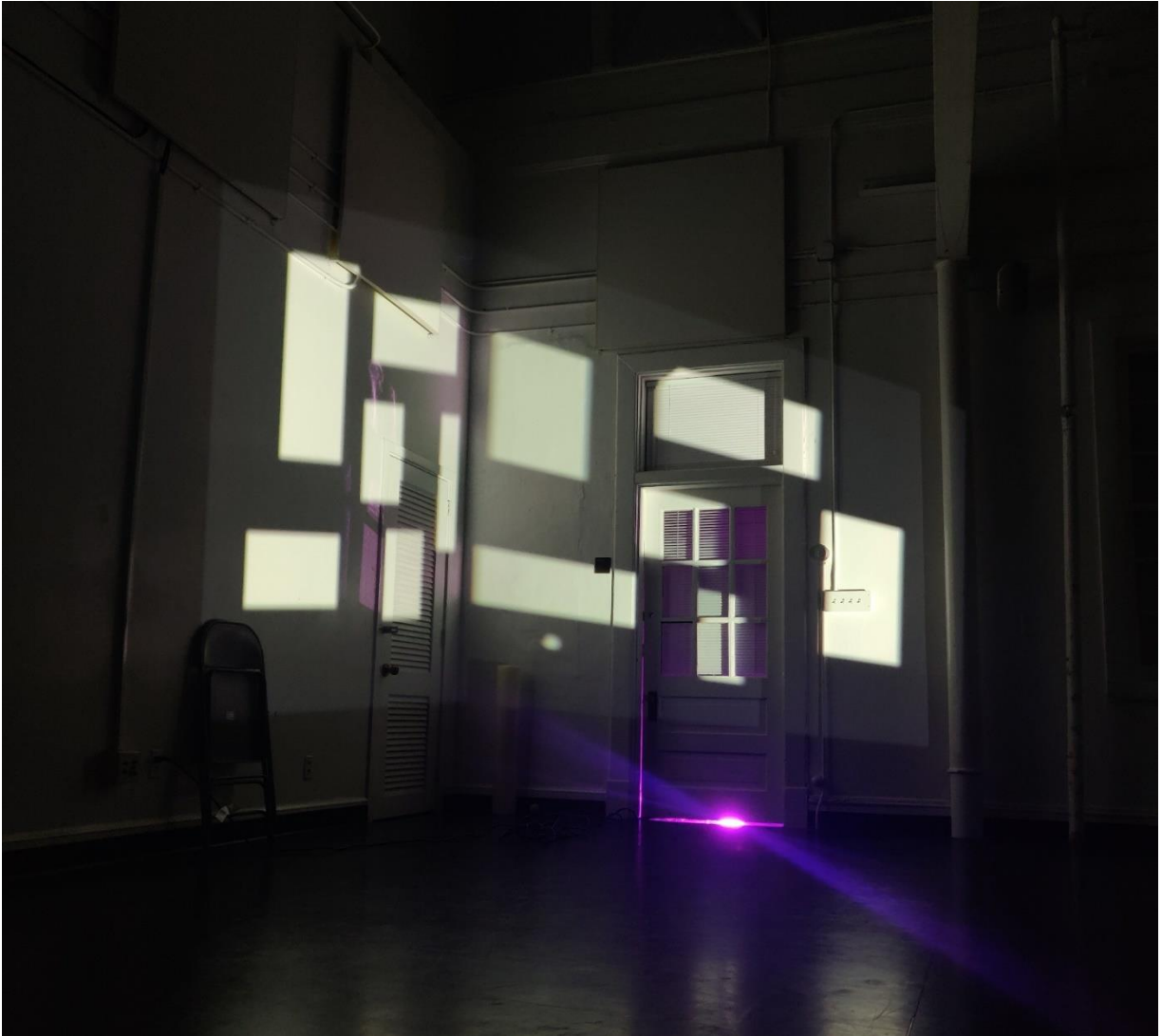

Figure 27. Photo taken by me during the rehearsal process.

Concluding Remarks

This research and process has only inspired me be more curious about this topic. I see the potential for the expansion of this piece and the different spaces that could

support it. I also believe it has deepened my appreciation for the collaborative process and how vital it becomes in bring art to life. Therefore, I value audience interaction as well. I want to continue my exploration of escapism through performance and deepen my research. Technology and intermedia performance is the future of dance, and I am interested in how this research can be transferred across the dance realm from higher education to conferences, and workshops.

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