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Tina M. Campt

The Loophole of Retreat— An Invitation

On April 27, 2019, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum was the site of a very special convening. It was the brainchild of Simone Leigh, and shared its title with her 2019 exhibition at the museum. Organized by Leigh, Saidiya Hartman, and myself, "The Loophole of Retreat" was an exhilarating, rejuvenating, and inspirational daylong gathering dedicated to the intellectual life of black women that brought together an international constellation of writers, artists, poets, filmmakers, and activists. This special issue of e-flux journal *seeks to lift up the extraordinary voices, thoughts, and conversations that emerged at the convening and share them with a wider audience. In doing so, I and my coeditors, Leigh and Hartman, seek to extend the dialogues of the "Loophole" in the hope of including others and inspiring future gatherings which, like the Guggenheim convening, will honor and celebrate the intellectual and creative labor of black women. Like all the texts included in this special issue, the comments below are revised remarks originally shared at the event.*

vessel:
a container for holding something;
a person into whom some quality (such as grace) is infused.

surface:
the outside part or uppermost layer of something (often used when describing its texture, form, or extent);
to rise or come up to the surface of the water or the ground.

touch:
the feeling generated by contact of an item with the exterior of the skin;
to come so close to as to be or come into contact with it.

formation:
an act of giving form or shape to something or of taking form;
an arrangement of a body or group of persons or things in some prescribed manner or for a particular purpose

insurgency:
an active revolt or uprising;
insurrection against an existing government (usually one's own)
by a group not recognized as having the status of a belligerent;
rebellion within a group, as by members against leaders.

Vessel, surface, touch, formation, insurgency—I offer these terms and definitions as a baseline/bass line for

what we hope to gather today. I offer them as a prelude to an open-ended and expanding lexicon of black feminist study. It is a *base* line intended as a foundation and a launchpad. It is a *bass* line intended to serve as a backbeat, a rhythm section, and an undercurrent for a collective practice of imagining. They are terms that resonate with the work of Simone Leigh, the artist whose accomplishments provide us with the occasion for our convening. But they are terms that resonate beyond her extraordinary body of work. Taken together, they resonate at a very particular frequency.

The loophole of retreat …

a dark hole
an attic space
she plots, she plans
she dreams of possibility from within impossible strictures of enclosure and confinement
her escape is immanent, as her imagination is boundless
her enclosure is an incubator for a practice of refusal and a roadmap to freedom.

These are the registers of a slave girl who dreamed into life practices of self-care, intellectual fortitude, and fiercely defiant forms of love and connection, of which we are proud beneficiaries. It is these multiple registers of Harriet Jacobs's loophole of retreat that we reference as a preparation ground for this gathering, as our attempt to cultivate a space for celebrating black women's intellectual and creative labor.

It is a site Jacobs claimed as simultaneously an enclosure and a space for enacting practices of freedom—practices of thinking, planning, writing, and imagining new forms of freedom. It is a place we mobilize in an effort to revalue black women's intellectual labor.

The loophole we hope to conjure is intended as a retreat that extends ongoing dialogues, creates new relations, and nurtures our collective intellectual and creative labor. It is a retreat that continues the legacy of Jacobs in stealing away and anticipating freedom in the confines of enclosure. It is a gathering and assembling that attends to urgent questions:

How do we sustain this intellectual and creative labor?
How do we figure, bear, and carry it?
How do we practice freedom inside the enclosure?
How do we hold and sustain each other?
How do we create a future in which it is possible to live unbounded lives?

Our Loophole of Retreat is devoted to intellectual collaboration, dialogue, engagement, and care. We invite your participation as active interlocutors in this assembly. Our hope is that you leave it with an expanded vocabulary of shared terms that allow us to nurture, extend, and transform the project of black feminist study. It is an aspiration to recognize and revalue black women's labor and to incite a new cycle of radical and rebellious imagination and care.

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Tina Campt is Owen F. Walker Professor of Humanities and Modern Culture and Media at Brown University and a Research Associate at the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. She is the author of three books: *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich* (2004), *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora*

in Europe (2012), and *Listening to Images* (2017). Her recently completed, forthcoming book is entitled, *The Black Gaze.*

Saidiya Hartman

Extended Notes on the Riot

Simone Leigh is a friend, a collaborator, a co-conspirator, and a sister. A shared set of concerns animates our respective practices, which can be described as an effort to articulate the conceptual rigors of black women's everyday life and ordinary use. A being made into a tool for others, equipment for living, an incubator of possibility, a refuge, a clearing, a dwelling, a loophole of retreat—these are some of the ways that Leigh has articulated the black female condition, the tension between the facts of blackness and the lived experience. Her work, like my own, is preoccupied with the question of scale: how to undo assumptions about the provincialism and narrowness of black women's life and work, so that the dimensions of their existence in the world, their contribution, their way of making and doing might be recalibrated. In Leigh's attention to the black feminine, not simply its myriad duties and functions or the long durée of abuse, violation, exploitation, precarity, and fungibility, but the black feminine as an architecture of possibility, as a grammar of (not) being in the world, I have found a critical language able to convey the epic reach of the black ordinary and the monumentality of the everyday. The solidity and mass of the work illuminates the paradox, expresses the antagonism: her capacity is yoked in service of others, exploited and devalued. She is load-bearing and breakable. The stark outline of the predicament is that the one who makes a home for others in the world finds herself outside the parameters of the human, not seen and never regarded, excluded and negated.

I have tried to describe something similar in my work on existence in a minor key, on what the chorus has made possible, on the radical thought that fuels the lives of ordinary black women, on the anarchy and beauty of colored girls: *Now it is impossible to turn your back, to carry on like the world is the same. Don't waste a breath asking why she has to hold everything the rest can't bear, like you don't know, like you supposed things were some other way, like there was some gift other than what she offered in her outstretched hands*, *or shelter outside her embrace*.

How does one convey the beauty of the gathering and how she brings us together? How she does what she does and what unfolds inside the circle? What has she been called to bear for all of us? Refuge is to be found in a skirt of raffia, in a rampart of clay. Simone Leigh's hands have created a world, have disrupted and evaded the dominant economy of the gaze, not by opposition or protest, not by explaining anything, but by looking otherwise, by retreating within, by a radical withholding that makes visible and palpable all that is held in reserve—all that power, love, brilliance, labor, and care. All that beauty. The "Loophole of Retreat" exhibition articulates this world, this dwelling, this possibility. *It is impossible to turn your back, to carry on like the world is the same*.

The ultimate *nègre*, the exemplary slave, is the black female; she is the *everything* and the *nothing* that

constitutes our modernity. She is the belly of the world, the factory, the crop, the implement of future increase, and the captive maternal that nurtures the world. Unacknowledged, disavowed, unloved, unseen—yes, but her existence is more than this inventory of violence. There is care and beauty too. Leigh's body of work transforms how we look and instructs us to listen at a lower frequency, to inhabit this architecture of possibility.

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The idea to produce a black feminist broadside for "Loophole of Retreat" emerged in collaboration with Leigh and Nontsikelelo Mutiti. In thinking about the kind of document we wanted to produce for the show, we revisited the pamphlet, "A Call to Negro Women," produced by the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, an organization of radical black women.* We echoed the call of the manifesto to black women everywhere to stand up, give air to our grievances, fight, and demand the impossible—redress. Like them, we would make the call in our name and on our behalf; it was a call to assembly—*Dry your tears, and in the spirit of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, ARISE*. A few months later, hundreds of black women would gather at the Guggenheim. Nontsi Mutiti designed the broadside. Leigh's work and Jacobs's words inspired it, and I assembled and composed the elements. The broadside blends literary and visual elements in an extensive sampling of black radicalism. *The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner* appears on the outer side and *Notes for the Riot, an Outline Drafted in the Midst of Open Rebellion, a Runaway Plot* is folded away inside. The broadside serves as a study guide and liner notes to the riotous music and noise strike of the sonic installation. *Notes for the Riot* is an assemblage of two centuries of black feminist utterance and radical thought. It is a reading guide and a plan for study inside the enclosure. The broadside offers an inventory of keywords and concepts essential to insurgent practice and to the world of beautiful objects Leigh has given us as incitements to thought, as provocations about value and existence, as a ready path and a line of flight away from the enclosure, as a directive: study this, the black femme as a figure and vessel of contemplation.

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Inside the loophole, you can hear the slave girl's runaway tongue, after Harryette Mullen's track on resistant orality; Nina Simone's lyric about a bird flying high; Assata's poem about contraband love in hell and her grandmother's dream-prophecy about the escape from the cell; the subterfuge of noise that Debbie Africa and her cellmates made as they ushered the child into the world; Frederick Douglass recounting, a decade after the *Narrative* and having abandoned the burden of being a representative man, how he was not a solitary hero, but rather that they were all in open rebellion that morning; Harriet Jacobs instructing other slave girls to be cautious and cunning at an early age; Hortense Spillers explicating the gift and impossibility of the black maternal, with Joy James extending Spillers's line in the captive maternal and Christine Sharpe in the womb as factory; Nahum Chandler's lesson on anacrusis, the expectant music of the before, and his step-by-step guide to paraontology in Cecil's music and Du Bois's compositions; Tina Campt humming the frequency of black life; Fred Moten amplifying the more-than-pain of Aunt Hester's scream; Orlando Patterson and Claude Meillassoux expounding on the structural design of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"; Sethe's refrain, mother make your mark on me; Elisée Reclus encouraging us to let our lives be beautiful, foreshadowing Amiri Baraka, if we could see ourselves, we would dig ourselves; Harriet Jacobs musing aloud in a cramped cell about the feel of the earth under her feet; Hazel Carby spinning a genealogy of black women's reconstruction and Thavolia Glymph providing the account of the war against the women, the war-within-the-war; Du Bois's call: How does it feel to be a problem? and Chandler's response: How does it feel to be a problem of thought?; Zora Neale Hurston chuckling, let's bring this talk down to earth and make plain that we speak with our sister's tongue in our mouth; NourbeSe Philip trying her tongue in the discourse on our hidden anguish; Gloria Wekker and Omise'ke Tinsley whispering *mati*, just friends, the embrace of a lover, life in the hold; *still life, still life*, Sharpe utters and augments; Frank Wilderson's full stop: there is nothing analogous to this!; Jared Sexton murmuring about social life and social death to the tune of "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue"; Riley Snorton introduces Mary Jones to the chorus, wedding the fungible and the trans; Dionne Brand cautioning us, do not for a moment forget the casual homicide of the dress, do not forget that nowhere has the assault come to an end; Zakiyyah Jackson speaks on it—the blackness of blackness or sublimity and the void; Rizvana Bradley chiming in about the lyric surplus that always exceeds and escapes; Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts takes it to the bridge: the shape depends on what it is designed to bear and who bears it; Ella Baker and Angela Davis affirming, yes, you have grasped the world at its roots, so you know the struggle is eternal; the chalk screeches against the blackboard as Denise Ferreira da Silva draws a diagram and writes the equation about blackness as matter signaling infinity, building with Gayatri Spivak's speculations on value, Cedric Robinson's Das Black Capital, and Sylvia Wynter's Black Metamorphosis; after the exercises on frequency and tonality, the chorus enters again, Glissant's refrains about free and forced poetics aerated by Ashon Crawley's black breath; Paul Gilroy, channeling Ralph Ellison and Seyla Benhabib, stresses the unsayable and the music of transfiguration; Wynter's laughter precedes the most beautiful cover of Aimé Cesaire's "Poetry and Cognition" that you have ever heard—poesis as black capacity; Stuart Hall explicates the concept of "articulation" so we might understand the way the world works and how the structure holds together;

Rosa Luxemburg decries the dangers of a policeman-like historical materialism and anarchists improvising in the air; Joshua Clover, finding his way to black music like the white boys from Liverpool, says the riot seeks to preserve nothing; Guy Debord mutters shyly about a theoretical account of practical action, because he knows philosophy is nothing compared with what they do in the streets of Watts, not interpret the world, but change it; Katherine McKittrick and Alex Weheliye introduce the deep beats and bass of the Roland TR-808 drum machine, crooning lyrics about black heartbreak, Fred moanin' about what we owe one another and the generosity of the debtor, the secondary rhythms of the subprime, and Moor Mother making dissident music of all of this.

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*Beah Richards and Louise Thompson Patterson issued the call in 1951. Two weeks later, 132 women gathered in Washington, DC. A young Lorraine Hansberry read the manifesto in front of the home of Frederick Douglass. Mariame Kaba reissued the manifesto as a pamphlet in 2019.

Saidiya Hartman is the author of *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford, 1997), *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (Norton, 2019). She is currently at work on a new book project, *N Folio: An Essay on Narrative and the Archive*. She was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2019.

Simone Leigh

Images from “Loophole of Retreat”

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Installation views of “The Hugo Boss Prize 2018: Simone Leigh, Loophole of Retreat,” Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, April 19–October 27, 2019. Photo: David Heald © 2019 The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Simone Leigh was born in 1967 in Chicago, Illinois. She is a recipient of the Hugo Boss Prize (2018), Foundation for Contemporary Art Grant (2018), Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize (2017), John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship (2016), and Anonymous Was a Woman Award (2016). Recent projects and exhibitions include “Loophole of Retreat” (2019) at the Guggenheim Museum, New York; the 2019 Whitney Biennial; “The Waiting Room” (2016) at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; “Hammer Projects” (2016) at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; *inHarlem* (2016), a public installation presented by The Studio Museum in Harlem at Marcus Garvey Park, New York; and *The Free People’s Medical Clinic* (2014), a project commissioned by Creative Time, New York. Leigh is the first artist to be commissioned for the High Line Plinth, where her monumental sculpture *Brick House* is on view through October 2020.

This poem is format-sensitive. For this reason, it is recommended to read it online at:
https://www.e-flux.com/journal/105/303739/bound-together-by-this-matter/

Audio track available at:
https://www.e-flux.com/journal/105/303739/bound-together-by-this-matter/

Simone White

bound together by this matter

I want to talk as plainly as I can about the obsessive urgency that attends work on my current project, which is called, depending on which way you look at it, either “or, on being the other woman” or “SURROUND.” The project started the same way everything I do starts: some words knocked me down, and I was converted to them, upending what I had previously believed about how they could and did mean. The date I have for Audre Lorde’s “Poetry is Not a Luxury” is 1977, the date of its first publication. In 1977, I was 5 years old. In 2017, I read “Poetry is Not a Luxury” again — maybe it was the 10th time I had read it, maybe it was the 20th.

Lorde’s first sentences:

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt.

By 2017, I had been thinking seriously and for years about trap music, but I was at a thinking place of bare sufficiency. I had begun to speak and write hesitantly about a hunch: I had to understand the sonic and material properties of certain wave forms. I guessed the matter of the sounds I was responding to conditioned and constituted my response to the music at the acoustic level, which constituted a social response, which is what music can *mean*.

I aired these first thoughts with my lover, an artist who is leagues ahead of most anyone in the world in bringing technological practices of electronic music to bear on problems of black life and a master of frequency manipulation. Obvious, he said; obvious that bass sounds wrap or squeeze or spread — they surround. We both thought we were talking about the possible effects of wave phenomena on my poems, which he claims not to understand, while I am slow to comprehend physical concepts. He gave me a cursory lesson on sine waves, with differential examples.

We agree that trap music is the most popular and consumable music on the globe. We disagree, then and now, about how trap music can be engaged as a problem for my work, understood as anti-pop or experimental, difficult to comprehend or incomprehensible; how is trap music a problem for thought and for writing, for art criticism, for criticism and performance that does not make of it corny amplification of pop music in the museum, cynical self-performance of black art avant-garde for a mass(ier) audience?

I figured if my language about trap music was, paradoxically, obvious and malappropriate-ly distortive to an expert (masculine) view, my project was probably worth pursuing.

When I hear this music, I know myself to be bombarded and embraced by its structure: the gigantic sine waves we call bass, sound at the low frequencies, wrap themselves around objects so that it does not matter where we are if we are within range of their movement; we cannot exactly know how we are entwined. I see us, all, bound together by this matter, and I see the masters of the machines who produce and manipulate our togetherness, as powerful intervenors in the possibilities of our social life. Insofar as it is in and through social life that we are made human, the masters of these machines are making us new. If we do not understand, we are at the mercy of what they know and we do not about how we can be got into, got to do things.

I see us entangled by this matter as an infinitely co-extensive orb – a physical thing — within which we are not altogether able to distinguish where we begin and the technology ends, so entangled and manipulated are we by the web of pleasures and disgust which surrounds us in the presence of the sounds.

The orb begins to break apart, or peel away. I begin to apprehend the thing that I am inside; I see us fall away from each other and the ligature of individuated desire becomes perceptible. The violence of the bind makes possible the path toward breaking. It is the beautiful impossibility of not feeling pleasure in company that degrades and insults us, the degradation's own fundamental energy, which is matter, thus neither this nor that, which propels it away.

I never argue that trap music is part of a radical or liberatory tradition. I want to see a thing as it is. Each thing contains the possibility of its being another.

If degradation is a complex matrix of relations and contacts that come to mean by virtue of frequent repetition

Light and sound travel through and around the spaces of the present I and we occupy.

Experience is how we are mattering / the fullness of materiality we sense and articulate by attending to responsiveness

My work proceeded to jump the formal boundary of the long poem, a form I dropped into for its ability to foreground the facts of my degraded form of life with the sentence as the primary unit — being black and a woman, raising a child outside the bourgeois family common in the intellectual and art classes among whom I mostly live, panic, being simultaneously upper middle class and dangerously broke all the time with enormous and growing debt, panic, my desiring self riven by loathing of patriarchy and sexual desire for men, my gender made illegible because of my self-sufficiency and lack of protection, the constant stream of insults, arm-twisting/disciplinary withdrawals of support and empathy — while I attempted to expose various aspects as a matter of writing, to turn experience around very slowly and stop on it when i came to a place that was not lit

but the poem needed to be shown to emerge from the bombardments that were its conditions of possibility; it needed a performance modality that showed how it could be crushed while it attempted to expand. or something like that. and it needed a theory of its mattering.

// for ED and WC and TH

I am an ignorant fucker. difficult to be close to in that i am unsentimental and intimate with everyone. This is connected to the problems I am working through regarding metaphor. As a form of patriarchal control over language and a currency of poetic power. My ex husband calls me an “ignorant fucker” when I complain that his hugely pregnant white girlfriend, whom I do not know whom I tolerate since for the last month and indefinite future my son must live in her house two days in a week, cannot show up unannounced in my child’s classroom where I pay all the bills and and I watch and half do nothing and half help in the acquisition of literacy and reason. I say this is no place for this white woman; she is a free rider on my labor and love for my son. I will not support any white people with my work. I tell him all of this pretty loudly. He calls me an ignorant fucker. Now you are street? What, are you going to punch her in her face? I have fought exactly three people with physical violence in my 46 years of life. Two men. And my sister.

“Pain — expands the Time — / Ages coil within / The Minute Circumference of the Brain” “Pain — has an Element of Blank” .

I
Am
An ignorant
Fucker —
I’ve learned a lot from Eileen. Lay claim to the processes of your mind, deal in the maniacal properties of the oscillating sign that is the mark on you like black is on you but don’t let them force you to sing. All BUrning prerogative.

“Since a Rack couldn’t coax a syllable now”

EMily talking shit. Vs me “being” “ ignorant” “fucker”

What “is” is is determining the terms of exaltation, praise and defilement, the turning off and on of the pleasure and pain centers. Subjectivation.
Profanity’s nonce forms engage linguistically in what sound people call muddiness, profanity’s imbrication with epithet is a richer form of meaning making that taps into sign at a zero level, incredibly powerful, elementally so.

“fuck that mumbling shit” : “you are an ignorant fucker”

what has to be said beyond off/on : good/bad; what happens when a linguistic field is generated by high energy signs across a flat plane of signification -- there’s no need for logical progression or … “narrative.” Each word or phrase can function as foregone, forethought, already known; that’s a black ontological truism that trap music knows deeply. That’s its language game.

On the one hand we experience a unidirectional surge (Playboi Carti, “R.I.P.”) and on the other intense confusion via harmonic scrambling (Future, “F&N”, or the new music like Lil’ Baby, “Word On the Street”).

I am an ignorant fucker wherein the comedic shock of the thing resides in the manner in which I do not resemble and yet am the thing, impossibly misperceived

This is like this. I regard this as baby work. Ultraconservative pandering. I seek to dwell outside the figure in a zone of “Pain”

This is my country. What is the difference between the figure that destroys and the figure that breaks away

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Simone White is a poet, scholar, and mother whose writing is both poetry and criticism. She is the author of *House Envy of All The World*, *Of Being Dispersed*, and *Dear Angel of Death*, as well as two chapbooks, *Unrest* and *Dolly*. She teaches poetry workshops and graduate and undergraduate courses in literature at the University of Pennsylvania.

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

The Music of the Spheres

The following is a notation—a way of marking down things heard, felt, sensed.

There is said to be a universal hum. An imperceptible vibration producing a sound ten thousand times lower than can be registered by the human ear. It can be measured on the ocean's floor, but its source is not exactly known: perhaps the hush of oceanic waves, perhaps the turbulence in the atmosphere, or the far bluster of planetary storms.

It is not seen, it is not felt. Its repercussions are unknown.

There is said to be another hum. Some can hear it, indeed are hounded by it. For many years dismissed, its existence is now acknowledged. It is called the "worldwide hum" or "earth audio resonance." Sometimes this emanation takes the name of a locality where its effect is pervasive, as if a seasonal wind. An incessant whir or drone, it has been described as an "unusual unidentified low-frequency sound" like a "motor idling down the street." It is louder at night than day; louder inside than out. The ones who hear it cannot escape, it goes where they go. Those who have attempted to measure it say the sound resonates at several percentages below typical hearing. It is possibly an internally generated acoustic phenomenon, or, possibly a natural resonance passing through minerals, reaching the earth. Perhaps this is what Pythagoras—citing knowledge he claimed was given to him by Egyptian priests—described when he named "the music of the spheres," those inaudible notes sounded by the movement of celestial bodies. But Aristotle rebutted the idea of unsounding music:

> Excessive noises, we know, shatter the solid bodies even of inanimate things: the noise of thunder, for instance, splits rocks and the strongest of bodies. But if the moving bodies are so great, and the sound which penetrates to us is proportionate to their size, that sound must needs reach us in an intensity many times that of thunder, and the force of its action must be immense.[1]

Whether the movements of the heavens made noise, what we saw when looking skyward entered language in unexpected ways. The philosopher Hannah Arendt reminds us that

> the word revolution was originally an astronomical term … designating the regular lawfully revolving motion of the stars, which since it was known to be beyond the influence of man and hence irresistible was certainly characterized neither by newness nor by violence.[2]

Those who can hear it, call it the sound of quiet. A sound that is no longer with the great many of us. It has been noted that at the time of the Battle of Waterloo, the sounds of the battlefield could be heard in the depths of England.

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There is a nonuniversal hum. It is a hum that has gone unheard, barely noted.
The two girls

> had gone to the headquarters to help distribute the Panther newspaper. After they were inside, she said, a man put a gun to her head and told the two to go downstairs. There, she said, they saw Mr. Napier, tied and gagged on a cot, humming, while on a nearby bed Miss Gwen Dolores Morton lay tied and humming.

The two children also were tied and told to hum.

> Then, the 12-year-old witness testified, "I heard one shot, and I didn't hear Sam anymore."
>
> "After the shot," she continued softly, almost inaudibly, "we were told to go into the backyard. I fell outside, then started smelling smoke. The fire got real hot."

There is the hum notated in the *New York Times*, reporting on the trial for the five men accused of the 1971 killing of Sam Napier, the circulation manager of the party's newspaper.

I have not spoken the names of these two girls, though their names are part of the public record. They were aged twelve and thirteen on the Saturday morning they went to collect papers for the weekly distribution. "Circulate to educate" being Napier's motto for the enterprise, each Panther was required to study the paper before they were allowed to sell it. The edition published that Saturday, April 17, 1971, announced a special supplement direct from the pen of Huey P. Newton: "On the defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and On the defection of the Black Panther Party from the black community." It was upon these defections that the men who bound and gagged and shot Sam Napier and bound Miss Gwen Dolores Morton and bound the girls and told them to hum were also speaking. They spoke in the voice of the internecine violence dividing the Cleaver faction from the Newton faction. In his essay on the defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and on the defection of the Black Panther party from the black community, Newton sometimes spoke of physics, wherein "the internal struggle of opposites based upon their unity causes matter to have motion as a part of the process of development."

Let's keep them close for a while. Understanding how their names have not been kept. Much is made of unknown names. Less of those whose names are known but who cannot be celebrated because what they know says too much about what is celebrated. The felt senses do not enter history. But if we attend to them, they might influence how we tell it, and what we tell, and what we need from it. Not heroes, not enemies. We needed those girls. And their hum. A sound that defines a field, barely detectable, a minor detail of a child's witness testimony. One strains to hear it and them. Their two voices. What song did they hum? Did they start off with two different melodies that eventually joined? Did their song repeat? Was it a song popular in the day, or a child's tune? Was it something that had been hummed to them as children to soothe them by a mother or father or grandmother who had loved them and whose song returned in that moment of extremity?

She continued softly, almost inaudibly.

History remembers these girls not at all. And Sam Napier is memorialized as having been "killed by fascists." It is a murky description for what they didn't then know was called COINTELPRO. Also applied liberally in those conflicts between the Cleaverites and the Newtonites, each calling the other fascists. But the divisions were lost over time, the name-calling inaudible, undetectable. The effect is to understand that the perpetrators were not only the people who entered the room, and bound and gagged and shot the man, and bound and gagged and left the young woman and told the two children to hum, but these men were potentially acting under the influence of forces then offstage, then unnamed, perhaps sensed, but not able to be detected by all.

Humming stimulates the muscles at the back of the throat that connect the vagus nerve. The sound vibrates against the edge of oneself, against lips, cheeks, throat, cranium, heart. You hear the sound from within. The nerve sends neurotransmitters and electrical signals, lowering activity in the part of the brain that governs flight, fight, and freeze.

There is a field. Some say this is where memory resides, not in the body, nor hovering above the place where an action originally unfolded. Yet it goes where we go. To enter the field is to be in the midst of that which is imperceptible, incessant, without known origin, without end. But it can be changed. Does the hum still sound?

X

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts is an American writer and historian currently based in New York.

1
Aristotle, “On the Heavens,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* , vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984), 479.

2
Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Books, 1970), 42.

Rizvana Bradley

A Gathering of Aporetic Form

Dionne Brand: "I am the clerk, overwhelmed by the left-hand pages."[1]

A black woman on Twitter declares:

> I have a deep respect for Anita Hill and her choice to say 'I don't forgive you.' There's something subversively powerful to me about that.

A white woman with the handle "DevilDawg" tweets:

> I don't give two shits about Anita Hill.

Toni Morrison, in her essay "Friday on the Potomac," writes of

> a black [Supreme Court] candidate already stained by the figurations of blackness as sexual aggressiveness, or rapaciousness or impotence … The "dirt" that clung to him following those allegations, "dirt" he spoke of repeatedly, must be shown to have originated elsewhere. In this case the search for the racial stain turned on Anita Hill. Her character. Her motives. Not his.[2]

The selection process "whitened" Thomas and the testimony of Hill "restained" him … Reading Morrison, it is clear that the racial disavowal Clarence Thomas enjoyed was itself the effect of a curious displacement. This displacement of race onto the black woman constitutes the black woman as such. Black femininity becomes the bearer of the burden of the racial mark, of blackness.[3]

The black woman's consummate failure to qualify both blackness and femininity has been historically haunted by a violence meant to limit her to a normative sexuality. Angela Davis's essay "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" reflects this claim:[4]

> [The black woman is] annulled [from the category of woman and] released from the chains of the myth of femininity.[5]

Simone Leigh, Jug, 2019. Bronze. 83 1/4 x 51 1/2 x 51 1/2 inches (800 lbs). Copyright: Simone Leigh; Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

At the same time, however, the enslaved woman is called forth and held to the same gendered ideology from which she is interdicted, in order that she might be forced to fulfill her laboring function.[6] Black femininity has circulated as both discursively empty and materially full, and this has direct implications for the way in which, historically, the black woman has been biopolitically constructed, pathologized, and held captive by slavery and capital, and excluded from the realm of symbolic power.[7] She prefigures a representational aporia, a mode of blackness, that challenges the prescribed limits of personhood, identity, and humanity on the one hand, and labor, resistance, and anti-humanity on the other.[8]

This is what Anita Hill cannot forgive. It's fucked up for *her*, not for him, too.[9]

For black women, can there be an ethics of unforgiveness?

Simone Leigh, Dunham II, 2017. Terracotta, graphite, and steel. 105.4 x 55.9 x 58.4 cm. Copyright: Simone Leigh; Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

The media's recent alternation between Anita Hill and Joe Biden betrays liberal political consciousness as fundamentally contoured by debt and forgiveness. Insofar as the obligational parameters of forgiveness are premised on an ethics of relationality, we might join the political philosopher Axelle Karera in querying:

> What would an ethics based on the radically non-relational look like?[10]

Explaining that anti-blackness becomes a structural necessity for relational ethics, Karera posits:

> Relationality is inherently not only a position that the black cannot afford or even claim. The structure of relationality is essentially the condition of the possibility of their enslavement.[11]

Blackness ruptures the space of ethics then, throwing foundational concepts like relationality into crisis. Such reckonings ought to compel us to consider whether there can be *a black feminist ethics of nonrelationality*. How might such an ethics alter our orientation to *sociality*? To *friendship*? Are the mechanics of friendship inevitably recuperative, reproductive? How are these forms of sociality and relationality given in and by the maternal? How are such social-relational bonds structurally different in the context of black maternal life? Alexis Pauline Gumbs points us toward Audre Lorde's provocative assertion:

> We can learn to mother ourselves.[12]

M/othering ourselves: a form of intersubjective (non)relationality that queerly threatens the reproduction of the present.[13]

What is the drama of the mother? What is the drama of the mother without reproduction—the drama of reproduction without the mother? *An impossible chiasmus.* If there cannot be friendship, can there be critical—(even sensuous)—proximity without recourse to relationality?

Simone White's gesture concerns the problem with intellectual sociality only expressed in

> the long quotation as verbal-visual bridge that … implies a wish to throw down with the previous by virtue of being fully given over to and in its presence … This ocular and intellectual stress … induced by … thick citation, big block, frequent repetition of the name of one's antecedent interlocutors. [This is] the order that constitutes the history of ideas … the masculine order of black writing, whose compositional assertion that the texts must be read together means something.[14]

What would it mean to break from the frisson of gendered citation?

James Baldwin exclaims in 1984:

> One of the dangers of being a Black American is being schizophrenic, and I mean "schizophrenic" in the most literal sense. To be a Black American is in some ways to be born with the desire to be white. It's a part of the price you pay for being born here, and it affects every Black person … Du Bois believed in the American dream. So did Martin. So did Malcolm. So do I. So do you. That's why we're sitting here.[15]

Audre Lorde responds:

> I don't, honey. I'm sorry, I just can't let that go past. Deep, deep, deep down I know that dream was never mine. And I wept and I cried and I fought and I stormed, but I just knew it. I was Black. I was female. And I was out—out—by any construct wherever the power lay. So if I had to claw myself insane, if I lived I was going to have to do it alone. Nobody was dreaming about me. Nobody was even studying me except as something to wipe out.[16]

Jacques Rancière understands political disagreement as

> a determined kind of situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying.[17]

The affective distance between Baldwin and Lorde measures an expressive dissonance, a generative discontent that bypasses the general structure of disagreement, which always presents itself as an irresolvable dilemma within existing democratic political discourse.

Lorde remains attuned to what Baldwin takes for granted—precisely the animating questions put forth by Simone White:

> What is power? What is intimacy? How do we know this at all? … The intimacy of power suggests the sheer difficulty of difference, the trouble endemic to determining where the white imagination ends and the black imagination begins.[18]

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Denise Ferreira da Silva unearths the transparent subject's relationship to aesthetic experience:

> The transparent I, when judging an artwork beautiful, presumes that it enjoys universality and necessity not because it has reference to a concept but to a feeling (of the beautiful) which is presumed ("as if it were") universal, because it is grounded on common sense (or the assumption that every human being shares in the cognitive structures and their capacities).[19]

Simone Leigh, The Village Series #1, 2018. Stoneware. 16 x 16 x 16 inches (40.6 x 40.6 x 40.6 cm). Copyright: Simone Leigh; Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

To weld. The practice of welding as making the sculptural come into being. Welding as an act of tending, of sending, inducing us to sense a dimensionality of that which is beyond universal perception. For the poet Aracelis Girmay, the work of art is realized in and through the work of

> A Tending[20]

Extending Girmay: Welding as a tending to form that is taking care with great or deep attention in an active way in which the artist's body is involved. The welded structure expands our dimensionality of the object. A poethical thinking about art involves the spatiotemporal revaluation of ideas of length, width, surface, and depth.

The haptic dimensionality of the sculptural. Heavily decorated objects adorned with ceramic roses, and glazed clusters of flowers covering the head or face. These figures circulate in the time of an unknown past that extends through a politically unhinged present. A ceramic sculptural practice that is itself an exercise in fabulation—the busts, embellished maquettes, summon a suspended time, occasion a speculative leap into black life forms. They register a sensuousness often excluded from modernity's visual apparatus and its representational regimes. The haptic shifts us outside vision's domain, outside the occularcentric desire for transparency, towards other practices—touching, folding, and fingering, or tracing the texture of an object.[21]

The hapticality of the object opens a series of questions:

What does form have to do with longing? What congeals to form? The works are themselves experiments in form that bring us into tactile proximity with the polymorphous afterlife of matter. But how to conceptualize the afterlife of matter?

Saidiya Hartman: "All we have is what she holds in her outstretched hands."[22]

The anti-monumentality of the monumental recovery of black female desire. This is what is at stake in the artist Simone Leigh's work.

Dionne Brand asserts:

> Desire, too, is the discovery of beauty as miraculous. Desire in the face of ruin. How in these lines there is such wreckage and that too is beauty, how in those lines there is such clear-eyed dread, such deeply mocking knowledge, and that too is desire … On any given night, even with history against you in any hardscrabble place, beauty walks in. The ruin of history visited on a people does not wipe out the steadfastness of beauty.[23]

Art critics fetishize the purity of form. When art critics emphasize pure form, do they realize pure form is the consequence of perfect black death?[24] Perhaps we need a thorough renovation of the aesthetic. Where can we locate black aesthetic praxis in the violent reduction of both pure matter and pure form? After Dionne Brand, what would it mean to call for the death of an aesthetic of imperialism?

The black woman is the figure that crystallizes the arrangement between capital and the event of captivity. Occupying the position of the laborer, the cost-free caregiver, the sexual object, historically the black woman has been the interstitial figure that capital polices … Evelynn Hammonds directs us to the black feminine both as an originary site for the capitalist exploitation and expropriation of the black body, and as a site of irreducible corporeal difference.[25]

The black woman is on display, once again. The black woman's figure stands; she fleshes out perverse forms of political economy. Casting a shadow over the contemporary cityscape, illuminating the residual trace of the marketplace and coffle as paradigmatic settings for the exchange of black bodies. For Saidiya Hartman,

> this theater of the marketplace wed festivity and the exchange of captive bodies … the to-and-fro of half-naked bodies on display all acted to incite the flow of capital.[26]

Simone Leigh, Brick House, 2019. Bronze. 497.8 x 289.6 cm. A High Line Plinth commission. On view June 2019 – September 2020. Photo by Timothy Schenck. Courtesy the High Line

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The anonymous black woman's ache/her unnamed grief. Alicia Hall Moran begins to sing, her song moving through a series of broken phrases:

> Oh my God … I'm so sorry … Please. Strike that. Please don't. Please don't … Please don't look. Erase. Erase. Erase … It's just everything … It's just too much … How am I going to go to the ballgame? … I don't want to go! … I've always done it. I've always done it. And I've been performing my whole life. Performing my whole life.[27]

Doing the work. Doing the work of spilling over. Here, where the singular virtuosity of the performer is bound up with the drama of heartbreak. How do we attune to this melancholic structure of feeling that lies at the interplay between heartbreak and breakdown? Heartbreak, as the subject of black performance, shifts through affective registers, often masquerading as uncontrollable agony, suffering, distress, even sheer misery. Heartbreak is about both the violent interdiction of black enjoyment, and the erotics of self-encounter.

Christina Sharpe spoke recently of Sheila Hines-Brim, who threw the ashes of her niece at Charlie Beck, the head of the LAPD. Sheila Hines-Brim's niece, Wakiesha Wilson, died in LAPD custody in 2016. Sharpe intones:

> I am trying to hear … Hines-Brim's actions, her political act and demand. Her ethics of dust.[28]

Reconjugating the present against the grain of linear time, Erica Hunt invokes poetry as the practice of getting free:

> (the *as if*, art's impulse)[29]

As if. The restless temporality of the future anterior.

Maurice Blanchot calls the writer the "Daytime Insomniac." Poets brush up against an oblique desire: to commune with the "fugitive gods," to no longer be able to sleep, to constantly dream of another place, to rub one's eyes to no avail.[30]

"I've lost a lot of sleep to dreams."[31]

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1
Dionne Brand, *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (Duke University Press, 2018), 6.

2
Toni Morrison, "Friday on the Potomac," in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* , ed. Toni Morrison (Pantheon Books, 1992), xviii–xix.

3
Excerpted from Rizvana Bradley, "Living in the Absence of a Body: The (Sus)Stain of Black Female (W)holeness," in "Black Holes: Afro-Pessimism, Blackness and the Discourses of Modernity," ed. Dalton Anthony Jones, M. Shadee Malaklou, and Sara-Maria Sorentino, special issue, *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* , no. 29 (2016) http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/bradley/index.html .

4
Excerpted from Rizvana Bradley, "Reinventing Capacity: Black Femininity's Lyrical Surplus and the Cinematic Limits of *12 Years a Slave* ," *Black Camera* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2015): 162–78, 166.

5
Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 4 (1971): 2–15, 5.

6
Excerpted from Bradley, "Reinventing Capacity," 166.

7
Excerpted from Bradley, "Living in the Absence of a Body."

8
Excerpted from Bradley, "Reinventing Capacity," 162.

9
In appositional dis/agreement with my friend, Fred Moten, whose formulation continues to guide me: "The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us." Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 140.

10
Axelle Karera, "Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7, no. 1 (2019): 47–48.

11
Karera, "Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics," 48.

12
Audre Lorde, "Eye to Eye," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Cross Press, 1984), 173.

13
Alexis Gumbs, "m/other ourselves: a Black queer feminist genealogy for radical mothering," in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* , ed. Alexis Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams (PM Press, 2016), 19–20.

14
Simone White, *Dear Angel of Death* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018), 79.

15
From James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, "Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation Between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde," *Essence Magazine* , 1984. Available at MoCADA Online https://mocada-museum.tumblr.com/post/73421979421/revolutionary-hope-a-conversation-between-james .

16
Baldwin and Lorde, "Revolutionary Hope."

17
Jacques Rancière, quoted in Davide Panagia, *The Poetics of Political Thinking* (Duke University Press, 2006), 89.

18
White, *Dear Angel of Death*, 121.

19
Denise Ferreira da Silva, "In the Raw," *e-flux journal*, no. 93 (September 2018) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/215795/in-the-raw/ .

20
Aracelis Girmay, "A Tending," *ArtsBlog* , November 18, 2014 https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2019/05/15/a-tending .

21
Some phrases from this paragraph are excerpted from Rizvana Bradley, "Introduction: Other Sensualities," on "The Haptic: Textures of Performance," special issue, *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24, no. 2–3 (2014): 129–33, 130. See the essays collected in this issue of *Women and Performance* for various perspectives on the haptic.

22
Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 18, no. https://tandfonline.com/toc/usou20/18/1 (2016): 171.

23
Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return* (Vintage Canada, 2002), 193.

24
My insights here offer a modification of a formulation from Calvin Warren, whose paper "Anti-Formalism and Black Destruction: A Pessimistic Meditation" was delivered at Amherst College as part of a conference I also participated in, titled "Rethinking the Black Intellectual Tradition: Pessimism as an Interpretive Frame," March 30, 2019.

25
Excerpted from Bradley, "Living in the Absence of a Body." See also: Evelynn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2–3 (1994): 126–45.

26
Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 37, 38.

27
Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (NYU Press, 2015), 215–16.

28
Lecture by Christina Sharpe, "Soil," presented during a panel on "The Theoretical Turn," hosted by the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University on April 26, 2019.

29
Erica Hunt, "Introduction: Angle, Defy Gravity, Land Unpredictably," in *Letters to the Future: Black Women / Radical Writing* , ed. Erica Hunt and Dawn Lundy Martin (KORE Press, 2018), 15.

30
Excerpted from Rizvana Bradley and Damian-Adia Marassa, "Awakening to the World: Relation, Totality, and Writing from Below," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* , vol. 36, no. 1 (2014), 112-131, 125.

31
The Roots, "Sleep," *Undun*, Def Jam, 2011.

Dionne Brand

Maps

An oral ruttier is a long poem containing navigational instructions that sailors learned by heart and recited from memory. The poem contained the routes and tides, the stars and maybe the taste and flavor of the waters, the coolness, the saltiness; all for finding one's way at sea. Perhaps, too, the reflection and texture of the seabed, also the sight of birds, the directions of their flights. This, and an instrument, a Kamal, which measured the altitude of stars from the horizon.

Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora

Marooned, tenantless, deserted. Desolation castaway, abandoned in the world. They was, is, wandered, wanders as spirits who dead cut, banished, seclude, refuse, shut the door, derelict, relinquished, apart. More words she has left them. Cast behind. From time to time they sit on someone's bed or speak to someone in the ear and that is why someone steps out of rhythm; that is why someone drinks liquor or trips or shuts or opens a door out of nowhere. All unavailable to themselves, open to the world, cut in air. They disinherit answers. They owe, own nothing. They whisper every so often and hear their own music in churches, restaurants, hallways, all paths, between fingers and lips, between cars and precipices, and the weight of themselves in doorways, on the legs of true hipsters, guitars and bones for soup, veins.

And it doesn't matter where in the world, this spirit is no citizen, no national, no one who is christened, no sex, this spirit is washed of all this lading, bag and baggage, jhaji bundle, georgie bindle, lock stock, knapsack, and barrel, and only holds its own weight which is nothing, which is memoryless and tough with remembrances, heavy with lightness, aching with grins. They wander as if they have no century, as if they can bound time, as if they can sit in a café in Brugge just as soon as smoke grass in Tucson, Arizona, and chew coca in the high Andes for coldness.

Pays for everything this one, hitchhikes, dies in car accidents, dresses in Hugo Boss and sings ballads in Catholic churches, underwater rum shops. This is a high-wire spirit laden with anchors coming in to land, devoluting heirlooms, parcels, movable of nips, cuts, open secrets of foundlings, babes, ignitions, strips of water, cupfuls of land, real estates of ocean floors and steaming asphalt streets, meat of trees and lemons, bites of Communion bread and chunks of sky, subdivisions of stories.

These spirits are tenants of nothing jointly, temporary inheritors of pages 276 and 277 of an old paleology. They sometimes hold a life like a meeting in a detention camp, like a settlement without a stone or stick, like dirty shelves, like a gag in the mouth. Their dry goods are all eaten up already and their hunger is tenacious. This spirit doubling and quadrupling, resuming, skipping stairs and breathing elevators is possessed with uncommunicated undone

plots; consignments of compasses whose directions tilt, skid off known maps, details skitter off like crabs. This spirit abandoned by all mothers, fathers, all known progenitors, rents rooms that disappear in its slate stone wise faces. These people un-people, de-people until they jump overboard, hijack buildings and planes. They disinhabit unvisited walls. They unfriend friends in rye and beer and homemade wine and forties.

She undwells solitudes, liquors' wildernesses. This drunk says anything, cast away in his foot ship, retired from the world. This whisperer, sprawler, mincer, deaconess, soldier is marooning, is hungering, is unknowing. This one in the suit is a litigant in another hearing gone in the world. This spirit inhaling cigarettes is a chain along a thousand glistening moss harbours and spends nights brooding and days brooding and afternoons watching the sea even at places with no harbours and no sea. This one is gone, cast off and wandering wilfully. This is intention as well as throwaway. This is deliberate and left. Slipstream and sailing. Deluge. These wander anywhere, clipping shirt-tails and hems and buying shoes and vomiting. These shake with dispossession and bargain, then change their minds. They get trapped in houses one minute, just as anybody can, and the next they break doorways and sit in company mixing up the talk with crude honesty and lies. Whatever is offered or ceded is not the thing, not enough, cannot grant their easement, passports to unknowing everything.

This spirit's only conveyance is each morning, breath, departures of any kind, tapers, sheets of anything, paper, cloth, rain, ice, spittle, glass. It likes blue and fireflies. Its face is limpid. It has the shakes, which is how it rests and rests cutting oval shells of borders with jagged smooth turns. It is an oyster leaving pearl. These spirits have lived in any given year following the disaster, in any given place. They have visited shutters and doors and thermal glass windows looking for themselves. They are a prism of endless shimmering color. If you sit with them they burn and blister. They are bony with hope, muscular with grief possession.

Marooned on salted highways, in high grass, on lumpy beds, in squares with lights, in knowledge plantations and cunning bridges grasping two cities at the same time. Marooned in the mouth where things escape before they are said, are useless before they are given or echo. Marooned in realms of drift, massacres of doubt, implications. Marooned where the body burns with longing for everything and nothing, where it circles unable to escape a single century; tenements and restagings of alien, new landings. Marooned in outcropping, up-crops of cities already abandoned for outposts in suburbs. Deserted in the fragility of concrete rooms, the chalked clammy dust of dry walls, the rot of sewer pipes and the blanket of city grates.

Marooned in music, dark nightclubs of weeping, in never-sufficient verses, uncommunicated sentences, strict tears, in copper throats. Where days are prisons this spirit is a tenant.

She moves along incognito on foot, retreating into unknowing, retreating into always orphanages, dew light, paradise, eclipses, bruised skies, atomic stars, an undeviating ever.

So if now and then they slump on beds in exhaustion it is hallowed pain. If they sink in the ear it is subversions that change their minds even before they are deployed, unexpected architectures of ambivalent longing, cargoes of wilderness. It is their solitudes' wet desolations. If they finger a string across a piece of wood and a tremolo attacks a room, toccata erupt, coloratura saturate the walls, it is their lost and found dereliction. If virtuosity eludes them, relinquishes them, cast away to themselves only, gaping limbs and topographies, it is just as much spiritoso, madrigal, mute chirping, ululating twilight unvisiting.

It is now and she, they whisper in cities' streets with two million people gazing at advertisements. It is now and he, they run his fingers over a moustache flicking frost away, breathing mist like a horse. Cities and public squares and public places corral their gifts of imagined suns and imagined families, where they would have been and who they might have been and when. Cities make them pause and wonder at what they might have thought had it been ever, and had it been dew light and had it been some other shore, and had it been time in their own time when now they are out of step with themselves as spirits are. Electric lights and neon and cars' metal humming convince them of cultivated gateways and generations of water, of necessities they cannot put back together. Their coherence is incoherence, provocations of scars and knives and paradise, of tumbling wooden rivers and liquid hills.

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Excerpted from Dionne Brand, *A Map To The Door of No Return* (Vintage Canada, 2002).

Dionne Brand is a renowned and critically acclaimed poet, novelist, and essayist. Her most recent books are *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* and *Theory*, a novel. Her award-winning writing is notable for the beauty of its language, and for its intense political engagement. She was Poet Laureate of the City of Toronto, 2009–12, and received the Order of Canada in 2017. Brand is Professor in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph.

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson

Suspended Munition: Mereology, Morphology, and the Mammary Biopolitics of Transmission in Simone Leigh's Trophallaxis

Simone Leigh's stated interest in "black women as a kind of material culture" has generated a career-spanning and award-winning meditation on black women as containers of trauma and knowledge.[1] This essay will offer some brief comments on Simone Leigh's *Trophallaxis.* The sculpture recalls not only racializing and imperialist histories of the breast, but also social insects as figured in political philosophy and scientific discourse. It evokes these associations by performing and inciting an investigation of a long-standing practice: the making of societal/organismic analogies, in particular the comparison of human societies to those of social insects such as ants and bees. Feeding behavior has played a key role in this tradition, which relates wholes and parts of various species in nature, generally within a political idiom.[2] While entomologists' precise interpretations of trophallaxis vary, what they share is the idea that soma is none other than trophic exchange. If the understanding of trophallaxis is the giving of soma to an Other, I ask: what does the history of the breast, with its attendant racializing cleavages of being, do to traditions of comparison? Thinking across the scale of the cell, the breast, and embattled human sociality, this essay shifts black feminist critical attention from the posterior to the breast and suggests that thinking sociogenically troubles utopic interpretations of trophallaxis in the biological sciences and beyond.

While an axiom of contemporary social theory readily acknowledges that our received categories of race are relational and grounded in histories of slavery and empire, it is worth considering how the distribution of soma itself, across demarcations of race, is the outcome of racial reasoning's circuit of comparison and hierarchical division of flesh and mammary labor. I suggest that Leigh's *Trophallaxis* is fructuous for thinking about how black female flesh un/gendered gives flesh both to bodies and to our prevailing categories of species and sex/gender and their systems of notation. Ultimately, *Trophallaxis* suggests the productive and explosively generative potential of intertwining histories of social insects and the mammary politics of transmission for Western origin stories of society and ontologies of the human.

A fusion of fecundity and cataclysm, Leigh's *Trophallaxis* recalls melons, bombs, and an insect egg sac. The sculptural work is at once a singular and collective breast. Composed of black porcelain and terracotta, the individuated breasts have gold and platinum nipples. The placement of antennae on mammary forms suggests conductivity or alternately exploding shrapnel. Hung from the ceiling in a chandelier-like formation, *Trophallaxis* hangs low enough to reveal a lattice of skin cells as well as tears in the skin, boot marks, and other signs of brutalization and distress. Taken as a whole, its pendulous shape is one fraught with racializing history.

As Jennifer Morgan has shown in "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and

Detail of Simone Leigh, Trophallaxis, 2008–2017. Terracotta, porcelain, epoxy, graphite, gold and platinum glazes, and antennas. Dimensions variable. Copyright: Simone Leigh. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500–1770," the imagined proof of the African's incivility and degraded humanity was frequently located in the perceived shape of the breast.[3] The key to African females' purported childbearing and child-rearing practices was thought to be emblematized by the breast. In this context, the breast took on mythic proportions: "European writers turned to black women as evidence of a cultural inferiority that ultimately became encoded as racial difference. Monstrous bodies became enmeshed with savage behavior as the icon of women's breasts became evidence of tangible barbarism."[4] African females' breasts were depicted as exaggeratingly pendulous, even as bestial additional limbs. The European imaginary equated African females' purported fecundity and propensity for easy birth and breastfeeding with their projected astonishing capacity for manual labor. Painless, meaningless, and mechanical childbirth, in their estimation, was the measure of the black female sex and of blackness, more generally.[5]

Londa Schiebinger, writing about the starting point of modern zoological nomenclature, reminds us that Linnaeus, the so-called "father of modern taxonomy," coined the term *Mammalia* in 1758, meaning "of the breast," a term capacious enough to embrace humans alongside a wide-ranging class of vertebrates.[6] In the same volume, Linnaeus also introduced the term *Homo sapiens*, "man of wisdom," to distinguish humans from other primates. For Linnaeus, female mammae become the icon of *Homo sapiens* for reasons, Schiebinger argues, "that have less to do with the uniqueness and universality of the female breast than with eighteenth–century politics of wet-nursing and maternal breastfeeding, population growth, and the contested role of women in both science and society" in an era defined by debates concerning "universality" and "equality."[7] As to the matter of adjudication, it was held that if evidence could demonstrate that social hierarchies issued from natural hierarchies, this assumption of "fact" could stem the leveling tide of democracy and abolitionism without moral opprobrium. As Schiebinger notes, it is strikingly odd that Linnaeus would base the name of a class on mammae, considering that they are only typically active in half the group and only for short periods of time (during lactation) or not at all. Linnaeus not only could have chosen a more sex- and gender-neutral trait (*Aurecaviga*, "the hollow-eared ones," or even *Lactentia,* "the sucking ones," for example), he could have also have chosen a term based on the conservative conventions of the day: scientific nomenclature usually conserved suitable terms, and new terms were derived from modifying traditional ones, commonly Aristotelian. *Mammalia* observed neither convention.[8]

This idiosyncrasy can perhaps be explained by the fact

that Linnaeus was involved with the struggle against wet-nursing. He joined a vocal group of politicians and physicians who argued that elite European women should end their dependence on peasants and, in overseas colonies, native and Negro women.[9] The latter emblematized the historic bestial connotations of female nature. Wet-nursing, during the mid and late eighteenth century, became associated with infant mortality and depopulation, and even national depravity and ignoble character were thought to transfer from diseased, unclean, and morally corrupt wet nurses drawn either from lower racial classes or impoverished European economic classes.[10] What is more plausible, Schiebinger notes, is that economic considerations may have pushed some wet nurses to take on more babies than they could adequately nurse. The abolishment of wet-nursing was also instrumental to gynecology's and obstetricians' displacement of midwifery. Medicine established its authority over pregnancy and birth, in part, through anti-wet-nursing campaigns.[11]

Linnaeus's term *Mammalia*, according to Schiebinger, helped to legitimize the restructuring of European society by emphasizing that nature itself dictated that elite European females suckle and rear their own children. Rather than rendering nature universally comprehensible, Linnaeus's systematics projected exclusively upper- and middle-class European notions of gender, such as gender-role complementarity, onto nature.[12] As Schiebinger suggests, one could argue that in coining the term *Mammalia,* Linnaeus broke with longstanding traditions that saw the male as the measure of all things. In the Aristotelian tradition, the female was considered an error of nature or a monster. In Linnaeus's system mammae became the sign and symbol of the "highest class" of animals.[13] However, I would counter this by saying that assigning a new value to "the female" and elevating *women's* reproduction (understood as European and elite) was purchased at the price of transferring and deepening teratological associations of "the female" with *the* "African female," which ultimately racially calcified into the singularity I term *blackfemale*.[14]

Both Morgan and Schiebinger have shown that the comparative anatomization of the breast played a crucial role in determining and differentiating both the matter of species and the matter of sex—"hemispherical" and firm breasts were thought to be racial characteristics of European and Asian women.[15] The idealization of the "hemispherical" breast is effectively a version of mapping that implied that the earth and its inhabitants could be divided into two halves and that an essential hierarchical racial division could conveniently be read in the perception and comparison of breast shape. The African female's purported characteristic pendulous breasts provided evidence that the indeterminate and contested (yet inferior) ontology of the blackfemale with respect to the discourses of species and sex/gender issued from nature itself. In both discourses, the blackfemale, and often the "Hottentot" female specifically, was the incarnation of the matrix for systems of classification.

Leading up to the eighteenth century, within the logics of comparative anatomy, racialized and racializing comparisons of the female sexes were sought to answer the question of the boundary of the species and the means of species reproduction. Additionally, because females were burdened with the idea that they directly shape racial traits and characteristics, such as those compared by phrenologists, this made the blackfemale responsible for black inferiority in general. However, it is important to note that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scientists and physicians did compare males, almost exclusively, in fields like craniometry and phrenology, which attempted to gauge intelligence and rationality—in short, fitness for civic life and the affairs of politics.[16] This exclusivity stemmed from the view that reason is what qualifies humanity and from the contention that females of all races were irrational and unfit for politics and science. Thus, while comparisons between males determined rank within the species of humanity, *the* "African female" was defined as the boundary of the species and thought to shape the inferior characteristics of African-derived people as a class, precisely because of her ontologized positionality as blackfemale.

The discourses of sex/gender and race worked in conjunction, or to put it more precisely, the discourse of sex/gender operating as racial (which is to say as species) discourse depicted blackness and black femaleness, in particular, as limit cases because African females were not so much deemed masculine, as is often claimed, but rather because African females failed to differentiate at the registers of sex and gender according to the emergent modern terms of these discourses, for which they were the foils; they were thought to develop neither feminine temperaments, such as delicacy, purity, chastity, passionlessness, and moral and spiritual virtue, nor feminine sex characteristics, including so-called racial characteristics such as redness of lips, length and style of hair, skin color, and shape of nose and skull—features placed alongside breast shape and assessments of the posterior, pelvis, and pudendum.[17] In sum, ascriptions of racially black femaleness administered and disciplined categories of species, sex, and gender. Mechanistic childbirth and feeding were thought to provide evidence of the underdevelopment of *the* African female's gender and sex. The antinomy of the idealized "angel in the household," "the African female" as a discursive formation materialized in the context of Europe's need for productivity; in response to this need, mechanistic childbirth and utilitarian breastfeeding would ultimately become forcefully located in the globalizing economies of slavery.

The title of Leigh's sculpture, *Trophallaxis*, refers to transferring of liquid food between adult social insects or between them and their larvae. The shared contents is

sometimes called "crop milk."[18] In 1918, William Morton Wheeler coined the term "trophallaxis." Not simply a nutritional fluid exchange, trophallaxis can involve the transfer of pheromones, organisms such as gut endosymbionts, and information to serve as a form of signaling.[19] In a choreography that synchronizes eusociality and the division of labor, trophallaxis enables some ants to stay and look after the nest whilst others forage for food. The sharing behavior is a means of resource distribution, dispersal of chemical messages around the nest, and the creation of a unified colony odor.

Early twentieth century entomologists, imagining humans as social insects, linked trophallaxis to the origin of human society. As historian of science Charlotte Sleigh has shown, feeding behavior in particular, including trophallaxis, was seen as the key to the riddle of the origin of sociality. Though generated to explain a specifically myrmecological phenomenon, trophallaxis from the outset was understood to cover general features of society. Wheeler suggested that mutual feeding relations were the true, necessary cause of social forms of life.[20] More precisely, as historian of myrmecology Abigail Lustig asserts, for Wheeler, "the center of the vortex, always remained the relationship between mother and offspring; all the other possible permutations of relationships were somehow extensions or subversions of this primal instinct."[21] Trophallaxis did not even have to entail an immediate reciprocation; the important thing was that the exchange had the ultimate function of maintaining society in equilibrium.[22] Wheeler posited that the only difference between the two species was that humans, an evolutionary novelty compared to ants, had not had time to incorporate their functional division of labor into their "heritable morphology."[23]

However, per my discussion of Jennifer Morgan's and Schiebinger's work, precisely what antiblack discourse suggested was that race divides the female sex into separate black and white female sexes, such that black breasts were divergent at the register of morphological sex and that they were peculiarly suited for slavery and mechanical reproduction. Moreover, the question of heritability was forcefully resolved by the seventeenth-century Virginia slave code known as *partus ventrem sequitur*—"that which is brought forth follows the womb"—effectively catalyzing an emergent discourse of race that would equate morphology with social ontological status.[24] Indeed, given its definitional context is parental care, mammalian nursing is sometimes considered trophallaxis.[25]

Auguste Forel, pioneering entomologist and eugenicist, in his *The Social World of the Ants Compared with that of Man*, has a romantic and utopic reading of trophallaxis. Forel saw its human significance as confirming his optimistic faith in socialism.[26] His concept of the "communal stomach" observes that in some ant species individual colony members store food in their crops, or second social stomach, and transfer it to larvae and other community members. In the process of doing so, pheromones travel alongside food, thus demarcating the

perimeter of community. Wheeler's conception of the trophallactic circuit recalls the regulatory function of a membrane dividing and mediating inner and outer worlds.[27]

In *Interstices*, Hortense Spillers draws our attention to a singularity legally established under slavery by telling us that black femaleness in flesh and symbol primarily acts as a regulating function rather than a self-willed agent: She is "the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of cunning difference—visually, psychologically, ontologically—as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between humanity and 'other.'"[28] In *Monstrous Intimacies*, Christina Sharpe emphasizes a crucial distinction between the mother's breast and the wet nurse's breast under slavery, whereby for the wet nurse "neither blood nor milk ensured familiarity," nor the rights of maternity nor privileges of womanhood.[29] Thinking with Sharpe, I argue that this division of labor does not simply assure the denial of rights of motherhood for the enslaved; it also reinforces racially ontologizing cleavages in the semiotics of sex and gender in the felt and lived experiences of the flesh that passes on sociogenically as mother's milk.[30]

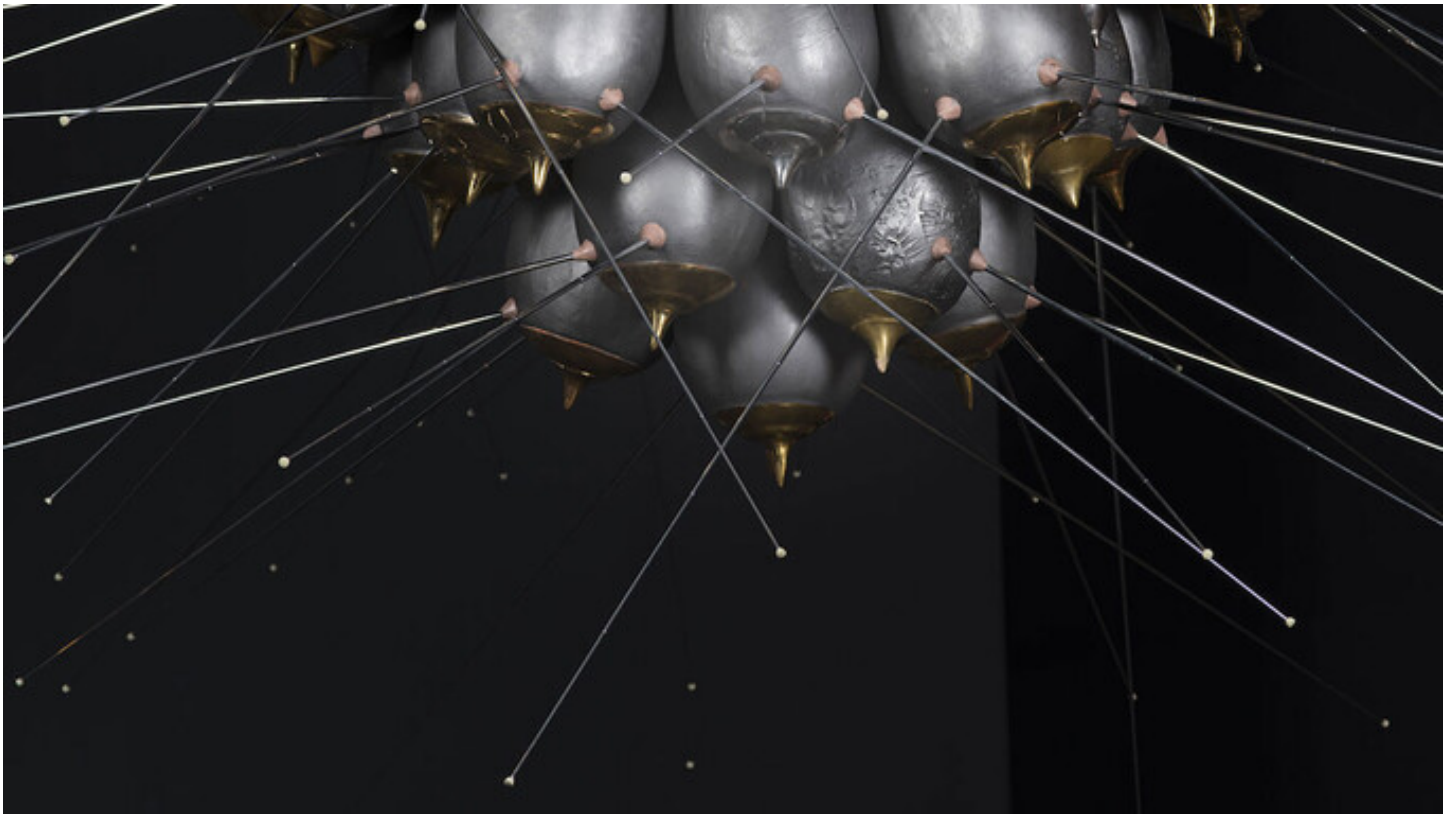
According to Forel, trophallaxis sustains the nest as a social entity. However, if we consider the mereological communal violence of the breast on command under slavery, then it troubles Forel's eutopic conception of trophallaxis and the notion of community that underwrites it. Partial objects are prior to the coalescence of identity, or the sense of a bodily ego one acquires upon entering into the symbolic order (iconography of civilization, history, culture); slavery attempts to effect the privation of a "body" and lock one in a state that is prior to the felt sense of bodily integrity. "Before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,'" Spillers writes.[31] Here, the *before* has spatial as well as temporal significance, as *before* recalls that the master class gains a sense of proprietary embodiment and sovereign "I" retroactively. Thus, the ekphrastic scenes of enfleshment Spillers describes act as a mirror stage such that the other is spatially before the lash, and her ensuing fragmentation hypostatizes—by that I mean converges literal and figurative meaning—in the abstractions made of flesh. The gold and platinum nipples of Leigh's sculpture mark the conversion of the nipple and its labor into somatic currency.

At/as the meeting point of *morphe* and *logos*, blackfemale flesh un/gendered functions as the constitutive outside of normative femininity and gendered humanity, more generally, in its normativized genre. From the perspective of dominance, normative—i.e., white bourgeois—femininity is arguably the only womanhood there is. However, in order to protect and uphold this exclusivity, it is necessary to repress the material and symbolic supplementarity of *black female flesh.* For it is a supplementarity produced along very different gendered and material lines: terms and conditions of enslavement *and scientific discourse* that subtend and rupture corporeal integration, ontological integrity, binarisms of sex and gender, and logics of gender-role complementarity. At the same time, a breast on command or the flesh as a repository of transgressive pleasure rather than bodily integrity differentiate gender and/or recourse to chastity and virtue. Thus, the blackfemale de-essentializes gender and shows the arbitrary relation between flesh and symbol.

In Toni Morrison's 1988 Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *Beloved*, Schoolteacher "arrived to put things in order."[32] A man who "always wore a collar, even in the fields," Schoolteacher was an emblem of both the epistemic powers and abuses of scientific and biblical authority under slavery.[33] In the world-making Schoolteacher produced by letter and lash, it is Sethe who makes the ink. The ink was made of "cherry gum and oak bark," recalling the chokecherry tree on her back.[34] She is a figure constitutive to Schoolteacher's transubstanting pedagogy. The ink and the notebook *need* Sethe and her avatars for its alchemy of being and world. The scent of the ink haunts Sethe's memory, recalling the atmosphere of slavery.[35] When Sethe overhears her name in one of Schoolteacher's many lectures, he instructs his nephew, who was writing in one of his books, to "put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up."[36] In doing so, Schoolteacher establishes the measure and metrics of being and world, indeed of being-in-the-world. Sethe's mammary rape soon follows. This is an allegory of world history.

No, this is not a figure to confuse with any commonsensical conception of a queen bee.[37] Logician and grammarian Charles Butler, sometimes called the "Father of English Beekeeping," in *The Feminine Monarchie, Or the History of Bees*, saw in bee sociality a matriarchal thesis synonymous with the moniker: queen bee displacing Aristotle's king bee thesis.[38] But as Spillers shows, such monikers, when applied to black women, have historically functioned with pernicious irony: "the black woman" is a term of "overdetermined nominative properties."[39] The nominative is a grammatical case of a noun that generally marks the subject of a verb or predicate, as opposed to its object. But "the black woman" is an ironic nominative in that the modifier "black" actually functions to objectify and aims to foreclose the actional agency of the nominative such that the case and its normative deployment would seem to suggest that the putative referent is the causal agent of her objectification, or at the very least introduces confusion into the terms of agency itself. The qualifier "black" not only functions to objectify and confuse the causal relations of agency, but also to un/gender.

Under slavery black female flesh un/gendered is produced by the order as an actant: actants have affect and modify actors, but without the pretense of liberal humanist



notions of will or self-directed agency—however attenuated, relative, and relational. Spillers argues that those ascribed as black females are a fleshly metaphor whereby "the human body as a metonymic figure" and "resource for metaphor" is essential for "an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements."[40] In short, the foreclosure and/or abjection of this figure make possible the transmission of the social as a hierarchy. And as it turns out, the name "queen bee" is a misnomer. Contrary to what the name implies, a queen bee does not reign over or directly control the hive. While she is primary to the reproduction of the community, everything else that is claimed to be known about her is a matter of perception and myth.

In Nancy Leys Stepan's well-known essay "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science" (1986), she argues that scientific analogies construct the very similarities and difference supposedly "discovered" by scientific methods.[41] So if analogies in science, historically, have functioned due to the imperceptibility of their arbitrariness and through a metaphorical system that structures the experience and understanding of difference such that the entities compared acquire new meanings in their analogical meeting, then we have to ask what are the social conditions of science that naturalize "nature" and generate the reality effects of arbitrary comparisons.[42]

The analogies that project abject somatic difference onto the blackfemale figure, in the making of this figure, have enabled the metaphor linking white womanhood to blackness even in her seeming absence. Without this chain of metaphors, much of the data on "women's" bodies

> (length of limbs, width of pelvis, shape of skull, weight or structure of brain) would have lost their significance as signs of inferiority and would not have been gathered, recorded, and interpreted in the way they were. In fact, without the analogies concerning the "differences" and similarities among human groups, much of the vast enterprise of anthropology, criminology, and gender science would not have existed. The analogy guided research, generated new hypotheses, and helped disseminate new, usually technical vocabularies.[43]

While new analogies produce new research questions and scientific "facts" by directing the course of empirical research, they do so in the context of histories that generate change as well as continuity and often assume the literalness of metaphor due to science's perceived objectivity and verdicality. As discussed here, the consequences of science's metaphoricity are not simply intellectual but also political and moral. The imbuing of insect/societal analogies with moral weight, Lorraine Datson explains, "were attempts to turn dross into gold, to create value out of the least promising materials," namely insects—and, I would add, per the gilded nipples of

Leigh's sculpture, African females, differentially and relationally.[44]

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, ridicule was heaped on naturalists who devoted time, resources, and passion to what were considered unworthy objects. It was held that such misguided attention would spoil one for polite society and the serious duties of family, church, and state.[45] In turn, naturalists countered that the intensity and direction of their attention was warranted because what observation revealed was the inner workings of divine handiwork.[46] Mastery of the disciplines of attentive observation and the texture of description, or what we typically understand as empiricism, increasingly defined who was a naturalist worthy of the name.[47]

Accused of idolatry, naturalists, particularly entomologists, justified their rapt attention in terms of creaturely love, claiming that "divine providence could be discerned in the design of a fly's wing or the industry of the beehive—in part to defend themselves against the charges of triviality, but also in part to redeem even the most lowly objects as repositories of divine artistry and benevolence."[48] What ultimately elevated ants and bees in the scales of value, however, was the perceived (hierarchical) complexity of their societies: recall "the feminine monarchie."[49]

In the case of *the* African female, denuded of a civilizational claim and genitrix of the primal horde, moral weight was attached to her, to her nakedness, as an object of study without the ennoblement and sympathy entomology typically extended to ants and bees. When insects are referred to as "queens" in this tradition, it is typically without the mocking irony that the moniker holds in the history of ascriptions of the blackfemale. In other words, unlike ants and bees, the blackfemale's status as specimen neither led to an elevation of axiological status nor produced subjects of sympathetic identification.

The blackfemale figure has historically been perceived as either exaggeratingly large, or synecdochically. As Susan Stewart notes, enlargement is often deployed as a stratagem to imply menace, and representations of the gigantic often end up synecdochic.[50] The synecdochic fissuring of the blackfemale may indeed gesture toward the sublime function of this figure: uses too numerous and too vast and too overwhelming to depict in a representationalist image. Mythologized as mammy, the blackfemale figure, with or without the bulk, with or without the headscarf, with or without her apron, domestic busyness, and simple moral correctives but stuffed with this peculiar *mater*(nal) function to the point of fissuring, embodies the threat of rupture. She, Sharpe instructs,

> becomes large, superabundant, splits into more of herself. Impossible to contain her in one body, impossible not to see her, she circulates widely but remains invisible nonetheless … Having no place in the memory of her creators as a creation she becomes a realized figment of collective imagination, an avatar of the collective unconscious. A phantasmatic figure, she is everywhere, in every place.[51]

The evocative power of Leigh's *Trophallaxis* would suggest that abstract artwork is an appropriate vehicle for that which exceeds the representationalist frame and cannot be captured by the mind's eye. The sculpture's antennae evoke the reception and transmission of energy. If sexuating antiblackness is imagined as an electromagnetic wave, then it theoretically, potentially amplifies into infinity. However, the munitions suggest this process of absorption and emission could redirect antiblack sexuating energy in such a way that it splits, and its trace and successive fissures might act as a bomb rupturing sex, gender, species, and *the* world.[52] Viewed from one perspective, this is a baleful unspeakable cataclysm; but from another perspective, such an event provides the leveling conditions that make (possible) a different future.

X

All images: Details of Simone Leigh, *trophallaxis*, 2008-2017. Terracotta, porcelain, epoxy, graphite, gold and platinum glazes, and antennas. Dimensions variable.Copyright: Simone Leigh; Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

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1
Simone Leigh, "Knowledge as Collective Experience," Creative Time Summit 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=70&v=q31nf3_f3is .

2
See Charlotte Sleigh, "Brave New Worlds: Trophallaxis and the Origin of Society in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 38, no. 2 (2002): 133–56. Entomologists such as Auguste Forel, Adele Fielde, and William Morton Wheeler alternately drew principles of "social hygiene," slavery, primitivity, blackmail, bribery, internationalism, and pacifism from the life of ants. My observations, in this essay, are perhaps especially true for early entomologists in search of the origin of sociality.

3
Jennifer L. Morgan "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500–1770," *William and Mary Quarterly* , no. 54 (1997): 167–92.

4
Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder,'" 191.

5
Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder,'" 186.

6
Londa L. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Rutgers University Press, 2004), 53. See chapters 2 and 3, in particular, on the comparative anatomization of the breast.

7
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 4–5.

8
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 41–42.

9
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 63.

10
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 67–68.

11
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 68–69.

12
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 74.

13
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 53.

14
Here, in using the conjoint "blackfemale," I am thinking with a previous model, namely Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (i.e., "whitefolks"). In reaching for language we find that the conjoin(ing) noun underscores the specificity of social positioning.

15
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 64.

16
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 148.

17
Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 156, 158–59. We can see this kind of thinking even in the work of Darwin. See Darwin's comments on the role of racial characteristics in sex selection in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871).

18
In birds, feeding via regurgitation is sometimes called "crop milk." See the following for an early, if not the earliest, use of the term: Oscar Riddle, Robert W. Bates, and Simon W. Dykshorn, "A New Hormone of the Anterior Pituitary," *Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine* 29, no. 9 (1932): 1211–12.

19
Mark E. Suárez and Barbara L. Thorne, "Rate, Amount, and Distribution Pattern of Alimentary Fluid Transfer via Trophallaxis in Three Species of Termites (Isoptera: Rhinotermitidae, Termopsidae)," *Annals of the Entomological Society of America* 93, no. 1 (January 2000): 145–55.

20
Sleigh, "Brave New Worlds," 133.

21
Abigail J. Lustig, "Ants and the Nature of Nature in Auguste Forel, Erich Wasmann, and William Morton Wheeler," in *The Moral Authority of Nature* , eds. L orraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 302.

22
Sleigh, "Brave New Worlds," 150.

23
William Morton Wheeler, "The Social Insects: Their Origin and Evolution," *Nature*, no. 122 (1928); and Sleigh, "Brave New Worlds," 146, 150.

24
Indeterminancy and flexibility has been emphasized in scholarship on the question of race in early colonial slavery, but Morgan demonstrates that the process of imagining black women as vectors of racial inheritance and, thus, slave status began several decades before this code was enacted into law. As Morgan argues, it is through the bodies of black women that assumptions about race and status were conferred, formalized, and navigated. The Virginia legislative pronouncement, she argues, only belatedly codified hereditary racial slavery into English colonial law. See Jennifer L. Morgan, " *Partus sequitur ventrem* : Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 1 (2018): 1–17.

25
On this point, this essay is informed by social systems biologist Adria LeBoeuf's work on trophallaxis. See LeBouef, "On Mammalian Breast Feeding" (n.d.); and her video "What is Trophallaxis?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e84sjk8z3lE&list=PL2LxPSJAVUVtXRz7lTa7mkDjtx7O4wlWO&index=2&t=0s .

26
But in order to see it this way, Forel had to emphasize trophallaxis as a means of social bonding and kin survival over its associations with communal boundary regulation, caste, and immunity. Moreover, some forms of trophallaxis have been described in less communitarian terms, particularly that of parasitism. Some species of wasps have been described as nest invaders that restrain and force trophallaxis on captive hosts. See Hal C. Reed and Roger D. Akre, "Usurpation Behavior of the Yellowjacket Social Parasite, *Vespula austriaca* (Panzer) (Hymenoptera: Vespidae)," *American Midland Naturalist* 110, no. 2 (1983): 419–32; and Reed and Akre, "Colony Behavior of the Obligate Social Parasite *Vespula austriaca* (Panzer) (Hymenoptera: Vespidae)," *Insectes Sociaux* 30, no. 3 (1983): 259–73.

27
Sleigh, "Brave New Worlds," 149–50.

28
Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 155. Here I draw on this essay, as well as the essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in the same volume, to tease out some of the implications of Spillers's thought, in light of Lacan's mirror stage and Bruno Latour's concept of an actant as that entity or activity which "modif(ies) other actors." Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature*, trans. Catherine Porter (Harvard University Press, 2004), 75. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* , trans. Bruce Fink (W. W. Norton, 2006).

29
Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Duke University Press, 2009), 165.

30
Building on the work of Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter suggests that sociogeny defines (human) being in a manner that is not reducible to physical laws. In fact, said laws are redefinable as sociogenetic or nature–culture laws because culture is not only what humans create but also what creates human being. Sociogeny suggests that cultural codes hold the potential to redirect "biology." If the organismic body delimits the human species, then the body is itself culturally determined through the mediation of the socialized *sense of self* as well as through the "social" situation in which this *self* is placed. Wynter limits her discussion of what she calls the "sociogenic principle" to the activities and efficacies of the nervous system. See Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be 'Black,'" in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America* , eds. Mercedes F. Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gomez-Moriana (Routledge, 2001), 30–66. In my forthcoming book, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (NYU Press, 2020), I extend and revise her theorization of sociogeny by considering what venturing beyond the nervous system reveals about the entanglement of semiosis and the organismic body.

31
Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 206.

32
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Knopf, 1987), 11.

33
Morrison, *Beloved*, 44.

34
Morrison, *Beloved*, 44.

35
Morrison, *Beloved*, 6.

36
Morrison, *Beloved*, 228.

37
An earlier version of Leigh's *Trophallaxis* bore the title *Queen Bee* . My reading of *Trophallaxis* suggests an ironic meaning to the earlier title.

38
Butler's *The Feminine Monarchie* (1634) was actually a revision of a text originally published by Joseph Barnes in 1609, which was itself the first full-length English-language book about beekeeping. However, Barnes and Bulter were not the first to describe the largest honeybee as a queen. Luis Mendez de Torres did so in 1586. His observation was later microscopically confirmed by Jan Swammerdam in 1670. As Cyrus Abivardi explains, although Aristotle noted that some authorities referred to the large ruler bee as the hive's mother, he found the hypothesis unlikely, since "nature only arms males." Because the hive's "ruler" has a sting, Aristotle concluded that it must be the king, and the defenseless drones were, therefore, the females. See Cyrus Abivardi, "Honey Bee Sexuality: An Historical Perspective," *Encyclopedia of Entomology* (Springer, 2008): 1840–43.

39
Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 203.

40
Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 205.

41
Nancy Leys Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science," *Isis* 77, no. 2 (June 1986): 264.

42
Stepan, "Race and Gender," 265–67.

43
Stepan, "Race and Gender," 272.

44
Lorraine Datson, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," in *The Moral Authority of Nature* , 100.

45
Datson, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," 104.

46
Datson, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," 105.

47
Datson, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," 108–12.

48
Datson, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," 105.

49
By the 1920s, darker peoples of Africa, South America, and Asia were arguably at times depicted as more savage than "races" of ants—that is, morally inferior to ants. Examples include the work of Belgian entomologist Eduouard Bugnion, and H. G. Wells's short story "The Empire of the Ants." As Charlotte Sleigh puts it, "Psychologically speaking, ants were a paradox, for they shared brutishness with the 'Negro' or 'Indian' and a complex social order with the European." See Sleigh, "Empire of the Ants: H. G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," *Science as Culture* 10, no. 1 (2001): 64. I have extended this observation by identifying the manner in which sex/gender qualifies this insight.

50
Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1984), 71.

51
Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*, 161.

52
A number of Black Studies scholars are currently in the midst of an exciting conversation concerning a reconsideration of the idea of "world." See, in particular, the work of Denise Ferriera da Silva and her important ethical call, on behalf of planetary existence writ large, for an "end to the world as we *know* it": Da Silva, "An End to 'This' World," interview by Susanne Leeb and Kerstin Stakemeir," *Texte Zur Kunst* , April 12, 2019 https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/interview-ferreira-da-silva/ ; and Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2015): 81–97. In my work, on the question of the destructive/creative power of the black *mater(*nal), as mater, as matter vis-à-vis the metaphysics of "world," I have focused on the particular problem of the definite article "the," as a qualifier of "world." In light of the work of Quentin Meillasoux and other realist approaches to "world" and anti-correlationist stances (i.e., some New Materialist approaches), I have argued for a disenchantment of the idea(l) of "the world" as a knowable concept while holding on to the notion of incalculable and untotalizable worldings. I argue that "the world," and especially "the world as such," fails as a concept, fails at knowability, but succeeds as an idea(l) of imperialist myth predicated on the absent presence of what I call the black *mater*(nal). This critique is not limited to any particular representation of "the world," but is a rejection of the concept of "the world." See Zakiyyah Jackson, "Sense of Things," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 2, no. 2 (2016). This argument is extended in my forthcoming book, *Becoming Human* .

Beauty is not a luxury, rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical act of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given. It is a will to adorn, a proclivity for the baroque, and the love of *too much .*
—Saidiya Hartman

Words set things in motion. I've seen them doing it. Words set up atmospheres, electrical fields, charges. I've felt them doing it. Words conjure. I try not to be careless about what I utter, write, sing. I'm careful about what I give voice to.
—Toni Cade Bambara

Christina Sharpe

Beauty Is a Method

vessel:
a container (such as a cask, bottle, kettle, cup, or bowl) for holding something
a person into whom some quality (such as grace) is infused
a watercraft bigger than a rowboat; especially: ship
a tube or canal (such as an artery) in which a body fluid is contained and conveyed or circulated
a conducting tube in the xylem of a vascular plant formed by the fusion and loss of end walls of a series of cell
More than flesh, a body—your "beat and beating heart."

I've been revisiting what beauty as a method might mean or do: what it might break open, rupture, make possible and impossible. How we might carry beauty's knowledge with us and make new worlds.

With all of the work that my parents did to try to enter and stay in the middle-class, precarity and more than precarity remained. That precarity looked and felt like winters without heat because there was no money for oil; holes in ceilings, walls, and floors from water damage that we could not afford to repair; the fears and reality of electricity and other utilities being cut due to nonpayment; fear of a lien being placed on the house because there was no, or not enough, money to pay property taxes. But through all of that and more, my mother tried to make a small path through the wake. She brought beauty into that house in every way that she could; she worked at joy, and she made livable moments, spaces, and places in the midst of all that was unlivable there, in the town we lived in; in the schools we attended; in the violence we saw and felt inside the home while my father was living and outside it in the larger white world before, during, and after his death. Though she was not part of any organized black movements, except in how one's life and mind are organized by and positioned to apprehend the world through the optic of the

door and antiblackness, my mother was politically and socially astute. She was attuned not only to our individual circumstances but also to those circumstances as they were an indication of, and how they related to, the larger antiblack world that structured all of our lives.

We lived in a town that used and hated and feared its black population. I grew up in Wayne, Pennsylvania, at a four-way intersection: rich white folks in three directions and a small black neighborhood in the other. One bright, sunny summer day when I was eight or nine or ten years old, police from at least two townships, but I think three, descended on and laid siege to my neighborhood. Multiple police cars blocked our streets because a white woman had reported that she saw a black man driving a station wagon through the center of Wayne with a shotgun visible in the back. The black man was named Chicki Carter—and he was really a boy, seventeen or eighteen years old. He was a friend of my brother Stephen. The rifle was a rake—part of the set of tools that Chicki used for the yardwork he was doing that summer in order to earn money. We gathered in our front yards, on the sidewalks, and in the road; we ran after the police cars; and we witnessed and insisted loudly that Chicki had done nothing wrong. That day, at least, while there *was* harm done, it was not *immediately* fatal harm.

Knowing that every day that I left the house many of the people that I encountered did not think me precious and showed me so, my mother gave me space to be precious—as in vulnerable, as in cherished. It is through her that I first learned that beauty is a practice, that beauty is a method, and that a vessel is also "a person into whom some quality (such as grace) is infused." *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* was my mother's book. My brother Stephen gave it to her. There is an inscription in it, as there is in every book we gave each other: "Happy Birthday, To Mommy, Love Stephen, 3/2/70." In the pages of the book is a list on a worn slip of paper—the top of the list is faded from the sun and is disintegrating. The list is in my mother's fast cursive—the writing she used when she was making notes to and for herself. My mother's handwriting for the world was instead meticulous (as in the note to me in the first edition of *Beloved* that she gave me on my twenty-third birthday). In rebellion against the nuns at West Catholic Girls' who tried to control every aspect of her school life, my mother had created her own beautifully ornate script. This particular list is written on the back of a form that she recycled from her job in human resources at Sears, Roebuck and Co., a sheet of light blue paper that she tore into strips to use as bookmarks: a lifelong habit instilled in a child of the Depression—use everything, waste nothing. The list:

Before the Mayflower ($3.95)
Malcolm X: The Man and His Time ($5.95)
**The Negro Handbook* ($8.95)
A Pictorial History of the Negro in America ($4.95)
What Manner of Man ($4.95)
This Child's Gonna Live ($4.95)
* *Contemporary Art in Africa* ($7.25)
Black Political Power in America ($6.95)
Black Power U.S.A ($5.95)
The White Problem ($6.95)
Confrontation: Black and White ($6.95)
To Be Young Gifted and Black (Lorraine Hansberry) ($6.95)
Black in White America ($5.95)

The bookmark marks the beginning of "Esther" from Jean Toomer's *Cane*.

I was a vessel for all of my mother's ambitions *for me* —ambitions that found their own shapes.

My mother made me a purple gingham dress with purple and lilac and blue appliqué tulips. She tried, over many summers, to teach me how to sew: needlepoint, appliqué, cross-stitch, slip stitch. She failed. We failed together. She had a beautiful old pedal-operated Singer sewing machine and when you opened the shallow drawers that ran along the top they were filled with brightly colored and differently weighted needlepoint yarn. I used to love to look at them. I would arrange and disarrange them, stack her thimbles, disturb her order.

When she was dying, my mother still made Christmas ornaments by hand. It was a shock on re-encountering the red felt hearts with the straight pins holding them together, the black, felt globe with its own arrangement of pins — the ordinary flat-headed pins, the round red and white and brown heads. My mother's symmetry: even the bent pins have a place. It was a shock to encounter them again—the way that beauty shocks. But more. What is beauty made of? Attentiveness whenever possible to a kind of aesthetic that escaped violence whenever possible—even if it is only the perfect arrangement of pins.

I continue to think about beauty and its knowledges.

I learned to see in my mother's house. I learned how not to see in my mother's house. How to limit my sight to the things that could be controlled. I learned to see in discrete angles, planes, plots. If the ceiling was falling down and you couldn't do anything about it, what you could do was grow and arrange peonies and tulips and zinnias; cut forsythia and mock orange to bring inside.

My mother gifted me a love of beauty, a love of words. She gave me every black book that was published—and in her practice, birthdays always included gifts for the body, gifts for the mind, and gifts for the soul. The mind and the soul came together in books: novels, poetry, short stories, history, art. One of those books was Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* in which Bambara, in the dedication,

thanks *her* mother, "who in 1948, having come upon me daydreaming in the middle of the kitchen floor, mopped around me." In that dedication, I saw something that my mother would do; I saw something that she had done. My mother gave me space to dream. For whole days at a time, she left me with and to words, curled up in a living-room windowsill, uninterrupted in my reading and imagining other worlds.

Some books I read in that windowsill: *The Collected Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*; *The People Could Fly*; *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America*; *Jane Eyre*; *Bright April*; *The Life of Ida B. Wells: The Woman Who Killed Judge Lynch*; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*; *Little Women*; *Song of Solomon*; *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.

That window was my loophole of retreat—two feet deep, three feet wide, four feet high—my small public/private place from which I began to imagine myself into another world. The house was an old farmhouse, built in 1804, and there were no right angles in it—everything was on a slope. The windowsill I sat in looked out onto the backyard. In summer that meant cherries and quince, crabapple, greengage plum, four peony bushes, a huge weeping willow that had been struck by lightning, and beyond that the road called Radnor Street Road. There was also a vegetable garden where we grew tomatoes, corn, collard and mustard greens, turnips, kale, carrots, several varieties of lettuce, cucumbers, eggplant, zucchini, sweet and hot peppers, and more. In the winter, you could see the house behind the fruit trees where Chico and Joey lived. Sometimes the house was cold, and then my mother's stacks of newspapers became fireplace logs. And though this was a sign that there was no money for oil, there was an art to making my mother's neat paper logs: roll the paper, tuck one edge in, roll a little more, tuck the other edge. That way they wouldn't come undone. That way we wouldn't come undone.

> Beauty is a method:
> reading in the windowsill
> running after the police
> a list on a slip of paper in a book
> the arrangement of pins in cloth
> the ability to make firewood out of newspaper

This attentiveness to a black aesthetic made me: moved me from the windowsill to the world

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Vanessa Agard-Jones

Selvage/Obsidian: A Response

In Simone Leigh's practice, bodies become buildings. Crania become carafes. Busts become dwellings. As she takes the black female form and reimagines its relationship to materiality, Simone turns Aimé Césaire's classic equation—"colonization = thingification"—squarely on its head.[1] Her body-objects, and their labile transformation from one form to another, act as a rejoinder to the old materialist conceit that we might imagine our selves and our lives as separate from the things around us: nonhuman beings, animate or not.[2] Each vessel is a study in the process of our entanglement, a meditation on the registers of, possibilities for, and challenges of this in/human relation, produced not only through the violence of enduring coloniality, but also through the possibilities that black women's labor makes manifest in our worlds.

Black women's labor, both intellectual and embodied, is at the core of Simone's re/imagining of a Jacobs-ian "loophole of retreat."[3] In this spirit, she imagined our gathering: a meeting of black women's minds across lines of difference in discipline, language, praxis. As Simone's sculpture keeps us attuned to the interimplication of form, the conference itself made space for different kinds and registers of coming together, of interface, and of making meet. As I considered the interventions that Dionne Brand, Zakiyyah Jackson, and Christina Sharpe offered us on this occasion, I kept coming back to my own practical labors, and their relationship to the loopholes that make my own life, both adjacent to and within the academy, one of deep meaning.

Like Christina's mother, I too sew. And I've done so in much more earnest over the last nearly two years, because of my own trophallactic labor: my toddler has not once slept through the night. And sewing has been the one thing that my head and hands will allow in that time of foggy suspension, after being roused at 2:00 a.m. night after night after night (many of us know this altered state). I learned recently about the doubled meaning of this sewing word that I have long taken for granted: selvage. A selvage is a "self-finished" edge of fabric, a band that keeps it from unraveling and fraying. Many contemporary sewists, and quilters in particular, eschew its use, but for those of us who come from traditions of working with every scrap we've got, the selvage is just as important as the rest of the fabric bolt. The word came into the English language from an alteration of "self" and "edge," on the pattern of the early modern Dutch word *selfegghe*.[4] As for so many, birthing a person was for me an experience of self meeting edge and of leaky, visceral spilling over—as my child left my body, she carried with her two liters of my blood. Our meeting was a brutal confrontation with life's precarity. Selvage evokes childbirth's rending of the self, the splitting that produces two people from one, but the word flows through other domains as well: in geology, a selvage refers to a zone of altered rock, especially volcanic glass, at the edge of a rock mass. And volcanic glass is most commonly referred to as obsidian.

As I am wont to do, I have iterated my thinking about a loophole of retreat into these geological terms, finding the material and metaphorical resonance among rock, sand, and clay in Simone's practice, and a sense of kinship between obsidian's edge and the attention to black life that this conference's attendees make possible for us.[5] We might consider the volcano to be a version of what Christina has called "total climate," and the rock edge that becomes obsidian a space of reserve, but not escape, from the crucible at that formation's fiery heart.[6] So it is on obsidian, this zone of alteration, this site where self meets its edge, that I have imagined this conversation, this loophole, this place of retreat for us. It is a place made through our labor, aligned with the labor of the world.

"You make bread out of stone," Dionne once urged.[7] Out on and out of this obsidian selvage, Dionne, Zakiyyah, and Christina have offered us this sustenance from stone: a sense of what might be imagined if we can make our way to our selves' edges, and what possibilities might emerge from the loophole. Through the figures of the map, the insect, and the vessel they each engage in this edge-work, underscoring the porous processes out of which our bodies and our lives are made.

The map.
Dionne.

Since I first read *Bread Out of Stone* I have been stunned by the stretching that Dionne helps us do toward a cartography that accounts not only for place, but also for time. Her work defies the closures of the map as we have thus far known it and orients us instead toward a worldly navigation beyond the strictures of language, of discipline, and of matter itself.[8] Christina has interpreted Dionne's "Ruttier for the Marooned in Diaspora" far better than I might, but I think of its marooned spirits, how "they wander as if they have no century, as if they can bound time," and later, of the invocation that they occupy an "undeviating ever," and I hear in their relationship to this temporally palimpsested world the clerk of her more recent *Blue Clerk*.[9] There is a moment there, between the principal figures—the author and the clerk—when Dionne writes:

> Verso 0.1:
> I would like, therefore, to live in time and not in space. Not the timelessness that is often spoken about, but time, in this world, as if living in an area just adjacent to air, a film of air which carries time and where I could be in several impersonations of myself, several but simultaneous. If there were time like this.
> But there is time like this. A pause from the author. The clerk lives in time like this, several and simultaneous. The author lives in place and not in time. Weighted. In place.[10]

Here Dionne gives us one way to imagine an area "adjacent to air," one way to refuse a weightedness in place, one way to imagine what it might be like to walk over the self's edge, to step one millimeter beyond the obsidian ledge, up—and into the atmosphere. Dionne charts sheer spatiality here, a zone of alteration that refuses to exist only in relation to time. She gives us what Omise'eke Tinsley has called "a crosscurrent of dissolved and reconfigured black selfhoods," bodies and beings that defy normative logics about their constitution, and their socialities.[11] As if anticipating a conversation with Simone's sculpture *Trophallaxis* (2008–2017), one of Dionne's versos intones: "the ants send their aged to war."

The insect.
Zakiyyah.

In Zakiyyah's essays, here and elsewhere, I have found a conceptual clearing, a vocabulary for thinking about blackness, the racial schema that we inherit, a sensorium capable of apprehending not only the material but also the immaterial world, and perhaps most importantly for me, the category human and its nonhuman others. She asks us to think along with her about the way that calls to move "beyond" the human are fundamentally compromised by our limited apprehension of the category itself. Pressing us to take seriously Sylvia Wynter's insistence that Man is but a genre of the human, but one mode of doing humanity, Zakiyyah calls for, in her words, "a queering of perspective and stance that mutates the racialized terms of Man's praxis of humanism."[12] For example, in a reading of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* in an essay called "Sense of Things," Zakiyyah asks how we understand, and what we might learn, from a life constituted by vertigo, by disorientation.[13] Foregrounding "the reach of antiblackness [in particular] into the non-human," she challenges us, but also those—legions of scholars at a purported critical edge working under the signs of posthumanist, object-oriented, and new materialist theory—to reckon with blackness.[14] She has consistently demonstrated for us, in her words, "the ways that black female experience de-essentializes gender and shows the arbitrary relation between flesh and symbol."[15]

Her taking up of Simone's *Trophallaxis* for this conversation draws our attention not only to constructions of humanity and its others—refusing any temptation to collapse triumphantly toward the queen bee—but also to the cataclysms that would remake our universe. Insect sociality, and the mereological concern for a part's relationship to a whole (and vice versa), is precisely a question of self and edge, of the zone of alteration made through trophic exchange.

Finally, the vessel.
Christina.

From *Monstrous Intimacies* to *In the Wake*, to all of the

essays in between, Christina has offered us a way to think about the making of post-slavery subjects, the imprint of inheritance, the afterlives of injury, the voraciousness of capital, and the work of haunting. She has taught me about care as shared risk among "we asterisked human/s—queer, black, women," and she has encouraged me, encouraged us, to continue crafting accounts that might "counter the violence of abstraction."[16] This work—its precision, its pain—has transformed my relationship to social analysis, but also my relationship to my own world.

And now, she gives us beauty as a method, as a practice. She gives us invocations of one vessel—her young self—imbued with grace, suffused with care. She gives us her mother's care for her own intellectual life (That list. Its detail.), her own creative life (Those pins. That arrangement.), she gives us her care for beauty in their domestic life (Flowers even when the roof was falling in. Newspaper logs for the fire as beautiful as any paper folding called art.), she gives us her attentiveness and her attunement. In our gathering's opening, Saidiya Hartman intoned, "Mother, make your mark on me," and I thought immediately of what Christina has brought us to here. Maternal attunement in this rendering is what makes aspiration possible—in and through what Christina has called the total climate of antiblackness. Alongside Simone's sculptural practice, she has reminded us of the beauty in becoming-vessel. In so many ways, this essay is one answer to the question that she poses in *In the Wake*: "what does it take to keep breath in the Black body?"[17] Even under the regime of the total climate, breath is still possible, she insists. Necessary. And here she reminds us that we can—and that black women's labor does—make space for each other's breathing. That's what this conference, this loophole of retreat, has done. Together, Dionne, Zakiyyah, and Christina, alongside our day's other co-travelers, took us to the selvage, to an obsidian plane where for one afternoon our collective labors made possible another site of black possibility—of aerial alteration, somatic exchange, and care transformed into the vital essence of life.

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A note on the title: Following Jafari S. Allen's invocation of the "strokes" that both demarcate and define intimacies among black/queer/diasporas, I place selvage and obsidian in relation here, as distinct sites of material transformation and too, as forms of merged mattering. See Jafari S. Allen, "Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 2–3 (2012).

It was an honor to have been asked to participate in this gathering—in such distinguished company—and to honor Simone Leigh: a person who enlivens me, not only because of her intellectual and artistic brilliance, but also because of her steadfast, hilarious, and deeply generous friendship. Thank you to Simone Leigh, Saidiya Hartman, and Tina Campt for all of their caring and intellectual labor in bringing us together. I am indebted to Naomi Greyser for shepherding this response into the world, and to Jafari S. Allen for being there, as ever, and for holding—like selvage—all of my unravellings. In 2017, the Guggenheim acquired Simone's *Georgia Mae*—a sculpture named for my daughter in the year of her birth. There is no greater gift: Georgia Mae in person, and now too—thanks to this radical gesture of love—Georgia Mae in porcelain.

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1
Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2001), 42.

2
Leigh's work troubles the terms of "animacy" itself, not unlike the work of: Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke University Press, 2012); Kim TallBear, "Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms," in *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World* , eds. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (MIT Press, 2017).

3
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

4
See https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/selvage#learn-more%C2%A0 .

5
With all due respect to our journal of arts and letters, *Obsidian*, in pu blication since 1975.

6
Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 21.

7
Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming and Politics* (Coach House, 1994).

8
My reading is indebted to Katherine McKittrick's fundamental insights about black feminist cartographies, and about Brand's work in particular, found in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

9
Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Vintage Canada, 2012). On Christina's interpretation, see Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 19, 106, 131.

10
Dionne Brand, *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (McClelland & Stewart, 2018), 135.

11
Omise'eke Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2–3 (2008).

12
Zakiyyah Jackson, "Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013).

13
Zakiyyah Jackson, "Sense of Things," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 2, no. 2 (2016).

14
Zakiyyah Jackson, "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human,'" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* , 21, no. 2–3 (June 2015): 215–18.

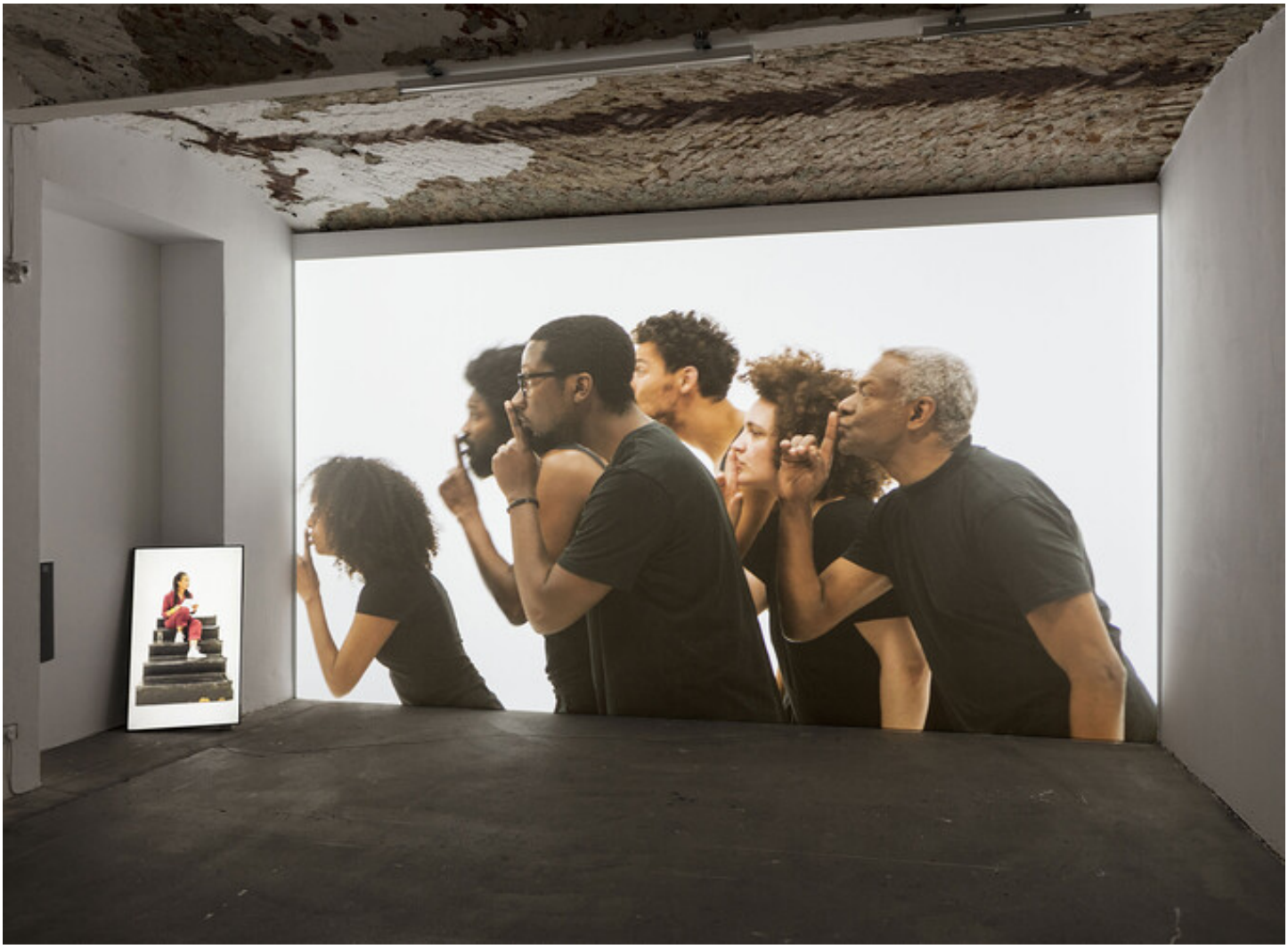
15
Jackson, "Sense of Things."

16
On asterisks, see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 29–34. On abstraction, see Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26, no. 7 (2008).

17
Sharpe, *In the Wake*.

Grada Kilomba

Still images from ILLUSIONS Vol. II, OEDIPUS



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Grada Kilomba is a interdisciplinary artist and writer, born in Lisbon and living in Berlin. Her work draws on memory, trauma, race, gender, and the decolonization of knowledge. She is the author of *Plantation Memories* (2008) a compilation of episodes of everyday racism written in the form of short psychoanalytical stories; and the coeditor of *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte* (2005), an anthology on Critical Whiteness Studies. Her artworks have been presented internationally at the 10th Berlin Biennale; Documenta 14; the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo; Rauma Biennal Balticum; Art Basel; Frieze London; Cape Town Art Fair; and the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Marrakech, among others.

Françoise Vergès

Politics of Marooning and Radical Disobedience

> A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by anything but rats and mice … There was no admission for either light or air. My uncle Phillip, who was a carpenter, had very skillfully made a concealed trap-door, which communicated with the storeroom … To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor … The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them …

This was how Harriet Jacobs described her *loophole of retreat* in her autobiography published in 1861. Drawing on Jacobs, Simone Leigh has invited us to transform the loophole of retreat into a symbol of fortitude, resilience, and agency for black women. Reflecting on these powerful words and invitation, I would like to reflect on historical practices of hiding and retreating to protect black people's lives, to gather strength, to survive, to invent ways of making kin and families, and to preserve love in a loveless world—a world which has made black people's death into merchandise.

When I was fourteen years old, I organized a series of walks with a group of friends that lasted two to three weeks through the mountains of my home on the island La Réunion, a French colony since the eighteenth century and then, since 1946, a French overseas territory. I wanted to discover a world which bears the Malagasy names of the maroons who rejected the names with which slave owners had marked them as objects of commerce. They gave themselves names that expressed refusal and dreams of freedom: Tsimendef (from *Tsi Mandevi*, which means "not a slave"), Mafate (from *Mahafaty*, which means "one who kills"), Dimitile (from the Malagasy word for "the watchman"), Tsilaos (from *Tsy ilaozana*, which means "a space that one does not abandon"), or Anchaing and Heva. As a rosary created in hopes of warding off the black world of freedom, cities on the coast were given names that also tell the story of the complicity between colonial power and the Catholic Church: Saint Paul, Saint Pierre, Sainte Suzanne, Saint Denis, Sainte Marie, etc.

Despite centuries of imposed silence about the struggles against slavery and slavery itself, by carving their names on the island, maroons kept their presence alive, their mark stronger than colonial denial. This was the story I was looking for while walking on perched trails, imagining

the women and men who had escaped the plantations looking down on the world of bonded labor, servitude, brutality, and death. Seeing without being seen. Carving spaces of freedom in a world organized around black unfreedom; a world that proclaimed that there was no alternative to the enslavement of black women and men and that this was as natural as day and night. Marooning, whether it was for hours, for some days, or for decades, tore apart this naturalization and affirmed that there was an alternative. Looking down from the mountains, maroons made their presence felt; their very existence threatened the colonial order. Colonial power waged a long war against them with hunters cutting their ears to prove they had been killed or bringing them back for public punishment: torture, dismemberment, branded in the face, hung, burned alive. Yet, they never surrendered from their retreat.

The maroons' story I was taught at home was my first lesson in creating spaces of freedom despite an ideology that reduced black bodies to commodities and rendered the logics of murder a rule and extinction politics. I also learned that creating spaces of freedom depended on patience and a kind of true but rare courage that black women have historically demonstrated. Their stories enlighten another temporality than the Western masculine one of progress, defeat, victory, and triumph over matter, all processes understood as enforcing submission, crushing all obstacles, laying to waste. In the spaces and places where white supremacy requires the performance of daily rituals of humiliation, of masterly control over the body and all kinds of matter, the practice of claiming a loophole of retreat means creating one's own forms of freedom, endurance, perseverance, fortitude, as well as cunning; it means learning to play stupid, deaf, and blind to gather information in order to distract those in power.

When I think of a loophole of retreat, I think of the enslaved domestic who had to stand silent behind her owner, who had to dress and undress her, to wash her and feed her children, always taken for dumb and half-witted but who observed and learned about her vanity, conceit, and meanness all hidden behind the mask of fragility and weakness. She pretended not to see but saw, she pretended not to listen while collecting facts. I think of the intellectual history of slave revolts as told by the historian Julius S. Scott in *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (2019), which tells the story of the intercontinental and Caribbean trans-island networks that tied enslaved communities and ensured the rapid transmission of mutinies and insurrections.

As black feminists have continued to show for years, if the universal subject of working-class history is a white man, that of black working-class history is always a black man. Yet, the economy of the slave trade and slavery were founded upon the capacity of black women's bodies to reproduce capital. In Africa, women bore children for centuries who were then stolen, captured, and thrown into the maelstrom of the slave trade. In the European colonies, black women were raped to feed the slave-breeding industry. Black women's wombs were made into capital and their children transformed into currency. Primitive accumulation rested on the production of wasted lands and of disposable people of color. The entire pyramid of the transatlantic economy rested on the exploitation of black women's wombs and the extraction of their labor. Rape was not only a demonstration of white male power, it was a central element in the process of capital accumulation. Blacks were forbidden to make kin and family while the white bourgeois patriarchal family was extolled as a model.

Slavery and colonialism laid waste to lands and people. They destroyed the cultural and natural worlds of indigenous peoples and produced humans as waste. The slave trade brought filth, desolation, and death. The slave ship was a space of putrefaction, feces, blood, and flesh rotted by the shackles of slavery. When a foul stench drifted onto shore, people knew that a slave ship was coming. Race became a code for designating people and landscapes that could be wasted. The flesh and bones of black and indigenous bodies mixed with the earth on plantations and in the silver and gold mines. The Western idea that the African continent was a limitless source of cheap labor went hand in hand with the Western conception of nature as limitless, there to serve "Man," i.e., the white and Christian male, to satisfy his greed and insatiable appetite for gold, silver, coffee, sugar, cotton. Nature had to be tamed and disciplined, made for the enjoyment of the white bourgeois.

The extractive economy is based on an economy of the exhaustion of the earth, of black and brown bodies, of water and air. In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2019), Kathryn Yusoff examines how the grammar of geology is foundational to establishing the extractive economies of subjective life and the earth under colonialism and slavery.

> A material and temporal solidarity exists between the inscription of race in the Anthropocene and the current descriptions of subjects that are caught between the hardening of geopolitical borders and the material de-stratification of territory ...[1]
>
> The move *toward* a more expansive notion of humanity must be made with care. It cannot be based on the presupposition that emancipation is possible once the racial others and their voices are included finally to realize this universality, but must be based on the recognition that these "Others" are already inscripted in the foundation formulation of the universal *as a space of privileged subjectification*.[2]

Today climate change is being discussed in terms of crisis and as making necessary a cleaning of the planet, but by whom and for whom will the planet be cleaned? Clean air, clean water, and clean space have always been distributed along segregated lines. The colonial/racial spatial division prefigured the world in which we live: to the rich go the whitened green parks, clean water, spaces of leisure, birds and flowers, and the poor and the black and brown are left with dirty water, polluted air, polluted soil. In this old *and* new configuration, how do we theorize black women's labor in the cleaning/caring industry?

I want to look at how the work of cleaning and caring historically tied to black women is being organized under the current regime of racial patriarchy and neoliberalism which professes that each individual possesses capital she/he must learn to fructify and that this enterprise allows anyone to transcend race, gender, sexuality, and origin *as long as the logic of neoliberalism is embraced*. Which leads to another question: how do we develop a politics of visibility *and* invisibility both for fighting in the open and for building spaces of retreat away from the constant racial-sexist gaze of State surveillance and control?

As I wrote earlier this year:

> Every day, in every urban center of the world, thousands of black and brown women, invisible, are "opening" the city. They clean the spaces necessary for neo-patriarchy, and neoliberal and finance capitalism to function … They have usually travelled long hours in the early morning or late at night, and their work is underpaid and considered to be unskilled … A second group, which shares with the first an intersection of class, race, and gender, go to middle-class homes to cook, clean, and take care of children and the elderly, so that those who employ them can go to work in the places that the former group of women have cleaned.[3]

Black feminists have long studied the racialization and feminization of domestic work and have shown that the white feminist demand for work outside the home demonstrated its class and racial bias first and foremost because black women had always worked, and second, because their aspirations could not be fulfilled without black women taking care of their children, homes, trash, laundry, cooking.

While cleaning and caring have become a growth industry as the surface of offices and business spaces have extended throughout the world, the work necessary to maintain this must remain invisible. The labor, the bodies, the exhaustion—all must remain hidden. Women cleaning in European hotels say that they are forbidden to drink water when they clean the rooms; they cannot use the toilets; they are forbidden to speak to guests or to speak to each other. The damage to their bodies and health—to their knees, wrists, backs; the inhalation of chemicals, bearing the weight of heavy loads—is not recognized as work-related. Rape is frequent and pervasive.

In this symbolic and material economy, black and brown women's lives have been made precarious and vulnerable, but their fabricated superfluity goes hand in hand with their necessary existence and presence as cleaning (cleansing?) and caring labor. They are allowed into private homes and workplaces. But other members of superfluous communities—such as the families and neighbors of these workers—must stay behind the gates unless they are willing to risk being killed by state and police violence and other forms of the militarization of green and public spaces for the sake of the wealthy. For these workers, the special permit to enter is based both on the need for their work and on their invisibility.

When women of color enter the gates of our cities and their controlled buildings, all too frequently, they must do so as *phantoms*. Black and brown women may circulate in the white city, but most often as an erased presence. Thus, their struggles are fundamental because they bring together issues of migration, race, gender, health, and the dialectic of clean/dirty in the neoliberal world at a time of "crisis." A critique of the economies of exhaustion and extraction, and the question of the necessity of cleaning and caring, must be linked. When they strike, they formulate from their place of acute observation a critique of a world where the measure of wealth rests on the production of waste, decay, and squander (squalor?). Fred Magdoff and Chris Williams have argued that waste is "a sign of capitalism's success," but the struggles of women of color against the ways in which the labor of cleaning/caring is organized and racialized contributes to the emancipation of all.

The work of black feminists has been essential to lifting the veil on the racial foundation of the social reproduction of cleaning/caring. In the current era, which sees a new racial politics of cleanliness produced by the anxiety over what the media has called the climate crisis, human societies cannot survive without the work of cleaning/caring. Yet this work has always been considered secondary and reserved for black and brown women. Black and brown women, with their vast knowledge based on what they have observed and learned for decades and over centuries of practice, know exactly what a decolonial politics of caring/cleaning (of reparation) can be. It is a decolonization of caring and cleaning what has been laid to waste in the past.

X

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1
Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 62.

2
Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 62, 50.

3
Françoise Vergès, "Capitalocene, Waste, Race, and Gender," *e-flux j ournal* , no. 100 (May 2019) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/100/269165/capitalocene-waste-race-and-gender/ .

Denise Ferreira da Silva

How

Without time or space, a when or a where, without references to moment or place, the various versions of the question of *how* that inspire this conversation alleviate the task; they gather us under the assertion that we — and, I mean, black women— *do,* or rather *create*. Without asking for a program or a method, it is a statement.[1] As such, it is a proposition for which Hortense Spillers's female flesh ungendered (\X => -Y + 0) is the operator; it rings infinity (∞ - ∞): the world image of blackness, that is, radical immanence, pure unboundedness.[2]

Thinking of Harriet Jacobs, whose feat inspired the title for this gathering; thinking of Margaret Garner's refusal to transmit the burden of servitude to her children; thinking of Alice H. Parker whose deed, the invention of a kind of furnace, made safe central heating possible in houses and buildings; and most of all, in this moment, thinking about and with Simone Leigh's *Brick House*, these questions have inspired me to consider what is involved in the appreciation of black women's doings.[3]

Because *how* refers to what has and has not already been done, to what takes place at this exact moment and in that other unimagined place, because *how* recalls infinity, all I do here is share with you another possible how, another black feminist doing, inspired by the kind of sensibility announced when one attends to doings that are always and simultaneously feats, deeds, burdens, artifacts. When contemplating such sensibility, I have in mind the works of many black female thinkers and artists, but it has been inspired particularly by the speculative/science-fiction writer Octavia E. Butler, the poet Ai Ogawa, and the artists Otobong Nkanga and Simone Leigh. More particularly, I am moved by the many presentations of matter that I find in their work. All of them are highly sophisticated and carefully composed texts or objects, whose raw materials (what is used as material content in their composition) refer to the past and present configurations of the global (juridic, economic, and symbolic) context, which they make available to the critical gaze through beautiful visual or written compositions.[4]

More specifically I comment on the approach to aesthetics that they prefigure. For, instead of presupposing a formal position for appreciation (as in Heidegger's condition of "being in the world"), it presupposes a description of existence as a condition, a material expression "of the world" (in both the quantic sense of being part of it and in Leibniz's sense of expressing it).[5] Put differently, these creations hail a sensibility that is not a variation of the figuring of the human as subjectivity, which the prevailing formulation of the aesthetic (ontologically) presupposes and (its phenomenological core) instantiates.[6] A thinking that refigures the doings of black women approaches the intellectual and the creative (or the critical + creative, as I have been thinking about it for a while now) always in reference to a mode of existing (as a condition of the world and not as the condition of being in the world, I repeat)

that yields that which is at once a feat, a deed, a burden, and artifact.[7]

From this perspective, it is possible to approach the *how* in a more general, even abstract way, without rendering it formal. Inversely, the how acquires a materiality unparalleled precisely because the doing resonates (refracts, diffracts, and reflects) the given arrangement of the social context, within which that doing vibrates as a feat, a deed, a burden, or an artifact—even though for the black female that does it, it will more likely be all four at once.[8]

What becomes then of the lexicon and grammar of contemporary art discourse and of classic themes such as aesthetics, intention, appreciation, and the artwork when the figure at its center—namely subjectivity—is not the one doing the organizing? Here I mean that this figure, which as Saidiya Hartman reminds us, is not available to enslaved black women, is therefore only very problematically retrievable by the black female scholar researching the archives of colonial and racial violence. Obviously, I am not delineating an easy task here. But I am not about to undertake the work—the feat! This is a sketchy presentation of the problematic.

All I have to offer are bits and pieces.[9]

Let me say a little more about the shift in thinking that would welcome such figuring of sensibility. Here I have in mind *how* black women exist; *how* we do intellectual, artistic, and life work; *how we do* teaching and mentoring, traveling, loving, caring, visiting, nesting, healing. Notionally, in light of the prevalence of a formal approach to the aesthetic, many of these other doings would not receive immediate attention in a piece that addresses an art audience (however we want to define it here). Fortunately, however, I have evidence to the contrary, such as, for instance, both Simone Leigh's *The Waiting Room* and other similar works, which have a place in contemporary art spaces. This is significant because this work as well as others try and recuperate and restore healing as an art, and bring the whole body (and not only the five senses) as well as sensing and the sensuous back to where they belong, that is, considerations that aesthetics refers to anyway.[10] When doing so, as practices and performance, Leigh's work and others collapse the fundamental separation of body and mind, which is the condition of possibility for Kantian, as well as Adorno's and others' versions of, aesthetics. Now it is precisely because aesthetics (in a post-Enlightenment rendering) requests the formal subject that it needs to be the first site of excavation before one moves into considerations of themes such as the artist's intention, public appreciation, and the artwork. Though of course, considering all three is crucial for a conversation about the work art does—of art's own doings, so to speak.[11]

Most generally, the task proposed here has to deal with the very notion of the aesthetic and with whether or not it is possible to rescue it from its conditions of emergence. More particularly, it involves, or should involve, a consideration of whether it is possible to extricate the formal in the Kantian sense (which has to do with the a priori as well as the rules and laws for knowing) from the form in the Aristotelian sense (which has to do with the shape of a given composition or thing). My view, as you might already anticipate, is that this extrication is not only possible, but urgently needed.[12]

What would this involve? For one thing, as mentioned earlier, it call for another description of the world and of the human's position in it. For instance, whether or not the thing (which is always a composition) under consideration comes into existence through working out a certain intention, an engagement with it should take the steps necessary for the dissolution of the subject presupposed in Kantian and later formulations of aesthetics. It must be critical, in the sense that it must consider the texts and discourses which have already apprehended it; it must do the necessary groundwork, the excavations and exposures of its various significations and their effects. It must also, at the same time, be creative; that is, poethical, in the sense that when attending to the thing, as a singular existent, it also attends to the various dimensions of the social (juridic, economic, and ethical) context with an explicit orientation towards decolonization (or the return of the total value expropriated [violently extracted] from native lands and slave labor).[13]

When the aesthetic is approached with this image of the world it is possible to image a kind of sensibility that can sit before and with black women's creations, both our intellectual and artistic doings, and be able to appreciate that, as singular expressions from a certain condition of this world, they immediately and instantaneously already arrest the viewer's (or reader's or listener's) yearning to remain in/different to it. For they participate in a fractal image of the world: one in which the artist's intention, the appreciator, and the material worked, for instance, are deeply implicated in quantic, organic, historic, and cosmic moments and, as such, participate in the burden, feat, deed, and artifact.[14]

Not surprisingly, such a sensibility requests the kind of sociality I have in mind when I consider a description of the world that attends to difference but does not presume separability—the kind of sociality that does not foreground violence. To reiterate, this sensibility is not that of the Kantian subject of the sublime, which Spivak misreads so aptly in her account of the workings of cultural difference in Kantian philosophy. For one thing, this sensibility does not prefigure the subject of the decision, which is the one predicated when Kant describes aesthetic judgment as being within the perimeters of the understanding.[15] Instead of a formal position of address, this kind of sensibility appreciates the given material (quantic)

condition of deep implicancy. That is, it takes into account—without rendering it as discourse—how the fact that all that exists is also and only a re/de/composition of basic material constituents, which, through uncountable transitions and transmissions, enter in the formation of the world through processes such as *calor* (heat) and *labor* (work).[16]

After, and only after, the aesthetic is unconfined by the subject of the understanding and fully offered to the imagination is it possible to contemplate the artist's intention (and not only the black artist, but every artist) released from the grips of determination. Here, however, I echo—if refractly, if you allow me the creation of a word—Simone Leigh's statements that her "primary audience is black women," and that black artists must eventually being able to gaze inwardly. When the infinite, undetermined possibilities which are our creations are not ignored in favor of an anthropological take, when these are approached aesthetically, the black artist's intentions, each singular expression of blackness ([∞ - ∞], or that which cannot but seep into, burden, the feat, and the deed, and the artifact) can be appreciated. When conceived materially, inwardness refers the doing to everything else from which it has inherited its basic constituents—that is: its quarks, leptons, and bosons, as well as every other particle with which these are deeply implicated at any given moment, during which time it is already and not yet part of that singular composition that is the black artist's creation.

Taking the very questions that organize this conversation as a frame for my contribution allowed me, I hope, to circumscribe, to limit what I had to say to what it could/can only be: not an answer but a copy, something which is both a replica and singular. This is obviously an incomplete assemblage of scattered meditations that came to me when I first looked at the *New York Times* photo of Simone Leigh working on her magnificent piece *Brick House*.[17] These are wanderings that I am honored to share with you as we gather on the occasion of Simone's marvelous achievement, her award of the 2018 Hugo Boss Prize.

X

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1
Perhaps the most significant aspect of this assertion is the fact that it does not demand a response for questions such as: "Why do black women create?" or "For whom do black women create?" As important as they have been, as generative as they became in the moment when the project was one of articulating black or women (or any subaltern) subjectivity, these questions seem to be caught in the ungodly task of responding to a negation. For this reason, because the question of "how" is not a reaction to a questioning but an invitation to comment, to share, it suggests that the conversation about black women's creativity (broadly defined) is to be undertaken without being preoccupied by the demand to prove its very possibility.

2
The significance of this shift regarding the task is that, instead of being caught in the presupposed formula *Black Women ≠ White Women* (how many times do we have to state what has from the beginning been the construction that has sustained capital's expropriative enterprise?), the assertion that black women do/create and the invitation to comment on how leaves undetermined whatever is then named a creation by black women. Meaning, this is not a formula, but an altogether different statement, *Black Women* are *non-white Women*, one that does not need a solution, that is, proof. I formally present her as \X => -Y + 0 – in "Hacking the Subject: Black Feminist and Refusal beyond the Limits of Critique," *philoSOPHIA* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 19-41. This figuring of black women is inspired by Hortense Spillers's "female flesh ungendered" as presented in her classic article "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987).

3
Expectedly, this shift also releases considerations of black women and creativity from the endless task modern thought imposes on itself: to deal with the question of Being while at the same time disavowing any gesturing to metaphysics. That is, precisely because blackness is a tool of racial knowledge, a political-symbolic construct that has been inscribed in the global context, as a presupposition and a product of its juridic, economic, and ethic architectures, it is possible to rewrite the infinite judgement as an existential, instead of an ontological, proposition: *Black Women* exist as *non-white Women*.

4
Released from ontology (and, consequently, from phenomenology, which is but a way to solve modern philosophy's qualms with metaphysics), black women's creations become something other than *objects* to be (or not to be) appreciated, critiqued, or consumed. Note that I am not saying that they will/should not be appreciated, critiqued, or consumed. What I am proposing is that the creations always already placed outside the scenes of (economic and ethic) value host more than a different version of these scenes; they also gift a whole different context.

5
What distinguishes *black women* 's creations is precisely how they refigure the creative itself. Instead of actualizations or effects of a separate and self-determined entity who draws from a given (presented as particular or universal) interior (essential) or exterior (causal) condition, they can (and perhaps should) be approached as everything else that is of the world; that is, as re/de/compositions of the elementary constituents of all that happens and exists. Put differently, they are approached as singular expressions of the world imaged as the play of infinity and not conceived of as a universe of the theater of determinacy. Different versions of this proposition appear in recent texts, including my essay "In the Raw," *e-flux journal*, no. 93 (September 2018) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/215795/in-the-raw/ .

6
Spelling out how this breaks away from modern "metaphysics"—with the theme of the transcendental—is beyond the scope of this commentary. Let me just elaborate on the distinction between sensibility and subjectivity. The target here is, obviously, Immanuel Kant's move, one which happens very early in his *Critique of the Pure Judgment* , but which is also already announced in *Critique of Pure Reason* . The move can be described as the distinction between sensibility and subjectivity; on the one hand, sensibility refers to the moment of engagement with the things of the world, which affect the human in the moment of knowledge, as appearances, that is, as already apprehended by the pure (transcendental) intuitions of time and space. On the other hand, subjectivity refers to the moment of engagement with impressions or representations of the things of the world (including the human itself), but here through the most fundamental mediation, which is that of the pure intuition of time—as the determinant of the inner sense and of the unification of appearances and their representations under concepts—which supports the Kantian statement that knowing is but determinacy. Undermining this distinction, that is, both the terms and the separation of sensibility and subjectivity, is, in my view, a crucial move towards dissipating the effects of the power of raciality and the juridic, economic, and ethical architectures it supports.

7
An important step in this task, I find, is to retrieve *existence* from its phenomenological and sociological apprehensions, to release her from the grid of the archives of slavery—where Saidiya Hartman finds her seemingly only available for appropriation or occupation and the grips of the mind and its scientific tools—and release it back to the world where it cannot but support accounts of the human as being part of it along with everything else. Saidiya Harman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14. Now, this is not just a call for replacing the prevailing image of the world with another. Modern thought's ambition of "discovering" the secondary causes of the things of the world has been effective in terms of enabling the building of a world that operates through and generates violence, both total and symbolic. Any creation that refers to existence in this world, insofar as it is not intended as a celebration of it, is also hopelessly a commentary on its architectures, processes, and procedures of violence.

8
When considering a sensibility that attends to the world as it has become while at the same time imaging the world without the grip of the subject of transcendental reason, I am not proposing that there is a choice—either sensibility or subjectivity—but rather that the latter be subsumed and collapsed in the former. For when the figuration of interiority is rendered another re/composition of the "matter" that constitutes the world, the critical task itself becomes open to refashioning, to other procedures, tools, terms.

9
Among other things, I find that this collapsing of subjectivity in/as sensibility allows for considerations of the artistic or the creative in general that take the Kantian lexicon as an object of critical analysis rather than a (usually unacknowledged) point of departure. Such a self-critical exercise in/of contemporary art is, given the current situation of the planet—which is another effect of the "discovery" motif in modern thought and the scientific projects it has promoted—already a belated gesture.

10
If the critical self-engagement seems to be lagging (mostly but not only because the available tools for critique share in the image of the world that needs to come to an end), contemporary art institutions seem (probably because they cannot help it; because it is a survival strategy) to remain open to invitations and opportunities to respond/attend to whatever captures the imagination at a given global juncture.

11
What would it take for a critical self-engagement to emerge that does not merely reproduce—even if under racial names (black, white, Asian, Latinx)—the formal figuring of subjectivity that organizes the Kantian program for aesthetics?

12
This would have to be a shift at the level of the imagination, rather than the mining of the understanding for old or renewed concepts that describe the world anew without violating the rules of modern signification. Meaning, to do so without rendering nonsense (and outright unacceptable) those things which we take for granted as they have been and will always be. Put differently, it would take nothing less than a crisis of sense (not one of meaning, which might still hold on to the theme of the transcendental) in all its moments—physical, emotional, intellectual, and metaphysical.

13
For it is not only a matter of rethinking using the same procedures and tools for knowing. What is urgently needed is a new approach to thinking itself, one that begins by dissolving the dichotomies (the separations) modern thought has produced to support itself. For this reason, as mentioned before, in addition to new procedures for thinking and their descriptors, movements, and propositions, thinking itself should become and beckon existing, in all its instances.

14
A thinking that is not set above existing is thinking in, with, and about complexity. As such, it must operate with generalities that do not presuppose or presume either identity or equality. Thinking before infinity, without a ground or a horizon, requires, among other things, a close and committed attention to what happens and exists in all that is actual and virtual, possible and potential in it.

15
Regarding the outline of the kind of critical self-engagement that must unfold in parallel and in pace with this shift of thinking, I can think of two crucial contributions to postcolonial theory that deal directly with the Kantian rendering of aesthetics: Gayatri C. Spivak's "misreading" of modern philosophy, in which she locates the figure of the subaltern in the folds of the Kantian (but also the Hegelian and Marxian) program, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1999), and David Lloyd's analysis of the Kantian subject of representation as a racial figuring and the conditions of possibility for the modern political subject itself, in *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (Fordham University Press, 2018). By locating the colonial and the racial in descriptions of the supposedly all-encompassing (universal realm), Spivak's and Lloyd's texts are helpful guides and resources for assembling the program for critique that addresses the world as it exists, that is, a global context in which state/capital's programs for extraction and expropriation are facilitated by the colonial (juridic) and racial (symbolic) architectures of violence.

16
Thinking beyond the limits of the understanding and in aid of (not against) the imagination does not require a flight as far away from the world as possible—something akin to Kant's solution to Hume's questioning of the universal. Instead, it demands the opposite move: an attention to the world, to its existents and their elementary constituents. For after all, they are also the basic constituents of everything that is known to exist from here/now to the outer edges of the cosmos, that is, since its inception.

17
Michelle Gustafson's photograph of Simone Leigh appears in Robin Pogrebin and Hilarie M. Sheets, "An Artist Ascendant: Simone Leigh Moves into the Mainstream," *New York Times*, August 29, 2018 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/29/arts/design/simone-leigh-sculpture-high-line.html .

Okwui Okpokwasili

# of wishing and superheroes

They say there was a time when love was blind
I say that time there never was

That who are they
they are no more
to the victor go the spoils

And the most lying li..(n)..es
Of history
Cause
It was always beautiful
Unlike the terrible now

But I say
if then was
As they say it was
How could Now go so astray

So if then was now
and now was then
I say both times twice
Left at least a few somebodies bent back
Over besides

Bent back far enough
And fit to break

I say back then
There was a rending
A mining
A ruining

Just like
now
Just like
this time

Maybe now sitting in front of the screen
And behind the screen
All at the same time

Creates a friction
A fiction
A feeling of multiples
Designed
to make you wretch fetch
Catch a bleary eye
Numb sucked soul sucked
Un-mirrored time

You think you can spin the world
Around
Soar up in the sky
You could be flying
Flying blind

Around the whole
Whole round world

Maybe you can take my hand

I will go with you
I will go with you

I will fly I will dive
Head over heals

Into the pool
That is empty
You and me

We will have no feet
We will fly
Round and round
Our bodies shape the air like
clay in our hands

I say can we make this time
that time now
We must make it
now
the time
To put aside
the lying
We been doing
we been doing
It is time
to put aside
the lying
the lying
we been doing

we got to remember
we got to
say what we can
about the true
pain

we can
you can
in my hands
together we will
we will
we will remember
all that time
and we will say it was not fine
and now
now
we will make it so
we will make it so
Now
we will make it
so.

If I stay asleep
If I count some sheep
If I sink in too deep
Won't I miss the sunlight break

Who will hold me now
As I swing in this bower
Isn't this a late hour
I don't have no cares to shake
But I....

[Listen to audio track at
https://www.e-flux.com/journal/105/305280/of-wishing-and-superheroes/]

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Okwui Okpokwasili is a performer, choreographer, and writer creating multidisciplinary performance pieces that center the African and African American woman in divining vocabularies to explore the unruly interiority of the human condition. As the child of immigrants from Nigeria, born and raised in the Bronx, the reconstitution of memory and the slippery terrain of identity as a particular condition of the African diaspora features prominently in much of Okpokwasili's work. Her productions are highly experimental in form, bringing together elements of dance, theater, and the visual arts (with spare and distinctive sets designed by her husband and director/collaborator, Peter Born). She was named a 2018 MacArthur Fellow.

Lorraine O'Grady

Interstice

1.

I'm a bit unprepared today. I've just come off six nights of rehearsal and performance for my friend Anohni's play, and the night after that I had to give remarks at the Skowhegan Gala. I'm winging it now on about three hours sleep, so I hope I make sense!

Earlier, at lunch, someone asked, "You must have had events like this in your day, right?"

"Sadly, no," I say, "I've never been to an event like this before." Later, I remember. There had been one. The *Black Popular Culture* conference organized by Michele Wallace at the Studio Museum in Harlem and at the Dia Center for the Arts in December 1991. I was there, but in the audience, not as a presenter. I remember feeling like an outsider—artists with their lonely individual practices seemed more isolated than academics at the time. And visual artists were even more so since, as evidenced by the conference, most black academics of that era did not consider visual art a central form of black expression in the way that literature and music were. Wallace had done her best: of the 29 presenters, seven were artists (four were visual artists who wrote theoretically, one was a musician who often wrote about visual art, and two were fiction writers—of the seven, two were women), but they did not seem integral to the event. I left feeling as unconnected as ever. I think, if you read writings from that period by black female avant-garde artists like myself, Howardena Pindell, and others, you might find an explicit or implicit loneliness. There were so few of us to start with, and no internet, so other than one's friendship and gallery circles, it was hard to get a sense of larger community in the way that's present in this room.

Although I'd left *Black Popular Culture* feeling once again on my own, simply attending the symposium must have affected me profoundly. Now I remember that it could only have been a week or two later that I holed up in my loft and began to read and write compulsively, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. It was a unique moment in my life. Six months after the conference, in June 1992, I published the first half of "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity" in *Afterimage*, a film and media journal, and began the long, slow process of finding my "larger community."

Among the differences between *Loophole of Retreat* and the earlier *Black Popular Culture*, more than a quarter of a century ago now, are that *Loophole* consists solely of women (women were half of the presenters at *Black Popular Culture*) and, importantly, that visual artists here are no longer guests at the table but seated securely at its center. But one of the most gratifying differences to me personally is that this symposium has been able to make its call, not to discuss black popular culture, but to range over the multiple agendas of black "fine art." And that we don't need to quibble over the definition of that term, because we know how loosely we use it.

I would like to thank Simone Leigh for having convened what many seem to agree may be the first such meeting of black female intellectuals, and to commend her for being, as she so often is, ahead of the curve. The miraculous new thing about this symposium is that we can all now imagine a dozen other convenings occurring simultaneously around the country, each with different topics, different types of presenters, and each coming to different conclusions. But Simone saw the need. We have reached critical mass. We're on our way. And we're not going to be lonely again. I would also like to thank Simone and her co-organizers, Saidiya Hartman and Tina Campt, for adding a dimension of depth to this convening, and that is the dimension of physical (and mental) diaspora.

It is so seldom that you find these added voices, like Dionne Brand from Trinidad and Toronto, Denise Ferreira da Silva from Brazil and Vancouver, Okwui Okpokwasili from Nigeria and New York, Françoise Vergès from Réunion and Paris, and Grada Kilomba, who is African-Portuguese from Berlin. When I'm addressing a feminist group, I often say that we need all the feminisms we can get. And I would add to a group like this that we also need all the black-isms we can get. No matter how different our experiences may be, we all face a monolithic response to our blackness that makes our actual experience more common than not. All over the world, we're faced with the same responses, and we have to deal with them in similar ways. We have a lot to learn from and to teach each other about how to manage and survive it.

I'll give you an example from my personal experience. I was in a show a couple of years ago called *We Wanted a Revolution.* It consisted of forty women artists, all from about the same period—1965–1985. Of the forty women, I knew only about ten or so personally. And, you know, full disclosure: I'm pretty arrogant. I always think of myself as quite an original, a kind of self-creation. But I'm always being brought up short. Something always happens to make me see yet again that I'm really the product of things that were given to me, or forced on me, or came from genetics that I had no control over—that no one is that original after all. You're only about five percent original. I remember standing in the gallery where my work was—I was meeting someone after hours. Nobody else was there, I was completely alone. And when I looked around the gallery and at all the work in it, I seemed to see it for the first time. My jaw dropped.

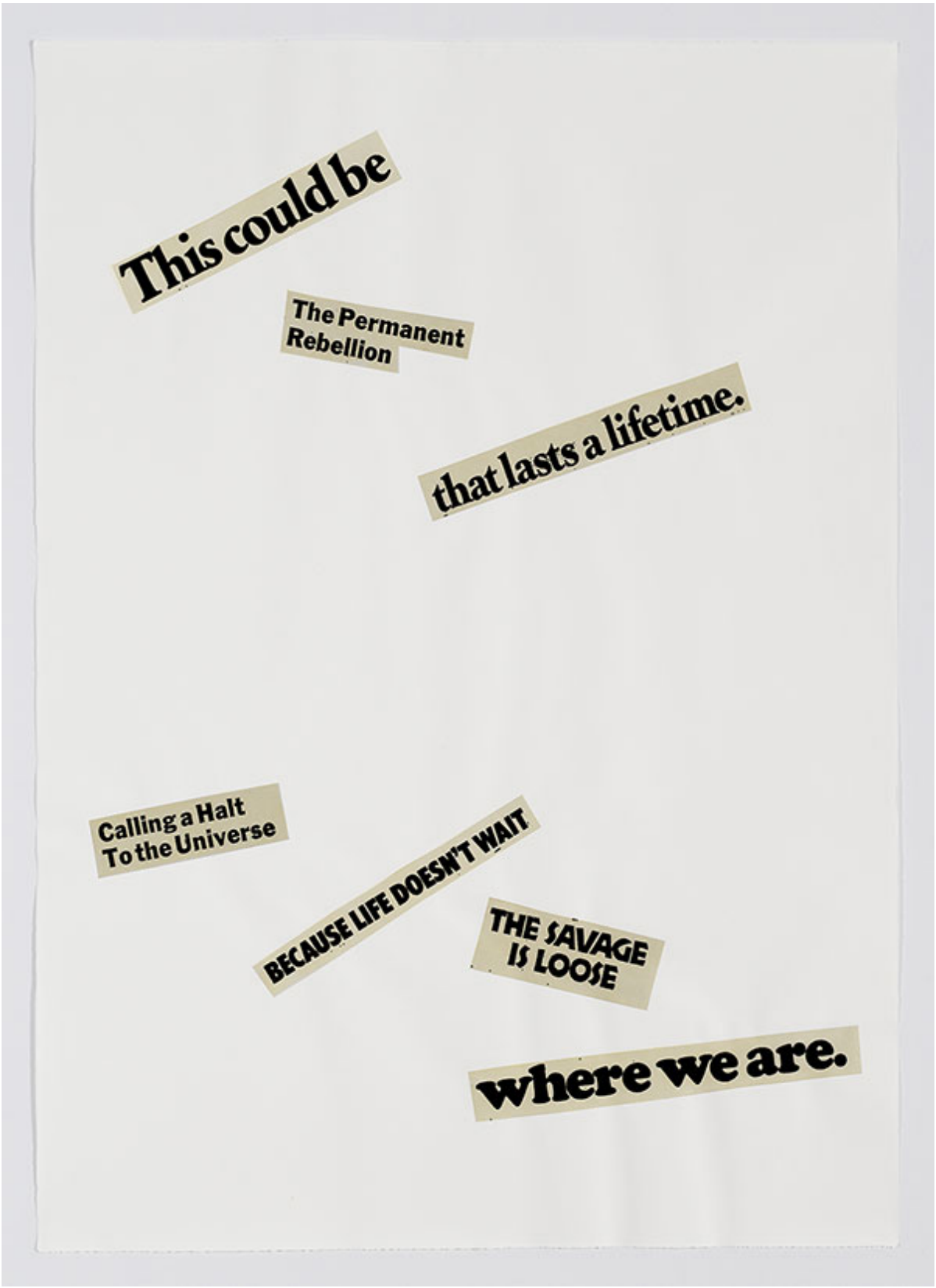
"My god, and I thought I was so unique, but here I am." I hadn't realized it, but I had been part of a movement. A movement I hadn't even known existed, or not in this way. Seeing that, across the country, across the decades, women who had never met, didn't know each other's work but had been responding to similar issues, had been creating *oeuvres* that were now in active, "knowing" conversation, was of course humbling. But realizing this at this moment, so late, was freeing at the same time. And I am thrilled to think that none of "us" will have to suffer a realization like that again. Such a waste.

2.

Just talking about the event qua event has brought me thoughts of differences and similarities and how much we can learn from each other. And it also brings me to how much we can learn from ourselves. I haven't followed the reviews carefully, but I would like to bring up an aspect of Simone's work that I haven't heard others talk about so much, and which for me was the most startling and, at least in the beginning, a very frightening aspect of her work, and that was the women without eyes. The blind women. I was frightened, maybe even horrified at first. Blindness—self-blinding—seemed like a high price to pay. But when you are as frightened as I was, I think one of the best things you can do for yourself is to hold your breath and say, "Why? Why does this frighten me so much?" The more you say it, and the more you look at the thing again, the more opportunity you get to let that fear transform into curiosity, and then possibly to learn from it.

I knew that this was—well, I was trying to figure out what it was, you know—I understood that this blinding was not the traditional blinding of European folklore—the kind of blinding that's come down to us from Sophoclean tragedy. It's not Tiresias. It's not the seer who, blinded by external forces, is now able to see the exterior more clearly. The blinding in Simone's figures seems to me a self-blinding in order to see the self more clearly. A blinding that forces the one blinded to look inside more deeply. It's a miracle, a radical act of self preservation, this blinding. It shuts out the exterior to be able to pay more and better attention to the interior. And the question it asks is: How brave and how honest will we be when we begin to look inside? It's one thing to have the safety net of the community, and the celebration and the support of the community, but then there comes a moment when, if one does look inside, one is alone, and what is one willing to see? And what then, from this aloneness and this view—this truth—can one bring back as news, as enlightenment to the community?

I was born in Boston, and my parents are from the West Indies, and I went to kindergarten in 1939. I lived in the Back Bay and it was a very immigrant neighborhood at that time: Irish, Italians, Greeks, everything. I lived in Boston when only two and a half percent of the population was black. And only a quarter of those were West Indian. So, you can imagine how isolated we felt as a family, and I as a child. I went to kindergarten with my head full of all my parents' British nursery rhymes. You know, "Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean, but between them both they licked the platter clean." Who knows what that means? ... something from some political campaign in London two centuries previously. I didn't know when I went to kindergarten that I was speaking patois until the other kids did ring-a-rosies around me, laughing as they imitated me. I got rid of *that* pretty quickly. And I learned lots of new nursery rhymes.



Lorraine O'Grady, Cutting Out CONYT 26, 1977/2017. Letterpress printing on Japanese paper, cut-out, collaged on laid paper, 41.75h x 30w in (106.05h x 76.20w cm). Photo: Jeffrey Sturges. Copyright: 2019 Lorraine O'Grady/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

In 1939, the playground of the C.C. Perkins School on St. Botolph Street was just 47 years and 53 miles from the City of Fall River in 1892. So it's no surprise that the most popular rhyme of all would be: "Lizzie Borden took an axe, give her mother forty whacks. And when she saw what she had done, gave her father forty-one."

This is a pretty horrible nursery rhyme, of course. But the reason it had such traction and power among the C.C. Perkins kindergarteners is probably that, in this immigrant community where most people were insecure, the crucible of the family didn't always live up to the romantic ideal of what family life should be. Everybody in the schoolyard, five, six years old, knew what this nursery rhyme meant. It sunk deep into our core, and for most, is probably still there. So for me, I have to tell you, this is one of the greatest advancements that has occurred in this new era of fearless black intellectuals and scholars. We are looking at our past, looking at our present, and not putting blinders on. There is a new willingness to bravely face what we find, in a kind of corollary to what I think Simone Leigh is allowing her blind women to do when they look inside.

One of the most wonderful books I've come across recently is the one that I'm holding: *Hannah Mary Tabbs and the Disembodied Torso*. It was published in 2016 by Kali Nicole Gross, a black female historian who is a professor at Rutgers. She went on a search, she followed a clue, and she had the courage to follow it wherever it led. And to learn what she could from this horrific story of the sort of person we do not want to admit to, or to own as part of us.

There was a woman. Her name was Hannah Mary Tabbs. She lived in Philadelphia in the 1880s, and she was a black woman who was clawing her way up into the middle class. And she was a psychopath. Her way of dealing with anything that was inconvenient was to murder it. It seems there were lots of murders. And I have to tell you that, when I read her story, I felt: "Thank God, what a relief. We have our own Lizzie Borden!"

I say this because I have got to the point where I don't want to be better than anyone else. I only want to be just as good and just as bad as everyone else. Can I say that again? I don't believe that I, or we, need to be better than anyone. It's enough to be just as good and just as bad as everyone.

This is probably a strange lesson to bring to a celebration of community, but I think there's both the community and the individual, and that we're going to have to bring all of these things together and learn what we can. I cannot imagine what Kali Nicole Gross must have gone through in producing this book. First, the horror that she herself may have felt, but also the horror that she might have felt from others. You know, "Why are you doing this? Why are you bringing a story like that out and examining it? That's not an image of black women that we need!"

But Kali Gross learned a lot from pulling the thread out to the end, and as a result has a lot to teach us about *what can happen*. What *can* happen. If we can acknowledge all of that—all of the good *and* the bad that we find when we look inside—I think we will be stronger.

We'll be much stronger.

That's all I can say.

X

Lorraine O'Grady addresses issues of diaspora, hybridity, and black female subjectivity, framing them in images and texts that utilize the both/and thinking of the diptych and of the diptych idea to destabilize the hierarchical, either/or categories underpinning Western philosophy. Her artwork has been acquired by the Tate Modern, London, UK; Museum of Modern Art, NY; and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, among others.