Preparing in Dispossession

Praise for the Recreation of All

Ronald Rose-Antoinette

All things
are too small
to hold me,
I am so vast

In the Infinite
I reach
for the Uncreated

I have
touched it,
it undoes me
wider than wide

Everything else
is too narrow

You know this well
you who are also there

—"All Things," Hadewijch II (1995:106)

[...] that everything is itself + everything else (thing + non-itself, instead of thing-in-itself) that may or may not exist (actually and virtually), that is, an infinite composition.

—Denise Ferreira da Silva (2022:292)

My feeling is that when I hear other people do it, I think that they're re-creating. Creating someone else's music to be invited into their own feelings, thoughts, and design. That's usually what I hear, a re-creation. You could be playing classical, say Beethoven, and it's not taking anything away. It's just not, well for one it's not your music, it's his music, which means you're involved in a re-creation of what is already done. But we hear your effect, we hear your feeling, we hear your definition, and I never took it as that we were trying to improve on something. But I did hear one story, and I don't want to mention his name, about a particular musician who played a very fine alto and was trying to improve on the music of a highly respected and celebrated musician. I thought that was so interesting because, to me, it just seemed like they were trying to perfect what was already happening there.

—Alice Coltrane (in Pouncey 2002:36)

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A "walk in whose wake I lay"[1]

We made the day long and feel unprepared. The air was startled by the obliquity of our hands, mouths, limbs, open to do things we had been riding on the low lower, stretch out our shade to folks who might have felt outpaced, tried by the terror of expectation, the enlightened cynicism that all that we do, even as we make and do these things to unmake and undo them, is "to improve on something," and work our way through a colonial regime that submits the contribution of human creativity to scarcity and valuation. We got a hold of a lot of hands during our ceremony, hauling ourselves in a twist of song, food, smoke, drums, bells, stimulants, displacing our formation round the site that we continued to revisit and amend till we walked out of the clear. We let our heads move freely from side to side, searching for a viewpoint, an angle from which we could ward off the unseen, stepping backwards, exhilaratingly, round the grounds. We continued moving counterclockwise, slowly laying ourselves in someone else's wake, which is to say in all's wake. All things that came before us were looking back at us. Zola, the man entrusted with organizing and leading the ceremony, pointed at the wood fire that was sitting on the brink of our breaking circle. If only for an instant, I watched its flames wobble and sputter in the common wind of our swirl. And once we moved past the fire and several household items—flowers, bushes, chairs, flutes, and tambourines that seemed to have been placed where they were with a curatorial sensibility—we reached another part of the ground, uncemented, a lot less wrinkled where the dry earth had received the broken signatures of our footprints and the *vèvè* symbol drawn directly on the floor to invoke Papa Legba, one of the *lwas* (spirits) energizing the underworld of vodou, and which my friend, Henri, would have as a reminder of his chosen spirit rider.

Did nobody think of a destination or settling somewhere, somehow? It was the idea of going round and round, strutting in the direction opposite to the world that laid before us that took hold of our minds. Our centrifugal walk was not intended to resolve into a coherent, permanent line. The scene we were making and unmaking had in fact altered our timing and spatializing of passage, and the many people who were in it (the majority of whom I had never met prior to the ceremony), involved in its breaking and hesitant re-formation, caused a whirlpool of anonymities spinning around the poor and porous habitat that served as their gravitational pull. What one became aware of was a slow, ineluctable dissolution of things eddying cautiously through the elements, scents, refreshments, ablutions, touches, voices, "an underlying layer of feelings" (Lispector [1973] 2012:19) that persuaded everyone involved to stay in. Nobody felt disinclined to linger in it perhaps in part because of that incessant variation and exhibition of solicitude. All that we kept passing around were provisions, supplies extended in ephemera, stimulants ceaselessly appealing to our senses. An urge to (be) please(d) in which we hovered.

From an economic standpoint, the town of Sainte-Marie, not unlike most places in Martinique, has been very partial to a kind of working of the land that exposes flatly the venal, deeply entrenched system of plantocracies driven by white minorities in the Antilles. Hundreds of acres of banana and sugarcane plantations, the two economic giants in the region, leap through the aperture of colonial time to harbor with the present. Such partiality to and management of the land, delineated by an empirical/ontological field wherein Black people—today undocumented migrants from Saint Lucia, Dominica, and Haiti—have been set to work, could not but be juxtaposed to our collective desire to move away from it. Where there was all tilling and digging that served the colonial oligarchy's interests only was nowhere near the earthen existence and practice that we imagined for ourselves. A cascade of green spilled over the area that Henri had pinned on a map the day prior. It was one of those pieces of land that had not been made suitable for monoculture yet while being surrounded by it. It required a certain obstinacy to get there by car; the rain that fell in the early hours of the day made it even more difficult to venture through mud and weed. By the time I arrived at the site all signs of the morning precipitation made way for the midday heat and the implacable radiation of the land. As soon as I got off the vehicle my attention was shattered by an ongoing operation that I

1. See Mackey ([2014] 2021b).

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would understand later was and would remain preliminary: I let myself drift aside to come amidst a group of people converging towards a precarious association of bricks and mortar; an anarchic structure that stood feebly on a slope amongst trees casting their majestic branches onto its surface. Something was on. The space was feverish with laughter and talk. All seemed in the mood for extravagance. At no point did I think to ask whether this architectural proposition was occupied or squatted by anyone, but there were suggestions that its uses and form were intentionally open to interpretation and play. Thus I admitted that it was not here in that it appeared to be deepened and simultaneously cut by an abundance of other things and other places where it could have been, itself + dispossessed of itself, as if it once acquired a self, in whichever way people were promised to inhabit its vacuoles of "breath and precarity" (Mackey 2021a). I struggled over whether I should be more inquisitive, wary that my chasing after sense might take away from the structure's suggestiveness.



Figure 1. A vèvè *(vodou symbol) representing Papa Legba drawn by Zola using corn flour at the beginning of the ceremony. Legba's significance in vodou religion is paramount in that he facilitates the crossings between humanity and the many divinities in the vodou pantheon. (Photo by Ronald Rose-Antoinette)*

Opacity notwithstanding, it did not take much of an effort to grasp that such space, while existing in the banlieue of urban society, was radically inclusive of desires that normative society kept pushing at its margins. As it turned out, me, Henri, and all the other people at the ritual found ourselves spirited and magnetic enough to turn each other on, open to sharing the provisions, how we came to know this church, inquire about our elders, and then somebody in the group would break from it, slide out of place, cruise the rims of the possible, enter the bush or river and help a person with the braiding of their hair, in/discreetly pass on a joint and/or an invitation to meet up for a drink with or without a hidden agenda. Airy and eerie as it was, the ceremony massed its tremendous energy in an atmospheric but irreducibly material *there*, a stubbornly sensuous not-here, where ceremony was required to move through race, sexuality, gender, class, and be carried off, moved along a path that continuously provided for the internal and unlocatable rematerialization of difference. The affordances it offered kept proliferating as it was continuously and consciously crisscrossed by a myriad of lesbian, gay, femme, racially ambiguous, unspecific, and unspeciated desires.

The sun entered quietly through the space, starting little thrusts of light on a series of scattered but conversing icons, floral wreaths, statuettes, and symbols that one was inclined to use not only to orient oneself through the intense weaving and unfolding of forms of worship, but also to move in and with the possibility that this gathering has to do with a certain facility for layering and cutting

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in those objects and terms, such that through them we might see and hear another modality of Black devotional life, another movement toward and for Black mysticism, what J. Kameron Carter calls "a mystic song" (2023). The density and depth of what could be thought of here as blackqueerness makes possible a whole other experience and practice of spirituality that is intrinsically nonexclusionary, allows people to connect, relate, relay, recreationally, at the level of physical, sensual, and theoretical vibration, and as a consequence of this profound relationality to interrogate the sorts of categories and norms of being that we tend to place on ourselves whether through religion or sexuality. The work that we had come to do was, amongst other things, to wonder what might happen if the Christians, Hindus, Yorubas, Sufis, Gnostics, and Agnostics paused outside their doctrines.

Light had to stumble through the leaves of the splendid breadfruit tree before finishing its fall in the shade of its branches and our bodies quivering, and divining, and shouting, and speaking in our mother and great-grandmother tongues. Far from the transactional, the preparation that we were collectively recessing in was as much translational as recreational, replete with a series of deviant, poorly coordinated but mutually implicated steps and senses. In the preparation of the pre, in the "anticipatory sociality" (Moten 2003:10) of the *pré* (Ponge 1979), as it widens and wanders freely in the wake of Francis Ponge's and Fred Moten's writings, something of this accretion of desires remains undetermined, unfabricated, "uncreated," like the space the medieval mystic Hadewijch tries to open to know and feel herself with and through others, infinitely.[2]

The day became a world of suns swearing through the trees, adumbrating our fugitive gathering. The ceremony proceeded through a confusion of voices and lures that instructed all who labored on the ground to make a miscellany of provisions. Though we were slow to get in the cars and let go of this place to get to another one we eventually, as we previously did, gave ourselves away to an elsewhere whose contour and support were no less precarious and evanescent.

Our advance was pushing the scene farther away from location, from any point whatsoever, to an ensemble of horizons swollen into troubled, surf-insurgent waters. Each location turned into a dislocation of itself. Opening ourselves to inappropriate ways of communication, speaking, and living with—insofar as they are not exclusive to anyone, and improperly shared—required that we continued walking and working along. There, between salty waters and a sugarcane field, different types of libations, food, perfumes, cigarettes, powders were passed around in benevolence until they found Zola's and Henri's hands, as if what these two were preoccupied with in that moment was to get themselves in a mood before entering the open water, and more generally as if the objective that animated our procession was shadowed by the propagative, unrestricted exploration of pleasure and our capacity to move in a disorderly manner. To the sea and to the day that had presented themselves defiantly, and to all who dwelled in the ceremony with a sense that their gathering could go on undetected, we offered our sweat and flowers, light but insistent presence, longing to resume our exile from the secret of being uncreated. Where we were was nowhere near the border of the discovered—a "tidalectics"[3] of our differences, a recursive, recessive encounter of the many things we were and were not all at once, "actually and virtually." The sustained whir of the sea refusing to divest itself from pursuing the shore's existence amplified our song.

The insistence throughout the ceremony on not being one, beyond and before one's occurrence, actively negating the singularity of being, carried over into the proposal to move with spirit, to convey the sense that we were equally torn asunder from ourselves, to lie down by Henri in the estuary where the sea had gone shallow, to aspire to suffer with him, in compassion. This is to say that spirit possession, no matter the degree of personal conviction and participation, was imagined, indeed anticipated as a possibility that loomed larger than any individual. More than

2. Indeed, the ways in which the mystical piety of Hadewijch remains and delays in the pre-sociality of "all things" can be seen through her reworking or recomposition of what is. At odds with the terms of being, she opens herself to a deeper form of communion with God so each can lose itself in the other.

3. I take the term "tidalectics" from Kamau Brathwaite, especially from his book *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* ([1967] 1973).

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Figure 2. Henri, on the left, and Zola enter the sea for purification. Sainte-Marie, Martinique, 15 November 2020. (Photo by Ronald Rose-Antoinette)

one subject was touched by no other force than "you," open to self-troubling, self-problematizing inquiry that, at the ceremony's behest, was carried through not only the incoherent gestures and utterances of some, but also the obliquely structured events of the day that made it seem loose or ill-prepared.

Where we had all come to required that we remain nomadically promiscuous, see our shared existence glow in the shade, and move through a complex menagerie of murky, spiritual affairs somewhere near the confines of racial, sexual, and religious doctrines. Whereas the intense verdure of our environment functioned as a common protection and preservation of our undisciplined,

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unruly gathering, a buttress against the ostentatious display and reverb of Catholicism's antimatter, the waters that carried off our furtive but dedicated collective were not, as we entered and were tossed by them, particularly conducive for reverence and egotistical reflexivity. Where river and sea could not be distinguished, evocations of Manman dlo, Lasirenn, Mariamman, Mary Mother of Jesus tinged the *fabric*ation of this anarchic Black queer temple, hinting at a sustained, secretive knot of breath-giving waters. It was during this softening and scrambling of orientations, in the wake of these tendered individuations, that one gave way to affect and being affected differently, and allayed whatever shame or coyness that was given in the categorical imperative of single being. For these are the waters, the wakes in which blackqueer folks seek love, trade beauty faces, hip curls, jobs, and sometimes numbers.

I remember saying "yes" to somebody else's flow, being swayed in seductive play, derived in skin and poverty, to chat up our fantasies. What was I thinking? Who was riding me? Who took a hold of me while I knew that I was and am equivocally somebody else's? That I lent myself to bear upon the question of "we"—I had been given twice to pass, the first time with the aid of Henri who had invited me in, and the second time through my repeated hesitations, stuttering, inquisitive poses, reflexive of my own transit in this ceremony (yet I found myself in it)—was an aspect of such an occasion that cannot be pointed to from a distance either. For what had been diffused throughout the appealing opaqueness of the day was a sense that none of us had the desire to remain where and as we were, narrowly confined in a self-assured subjectivity. A noticeable feature of this derivative confluence was a tenacious stress on form and ideality to sustain inklings of underlying activities between work and allure, flight and assistance, recreation and sustenance. The significance we attached to lying in someone else's passage placed a greater emphasis on our consent to practice displacement from our own proper places, which is precisely what ecstasy is about and after. This kept us busy with a model(ing) of collective life that allowed us to do things for each other, to be seen and thrown through one another, and to become instruments of a boundless, ongoing practice of collective possession.

Breath

Where were we? This is a question concerning accompaniment, where we might want to consider company in its relationship to stray and fissure, straying and fissuring, and the ways we are made and unmade (to be) with(out) a center, to consent not to hold in the center, err, utter incoherently, where we might also want to take another look, follow another's regard on the procession of forms we come back to all frazzled, stunned in the terrible beauty of things overturning each other. Our mutual mis/apprehensions, steps and missteps, suggested another kind of work (and, at the same time, the undoing of any kind) that had to be haunted by a history of forced displacement, exile, and diasporic longing. The pleasures and difficulties in which the ceremony immersed us grew largely out of a concern with declaring ourselves citizens of nowhere. This too, it should be noted, is a dimension of Hadewijch's acquittal of self and scale in her poetic quest for divine love: "I have touched it, it undoes me wider than wide." That this conjunction of touch and undoing implies nonseparability becomes more evident when we come to the phrase "You know this well, you who are also there" (1995:106). Here we see how Hadewijch calls for and tries to open onto a radical poetic of knowing and nonknowing, a way—elliptical, fragmentary itinerancy—to be touched, undone by the *n'étant* of presence within which the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between locality and the infinite is re-imagined, poetically revisited as a preliminary, propulsive social field. It is the way the inclusion of who is not here, the antireduction of presence to being here, is tied to the liberatory potential of touching, and not only that, to the whole substance of Hadewijch's haptic poetry. Her internal differentiation/re-creativity will have been given through the invocation/voicing of anotherness ("you"), as a modality of her being done with an authorial subject, or at least as an attempt to not situate herself at the center of such undoing. "All" is where the poem begins. Or rather, it exists as the priority wherein the subject is insistently previewed but prematurely undone. As Catherine Keller knows, and as her nonlocal "apophatic entanglement" with Hadewijch reveals:

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"That breadth that I am—a vastness after all—so far from inflated, is that of a self dispossessed of the unitary ego. Perhaps this very overreach of outreach will render my undoing an opening" (2015:228).

Hadewijch's beguinal and unbegun personal life is itself haloed by uncertainty. We get to know her as a Christian laywoman who handed herself to God's love in the 13th century, someone that most religious historians believe to be a different person from another Flemish beguine from that era, Hadewijch of Antwerp, who wrote of her ecstatic and mystical experiences in visionary narratives, as well as in poetic and epistolary forms. Most scholars agree that the writings of Hadewijch II not only build upon but also differ slightly from the work of her predecessor, Hadewich I (of Antwerp), through its style (shorter, more direct) and lexicon. That said, it appears that the poems written by the later Hadewijch did not veer away from the ethics of generosity that also guided the writings of her alter ego. For her, the love of God could not be set apart from a radical practice of giving with, a commitment and dedication to "you" that comes before any aspiration toward self-presence and possession. She saw and wrote herself out of an im/possible thingliness; cut for herself a path out of a patriarchal, philosophical, and theological doxa that preferred not to see and believe that a woman like her could pierce through the "imprisoning walls of the structured psyche" (Wynter 1977:46). Yet there is no doubt that it was "you," an infinite alteration, that called me in, got me involved, undone with some passing and passion of the senses.

Where we were we knew was not here, not on this small part of France located thousands of kilometers away from the metropole. What the ceremony allowed us to do was indeed to know ourselves otherwise, to evidence an interest in performing our liberation from reductive notions of home, nation, or family as we kept voicing our dissatisfaction with a colonial articulation of presence and sovereignty through aesthetic and spiritual practice. Such articulation had nothing to do with and for us, the colonized, had nothing to do with and for all things undone "wider than wide," the turbulent, undisciplined recreation of "all" in possession's and mastery's luxuriant pre-, in the field that work and recovery, work for recovery, recovery for and after work, would never amount to. Sovereignty would have none of it, too small to contain the flows of flowers unknown, repress the displacements of breath, our mutual aid-in-exhaustion. But as the history and geography books would have it, it was as close to home as "we" could be, a "flower"[4] that the Middle Passage and slave trade forged within the racial geometry of their "poverty archipelagoes" (Wynter 1992:243) and whose imprisonment in the colonial, capitalist occupations of postslavery France, intercepted in the violent humanism of progress, only meant that the lightness of our hands and treads was less concerned with the preservation of sovereignty's garden than tending to its disappearance. So much that "we" can say and leave behind: looking into the aesthetic *bricole*, that culturally signifying substance, the real deal that Black life yields us, the ways through which we widen and demur by the pre- of our workplaces, a work that we have already unmade anyways, get busy with housing the belatedness of work, getting the work out while ensuring that we get out of it too, go "werk" some more, get ourselves fired up, makes us more objectively prone to come undone on the other side of work.

All that can be said about the things and people we were most attached to, that is, to begin, that they had not been ours, they had never confined themselves to the transcendent register of the "thing-in-itself." What we had jumped into, we know, and at the same time, jumped inside us, was flow's ambiguity, flow's indeterminacy taunting one's wish to conclude or remain with France. We bore on the question of "we" with a contrasted insight so as to eclipse rather than confess (to) the centrality of empire.

At the heart of this improvisational composition of differences, of experiences born(e) in difference, resides a relational practice, a belief, we might argue, that insists as much on the sensuous as on the historical underpinnings of an emergent, migratory "we." This practice, we may surmise,

4. Martinique is often identified with the moniker "The Island of Flowers."

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Figure 3. Henri, Zola, and Zola's assistants, known as badji-cans*, stand on the beach in Sainte-Marie, Martinique, 15 November 2020. (Photo by Ronald Rose-Antoinette)*

asks us to consider what form of social life could be imagined, danced, sung, under conditions of ongoing, irruptive displacement and dispossession. By performing the essential work of laying down the values and conventions that have piled up under structures of colonial rule, while questioning the reason that both produces and dispossesses the proper and appropriate work(er), such relationality not only echoes but is augmented by "the demand for happiness/fulfillment" that Sylvia Wynter re(p)lays in Bob Marley's wake, in the Wailers' flow as well, in that troubled yet shared consistency of Black exodus and ecstasy (Wynter 1977:46).

Whatever the means of terror, whatever the procedures for narrowing or enclosing oneself at any given time, that unparalleled energy, such associative demand, chooses to assume what I have come to think of as and in preparation. Wynter's essay, "'We Know Where We Are From': The Politics of Black Culture from Myal to Marley," concludes with a compelling case for such preparation, not only in the sense of a preparedness or readiness to be done with the coloniality of our current world order, but also, primordially, as a general indisposition or unavailability to institutionalized material and historical dis/possession. The "projected emancipatory telos of the Rastafarian's millenarian counter-politics" that Marley helps disseminate, she writes, implies that its members must "*be prepared to refuse*, *to negate any* new structures of power that a this-worldly Messiah may seek to institute" (1977:53). But this is where the incantatory call to exodus, as an incommensurable force that precedes and produces the creative and critical introspections of the Rastafarian's religious-aesthetic practice, as well as those of the ceremony on whose shifting grounds I played, becomes important. Exodus can only see itself as a critique immanent to the institution of an ontological present, dis/orienting itself away from the forms of life, sense and nonsense deprivation that old and new systems of governance sell at the workplace, the supermarket, the university, on social media, and so on. But more crucial, even there, while Wynter's essay ostensibly addresses the religious and aesthetic re-assemblies of Black peoples in Africa and the diaspora, it is also going about the work of bringing our world to an immediate end, the work of preparing or pre-creating in dispossession, fugitively, in having no being, no place in a world that seeks to institute itself out of our no-thingness. Even the "projected emancipatory telos" of the Rastafarian's counterpolitics cannot resist this immeasurable insurgency.

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A place of assembly—*lakou*[5]—where delay and contact could be enrolled and rolled out in favor of the quickening of flesh? A zone of suspension and nonknowing where life's mystic servant walks out of the present's moral, ontic, and epistemic certitudes simply to enjoy the company of others? Who could imagine this? What people? What camaraderie could display such sensitivity to an uncreated elsewhere? This is the outside to the coloniality of the present, the materiality into which all kinds and all things fade, the fleshy endurance that Nathaniel Mackey entrusts to the multitude of things and persons that cut or share someone's life, dis posse, dubpossess'd prose, preposse, the alterities and angels Mackey tours with in the mutual implications of song and escape; his light treads across parts such as *Eroding Witness* (1985), *Late Arcade* (2017), *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Volumes 1–3* (2010), to name a few.[6] "Mu"—an all-embraceable muse, inseparability's anthem—is one of Mackey's centrifugal epistrophes, dervish-like turns in mysticism and musical form, in the blackness and etiolation of such form, in ways that Wynter's demand moves or lays in only by disappearing with it.

On the one hand, this is all bound up with the Jamaicanness of where Wynter speaks from, the vibrations and echoes of that dividual, internally differentiating reggae and Rastafarian dread talk—"I and I"—that she riffs on. On the other hand, it also requires us to remain attentive of the fact that the "techniques of religious ecstasy which breached the iron walls of exile" (1977:45), the rituals such as the one my comrades and I tuned in, take part in a much larger ensemble of non/senses, larger than any finite composition; an an-archic exodus that simultaneously anticipates and produces the reactions against it. Consequently, this raises with Marley, Wynter, and Mackey a musical question—relative to music that is not and refuses to be discerned from life's wordlessness and material prepossession—that the vocalist and toaster U-Roy takes up in the song "The Merry Go Round" (1992) as well: "Where must I go if there is no place that I know?" This is a generative tension and question that Stefano Harney asks us to carry along with him when he urges us to be reminiscent of the fact that "the practice of fugitivity, the escape that goes nowhere but remains escape, is a key theme in the black radical tradition" (2024). This is why abolition and exodus go hand in hand, are twin sides of the same coin, and fugitivity makes Moten and Harney inseparable. What moves on the other side of mastery and worthlessness, at the end of an economy and a theology of service that cling onto visions of life, work, and value as necessarily coextensive, is grass, a tangled mas of renegades, an Antillean rotation and modulation of religiosity and crossing, indigeneity spined, remixed, overjoyed.

So outraged and astonished we were that the rivers and aquifers that cut out the hills and vales we surrounded ourselves with were laden with unscrupulous businesses bringing our communities closer to death,[7] so close to their homes of exhaustion, so tired of their modes of recovery, we intoxicated ourselves with the endangered beauty of the earth, and the kind of social and aesthetic practice it asked us to imagine on the go. Our indignation was informed by the historical, material,

5. A *lakou* in Kreyòl language refers to a "place of assembly."

6. The three volumes comprising *Eroding Witness* (1985), *Late Arcade* (2017), and *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Volumes 1–3* (2010), the latter comprising three volumes (*Bedouin Hornbook*, 1986; *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, 1993; and *Atet A.D.*, 2001b).

7. For an in-depth look at industrial farming and more fundamentally how plantation economies have impacted Black rural communities in the French Caribbean see Malcolm Ferdinand's *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World* ([2019] 2022) and "Bridging the Divide to Face the Plantationocene: The Chlordecone Contamination and the 2009 Social Events in Martinique and Guadeloupe" (2021). Suffice it to say that in the recent history of Martinique and Guadeloupe the major purveyor of ecological destruction is a toxic chemical known as chlordecone. This pesticide was massively used between 1972 and 1993 to mitigate the proliferation of the banana root borer despite its classification as a highly toxic molecule in 1979 by the World Health Organization. An enduring legacy of this colonial prejudice is the contamination of essential ground provisions for many years to come. The use of chlordecone, I argue, happened under the belief that Black people, dispossessed of the right to possess themselves, could be removed from the land as a site and function of congregation. As such, this form of socio-ecological destruction can be characterized as an extension of the colonial logics of dispossession and displacement in the Caribbean.

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and social blackness of our consciousness—some ante-ontological "baggage" (Wynter 1977:1), pre-syncretic faith culturally inlaid with our lived experiences that regarded environmental racism, and by extension all thoughts and all things unleashed against sentient life, as ethically inexplicable. It was also the case that the base of our faith characterized such custom or behavior as funest and indefensible.

Samuel R. Delany's meandering desires for interclass, intergenerational, and cross-cultural contact amid the rapidly shifting urbanscape of New York City might prove to be a prescient guide to living under conditions of socio-environmental destruction. Observe that I make use of the word "environment" here in its more-than-human, adventurous orientations to account for a practice that moves through a vast array of policies, laws, and zones of interests, whose forms and effects vary in time and space, without being reducible to or defined by these. In Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, contact is promoted as a mode of study that takes the erosion of such environments and the infrastructures they accommodate as its object. It is the improvised, random

> conversation that starts in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you [,...] the discussion that begins with the person next to you at a bar [...] the intercourse—physical and conversational—that blooms in and as "casual sex" in public rest rooms, sex movies, public parks, single bars, and sex clubs. ([1999] 2019:123)

Relatedly, the ceremony through which I stepped back shows that such scenes of encounter, portals of communication across classes, religions, races, and genders, are not exclusively available to or accessible by city dwellers. Bar, club, restroom—all were at once invented and uncreated along our journey from the top of the hill where we started all the way to the sea and back up. Contact, Delany continues, "is often an outdoor sport" (129).

Our experiment in sociality, the kind of alteration and alterity within which we were studiously digging, suggested that what we truly carried and volunteered to rehearse was our capacity to dislodge any finite composition, undercut pretensions to singular being in favor of the "re-creation of what is already done," of "what was already happening there"—you know this well, Alice Coltrane. But this is not ground to which colonized people are typically expected to lay claim. Even as we thought and said wordlessly that the resistance to the domestication of the present is inherent to the sociality of Black life, we seldom placed any importance on whether the music, the shout we all came to practice, would be received or denied by the colonial order of things. What rose as an aspect common to our senses was an aspiration to intra-act, perhaps intra-lie, with all kinds of things, matters, people, when one for instance requested assistance to move from one place to the other, or joined the food preparation line, and simultaneously took part in what Karen Barad calls in turns a "radical undoing of kinds," an "invisitation," a touch knowingly profound and manyfold:

> *Hence self-touching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self. Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is*. Polymorphous perversity raised to an infinite power: talk about a queer/trans* intimacy! (Barad 2018:158)

Let us put it another way: we could not care less about the prerogatives attached to the project of self-investment, or the social capital of being self-managed and for contributing to the betterment (i.e., securitization) of a world that works to extricate, to root out its strangers everywhere.

The Imperative to Aid and Assist

We don't mind worshipping in that kind of cathedral; for there is a possibility—more than a possibility—that we will introduce some new psalms.

—George Lamming (1960:153–54)

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Many of those who dwelled by the caravan were fellow exiles from the political present, and as much as it provided shade, it was also *pre*faced by the social encounters it accommodated and enabled. They had come to practice a communal re-enchantment of togetherness—free of a never-ending reenactment of an archetypal, originary formation—in an environment that sprawled across the chasm between private and public, performing an anticolonial poetics of collective, nonsubjective, nonlocal possession. It is this opening, this blurred articulation that made it possible for visitors like me to enter and inhabit the richly colored, intensely textured iteration, which was at once furtive and recursive and demanded a certain degree of flexibility on the part of those who engaged in its evanescent, "formless formation" (Ruiz and Vourloumis 2021). At the same time, membership in the ceremony was never modeled on or predetermined by a return to an originary scene or primordial movement. In so insistently rattling and studying its form, calling attention to its paraontological[8] discrepant relationship to given categories of existence (+ and – than the "thing-in-itself"), the ritual appeared to harbor questions regarding assumptions of authenticity, monolithic identity, and stable origin. What one was struck by was the informality of it all. And it is not easy, except in the context of a sustained collective description, to transmit the flavor of its improvised structuring.

Something held this experiment in congregation in the cut between home and homelessness. It was a demand carried forward by queer and Black diasporic desires, insurgent longing held in the paradox where each person feels beside themself, at odds with home, gone, finding that deep within themselves lies an otherness, another kind of voicing and presencing that they choose to listen to and play with. This demand ushered itself into a renewed, carefully paced elaboration and use of methods for sharing breath and intimacy.

Here we would do well to remind ourselves that the multiple infrastructures, portals, routes, and pathways of communication that Black genderqueers engineer in situations of great prejudice and social insurgencies cannot be described outside their interactions with each other, their overlapping frequencies and resources. To see this, consider what the question of stance, of any given positionality might mean for a person whose existence, both actual and virtual, is supposed to be predicated on empirical and conceptual/analytical death, or implied in situations of decay. Even in conditions of (sur)real apocalypse, shaped by centuries-long imperialist, white supremacist projects, undying practices of racism, heteropatriarchy, homo- and transphobia, the violence of this axiomatic frame, this system of knowledge and being-in-the-world does not foreclose anticolonial imagination—the actualization of alternative pathways through the renewal of pedagogies of secrecy, habits of unknowing, and shade epistemologies.

The larger point is that the massive trick played on/rehearsed for aesthetic and spiritual possibility by Black genderqueers, under variously concentrated and concerted conditions of colonial violence against their flesh, betrays a sense of society as prohibitive, too retentive, hemmed in by its exclusions of fluid worships and desires. To regard this energetic overflow via its powerful dislocation of meaning and knowing, especially in the context of a French imperialist racial project, is to boldly disregard claims of socio-historical progress or improvement underlying the colonial enterprise. It is to refuse modernity's reverie, modernity's fallacy concerning time and space as worldviews upon which it ostensibly places emphasis.

The kinds of work this liminal space was undoing, as we touch with and in Barad, took up the quest(ion) of blackqueerness, the elliptical, recursive "sense of brownness" that, in keeping with José Esteban Muñoz's formulation of inhuman labor, could be felt as "a continuous straining to make sense of something else that is never fully knowable" (2015:209). Anarchiving our work in escape, insofar as we were escaping any kind of work, implied that under the theodicy of a meliorative self,

8. In the radical tradition of thinking in and through such questions, paraontology moves in excess, on the wayside of normative, exclusionary interpretations of social life that inhibit one from existing in difference.

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under the sweeping reassessment of the betterment of self, we pre-membered ourselves through our intimacies and frictions, our refusal to lean too easily into problem or tension solving.

We could not rest assured we knew what story we were telling, admitting that past, future, and present, regardless of how much they point to a destination or course, cannot altogether avoid indefiniteness. "And it is this priority and futurity," Harney points out, "that shows up in the form of debt at a distance" (2024), as an ethical and aesthetic objective, a prehistorical obligation to aid and assist, and to imagine life beyond one's personal aspirations to freedom. I would like to think of this "debt at a distance" in much the same way Delany thinks of contact, as it also overlaps with Wynter's "demand for happiness/fulfillment now": an improvisational, connective practice that allows people to vibe/vibrate together through one another without strings attached, outside any contractual, transactional framework. Inevitably, such a framework postulates at least some type of equivalence, if not a disproportionate response, namely that what has been given—whether as an object, service, or affliction—must be returned or reciprocated in one way or another, and deeper still, that the givenness of what is given cannot be forgiven. The sharedness of what is shared is necessarily presumed, with the notion of ownership as a marker of division or separation. On the other hand, Harney's conception of debt prompts us to reflect alongside an undercommon improvisation of sharing and reciprocity that moves past and indeed before the tyranny of ownership and equivalence. In other words, debt is a motion, perhaps even a pre-motion, that does not begin or end with the presence of a possessive subject. It is there, subjunctively, ongoing, shared but not measured, irreducible to any one person, any state formation, or any singular historical moment, insofar as it acts from a zone that cannot be "fully knowable." However, as I have commented earlier, and as Harney and Ferreira da Silva both help us understand, such "unpayable debt" (see Ferreira da Silva 2022) and fugitive impulse, as they come through most dramatically in the pre-empirical field of Black flow, in the radical praxis of those who have been called out to occupy and otherwise work out the category of blackness, are themselves the conditions against which new and old procedures of oppression are put to work. But what is it that Hadewijch not only sees but also refuses to leave as a base for her demand for ecstasy/love in the infinite? What Black, queer, and feminist pressure includes but at the same time exceeds in ambition any kind of resistance to capitalist aesthetic definitions of work and relation? What black hole? What pre-syncretic, pre-holistic faith moves us through this terror?

By way of an inconclusive end, let us sway a little longer by the ceremony that saw us fluctuate and communicate beyond its particular, local coordinates. While the people that composed and *pre*-membered it—in ways that worked against the telos of a singular subject—were never moved by any principle, ungoverned by any originary or centralizing force commanding the time and space of their engagement, they were also absolutely committed to growing and proliferating from within and on the borders of the political economy that sought to exploit and undermine their non/sensuous ways of narrating and pacing themselves. The interminable pursuit of an open form of generosity and solidarity that could be subjectless was inseparable from a desire to break with political determination, erode the "terms of order"[9] (Robinson [1980] 2016) that could accelerate one's exposure to premature/unnatural death, and instead forge new places of assembly, explore other modes of subsistence, extend old relationships, advance new affairs indispensable to the actualization of other forms of sociality.

Walking along with the experiments in refusal that C.L.R. James and Hélio Oiticica carried in their respective, occasionally shared historical and material environments, Laura Harris lures us towards the fact that "the aesthetic sociality of blackness is an improvisational assemblage that resides at the heart of the polity while operating under its ground and on its edges" (Harris 2018:33). And while the improvisatory odyssey of this mass of differences is crucial for the

9. "That order," as Hortense J. Spillers uncovers, "with its human sequence written in blood, *represents* for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of *actual* mutilation, dismemberment, and exile" (1987:67).

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formulation of Black resistance to colonial rule, it also hints at the meticulously sensuous and alluring sociology of Black life as such. The layered provisions used to tender Henri's flesh, parts or fragments of which were not only the food, alcohol, unlabeled concoctions, and cloth cinched around his body, but also the extraordinarily vibrant atmosphere of people throwing their hands and stories in for the preparation of the day, pressing and turning each other on, soaking in the salty, tidal marsh, attempting kinky, surreptitious moves under a "moment's notice, moment's gnosis" (Mackey [2014] 2021b:175) made dwelling and giving *with* a deeply sensual, erotic, and overall fragile experience.

The fabrication of collective techniques for mutual aid, nourishment, ecstasy, but also suffering (on the far side of static/individual/local pain) advanced a demand the occasion made beyond itself. What the ceremony required was for us to revisit the means of living in "infinite composition," that is, in communal dispossession. In so doing, it opened itself up to intramural inquiry, to wonder, under the more-than-perfect t/sense of its conditions, what else it could have been. Part of what one might say, then, about this motion of light, water, and people in the shade is that it widens a space for us to think and feel through the ongoing vibrations of the irrepressible priority and futurity of an abolitionist ethic and aesthetic.

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