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The Black Aquatic: Affect, Occiduus, and Temporality Beyond the Atlantic

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation interrogates the relationship between affect and blackness, as it is intimated in the materiality of water and its attendant sensations. Its methodology draws from black feminist theory and metaphors extracted from the natural and neurosciences. Ultimately, the black aquatic accomplishes two maneuvers: first, it combines affect theory with black feminist critique to re-engineer Sigmund Freud’s elusive idea of an “oceanic feeling” as a racial affect; and second, it troubles geophilosophy by liquidating patrilineal understandings of black futurity, thereby enabling new insights of time and embodiment that expand upon larger notions of race, sensation, and visibility.

In so doing, I grapple with the following questions, as they apply to specific cases within the black aquatic: How does the figure of gestation appear as both deathly and vivified in the black aquatic? How does blackness travel as a queer contagion, or vector, within water? What does a topography of racial affect look and *feel* like? How do we make sense of black temporality—an element that has been denied futurity and rendered ahistorical, anchoring modernism all at the same time—within the oceanic, a space crosscutting zoological and cosmological time? How is black subjectivity represented as a synesthetic experience? Regarding the Caribbean and the Pacific, what are the biosocial components and historical stakes of black surf culture within neoliberal strictures of privatized land development? And, ultimately, how do the affective and spatial components of “vestibularity”—a term I borrow from Hortense Spillers—appear throughout the black aquatic? The archive for this project encapsulates film, black popular culture, art, and an ethnographic and theoretical study of black surf cultures. Artwork by Doreen Garner; performances by Azealia Banks, Beyonce, and Maxwell; and

cinematic offerings by Barry Jenkins, Spike Lee, and Steve McQueen represent key objects of analyses.

Although mostly a theory-based undertaking, this project's composition—its intellectual framework, archive, *historicity*, and *historiography*—can be located between the 1980s and the 2010s. This 30-year expanse marks a confluence of several socio-political and scientific phenomena: the galvanization of globalization; the increased awareness (and fantastical denial) of global warming and its antiblack machinations (e.g. Hurricane Katrina); the affective and sonic turn in the humanities from the 2000s and onward; the rise of embodied film theory (e.g., “sensuous cinema”); critical leaps in black cinema's newfound visibility and experimental aesthetics, both in the art world and the major motion-picture market; and the institutionalization of Black Studies. While no “singular” event grounds this dissertation, all of the above-mentioned processes and intellectual foci find commonality in the neoliberal milieu of posthumanism and its contentious relationship to theorizations of black life.

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Time to swim.

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INTRODUCTION:
The Black Aquatic in *Occiduus* and the Mapping of Vestibularity, Affect, and Vectors

The sea is History

—Derek Walcott, *The Sea is History* (1979)

The sea, the great unifier, is man's only hope. Now, as never before, the old phrase has a literal meaning: we are all in the same boat.

—Jacques-Yves Cousteau

they ask for water we give them sea

they ask for bread we give them sea

they ask for life we give them only the sea

—M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (2008)

Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans.

—Jacques-Yves Cousteau

The above epigraph stages a tragicomedy on race, water, and time. Quotes from Jacques-Yves Cousteau—famed French oceanographer who co-invented of the Aqua-Lung, served as a

naval officer and thrived in the popular imaginary as a filmmaker of related subjects—are alternated with poetry excerpted from the creative work of diasporic writers Derek Walcott and M. NourbeSe Philip. The resultant texture feels like the historical conditions of blackness, although their presence is not explicitly named. Consider, for example, the first two extracts: while Walcott comments on the archival capacity of the sea, presumably as it relates to the dehumanizing trans-Atlantic slave trade, Cousteau characterizes it as “the great unifier” of “man” that has figuratively placed us all in the same vessel. Together, these two snippets evoke a past, a present, and a potentially doomed future, which, according to Cousteau, assigns us all to the sailing ship of humanity, irrespective of difference, oblivious to the hold that contains its fungible antithesis.¹ As for the pairing of the French oceanographer with NourbeSe, it reminds us of the materiality and vitality of water: while NourbeSe notes how the captives’ basic needs have being jeeringly met by captor’s gift of a salty and deathly ocean, Cousteau contends that the same waters have become a dump that nonetheless sustains us “humans.” In juxtaposing these quotes together, I gesture towards the temporal elements, vivacities, and ecological crises of the ocean, a space functioning as a repository for the expendable life and resultant “position of unthought” inhabited by black subjects.²

Since black life has been disbarred from the human, let us shift our focus to the fantastical. In Octavia Butler’s novel *Wild Seed* (1980), Anyanwu, an immortal shape-shifter, possesses the ability to assume any form of intelligent life, irrespective of the creature’s genome, species, or gender. At one point in the narrative, Anyanwu’s wet skin conjures an almost-melancholic memory of her experience as a dolphin. The affective and material charge of her recollection reveals the experience of two species unified by one consciousness, a preternatural event borne upon the sea. To my mind, there is something evocative of this wet, paranormal skin

of transformative black flesh caught between the surface and depth of the water. Water offers a way for us to ponder symbolic order and bodily sensation, all at once.

Even though jazz visionary Sun Ra once proclaimed, “space is the place,” there is another realm that has often been denied futurity and excluded from narratives of black speculative fiction: the aquatic.³ The aquatic in all of its forms—from the finite depths of baptismal and recreational pools to the seemingly boundless expanse of the oceanic and its littoral boundary—has saturated both the historical conditions and the expressive arts of the black diaspora in divergent ways. Physical displacement and failed retreat; collective memory and dis(re)membrance; expelled desires and nurtured longings—all of these themes cohabit the same hydrography and inform many of the narratives conjoining blackness with the aquatic. The imaginary of a black aquatic— an ever-shifting aggregate of cultural, theoretical, and political ties between black subjects and water—opens inquiries into kinship and explores other hydrous spaces beyond the ocean.

This dissertation interrogates the relationship between affect and blackness, as it is intimated in the materiality of water and its attendant sensations. My methodology draws from black feminist theory and metaphors extracted from the natural and neurosciences. In so doing, I grapple with the following questions, as they relate to specific cases within the black aquatic: How does the figure of gestation appear as both deathly and vivified in the black aquatic? How does blackness travel as a queer contagion, or vector, within water? What does a topography of racial affect look and *feel* like? How do we make sense of black temporality—an element that has been denied futurity and rendered ahistorical, anchoring modernism all at the same time—within the oceanic, a space crosscutting zoological and cosmological time? How is black subjectivity represented as a synesthetic experience? Regarding the Caribbean and the Pacific,

what are the biosocial components and historical stakes of black surf culture within neoliberal strictures of privatized land development? And, ultimately, how do the affective and spatial components of “vestibularity”—a term I borrow from Hortense Spillers— appear throughout the black aquatic? The archive for this project encapsulates film, black popular culture, art, and an ethnographic and theoretical study on black surf cultures. Artwork by Doreen Garner; performances by Azealia Banks, Beyonce, and Maxwell; and cinematic offerings by Barry Jenkins, Spike Lee, and Steve McQueen represent key objects of analyses. Although mostly a theory-based undertaking, this project’s composition—its intellectual framework, archive, *historicity*, and *historiography*—can be located between the 1980s and the 2010s. This 30-year expanse marks a confluence of several socio-political and scientific phenomena: the galvanization of globalization; the increased awareness (and fantastical denial) of global warming and its antiblack machinations (e.g. Hurricane Katrina); the affective and sonic turn in the humanities from the 2000s and onward; the rise of embodied film theory (e.g., “sensuous cinema”); critical leaps in black cinema’s newfound visibility and experimental aesthetics, both in the art world and the major motion-picture market; and the institutionalization of Black Studies. As far as particular historical incidents, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the calculated malice behind water management in Flint, Michigan also serve as grave moments in the black aquatic whereby necropolitics and disaster capitalism converge in egregious proportions. Examinations of these tragedies, which parallel the privatization of water and profiteering of disaster relief, are ongoing and exceed the space of this dissertation. While no “singular” event grounds this dissertation, all of the above-mentioned processes and intellectual foci find commonality in the neoliberal milieu of posthumanism and its contentious relationship to theorizations of black life.

Ultimately, the black aquatic accomplishes two maneuvers: first, it combines affect theory with black feminist critique to re-engineer Sigmund Freud's elusive idea of an "oceanic feeling" as a racial affect; and second, it troubles geophilosophy by liquidating patrilineal understandings of black futurity, thereby enabling new insights of time and embodiment that expand upon larger notions of race, sensation, and visibility.

Occiduus

Occiduus is a sinking feeling, a geopolitical mood.⁴ More specifically, I use *the term occiduus* account for the ecstatic and eschatological modes of racial blackness and its aquatic life, which can appear across expressive, recreational, and theoretical dimensions. Due to its etymology, *occiduus*, a Latin term, denotes a range of phenomena: it simultaneously connotes "sinking," "falling," "declining," and westward direction. In the bounds of this project and current historical moment, this term designates an affective set of anthropocene fears of ecological demise—particularly as they pertain to seaborne immigration and rising sea-levels tied to global warming and describe a point of contagion and bodily transformation ferried by aquatic vectors.⁵ Thus, I use *occiduus* to account for the affective or sensorial state of black subjectivity upon the water in the Western imaginary. Within the whirlpool of *occiduus*, I theorize several aquatically provoked sensations as racialized affects and analytics that can be interpreted as disruptive processes such as ones (in)digestion of queer substances and sounds.⁶ These ideas include "sounding," seasickness and its residual disembarkment syndrome, wetness, decompression sickness (or "the bends"), buoyancy, and drowning.

As a critical analytic for thinking about the affective connections between the black aquatic and the drowning of the West, *occiduus* invokes an expansive cadre of crucial thinkers

and texts. However, the ideas that most closely resonate with my theorization of this geopolitical sensorium can be found in the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Christina Sharpe, and Edouard Glissant. According to Bauman, liquid modernity protracts modernity as opposed to a posterior epoch. Engendering a neoliberal disintegration of social relations, liquid modernity has flooded the world with an aura of precarity. While Bauman's philosophically and sociologically informed idea accounts for privatization's rearrangement of concepts such as time, life, and freedom, it does not explain its racial *effects* and *affects*. Since it suffers from a lack of social safety nets, black life has incurred myriad forms of violence that fall across the increasingly blurred spaces and machinations of the public and private. At the same time, neoliberalism has, for better or (mostly) worse, inspired "community-minded" responses encompassing initiatives such as social practice and "social entrepreneurship"—two configurations deserving a hearty critique extending well beyond the space of this project.

That being said, a series of questions come into play: If liquid modernity illustrates a more chaotic form of modernity and addresses the liquidating forces of late capitalism, how does one account for drowning and sinking? Concerning the aquatic—a term that embraces the oceanic and other bodies of water—and liquidity, how does one conceive of blackness as a psychic and somatic retreat? Regarding the body, how can one think about "stealing away" into corporeal surface and autonomic processes while occupying water? In her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe relatedly explores how the non-being of black subjectivity has always been metaphorically situated "in the wake": a quotidian slipstream of extrajudicial capture, migration, and abjection that constitutes a form of black consciousness. Calling our attention to the multivalence of the analytic "wake," Sharpe highlights how the semiotics of slave vessels, mourning, and political violence distinguishes black life from other

forms of vitality. “Living in the wake,” Sharpe reminds us, “means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our every day Black existence [...]”⁷ Attending to the metaphysics of geopolitics, Glissant poignantly contends, “The West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place.”⁸ Sharpe's orthographic and semantic maneuvers also inform my deployment of multivalent terms that elucidate the black aquatic. However, my project explores the affective, synesthetic, and topographic qualities of this imaginary.

The term “West” has been brandished to alleviate the fissures of class and regionalism among whites, in turn solidifying white supremacy. This concept also operates as a euphemism for whites and whiteness (e.g., a floating signifier) given that this geopolitical idea, as Glissant reminds us, connotes an imperial and colonial process rather than demarcating a stagnant location. This idea also mitigated the white crises of racial solidarity that have been fraught by military failure, decolonization, and class differences among Western nations. Alastair Bonnett explores the proliferation of this term as it encapsulates the predicament of whiteness. Bonnett locates the racial crisis between Britain and Australia between the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. While Great Britain used Australia as its colonial outpost, both of these countries sought to protect and consolidate whiteness.⁹ However, class proved to limit efforts toward white solidarity. The contradiction of juggling white working-class populism with elite leadership was resolved by the geopolitical and racial labor accomplished by the term “West.” Hegelian notions of history, which conferred “culture” and “progress” to white imperial nations, also suffused idealist and materialist constructions of the occident. In his seminal essay “The End of History” (1991), Francis Fukuyama argues that Western liberal democracy stands as the final stage in man's ideological evolution. Despite its eschatological tone, Fukuyama's thesis still accommodates new historical events. According to Fukuyama, other political ideologies,

such as Communism and Fascism, have sung their swan song, as evidenced by the defeated tenures of Mao, Mussolini, and Stalin, among others. These authoritarian systems no longer pose a lethal threat to capitalism and its attendant ideals. Fukuyama supports his assertion by redressing the overt, materialist handling of Hegel's linear model of history. Critiques of Fukuyama's thesis are, of course, varied and trenchant.¹⁰ Undoubtedly, Donald J. Trump's presidency—which effectuates a fascist mixture of Nixonian rhetoric and Peronist “family branding” amidst various manifestations of white supremacy—has simultaneously affirmed and challenged this theory in bizarre ways, which cannot be adequately explored in the space of this project. However, one of the more interesting aspects or blind spots of Fukuyama's argument is what this sociocultural “end” means for the Western category of the human, an ontology increasingly scrutinized by Black Studies and other interdisciplinary fields.

Given these geopolitical and economic systems, I use the work of Hortense Spillers to conceptualize vectors and vestibularity as sensory mismatches or synesthetics occasioned by aquatic scenarios. I designate vestibularity both both as a point of “disembarkment syndrome” and as a synesthetic *passage* for sensory mismatches within the black aquatic. In her essay “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” Spillers famously explains, “these lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a *cultural vestibularity* [emphasis added] and the culture, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, ‘owners,’ ‘soul drivers,’ ‘overseers,’ and ‘men of God,’ apparently colludes with a protocol of ‘search and destroy’.”¹¹ These violent markings incidentally represent what Spillers calls the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” which turn raw tissue into an illusory body disbarred from legal personhood. The implications of such racialized stigmata become more complex when conjoined with the multiple meanings of

vestibularity, which connote the sonic, the "bodily," and the spatial all at one. I operationalize Spiller's notion of vestibularity, an already-multivalent term, to conceptualize aquatic sensations as black affect. My understanding of affect partly draws from the work of Brian Massumi, who explains these phenomena as synesthetic intensity springing from a physiological disconnect with perception and bodily reaction.¹² Similarly, motion sickness involves a mix of vestibular, visual, and kinesthetic inputs. "Sensory conflict of sensory mismatch is between actual versus expected invariant patterns of vestibular, visual, and kinesthetic inputs."¹³ Thus, I expand Spiller's notion of vestibularity into a metaphor for a neural mismatch, postulating a conflict between the visual and the sonic within the black aquatic. Theoretically, auditory-neurological disorders, such as disembarkment syndrome and vestibular hyperacusis, suggest aquatic affects, which concatenate the hearing, balance, and uterine systems into a series of sensations that further a sonic framework around racial assemblage. Thus, my endeavor differs from that of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993) in that it focuses on *sound* and its bodily resonances as opposed to music and its transnational circulation. Black aquatic concepts and affects, such as vestibularity and disembarkment syndrome, also resonate with other nauseous sensations that the work of several existentialist philosophers contemplates. For Jean-Paul Sartre, anguish involves arbitrary freedom or will without a justified ground. Here, Sartre does not deny causal determinism; rather, he is concerned with phenomenology, or how we experience freedom. In short, anguish entails the almost disorienting consciousness of freedom. Similarly, Fanon also uses nausea to characterize the shame and self-contempt assigned blackness.¹⁴

Vectors indicate not only the direction and velocity of movement but also the kinetics of subjectivity. From epidemiology to physics, this concept offers a way for us to ponder the

dynamics of contagion and bodily movement and its attendant sensations. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari conceptualize vectors both as the pitch of intensity or affect and as an intersection of plateaus that illustrates dynamic components of assemblages.¹⁵ In my estimation, water provides an excellent interface between blackness and affect—especially in the case of queer romance and feelings. Relatedly, John Protevi argues that water serves as a metaphor for Deleuzoguattarian physics, which includes extensiveness, intensity, and virtuality. Water can be extensive as solid, liquid, or gas; intensive in terms of temperature and viscosity; and virtual within meteorological and hydrological systems.¹⁶ How might the vestibularity of black affect be described concerning this mathematic function? Here, the cinematic qualities of Steve McQueen's short film *Ashes* (2015), Barry Jenkins's full-length movie *Moonlight* (2016), and, surprisingly, Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, come to mind regarding motion sickness.

Perhaps the most apparent affect related to my theorization of blackness and water wells up from Freud's conception of *la sensation oceanique* or the oceanic feeling. We find the oceanic feeling initially noted in the personal letters between Freud and French art historian Romain Rolland. Freud's explication of the oceanic feeling often falls into ambiguity as it vaguely purports a form of spirituality.¹⁷ He explains this pre-Oedipal sensation as an infantile feeling that involves “an indissoluble bond of being one with the external world as a whole.”¹⁸ Herein lies the limitless, the narcissistic union of mother and child. William B. Parsons historicizes the reception and interpretation of the oceanic feeling, arguing that it opposes institutionalized religion. The discourse around the oceanic feeling has centered on eastern religions, psycho-theology debates, psycho-comparativist views, and syncreticism. A few passages from Freud's text *Future of Illusion* (1927), along with some personal letters addressed to Rolland, provide the basis for assertions made by Parsons and other scholars. Here, my concept of *occiduus* exceeds

Freud's idea of psycho-maritime sensation by taking in account blackness and its aquatic affects at a material and metaphoric level.¹⁹ The Freudian purchase of the aquatic also resonates with Spillers, as she explains, "Those African persons in 'Middle Passage' were literally suspended in the 'oceanic,' if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity [...]"²⁰ While one could easily analogize between the ocean's fluidity and limitless and the equally fluid identities of queer subjects, same-sex desire halts this optimistic comparison by way of a death-drive that jeopardizes what Lee Edelman terms "reproductive futurism."²¹ These issues of black flesh at sea and black queer romance on the coast can be found in both the sculptures of Doreen Garner and the narratives in Jenkins's *Moonlight* and Spike Lee's *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* (2014).

The pre-Oedipal status of Freud's oceanic feeling cannot be underscored enough, as it connects to the psychosocial predicaments of black kinship and maternity. Sharpe, for instance, observes the carceral quality of black women's maternity within the state and examines how the hold of the slave ship is replicated in contemporary modes of black confinement.²² Regarding oceanic space, Glissant conceptualizes the slave ship and "the abyss" as maternal entities offering a particular type of temporality and terror redoubled by the loss of language and disorientation toward the land-sea horizon. Black life's incompatibility with the Freudian family model and status as a genealogical isolate open up a queerness that becomes even pertinent within aquatic scenarios prevalent in the films I analyze in Chapter One.

The dichotomy of the *reflective* between the *reflexive* within the context of a vestibular acoustic mirror illustrates how we can rethink the psycho-somatic components of black kinship. According to Jerrold Siegel, reflectivity involves the specular or mirror image while reflexivity comprises reactions of bodily reflexes to intra-somatic processes and/or external phenomena.

Reflectivity and reflexivity can, in my reasoning, be mutually exclusive. Furthermore, reflectivity “sires” a Lacanian split through the mirror while reflexivity evokes the affective. Since the dispossessed maternity is often central to black kinship, reflexivity and reflectivity are displaced from the maternal onto the aquatic. Sounding, thus, articulates this displacement in terms of aural reverberation and physical and lyrical submergence. We witness this in my analyses of Doreen Garner’s kinetic sculpture; Maxwell and Beyonce’s respective performances; and the black *Rückenfigur*, or (b/l)ack-turned figure, who indulges in interiority alongside the shore.

Between Land and Sea: Geophilosophy and the Topography of Black Affect

Man and man's earth are unexhausted

and undiscovered.

Wake and listen!

Verily, the earth shall yet be a source of recovery.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *And Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1911)

For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.²³

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

In the above epigraphs, Friedrich Nietzsche and Fanon—two thinkers who create an existential gamut between nihilism and colonial pessimism—valorize *terra firma* to various measures that are nonetheless materialist. While Nietzsche heralds the vitalism of earth, Fanon values the land as an agricultural entity promising a form of ever-deferred respect for the colonized. However,

this foretold bounty of epistemological renewal and nourishment elides water's significance to subjectivity and sovereignty (or lack thereof). Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley uses her conception of a “queer black Atlantic” to negotiate what Kale Fajardo calls “crosscurrents,” which designate the maritime flow and collusion of militarism, capital, tourism, pollution, and sexuality.²⁴ The queer black Atlantic, Tinsley argues, “brings together enslaved and African, brutality and desire, genocide and resistance. Here, fluidity is not an easy metaphor for queer and racially hybrid identities but for concrete, painful, and liberatory experience.”²⁵ My project also explores connections between queerness, water, and blackness. Thus, the black aquatic, in *all* of its manifestations of race and watery spaces (e.g., the embryonic and such) and sensations, questions patrilineal notions of land and time—all of which summon problems rooted in geophilosophy.

In addition to theorizing aquatic sensations as affective states of blackness, this project attempts an intervention in the discourse of geophilosophy. From Nietzsche to Deleuze and Guattari, to Protevi and other scholars of ecology, ecocriticism, and affect, geophilosophy considers the earth as an agential entity rupturing ideas of human sovereignty. This hybridized form of philosophy also thinks through ideas of autochthony, which, as I reveal in Chapter One, delight in a contradictory Western imaginary that lavishes itself with the following irony: while autochthony seeks to establish hereditary lines within the actual earth, it also plays into the expansionist idea of *terra nullius*, furthering the project of white supremacy. The spatial politics of affect and blackness take us from land to sea, from buoyant spaces to buried places. On this score, what does a topographical rendering of racial affect resemble? How would it differ from land-based cartography? How do Deleuze and Guattari's topographic anti-humanism and Freud's anthropomorphic topology implode under the deep pressures of the black aquatic and it affects?

Incidentally, regarding the epistemological lacunae in the ledger of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, how are Foucault's archaeological metaphors for knowledge production complicated by a hydrospheric framing of archive, race, and affect? I argue that the gestational sea undermines the stasis and patrilinearity of geology, a figure undergirding a considerable breadth of Deleuze and Guattari's and Freud's theoretical enterprises.

The geography of Freudian psychology falsely stands as a universalist *topology*, yielding a *topography* of subjectivity caught between land and sea. Psychological literature and popular interpretations have illustrated his model as either an iceberg or a buried set of drives. While the unconsciousness has often been described as buried or repressed, the iceberg metaphor represents the glacier's tip as consciousness, peaking out of the water's surface, while its submerged body symbolizes both the unconsciousness and the preconsciousness. Michael S. Moore, Elizabeth A. Wilson, and Ruth Stein have written about the complexities of Freud's topographical model, a design that vacillates between neurology and biology. Of particular interest, as Stein points out, is the topographical model found in Freud's "Metapsychological Papers" (1915). In these essays, Freud diagnoses affect as a drive-derived phenomenon as opposed to a one grounded in lived experience.²⁶ This drive resides between the psyche and the somatic, a liminal space that I analogize to that of water. In Massumi's estimation of affect, Gottfried Leibniz's non-consciousness is not identical to Freudian unconsciousness since repression only applies to the latter. As such, non-consciousness may be argued for specific inorganic matter. This aspect resounds with Sharpe's conceptualization of water's materiality, as it applies to the aquatic disintegration of black bodies during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and echoes M. NourbeSe Philip's ideas concerning the sonic and molecular memory of water.

How do philosophical conceptions of geology antagonize blackness? In their book *What is Philosophy?* (1991), Deleuze and Guattari position geophilosophy as a mode of inquiry that de-familiarizes human ontology and deterritorializes thought from a transcendent ego. Indebted to Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of geophilosophy amounts to a move away from identity, favoring a politics of desubjectivization. Incidentally, Deleuze and Guattari seek to divorce thought from image and representation. As a depoliticized body of knowledge, Geohistory chronicles of Man's autochthonously link to the earth.²⁷ This idea of *terra firma* subverts the ontological divide between human and nature that Geohistory, according to Rodolphe Gasché, encourages geographers to pay more attention to temporality while persuading historians to consider the permanence of space. That being said, geophilosophy does not correspond to ecophilosophy, the latter of which regards a human's place in the biosphere.²⁸ Relatedly, Gregory Flaxman asks, "How does genealogy, the study of ancestry, presage a geophilosophical practice in which 'paternity does not exist' and the subject dissolves in the slow passage of geological time?" In responding to Flaxman's inquiry, I argue that the black aquatic presents moments in which black subjects turn toward water in a counter-interpellative move. The disinheritance of land, the dispossession of black maternity, and the absence of black paternity render the diaspora as an aqueous collection of stories and sensations.

Likewise, the ocean proves to be just as culpable as *terra firma* when it comes to the colonial logics of law, the flow of capital, and Man's rights. Contestation over the legality of open waters can be traced back as far as the seventeenth century. For instance, in his book *Mare Liberum* (translated to *The Freedom of the Seas*, 1609) Dutch jurist and philosopher Hugo Grotus conceives of the seas, as he writes,

The air belongs to this class of things for two reasons. First, it is not susceptible of occupation; and second, its common use is destined for all men. For the same reasons the sea is common to all, because it is so limitless that it cannot become a possession of any one, and because it is adapted for the use of all, whether we consider it from the point of view of navigation or of fisheries.²⁹

Nevertheless, Grotius's ideas arguably set the tone for colonial transport and late-capitalist transnationalism. Additionally, edicts such as *mare clausum*, innocent passage, and freedom of navigation propose differential postulations and laws that have attempted to negotiate the open seas. In their generative text *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari problematically strip the maritime space of its historical and economic debt to racial slavery. Characterized as a "smooth space," the sea, in the duo's estimation, became striated by cartographic and implicit market forces.³⁰

Given these legal and philosophy discourses about the earth, topology and topography (e.g., geography's disciplinary relatives) inform how we conceptualize the *terra firma*'s abstractions and material compositions and textures, and their connections to black subjectivities—especially within black feminism. However, out of these two geo-branches, topography offers the most relevant metaphor for thinking about the surface quality of affect, and how said feature then expresses the metaphorical and material import water and enriches understandings of the spatial politics of intersectionality within black feminist theory. Regarding the latter aspect, James Bliss asserts, "Intersectionality has largely been rendered as a crude topographical instrument, a method for locating oneself at the intersection of multiple discrete identities or modes of oppression."³¹ Furthermore, Bliss argues that standpoint theory has transformed into "carceral logic," one that constitutes a node of capture and "buries" black

women's subjectivity and legal recourse. Accordingly, intersectionality comprises spatial metaphors, ones that some scholars such as Massumi have bemoaned as a grid or position stagnated in possibility, barred from potentiality and movement.³²

Affect Theory: Critiques and Semantics

The affective turn in the humanities has pushed our understandings of sensations into a more somatic terrain, an area drawing its descriptive and explanatory power from cybernetics, biology, and cognitive sciences. Affect theory can be framed either as a rejection or as a reform of poststructuralism, linguistic representation, and psychoanalysis.³³ From Massumi to Jose Esteban Munoz, the relationship between affect and psychoanalysis has been analogized to that between surface and depth.³⁴ Again, this correlation cannot be stressed enough, as it allows us to ponder how water can act as a material that simultaneously embodies and signifies both of these discourses. In Massumi's handling of depth and surface, he assigns the "conscious automatic" system to a vertical axis, which is connected to signification and narrative continuity, while locating intensity on the surface of the body. Thus, the metaphoricity and materiality of water provides an alternative to land-based topology and subsequently alters our understanding of black subjectivity that supplants geological grounding and normative, Oedipal kinship.³⁵ However, there are critiques. Much of affect theory favors assemblage over intersectionality, and avoids "ideology" and "identity." These maneuvers arguably occasion antiblackness and subsequently devalue black feminist thought. However, Alexander Weheliye has anchored these assemblages in Spillers's notion of flesh to calibrate Deleuzoguattarian becomings to the materiality of antiblackness. Weheliye notes, "Racializing assemblages articulate relational

intensities between human physiology and flesh, producing racial categories, which are subsequently coded as natural substances, whether pure or impure, rather than as the territorializing articulations of these assemblages.” With that said, the following section provides a brief overview of affect theory with its attendant semantics and critiques.

In his book *The Fabric of Affect in Psychological Discourse* (2003), psychoanalyst Andre Green outlines the nuanced terminology and semantics behind affect. Green writes, “In opposition to the category of affect is that of representation, rather as feeling is in opposition to intellect.” For Green, affect combines external effect with internal movement. There is also an interdependence of violent and physical organization of affects. Andre Lanlande’s use of *sensibilite* involves the homonym “*sens*” which doubly connotes *sensibilite* (feeling) and “signification” (meaning). But others understand affect as a phenomenology that exceeds semiotics. Affect theory, as it is currently envisioned by thinkers of the past ten years, is generally absent from the French psychological tradition. This school, in turn, uses emotion (e.g., acute, transitory state), sentiment (e.g., a more stable, perhaps calm state), and passion (e.g., a violent and lasting state). Ultimately for Green, affect operates as a metaphysical term rather than a descriptive one.

For all the optimism and “becomings” sparked by this ostensibly new body of thought, which has mostly been grounded in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage and anchored in a genealogy of continental critical theorists, its post/non/anti-humanist poses challenges for black feminism and Black Studies at large.³⁶ Additionally, Consequently, alongside Tiffany Lethabo King’s brilliant analysis of high education’s corporatization, I argue that the humanities’ engagement with neuroscience (or “neurohumanities”) and the resuscitation of biologicism is not so much a new chapter in interdisciplinary study.³⁷ Instead, the humanities’ enchantment with

some of affect theory's biologicism can be marked as a symptom neoliberalization of the U.S. university. In addition to contending with business-model education, the humanities seek to justify its existence in the university by pulling explanatory power from the “hard sciences.”³⁸

Often imbricated in the discourse of new materialism and posthumanism, affect theory seeks to upset the traditional divisions within and between the (non)human and the (in)organic.³⁹ In so doing, material and haptic qualities of agential factors within and outside of institutions like the state are underscored through ideas such as assemblage. Anti-humanism, moreover, can be defined as non-anthropomorphic in that it foregrounds “natural” forces—climate, physics, geology, etc.—as affective agents in the world.⁴⁰ Overall, affect comprises impersonal forces, or intensities, and unfolds its trajectories and attachments as circulatory, penetrative, permeable, and sticky. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write, “Affect at its most anthropomorphic is the name we give to those forces visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than consciousness knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion [...]”⁴¹ By using liminal, almost-Heideggerian, prepositional adjectives (e.g., “in-betweenness” and “accumulative beside-ness”), Seigworth and Gregg generally typify affect in a way that mostly emphasizes surface. The duo also contends, “Affect is an accumulative, aggregated quality between bodies, human and non-human.”⁴² Furthermore, Patricia Clough imagines affect as a “surface of inscription” or cultivation of bodily responses, which are involuntary. Clough writes, “Bodily capacities to affect or be affected, and how they can enable or diminish a one's abilities.”⁴³ In general, affect theory throws experiences such as physiological processes and emotional states into self-reflective loops that emphasize the material and defy rigid categories set forth by discourses such as aesthetics and identity politics. Additionally, Donald Nathanson argues, “the affects are...completely free of inherent meaning or association to their triggering source.” In general,

several scholars have problematically argued that affect theory is a "precognitive," "nonsignifying," autonomic phenomenon that exceeds semiotics and identity.⁴⁴

For some, if not, all, of these very reasons, most affect theory creates strains of antiblackness and resurrects a universal body. In a trenchant critique, Ruth Leys calls attention to affect theorists' rejection of geneticism and determinism in favor of neurohumanities, which ironically reiterate biological notions of physiognomy and emotion that are drained of agency and historical context.⁴⁵ In attempting to "recast biology in dynamic, energistic, non-deterministic terms that emphasize unpredictability" of a non-racialized, unmarked able body, affect theorists reiterate the Western notion of Man.⁴⁶ Incidentally, the connections that Sylvia Wynter makes between neurobiology, its discourse, and notions of subjectivity or consciousness are elaborated elsewhere in this project as I interrogate Massumi's notion of the ontogenetic.⁴⁷ In the vein of Saidiya Hartman, I maintain that the black body has primarily enabled white affect of pleasure and fear, the latter taking the form of the speculative and preemptive.⁴⁸ Black corporeality and the optics of its suffering have historically been rendered as both hypervisible and illegible. As such, black life serves as a subjective and subjugated enterprise of affect. In this case, the black facial expressions or emotions are mistakenly used as a primary barometer for pain, remorse, gratitude, and are appropriated for parody and projection.⁴⁹ For Eric Shouse, feelings are a priori while emotions are projections that evidence sentience. Both of these phenomena differ from affect, which entails a "pre-personal" sensation eluding language. As far as Shouse's linkage between emotion and sentience is problematic, to say the least when considering the history of doubts around black sentience that dates back as far as the Enlightenment. In addition to representing a sociolinguistic fixing of personal content, emotion is qualified intensity: the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically

and semiotically formed progressions and narratives.⁵⁰ Ultimately, the fugitive state of blackness simultaneously vivifies and deadens objecthood and troubles affect theory's pretense of physiological and neuroscientific objectivity.

Consequently, my misgivings around popular theories of affect have inspired my project's indebtedness to black feminist theory. Queer theory, as Calvin Warren argues, elides blackness and demonstrates an investment in Man's overrepresentation. As for queer of color critique—a body of theory cultivated by Jose Esteban Munoz, Chandan Reddy, and Roderick Ferguson, among others—its dedication to racialized and queered handling of Marxism, while important and implicit to my critiques of geophilosophy and its political economy, does not fully articulate my interests in the sonic. However, the work of Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Vanessa Agard-Jones, to name a few, examines blackness and new materialism in way that jettison intersectionality for assemblage; rather, their work considers how both systems work in tandem.

Black Ecocriticism

Within the past ten to fifteen years, many scholars have focused a racialized lens upon ecocriticism. Mainly through literary analysis, scholars such as Alison Deming, Lauret Savoy, Paul Outka, Melvin Dixon, and Kimberly N. Ruffin, Vanessa Agard-Jones, and Chelsea M. Frazier, among others, have theorized the relationship between black agents and natural environments.⁵¹ Connected issues such as gentrification, environmental racism, and natural catastrophe figure significantly into discourses that paradoxically examine expendable blackness alongside sustainability. Occasionally, my dissertation combines cultural ecology with affect in

an effort to challenge the hermeneutics around blackness, water, and attendant materialisms and temporalities.

Following the Holocene, the anthropocene marks an unprecedented period in geological and ecological history in which human activity has irreversibly altered biospheric processes.⁵² The human-driven factors of intense carbonification of the atmosphere, drastic rearrangement of topography, and the woeful acidification of oceans characterize this current moment to a terrifying pitch.⁵³ Moreover, a deadly abundance of synthetic chemicals and an ever-increasing speed of glacial melting have intensified natural disasters and agricultural dilemmas. Even though many scholars and scientists have debated the genesis of the anthropocene, most would agree that the late eighteenth century demonstrates an unrivaled, devastating shift in several terrestrial domains. According to Paul Crutzen, the anthropocene starts in 1784, a year that marked a triumph in mechanization by way of James Watt's steam engine within the broader stretch of the Industrial Revolution.⁵⁴

If ecocriticism uses the discourses of anthropocentrism, how does it account for race? Specifically, how does this ecological epoch of entanglement regard black agents who have continuously been denied access to the human? How do we then grapple with littoral cosmologies and practices (e.g., baptism and surfing) across the diaspora within the wake of neoliberalism and sustainability movements? While theorizations of the anthropocene disintegrate the futurity of "conscious capitalism" and "sustainable development," they often evade race and histories of imperialism⁵⁵ Within this seemingly unending nadir, the projects of neoliberalism, intergalactic colonialism (e.g., governmental and corporate interests with Mars), humanitarian projects—some of which nefariously thrive off disaster capitalism—and humanism itself confine black subjects to far more precarious positions.⁵⁶ Since the exclusion of blackness

is central to Man's overrepresentation as human, and the anthropocene is mostly centered within a *humanistic* (e.g., white), post-human understanding of the ontological blurring between human and non-human worlds, blackness stands as a genre of being mired in *occiduus*: dispossessed of Man and land, abandoned to the exploits of watery migration and fatal retreats.

Regardless of its the self-congratulatory critiques of Enlightenment ontology and acknowledgment of entanglement, the anthropocene's overall disavowal of race and subsequent reinstantiation of the Man and denies the colonial links between blackness, capitalism, and environmental degradation.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, James Moore and Joachim Radkau have sought to recontextualize this ecological epoch in racial and colonial histories. According to Moore, the term "capitalocene" extends the temporal span of the anthropocene to the sixteenth century, which heralds the discovery of the New World and its attendant systems of colonialism and slavery.⁵⁸ Similarly Radkau, he argues,

the chief problem of colonialism seems to have been not so much its immediate ecological consequences as its long-term impact, the full extent of which became apparent only centuries later, in the era of modern technology, and many times only after the colonial states had acquired their independence.⁵⁹

Radkau and Moore's proposed *longue durée* of ecological crisis, unveiling connections to the Age of Exploration, serves as a corrective to the universalist impulse of anthropocene discourse, which fetishizes the Age of Industrialism to the point of racial exclusion. To this set of ideas, I add my concept of *occiduus*: located in the flesh, it accounts for the aquatically inspired, existential-affective state of blackness within the West and its violent relationship to watery spaces.

In addition to Sharpe's book *In the Wake*, Anissa Janine Wardi's *Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective* (2011) and Kevin Dawson's *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (2018) offer the closest approximations to my idea of a black aquatic. Wardi examines the materiality of watery sites in African American expressive culture. Concerning her methodology, Wardi combines cultural history with scientific texts to produce interdisciplinary readings of works by writers Morrison, Richard Wright, and Henry Dumas, and filmmakers Julia Dash and Kasi Lemmons, among others. In her analyses of Lemmon's film *Eve's Bayou* (1997) and Morrison's book *Tar Baby* (1981), Wardi conceptualizes the bayou and wetlands as postcolonial sites of resistance and memory, two details that are further elucidated by an unexpected use of estuarial science. Wardi also analyzes the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, explaining that the catastrophe "is tethered to environmental degradation, toxic geographies, racism and classism, and our nation's historical, material, and political identity."⁶⁰ Overall, Wardi's book plumbs water for its symbolic capacities for memory, its material facets for resistance, and its political valence within the growing literature on racial ecocriticism. Wardi's inspired combination of estuarial sciences and literary discourses on memory—specifically those found in Morrison's fiction—motivate my metaphorical use of the natural sciences and affect in an examination of the aquatic in black expressive cultures.⁶¹ In its contributions to cultural history, Dawson's book spans 1444, the year of Portuguese contact with sub-Saharan Africa, to 1888, the year marking the abolishment of slavery in the Brazil, host to one of the last New World colonies of bondsmen. In so doing he observes a diverse range of historical episodes and activity, which include surfing, canoe-making, and swamp maroonage. "Terrestrial perspectives," Dawson argues, "treat water as a border for land-based events and an intercontinental highway, concluding that cultural creation was restricted to land."⁶² Similar to

Wardi's analytic tools, Dawson uses the term "waterscapes" to identify how "fresh and saltwater systems actively informed group identities while articulating how water and land were interlaced into amphibious culturescapes."⁶³

Chapter Summaries

The chapters in this project follow strange vector. Our itinerary ushers us into gestational hold of the boats where we experience seasickness; alights us to the shores of (im)mortal lovers confronting their queer horizons; dares us dives into the sea alongside the monstrous transformations of black women; frames us as witness to those who drown; and then buoys us back up to undulating surface where heroic wave-riders greet us. Through voyage into the black aquatic allows us to consider how affect manifests itself in the imaginary and lived-experiences of diaspora upon the water.

In Chapter One, "Visualizing the Oceanic Feeling and the Queer Horizons of Blackness in Cinema," I examine three texts: Steve McQueen's short-length film *Ashes* and the full-length features of Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight* and Spike Lee's *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*. I use the literal and figurative horizon—that elusive, phenomenological split between sky and, in this case, the ocean—to unite all three texts in a meditation on the queerness of black futurity upon the water. On the one hand, we enjoy adventure in McQueen's *Ashes* and unexpectedly find forms of black paternity and queer romance on the sea and shores in Jenkins's *Moonlight*; on the other hand, we confront the afterlife of these two supernaturally damned black women standing on a beach in Lee's *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*. In so doing, I attempt to answer the following questions: If at all guaranteed, how does futurity unfold for this subject-position? How does do the temporal, metaphorical, and visual figures of the horizon appear at the tangent of sky and water? To

answer these questions, I turn to the most unexpected characters who act as *ruckenfiguren*, or back-turned figures, enamored and taunted by the horizon and its relation to the aquatic.

Despite the differences between these three films, they all ultimately connect black queer subjectivity to the water in the most intimate, erotic, and unexpectedly fatal ways. The agenda of this chapter is three-fold: First, I use Spiller's multivalent notion of vestibularity to reconceptualize Freud's oceanic feeling as a black affect; second, I theorize buoyancy as an affective state in *Moonlight* and *Ashes*; and third, I conceptualize black queer visibility as it manifests itself in *ruckenfiguren* positioned toward the aquatic horizon in all three films. Again, I use the elusive, phenomenological split between the sky and, in this case, the ocean to unite all three texts in a meditation on the queerness of black futurity upon and near the water. In so doing, I call attention to how the black aquatic in all of its episodes of queerness and untraditional kinship defies the land-based patrilinearity of genealogy and geophilosophy, two genres in critical theory that ultimately reify the overrepresentation of Man as human. In the case of the black *ruckenfiguren*, the characters have oriented themselves away from land and toward the water. Additionally, I theorize how vestibularity appears in the camera maneuvers of Jenkin's and McQueen's films, which emphasize what I term the *buoyancy* of black life.

Chapter Two, "Sounding Sirens And Skin: Aquatic Mutations of Black Women," considers the synesthetic transformation of black women and black flesh within the water. Where do organs fall in relation to flesh and body? How have we constructed the binary between organs and body? If organs are meant to animate the larger corpus and its flesh—a material made fungible by blackness—what are the implications of organs enjoying or propagating a life of their own? How can we "sound" (e.g., measure, hear, and discover) these corporeal entities within a black aquatic imaginary? In what way is black flesh vestibular? The artwork of Ellen

Gallagher and Doreen Garner, Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, and the performances of Azealia Banks invert and, in some cases, liquidate, or destroy, normative notions of corporeality, consequently “sounding” alternative conceptions of life.

The “sounding of sirens” denotes both a black sea creature and a series of “alarms” or panics around black sexuality at visual and aural levels. According to Jean-Francis Augoyard, a siren qualifies as a phonotropic effect that “manifests itself exclusively in the sonic sphere, and whose source often cannot be located, illustrates the attraction/repulsion duality that characterizes the emergence of certain sound events.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, this dyad of attraction and repulsion characterizes flesh as a vestibular substance within the black aquatic, as holds a dual capacity in racializing bare life and sustaining Wynterian Man. After Spillers, I assert that black women’s flesh has functioned as the principle vestibule, or aural and bodily passageway, between human and non-human worlds.

Chapter Three, “Interlude to Quiet Storm: The Sexual Politics of Black Soft-Rock,” I argue that the concept of black soft-rock and its internet coinage as “Blacht rock” (e.g., “black yacht rock”) manufacture an inoculated form of black heterosexuality, one that emphasizes normative desire and evokes maritime leisure; this music genre and its sexual politics neither threaten nor taint white consumers. Black soft-rock constitutes an aspirational genre of respectability that sought to create a safe space for black erotics. In this aspect, black soft-rock resumes disco’s project of disinfection concerning embodied, hypersexual funk music. This interlude, as opposed to the *historiographic* maneuvers deployed in the other three chapters, represents a break in form in its distinctly *historical* framework around AIDS, the Culture Wars, and attendant socio-economic politics mostly anchored in the 1980s and early 1990s.

As a seemingly silly hiccup in the blogosphere, Blacht rock could be seen as an evanescent joke in virtue of its anonymously authored status and shallow archive. However, Blacht's conceptual and analytic waters run surprisingly deep; this neologism contributes to the overarching framework of this paper, as it allows us to think through music, race, and sexuality, and their attendant "dis-eases" vis-à-vis the aquatic—particularly in the case of Sade's rendition of the mermaid. While Banks offers a digitally enhanced mermaid body impervious to death by way of replication, Sade presents aquatic corporeality more vulnerable to love and its attendant illnesses.

Chapter Four, "Black Drowning/ Black Thirst" examines black volition in the context of drowning and "natural" drives such as thirst. The suicide of Haitian poet Edmond LaForest, who drowned himself with a *Larousse* dictionary tied around his neck in 1915, calls to mind colonial issues around logocentrism and poetics. Using my idea of "over-thrownness," I explore the philosophical implications of LaForest's radical demise. In the case of the 2014 music video for her single "Babylon," singer SZA calls attention to black women's agency and drowning. How does SZA's anti-portrait relate to both the hyperinvisibility of black women's violation in culture and the absence of Middle Passage narratives? Back-paddling from black death to black romantic life, I study Maxwell's 1998 album *Embrya* and Beyonce's 2016 visual album *Lemonade*. I claim that *Lemonade* and *Embrya* represent uterine and aqueous moments of black gender's interiority wherein there is both plenitude and lack. Furthermore, these two texts exemplify a vestibular-acoustic mirror across their different media. While Beyonce's non-diegetic voice recites Warsan Shires's poetry from outside a flooded bedroom, we hear Maxwell's crooning situated within a belly, amongst somatic grunts and growls. Here, we have two structures of confinement for black interiority: the bedroom and the belly. One is organic,

the other architectural—both are dreamlike in their atmospheric sounds and surreal settings.

Maxwell's album makes aquatic appeals to the maternal, both visually and sonically. In this section, I analyze the immersive elements of the album's sounds and the watery motifs of the cover art. Here, I use my Glissant-Freud framework for thinking about the affective measures of the oceanic feeling as it relates to black masculinity and hydro-uterine metaphors in Maxwell's music.

The conclusion of this project includes an epilogue hinting at the next installment of the black aquatic: surfing cultures across the black diaspora. One of my critical sites of inquiry considers Surf Haiti, a non-governmental organization located in Jacmel. Founded by Ken Pierce in 2011, Surf Haiti functions as a non-governmental agency, a socio-economic assemblage that has engendered transnational ties. This aspect enriches an understanding of neoliberal tourism, whereby privatized debt and increasing poverty place pressure on the racial state's rebranding of ethnicity for white consumption. Factors such as the ongoing fiscal ramifications of Haiti's 2010 Earthquake and President René Préval's privatized government have strained tourism strategies, arguably increasing the popularity of black surfing on this Caribbean island. Consequently, several fundamental questions arise: How does surfing upset the local sports cultures in these two countries? With black men as the chief athletes in these sects, how does surfing simultaneously reflect and challenge the neoliberal ordering of race, gender, and tourism within developing nations?

CHAPTER ONE:
Visualizing the Oceanic Feeling and
the Queer Horizons Of Blackness in the Cinema of Barry Jenkins, Spike Lee and Steve
McQueen

“Queerness’s ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to greater openness to the world.”⁶⁵

—Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009)

“Immersion, and its crises of seeing and subjectivity, is the suspension of circulation that leaves the subject in the sea between regimes of power.”⁶⁶

—Nicholas Mirzoeff, “The Sea and the Land: Biopower and Visuality from Slavery to Katrina”
 (2009)

In Barry Jenkins’s 2016 film *Moonlight*, we witness the coming-of-age tale of Chiron, a black man who struggles with variety of social instabilities and wrestles with unspoken desires. Set in Miami, from the early 1990s onward, the film unfurls Chiron’s life across three vignettes of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I open this chapter with a scene extracted from the first stage of Chiron’s life in which he affectionately bears the nickname “Little.” Within the choppy waves of Miami Beach, we see a literal and figurative wake around Little as he learns how to swim with guidance from Juan who hustles as a presumable drug dealer and happenstance parental figure: the ocean offers a baptismal sanctuary from his tragic life at home and foreshadows the violent stakes of his undeclared passions, which transpire in the two subsequent phases of the film’s triptych. This *mise-en-scène* is ecstatic. Past, present and future

splash together. This scene's non-normativity appears in the doubled surrogacy of Juan's maternal capacity as a swim instructor to a son not of his own seed. In general, *Moonlight* illustrates the queer and affective dynamics of black kinship in the water, forces central to what I call the black aquatic.

At this moment, I want to direct our attention to the horizon. I use this literal and figurative line as an overture into cinematic instances of black-queer subjectivity, which finds itself standing on the shore, helming the boat, and floating among the waves. In this chapter, I examine three cinematic pieces: Steve McQueen's *Ashes*, Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight*, and Spike Lee's *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*. Despite the differences between these three films, they all ultimately connect black queer subjectivity to the water in the most intimate, erotic, and unexpectedly fatal ways. The agenda of this conversation is three-fold: first, I use Spiller's multivalent notion of vestibularity to re-conceptualize Freud's oceanic feeling as a black affect; second, I theorize buoyancy as an affective state in *Moonlight* and *Ashes*; and third, I conceptualize black queer visibility as it manifests itself through *Rückenfiguren* positioned toward the aquatic horizon in all three films. Again, I use the elusive, phenomenological split between the sky and, in this case, the ocean to unite all three texts in a meditation on the queerness of black futurity *upon* and *near* the water. In so doing, I call attention to how the black aquatic, in all of its episodes of queerness and untraditional kinship, defies the land-based patrilinearity of genealogy and geophilosophy, two genres in critical theory that ultimately reify the overrepresentation of Man as human. In the case of the black *Rückenfiguren*, the characters in all three of these films have oriented themselves away from land and toward the water. This examination of film, nonetheless, deploys art historical themes and methodologies to broadly

conceive of the visual and affective connections between race, queerness, and kinship. Namely, Alois Riegl's methodological framing of haptics enables me to unveil the tactile, temporal, and affective dimensions of McQueen, Lee, and Jenkins's respective films.

Jose Esteban Munoz imagines queerness as a performative "horizon of being" situated in the utopian. This is to say that he envisions a collective politics of gendered and sexual non-normativity as future-oriented and ecstatic. Orgasmic and not-yet-here, queerness laterally conjoins past, present, and tomorrow. For black queer subjectivity, however, that glimmering horizon is far-too-often out of reach. If at all guaranteed, how does futurity unfold for this subject-position? How do the temporal, metaphorical, and visual figures of the horizon appear at the tangent of sky and water? Regarding interpellation, how does intersectional identity coagulate in the sea while immuring itself on the shore? To answer these questions, I turn to the most unexpected characters who act as *Ruckenfiguren*, or back-turned figures, enamored and taunted by the horizon's relationship to the aquatic. Ultimately, I look to a pair of immortal lovers, a perished fisherman, and a young man who learns how to live and love in the wake of his choppy maturation. All of these characters have turned their back toward land to *see* the sea as both drive and desire.

Concerning the *Ruckenfiguren*'s appearance in art history, German painter Caspar David Friedrich and African American photographer Carrie Mae Weems become surprising, yet ideal cross-temporal companions; both of these artists share interests in wandering, nature, and interiority. One of the most famous appearances of the back-facing figure can be found in images produced by Friedrich. Emblematic of Romanticism, Friedrich's landscape paintings, such as *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) and *The Monk by the Sea* (1808-1810), direct our attention to the grandeur of nature and its dwarfing effects on the individual as they relate to

scale and distance.⁶⁷ As a photographic compliment to this art-historical motif, Carrie Mae Weems's *Roaming* series envisions the black woman as a stately figure who is, nonetheless, dispossessed of the state.⁶⁸ In this collection of photographs, we find Weems acting as her avatar who, in most of the images, solemnly faces the architectural facades of various cultural institutions and public spaces. We are left to surmise her intentions and interiority as she quietly beholds porticos, museums, and promenades—most of which are eerily depopulated. According to the artist, this series explores how the monumental scale and histories of such establishments interpellate black women.⁶⁹ Clothed in the same black dress and refusing our gaze, Weems is at once indifferent and commanding in her stance. Taken as a whole, *Roaming* serializes Weems's figure as an apparition, solidified by a contrast between her black garment and the gray tonality of the built space she inhabits. However, the photograph titled *A Broad and Expansive Sky—Ancient Rome* (2006) presents an anomaly in the series, as we see Weems standing opposite to the watery horizon on a rocky shore, removed from architectural space. Comparable to Friedrich's painting *The Monk by the Sea*, Weems's image shows her erect, gazing upon what is presumably the Tyrrhenian Sea.⁷⁰ With all *Rückenfiguren*, we are left to guess how their inner life correlates to both the splendor of the outer environment and the expansiveness (or singular fixation) of their intentionality. There is something particularly queer about the back-facing figures found in the three films on which I have set my sights. These moments of oceanic reverie offer nonlinear narratives, erotic charge, and sheer bewilderment in the separate yet connected cinematic offerings by McQueen, Lee, and Jenkins.

When *envisioning* an oceanic *feeling*, however ironic a deed may be, the stakes of the sublime and viscosity inevitably come to the fore when we face the black *Rückenfiguren*. The shore and its horizon hint at the deferred possibility of survival in the case of *Ashes* and create a

watery vista of contemplation and queer desire for the characters in *Moonlight* and *Da Sweet Blood Jesus*. The three films recast the sublime, a tenant of romanticism, as a visualized unfreedom that illustrates queerness of narrative, agency, and desire within blackness and its position on the shore.⁷¹ In poet W.H. Auden's estimation, the ocean, after the Romantic era, became a field in which "the moments of eternal choice, of temptation, fall, and redemption occur."⁷² Concerning the black queer characters in these films, recovery and temporality level a blow to the optimism of ecstatic time.

With these particularities in mind, a few fundamental questions are summoned: How does Freud define the oceanic feeling? What is viscosity? What is the horizon? In terms of the two latter questions, how do these two optical phenomena apply to the temporality and sight of black queerness on the shore? The diptych installation of *Ashes* and the ending of the full-length film *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* answer these questions through their preoccupations with mortality, race, and non-normativity. Water, in these two films, functions as contemplative and obstructive. Regarding non-normative narrative, *Ashes* generates a storyline of non-relationality and premature death.

We find the oceanic feeling initially noted in the personal letters between Freud and French writer and art historian Romain Rolland. Freud's explication of the oceanic feeling often falls into ambiguity as it vaguely purports a form of spirituality.⁷³ He explains this pre-Oedipal sensation as an infantile feeling that involves "an indissoluble bond of being one with the external world as a whole."⁷⁴ Herein lies the limitless, narcissistic union of mother and child. William B. Parsons historicizes the reception and interpretation of the oceanic feeling and argues that it opposes institutionalized religion. The discourse around the oceanic feeling has generally centered on eastern religions, psycho-theological debates, and syncretism. A few passages from

Freud's text *Future of Illusion* (1927), along with some epistolary exchanges with Rolland, provide the basis for assertions made by Parsons and other scholars. Here, my concept of *occiduus* exceeds Freud's idea of a psycho-maritime sensation since it accounts for blackness and its aquatic affects at a material and metaphoric level.⁷⁵ The Freudian purchase of the aquatic also resonates with Spillers, as she explains, "Those African persons in 'Middle Passage' were literally suspended in the 'oceanic,' if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity [...]"⁷⁶ While one could easily analogize the ocean's fluidity and limitlessness to the elasticity of queer identities, same-sex desire halts this optimistic comparison by way of a death-drive that jeopardizes what Lee Edelman terms "reproductive futurism."⁷⁷

Black kinship and its impossible correlation to the normative familial structures of psychoanalysis become complicated in the context of the aquatic cinema. Psychoanalytic film theory locates cinema and its accessories (e.g., the projector, the screen, and the theater) in the realm of the maternal, the pre-Oedipal space of the womb. The oceanic feeling stages the instance in which the infant cannot differentiate themselves from their mother. However, given the natal alienation social death, black life has been transmogrified into commodified, genealogical isolates debarred from sentience. There is no blur between child and mother; instead, a complete transformation or queer substitution is at stake within and upon the water.⁷⁸ Social death's accessories of natal alienation, invisible life, and hypervisible death along with, to a certain extent, queer non-relationality (or negativity) structure black life in ways Edelman has not expressed in his argument of queer temporality. Edelman defines reproductive futurism as "terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering *unthinkable* [emphasis added], by

casting outside the political domain, the possibility of queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations." *Unthinkable*. Edelman's use of this term calls to mind what Frank Wilderson and Saidiya Hartman call the "position of unthought," the invisibility of black subjects as it relates to inaccessibility to political redress and humanity. "Reproductive futurism" does not account for black women's maternity concerning social death, which serves a precondition for black life. Sharpe and James Bliss express similar thoughts on this issue in their respective works. Bliss calls our attention to how "interstitial space"—a position that Spillers designates for black women, that gap between the historicity of slavery and its historiography—ironically animates Edelman's argument for white queer negativity—albeit from the point of invisibility.⁷⁹

As I mentioned before, the horizon and visibility are inextricably linked by philosophical and art historical discourses. According to Nicholas Mirzoeff and Hal Foster, vision denotes how and what we are allowed to see while visibility reveals how we view this seeing.⁸⁰ "Visibility is very much to do with picturing and nothing to do with vision [...]" When it comes to gender and sexuality, Munoz asserts, "Indeed to access *queer visibility* [emphasis added] we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of here and now." In his exegesis of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Saulius Geniusas describes horizon as a limit that constrains and anticipates the visual field and its unannounced or unseen entities.⁸¹

Much like the concept of visibility, the white *Rückenfiguren* emerges from a colonial imaginary.⁸² These back-facing figures, whose quiet interiority is often compounded by the sublime outdoors in which they find themselves, allude to the expansionist survey of lands yet to be explored and yet to be emptied of its native peoples. Within modernity, the horizon has been regarded as an epistemological entity endowed with a felt visibility. At this juncture, however, I

am interested in imagining a black queer visuality as a hermeneutic connected to an impossible horizon of not necessarily death but of an afterlife.⁸³ Across these three films, we witness black queer characters who find themselves either halted on the shore or floating in the water, indulging in moments of reverie and buoyancy. Such instances amplify aspects of quietness in black visual culture, qualities to which scholars such as Tina Campt, Lokeilana Kaimana, and Kevin Quashie have directed our optical ears. This understated aurality all-too often goes unnoticed within over-determined discourses that postulate the visuality of race as exclusively engaged with public acts of resistance and riotous volume. As I will demonstrate, these meditative moments in the black aquatic operate as mediation between the troubling sight of blackness and the sublime sounds of the ocean. This gesture recovers interiority forgoes appeals to the category of Man.

Helm of the Boat, Edge of the Shore: Ruckenfiguren in Ashes and Da Sweet Blood Of Jesus

Originally presented at the 2015 Venice Biennale as part of Okwui Enwezor's exhibition titled *All the World's Futures*, McQueen's *Ashes* chronicles an unreached horizon of a titular fisherman in Grenada and offers a different kind of obituary: a grave of poetic images and documentarian visuals split between two projection screens. In the installation, the left screen displays a lyrical portrait of Ashes: shot with a handheld, super-8 camera, we see looped footage of the svelte, dreadlocked youth manning an orange vessel; he occasionally takes a dip in the ocean whose aqueous body takes on the velvety grain of the film.⁸⁴ The mood is buoyant—and so is the camera movement. The diegetic gushing of oceanic tides is punctuated by a typographer's arduous hammering shown on the right-hand screen. The fisherman occasionally acknowledges the viewer's (or camera's) presence as he climbs back into the boat after a brief

swim. On the right screen, however, we find linear, documentarian footage of grave-makers fashioning a tomb that identifies the hitherto anonymous seafarer. In contrast to the soft, wooly texture of the left-hand screen's footage, the right-hand screen bears the sharp projection of crisp, 16-millimeter film. Here, we encounter a *mis-en-scene* of the reaper's garden: a shot of a sunny graveyard hosting thick vegetation that then cuts to footage detailing a typographer attentively stenciling letters into stone with a knife. We later find gravediggers and masons in the midst of their mundane toils: they exhume hearty pieces of earth for an above-ground vault; they pour and subsequently sand cement into the parameter of a humble coffin; and they gild and etch the tombstone for the yet-to-be-revealed soul. Eventually, this memorial reads, "In memory of Kenson Baptiste, better known as Ashes, entered into rest 30 May 2002, Age 25 years." The mewling of island livestock and the hymn of a phantom congregation intersperse with footage capturing the construction of Ashes's crypt.

As a whole, McQueen's dual-screen installation encompasses the narrative and aesthetic characteristics of both Structural and New Romantic films. Much like the Structural filmmaker, McQueen draws our attention to the materiality of the celluloid strip by using a super-8 camera to capture what are now the final moments of Ashes's life, an existence whose historicity enigmatically concedes itself both to the dreamy, looped footage and to the modest confines of a concrete grave. The grainy, jittery cadence of the left-hand screen's images simultaneously situates Ashes in a distant past while imprisoning him in the sunny buoyancy of a non-narrative present.⁸⁵ The velvety variations of cornflower blue punctuated by the Ashes's brown, burnished body and tangerine vessel create a tonal and textural lushness similar to work of Derek Jarman and Isaac Julien. However, the softly textured motion pictures of Ashes are betrayed by right-hand screen's unblemished 16-millimeter footage. Either way, both of these screens reveal

particular kinds of abundance around his life in the forms of aesthetic flourishes found in the film's texture and biographical details condensed into a brief obituary.

Between the left-hand screen, which bears the looped footage of his seafaring and swimming, and the right-hand screen, which evidences Ashe's untimely death, McQueen's film complicates notions of queer narrativity.⁸⁶ The free state, according to Hartman, involves speculative writing that takes up subjunctive grammar in its mining of the archive. This form of narratological bad-faith illustrates what Saidiya Hartman calls a "double gesture." "Put differently," Hartman writes, "how does one rewrite the chronicle of a dearth foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?"⁸⁷ Most of the looped footage features Ashes as a *Rückenfigur* with his sights set on an allusive horizon that he never seems to reach. Although Ashe's sexual and gendered desires are foreclosed to us, his premature death and the continuous coiling of the moving-image frame his life within a queer presentism and non-linearity punctuated by a *non-relation* to his family and institutionalized faith. As we find out later in the film, Ashes was shot and killed just two months after his likeness jubilantly entered the grainy archive of McQueen's camera. Since he was not affiliated with a church, Ashes was interred in a nameless, pauper's grave. As implied by his name, Ashes returned to the earth as soot that remained unmarked until McQueen returned to Grenada. The filmmaker, subsequently, buries the fisherman in a respectable sepulcher, as illustrated by the denouement on the right-hand screen. However, the super-8 footage displays a collapse of real time into circular *reel*-time, archiving Ashes's aquatic adventure.

The confrontation between black queer subjects and horizon occasions a different temporality and equally unique desire, neither of which necessarily leans toward narrow

positivity. Queerness-as-utopia, as Munoz would have it, does not concern the here and now, but aims towards a “forward-dawning futurity.”⁸⁸ This ecstatic tomorrow pushes against the antisocial turn in queer theory and relinquishes (or relieves) itself of heteronormative, linear time, which concerns itself with biological reproduction and the present moment. This feeling is one of hope, a form of futurity outside normative production.⁸⁹ The past is performative just as much as futurity is. However, Calvin Warren argues, “Queerness is at the limit of the human, while blackness is at the limit of the object.”⁹⁰ As such, black-queer subjectivity, which fades within the onto-existential horizon, constitutes a double elision and poignant fracture when it comes to conjoining queer theory with black studies.⁹¹ Thus, the non-ontology of blackness simultaneously maintains and threatens the boundaries of the human. Indeed, the relationship between black queer vitality and the horizon is utopian: it is nowhere due to non-being, gratuitous violence, and displacement. The shore, in many ways, marks that boundary. The elusive line between sky and water skews a hope not to be had. The concluding scenes of *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*, which feature the baffled reunion between Ganja and her resurrected lover, and the middle-vignette of *Moonlight*, which purloins glimpses of the erotic exchange between Chiron and Kevin on the beach, position the shore as a space where black queer romance flourishes in clandestine and defeated ways.

A remake of the 1973 Blaxploitation horror film *Ganja and Hess* (1973, dir. Bill Gunn), Lee’s *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* follows the vampirical downfall Dr. Hess Green, a prosperous black Anthropologist who resides on the equally affluent island of Martha’s Vineyard. After his colleague Lafayette Hightower stabs him with a magical Ashanti dagger, Hess dies and then resurrects himself as a vampire. After discovering the corpse of Lafayette, who shot himself, Hess indulges in his fallen colleague’s blood, affirming his thirst for this vital fluid. Hess’s

vampiric drive demonstrates variously classed analogies between race and blood, two elements that are often biologicized in his sexual relations with working-class black women and conversations with white socialites throughout the film. Towards the end of the film, Hess marries and exsanguinates Layfayette's estranged wife Ganja Hightower, who then becomes a vampire, too. Subsequently, Ganja covets Tangier, Hess's ex-girlfriend, as an object of her desire and drive. Ganja then has sex with Tangier, asphyxiating her and drinking her blood. Eventually, Ganja and Hess bury Tangier in the forest near the beach. Repentant and shaken by his fleshy cupidity, Hess unsuccessfully seeks salvation at the hands of a Pentecostal preacher and then kills himself by sitting in the shadow of a crucifix, with Ganja by his side.

Eccentric plot twists aside, the closing scene of *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* endures as one of the most pivotal segments in the film. Here, we watch Ganja slowly stride toward the shore. Wrapped in a semi-sheer, black cape, she beholds the sun as it sets over the horizon of what could be either the Nantucket Sound or the Atlantic Ocean. As Ganja peers to her left, Tangier reappears, nude and self-composed. Pallid and almost somnambulant, Tangier has disinterred herself from an earthen grave. Captured in slow motion, she saunters toward Ganja only to engage her with a pair of newly zombified eyes. These two women, vampiric and immortal, stand on the shore with their back turned to us, confronting the coming evening. Inaugurated by brutal sex and bloodlust, the bond of this supernatural couple coheres in an afterlife whose infinity is mocked by an unsatisfying sunset and Hess's death, which vivifies the visibility of these black-queer femmes. Ganja and Tangier's twilight parallels the horizon. The shore marks their boundary while the ocean softly signals their damnation, welcoming their inhumanity in each soft gush. Their futurities have become stagnated as eternal, assuming the form of an increasingly dim horizon over the water. Ganja and Tangier quietly personify the madmen whom

Nietzsche clamored about in his parable of the horizon; however, they neither destroy the land nor set sail on the high seas like Ashes.⁹² These two women remain fixed in place.

As *Rückenfiguren* who face the ocean, Ganja and Tangier not only trouble the logic separating mourning from melancholia, they also help us to understand how the vestibular resituates the oceanic feeling as one of blackness and queerness. "In mourning," Freud reminds us, "it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself."⁹³ Accompanied by Tangier, Ganja turns her back both to us and to the estate, gazing at a sunset distanced by the aquatic chasm. While Ganja mourns the loss of Hess, she and Tangier contemplate the loss of their humanity as they aim their cathexis at the horizon, which was never within their reach in the first place. The future is melancholic—and so potent to the point where Tangier revives her undead self from a loamy bed. Even after death, she is unable to sleep away her desire and damnation. How do we internalize something that was spectral in the first place? Once more, Freud theorizes the oceanic feeling as a sensation of pre-Oedipal unity, one that is eternal. However, as Spillers and Eduoard Glissant would have it, the ocean for black subjects constitutes a deathly and captive, embryonic space in which maternal dispossession occurs.⁹⁴ Here, the shore functions as the vestibule. According to Spillers, the vestibule provides the "pre-view" of a colonized New World where black bodies are denatured into black, and black kinship loses meaning.⁹⁵ Here, Spillers posits vestibularity both as a violent antechamber birthing inhumanity and as a *way of seeing*. Black queer visibility, therefore, involves both a seeing and a *seen* subject-object position on the shore; it sets its sights on an unreachable and uncertain horizon, or futurity, isolated by the maternally dispossessing ocean.⁹⁶ The littoral demarcates a boundary of castration from the proprietary constraints of landed property and Ganja's heteronormative marriage to Hess. While dreams are, according to Freud, "the royal road to the

unconscious," Tangier's trance-like condition has guided her to one the most massive bodies of *non-consciousness*—that being water.⁹⁷

The arguable failures that Ganja experiences underscore some failures in (and perverse achievements of) what Hartman terms “burdened individuality.”⁹⁸ Ganja is released from her marriage to Hess but still retains both his property and his cursed gift of wakeful damnation. While death has annulled her matrimonial contracts to Lafayette and Hess, Ganja joins Tangier in a blood-based pact of middle-classed monstrosity. Indebtedness in this moment simultaneously signifies the biological, the supernatural, and the proprietary. Meanwhile, Deleuze proffers some interesting and related ideas about the sea’s place in cinema, opinions that I have to yet to fully grapple with in my reading of *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*. He explains that land-based movement is encumbered by “commodities, the fetish, the article of clothing, the partial object and the memory-object.” Water also reduces the white bourgeois body to a “monstrous organic body” or a “fetish-body.” “The bourgeoisie,” Deleuze continues, “is reduced to the objectivity of a fetish-body, a body, to which childhood, love, navigation oppose their integral bodies. ‘Objectivity,’ equilibrium, justice are not of the earth: they are the presence of water.”⁹⁹

Munoz regards the here-and-now as both pragmatic and homonormative. In contrast, queer time precipitates from an ecstatic futurity that combines past, present, and future. I find Munoz’s formula of non-normative, pan-temporality too capacious, too utopian—a leap too joyful into an unknown, an explosive gesture that contradicts the quiet, implosive interiority of Ganja and Tangier. As a consequence, I want to theorize black temporality as that of queerness within the aquatic. When it comes to *Ashes* and *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*, there is a particular kind of stuckness—a kind of reverie—in presentism. Munoz claims that straight time

encompasses the here-and-now and quotidian existence. The present is toxic to queer subjects, and an embrace of it falls into the pragmatism of homonormative politics. Indeed, extrajudicial and state-sanctioned violence against black queer people renders the present as harmful. Subsequently, Munoz asserts that queerness is not yet here; instead, queerness is ecstatic in its unity of past, present, and future.¹⁰⁰

The ocean acts a queer space for desire, nonlinear narratives, and inhuman capacities of black life. From the boat to the grave, and from the grave to the shore, vestibularity designates a particular spatiality and visuality for black queer subjects in McQueen and Lee's respective films. For the protagonist Ashes, his boat serves as a vestibule that buoys him into a looped, eternal present. For Ganja and Tangier, the littoral symbolizes a vista wherein the lumens of horizon, futurity, and Man dim. Quite literally at the end of the day, beyond eye's reach and across the water, we are left to reckon these characters' inner-lives. Were their eyes watching God? Or, were they straining to see a different kind of mortality over an ocean containing an alternate humanity?

Black Kinship and Haptic Buoyancy: The Oceanic Feeling in *Ashes* and *Moonlight*

At this juncture, while holding on to the vestibular, I drift from the shore to the water. In so doing, I risk a contradiction. I leave behind queer negativity for something a bit optimistic—maybe even ecstatic. Such a maneuver would surely pivot us from the previous section's focus on presentism. In this segment, I continue our engagement with *Ashes* by coupling it with *Moonlight*, as the cinematography of these two films evoke what I call “buoyant haptics.” Such palpable pleasure, nonetheless, will still allow us to ditch land for alternative modes of care, being, and time. For the black aquatic envisions a world of solicitude, unencumbered by the

overrepresentation of Man as human, initiating a disembarkment into the watery chasm between normative genealogies and land-based geography. Here, Mirzoeff's idea of "immersion" currently stands as the most consistent effort in theorizing connections between water, sight, and the sublime. Largely inspired by J.M.W. Turner's romantic painting *The Slave Ship* (1840) and news footage detailing Hurricane Katrina, Mirzoeff's idea of "immersion" construes a form of overwhelmed seeing beholden by a subject fearful of violent, watery engulfment.¹⁰¹ While I find Mirzoeff's idea to be generative, it does not consider the allusiveness of the horizon and its various meanings for subjects and narratives marked as both black and queer.

When it comes to the history of Western thought, black kinship's natal alienation in the water helps us unearth the patrifocal investments in *terra firma*. Within continental philosophy, principles of genealogy root themselves in a patrilinearity while geophilosophy anticipates the latter and ignorant of blackness powers a post-human future whose affective flows.¹⁰² Foucault and Nietzsche's respective works propound genealogy while Deleuze's geophilosophy invests in the anti/posthuman framing of the earth. In this divide, we move from human lineage to geological time.¹⁰³ The coexistence of origin and genealogy produces an irony in that the former implies that there has always been a series of causalities and underlying layers of the former.¹⁰⁴ As a product of Deleuze's affair with the sciences, geophilosophy considers the interplay between *philia*, or family resemblances, and *doxa*, which connotes civic opinion and rhetoric and initiates philosophy itself.¹⁰⁵ The non-normativity of narrative and black kinship in *Ashes* and *Moonlight* can assist us in conceptualizing the stakes of queer relation whereby the "position of unthought" furnishes the *doxa* for black life in the water.¹⁰⁶ These instances of unthinking can be found floating alongside an embryonic fashioning of black fatherhood and coupled with the pleasurable itinerancy of a Grenadian fisherman.

As a topology for the earth, the Deleuze's idea of the fold inspires my inquiry as to what kind of topology is produced between blackness, affect, and water—the latter of which defies the stratigraphic. The territory of human cultures has been mostly determined stratigraphically.¹⁰⁷ However, the idea of a fold troubles this connection between land and Man's overrepresentation as human. Deleuze uses the fold to disavow psychoanalysis and interiority: an externalized interior that remains surface even in its process of infolding. As a reminder, Gregory Flaxman asks, "How does genealogy, the study of ancestry, presage a geophilosophical practice in which 'paternity does not exist' and the subject dissolves in the slow passage of geological time?" To answer or complicate this question, let us consider the phrase *partus sequitur ventrum*.¹⁰⁸ This Latin expression, derived from Roman civil law and appropriated by New World colonies, translates to "that which is brought forth follows the womb." Furthermore, Hartman explains,

Partus sequitur ventrem negated kinship and denied it any "legal or social efficacy." The condition of the mother marked her offspring and was "forever entailed on her remotest posterity." We carry the mother's mark and it continues to define our condition and our present.¹⁰⁹

Genoi, a Greek word, designates hereditary lines, race, and familial resemblances birthed in autochthony. Furthermore, historian Nicole Loraux writes, "men are mortal (*brotoi*, *thnetoi*, *anthropoi*) before they are characterized as terrestrial." In other words, Man cannot lay claim to Gaia since his proper domain is *kthan*, the sociocultural domain of humans.¹¹⁰ Even here, Man's overrepresentation makes an appearance in conceptions of land ownership and belonging. That being said, the swimming scene in *Moonlight* wherein a black father figure improvises as a midwife to the queer future of Little—which manifests as the thick-skinned Black in the film's third and final vignette—arrays theses concerns around kinship. Here, black paternity is born in

the water, a space that operates as uterine in place of both a striated earth and a neighborhood that has disposed Chiron due to his non-normative desires and blackness. Concerning character names, the final part of *Moonlight*'s triptych offers yet another glimpse into the black kinship by way of Greek mythology. According to the Hellenic fable, Chiron stands as one of the most essential centaurs who wielded healing and oracular powers. He was also the son of Cronus, a god whose Roman equivalent is Saturn and Philyra, an Oceanid. While the father of Chiron in *Moonlight* is absent, his mother Paula is present yet dispossessive to various extents throughout the film. Much like the oceanic domain of Philyra, Paula represents a destructive force. Yet, Juan's guidance mitigates much of this domestic strife experienced by Little and Chiron. Ultimately, the impromptu swim lesson comprises baptism, dispossession, and the uterine all at the same time.

Ashes and *Moonlight* depict different kinds of black masculinities that find commonality in the aquatic and even more similarity in their respective characters' non-relations to traditional kinship and conventional narrative. In *Moonlight*, we witness the development of black paternity in the most unexpected space of the aquatic. Juan, a heterosexual drug dealer who furthers his paternal care in this embryonic scene, assists Little in a makeshift swim lesson. He wades through a tacit understanding of his queerness. Cradling Little as if he were his own, Juan shows gestures similar to those of the *pieta*. Juan's aquatic coddling of Little warmly effectuates a version of the virgin, and her sacrificial son, a rendition echoing the inverse embraces enacted across black sociality, as evidenced by the work of Renee Cox and other black artists.¹¹¹ Natal in its baptismal and embryonic qualities, this scene draws our attention to the motherly capacities of black paternity.

Overall, both McQueen and Jenkins's films exude what I term "haptic buoyancy."

Drawing from discourses of affect, sensual cinema, and art history, I develop the idea of haptic buoyancy in which *Ashes* and *Moonlight* indulge.¹¹² The watery undulations of the camera movement create an immersive experience in Jenkins's film while the sunny jaunt on the rolling waves provides levity to the lamentation found in McQueen's film. According to Riegl, the haptic implies that which immediate and richly textured, fusing the eye with the hand's tactility.¹¹³ This melding of two senses calls to mind Massumi's in his ideas of affect and proprioception, which he locates between dermis and viscera. As a physiological capacity, proprioception constitutes a quasi-corporeality where "vision plunges into the body's suspended animation"¹¹⁴ Much like buoyancy, "[v]iscerality is the perception of suspense."¹¹⁵ While Jennifer Barker, Laura Marks, Vivian Sobchack, and other scholars of sensuous cinema have addressed several phenomenological and materialist elements of film's physiological affects *and* effects, they do not come to grips with the aquatic optokinetics in cinematography.¹¹⁶ Simply put, theorizations of water and camera movement run dry in film theory. The eye's tactility of sloshing water becomes enlivened even more with the buoyant movements of the apparatus, whether it be floating in the water or mounted on the boat.¹¹⁷

Situated among several countervailing forces, Jenkins's low-immersive cinematography of the swimming lesson allows us to bobble alongside the baptismal interaction between Chiron and Juan.¹¹⁸ In this scene, the waves lapping around the lens emphasize the viscous materiality of the ocean.¹¹⁹ Within Deleuze's taxonomy of cinematic ideas, "liquid perception" functions a type perception-image.¹²⁰ As opposed to land-based cinematography, this aquatic visuality involves displacement and "grace." Unlike the underwater scenes from Jean Gremillon's *Remorques* (1941) and Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* (1934)—two films that serve as prime examples of "liquid

perception” for Deleuze—the camera in *Moonlight* stays just above the surface and avoids a series of slow-dissolving frames.¹²¹ According to J.P. Bamberger, terrestrial movement entails “perpetual disequilibrium because the motive force is always outside the center of gravity” while aquatic movement simulates a displacement of the center of gravity, whether it be straight or elliptical. In other words, movement on land toggles between two points while motion in and upon water is always between multiple, countervailing movements that spur either an inversion or a conversion of motion.¹²²

Between the exteroceptive and proprioceptive, I am interested in the movements of the camera and the depicted characters. As Sobchack warns, merely framing cinema as an "objective symbolic representation" runs the risk of "disincarnating" the spectator's responsive body.¹²³ Thinking about haptic buoyancy allows us ways to reflect on palpability and its affective impress upon cinema in the aquatic and what it might mean for black subjectivity and its oceanic feelings. Bearing in mind buoyancy as posture and affect allows us to accomplice a three-fold gesture: it permits us to positively co-conceptualize elation, survival, and presentism. Inspired by Ashes's reverie around his vessel and Chiron's swim lesson with Juan, I conceive black buoyancy as a state in which black subjects keep themselves afloat. How can the gravitational state of buoyancy furnish us with an account of black pleasure and its existential stakes? How can we think about buoyancy within the broader scheme of *occiduus*? Munoz borrows the idea of ecstatic temporality from Heidegger who envisions this trinity of time as enrapturing.¹²⁴

In her analysis of film's imbrication of phenomenology and tactility, Barker explains, “Empathy between film and viewer isn't simply a matter of the viewer sharing a characters physical location by means of point-of-view shots and first-person narration, for example. It is instead a kind of empathy between our own body and the film's body that happens even in a non-

narrative film or one without actors, for example.”¹²⁵ In other words, the camera’s mechanical movement mimics the motility of human bodies. The filmic body displays gestures or comportments both towards the cinematic world and towards the spectator.¹²⁶ The mimetic, empathetic relationship between film and spectator also manifests itself in the narrative. In the case of *Ashes*, the film body and, in turn, our bodies are distanced from the Grenadian youth whom we find at the helm of the small boat. This move illustrates the mystique around the living protagonist, even though our view occupies the same undulating vessel.

Overall, how does Spiller’s notion of vestibularity re-situate the oceanic feeling as a black affect? As a reminder, Spiller characterizes the vestibule as the "pre-view" of a colonized New World where black flesh is created, and black kinship loses meaning. Here, vestibularity operates both as a violent antechamber and as a way of seeing. In addition to its architectural and optical definitions, vestibularity also marks corporeal space, from the ears to the uterus. Given its three meanings, vestibularity calibrates the oceanic feeling to blackness in marking drainage of normative kinship and designating corporeality made entirely of flesh in which the interruption of the vestibular system produces synesthetic viscera that sense the sonic and infolds the aquatic movement as an affect.

Affect, for Massumi, constitutes the bodily condition between perception and reaction, a passionate sinking into the medium depth of flesh. He explains proprioception’s relationship to flesh as a body without an image or an involution of subject-object relations into the body. Even though Massumi attempts to universalize the body in his theory of affect, it is the raw, outlawed material of blackness that enables his scheme in the first place. In other words, Massumi characterizes affect as a concrete incorporeality hinged on both the “impersonal” and the “anti-identitarian,” his invocation of flesh inevitably tied to subjugation and the human, two elements

whose structures depend on the abjectness of black persons. While Spillers differentiates flesh from body, Massumi's notion of a "body without an image" conceives of viscera's connection to proprioception, which concerns motility and kinesis within the body's skeletal-muscular frame. In Massumi's estimation, proprioceptive memory "is to skin what movement-vision is to the eyes."¹²⁷ Corporeality without a movement-vision constitutes a body enfolded in its own flesh. Thus, proprioception comes to fore in thinking about the camera movement in *Ashes* and *Moonlight*.

In conclusion, Lee, Jenkins, and McQueen's respective films display various aquatic milieus of black queer subjectivity and temporality. At this point, we have only begun to see glimmers of how oceanic feelings, such as shore-based reverie and buoyant haptics, inform the visuality of black life upon and within the water. Given its three meanings, vestibularity calibrates the oceanic feeling to blackness by marking a drainage of normative kinship and designating a synaesthetic experience animated by aquatic movement. Considering what Hartman identifies as the transferred dispossession on black maternity, the oceanic feeling *via* vestibularity classifies the conjoining of black flesh to gestational water as a *uterine involution*: the non-pregnancy or loss of black kinship allows black subjectivity to collapse or infold into itself as prenatal flesh.

On this closing score, I offer a mix of condolences and congratulations to the characters we have encountered across these three films. Goodnight to Chiron and his ultimate comfort in a long-delayed intimacy. Well *mourning* to the Ganga and Tangier as they welcome the evening. Goodbye to Ashes as he rests in the earth and thrives in the eternal loop of waters uncharted. They wait for no ships and anticipate dim dawns.

**CHAPTER TWO:
Sounding Sirens, Flesh, and the Queer Mutations of Black Women in the Aquatic**

Within the wake of new materialism and Spiller's perennial understanding of captive bodies, the animacy of black women inspires a number of sea changing questions: Where do organs fall in relation to flesh and body? How have we constructed the binary between organs and body? If organs are meant to animate the larger corpus and its flesh—a material made fungible by blackness, which serves as a kind of *urgrund* to capitalism—what are the implications of organs enjoying or propagating a life of their own? How does the vitality of black organs re-invigorate notions of animation, such as liquidity and liquidation, within the presumed stasis of social death? How does Spiller's idea of vestibularity act as conduit for aquatic affects such as *mal débarquement*? And, more intriguingly, how can we “sound”—measure, hear, and discover—these corporeal entities within a black aquatic imaginary? Octavia Butler's kinship-warping science fiction; Ellen Gallagher and Doreen Garner's respective artworks; and the performances of hip-hop artist Azealia Banks invert and, in some cases, liquidate or destroy normative notions of corporeality, consequently “sounding” alternative conceptions of life that nourish black feminist futures within the aquatic. This chapter features three case studies: in the first section, I develop and deploy the analytic of “sounding” to account for the auditory and spatial capacities of flesh in Butler's novel *Wild Seed*; in the second section, I examine the respective works of Gallagher and Garner, as they relate to ideas around embodiment and organs; and in the third section, I analyze the aquatically inspired performances of Azealia Banks. As I demonstrate, the boundary between body, organs, and flesh is just as nautically deep and productively murky as the borders that ostensibly separate bodily drives from each other.¹²⁸

Queer Vestibularity, Sounding, and Butler's *Wild Seed*

“Sounding” functions as a calculation of black life-as-flesh within the aquatic; more specifically, it offers a measurement of black women’s parahumanity, or flesh, and its sonic afterlives qua vestibularity. In her essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Spillers famously explains, “these lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a *cultural vestibularity* [emphasis added] and the culture, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, ‘owners,’ ‘soul drivers,’ ‘overseers,’ and ‘men of God,’ apparently colludes with a protocol of ‘search and destroy’.”¹²⁹ These violent markings incidentally represent what Spillers calls the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” which turn raw tissue into an illusory body disbarred from legal personhood. The implications of such racialized stigmata become more complex when conjoined with the multiple meanings of vestibularity, which connote the sonic, the “bodily”, and the spatial all at one.

The multi-valence of the vestibularity coupled with its productively hazy invocation by Spillers render rich implications for bare life and its sonic and spatial ontologies. According to the physiological components of corporeality, vestibularity denotes several antechambers or passageways within the body; for the sake of this chapter, I deem most poignant of these spaces to be the cochlean (e.g. ear-based) and uterine cavities. Hearing (im)balances, and (re)production occasionally overlap on material and metaphorical levels. Auditory vestibules of the ear foster proper bodily posture, process percussions, and maintain neurological functions.¹³⁰ Energy vibrations, such as the low frequencies of (human) speech, are detected by the cochlea, which aids gravitational balance. In terms of the uterine, vestibularity invokes several spaces such as the vulva, cervix, and fallopian tubes. Theoretically, auditory-neurological disorders, such as *mal de débarquement*—otherwise known as disembarkment syndrome—and vestibular hyperacusis,

suggest aquatic affects, which concatenate the hearing, balance, and uterine systems into a series of sensations that further a sonic framework around racial assemblage. Even though this chapter focuses on the queer mutation of black women's para-humanity and its evocation of "female" biology, it still examines elements such as spatiality and black masculinity in relation to the "womb," which, in virtue of its psychoanalytic purchase, can be more abstractly construed than the more fleshy term "uterine."

The "sounding of sirens" denotes both a black sea creature and a series of "alarms" or panics around black sexuality at visual and aural levels. (In Chapter Three, sounding also connotes the aural measurement or analysis of queerness by way of timbre and vocal range exemplified by the aquatically inspired performances by black rhythm-and-blues recording artists.) According to Jean-Francois Augoyard, a siren qualifies as a phonotropic effect that "manifests itself exclusively in the sonic sphere, and whose source often cannot be located, illustrates the attraction/repulsion duality that characterizes the emergence of certain sound events."¹³¹ This dyad of attraction and repulsion characterizes flesh as a vestibular substance within the black aquatic, as holds a dual capacity in racializing bare life and sustaining Wynterian Man. After Spillers, I assert that black women's flesh has functioned as the principle vestibule, or aural and bodily passageway, between human and non-human worlds.

In addition to Spiller's writings, I use the work of Weheliye and Moten to think through particular cases in which the vestibular occasions visceral and visual components of sound within the black aquatic. At a glance, Moten's writings examine how black aurality and its attendant subject-object status is founded on the coupling of repetitive refusals, repressions, and ritual subjugation. The specter of enjoyment and empathetic projection disallows for an ethical reproduction of the primal scene undergirding black subjugation. Commenting on the

imbrication of Frederick Douglass's recollection of Aunt Hester's battery and resultant scream in Hartman's theory on black subjectivity, Moten writes, "The dialogue [between Douglass and Hartman] is opened by a refusal of recitation that reproduces what it refuses."¹³² I find this circular irony, which embeds itself in the visual and the sonic, even more productive when translated into what Weheliye poetically terms the "scopic echo."¹³³ Weheliye deploys this visualization of sound (or the sounding of vision?) in an effort to illustrate how subjects disbarred from the precincts of humanity experience their ontological insufficiencies and diminutions in the shadow casted by the illusory, totemic scale of Man. "Here," Weheliye explains, "the different groups excluded from the category of proper humanity encounter only a scopic echo of their deviance from—and therefore reinscribe—the superiority of Man, reflecting their won value as ontological lack and western man's value as properly human."¹³⁴ Additionally, in his critique of Wynter, Weheliye illustrates the racial and sexual differences in modern assemblages, which root themselves in a later-explained predicament between anatomy and physiognomy, as an "isomorphic echo chamber."¹³⁵ I use this poetic of reverberation between racial and anatomical difference to understand the troubled, transmogrifying dynamics of animality and race as it is interfaced between characters in Butler's novel *Wild Seed*.

Ultimately I assert that flesh registers as vestibular in its auditory and fungible capacities within the world of Man. By way of the state's torturous tools and legal apparatus, flesh sounds itself through pain. Upholstering the passageways between animate and inanimate, human and non-human, flesh, according to Weheliye, poignantly lacerates a "*vestibular gash* [emphasis added] in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology."¹³⁶ Put differently, this material stands as another instantiation of the shrieking black

subject, echoing Moten's characterization of Aunt Hester's scream. This crucial cut in Man's protective covering occasions a sexual cut out of which speaking, shrieking flesh can ooze.

"The commodity," Moten explains, "whose speech sounds embodies the critique of value, of private property, of the sign."¹³⁷ Consequently, sonic thingliness simultaneously contests and enables exchange-value in its very aurality, complicating the twinning of pleasure, via the Master's/Man's enjoyment, with the black subject's pain. With this said, sounding as an aquatic and aural analytic for black female parahumanity often eludes land-bound capitalist understandings of ownership and personhood. Sounding, then, offers a way to imagine a mode of being that, at one and the same time, accounts for the flesh's circumvention of Man and subsistence as an un-gendering, sonic material that acquires a different type of value in its condemnable fungibility, which hinges on an indemnity that animates theories around drowned commodities within the *occiduous*.

The crucial cut in Man's protective covering that Weheliye heralds recalls the sonic and fleshly qualities of invagination. In borrowing the concept from Jacques Derrida, Moten diagnoses invagination's doubled affect: first, it creates a radical, exterior aurality that resists certain identities and subsequently tests "the reducibility of phonic matter to verbal meaning or conventional musical form"; and second, it fosters what Nathaniel Mackey calls "wounded kinship" that springs from the Middle-Passage and its diasporas.¹³⁸ Moten continues, asserting that this estrangement "would work by way of an imaginative restoration of the figure of the mother to a realm determined not only by verbal meaning and conventional musical form but by a nostalgic specularity and a necessarily endogamous, simultaneously virginal and reproductive sexuality."¹³⁹ A wound signifies neither death nor inert, mute material; rather, it speaks and thrives at a register below liberal humanism. For as Julia Kristeva reminds us, "A wound with

blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, accept.”¹⁴⁰ Just as the abject accompanies life (or white bodies) toward death, wounds are co-constitutive of black phonic matter/ flesh towards sounding, and do not exclusively signify “quietus,” whether it be biological or silence/death.

Overall, Butler’s *Wild Seed* (1980) illustrates how racial assemblage works in tandem with the connected axis of animality, colonialism, and eugenics, and other systems attempting to sustain the mythic image of Man. Set in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the trans-Atlantic world of racial slavery, *Wild Seed* centers on Doro and Anyanwu, two immortal, parahuman characters with varying sets of preternatural abilities. Doro manages “seed colonies” that breed persons with paranormal abilities such as psychic powers. His transformations are parasitic, as he fatally transfers his consciousness from one body to the next. In contrast, Anyanwu has survived as a healing shape-shifter whose mutations are founded in the literal consumption of flesh: she can assume the embodiment and acquire the consciousness of any animal whose viscera she eats. In one scene, for instance, Anyanwu acquires the epistemological and corporeal components unique to a fish through ingestion,

Everyone ate well that night. Anyanwu ate better than anyone, because for her, the flesh of the fish told her all she needed to know about the creature's physical structure—all she needed to know to take its shape and live as it did. Just a small amount of raw flesh told her more than she had words to say. Within each bite, the creature told her its story clearly thousands of times. That night in their cabin, Doro caught her experimentally turning one of her arms into a flipper.¹⁴¹

For Anyanwu, the epistemology of the fish's flesh manifests as an edible text. As I explain later, Anyanwu retreats into a queer form of "unfreedom" by transforming herself into a dolphin.¹⁴² Given the bestial and proprietary ontology of blackness during chattel slavery, Anyanwu's empathetic consumption of animal flesh could be framed as cannibalism. This predicament also reappears in my analysis of Anyanwu's glutinous murder of Lale Sachs—one of Doro's white sons—in a scene that throws questions of "purity" of heteronormative gender and flesh into the high relief of queer communion.

The seemingly immaterial Doro incites several temporal dilemmas in terms of embodiment and race. In his analysis of Doro, Gregory Jerome Hampton asks, "And if an individual can exist without a material body by preying on the bodies of others, how are we to imagine such an individual."¹⁴³ Hampton continues, arguing that Doro exists as "blank pages waiting for inscription," an antecedent to body and flesh.¹⁴⁴ I disagree with this assertion, instead suggesting that Doro subsists as a type of black aether. His ego—an entity that hubristically mocks Hegel's conception of Geist and, at the same time, faithfully adheres to the philosopher's master-slave dialectic—parasitically floats from host to host, possessing persons and subsequently killing them. Stacey Alaimo appropriately expresses, "Butler's *Wild Seed* dramatizes a battle between two modes of knowledge and being: the tyrannical force of an egotistical, disembodied mind and the transformative powers of an utterly embodied woman."¹⁴⁵ Relatedly, Hampton explains that Doro uses selective breeding to create "an entire race of people to become his servants, prey, and family."¹⁴⁶ In virtue of Doro's eugenicist program of husbandry, he stands at the intersection of three divisive temporalities: biblical time, which grounds its telos in an eschaton; Hegelian time, which finds its telos in reason; and black time, which is largely circular and entangled (e.g. the juxtaposition of the (post)colonial against

modernity's myth of progress). Ultimately for Doro, who is "both a Cartesian and a capitalist, bodies are nothing but vestments and investments."¹⁴⁷ Doro's vestments of flesh coincide with the material's fungibility, as he heroically dons the skin of his fallen hosts. As I demonstrate, his performance registers as morbid transvestitism.

Even though Anyanwu and Doro enjoy gender fluidity in their myriad transformations, they differ significantly in their means of mutation. While Doro can acquire the corporeality of any human by way of spiritual possession, Anyanwu assumes the embodiment of any animal or human by way of ingestion and preternatural palpability. For as Gerald L. Bruns notes, "Flesh is for eating and being, whereas the body is defined by self-denial or self-transcendence (one sinks into corpulence, whereas the body is fleet of foot, swift and agile like Achilles—whose heel, alas, is the one piece of flesh)."¹⁴⁸ Anyanwu maintains her immortality and enters animal embodiment by devouring flesh while Doro reifies himself as aether by denying the reader a representation of his original body, using possession to alight from one mortal host to the next. In other words, the victuals and vestments of several life forms constitute Anyanwu and Doro's respective transmogrifications.

Anyanwu's cannibalistic powers instantiate the queer capacities of black, ungended female flesh through sound. Spillers, for instance, explains, "Since the gendered female exists for the male, we might suggest that the ungended female—in an amazing stroke of pansexual potential—might be invaded/raided by another woman or man." Anywanu's ungending often occurs in incidents involving her consumption and evisceration of flesh. For example, in a scene where leopard Anyanwu disembowels white crewman Lale Lachs—one of Doro's hybrid sons who was formerly a reptilian animal but then retreated into human form due to his fear of Anyanwu—Doro pleads her to assume the proper, feminine gender and threatens to wear her

female form as a morbid vestment. After Anyanwu's initial wounding of Sachs, she *resounds* his psychically inserted "scopic echo" of laughter and sexual intercourse (e.g. "The green-eyed man [Sachs] laughed, and somehow his grating laughter echoed within her as had the thought of Doro.") with an additional attack,

She [Anywanwu] sprang. The spirit [Lale Sachs] *screamed, collapsed, and became a man again* [emphasis added]. Anyanwu hesitated, stood on his chest staring down at him. He was unconscious. He was a vicious, deadly being. Best to kill him now before he could come to and control her thoughts again. It seemed wrong to kill a helpless man, but if this man came to, he might well kill her. "Anyanwu!" She closed her ears to him. With a snarl, she tore out the throat of the being under her feet. In one way, that was a mistake. She tasted blood [...] The speed of her change had depleted her as nothing else could. She had to feed soon. Now! She slashed her victim's shirt out of the way and tore flesh from his breast. She fed desperately, mindlessly until something struck her hard across the face. She spat in pain and anger, realized dimly that Doro had kicked her. Her muscles tensed. She could kill him. She could kill anyone who interfered with her now. He stood inches from her, head back, as though offering her his throat. Which was exactly what he was doing, of course. "Come," he challenged. "Kill again. *It has been a long time since I was a woman* [emphasis added]." She turned from him, hunger driven, and tore more flesh from the body of his son. He lifted her bodily and threw her off the corpse. When she tried to return to it, he kicked her, beat her. "*Control yourself,*" he ordered. "*Become a woman!*" She did not know how she made the change [emphasis added]. [...] She had almost forgotten that part of the killing herself—the shame! *Her people did not eat human flesh—but she had eaten it then* [emphasis added]. She had

terrorized them into forgiving her, then outlived all but the legend of what she had done—or her mother had done, or her grandmother.¹⁴⁹

As this scene demonstrates, Doro's battery, consumption, and disembowelment of *white and human flesh* ungenders Anywanwu, creating for her an ungendered "pansexual potential."¹⁵⁰ Sachs's white body becomes flesh within a queer communion viciously initiated by Anyanwu. The consumption of human flesh—in this case, the viscera of Sachs—qualifies as depravity in the eyes of Anyanwu's people. Prior to the attack, Sach's body could have been abstracted into the ideal of Man but Anyanwu's hunger and anger produces a fatal, flesh-registering "vestibular gash" into his armor.¹⁵¹ Sachs's supernaturally inserted, psychosexual-sopic echo of the *ménage a trois* (e.g. alternating intercourse between Sachs, Isaac, and Anyanwu) attempts to establish an isomorphic echo of racial and sexual difference between himself and Anyanwu by way of his white-male embodiment. However, Anyanwu's vestibular gashing of Sach's body renders him as consumable flesh, consequently queering him in virtue of his newfound edibility and screaming materiality. As for Doro, his threat of killing Anyanwu and donning her dead, female form manifests as a morbid transvestitism, which destabilizes any presupposition of cis-gendered masculinity. Even though these scenes of gendered, sexual, and bestial mutation occur on land, they nonetheless highlight the function of the same racial assemblages that appear in aquatic scenarios throughout *Wild Seed*.

Anyanwu's reverie on aquatic unfreedoms and after-affective sensations of wetness are interrupted by the sight of Sachs's body and its covered wounds,

She had watched such creatures before, watched them longingly. She thought she could do what they did, thought she could become one of them. *She could almost feel the*

sensation of wetness, of strength [emphasis added], of moving through the water as swiftly as a bird through the air. She longed to try, and she feared to try. Now, though, she did not think of trying. She thought only of the body of Lale Sachs, *wrapped in cloth, its gaping wounds hidden* [emphasis added]. Would the leaping fish finish what she had begun? Consume the rest of the foolish, ugly, evil man?¹⁵²

Both the knowledge and the remembered taste of Sachs's flesh inspire in Anywanu daydreams of swimming with dolphins—a seemingly more intelligent strand of life—and the attendant sensation of wetness. This after-affect of aqueous flesh registers as form of *mal de débarquement*, otherwise known as disembarkment syndrome. Anyanwu's disembarkment syndrome illustrates the affective stakes of an infolded body. Inspired by Spinoza's idea of impersonal affect, Massumi explains, "The body infolds the *effect* of the impingement—it conserves the impingement *minus the impinging thing* [emphasis added], the impingement abstracted from the actual action that caused it and actual context of that action."¹⁵³ For Massumi, the virtual bypasses a "mediating present" and entails "something that happens too quickly." In so doing, this potentiality achieves a futurity that combines with the past upon the surface of the infolded body. For Anyanwu, the illusory movements and damp tactility of gliding through the sea constitute an almost-melancholic maladjustment to land and human form—a crestfallen imbalance underscored by both her newfound dissatisfaction with flying in eagle form and her guilt of seeing Sachs's dead white body, which was once *flesh* in her gustatory and alimentary tracks. Here, cannibalism is truly manifested by the facticity of Anyanwu's blackness *as it inheres within* Sachs' corpse: this unthinkable moment inverts bell hooks's logic of racial desire-as-alimentary, as it epitomizes the Other eating the dominant, whom, in this moment, is reduced to a surprisingly fleshy instantiation of Man. This *mal de débarquement* surfaces as an

oceanic feeling where, as Audre Lorde verses in her poem “A Song for Many Movements”

(1978), “Nobody wants to die on the way/ and caught between ghosts of whiteness/ and the real water/ none of us wanted to leave/ our bones/ on the way to salvation.”¹⁵⁴

Dolphin Anyanwu lavishes in corporeal freedom and cross-species kinship within the aquatic—the latter occasioning the complex, “pansexual potential” for bestiality. As a member of the ordontocenti, a transformed Anyanwu experiences a heightened sensitivity in her skin from a male dolphin attempting to court her. This prospect excites her but also elicits a taboo,

Her male dolphin came to touch her again and drove all thoughts of Doro from her mind. She understood that the dolphin's interest had become more than casual. He stayed close to her now, touching her, matching his movements with her own. She realized that she did not mind his attention. She had avoided animal matings in the past. She was a woman. Intercourse with an animal was abomination. She would feel unclean reverting to her human form with the seed of a male animal inside her. But now . . . it was as though the dolphins were not animals.

While this underwater infatuation excites dolphin Anyanwu, causing her to forget Doro, she remains wary of breeding, given her ability to return to human shape. Birthing the embryo of a non-human *while seemingly* human would register as desecration. This moral dilemma becomes complicated for a number of reasons: first, the denial of personhood to Anyanwu and other diasporic subjects sounds as disbarment from the category of Man; second, her flesh and its potential hieroglyphics are sublimated to an increasingly recessive memory of Doro, white subjects, and other oppressive actors while living as a dolphin; and third, dolphin Anyanwu develops an empathy toward other dolphins and sea life that haunts her while she occupies human form, a detail that she uses to morally convict Doro and Isaac’s marine hunt. Within the

sea, dolphin Anyanwu escapes the status of flesh, or racialized bare life, slipping into the biopolitics of the pelagic food chain and, at the same time, reifies the racist, colonial continuum between blackness and animality. Overall, Anyanwu's transformations speak of the intricate anxieties surrounding anthropophagy and supernatural palpability as conduits to multiple racial assemblages that run the gamut between the privilege of a white-male suitor to the non-human zones of blackness, which have historically evoked notions of the animal in terms of unwaged labor and fears around unrestrained libido. Her queer mutations, which function as assemblages, anchor themselves in what Stuart Hall calls "tendential combinations," which articulate the impresses of dominating systems upon the (de)territorialized being in question.¹⁵⁵ Additionally the sea and ship form different gendered spaces from which Anyanwu and Doro operate. For dolphin Anyanwu, the seas provide a sanctuary from Doro's gaze and crewmembers' sexual violence (e.g. Doro: "Everyone aboard has been warned against molesting you. My sons have been doubly warned. Lale chose to ignore me."). Dolphin Anyanwu's unfreedom in the sea circumvents the commodification—or *liquidation*—and sexual violence proffered by the ship, elements that Tinsley rightfully attributes to the material struggles of black slaves founded in the bellies of European vessels. Her vitality in the aquatic *feels alongside* aquatic life.¹⁵⁶

Ultimately, the visceral, parahuman alchemy of alloying object with subject assumes a transformative measure when we sound the aquatic for alternate forms of black life and "agencies," however stilted they may be. Such is the case in Anyanwu's string of zoological and aquatic transformations, which arguably produce forms of "unfreedoms" the generate provisos of bounded agency in relation to the systems of trans-Atlantic slavery and Doro's lethal, unrelenting surveillance and eugenic telos.

Aquatic Flesh and Organs-without-Bodies in the Work of Ellen Gallagher and Doreen Garner

To varying extents, artworks such as Ellen Gallagher's print *Wiglette* and Doreen Garner's sculpture *(NEO)plasm*, for instance, amalgamate flesh with externalized internal organs, a scheme that complicates understandings of racial assemblage and black corporeality. Both artists highlight how organs signify race and survive at a hyper-fungible level, operating as commodities free of the body and possibly offering vitality to others. While Gallagher's plasticine-and-paper collages of black women resemble intestinal flora, Garner's artworks and performances respectively explore the limits of flesh and organs through sculptural assemblage and kinetics. Despite differences in media, these two artists enjoy a commonality in both the inversion of corporeal boundaries and the perversion of modern gazes, which include taxonomical, clinical, and archaeological views of black women's viscera. In my examination of Gallagher and Garner's respective works, I argue that organs function as a form of hyper-fungibility, superseding and liquidating the flesh through queer mutation.

In addition to sounding, there are three other key analytics that swim around Gallagher's and Garner's versions of queer mutation: heautophany, liquidity, and liquidation. As stated before, I use the term "sounding" to account for the discovery of visceral and auditory para-humanity within the maelstrom of blackness and queerness. As understood by Frantz Fanon and then further illuminated by Monica Allewaert, heautophany connotes the fear or phenomenon of internal organs becoming externalized.¹⁵⁷ This phobia of exteriorized innards echoes Spillers's ideas of fleshy hieroglyphics. Again, Spillers asserts, "This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside

has been *turned outside*.”¹⁵⁸ Here, organs bear inscriptions of subjugation and exude liquidation through disembowelment and dissolution of the body. For all intents and purposes, I define queer mutation as a form of animacy that demonstrates all four of these analytics. Such transformation queers black corporeality by liquidating and liquefying the glorified body of Enlightenment reason—a corpus rendered captive by violent markings—into viscera. On the whole, which is to say, *in parts*, queer mutation makes its most gutsy appearance through disembowelment: the spilling out and slipping off the captive body, a point where flesh and organs subsist on their own, regenerating themselves through and against racial assemblage, and illustrating what Donna Haraway and Eva Hayward term “metaplasma.”¹⁵⁹ As I demonstrate, Gallagher’s collage-based practice and Garner’s sculptural and performative depictions of offal throw blackness’s fungibility and atomization into a gooey palimpsest. This very exchangeability and its attendant disaggregation of the body render blackness as a queer commodity.

Within the theoretical frame of viscera, I combine Hartman’s ideas of fungibility with Spillers’s racialized dyad of flesh and body in an effort to deracinate Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s notions of bodies and organs. Spillers, for instance, explains that the “profitable ‘atomizing’ of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features [...]” Likewise, Hartman contends that the figurative capacities of blackness “are made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity—and by the extensive capacities of property – that is, the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons.”¹⁶⁰ These artists and theorists all destabilize notions of the human through the disaggregation and fungibility of the black body.

Within the milieu of Man, race, and queerness, how does the body differ from flesh? The body stands as the rational, Cartesian machine whose sum is greater than its unmentionable parts, while flesh equates to the raw, fungible material. Black viscera, as artistically imagined by Gallagher and Garner, functions as the latter. Fittingly, Monique Allewaert asserts that bodily fragmentation is central to parahumanity; similarly, I argue that disembowelment perpetuates and queers this particular onto-epistemology.¹⁶¹ Disembowelment can be aligned with the exceptional state of colonial violence and necropolitical ends. Relatedly, Weheliye explains, “Flesh epitomizes a central modern assemblage of racialization that highlights how bare life is not only a product of previously established distinctions but also, and more significantly, aids in the perpetuation of hierarchical categorizations along the lines of nationality, gender, etc [...]”¹⁶²

Inspired by the mythos of Drexciya, Ellen Gallagher’s so-called “wig ladies” from the 2004 extract *Wiglette*, display a form of queer mutation that uses an aquatic imagination to betray the modernist grid. More specifically, Gallagher’s characters symbolize chromosomal change in the context of queer mutation, indicating duplication and inversion. Combining minimalism’s cold seriality with the delicacy of craft, Gallagher populates the grid with black femme figures clipped from vintage editions of *Ebony* and *Jet Magazine*. Gallagher then transforms these characters by gouging out their eyes and adding plasticine wigs, which simultaneously resemble intestines, echinodermic forms, and cerebral matter. “Plasticine,” according to Gallagher, “is meant to allude to that idea of mutability and shifting, because Plasticine is used in animations and Claymation. Much the same way that penmanship paper is not a fixed material, the Plasticine will always continue to be vulnerable.”¹⁶³ In other words, the seriality of the wig ladies combined with Gallagher’s intimate execution of craft arts suggests a numerical and structural change in life form that the grid cannot contain. This is small-scale

rebellion represents chromosomal change. The incongruity between black kinship structures, black women's flesh and the Freudian narrative of family becomes a gimmick within Gallagher's rendition of the grid.¹⁶⁴ Her queerly mutated women implode taxonomy and meronymy, two classifications promised by this narrative lattice. Incidentally, her series *DeLuxe*, Gallagher also pulls from the work of Spillers and juxtaposes what she imagines as Drexciyan anatomy with beauty advertisements for skin whitening, weight-loss aids, and hair straightening products.

Similar to Gallagher's work, the sculptural and racial assemblages of Doreen Garner engage the grotesque histories around the black women's bodies at the level of flesh and organs. Garner's art audaciously disinters the grotesque histories around black women's bodies. As her use of glitter, prosthetics, and gems demonstrates, Garner handles the accounts and optics surrounding black women's corporeality with a grisly and glamorous maneuver. Here, Saidiya Hartman's concepts of black optics and fungibility array a series of affects and sights/sites that Garner realizes in two artworks: *The Observatory*, a one-hour performance featuring the artist encased in a vitrine, and *Black Ocean/Big Black*, a kinetic installation (both 2014)—both of which the artist has archived in film and photography. While Garner's vitrined performance in *The Observatory* evokes a *terra firma* filled with the interred organs of black women, *Black Ocean*, an inflated sculpture comprised of over one thousand trash bags, offers the viewer an undulating mass of black flesh that mimics watery billows.

Between Garner's performance *The Observatory* and sculpture *Black Ocean/Big Black*, a significant divergence in gazes and spaces emerges. On the one hand, *The Observatory* arguably evokes a metaphorical nexus between body, flesh, organs, and land—a move that integrates archaeological and clinical gazes into a black female optic of pleasure wherein an oppositional gaze disidentifies the theatrical and scopophilic framing of black women's bodies.¹⁶⁵ Here, for

instance, Garner creates a scene of subjection whereby the vitrine simultaneously resembles the staging of freak shows, scientific inquiry, and artistic aura. On the other hand, *Black Ocean* functions purely as an undulating expanse of flesh, which calls to mind an oceanic space that denies any penetrative gaze. In other words, I argue that while Garner's vitrine-enclosed performances, which elicit several gazes at once, signify a geological position and attempt to exhume the gory archives of black women's bodies in art and science, her sculptural installation *Black Ocean* signals a queer liquidation and kinetics of *black flesh*. Across the two artworks, Garner takes us from black *organs* to black *flesh*, from ornamented disembowelments to unified sheath. With a slimy, almost-surgical hand, Garner's work abstracts the spectacular displays and medical exploitation of black women, such as Sarah Baartman and Henrietta Lacks, into an amalgamation comprising emetic, ornate chunks of viscera. What follows is work in progress—an unfinished autopsy, an experimental allegory—whose terms are as elusive as the bodily integrity from which black life has been barred.

In my analysis of Garner's work, I contrast *flesh* and *organs*. My theorization of this differentiation draws from the work of Nicole Fleetwood, Hortense Spillers, and Hartman. In her seminal essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: an American Grammar" (1987), Spillers makes a critical distinction between flesh and body: the former signals a "zero degree of social conceptualization," producing ungendered viscera; and the latter enjoys legal personhood and full subjectivity.¹⁶⁶ Within the context of the pained black body, this concept of flesh stands central to Hartman's critique of humanism and conceptualization of injury and legal personhood. As Hartman notes,

The bestowal that granted the slave a circumscribed and fragmented identity as person in turn shrouded the violence of such a beneficent and human gesture. Bluntly stated, the

violence of subjection concealed and extended itself through the outstretched hand of legislated concern. The slave was considered a subject only insofar as he was criminal(ized), wounded body, or mortified flesh.¹⁶⁷

Hartman's notion of flesh accounts for the reduction of black bodies that have been rendered raw material and denied legal personhood through the apparatuses of violence. Similarly, Fleetwood imagines this raw material as *excess flesh*, which "attend[s] to ways in which black women's corporeality is rendered as an excessive overdetermination and as overdetermined excess."¹⁶⁸ For my purposes, I maintain flesh as the fungible material of black life, while I frame organs as biological commodities that have been viciously disinterred from the flesh. At a literal level, I am aware that flesh functions as porous organ per se, as it enables perspiration, heat regulation, and absorption. However, this ectodermal sheath, unlike internal organs, immediately incurs multiple gazes and yields a particular potentiality, as demonstrated by *Black Ocean*. Meanwhile, I designate organs as the *decorative, expendable, and decayed* condition of viscera found in Garner's work, with *The Observatory* standing as the most explicit example. Incidentally, both organs and flesh share a history with *offal*. In regards to its etymology, the term "offal" originates from the German word *Abfall*, which means "garbage," "dross," and a falling off of decay.¹⁶⁹ Fittingly, this mode of viscera, which envelops both organs and flesh, harkens back to fungibility.¹⁷⁰ With this said, black women's corporeality has served as offal: a repugnant feast for the medical gaze and a tried-and-true victual for colonial appetites. The organs in Garner's work bear sutures, jewels, forks, staples, fissures, kinky weaves, and lesions of pearls—all of which racialize this supposedly universal matter. Accordingly, Garner's *Onika* (2014) and *Pickled Pearl* (2015) gruesomely depict a disembowelment of "black female" innards as

bejeweled, hairy baroque-like sculptural clusters.¹⁷¹ Besides highlighting what Weheliye terms "physiognomic territorialization of anatomic qualities," Garner's work demonstrates how certain materials—accessories associated with "recalcitrant" cultures of excess—pathologize black women's corporeality and innards.¹⁷² In this sense, Garner's sculptural assemblages double as racial assemblages.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the body without organs comes to mind in a discussion of Garner's work. The body of without organs (known hereafter as the BwO) enables us to think about somatic capacities that exceed conventional models of social and corporeal organization. Inspired by Antonin Artaud's radio play *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* (1947-48) and embryology, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the BwO "is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism [...]. The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemies of the body."¹⁷³ The duo also characterizes the body without organs as "the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, [and] the unconsumable."¹⁷⁴ Incidentally, Deleuze and Guattari and Slavoj Žižek theorize affect as impersonal intensities, feelings that exist within the world and toggle between immanence and transcendence. In his book *Organs without Bodies*, Žižek inverts Deleuze and Guattari's concept of corporeality. In a maneuver similar to Marshall McLuhan, he argues that technologies such as the camera and recorded voice function as disembodied organs with wills of their own. However, viscera and its "intensities," while infectious and affective, are anything but impersonal given the story of race—namely, the bloody history around black women's bodies. Black women have historically been framed both as fertile and (re)productive actors within capitalism and as contaminants to the normative sexuality.¹⁷⁵

The absence of sadism from Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the BwO perpetuates a politics of whiteness that absolves such theory from the intellectual and moral labor required by critical conceptions of race and interrogations of colonial violence.¹⁷⁶ With that said, there are some possible affinities between black studies' theorization of corporeality and Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of the somatic. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari contend, "The body without organs is not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality. Above all, it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image." This passage arguably offers connections to Orlando Patterson's idea of social death, Spillers's differentiation of flesh from body, and Frantz Fanon's work on the psychoanalytic and phenomenological stakes of black being. Deleuze and Guattari even imagine the BwO as a form of capital, a view that could certainly call to mind Hartman's concept of the fungible black body. Nevertheless, the duo's omission of sadism and emphasis on masochism evacuates race from the theoretical precinct.¹⁷⁷ Here, whiteness enjoys the ecstatic capacities of self-inflicted pain (e.g. further realized by what Deleuze and Guattari term "pain waves"), schizophrenia, and drug usage—three instantiations of the BwO that heavily rely on pathologized blackness, which resonates as a fearsome infrasound against the ear and body of white liberal being.¹⁷⁸ In the vein of Hartman, the retelling of violent scenes from slave narratives and the white subject's empathetic slippage in the captive body, otherwise known as an object, recasts black sentience as merely suffering.¹⁷⁹ Garner's visceral work complicates this discursive rehearsal of black women's histories in Western medicine by the very fact that it resituates flesh and organs as *things*. For instance, *Pickled Pearl* (fig. 5)—an entity that "functions" as a strange, digestive sack that bears a plumber's pipe and clear plastic tubing connected by sphincters—conceivably exists as a thing whose many amalgamated thwart a grasp

on its explicit purpose. It is an organ that reposes aside from, but is nonetheless the product of the corridor relay between object and subject in modernity's sanatorium.¹⁸⁰

As a fungible commodity, black corporeality inspires a series of questions: Where do organs fall in relation to flesh and body? How have we constructed the binary between organs and body? If organs are meant to animate the larger corpus and its flesh, what are the implications of organs enjoying or propagating a life of their own? What kinds of fungibility do they suggest? How does the vitality of organs reinvigorate notions of animation, such as liquidity and liquidation, within the presumed stasis of social death? Fungibility, according to Hartman, is "made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity—and by the extensive capacities of property – that is, the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons."¹⁸¹ As exemplified by James Marion Sims's brutal, gynecological experimentation on black women's bodies during the nineteenth century, The Tuskegee Syphilis Study, and the unlawful harvesting of Henrietta Lacks's and John Moore's respective immortal cell lines, the lengthy history detailing the medical exploits of the black body and its innards, which includes cellular and visceral content, proves that racism is deeper than skin. This visceral archive has become even more relevant in light of present-day factors such as the neoliberal market for biological matter and racial pharmaceuticals, phenomena interrogated by Dorothy Roberts and Jonathan Xavier Inda.¹⁸² As Weheliye observes, "It would seem that persistence of the twin phantoms of racialization and property relations unsettle the promise of a subepidermal and cellular humanity as an absolute biological substance."¹⁸³ Doreen Garner renders and then reconstitutes the fat, flesh, and feelings of these histories into a gutsy aesthetic.

From an oppositional gaze, Garner's work engages visibility, visualization, and hypervisibility, three modes of vision that have historically framed black women.¹⁸⁴ (Incidentally, I collectively refer to these three modes as "the optical regime" throughout this essay.) According to Fleetwood, visibility entails "the state of being able to be seen" while visualization involves "the mediation of the field of vision and the production of visual objects."¹⁸⁵ As for hypervisibility, perhaps the most conspicuous optic brought to bear on black women, Fleetwood defines this mode of vision as a set of "processes that produce the overrepresentation of certain images of blacks and the visual currency of their images public culture."¹⁸⁶ In terms using her artistic practice to develop an oppositional gaze within the optical regime, Garner draws from her family experiences with a now-deceased disabled sister. Garner recalls the looks incurred by her late sister, who suffered a cerebrovascular accident at a young age,

[...] when she was eight-years-old [Garner's sister], she had an AVM rupture that resulted in a stroke, which left her with the inability to walk and talk. Her face was severely distorted, but naturally she wanted to still do all the things she had done before, like going to the zoo. But people stared – children, adults alike – and I felt powerless to stop them. I was only two years older than her. A lot of my work is aimed at getting even and creating a power dynamic critique for her. She died in 2007.¹⁸⁷

Garner's desire to requite these unsavory looks that constituted visibilities of her sister translates into her vitrined performance in *The Observatory* and the opacity of her kinetic, air-filled sculpture *Black Ocean/Big Black*.

From the nineteenth-century archive of atrocities, which includes the medical and theatrical histories ensuing from James Marion Sims's gynecological experiments on black

women and Sarah Baartman's objectification as freak show attraction, to the present-day opulence of hip-hop culture, Garner carefully sutures these references into grotesque performances and sculptural assemblages that resemble the racial assemblages, which weigh upon black women's corporeality.¹⁸⁸ Her media include synthetic hair, Swarovski crystals, condoms, glitter, and other materials illustrating the amalgam of intersectional identity with non-humanity and thingliness. On the materiality of her work, Garner explains,

My materials are all in tune with what I feel the eye is drawn to, we are attracted to wet glossy materials – I use a lot of silicon, which is the closest material to skin. Many of my configurations can be visualized as sex toys, dildos, etc. They somehow conjure up ideas of masturbation and sexual fetishization, maybe because of who I am as an artist or maybe because the viewer wants to see this in my work. However, I often find myself being looked at with the same gaze that's afforded to my work. The art world and society are making black women into sexualized objects: just look at the media for confirmation.¹⁸⁹

The carnal specters of race haunt and enable Garner's uncanny ability to glamorously, yet gruesomely, replicate organs and flesh. As a black woman situated in an art market overwhelmingly dominated by white collectors, curators, and critics, Garner has been expected to perform particular tropes of blackness. However, she does so in way that demonstrates how flesh and organs, which serve as bare-life oblations to science and its irrational spectacles, traverse and subsequently collapse the binaries between the gift and the commodity, the vital and the deathly, and the decorative and the disposable—categories that are eclipsed by the looping twilight and profitability of black life.¹⁹⁰ From *The Observatory* to *Black Ocean*, we transition

from spillage of organs to a kinetic sheath of black flesh. Such a passage elicits or, in some cases, obscures several ways of looking.

In her one-hour performance *The Observatory*, Garner calls attention to how clinical and archeological gazes frame black women's bodies. Nestled in a glass vitrine sullied by bodily waste and contraceptives, Garner languishes as a specimen surrounded by layers of hair, petroleum jelly, glitter, and stuffed condoms, which emulate engorged intestines and other innards. These objects (e.g. contraceptives, lipids, and decorative materials) have uses-values outside of her performance.¹⁹¹ However, Garner manipulates these objects to resemble viscera, which include organs that carry a distinct use-value tethered to medical economies of transplantation.¹⁹² This bizarre inversion of fungibility, by way of Garner's sculptural craft, calls to mind tensions between vitalities and social death, between the organic and the ersatz. *The Observatory*, arguably, forces the viewer to amalgamate a clinical gaze with an archaeological one, a maneuver that casts the environment as a type of terrarium, a microcosm of land. Here, these biopolitical and geological ways of seeing encase Garner, representing a heap of earth ripe with organs. In the spirit of Spillers, Garner's *Observatory* showcases "notions of captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory."¹⁹³ The deductive, inductive, abductive modes of reasoning deliquesce within this mise-en-scene of viscera.¹⁹⁴ Overall, her practice coagulates into a brand of nauseating decadence that questions several gazes and unique vitalities that have shaped ideas around black women's materialism.

The history of the vitrine spans many eras and archives, and acts as an instrument of optical regime in *The Observatory*. John C. Welchman asserts that "vitrinization" paralleled the enclosure of land during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. This detail coincides with the

idea of *The Observatory* exemplifying a cross-section of organ-filled earth. Welchman subsequently highlights four historical episodes and themes that connected sculpture to the vitrine: first, pre-modern encasements found in Christianity (e.g. reliquaries, iconostases, and monstrances); second, the *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; third, the arcades and department stores of the mid-to-late nineteenth century; and fourth, the self-reflexive practices of display found in modern and contemporary art (e.g. the readymade works of Marcel Duchamp, Mike Kelley, and Damien Hirst). Vitrines “withheld things and a certain zone around them from common appropriation while at the same time encouraging viewers privileged to look at them to see according to a disciplined optic ordained by those who control the display.”¹⁹⁵ *The Observatory* simultaneously encapsulates all four of these themes, as Garner's body (or flesh) and, by extension, black women's corporeality stand as icons of abusive scientific inquiry (e.g. modern gynecology), circulate as objects in capitalism, quiver as aberrations in specular imaginary of Man, and flourish as cultural agents who, according to Uri McMillan, perform objecthood in the manner of avatars.¹⁹⁶

With this said, I argue that the vitrine in *The Observatory* instantiates what Spillers terms *cultural vestibularity*, a space that subjugates the non-human. Spillers explains,

these lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a *cultural vestibularity* [emphasis added] and the culture, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, “owners,” “soul drivers,” “overseers,” and “men of God,” apparently colludes with a protocol of “search and destroy.”¹⁹⁷

These violent markings incidentally represent what Spillers calls the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” which transform raw tissue into a delusive body disbarred from legal personhood.¹⁹⁸ Entrapped

in this antechamber, Garner deploys an oppositional gaze that disidentifies the optical regime. This system of looking and being looked at has lethally framed black life—in this case, black women.¹⁹⁹ Here, Garner is a lively *thing* set aside from the object-subject relay, as her scopophilic platform plays into medical inquiry, sideshow oddity, and flashes of zooscopy.²⁰⁰

First exhibited at New York City's Socrates Sculpture Park in September 2014, Garner's *Black Ocean/Big Black* is a looming piece that mimics water and stirs up an image of black flesh. Garner recalls fabricating and animating this inflatable sculpture, explaining,

1,020 trash bags were conjoined together to form 1 large solid sheet inflated by electric fans. The sculpture expands two stories high and extends the full size of Skowhegan's Old Dominion Fresco Barn. *Black Ocean / Big Black* mimics the image of a large body of water at night. The surface of the bags glisten[s] as waves of air pass beneath. The current of air from the fans create large fluctuating mounds that that move in slow motion.²⁰¹

The very material and color of *Black Ocean* suggest dispensability and creates an illusion of weighty, fluid mass. However, at the same time, the airy animation of the sculpture alludes to volume and vitality.

While Garner's vitrined performance in *The Observatory* evokes a *terra firma* filled with the interred organs of black women, *Black Ocean* offers the viewer an undulating mass of flesh that mimics watery billows. Although Garner describes the sculpture as a "body of water," I assert that it can be conceptualized as seaborne *flesh*, given its lack of extremities or figural qualities, which are so commonly ascribed to Man. The ocular refusal of *Black Ocean* thwarts what Foucault calls "white visibility," a continuation of the medical gaze that frames the corpse.²⁰² The aquatic-like expanse of *Black Ocean* glistens but denies the viewer their reflection. Moreover, the clinical gaze, a vision inextricable to black women's violability and

sexuality, privileges geography over history. In other words, this sight/site is built upon the spatialization of the body; it attempts to localize pathology. In all of its aquatic mass, *Black Ocean* occludes cartographical efforts due to its very undulating form and absorbs the viewer's gaze in its shiny yet non-reflective surface. Indeed, it "denies the mirror image" of western Man.²⁰³ Garner's billowing sculpture offers a queer spatialization of ungendered black flesh. It is the littoral vista that forecloses reflective likeness and unfurls forms of the para-human. Relatedly, Hartman reasons, "Indeed the elusiveness of black suffering can be attributed to a racist optics in which *black flesh* [emphasis added] is itself identified as the source of *opacity* [emphasis added], the denial of black humanity, and the effacement of sentience integral to wanton use of the captive body."²⁰⁴ It is within this optic that black life sounds a new form of living that then clouds the gaze of liberal humanism.

The spatial-sonic component of *Black Ocean* simulates what Hartman calls "the elasticity and capacious affect of blackness," which enables white flights of empathy. *Black Ocean's* flesh embodies "the abstract and empty vessel" of the captive, making it fungible. To use Deleuze and Guattari's term with caution, the sculpture as an affective entity functions as a type of BwO. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the body without organs opposes the arrangement of organs into an organism or body that,

produces and distributes them [intensities] in a spatium that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree—to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. It is nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0 [...]²⁰⁵

Much like Spiller's concept of flesh, affect wields energy even at the intensity of *zero* or non-being. In turn, *Black Ocean's* flesh stands opposite to legal personhood. Unlike Deleuze's

concept of immanence—a quality endemic to the BwO, connected to chaos, and dissimilar from the stagnancy of transcendence—*Black Ocean* lacks speed.²⁰⁶ At the same time, the sculpture creates a dynamic in its deployment of intensity, or affect, as a liquefied and liquidated aural undulation of viscera. *Black Ocean* swamps cultural vestibularity that lies between Man and other forms life.

The sonic and phonic material that accompanies *Black Ocean's* video invokes digestive functions; moreover, these drives figuratively align themselves with queer vibrations. For instance, the dark, loco-motive trudge of rhythmic base alludes to the digestive sounds familiar to monotone digestive processes. The screwed or slowed-down phonic murmuring, which interjects the beat, registers as unintelligible within the register of western Man and his logos.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, the wavelengths and kinetics of *Black Ocean* are equally important, as they indicate queer, affect vibes. Weheliye asserts that queer vibes occur when the flesh makes itself known through other senses and registers.²⁰⁸ While it may not have the voice of the liberal subjects, Garner's fleshly piece undulates to the slow, guttural- and bowel-like base. Here, the larynx's vocal capacities and the gut's ingestive abilities fuse together. Here, *Black Ocean* “sounds” a para-human, or not-quite-so human, ontology. This kind of existence appears on sonic and kinetic ranges that are deeper and more viscous than those commonly associated with the aural scope of liberal Man. If one were to envision the placement of *Black Ocean* on an audiogram, they would locate it at a pitch and intensity lower than human phonemes; in other words, the movement and sounds of this sculpture and its audiovisual life falls below the threshold of human hearing, into what otolaryngologist consider a zone of profound hearing loss. Here, our shovels, our picks, and other archaeological tools, which have been solely wedded to

the exhumation of land and its hidden corpses, fail to help us attune our gazes and aural capacities to the forgotten black flesh *in* and *of* the sea.

Ironically, the fleshy specter of blackness and its objecthood haunt Massumi's theory of affect. Affect, for Massumi, constitutes the bodily condition between perception and reaction, a passionate sinking into the medium depth of flesh. He explains proprioception's relationship to flesh,

Proprioception effects a double translation of the subject and the object into the body, at a medium depth where the body is only body, having nothing of the putative profundity of the self nor of the superficiality of external encounter. This asubjective and non-objective medium depth is one of the *strata* [emphasis added] proper to the corporeal; it is a dimension of the *flesh* [emphasis added]²⁰⁹

Put succinctly, the body without an image is an involution of subject-object relations into the body. Even though Massumi attempts to universalize the body in his theory of affect, it is the raw, outlawed material of blackness that enables his scheme in the first place. While Spillers differentiates flesh from body, Massumi's notion of a "body without an image" conceives of viscera's connection to proprioception, which concerns motility and kinesis within the body's skeletal-muscular frame. In Massumi's estimation, proprioceptive memory "is to skin what movement-vision is to the eyes."²¹⁰ We have witnessed such mechanics in Garner's kinetic sculpture, whose movement as an opaque, oceanic expanse denies us reflectivity and erases the performative traces of the artist as it exhibits a non-life of its own.

Issues of visibility in aquatic space cannot be stressed enough. Reminiscent of Tinsley's idea of "materiality without transparency" are Glissant's notions of opacity and transparency. The optic summons problems of the human that emerge from the imaginary of the black aquatic.

Albeit in the context of Francophone linguistics, Glissant's ideas around optics can help one understand two aspects: first, the material and symbolic capacities of the Black Aquatic and the archive; and second, the limits of language in relation to affect. "Transparency," according to Glissant, "no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its won image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations [...]"²¹¹ This deceptive transparency of language, which is then equated to the ocean's materiality, calls to mind a distinction between self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity. The difference between self-reflexivity and self-reflectivity may seem arbitrary but, as Jerrold Siegel points out, it demarcates the nuanced relationships between inner-life and self-reflection. Siegel explains that, "a reflex involves an automatic or involuntary response to stimulus. In this sense, something is reflexive if it simply doubles or reinforces its origin; images in a mirror are reflexive in this sense, even though we refer to them as reflections. On the other hand, the mental act of reflecting entails a more active, intentional practice—not an unwilled response."²¹² Similarly, Weheliye explains the biopolitical stakes of Black flesh within the paradigm of optics, writing, "the flesh is not an abject zone of exclusion that culminates in death but an alternate instantiation of humanity that does not rest on the mirage of western Man as the mirror image of human life as such."²¹³ Consequently, the following questions arise: How does one make sense of Black women's mutated flesh and corporeality within the work Octavia Butler, Wangechi Mutu, and others? How does one grapple with these mutations within the refracted optics of oceanic space?

Azealia Banks's "Atlantis" and Digital Flesh

Shifting our attention from Garner to independent hip-hop artist Azealia Banks, we escape the vitrine for the virtual, transmuting flesh into digital aether. In so doing, we also witness an implosion of the spatial, as the intergalactic and the oceanic collapse into each other. In the case of Banks and her contributions to the ostensibly emergent ethos of openly queer hip-hop culture, the aquatic also offers fluid desire and destabilizes notions of the human. Banks's multi-genre mixtape *Fantasea* (2012) and her "Mermaid Ball" concerts—performances in which she fashions herself as an urban siren—heavily borrow from black-queer ball culture of the 1980s and early 1990s, and cull elements from Seapunk, a bizarre aesthetic inundating marine themes with nostalgia for the early days of the internet. Consequently, Banks' theatrical maneuvers inspire several questions: How does the mermaid motif articulate her queer identity? What kind of "black femininity" ensues from Banks's amalgamation of saccharine mermaid motifs, hip-hop masculinity, and ball culture? Contrary to what Amelia Jones has identified as "televisual flesh" in the 1970s video art of Lynda Benglis and Paul McCarthy, the corporeality presented by Banks is distinctly digital and distended in its various cartoonish iterations.²¹⁴ Given her "video game" aesthetics, Banks's closest kin in new media can arguably be found both in the queer video art of Jacolby Satterwhite and in the dystopian digitalism of Sondra Perry. As we will eventually see, Banks's video for her single "Atlantis" bombards us with a world of purely deceitful surface that jettisons the grainy warmth and human-adjacent textures of analogue representation.

In her controversial essay "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag attempts to delineate a (white) queer aesthetic through a lengthy list of characteristics. Camp, according to Sontag, is an "ineffable" aesthetic that values artifice and exaggeration.²¹⁵ In this case, the subversive and/or

flamboyant performance of gender, whether it be androgyny or hyperbole constitutes a blithe culture in which self-presentation always sashays in “quotations.”²¹⁶ The queer subject, thus, fashions their self as an ironic, disengaged aesthete who delights in the apolitical. Unfortunately, like many canonical pieces in queer studies, Sontag’s essay disregards race and transgendered identities in its explication of camp. The dynamics of ballroom culture undoubtedly challenges heteronormative roles in its performativity and lavish instances of self-determination. However, using Sontag’s definition of camp to corral the black and brown queer bodies into a vague aesthetic ignores the very real politics of and equally tangible violence toward of non-white, non-normative subjects. This is not to rob queer people of color of the aesthetic; indeed, style, form, and affect subversively reach new heights within ballroom culture. Still, the intersectionality of black-queer recording artists such as Banks always produces a palimpsest rife with political scripts, imposed pathologies, and rebellious performance.

As noted by a few prominent media outlets, self-identified queer artists have been enjoying a recent increase in visibility and success.²¹⁷ Catering to a predominately white, young middle-class readership and older tastemakers, *Pitchfork* and *The New York Times* have attempted to identify the “new” trend of queer hip-hop. In her article “We Invented Swag: NYC’s Queer Rap” (2012), *Pitchfork* writer Carrie Batton examines the blurring between “mainstream stardom and underground oddballism” in relation to the recent wave of self-identified queer rappers from New York City. This raucous clique includes Mykki Blanco, House of LaDosha, Cakes da Killa, Zebra Katz, and Azealia Banks, among others. While Batton focuses on queer hip-hop within a metropolitan context, *New York Times* writer Jonathan Dee offers an account of “Sissy Bounce,” a bass- and loop-heavy, queer brand of rap native to New

Orleans; Big Freedia, Sissy Nobby, and Nicky Da B act as energetic ambassadors on behalf of this Southern subgenre of hip-hop.²¹⁸

This campy crop of black queer rappers brandishes a particular flag of pride and novelty; however, any conversation about the “newness” of this subject should only be confined to its newfound marketability and mainstream visibility. Hip-hop’s homophobia may be slowly disintegrating, as evidenced by the seemingly tolerant attitude of heterosexual artists toward their LGBTQ counterparts, but a majority of the genre still deploys heterosexist discourse and misogynistic spectacles.²¹⁹ Additionally, hip-hop’s tropes of vehement homosociality between black and Latino men and rampant commodification of women destabilize its monolithic heterosexuality, throwing the possibility of sublimated homoeroticism into high relief.

Banks’s iconography comprises a mixture of girlish popular culture and black diasporic religion. For instance, Banks draws from *The Little Mermaid* as a source of inspiration, Banks cross-pollinates her aquatic imagery and performance with competing archetypes of gender that coincide with the aberrations of black sexual identity. More specifically, Banks combines the saccharine femininity of Ariel, a character whose life reproduces a parable of white bourgeois feminism,²²⁰ with the campy drag of Ursula the sea witch. Within this amalgam, Banks toggles between the following identities and bodies: girly “realness,” “butch queen” transvestitism, enchanted corporeality reminiscent of Mama Watu—a water deity unique to black diasporic religions—and a chimeric body furnished by Disney. Interestingly, Ariel still stands at the only Disney princess who enjoys an amphibious corporeality; her ability to navigate both land and water demonstrates her versatility between the empirical world of the terrestrial and the “irrationality” of the sea. Banks’s concert attire for her Mermaid Balls reflect these syntheses. Theatrical makeup, extravagant siren-inspired costumes, leagues of long, silky sea green

weave—all of these elements, combined with the masculine bravado of her hip-hop performance, add up to a hyperbolized femininity that parodies itself, bespeaking “banjee-style” camp that dishes out realness through the integrity of artificiality.

Banks’s mermaid-inspired ethos dialectically engages what Celeste Olaquiaga identifies as nostalgic and melancholic kitsch. Olaquiaga explains nostalgic kitsch as encompassing the “acceptable parts” of a traumatic event.²²¹ Conversely, melancholic kitsch suspends itself in a state of unsatisfied longing and unrelieved grief.²²² Banks’s mermaid-inspired performance evokes a redemptive creature, one that represents the “free state” of speculation that Hartman discusses.²²³ The half-human sea creature redresses the discarded biographies and bodies of Venus and other black women who never made to shores of the New World. Venus, Ariel, Ursula, banjee girl—all of these identities intermingle in Banks’s aquatically inflected repertoire of performances and illustrate the types of non-normative genders that the black aquatic offers. Here, the “body,” or captive corporeality, becomes baptized through drowning and resurrects itself as a different kind of “flesh” of the imaginary sort: the mermaid. Consequently, the black siren personifies both modes of memory. As a siren equipped with throaty jazz vocalizations, Banks lures seafaring heterosexuality into the very waters of its expelled, queer desire and projections; she then unapologetically drowns hetero-normativity in a sea bass-heavy beats, dragging it down to Drexciya where interpellation cannot impede upon the subject’s erotic bonds and fluid self-making.

In his article “Little Mermaid Goes Punk” (2012), *New York Times* writer Ben Detrick describes the web-based movement of Seapunk, reporting,

Sprouting from the digital petri dish of social networking, seapunk is a whimsical style that mashes together cartoonish aquatic themes, rave culture and nostalgia for ‘90s

Internet imagery. The iconography, which exists almost entirely online, includes clip art of dolphins jumping through pyramids, aquamarine-haired mermaids with Sponge Bob T-shirts, and psychedelic orbs flying over computer-generated waves.²²⁴

This movement has generated waves with within various circles of mass culture, including singers Rihanna and Grimes, and American fashion designers Proenza Schouler, among others. In its reimagining 1990s cyber culture, an ethos marked by an almost-embarrassing obsession emergent technologies, Seapunk offers a wistful, virtual reality that maps itself across bizarre landscapes of simulacra. This subgenre has caused a stir in the “real” world of embodied hipsters and independent recording artists alike.

Reveling in a hallucinogenic brand of the sublime, the waterborne imagery of Seapunk informs much of Banks’s aesthetic in her video for “Atlantis.” Within this computer-generated world of intergalactic seascapes, Banks, who bedecks herself in rave attire, multiplies, dissolves, pixelates, and reassembles herself by digital means. Every instantiation of the Aquababe magically wields command over waves of day-glow static and eccentric marine life. She even emerges from the gaping maws of a killer shark; such a performance perverts the ethereal iconography of Venus’s birth, harkening to an instance in Ernest Hemingway’s novel *To Have and To Have Not* (1937) in which the story’s protagonist likens his sexual interaction with a black woman to that of copulating with a nurse shark.²²⁵ Shape-shifting grids and blurry foreground thwart a Western perspectival gaze, disorienting the viewer. Banks’s video arises from a surreal amalgam of a waterlogged version of Giorgio De Chirico’s disproportionate dreamscapes, the terrifying cuteness of Lisa Frank’s oceanic bestiaries, and the dizzying phenomenology of digital mazes native to Windows 95 screensavers. Within this realm,

blackness becomes interpellated through a cyberspatial ethos, a measure that rebuts the stereotype of blacks being absent from punk subgenres and technological aesthetics.

Banks's seizure-inducing video nostalgically looks towards the 1990s in an effort to fuse kitsch with camp. Bucking dolphins, black-and-white checkered seahorses, the metallic typography of brush script, and spacey landscapes plotted by neon grids fondly recall the psychedelic imagery found across Lisa Frank merchandise, Trapper Keepers, and garish graphic design. The deliberate gaudiness and sentimentality of the video's visuals register as kitsch and harken to the millennial infatuation with emergent technologies of the early- to mid-1990s. At the same time, Banks's artificial corporeality, with all of its sea creature appendages and algae green weave, express camp. Indeed, the absurdity and aestheticism of Banks's audiovisuals could be seen as disengaged and depoliticized—a world of abusively fantastical surface. Yet, the imagery of dolphins and seahorses, which recall both the tchotchkes of beach vacations and the cheesingly bedazzled creatures of Frank's Technicolor seas, perversely bespeak a longing for a bygone era of childhood consumerism and surprisingly allude to a near-future of subversive sexualities.

The disorientation and sea creatures in the Banks's video bring to mind transgendered possibilities and non-normative vision. Here, it is important to make a distinction between transgender and queer desire. Such a distinction circumvents what Gayle Salamon sees as “the conflation of transgenderism with sexuality.”²²⁶ Furthermore this difference prevents the reduction of trans-identity to an erotic fetish. In terms of the seahorses that populate the video, they could signify transgender. More specifically, for non-mammals such as the seahorse, changing from one gender to the next is a natural act. The trans-mogrification of Banks body into cartoonish iterations draw from animality, which calls into question gender as understood

through Man's overrepresentation as human. In addition to these metamorphoses, the video's disorientating visuals engender a queer phenomenology that translates non-normative bodies moving non-normatively through space. Sarah Ahmed explains queer disorientation as a potentially nauseating position. "Disorientation," Ahmed writes, "involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. At this moment of failure, such objects 'point' somewhere else or they make what is 'here' become strange."²²⁷ Indeed, the virtual reality of the "Atlantis" video, which features the constant dissolution of Banks's body and assaults the viewer with equally dissoluble optical patterns, denies tactility. In a way, this disorientation in "Atlantis" epitomizes Freud's oceanic feeling (e.g. "an indissoluble bond of being one with the external world as a whole") within a digital topography. The haptic is lost, with distance and proximity becoming difficult to ascertain in the space of the music video.

In the video for "Atlantis," Banks's corporeality embodies animal hybridity, illustrating what I term "sublime simulacrum." As a becoming-animal, Banks's "sea witch" persona comes into play as she dizzyingly transfigures herself between human, animal, and the technological. In one computerized tableau, for instance, Banks sports digitally superimposed tentacles and a long, pronged tongue, appendages that recall the body of a kraken. Deleuze explains that a "becoming-animal" functions rhizomatically, as it coagulates in temporal instability, nomadic in its constant shape shifting; the only thing that can be ontologically guaranteed is the process of transformation itself.²²⁸ This milieu fosters an indeterminate embodiment, which entails "sorcery" insofar as it functions as a "demonic" skill to negotiate the contagion between human and animal.²²⁹ Moreover, in emphasizing the vacillation between animal and human as one of dis-ease, Banks's replication—and not reproduction—can be seen as viral. This detail throws

queerness of cyberspace into high relief, giving queer bodies a multiplicity and futurity that defies ontological destruction and erasure. Contrary to Immanuel Kant's conception of the sublime, Banks's corporeality *arouses* this feeling and *embodies* it all at the same time,²³⁰ its phantasmagoria captures the viewer. As a matter of fact, Madhu Dubey notes, "the feminine genre of fantasy, driven by the suprarational and putatively antiscientific principles of magic."²³¹ Banks's constant shape shifting exemplifies a sublime simulacrum in which the body inspires both euphoria and fear, and lacks a referent. These mercurial images of the Aquababe dodge extinction since they have no material source.

In the grammar of seapunk, Banks's performativity and visuals ultimately contribute a cyber imaginary to the black queer aquatic. Her engagement with this cyberpunk subgenre elicits nostalgia for a bygone decade. The articulation of crossbred corporeality within a 1990s cyber aesthetic puts pressure on what Arthur Kroker calls the "flesh-eating 90s."²³² In the video for "Atlantis," more weight is given to constant metamorphosis than to digital dissolution. Consequently, the simulacrum or hyper-reality of Banks's body and her fantastic world could be viewed as a form of posthumanism.²³³ However, given the overdetermined discourses around blackness-as-subhuman, discourses that extend far back as the Enlightenment Period, the black body cannot bear the title of "posthuman." As a result, Bank's corporeality straddles the animal and the digital, with the "human" in flux, as illustrated by her mermaid performances.

Overall, how does Spiller's notion of vestibularity re-situate the oceanic feeling as a black affect? And how do the respective works by Butler, Garner, Gallagher, and Banks unify in this affective frame? As a reminder, Spillers characterizes the vestibule as the "pre-view" of a colonized New World where black flesh is created and black kinship loses meaning. Here,

Spillers posits vestibularity as both violent antechamber and way of seeing. In addition to its architectural and optical meanings, vestibularity also aurally marks sonic and reproductive spaces within the body, from the cochlear to the uterine. Throughout this particular archive, we have observed the flesh of black women being distended, torn, and made anew into parahuman materialities—some of which engage with sound.

Bearing in mind its three meanings, vestibularity calibrates the oceanic feeling to blackness in marking drainage of normative kinship and designating corporeality made entirely of flesh in which the interruption of the vestibular system produces synesthetic viscera that sense the sonic and infolds the aquatic movement as an affect. Considering what Hartman identifies as the transferred dispossession on black maternity, the oceanic feeling *qua* vestibularity designates the conjoining of black flesh and gestational water as *uterine involution*: the non-pregnancy or loss of black kinship allows black subjectivity to collapse or infold into itself as prenatal flesh.²³⁴ This somatic collapse into an aquatic interiority composed of surface-based affects is revealed as we wade into the final chapter of this project.

CHAPTER THREE: Interlude to the Quiet Storm and the Sexual Politics Of Black Soft-Rock

At this juncture, I shift my focus from the Banks's cyber-sexed evocations of Mama Watu to Sade's romantic performance of the mermaid, as it relates to queerness and Blacht rock. As a seemingly silly hiccup in the blogosphere, Blacht rock (e.g., black yacht-rock or black soft-rock) could be seen as a transitory joke in virtue of its anonymously authored status and shallow archive. However, Blacht's conceptual and analytic waters run surprisingly deep: this neologism contributes to the overarching framework of this interlude, as it allows us to think through music, race, and sexuality, and their attendant "dis-eases" vis-à-vis the aquatic—particularly in the case of Sade's rendition of the mermaid. While Banks offers a digitally enhanced mermaid body impervious to death by way of replication, Sade presents an aquatic corporeality more vulnerable to love and its attendant illnesses. By way of glittery scales, her corporeality encompasses both "body" and "flesh." At this point, we sail into an estuary filled with queer melancholy, fears and easy listening.

Blacht Rock: Rethinking Black Soft Rock, the Quiet Storm, and AIDS

The concept of Blacht rock emerged from an anonymously authored blog on WordPress bearing the same name in April 2012. Blachtrock.com rearticulates black sound cultures from the 1980s and early 1990s as a counterpart to white soft-rock artists. The blog's author combined the terms "black" with "yacht" together, producing a tongue-and-check neologism. Again, Blacht rock serves as the "black" version of its "mainstream" equivalent, comprising soft rock and smooth jazz by musicians and vocalists. According to the blog, the crew of this easy-listening genre includes saxophonist Grover Washington Jr. and vocalists, Lionel Richie, Anita Baker, and Sade,

among others. In part, Blacht rock siphons yacht rock, a genre largely encompassing white American, heterosexual male recording artists from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s who supplied soulful vocals over easy-listening arrangements. Incidentally, a majority of the artists in this musical subfield have been identified as arbiters of blue-eyed soul. In fact, an eponymous online “mockumentary” from the mid-2000s bearing the same name, which made its debut at the Channel 101 film festival in Los Angeles, has been credited with the dissemination of this concept. Using the web series as a reference, Wikipedia explains Yacht rock as a

pejorative name used retrospectively to refer to the soft rock format that peaked in popularity between the years of 1975 and 1984. In part, the term relates to the stereotype of the yuppie yacht owner, enjoying smooth music while out for a sail. Additionally, since sailing was a popular leisure activity in Southern California, many "yacht rockers" made nautical references in their lyrics, videos, and album artwork, particularly the anthemic track “Sailing” by Christopher Cross. Notable artists also include Michael McDonald, Kenny Loggins, Boz Scaggs, Steely Dan and Toto.²³⁵

Even though it only encompasses music produced in the United States, Yacht rock easily parallels the sound of United Kingdom bands such as Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet. As one might already guess, Blacht rock shares some of the same musical qualities of Yacht rock such as machine percussion, atmospheric synthesizers, and smooth jazz arrangements.

Blacht rock’s aesthetic brings to mind the luxuries and leisure of coastal life and aquatic recreation. Expansive synthesizers stir up images of equally capacious sunrises and sunsets, either on the shore or at sea. White wine, black love, blue skies, white linen, smooth sailing—all of these images come forth through these sonic elements. A singer such as Sade has consistently crafted a transnational sound that combines subtle, Afro-Caribbean rhythms and percussion (e.g.,

bongos and shekeres) with jazz melodies and bass harmonies. Albums such as *Diamond Life* (1984) and *Stronger Than Pride* (1988), which feature the iconic songs “Sweetest Taboo” and “Smooth Operator,” serve as famous examples of Sade’s coastal, cosmopolitan sound.

Blacht rock also re-contextualizes the Quiet Storm radio format. Eponymous with Smokey Robinson's 1974 song, the Quiet Storm was launched by the Jack Shuler and the late Melvin Lindsey in 1976 at Howard University's station WHUR. Since then, this program has become a staple in "urban radio" markets across the United States, featuring "slow jams" and love ballads by black artists and musicians whose work often cuts across rhythm and blues, smooth jazz, neo-soul and, of course, soft rock. The musical crew of the Quiet Storm has typically comprised the likes of Alexander O'Neal, Anita Baker, Barry White, Lionel Ritchie, Luther Vandross, Phyllis Hyman, Patti LaBelle, and Sade, among others. Most of these artists have found their way onto the recent Blacht blog, contextualized within Yacht rock and its aesthetic of maritime leisure. Furthermore, the Quiet Storm and Blacht rock share a commonality in their ability to symbolize the aquatic, the nautical and the rise of the integrated black middle class.

Regarding socioeconomics of the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, the gap between the black community’s working and middle classes widened significantly.²³⁶ This development informed the industrialization of rhythm and blues and its various forms. During these two decades, the nation transitioned from manufacturing jobs to service- and information-based economies. This shift gave rise to the black bourgeoisie and occasioned urban blight, which the AIDS epidemic then aggravated.²³⁷ Given these developments, Blacht rock's aspirational aesthetics produces two interpretations concerning class: first, the genre's emphasis on recreation and black aspiration parallels the growth of service-based economies; and second, this desire can be articulated through the Blacht vessel, which functions as a mode of sea-bound escape from disease-ridden

industrial cities with flailing markets. In his explanation of the class dynamics and marketing ruses girded rhythm and blues, Mark Anthony Neal writes,

R&B was primarily a marketing ploy that finally gained a significant foothold during the late 1970s. R&B was born out of competing logics—record companies tried to negotiate the realities of black culture and identity within the history of race relations in America while working at the same time to reach a wider audience of black consumers and white record buyers. As black radio needed mainstream advertisers to court the emerging black middle class (as much an ideology as a measurement of economic and social status) and mainstream record labels became fixated on crossing over black artists to white consumers, terms like Soul and Rhythm and Blues quickly became too black.²³⁸

Indeed, aspiration, respectability and an integrated black middle class informed the marketing of rhythm and blues, which was then complicated by AIDS.

Given the meteorological implications of the term "Quiet Storm," I deploy it as an analytic for thinking about the peculiarity of black culture during the 1980s: the "quieted" or suppressed discourse on AIDS in the black community and homophobia coexisting with (ostensibly) heterosexual ballads by black singers. For as Tavia Nyong'o writes, "The close affiliation of popular music with seduction, romance and sex speaks to the anxiety with which queerness is policed within it."²³⁹ In particular, singers such as Baker, LaBelle, Vandross—all of who appear on the Blachtrock.com—have enjoyed a queer following and function as icons for the said community—particularly in the case of the late Vandross. As Mark Anthony Neal notes, rumors connecting Vandross's drastic weight loss to an alleged HIV infection corralled his body into public worries over lethal contagion and queerness. "In a broad cultural sense, with his increased popularity," Neal writes, "Vandross's body became a source of anxiety for some black

audiences, initially because of his girth and later with the advent of the AIDS/HIV crisis." This gossip combined with Vandross's deployment of falsetto constituted a black male vulnerability represented an image of either feminized masculinity or homosexuality.²⁴⁰ Such an aporia proves productive for thinking about suspicions and silences toward queerness, as illustrated by a conception of the Blacht sailing through a "quiet storm."

No Ordinary Love: Sade, the Mermaid Body, and Queer Failure

Sade Adu stands as a diasporic *flâneuse*, as her cosmopolitan branding and biography have continually defied geographical and musical categories. Named Helen Folasade Adu initially, Sade was born in Ibadan, Nigeria to a black African father and white English mother. Her education and personal life have been itinerant, taking her from West Africa and Holland-on-Sea to London. Before the 1984 album *Diamond Life*, her solo debut, Sade sang for the British band Pride. Her next two albums, *Promise* (1985) and *Stronger Than Pride* (1988), solidified her smoldering brand of soul that has often dwelled on forlorn love. Vocally, Sade's languid timbre evoking the styles of Astrud Gilberto and Billie Holiday, creating a mix of Bossa Nova, American jazz, blues and soft rock.

Released in 1992, *Love Deluxe*, Sade's fourth album, entered the ears of consumers as AIDS reached a dangerous peak in the United States. With four million copies sold in the United States, Sade's album earned quadruple platinum status and ranked as the second best-selling LP on the rhythm and blues charts from 1992 to 1993. *New York Times* writer Jody Rosen contends that *Love Deluxe* was "a pretty surprisingly brawny record that stripped away a lot of the cocktail jazz fussiness of earlier efforts." More poignantly, in the December 1992 of *Rolling Stone* magazine, music critic Mark Coleman assesses Sade's album and situates one of its singles

within the AIDS epidemic. Coleman explains, “The first single, ‘No Ordinary Love,’ builds languid guitar lines and a velvety vocal to a warm climax. Sade’s an exacting songwriter, too. On this album, she subtly invokes the generalized fear of AIDS on ‘Bullet Proof Soul.’”²⁴¹ Indeed, the song’s equation of trigger-happy gunmanship with reckless love indicates a timely vulnerability for relationships forged in the era of AIDS. I extend Coleman’s interpretation to the song “No Ordinary Love,” as this ballad indulges in the themes of emotional violability and regret, that could also convey biological vulnerability.

Sade released her video for “No Ordinary Love” in 1992, the same year in which several black male celebrities became public sites for HIV. On February 16 of that year, basketball player Magic Johnson retired from the NBA due to his HIV status, which he announced during the previous year at the association’s press conference. During that same year, actor Larry Riley and radio personality Melvin Lindsey, the originator of the Quiet Storm format, die from the disease. The prominence that the U.S. media bestowed upon these “respectable victims,” to use Cathy Cohen’s term, heightened a hyper-visibility of the black men, famous and otherwise, while underscoring the hyper-invisibility of black women’s bodies. Even though between 1991 and 1993 the number of reported AIDS cases totaled between 30,000 and 40,000, mass media still nominated gay white men and “questionable” black men as the icons of this relatively new disease.²⁴² The hyper-invisible yet pathological status of black women within that historical moment can be articulated through the mermaid. Seductive and culpable of luring men to their deaths, the mermaid eludes capture and discourse; this aquatic creature emblemizes the cross-cutting issue of AIDS, a problem that black middle-class politics had abandoned in favor of black respectability, a goal invested in the black male middle-class body, the governing corpus for consensus issues.²⁴³ Black middle-class politics have ignored AIDS; this issue, much like a

siren, lurks in the waters, never taken aboard as a visible issue. Subsequently, consensus issues cause the minority party to cast the mermaid back into the water, which, according to Nicholas Mirzoeff, simultaneously functions as a *mare liberum*, a free sea governed by imperialism, and *mare clausum*, a closed sea wedded to national sovereignty.²⁴⁴ Within this context, the black siren and, by extension, black women's bodies occupy public space and national discourses at a level that is simultaneously invisible, repulsive, mythic and seductive.

Directed by Sophie Mullen, the video for "No Ordinary Love" depicts Sade's misadventures on land and in heterosexuality. The audiovisual opens upon a simulated underwater scene featuring Sade sitting curled on a rock; she hugs her fins in a wistful reverie. Tinsel seaweed and glittery bubbles imbue the environment with a bit of levity. A disorientated white sailor suddenly interrupts the serene habitat by tumbling into the water. Sade then attempts to either resuscitate or drown this deckhand. This ambiguity buoys itself upon the fact that, according to mythology, sirens have lured men to their deaths by way of seductive singing. For instance, Judith A. Peraino contends, "The history of Western thought about music is, in part, a history of ambivalence and anxiety. Since before Homer, musical creatures, musical gods and demigods, musical humans, and music-addled or –inspired listeners have given evidence of a moral dilemma. Music presents an occasion of conflict between discipline and desire that seems not only irreconcilable but also inexplicable."²⁴⁵ In the case of sultry-voiced Sade, the drowning sailor could be read as an ostensibly heterosexual mariner drowning into queer desire.

Sade's failure in heterosexual marriage indicates queer melancholia. In the video, Sade dons a wedding gown, which she has expertly sewed underwater, and then makes her nuptial debut on land as a bipedal bride. Her entrance onto *terra firma* signifies entry into the nation-state, a maneuver that domesticates this otherwise itinerant and diasporic singer. Additionally,

her performance as a hopeful bride illustrates an attempt to marry into heterosexuality with hopes of enjoying its privilege of full citizenship. Combined with her newfound bipedalism, all of these factors of normative, state-sanctioned sexuality appear to be the more “evolved” alternative for this diasporic woman. Sade eventually visits a bayside bar where white working-class patrons greet her with confused gazes. A bartender serves her a glass of water, which she then salts; it appears as though Sade’s briny beverage parallels the sweetened tea and honeyed wounds of black queer men. After an awkward interaction with the seaside saloon and a desperate sprint through the streets to find her male lover, Sade depressingly retires to the dock with bottled water in hand. Her bottled water represents a microcosmic of her former life as a mermaid and its associated fluidity; its commodified, plastic container bespeaks a presumably “purified” or “filtered” sexuality safe for mass consumption. Her disposition rings similar to that of Sappho, as she contemplates her unrequited love, a commercial dock substituted for the Leucadian rock.²⁴⁶ Her Phaon is nowhere to be found.

Concerning reproduction, Sade's mermaid body educes problems from teratology, a medical field that observes monstrous births and abnormalities within the embryonic stage. Even though teratology concerns the study of monstrous births, it does not necessarily focus on the *reproduction* of these abject subjects.²⁴⁷ Within this context, Sade's underwater world suggests a prenatal environment out of which she emerges. However, instead of maintaining her fantastical corporeality, which can register as “monstrous,” she strides upon the land as an able-bodied bride in hopes of matrimony and, perhaps, normal reproduction. The video's adherence to Hans Christian Andersen's romantic fairytale and the almost-maudlin femininity of Sade’s mermaid performance mitigate the monstrosity to a certain extent. In her essay “The Queer Ethics of Monstrosity,” Patricia McCormick explains that the monster lurks “outside of the family tree of

the evolutionary zenith of the human, mean[ing] there is no family for the monster, so the only relations possible are unnatural."²⁴⁸ Hence, Sade's transformation into a "normal" woman negates the possibility of monstrous reproduction, whereas her former body stood as a genealogical isolate bereft of progeny.²⁴⁹ As Yemaya without children, Sade's lineage can only be traced to myth.

Finally, the hybridity of Sade's mermaid body raises questions about sentience and pleasure in the time of AIDS during the 1980s and early 1990s. At this juncture, I turn to the zoology to analyze the concatenation between animality, race, sexuality, and feelings, an assemblage that highlights the necropolitical stakes of black love in the time of terminal illness. According to ichthyology, fish cannot feel pain in the same neuro-psychological capacities as the "human." Here, the irony ensues: Sade's' amalgamated corporeality suggests a lack of feeling, while her human portions and lyrics (e.g., "I gave you more than I can give/ I gave you love [...] I keep crying/ I keep trying for you") imply sentience and communicate desire. The physiology of the mermaid body displaces pleasure from the *corpus* to the romantic realm involving erotic and emotional experience, as opposed to a sexual one; the later physiological process could highlight the fear of viral infection. I use the term "corpus" to account for Sade's amalgamation of "body" and "flesh" in her mermaid performance. As stated before, Spillers's views these two entities as separate regarding the aberration of black gender and sexuality within the slave trade. If Sade transformed herself back into a mermaid, the racialized "body"—the Cartesian machine of European fictions concerning "humanity," legal self-hood, and cisgendered arrangements—would unfasten into "flesh"—violable black corporeality—within the symbolic space of water. However, our siren does not (or cannot?) transmogrify herself into her former corpus; she sits on the dock heartbroken.

Shore Versus Sea, Train Versus Boat: Blacht as an Analytic for Black Sexuality and Music

I ultimately argue that the concept of black soft-rock and its recent manifestation as Blacht rock manufactures an inoculated form of black heterosexuality, one that emphasizes normative desire and evokes maritime leisure; this music genre and its sexuality neither threatens nor taints white consumers. This aesthetic constitutes an aspirational genre of respectability that sought to create a safe space for black erotics. In this aspect, black soft-rock can be seen as resuming disco's project of disinfecting the embodied hypersexuality of funk music. For instance, music historian Rickey Vincent writes,

The down and dirty sounds of bands like P-Funk, Slave, Bootsy's Rubber Band, Cameo, and the Bar-Kays were avoided like the plague in the late 1970s, in favor of a more "color-blind" sound that "everyone" could dance to. The preposterous hype-dog known as disco music was invented in the 1970s to bring the hot, freaky elements of funk to the well-washed masses in sterilized form [...] With black style, black soul, and black funk saturating radio and television in the early 1970s, white America needed a means to get in on the fun, and sterilized simulations of *Soul Train* across the nation—known as discos—were the ticket.²⁵⁰

Moreover, black soft-rock drowns the hypersexual in favor of morality. However, unlike many of the recording artists of disco, who enjoyed mainstream listenership, a majority of those associated with black soft-rock did not acquire the same crossover appeal. In addition to the national panic around AIDS, which began in the late 1970s, the Culture Wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s contextualize Blacht rock as an easy-listening sedative for fears around black

(queer) sexuality.²⁵¹ Relatedly, Richard Iton explains that rhythm and blues in the late 1980s and early 1990s can “ be seen as a locus for the formation of the feminine identities, the articulation of black bourgeois sensibility, and the practice of Christianity.”²⁵² The timelessness to which rhythm-and-blues music aspires, as evidenced by its discourse of the "classic," also bespeaks a desire for futurity qua reproduction or "baby-making music."²⁵³ Unlike the fluid desire in Tinsley's conception of a black queer Atlantic, Blacht rock never fully gets its feet wet due to its commitment to heterosexual ballads and its associated performances.²⁵⁴ Like a yacht, it always returns to shore, the sandy edges of nation-state sanctioned, normative sexuality. In light of Vincent's narrative, I want to highlight the land-based mobility implied by the television title *Soul Train*. The locomotive connotes both the erotic and, within the context of United States Black history, the itinerant epoch of The Great Migration. This land-based movement of black people from the South to other regions of the United States during the early and mid-twentieth century kept them within the confines of the nation-state and, consequently, its approved sexuality. Moreover, much like theorist Paul Gilroy's discussion of the Black Atlantic, which attempts to explain the flow of diasporic sound cultures, the aesthetic of Blacht rock often neglects its principal, seaworthy vehicle: the boat. Tinsley, for instance, notes the materiality of the slave ship and its (queer) human cargo drops out of existence after the introduction to Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). That being said, where do the Blacht and the black mermaid fall within the black aquatic?

As paradigmatic vessels, the yacht and the slave ship function as opposed apparatuses that nevertheless maintain the analogy between black sexuality and the aquatic, all at the same time. Giorgio Agamben defines paradigm according to six features, two of which best serve my analysis of Blacht rock concerning the yacht, its attendant heterosexuality, and the queerness of

the slave ship.²⁵⁵ For instance, he explains that a paradigm “moves from singularity to singularity” and subsequently “neutralizes the dichotomy between the general and the particular, [replacing] a dichotomous logic with a bipolar analogical model.”²⁵⁶ For Agamben, Michel Foucault’s panopticon functions as an ideal paradigm in that it has yielded its own general, social theory, as exemplified by the term “panopticism.” This is a singular historical event that can be used as epistemological models to make another phenomenon intelligible. Likewise, the trans-Atlantic slave trade also stands as a singular historical event due to its violent scale (e.g., the fungibility of black bodies), epistemological gaps (e.g., lack of a consistent archive), and pivotal affect on human consciousness in the West, occasioning both modernity and, ironically, liberal humanism. The slave ship, then, floats as the paradigmatic vessel encompassing all of these onto-epistemological changes. As for *Blacht* rock, the specter of the yacht and its presumably black middle- and upper-classed passengers counter many of the terrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Due to its elements of leisure and absence of physical violability, the yacht and its imaginary world of *Blacht* rock undoubtedly differ from conditions of the slave ship. In virtue of its neologism, the term “*Blacht*” implies a vessel, which would serve as a recreational vehicle for the black bourgeoisie. The *Blacht* lifestyle and aesthetic maintains a strong connection to the coast, while Middle Passage represents a suspension of black subject in a state of queerness due to the erotic bonds formed between same-sex captives. As for the “cargo”—the hostages who either died or were thrown overboard—that never made it to the shores of the New World, their sexual experiences and embodied memories remain in permanent deferral in their watery graves.

Within the black queer aquatic, the mermaid, as taken up by Banks and Sade, functions as a figure of refusal. While Banks and Sade’s respective performances are not necessarily commensurate, they are continuous in their engagements with monstrosity and its fictive

rearrangements of reproduction. Even though Blacht rock proffers a form of inoculated black sexuality, the figure of the mermaid disrupts this schema; more specifically, Banks's and Sade's enactments of the siren foil hopes of hetero-reproduction, which would calm white fears about racialized queerness. In the case of Banks, albeit in the context of Seapunk, the digital replication of cartoonishly grotesque body supplants the singularity of the reproductive hetero-body. As for Sade, her failure with land-based heterosexual romance disallows her entry into the nation-state, regardless of her matrimonial efforts. She swims as a subaltern who never makes it aboard the phantom Blacht. Despite their engagements with femme aesthetics, queerness ultimately crops up in these moments of cyber-based repetitions of the body and unrequited love.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
Black Thirst, Black Drowning**

My great, great, great, great, great, great grandma

And your great, great, great, great, grandpapa

Didn't need a ring or a broom

Didn't need a past or a bloom

Nothing old, nothing new

Nothing borrowed, nothing blue

They're dancing in the deepest ocean

See? Not even death could stop them

I don't wanna run away with you

I wanna live our life right here

I just wanna jump the boat with you

When we dance the ocean waves²⁵⁷

—Jamila Woods, “Heavn,” *Heavn* (2016)

This kind of dehydration [Hypernatremia] is not usually the result of increased salt intake (e.g., the ingestion of sea water), but is instead created through consistent water loss that leaves the body unable to manage its usual sodium levels. And it is this excess of salt that creates the need for water. The condition of absolute thirst, however, meant that the slaves’ relationship to water surpassed biological need and took on the character of a demand.²⁵⁸

—Diana Leong, “The Salt Bones: 'Zong!' and an Ecology of Thirst” (2017)

It is incredible how an element associated with plenitude can also create lack. In their relationship to water, the two epigraphs above present tension between the mythic and the scientific, between the descriptive and the explanatory. These two sets of inscription whisk us away from a Drexciyan dream of undersea matrimony, as softly sung by Jamila Woods, to a dry, clinical account of the enslaved body's salinity that Diana Leong contextualizes within materialist terms. Despite the juxtaposition, these two epigraphs not only overlap in their aquatic references but also intersect in their interests around thirst and drowning, as related to scientific and fictitious narrations situated in place of the archival gaps created by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The entries to thirst and drowning are myriad but what I find most interesting are the following motions: the act of slow submergence as opposed to the acts of “overthrowtness” and falling; and the yearning for an articulation of black interiority in romantic and maternal valences. In this chapter, I theorize thirst and drowning as a co-constitutive phenomenon in black expressive culture and black life writ large. In so doing, I offer two meditations: an analysis of interpellation concerning the episode of drowning in SZA’s video for her single “Babylon”; and a study of how the vestibular manifests in what I identify as “vestibular echoes” around acoustic mirroring and spatiality between Maxwell’s album *Embrya* and Beyonce’s opening scenes from her visual album *Lemonade*. Ultimately, this installment examines how drowning and thirst co-constitute each other and, in so doing, rearrange typical models of interpellation and spatiality. Consequently, locating other subject-formations of blackness within the water contests geophilosophical tenets of subject-formation.

Like a violent maelstrom, the West has always been expanding its territory and drowning the most vulnerable populations; it has always operated as *occiduus*. From the tragedy of polluted drinking water in Flint, Michigan and Haiti, to the deadly deluge of Hurricane Katrina, to the underground economy of illegal oil refining in Nigeria and its contamination of the local aquasphere, to the various refugees disembarking North Africa and sailing into the Mediterranean Sea—in all of these cases, thirst and drowning have affected the diaspora in horrific ways, which have yet to reveal the fullness of their environmental and economic wages.²⁵⁹ In the end, these ongoing episodes of disaster capitalism make plain a fundamental assemblage: an entanglement of blackness and water whereby the aquatic acts as a vector through which corporations and governments of varying scales attack diasporic communities in the utmost calculated ways.²⁶⁰ To this end, structural superpowers have distilled the necropolitical into an aquatic vector of antiblackness. These circumstances of terror frame the following analyses of drowning and thirst in black popular and expressive cultures. Such a context allows us to use black popular and expressive cultures as a means to consider the very bodily stakes of blackness in its aqueous submergence and lack.

Black vernacular often uses the term “thirst” to characterize erotic and libational drives. On the one hand, thirst characterizes those who either incite or incur romantic or sexual longing; on the other, thirst indicates the “turn up”: partying and drinking. Additionally, songs by ILoveMakonnen, Mariah Carey, PartyNextDoor, and Kendrick Lamar, among others, deal with this desire according to various moods. Overall, there is a sense that the medium becomes the mediation of desire in the context of dehydration. Yet, the opening vignette of Beyonce’s *Lemonade* and various songs from Maxwell’s *Embrya* offer us a chance to consider thirst and drowning anew as interconnected incidents. On this score, I claim that *Lemonade* and *Embrya*

represent uterine and aqueous moments of black gender's interiority wherein plenitude and lack co-exist. Furthermore, these two texts exemplify what I term vestibular-acoustic mirrors across their different media. While Beyonce's non-diegetic voice recites lines from Warsan Shires's poetry from outside a flooded bedroom, we hear Maxwell's crooning arguably situated within a belly, amongst somatic grunts and growls. Here, we have two structures of confinement for black interiority: the bedroom and the belly. One is organic, the other architectural—both are dreamlike in their atmospheric sounds and surreal settings.

Ultimately, thirst represents an investment in the human. In an attempt to compile literature on thirst, one peculiar book comes to the fore: Barbara J. and Edmund T. Rolls's *Thirst* (1982). In this text, Barbara, a nutritionist, and Edmond, a neuroscientist, write, "associated with the sensation of thirst is the desire to drink water, and usually thirst subjects report a dry feeling in the mouth and find that water tastes pleasant."²⁶¹ Is thirst a state of pain? Is it a form of jouissance? Either way, drowning quenches thirst while amplifying the need for air. The Rolls, overall, construct a qualitative study of thirst that rings as humanist. An application of the rest of the Rolls's book is too quantitative and would risk a pitfall into scientism. Diana Leong, on the other hand, ponders the stakes of black thirst amidst the abundance of salty water. She does this through historical analyses of the slave ship *Zong* and close readings of M. NourbeSe Philip's eponymous poem.²⁶² Thirst ratifies modes of being Human. Drowning presents an entanglement of thirst that is both quenched and aggravated. Leong considers thirst as it relates to salinity within the enslaved black body. Leong explains,

When severe sweating or diarrhea occurs in suffocating and toxic conditions, as in the holds of slave ships, bodies lose both water and sodium, making it even more difficult to regulate one's electrolyte balance. If not remedied quickly enough, these losses may lead

to hypernatremic dehydration, a condition that is marked by an excess of sodium ("Hypernatremia").²⁶³

Humanity has, in fact, been measured by thirst. As such, water, drinkable or otherwise, forms the boundary between human and non-human. "Despite the widespread distribution of thirst as a marker and metric of life," Leong argues, "the slaves' thirst and therefore their 'experiences' of water were mediated by the need to shore up the boundaries of 'human.'"²⁶⁴ Controlling access and distilling value from drinkable water evidence an aquatic necropolitics whereby the praxis of Man blooms in the ravaged site of disaster capitalism. In short, dehydration fomenters racialization and racism all while indicating lack within the body and removal from plenitude.

Watery Retreat and Figural Refusal: SZA's "Babylon" and Black Women's Interpellation

Before we examine SZA's episode of drowning, I want to direct our attention to an arguably obscure literary figure: Edmond Laforest. A Haitian poet who communed with the La Ronde movement, Laforest committed suicide in 1915. Some sources say that he jumped into a swimming pool, others claim that he leaped off a bridge into some supposedly naturally occurring body of water.²⁶⁵ In any case, one set of facts remains consistent: with a Larousse dictionary tied around his neck, Laforest threw himself into the water and drowned. An incredibly limited collection of scholarly documents and journalistic pieces paint him as creative who was driven to "self-murder" by colonialism. This is tragicomedy if there ever was or is such a thing to be wielded by colonized subjects. Laforest's suicidal spring into the aquatic complicates notions of black agency and its peculiar yoke to cultural "unfreedom" and the non-events of post-colonialism and jubilee.²⁶⁶

Laforest's jump differs from the slow submergence enacted by SZA. Here, the juxtaposition of these two figures becomes clear. On the one hand, we have a poet whose deadly deed summons other states or acts of falling and what I term "overthrowness." On the other hand, we witness a popular singer taking on the possibly protective anonymity of the *Rückenfigur* as she gradually drowns herself in a pond. While falling indicates a continuous and progressive theological grammar of descent from the Lapsarian world, overthrowness reworks Heideggerian terminology to the historical and onto-epistemological specificity of black being. As a reminder, thrownness or *Geworfenheit* points to the arbitrary quality of existence, an aspect reminiscent of the gratuitous violence characterizing the structural position of antiblackness.²⁶⁷ Yet, historical incidents such as the 1781 massacre aboard the slave ship *Zong* and the 1651 suicidal leaps of Grenadian Caribs, who sought aquatic refuge from imminent French rule, amount to a superfluity whereby the analytical, volitional, and spatial purchase of overthrowness emerges. Again, this is all to say that we are dealing with a subtle difference when discussing the watery demise of SZA in the video for "Babylon." Evoking images of the suicidal retreat of Igbo into the littoral depths surrounding St. Simon's Island, SZA's submergence, which is connected to her back-turned stance, can be seen as an instance wherein drowning and thirst fuse with one another. Water, acting as a *fold* in the Deleuzian sense, consumes and envelopes the subject and vice-versa. SZA heeds no authoritative call and only "turns" on herself towards the end of the video, facing us, only to drown in a pond. However, unlike the interpellative model set forth by Louis Althusser, there is no self-reproach in her turning toward the camera.²⁶⁸

Set presumably in the brushy hills of Los Angeles, the opening of video for SZA's "Babylon" (2014) reveals the songstress seated on the ground with her back turned to us. She

gazes upon a scene of suburban homes stilted on variegated highland. The sky resembles chai with its milky, overcast hues and muted light. SZA has rolled up her pair of denim overalls to thighs' length, revealing her shapely legs. *Shaped like a figure eight/ who trusts pretty girls anyway?* Without any success, the camera attempts to peer over SZA's shoulder in several slowly zooming shots to capture a glimpse of the songstress's face, which is further obscured by her blown-out, wavy hair. She still casually denies us her countenance. The camera then cuts to a more lush setting: we now find SZA in a wooded area textured by a thicket of ferns and tree roots, which creep into the muddy shores of a nearby pond. An opportune glare of sunlight eclipses her face yet again. Midway through the video, we witness SZA's vulnerability as she, still in *Rückenfigur* position, slowly and selectively disrobes and divests her person of clothing and various belongings. The first garb she removes is a knitted white cardigan, which she then spreads upon the soil. This knitwear then hosts a tableau of several objects that she carefully relieves from her person: we see a slender gold ring unfixed from fingers bearing a chipped manicure; a smartphone with a cracked screen; a folded note; a mechanical pencil; a few dollar bills; and a pair of faithfully worn Chuck Taylor high-tops. Here, her possessions create a curious assemblage of millennial personhood. Is she the singer? Is she an individual everywoman? Or, is she a subject? Relatedly, Jean Amery notes, "most deaths cannot furnish models for forming good subjects. To gaze at death is to be indulgent, morbid, to fetishize the negative, to glamorize suffering, to be naively romantic: the condemnations are so ready to hand that they are easily multiplied."²⁶⁹

Eventually, we find that SZA has gradually reduced her tomboy attired to an oversized white t-shirt; this simple garment serves as an extempore gown for her upcoming baptism. She slowly wades toward the middle of the pond, where she then creates gentle ripples, a halo of

waves. At this point, SZA finally faces the camera while biting her lower lip, as if to signal some disappointment or dereliction on our part, somebody's part.²⁷⁰ At this time, she turns away yet again and drowns herself. *I'm sure I'll be the death of me.* An aerial shot shows SZA starfished and facing down in the pond, gradually sinking while her hair soaks up every bit of freshwater. What does it mean to both sink and float? Such an inquiry addresses a curious imbrication of passionate attachments and fatal detachment or nonchalance. Unlike painterly representations of Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, she withholds from us a frontal view of her submerged body. And unlike Sappho, SZA does not jump off a cliff; instead, she has quietly lowered herself into a watery grave. At this point, while the evening has faded into its Californian twilight, we see a young white man with glasses discovering a note from the singer's banked offering. The unfurled scrap paper then reads "gone fishin'" signed with a heart. Apparently, Phaon came too late. *Aren't you tired of always making ammends?* The scene fades to black. *Bring on the thorny crown/ Crucify Me.*

Throughout much of the video, SZA's *Ruckenfigur* stance conjures up the figural refusals of black women found in Lorna Simpson's conceptual photographs. Pieces from Simpson's oeuvre such as *Stereo Styles* (1988) and *Guarded Conditions* (1989) demonstrate the same protective posture as the one taken up by SZA as she disrobes herself on the woodsy banks of a pond. However, unlike Simpson's images, SZA's video eschews both minimalist seriality and written text.²⁷¹ Much like the anonymous women comprising the photographic lineup of Simpson's work, SZA's hair and skin serve as the only markers of racial and gendered identity. Furthermore, parties on both sides of this genre of visual culture refuse the interpellative turn expected of citizens or lawfully recognized (and respectable) subjects. They remain back-turned. In both cases, the apparatus functions as the interpellative force that falters at the steadfast

withholding of black women. It is no mere coincidence that many instances of figural refusal can be located in the photographic work of black women such as Weems and Simpson. The visual repertoire of these two artists, combined with SZA's stance, offer meditations on the protective interiority of black women who find themselves framed within institutional gazes, public space, and the expansive potential of wandering outdoors, furthering oneself from the "passionate complicity of law."²⁷² Guilt anticipates the law and engenders the *turning* of the subject toward authority; however, as Judith Butler explains, the turn is prior to the subject formation. "The turn toward the law," Butler argues, "is thus a turn against oneself, a turning back on oneself that constitutes the movement of conscience." Incidentally, the black *rückenfiguren*'s position to water, the issue of anonymity of the back-turned stance and the specificity of the "individual"—if we take this term to denote personhood before subjugation in the Althusserian context—are at odds.²⁷³

Suicidal acts—a final performance—can never register as *a ritual* on the same individual; in so doing, suicide problematizes interpellation as it falls upon the body of black women in particular. Whereas suicidal *behavior* can be iterated over and over again, the loss of an individual life is irrevocable. Concerning interpellation and performance, Judith Butler contends,

If ideology is material to the extent that it consists in a set of practices, and practices are governed by rituals, then materiality is defined as much by ritual a repetition as it is by more narrowly empiricist conceptions. Moreover, the rituals of ideology are material to the extent that they acquire a productive capacity and, in Althusser's text, what rituals produce are subjects.²⁷⁴

Yet, suicide's iterations across different subject-positions reveal the differences between those whom we memorialize and those whose lives are rendered expendable, excised from honorable memory. How do we even imagine interpellation in the scenario of black subjects (or objects) stealing their lives away from structures and discourses that disallow them (the curse of) governmentality and (bourgeois articulations of) humanity? What is the significance of water in these occasions? While the literature on race and suicide tenders a paltry collection of writing that is often limited to occasional sociological studies, the discourses of affect theory, philosophy, and gender regarding "self-murder" focus on issues of "love," or passionate attachments, and happiness.²⁷⁵ At this juncture, intentions and intentionality come to the fore when pondering the real-life or historical death—and, by extension, archival occlusion—of Edmond Laforest and the fictional drowning of SZA. These incidents are more than just another fatal form of "stealing away."²⁷⁶ To my mind, the "tragedies" of SZA and Laforest signify defiance of interpellation. Most poignantly in the case of SZA, we see both another iteration of black *ruckenfiguren* and another inversion of geophilosophical tenets wrought by one of the diaspora's quintessential spaces: water. These aquatic retreats of LaForest and SZA recall the collective retraction of the enslaved Igbo into the water and the overthrownness of captive bodies from many ships.

Similar to the black *ruckenfiguren* we encountered in Chapter One, SZA's refusal to face the camera and perform in front of a gaze can help us rework the auditory and spatial stakes of interpellation. Regarding the video, I argue that the camera/gaze substitutes the hailing of state authority. This instance shifts the state practice of authoritative hailing on to the audiovisual apparatus of the camera. Yet, even in so doing, this form of interpellation in "Babylon" converts hailing into a visible matter—an intrusive gaze—as opposed to an auditory response and turn

toward authority. With respect to particular spaces, the ideological apparatuses of the state (e.g., church, school, mass media) are absent from the video, as SZA secludes herself and her face from the camera while occupying a rural space. Here, the outdoors provides some refuge for SZA. If any, the only ideological apparatus remaining is the apparatus itself: the camera.

In addition to overlooking race—despite the racially loaded example of police interaction undergirding its rationale—Althusser’s idea of interpellation contains temporal and ontological ironies. As Butler notes, Althusser’s story of subjection is circular in that it presupposes a subject for which it seeks to account. Put succinctly, there is no subject before subjugation. This coordinate produces a doubled effect of subjection: power assembling a set of conditions that precede the subject and subordinates it externally. Theories of subjection, according to Butler, do not account for the psyche. The figure or performance of turning—“turning back upon oneself or even turning *on* oneself”—signals and emerges from the psychic mechanisms of power and subjection whereby consciousness acts as a moral agent and passionate attachment—the latter of which can be called “love,” as Butler and Mladen Dolar would generally have it. Nevertheless, too much has been assumed by using the “subject” as a starting point for blackness. Somewhere between object and subject, the thing resides, and the water provides that space in which blackness steals itself away.

Traditional theories of interpellation also perpetuate ableism and solitary sensory perception. It is one thing to heed the hailing of state authority, and it is another thing not to be *incapable* of hearing it in the first place. Foucault’s views on the discursive production of the subject stem from Althusser, who argues that subjection occurs through an authoritative voice or hailing. Even the Fanonian interpellative-imperative of “Look, a Negro!,” with its combination of racial visual and auditory cues that convert a *sentient subject* from second-person standpoint

to a third-person position, privileges black heterosexual male embodiment.²⁷⁷ Butler contends, “This turning toward the voice of the law is a sign of a certain desire to be beheld by and perhaps also to behold the face of authority, a visual rendering of an auditory scene—a mirror stage or, perhaps more appropriately, an ‘acoustic mirror’—that permits the misrecognition without which the sociality of the cannot be achieved. The law requires subjugation for subject formation or subjectivization or *assujettissement*.”²⁷⁸

As a reminder, the black *ruckenfiguren* underscore the quiet qualities of black visual culture that often go unnoticed. Regarding water as a body of non-consciousness complicates notions of self-reflexivity and self-reflectivity for black subject-formation and interiority (e.g., reflective moments within and upon the water and/or shoreline) for the black *ruckenfiguren* facing the water. Butler argues that internalization manufactures a division between interior and exterior life and that some people crave subjection for recognition. Conscience allows the subject to become an object of inquiry for itself (self reflexivity). Here, the occasional opacity of suicide and water's duality as reflective and translucent create a dilemma for theorizing interiority within black visual culture. Butler suggests that guilt plays a role in the interpellation of the subject, who was once an “individual.”²⁷⁹ Althusserian interpellation produces both a question of guilt, highlighting the oft-illegible inertia created between interiority and “motivation,” and revealing a confusion of the causality’s temporal stakes (e.g., a case of the “chicken or the egg,” if you will) as they relate to personhood and subjugation. Thus far, according to certain theorists of sensation and time, affect is prior and present while effect is future perfect. These ironies of interpellation cannot be stressed enough. Passionate attachment to the law illustrates this contradictory circularity relating to the turn to the authoritative voice. However, the black *ruckenfiguren* across this project keep their selves turned to the water, ignoring any possible hailing. How does SZA’s

gestures or non-performance challenge this? How does suicide change our interpretation of moral *intentions* and phenomenological *intentionality* as it relates to affect theory as a whole? Suicide can be a dis/passionate dis/attachment that dissolves any possibility of ritual.²⁸⁰ In other words, suicide is final while suicidal behavior can be repetitive. The subject does not ontologically equate to the individual; yet, according to Althusser's narrative of subjugation, a linear cause-and-effect narrative supposedly connects these two modes of being.

Vestibular Echoes: Acoustic Mirrors and Spatial Difference Between Maxwell's *Embrya* and Beyonce's *Lemonade*

I pray I catch you whispering/ I pray you catch me listening

—Beyonce, “Pray You Catch Me,” *Lemonade* (2016)

I'm you, you are me and we are you

You are me and we are you

—Maxwell, “I'm You: You Are Me and We Are You (Pt. Me & You),” *Embrya* (1998)

Between these two sets of lyrics, aural desire unfurls and subjectivity's borders blur. While Beyonce entreats someone—either a lover or a child—to notice both her voice and her potential eavesdropping, Maxwell conflates self with other in a melodic ramble. At any rate, sound and fantasies of plenitude come to the fore within the context of watery submergence. Ecstasy and uterine imagery flourish throughout Beyonce's *Lemonade* and Maxwell's *Embrya*. Orgasm and nourishment co-mingle in these spaces, standing as particular acoustic mirrors for blackness. By this tenor, I gesture toward the vestibular in conceptualizing the sonic qualities of paternal absence and violable motherhood regarding the sonic qualities of subjugation in the womb. In her essay “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labor” (2016), Hartman seeks an

interstice in black radicalism in which to install black women's reproductive labors and quotidian resistance. Natal alienation serves a key feature of social death and Hartman relatedly contends, "Gestational language has been key to describing the world-making and world-breaking capacities of racial slavery. What it created and what it destroyed has been explicated by way of gendered figures of conception, birth, parturition, and severed or negated maternity."²⁸¹ Similarly, Kaja Silverman posits the female subject as already identified with dispossession whereby "exposures to further castrations jeopardizes nothing [...]"²⁸²

The maternal voice in psychoanalysis may serve as a sonic antechamber to subjectivity, but the dispossession of black maternity and the absence of black paternity say otherwise. According to Silverman and other film theorists, the female voice acts as an acoustic mirror. Confusing object with subject, the acoustic mirror eases the pathway between projection and introjection. The maternal voice introduces the child to its mirror reflection; consequently, the child learns how to speak by imitating the mother's voice. Before the mirror stage, the child introjects the maternal voice. Ergo, the child finds their own voice in the mother, but the man refines his interjected maternal voice by projecting it onto all that is impotent and unassimiable to paternity.²⁸³ Guy Rosolato's interpretation of an acoustic mirror accounts for the blurred boundary between exteriority and interiority. The mother's voice is heard at the same time as it is emitted. Voice becomes visual and enveloping, as the mother becomes sonic and olfactory to the child. That being said, how does black kinship crack the acoustic mirror? Since the several arms of the state have co-opted the black women's reproduction, plenitude for black subjects, even from the womb onward, is almost impossible. Considering this woe, cinematic representation, as it relates to particular vignettes in Beyonce's *Lemonade*, already exists as artifice; there is no pre-Oedipal real that sacredly absconds from representation.

Act One of *Lemonade* commences: a black woman zipped up in a black hoodie takes a suicidal leap off a building. She accomplishes a few relaxed somersaults in mid-air before miraculously crashing into water. This death-defying and spatially surreal moment marks the beginning of the “Denial” chapter, the first vignette of Beyonce’s visual album. The subsequent scene features a flooded bedroom furnished with Victorian trappings. In this domestic aquarium, we find the singer’s doppelgangers: one floats, curiously and carefully gazing upon the other, who peacefully sleeps in the bed.²⁸⁴ Interestingly, Freud asserts that the double simultaneously denies death in its duplication of the ego and affirms it, all at the same time.²⁸⁵ A series of underwater acrobatics performed by the singer are set against recitation of Warsan Shire’s poetry, which reads,

I tried to change. Closed my mouth more, tried to be softer, prettier, less awake. Fasted for 60 days, wore white, abstained from mirrors, abstained from sex, slowly did not speak another word. In that time, my hair, I grew past my ankles. I slept on a mat on the floor. I swallowed a sword. I levitated. Went to the basement, confessed my sins, and was baptized in a river. I got on my knees and said 'amen' and said 'I mean.'

I whipped my own back and asked for dominion at your feet. I threw myself into a volcano. I drank the blood and drank the wine. I sat alone and begged and bent at the waist for God. I crossed myself and thought I saw the devil. I grew thickened skin on my feet, I bathed in bleach, and plugged my menses with pages from the holy book, but still inside me, coiled deep, was the need to know ... Are you cheating on me?

Cheating? Are you cheating on me?²⁸⁶

The avoidance of mirrors and sex speaks of an attempt to return to a pre-Oedipal Real while the narrated suspicions of infidelity sour any taste for paternity and patriarchy.²⁸⁷ The reticence from

airing opinions and other saintly feats and ideals allude to the Imaginary painfully internalized by black women. The imagery of menstruation lends itself to the uterine characterization of the space itself.

Later on, the camera cuts from the flooded room to the façade of a civic building. Dressed as a modern-day Oshun, clad in a canary yellow dress bedecked with tiered ruffles, Beyonce triumphantly opens the doors of the edifice, unleashing a torrent of water. What follows is a cinematic epic that situates itself between pastoralism and Southern Gothic, acting as a collective *bildungsroman* of black women's intergenerational trauma, anger, and eroticism. This visual album will surely birth an immense amount of critical thinking regarding the scale and form of black women's creativity. Additionally, the imbrication of Shire's poetry with Beyonce's cinematic scenes warrants analyses that far exceed the bounds of this chapter. Such undertakings would further illustrate how black kinship, gender, and its attendant ontologies reverse and implode the project of psychoanalysis. This current analysis, however, focuses on the saga's opening scenes due to their embryonic measures and non-diegetic narration.

In the flooded room, Beyonce's doppelgangers occupy a belly-like space that represents a phantasmic return to the womb and emotional interiority. While black women's wombs have been continuously invaded by capitalism, serving as what Hartman calls "the belly of the world," the internal life has been heap over and tested by both the torturous praxis of Man and the lethal measurement of sentience.²⁸⁸ As standard film theorists would have it, the camera's function as an index to the world creates an illusive of fusion between real and symbolic. Julia Kristeva notes that Bazin's nostalgia for the object is so intense that he is willing to sacrifice subjectivity for "brute materiality."²⁸⁹ Silverman states, "Cinema replays the drama of phenomenal loss and cultural recover."²⁹⁰ Yet, how does black kinship complicate this drama of lost and found? More

precisely, how can we think of black women's emotional labor and trauma as part of this narrative of "phenomenal loss and cultural recovery?" This moment in *Lemonade* puts forth a chance to think about black women's interiority outside the literal context of motherhood. While this *mise-en-scene* may be heavily gestational, it is not necessarily concerned with parturition in the normative sense. Instead, the domestic aquarium in which Beyonce's doubled selves linger represents a space to where trauma is internalized.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of *Lemonade* is its female narrator. More specifically, Beyonce's non-diegetic voice inhabits a role typically reserved for male speech. As Silverman attests, cinema's soundtrack situates the male voice in a textual origin and the female voice within diegetic containment.²⁹¹ Incidentally, the only other comparable instance of a non-diegetic voice-over that comes to mind would be Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), a film that features the Unborn Child narrating the intergenerational drama of her Gullah family from the womb, toggling between the grammatical tenses of present progressive and future-perfect. "*We are two people in one body. The last of the old and the first of the new.*" Beyonce's non-diegetic recitation of Shire's poetry concerning the aquatic bedroom demonstrates in cinema what Christian Metz deems a missed encounter—albeit at a sonic level whereby the acoustic mirror incurs a disconnection.²⁹² As Silverman points out, *vraisemblable* works to establish sexual difference in cinema's sonic sphere and extends a larger metaphysical tradition. She writes,

The notion that cinema is able to deliver "real" sounds is an extension of that powerful Western episteme, extending from Plato to Helene Cixious, which identifies the voice with proximity and the here and now—if a metaphysical tradition which defines speech as the very essence of presence.²⁹³

Lacan assesses the discoursing voice as a symbol of castration, as it uses language to create “aphanisis,” or the disappearance of the subject behind meaning. Since we hear before we see, the voice plays a critical role in the infantile scene. The voice-over indexes a disembodied and, I would add, an occasionally didactic voice, which hovers outside diegetic space.²⁹⁴ In virtue of this aspect, the scene as an acoustic mirror bears a detachment in that doppelgangers seem disengaged both from each other and from the narrator.

Another uncanny detail that rivals the peculiarity of Beyonce’s twinned selves is the fact that Shire’s poetry works as in *ingested* instantiation of introjection. An ingested introjection might sound semantically redundant, but it is in fact not: if introjection signals internalization of authoritative voice then its ingestion indicates the voice becoming material with and submerged within the aqueous space and womb; it becomes vestibular. Put differently, Beyonce’s narration functions as an interior monologue simultaneously representing the voice and its body; yet, it foregrounds inner thoughts as an audible script.²⁹⁵ “The voice,” Doane explains, “displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the ‘inner life’ of the character.”²⁹⁶ Within the parameters of *Lemonade*’s opening scene, the ingested introjection, or the soliloquy staged from within the womb, represents an inside-out of a black woman’s interiority that then resides in an aquatic household. In this sense, this vignette as a whole symbolizes a *mise-en-abyme*—albeit, one narrated by the unsequestered black woman’s voice.²⁹⁷ The doppelgangers strengthen the *mise-en-abyme* by representing a split self within the womb-like, watery space of the bedroom. Could this be an aquatically induced involution of auditory interior and exteriors, which collapse within the vestibular? Could this be an example of “black plenitude?” “*We are two people in one body.*”

The nesting of bodies, desires, and voices continues in the work of Maxwell. Released in 1998, Maxwell's *Embrya* stood as the singer's experimental sophomore effort. The album garnered mostly the cavil of music critics for its somewhat soupy mélange of music genres syruped across atmospheric soundscapes. For instance, Dream Hampton of *The Village Voice* complained, "The band drones along as if in some somnambulant session that never ends. Not in any seamless, connected way. But in a manner that is absent of interesting changes, moods, or any real movement."²⁹⁸ Arion Berger deemed Maxwell's effort rife with "overwrought, underwritten songs with obscure, fancy titles revolving around a sort of sexual gnosticism."²⁹⁹ These quibbles along with other reviews disclose a discomfort with Maxwell's exploratory aesthetic and sensitive masculinity—the latter of which disturbed Greg Tate at *Spin Magazine*, a detail I revisit later in this chapter. *Embrya's* album art illustrates the gestational tides raspily warbled about by Maxwell. Additionally, the liner images comprise photographs of the singer floating in a pool, loosely swaddled in what appears to be colorful swaths of orange, blue, and red organza. Maxwell wears a white, gauzy ensemble that further emphasizes the aqueous levity of his environment. At any rate, *Embrya* combines reggae, funk, jazz, and rhythm-and-blues in its construction of a womb in which the singer croons many desires that reveal a form of black male interiority caught between day and night, ascent and drowning.

In his book *The Voice in Cinema*, Michael Chion measures the sonic ambivalence and maternal affects of what he terms "uterine night." He writes,

In the beginning, in the uterine darkness, was the voice, the Mother's voice. For the child once born, the mother is more an olfactory and vocal continuum than an image. Her voice originates in all points of space, while her form enters and leaves the visual field. We can imagine the voice of the Mother weaving around the child a network of connections it's

tempting to call the umbilical web. A rather horrifying expression to be sure, in its

evocation of spiders-and in fact, this original vocal connection will remain ambivalent.³⁰⁰

Here, we have sonic engulfment and immersion, swimming, and nourishment. These forces signal both a wake of sustenance and a flood of horror or, at best, uncertainty. In Chion's reasoning, the maternal, sonorous envelope indicates the infantile scene and not the embryonic—not the actual womb. What does this concept mean for Jenkins's *Moonlight* and Maxwell's lyrical, sonic, and visual components to his album *Embrya*? Mother equals sound and the nocturne while father occupies logos by engendering or illuminating text and meaning. Thus, interiority involves discursive impotence while exteriority offers discursive mastery. Maxwell's soft-brand of masculinity—as it is articulated in lyrics, sound, and album art—call to mind the three images of an enclosure similar to feminine interiority—those being woven enclosure, umbilical net, and cobwebs.³⁰¹

Before explicating what I find to be vestibular echoes in Maxwell's album, we must revisit Spiller's definition of vestibularity. As a reminder, Spillers characterizes cultural vestibularity as a violently forged passageway where blackness resides, writing, “these lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a *cultural vestibularity* [emphasis added] and the culture, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, ‘owners,’ ‘soul drivers,’ ‘overseers,’ and ‘men of God,’ apparently colludes with a protocol of ‘search and destroy’.”³⁰² These violent markings incidentally represent what Spillers calls the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” which turn raw tissue into an illusory body disbarred from legal personhood. The implications of such racialized stigmata become more complex when conjoined with the multiple meanings of vestibularity, which connote the sonic, the “bodily,” and the spatial all at one. The

multi-valence of the vestibularity coupled with its productively hazy invocation by Spillers render rich implications for bare life and its sonic and spatial ontologies. Within the culture of corporeality, vestibularity denotes several antechambers or passageways within the body. Just as in Chapter Two, this installment locates the most poignant of these bodily spaces within the cochlean (e.g., ear-based) and uterine cavities. Hearing (im)balances, and (re)production occasionally overlap on material and metaphorical levels. Auditory vestibules of the ear foster proper bodily posture, process percussions, and maintain neurological functions.³⁰³ Energy vibrations, such as the low frequencies of (human) speech, are detected by the cochlea, which aids in gravitational balance.

As they sound the sonic and spatial components of the body in gestation, vestibular echoes evidence the black body folding into itself by way of gestational noises and reverberations *without an image*. If we weave Massumi's ideas of proprioception into Chion's concept of uterine night *and* day, we come to an understanding of affect that thrives on the materiality of the sonic and its framing of black interiority. Songs from *Embrya*, such as "Gestation:Mythos," "Submerge: Til We Become the Sun," and the eponymous closing track, contain guttural, embryonic bass. In these three songs, Maxwell presents a gestational solar-and-lunar articulation of his romantic and erotic desires. Maxwell's songs may be unaccompanied by a moving-image, but they compensate for cinematic lack by deploying some level of ekphrasis in their lyrical content. *Embrya* rearranges the continuum between olfactory and sound, a sequence that occurs in uterine night. While we are certainly given sound regarding singing and music, allusions to smell are lyrically absent. However, the truancy of scent allows for luminescence to poetically come forth in the song "Submerge: Til We Become the Sun." Maxwell, for instance, croons,

Over to under

Enter your wonder, baby

Submerge into me, baby

And take me to higher

[Chorus]

Submerge within the light

Illuminate my night

Let your atmosphere surround me

Submerge within the light all night

'Til we become the sun

'Til we become the sun

See if I'm breathing

'Cause I'm not sure tonight if I'm alive

Words are demeaning they can't describe

[Chorus x2]

Oh, my God

'Til we become the sun

[Chorus x3]

Submerge within the light

Illuminate my night

Let your atmosphere surround me

In “Submerge,” Maxwell expresses spatiotemporal desires that defy gravity and time within the embryo. Maxwell begs his lover to “submerge” into him while permitting them to envelope him with their “atmosphere.” At the same time, he expects the drowning to take him “higher.” The sensorium of “Submerge” whirls masculine and feminine into a synergy of involution: an *embryo* without an image or an involution of subject-object relations into *flesh*. *Ascent* and *descent* within the womb as an *embryo* differ from the interpellative response of *the turning subject*. Darkness, or disorientation, and sound combine with the light of the lyrical to create this space of contradictory envelopment.

Here, Maxwell uses immersion to vocalize a kinetic orientation within the womb, delineating a point at which black masculinity infolds to its fantasy of a romance safely secluded from authoritative apparatuses and their architectures of confinement.³⁰⁴ Silverman explains that a fantasy of origins is an image of an infant wrapped in the mother's voice—entry into memory, desire, and subjectivity. However, Maxwell, with his tenor-falsetto range, simultaneously embodies a maternal voice, which does not exist in the album, and inters himself as a gestational entity throughout *Embrya*. The maternal voice as a sonorous envelope is rooted in a “cultural fantasy,” which is not to be confused with illusion.³⁰⁵ For fantasy is a retroactive entity. Rosolato argues that the maternal voice stands as the first instance of auditory pleasure. However, Chion writes of the terror of “umbilical night.” The maternal, sonorous envelope can be viewed from two standpoints: either from a site of unconsciousness that hosts the bliss of plenitude or from a place of preconscious the entails entrapment and impotence. “Fantasy” is invoked to bridge two disjunctive moments: it connects the infantile moment before subjectivity (“too early”) to the initial entry to meaning and desire. Moreover, Maxwell sings about his romantic desires and wishes for oneness within an imaginary womb.

Maxwell's tenor-falsetto range reveals the differently gendered spaces within his body. His destabilization of black masculinity's testosteronic bravado caused unease for Greg Tate, a music critic for *Spin Magazine*. Tate expressed anxiety around Maxwell's vocalizations due to their non-normative masculinity, warning,

If you're a[n] A-type male, you probably don't get Maxwell. Why should you? He's the king of mush, and he's not fiending for your love, brother. Until you've seen him charm mammoth audiences of grown women into utter hysteria, you're allowed to inquire, "What's all the rumpus?" Afterward, you bow down and admit that he's Maxwell and you're not, and for however long he's onstage, every *vulva* [emphasis added] in the room is Maxwell's property—including your main squeeze's. How is it that Maxwell's slightest quiver of the wrist elicits sighs and shudders as surely as his *pleading falsetto* [emphasis added] and heart-palpitating lyrical tactics?³⁰⁶

With flabbergasted condescension, Tate airs cognitive dissonance in his inability to reconcile what he deems to be Maxwell's effeminate gestures (e.g., "quiver of the wrist" and "pleading falsetto") with the singer's heterosexual sway over his swooning female fans. This paradox in black masculinity is nothing new when one considers the prismatic eroticism of figures such as Prince and Little Richard. Nonetheless, Tate's discomfort is certainly entertaining. What is particularly interesting in Tate's assessment of *Embrya* is his reduction of Maxwell's admirers to an external sexual organ: the vulva. As a passage both to the painful subjugation found in the New World with its various atrocities and to the pleasures of intimacy, Tate's mention of vulva evokes the vestibular in the most clinical and perhaps crass way. His essentialist reference juxtaposed to the remark on Maxwell's falsetto creates a continuum between sexuality, sex, and sound. Fittingly, the head and chest are marked as gendered vestibules within the body. To this

end, Michael McCallion claims that the female voice mostly resides within the second register, or head voice, while the male voice occupies the first register or chest voice.³⁰⁷ As such, Maxwell utilizes both head and chest in his vocal performance. Relatedly, Roland Barthes describes the pleasure of a singer's voice when it contains "the grain of the voice"—and by this, he means "the body in the voice."³⁰⁸

Again, the child finds their own voice in the mother, but the man refines his interjected maternal voice by projecting it onto all that is impotent and unassimiable to paternity. This particular detail helps unveil the peculiarity of Maxwell's *Embrya* by way of vestibular echo. As a reverberation chamber, Maxwell's songs compensate for the absence of a maternal voice through sonic echoes; moreover, Maxwell interjects and projects his own voice within these songs such as "Submerge" and "Drowndeep: Hula." These tracks feature resounding layers of melasmatic vocals and reggae percussion. Incidentally, Maxwell's melasmatic singing resounds respectively compound and run-on song titles such as "Eachhoureachsecondeachminuteeachday: Of My Life" and "I'm You: You Are Me and We Are You (Pt. Me & You)." These particular songs and their titles respectively jettison syllabic crooning and represent shrunken kerning between words—all of which formulate a fantasy of pre-specular plenitude in which self and other are fused in the womb. We see this typographic gesture elsewhere with Parliament-Funkadelic's 1978 single *Aqua Boogie (A Psychoalphadiscobetabioaquadoloop)*. (When normal kerning is adding to Parliament's song, the title reads "Psycho alpha disco beta bioaqua doloop.") At any rate, "Submerge" offers percussive echoing reminiscent of reggae that counterpoise Maxwell's airy runs. The resounding layers of Maxwell's *Embrya* effectuate what Michael E. Veal identifies as the two types of reverb in Jamaican music: spatial effects and ambiance.³⁰⁹ Spatial application of sound uses panning, which spatializes the placement of audio

signal during stereo mixing. This technology gives the listener the impression of moving through physical space.³¹⁰ In the case of Maxwell's *Embrya*, we enjoy a sonic sense of turning, drowning, and tumbling. Ambient reverb contains a high saturation of reverberation for atmospheric qualities. Here, we have mobile and static qualities as they relate to simulated sounds. Rewound, backward tape-speed also figures prominently into the opening and closing tracks.

Regarding dizzying lyrics and dusk-dawn temporality, Maxwell's *Embrya* evokes Glissant's maternal ekphrasis of the slave ship as it relates to oceanic and uterine kinetics. With a phenomenological vigor that leans toward vertiginous vector and embryonic containment, Glissant describes three abysses—the boat, the sea, and the endlessly expansive horizon, which generates a sublime inertia through the terrifyingly indeterminate semiotics of inclement weather—that span various points of seizure and represents the overthrownness emblematic of Middle Passage. With Zarathustran force, Glissant writes,

Imagine, if you can, the swirling red of mounting to the deck, the ramp they climbed, the black sun on the horizon, *vertigo* [emphasis added], this dizzying sky plastered to the waves [...] What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the *belly* [emphasis added] of the boat. For, in your, poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. This boat is a womb, a womb abyss [...] This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death.³¹¹

Glissant imaginatively recounts the woozy ferrying of enslaved flesh to the New World, all while anthropomorphizing the boat as a buoyant paunch pregnant with commodified flesh. Meanwhile, Maxwell's "Gravity: Pushing to Pull" describes a set of romantic physics,

[Verse 1]

All my days and all my nights and

Every hour is devoured

As the dawning strokes its morning

I'll be wanting, I'll be

[Chorus]

Pushing to pull me closer to you dear

Deeper than gravity is how I must be near

I'll be hunting

[Verse 2]

As the moments drip like water

I'll be patient for my slaughter

As the dawning slays the evening

I'll be waiting, I'll be³¹²

Once more, uterine night and the sun return in these respective sets of verses penned by Maxwell and Glissant. The horizon offers bleak lumens in one chronicle (e.g., "black sun on the horizon") and sexual yearning in the other (e.g., "dawning strokes its morning"). As a reminder, solar imagery appears in the lyrics to Maxwell's "Submerge" (e.g. Submerge within the light/ Illuminate my night/ Let your atmosphere surround me/ Submerge within the light all night/ 'Til we become the sun), representing a romantic union that illuminates the night with a downward

dawn into embryonic waters. Rivaling the cosmographic poetics of Kant and Nietzsche, these Copernican exploits imagined by the inspired minds of Maxwell and Glissant produce an eccentric cosmography wherein blackness reclaims love and eroticism yet loses access to humanity.

Perhaps Maxwell and Glissant's respective poetic deeds attest to what W.J.T. Mitchell finds to be ekphrasis's ornamental quality, which endangers the "spatio-temporal and aesthetic orders within literature" and privileges "space over time, and description over narrative"³¹³ Mitchell recognizes three modes of ekphrasis: indifference (e.g., ekphrasis is impossible in virtue of common sense), hope (e.g., said impossibility is triumphed by imagination or metaphor, which Deleuze disavows) and fear (e.g., a moment of resistance or counter-desire between visual and verbal becomes a moral and aesthetic imperative).³¹⁴ "The ambivalence about ekphrasis," Mitchell claims, "then, is grounded in our ambivalence about other people, regarded as subjects and objects in the field of verbal and visual representation. Ekphrastic hope and fear express our anxieties about merging with others."³¹⁵ Glissant's separate invocations a "black sun" calls to mind George Bataille's darkened, solar reference. Bataille writes, "The sensations we drink from the black sun afflict us as ruinous passion, skewering our senses upon the drive to waste ourselves."³¹⁶ The black sun in Bataille's imagination provides a calamitous affect to be imbibed. Furthermore, Bataille and Glissant's black suns and Glissant's womb-like characterization of the slave ship realizes a connection to Leong's ideas of the enslaved, thirst-stricken body. This is to say that we can think of black thirst as something auguring either an eclipse or an eschatological event. Whereas Maxwell's waxing of illumination concerns romantic submergence within the womb, Glissant's black sun bodes another dawn of Man and, at the same time, surrenders to a dusk inaugurating dehydrated flesh to the New World by way of salty water.

In *Embrya*, Maxwell's poetic flux between night and day, accent and decent, calls to mind the saga of Orpheus. As one of the most storied figures in Greek mythology (asides from Oedipus), Orpheus's tragic love for his wife Eurydice ferries him from the realm of the living to the underworld. On the day of her wedding to Orpheus, Eurydice suffers a deadly snakebite and dies, relegated to the bowels of the underworld. Eventually, Orpheus's deep affection for Eurydice takes him into the abyss. With a gifted display of song and poetry, the grief-stricken hero then affectively convinces Hades and Persephone to release his wife. Hades and Persephone offer to fulfill Orpheus's wish on the condition that he never looks back at Eurydice during his ascent from the underworld. Ultimately, Orpheus violates the stipulation. Since he could not hear any evidence of Eurydice trailing him, he glances over his shoulder upon reaching the threshold of between the worlds of the living and dead, only to discover Eurydice plummeting back into the underworld. Here, we have a tragedy of epistemology regarding one's physical orientation and lack of sonic proof. Sound, or lack thereof, betrays that which cannot or should not be seen. How does interpellation account for the silent lover who follows you? How does subject-formation function in Maxwell's return to a womb that has no external voice of maternity? Songs such as "Submerge" and "Gravity: Pushing to Pull" lyrically and sonically depicts the womb as a type of underworld in which desire, death, and plenitude coexist. In particular, the lyrics in "Gravity: Pushing to Pull" (e.g. "Pushing to pull me closer to you dear/ Deeper than gravity is how I must be near/ I'll be hunting/ As the moments drip like water/ I'll be patient for my slaughter/ As the dawning slays the evening/ I'll be waiting, I'll be") details an Orphic forbearance and gestational, pre-Oedipal fusion of two lovers that anticipates demise (e.g., "I'll be patient for my slaughter"). These ascents and descents of celestial and libidinal bodies evoke Glissant's ekphrasis of the deathly slave ship encountering nocturnal dawn. Yet, the combination

of Maxwell's lyrical singing from the womb with the sounds of rewound gurgles of aquatic and abdominal churnings delivers what I deem a *neo*-Oedipal condition to our ears. Our soulful crooner returned to the belly with melodically uttered signs that swirl within an imagined whirlpool of pre-linguistic auralty. This smuggling of lyrics into the womb—an adult rendition of a *prenatal chora*—might be the key anachronizing factor in producing the co-existence of ostensibly heterosexual plenitude and lack.³¹⁷ Regardless of Kristeva and Silverman's respective reformulations of Freudian and Lacanian schemes, the so-called Real imagined by Maxwell is inflected by black gender, which contextualizes “subject” development as subjugation.

More darkening light can be shed upon the gendered dynamics of *Embrya* when one returns to the ideas of Spillers. In her essay “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race” (1996), Spillers examines the curious life of “Oedipe africain,” a function of both the substitutive identities in black culture and the philosophical traditions of negation, and the object of anthropological and psychoanalytic findings. In questioning the efficacy of Lacan's Real within the context of race, Spillers places two francophone texts in dialogue with each other: Marie-Cecile and Edmond Ortigue's psychoanalytic *Oedipe africain* (1964) and Ibrahim Sow's ethnography *Les Structures anthropologiques de la folie en afrique noire* (1978).³¹⁸ The text *Oedipe africain*, according to Spillers mitigates reductive conceptions of blackness in virtue of its cultural relativist framing of the Senegalese people from 1962 to 1966.³¹⁹

According to Spillers's reading of the Ortigues's text, ancestral deference and homosociality and its accessories of *regard*—those being the *specular* and *spectacular*—constitute the figure of Oedipe africain.³²⁰ Spillers elucidates the role of black paternity as it pertains to the symbolic, writing,

The coil of the looks for the Ortigues, however, is entirely related the psychoanalytic aims of *Oedipe africain*, and that is to explore oedipal crisis finding one's place in the social order is resolved in a cultural context where the symbolic function of the father remains tied to the ancestors. We can only sketch out a few more details of this running narrative: (1) In the case where the father mediates between the dead ancestors and the living sons, the sons cannot think of themselves as the equal of the ancestor (and therefore not of the father either) and indeed not as his superior. What one must confront instead is the right to claim one's place within the group, as castration here is based on the collective register of obedience to the law of the dead, the law of the ancestors.³²¹

In this scenario, sight constitutes castration and ancestral statute negotiates the homosocial order of men.³²² In addition to the black father's gaze, his referral of his sons to the world of the dead and deified ancestors substitutes patricide.³²³ However, lyrics to Maxwell's song "Luxury: Cococure" fractures an already fragmented (or absent) acoustic mirror,

[Hook]

I found a cure for this

Cococure for this

It's got me plushed on some luxurious

Cococure

[Verse 2]

It's a happy in a sad

It's a more that's less

It's a glad, drive me crazy (ooh baby)

You're my mommy, you're my dad

Lady lover never go

You're the part of my heart that is soul³²⁴

In the lyrics above, Maxwell frames his presumably female lover as both mother and father within the womb. Even though there is neither ancestral worship nor homosociality in the album, Maxwell's retreat into himself within the womb and the heterosexually inflected, parental double-duty of his beloved constitutes a kind of atmospheric, homoerotic romance that desires a specular duty from queerness *without* spectacle: a paternal-maternal lover with which the singer attempts to fuse himself. Within the belly, *Embrya*'s divergent repertoire of drowning presents thirst both as an ingestion of and as a fusion with the lover.

Taken together, the varied sumptuousness of "Luxury: Cococure" (e.g., simple lyricism contrasted to lush orchestrations) and the embryonic heliocentricity of "Submerge" allude to the excessive haptics of light. In his reading of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952), Weheliye explores the interdependence of sound and sight through the appropriation of light by the protagonist, an unnamed black man.³²⁵ In so doing, Weheliye notes that lux corresponds to the "physical experience of light" while lumen indicates its "disembodied ideal."³²⁶ It is also important to mention that lux connotes the opulence. The ecstatic surplus of ameliorative romance that Maxwell expresses in "Luxury: Cococure" (e.g., "I found a cure for this/ Cococure for this/ It's got me pushed on some luxurious/ Cococure") connects to the luminous oneness he conveys in "Submerge" in that it renders light as a felt texture as opposed to just an optic. Additionally, these themes of light and luxuriance in Maxwell's album echo some of Warsan Shire's poetry used in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. As rehearsed by Beyoncé during her vignette titled "Forgiveness," Shire asks, "Do you remember being born? Are you thankful for the hips that

cracked? The deep velvet of your mother and her mother and her mother? There is a curse that will be broken.”³²⁷ Indeed, Maxwell has found a cure in a femme subject who doubles as mother and father. His phantasms are now bounded by lyricism bathed in the non-linguistic sounds of the womb.

Like Freud and Parsons, Weheliye also observes how the oceanic fantasy involves the dissolution of self within the sea. As such, subjectivity bleeds into the water expanse, heralding an almost mawkish return to a pre-Oedipal state. Consequently and rightly so, Weheliye notes that psychoanalysis has privileged the nuclear family and a “privatized history of the subject” in its overdetermination of the oceanic as a narrative of regression.³²⁸ Maxwell’s *Embrya* and its uterine churning and Beyonce’s *Lemonade* with its aquarium-bedroom do not by any stretch of the imagination attempt a hackneyed return to the pre-Oedipal. Instead, these two texts illustrate black interiority’s (occasionally quiet) life as it unfolds or infolds in the context of maternal dispossession and substitutive performances for the paternal.

In conclusion, thirst and drowning are co-constituted phenomena that inform blackness’s vestibular articulations and mis-interpellative moves. Across SZA, Beyonce, and Maxwell’s respective texts, we see different modes of thirst simultaneously quenched and aggravated through submergence or drowning. Vestibularity indeed does not function as a *deus ex machina*; yet, this Spillerian concept helps us contend with the corporeal and spatial components of cinematic narration—both diegetic and non-diegetic—and understand lyricism of cross-gendered luminosity from the womb. Regarding submergence, the repertoire of baptism, drowning, and swimming calls attention to how black bodies comport themselves to survival, pleasure, and spiritual renewal. In particular, swimming, according to Kevin Dawson, “allowed many

[bondsmen] to *appropriate* [emphasis added] their bodies.”³²⁹ This aquatic act encourages bodily reclamation and, at the same time, summons the contradictory ideals of stealing away. Hartman reminds us of the ironies of self-purloining, as she writes,

As in the case of “stealing away,” the slave’s property in the self is defined not by possession or legal title, customarily understood as inalienable rights, but by appropriation and theft. The relation of the enslaved to the self is possible only by way of wrongful possession or possession without the right or permission. Thus the deliberate calculation reinscribes the status of the self as property in order to undo it.³³⁰

In the end, what good are passionate attachments to the law when one is not a subject, yet, nonetheless, subjugated? How are such bonds challenged when one not only ignores the heed but also drowns and turns into their being?

CONCLUSION:
Riding Occiduus; Or, Future Directions in Surfer Cultures across the Black Diaspora

In conclusion, the futurity, affective capacities, and alternative ontologies of black subjects lead us to the water. The black aquatic troubles long-held conceptions of archive, sound, bodily sensation, and mapping. Regarding the latter aspect, blackness's fraught relationship with geophilosophy arrays several reversals in kinship models and traditional psychoanalytic theory. As far as particular historical incidents, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the calculated malice behind water management in Flint, Michigan also serve as grave moments in the black aquatic whereby necropolitics and disaster capitalism converge in egregious proportions. Examinations of these tragedies, which parallel the privatization of water and profiteering of disaster relief, are ongoing and exceed the space of this dissertation. While no "singular" event that grounds this dissertation, all of the processes mentioned above and intellectual foci find commonality in the neoliberal milieu of posthumanism and its contentious relationship to theorizations of black life.

My future project entails an ethnographic, theoretical, and historical account of black surfers. Notwithstanding the crucial contributions of surf scholars—such as Michael Kevin Dawson, Belinda Wheaton, and Alison Rose Jefferson—this topic remains under-researched. Complicates narratives around the sport, my project broadens racialized conceptions of recreation, expressive arts, and protest within the milieu of neoliberalism and environmentalism. Spanning the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I analyze black surfing across four case studies: surfer Duke Kahanamoku and blood quantum discourse in Hawaii during the early twentieth century; Nick Gabaldón's fugitive wave-riding in Santa Monica, CA, during the 1940s; the Black Surfers Collective (BSC) in Southern California from 1960s to present; and the surf

cultures that have emerged in Haiti and Sierra Leone in the past five years. Deepening Carl Schmitt's ideas of maritime governance by way of athletics and race, these investigations further politicize the ocean as a site of fugitive performance for black subjects. Concerning the malaise between eco-sustainability and privatization, I also consider the stakes of land sovereignty and management as they apply to black surfers in Honolulu, Hawaii and Jacmel, Haiti.

Much can be said, (literally) purchased, and seen when it comes to the culture of surfing. If the athletic prowess of surfers Duke Kahanamoku and George Freeth was responsible for globalizing surfing, then the dominant visual representations of surf culture—which includes the Hollywood "beach party" films in 1950s and 1960s (e.g. *Gidget*, 1956, being one of the most popular of the genre), and the magazines of the same era and onward (e.g. *Surfer Magazine*)—have been responsible for globalizing the sport into a multi-billion dollar industry. In fact, the sport boasts 10 million practitioners and generates \$10 billion in annual profit. Alas, based on my in-progress comparative fieldwork and archival research, I conclude that the visual representation of black surfers remains, at best, extremely novel. At the same time, robust communities of black surfers in Hawaii, Southern California, and Haiti, among other many other locations, brave watery curls and surges despite this discursive erasure. Incidentally, within the larger imaginary of American archetypes, the stakes of erasure for black surfers are very similar to the ones incurred by black cowboys in the American West of the nineteenth century: while both of these activities or lifestyles enjoyed a large black demographic and originated from indigenous communities, they still became overwhelmingly associated with white expansionism.

Another component of my future project focuses on Surf Haiti in Jacmel, a surf club founded by Ken Pierce in 2011, and black Hawaiian surfers in Honolulu. More specifically, this study spans the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, observing the neoliberal stakes of

sustainable tourism, sovereignty, and land as they relate to the political tasks heaved by black surfers.³³¹ Established by white men, the Surf Haiti, similar to founder Shane O'Connor's Bureh Beach Surf Club (BBSC) in Sierra Leone, operates as a non-governmental agency, a socio-economic assemblage that has engendered transnational ties. This aspect enriches an understanding of neoliberal tourism, whereby privatized debt, disaster capitalism, and growth in poverty place pressure on the racial state's rebranding of culture for the sake of the Global North's consumption.³³² A double-edged sword of "greenwashing," the entangled conundrum of sustainable surf tourism operates on a logic "whereby conservation requires tourism development, just as development spawns the need for conservation." Factors such as the ongoing fiscal ramifications of Haiti's 2010 Earthquake; the privatized governance by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, René Préal, Michel Martelly, and Jovenel Moïse; and Bill and Hillary Clinton's egregious misappropriation of relief aid have strained tourism strategies, placing Black surfing in these two locales in the neoliberal predicament of sustainable tourism.³³³ As for the Aloha State, some of the black Hawaiian surfers I interviewed consider how their wave riding connects to the local land sovereignty movement. Hawaii's association with black subjects roots itself in U.S. imperialism, global disseminations of black culture, and even longer histories of colonialism.³³⁴ The scholarship of J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua, Ikaika Hussey, Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright, and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, among others, addresses the indigenous struggle for land sovereignty, kinship, and gender in a variety of contexts.

In sum, Haitians face the plight of land management while black and native Hawaiians align themselves with land sovereignty. Both of these diasporic cases evidence both the ongoing effects of colonialism and the market-based logic of neoliberalism. Consequently, several fundamental questions arise: How does surfing upset the local sports cultures in these two

countries? How does surfing simultaneously reflect and challenge the neoliberal ordering of race, gender, and tourism?³³⁵ How do these diasporic engagements with surfing—an activity that has been globally marketed as "white man's hobby," despite its Polynesian roots as a pious sport—complicate conceptions of the recreation's industrial dependency on under-waged labor in developing nations similar to Haiti?³³⁶ How does Haiti's oligarchic democracy trouble these notions of the sport's supposed self-governance and cultural insularity?³³⁷ In Tara Ruttenberg and Peter Brosius's estimation, the state of modern surfing creates a space to imagine community and futurity "beyond the foundation of another brand, company, nongovernmental organization or non-profit."³³⁸ Yet, the fire and floods constituting the anthropocene have incinerated and drowned many optimistic imaginings of tomorrow.

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¹ Christina Sharpe explains, "The belly of the ship births blackness; the birth canal remains in, and as, the hold. The belly of the ship births blackness (as no/relation)." Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 74.

² Jared Sexton and Huey Copeland, "Raw Life: an Introduction," in *Qui Parle*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003), 53-54.

³ An emergent discourse revolving chiefly around literature, film, and music, Afrofuturism presents a racialized science fiction that imagines black temporality vis-à-vis technology, galactic elsewhere, disjunctive time, and speculative narratives stemming from either utopic or antithetical visions. While theorists have largely contested the genre's beginnings, cultural critic Mark Dery first coined the term "Afrofuturism" in his 1994 essay "Black to the Future." Eight years later, Alondra Nelson, professor of sociology at Columbia University, edited a special issue of *Social Text* that explored the new niche. Scholar J. Griffith Rollefson identifies Nelson as the first organizer of Afrofuturism's virtual and academic communities. Though Nelson's creation of a center of communication for Afrofuturists is undoubtedly a milestone, exemplars of this genre, such as literary luminary Ralph Ellison, can be found as early as the 1950s.

⁴ Alongside Sharpe's ideas, the work of John Protevi and William E. Connolly partly informs my theorization of *occiduus* as a kind of economic, biosocial force. In his book, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (2009), Protevi conceptualizes the imbrication of the social with the somatic. Protevi comments on the two divergent schools in the philosophy of mind: affective neuroscience and embodied-embedded mind. Protevi's uses a synthetic method comprising the bio-social-political concatenations. For instance, Protevi explores the affective facets of Hurricane Katrina, as they relate to the linkage between racial pathology, public panic, and ominous meteorological reports. As for Connolly, he critiques neoliberalism as being narrowly conceived as anthropocentric in his book *The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (2013). This concept serves as one of the starting points for conceptualizing the real and metaphorical liquidity and liquidation of black life as it relates to privatization and the disbarment from Western notions of the human.

⁵ As Ian Baucom, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Paul J. Crutzen have noted, the anthropocene simultaneously indicts human involvement in ecological destruction and geological time, and highlights how anthropocentric systems of ontology and action have mutated to the point where materialism and affect become a posthumanist approach to determinism. Ian Baucom, "'Moving Centers': Climate Change, Critical Method, and the Historical Novel," in *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 2 (June 2015), 137-139.

⁶ One version of Freud's affect theory roots itself in a trauma model, suggesting an "undigested affect," a sensation suspended at the surface. Ruth Stein, "Freud's Writing on Affect," in *Psychoanalytic Theories of Affect* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 10.

⁷ Sharpe, 15.

⁸ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 2.

⁹ The writings and biographies of Victorian intellectuals Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916), a Social Darwinist, and Charles Pearson (1830-1894), an English-born Australian politician and social reformer, illuminate these difficulties in identifying whiteness. The impossibility of a multiracial democracy and the transnational liberal socialists and labor movements provided the context out of which whites' anxiety and solidarity arose. Regarding militarism, the humiliation of the Russian naval force in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) also fueled white fears over military might and shook confidence in Western expansionism. "Although more and more of the world was passing into white control," Bonnett explains, "by the last years of the nineteenth century, there had emerged a ready market for those who were feeling fretful about the quality of military recruits, the poisonous influence of city life the rise of feminism, the spectre of intra-European rivalries, the falling birth rate of middle classes and many other things beside." Alastair Bonnett, "From the Crises of Whiteness to Western Supremacy," in *Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association* 1 (2005), 11. Tropes of the "absent presence," otherwise

known as the future, include apocalypse, utopia, prophesy, hope, fear, and potentiality. These are all affective capacities. Researchers have privileged the past when it comes to the geography of whiteness eliding the projections of whiteness onto the future horizon. Andrew Baldwin aims to situate the analyses of white geographies in relation to the future and futurity. Research on white geography has been regularly past-oriented, which potentially reifies the "teleological assumption that white racism can be modernized away." Baldwin ponders how whiteness is already future-oriented. Baldwin points to the racially unjust practices undergirding real-estate projection and appraisals that are fueled by the future-oriented affect of fear. Andrew Baldwin, "Whiteness and Futurity: Towards a Research Agenda," in *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 2 (2012), 174.

¹⁰ Timothy Stanley and Alexander Lee, "It's Still Not the End of History," in *The Atlantic* (September 1, 2014): <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/its-still-not-the-end-of-history-francis-fukuyama/379394/>; Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 76, 106; Chapter Four and Chapter Five in James Martel's *The Misinterpellated Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

¹¹ Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, 17.2 (Summer), 67.

¹² To this measure, affect can be summed up as the gap between content and effect, between signification and autonomic intensity. Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 25.

¹³ J.F. Golding, "Motion Sickness," in *Neuro-Ontology*, edited by Joseph M. Furman and Thomas Lempert (New York: Elsevier, 2016), 374.

¹⁴ In examining aspects of shame and negation in Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, Amber Jamilla Musser suggests, "If we bracket the contagious dimension of shame, its individuating properties are most apparent in the way it traps the narrator in his body. Rather than open the narrator to a multitude of possibilities, shame anchors him further to racial schemes of organization." Musser is concerned with kinship and temporality and centers her discussion in Fanon's interpellative moment of "Look, a Negro!" Here in the infamous scene from *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon describes this ocular moment as one of explosion (e.g., *J'explosai*) in which becoming black distills a racial epidermal schema. Musser's use of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas as a frame for recalling Fanon highlights the affective stakes of Fanon's rejection of the Oedipus complex and vice-versa grounds Deleuze and Guattari's abstract concepts within the lived experience of black corporeality. Amber Jamilla Musser, "Anti-Oedipus, Kinship, and the Subject of Affect," in *Social Text* 112, vol. 30, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 78.

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 2, 158; Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton (New York: Continuum, 2004), 290-291.

¹⁶ Protevi, “Water,” in *Rhizomes*, no. 15 (Winter 2007), 2. Colin Patrick Ashley and Michelle Billies use “inundation” as analytic for think about the affective flow of blackness: “This force of productive blackness is therefore ontological. It is knowable and sensed at the level of bodies that take in and transmit information. It is the inundation of this informational code—a proliferating pool of data that can be leveraged to generate bodies, populations, circulations, etc.—that allows blackness to register on a level of felt sensation through systems, bodies, and spaces outside of a pure linguistic or discursive regime. Inundation can be understood as the multiple processes that bring time into singularities of feeling over time such that past and future live in the body as affective resonances.” Colin Patrick Ashley and Michelle Billies, “The Affective Capacity of Blackness,” in *Subjectivity* (January 2017),

¹⁷ Parson, “The Oceanic Feeling Revisited,” in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 78, no. 4 (Oct. 1998), 501-523.

¹⁸ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York, 1961), 12.

¹⁹ Freud mentions affect for the first time in 1892 as one of “expectancy,” involving active intentions bound to failure. Freud regarded affect as mental states that split the mind and caused trauma. Ruth Stein, *Psychoanalytic Theories of Affect* (New York: Praeger, 1991)

²⁰ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 72.

²¹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); James Bliss, “Hope Against Hope: Queer Negativity, Black Feminist Theorizing, and Reproduction Without Futurity,” in *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 48, no. 1 (March 2015), 86-87; Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson, “The Position of Unthought,” in *Qui Parle*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003), 185.

²² Sharpe, 75.

²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Wilcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 9.

²⁴ Kale Fajardo quoted in Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2-3 (2008), 192.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

²⁶ The topographical model assisted Freud in dividing drives of affect from those of idea, furnishing different explanations for neurotic functions. There are three problems of affect that arise from this topographical model: quality and quantity; the transformation of affect; and the unconscious of affect. Incidentally, in Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), affect is theorized as a reproduction of painful experiences, which leave a residue on the subject. Affect is also detailed as an energy increase that could be felt as either pleasure or unpleasure. Here, Freud also differentiates affect from sensation. Stein explains, "This formulation seems to put affects on a par with sensations, the only difference being, according to Freud, that in contrast to sensations, the excitation leading to affect is endogenous rather than external. Accordingly, the perception of the object is an inner perception, sometimes of a hallucinatory nature, rather than an outer perception, which occurs through sensations." While affect equates to traces of pain, wishes translate to traces of satisfied desire. Stein, 12.

²⁷ Deleuze states that genealogy inaugurates what Nietzsche names *national characterologies* within the history of consciousness. By the term *national characterologies*, Nietzsche sought to outline the boundaries of French, English, and German philosophy, which is still very figure-driven and humanist. Geophilosophy seeks to make "nationaltarianisms" a matter of the earth. Gregory Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 80.

²⁸ “The earth, in D&G’s sense, is not the planet or the globe, which are the correlates of an objectifying and referential mode of thought. As a referent of thought, the earth as planet or globe belongs to a form of thought other than philosophy, namely as we will see, the sciences. Nor is the earth, as I have already said, the world in the sense of the cosmos.” Rodolphe Gasché, *Geophilosophy: On Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s What is Philosophy?* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 16-17.

²⁹ Hugo Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas*, translated by Ralph Van Deman Magoffin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1916), 28.

³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari argue, “For the sea is a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation. The problem did not arise in proximity to land. On the contrary, the striation of the sea was a result of navigation on the open water. Maritime space was striated as a function of two astronomical and geographical gains: bearings, obtained by a set of calculations based on exact observation of the stars and the sun; and the map, which intertwines meridians and parallels, longitudes and latitudes, plotting regions known and unknown onto a grid (like a Mendeleyev table). Must we accept the Portuguese argument and assign 1440 as the turning point that marked the first decisive striation, and set the stage for the great discoveries?” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 479; Ian Baucom uses the slave ship *Zong* as a case study for considering the ethical and economic perils of the slave trade. Baucom argues that the *Zong* Massacre demonstrates speculative finance, which continues to hallmark capitalism today, and then juxtaposes it with the seventeenth-century

discourse of what he terms “melancholy realism.” Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 222-223.

³¹ Bliss, “Black Feminism Out of Place,” in *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society*, 41, no. 4 (2016), 728.

³² Linguistic models for culture and subjectivity are predominately informed by Jacques Lacan and Ferdinand de Saussure. Consequently, Massumi uses Henri Bergson’s ideas of fluidity to complicate this psychoanalytic-linguistic discourse in order to conceptual the autonomic as intensive and “processual.” Massumi’s problem with cultural and literary theory is that they are not abstract enough to grasp the incorporeality of the concrete. In other words, Massumi argues that these two discourses fail to theorize affect and it's "impersonal," anti-identitarian lines of movement. Massumi, 16, 31-32, 191.

³³ As some scholars have argued, affect theory exceeds representation, due to its pre-cognitive quality. This visual has undoubtedly constituted the phenomenology of blackness and critical race studies. From W.E.B. Du Bois to Frantz Fanon, to Kobena Mercer, the optical stakes of blackness has been appreciated at great length. However, other senses feed into bodily sensations and perceptions, as they are related to one’s encounter with racialized bodies. I anticipate that my expansion of Spiller's notion of vestibularity will help us understand the synesthetic qualities of the black aquatic.

³⁴ Jose Munoz Esteban, "From Surface to Depth, Between Psychoanalysis and Affect," in *Women and Performance Journal* 19, no. 2 (2009), 123-122; Massumi, 58-60.

³⁵ Massumi comments on the mobilization of scientific concepts as analytics/analogies in humanities: "The optimal situation would be to take a scientific concept and use it in such a way that it ceases to be systematically scientific but doesn't end up tamed, a metaphorical exhibit in someone else's menagerie." Massumi, 20.

³⁶ In his racialization of Deleuzoguattarian assemblages by way of relational mode of articulation, Alexander G. Weheliye writes, "The flesh, although not synonymous with racialization in toto, represents one such racializing assemblage within the world of Man, and, consequently, it represents both a subject and object of knowledge within black studies' intellectual topographies." Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 51. Even though Henri Bergson and Baruch Spinoza have been honored as the forefathers of affect theory, with Deleuze and Guattari inheriting their conceptual lot, thinkers within Black Studies have been largely dismissed from this narrative. Undoubtedly, the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter, among others, could enrich the "emergent" historiography of affect theory. However, given the post-identity, "pre-cognitive" tilt of many affect theorists, the work of these Black Studies thinkers is often overlooked. In a manner that is oft-times too capacious, Ashley and Billies characterize blackness as an affective capacity that

engages with “desire beyond the individual that bring together feelings, spaces, objects, bodies, and organic and nonorganic body parts into productive assemblage by leveraging the ‘stickiness’ and ontological generativity of blackness.” Similarly, Ahmed, Musser, and Saldanha have used textural and arguably velocity-like qualities such as stickiness and viscosity to describe the affective features of race. Also see Andrew Culp’s *Dark Deleuze* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

³⁷ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Post-Indentitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” in *Feminist Formations* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2015), 115-125.

³⁸ Ruth Leys critically examines the humanities and social science’s interest in affect or the neurosciences of emotion (434). Daniel Lord Smail started neurohistory as a discipline that combines history with brain sciences. Affect is constantly described and explained as pre-cognitive intensities that register at the impersonal level. Ley observes that affect theorists share a discontent over political theory and rationality being rendered as immaterial or disembodied (436). Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011), 434, 436.

³⁹ Recently, the social sciences and humanities have reconsidered the link between Newtonian physics and Cartesian dualism, as a means to constitute new materialist views within the neoliberal milieu of neuroscience, biopolitics, economic globalization, and environmentalism, among other phenomena. Put succinctly, thing theory is alive but takes on a perverse vitality

within the context of Black expressive cultures. In addition to Manuel DeLanda's work, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's edited anthology *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010) attempts to reincorporate materiality into philosophical discussions of subjectivity vis-à-vis social constructivism and analytics. Regarding more racially explicit engagements, Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003) and Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) arguably explore forms of what Harry Garuba has termed "animist materialism." Whether it be Moten's phonic theorization of Aunt Hester's scream and its Marxist substrate or Mbembe's account of neoliberalism's effects on Black labor within the postcolonial crucibles of arbitrary violence and *commandment*, the thingliness and fugitivity of Blackness come to the fore within the current discourse of new materialism. For as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten explain, "Some people want to run things, other things want to run." Put differently, the fugitive state of Blackness vivifies and troubles objecthood and objectivity—particularly while "a/wake" in the watery spaces of cultural memory and scuttled archives. (Here, I borrow the analytic "a/wake" curator Erin Christovale's show *a/wake in the water: Meditations on Disaster* (2014), hosted by the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts.) Other texts that are related to my project include Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009), Mel Y. Chen's *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012), and Monique Allewaert's *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (2013), and Amber Jamilla Musser's *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); this scholarship enables me to situate the affective imaginary of a black aquatic within the discourse of new materialism. Similar to Chen, Jeffrey J. Cohen, and Todd R. Ramlou argue that Deleuze and

Guattari's idea of animism challenges notions of queerness. "To invoke mortality in a discussion of the queer is, we realize, to risk the pernicious linking of the queer to the fatal. This heteronormative conjoining of queer sexuality to morbidity (especially post-AIDS) conceptualizes death as an individualized judicial event." The authors, however, problematically make black political models fungible to the white category of queer, arguing that queer theory has always been "deleuzoguattarian." Harry Garuba, "Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society," *Public Culture* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2003), 262-285; Cohen and Ramlou, "Pink Vectors or Deleuze: Queer Theory and Inhumanism"; Stefano and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 51.

⁴⁰ In her exegesis of Deleuze's *Cinema* texts, Barbara Kennedy notes how affect is a non-human becoming that works as a "produced resemblance." In accordance to the incarnating yet unmarked subjectivity of affect, cinematic encounter offers a "bio-aesthetics" of "pre-personal" experience within Deleuze's thinking. Affect as a micro-political method furnishes us with new understandings of supposed unmarked subjectivity, materiality, and aesthetics. Deleuze's notions of becoming are anti-Hegelian (i.e., no telos) and anti-metaphysical (i.e., against linguistics). Relatedly, he characterizes the brain as a subject or autopoiesis—a kind of self-enjoyment—that exists before the emergence of a perceptual field. Here, race and its rubric and problems around perception or representation haunt affect theory. Deleuze also tries to go beyond phenomenology's idea of subject-object relations and intentionality by seeing the image as a product of a brain/mind/body assemblage. Kennedy, *The Aesthetics of Sensation*, 84-85, 88, 91,

109; Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” in *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013): 669-689.

⁴¹ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Patricia Clough and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 59.

⁴⁴ Leys critiques affect theory as “independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons and beliefs—because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness.” Silva S. Tompkins and Paul Ekman argue that affective processes are independent of semiotics and phenomenological intention and volition. Leys explains, “They [Tomkins and Ekman] thus posit a constitutive disjunction between our emotions on the one hand our knowledge of what causes and maintains them on the other, because according to them affect and cognition are two separate systems.” Appraisal theorists, unlike Tomkins and Ekman, assert that emotions are intentional states directed toward objects and dependent on beliefs and desires. If we take Joseph Le Doux’s and Eric Shouse’s related arguments seriously, they pose an equally grave problem for black sentience, a topic expounded upon at length by Hartman. Leys, 437-438.

⁴⁵ Leys, 450.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 441.

⁴⁷ Wynter writes, “Parallely, a new language able to convey what *it is like* to be conscious outside the terms of each culture-specific order of consciousness, would also have to be one only findable within the term of the postulate of autonomously functioning laws of culture, as laws specific to the third (beyond the physical and the purely biological) and hybrid level of ontogenetic/sociogenetic existence at the level that would be the specific domain of inquiry of this new language.” Sylvia Wynter, “Toward the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be ‘Black’,” in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Change in Latin America* (2001), edited by Mercedes F. Duran-Cogan and Antonio Gomez-Moriana (New York: Routledge Press), 55.

⁴⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19-20.

⁴⁹ Tyrone Palmer, “‘What Feels More Than Feeling?’: Theorizing the Unthinkability of Black Affect,” in *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3, no 2 (Fall 2017).

⁵⁰ Eric Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” in *M/C Journal* 8, no. 6 (December 2005),

<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php> 28.

⁵¹ For information regarding black women's aesthetic engagements with environmentalism and ecocriticism, see Chelsea Frazier's "Troubling Ecology: Wangechi Mutu, Octavia Butler, and Black Feminist Interventions in Environmentalism," in *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016), 40-72.

⁵² Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz write, "In order to agree to inscribe the Anthropocene in the series of geological epochs, however, stratigraphers are not content with models or predictions. What they need is something solid—sediment, a stratigraphic division that can be seen and measured here and now." Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, translated by David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2017), 12.

⁵³ Ibid., 5-8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20-21

⁵⁶ Nandini Gunewardena, "Human Security Versus Neoliberal Approaches to Disaster Recovery," in *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Disaster*, edited by Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller (New York: Rowman Altarmira, 2008), 3-13.

⁵⁷ Barnor Hesse, "Escaping Liberty: Western Hegemony, Black Fugitivity," in *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (2014), 291-293.

⁵⁸ Jason Moore, "The Capitalocene Part I: On the Nature & Origins of Our Ecological Crisis," in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017), 603-606.

⁵⁹ Joachim Radkau, *Power and Nature: A Global History of the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153.

⁶⁰ Anissa Janine Wardi, *Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 140.

⁶¹ Ibid.,

⁶² Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 2.

⁶³ Ibid., 2-3.

⁶⁴ Jean-François Augoyard, *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sound* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2014), 27.

⁶⁵ Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 25.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Sea and the Land: Biopower and Visuality from Slavery to Katrina," in *Culture, Theory and Critique* 50, no. 2 (December 2009), 291

⁶⁷ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (Reaktion Books, 2009)

⁶⁸ Sarah Jane Cervenak and J. Kameron Carter, "Untitled and Outdoors: Thinking with Saidiya Hartman," in *Women and Performance*

⁶⁹ Wesley Miller and Nick Ravich, prods., "Carrie Mae Weems, 'Roaming'," *Art21* (September 10, 2010): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI0R2qlRfps>

⁷⁰ In explaining the importance of her *Roaming* series and artist's residency in Rome, Carrie Mae Weems states, "The world met on the Mediterranean, not on the Mississippi." This sentiment attempts decenter the exceptionalism of U.S. articulations of race by pointing toward the longer history of blackness in the west, as evidenced by the exchange between Europe and Northern Africa. *BOMB Magazine*

⁷¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 116, 118.

⁷² W.H. Auden quoted in Mike Brown, "Seascapes," in *Seascapes: Shaped by the Sea* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17.

⁷³ Parson, "The Oceanic Feeling Revisited," in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 78, no. 4 (Oct. 1998), 501-523. Massumi explains, "An emotion or feeling is a recognized affect, an identified intensity as reinjected into stimulus-response paths [...] into subject-object relations." Ironically, Freud's oceanic feeling, one being of limitlessness, is still enigmatic and rather capacious when compared to his taxonomy of psychosexual drives found in his oeuvre. Massumi,

⁷⁴ Similar to Freud, Arthur Schopenhauer also professed a sense of "oneness" indicative of subjectivity and consciousness being indivisible from the aquatic. For Edmond Burke, the ocean serves as a gigantic reminder of the possibility of death. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, translated by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1909), 272; Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, translated by E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 216; 336 Schopenhauer on thirst. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York, 1961), 12.

⁷⁵ Freud mentions affect for the first time in 1892 as one of "expectancy," involving active intentions bound to failure. Freud regarded affect as mental states that split the mind and caused trauma. Ruth Stein, *Psychoanalytic Theories of Affect* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 3.

⁷⁶ Spillers, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*, 72.

⁷⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); James Bliss, “Hope Against Hope: Queer Negativity, Black Feminist Theorizing, and Reproduction Without Futurity,” in *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 48, no. 1 (March 2015), 86-87; Hartman and Wilderson, “The Position of Unthought,” in *Qui Parle*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003), 185.

⁷⁸ “The earth,” Gregory Flaxman argues, “is both mother and father but it is, more accurately, mother and *then* father—a place of nativity qua nativism and *then* a patriarchal qua political inheritance.” Gregory Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 107.

⁷⁹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); James Bliss, “Hope Against Hope: Queer Negativity, Black Feminist Theorizing, and Reproduction Without Futurity,” in *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 48, no. 1 (March 2015), 86-87; Hartman and Wilderson, “The Position of Unthought,” in *Qui Parle*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003), 185

⁸⁰ Hal Foster writes, “Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visibility as a social fact, the two are not opposed as nature to culture.” Hal Foster, “Preface to Vision and Visibility,” in *Visual Culture: What is Visual Culture Studies*, edited by Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 116. Mirzoeff

⁸¹ Saulius Geniusas explains, "The notion of the horizon drives from the Greek *ὀρίζειν*, a verb which can be roughly translated as 'to divide,' 'to delimit,' to mark off by boundaries, and which in Antiquity was employed primarily in the context of astronomy." While scholars of the Middle Ages and theologians and philosophers elsewhere have explained the horizon as an anthropological and metaphysical entity, thinkers within modernity, by contrast, conceive horizon as an *epistemological* object that is neither a matter of cosmological position nor a concern of the soul. Saulius Geniusas, *The Origins of Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 1.

⁸² In 1841, Scottish historian Thomas Carlye first coined the term "visuality" in his lecture *On Heroes*. As a staunch detractor of the Enlightenment, Carlye supported imperialism and declared visuality to be a heroic extension of the Anglophone imperial culture. The hero and the historian, according to Carlye, possessed the "eye of history," or the ability to see history unfold in real time. Ironically, the hero stood at the intersection of embodied vision and the disembodied vision of the camera obscura, which Carlye favored over the photographic camera. Emblematic of Romanticism's conservative constituents, he saw the Enlightenment as a chaotic break from the telos of history, ushering in unreason and political revolution. Empire's practice of and implication in visuality created a contradiction. Interestingly, Carlye's concept of visuality included sound. Mirzoeff, 54-59.

⁸³ The figure of the horizon appears in phenomenology, hermeneutics and reader-response theory. This linear phantom lies between the optical and the epistemological. Here, we can begin

to think about black queer visibility being tied to tides, an accessory to eyeing the ocean. In *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer explains, “to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it.” Gadamer explains horizon (*Horizont*) as a historically-determined situation. Gadamer’s work is indebted to Husserl’s phenomenology but chiefly addresses hermeneutics, which critiques the former method as descriptive. In art history, the horizon was developed as a compositional principle in perspectival rendering, as evidenced by Renaissance painters. Gadamer writes, “Since Nietzsche and Husserl, the word [e.g., horizon] has been used in philosophy to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy and the way one’s range of vision is gradually expanded.” The fusion of horizons equals *Horizontverschmelzung* or the understanding of the unfamiliar. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 313.

⁸⁴ We can think of Ashes’s boat as a vestibule of sorts, a heterotopic entity that enables to float nowhere, an episode captured on looped footage that imprisons him in presentism that is then underscored by the finality of his finely crafted tomb. As Michel Foucault would have it, gardens, cemeteries, and cinematic screens exemplify the perverse “non-place” of heterotopias. Relatedly, McQueen’s film amalgams several kinds of heterotopias, both in form and content. Incidentally, Foucault identifies the sea as *res nullius*, a nothing thing. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” in *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (April 1986).

⁸⁵ Sean Cubitt argues that, at its inception, film was not a narrative entity but that it became so once the cut was introduced. This entailed the transition from experiencing a moving image to perceiving a moving-image. By extension, it can be said that left-screen featuring the looped footage of Ashe offers an experience that gradually gives way to a level of perception on part of the viewer. The aquatic or oceanic feeling comes with the experience of viewing Ashe on water with no apparent narrative; it is a *temps mort* on loop and functions at the first level of narrativity, as it shows more than it discursively tells. This circularity offers a form of suspension while the right-hand screen is strung on a linear story. Peter Verstaten, *Film Narratology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 14.

⁸⁶ Peter Brooks considers how narrative establishes limits and “follows the internal logic of the discourse of mortality.” Hermeneutic structures the proairetic into large interpretive wholes. Proairetic codes equal vignettes and details of the narrative. Reordering the proairetic provides one with narrative pleasure, a sense of closure that’s typically absent from lived experience. Brooks goes as far to argue that the linear grants one pleasure. The hermeneutic code, on the other hand, establishes enigma and incites the reader to handle the text proairetically. Proairetic equals suspense or pleasure created by action rather than resolution; it also equals plot events while the hermeneutic involves the effect, the unexplained resolution (e.g., mysterious murder). Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 18.

⁸⁷ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 3.

⁸⁸ Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 87.

⁸⁹ As a utopian formation, queerness is “always directed at the thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise.” Ibid., 26

⁹⁰ Calvin Warren, “Onticide: Afropessimism, Queer Theory, and Ethics,” *Ill Will Editions*

⁹¹ Ibid.,

⁹² “In the horizon of the infinite. – We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us – indeed we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §124

⁹³ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”

⁹⁴ Spillers explains, “Those African persons in ‘Middle Passage’ were literally suspended in the ‘oceanic,’ if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet “American” either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also nowhere at all. Since, on any given day, we might imagine, the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally

'unmade,' thrown in the midst of figurative darkness that "exposed" their destinies to an unknown course." Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 72.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁶ In the case of black kinship's ruptures and rearrangement and black motherhood's commodification, psychoanalysis also undergoes a reversal. To this end, Spillers has astutely examined how black women have been "misnamed" by way of slavery's violent ungending, absent paternity, and Freudian-Lacanian arrangements of "male" and "female." In linking these aspects to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "Report," Spillers explains, "This stunning reversal of the castration thematic, displacing the Name and the Law of the Father to the territory of the Mother and Daughter, becomes an aspect of the African-American female's misnaming." She continues, "In other words, in the historic outline of dominance, the respective subject-positions of 'female' and 'male' adhere to no symbolic integrity." Ibid., 66.

⁹⁷ When discussing vitalism and philosophy of the mind (e.g., perception), Leibniz's non-consciousness should not be conflated with Freudian un-consciousness because repression does not apply to non-consciousness, which may be argued for specific nonorganic matter. Massumi, 16; Pauline Phemister, *Leibniz and the Natural World: Activity, Passivity, and the Corporeal Substances in Leibniz's Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

⁹⁸ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 9, 117.

⁹⁹ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 80.

¹⁰⁰ “Straight time’s presentness needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of the queer utopian hermeneutics.” Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.

¹⁰¹ “Slavery’s modernity formed a cosmography in which the space of the living was divided from that of the dead by the sea, a place of simultaneous life and birth.” Mirzoeff, “The Sea and the Land: Biopower and Visuality from Slavery to Katrina,” 290.

¹⁰² Manuel Delanda asserts that humans and non-living historical structures, such as geology, both share energy flows and non-linear causalities—hence, affect. Foucault writes, “Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the mole-like perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal signification and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for ‘origins.’” Flaxman, 72; Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92.

¹⁰³ Flaxman declares, “Genealogy presages this geodynamic enterprise because the lineage of signs and the history of forces are written on the earth itself—in the mineralization from which we emerged as vertebrates, on the landscape which we have transformed over millennia, to the vast fossil record to which we will return, perhaps some day to be recovered by a future species.”

Geophilosophy seeks to deterritorialize thought from a transcendental ego, draining humans of identity (e.g. “desubjectivization”) and envisioning a world without others. Flaxman, 84.

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche’s nomenclature regarding the metaphysics of origin includes *Ursprung* (“springing forth”), *Herkunft* (“whence coming”), and *Entstehung* (“rising out”). Ibid., 74.

¹⁰⁵ Flaxman, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Hartman and Wilderson,

¹⁰⁷ Flaxman, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Hartman, “Belly of the World,” 168; Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania), 69-81.

¹⁰⁹ Hartman, “Belly of the World,” 168.

¹¹⁰ Flaxman, 80.

¹¹² What are the politics and affective qualities of black pleasure within the aquatic? Indeed, Freud, Lacan, and Deleuze’s respective models of pleasure and desire stand as the usual frames for thinking through the psychoanalytic stakes of fulfillment, primarily as it pertains to sex. (As I

demonstrate later in this chapter, these instances of misnomer and disappearance become all the more complicated in my analysis of the Little's swim lesson in *Moonlight*.) However, I am less interested in the act of sex than I am in the stakes of queerness and happiness and how they appear in the McQueen's *Ashes* and Jenkins's *Moonlight*. For as Tinsley argues, "Queer not in the sense of a 'gay' or same-sex loving identity waiting to be excavated from the ocean floor but as a praxis of resistance. Queer in the sense of marking disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so: connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, [and] loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist [...]" Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," 199. Sara Ahmed considers happiness as "happening"; or, to be happy is to be affected *by* something and to be happy *about* something (e.g., intentionality). Happiness is a positive accumulative value while affect is framed as sticky. How can we think about buoyancy as a form of happiness alongside the surface quality of wetness and the spatial capacity of the immersive? In considering the "politics of good feeling," Ahmed argues that the family serves as the site of happiness, which is threatened by "melancholic migrants, unhappy queers, and feminist kill-joys." According to Laura Marks, pleasure also offers a haptic alternative to the power relations of the Lacanian gaze. Marks explains, "I was looking for an alternative to the dominant theory of the Gaze, derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis. I wanted to understand how looking could be something other than the exercise of power, and how to explain the pleasure of looking as not gendered, not perverse." Marks (2004)

¹¹³ Alois Riegl's notion of the haptic not only stands as an exemplary method of formalism revisited by art historians, but it also has permeated film theory's tactile and somatic turn. The

term “haptic cinema” first appears in the work of Noel Burch who uses it to describe the “stylized flat rendition of deep space” in early and experimental films. Laura U. Marks, *Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 8. Also see Abbie Garrington’s *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁴ Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, 60.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁶ The shift in film theory from psychoanalysis to embodied or physiological models of reception arrays several thinkers whose work ponders the cinema’s cross-sensory possibilities. The English translation of Jean-Louis Baudry’s text substitutes the term “apparatus” for the French term *dispositif*, which focuses on the material conditions of cinema as opposed to the cinematic machine itself. Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and Sobchack are some of the key figures attend to cinema’s somatic elements. This genre of film theory differentiates Foucault’s abstraction of the body from embodiment, as demonstrated by Sobchack. Laura Marks looks at the multi-sensory elements of cinema. Steve Shavirro encourages a mimetic connection between film and spectator. Ariel Roger, *Cinematic Appeals: The Experience of New Movie Technologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). Also see Chapter Three “Subjective Vision and the Separation of the Sense,” in Jonathan Crary’s

Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

¹¹⁷ Deleuze explains the anti-humanism of the film camera, “the sole cinematic-graphic consciousness is not us, the spectator, nor the hero; it is the camera—sometimes human, sometimes inhuman or superhuman.” Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 20. The cinema constitutes subjectivity/conscious. With this in mind, my use of horizon as a philosophical figure or analytic might pose some contradictions. In contrast to phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze is a Bergsonian, 76. Deleuze rejects phenomenology’s intentionality by way of Bergson and Spinoza.

¹¹⁸ Julian Hanich contrasts immersion to illusion, which has been used pejoratively in several discourses. Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films*

¹¹⁹ Jennifer Barker writes, “Cinematic tactility is a general attitude toward the cinema that the human body enacts in particular ways, haptically, at the tender surface of the body; kinaesthetically and muscularly in the middle dimension of muscles, tendons, and ones the reach toward and through cinematic space; viscerally in the murky recesses of the body, where heart, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing synapses receive, respond to, and reenact the rhyming of cinema.” Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 3.

¹²⁰ According to Deleuze, the French school and German Expressionism dissolved the subjective image. However, the French school preferred water. For Deleuze, notable directors from this niche include Jean Renoir and Marcel L'Herbier. Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Homme du large* (1920) framed the sea both as an object of perception and as a perceptive system, which is distinct from earthly optics and language (or sight and linguistics). Deleuze argues that water is the precondition for the French school of film and its genre (e.g., social documentary, narrative, abstract aesthetics, etc.). "It is firstly because water," Deleuze writes, "is the most perfect environment in which movement can be extracted from the thing moved, or mobility from movement itself." Deleuze, *Cinema*, 77.

¹²¹ In his consideration of Gremillon's films, Deleuze interestingly describes the separation of land from water both as a dissolution of relational bonds (e.g., familial, romantic, and maybe even libidinal) and as a means toward universalism. He writes, "The drama was that it was necessary to break the links with the earth, of father with son, husband with wife and mistress, woman with lover, children with parents; to retreat into solitude to achieve human solidarity, class solidarity." For Deleuze, the cinema of Gremillon and Vigo draws a line between the affections, perceptions, and actions of men on land versus those of men of the sea. *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Sobchack claims, "to understand movies figurally, we first must make literal sense of film." Taking carnal sensuality seriously in film studies is an aim that differs from linguistics and

psychoanalysis. As Sobchack demonstrates, this measure involves an auto-ethnography, an impressionistic approach to scholarship. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 59.

¹²⁴ When it comes to queer theory's relationship to continental philosophy, most queer theory avoids Heidegger, perhaps due to his concerns with idealism and transcendence and queer theory's materialist and historicist approaches to desire, epistemology, politics, and subjectivity. For as Shannon Winnubst writes, "Not even anti-Heideggerian, queer theory is simply apathetic to Heidegger perhaps enacting a Hegelian kind of spiritual killing." Winnubst continues, arguing, "queer theory is focused directly on temporality rather than the metaphysical questions of times derivation, structures or principles that have often consumed philosophy's focus." Shannon Winnubst, "Temporality in Queer Theory and Continental Philosophy," in *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 2 (2010), 137-138.

¹²⁵ In Barker's estimation, the spectator is doubly situated in the here and there. Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, 75.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 79, 84

¹²⁷ Massumi, 59.

¹²⁸ Afrofuturistic identities and monstrous subjectivities can also be found in the work of contemporary black women artists such as Renee Cox and Wagechi Mutu. Cox's photographic series *Raje* (1998) humorously chronicles the conspicuously Photoshopped adventures of a black superheroine who triumphs over the commercial stereotypes of Uncle Ben and Aunt Jemima. While Cox employs a comedic revision of commercialized stereotypes, Mutu's collaged images embrace abjection as they present mutilated and amputated mutants whose faces encompass a hodgepodge of uterine imagery and exaggerated black female phenotypes. Using medical diagrams from the Victorian era as the background, this Kenyan-born artist conflates epidemiological imagery, anthropological documentation, with clippings from fashion advertisements and pornography, creating a lovely brand of black grotesquerie that begs for the viewer's squeamish attraction and plays with the Western opprobrium provoked by such bodies.

¹²⁹ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

¹³⁰ Stephen P. Cass, Susan L. Whitney, and Joseph M. Furman, *Vestibular Disorders: A Case Study Approach to Diagnosis and Treatment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹³¹ Jean-François Augoyard, *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sound* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2014), 27. Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 113.

¹³² Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5.

¹³³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 43.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁷ Moten, *In the Break*, 12.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 390

¹⁴¹ Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed*.

¹⁴² Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2002), 763.

¹⁴³ Gregory Jerome Hampton, *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 26

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴⁵ Stacey Alaimo, "'Skin Dreaming': The Bodily Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, edited by Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 126.

¹⁴⁶ Hampton, 26.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴⁸ Gerald L. Bruns, *On Ceasing to Be Human* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2011), 66.

¹⁴⁹ Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed*,

¹⁵⁰ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 77.

¹⁵¹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 44.

¹⁵² Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed*

¹⁵³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 31-32.

¹⁵⁴ Audre Lorde, “A Song for Many Movements,” in *The Black Unicorn: Poems* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1995)

¹⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 2007), 105.

¹⁵⁶ David Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe: Heidegger from Being and Time and the Black Notebooks* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 20-25; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 160-164.

¹⁵⁷ Monica Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013),

¹⁵⁸ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

¹⁵⁹ Eva Hayward, “More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves,” in *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36.3-4 (Fall/Winter 2008), 76-78.

¹⁶⁰ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

¹⁶¹ In her book *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (2013), Allewaert argues that Caribbean agency and personhood are ecologically engendered phenomena stemming from the colonial era; such marvels threatened European notions of materialism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Allewaert converts Ariel’s lyric from William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* (1610-11) into an analytic whereby corporeal disaggregation comes to the fore within the context of tropical climates, slavery, and the natural world. Drawing from John Locke and Thomas Hobbes’s respective yet connected political conceptions of the body and property, Allewaert’s conception of personhood differs greatly from Enlightenment and Romanticist notions of subjectivity, beliefs that falsely presupposed a division between the natural world and humanity.¹⁶¹ For Allewaert, *gens de couleur* warranted a special ontology. She argues that personhood—particularly for slaves—operated as an interstitial that survived in the ontological gaps between the human, the animal, the botanical, and the object.¹⁶¹ Here, minoritarian bodies within the colony have been corralled into bestiaries (e.g. unwaged labor and sexual reproduction as animal husbandry); heritaged conceptually as vegetation (e.g. mythically tied to the land due to genealogical isolation); and

rendered as capital. Given this liminality, Allewaert specifies this minoritarian personhood as “para-human,” a category that encompasses slave and maroon personhoods that were elided by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century legal and philosophical discourses.¹⁶¹ Allewaert, 3, 8-11, 15, 18.

¹⁶² Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 43.

¹⁶³ Eleanor Heartney, “Ellen Gallagher: Mapping the Unmentionable,” in *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (New York: Prestel, 2013)

¹⁶⁴ “In the flatness that results from its coordinates,” Rosalind Krauss writes, “the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. In the overall regularity of its organization, it is the result not of imitation, but of aesthetic decree” (50). Simply put, the grid represses the real and its representation. The grid, according to Krauss, is analogous to structural anthropology: it’s the narrative lattice binds myth to science. With that said, the grid plays the perfect host to Gallagher’s wig ladies, creatures who hail from the storied worlds of Drexciya and black bourgoise publications with marine biological organs. Krauss, “Grids,” in *October* 9 (Summer 1979), 50-64.

¹⁶⁵ José Esteban Muñoz explains disidentification as “recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and

exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.” Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 15; Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, translated by A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003), 162-164.

¹⁶⁶ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

¹⁶⁷ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 94.

¹⁶⁸ Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 9.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Moser, “The Acculturation of Waste,” in *Waste-Site Stories: The Recycling of Memory*, ed. Brian Neville and Johanne Villeneuve (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 87.

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Mennell contends, “Offal is a good example of the *changeability* [emphasis added] of objects of repugnance, and the interaction of ‘moral’ and social grounds for food avoidance.” Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 310.

¹⁷¹ This phobia of exteriorized innards echoes Spillers's ideas of fleshy hieroglyphics. For instance, Spillers asserts, “This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been *turned outside*.”

Here, organs bear inscriptions of subjugation and exude liquidation through disembowelment and dissolution of the body. These corporeal ontologies resonate with Garner's art. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", 67.

¹⁷² Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 41.

¹⁷³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 158.

¹⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: A&C Black, 2004), 9.

¹⁷⁵ Jasmine Cobb, *Picturing Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 209; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 144-145; Barbara Bush, "Hard Labor: Women, Childbirth, and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine and David Barry Gaspar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 194.

¹⁷⁶ Despite its supposed rejection of the ego, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the BwO ultimately remains as a bedfellow to the Freudian family model and arguably perpetuates bodily integrity.

The duo conceptualizes the BwO as the ideal impetus for deterritorialized libido, the embodiment of “schizoanalysis” that dissolves Oedipal desire. After the BwO jettisons the ego, it still adheres to the id. Incidentally, the duo also characterizes Oedipal desire as a colonial force that holds societal and familial structures hostage from libidinal freedom. In true “D&G” fashion, this maneuver is executed without any sustained engagement with race and irony. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 88, 112, 264-265, 289.

¹⁷⁷ Amber Jamilla Musser explains the potentially problematic link between Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the body without organs and masochism. Musser contends that this connection forms “the bedrock of a politics of nonidentity by illuminating a way to be attentive to the flesh while not reifying a connection between experience and subjectivity.” In virtue of this de-racialized schema, Deleuze and Guattari arguably use an intact *body* as a point of departure for the BwO. Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 145.

¹⁷⁸ Sander Gillman, “On the Nexus of Madness and Blackness,” in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 131-149.

¹⁷⁹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 18-19.

¹⁸⁰ After Fanon, Fred Moten ponders the facticity of blackness, as it relates to the slippages between object, subject, and thing. Moten writes, “What I am after is something obscured by the

fall from prospective subject to object that Fanon recites—namely, a transition from thing(s) (*choses*) to object (*objet*) that turns out to version a slippage or movement that could be said to animate the history of philosophy. What if we bracket the movement from (erstwhile) subject to object in order to investigate more adequately the change from object to thing (a change as strange as that form the possibility of intersubjectivity that attends majority to whatever is relegated to the *plane or plain of the minor* [emphasis added])? [...] What if the thing sustains itself in the absence or eclipse of meaning that withholds from the thing the horrific honorific of ‘object’?” Regarding the “plane or plain of the minor,” Garner’s *Black Ocean/Big Black* challenges this surface-based metaphor as it defies *terra firma* and horizontality, as it undulates and expands notions around blackness’s figurative animation. In terms of objects, I argue that these entities are indebted to the commodity, while things challenge capitalism either by their singularity or their ambiguity towards a use-value. Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” in *Criticism* 50 (Spring 2008), 181.

¹⁸¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

¹⁸² Dorothy Roberts, “What’s Wrong with Race-Based Medicine? Genes, Drugs, and Health Disparities,” in *Minnesota Journal of Law, Science and Technology* 12, no. 1 (2001), 1-21; Chapter Six, “Neoliberalization of Life,” Jonathan Xavier Inda, *Racial Prescriptions: Pharmaceuticals, Difference, and the Politics of Life* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014).

¹⁸³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 80.

¹⁸⁴ bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 117-123.

¹⁸⁵ Fleetwood, 16.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Penny Rafferty, “Body// Re-Examining the White Supremacist Gaze: An Interview with Doreen Garner,” *Berlin Art Link*, <http://www.berlinartlink.com/2016/04/06/body-re-examining-the-white-supremacist-gaze-an-interview-with-doreen-garner/>.

¹⁸⁸ Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008), 66-69.

¹⁸⁹ Rafferty, “Body// Re-Examining the White Supremacist Gaze,” <http://www.berlinartlink.com/2016/04/06/body-re-examining-the-white-supremacist-gaze-an-interview-with-doreen-garner/>.

¹⁹⁰ The industry of organ transplantation complicates ideas of agency and gift-commodity binaries. Regarding agency, Jeffrey P. Bishop argues that death is now measured by brain or neurological activity, a recent phenomenon. As a consequence, organs are drained of subjecthood and given autonomy from vitalism at the same time. Transplantation privileges brain death as the ultimate marker of quietus. Jeffrey P. Bishop, *The Anticipatory Corpse: Medicine, Dying, and the Care of the Corpse* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 143.

¹⁹¹ The wet and oily surface-quality of Garner's work calls to mind stickiness, a similar sensation that Sara Ahmed theorizes the medium through which objects stick and affect moves.¹⁹¹ Amber Jamilla Musser then characterizes this stickiness as a racial affect that epitomizes blackness's being-biological. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 91; Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 89.

¹⁹² Using a kidney as an example, Robert Edward Mitchell and Catherine Waldby argue, "if, as Marx noted in *The German Ideology*, use-values and exchange values can only be produced when humans are 'in a position to live,' living itself requires the functioning body that supports this labor." Robert Edward Mitchell and Catherine Waldby. *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 174.

¹⁹³ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.

¹⁹⁴ Garner's interest in organs and display practices, which often rely on the sterility of glass vitrines, call to mind the individual works of Paul Thek and Damien Hirst. Susanne Neubauer, "Framed Devices: Paul Thek's Technological Reliquaries," in *Sculpture and the Vitrine*, ed. John C. Welchman (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2003), 143-158; Elyse Speaks, "The Transparent Signifier: Hirst, Invisibility, and Critique," in *Sculpture and the Vitrine*, ed. John C. Welchman (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2003), 231-250.

¹⁹⁵ John C. Welchman, Introduction to *Sculpture and the Vitrine*, 2.

¹⁹⁶ Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 7-11.

¹⁹⁷ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Correspondingly, Joseph Pugliese explains Spillers's idea of cultural vestibularity as "biopolitical space" in which "Spillers effectively spatializes 'the distance' between slave and human, thereby mapping the coordinates of the space that will quarter animal life, in contradistinction to the civic space of the culture." Joseph Pugliese, *State Violence and the Execution of Law: Biopolitical Caesurae of Torture, Black Sites, Drones* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 45.

²⁰⁰ Garner's work calls to mind a lecture delivered by Mbembe. Mbembe's talk speculated the "post" conditions of humanity and private enterprise, with Africa dramatized as stage for the end of these two entities. Consequently, one can align his intellectual project with the nihilism of Frantz Fanon and the particularities of Neo-Marxism. Although Mbembe argues that animism critiques late capitalism and constellates new relationships (e.g. "entanglements") between subject and object, his eschatological theme problematized the otherwise positive effects of this ontological perspective. Unlike solipsism, which maintains that the only real object of inquiry is one's mind, and narcissism, which involves a pathological self-absorption, animism concerns what Mbembe describes as relational ontology. This type of metaphysics accounts for the subject's metamorphosis into multiple objects. While the prospect of transformation seems liberating, it actually troubles the bodily and psychic condition of subjects by diminishing their humanity and bolstering their alienation. Due to their increased charm or fetishism, objects now carry their own selfhood. Mbembe explains that the demise of subjectivity opens up paths of reification whereby people willingly turn themselves into objects that are animate. Such a process differs from the dialectic of slavery in which enslaved subjects are things *for* their master. Therefore, people seek to become commodities in an effort to garner more monetary value and earn the affection of others. Given the rapid commodification of subjects, Mbembe argues that capital accumulation has increasingly acquired biological features and annexed surplus labor. Within the biocentric economy, investments aim to become self-renewable. Hence, cloning and other regenerative medicine have gained popularity. He asserts that such practices, within a political-theological perspective, evoke the pursuit of immortality. (Achille Mbembe,

“Notes on Fetish and Animism,” Warnock Lecture Series, Northwestern University, October 18-19, 2012.)

²⁰¹ Doreen Garner, Email to Doreen Garner, September 20, 2015.

²⁰² Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 126.

²⁰³ The flesh,” Weheliye opines, “is not an abject zone of exclusion that culminates in death but an alternate instantiation of humanity that does not rest on the mirage of western Man as the mirror image of human life as such.” Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 43.

²⁰⁴ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 20.

²⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 164.

²⁰⁶ Fredrika Spindler, "Gilles Deleuze: a Philosophy of Immanence," in *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, ed. Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2010), 154,159.

²⁰⁷ Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, 109; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 112; Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond the Word of Man:

Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles,” in *World Literature Today* 63.4 (1989): 645;

Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 120-121, 125.

²⁰⁸ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 121.

²⁰⁹ Massumi

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 111.

²¹² Jerrold Siegel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 12-13.

²¹³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 43.

²¹⁴ Amelia Jones, “Televisual Flesh: Activating Otherness in New Media Art,” in *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine* 113 (Jan-March 2004), 71-73. Also see Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2006).

²¹⁵ Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, edited by Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 53-54

²¹⁶ Ibid., 56.

²¹⁷ For more information on queer hip-hop, please see Toure, "Gay Rappers: Too Real for Hip Hop?," in *The New York Times*, April 20, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/20/arts/gay-rappers-too-real-for-hip-hop.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>; Jonathan Dee, "Sissy Bounce: New Orleans," in *The New York Times*, July 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/25/magazine/25bounce-t.html?pagewanted=all>; and William Van Meter, "Hip Hop's Queer Pioneers," in *Details*, October 2012, <http://www.details.com/celebrities-entertainment/music-and-books/201210/hip-hop-queer-pioneers>

²¹⁸ Jonathan Dee, "Sissy Bounce: New Orleans," in *The New York Times*, July 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/25/magazine/25bounce-t.html?pagewanted=all>

²¹⁹ Carrie Battan, "We Invented Swag: NYC's Queer Rap," in *Pitchfork*, March 21, 2012, <http://pitchfork.com/features/articles/8793-we-invented-swag/>

²²⁰ Laura Sells, “‘Where Do the Mermaids Stand?’ Voice and Body in the Little Mermaid,” in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, edited by Elizabeth S. Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 176.

²²¹ Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: On the Kitsch Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*, 2.

²²⁴ Ben Detrick, “Little Mermaid Goes Punk,” in *The New York Times*, March 2, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/fashion/Seapunk-a-Web-Joke-With-Music-Has-Its-Moment.html?_r=0

²²⁵ Suzanna Chan, “‘Alive...again.’ Unmoored in the Aquafuture of Ellen Gallagher’s Watery Ecstatic,” in *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 45.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2017), 254.

²²⁶ Gayle Salamon contends, “There is a danger of overstating the confluence of sexuality and identity, and this danger is particularly acute in relation to transpeople. Second-wave feminist receptions of transsexuality, some recent biological theories about transsexuality, and popular misconceptions of transsexuality all share this conflation of gender expression with sexual

expression. Historically, transsexuality has often been fantasized to be—and thus described as—a kind of hypersexualization[...]" Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), .

²²⁷ Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 160.

²²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

²²⁹ Ibid; Gerald L. Bruns, "Becomings-Animal (Some Simple Ways)," in *New Literary History*, 38.4 (Autumn 2007), 703-704, 706.

²³⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer and translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128-160.

²³¹ Madhu Dubey, "Becoming Animal in Black Women's Science Fiction," in *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*, edited by Marlene S. Barr (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 32.

²³² Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, *Hacking the Future: Stories for the Flesh-Eating 90s, Volume 2* (London: St. Martins Press, 1996)

²³³ Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, edited by Nicholas Zurbugg (New York: SAGE Publications, 1997), 9.

²³⁴ Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 18.1 (2016),

²³⁵ Unknown author, "Yacht Rock," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 5, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yacht_Rock.

²³⁶ Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 91.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90-92.

²³⁸ Mark Anthony Neal, "Rhythm and Bullshit? The Slow Decline of R&B, Part One: Cultural Imperialism and the Harvard Report," in *Pop Matters*, April 14, 2014, <http://www.popmatters.com/feature/050603-randb/>.

²³⁹ Tavia Nyong'o, "'I've Got You Under My Skin' Queer Assemblages, Lyrical Nostalgia, and the African Diaspora," in *Performance Research* vol. 12, no. 3 (March 2010), 48.

²⁴⁰ Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press 2008), 153.

²⁴¹ Mark Coleman, album review of Sade's *Love Deluxe*, in *Rolling Stone*, December 10, 1992.

²⁴² Cohen, 164.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9, 19.

²⁴⁴ Mirzoeff, "The Sea and the Land," 291-292.

²⁴⁵ Judith A. Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11.

²⁴⁶ Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 71.

²⁴⁷ Caroline Joan (Kay) S. Picart and John Edgar Browning, editors, "Introduction: Monstrosity and Multiculturalism," in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-2.

²⁴⁸ Patricia McCormick, "The Queer Ethics of Monstrosity," in *Speaking of Monsters*, 261.

²⁴⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery, and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 5; Sharon Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 13-15.

²⁵⁰ Rickey Vincent, *Funk: The Music, The People, and The Rhythm of The One* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), xvii.

²⁵¹ The Culture Wars infiltrated the political agenda of the black middle class within Ronald Reagan's regime. For instance, Adolph Reed explains Reagan's cooptation of black politicians: "In Reagan's second term the administration apparently opted for a different posture as a new group of its black supporters, led by [Glen] Loury and Robert Woodson of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, stepped into the spotlight. Although this wave of black Reaganauts (Woodson especially) also could be pugnacious with adversaries, they were far more inclined than their predecessors to make overtures to the entrenched race relations elite. Those overtures, moreover, disarmed partisan skepticism by emphasizing a transcendent ideal, the black middle class's supposedly special responsibility for correcting the black underclass and the problems associated with it." Quoted in Cohen, 95. Please also see Jennifer Brier's book *Infectious Ideas: U. S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

²⁵⁷ Jamila Woods, "Heavn," *Heavn* (2016)

²⁵⁸ Diana Leong, "The Salt Bones: 'Zong!' and an Ecology of Thirst," in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (2016), 14.

²⁵⁹ Sharpe, 58-59.

²⁶⁰ Khachig Tölölyan describes the overlaps and disconnections between diaspora theorists and transnational advocates. "Transnationals," Tölölyan explains, "continue to need and support certain national bases: but only as safe citadels of capital, enforcers of contracts, guarantors that the playing fields of global capital will be kept free of unwelcome local arbiters. In general, the transnationalist elites are less in need of nation-states than of 'countries': minimally administered spaces where local factotums supervise properly segmented labor and consumer markets, make no claim on payroll taxes in the name of national health and social security, and no attempt to guard jealously either weak and emergent indigenous industries, or local and in some ways residual cultures." Transnationalism's capital and waste are important to conceptualizing necropolitics as it falls across diasporic communities. Khachig Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 5.

²⁶¹ Barbara J. and Edmund T. Rolls, *Thirst* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1982), 1.

²⁶² Some of the most prominent artistic treatments of *Zong* include the work of writer M. Nourbese Philip and visual artist Edgar Arceneaux. Philip's poetic fragmentation of the Gregson v. Gilbert verdict—the legal decision from the *Zong* court case—approximates the predicament of Theseus's Ship: Philip exaggerates space between the poem's words to underscore the moral apertures of the original document. Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith explain Philip's strategy, writing, "Working with only the five hundred or so words of that source text, she obscures, reverses, and redistributes them in an attempt to subvert the rational, semantic, grammatical basis of the legal logic that generated those words in the first place." Similar to Ishmael Reed's irreverent use of typography in his novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Phillip's scattering of words across the page arguably draws attention to the materiality of the text, underscoring the spatial elements of an expurgated and poetically fragmented archive of the Middle Passage. As for Arceneaux's work, his "Slave Ship Zong" series (2013-present) comprises drawings that conflate the 1781 atrocity with the contemporary racial plight of Detroit. Some of Arceneaux's pieces juxtapose headlines from *The Detroit News* against images of oceanic waves. These visuals integrate notions of protest, expendability, and economic disenfranchisement—both speculative and neoliberal—into aquatic phenomena, affective and meteorological elements that evoke political rallying and social devastation. Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

²⁶³ Leong, 14

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.

²⁶⁵ Danny Laferrière, “Speeches de Mr. Danny Laferrière,” *A Gathering of Tribes*, posted by Steve Cannon (June 22, 2015), <https://www.tribes.org/web/2015/06/23/6659>; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Editor’s Introduction: Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference It Makes,” in *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985), 13.

²⁶⁶ While very little is known about LaForest and the exact details of his death, the literary movement of *La Ronde* provides some context for understanding his “willed” tragedy and disillusionment with modernity. Informed by the United States’ invasion of Haiti in 1915 and French colonialism, which had already been in violent operation for almost three centuries at the time, *Le Ronde* rooted its aesthetic ideology in escapism, as it was “fatally tied to French culture and morbidly fascinated by the French Symbolist Movement.”²⁶⁶ This characterization of *La Ronde* became a part of post-Occupation polemics in Haiti that pitted indigeneity against assimilation and colonial aesthetics. Furthermore, this rivalry illustrated two essential features of literary culture in nineteenth-century Haiti: the priority of literature and the validity of such and concern for Haitian sovereignty while acknowledging its French heritage. J. Michael Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961* (London: McMillan Press, 1981), 25.

²⁶⁷ Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 49, 59; Heidegger argues that thrownness individualizes Dasein. He writes, “In being a basis—that is, in existing as thrown—Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent *before* its basis, but only *from it* and *as this basis*. Thus ‘Being-a-basis’ means never to have power over one’s ownmost Being from the ground up. This ‘not’ belongs to the existential meaning of ‘thrownness’ It itself, being a basis, is a nullity of itself. ‘Nullity’ does not signify anything like not-Being-present-at-hand or no-subsisting; what one has in view here is rather a ‘not’ which is constitutive for this *Being* of Dasein—its thrownness.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 330. For a critique of the agential appropriation or reworking of black non-being, see Keguro Macharia’s “black (beyond negation)” in *The New Inquiry* (May 26, 2018), <https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/black-beyond-negation/>.

²⁶⁸ “More specifically, it must be traced in the peculiar turning of a subject against itself that takes place in acts of self-reproach, *conscience* and melancholia that work in tandem with processes of social regulation [...] How does subjection of desire require and institute the desire for subjection?” Judith Butler, 18.

²⁶⁹ Jean Amery, *On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

²⁷⁰ Silent cinema often involves pantomime, which has been construed as compensation for an auditory lack. Hugo Munsterberg (1916) contends, "To the actor of the moving pictures...the temptation offers itself to overcome the deficiency [the absence of "words and the modulation of the voice"] by a heightening of the gestures and the contortions of the face—it is spread over the body of the actor." Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," in *Yale French Studies* 60 (January 1980), 33.

²⁷¹ Huey Copeland, "'Bye, Bye, Black Girl': Lorna Simpson's Figurative Retreat," in *Art Journal* 64, no. 2 (July 2005), 63-64.

²⁷² Judith Butler, 108.

²⁷³ Judith Butler explains, "The paradox of subjection implies a paradox of referentiality: namely, that we must refer to what does not yet exist. Through a figure that marks the suspension of our ontological commitments, we seek to account for how the subject comes to be." Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4.

²⁷⁴ Are subjugation and *assujettissement*, or subjectivation, one in the same? And where does governmentality fall into Butler's reading of Althusser's model of interpellation with its "love" for the law? Richard Iton critiques Habermasian civics, which employ Foucault's notions of governmentality. Ignoring race, ethnicity, and colonialism, Foucault centers his project on

European polities and their attendant statecraft. According to Iton, the prophylactic state relinquishes the traditional monolith of juridical models by "inoculat[ing], inject[ing], protect[ing], and secur[ing] through the provision of public goods and ward[ing] off those elements suspected of spreading various disease and contagions." The prophylactic state, in other words, imbues citizens with various flows of power, otherwise known as governmentality. Self-discipline inspissates the subject into a citizen, according to Foucault's account of interpellation. Iton associates the black counterpublic with the civil rights movement, while he designates the mid-1980s as the emergence of the black superpublic; this periodization offers several implications. Theorists such as Saidiya Hartman and Katherine McKittrick have ripped through the blanketed rationale of spatiality, as furnished by Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel de Certeau. Additionally, when it comes to the presiding ideas of temporality, thinkers such as Paul Gilroy and David C. Scott takes linearity and the teleology of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to task by demonstrating the complicated time models engendered by colonialism and Black expressive and political cultures. Judith Butler, 125; Richard Iton, 110, 132-133.

²⁷⁵ Michael J. Cholbi explores suicide's moral connections to self-preservation. He writes, "Self love cannot be a law of nature, for it is only a feeling "to stimulate the furtherance of life." This maxim is self-contradictory, for it rests the justification of suicide on self-love, a feeling whose nature directs us to improve life, not to end it. Hence the miserable agent's maxim is 'opposed to the supreme principle of all duty.' Kant repeats this position in the second Critique, asserting that maxims are adoptable 'in order that a system of nature could maintain itself in accordance with

such a law. Obviously in such a system of nature no one could arbitrarily end his life, for such an arrangement could not constitute a permanent natural order." While self-love concerns the improvement of life, suicide seeks to end it. Michael J. Cholbi, "Kant and the Irrationality of Suicide," in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (April 2000), 163.

²⁷⁶ Hartman writes, "Despite the effort to differentiate between compulsion and 'giving oneself,' coercion and calculation become interwoven in the narrative as in the law. Largely because the assertion of consent requires an impossible approximation it assumes a space of desire defined neither by white dominance ('a lover who has no control over you') nor by coercion, but by kindness and willed exchange ('it seems less degrading to give one's self'). In addition, this 'giving of the self' presupposes a degree of autonomy over the self in order to be able to facilitate this transaction. This 'deliberate calculation' acts as a transmutation of property in which chattel, absolutely subject to the will of another, gives way to property in the self." Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 110; Also see 66-67, 78.

²⁷⁷ "The Althusserian formula of subjection draws its efficacy from its purely verbal character: it is projected from behind, from a source systematically concealed from sight (when God speaks to Moses, while hiding himself in a cloud, his voice alone bears the sum of his presence). 'Look, a nigger!': this reaction is spoken to his face, and is sustained in the line of a gaze whose verdict it only goes on to clarify, a verdict that is without appeal [*appel*] to the extent that it presents itself from the outset as a pure observation, whose neutrality is beyond question; at the limit, the words do nothing but translate the impression felt, and may even go unuttered – this is, after all,

what usually happens; the surprise that the interjection ‘Look!’ reproduces is, before anything else, an effect of posture, a recoiling movement, for example, that speaks for itself. For Althusser, the subject is defined by the place that it occupies in the space of language, its status depends on the order of the sayable; for Fanon, however, the subject, or at least this subject unlike others who is a subject of colour, is constituted as such in the order of the visible, in plain sight, so to speak, and this changes everything.” Pierre Macherey, “Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon,” in *Radical Philosophy* (May/June 2012), accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/figures-of-interpellation-in-althusser-and-fanon>

²⁷⁸ Judith Butler, 112; Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “The *Final* Foucault: Government of Others and Government of the Self,” in *A Foucault for the 21st Century: Governmentality, Biopolitics, and Discipline in the New Millennium*, edited by Sam Binkley and Jore Capetillo-Ponce (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 62-65.

²⁷⁹ Judith Butler, 5.

²⁸⁰ According to Mladen Dolar, love is beyond interpellation since it is driven by an “immaterial law.” However, Butler contends that passionate attachment exists before subjection to an extent. The subject’s passionate attachment to the law evidences a form of love. Here, love forms a passionate, circular model of interpellation. Conscience is one form of passionate attachment. “What forms might linguistic survival take in this desubjectivized domain.” Judith Butler, 127.

²⁸¹ Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 166.

²⁸² "Cinematic projection consequently," Silverman writes, "provides an invaluable metaphor for the sexually differentiating projections discussed above; the latter are no more 'willed' than the former." The woman's "scare of castration" allows both she and man to enter language, allowing him the belief that he is still intact. The phallus has acquired even more distance between itself and the penis, reaching greater abstractions. It is no longer a theatricalization or hyperbolization of the male organ; it symbolizes knowledge, power, and privilege since, according to Saussurian logic, the relation between the phallus and penis are arbitrary. Thus, an ideal male representation is needed to stabilize or mediate it. Men have dissociated themselves from the visible, ensconcing themselves higher in the symbolic (i.e., white men). Male psychoanalytic dynamics often include voyeurism, exhibitionism, narcissism, identification, projection, and introjection. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 26-27.

²⁸³ The child's entrance into the symbolic order effects a sacrifice of parts of their being, which are turned into objects (e.g., fecal matter, etc.). The mirror stage creates a perception of self from the m(other). Subjectivity is founded on a distance from object and m(other). Entrance into the symbolic equates to a loss of the real. The severance from or jettison of objects previously experienced as part of the child (e.g., breast, feces, urine, mother's voice, toys) secures the child subjectivity. How does haptic buoyancy relate to this? Haptic implies proximity, tactility, and

touch while buoyancy arguably throws this into an off-balance yet floating immersion.

Silverman, 81.

²⁸⁴ The uncanny represents a rare moment in Freud's work where he mixes psychology with aesthetics by way of literary theory. Freud constructs a semantic field of opposition between the German words *Heimlich* and *unheimlich*. *Heimlich* usually means “belonging to the house” and points to the friendly, familiar and tame. *Unheimlich*, on the other hand, connotes the “unhomey,” the unfamiliar and the eerie. According to Freud, the uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known and unfamiliar. The uncanny can arise from either the confirmation of a fable or a disproved belief or the confusion between the real and the imaginary. In general, anything in adulthood that reminds the subject of their earlier psychic developments conjures the uncanny. This uneasy feeling signifies a return of repressed infantile material. Freud uses E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story "The Sandman" (1817) to illustrate these points mentioned above and illumine fears of castration via the loss of one's eyes. Freud, *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 126-128.

²⁸⁵ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (Toronto: Hogarth Press, 1955), 234-235.

²⁸⁶ Michelle Togliia, “Transcript of Beyonce’s ‘Lemonade’ Because the Words are Just as Important as the Music,” in *Bustle* (April 24, 2016), <https://www.bustle.com/articles/156559-transcript-of-beyonces-lemonade-because-the-words-are-just-as-important-as-the-music>

²⁸⁷ There are two losses in cinema: the loss of representation of reality substituting for the foreclosed object; and the discursive dispossession, which is concealed by the fetish. Jacqueline Rose critiques Metz and Comalli for misappropriating Lacan and selectively focusing on pre-Oedipal splittings as a way to eschew sexual difference. For Rose, the woman represents losses preceding sexual difference and the "vestibule" through which sexual difference is established. Black women, on the other hand, represent the vestibule through which humanity dissolves and capital and commodity are born. The idea of lack is "so alien" to white men, and in my estimation, it must be instilled through paternal reproach or reprimand. Pre-Oedipal castrations are realized "retroactively" in the Lacanian system. Lack structured by castration happens before recognition of sexual difference. In the Freudian system, however, disavowal equates to a refusal to recognize an unwanted quality in the other. Subsequently, projection involves a refusal to be that which evokes unpleasure. In other words, disavowal is epistemology with avoidance and projection is ontological flight. Lack is uncanny in that after men projection themselves onto women, it revisits them in a boomerang fashion (e.g., return of the repressed). Silverman 14, 16, 19.

²⁸⁸ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19, 97.

²⁸⁹ Silverman, 11.

²⁹⁰ Silverman, 10.

²⁹¹ Silverman argues, "the voice of the mother somehow comes to absorb the perceptual and semiotic immaturity which more properly characterizes the infant's condition." The mother's voice is the first to be identified and delimits objects and the external world. However, the male voice is synonymous with the cinematic voice-over, as opposed to the female's, which is diegetic.

²⁹² Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 63.

²⁹³ Silverman, 43.

²⁹⁴ Voice-off is when we hear the voice of a character who is not visible within the frame—yet, it is still diegetic and spatially situated in the film (37). The voice-off confirms what Christian Metz deems the privileging of the visible over the audible. On the other hand, "cinema," Doane explains, "the sonorous envelope provided by the theatrical space together with techniques employed in the construction of the soundtrack work to sustain the narcissistic pleasure derived from the image of a certain unity, cohesion and, hence, an identity grounded by the spectator's fantasmatic relation to his/her own body." Doane, 37, 45.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 41.

²⁹⁷ Silverman explains, “The female voice must be sequestered (if necessary through a *mise-en-abyme* of framing devices) with the heart of the diegesis, so far from the site of enunciation as to be beyond articulation or meaning.” Silverman, 77-78.

²⁹⁸ Dream Hampton, “He Wants You to Want Him,” Review of *Embrya* by Maxwell, *The Village Voice* (July 14, 1998), <https://www.villagevoice.com/1998/07/14/he-wants-you-to-want-him/>

²⁹⁹ Arion Berger, Review of Maxwell’s *Embrya*, in *The New Rolling Stone Album Guide* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

³⁰⁰ Michael Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 61.

³⁰¹ Silverman, 75.

³⁰² Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

³⁰³ Stephen P. Cass, Susan L. Whitney, and Joseph M. Furman, *Vestibular Disorders: A Case Study Approach to Diagnosis and Treatment* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 157, 254-256, 308.

³⁰⁴ Relatedly, Kristeva explains “Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such, and in the course of his development, they are arranged [*se disposent*] according to the various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures. In this way, the drives, which are ‘energy’ charges as well as ‘psychical’ marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is full of movement as it is regulated.” Kristeva quoted in Sarah Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity* (Albany: The State University Press of New York, 2004), 44.

³⁰⁵ Silverman, 72.

³⁰⁶ Greg Tate, “Review: Embrya,” Review of *Embrya* by Maxwell in *Spin Magazine* (August 1998).

³⁰⁷ Liz Greene, “Speaking, Singing, Screaming: Controlling the Female Voice in American Cinema,” in *The Soundtrack 2*, no. 1 (August 1, 2009), 63-64.

³⁰⁸ Roland Barthes quoted in Joke Dame, “Voices Within the Voice: Geno-Text and Pheno-Text in Berio’s *Sequenza III*,” in *Music and Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic*, edited by Adam Krims (The Netherlands: G&B Arts International, 1998) 239; Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179–89.

³⁰⁹ Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 82-87.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5-6.

³¹² Maxwell, "Gravity: Pushing to Pull," *Embrya* (1998)

³¹³ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 179.

³¹⁴ Stephen Cheek, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008),

³¹⁵ Mitchell, 163.

³¹⁶ George Bataille quoted in Nick Land, *Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 29.

³¹⁷ Ruth Ronen, *Representing the Real* (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 39. Similarly, Sarah Beardsworth explains, "The semiotic *chora* can be presented either by analogy with vocal or

kinetic rhythm or by theoretical description, but never demonstrated.” Beardsworth, 44. For more information on the performativity of gender and melancholia, see Judith Butler’s “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification,” in *Constructing Masculinity*, edited by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21-36.

³¹⁸ “In a sense, the universe project in *Les structures anthropologiques* is vestibular to both the historical insofar as it is finished and elegantly arranged according to an immemorial Law and Order that Sow elaborates at length.” Spillers explains that West African cosmography features an “imbricated, yet hierarchical, grid of functions” based on three elements: the sensible microcosmos of the immediate and social world; the intermediary world the mesocosmos comprising “genies, the spirits, and a repertoire of malevolent and beneficent forces;” and the suprasensible world of the Spirits elect, the Ancestors and the Godhead.”³¹⁸ Thus, the individual reverberates all three of these dimensions, charging therapists with the “responsibility” of restoring cosmogonic harmony. Spillers, “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race,” in *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1996), 719.

³¹⁹ According to the Ortigues, doctors were not treating an individual per se; instead, they were dealing with an ensemble of collective identities, religious figures, and cosmographies.³¹⁹ Within this culture of substitutive identity, doctors regarded illness not as a clinical root but as a stemming from a magical causality. Spillers comments on this nosology, writing, “In any case, however, this complicating factor in the relationship between a speaking subject and the

grammar of his speaking brings to focus one of the key differences between tools of Western practice and the African context, as Sow will spell out: Who is the subject of treatment? In the African context, there are no lone subjects of mental illness. A profoundly anthropological reading of subject disorder and its essentially communal and familiar character in traditional (and this distinction is crucial for Sow) African societies defines the project of *Les Structures anthropologiques de la folie en afrique noire*.” Ibid., 716.

³²⁰ Ibid., 725-726.

³²¹ Ibid., 729.

³²² Ibid., 728.

³²³ Ibid., 729.

³²⁴ Maxwell, “Luxury: Cococure,” *Embrya*.

³²⁵ In *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, Weheliye puts forth an intervention into Black Studies and sound studies that attempt to mitigate the theoretical disconnect between black cultural production and technology. He notes how the phonograph inaugurated the split between sound and source by way of mechanical reproduction. Using the work of Walter Benjamin, Derrida and W.E.B. Du Bois as tripled theoretical frame, Weheliye calls attention to how this

rupture offers a sonic double-meaning regarding aura and aurality. This twinned connotation underscores the “emphemoromateriality” of black sound culture. Weheliye also considers why minoritarians are confined to the category of “identity” as opposed to being admitted into the discourse of the subject. This discrepancy in subjectivity rings familiar with my conversation around black ruckenfiguren and Judith Butler’s handling of Althusser’s subjection. Just what kind of counter-interpellation are we dealing with when it comes the refusal a black figure turned towards water? Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 8, 47-57.

³²⁶ Ibid., 51.

³²⁷ Toglia, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/156559-transcript-of-beyonces-lemonade-because-the-words-are-just-as-important-as-the-music>

³²⁸ Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 61.

³²⁹ Dawson, 20.

³³⁰ Ibid., 110.

³³¹ Sherrie Bayer, “Hispaniola’s Environmental Story: Challenging an Iconic Image,” in *Callaloo* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2014), 648-661; Anthony Loewenstein, “Haiti: The Neoliberal Model Imposed on the Country is Failing Its Citizens,” in *The Guardian* (February 4, 2014), accessed

August 7, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/05/haiti-the-neoliberal-model-imposed-on-the-country-is-failing-its-citizens>; Jake Johnston, “Haiti’s Eroding Democracy,” in *Jacobin* (February 13, 2017), accessed August 7, 2018, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/haiti-election-democracy-neoliberal-clinton-jovenel-moise-martelly-aristide-preval-duvalier/>; See Mark Shuller’s Chapter 5, “Tectonic Shifts and Political Tsunami: USAID and the Disaster of Haiti,” in *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Haunani-Kay Trask, “Native Social Capital: The Case of Hawaiian Sovereignty and Ka Luhi Hawaii,” in *Policy Sciences* 33, no. 3-4 (Dec. 2000), 375-385; Noelani Goodyear-Ka’opua, Ikaika Hussey, Erin Kahunawaika’ala Wright, editors, *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³³² “According to Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle Model, tourism development follows a continuum of linear phases: (1) exploitation, (2) involvement, (3) development, (4) consolidation and (5) stagnation, at which point a tourism destination will either find ways to rejuvenate and maintain its appeal, or self-destruct because of oversaturation by mass tourism and the appeal of new attractions elsewhere.” Tara Ruttenberg and Peter Brosius, “Decolonizing Sustainable Surf Tourism,” *The Critical Surf Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 111.

³³³ Dinesh D’Souza, “How the Clinton Foundation Got Rich off Poor Haitians,” in *National Review* (July 18, 2016), accessed August 7, 2018,

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/07/hillarys-america-secret-history-democratic-party-dinesh-dsouza-clinton-foundation/>

³³⁴ White colonists misconstrued surfing as a purely recreational and sometimes licentious activity. "Westerners are purely terracentric, treating waterways as cultureless ahistorical voids." Dawson considers the parallels between Atlantic Africans and Oceanians in their engagements with waterscapes between the seventeenth century and early twentieth century. Incidentally, most scholars contend that the first account of surfing was written in Hawaii in 1778. However, as Dawson points out, an earlier record of wave riding was written by Michael Hemmerson in the 1640s, situated in present-day Ghana. Other accounts include 1834 Accra and 1861 southern Cameroon. "Surfing was independently invented throughout Atlantic Africa and Oceania. African surfing developed in Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Ghana, Cameroon, and West-Central Africa." Dawson, "Surfing Beyond Racial and Colonial Imperatives in Early Modern Atlantic Africa and Oceania," in *The Critical Surf Studies Reader*, 136, 139.

³³⁵ Colleen McGloin notes how surfing illustrates a desire for "precolonial sovereignty." Relatedly the appropriation of the sport by black diasporic surf-clubs offers a way to imagine some futurity by way of recreation. McGloin writes, "mainstream surfing has been stridently assimilated into corporate market ideology, perhaps because of its already competitive impulse grounded in competitive white masculinities, but also, I would argue, because of surfing's connections to nationalist discourses." Colleen McGloin, "Indigenous Surfing: Pedagogy, Pleasure, and Decolonial Practice," *The Critical Surf Studies Reader*, 204.

³³⁶ Douglas Booth analyzes the historical-materialist organization of surfing. This framework includes consumer products, endorsements, tourism, surfing schools, and other entities.

According to Booth, three kinds of workers sustain the surf industry: professional surfers, free surfers, and shapers. Douglas Booth, “The Political Economy of Surfing Culture: Production, Profit, and Representation,” *The Critical Surf Studies Reader*, 322.

³³⁷ Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman regard surfing as a semi-autonomous world with its own “citizenship,” or “surf governance.” Several other surf scholars—particularly in *The Critical Surf Studies Reader* anthology—identify a kind of sovereign political economy enabled by neoliberal entities. Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman, “Consolidation, Creativity, and (de)Colonization in the State of Modern Surfing,” *The Critical Surf Studies Reader*, 86-87.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

