

UrbanApa presents

BLACKNESS



**THE
POSTMODERN**

Blackness & the Postmodern

Edited by Sonya Lindfors

Layout by Kiia Beilinson

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3 CONTENTS

- 5 Foreword
Sonya Lindfors
- 9 Crisis in the Gallery: Curation and the
Praxis of Justice
Jaamil Olawale Kosoko
- 28 This hopeless rage
Jassem Hindi
- 38 Musings on Jazz and other noise
Christopher Wessels
- 42 Confessions of a Bounty
Maimouna Jagne-Soreau
- 50 Checklist of Irrelevance for the
Brown Girl Writer
Koko Hubara

4

63 Pleasure in Racialization-
Sexualization

Anh Vo

74 fingers on my desire/_is my body
just a niche

Jamila Johnson-Small

92 afrofuturequ##r

Thomas F. DeFrantz

5 FOREWORD

by Sonya Lindfors

Dear Reader,

You are holding a copy of the art community UrbanApa's publication *Blackness & the Postmodern*. This publication contains eight texts of various forms, each of them approaching the friction between Blackness and postmodern contemporaneity in one way or another. The writers come from different backgrounds and localities; they are artists, curators, researchers, performers, activists and much more. The collection is not seeking coherence, but juxtaposing different voices and perspectives. It uncovers personal strategies, structural abrasions and fundamental questions:

_Can Blackness be postmodern, abstract or contemporary?

_Who gets to represent neutrality or humanity?



_Who is assigned to the canon?

_In general, who are the creators of discourse in dance, choreography or performing arts?

_Who are the gatekeepers and invisible holders of power?

_Who get their voices heard, who are given visible agency?

_Is Blackness a niche for the contemporary capitalist art market?

_How can we collectively dream about a better future?

But why these writers and questions right now?

This publication, like UrbanApa's previous publication *Toiseus 101 – näkökulmia toisenteen* [Otherness 101 – Perspectives of otherness], was born from a very personal need.

Over the past few years, I have endeavoured to stir up debate on the exclusivity of our art institutions and contemporary art in general, as well as the homogeneity of our arts field. By exclusivity, I mean here both concrete exclusion and the underlying ideologies. Why – barring a few exceptions – only people from certain backgrounds or in possession of certain qualities are admitted or end up in art institutions? What is the reason for the fact that in 2017, European stages still continue to show predominantly white, slim, able, cisgender bodies?

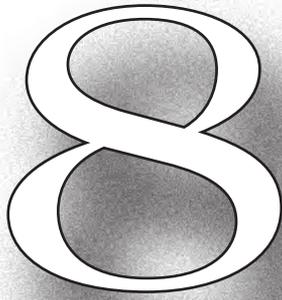


The causes of such concrete exclusivity lie deep in our concept of art and, therefore, in the structures of the arts field. Even though structural obstacles always call for an intersectional approach, the title of this publication suggest a frame which centralizes questions around Blackness.

The postmodern concept of art – like the entire concept of Western – is defined by the great narrative of whiteness. In other words, despite postmodernism as an ideology being based on the deconstruction of great narratives, it has failed to deconstruct its own whiteness.

Moreover, the norm of whiteness is not a question of mere skin colour, but it is a large and complex ideological field. It includes the perception and ownership of certain values, like equality or democracy, and certain qualities, like civilisation, education, intelligence and beauty, as ‘Western’ and ‘European’ and white. Whiteness is neutral and invisible, but at the same time desirable. Any other art apart from ‘white art’, not originating from the Western European white canon, is primarily perceived as cultural, symbolic, archaic and infantile, exotic and energetic, primitive but at the same time without a history.

However, during the past years the world, and with it the field of art, has changed a great deal. Words like *Blackness*, *otherness*, *intersectional feminism* and *decolonial practices* have entered our everyday language. Art festivals around Europe are presenting works (my own included) where brown and Black artists explicitly address their otherness, Blackness and pain. These works are emancipatory and revolutionary, but at the same time otherness or Blackness has become a trendy theme in the arts markets. It sells tickets, attracts media attention. It creates political debate and ‘bold initiatives’. Today, more and more art institutions welcome a POC artiste with open arms onto their stages, but for an antiracist and intersectional feminist ideology to permeate the whole operation of the institution is much more of a rarity. In any event, the arts field is always defined by its structures; the context is always in the content. If the arts field does not diversify from the top down, including the ruling gatekeepers, there is a danger that Blackness



and its treatment remain but a passing trend. The texts by both Olawale Kosoko and Johnson-Small address this complex relationship between the Black artist and white institution.

Analysis of Blackness and otherness, exposing the historical and structural layers, is both extremely important and challenging. For now, the arts field is informed by whiteness, and addressing Blackness and otherness within essentially white contexts is a source of friction. It is inevitable, but we are all involved in a process of learning. On the other hand, when there is a sufficient impetus for change, enough voices all demanding change, we can alter the structures despite the friction.

I am eternally grateful to the contributors of this publication. The texts are personal, political, courageous, wild, precise and analytical. Each of the writers has taken the time from their own work for the common good. Each of them makes their own contribution to the change.

I hope the publication will inspire questions, ideas and discourse.

Sonya Lindfors is a Helsinki based Choreographer and the Artistic Director of UrbanApa arts platform. In all her work she pursues to shake and challenge existing power structures and empower the community.



CRISIS IN THE GALLERY. CURATION AND THE PRAXIS OF JUSTICE

by Jaamil Olawale Kosoko

_The story is [...] we are still talking/thinking about diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism (conversations that started three or four decades ago) when we need conversations about cultural equity, cultural democracy, cultural justice. We are still talking about a paradigm

10

shift when, in reality, we are often engaged in (unspoken) power struggles. We are fighting a revolutionary struggle on two battlefronts with a two-edged sword: the need to build, support, sustain community-based/culturally-grounded/culturally-specific institutions on one hand; and opening up opportunities for board participation/employment opportunities in “major/mainstream” organizations on the other.

—Ms. Baraka Sele, *A Black Paper: Revolution/Resilience/Race*

_When we speak radically of the dark divine, the invitation is for each and every one of us to transcend race and gender, to move beyond categories, and into the interior spaces of our psyches to encounter there the ground of our being, the place of mystery, creativity, and possibility. For it is there that we can construct the mind that can resist, that can revision, that can create the maps that when followed will liberate us.

—bell hooks, Lorde: *The Imagination of Justice*

11

PART 1: Colonial Distortion

What does a radically inclusive curatorial practice look like? How does this practice become a lived experience that moves beyond the predominantly white cultural institutional frame? Throughout my travels in Europe, Canada, and the United States, I have consistently encountered a lack of supportive inclusionary cultural spaces for individuals who identify as trans*, queer, disabled, Black, indigenous, and/or people of color. Performance curators and audiences alike ask me the same question in regards to creating more inclusive spaces for people who exist outside the sphere of white cisgender hetero-normality and ability: *How do we begin to break the border between art and culture to allow diverse audiences to feel more welcomed inside predominantly white spaces?* In her blog post, “Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice”, the independent curator and educator Chandra Frank speaks directly to this question. She makes a case to broaden and decolonize modern curatorial practices by altering the current conventional predominantly white structural frames of curation. Frank writes:

A decolonial curatorial process is committed to undoing coloniality that is embedded in the existence of the Western museum space, and disrupts the power dynamics that lie beneath the development of exhibition making. This commitment creates an environment where the incorporation of alternative epistemologies becomes a core part of the politics of curation. That said, the application of this informed process requires the curator and the institution to contribute to the unearthing of hidden histories. Frank 2015

Before I discovered the language to identify my curatorial practice, I found the act of organizing performance, exhibition, and the humanities fascinating because of my consistent impulse to focus my thinking within Black study and artistic communities. My first job, as a teen usher, was at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American

12

History in Detroit, Michigan. For me, that museum was a place of refuge, mentorship, employment, professional development, and community. It sparked my engagement in “conversations about cultural equity, cultural democracy, cultural justice” ^{Sele 2017}. I understand my curatorial practice today because of the foundation I gained within those museum walls.

As I have grown to define it, curating is a practice that requires “unearthing” hidden histories to reveal social structures and creative practices through *oblique* or *slant* readings of modernity both inside and outside the cultural institution. Curating involves selecting, organizing, and presenting live works, objects, and ideas to realize the possibility for one’s own imagination (and perhaps spark the imagination of others); curation shares embodied practices and resources to centralize new cultural production, and practice radically inclusive strategies that heal, induce care, and support multiple expressions of freedom for all people.

Unfortunately, due to embedded systems of coloniality, this curatorial ideology—while shared by many—is not a standard practice. The concept of care as it pertains to curatorial practice simply cannot co-exist within this “perverted logic” ^{Fanon} of racialized institutionalized power. In his acclaimed book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon writes about the distortive effects of colonization:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. ^{1963: 210}

With this understanding of the corrosive effects of colonization and the crisis located within institution of the American project, I am left with a series of inescapable questions. How does care operate as an essential part of survivalist tactics and freedom strategies for diasporic people? How does predominant whiteness distort curatorial praxis? Are predominantly white institutions (PWIs) actually able to care for Black and other “minoritarian” ^{Muñoz: 1999} people? How do we curate health in the wake of such overwhelming tribulation?

13

If alternative decolonial epistemologies are to become a core part of the politics of curating, practitioners within the field must be willing to wield a paradigm shift within their institutions (as they relate to education, activism, and the sustenance of culture). A commitment to undoing coloniality in curation must be a central goal for those in positions of power if we are ever to realize radically inclusive cultural spaces for all people.

Curation, when practiced with radical care at its foundation, is inevitably inclusionary and holds itself accountable for oversights and omissions. American scholar Nicole Martin speaks to this point in her essay, “Rep’ing Blackness: Curating Performance as a Practice of Radical Care,” where she outlines a series of radical care attributes. She writes, “Radical care does not shy away from the unfamiliar. Radical care is unamused with ego and considers community the cornerstone of practice. Radical care is gracious, healing, and affirming”^{2015: 56}. In my own independent curatorial projects such as *Black Male Revisited: Experimental Representations Through the Ephemeral Form*²⁰¹⁴, *legible/illegible: opening beyond the space of identities*²⁰¹⁵, *Imaging Justice for the Dark Divine*²⁰¹⁵, and, most recently, *The Blood Was On Their Shoulders*²⁰¹⁷, I have worked to institute these same strategies of collective care and inclusivity by centering the voices of women, queer, trans*, indigenous, and people of color (QTIPOC) artist-curators allowing us, as an ensemble, to frame the curatorial rationale and presentation of these projects.

The work of undoing coloniality is difficult. The American project is built on a systemic colonial doctrine. The case might even be made that modernity is intrinsically linked to coloniality whereby “race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification”^{Quijano 2000: 534}. Thus, the racial biases informing curatorial practices in the United States and beyond are still deeply entrenched in colonial systems of power. Undoing this will require a communal methodology that allows the laborious work of imaging

14

justice and implementing decoloniality to be shared among multiple individuals (both inside and outside of the institution) whose central goals cohere.

While my curatorial work centralizes Black and other minoritarian communities, much of my academic study before graduate school was rooted inside a traditional predominantly white liberal arts training of literature, performance, and visual arts. To create the inclusive curatorial ideology, hereby named Socio-Choreological Mapping (SCM)¹, I draw from my academic performance studies in complexity theory and Emergent Improvisation (under the tutelage of Susan Sgorbati at Bennington College) and am influenced by dance theorist and mathematician Rudolf Benesh's term "choreology." He coined the term in 1955 with dancer Joan Benesh—his wife—to notate movement systems in the body ^{Kando 2016}. I situate choreology and Emergent Improvisation within a Black/minoritarian social context to identify how queer, trans*, indigenous, people of color (QTIPOC) *move* together, document, communicate, and realize their own freedom strategies.

Clear examples of SCM ideological application can also be found in trans-digital reality and social justice movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #TransIsBeautiful and #GirlsLikeUs. These examples, when considered through the lens of performative movement actions created by Black and queer women of color, decentralize the voice of one single curator. Decentralization is critical because it allows the behaviors of Socio-Choreological Mapping to have the nuance, reverberation, and emergent complexity needed to empower any person seeking to participate within a shared goal or project. The versatility of decentralized systems allow multiple points of entry within the digital world, the physical world, and the psychic/theoretical world. A self-proclaimed activist can tweet, write, march

1 Socio-choreographical mapping is a practice and conceptual frame to discuss how minoritarian people create radically inclusive spaces where they notate, archive, document and strategize themselves (their bodies, ideas and movements) into the cultural record.

15

in protest, create a mural or theatrical work, all as legitimate notated and/or archived forms of performed protest.

In identifying Socio-Choreological Mapping as a conceptual framework for inclusivity, it has become clear that the role of the curator is deeply situated within the practice and sustainability of care (both for self and others). Some examples of projects that centralize care and serve as examples of how the model of SCM works successfully in partnership with various institutions include *The Gathering* (a project created by Camille A. Brown that has been held at New York Live Arts and Gibney Dance among other locations), *Dancing While Black* (a project created by Paloma McGregor that has collaborated with institution such as BAAD in the Bronx and BAX), and *Dancing for Justice* (a project created by Brittany L. Williams with team members based in Trinidad & Tobago, Miami, Detroit, and DC). These curatorial projects, while created by a single artist-curator, encourage deep collaboration between institutions and artists/activists allowing new voices to enter the institutional frame and cause much needed disruption.

My goal in writing this paper—as artist, academic, and curator—is to consider care as a technology derived from centuries of documented and undocumented fugitive knowledge^{Harney & Moten: 2013} while providing case studies that highlight value systems that are integral to the SCM conceptual frame. I argue for SCM as a healthy alternative for the creation of radically inclusive care-giving within the dominant culture of the art world. Through collected interviews, rehearsals, workshops, performance showings, readings, and personal reflections that give voice to the ways in which artist-curators render themes of fugitivity, illegibility, and healing in their work, I ask my readership to consider if we—as members of the cultural sector and global citizens invested in the resistance against white supremacy and coloniality—are genuinely committed to providing the socially engaged artist-activist with the sustained resources needed to continue creating “the maps that when followed will liberate us”^{hooks}.

16

PART 2: Personal Reclamation

I consider SCM as pedagogy linking my early explorations with art making and embodied theory to my contemporary approach to curatorial practice. SCM is a way of thinking and considering the self in relationship to one's practice as well as the environment inside which that practice takes place. It is a psychic process before it is articulated through action.

For example, one of my early creative projects, *The Night Dances* was an attempt to begin a conversation with myself about what my performance of Blackness would mean. It was an effort to locate some aspect of myself while creating a space where my unconscious could perform freely within my environment. I became curious if another kind of unarticulated set of Black identities would emerge. Might it be possible to disrupt the finite notions of colonized Black identity already programmed into my perception of self? I wanted to better understand how I might be in dialogue with the various intersectionalities that I noticed were surfacing inside me. Eager to decolonize my performance of Blackness inside my daily life at Bennington College, *The Night Dances* became a means for me to vent, to unleash my creativity and find the refuge, space, tools, and systems of self-care I needed to materialize (and create space for) the deep unknowing that was growing inside me. While I could not openly articulate this internal need at the time, I was thirsty to locate myself and those like me inside my performance practice and education.

Years before I was exposed to the writings of Michelle M. Wright, James Baldwin, Fred Moten, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, José Esteban Muñoz, and Stuart Hall, *The Night Dances* allowed me to begin a nascent investigation of fugitive theory, Black existentialist thought, and explorations into alternative digital-reality performance.

But these Black and Brown scholars and poets were omitted from my undergraduate experience and as a result of this eraser, a significant amount of mentorship, embodied knowledge, and cultural negotiation

17

was lost to me—and my entire undergraduate community—because there were so few representations of racial diversity among the faculty, students, and staff. I believe Black and Brown professors simply would not have let this kind of literary omission take place at a renowned liberal arts college, although it can be argued that scholars of color teach the white supremacist heteropatriarchal canon because otherwise tenure may not be an option. As a result the act of teaching outside the white masculinist lens becomes a radical act.

In 2013, I found myself again at a kind of artistic crossroads where I would have to take on a practice of unlearning certain kinds of normalized creative tactics dominant within the post-modern franchise of professional American concert dance. During that year, I took on a practice of decolonizing my creative work in order to become the kind of artist and thinker I knew was forming inside me. Similar to my practice with *The Night Dances*, I found myself wanting to express myself through digital media to reveal a complexity of Black masculinity rarely caught on camera. The project was titled *Black Male Revisited: Revenge of the New Negro*, but this line of research evolved into various configurations of video and live performance, including works entitled *other.explicit.body*.^{2013/14} and *#negrophobia*²⁰¹⁵. This series of projects was influenced by a theoretically queer ecological study of performance and curation. Central to these projects was the idea that a performance site can serve as a container for multiplicity and queer study, and could ‘unearth hidden truths’ regarding my understanding of Black masculinity.

With the 20th anniversary of *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art* approaching the following year in 2014, I found myself deeply inspired by Thelma Golden’s writings and curatorial approach with this exhibition. Currently working as the Chief Curator and Director of The Studio Museum in Harlem, Golden curated *Black Male* in 1994 as the *first* African American curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. I set out to create a platform that would celebrate the original exhibition while continuing to push

18

forward and open a conversation as to how performance and Black trans identities might fit into the 'Black Male' exhibition lexicon.

In her essay *My Brother* written for the *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* exhibition catalogue¹⁹⁹⁴, Golden writes,

“One of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century is the African-American male—‘invented’ because black masculinity represents an amalgam of fear and projections in the American psyche which rarely conveys or contains the trope of truth about the black male’s existence”¹⁹.

I found this passage particularly striking for three reasons. First, the concept of being *invented* articulates a specific framing and perspective in regards to the creation and experience of the Black male’s presence in America. Second, the idea that the invention became a catalyst for fear-mongering within the American psyche articulates a very clear understanding of the Black male’s positionality both within the historical context as well as the current socio-political climate. And third, the notion of truth as a idea embedded neither in the conception of the invention nor in the result of the fear projected onto his body struck a chord in me emotionally and profoundly influenced my thinking and understanding of self.

Being Black is belonging to a state organized according to its ignorance of your mind—“a state that does not, cannot know your mind” Wagner, 2009: 1. As Black people forced to either conform to white social norms or risk utter annihilation, it’s worth asking: What shape might my practice of living, curating, creating art take given the opportunity to exist outside of a normative white masculinist system of oppression? The diagnosis of trauma within Black and other minoritarian communities is nothing new. Black people in America have been forced to master the art of coping within the wake of trauma as proven in both the people and the environments inside which these people are forced to exist.

19

Socio-Choreological Mapping requires these kinds of issues to be constantly interrogated. In locating the vital curatorial questions located in this essay, I become an active participant inside the SCM framework. By engaging in a thought process that challenges current positions of privilege and power, examines a strategic process that can serve as a tool to decolonize my thinking and undo the learned protective reflexes I employ to protect my oppression, as well as challenge standard stereotypical notions of Blackness so often presented in the public domain, in turn, I reclaim the history of my Black body in the present moment as an infinite space of unlimited evolution and possibility.

PART 3: Fugitive Survival

Before I knew who I was, my being was already rendered into a social construct that understands me to be non-human, invisible, illegible, criminal, disposable, trauma-stricken, policed, a thug, a nigger, a negro, colored, an incomprehensibly Black fugitive. But even as these labels mark my past and present, I choose how they obtain the power to mark my future. Black theory allows a space for infinite imaginative performance and psychic experience to occur. It allows escape, refusal, transgression, and practices of freedom to be felt and materialized in the body, transmitted into action through creative forms of expression and activism. As a Black artist-curator I am a remarkable expression of freedom and futurity risen from a stolen past. The practice of creating and curating live performance is deeply intertwined with the ability to dream limitlessly and, as a result, “create the maps that when followed” hooks 2011: 243 articulate the possibilities for a liberated society.

I like to imagine what if my ancestors had not been colonized, reinvented, labeled, and rendered marginal? What if the diseased illusion of race had never become a preordained performance assigned to my body, and all bodies alike, for generations? What performance of self might I be able to engender had those before me been curated into a

20

condition of freedom instead of enslavement?

Knowing loss is an epistemology located in my blood memory. My Black being came into existence within an American context where loss is an epigenetic system embedded in the DNA of how I have come to understand the performance of my identity. The strains trace back to my father's too frequent disappearing acts and sudden death. They take the shape of my 22-year-old brother who was murdered outside a 7-Eleven in Denver, Colorado. In the alcoholic tears and schizophrenic episodes that led to my mother's premature death at the age of 36, I know loss because my entire immediate family is dead, and so everyday I live in the wake of that ultimate truth.

Within the American colonial project, historical loss is the single unifying factor that still connects us, that holds us "always living in the push toward our death" ^{Sharpe 2016: 10}. Blackness, "the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption [...], a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity"

^{Moten 2003: 1} forces us to imagine new experimental ways of practicing achievement "in the wake of loss" ^{Sharpe 2016} because one is never quite at ease in the world. Always forced to live on edge, Black life is constantly in the throes of the avant-garde, always considering new imaginative methods of being because it is constantly negotiating the obstacle of *being*. From popular music to visual art to literature, Black people are in the habit of conjuring magic, medicinal potions, stories, and other anecdotes of Black joy and survival for the world to eventually consume and/or shun. Black artists are vital to the contemporary cultural discourse more now than ever before. The cultural production that we offer the public domain is integral to the healing of *all* people as we attempt to navigate through this turbulent atypical political moment in world history known as the Trump administration.

In bringing attention to the issues plaguing the art sector within the US and western world cultures, I return to one of my leading questions for researching this idea of self-care as a curatorial practice. What can Black

21

thought teach *all* people about living, being, and creating meaning in a world where “we were never meant to survive”¹ Lorde 1995? The SCM concept is an ideology I needed to research and name because I had to develop a strategy for my own survival in the wake of immense loss; a strategy that might translate into various communities and creative practices. Learning how to exist inside this wake, how to do the work of the wake² Sharpe was how I was able to begin identifying SCM, and as a result, allow myself to find new meaning within my life’s work as an artist-curator.

But for my Socio-Choreological Mapping ideology to be applied successfully within the white cultural frame, more inclusionary practices within the arts field must occur. A reorganized methodology surrounding the consistent and highly problematic implementation of “predominant whiteness” must transpire within the field of curation

Wethers 2015: 15

The statistics are not surprising. We live in an incredibly pain-stricken civilization, still trying to heal from the traumas of war, enslavement, and segregation. And while many enlightened white contemporary curators and artistic directors know the importance of incorporating Black and other minoritarian voices into their staffs, exhibitions, and performance seasons, much of the art world is still managed under a structurally violent white supremacist’s doctrine that ordains European aesthetics and creativity as the highest level of intellectual and/or conceptual rigor. Even if it is not practiced, I believe most people within institutions recognize the importance of diversity within art and culture. The issue, in my opinion, goes far beyond the concept of *creating diversity* within predominantly white spaces.

What I am arguing for is a revision in the way we care and support individuals who are QTIPOC once they arrive within the walls of the predominantly white institution. No matter the capacity (staff member, artist, audience, board member), I question if the modern American white institution is actually capable of delivering the kind of care and hospitality needed to sustain members of minoritarian communities

22

who have been forced to work within spaces where the white gaze (and its corresponding micro-aggressions) are endured on a daily basis.

In response to this cultural erasure, many artists of color have managed to become far less dependent on cultural institutions. The internet has changed the way visual and performance art is experienced. The mainstream distribution of the world-wide web has allowed multiple artists a platform to challenge the structural racism within the art field. Today, contemporary Black experimentalists can work online and/or in video and film mediums to push their work towards greater public consumption, and in some cases, monetize their work without the backing of an established cultural institution. Digital platforms circumvent the institution as mediator, connecting the artist directly with public.

Experimental Black artists such as Juliana Huxtable, M. Lamar, IMMA, Lawrence Graham-Brown, and Jacolby Satterwhite, among many others, have created significant audiences for themselves online. The hyper-Afro-queer futuristic digital personas they often portray in their works locate them in situations that create structural, multi-layered, and sexually complex mystique. These artists use their bodies—sometimes as sexual subjects, sometimes as radical racial metaphors—to bridge the gap between “high” and “low” art, pop and avant-garde, all the while connecting their work to digital audiences as a means to distribute their work to the public regardless of gallery or venue representation.

But just as the internet has excelled the careers of many Black artists, it has also aided in the viral sharing of Black death. Advancements in cell phone technologies have allowed many of the illnesses that plague Black communities to be displayed online, gaining an international audience, simultaneously making celebrities out of murdered Black people. With the constant threat of death looming like an evil shadow over our heads, the potency of this question feels particularly vital. The contemporary digital age has QTPOC positioned under constant surveillance.

23

The policing, killing, lynching, and public assassinations of these people by negrophobic badge-and/or cape-wearing white men is an awful habit. America has a long, deranged history with this kind of pass-time, too often displaying the mutation of these bodies in the public domain for mass consumption. Loss and mourning have always plagued the Black/minoritarian experience in America, and even more specifically the Black mother's experience because too often she is left with the unfortunate duty of burying her children. In the preface to her book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, feminist scholar bell hooks argues, "[B]lack men endure the worst impositions of gendered masculine patriarchal identity" ^{2003: xii}. She writes:

Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. They have made few interventions on the stereotype. As a consequence they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day. Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it. ^{2003: xii}

When so many lives are hanging by a thread, I am forced to consider the role of radical care and decoloniality even more closely. What is the connection between curation and larger societal issues? How do artists of color curate spaces, environments, and communities that are brave enough to bring to light the sociopolitical issues of the contemporary moment? It is the role of curators and artists to concern themselves with these questions. As cultural citizens, I believe it is our duty to respond to these circumstances. Most curators and artists of color have a deep knowing and practice of this. Whereas many of those operating within white dominant culture, who have positioned themselves under the

24

cloak of whiteness and neoliberalism, are just becoming 'woke' to the urgency of the matter now that many of their civil rights are also in danger. Arguably, it may be the historical lack of social engagement, political investment, and the delusion of national socio-economic progression among white curators and cultural producers in positions of power within most institutions throughout the US and the Western world that got us in this predicament of monotonous curatorial praxis and vague societal understanding in the first place.

In a time when financial and educational resources in the arts are scarce across the board, no matter one's race or gender, if contemporary institutions are to remain embedded in the criticality of current artistic concerns, then they must be in constant discourse with artists, producers, and curators who are on the horizon, self-taught, outsider, minority, and independent. More than ever before, individuals are in control of their experiences, carefully curating the cultural content which they ordain as most important to their lives (as displayed most concretely by social media), and so the role of the art institution of the future is to create more spaces for this kind of experiential, innovative, even-leveled, interaction to take place without judgment, prejudice, and highbrow critique. Because "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" Lorde: [1984] 2007: 110, in order to implement the real work of diversity, inclusion, and radical care, cultural hubs must meet Black and Brown people with new creative strategies. The tools and frameworks used to support the work of the artists of color need to be just as multilayered, dynamic, and radical as the work itself.

Hand over your old tools and allow those who exist on the outskirts to enter into the center. Watch and listen. Curators and presenters can no longer use passé systems support work and make hires if their institutions are to remain vital for decades into the future. The American cultural Infrastructure has spent hundreds of years mastering barriers that facilitate non-inclusion and segregation to locate, intrigue, and attract white, wealthy prospects. Now it is time to devote the same

25

amount of energy to centralize the “dark divine” hooks and gain the trust and attention of disabled communities, QTIPOC communities and the like, allowing us the cultural equity, support, and care we deserve.

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko is a Nigerian-American artist-curator, author, and performance artist. He is a 2017 Princeton Arts Fellow, a 2017 Jerome Artists in Residence at Abrons Arts Center, a 2017 Cave Canem Poetry Fellow. Kosoko performs and teaches internationally. Learn more about his work at jaamil.com.

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26

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28

THIS HOPELESS
RAGE OR HOW TO IGNORE
YOUR ENEMY IN ORDER
TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE

by Jassem Hindi

Here I share the ongoing accumulation of material I have built towards what I named the *arab future fiction*, an artistic movement defined by a triple function: An articulation of the concepts of *death* and *hospitality*¹.

A critique of the word *future*, understood as ‘a new curatorial emergency’, imposed by the West on some artists, redefining them

29

as representative voices of various POC communities. I qualify this hectoring gesture as an *appropriation*²(in the marxist sense of the word). By using the aesthetical hammer, the imperialist reactionary forces flatten the internationalist revolutionary forces by demanding a *clarification* of our games. This gesture threatens, among other things, the sense of humor at play in political artistic gestures such as afro-futurism or arab future fiction.

The arab future fiction is also a love song to anti-bigot Middle Easterns, anti-establishment Arab artists, and to the faggots, the freakazoids, the intellectuals, the enraged teenagers, the historians and the extreme left wing, who are continuously strangled by the mortiferous caring hand that is constantly handling Arabs under the brutal equation Arab = x, forcing a re-homogenisation, re-nationalisation and 're-religionisation' of the Arabs, stabilizing identities in order to destabilize populations, defacing the poly-singularities, the pasts, the cultures and the complexity of our geopolitical pre, post and colonial upbringing.

I have found solace in *using* fugitive writing techniques, rather than writing *about* them, in a tradition opened by Moten and before him by Mansour and after her by Borges. Here are the gifts I made and that I would like to share with you.

(thank you Fred thank you Joyce thank you Luis thank you)

_A quote is always a lie

-Arab proverb, supposedly

30

_Look! See the living breathing pictures painted by the sun. The Pagan Leopards - the unrecking and unworshipping things, that live; and seek, and give no reasons for the torrid life they feel! Talk not to me about blasphemy, I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."

*-H. Melville reconstructed by Annawel Sahabat el Sai'da, in *Five reasons not to be afraid of God* ²⁰⁰⁶*

_I will refuse the euro-american obsession with cohesive thinking and I will find other ways to build my house of knowledge. A house built so that others can come and visit, play, transform and die. A house that rose from the ground long before me and will stay standing long after I die. I welcome my death as a condition for a shared transmission of knowledge and for kindness to persist. For too long it was thought that a collective survival technique was to imitate the masters of the West, to pretend to be them, to talk and write like them. For nothing. We have gained nothing from this, but the pleasure to

31

hear our bones crack. My bones. This is not the dialectic I will engage in. I will joyfully ignore my enemy and dance my way to death. There are no masters of the land. Only masters of the words. Only a power to name the land, quickly, furtively, which makes this poison of naming grow stronger and stronger – like blowing on dead embers, slowly but surely giving rise to the fiery master that will break our bones.

–Joumana el Hindi Ekht el Mehtél, *Against our masters*, an essay on oracle poetry ²⁰¹⁶

_During the war, we felt the silence in the policy of the governments of English speaking countries. That policy was to win the war first, and work out the meanings afterwards. The result was, of course, that the meanings were lost.

–Muriel Rukeyser ²⁰⁰²

_At some point, the outpouring of psychological and structural analysis of what a racialized

32

body stands for starts to blend with the history of racism itself. A step further and this sum of knowledge will be used as a political resource, not by progressive forces, but by racist theoreticians. At some point, the so-called pragmatic usamerican race theories about living beings become a tool, not for the revolution, but for the reactionary forces. And worse, they become an excuse, a constant delay for the moment when we will have to do the work, and let go of this volunteer slavery, this constant perverse narcissistic dialogue with our oppressors. The word of the revolution is not: vanquish your enemies, it is: ignore them.

–Samar Leyl el Khebez, excerpt of a lecture at the *Arab feminist guerrilla symposium*, Bint el Jnoub, Lebanon ²⁰¹⁷

And to endure otherness as a royalty placed on our bodies, and posited by others.

Those who have been vowed to otherness by otherness itself share a likeness with kings. They are the thaumaturgic powers of society. Their

33

curse is to heal all others. They will be hated for that. There (...) is nothing.

–Nour Hurriya A'nd el Jiran, Strangers and magic in the Middle East ¹⁹⁷²

_make trouble, fail, make trouble again, fail again... till their doom; that is the logic of the imperialists and all reactionaries of the world over in dealing with people's cause, and they will never go against this logic. This is why they will never attain Buddha.

–Mao Zhedong, Quotation from chairman Mao Zhedong, aka the little red book ¹⁹⁶⁶

_In order to enslave them to your will and to your discourse, you must make them loose the very joy of their life: the art of telling stories, and their sense of humor.

–Line Helm el Bahr, The art of having slaves ¹⁵⁸⁵

_One historic racist cliché is the analysis which states that what separates western civilization (sometimes also just called 'civilization' for

34

that matter) from others is a specific relation to truth. Placing rationalism on one side and confabulation on the other. The distinction once made by Claude Levi Strauss was: the engineer and the tinkerer. The engineer knows what he is doing beforehand, and the tinkerer just tinkers their way through life and objects, associating tooth of shark with petals of flower and skin of bear, hoping for a “result” that is anything but incidental. The engineer rather, operates following a coherent set of determined, repeatable operations, and his actions are directed towards a specific, repeatable result. If he fails, he can modify such or such moment in the operation, and the process is supposedly always transparent to him.

One possible way to circumvent this entire cliché distinction is to not fall into the trap of:

A. Defending the existence of rationalism in other civilizations (therefore validating the concept of civilization)

35

*B. Defending the value of the tinkering program
(ye olde debate around magic and truth)*

*but to dismiss the entire distinction as the mere
struggle of a child to understand the world.*

*Would we bother arguing with a child? The result
of that conversation would most certainly lead us
to our collective doom. Just ignore the child and
keep working.*

–Nouhad Alba Tayyeb bas mat Narvéza, My struggle with
struggling monkeys ¹⁹⁹⁷

Perhaps these are enough gifts to nourish this intuition that one possible
strategy to survive as a stranger, as a marked name, is to ignore the
enemy, and invent your own allies.

But hear, my last raging gift to you.

*We have not come here to take prisoners
But to surrender ever more deeply
to life and to joy.*

*We have not come into this exquisite world
to hold ourselves hostage from love*

*run my dear
from anything
that may not strengthen
your precious budding wings
run like hell my dear*

36

*from anyone likely
to put a sharp knife
into the sacred, tender vision
of your beautiful heart*

*we have a duty to befriend
those aspects of obedience
that stand outside our house
and shout to our reason:
'O please O please come out and play'*

*For we have not come here to take prisoners
Or to confine our wondrous spirits*

But to experience ever more deeply our divine courage.

Our dear brother Hafez, 1320–1389

Jassem el Hindi, Saint Erme – Telemark, April 2018

Arab future fiction is now focusing on the reconstruction of death poems written by Arab women: Nazik el Malaika, Etel Adnan, Rasha Omran and others. Hindi's task is to find ways to explore the *materialität* of these texts, their ecology, their capacity to transform into a series of drawings, a shared meal, or an atmosphere; their hospitality to a somatic practice, to a recitation, to derivation into something else: we try them out, like one would try clothes that were tailored for another body than ours.

37

Jassem Hindi is born in Saudi Arabia, of Palestinian-Lebanese and French descent. He is a performer, sound artist, and writer, with an education in philosophy. He is inventor of the Arab Future Fiction movement - a performance, poetry and visual art project. Hindi's other works include a long term research/performance installation on the eco-poetics of the north of Norway. He's recent collaborators are Ligia Lewis, Eoghan Ryan, Keith Hennessy, Valentina Desideri, Sina Seifee and Mia Habib.

Endnotes

1. "what is it I wanted?
when we entered that storm I was the one arresting the betrayal of life
or driving it to dead ends
where, clear, coming into view,
was the true metal of death
Where did we get the idea of going into this night that does not subside?"
Rasha Omran, When longing tormented me, excerpt translated from Arabic by Gomez-Rivas and reconstructed by Jassem el Hindi.
2. Just to remind us here of a technical distinction: the concept of appropriation chez Marx is not the one used in cultural studies. It is merely a general expression of the fact that humans incorporate the nature they come into contact with into themselves. This activity of appropriation is the chief mean by which humans apprehend objects, and the mode under which individuals apprehend the outer world. In the context of my critique, the use of the Marxist concept is substantially more cynical than the post-colonial studies' version, as it means that the curator considers everything that isn't them (the artists and their ideas) as "nature", through which the curators can express themselves and manifest their imperial body to the outer world.

38

MUSINGS ON
JAZZ AND OTHER
NOISE¹

by Christopher Wessels

1

This Musing is an excerpt from a sub chapter called 'personal praxis/archeology of subjectivity/ So What' that I have written in a MA thesis I have co-written with Ahmed Al-Nawas called "' If I could find the spot where truth echoes', How/is it possible to decolonize the art space?" (2016). I have added more to this musing because I have changed since 2016 and as I am doing the recommendations suggested by the editor I am tempted to change something very fundamental in this text after spending sometime in Dakar. It does sound like another musing though. Enjoy!

39

Suggested playlist to accompany this text.

1. **Miles Davis, *So What*** Kinda Blue, 1959
2. **Nina Simone, *Don't smoke in bed*** Live In concert, Live in New York, 1964
3. **Archie Shepp, *The Magic of Ju Ju*** The Magic of Ju Ju, 1967
4. **Cecil Taylor, *Cell Walk for Celeste (Take 1)*** Cell Walk for Celeste, 1961
5. **Sun Ra and the Arkestra, *There Is Change In the Air*** Antique Blacks, 1978

Our science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract, and castrate meaning, forgetting that life is full of noise and that death alone is silent: work noise, noise of man, and noise of beast. Noise bought, sold, or prohibited. Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise.

– Jacques Attali, *Noise, The political economy of Music*

A musical form that has deeply influenced me is jazz, then within jazz it is modal jazz tradition that for me becomes the music that starts talking about other possibilities, the beauty of it lies in its very obvious homage to the blues, thus its acknowledgement of its struggle roots. The Oxford English dictionary defines ‘modal’ as ‘form’ as opposed to ‘substance’. Modal jazz can thus be defined as jazz that uses forms of music or modes of music instead of chord progressions as a harmonic framework. Miles Davis’ album *Kind of Blue*¹⁹⁵⁹ and the song *So What* is regarded as the epitome of the modal jazz tradition. This break from Western classical music is probably the reason why it was regarded as noise, as unsophisticated. If one takes Attali’s² conception that music/noise is prophetic then it certainly is modal jazz that ushers us into the postmodern. Attali says, referring to music as prophetic,

2 Jacques Attali, ‘Noise, the political economy of Music’, In *theory and History of Literature* (Volume 16, University of Minnesota Press, 1977:6). Attali is a French economic and social theorist and in the 80’s became a senior civil servant under Mitterrand and right-wing Sarkozy. I am obviously a very different political animal to Attali but I find some of their thoughts on Noise very interesting. It is worth noting that this text was written prior his career as a civil servant.

40

It heralds, for it is prophetic. It has always been in its essence a herald of times to come. Thus, as we shall see, if it is true that the political organization of the twentieth century is rooted in the political thought of the nineteenth, the latter is almost entirely present in embryonic form in the music of the eighteenth century.

Cecil! I'm searching, what does your atonality suggest?

With its butchering and deconstruction of old melodies reinventing them to give new meaning 'other' meaning. Soloists improvising to re-define sound the rest of the band waiting in the wings keeping the ship steady sure of it's form not sure not where it will end. If modal jazz represents a new beginning in the conception and expression of Western music then it is Sun Ra and his Arkestra with its cacophony of dissonance warning us of our cognitive dissonance in time and space. Then it is Archie Shepp who, through free jazz, brings jazz back to its maternal home of resistance breaking the shackles of the capitalist patriarchy that has so successfully commodified and captured the spirit of change this music was/is/will demand/ing. It is Nina Simone's lyrical clarity and virtuosity that awakens us and reminds us of our complicity in shit and helps us mend our broke(n)ess. It is Cecil Taylor who reminds us that a three-letter word cannot begin to describe the complexity of their humanity. It is the polytonality of modal jazz that for me becomes a theoretical tool that I want to use to explore the practice of noise³.

The tonality of music is essentially the arrangement of cords to create a perceived hierarchy of perceived relations, stabilities and attractions. Polytonality then, is essentially a cacophony or many hierarchies of stabilities and attractions. Noise needs to seek to subvert these hierarchies, while at the same time amplify the poly nature of things. It needs to constantly be in a position where it is in a re/hear/sal

3 What distinguishes noise music or art is the expressive use of noise within the context of music. Orthodox uses of harmony, melody and rhythm is actively and consciously ignored.

41

of rebellion, it must crack the dome that colonises our mind. Countering the normative needs to be it's starting point as it blasts through our stratosphere taking us into space where the Impossible is considered because we know what's possible. Borders must be challenged; ambiguities and paradoxes must be encouraged. It needs to help us experience those temporary moments of emancipation for the journey to freedom is long because we do not yet know what freedom is. It comes and goes. It must help us rethink risk help us imagine risk in it's non-economic determinist manifestation because on our march to freedom it is risks that we must take. It needs to help us decolonise our bodies! Decolonise our minds!

We need to breathe in and out.

It needs to take us out of our elitist bubbles and help us unlearn our privilege as a loss. We need to rethink the margins as the center and move toward the conception of the center for the study of the Impossible and the musing of Impossible Forms.

Christopher Wessels is currently a curator with the Children's Library Project at Åbo Akademi University. He is founding member of The Museum of Impossible Forms (M{if}) where he is also one of the Artistic Directors, and he is co-founder of Third Space (2014-2016), a collective of artists and curators in Helsinki. His artistic and curatorial practices look at the un-silencing of counter hegemonic narratives and the building of counter hegemonic institutions with anti-racist, anti-sexist and class consciousness at its foundations.

42

CONFESSIONS OF A BOUNTY

by Maimouna Jagne-Soreau

In my head, I am an old white man. Growing up, I was what you would probably call a culture nerd: my introversion pushed me towards literature, music and philosophy, around which I quickly built my imaginary world. Nietzsche became my best friend, and I would laugh out loud reading Flaubert, as I was sure he made those clever jokes just for me. When life felt like too much to handle, I would just listen to Mozart at full volume on my Walkman, crying in rage and relief for the most extreme catharsis. Old white men were my heroes and closest friends: I saw myself as one of them. My body

43

nonetheless seems to tell a different story. People existing in the real world, my living friends and family, would indeed most likely describe me as a young brown woman.

There is probably no greater diametric opposite along the spectrum of body features, but this contrast never bothered me. On the contrary, I saw it as a good fortune: it never occurred to me that I could not identify with the character of a novel or a movie because he was male, and/or white. It never occurred to me that my body eventually limited me in the eyes of society. I genuinely always believed that I could do whatever I wanted and become who-ever I wanted. And as long as I was not made aware of what people might say behind my back, I did not care. But my awareness grew and I *tried* not to care. Eventually, I definitely cared. More precisely, I started to feel guilty.

The first “people” who made me care happened to be my two-years-younger brother. Although the both of us are *métissés* and not even *métisses*¹ – we grew up with our white mom, white step-father and white younger siblings in a white neighborhood – my little brother claimed his Black identity. A bit out of the blue, he started to speak in slang, changed his walk, listened to rap and hip-hop, got obsessed with Malcom X, progressively dropped out of school etc. There has already been a lot written about racialization, structural racism, and great discussions about how representation and stereotypes can influence one’s identity, so I am not going to go into that here. While I, for some mysterious reason, escaped this fate, it is clear that my brother did not. But as much as his not-so-unique-case still deeply fascinates me, I found the way he perceives me even more interesting.

By the age of ten he indeed started to call me “le bounty”. “A bounty”, this chocolate bar with coconut inside, is the French equivalent of the American insult “Oreo”: you may be brown or black

1 The French language distinguishes the “*métisse*”: mixed-race with the culture of both parents, from the “*métissé*”: mixed-race with the culture of only one parent.

44

on the outside, but you are white on the inside. This accusation of being “white-washed”, of not being “true to myself, my origins and my people”, progressively took away the innocence of my (supposedly white) inner world from me, and I was forced to question its nature and authenticity. Was I really just a parody? Had I lost myself? Was I pretending to be something I am not? Something I cannot be and will never be? Realizing the absurdity of those questions – as if my identity was related to my skin color by *essence*, in the same way that we long believed that gender and sexuality defined each other- I was not spared from the feeling of being the bad guy in the house. Reading further about my brother’s “Oreo complex”, I realized that his fear of being out-blackened was surprisingly common among mixed-race and other POCs. In some extreme cases, an explicit disgust of the idea of being associated with white people even occurred. On the other side – the ones called Oreo-, their testimony had the common aspect of calling out the representational problem of associating success, education, good language, high cultural capital etc. with Whiteness. Turning to literature, I found the avant-garde and one-of-a-kind satirical novel *Oreo* by Fran Ross¹⁹⁷⁴, which depicts the adventures of a young woman of African-American and Jewish background, Oreo, with a hilarious picaresque tone. With direct references to the Greek myth of Theseus, the story cleverly problematizes the idea of authentic ethnic identity by telling the heroine’s quest of her lost Whiteness (her white Jewish father disappeared when she was a baby). But, like Theseus came back confused from the labyrinth after he killed the Minotaur, Oreo comes back from the search for her identity in a black-sailed ship, flagging her defeat. For my part, an optimist, I kept searching, but I could not find a text about what I will call “happy Oreos”: non-white people not caring about being considered “white inside”. Maybe they don’t need to write about it, if they don’t care? Or is it more that no one is really allowed to be a happy Oreo?

45

Beyond a simple skin color, Blackness as a sociocultural concept² started to be developed in the USA around the twentieth century. Evolving from the history of slavery, it can be considered to encapsulate ideas and movements going from Black power, Black pride, Black love, Black excellence, Black Lives Matter, to a certain defined culture and behavior, and experiences and feelings such as cultural exclusion and inferiority, racial terror etc. As early as 1903 the African-American scholar W.E.B Du Bois talked about *The Souls of Black Folk* and pointed out its double-consciousness: “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”. In other words, the vertiginous feeling of being aware of what you are and of what others want to see at the same time; eventually taking yourself to be a problem in and of a set social arrangement. It is the fixed and persisting awareness of existing simultaneously both within and outside of the dominant white culture. A century later, building from this idea of double consciousness and within the project of modernity, Paul Gilroy developed the concept of “Black Atlantic”¹⁹⁹³. He argues against essentialist visions of racial identity and racial nationalisms, in favor of a shared, though heterogeneous, culture that joins diverse communities in North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa.

So, there you have it: the black cream filling my brother accused me of betraying. From where I stand, calling myself Black would be a really artificial thing to do; a performance of cultural appropriation reciprocally as grotesque as the one we all accused Rachel Dolezal³ of doing in 2015. But unlike Dolezal, and despite my helpless social awkwardness anytime I end up outside my limited comfort zone, my skin and hair seem to make the choice for me every day. In the eyes of

2 I write “Black” or “Blackness” with a capital letter when referring to this established sociocultural concept, otherwise “black” when referring to a simple skin color.

3 Rachel Dolezal (1977-) is an American former civil rights activist and former Africana studies instructor. In 2015 Dolezal was publically accused to have committed cultural appropriation and fraud as she lied about being African American.

46

the white majority, I am Black. Yet, in the eyes of (at least) my brother, I am not. Trying to formulate how I see myself through my own eyes, it struck me that as Oreo, I suffered from a triple consciousness⁴: I was made to look at myself through the eyes of both a racializing white majority, and a judgmental -eventually as racializing- black minority. Add the insidious feeling of being a traitor against black people by lack of association, I have long seen myself as a pathologically selfish, irresponsible and dysfunctional person. Today, I have understood that a lack of association does not mean a lack of solidarity, anti-blackness, nor a lack of shared experiences or a deep understanding and concern for invisible power structures. Given that, I found myself at the conclusion that it is fully my right to have brown skin without identifying as Black and without feeling guilty for that.

At a time of super-Blackness -romanticization of the ghetto and encouragement to embrace our black features without compromise- this claim may sound provocative. This internal battle being highly personal, it appears however that defending an identity in a “neither-nor” dialectic is symptomatic of postmodernism. In contrast to “either-or” dualities (either black OR white), or “both-and” reconciliations (both black AND white), the logic of double negation (neither black NOR white) could come as a much-needed exit door in today’s racialized discourse. Parallel to my attempt to articulate a postmodern identity *in dialog with* blackness, I also want to acknowledge manifestations of postmodernity *within* blackness.

James Baldwin in “Princes and Powers” reported the big “Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs” that took place at La Sorbonne in 1956. Delegations from Africa, Europe and America were present (including figureheads like Alioune Diop, Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon,

⁴ The expression “triple consciousness” is commonly used in black feminism and queer studies to express the problematics of intersectionality: the burden of being both black and a woman, or black and gay. I mean triple consciousness in another way here, but the gender perspective is of course important to have in mind.

47

Léopold Senghor to only name a few), with the project of allying black men across the planet with the establishment of a “cultural inventory”. The project did not quite work as planned, the variety of geographical, political, spiritual, and historical backgrounds making the crowd irreconcilable. Yet coherent “grand narratives” of Blackness like Du Bois’s or Gilroy’s are still dominating today, ignoring most individuals’ realities. In reaction to this unwanted homogenization, and parodying the Black nationalist movement, Trey Ellis argued for “The New Black Aesthetic”¹⁹⁸⁹, and became one of the first black postmodern figures. Going against the separatist doctrine, Ellis expressed the idea of dual identity and defended the concept of “cultural mulatto”, meaning someone who can relate to multiple cultures the same way a *métisse* can relate to different heritages – “some of the only blacks who admit liking both Jim and Toni Morrison”. On the other hand, he talks of “neutered mutations” while referring to Whitney Houston and Lionel Richie, as examples of commercialized “assimilationist nightmares”. Since Ellis, other postmodern Black movements have seen the day, from “postliberated” to “post-soul” to “post-black” to “NewBlack” and beyond. These movements all have in common not defining Blackness as primarily opposed to Whiteness. Rather, they trouble Blackness, blur and challenge its limits from within by telling non-traditional Black narratives. Tragically, scholars have pointed out the absence of a sociocultural paradigm shift that would have permitted a real impact for these postmodern movements. The New Black Aesthetic today – if not dead – is still fighting for the same things and on the same racial terrain it was already fighting fifty years ago.

Talking of terrain, the European ground, and even more precisely the Nordic scene, is displaying a very interesting trend. Although Rosa Emilia Clay became a Finnish citizen as early as in 1875, no one could really argue that any black narrative was ever developed after that. Instead, the local understanding of Blackness is largely inspired by African-American aesthetic and history, progressively adding

48

the traumas of colonialism, war, and dislocation of the last waves of refugees. Lately, use of words like “afrosvenskar” and “afrosuomalaiset”, as well as the creation of separatist spaces, illustrate the will to give a cultural echo to the experience of racialization. I am glad that things are finally happening so that a growing number of people can find a way to better express their identity. There was a real need to create a narrative in which non-white people can feel safe and accepted, and despite the tense political climate, a renegotiation is in full progress. And yet, my postmodern reasoning challenges me to think outside this current battle. In the spirit of Trey Ellis and my imaginary friend the deconstructivist Jacques Derrida, I would argue that it is not enough to expose and deconstruct the way oppositions work and then stop there in a nihilistic or cynical position. Highlighting the construction and establishment of the dichotomy between Blackness and Whiteness is a needed step to dismantle our excessive loyalty to one or the other idea. This is the only way we learn to see the aspect of the truth that might lie buried in the opposite. Then to be effective, deconstruction needs to create new terms, not to synthesize the concepts in equal opposition, but to mark their eternal interplay. In this dynamic, I got seduced by the interesting concept of “betweenship”. Originally an independent and non-profit Swedish organization, Betweenship (Mellanförskap in Swedish) is a postmodern movement which offers a Blackness-free cultural neutrality, while still putting words to the experience of racialization, triple consciousness and more. No cultural inventory nor big narratives there, just a bunch of other Bounties and Oreos, métisses and métissés, transnational-adoptees and second-generations trying to resist cultural projections.

“We all have our own way of relating to our betweenship, but our common denominator is the search for a place where our identity is not questioned” claims Betweenship. This place would be, for me, one permitting me to be a happy young brown woman, at peace with my inner old white man –eventually nothing more than an allegory for freedom and equality.

49

Maimouna Jagne-Soreau (born in France, 1991) is a Ph.D candidate at the University of Helsinki and Paris-Sorbonne since 2015. In her doctoral thesis, she develops the term “postmigration’s literature” and focuses on the literary expression and representation of second generation migrants and people of mixed-race heritage in the Nordic countries.

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50 CHECKLIST OF IRRELEVANCE FOR THE BROWN GIRL WRITER

by Koko Hubara

Postmodernism is, from an intersectional feminist point of view, a fascinating -ism. While it challenges us to not take anything as a given and encourages us to step outside boxes – which, and this goes without saying, is the very point of making art, regardless of genre or school

51

of thought – it manages, at the same time, to conveniently keep parts of history, marginalizing structures of society and power structures in general out of the reach and scope of any kind of skepticism. So, while postmodernism claims that it is impossible to rate discourses based on whether they lead to some type of objective truth, it also somehow manages to keep some categories of society as more prevalent than others in a very modern manner of thought that, upon closer inspection, only seems to serve the privileged.

Of course, postmodernism has an answer to this: prevailing discourses prevail because they are valued by elite groups. You may remember the mid-century French philosopher, linguist, literary/cultural theorist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray,¹ who argued that those in power are more interested in developing solid mechanics rather than fluid mechanics because the institution of physics, which is predominantly male, associates solidity with male sex organs and fluidity with female sex organs. She agrees with Jacques Lacan and all the greats that in order to become a subject, one has to place oneself in the realm of language but adds that in order for women to be free to use language, the masculinity of language has to be recognized and changed. Because she wrote at a time when people of color were not considered an equal and credible part of any discourse, she understandably does not elaborate on the Whiteness of language.

I had a great lesson of what is valued in a postmodern Finnish cultural landscape when I became a writer of color of a couple of firsts. And through this lesson, I created the Checklist of Irrelevance for the Brown Girl Writer.

But, to provide context, let me start at the beginning.

When I started my studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland, in 2004, postmodernism was all the rage. I am quite confident that this was the case in most parts of the Western world. Being a curious

1 <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/>

52

(at best) and unstable (at worst) personality was a match made in heaven with the times, in which it was trendy to be skeptical to the point of panic, metaphysically relative, and as subjective and free in intellectual spirit as possible. I ended up studying English philology, North American studies, social work and communications for a total of ten years, and I feel like it was not just semantics but everything from *Beowulf* to the Finnish welfare state system that was taught through a Foucaultian lens.

As a working-class Finnish kid who had survived a great recession in the 1990s and as someone who had grown up in a fairly religious and conservative household, I remember feeling excited and able to finally breathe through the fragmented thoughts of postmodernism; not everything was gloomy and black or white (no pun) all the time. At the same time, I remember being endlessly exhausted throughout my academic decade, feeling misunderstood and misplaced (stupid, fat, ugly) most of the time. Up until very recently, I thought the reason for my fatigue was the double-edged fact that while this all-encompassing postmodernism granted me too much freedom of thought and identity at too young an age, I also happened to be a Brown Girl surrounded by only White, Eurocentric higher knowledge and White students and teachers (well, I am lying: I did have one Brown student colleague and one African-American professor in one course throughout all those years).

But my understanding now, after a few years of participating in a public discourse on journalism, literature and the arts in general from the point of view of non-whiteness in the Finnish context, is that that was not the whole truth. My exhaustion and confusion were—are—actually brought on by a much more relentless and painful dichotomy than that of young adulthood and personal background. In fact, it is a paradox that I am not in any way responsible for or in any position of power to change. It was not just me being the only Brown Girl in all of the nearly one hundred classes I took, and now being the only non-white Brown Girl Editor-in-Chief in all of Finland's one hundred years of

53

independence (I will return this later in the text).

It was the fact that, in the spirit of postmodernism, I was being taught to question everything around me – except Whiteness, except the very thing that I was being taught.

It could be argued, since writing is an artform based solely on words and the self-contained, self-referential nature of language, that it is, in and of itself, the very epitome of postmodernism in the arts. I do not have any knowledge about working in other artforms, but I do know that writing is a deeply solitary, subjective act of creativity, no matter the subject. Save for sporadic meetings with an editor or a book cover art director, there is no team. Save for short readings for PR purposes, producing literature does not happen in front of an audience. It happens, at least in my case, in a food-stained, worn-to-pieces Supreme T-shirt with the blinds closed on a sunny day. There is always blank paper on which you can place anything. And whatever it is that you choose to write, it is all based on imagination, i.e., endless skepticism, relativism and a complete denial of objectivity.

Literature is also a truly postmodern form of art in that when it finally reaches the audience, it generally reaches it one by one. The act of reading, most of the time, happens in private, within a very personal, relational space, within an incredibly individualistic linguistic landscape over which I, the writer, have no control whatsoever. I'd like to think that my reader also sits in their ragged house clothes, having an unhealthy snack, getting my book dirty with their greasy fingers. Or, perhaps, they read my book on the toilet. This thought makes me very happy.

What does not make me happy, what in fact makes me as uncomfortable and confused as I ever was as a young student, is what happens to my writing when it ends up in the hands of individual readers who are simultaneously representatives of institutions that have merrily participated in creating postmodernism – even with a parallel, rigorous discourse on civil and human rights and decolonization – who

54

have not, in the forty odd years' time they have had, bothered to stop and think about how this philosophy applies to them in the contexts of Gender, so-called Race, Class (in my personal case) and of course other contexts such as mental and physical ability/accessibility, sexuality and so forth, as well as the different intersections of all of these. In the last few years, it has become clear to me that postmodernism is reserved, despite all of its noble efforts and seemingly universal premises, for those who do not turn their skeptical eye onto how deeply White a concept it is. Postmodernism is so concerned with the fragmentary nature of human life that it misses out on the fact that, in the end, for some of us those fragments intersect. I am talking about the institution of literary criticism and journalistic coverage of literature in general.

As I said, I became the writer of a couple of firsts. I am the author of the collection of essays called *Ruskeat Tytöt – Tunne-esseitä*,² which translates into English as *Brown Girls – Emotional Essays*, and the Editor-in-Chief of *Ruskeat Tytöt Media*.³ The book, as well as the online media, were both the first “for us, by us” textual publications by a Finnish person of color that were explicitly not concerned with explaining non-whiteness to whiteness. I have very verbally dedicated both of my endeavors to other Brown Girls, i.e., those of us who have been completely excluded from the literary and media canons in my home country.

In this essay, I am going to focus on my book rather than the online media, as I feel the internet is a space freer of institutions and confinement of thought. I maintain that because of the endless natures of the internet and social media, I have not had to face the same type of resistance to my work as while writing a book. In fact, book bloggers – most of them, to my knowledge, people with no background in literary

2 I am sorry, dear reader, that there is no way for you to read an English translation of the book, because my Finnish agent decided that this discourse is not relevant to other countries. There will be a Swedish translation, though, in the Fall of 2018.

3 <https://www.ruskeattytot.fi/about-us>

55

criticism, and also people online who identify themselves as White (save those who identify as explicitly racist) – have not had any problem with treating my book as a normal book and my online media work as just that.

Let us start with the name of the book: I chose it because, in the context I was writing it – the Finnish cultural and national landscape – I had next to no statistics or even other scientific references to draw from, mostly only personal experience and feelings. In Finland, like in most countries in Europe (to my understanding) no data of the ethnicity of its inhabitants is collected, based on the idea that during the Second World War, ethnicity statistics were used to plan and execute genocide and such a mistake cannot be repeated. The thought is important and noble, yet while protecting minorities and people of color, it at the same time erases us. Some data is collected, of course, this being a person's country of birth, their parents' countries of birth, mother tongue and nationality. Someone like me, whose own and mother's country of birth is Finland and whose mother tongue and nationality is Finnish, is considered a native Finn. And, in day to day language, native Finn means White, which is the complete opposite of how I have been treated my entire life in my home country, based on my Middle Eastern (or at best racially ambiguous) appearance and name – and how I am now being treated as an artist/writer. This very much reminds me of the paradox of postmodernism from the point of view of a female writer of color: the magnificent quest for freedom somehow also manages to erase entire discourses. This freedom is still not granted to everyone.

My book tackles a variety of topics from literature to hip hop, from motherhood to Paris. What I am trying to say in it is that Brown Girls are concerned with all the small and grand things in life, just like everybody else, all the while tackling life in a country that does not acknowledge them unless it is in the context of racializing, exoticizing, fetishizing and generalizing. Outside the four walls of the home, we are constantly juggling with the intersections of race and gender and, some of us,

56

many other things as well. What I am trying to say in my book is that we are constantly juggling the randomness of postmodernism while simultaneously dealing with monolithic, marginalizing structures that seem to be in no hurry to question themselves, let alone change. This kind of constant double-life is, in my opinion, exhausting, and it derails energy that instead of being used for mere survival could be put into the artistic practice.

I wrote my book after careful considerations of style, structure, and language, just as writers are supposed to. I deliberately chose the essay form because I felt its dual nature – the simultaneous presences of fact/fiction and personal/social high/low would best serve in delivering my points. I used all of the languages in which I think and speak, from Yemenite Jew Hebrew to rap lyrics to academic Finnish, to create a realm of language that includes all parts of who I am and to include as many people as possible, a language that depicts the very fragmentary nature of my postmodern being. Except that it was never read as such by the gatekeepers of the postmodern discourse, the critics.

The book hit the shelves with a bang, which is what every writer hopes for. It was wonderful; rarely have I felt such pride and joy – and absolute freedom. Äiti, aba, walla, I made it, I managed to make a few smart choices and make use of all of my many privileges and publish a book. This joy lasted exactly up until the point that it ended up in the hands of cultural journalists.

bell hooks writes, “*Racism is perpetuated when blackness is associated solely with concrete gut level experience conceived either as opposing or having no connection to abstract thinking and the production of critical theory. The idea that there is no meaningful connection between black experience and critical thinking about aesthetics or culture must be continually interrogated.*”⁴ I suppose a similar thing could be said of brownness. Just to give you a few examples: the biggest daily newspaper

4 http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Postmodern_Blackness_18270.html

57

in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, decided to not write a normal review of my book but instead created a whole new article concept in order to speak about it. In the article,⁵ which was written by the White journalist Arla Kanerva, they gave my book to two teenage girls of Arab background and asked them if they could relate to it. The headline read: “*Brown Girls Are Used to Movies in Which People Who Look Like Them Are Terrorists – Koko Hubara Wrote a Book About It, and Teenagers from Espoo Identify With It.*” Not a word about essay as form, about the language I chose to use, the stories I told (among which I did not really go into the representation of Brown people in the film industry, not with the lazy angle mentioned in the headline, at least), the thoughts I had. Just plain, pure infantilization and underestimation.

Another example: one of the most popular contemporary writers in Finland, Juha Itkonen (White, Male) wrote a one-page review of my book in one of Finland’s most reputable monthly magazines, *Image* (review not available online). In it he calls my book “*enlightening and strong*,” but he also calls me “*an activist first, author second*” and focuses heavily on my writings on cultural appropriation in the Finnish literary context, which I had published online over a year before the book came out, which were not included in the book, but with which he seemed to disagree, because writers should be free to do whatever they want.

Third example: I was interviewed by a longtime journalist (White, Female) for a lengthy feature in the Women’s magazine *Voi Hyvin (Feel Well*, not to be found online). We had a great conversation for over three hours, and I left the interview happy, feeling that I had said what I wanted to say and presented myself agreeably. I felt understood. A few days later, I received a draft of the article. It was full of a) generalizations on people of color and b) things I had most definitely not said, in quotes. When I confronted the journalist via e-mail, asking her why she had made me say things that I had not said (and disagreed with),

58

she promptly replied, educating me on the fact that she herself was an adoptive mother of a Brown Boy and had participated in a peer support group for adoptive parents in which they had already discussed all the issues that I write about. So she felt that she knew better than me what I thought of the world. Let's just say that her e-mails did not get any less aggressive when I explained to her, as a fellow journalist, the Finnish ethical code of journalists and the rules of quotation.

We do not have time nor space for all of my experiences of being a postmodern writer of color. All interviews, save one, were conducted by White people. I have been asked why I am so angry – after I have just told a joke. I have been asked multiple times in interviews what it feels like to be a Brown Girl, as if I know of another life. What it feels like to have experienced sexual violence based on my skin color as a child, as if there were more than one plausible answer. My book has been called a self-help book. It probably goes without saying that the book was not nominated for any literary prizes.

I imagine it is difficult for any writer to make sense of the criticism they receive, no matter their gender and/or so-called race; it must be very difficult to move on to the next story after writing one and then reading the reviews. In fact, the aforementioned Juha Itkonen himself made headlines⁶ a few years back when he wrote a miffed Facebook post as a reply to a not-so-great review in *Helsingin Sanomat* of his book in which he was reprimanded for polishing his sentences too much (ironically, that is probably the only critique that I have yet to hear of my own work).

All of this has left me with a few questions: what would happen if these liberal, postmodern gatekeepers read my book as a book of essays? What would happen if they let me into the canons of literature and the arts in general? What are they afraid of? Why go through all this trouble of trying to shrink my work into irrelevance? What is there to

59

lose? What is the worst that could happen if *everyone* were granted the opportunity to place themselves in the realm of language and become a subject? I cannot help but think that the reasons for this can be found not in an inability but a reluctance to look at the limits of postmodernism, the fact that it has failed to recognize intersections of human life and its own Whiteness – the fact that in all of its freedom, it actually is a tool for maintaining White privilege and oppressive structures in society.

I know for a fact that it is difficult to move forward when one's entire body of work has been, either explicitly or implicitly, deemed angry, silly and childish. It makes one feel quite hopeless, to be honest. And what is really quite surprising and funny is that it is actually insufficient postmodernism that has given me hope after everything.

This *Checklist of Irrelevance for the Brown Girl Writer* that I have been trying to get to throughout this essay is exactly that: postmodernism as hope, postmodernism as a guide to what is relevant and what is not, a guide to placing oneself smackdab in the middle of language as art. It is a very simple practice with which you can get started by answering these questions, also known as part one of the Checklist:

1. Do I or do I not read what is written about me? If not, then that is fine, but let us imagine that for the sake of keeping up with the discourse, I choose to read what is written about me.

2. In which case, which publications do I choose to follow? Maybe the daily newspapers and

60

quality magazines but not the neo-Nazi message board? Why do I make this choice – why do I agree to this discourse’s prevalence?

3. When do I choose to read what is written about me?

4. (As a type of side note: How do I communicate to the people around me that I do not wish for them to send me links to articles that undermine my work and dehumanize my people all at the same time?)

5. How do I react when I read what is written about me in these prestigious publications that I have chosen to follow, which is usually something that I call “acceptably and casually racist/sexist”?

After answering this set of questions, you may move onto part two of the Checklist:

61

6. Is this person White? Is this person Male? Is this person middle or upper class? Is this person of the age that he is likely familiar with the concept(s) of Postmodernism, even likely to subscribe to them? Is this person a representative of an institution that is likely familiar with the concept(s) of Postmodernism, even likely to subscribe to them? Is the institution predominantly White, and/or built on Eurocentric assumptions? If the answer is “yes” to more than one question,⁷ I bring out...

7. Part three of my Checklist of Irrelevance: Is this the person I am writing to? Is this the person I want to align myself with? Can my writing better this person’s position of power in the world? Will they do the same for me with their writing? (Writing to get rid of guilt does not count.) Is this the institution I am writing for? Does this institution value me in any way other than as a token or trend? Are there any institutions I can write to?

7 If not, I may stop to ponder the intersections at play. Or not.

62

If the answer is “no” to more than one question, the Checklist of Irrelevance is completed and I go on to write whatever it is that I damn well please in all of my postmodern freedom and subjectivity and Girlhood and Brownness in the epicenter of every letter, syllable, word, sentence, paragraph, chapter and story. The Checklist is a tool to reclaim postmodernism as a theoretical frame for a discourse of intersectional feminism – no, on being a Brown Girl Writer – of taking what is mine and exercising my freedom to question everything, just like Lacan and the other White Men wanted.

Koko Hubara (b. Helsinki, 1984) is an essayist and translator and Editor-in-Chief of *Ruskeat Tytöt Media*. She is also the principal of RT LIT AKATEMIA, a writing school for Brown Girls and Non-Binary kids, opening soon. Her main objective is to create new words for the Finnish language, which has dozens of words for snow but not a single established one for people of color.

63

**PLEASURE IN
RACIALIZATION—
SEXUALIZATION**

by Anh Vo

64

Foreword

I am an emerging choreographer and performance theorist, born/raised in Vietnam, currently studying and working in the U.S. My current scholarly research interest lies at the intersection of choreography and pornography, where I look into pornography's mobilization of bodies and affects in a prescriptive pathway, consequently extracting sexual pleasure as capital. I turn to contemporary dance/performance artists and porn stars, using their works as a tool in my search for orgasmic freedom – a mode of freedom that is unfortunately often experimented with as bodily intensities that are immaterial, internal, and inherently colorless. Pleasure has been conceptualized without regards to, and at the expense of minoritarian subjects' racialization-sexualization.

This project of internalizing pleasure within the body, yet without the specificities of whose bodies are at stake, should not come as a surprise, since the public representation of pleasure in pornography, dance or any other cultural industries is fundamentally a realm of whiteness. In the West, non-white folks are never in control of their mass representation – their bodies are constantly deployed by whiteness to confess their racial difference, most prominently in mainstream pornography, where there are categories for any imaginable races, except for white. Therefore, if white artists have endlessly explored pleasure as a subject matter throughout history because they are entitled to, non-white artists do not have the (same) authority and agency to bare their bodies-in-pleasure in public. How can we artists of color get pass the pain of racialization and colonization? How can we even allow ourselves to feel anything other than pain, let alone pleasure, let alone in public?

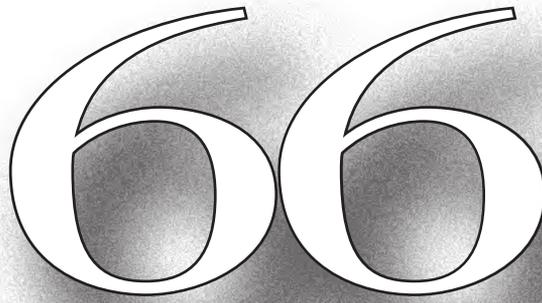
The public in contemporary dance, more often than not, is white, which brings to my mind the most prominent question: how can we artists of color bare our racialized pleasure for the white gaze? Yes, in the downtown New York dance scene there has been somewhat more diversity among the younger generation, more awareness of race, more

65

grappling with whiteness; but essentially the theatre goers who donate and pay the most are white, the curators and presenters who hold the most power are white, the donors and institutions with the most resources are white, the whole social structure, architectural structure, and structure of viewing/making performance are also deeply rooted in whiteness. Thus, even when efforts are made to drag non-white performances into visibility, there is still this pressure for artists of color to bare their racial difference in order to assimilate into the existing white structures – white folks are only interested in black artists if their works look black, and are about blackness. Adding another layer of racialized pleasure on top of this question of assimilation, the extra danger of not only baring racial pain, but also of selling this pain for white pleasure, can become too overwhelming that it can paralyze scholars and artists of color like me who want to experiment with the orgasmic body.

Nonetheless, Narcissister dives straight into this risky space, engaging in a process of striptease and “reverse striptease” that literalizes racist-sexist stereotypical images across her own explicit body, making visible the tight grip of fetishization on the racial-sexual subject. In the following text, I will examine her latest evening-length show *The Body Is A House* ²⁰¹⁷, looking specifically into section seven *Everywoman*, and section three *Basket*, respectively. I argue that even though Narcissister bares herself in front of a predominantly white audience, pleasure does not emerge either from the female sexualization or the racial exploitation. Rather, there is pleasure in a collective laughter that at once enlarges and deflates racist-sexist these controlling images.

**Pleasure in Racialization-Sexualization:
The Body Is A House ²⁰¹⁷ by Narcissister**
Narcissister is a Brooklyn-based performance maker, known for her signature use of mannequin-like masks in every public performance



and video work to construct a persona that is at once anonymous, aloof and attention-grabbing. Never appearing as her personal self yet always performing by herself, Narcissister is situated in the liminal space between the singular narcissism and the collective sisterhood, mobilizing her own explicit body while masking and emptying it of any personal essence, to address larger-than-self issues of racial-sexual identity, and its mass representation. In particular, her tropes rely on a virtuosic manipulation of masks, costumes and various bodily orifices (mouth, anus, vagina) to spectacularly constructs and deconstructs stereotypical imagery on her own naked physicality – her body becomes a prosthetic doll with such extreme mutability that she can transform into almost any images imaginable.

I first encountered Narcissister’s work recently during Performa Biennale 2017 in New York City, when she presented her latest evening-length show *The Body Is a House* ²⁰¹⁷ in a small gallery space in the Lower East Side. Structured like a burlesque performance with a similar sexually inviting and suggestive quality, *The Body Is a House* contains seven distinct dance/performance/video numbers where the artist quite directly performs *for* the (predominantly white) spectators. She teases the audience’s imagination with her mannequin-like naked body, stripping in and out of different racialized-sexualized icons around womanhood. In turn, she confronts, with her own visceral yet prosthetic body, the prevalence of racist stereotypes in sexual fetishes, expounding the process behind the production of pleasure that has always been contingent upon the manufacture of racial difference. Narcissister makes explicit that “race is necessarily a pornographic fantasy”¹: the bodies-in-pleasure of the racialized others have been persistently deployed in pornography and popular culture to bare their racial difference—a difference essentially invented by, and exploited for

1 Jennifer Christine Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Duke University Press: 2014), 6.



white pleasure. Race is a fantasy, a fantastical wet dream perhaps, that nonetheless haunts the racialized subjects in reality, taking hold their flesh, constraining their presence and limiting their identification within the exhaustion of white imagination.

***Everywoman*: Pulling Womanhood Out of Her Ass**

The regulatory power of stereotypical imagery is made most prominent in the finale *Everywoman*, in which Narcissister tackles the fantasy of seeing black woman as a hypersexual creature, by quite literally pulling this fetishized image out of her ass. *Everywoman* structures itself around the high-energy and feel-good disco anthem “I’m Every Woman”¹⁹⁷⁸ by Chaka Khan, whose lyrics unapologetically celebrate the sexual prowess of womanhood. Dancing through the entirety of the song, Narcissister enters the stage naked – that is if I do not count the mask, the merkin, the pair of red gloves and the giant Afro wig that she has on her head – performing what she calls a “reverse striptease”. If a striptease relies on the suspension in shedding layers of clothing and the titillation in uncovering the flesh hiding underneath, this “reverse striptease” plays with a similar kind of excitement in teasing and revealing, but not of the “natural” unclothed body – instead, what keeps me on my toes is the donning of apparels and accessories that are tucked away in the artist’s various bodily orifices. A red mesh bandeau top, a gold belt, a pair of yellow hoop earrings inside her mouth; a pair of sparkly bracelets, a pair of heels and a small purse inside her Afro wig; a pair of red stockings, a black-and-white stripe mini-skirt, and a colorful summer scarf inside her vagina/anus – slowly over the next four minutes she pulls them out one by one to wear on her body, constructing in real time the physical image of an “every-woman”.

68

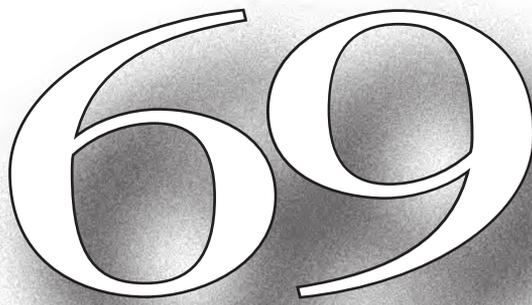
*I'm every woman, it's all in me
Anything you want done, baby,
I'll do it naturally*

– Chaka Khan, Lyrics from *I'm Every Woman* (1978)

“Every-woman” becomes the destination point in this “reverse striptease”, an expression of a fetishized black femininity that Narcissister meticulously designs: a woman in high heels with tight and revealing clothes (her breasts can be seen through the bandeau), dressed in bright colors and adorned by over-the-top shiny jewelries. This over-rehearsed over-sexualized stereotype of black womanhood, is further enhanced and parodied by the artist’s hyper-feminine choreography, whose vocabulary borrows significantly from the flirtatious and suggestive convention of female striptease. Her hips highly articulate, her fingers animated and expressive, her gestures playfully drawing along the contours of the body and the objects, Narcissister performs successive poses that are culturally stylized as sexy, enacting the script for femininity, for sexualization and commodification of the female body that these costumes carry with them².

As the catchy anthemic hook “*I’m every woman, it’s all in me*” infectiously echoes in my head, the irony is not lost when the objects that make Narcissister an “every-woman” are quite physically *in* her. Bringing a whole new frame of understanding to the song by literalizing its lyrics, Narcissister pulls womanhood out of her ass, and in such a shockingly explicit act, she reveals the artificiality of the fetishized black femininity, and at the same time how this artificiality been normalized

2 Robin Bernstein defines “scriptive things” by their ability to hail an individual into subjecthood, to script the subject’s behavior but not without opportunities for resistance and variation, creating a dance between people and things. See Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race.” *Social Text* 27, no. 4 (101) (2009): 73.



in society through the fixing of stereotypical imagery. As the slang would imply, pulling something out of one's ass suggests a process of fabrication with no real basis of evidence – yet, despite this arbitrary fabrication, a representational synthesis of an “every-woman” has very real cultural effects, generating a concrete regulatory and fetishized image, which has nothing to refer to but itself. Through the slow unfolding of this “reverse striptease”, Narcissister makes explicit the grip of this controlling image on the black female subject: like a mannequin, Narcissister's naked body only gains cultural meanings and identities, insofar as it is adorned and costumed in a way that makes itself socially and visually legible. In other words, her corporeal status as a blank canvas waiting to be made into an “every-woman” reveals that the terms of racial-sexual construction are not so much contingent upon skin color or biological determinants, as it is an imposition of style and “visuality”³, an invented racial fiction.

For Narcissister as a racialized female subject, there is no way out of this controlling visibility. Yet, by making explicit racial mythology across her visceral yet prosthetic body, Narcissister deflates the authoritarian stereotypical imagery, rendering it absurd in front of a predominantly white audience. Pleasure emerges, not from the sexualization of the womanhood nor from the exploitation of blackness, but from the parodying literalization, from the absurd enlargement of the fetishized sexual-racial difference that is often subsumed, and made invisible for the sake of pleasure. Thus, even though she bares herself performing *for* white spectators, Narcissister does not feed into the manufacture of race as a pornographic fantasy that is constructed by and for white pleasure. On the contrary, Narcissister bursts this fantasy open, reversing the pleasure agency away from the (white) spectators towards the performer in this “reverse striptease”. It is no longer Narcissister, the racialized female subject, who has to exclusively bear the regulatory

3 Ariel Osterweis, “Public Pubic: Narcissister's Performance of Race, Disavowal, and Aspiration.” *TDR/ The Drama Review* 59, no. 4 (2015): 106.

70

burden of racist-sexist images, but it is the (white) spectators, who are passed on this weight of racialization-sexualization, who are revealed as being complicit in the production and reproduction of racist-sexist stereotypes.

Race-humor: Pleasure in Racialization-Sexualization

Pleasure produced in *The Body Is a House* is not so straightforward or at times even expected, but it is quite visceral, sudden, and uncanny in moments of cleverness, virtuosity and shock. It is not a form of derivative pleasure, but a radical form of ecstasy that Jennifer Nash, a black feminist scholar on pornography, calls “race-humor”, “where racial fictions are played with, exaggerated, rendered absurd, deflated, and even rendered exciting and sexy”⁴. Nash coins the term “race-humor” to describe how black female porn actresses manage to find agency within the extreme condition of racialization-sexualization on-screen, which aligns with Narcissister’s project of composing minoritarian pleasure by literalizing racial-sexual fetishes across her body. Narcissister’s race-humor relies not only on the suspenseful and comical construction of black femininity out of her ass, but it also manifests in her spectacular mutability, which allows her to switch from one image to another in the blink of an eye. In the third section *Basket*, the artist utilizes layers upon layers of costuming and masking, disassembling and reassembling multiple stereotypical images from black to white, from a maid to a stripper. In such uncanny transformations, race-humor comes in to act, generating laughter that gestures towards a collective pleasure in face of such racist-sexist stereotypes.

Basket opens with Narcissister in a white mask, her body stuffed up, her hands holding a big laundry basket on top of her head. She

4 Jennifer Christine Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy*, 127.

71

performs an Eastern European folk dance routine, accompanied by folk music and colorful costume that are also culturally specific to the dance. However, this character is shortly after interrupted by a ringtone, from which she answers with an old school phone buried in the basket: it is a call to strip into a different avatar, a call so sudden and abrupt that it unsettles any comfort that I have developed with the image currently unfolding, a call that will constantly return throughout the piece to rush Narcissister into the next image. She slowly takes off the layer of white mask to reveal another black one, turning herself into a caricature of African American mammy. No longer standing upright dancing, the artist is now on the ground, using one of her head-wraps as a cloth to wipe the floor while Nina Simone's sorrowful version of "Wild Is The Wind" is being played in the background, evoking the mythology of black womanhood during and after slavery as docile, nurturing and overweight housekeepers serving in white families.

With each of the image construction, Narcissister composes a wholesome package of not only visuality but also of audio-kinetic experience that meticulously interlaces costumes, music, and movements to make her caricature immediately recognizable as caricature. As two more phone calls interrupt the performance, the artist in turn offers the spectators two more stereotypes: first an off-duty African-American mammy in a leopard-print dress grooving to Nina Simone's "Blues For Mama", flattering her giant boobs and butt to the audience; and second, an oversexualized black woman in provocative red and black lingerie, performing a striptease to Lil Kim notoriously vulgar "How Many Licks". Four very distinct icons in under five minutes, Narcissister's virtuosic and dizzying mutability overwhelms and disorients my experience, depriving me of any opportunities to sit with these problematic stereotypes and to come to a resolution – nonetheless, I laugh, a lot.

I laugh not only because the characters Narcissister strip in and out of cannot be any more dramatically different, but also because I

72

feel extremely uncomfortable watching these problematic racialized-sexualized images constantly popping up in front of me. As oppose to the slow teasing in *Everywoman*, *Basket* bombards the spectators with a range of racial-sexual mythologies around the female figure as a basket holder. There is no unfolding in Narcissister's extreme mutability here, but these culturally legible images in its sudden appearance immediately hail the audience into a "bind of representation", which feminist film scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu defines as a "hypersexual interpellation" of marginalized racial and sexual subjects⁵. As this bind multiplies and intensifies after each of Narcissister's transformation, laughter as an effect of race-humor nervously breaks out among the audience, demonstrating a collective acknowledgement of the tight bondage between subjectivity and visibility. As a result, a sense of commonality emerges that makes the bind visible while somewhat loosening its arresting grip on racial and sexual subjects.

As race-humor permeates the space, there emerges a utopic feeling and a sense of agency in face of such racist-sexist stereotypes. However, Narcissister's virtuosic mutability does not suggest so much a "transgressive magic" that performs "a utopic fluidity of identity" as dance scholar Ariel Osterweis theorizes⁶. Quite the contrary, the artist makes it very explicit that identity is not at all fluid, as the body is constantly being policed, regulated and molded into multiple static visualities. The "fluidity of identity" that Osterweis extrapolates from Narcissister's mutability appears to signal more of an extreme self-erasure that magnifies the working of racial-sexual fetishes across her body, than an enactment of a utopic ever-changing self. Nonetheless, the utopian still emerges not from the promise of a reflexive self, but from a reflective and introspective laughter that brings less of an affective relief, than a collective sense of responsibility and awareness around the

5 Celine Parreñas Shimizu, "The Bind of Representation: Performing and Consuming Hypersexuality in Miss Saigon." *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 2 (2005): 248.

6 Ariel Osterweis, "Public Pubic", 104.

73

“bind of representation”. Such radical race-humor allows racist-sexist stereotypes to paradoxically be enlarged, made explicit and at once be laughed at, deflated, to the point where there can be pleasure taken in Narcissister self-racialization and self-sexualization.

My argument that Narcissister utilizes racialization-sexualization as a possible technology of pleasure can appear quite unintuitive, but as Jennifer Nash points out, “black pleasures can include racialization even when (*and precisely because*) racialization is painful”⁷. It is important to not mistake Narcissister’s literalization effort as an act of baring pain in front of whiteness in order to critique the white-centric mode of pleasure production. Rather, it is a radical form of ecstasy in racialization-sexualization itself, an effect of race-humor that plays with the painfully tight bondage between visibility and minoritarian subjects. By expounding the matrix of social relations that cut through the explicitly racialized female body, Narcissister paradoxically shifts the urgency away from the pain of the cut, towards the pleasure in the cut, the collective responsibility around the cut and the potential healing of the cut that can happen along with the residual of historical racial-sexual pain itself.

Anh Vo is currently an Honors candidate for the B.A. program in Performance Studies at Brown University, studying under the tutelage of Rebecca Schneider and Noémie Solomon. He is the founder and editor of the performance theory blog CultPlastic (www.cultplastic.com), which deals with questions of capitalism, colonization, whiteness, and queerness in dance and pornography. His writings have been published on The Indy (USA), Etcetera (Belgium), and The Theatre Times (Canada).

74

FINGERS ON MY
DESIRE / IS MY BODY
JUST A NICHE

(FRAGMENTS OF TEXTS FROM WORK IN 2017)

by Jamila Johnson-Small

75

Some things are taken from Unacademic unprofessional unneutral unperformance: a poetic lecture about navigating fragility, accepting nonbelonging and decolonising my mind including ideas for anti-assimilationist holistic practice with tangible, focused manifestations as dance performances (ie stuff about my art practice) thoughts about gaze, resistance, surrender, alienation, destruction and transformation... Considering not 'Otherness' but entanglement, complexity, hybridity and blurred boundaries / in relation to movement and removal and harnessing of power etc. Delivered as part of Performing Otherness conference, Helsinki November 2017.

More struggling

I have been struggling with the preparation of this presentation, asking myself what I want to say on these topics, suspecting that I am here to 'represent' and give voice to 'The Other, one of 'the others', wondering whether I need to address this... I always find it strange to be given time, to be given time...what am I required to 'give back' in exchange for the privilege? Does this scenario turn me into a curiosity, something distinct, the other? I have titled this lecture/notlecture 'unperforming' because I don't think of otherness as a performance but a projection, an expression of distance and distinction, a system of relation, something produced through the effects of a gaze usually to describe those with (culturally) less power (the kind that allows for ease of movement in and through the global North). If this is about relation how does space denote or create situations of otherness or an othering? Otherness as currency (that can never be cashed in by those who produce it). Otherness and oppression. 'Otherness' and co-option, corporations, festishisation....

I find the idea that otherness is an objective, possessed, to be picked up and put on, confusing. It reads like the perpetuation of boundaries. Working with dance I find the idea of boundaries interesting, practice as constantly transgressing, holding the multiple and disrupting patterns

76

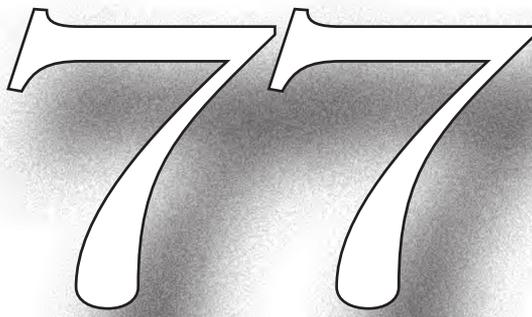
and codes of language and feeling and being. As a black, if you like, queer, artist making dance performances that use my embodiment as medium I am working a lot with these gazes that other me.

_What happens when we shift the centre? What happens with the centre is always shifting and the focus is never clear and meaning is always slippery, forming, reforming, unforming? What happens when the spotlight is on you? What happens to you when the spotlight is on me? What happens when 'the Other' does not accept that position?

Backstory

I was born and and am still based in London. I trained in 'Contemporary Dance' and I make shows, organise events and host conversations. Two weeks ago I was in Munich with my collaborator Alexandrina Hemsley, with whom I work with as Project O. We were speaking at Spielart in a section of the festival called 'Crossing Oceans'. This title makes me think of the bodies of my ancestors that were forced to cross oceans hundreds of years later my grandmother on a boat from the South American continent to England...these oceanic crossings as epic for different reasons and representing the impossibility - to me - of Home, the embodiment of a long history of displacement. Ironically then, the presentation we were invited to give was on Brexit, under the banner 'Britain in Pieces'.

Last Yearz Interesting Negro is the name I give to my solo projects. This name came up after watching *Basquiat* the 1997 dramatisation



of the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat by Julian Schnabel. I didn't know how I wanted to use it - the title of a work, the name of a book, and then eventually I realised that it was a name for me.

The way I've operated so far is just to go where I am invited so I guess this has taken me and my work into a range of spaces - galleries, squats, museums, theatres, concert venues, fields, shops, living rooms... I about my practice making responses to my environment, and I think about this happening on different scales. - scenario responsive, context responsive, pragmatic somehow - I will work with whatever I can get and of course that affects the shape and form that what I make will take, but my interest is maybe more in how ideas can be embodied or communicated in a multitude of ways, rather than through one formal language. I did a performance the other day of my show *i ride in colour and soft focus*, no longer anywhere and as I was dancing I felt like nothing was mine, like I was just a sequence of references, a channel, some kind of medium (at best), I felt as though I was 'no where' but afterwards I realised that I was sort of Everywhere; my practice is interested in developing a meta-logic for thinking about how and why to do things, driven by questions around how to undo so much that I have learned without rejecting or disregarding, how to develop working processes that are anti-assimilationist and not interested in seeking innovation or newness but dealing with the present, my present. I am interested in thinking about choreography as atmospheric temporary world building, dancing as state altering, working with emotionality, sadness, attempts to produce states of alienation and discord and to find the flow in these tensions, accepting that I am at odds with my environment and the processes of hybridisation that produce me mean that I am at odds with myself...

I am thinking a lot about the professionalisation of art and practice to the point of the destruction of the artistic gesture and how this might relate to processes of othering and fetishisation... I don't make work in order to have a career, I make work because I feel moved to attempt

78

to make spaces for my body and my experience to be included, to be counted, to be visible and to connect, to take up space in discourse and encourage the necessary shifts to allow for my inclusion, because it's a way for me to process, respond, heal and also, to be in control and set the terms which is the opposite of my experience of daily life. So to make space where my unadulterated presence is welcomed and facilitated, where my political/ethical/aesthetic agenda is prevalent (control) and where my potential growth through abandon can happen. But not to assume that this taking up space to Be looks/sounds any particular way.

Right now, **I want to talk about Destruction.**

Small rant

I will read an extract from a review of my work, written by Eve Allin about my show *i ride in colour and soft focus*, no longer anywhere performed at Fierce festival in October:

Before this review continues, I want to make it clear that I'm not sure I have a foothold here. I'm a cis white woman. I do not want to take this story as my own to analyse; I can't. I can attempt to observe through a lens of critic, and reflect the show back to you. I have to ask what gives me the right to enter this space, and comment on it. I write this from a place of ignorance and of privilege. I also write this from a place of admiration, and of wanting to learn, to be educated. I don't think that was the intention of the show, but I wanted to preface with that, because it is important to not claim space where it is not yours to be claimed.

I have a questions about dialogue and change in response to this – what is the lens of a critic? Why is analysis the first way of relating instead of response? Why does she need to ask what gives her the right to enter 'this space' - being a public performance to share my work (which I obviously have desired and consented to share) to which she has a ticket? I often come up against this sentiment, the feeling that ignorance and privilege mean you have the right to abdicate. I think

79

that this can often, once again, affirm and centre the narratives and feelings of the person/people feeling too ignorant and privileged to comment and comes across as confused and ungenerous as a response to an act of sharing. How does this abdication disrupt that ignorance or privilege? How does the work disrupt ignorance or privilege if it leads to abdication? What does it mean to 'give space'? That space is not only physical space but a request for space in the minds of other people who can move about the world not having to consider the experiences of people who are 'othered'.

Now

I think we are bored of 'the other', I see trends in dance and performance that attempt to create some sort of collective with collective feeling and energy. I see this in the growing interest in dance performances that speak or relate to club spaces. I think the one who is not the other feels they need liberation, want to take off their skin and celebrate energetic meeting spaces where one is not singular but multiple, many-headed...

Sometimes I think that this denies and erases histories of oppression that work to produce our present identities, intellectual positions and social status as qualities seen in or movements made by 'the other' are adopted for the purpose of 'liberating' the oppressor

There are so many cliches about black people and rhythm, black people and dance and song and ritual...People suggest that I must be working with dance because I struggle with words. I am bored of this ring being drawn around dancing, separating it from thinking processes, archival processes, practical healing processes and making it purely about 'expression' as though expression is abstract, presupposing limitations on choice or agency or intelligence of people working in dance/me. This all feels super old fashioned.

I am thinking and dancing about alienation a lot at the moment, the impossibility of un-fractured togetherness and the acknowledgement of

80

constant, shifting divisions and points of separation rather than a quest for wholeness, oneness, unity, that at this point just looks and sounds like forgetting and erasure. Instead of looking for commonality to be a starting point, can we just start from here? (wherever here might be) I could speak about dancing and say that I am not interested in creating a shared language that deals in repeated forms and fixed definitions but an understanding or engagement that happens on different, multiple levels through some kind of performance of an embodied engagement with myself and my forming/unformed logics as a space of rupture to everyday practices of communication. We all speak in tongues across continents and back and forth through time, simultaneously telling many stories at once. Bodies are complex time-travelling beasts of many intersecting and conflicting systems.

I had a conversation the other day and it reminded me that the future is contained in the present. Not some dream but the thing I create with all my actions and choices and the thing that I am imagining when I make those actions and choices. Looking at what is here now, already, and the politics assumed within gestures, taking them apart and looking at the little pieces and seeing what they tell about the past, and about the future...

At the moment I am thinking about 'instinct' and rhythm, musical genres, what these rhythms have to tell about a body, about a moment, and about what will follow. What vision of the future is contained in those aesthetic choices?

Nothing ever really goes away, and fetishising newness and innovation is totally colonial, the performance of a continued forgetting, erasing and ignoring. I had a Year 3 teacher who told me that energy cannot be made or destroyed, only transformed. I have thought about this every day since. Every day I am trying to figure out how to transform.

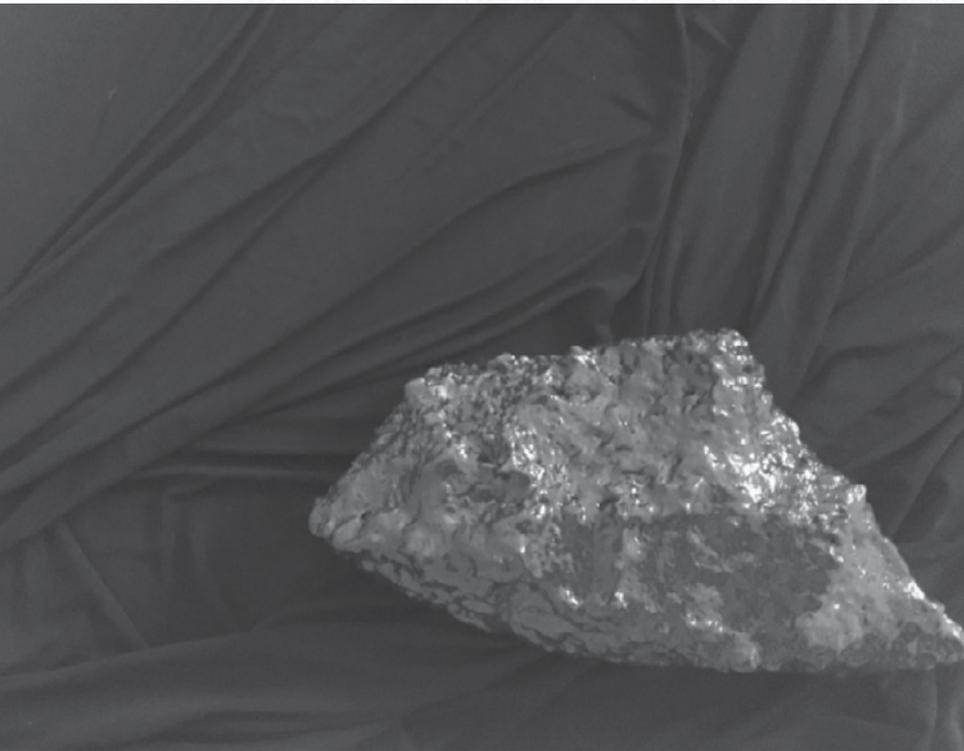
81

London and me 2017

In London, we've had what people called the 'Black Summer'. Black artists presenting and represented in large institutions, white people braiding their hair with extensions, blackness and queerness intermingling in the mainstream, white people wearing tracksuits and trainers to work, everyone lathering themselves in coconut oil, white people endlessly quoting bell hooks and Audre Lorde to me....and you know, a part of me feels like BACKTHEFUCKOFF because we have got so much shit for all these things for so long and then you walk around in your hoodie like it is nothing. I'm like, stay in West London, keep your brogues on and shave that beard. At the end of the year I was left with so many feelings of conflict, compromise, contradiction and _____ that my brain switched off, went on holiday as soon as the clock struck December 1st.

82

I was invited by Zinzi Minott and Imani Robinson, alongside Errol Anderson and Joy Miessi, to participate in 'Work It Out' a workshop at Tate Modern as part of the public programme of events alongside their current Soul of a Nation exhibition.



The brief for the text that I am sharing here was to make a 10 minute presentation on my practice and reflections to the exhibition, to open a group discussion around a contemporary Black British context for 'art in the age of Black Power'.

83

*I find it easier at the moment to move rather than to speak, a place where I do not need to deal with the complications created in the gaps between perceived and intended meaning. It's 22:40 on Friday night, the night before I am due to deliver this presentation, and I am clutching at straws trying to imagine relevant ways to speak about my practice or imagine my practice at all. It all feels like a void...but maybe I am just tired. So, a stream of consciousness:
meaning*

I struggle – I feel like it would maybe be more on trend to say ‘grapple’ – with meaning, at this point, I do not know about ‘Meaning’, I am possessed by feeling and an instinct for survival. In this moment, where there is demand (from institutions at least) for ‘political’ art, I am often asking myself what it is that makes something ‘Art’, maybe more so than what it might be that makes something political. All actions contain a politic, all thoughts processed through ideology but I am curious about the art part, the thing that weaponises the statement, represents the reality more clearly than the reality itself whilst doing away with the possibility for singular realities, something my body encounters and my mind rearranges itself around...transgressions, transcendence... understanding as sensing...

I participate in a few ‘professional’ conversations, public and as research, and we often say we want the conversation to be productive

84

(too much of a capitalist agenda); generative (privileges the tangible and the immediate and expansion); now I have started to say that I want these conversations to be Transformative. It made me smile that this was also what Zinzi [Minott] said regarding this conversation in our meeting on Thursday. That's the thing right now: FUCKING TRANSFORMATION. Not change, shift, little by little but actually transformation. I had a teacher in Year Three – and these were the days when the curriculum in the UK seemed less strict – and this teacher loved science and she would always say, it was her motto, “Energy is the go of things” and “energy cannot be made or destroyed, only transformed”. This stays with me and informs my practice.

Walking through the exhibition I hear this sentiment echoed in a quote from Frank Bowling, about the way that black artists disrupt conventions of signification in their work, imbuing the signifier with new ‘meaning’ about experience that was not initially represented. Feelings make facts. David Hammons in Room 6 is quoted “I feel it my moral obligation as a Black artist, to try to graphically document what I feel socially”.

At the moment my work is a lot about energy transformation. Arriving in a space, feeling it out, letting it in, processing it and transforming it into something else. I guess you think about this as sampling, remixing, collage, ritual, trance...

abstraction

There's this annoying debate about abstraction that is referred to in Room 10 – can black artists make abstract art? Should black artists make abstract art or is that shirking responsibility? can black artists make art that isn't political?

I realised something the other day, which is that I cannot be a Contemporary Dancer. I thought that I was, I trained for years in ‘Contemporary Dance’, I have an MA in Contemporary Dance but actually, what I do, cannot be that, will always disrupt that or otherwise become an obstacle for me.

85

Can black artists do contemporary dance? Can black artists make abstract art? In a way, always no, because we do not have the privilege of pseudo-neutrality aka whiteness – perhaps this is sometimes possible to gain when your body (or your name) are not visibly racialised in your work, but I walk down the road and I know full well that everything I do is loaded here, that my being presents a threat, there is no “freedom from representation” or ability to deal with “ideas rather than events” because my black body appears in front of you with a history of events, encounters, death. But new languages are always being created and what was once abstract is now an aesthetic convention and ‘abstract’ is also often a word used to describe a person’s perceived distance from the thing.

This energy work I am doing, it is on one level a strategy for attempting to engage with a public or an audience as many, not a singular mass. There are different conversations to be had with different people but when you don’t choose – or even know – who is in a space and engaging with your work, it feels important to try to acknowledge that this. I have seen – and felt sadness and erasure at – too many shows that are by black and poc artists that address themselves to a white audience, I am sure I have also done this, it is a gaze that I think I have had to internalise for survival but it feels very important to try not to continue this culture of exclusion and centring of whiteness. How to have many conversations at once? How to hold all the contradictions and conflict and continue? In discussion with someone I work with, they said that in discussions about the work I “open all the doors” and they wanted to close them so that we could ‘focus’. I found this very interesting, I think about focus as some kind of epic holistic awareness and want to find all the ‘doors’ possible, open them, and feel the breeze.

improvisation

Room 10 speaks to improvisation. This is another word I struggle with. I describe what I do as dancing. It is technical, it is improvised, it is no freer than I am, it is choreographed, it is experimental as it is working its way

86

from knowns and into unknowns. The way that this word ‘improvisation’ privileges certain kinds of knowledges I do not think is helpful for black experience and black art when lack of representation is a thing, and experience is your reference point because there is no book in the local library that will explain the situation to you. (This is said, I hope the collections in the libraries I frequented as a teenager, desperately looking for myself, have changed) Feelings have to become facts, and we need to validate them ourselves. Fantasies and visions become Guides.

Improvisation is defined in this dictionary here (google): “create and perform (music, drama, or verse) spontaneously or without preparation”. Running through this text, I guess is the idea that everything can be material; one of the most striking works in this show for me is the tights Zinzi referenced by Senga Nengudi. I think life is preparation enough for art making. One of the questions I ask myself a lot is, what is here already? And what can be done with it? Objects, energy, ideology, power structures, the tensions between things that we call relationships.

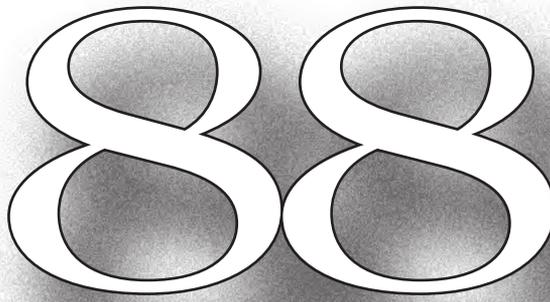
I wonder about the curation of the exhibition, the journey could perhaps have been designed with a logic that relates to that history, those intentions, a vision of and a struggle for a world that doesn’t centre whiteness and exploit and crush blackness, could it employ those strategies used by artists working to create (intentionally or by virtue of history) a Black aesthetic tradition? I am struck by the experience of moving through that space full of art that describes, represents, presents, produces complex experience as a black body, as a living body. What if chronology shifted from the calendar logic? What if locations of the production of the work or the artist’s birth were not mentioned? What if Nationhood was not invoked? What if different forms of contextualisation were presented? What if the gaps and absences were marked? What if we were not spat out into the shop? What if it wasn’t called ‘Soul of a Nation’ but actually referenced some kind of embodiment when bodies are the ground on, through and over which the work and politics are activated or enacted?

87

In my thirty years I wonder the number of times that I have walked
up and down these streets Mare Street Kingsland Road Dalston Lane
Balls Pond Road Lower Clapton Road Homerton High Street Morning
Lane Well Street Hackney Road

Sometimes I am walking
and it would seem as I am wading through the debris of this past
that is unwilling to be suppressed by the paving stones
by a daily trampling
good n proper
from the thousands
millions
of footsteps
just rises up

I have this recurring dream
it is about waste
we've tried to bury it beneath the pavement and the roads but it pushes
up
like the roots of those angry trees driving up the cement and tarmac on
some roads
regardless of the destruction
Life will out
Nothing is forever
And why should the tree give a shit anyway
Anyway
the rubbish pushes up, expanding the cracks in the street on which I
am walking
initially
I'm like
bobbing up and down as I walk
buoyed by the masses of waste emerging from what I pretend on a



daily basis is the ground
I keep walking
colours rising
Soon I will be drowning

Would you rather
drown
or burn

I am afraid of water
I am also afraid of time
because of the things they keep
and the things that they take away

My metropolis
fresh nike creps on credit
reebok stepping up once again

I buy a new pair of shows for every show
but I don't have a home
2016
baby
walk with me
walk with me

The parks and canals are full of constant joggers
trotting towards self-improvement and looking like something sinister
self-contained machines of purpose
desperation in sports tech and buggies

Coherence is stifling me



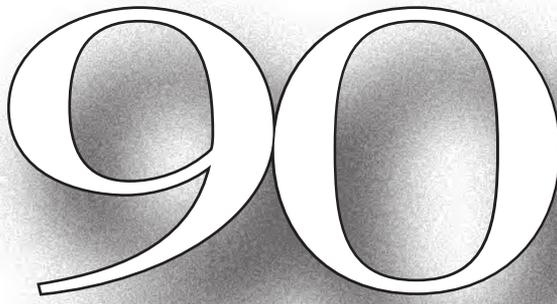
I try not to spend all day reacting
people so loaded up with signs they look like code
between one and zero there isn't really much nuance

what happens to my body when growth is an abstract concept

Acts of love
of unruly feeling like sabotage
to my daily existence
inside the binary
sometimes
engaging with feeling is just too much
and life
becomes managing this sensory overload

A good tactic is to overload the senses so much
on purpose
that this excess overloads the overload and confounds the bodily
systems
another
is to devote yourself to a single source of stimulation
and engage it
repeatedly

I like our shared and casual fantasies
this world building
Do you think that's ground you're walking on
so many things made real
what incredible potential
nostalgic word something is being chased and something else is what
it is chasing and that something else already left



a long time ago

I am happy to be imprinted upon
say
to gain the extra code
in an endless act of composition
addition

I wanted to write a text about dancing
a prologue
or something

Last night I dreamt that I have two huge clitoris growing from my iliac
crests
and I worry
how my jeans will fit

Last Yearz Interesting Negro is the solo project of **Jamila Johnson-Small**, she makes shows with dance, choreography, sound, video, sculpture and works with in-between spaces – things that exist in and through cracks in time/memory/attention – syncopation, trance states, internal narratives, intensities, electronic music, and a love of dancing on the spot. In her performances, bodies of public and performer(s) are navigated as object, animal, human, machine, environment, energy, to build atmospheric landscapes created by the live unfolding of the tensions between things that produce meaning. Not interested in invention or innovation she uses things that are already there and rearranges them in an effort to encounter some unholy combination that resonates with the horror, discomfort, cringe, confusion and sensuality of this contemporary moment and her position within it, opening up spaces in thinking, feeling, reading and dancing. The landscapes she creates for her dancing body to inhabit with a public, seek to access and utilise her own power for her own ends,

91

disentangling from – or entangling herself further with – the isms that instrumentalise her existence on a daily without her consent.

Of Caribbean descent, born and based in London she has formed long term collaborations with other artists including Project O with Alexandrina Hemsley, immigrants and animals with Mira Kautto. More recently she performs in work by Fernanda Munoz-Newsome, runs HOTLINE with Sara Sassanelli, and GUSH with David Panos, a semi-regular low-key DIY event.

92
AFRO-
FUTURE-
QU###R

by Thomas F. DeFranz

93

_we begin in the afterlives of slavery.

here, little may be taken for granted.

*little makes sense, beyond the logics of
capitalisms.*

disavowal, abjection, disdain.

bare life. incompletely rendered.

incompletely allowed.

saturated by experience.

*but this is the posthuman condition and its
possibility.*

African American cultural expressions rise among multi-valent renderings of experience as simultaneous acts of citation that cut across temporality, gender presentations, class formations, conceptions of place, articulations of bare life, etc. Black expression in this mode seeks to overlay experience by way of citation to produce a capacious, impossible experience of deep sensorial complexity. Posthuman concerns of information overload butt up against these demonstrations of black aesthetic creativity. As researchers wonder at the limits of human capacities to maintain clarity of focus in relation to endless streams of data, Black performance engages multiplicitous formations of citation and data arrangement in the service of artmaking.

In other words, Black performance arises within and through

94

contradictory flows of information that are ultimately unreconcilable; recognizable only through the posthuman condition produced centuries ago by the brutalities of the slave trade and its aftermaths. Slavery, Colonialism, and Apartheid; named by Mbembe as the three devastations that have shaped Black life and formed Black Reason, become the circumstance or situation from which Black performance proceeds. Conceived at its start to be outside the human, Black life epitomizes the posthuman, and its stretching beyond known and knowable characterizations of civil societies.

To imagine possibility in this circumstance of outsidersness and abjection, we turn to the afrofuture. A speculative space that combines science fiction and fantasy, afrofuturism operates as an anecdote to the afropessimisms that define Black histories as disavowal, with a call to imaginative rendering of an afrofuture rife with possibility and diversity.

so welcome to the afrofuture

the afrofuture is unafraid

the afrofuture knows that it is complex and unapologetic

the afrofuture admires collective action

the afrofuture is physical sensation, bound up with emotion and spiritual possibility.

the Afrofuture is yesterday and tomorrow... and tomorrow and more of tomorrow and tomorrow.

95

in the afrofuture, we dance to demonstrate our protest of the assumption of a unified subject.

We are not one thing, we who are invested in black and african diaspora dance, and our gatherings confirm this. We are ballet and orisha dances, senegal and brazil, urban moves and postmodern stages. We imagine forward together. Knowing how different we are from each other, and how aligned we are in this pursuit of an African diasporic understanding of social possibility and art, we imagine forward together.

an afrofuturist exercise:

close your eyes

100 years from now - 2118

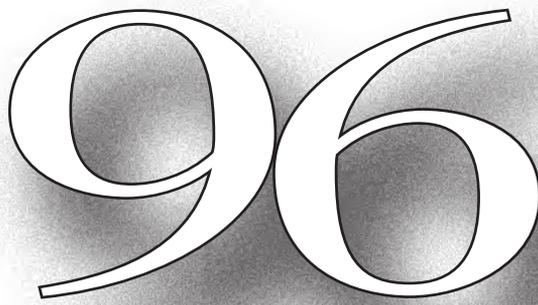
where on the planet are you?

imagine the city - where do you see it from?

focus on us - see us where we live

note a detail

can you describe the afrofuture?



Afrofuturism is VERY POPULAR

Afrofuturism arrives as a hailing of Black Humanism. Because Black life emerged in the cracks of historical action formed by disavowal and coercion, afrofuturism presents a radical restructuring of historical trajectories toward impossible openings outward. Toward hope, yes, but also toward human capacity beyond reason. An imaginative leap toward a possibility outside of time. Or maybe ahead of time. Afrofuturism replaces Black disavowal with African-inspired humanity forged in reponse to, and in spite of, asymmetrical encounters of Slavery, Colonialism, Apartheid.

I want to arrive at the Afrofuture through dance, and in particular social dance as it moves through media and other forms of performance. I want to consider how Black social dance operates as a basis for Black performance, even in its more abstract or hyperreal modes. Black social dance performs the remains of Black humanism, through the encounters of Black people among each other, enlivened by physical gesture and communion through music and motion. Music and motion arrive as interlocking and interdependent creative gestures in Black performance; social dance consecrates this connection, pushing rhythmic gesture and its sonic universes outward as one action.

Afrofuturism might be so popular now because of its radical assembly: Black cyborgs and dances of the ancestors cut and mixed among each other, so that electronic interferences can be privileged as the noises of tomorrow and yesterday. Yes, we want the funk, gotta have that funk. And it is coherent in its impossibility: in what universe could Black people dance even as we are disavowed; experience and circulate BlackJoy even as we are shot in the streets, forced into ghettos, denied the bases for considered and sustained intellectual debate? Afrofuturism confirms a humanity that transcends disavowal, or even enslavement and forced migrations through sonification and digitalization. In the Afrofuture, people dance truths within Black sound; Afrofuturism stabilizes the steady presence of erratic humanity among the binary code.



But What of Posthuman Interference?

We imagine around future possibilities that place Human in relation to overwhelming streams of big data. We wonder, again and again, can we survive the onslaught of technologies that seem to remember and process more than we can or do? If we can barely remember where we put our keys down, or where we parked the car, or what we had to eat a day before, how can we approach AI, or global surveillances, or smart machines that process this information seemingly without effort? What chance do we have in the light having it all done for us already: processed, categorized, assessed and filed away even before we realize that we're not sure of the question at hand?

Posthuman critiques wonder at the capacities of people to maintain some sorts of autonomies in the face of data aggregation that overwhelmingly denies the places of human indeterminacies. As humans, we actually enjoy not knowing; becoming. We don't necessarily know why this is; why we might achieve pleasure from the pursuit of information discovery. But we do explore; we gather and debate, we revel in not knowing or coming to consciousness; in finding modes of expression and capacity new to us we enjoy time and its irregularities.

The posthuman prediction, in some ways, imagines a gathering of data and a narrowing of possibility. When the robot can successfully process the information and predict the optimal outcome, we may be left without a phenomenological purpose. In this formation, I imagine the uncanny valley not as a surprise to my sense of life or not/life, but rather as the abdication of mystery that enhances encounters in time.

Posthuman interference in not knowing, then, might be the ways that we hunger for more information, more data, more capacities even as we recognize that we can but barely accommodate what is in front of us now. I wonder if we replace our desires to become - to not know, to discover - with desires to touch more surfaces; to pass our eyes across more imagery more quickly; to stimulate with vigorous intensities made possible by emergent interfaces. What might be different now,

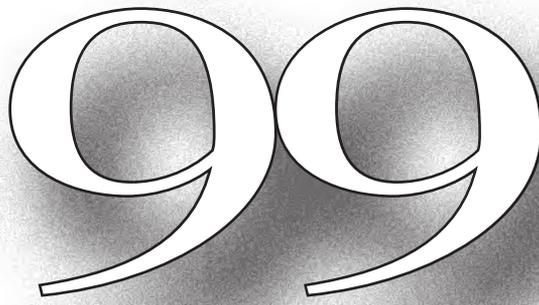
98

in the face of today's technologies, are the scales of these interactions, and the absolute impossibilities of connecting to even a fraction of the information available.

The circumstance of posthuman technologies interferes with daily life by creating a need to disembody. In some ways, the rabbit holes of social media: Twitter, Facebook, Closed Caption Security Feeds, reality television programming, or enhanced reality gaming all encourage physical containment. Ready Player One: play the oculus from your dingy bedroom, which you never need leave. Participatory artwork rises now as a countermeasure, but its spreadability is tiny in relation to the populations invested in visual monitoring. We honestly don't know what will happen next in response to a global digital connectivity.

So then, we turn to Black performance and its strategies that collude with an impossibility to know the outcome of the day; strategies born of aesthetic structures that valorize the collective and its knowledges of itself, even as they push towards pleasure.

I'm wondering here, how is it that Black creativity has endured abjection, slavery, Jim Crow, and 21st century police states? How has Black creativity withstood and advanced itself amid Slavery, Colonialism, Apartheid? If we acknowledge that Black people have never been human in the context of the west; that legislative disavowals precipitated social disavowals, how has this creative life recurred? To move through a thumbnail depiction then: Black People became the matter of <otherness,> the keepers of alterity for whites invested in structures of capitalism. Black people became the physical matter of labor. Black people became black bodies, and the physical engine of capital and the modern; this transference from human to thingness, to the nebulous status of Black Body, reflected the engagement of chattel slavery, a slavery practiced in huge variance from other sorts of slaveries alongside modernity. This chattel slavery produced the modern, as it re-coded people into property and not-citizens in the context of the United States.



Black creativity endured through this, with a vigorous attention to improvisation as a mode of production and expression; the literal exploration of bending the note and bending the gesture as creative demonstration of method to bend the circumstance of enslavement. Bend whatever seems rigid, including the non-human status of the Black Body. Create a collective awareness that knows itself through accumulative, remixed, bent and contradictory impulses brought into relation no matter their origin narratives. Develop an outrageous ability to withhold conclusions/endings/solutions; revel, instead, in the creation of bent possibilities. Create amid a shared truth of living in an inhumane world without imaginable end; living without an assumption of an outcome.

In this, Black performance created urgent modes of address in split-focus and distraction. Multiplicities of data delivered simultaneously, as in the spirituals and sorrow songs that conveyed information on how to escape the Slave plantation, mixing religiosity with the practical directives of Googlemaps. Jazz music that laid tunes within tunes; musics on top of musics; contradictory assemblages always intended to provoke dancing and animated physical gesture. Distractions from the labors of capitalism; labors that produce no capital for the Black Bodies coerced into work. Creative practices emerge in relation to the fuzzy impossibilities of being. In some ways, Black Life itself emerges in these places of performance: these predictive performances that suggest futures of technological interfaces and human impulses spliced and re-coded to allow for imaginative, creative re-purposing.

As example of this sort of creative address, consider Bonebreaking. In this decidedly Afrofuturist dance practice, performers treat the body as a malleable object, able to move beyond standard social recognitions. Here, the dancer demonstrates physical agency in an ability to bend their body and reform its energy in shapes of unlikely accord. And always, of course, in relationship to musical structures brought forth by recordings assembled by djs.

100

an afrofuturist exercise, part 2:

close your eyes

200 years from now - 2218

we are in a neighborhood - there is music; a party coming.

hear the sounds... ooh the sounds...

feel the vibe

note a detail

how does the afrofuture dance?

101

Afrofuturism Arrives Inherently Queer

How do aesthetic strategies of improvisation and citational collage predict a black posthuman able to navigate ever-increasing streams of data aggregation?

Actually, Black aesthetic structures move through processes of creative improvisation, designed to expand from continuous access to an archive of possibilities. Creativity in Black expressive cultures trades in this ability to innovate by citing myriad sources and arranging those contents in unusual and unanticipated manner. Cut and mix. The best improvisers hold the largest storehouses of information that they refer to: dropping a children's nursery rhyme into a piece about police brutality; cruising through gestures of classical ballet in the midst of a dance about trans lives and gun laws; referring to rhetoric from Angela Davis and Bootsy Collins in a sequence concerned with property values in Black neighborhoods. The mixture of sources and approaches to creative address speaks to and from the circumstances of Black life, and also underscore the ways that Black creativity emerges amid queer possibility.

These creative forms are built upon recyclings and reflections through unanticipated lines of flight; unanticipated and inherently queer in their conceptions of assemblage. Unexpected, odd, surprising - queer. Perhaps sexually ambiguous, but not necessarily so; maybe gender fluid in their citational surprises. Queer in the most basic mode of assembly: non-normative in exclamation and revelation.

These are rhizomatic assemblies - gathered by exploring the grounds spilling to and fro; perusing the connections and divergences according to the impulses that come forth amid always-changing circumstances. Black aesthetics exploring the unusual affiliations and marvelous speakings-to. Always already in motion, Afrofuturism is queerly aligned as an encounter with posthuman interference. Aligned with the distractions of data aggregation that accelerate the contemporary condition of continuous disembodiment, afrofuturism arrives queerly adjusted to affirm. Black performance builds directly from the space of disavowal

102

and displacement, and from the imperative of the collective voice. These are practices that encourage artists and accomplices to choose what you need from an endless stream of possibilities, but bend the information, the gesture, the sound toward a narrative that is of and for right now.

And bend it queerly, toward the *afrofuture*.

This bending could create a refraction that encourages participation in large data streams, with an intentionality that imagines a critical posthuman creativity, one wily and aware of the ends of humanism amid the possibilities of expressive reconfiguration.

Bending toward the *afrofuture* ~~qu~~##r.

close your eyes

300 years - 2317

focus on us - see us where we live

where on the planet are you?

imagine the city - where do you see it from?

in a neighborhood - music; party coming.

hear the sounds ... ooh the sounds ...

feel the vibe

note a detail

how do we get to the afrofuture?

103

We go back to imagine what could be next. This is a ‘what if’ sort of proposition, a riff on alternative alignments of capital and dance-making; the applied science of the physical embedded within the social; a doing enlivened by a being. Dancing situated as a local present that animates memories of deep compassion. To me, dance is often an act of compassion, a moving into an unknown space that can be enlivened by a generosity of memory. Africanist dance is a trust, at once physical and communal; it has to be recognised to be circulated, and its traces exceed its manifold emergences for dancers and witnesses alike. These lingering allusions to an inevitable social context bind dance to its presence and presents; its here and now. Afrofuturist allusions imagine ahead, toward an unknowable circumstance that may involve untested applications of science in technologies not yet developed.

In the Afrofuture, dance arrives as a memory of something personal and impossible; an emancipated dance of communion that can be entirely mediated and digitally exchanged. This is the dance that most everyone can engage somehow; the dance of the family transmitted anew. This eternally forward-looking dance accommodates new technologies—the LP, the CD, the video game, the hologram—to replenish communication among people. The Afrofuturist remains are pre-, pure- and post-human iterations of corporeal connectivity: dance born of a belief in the social essence of creativity.

Typically, Afrofuturism is narrated in terms of speculative science fiction laden with fantasy imagery of aliens and cyborgs; Funkadelic music and its progeny, the electronic, vocoded soundings of a digitised black soul; festooned costuming that references other-worldly space-travelling indigenous populations; and the ironic implications of dense cultural criticism projecting an impossible future rife with black corporealities cognisant of middle passages. Irony is surely a key component of how Afrofuturism achieves social traction. Common assumptions surrounding a future/presence of blackness might assume an assimilation that could render the black unrecognisable; a hue

104

among many without specific cultural imperatives.

Afrofuturism, though, assumes a tangible black affect present in an entirely mediated future; not a future without race, though one with an abeyance of racism; not a future without black ministries, though one with a release from the primitive-naïve analyses consistently associated with the black church; not a future without black subjectivity, but one that evades the inevitable yoke of subaltern status. Instead, it is a future of queer, trans and hetero-sexual black women engaged with the fabrication and deployment of technologies. But more than this; black women of all ages engaged with these technologies. Geeks, glamour-pusses, and ‘round the way girls’ alike. Athletes, nerds, shy boys, and wanna-be bangers, too. Grandparents, toddlers, middle-aged brothers on the cusp of senior status. How can we people—the drylongso—project ourselves into an Afrofuture with any vestige of the complexity that our dancing selves routinely engage? British theorist Kodwo Eshun and American artist DJ Spooky (Paul Miller) narrate the musical in Afrofuturism as breakbeat science, or rhythm science, which suggests the alignment of so-called hard scientific analyses—beats per minute, tiny differences in particular technologies of musical production, engagements with software and hardware, histories of invention and product creation—with the undeniably soft esoteric spaces of playful literary translation. As a concept, breakbeat science legitimises Africanist rhythmicity to post-Enlightenment doctrines of value. In writings, recorded explorations, and performances, breakbeat or rhythm science authors fast-forward to a somewhat obscure space where concepts of affect are defined by their digital coding, and still allowed to be mysteriously fun.

Cultural historian Alondra Nelson opened a productive intellectual space to consider Afrofuturism when she edited an important issue of *Social Text*, in which various authors explored the fact of black people living with tools of technology; how artists identify with Afrofuturism in order to resist the label of ‘nerd’; and the ways that an emergent

105

Afrofuturism could counter the negative ontological placement of blackness in Western modernity. Literary theorist Alexander Weheliye is especially eloquent in this latter motive, when he notes that ‘inscriptions of humanity in black culture provide particular performances of the human—singularities that always incorporate their own multiplicities.’ Weheliye notes that the performance of the human in black literature and music can mark ‘the boundaries and limitations of the human itself’—a capacity bound up in histories of capital, captivity, and labour. Drawing on black performance, Afrofuturists continually remark the boundaries of queer, freedom, and individuality within a group dynamic. This is because Afrofuturists have to refer to the group from which they teleport forward, even if only to productively disidentify.

7. Afrofuturism Changes Time

The Afrofuturist space shimmers in anticipation of a future always just beyond imagination. Afrofuturists demonstrate responsibility ‘towards the not-yet, towards becoming’ to create aspirational space that speaks to social ambitions enlivened by artmaking practice. This may be something like the queer utopia that theorist José Esteban Muñoz predicts, one that is always out of reach, in part because its value lies in its pursuit. Muñoz wonders about queerness as horizon, or queerness as an ideality; a horizon imbued with potentiality. Queerness as a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel ‘beyond the quagmire of the present’. Like Afrofuturist performance, Muñoz’s queer futurity imagines itself ahead toward possibility.

But Muñoz’s queer dance is ‘hard to catch’, while Afrofuturist performance arrives emphatically present and unavoidable. It creates archive in its most spectacular manifestations, leaving remains as provocative as its fantasy-laden imagery, but also in its social dances engaged by children and grandparents imagining forward by remembering older dances. Pace Schneider, its remains in terms of

106

body are processes and relationships; its values are created in the emergent archive of dance, and that archive tilts continually forward by referencing its past accumulations and improvising on their contents.

Speculation is an economic approach to building wealth based on analysis, conjecture, and risk. Afrofuturism participates in a speculative economics of black creativity that exceeds expectations of its disciplines or its standards. It surprises by its implication of the everyday within the technologically inflected future of black life. It imagines black corporealities as mainstream in futuristic iterations; it speaks of black lives as rich in nuance and availability. Afrofuturism deploys strategies to reflect on past actions and histories as we imagine new modes of computation and performative interactivity. In the Afrofuturist space, previous social exchanges are continuously referenced, in the service of a black pause. A black pause, where Afrofuturist remains reach multidirectionally, aligning both a particular and a situated possibility for social, familial, communal, technological, and of course, corporeal presence. A black pause that allows us to consider the impossible objects of social dance and, most importantly, an impossible, unalienated black subject in motion.

Because the Afrofuturequ##r revels in diversity

Let's end with a fiction.

107

TeleBrea

_in the afrofutur dance instruction is a solitary pursuit.

TeleBrea Roth’astein waved her hand in front of the sensor pad to open the door of the classroom assigned to Arts and Culture 732.5: Black Social Dance. She needed to check the visual imaging interfaces for her class, scheduled to meet for the first time that evening. TeleBrea was known by a global cohort of students to be a tough but approachable professor of an indeterminate age who encourage her students to understand black dance as a capacity and a strategy, more than a collection of dance forms or even a set of particular practices. Her interface sessions were smart and sweaty; a combination of discussion, provocation, integrated neural system participation, and some very old fashioned dancing. For tonight’s session she expected most of the 1500 enrolled university participants and some 80,000 witnesses, with 5 live presence students coming in person to dance in the neural-system participation classroom.

TeleBrea had only been teaching at this private university for a couple of years; well, teaching in person, that is. Long ago, she had run a successful neural distance dance academy of her own. Only recently, the university picked up the feed and broadcast her teaching as an elective ‘physical activity’ to its student network. it was just two years ago that she was asked to do in-person, on-site sessions. this was highly unusual for someone working in dance, and in particular, black social dance; to be invited to teach classes on campus. TeleBrea’s participation vectors had gone from the 1200 she used to have participating in her broke-down, home neuro-pulse network – and that had been operating at a truly slow 5 million clicks per second - to this

108

brave new world of nearly 100,000 students at a time plugged into a hyperfast 2 billion responses per second, full neural interface. She liked working in these advanced, newly-outfitted facilities, where at the tap of her temple-processor she could summon a team of IT support ready to troubleshoot whatever communication that might gone awry.

_in the future, dance classes are taught by way of distance neural interface as often as not.

honestly, though, telebrea didn't have much experience working with live students in the classroom. her home-teaching sessions had always been conducted without any students in proximity. and the distance neuro-pulse students tended to be awkwardly detached as they tried to perform the movements that she demonstrated, even if their pulse devices guided their gestures through tiny electric charges. distance dance lessons became popular when neural implants replaced wearable sensors; as dance teachers could generate movement within the very bodies of their students, telebrea, like other industrious dance teachers, jumped onto the bandwagon of impulse-driven instruction. the emergent technological interfaces allowed more and more people to take up dancing as a creative physical exercise. the plug and play method of having a talented dancer literally move you by way of her movements attracted all sorts of students.

_in the afrofutur, traditional black social dance is still taught body-to-body – at home.

telebrea's specialty was the old-timey black dances of the twenty-first century. she learned these dances from her father, when she had been

109

a little boy, his father, zekiel, came from a dancing family, and telebrea's parents had met at a dancing protest in new Detroit. zekeil and jadeena – telebrea's mother – danced all the protests that they could in the 2070s; at the resistance against central congo overdevelopment; at the rethinking repatriation affair of south florida; at the holistic happiness hoedown staged in chinese cote d'ivoire. when telebrea was born, zekiel and jadeena knew that he was no single-gender child, and they did the work to allow him to express the fluid gender identities that suited him. intra-gender children were not all that uncommon at the dawn of the twenty-second century; but that dispersed community didn't make anyone's lives easier. between five and eight years old, telebrea preferred to be recognized as a boy, and zekeil taught him the basics of turn of the last century b-boying as he could; he learned those from the old WW4 internet archives that you could still find hooked up to some church communication networks. he taught him the wind-jamming line dances that had been popular in the 2030s, those dances that had become popular in the great power failure decade, when most black folk lived with electricity only half the time. and he taught him the man-to-man be-a-man partner dances, that had developed in the megajails of the 2060s; those dances that alternated tender caress in hand dancing and full-bodied slam dancing, crashing one into the other to synthesized sounds of the mechanical apocalypse. telebrea enjoyed these styles, and the way that his father guided him through the movements the old way, by demonstrating, playing together, discussing the metaphor and meaning, and through full bodied, hand shoulder leg and foot contact.

telebrea learned her warrior dancers from her grandmother, tesladella roth'astean, her mama's mama, who had emigrated from argentina in the 2050s. tesladella taught her the long-time ago black power fertility and power dances – twerking and j-setting. learning these dances from her grammamere helped telebrea understand her feminine and social self as a capacity she had to practice. in the middle of a vogue drop, a movement she always did as part of her twerk

110

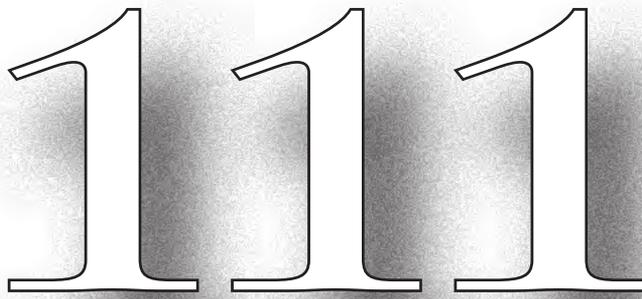
sequence, telebrea thought of herself as a badass girlboy, ready to kick the ass of racist bs worldwide and across time.

_in the afrofuture, some dancers claim mixed-gender, mixed-race blackness

Telebrea's social dance classes gained in popularity as he matured as a mixed-gender mediated personality. he began posting his 3-d visualization dance logs as a teenager, first alternating gender representation week by week and then day by day. she didn't want her gendershifting to be a trick, so she always chose a unified mode per day; something perhaps recognizably male, surreptitiously androgynous, but demonstrably female, or sometimes straight up fem-bot glamour puss. her glamour puss perona, while popular, took considerable time to generate, and Telebrea only worked that mode on occasion. Telebrea's claim to blackness, though never wavered.

in the afrofuture, neural attachments allow students to connect with instructors at at the level of musculature impulse.

The five on-site student teaching assistants freaked Telebrea out. they were young, hungry for movement, agile, and not very nice, she thought. of course they each had excellent technique, and could do pretty much anything that came their way. they were all hyperflexible, and a couple of them could dislocate their shoulders on command to perform the old 'mars-man' styles that blew up in the 2140s. the university assigned these teaching assistants to telebrea without her consultation, and they were paid with tuition remission and super fast neural connection interfaces. the teaching assistants provided an alternative physical narrative for the distance learners; students could alternate between the impulses that Telebrea emitted and those of any of the teaching assistants. Telebrea knew her dancing was infinitely



more nuanced than that of the TAs, but many of the course enrollees preferred to feel the spikes of energy cast by the younger dancers.

Teaching, Telebrea relaxed into remembering the dances and engaging their contours. She dipped, with subtlety and suppleness, carefully tending to the motions and their implications, narrating the histories as she had been taught them, and demonstrating their bounded weightiness, rhythmicity, and affect. Today she chose to focus on the oldest dance in her repertoire, a strangely free-floating, but rhythmic partner dance from the old days. Telebrea knew his black history, and he knew that this was a dance about the industrial prison complex, and the way that 21st century black youth would engage in extravagant gang dance battles, and how this dance was very popular as part of that practice. the dance called for a sort of weighted volition down and back, down and back with the legs, while the arms floated and pushed, gathered into loose fists, and the chest heaved in time to a soundscore of dogs barking and the old police sirens.

Telebrea danced, and the TAS looked bored. She knew that they would rather be doing their “bumping time” interface dances, the ones that gave full-body stimulation by neural feedback in response to slightest passing erotic thought. some folks thought of these new styles as just sex dances, that these new dances that interfaced young people did together in groups of 8 or 10 were nothing more than electronic orgies; they had nothing to do with dancing and little to do with black culture. Telebrea wasn't sure. maybe there was something in this group undulation that had emerged in a hook-up network between Oakland and South Memphis that told a story about black erotic connection? once, she switched on her feedback paradigm; this allowed her to feel the gestures that her students created, to better understand where the movement worked and, more commonly, where it didn't. sure enough, while most of her students were trying to capture the gestures she created, others were watching interface news feeds or chatting about music.

112

Telebrea did the unusual. She screwed up her face, clenched her fists, deepened her voice, and morphed into a male personae. “Come on now, wake up!” he said .. *“This is an important dance you need to know to understand black history! This is an old courtship dance that would be done by partners who wanted to get each other’s attention. Jack your legs, heave your chest, make a loose fist, and push up alongside your partner so you can dance in team. Let’s go now, this is it. It’s time to do the... running man!”*

113

_in this fiction, the afrofuture shimmers.

it forgets itself.

it animates.

it doesn't like all that it reveals.

it missteps.

*and it challenges us to rethink the extraordinary
capacity*

of black life

of bare life

of overwhelmed life

of life

of black life.

114

Thomas F. DeFrantz received the 2017 Outstanding Research in Dance award from the Dance Studies Association. He directs SLIPPAGE: Performance, Culture, Technology, a research group that explores emerging technology in live performance applications. He has taught at the American Dance Festival, ImpuseTanz, Ponderosa, and the New Waves Dance Institute, as well as at MIT, Stanford, Yale, NYU, Hampshire College, Duke, and the University of Nice. He contributed a voice-over for a permanent installation at the Smithsonian African American Museum. DeFrantz believes in our shared capacity to do better, and to engage our creative spirit for a collective good that is anti-racist, anti-homophobic, proto-feminist, and queer affirming.

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