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becoming undisciplined

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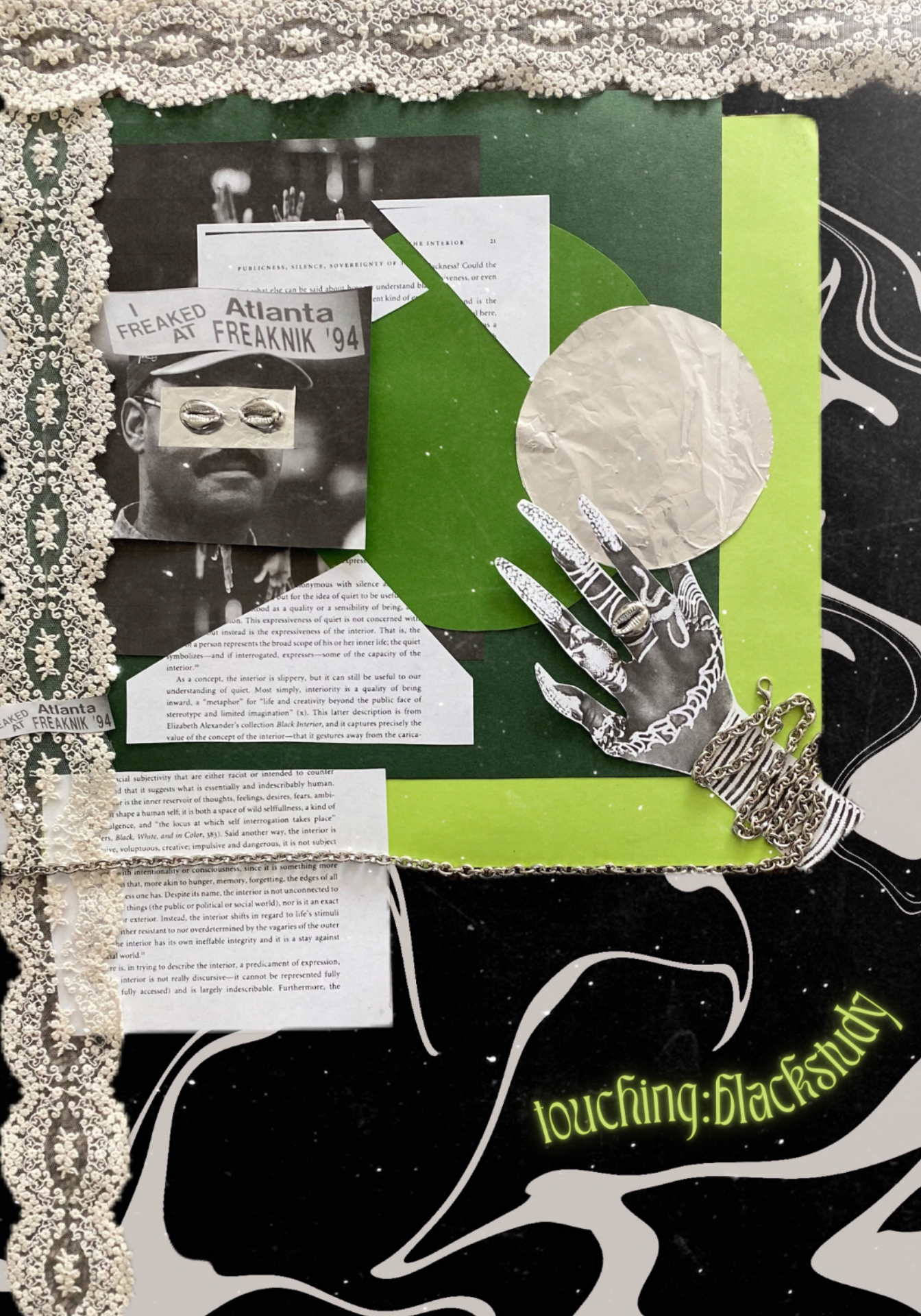
becoming undisciplined collective

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I FREAKED AT Atlanta FREAKNIK '94



FREAKED AT Atlanta FREAKNIK '94

As a concept, the interior is slippery, but it can still be useful to our understanding of quiet. Most simply, interiority is a quality of being inward, a "metaphor" for "life and creativity beyond the public face of stereotype and limited imagination" (x). This latter description is from Elizabeth Alexander's collection *Black Interior*, and it captures precisely the value of the concept of the interior—that it gestures away from the carica-

social subjectivity that are either racist or intended to counter... that it suggests what is essentially and indescribably human... the inner reservoir of thoughts, feelings, desires, fears, ambi... shape a human self, it is both a space of wild selffulness, a kind of... algence, and "the locus at which self interrogation takes place" (x). *Black, White, and in Color*, 383). Said another way, the interior is... ve, voluptuous, creative; impulsive and dangerous, it is not subject... with intentionality or consciousness, since it is something more... that, more akin to hunger, memory, forgetting, the edges of all... ess one has. Despite its name, the interior is not unconnected to... things (the public or political or social world), nor is it an exact... or exterior. Instead, the interior shifts in regard to life's stimuli... ther resistant to nor overdetermined by the vagaries of the outer... e interior has its own ineffable integrity and it is a stay against... al world."

ere is, in trying to describe the interior, a predicament of expression, interior is not really discursive—it cannot be represented fully (fully accessed) and is largely indescribable. Furthermore, the

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edited by the becoming undisciplined collective

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becoming undisciplined collective

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introduction

You're probably wondering how we got here, into this situation.

See.

We have been to the sunken place. For graduate students, being disciplined into institutional processes of knowledge production is a core function of our professional training. Given our intellectual and political commitments, we often simultaneously try to resist forms of disciplining and other harmful demands the university makes of academics — especially those of us for whom academia was not built for. This period of our (inter)disciplinary training is also a moment of ongoing racial, gendered, and ecological violence; of precarity and crisis.

We recognize the need to reimagine together. What can transformative knowledge making look like in our own practices? A desire to acknowledge this question and its underlying tensions in community with each other inspired *becoming undisciplined: a zine* in which fifteen black writers, artists, and/or graduate students shared essays, poetry, art, and photography.¹

We have been faced, since then, with ongoing struggle for black liberation in the midst of a global COVID-19 pandemic that has exacerbated existing social inequalities. This reality has had immense impact on the lives of black people. For many of us black folks who study aspects of black life, the multiplied challenges of antiblackness during a pandemic have taken a toll on us in ways sometimes difficult to name.

So.

We give ourselves space to reflect, check-in, mourn, reconnect, be curious, and just be. Especially after all the past few years have brought, taken, and renewed.

We share what we feel must be shared about living and studying black (gender, sexuality, intimacy, and life) in worlds of crisis.

We offer this zine with hopes that it may encourage discernment — physical, intellectual, emotional, more — and as a space of affirmation, release, a place to vent

scream cry laugh think, in whatever form feels necessary.

We have found it hard to sustain ourselves within institutions and environments built on disregard. Like many before us.

We honor the reality that black people have long lived, touched, connected, and imagined otherwise within spaces of neglect. That many of us will continue to do so out of necessity. That our ways and experiences of doing so are too often shaped by violence and hardship.

We know, anyway anyhow, that we deserve to sit with ourselves, with that interior realm of us, black people, that Kevin Quashie explores as quiet: “a metaphor for the full range of one’s inner life—one’s desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears.... the interior—dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty.”²

In that spirit.

We invited black graduate students, independent scholars, and artists to share their creations. Our call was a prompting set of questions, including:

Black touch, intimacy, desire, study:

How does black sexual knowledge help us map new ways of being in and after pandemic times? What does the disobedience of black scholarship, pedagogies, and praxis teach us about intimacy, desire, and touch? What is it like to do black study while it is more dangerous to touch and connect in familiar ways? How might a focus on touch help us think through feelings of disconnection: from black study, life, and being?

Understanding antiblackness, violence, crisis:

What happens to our understanding of antiblackness if we put sexualities at the center? How might we recognize the centrality of gender and sexuality as lenses through which to study the devastating and violent impact of white supremacy and structural violence? How may centering black feminist and queer practices help us think through, about, and outside of pandemic frameworks?

Connecting to our life/work:

How are people sitting with exhaustion, uncertainty, and violence? How are these impacting motivation for / the urgency of our efforts to affirm black life and sexuality? What is it like doing “the work” of affirming black sexuality while that work is commodified? How do anti-work, critical and abolitionist university studies, or other perspectives inspire alternative visions of black study?

The contributors' responses are lovely, touching upon these questions elsewhere, beyond, in different ways — embodying the complexity and depth of black erotic touch and intimacy within and despite antiblackness through written and artistic expression.

We invite you to get into this, these expressions of selves and worlds that we have been able to collect here. Feel free to touch yourself. Be touched. Blackstudy is waiting, always, ready.

becoming undisciplined collective

Notes

1. Quashie, Kevin Everod. *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 6.
2. becoming undisciplined collective, ed. *becoming undisciplined: a zine*. (UC Santa Barbara: Department of Feminist Studies, 2019). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7c16q31w>.

Things i imagined

Lexxus Edison

Lexxus Edison is a third-year graduate student at UC Santa Barbara in the English PhD program pursuing an emphasis in Black Studies and Feminist Studies. Lexxus' research areas include African American Literature and Culture, Black Performance Studies and Creative Writing. Her research examines 20th-21st century African American autobiographies as a literary mode that highlights the nuances of everyday livelihood that accompanies the struggles and joys of Black people while focusing on the intra- and inter- racial antagonisms. Her research aims to understand how Black people engage in writing autobiographies and the importance of Black people's autobiographies. Lexxus is also a creative writer, poet, and performer. She is very committed to her community and the work she engages in. She is a graduate intern for Office of Black Student Development (OBSD), TA for Black Studies and English, a co-chair for the Committee of Graduate Students (CoGS) in the English Department.

Saw things i imagined

i saw things i imagined
shadows

shadows lurking in the corner

i saw things i imagined
jumpin' at me

grabbin a hold of me

i saw thing i imagined
de spirits weighing me down

weighing me down forcin me to drown

i saw things i imagined
me captive tied in chains

things i imagined

Enslavement

things i imagined

Emancipation Proclamation

things i imagined

Jim Crow— the dirty south, the good north

Emmett Till

was all a dream

i dreamed and imagined by brownness

There was no such thing as a black body with a

crown

Just a thorn in my foot/ a needle in my side/ blood falling from my brain

Head hung in shame

On a poplar tree

Dere he

Crucifixion only happens in my dreams

P.S. I Loved You Once, I Still Do:
A Performance Installation

Brianna Alexis Heath

Bri Heath is a dancer, writer and cultural organizer based in Atlanta, GA.

I. Procession

A Woman descends from a whirlwind, lands onto the earth from a past, present now. Laden in a purple, babydoll dress that allows her breasts to roam free, a large translucent hat with an even larger lavender bow, she walks briskly through doors, upstairs and toward her garden, her h(e)aven while a long, gold cloth—that names her sisters, now ancestors—trails behind her. Etta James wails a tune that has all too long been the cry of Black womxn since 1619. “Why don’t you trust in me when things go wrong? Cling to my daddy, and I’ll be strong. We can get along, we can get along, if only you trust in me” (James). Her rhythm and blues notes mix with the wind slipping through the trees, as the Woman’s feet shuffle underneath her. She stomps and rocks against the pavement as Etta’s voice fades into another woman’s breath. She says “When I think about being...womanhood in this moment, when I think about pleasure, democracy, and love, I think that those words have to be verbs...” (Monroe). The Woman continues to dip her body in and out of rhythms, using her feet to shift her weight, and deciding how much she will give in to gravity. “They can’t be static. They have to be dynamic. It has to...you have to think about these things as action. Like, love has to be a verb. It has to be something that we’re...doing redoing and remaking and rethinking and...” (Monroe). In between dips the Woman pours water onto the pavement. Water is a sign of life. It is the portal through which life is incubated; the main ingredient in rituals where we are called into being. It is the portal through which her ancestors escaped this life to meet God. Where they made a decision that it was better to love us from the Otherside.

She said “When we come from that place of love, and then when we think about what brings us joy...and keeping our eyes toward Joy, and moving in ways that bring joy, then we enact pleasure. And then from that place I think about creating democracy knowing that democracy is always in negotiation and it’s always in flux” (Monroe).

II. Pleasure

I’m not going to lie to you. I’m tired. It’s been a year. On those days where I was gripping my heart and holding my breath, fearing more news of another sister’s death, the love of my Sisters held me up. We gave each other space to cry, got our asses in the streets, organized how we were going to “keep our feet on these white folks’ necks” a saying expressing our intended political, social, and communal strategies to make sure not another one of us would die by the hands of white supremacy, patriarchy, misogynoir, or capitalism. Our conversations about the 2020 elections, mixed with our plans to purchase dildos, and our exchanging photos of folx we deemed fine and sexy. We laughed and cried and cussed while we laughed and cried. We talked about orgasms and our favorite books and the deafening silence of our homes during quarantine. We longed to hold the ones we loved, to lovingly whisper sweet secrets in

their ears. We desired sex and Spirit and community and love. She said, “The question that I have for God, for the world, for myself is...where can I find love, where can I look for love? I think it is the joy, the pleasure that sustains us. To me those are super elements. Like...we need them, like...we can’t survive without them. It’s like water. That’s what love is to me” (Blade).

III. Democracy

“Nobody, and I literally mean, nobody loves Black women except for Black women.” This is what a friend of mine said to me during a recent phone conversation. The statement pierced my heart when news report after news report carried with it the death of Black women and femmes by the hands of those who thought it easier to kill us than to love us. Yet, in the wake of horror and injustice, Black womxn continue to create space for ourselves to experience joy and pleasure, enacting a “politics of articulation” to borrow from Evelyn Hammonds where we show up for one another to heal by retelling our stories for the our sakes, for the love of us. The Woman finishes pouring the last drop of water from the vase. She sits in a chair that’s sunk deep into the soil, as she drapes her long gold quilt over her lap. R&B sensation, Brandy Norwood’s song “I Wanna Be Down” blasts in the background. Her laughs-turned-cries- turned-laughs mix into Brandy’s proposition elucidating a tune similar to Etta’s: “I would like to get to know if I could be/ the kind of girl you could be down for / ‘Cause when I look at you I feel something / tell me/ That you’re the kind of guy I could make / a move onnnnn” (Norwood). She rocks her shoulders as she weaves her quilt, stretching her long arms up above her head and back down to the earth. She takes the long needle and inscribes “trust Black womxn” in the air. “What would it take for the world, for America to trust us/me?” she says with her laugh. How much grief must I endure before you see me? Don’t you know that in the freedom of my hips, and the surrender of my closed eyes and tossed hair lies your sacred democracy?

IV. Orneriness

The Woman labors in the soil to prepare for ritual, draping the tree and bushes in flowers, hanging photos of Black, cis, queer and trans women and girls from glitter-gold ribbons, lighting candles, and spraying perfume into the air. She claims space for Black feminine energy and memory in the middle of campus between the lecture hall and the chapel, between the academy and the church, between two institutions that have often been silent, complicit in the death of her sisters. She randomly catches a glimpse of the cross, carved into the towering piece of stone above her head. The sun shines gloriously, and the tree gently sway as if to approve her work. She smiles as other Black womxn students pass the site, gasp and say, “Is this your work? It’s so beautiful! Tell me more!” Their approval means the world to her. She labors for them. She carries this in her heart as people begin gather at the beginning of

the procession. She motions them to come closer, to commune with her in the garden, to witness up close. She turns up Etta's voice as it reverberates off the buildings, and even marks a path of water hoping they would be curious enough to step in. Yet, they remain at a safe distance, arms crossed, lips pressed, eyes squinted. As she pours the last drop of water from the vase, the Woman chooses to retreat back into her h(e)aven, sits in her rickety chair, and begins to knit.

In her 2016 lecture, "Colored Orneriness: A Concerto in Four Movements," Dr. Emilie Townes theorizes the power of radical love for one's community and nation in what she terms "colored orneriness." By invoking one's embodied lived experience of faith and "doing one's first works over," we can live up to what it means to be responsible to our communities, to learn the very meaning of democracy and enact it. "Colored orneriness" is an attitude, a swag, a womanist methodology filled with possibilities, a divine calling to answer God's "what if's?" A call to "not perform a heteronormative drag show and resist [labor] that does not resemble reflection or faithfulness" (Townes). The Woman enacts "colored orneriness" as she walks through campus, pours water, knits in ecstasy, and laughs-cries as a ritual to reclaim the land back for its rightful owners, for those whose blood was spilled in its construction. She builds a site of Black feminine energy in memory of Black queer and trans womxn as an ornery labor of love, an act of resistance buffered by the sweet, soundtrack of classic, Black R&B love songs. She asks, "What does it mean for Black womxn to have marched to the polls this election cycle and cast their ballot for a country that has never loved them back? What does it mean to enact radical love for oneself, one's nation as an act of political resistance?"

V. God

Another woman's voice emerges from the speaker. She says,

"I feel like people use God to minimize or contain Black womxn's experience. If you think about church politics, in my opinion, it's used to control how people exist. I feel like, for Black women, when it comes to God, I feel like they get don't get the credit they deserve for the work they have done, or they get dismissed from the conversation. But, God for me is also outside of the church, more so than inside the church. Like...when I protest, I feel like that is my ministry, involving myself in the work of my people. I feel like that is where God exists. God exists in the actual work, and that is where love exists as well. 'Cause if you truly love people, you will do what you can to support them by whatever means necessary. And, if you love God, and you say that God exists within you, you don't put limitations on who you show that love to, by deciding who deserves love and who doesn't" (Collins).

The Woman restfully sits and knits under the safety of the tree's shade, under the

shadow of God's creation while rocking to the sounds of Aretha Franklin's "Day Dreaming." She enacts a theology of pleasure by embodying the truth that God is indeed grieved by the death of Black womxn, that God is indeed a god of Justice, that rest and pleasure is indeed God-ordained.

VI. Recessional

The Woman stands up from her chair and drapes the gold cloth around the tree. She adjusts her hat, leaving her leaning chair and frazzled yarn and needle behind. She finally peaks from beneath her hat and mask labeled "ICON" to see the people gathered around the tree. Unbeknownst to them, she smiles and begins to feel the rhythms of Brandy, Etta, and Aretha enter once again into her hips and spine. Her work is finished; she grabs her shoes and speaker, and pimp-walks away, down the stairs, disappearing into the courtyard before her spirit is whisked away.

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Image © Brianna Alexis Heath, courtesy of the artist



Image © Brianna Alexis Heath, courtesy of the artist



Image © Brianna Alexis Heath, courtesy of the artist

RAW. AN ERO-IMAGINATION.

Alex Cunningham

Alex Cunningham (she/her) is a writer, dancer, sexuality educator, erotic archivist and scholar from Chicago, Illinois. She studies as a Ph.D. Candidate in African and African Diaspora Studies with a portfolio in Women's and Gender Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. She is also a 2019 John Money Fellow for Scholars of Sexology at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction. Broadly, her work explores Black women's erotic cultural production as insurgent sites of (be)coming, (re)imagination and vision for Black sexuality studies' theory-making on pleasure and liberation. Her dissertation muses on how Black women touch, articulate and move pleasure in their daily lives through sensual, quotidian desire and practice in the midst of global forces—digital and material—that seek to negate them. Alex's work has also been published in the Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships and becoming undisciplined: a zine.

As the great pimp and poet David Banner and Jazze Pha once crooned, “we should be touching.” In the raw, or uncut version, what they really say is, “we should be fucking!” They’re right, you know.

I like my vegetables raw.

Sometimes, I like dick raw when it’s in me.

Call it farm to table.

Unfiltered, unprocessed and unbothered.

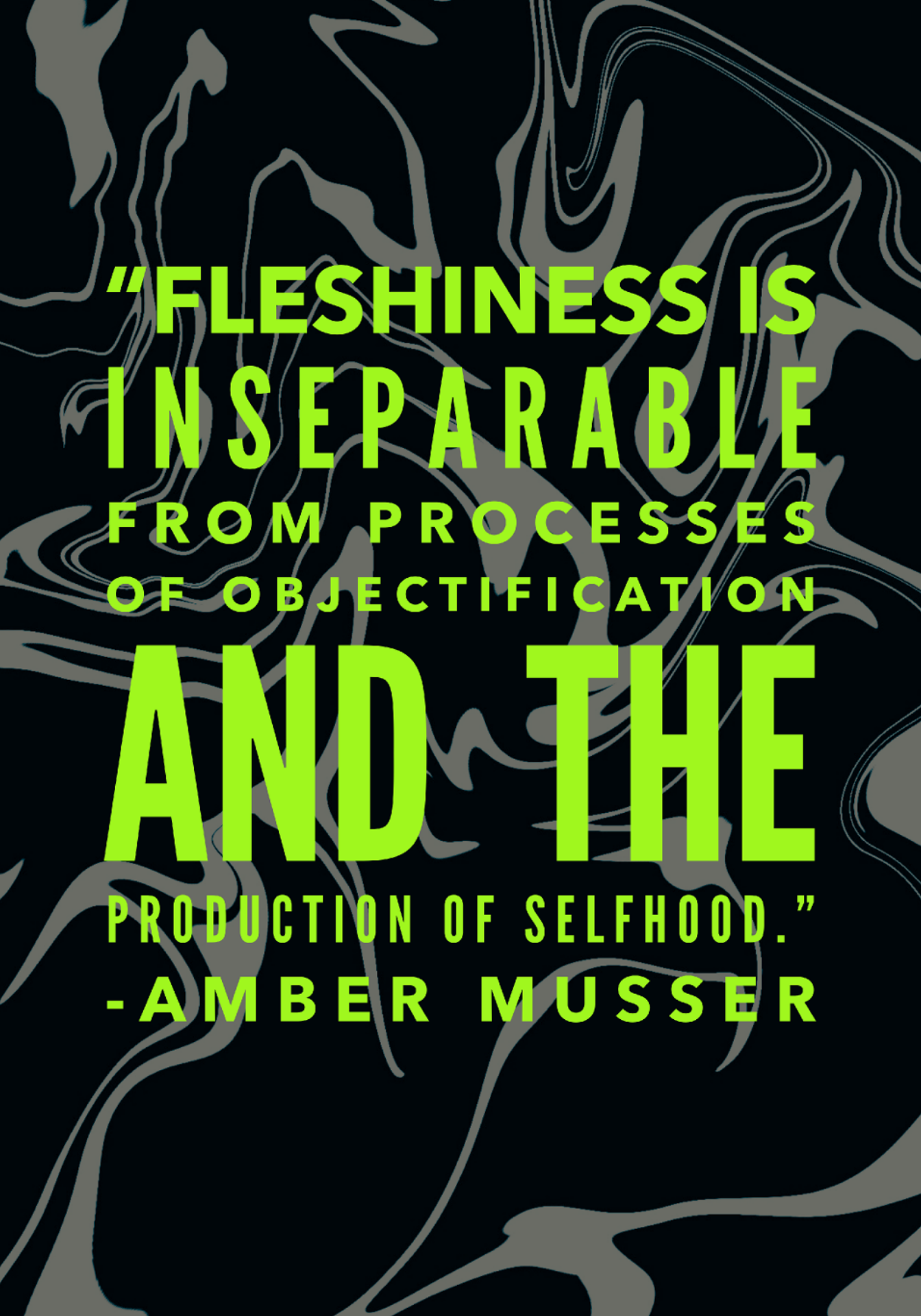
I am grateful for the potential growth that comes from my explicitness. My desire to strip the parts of myself that are in need of transformation is a beautiful, organic choreography. With every move, I tease a piece of my falling armor as I slip into better boundaries that fit this new version of me. I ride my alignment into a new universe of potential guided by my willingness to go *there*. Activated chakras and all—carrying my pain and my pleasure—I pillow talk with my rawness as a way to honor my emotions. My integrity. I could not do this work any other way; it always felt too arduous.

We should be touching in Black Studies. I want to be raw. I want to be fucking with so much. I want to be fucking shit up. I want the slow, delicious synergy of how I dance and fuck around to shine through in my writing. I wish I did not feel a need to hide that this is my style, or me. I so desperately want all that build up—the flirting, the practice, the improvisation, the crowdedness, the affirmation, the stickiness, the exchange and the aftercare—to be transparent in my lifework. Ultimately, I want that rawness of going through the motions and creating, from the most sensuous and alive places within me, to be a catalyst, rather than a shame or an oddity, in my field.

I want to do all the things that feel like dreams. One day it will happen where everything that feels juicy, right, wet and delicious just drips from the pages. My pages. I pray that my work feels like permission for someone else to try, even if only for their eyes. I want the girls and the guys... I want folks at the conferences to clutch their pearls at the audacity of it all. Why? Well, I think we deserve to have space, a kiki, community, fun and play—as bare minimums. I work towards it in my lifetime.

What if imagination is at the foundation of our work, might rawness be a pillar holding us up?? I want rawness to be a resource to keep us, as a community, together and sane. I want us to touch—our bodies, our spirits and each other (with consent). I want that to be done in a raw, that is, vulnerable way. I wish us healing towards our bodies and our teaching. The way we interact with our students, mentors and our approach to the meaning of “the work,” especially as it undermines our quality of life, even if we feel temporary comfort for our brilliance, certainly needs raw imagination.

I advocate for an unapologetic fucking around—a raw, imaginative praxis—that lends itself to a sensual sightedness for the field and for life. Perhaps it is an article soon to come, maybe not. The point of the matter is to live by what our bodies tell us, if only we can pause long enough to listen.



**"FLESHINESS IS
INSEPARABLE
FROM PROCESSES
OF OBJECTIFICATION
AND THE
PRODUCTION OF SELFHOOD."
-AMBER MUSSER**

Orchid, the name of today

Melaine Ferdinand-King

Melaine is a writer, poet, curator, and thinker from Brick, New Jersey. She currently lives in Providence, RI, where she works as a graduate student in Africana Studies at Brown University. She is usually always thinking about forms of love & affection, funny things, survival, and the need to positively create against the cult of negative realism.

I confronted a rainbow snake
Not here on this earth exactly

Remembering that I was of the land that “found” the gold
I saw the black bovine and the lions in the cove
Negro nations and galactic love obsessions
seeds and soil and metal and power
Has a lot to do with my now pains and wounds
And why I’m on the edge of my mind

Too far from The Equator
Too close to tracks and belts
I’ll sing out another sour tune
Grab the children and swing them back down
To The South and let them sweat
I want fruit from real trees
And clean water from a cold spout
I want the heat too
And to see windstrokes fleeing rays of sun
I want to go where we already are and always been
And already fit in
And run run

I should retire close to the line
Bring decisions to vision
Enjoy days tropical and mild
Relish in ages old, wrinkly, and fine
Drown out laughter and ripe next to kin
I have many reasons to request another season
What about that day
That sounds like a heaven you will touch
Inevitably is the hour if asked the time
And feels like free peoples doing their things
“Tomorrow”, a field of fragile flowers
I think we just might be

I Love To Hear My Magpie Sing

Jasmine Lomax

Jasmine Lomax (she/her) is an educator, poet, performer, and events coordinator at Hugo House in Seattle, WA. She received her MFA from Spalding University and has been or will be featured in: Fourth River Review, The Sante Fe Literary Review, Peach Velvet Mag, Sundress Publications, and Winter Tangerine. Jasmine's first book, I Am The Final Girl, is in a furious state of being made.

When Jasmine isn't busy ticking away at the computer, she enjoys reading, swimming, tending to her spiritual studies, and the occasional bout of crying over fictional characters with her fiancé.

even (and especially) when his voice is three octaves too high

cracking from joy
on purpose

(he jettisons into the sky all the time —
life is a burden but not his).

my magpie floods our nest with trinkets.
our cabinets are fit to burst from his trove
of Flaming Hot Cheetos and ramen;

on the way in
or out

his hoard of sheathed swords by the door

where i will sometimes trip
over one if i'm not looking

(i am often not looking)

my magpie, by the grace of his stilted legs

lifts off from his feet like a swan,
twirls in the air from room to room

i keep no cage for my magpie for he knows me
most; my face, the inkblot that drips

down his memory —

(i love my magpie and my magpie loves me).

Xir

Joshua K. Reason

Joshua is currently a doctoral student and William Fontaine Fellow in Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Their research combines performance, ethnography, and geography to detail the material and affective registers of Black queer and trans life in the Americas. Outside of work, they can be found trying out vegan recipes and watching too much reality television.

I gave Them my body, and They made my mind cum.

Control is my safe space and my trauma response. I am notorious for knowing what I want, and not being afraid of expressing those desires. I perform control because that is what gets me through my 9-5; the university demands a level of poise and rigor that I have perfected throughout nearly 7 years of occupying this space. Control feels like second nature, like survival, like chronic need. It sounds like commanding a room with the eloquence of my speech, the depth of my experience, and the abnormality of my presence. Knowing how I am marked, as Black and (gender)queer, has allowed me to experiment with how I show up in my academic life. From shy and unassuming to flamboyant and confrontational, I embody the desires, fears, pleasures, and pains that one might expect the Black queer body to hold. However, my ability to control the scene, to switch up my (re)presentations on a dime, fucks with folks. I may give the girls emo sad boi vibes during class on Monday, and come to the department event on Friday with a full set of nails and one of my many rompers. This aesthetic variance only scratches the surface of my experiments in transmuting the self. The register in which I decide to engage in class is also carefully curated: the tenor in which I speak, what and when I decide to contribute, who I choose to be in conversation with. These are all choices that I make for the sake of self-preservation and self-discipline, a refusal to give all of myself because, quite frankly, I don't know these people like that to have them all up in my business. I rarely break that script, but when I do it tends to be the result of my need for some form of primal release. I surprise myself with what comes out of those moments...

I gave body. mind. cum.

Ambitious. Intense. Well-trained. I am known by many names, but none of them feel more like home than *submissive*. I don't submit easy; even when I am outside of formal space, I carry my controlling nature as a safeguard from unwanted interactions. There are few folks capable of bringing me to my knees, bending me to their will, but when I do encounter them I become a symphony of visceralities and guttural utterances. These folks elide all sense, reason, and desire for control, the very things that have come to anchor me in this world. So when I came across Xir on Instagram, drawn in by the depth of Their melanin and the soft dominance of Their demeanor, I knew I wanted my first time to be with Them. The amount of time They take to curate a scene, to bring both Their submissives and viewers into a fantasy that is as carnal as it is mental, captivated me. Mummification. Rigging. Hypnosis. Fire Play. The range of Their expertise paired with the intentionality of Their practice made entrusting Them with my control an easy decision...

I gave Them mind.

When Xir laid my head to rest on the pillow, only to flog me into oblivion shortly

after, I lost all sense of space, time, and movement. My consciousness flickered in and out of knowing the agreed upon scene: it was still light outside, I was in an apartment on the floor, and I was bound to myself with a rope. The only movement I could sense was the moment of impact between Their tools and my flesh. As soon as I sensed a rhythm or sense of comfort, They would switch up the pacing of Their strokes and the targets on my body. After They finished with a flogger, They would trace my body with a metal instrument to see where I was most tender, and where I could be pushed further. Equal parts torture, care, and ecstasy, I vividly remember those interludes between beatings. More than a domination of the body, Xir blessed me with a domination of the mind...

I gave Them cum.

I asked Xir to train my hole. As someone who tends to take on a more active role in sex (due to expectations of how my Black body should fulfill the libidinal desires of others), I rarely have the opportunity to bottom. I admire those who manage to take all shapes and sizes of dick into them, and I aspire to expand the limits of my own body in that regard. When Xir inserted the first toy inside of me, a small metal butt plug, I adjusted pretty quickly. But when They added the vibrations of a wand that had been secured to my ass and positioned at the tip of the plug, I immediately became wet. Never had I been invited to connect with my internal vibration before, but in an instant, Xir took me inside of myself. Together we explored the interiority of my desires, which grew deeper and deeper as our session went on...

I gave Them body.

The warmth of Xir's body against mine. The debrief as to how I experienced my first time. The short walk with Their dog that we took on the way to my car. All of these forms of aftercare caressed my body in the wake of Their consensual abuses to my flesh. The welts on my skin were a reminder that, even if only for a couple of hours, I allowed myself to be Theirs. And the tender moments of care that They showed me were an intentional release of my body from the tight spaces and unnatural poses They had put me in. While I came into this session wanting to give up control, I left with a more robust understanding of my body's potential, and what it takes for me to reach it. That looks like feeling safe enough to surrender, a structure of feeling that is both high risk and high reward. While I still don't trust regular folks enough to lean into my submissive side on a daily basis, I find solace in knowing that I can turn to folks like Xir to exercise that freedom.

I gave. I gave. I gave.



Image © Chazmen Sonique (Instagram: chazmensonique; houseofsonique), courtesy of the artist.

The Consensual as Energy and Condition

Savage.Seraphim (Ashley S.)

Ashley S or Savage, whichever you decide is appropriate, is an artist and more importantly a human being that doesn't have it figured out but is willing to try anyway.

Unfinished thoughts and reflections on what “the consensual” relationship is between an artist, that uses the power of the erotic as sexual energy to imagine and express using the body as tool, and a viewer in space. Different from the actions of physical sexual intercourse, using the erotic in the form of sexual energy that can be perceived as sex-appeal, suggestive or sexual in different dimensionality of space— I was curious about what is the continuum of dynamics that consciously/unconsciously create a relationship of giving and receiving in many contexts: learning, existing, communication.

The initial curiosity of what I’m identifying as ‘the consensual’ came by way of introduction to “The Wheel Of Consent” by Dr. Betty Martin. It is a diagram that uses a 4 quadrant visualization to explain the sexual negotiation of taking, allowing, serving and accepting. I then cross referenced that with personal disposition (personality) and color of character diagram. The intersection of these works lead me to creating a method to sense what I’m terming “consensual energy,” which I define as the way in which we utilize sexual energy (temperament) in relation with/to others, consciously or not, to create meaning for self and others. Mapping one’s consensual energy often (as it can change with time and geography) can help erotic performers and the erotically curious locate their capacity for pleasure, arousal, and dominance amidst violence and projection.

Unfinished landings on the visualization of “the consensual”:

- It’s an energy so it can be explained through color/light.
- There is an X-axis — that indicates the range between hovering energy and penetrative energy.
- There is a Y-axis — that indicates the relationship between the source of the energy and the response to the source.
- What creates this continuum is overlaying the frameworks of “consent” (from “The Wheel of Consent”) and “perception” (color of character) and the nature of how consent works in “unintelligent” life forms like nature (plant, wind, fire, ice).
- The result is a continuum tool that helps to locate “the consensual” energy of a person’s condition to learn, exist and also to communicate. The hope is that this tool can help them to better identify the energetic conditions that create consensual relationships with self and others that are flexible and malleable to create synergy towards equitable, constructive, and meaningful creativity.

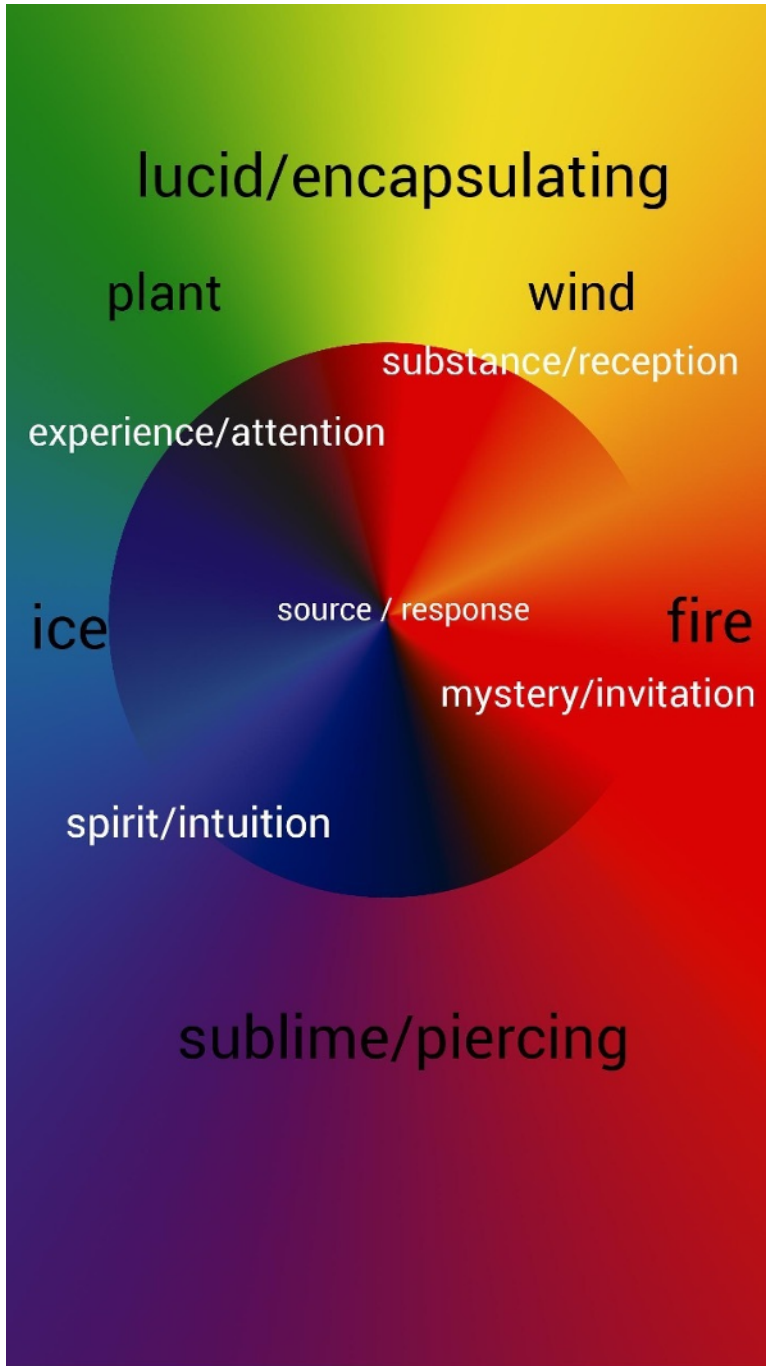
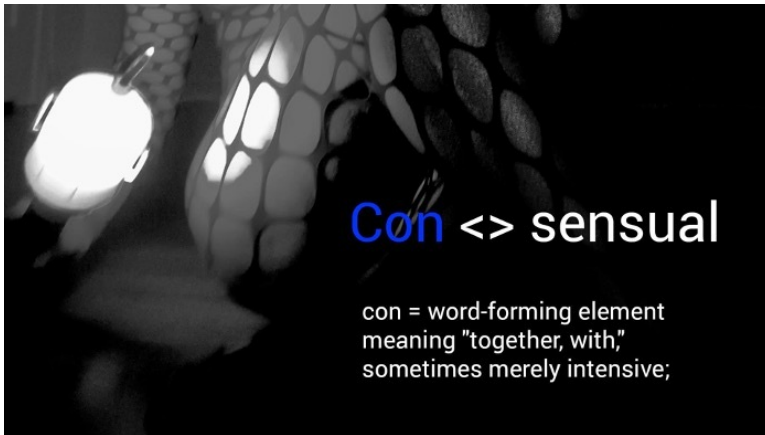


Image © Savage.Seraphim/Ashley S., courtesy of the artist



Images © Savage.Seraphim/Ashley S., courtesy of the artist



**CUM
FONDLE
GRIND
FINGER
STROKE
PRESS**



**SPANK
TOUCH
CARESS
LICK
FUCK
CREAM**

to feel.

Amoni Thompson-Jones

Amoni Thompson-Jones (she/her) is a poet and scholar whose work explores Black girlhood, visual theory, and Black feminist studies. Amoni is a PhD candidate in the Department of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Prior to UCSB, she graduated with a BA in Comparative Women's Studies and a minor in Creative Writing from Spelman College, a historically Black women's college in Atlanta, GA. Amoni grew up in Lumberton, NC and is continually shaped by the rich creative traditions of her home in the Black rural South. Her dissertation explores how Black girls' visual and material cultures demonstrate the value of the interior, self-possession, and Black spatial practices. Her work has been published in The Black Girlhood Studies Collection: Imagining Worlds for Black Girls, becoming undisciplined: a zine, and Visual Arts Research. When Amoni isn't writing, she's somewhere reading poems in the sun, playing catch with her grumpy Boston Terrier named Bray, or finding new restaurants to try with her love, Casey.

there is a poem
waiting
in the space where your breath meets mine

a poem about salt
and skin
and quiet

touch craves us
chest against chest
a meeting of flesh
that exists
beyond ourselves

grip

tongue

tight

warm

feel

unravel

the span of your hold
a gentle
landing place

you gather time
with your fingers
spread them open
and still
to show me
nothing felt is ever lost

instances(breath)

Jordan Victorian

Jordan Victorian is a writer and educator interested in black, queer, feminist, and cultural imagination. Jordan is a phd candidate in feminist studies at UC Santa Barbara and has shared writing in becoming undisciplined: a zine and GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies. Jordan is currently dreaming, somewhere.

/one/

knew not your kind could breathe : even : had the mechanics
: you : take in the world : taste : the weather : you have
taste? : articulate : a record spell antidote : oh not every
record is : an antidote : you have to spell : your breath
out : in no uncertain terms : maybe say less : and : hear
that : ?

/two/

only one breath you take
you take it all you can
do
take it again
you
take it again
you steal it
all you can
did
steal
you
stole
all of you
a
way
it's only right

/one/

side:

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side:

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/two/

educated guesses on the origin:

- word search
 - how delightful
- connect the
- stitches
 - tied to
 - 'dehiscence' (cypher?)
 - meaning: wound (archaic?)
- blanks
 - nonlethal
- morse code
 - hieroglyphic, hiss
- sounds of-

/one/

walked so you _ could run this
shit into the ground _ hell the whole
 continents _ getup gone bad girl good
 bye _ I see why no place is here
 on the surface _ for a child who moves
stillness folding in beneath _ colliding into
broke apart at the seam _ precipitating shifts like
you can't even see but feel _ the magnitude
a lot of people will _ be scared if you need
the easiest thing to do _ because the surface
 i hear is like _ to put it in perspective
 the peel of an apple _ may as well bite
for now still here holding _ maybe the blood as it runs
you down chin dripping juice _ will remind you
oh what it's like to be sweet _ how you are

/two/

___ you could run ___
___ shit, the ground is hell ___
___ bye! [laughter] I see why ___
___ now stop. I do it for you ___
___ see, ___
___ not them still on surface. I mean ___
___ but ain't no place there beneath ___
___ now you can see the people, that's easy ___
___ but did you want ___
___ to ? ___

[transmission disrupted]

/one/

black fell over the horizon
and the sun followed
reduced to a fact
of blankness shelved
and for the record,
life a culture a body
an open archive
for oblivion only
in the best of ways
and culture served
the people not the other
way around circumscribing
the point the living

still black flew through
the wind in specks
of chalk and dust
wrapped the body
and earth cracked open
to screams breathing
chests suspended animation
black frozen

hetero
porno
iso
tropic
heat
on my tongue
relieved

/two/

upon further reflection:
i see why them
damned continents
got the fuck
and left us here
in, for
the first place
get the fuck
go on
out of here
you go on

/one/

back...
wherever this is
ain't all that
it seems
there's been a
misunderstanding
on the standing
again.
again:

/two/

_ can't be a singular
expression of _ self
so
_ have to come back again
back again
come again come
come again and:

/one/

If you want to
be, breathe again:
say
 (say, say, say)
the word,
 spell it out
the world,
 on your tongue
letters collapse
 jumbled speech
knit your tongue taught
 speech therapy,
untangle after-ward,
 sing, moan, say.

Now the province:
 (nothing else)
everything all black
everywhere at once.

/two/

If you want to	
you may not	be ready
yet	
when you are	i will be here
until then	i will be here
still, open arms	weapon, the world
a quiet defense	we may be.

//

reminders:

(weather)

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

(dehiscence)

Fred Moten, "Black Op"

(hieroglyphic)

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"

(sound of)

Solange Knowles, "Sound of Rain"

(continents)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: *M Archive: After the End of the World*

(can't be)

Solange Knowles, "Can I Hold the Mic (interlude)"

(say the word)

Rodney Bryant, "Say The Word"

(quiet)

Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*

//

experiment 555

Mariah Webber

Mariah Webber is a writer, artist, & descendant of sharecroppers from Waco, North Carolina. She considers her life to be an embodied extension of her ancestors and chooses to honor her lineage by centering ancestral reverence & spirituality within her lifework. Mariah has received a Bachelor's in Psychology from Appalachian State University and a Master's in Sociology from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Currently, she studies as doctoral student of Feminist Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara as a Eugene Cota-Robles Scholar. Her research broadly explores black erotics, performance/stylistic technologies, and Afro-indigenous spiritual methods of healing in the US South through the lens of queer black feminisms. Mariah's working dissertation unravels the connective threads between spirituality and eroticism within the aesthetics and performances found in Black Southern strip clubs. Her writing has been featured in Sistories: A Literary Magazine (2019, 2021) and becoming undisciplined: a zine (2019).

"beautiful experiments-to make living an art-undertaken by those described as promiscuous, wild, and wayward."

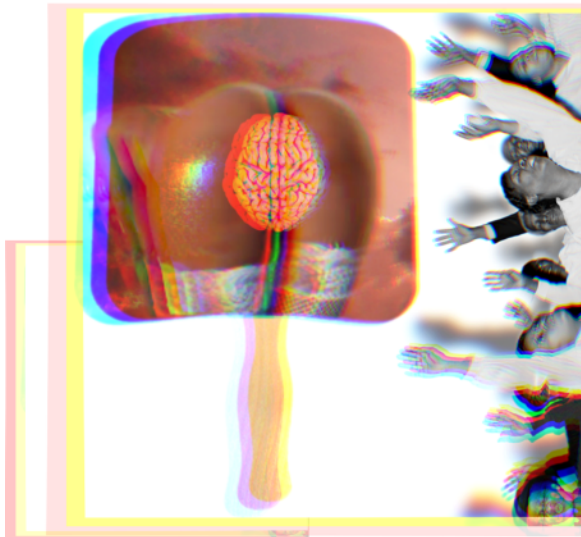
- Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

[the scene is
shot from the foot of the bed]

book in bed
titties in hands

horizons

book & flesh
blood
pink and throbbing
like the folds of your brain
to the lining of the uterus
knowledge is rebirth
aren't we born again?



555

saidiya hartman
found my wayward god
i am an experiment
the way i change and grow
the way i am: whore
& doctor
& friend
& witch
& not yet mother,
& maybe never wife.
wayward. pink. pynk.
pussy with a mouth and a mind.
formed in a hot stickybed.
experiment 555.

"THE BLACK GODDESS



→ WITHIN EACH ←

OF US

- THE POET -

**WHISPERS IN OUR DREAMS:
I FEEL, THEREFORE
I CAN BE FREE."**

-AUDRE LORDE

Rituals Required for Black Girls Who Know Time Ain't Linear: An Apocalypse Time-Travel Log

Sara Makeba Daise

Sara Makeba Daise aka Geechee Gal Griot (she/her/hers) is a Black, queer, fifth-generation Gullah Geechee woman, Griot, Afrofuturist, space & time- traveler, dimension-hopper, gatekeeper, Cultural History Interpreter, Writer, Singer and Healer from Beaufort, SC.

Daughter of Storytellers, Culture Bearers, and stars of Nick Jr.'s Gullah Gullah Island, Ron & Natalie Daise, Sara's praxis builds on their continuous work, unearthing new and old archives, accessing portals, and weaving timelines and dimensions together.

I haven't always wanted to live. Worded more accurately, there are plenty of times I've wanted to die. On more occasions than I care to detail here, I have imagined that going to sleep and never waking up again would be infinitely better than living each day in this incredible pain. Black queer womanhood, depression, anxiety, and chronic pain aside, the pain I am speaking of is bone and soul deep, and generations old. It's the pain that comes from trying to exist inside of a world crafted in your opposition. As Sista Docta Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes:

to put it in tweetable terms, they believed they had to hate black women in order to be themselves. even many of the black women believed it sometimes. (which is also to say that some of the people on the planet believed they them-selves were actually other than black women. which was a false and impossible belief about origin. they were all, in their origin, maintenance, and measure of survival more parts black woman than anything else.) it was like saying they were no parts water. (which they must have believed as well. you can see what they did to the water.)

the problematic core construct was that in order to be sane, which is to live in one body, which is to live one lifetime at one time, which is to disconnect from the black simultaneity of the universe, you could and must deny black femininity. and somehow breathe. the fundamental fallacy being (obvious now, obscured at the time.) that there is no separation from the black simultaneity of the universe also known as everything also known as the black feminist pragmatic intergenerational sphere. everything is everything.¹

This white supremacist patriarchal capitalist society we live in seeks to exploit, consume, erase, and destroy me. It defines and validates itself by everything I'm not, and then projects its inherent lack onto me. And the manufactured scarcity clings to my skin, hangs out in my stomach, my chest, and the back of my throat. Ricochets and echos all through the reproductive organs they try so hard to control. I feel it in my shoulders, back, and neck. The pathological insecurities they cast onto me. It is debilitating. And I know it's on purpose. The cruelty is the point. If that wasn't obvious before 2020 (it was), it is painfully obvious now. And I was in pain already.

In "Uses of the Erotic", Audre Lorde says, "The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment."²

Meaning that even in this doctoral program, which is in many ways "my work", my survival requires me to tap into something that the academy could never truly validate or affirm. "Diversity and Inclusion"— much like "integration"— maintains cis hetero

1. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2018.
2. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 55.

able bodied whiteness at the core, while ushering in and promptly manipulating and gaslighting everyone deemed “other.” I’m tired.

Dayna Lynn Nuckolls, Thee Sidereal Astrologer who preaches Divination for Liberation, reminds me that I descend from people who weren’t afraid to call out evil. In a video she shared on Instagram, she referenced Ephesians 6:11-20. “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness (I say “whiteness” when I’m reading it aloud to myself) of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Nuckolls went on to define principalities as unaddressed traumas. These unconscious traumas determine our perception and shape our realities. They dictate the partners we choose, the spaces we enter, and how we respond/react to external stimulants. In order to address and heal my trauma, I must articulate my pain and who has caused it. I must name the perpetrator(s), because as Zora Neale Hurston told us, “if we are silent about our pain, they will kill us and say we enjoyed it.” What always gets me about that quote is how she’s not even saying that speaking up will save my life. It is understood that they will try to kill me whether I’m silent or not. And don’t they try? “Everyday”, like Lucille Clifton said. So here I am going on record, as so many before me have done, calling evil EVIL, and making it known that I do not enjoy it.

This isn’t really about that, though. What I’m actually talking about is how I wanna live. I’ve wanted to die many times before. But right now I want to live. A sister and lifeline, Dru, reminded me today of the perfect affirmation— one of many that Octavia Butler left us with. “I intend to survive. I mean to learn everything I can while I can. If I find myself outside, maybe what I’ve learned will help me live long enough to learn more.”³ This intention is stated by Lauren Olamina, the Black girl protagonist of Butler’s horrifyingly prophetic *Parable of the Sower*. We are a lot alike, Lauren and I. She lives with hyperempathy, a condition that causes her to physically experience the pain of anyone she sees suffering. “I can take a lot of pain without falling apart. I’ve had to learn to do that,” she says.⁴ Me, too, Lauren. Pain and suffering surround me. I swear I feel it all. And just like Lauren, I intend to survive.

In the Introduction to *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*, Akasha Hull and Barbara Smith explain:

Like any politically disenfranchised group, Black women could not exist consciously until we began to name ourselves.

Merely to use the term ‘Black women’s studies’ is an act charged with political significance. At the very least, the combining of these words to name a discipline means taking the stance that Black women exist—and exist positively—a stance that is in direct opposition to most of what passes for culture and thought on the

3. Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 58.

4. *Ibid.*, 11.

North American continent.⁵

I exist. I am here. And I hope to one day exist without pain. I will use it now, though. Allow it to act as a guide, shining light on my own principalities. In *Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community*, Malidoma Somé writes:

For the Dagara elder, pain is the result of a resistance to something new—something toward which an old dispensation is at odds. We are made of layers of situations or experiences. Each one of them likes to use a specific part of ourselves in which to lodge. It's like a territory. A new experience that does not have a space to sit in within us will have to kick an old one out. The old one that does not want to leave will resist the new one, and the result is registered by us as pain. This is why the elders call it *Tuo*. It means invasion, hunting, meeting with a violent edge. It also means boundary. Pain, therefore, is our body complaining about an intruder. Body complaint is understood as the soul's language relayed to us. A person in pain is being spoken to by the part of himself that knows only how to communicate this way.⁶

Dr. Montinique McEachern, co-host of QueerWOC Podcast, says that there are rituals that prevent pain from becoming trauma. Rituals to keep harmful experiences from lodging themselves in the body and taking on a life of their own. That's what this is really about. The rituals required for my survival. In the conclusion of my thesis, "Come on in The Room': Afrofuturism as a Path to Black Women's Retroactive Healing", I wrote:

...I regularly considered what measures could be taken to remember who you are when you are being methodically, sometimes violently, indoctrinated to believe something different about yourself... And what does it really require to deprogram, and stand upright in this version of reality? One might have to whisper their own language to themselves every night before sleeping. One might need to create mantras that speak to the truth of who they are.

Thankfully this isn't the last thing I'll ever write. I'm still trying to love myself every day. I'm still just trying to love myself every day.

Nothing about this world says that I'm worth loving. Loving myself is a practice. An act of resistance. It necessitates unearthing the powerful knowledge and ways of being that the academy loves pretending do not exist. What ceremony will prevent this present harm from becoming trauma? What is required?

5. Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1982), xvii.

6. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community*, (New York: Arkana, 1997), 21-22.

Apocalypse Time-Travel Log

8-23-20

My desire is a mentor/healer/midwife. A physical elder guide to assist me on this depth journey. Through my PhD. Through 2020. Through the dismantling of the old and integration of the new. I seek a guide who finds me right on time. And they will speak my language and be accessible and will hear and see and feel and know. I will unlearn and learn. Unname and name. I will feel safe and learn to navigate shaky, changing terrain. I desire the ancestors desiring to work with me right now to make themselves known in ways I can't misinterpret. That all blockages be cleared. I desire protection from envy, harm, jealousy, violence, ill will, unalignment. As I grow and stretch, be and be seen, as is partly my work: protect me, love me, hold me, fortify me. As I go deep deep deep. Fill my lungs, clear my vision. Fill my heart, hold me close so that I don't drown. Or if I drown, it is beautiful and I am born again somewhere free. Protect me in the depths. Fortify me in the depths. Strengthen me to know freedom. And reveal or have my guide find me. I am ready for this guide/healer/elder/mentor to help me on this journey to unpack. Please find me and let me know you are in alignment with my highest good. I have grateful energy to exchange. The root is love. Love I don't gotta tangle, struggle, filter through to find. And forgiveness for myself for seeking that outside and in others who can't give it. I am not alone. I am never alone. Let me know who you are.

8-23-20

Personal Divination

Notes from the *Hoodoo Tarot Deck*:

I exist to help people remember. I exist to remember. I exist to engage the depths and retrieve the treasure that is technology and us. I exist to be free. I exist for my ancestors to be seen. I exist to usher in the new earth. I exist to feel and know. I exist to teach and learn. I exist because I am who I am doing what I came to do. I exist to engage many types of power. I exist to guard and open gates to infinite dimensions. I exist to travel through space and time. I exist to heal back back and forward forward. I exist to myself and God and my ancestors intimately. I exist to be a steward of magic. I exist to ask and answer tough questions. I exist to manifest health, healing and abundance. I exist in alignment with my highest good. I exist to embody and mirror back Source Love. I exist to do the Shadow Work that heals epigenetic and present trauma. I exist to learn how to do my sacred work with pleasure, joy, and satisfaction. I exist to be soft.

What keeps me connected to life? Reading. Listening. Getting still enough to hear. Feel. Sense. Savoring my softness. Sleeping. Drinking water. Making connections across space and time. People being free. Being affirmed. Black Feminism. Womanism. Afrofuturism. Black women. Black people. Queer. Trans. Nonbinary. Disabled. Sharing my work. Cooking. Eating good food. Singing loud. Harmonies. Full moons. Feeling affirmed in my purpose. Dancing. My family. Homemade Florida Water. Writing. Meditation. Talking to my sisters. Prayers. Plants. The garden. Sunshine.

Love from others. Crying. Laughing. Great sex. Orgasms. Knowing, honoring, and understanding my ancestors. Cleaning my body. Cleaning my house. Tea. Herbs. Spiritual baths. Hot showers. Visits to the water.

Cards pulled from the *Black Angel Deck*:

The Wanderer “Your spirit is free to choose”

Waking path: Freedom, Sleeping path: Neglect.

The Midwife “You are the witness to creation”

Waking path: Birthing, Sleeping path: Paralysis, fear

The Grandmother “You use insight and wisdom to activate your life”

Waking path: Guiding wisdom, Sleeping Path: Withholding wisdom

The Changer “You are transforming the foundation of your soul

Waking path: Evolving, Sleeping path: Fixed

The Sower “You are planting new seeds for the world”

Waking path: Flourishing, Sleeping path: Disappearing

The Builder “You have an innate instinct for building strength in self and others”

Waking path: Building strength, Sleeping path: Walling off

The Mother Soul “You are restoring your soul”

Waking path: Soul Revival, Sleeping path: Emptiness

The Dreamer “You are living the largest vision of life you could have imagined.”

Waking path: Inner vision, Sleeping path: Invisibility

8-24-20

My essay “Be Here Now: The South is a Portal” was published in *Root Work Journal* today. It is big and special and people are saying nice things about it. Miya said it reminds her of sitting on her grandma’s porch, and being with her whole self. Rj likes it, too. Said the questions I pose are portals. Mommy bought me fried green tomatoes to celebrate.

9-1-20

Here we are. I am here. September of this year. SyFy movies on Netflix make me think about factions. The ways those in power fight to stay that way. The ways the oppressed mimic and emulate their oppressors. I don’t wanna do that. I wanna be well. Safe. Safety, accessibility and liberation. I want a world where we’re all safe and have access to everything we need. I feel empty and full all at once. I fasted yesterday. Just wasn’t hungry. I’m not hungry now either. My stomach hurts.

9-5-20

Came to Brookgreen Gardens with Daddy today. He’s finishing up an exhibit. Everything is lush and glorious. The plants. The art. The breeze. The sun. My ancestors, my mask, efun, and my selenite protecting me. How blessed I am. And golden! I feel the air. Oh thank you! Thank you! Cookie’s quilt show is named “Gratitude” and it is just that. I feel joyful. Grateful. Sexy. Kissed by the sun. I feel longing. In a good way.

Faith isn’t an antonym for grief. It is not a method of bypassing the necessity of grief.

Faith allows you to grieve knowing the pain won't exist in the same way always. Faith softens the heart to the wondrous gems buried at the roots of our hurt, the gifts folded into the process of feeling our feelings. It is all there, too. All the questions. All the answers. All the choices and reasons and wisdom and stardust and millenia. It's all here waiting on you to remember. Faith says the hurt won't kill you. And if it does, it's just a new beginning. There is no death. Not really. Not like we've been taught to believe. Faith says you're not alone in the feeling. I thought the message of Christianity was that Christ became human and felt it all so we knew he knew how it felt. I swear folks who say they follow Christ sell him short. What do I think? It's ok to be me. And when I'm me, I'm open to it all. I am capable and I am loved. Descendant of those who lived and descendant of those who didn't. Energy doesn't cease to be. And neither do I.

9-18-20

Lessons Learned:

My peace is priceless and non-negotiable. My body will ALWAYS tell me if something isn't aligned. I've just gotta listen. I can trust myself. I don't require a partner to be whole. I can be alone. I am enough already. I have friends who really really love me. Forgiving myself clears a lot of space and density inside of me. I've always done my best with what I believed to be possible or true at the time. I am loved. I prefer my living space a particular way. I'm worthy by myself. Good things do not require my exhaustion, overexertion. I don't require trauma to learn. I am enough already. The more time I spend alone, the clearer I hear God and my folk. I can do anything I want to. I am the culmination of lifetimes of love. I am always protected and always have been. My family loves me fiercely. My pleasure is divine. Necessary. And my priority. I only share myself with people who see my divinity and prioritize my pleasure and needs. *I love myself enough to be who I am. I am who I am doing what I came to do. Love is the greatest power ever existing. And we have ALWAYS loved each other, children. Pass it on.*⁷ I can do hard, challenging things. I can choose myself. My gifts make a way for me. I am open to infinite ways of loving myself, and being loved. Forever student. Forever teacher. My teachers come to me. I am ready for my teacher/mentor/healer. And maybe she's me. So I need more quiet space to hear her.

What a grieving time. What a grieving time. I went to the ocean and danced and stomped and swayed in the waves. Inhaled the salt water. I been releasing so much. Let so much shit go this year. I released it to Mami Wata. I'm open. Open to knowing and loving myself more deeply. Asking questions. Feeling spirals. I am well. Ase.

11-2-20

Now means forever. Yesterday was Grandma Kathleen's birthday. Born in 1913. She lived to be 101. I am whole, and so is she. I'm in my new home. First time I've had my own place in 6 years. I'm back in the West End. Georgetown this time. In a beautiful house with a purple bedroom, and beautiful carpet, and hardwood floors and a

7. Mobile Homecoming Trust Living Library and Archive, "Black Feminist Breathing Chorus," <https://sangodare.podia.com/view/courses/breathingchorus>.

washer and dryer. And windows that bring in incredible light, and working heat and AC. Closet space. So much light! And me and Grandma Shirley are in a generative and intergenerational giving circle. And there are roles we play. I am here in my role. And grateful. So grateful. I am provided for. I registered for classes this weekend. The degree costs \$76k. In addition to the government funding, (my ancestors are the reason this government has money), I will need to align with more money, scholarships, grants, fellowships to cover the remainder.

I know I will. I aligned myself with Sierra Leone and I went. I aligned myself with the right graduate program. I aligned myself with publishing my work and providing narration and voice overs for other people's work. I aligned myself with this house.

I transplanted a schefflera plant yesterday. Her name is Toni Cade Bambara. I cleaned and unpacked some more.

I also defined myself as a time-traveler, griot, shapeshifter, storyteller, keeper of ritual and song, and a gatekeeper on an international panel. I met Dr. Margaret Washington in March. I facilitated a discussion with her about her 30-year-old book *A Peculiar People*. And she's proud of me. In real time.

11-2-20

Notes from Tarot Reading with Jade T. Perry, The Churchy Mystic - this was a barter exchange for me being a guest on her platform:

Passion, politics and rootedness drives me, but shouldn't push me past my material limits. I'm fatigued. I need space for groundedness. I am not grounded. Be a little less intense. My work is heart centered. Find my sweet spot. The wheel in the middle of the wheel. The mystical arts will help me in my career—fun, play. It's ok if it looks meandery. Be kinder to myself. Need new perspectives on career, achievements, and success. Let go. Surrender. Don't force anything. Clear a space inside instead. Sustain fortitude. Avoid the trap of comparison. Set intentions and create spaces with folks I've been collaborating with. When I feel pressured, I am out of balance. My work requires periods of incubation. Know what I'm attracted to. Make flexible, balanced choices. Heavy self-doubt. Find my place of power and choose from there. Create a vision statement for my work. What does it do? Update my website and all online content. Start where I am, using what I have. Choose rates. Create containers for my career to thrive. The PhD is a mixed bag. It will be what I make it. The spiritual work has prepared me for the PhD. Have discretion. Find the wheel inside the wheel vs. something outside. Knight of Wands reversed. Temper tantrums, misuse of power, grandstanding—I may encounter someone with this energy. Find the center. Still center in the midst of the fire. Is the fastest way the best way to move forward? Don't play in debating. Seek harmony at all times. I don't have to choose chaos. Don't parlay in the foolishness. Trust my inner authority. Stand in my own expertise. Fully own my knowledge. I know enough to teach. Love life: Allow the Mother to heal my sorrow as I open my heart in compassion to others.. It'll be what it's gonna be. Know when I've done my best and rest assured love will continue to flow. Cultivate my own garden. Celebrate the things I've already built. I am too hard, too harsh with myself. Play.

Flirt. Learn by doing. Balance is achieved through celebration. Take a romantic risk. Play and flirt my way through.

11-11-20

So many feelings all the time. And I know it's better when I get them out on paper. I feel better most times when I do. Mommy's birthday dinner was nice. We laughed a lot. Grandma "discovered" that Papa had remarried. Decades ago. Dementia is hard to witness. And it looks so different in everyone it touches. Papa's didn't look like this. I wanna think less. Be more present and receptive to the expansiveness of each moment. Right now. Being present. I've been intellectualizing it for a while. And I'm acknowledging that being it might really mean being still without anything in my hands, because my arms and shoulders are sore. My stomach is sore, too. I haven't felt the greatest. Kinda blah even though I've been drinking water. I watched some really good panels about Black Feminism on Youtube. Black Feminism = a political legacy, a spiritual/ritual practice. I wanna take another shower. Oh ok also. My work: makes space, grounds breath, is founded in the present and this is expansive. So practicing presence is required. Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks "what is the trust? What is the commitment? What am I committed to?" I'm enough. In a world where all my needs are met and I know that I'm enough already. I live in this world now. Make love powerful.

11-14-20

New Moon Affirmations/Intentions:

I affirm clarity, articulation, ease, and the externalization of my purpose—what my work does in the world. I affirm my website is updated, agile, accessible, fun, clear, creative, sleek, welcoming, enchanting, and that it clarifies my services and mission statement.

I affirm the courses and curriculum I create clearly align with my purpose: facilitating education as healing, liberation and pleasure. I affirm all the paid offerings I offer are sold out. I affirm people sign up for memberships. I affirm my courses inspire, affirm, illuminate, empower, activate, and create space. My work enchants. My work aligns. I affirm I'm immune to Corona Virus. I affirm a therapist in alignment with all my needs who can guide and help me heal in this new 13-year cycle. I affirm I don't have to perform emotional labor for my healing—meaning I don't need to explain or defend my intersections or subjectivities in order to receive care. I affirm it's a beautiful, joyful relationship. I affirm my Ori, my Higher Selves, my Creator and my ancestors guide this relationship. All of my needs are met.

I affirm I am guided, protected and held throughout the entirety of my Doctoral journey. My team includes: Conseula, Myrtle, Leroy, Ade, Osha, Elizabeth, Kathleen, William, Gibeon, Monifa, Larry, Adelaide, Aji, Sarah, Gertrude, Alberta, Martha, Henry, Mildred, and the many many names I don't know. I affirm a shield around me. I affirm clarity, discernment, intuition, built-in breaks. I affirm trustworthy colleagues, cohort-members, professors, and mentors. I affirm life-long aligned relationships. I affirm I complete my degree with distinction. I affirm the first term

goes so well, and I'm aligned with more funding and scholarship opportunities to cover the \$76k degree. I affirm school is already paid for. I don't have to know how.

I pour into myself. I prioritize myself. I love myself. I cherish myself. I trust and count on myself. I know myself. I am reflective, vulnerable, brave. I am honest, compassionate, spacious, patient, and loving in a relationship with others. I show up for myself so I can show up in alignment for others. My body is healthy, vibrant, sexy, enchanting, soft, and strong. I am grateful.

11-16-20

I cleaned this morning. Feels good. Vacuumed, swept, mopped. I made a floor-wash with herbs, oils, and Dr. Bronner's Peppermint Soap. Sang along with Juanita Bynum's "23rd Psalms" as I mopped from the back of the house to the front. Poured what was left in the bucket out into the backyard. Shakeema told me about that ritual. Daddy caught a mouse for me last weekend. I saw it running down the hall towards me on Friday night, cut a quick right, and run into the closet. I walked out so fast and went to their house. The trap Daddy set later that evening caught the mouse on Saturday. I affirm there are no more mice in this house!

11-19-20

Sunshine from the east pouring through the window onto Monifa the Monstera dripping xylem sap from her leaves. She looking all heart chakra and sustenance and growth and regeneration. I fell asleep under her yesterday. She called to me, really. Offering shade and familiarity. Like Grandma Myrtle and The Room. I slept under her on my purple yoga mat with no blanket. I love her. I say "excuse me" when I walk by and bump her leaves. She's unfurling, too. In two spots. Un-spiraling light green. Prepping to open. Unfolding into wonder. What a treat to witness.

I know I have whale ancestors. I remembered a few months ago. Right now this is reminding me of my long-time fear of shadowy figures in the water. How I was scared of my ancestors. My folk, the whales. I'm breathing as deeply as I can—recalling ancestors who breathe under water. How I don't gotta be afraid of the shadow, the dark, of the unknown. It's full and big and wide and knowing. The darkness. I'm studying the Solar System—this one anyway. Gaining more familiarity and rhythm. I'm grateful.

11-21-20

CoronaVirus voice memos. My sisters and I piece together our lives. We theorize and affirm back and forth through virtual air waves. Making sense of ourselves. Keeping each other sane and possible. Sharing space and grace in a spiral. Like we do.

And the Lorde says, "These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep."⁸

This space of imagining who I might have been without any oppression, and reveling in who I've been, who I am, and who I'm constantly becoming in the process of unlearning all the internalization of the same oppression.

Thinking of all I've already done and all that I can do.

11-24-20

It feels heavy. Heaviness in my chest. So many folks grieving. So many folks dead. And I feel a bit sad. Also a bit full. Empty and full.

11-29-20

Dayna, Thee Sidereal Astrologer, says we must decolonize our survival instinct. "Individualism will kill us." I wanna make it through to the other side. I haven't always wanted to live. But I do now. Black women are really out here preaching. Trust my body. Decolonizing my body aids me in recognizing and creating necessary boundaries. This is how I will protect myself. I will go. I shall go. To see what the end is gonna be.

I feel like I've been doing heavy lifting. Maybe that's why my shoulders hurt, and not just because I'm stressed out, dysfunctional, and unable to get right. Maybe I've actually been getting stronger this whole time.

12-26-20

There's only denial or damnation with her. Never actually doing better. Never changing her behavior. I know that phone call was nothing but manipulation. And another indication that the intimate and vulnerable expressions of my feelings are futile. She doesn't track what I say. She knows tracking as a concept. Knows how to perform it if it's expected of her. But in real life, she's only able to pay attention to something as much as it's useful and there is a relatively quick and visible outcome. A postable, shareable outcome. There is no point for me to explain myself again. This is literally a toxic game. And she was just saying during eclipse season that she can't be concerned with how her words and actions impact others. Her PTSD excuses her behavior, per her. Who don't have PTSD in this fucked up place, girl? Who isn't traumatized here? Grandma Myrtle said every American is sick. This country does not encourage wellness. Why does your deep hurt justify you hurting me?

I did want my love to be the fixer. The equalizer. The healer. And thus the affirmation that I'm actually worthy of love. Maybe it will work that way with myself. Maybe loving myself is proving to myself that I'm worthy of love, protection, understanding, celebration, rest, time alone, pleasure, my needs being met, my dreams being affirmed, my chains being broken. Maybe prioritizing that, like I've been doing this year. Like I just did again. Like I'm doing right now. Will open me up to goodness and healthy relationships. Releasing the need to defend myself and beg for love where there is none. To explain myself when it's clear my words aren't heard or valued—which is a drain on my energy. Everything is a performance with her. A show.

8. Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury" in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 36.

I know I'm fereal, though. I know who I am. She said she cared about what's important to me. But she doesn't. There was never—could never be—love. Just projections and funhouse mirrors. Repeat repeat repeat. Only perfection or monsters.

These are my feelings. I hope they pass.

“I love the parts of you that no one thinks are particularly special. I love the basic you of the unmarketable and every day. I love to be around you because the round around you thrills me. And let's get together again soon. A whole bunch of us. I love you more than press conferences can say. Breach when you want to.”⁹

12-31-20

Uncle Ben passed away. 2 days ago. His wife just let Daddy know. He didn't want a service. I didn't know him well. He was one of the first Black professors of Philosophy in the country. He wrote *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art*, and was a leading voice on the guy. I don't know Kierkegaard. Mama and Daddy often said Uncle Ben's work was hard to understand.

I know he left the South and seemingly never looked back. He wasn't distant in a bad way. I don't mean like that. All of my memories of him are really pleasant. He was encouraging of my work. Told me my poems were moving. And once in my early 20s when I was really sick, he sent me some money. Daddy looks a lot more like him than he used to.

Now I'm sitting with how we try to escape pain. Escape our feelings. Run away. But wherever we go, there we are. And it's always in the body. He passed from serious health complications. Something to do with the stomach, among other things.

Daddy shared some reflections Uncle Ben had shared with him and Uncle Stanley earlier in the year with all the cousins. He wrote about a study abroad trip to Vienna he took before his senior year at Morehouse. He was a Merrill Travel Scholar in 1963-64. Traveled throughout Europe, and saw that more was possible than he'd thought before. Studied Intermediate German, Greek Moral Philosophy, Metaphysics, and European Art.

I'm struck by how he describes home. “Our home, St. Helena Island, SC was bleak. You could hunt, fish, and farm. Farming meant using a horse or ox-drawn plow and a hoe. It was not exactly the stuff of which dreams are made. My father felt a moral obligation to work the land and my brother and I were the instruments of his virtue.”

There's a whole lot there. Lots of pain. Lots of promise. Lots that he made possible. Lots that he couldn't see. I can get to know Uncle Ben way better now that he has transitioned. Grateful for another scholar ancestor. And grateful we get to lay that pain down.

9. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (Chico: Edinburgh, AK Press, 2020), 71.

I might look into Kierkegaard.

1-17-21

Listening to podcasts and snippets about narcissism. I'm angry. And sad. I do feel victimized. Targeted. And my whole body was screaming the whole time. So I feel disappointed that I didn't/couldn't get out sooner. Embarrassed. So embarrassed. And I do want genuine understanding. Like. She's only in pain. Her pain is all she knows...and...maybe she really does believe she can do no wrong. Who believes they've done NOTHING wrong? I'd like to believe I wouldn't allow this to happen again. I feel gross. Disgusted. I want to vomit. She manipulated and gaslighted me. I'm also angry that her therapists just let this shit go. It's because she isn't very honest. So I see now she couldn't be relaying any stories outside of her own warped reality. I'm so fuckin mad. It's so hurtful to know she preyed on my insecurities. And some people could see the harm, while others thought it was beautiful. And I could only hear the valid concerns as homophobia, a judgement of me being queer in practice and not just in words. It wasn't ever beautiful. It was always scary. I was scared of her. A lot. And she dumped all this emotional shit on me early, so I knew it wasn't ever ok to say "you're scaring me." "Am I a monster?" She'd always cry. Monsters or perfection. There's nothing in between.

1-21-21

I've had a hard time concentrating. My period started yesterday. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were...installed (?) yesterday, too. She is Jamaican and Indian. And a former prosecutor-Top Cop. Biden is an accused rapist, and looks like he's gonna fall forward and die whenever he walks. Go, America! I feel so behind. I have a lot of writing and reading to do by Saturday. I wasn't able to do much earlier. Had to take my time and work through some things. I did more work for my website. Some writing. Getting clarity, downloads, and loud ass messages from Spirit. Most came through YouTube videos, interviews, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and my sisters. It was an *Octavia Butler Tried to Warn Us* interview. A woman who knew Octavia Butler affirmed that she would be surprised and pleased to know all of us are gathering in her name and believing her truth and teaching it to others. The woman said Octavia Butler was shy, insecure, and often felt isolated. She had a great sense of humor. She studied. Observed. Committed to her research. She watched climate change over time. Didn't drive. Walked everywhere and witnessed the world changing.

Not sure what the flow for school will be—but I will do my best. And Ancestors, I need continued financial support to buy my books and create my online business. I am clear that if I'm supposed to work for someone, you will let me know. I know I can work for myself. And things are coming together. And while working for myself, school is my job. So I truly need yall to send income. Income for this job. I need balance, space, time, flexibility, and commitment. And to be pain free. I want to be happy. Healthy. Whole. Healed. Loved. Ok, Sara. You know time is different now. But this will call for more. Will require something new from me. And I have it. I have that. I bring that. I'm learning. I'm aware. I'm capable. I'm learning. I'm learning.

1-24-21

It was a crooked room.¹⁰ That relationship. And I wanted so badly to be loved, seen and appreciated for me. For the things I like most about myself. Or the things I've been taught to hate about myself. And so...I encountered someone to teach me again that it's all about me loving those things. That's no one else's work to do. I'm not a rescuer. I'm not a savior. It's not my job to teach adults decency, compassion, accountability, and empathy. I don't need to "teach" people how to treat me. I need to go where my energy resonates and leave where it doesn't. I don't match energy anymore. I don't abandon myself trying to rescue someone else. In hopes that the hole I feel inside will finally be filled by the gratitude and appreciation of the rescued. No. It never works like that. I am a sovereign being. A starseed. A divine soul. A divine body. And I am deeply loved.

I called Auntie Dee and she just poured into me. Said she'd been praying for me and Simeon all day. Praying Sim gets work he loves, and that he is safe and has what he needs. She remembered I started school this month. She said she, her prayer partner, and their prayer group have different members of the family to pray for every day so that everyone is prayed for. I asked her how long she's been a Prayer Warrior. She said she's been praying like that since she had her boys. Her foster sons thought they weren't worthy of love. And she prayed down. Prayed hard. Prayed they'd know they were loved like sons. Eric definitely knows he's loved. And he pours that love right back. She also said she can't smell or taste her food anymore. So maybe that bug back in early 2020 really was COVID. She said she can't complain though. She remembers how the food tastes, and that's enough. She's the first college graduate of the Eldridge family. I didn't know that before today.

1-25-21

I have such a hard time reading for class. Being made to engage theory that requires my subjugation to make sense. I feel crazy. Everytime. I want to pull all my hair out. Everything feels crazy today. I can't get right, and I feel so sad and wrong. I should just do nothing today. I don't feel small. I feel really erratic and scared. I want to spend time outside, but so few neighbors wear masks. I want to feel better and not like this. I am tired. Tired of feeling like the problem. And sitting with the realities of patriarchy and how it manifests. I'm exhausted. So exhausted with whiteness and maleness that is just so basic. I feel so lonely even though I am connected and supported. I need love. No. Yes. I need a therapist. I need to be able to afford a quality therapist I can unpack this shit with. Or. I think. I need something. Someone. Maybe I'm just supposed to feel this shit. These hurts. All these spaces and people who project(ed) their insecurities onto me. Him. Her. Every man I've ever been with. This fucked up country. The canon. I'm tired. I'm tired. I'm angry and disappointed. I had the worst back pain yesterday and today. I thought it was gas but it wasn't. Yoga didn't help. I want to crawl out of my skin. I don't require constant validation. I know I'm smart. I don't wanna understand why people who believe they are men are the way that they

10. Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 28-29.

are. I don't want to. I want to be free. What do yall want from me? Huh?! I feel dumb now. Again. Unsure. How does this work? Why is every space I enter a fucking warped mirror? What am I supposed to see now? What am I supposed to do and why can't I just read the required texts and respond? Why do I feel like this? I feel like I can't get nothing right. I feel dumb and not smart or capable right now. I feel like I've been played. I wanna sleep. I want to be held. I wanna be rubbed on. And cuddled. I just want to be gone from here today. It doesn't feel good. I feel fucked up. Can't get right. I need money. I need help. I need therapy. I need the tools to work well cuz I currently feel stupid and tired and gaslit.

The oracle says:

the salt took everything out of her that the sun didn't want. and when she reached the shore the sand cut her in a million places. nothing about her was elastic or quenched or smooth. and technically, she was alive. while she waited for something else to happen, she considered that maybe something was happening. like maybe the sand cuts were turning into gills and the scales of her dried-out skin were appropriate. she had a sense of herself one day soon, being able to breathe through her whole body. and then she passed out again.¹¹

1-27-20

Patriarchy is an absence. It is a gap. White supremacy, capitalism, western supremacy are all absences. They are scarcity. And insecurity. An inability to know one's true self or see one's true self. And in its endless need for narcissistic supply, it projects its deep sense of scarcity, nothingness, and insecurity onto everything else, while making itself the star of the show, the only mattering one. The discussion maker. Simply consuming everything it cannot acknowledge as divine. And telling us. Telling me I'm shit. It would be sad if not so violent.

My pleasure is key obviously. This system depends on me not knowing who I am. Depends on me being unsure of what I know and how I know it. It needs me to believe my folks ain't made a place for me outside of hell. It needs me to feed it. It needs my energy, my sacrifice. My body. Needs me to believe I can use their tools and play their game. Needs me to believe I should model myself after them. Show and prove myself worthy to be here. Prove and prove and prove and prove myself to an absence. A gap. Only visible via my light. Oh, but what if I truly saw myself as the root, and the reflection and the presence of the whole? Light and shadow. Integrated mind-body-soul. Spirit integrated. Pleasure prioritized. Giving rise to creation. And ain't that it? I think so. This system thrives on making me believe I don't know. When I know, it crumbles. It wanes. It has to. I see that now in this moment. Thankfully. Thank you.

So I know the shadow isn't bad or good. It is. Just is. As is light. The sun. Our

11. Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World*, 113.

spinning planet. And at some point, humans chose physical might over all of it. Subverting both the darkness and the light. Claimed themselves as the sun with obvious dominion over Mama Gaia and Mama Luna. Thus misunderstanding everything and everyone. Subverted their own light. Decided the shadow was all they could really be—the absence of light. And since this could not be true (and wasn't), they claimed they were the only true light. Even though, since forever, darkness and light are complementary. And there is no static or rigidity. Look at the expansiveness of the ever-moving ocean, planets, and every living thing. And since you can't dehumanize or de-divine anyone else without doing so to yourself, they built institutions, mountains, monuments, identities, and personalities on top of the shadow they denied. The lack is all they've known. Simultaneously believing that was all they were, and never being able to consciously acknowledge it. Ha. They projected the emptiness they could not articulate onto everything they chose to dominate. Making sense where there is none. Rationality without feeling is nothing at all. Is not wisdom. Is not wholeness. The lie that physical strength = power = authority = imposing one's will = domination. It's obviously rooted in fear. In trauma. In abandonment. Who wasn't there? What was the original wound? This is eons old. My mind would say an absent parent from way back. But Indigneous people certainly weren't absent parents in the ways I understand as normative in the west. So when? Where? Why? How? And is the answer in a book I already have?

1-28-20

Ms. Barbara told mommy to tell me to call her. I'm so happy I did. She came through. Said my ancestors had been keeping her up all night, and she knew she had to talk to me. "I didn't know what was going on with you! I may never sleep again!" Ha. My ancestors had messages for me. When I meditate, imagine an ancient thread coming from the heavens entering the crown of my head. See it spooling into a ball, inside my solar plexus. Gather it inside myself. They said don't be alarmed if I feel misplaced. There is an ancient one rising up inside of me saying "what the hell is this shit?" See myself standing with my arms raised overhead, holding a big cup in both hands. Understanding and divine wisdom rains down and I catch it in the cup. It's heavy. It's heavy anyway. Once it's full, it must be poured out. It's heavy now. I must pour it out. My divine work: Education4Liberation, must be accessible and not academic. Start by asking for donations. At some point soon I will be offering classes and selling memberships. Doing my work allows that reciprocal energy of abundance to flow. Be absolutely ruthless in marketing.

Ms. Barbara said remember that my basic intelligence far exceeds what the academy could teach me. I am not here for the academy's approval. I am here to have the choices I want to have. Be my natural self. I'm alone too much. Spend more time at my parents' house. There's a foundational way I can be around my family. My family is my refuge. On the plantation—a facade of wealth built on our backs—enslaved people maintained sanity because we clustered together. Older women feeding you potlicker, healing wounds. We're fighting the same battle without the same tools. When my soul needs rest, I need to go home. Individualism is modeled after the

colonizers. We need every mama, papa, sister, cousin, brother, auntie. My thread is my family. Don't worry about romance until I'm more grounded. I can practice celibacy if I want to, but it's not required. Sex is an exchange of powerful energy. I must learn to ground and balance it. Without balance and grounding, the energy is too hot. I'll get burned every time. My ancestors said they've never withheld anything I've wanted. I may have gotten it and found out I didn't really want it. But they've never ever denied my pleasure or desires. I don't have to be sick to go get well. Nothing's gotta be wrong for me to go home and cry and lean on my folks. To go home and recharge. This grace is my karma. Because of the work. Because of what I'm interceding. To do what I'm here to do.

Ms. Barbara said to take notes because she's channeling. She won't be able to repeat anything she shared once the transmission is over.

She texted me later and said she wants us to talk weekly for a while. Because I'm navigating some heavy shit and she wants to help me do it. In another time, a woman in my role would be surrounded and nurtured by elder women. She is one of those elder women. She takes this role seriously. She loves me.

I prayed for this. Wrote this down. Thank you. Ase.

Once Upon An Endless Now

Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet Audre Lorde says it best:

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from without ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.⁶

The answers are indeed in books I already have. The answers are in my 31-year old body and my ancient soul. The answers are in my ancestors' hands and mouths. The rituals required for my bravery and survival are in the everyday love and magic of my Beloved Community. Any attempts to draw a straight line are futile. There's nothing linear about the Universe. Or time. It moves and is in flux and flow. Infinite spirals.

11. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic", 58.

And we pass wisdom and knowing up, down and around. Dayna Lynn Nuckolls says wisdom requires confirmation. And there's so much confirmation when I'm paying attention. Grateful for that. I am not a mule. I am not a savior. I have personal, communal, and ancestral incentive to share what I know to be true. To feel my feelings. Loving myself fiercely, regardless, is part of the work. This is how I know and save myself. I am worth saving. I intend to survive.

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Between Us

Cinnamon Williams

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No, I don't think she has a fear of orgasms or condoms or quaking thighs or sleeping in the wet spot. I don't think her stomach gets queasy or her palms sweaty at the suggestion of foreplay. I don't think she walks into any bedroom—or living room or kitchen or wherever she gets down—with unsuspecting innocence, as if she's just there for the food or a Netflix password. I know she has had sex before. She knows the same about me. We have never talked, giggled, marveled, cried, whispered, felt our cheeks flush in shame, gotten warm in the bosom, or sighed rapturously about it—but we know.

I am twenty-one years old, and my older sister and I have talked about sex exactly three times. Sometimes, I wish it were different. We are almost two years apart, and when she got serious about dating, I was just entering the ninth grade. She was a junior and in that awkward space between being able to share everything with me and being afraid I'd slip up and tell our mom something I wasn't supposed to. I never knew much about her and Aaron's relationship, and I only ever saw them kiss once, so I knew very early that she'd never talk to me about...other stuff. Still, I imagine that she is the one who demonstrated how to use a condom with a banana, telling me to pick a slightly bent one from the red, plastic fruit bowl on the kitchen table just in case I encounter a small curve when the real thing happens; the one who preemptively warns me that nothing goes inside—penis, finger, vibrator, or whatever it is that I like—unless I am slippery with excitement; the one who has told me that none of these things will actually go in the same hole that pee comes from (“Eighth grade sex ed did you so wrong,” she will sigh); the one that gives me a few pointers when I share how I want to have oral sex for the first time with a person I really like; the one that tilts her head in concerned skepticism, saying, “I know you want to do something nice for him, but you need to guarantee that he will return the favor. So start with something more...even. Like 69.” Then she tells me that it doesn't have to be a competition, but I do have to put up a little bit of a fight, be quick on my feet. I nod bravely, ready for the hand-to-penis combat she describes.

Once after school, she yanked me into her room, scanned the hallway to make sure no adults were coming, plopped me down on her bed, and asked, “So. What do you already know?” On another occasion, she warned me of how messy tongue-kissing would be and assured me that, when the time came, she would school me on how to most successfully hide hickies. I flashback to the morning after my first serious boyfriend has made a Gettysburg of my neck. It is a defining moment for me, for us. When I visit the memory, barely a year old, Tia is rushing towards me to inspect the damage, part surprised, part proud, poised with know-how saying, “You're going to need a cream concealer and your flat-top kabuki brush.”

Fantasies like this come in waves with each major sexual milestone I have. Most of the time, I am fine with the grave reality of the silence though. It still occupies some sacred space between us. Some sacred space that we just haven't figured out how to make use of yet. Some sacred space with a paralyzing kind of time that keeps her Chicken Big Sister and me Chicken Little. It is cavernous, seems to spread limitlessly

over the course of birthdays, graduations, gynecological checkups, breakups, makeups, promotions, pregnancy scares. And it has a way of telling me just how much we talk about sex...without ever actually talking about sex.

During one of those times that we talked about it, we were in my grandma's kitchen helping her prepare dinner after church—Tia peeling and slicing sweet potatoes, me claiming to be tending the fried chicken when I was actually just watching it about three feet away from the stove, my grandma shelling the last of a pile of butter beans. Grandma asked what we thought of the sermon. Much of what the guest preacher had said and done had escaped me: the exact scriptures he had recited, the song he had melted into upon closing, how long he spoke, even what he wore. But I did recall his insistence on women “saving” themselves for marriage. I recalled it because it was the part of the sermon that got him most excited. He began sweating excessively, wiping his forehead and temples with a handkerchief every five seconds or so, as he told us that there was nothing more sacred than the sexual bond between a married woman and man; that “the [female] flesh [was] always at war with the [male] moral compass”; that the apocalypse would not come as quickly if women would only learn to close their legs. I hadn't had many serious sexual encounters before this, but even then I felt that it was bullshit. I only had to figure out a different way to express my disagreement since I couldn't say “bullshit” around my grandma.

“It was okay, I guess. He was kinda all over the place.” Tia had gotten up to throw away a heap of potato skins.

“Hmmm...I couldn't really follow him,” I added rather timidly.

My grandma must have been expecting more emotion from each of us because she proceeded to ask, “Well, what about the thing he said about women?”

I watched blood bubble out of the bones of a few pieces of frying chicken. When they began to darken to a tawny crisp, recruiting someone else to take them out of the pan seemed much more important. Much more pressing.

Tia continued, grabbing bright, firm potato slices from the table by the handful and plunking them into a dented boiling pot filled with water on the stove. She moved back and forth for five or six handfuls. The two, table and stove, were so close that she only had to twist at the waist. Oil popped all around her arms, but she went on twisting and plunking.

“I don't know, maybe he had a point. Maybe it can be a good thing depending on where you are with relationships and stuff. Like...maybe we should all just try to be more selective about who we...entertain.”

It was just like Tia to say “entertain” instead of “sleep with.” Have sex with. Fuck. I have obviously become the more crass of us, less careful with language. Perhaps with

my body, too.

“It just seemed a little odd to me that he didn’t say the same thing to any of the boys. If all the girls are waiting, who are the boys having sex with?” I asked. It wasn’t rhetorical, but she didn’t answer. “I mean the ones who don’t have sex with other boys,” I added.

“Cinnamon.” My grandma peered up slowly from the bowl of beans, a Bible verse about Sodom and Gomorrah waiting patiently on her tongue. She reached over to turn a burner on.

“Just asking a question, grandma. It just doesn’t feel right to tell us to wait and the boys don’t get the same message. That’s all.” The chicken was ready, and I began approaching it with tongs until Tia saved me.

“I’ll get it. You’ve been standing over it for a while.” She plucked out piece after piece with ease and placed them all in a rectangular, glass pan, layers of paper towels soaking up the excess oil.

“Okay, maybe you have a point about the whole yelling at girls to wait thing but not saying the same to boys. They do have a habit of doing that at Jerusalem, grandma,” she said, coming to my defense.

My grandma didn’t reply. She stood still at the counter, picking through the bowl of beans, her strong hands churning through the grayish-purple mass, a set of pearl bracelets clinking together with each vigorous movement. I had been watching her cook in the same way since I was four or five: barefoot, a floral housecoat on, usually over the skirt and girdle she had worn to church, her hair pinned up or curled around her face depending on the season, and always, always, always wearing each piece of jewelry that she had donned at the service. The clashes were coherent. They made her a petite frame of contradictions: relaxed but rigid, decorated but plain, confined yet free. But she was quiet, and I never listen to my grandma more than when she is silent. At that moment, she seemed to be yelling across the kitchen.

“How did they talk to the girls when you were little?” Tia asked.

“Oh, you know it was the same thing. Same thing that pastor was telling y’all.” She busied herself with rummaging through the cabinets underneath the sink for another boiling pot.

Tia pressed, “And what did you and your sisters say?” There were eight of them.

“Mmm hmmm,” she said, finding a pot and turning on the faucet. “We didn’t like it either. But you know, we just went every Sunday and listened to it anyway.” The burner was glowing orange and hissed when she placed the pot on it. Beans slipped

and splashed into the water as they left the bowl. She stared at them for a short while before turning back to the faucet to wash her hands. A damp dishcloth was on the counter, and she used it to begin wiping the counter.

“Well, maybe I shouldn’t say listened. We heard it though.”

“I didn’t know that. Well if girls didn’t like it then, they certainly wouldn’t like it now.” Tia turned the burner off and moved the pan of oil to the back of the stove. She wiped her face with the back of her hand and stood with an inverted hand on her hip, waiting for my grandma to say something.

“Grandma...did you wait?” I don’t know if I meant for it to actually come out.

It seemed inappropriate, invasive even, as soon as it left my mouth. It was a bold question for an 18-year-old to be asking her 64-year-old grandma. But in my mind, there had to be at least one girl among them, maybe two, who didn’t even like going to church with its scratchy pews and sweaty preachers. There had to be at least one girl who didn’t want to wait. There had to be at least one girl who thought it was bullshit, too. Her answer was so quick, so casual, that I didn’t even have the time to think about or process it. She didn’t seem embarrassed, taken aback, or harried by the question. In fact, she seemed happy to answer it. It was as if she had been waiting for one of us to go there with her. She stopped wiping the counter.

“Nooooooooo, chile, I didn’t do that. But,” she added proudly, lifting the bowl that once held the beans to return to her wiping, “I *never* got pregnant.” She beamed.

Perhaps it was all the white she sometimes wore on Sundays or her love for sitting in the very first pew. It might have been the disapproving look I sometimes caught when my jeans began gripping my thighs more tightly, and I expressed no interest in wearing a different fit. Or maybe it was how her hands went up in praise whenever a preacher at New Jerusalem gave his trademark sermon on how women might best get back to “living right.” It could have been her getting—and staying—married at 24, having four children with the same man. She always seemed so proud of that, relieved by it. Whatever it was, it made my mouth drop when my grandma casually revealed, one Sunday after church, that she hadn’t waited until she was married to have sex.

When I go back to that Sunday, I wonder, “Was I feigning surprise? Should I have expected her to say, ‘Of course I did?’” Because this was also the grandma that sometimes said she was tired of going to church. And this was also the grandma that told me that I had a nice body and should show it off as much or as little as I wanted to. And this was the grandma that has told, on more than one occasion, that being married has made her extremely happy, but it’s not for everyone. This is the grandma that, whether she knows it or not, has given me permission to be Black and woman and Southern and Christian and sexual and free. All at the same time.

I wanted to reply, “Really?” or “You?” but neither could hold the weight of what she had shared. Neither could simultaneously convey how she had both surprised and inspired me. There she was, that petite bundle of contradictions, shattering everything I had ever assumed about her love, sex, and marriage life. There she was, showing us that you could negotiate sex and pregnancy on your own terms. And there she was, sharing this with us, while we couldn’t even share it with each other.

It is dusk on my twenty-ninth or thirtieth birthday, and Tia spends the weekend with me in San Juan, maybe Negril. We order a second round of margaritas at an outdoor tavern, low-slung, white lights married to wooden beams, dancing above our heads. The local people who call this place home weave and loop around us, moving to music, clinking beer bottles, pouring out laughs that have all the familiarity of a big city with none of the rude speed. We talk about rough days at work, rougher days at home, how tired we are of going on dates that lead to nowhere. I laugh, grateful that my vibrator doesn’t disappoint me as often or as deeply. “You have a vibrator?” she asks with intrigue. “Yes...” I say, warily. “Hub,” she goes. When more sangrias come, she smiles and starts to stir her drink. “Tell me more. What else do you know?”

THERE ARE BLACK PEOPLE IN THE FUTURE

Jasmine Lomax

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