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After the Revolution:
Memory, Absence, and Carrying on in Black Literature and Film of the Americas

DISSERTATION

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for the degree of

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by

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DEDICATION

To

my brother

Matthew James Rogers (1976-2009)

whose absent presence

evoked each word.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

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Hemispheric American literature and film; Black Studies; Black, decolonial, and transnational feminist thought

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

After the Revolution:
Memory, Absence, and Carrying on in Black Literature and Film of the Americas

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Adriana Michele Campos Johnson, Chair

Situated in different but related "post-revolutionary" contexts, *After the Revolution: Memory, Absence, and Carrying on in Black Literature and Film of the Americas* begins by positing communal and intersubjective labor as central to the interrogation of resistant and revolutionary subjectivity. The dissertation engages with recent scholarship on affect and ontology in feminist studies, Black studies, and critical theory in order to reframe intersectional approaches to race and gender within the fields of literary and media studies. Focusing on Black literature and film of the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America, the dissertation asserts the intellectual and political stakes emerging from theorizations of everyday life and the affective dimensions of race and gender in cultural productions. Its concentration on the "after" of revolution departs from event-based narratives of social and political transformation and moments of revolt, and highlights instead artistic expressions of daily living. These moments are are no longer about explosive transformation, heroes, and grand historical gestures, but rather the quiet spaces in between, and the enervating work of carrying on. More so than within revolutionary activity

itself, I argue, these are the moments where the sedimentation of subject formation within newly defined political and social parameters begins.

The dissertation brings together interdisciplinary cultural studies methods derived from theories of coloniality, such as put forth by Sylvia Wynter, Black feminist theories of resistance, empowerment, and affective politics as developed by Audre Lorde and June Jordan; contemporary Black feminist theorizing of subjectivity, identity, and epistemology, drawing from Denise Ferreira da Silva and Saidiya Hartman; and contemporary Black scholarship concerned with discursively produced constructions of Blackness, such as that by Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton, and Fred Moten. In doing so, I draw attention to affective circuits within different geopolitical and historical contexts that are formed in relation to race, gender, and sexual hierarchies of power.

INTRODUCTION:

Rethinking Revolution and Resistance

In lieu of an epigraph, I open with a triptych of images that represent each of the three terms of the dissertation's subtitle. *Memory:* Above left is "Untitled (Boone Plantation),"[1] a photograph from Carrie Mea Weems' Sea Islands Series (1991-1992), which consists of images taken on the U.S. Southern Sea Islands that lie off the coast of the Carolinas and Georgia, and where the last of the fugitive slave ships were said to have docked. Like many of the titles in the series, it begins with the word "Untitled," indicating the impossibility of naming and narrating stories of slavery from the perspective of the slave. By following up with a historical marker ("Boone Plantation" in this case; "Ebo Landing" in another), the photographs nevertheless insist on naming and representing those effaced stories, even if they are fragmentary and incomplete, partially derived from histories engraved in material spaces, in official records, and in inherited memories. *Absence*: The middle image is taken from a real estate company's Web site that is advertising homes for sale in the "heart of the sea islands." It touts the private, gated community of Dataw Island as home to "superlative" golf and tennis, a water marina, excellent club facilities and gracious homes, "all in the casual lifestyle and abundant natural beauty found in the Low Country of South Carolina" where there was "once a prosperous sea island cotton plantation."[2] Not only are the slaves, upon whose backs those plantations became so prosperous, erased from this image, but so too is any indication that the decedents of those slaves, the Geechee

[1] Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Boone Plantation).* 1991-1992. Sea Island Series, Jepson Center.

[2] Beaufort, SC Real Estate, accessed June 21, 2018, http://www.discoverdataw.com.

(sometimes called Gullah) people, still reside on the island. *Carrying on*: Above right is another image from Weems' Sea Island Series.[3] A Gullah woman stands in her home, dressed in the all-white clothing that is traditional on the islands. The photograph is part of a polyptych that includes two prints and two text panels. The second print is of a dark rocking chair in medium focus, situated in the same room in which the woman stands. The text panels offer folk wisdom, tips on how to rid yourself and your home of bad luck. Tourism, gentrification, deforestation, and rising sea levels are all among the omens of bad luck plaguing the Sea Islands in the present, displacing the people, destroying the land, and replaying again a history in which Black people of the Americas are disinherited, stripped of rights, and made invisible. The image of the woman, eyes closed, candles burning behind her, bent slightly in a gesture perhaps of some kind of prayer, indicates, however, ritual practices and mechanisms of daily living that uphold Black life, even in the face of absence and disaster. The rocking chair, a sign of comfort and tradition, signifies Black social life, representing at once a site of community (as a place to gather around elders, for example) and a site of self-care (as a place for an individual to rest). Taken together, the panels express enduring through struggle, or the process of carrying on in creative resistance to and rejection of a world in which Black life is constructed as social death.[4]

The U.S. Civil War, a revolution whose end ostensibly brought with it the abolition of slavery, came to a close in 1865. But as Viola Peazant (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) in Julie Dash's

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[3] Weems, *Untitled.* 1991-1992. Sea Island Series, accessed June 21, 2018, http://www.artnet.com/artists/carrie-mae-weems/sea-islands-series-0BnO8riP5mP7scVsL6AYEg2.

[4] See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7. Patterson argues that slavery produces the "social death" of the slave, which he describes as the alienation or exclusion of the slave from the community of slaves at large, justified by the construction of the slave as a non-human object, and accomplished through law and genealogical rupture.

Daughters of the Dust, points out, freedom came slowly to the U.S. Southern Sea Islands: "Just before the [Civil] war, they'd keep boatloads of fresh Africans off on some secret islands around here. ... Just before the war, they were still running and hiding salt water Africans, pure bred, from the Yankees."[5] To the south and across the water, freedom was slow to arrive in Cuba as well. Abolition was finally ratified in 1886 (when economic conditions made it more profitable to hire freed slaves than to maintain them year round), and in 1912, thousands of Afrocubans were massacred in what has been called the "Little Race War" in retaliation for their political organizing. And while Cuba's 1959 Revolution brought with it new laws intended to eradicate racial discrimination, Blackness remained and remains a social stigma. A few years after the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. Civil Rights movement, popularly thought of as revolutionary, also reformed the discriminatory legal system, with the passage of 1964, 1965, and 1968 legislations intending to reverse state-sanctioned segregation, employment discrimination, and voter intimidation. As early as 1968, however, it was already clear that the failure of these laws to address the economic violence of poverty in Black and minority communities was but a symptom of the underlying white supremacism that was inaugurated with colonialism and remained a foundational, if now hidden by reform, ideology in the United States.

And even further south, directly west of the African coast, lies the tiny island nation of Grenada, whose own freedom fight reached a landmark moment on August 1, 1838, when the last of its slaves were freed. The country, however, strained under white British rule until 1974, when it was replaced by Eric Gairy's autocratic rule. The short-lived Grenadian Revolution (1979-1983), a Black socialist movement for the autonomous rule of the people, served as a

[5] *Daughters* is set on an unnamed Sea Island in 1902. It was filmed largely on St. Helena Island, just east of Beaufort, South Carolina.

beacon of hope for Black Americans throughout the hemisphere, until its incomprehensible collapse in 1983 and the subsequent opportunistic invasion by the United States in the name of "protecting" U.S. citizens who were studying at the medical school there. The ideology of exceptionalism that supports such U.S. invasions necessarily disavows global and domestic suffering beget by U.S. policy. Such exceptionalism was given an alibi in 2008, with the "revolutionary" election of the first Black president, Barak Obama.[6] With Obama in office, the nation appeared to announce itself as a post-racial society, even while Black, Indigenous, and Brown bodies continue to fall victim, with even more visibility due to social media, to police bullets, targeted incarceration, and failed infrastructures.

I present this litany here in order to make legible a slice of the interconnectedness and the continuities of Black and Brown freedom struggles that are intrinsic to the political, social, and economic underground of the Americas; the struggles that are the *after* of revolutions and ostensible revolutionary activities that were supposed to have brought an end to Black suffering. As the photographs above suggest, revolution remains ongoing, even if no longer in armed struggle. These moments are no longer about explosive transformation, heroes, and grand historical gestures, but rather are about the quiet spaces in between, and the enervating work of carrying on. More so than within revolutionary activity itself, I suggest that it is the work of daily living in the aftermath of revolution that largely sets the parameters of newly defined social and political fields. This dissertation focuses on texts coming out of the post-revolutionary contexts

[6] On both the left and right, Obama's election was declared revolutionary. Beyond the landmark of his being the first Black man to be elected president in the United States, his election was celebrated by many on the left as a sign of the power of the people, and his win attributed to the role of grassroots organizing (see, for example, *The Obama Revolution* by Alan Kennedy-Shaffer). On the right, he was demonized as a socialist who intended to "subject America to a wholesale transformation," as the promotional material for David Horowitz's *Barak Obama's Rules for Revolution*, notes.

in Cuba and Grenada, whose socialist revolutions were in large part responses to the failures of their post-independence governments to emerge from colonial structures of exploitation and inequality, and on the post-Civil Rights and post-Obama eras in the United States, where reform and claims to post-raciality served more to bolster U.S. claims to moral superiority than they did to ease the suffering of the oppressed. I do so to draw attention to the transnational connections between the three locations' revolutions or resistance movements, as well as to the distinct responses of each to the long afterlife of slavery,[7] and the coloniality that revolutionary activity has ultimately failed to rupture.[8] I argue, however, that each of the texts I treat nevertheless refuse the foreclosure of Black life. Instead, they are signs of the radical creativity that living within spaces of abjection necessitates if one is to carry on. Focusing on Black film, video, and

[7] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6. Saidiya Hartman describes the afterlife of slavery thus: "Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery — skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery."

[8] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257-337. Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter and members of the Latin Americanist "Coloniality of Power" group, use the term "coloniality" as a descriptor of the socio-material systems that inaugurated modernity, beginning as early as the 15th-century with European colonization of the Americas and subsequent chattel slavery. These systems, which continue to structure the conditions of neocolonial imperialism and white supremacy in the present, are sedimented through hierarchies of power, culture, and knowledge that are attached to the colonial invention of categories of race, which place white European masculinity as the highest marker of value. As Wynter has pointed out, this hierarchy constructs Blackness as the paradigm of the "natural slave," and places other non-white, non-Europeans on historically shifting scales of "not-quite" fully rational Man. In the Western imaginary, Blackness (especially Black femininity) comes to be associated with the "lesser" of human traits — sensuality, sexuality, and communality — and is categorized spatially as attached to the "dark continent" of Africa and its diasporas, and temporally as primitive, without history or civilization. White masculinity, on the other hand, is imagined as possessing "civilized" traits — rationality, morality, and individuality — that are attached to Western Europe and modernity. (White femininity is imagined as falling somewhere in between these paradigms). The debasement of the body and its capacity to affect and be affected within the system of coloniality produces subjects, both non-white and white, who are ontologically split from the start — with whiteness being associated with a "healthy" ability to maintain this split, and Blackness or proximity to Blackness being associated with the pathological. Contemporary biopolitical formations of power are maintained through this racial, sexual, and gendered structure of normativity.

literature, I argue that it is from within such spaces of creativity that the most resistant and inventive — that is, *revolutionary* — modes of political living emerge.

My concentration on African diasporic cultural production in the Americas has three additional aims. One is to acknowledge and contribute to the study of Black artistic and intellectual discourses and practices that are often excluded by predominately white institutions (such as universities and museums). I argue that this systemic exclusion participates in producing affective forms of relations among groups associated with these institutions, which in turn go hand in hand with the maintenance of white supremacist heteropatriarchal cultures inaugurated with colonialism and the subsequent commodification of flesh through chattel slavery. For example, the continued undervaluing, delegitimizing, and appropriating of Black women's intellectual and artistic work in institutional spaces contributes to the reproduction of race and gender hierarchies in which Black women are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, oppression, and violence.[9] In Chapter One, "Invisible Memories: Black Feminist Thought and its Affective Flights," I argue that Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and Toni Morrison were developing political and literary theories of affect beginning as early as the 1970s, in part as a response to the failures of second wave feminism, Black Power, and the Black Arts Movement to address their own reproductions of race and gender hierarchies, respectively, in their liberatory politics. Genealogies of contemporary affect theory, in turn, continue to reproduce these hierarchies by neglecting Black feminist theorizing as part of its history. In

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[9] Patricia Hill Collins, "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought" in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Conciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* 2nd Edition (New York: Taylor and Francis 2002), 3. "The shadow obscuring [the] complex Black women's intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign. Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggests that sub- ordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization."

doing so, these affect theory as a body of thought fails to fully incorporate Black feminist interrogations of the relationship of affect — which theorists have described as the "building blocks" of drives, from the libidinal to the aggressive[10] — to cultures of white supremacy and to the sedimentation of anti-Blackness into the emotional and libidinal economy of modernity.

My concern with institutional neglect of Black women's intellectual and artist labor relates directly to my second aim in the dissertation, which is to interrogate more generally the ways in which texts come to be produced, distributed, and understood by institutions and the consuming public. By starting here in my analysis of literary and visual texts, I comparatively trace the relationship of socio-political conditions in different geographic spaces and historical moments to a variety of production and reception practices. In doing so, I interrogate assumptions (and resistances to those assumptions) about the ways in which texts are or should be created, consumed, and preserved. For example, Chapter Three, "Imaging Sara Gómez," argues that certain critical readings of the Afrocuban filmmaker's feature film, *De cierta manera* (1974), attribute to it an intersectional critique of gender and race based largely on responses to affects generated by Gómez's early death, and by the fact of her biographical background as the only woman, and one of the very few Afrocubans, to make a feature length film in Cuba (a statistic that remains largely true in the present). I argue instead that the film's focus on race is tacit, and its exploration of the tensions produced by *machista* culture within the revolution is largely uncritical of nationalist discourses of (hetero)normative family life as the center of revolutionary praxis. My primary aim in that chapter, however, is not to criticize Gómez's film for what it lacks, but rather to highlight the complex conditions under which she labored in post-

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[10] Otto F. Kernberg, "New Perspectives in Psychoanalytic Affect Theory" in *Emotion, Psychopathology, and Psychotherapy,* eds. Robert Plutchik and Henry Kellerman (Academic Press 1990), 115-131.

revolutionary Cuba, where official discourse silenced interrogations of racial inequality, declaring them to be counter-revolutionary and a threat to national unity. I draw comparisons to Gómez's earlier work, including her censored documentary *Guanabacoa: crónica de mi familia* (1966), concluding that her treatment of Afrocuban history through the use of her own family's photo album and the affect it produces sidesteps official discourses and offers more salient commentary on Cuban struggle with systems of racialized patriarchy than her later film. The celebration of *De cierta manera* serves a double purpose: It allows Cuban officials to claim an Afrocuban woman as a figure of national unity, while at the same time covering over and thus disappearing the pointed criticisms of her earlier work. In other words, such a practice participates in producing circuits of affects that are mobilized in official circuits to impart revolutionary and nationalist sentiment among the cinema-going public while maintaining surreptitious white supremacist ideology.

My third aim is to focus on texts that M. NourbeSe Philip has described as attempting the "telling and untelling of what cannot, yet must, be told." That is, I concentrate on narratives of slavery, cultural genocide, and racial and gendered violence, as well as those of resistance and revolution, communal struggle and acts of enduring, all of which are otherwise absented from a historical archive that has been largely produced by Western narratives of linear progress that produce the Black body as a dehumanized object. Such narratives, as Denise Ferreira da Silva notes, function as the chains through which Blackness remains tethered to the project of global capital as commodity. The colonial architecture that constructed categories of race as an ethical justification for the expropriation of native lands and the enslavement of African labor continues to produce value that sustains global capital today, she argues, and the maintenance of racial

categorization and hierarchization is reproduced by tools of reason and causality that structure (racialized) space and time as fundamental descriptors of a world that is always "in progress." Narratives of progress, in other words, cannot accommodate stories of slavery from the perspective of the *human* slave; the only stories of slavery that are legible to these narratives are those in which the slave remains a silent commodity. Thus, the erasure of Black women's intellectual contributions described above is, I argue, part of a continuum in which the full humanity of Black subjects is routinely buried by way of incomplete and false historiographies that stand in as the official record of Black subjectivity. The power of the archive is to select and legitimize what power deems "archivable," and at the same time to entomb, enclose, and encase that which it does not deem politically or economically advantageous to save: The history of the making of Black humans into flesh for the sake of capital.[11] The archive, then, might record the numbers of Black captives transported across seas, but not their names, their birth places, or who their parents might be. Or, it might record the lives of the extraordinary, those whose names *are* known thanks to their gifts of literacy and ability to record their stories. But even these writers of slave narratives had to "drop a veil over [those] proceedings too terrible to relate" when it came

[11] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 68. Spillers' response to the 1965 Moynihan Report, in which Black family structures are dehumanized and pathologized, with Black women in particular being named as out of step with "American" patriarchal values describes the discursive construction of Black flesh. The dehumanization of Black people in the Moynihan report, according to Spillers, derives from the "zero degree of social conceptualization" developed through slavery in which Black flesh accrues a more fundamental level of meaning within white supremacist capitalist structures than Black sociality due to its relationship to capital. Spillers points to an advertisement from 1838 seeking 50 "sick Negros" whose various body parts (which are named in the ad) can be used for "medical education." Spillers writes of the ad:

> [The] profitable "atomizing" of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory.

to expressing the interior quality of their lives, lest white abolitionists become offended.[12] Or it records the acts of revolutionary heroes such as Toussaint Louverture, Antonio Maceo Grajales, or Maurice Bishop, but not the acts of those who create worlds anew in everyday practices of resistance, of self-making, and of self-love.

Throughout the dissertation, then, I seek to interrogate the ways in which texts that aim at interiority, at stories of everyday resistance, and at modes of Black self-making and self-valuation, function as part of a practice of sitting with the world *as it is* in its ani-Black heteropatriarchal structure, in order to imagine how it *could be*. Chapter 2, "Black Self-Making and the L.A. Rebellion School of Film," for example, asks what it means for Black subjects to endure in the absence of a liberatory field. This chapter argues that the filmmaking practices of what has come to be known as the L.A. Rebellion — a loose consortium of Black film students who attended UCLA from the late 1960s to the 1980s — generated a constellation of texts that together evoke struggle as the very condition of Black life. At the same time, L.A. Rebellion films articulate what Black feminists such as Lorde and Jordan also posit: That struggle, or everyday acts of enduring, are acts of great courage, that loving Blackness in a culture based on anti-Black hate is radical, and that conscious cultivation of alternatives to that hate — self-love, self-care, self-valuation — is part of a dynamic and active political process.

While Chapter 2 concentrates on the personal and political salience of enduring, Chapter 4, "Self-Invention and the Radical Leap in Revolutionary Grenada," begins by examining

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[12] Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *The Invention of Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2nd. Edition, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1995): 83-102. As I discuss further in Chapter Five, even slave narratives lack engagement with interiority as their primary aims were to garner sympathy from white abolitionists. Morrison notes that in order to make the narratives more palatable to white audiences, writers veiled their inner thoughts and the extent of the violence of their experiences (90-91).

enduring's end in order to rethink possibilities of personal and political practices of resistance. Through an interrogation of representations of memory, suicide, and the queer diaspora in novels and videos related to the Grenadian Revolution by Dionne Brand, Merle Collins, and Steve McQueen, this chapter theorizes the political and personal repercussions of ostensible "failures" to carry on. I argue that the texts disrupt normative criteria of what counts as "success" and "failure" in revolution, and open up the possibility of thinking affective, bodily relations as the ground upon which radical self-invention meets and refuses the totality of coloniality and its gendered, spacio-temporal racialization. Using Franz Fanon's conceptualization of the "leap into real self-invention" as a guiding metaphor, I examine the videos' and novels' representations of the historical leap of the "last" of the Caribs from Grenada's Sauter's Hill to ask what other worlds are possible, even within the seemingly irreparable confines of the white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchal logics of *this* world. What "leaps" are necessary, and what are the stakes of the leaping? These works, I conclude, offer not alternative criteria for defining revolutionary success and failure, but rather alternatives to the very notion of success or failure's finality by crafting chronotopic disruptions that require readers to conceptualize history as fluid and inconsistent affects of a continuum that do not necessarily relate to a stable point in time or space.[13]

To do so, I draw from a range of theoretical strains of Black studies and feminist studies throughout the dissertation. In particular, I bring a mode of contemporary Black studies that is preoccupied with Western modernity's discursive construction of Blackness, such as in the Afro-pessimist tradition, together with Black feminist thought that engages more closely with

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[13] See Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 84-258.

subjective experiences of gendered Blackness.[14] The former theories of Blackness are shaped by considerations of the ontological standing of Black lives as having a particular intimacy with death, be it social, political, or physical death. This intimacy is born of constructions of Blackness that emerge out of what Orlando Patterson describes as "the slave relation," or the irreconcilable natal alienation, general dishonorment, and gratuitous violence that was initiated with chattel slavery, and which continue to shape perceptions of Blackness as a dehumanized category in the present.[15] This construction of Blackness founds capitalist modernity through its creation of a hierarchy of exploitable bodies based on their proximity to Blackness,[16] and is so deeply ingrained in imperialist narratives of progress that liberation is not possible within the epistemological confines of the world as it is presently understood, as theorists of Afro-pessimism, such as Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton, have argued.

Black feminist theories of liberation concentrate on intersectional analyses of gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and race in order to develop counter-narratives to the discourses of white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy,[17] and to develop and implement collective strategies for transforming lived conditions of the oppressed. These counter-narratives and strategies involve a re-valuing of Blackness and the capacity for Black self-making, and while

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[14] See *Theory and Event*, 21, no. 1 (2018), guest edited by Shadee Malaklou and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, which examines with precision and nuance the terrains of Afropessimism and Black feminism and their generative tensions.

[15] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7.

[16] See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[17] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981). hooks began using the term "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" to note the interlocking nature of these systems of oppression. I have added the modifier "hetero" to note the ways in which heteronormativity, too, is constitutive of gender and race hierarchies within capitalist modernity.

they often figure in local organizing, they are also rooted in transnational and diasporic solidarities. Like Afro-pessimists, many Black feminist thinkers also understand liberation as necessitating undoing the world as we presently know it. As Shadee Malaklou and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard note, for example, Audre Lorde argued long ago that humanity's patterns of being are unsustainable, and that the

> future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. … The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetition of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recriminations, lamentation, and suspicion.[18]

In other words, Lorde reminds us, the master's tools can not dismantle the master's house.[19] In the following chapters, then, I consider what these modes of thinking do within the political imagination when they are thought appositionally rather than oppositionally.

In their introduction to a special issue of *Theory and Event* that aims at just such a project*,* Malaklou and Willoughby-Herard contend that to "hold black feminism's fugitive demands to undo the world and Afro-pessimism's unflinching turn toward social death in the same frame" allows for a consideration of the

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[18] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 123.

[19] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 123. See also "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 110.

> 'both/and' of their demands — not towards cathartic and/or recuperative ends, that is to say, *not towards dialectical ends, which can only ever disarm the threat of their interventions, but as a praxis in search of insurgent ground,* which … Jayne Austin Williams describes as a different 'longitude' for 'life and being' that also accounts for 'the empirically supportable fact that when blacks survive at all, they must do so with a resolve to resist and protest.'[20]

Within this unceasing struggle to survive, in other words, Black people endure — they protest, resist, and carry on; they make themselves anew with visions of undoing this world in which redemption is not possible. The texts I address in the following dwell in this space of enduring, of carrying on within the impossible, and ask, given that reality, what other worlds nevertheless *do* get made? The texts, both in their narrative imaginaries and in their material existence as artifacts of Black cultural production and "fugitive" intellectual life, are evidence, I argue, of both the limits and the potentiality of thinking otherwise in the world in order to undo it. In other words, they offer non-prescriptive "blueprints of expectation and response" for ways of thinking and being toward revolution, even if revolution is always already foreclosed within the economy of anti-Blackness.[21]

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[20] Shadee Malaklou and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, "Notes from the Kitchen, the Crossroads, and Everywhere Else, too: Ruptures of Thought, Word, and Deed from the 'Arbiters of Blackness Itself,'" *Theory and Event*, 21, no. 1 (2018): 4.

[21] Audre Lorde, quoted in Malaklou and Willoughby-Herard, "Notes from the Kitchen, the Crossroads, and Everywhere Else, too: Ruptures of Thought, Word, and Deed from the 'Arbiters of Blackness Itself,'" *Theory and Event*, 21, no. 1 (2018): 4.

Throughout the dissertation, I borrow the term "Black self-making" from both Saidiya Hartman and Jafari Allen throughout in order to highlight this productive tension between Black feminist liberation politics and the assertion that struggle is the enduring ontological condition of Black life. Allen's book, *Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba*, follows Lorde's discussion in "The Uses of the Erotic" to describe intimate Black spaces as spaces of autonomy in which struggles for dignity and freedom are, in some small way, realized in everyday acts. As Allen points out, Lorde argues that practices of self-love, loving friendship, and erotic connection "form powerful tools *that we have now* to use as a way of healing from compound traumas of race/sex terror" (emphasis Allen's).[22] Working toward healing from the compound traumas of white supremacy, misogyny and homophobia is, according to Lorde, a necessary *precondition* for living a life that is "richer and more possible" and through which the "world can be truly different."[23] It is, in other words, the condition within which inventive self-making can offer new "blueprints of expectation and response."[24]

Hartman, on the other hand, points to the juridical double-face of the concept of "self-making," examining in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in 19th Century America* the ways in which the liberal discourses of possessive individualism enabled new strategies of bondage in the postbellum era, primarily by equating emancipation's invitation to Western modernity's rational individualism with social and legal blameworthiness, opening the way for post-restoration carceral slavery. From this vantage point, she says, "emancipation

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[22] Jafari Allen, *Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 16.

[23] Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 55.

[24] Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 123.

appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection."[25] In other words, the afterlife of slavery that characterizes U.S. social and political life from restoration to the present is constituted by modes of racial subjection that shift to accommodate new forms of racial terror.

Allen and Hartman's formulations, while in many ways incongruent, nevertheless each both point to the limits of radicality. Hartman, on one hand, is fundamentally concerned with the paradox of Black life as always lived in essential intimacy with death, and the implications this has on the hail to subjectivity. Black subjects, in this formulation, *become* subject by way of juridical standing, which positions Black bodies not as rights-holding individuals, but rather as culpable agents vulnerable to state-sanctioned violence and carceral slavery. Allen, on the other hand, joins contemporary scholars who theorize resistant subaltern subjectivities by concentrating on the small spaces of community and the quotidian in order to think about self-making as part of a continual process of becoming-subject that occurs outside of, or rather, in a multilayered relationship with, the nation-state and the legal system. Allen's emphasis on the present in his discussion of the tools provided by the erotic, however, theorizes a type of futurity that does not necessarily assume the possibility of resolution to the paradox of Black subjectivity within the anti-Black "antagonisms" that continue to structure the present.[26] The tools of the erotic are at hand *now,* not in an impossible future in which modern epistemologies and economies have been overturned and the world as we understand it today no longer exists. These

[25] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in 19th Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

[26] Frank Wilderson, "Incognegro," accessed June 24, 2018, www.incognegro.org/afro_pessimism.html. Wilderson describes the discursive structure of anti-Blackness as a foundational antagonism rather than a conflict to emphasize that the relationship between "Blacks" and "humanity" is one of irreconcilable encounter in the structure of the world as we know it.

tools can be used to claim Black sociality *for itself*, within autonomous spaces of community and intimacy. In other words, Black self-making and self-love claim value for Black life that endures outside of the commodity function that constructs Blackness as social death, thing, or fleshy commodity without history, even while structures of anti-Black violence continue unceasingly to assault such life.

The concept of Black enduring in an anti-Black world, then, points to a philosophy of value in which enduring despite the irrationality of existing in a world bent on destruction is a value in and of itself. A theory in which revolutionary Black self-making and self-love endures even within the reality of unending struggle is a fundamentally "irrational" one; "revolution," in the fullest sense of the word, is always already denied its potential by the foundational structures of anti-Blackness, and thus has no teleological end. However, the irrationality of the theory is paradoxically what makes it revolutionary: It rejects rationality as the primary marker of what it means to be human, radically departing from the philosophical constructs of Western modernity.

The colloquial way that I am using the term "endure," in this regard, is perhaps better described by the concept of "perduring," or rather, the constant tension between enduring and perduring. To *perdure* means to persist *through* or *despite* something else *with change*. Enduring, on the other hand, is described in philosophy as matter's persistent unchanging nature, and relates to attempts by subjects to fix properties of substances into something knowable or recognizable. *Perduring*, then, implies a way of being in the world without fixing it in space and time. A theory of revolutionary Black self-making and self-love is necessarily a theory of perdurance, in that it is always in struggle against attempts to fix Blackness as a commodifiable, singular, and discreet (i.e., knowable) thing. *Revolutionary* Black self-making and self-valuation,

in other words, work toward rejecting the hail to subjectivity that is defined by structures of rational individualism and their concomitant relationship to commodity culture, and hence slavery, even if it cannot but remain confined within those structures. This is the paradox of Marx's "commodity that speaks," or what Fred Moten describes as the "undercommon, underground, submarine" life of the slave that persists in sociality despite its relentless foreclosure in social death.[27]

Black social life, he says, is violently and continuously abjected from the sphere of the Western political subject — the self-possessed individual — and returned to the sphere of the "supposedly undifferentiated mass or blob of the social."[28] The undifferentiated mass, Moten says, is understood as such only from the *imagined* position of the transcendental, discrete political subject of knowledge — that imagined position of authority looking down from above at the masses who dwell in the subterranean.[29] Rather than despair the subterranean position of

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[27] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). According to Marx, the only social relation of the commodity is the relation of exchange. Moten reproduces Marx's ventriloquization of speech given to commodities that according to Marx cannot themselves speak:

> If commodities could speak they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values. Quoted in *In the Break,* 8.

Moten, however, points to the sonic reverberations of the speech of slaves and their decedents, the sounds made by those whose flesh is deemed commodity but who nevertheless refuse the limits of a social life of exchange: the songs of Strayhorn, the utterances of Baraka, the screams of Aunt Hester. These are the sounds of the claims to self, to the value of self that exceeds the value of the body as a means of production, or as mere flesh. These are the sounds of creative self-invention, of Black social relations from within the space of nothingness — the "abyss" or the "hold" — despite being denied the capacity for such relations.

[28] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 740.

[29] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 741.

Blackness, however, Moten asks if it can be analyzed as a space from which the "butchery" of civil society can — or must — be abandoned. Can there be, he asks, an "aesthetic sociology or a social poetics of nothingness?" Rather than seek to be some/thing in the eyes of the society that produces Blackness as nothingness in the first place, what if the project of a Black poetics or Black sociality is to blow the standpoint of civil society altogether?[30]

As I discuss further in Chapters One and Five, Toni Morrison indicates both the subterranean and communal quality of tracing Black social life when she describes her writing process as akin to "literary archeology."[31] ("Site" 92). By piecing together what could have been based on fragments snatched from memories imprinted in symbols, speech patterns, and practices of everyday life, as well as by "reading between the lines" of historical records, she imagines the "interior life" of Black people who are historically and systematically denied the capacity for such interiority. Quoting Zora Neale Hurston, she says "'Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me.' These 'memories within' are the subsoil of my work." The metaphor of the subterranean, of the earth and its underground, is of no small consequence. It was, after all, from underground that slaves made their way out of the belly of the South. The "memories within," shared through labyrinths of stories passed from generation to generation in writing, song, and orature, in culinary practices, medicine, and folk tales, in novels, poems, and films — even in multimillion dollar music videos — yields a subterranean and communal archive in which loss, or rather, what loss

[30] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 742.

[31] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *The Invention of Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2nd. Edition, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995): 92.

manifests through its traces and remains, becomes the matter with which underground social life is built.

For Ferreira da Silva, surfacing the “memories within” through creative works allows for imagining ways in which non-causal, indeterminate time and space — what she describes as *plenum* — might appear if Blackness were “emancipated from science and history” and made free to “wonder about another praxis and wander in the World, with the ethical mandate of opening up other ways of knowing and doing.[32] She describes the character Dana in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, for example, as traversing linear time and causality in her movement from her contemporary moment as a conflicted Black woman in 1976 California, to her ancestral past as a freewoman forced into slavery. Dana brings into focus the remains of slave labor on her own body, which is marked by absence upon her last return home when her left arm, gripped by the slavemaster of the past, becomes stuck in the wall — the matter of fixed time and space — that divides her time from his. Imagining the past as present within the reality of the now, Ferreira da Silva argues, is an exercise that exposes the cracks in the assumption of unbreakable historical continuity or natural causality. While she acknowledges that this is but a thought experiment, it is one that, “like the dead-seeming cold rocks” Hurston describes, draws upon material that went into the making of Blackness and Black social life. By imaginatively reconfiguring that material, the text discloses the ruse of the “self-contained and coherent image of the Subject,” that exists in singular space/time,[33] and offers a glimpse of an underground Black sociality that in its

[32] Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,” *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 81, 93-94.

[33] Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics,” *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 94.

abjection can not help but be engaged in the ongoing process of re-imaging and re-arranging the world as we know it.

Chapter 5, "Diasporic Communion and Intertextual Exchange in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust,*" examines the imaginative reconfiguration of the material that goes into the making of Blackness, and the creative wondering about the world that disrupts linear time and space as it surfaces in intertextual exchange in Black texts. Building on Chapter 4, it theorizes the chronotopic disruption that is produced by the intertextuality of works such as Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* (2016) and Julie Dash's film and novel *Daughters of the Dust* (1991 and 1992) as indicative of the type of Black feminist poethics that images ways of being in the world *Other-wise;* that is, to being Other and *other than* the regime that constructs it as such. A poethics that announces a whole range of possibilities that are other than the world as we know it would not be bound by the stranglehold of "universality and its particular arrangement of Space and Time" nor to "transcendentality (self-determination)," but could instead imagine time and space as plenum: "virtuality" rather than causality, or "contingency and possibility rather than necessity and determinacy."[34] Ferreira da Silva points to Gottfried Leibniz's description of plenum as all matter being interconnected, as every motion having some effect on distant bodies, and as communication extending to "any distance whatsoever."[35] *Diasporic communion*, as I conceptualize it, performs this type of communication across the plenum — or what might be thought of as subterranean, rhizomatic communication across time

[34] Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 92-93.

[35] Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 84.

and space — through both intertextual and the extratextual relations that the texts initiate, suggesting a cosmology of relationality rather than of individuality.

Diasporic communion might be thought broadly, then, as a process of transmission of stories, histories, and cultural codes via inter- and extratextual exchange that encourages intimate relationships — communion — across the plenum among diasporic subjects, even when those relationships are only imagined. Through examination of *Lemonade*'s conversation with *Daughters of the Dust*, and both of their conversations with other texts, I examine how their intertextuality activates transnational and transgenerational connections through layered citation of shared histories of struggle and resistance. Further, I argue that the ways in which the texts both reproduce and resist capitalist logics of linear narratives of progress (both through their function as material commodities, and within their narratives) disrupts what Michelle Wright calls "Middle Passage epistemologies," or the tendency to construct Blackness as a stable, knowable thing, rather than as an unfolding that differs across space and time. Such disruption encourages an inclusive and fluid theorization of Blackness that nevertheless remains attentive to specificity of experience. The works' intertextual exchanges, in other words, build upon each other to tell stories of Blackness that are often left out not only of white cultural configurations, but also of certain ways of understanding Blackness from Black Studies perspectives that remain

tethered to linear Middle Passage formulations that have dominated scholarship on Black subjectivity.[36]

Through the dissertation's attention to intertextual exchange across the temporal and geographical locations of the texts it treats, the work as a whole interrogates these constructions of Blackness from the always unstable standpoints of contemporary Black Studies, including Black feminist, Afropessimist, and Black arts traditions, and examines the ways in which Blackness is mobilized by these projects toward resistance and within freedom dreams. In doing so, I trace the ways in which texts function both as thought experiments, and as affecting objects that shape readers' and viewers' relationships with always ongoing revolution. While I have named the moments that I examine in the dissertation "post" revolutionary, what becomes clear through the texts is that revolution takes many creative forms beyond armed uprisings and party politics, and are at once distinct *and* linked across time and space. In Cuba, for example, Sara Gómez was reading Malcolm X and Franz Fanon, books passed from hand to hand, according to her friend and comrade Inés María Martiatu.[37] She was the first, it is said by many, to wear her

[36] Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). Wright notes that Middle Passage epistemologies, such as those proposed in Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey* and W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Soul of Black Folks* rely on linear progress narratives to connect the African continent to Middle Passage Blacks of the present. In doing so, she says, "we run into a logical problem, because our timeline moves through geography *chronologically*, with enslavement taking place at the beginning, or the past, and the march toward freedom moving through the ages toward the far right end of the line or arrow, which also represents the present. Exactly insofar as Gates's engagement with West Africa is with Africa of the sixteenth century and beyond, and as Du Bois, albeit more obliquely, defines Africa as one of the "past selves" in the beginning of his book, never to mention it again, Africa inadvertently becomes locked in its past" (57-58). This presents the problem of the encounter between "American" descendants of the Middle Passage attempting to claim "African" identity, and those who reside in America but who were born or whose parents were born in Africa. Wright further argues that linear narratives that structure Middle Passage epistemology also problematically make absent women and queer Black subjects who do not fit with the narrative's heteropatriarchal construction of progress.

[37] Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal and Inés María Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 197.

hair in the natural Afro style, a sign of pan-African solidarity across transnational Black Power movements in different national contexts. In the United States, L.A. Rebellion filmmakers were watching and studying Third Cinema, including that coming out of Cuba.[38] Feminist poets and activists were participating in, and critiquing, Black Power and the Black Arts Movements, and Black filmmakers were reading Black feminist poets. And those same poets, artists, and activists were traveling to Grenada, when the Revolution moved a generation of Black people to think the possibilities of anti-capitalist Black self-rule.[39] And much later, after the Revolutions in Cuba and Grenada, after Civil Rights, after Obama, after Occupy, and after the Arab Spring, there is the Movement for Black Lives, in whose platform are traces of Black Panther commitments to Black self-determination and community control, the 1968 Poor People's Campaign commitments to economic justice for all, and Black feminist commitments to gender and sexual equality, as well as to "reproductive justice, holistic healing and reconciliation, and ending violence against Black cis, queer, and trans people."[40] In and around these movements, then, Black thought travels throughout the plenum via intertextual exchange and extra-textual discourse, via community and communion, and via the affective relations and Black sociality that such thought inspires.

Black thought remains, however, subterranean and fugitive, prevented from "wandering in the World" freely, tethered by anti-Blackness, gender and sexual violence, and neo-imperialist

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[38] Barbara McCullough Oral History, UCLA Television and Film Archive. McCullough, in fact, notes that she never even considered filmmaking until she saw Humberto Solás' *Lucia*.

[39] Lorde, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Grenada, spent time there before and after the revolution, for example (see "Grenada Revisited"), and L.A. Rebellion filmmaker Bernard Nicolas considered joining the Revolution before attending UCLA's film school (Nicolas Oral History).

[40] "The Movement for Black Lives Platform," *The Movement for Black Lives*, accessed June 29, 2018, https://policy.m4bl.org/platform.

capitalism that all continue to be the world's structuring reality.[41] In other words, while there is the Movement for Black Lives, there is also Donald Trump. M4BL, then, faces, on one hand, constant threat by an administration that has labeled members of M4BL coalition groups Black Lives Matter and Black Youth Project 100 "terrorists" and "black identity extremists," while at the same time it asserted (by way of a Trumpian Tweet) that there were some "very fine people" among the neo-nazis and white supremacists who marched in a rally in Virginia in 2017 that left one counter-protester dead. On the other hand, M4BL faces growing support by the mainstream left, from white liberals to Black pop stars, who have been galvanized by Trump. This support is promising, and yet also alarming, as it tends to be selective, focusing on the most egregious and obvious of abuses faced by Black people, and often refusing all but cursory class and gender analyses. It therefore risks emptying M4BL of its radicality, at least in the popular imaginary. When Beyoncé wears a black hoodie and invites Mothers of the Movement to appear in *Lemonade*, she brings images of U.S. Black struggle to a world stage. But when she concludes the entire visual and sonic extravaganza with the line "always stay gracious, best revenge is your paper," she risks replacing M4BL's radical global anti-capitalist platform with a conservative respectability politics that embraces capitalism.

Yet, the album still functions as conduit. It is a space of Black subterranean sociality brought above ground, where diasporic subjects are encouraged to recognize themselves in all their variety through its narrative, and where Black art, politics, and history is made visible on a global stage. As I argue in Chapter 5, its intertextuality serves as a virtual archive or roll call of Black arts and resistance movements within its fabric through both thick and thin references to

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[41] Ferreira da Silva, "Poethics," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 93-94.

works and artists that came before it,[42] from works like *Daughters of the Dust*, Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), Kasi Lemmons's *Eve's Bayou* (1997), and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993), to the afrofutrism of Octavia Butler and Sun Ra, the sonic power of Nina Simone, and the stirring speeches of Malcolm X, among many, many other figures and texts.[43]

However, the making-visible of the subterranean generates a complex coming-together in the text of Black sociality and capitalism, underscoring that Black social life wandering freely about the world is irreconcilable with the structural antagonisms that maintain it; Black freedom remains an incomplete project so long as capitalist modernity, which necessitates the category Blackness as a defining limit to the human in order to support an ethics that authorizes the exploitation of human flesh in the name of accumulation, remains constitutive of the affecting, economic, and philosophical structures the world. The limits, then, of the political potency of *Lemonade'*s above-ground wanderings are made legible by a series of lawsuits that the album's intertextuality has generated. The estate of the late Messy Mya filed a $20 million lawsuit against Beyoncé, Parkwood Entertainment, Sony, and others for using Mya's voice on the album without consent. The lawsuit was settled in February 2018, just as another one was filed by Kimberly Roberts, star of the documentary *Trouble the Water* (2008), which uses footage she shot while

[42] Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993): 141-142. Bambara notes that L.A. Rebellion filmmaker Zeinabu irene Davis points out that this type of roll call is characteristic of African American women filmmakers, who tend to pay tribute to Black women mentors and artists in their work. Bambara herself then goes on to name the Black women mentors and artists that had been foundational to her own work.

[43] To continue the roll call: *Lemonade*'s sampling brings in references to Issac Hayes, Led Zeppelin, Kendrick Lamar, Outkast, the Lomax brothers, and Messy Mya. It also gives writing, producing, and/or performance credits to Big Freedia, the Weeknd, Kendrick Lamar, Ezra Koenig, Wynter Gordon Mike Will Made It, Khalif Brown, Jack White, the Dixie Chicks, Ben Billions, Just Blaze, Boots, Father John Misty, and on and on. Directors and cinematographers include Kahlil Joseph, Melina Matsoukas, Dikayl Rimmasch, Todd Tourso, Jonas Akerlund, Mark Romanek, Chayse Irvin, Khalik Allah, Santiago Gonzalez, Malik Sayeed, and Reed Morano.

she was stranded in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Roberts claims that Beyoncé has failed to pay the agreed upon royalty fees for use of the footage in the visual album and in live performances. That these lawsuits are filed by the very "subterranean" people and community that the narrative of *Lemonade* is meant to speak to and support is telling of its — and Beyoncé's — limited commitment to radical politics.

Nevertheless, *Lemonade* participates in an intertextual process of linking Black diasporic thought and art, even if through the debates it initiates as much as through its intertextual roll call. Perhaps, then, as important as the work that *Lemonade* itself performs is the work performed through the chains of referentiality it participates in. Dash's *Daughters of the Dust,* for example, also performs a calling of names, both narratively when Viola (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) lists the nicknames of the Peazant family, from present to past ("Goober, Boy Rat, Hail, Harvest, Winter, Pigden, Hardtime, Fantee, Cudah, Ocra, Yono, Cish, Alexmine, Jackiemine, Jaspermine, Cornhouse, Binah, Shango, Obatala, Oya-yansa, Yemonja, Eshu Elegba …"), linking the filmic past with its narrative present, and extra-textually in its intermedial borrowing of Black artistic techniques. Jacqueline Bobo notes that the film is "deeply saturated in black life, history, and culture and is intended to hone those traditions from which it spawned."[44] The opening montage, she says, includes a series of what Dash calls "layered dissolves," which re-create the technique of Harlem photographer James Van der Zee, who developed a double printing method in which one photograph is superimposed over another. One example that Bobo describes is the funeral portrait of a young Blanche Powell, in which Van der Zee superimposed her portrait over an

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[44] Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 133.

image of her coffin after her death.[45] The collapsing of the past with the present that such portraits imply suggests relations that move outside of linear narratives of time. Bobo describes a series of dissolves in the opening sequence of *Daughters* as producing the same effect, beginning with a close up on a pair of hands covered with soil that is being blown away by the wind, and ending with a dissolve imposed onto an image of a St. Christopher medal worn around the neck of the character Yellow Mary. Each dissolve, Bobo says, is a careful composition of individual shots that appear as iconic portraits, and resonate beyond their duration on the screen.[46] The film's intermedial quoting of Van der Zee also resonates beyond the quoting's duration on screen as it calls out and dialogues with the works that proceed and follow it.

Bretta E. Smith-Shomade, Racquel Gates, and Miriam J. Petty point out in the introduction to a special Black Caucus "In Focus" section of *Cinema Journal* the power of the roll call and "naming rituals" performed by texts such as these.

> This calling of names of a given community has a specific value that owes something to the African oral tradition and something else to the importance and agency involved in names and naming, given African Americans history as dominated by erasures and obfuscations. Naming onesself, naming pioneers,

[45] Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 134. Powell was the daughter of Adam Clayton Powell Sr., who was the minister of the largest Black church in New York in the early 1900s, and sister of the first Black elected U.S. Congressman.

[46] Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 134-135.

naming the dead and the living, provides a way to establish a sense of lineage and communal bonds.[47]

The practice of naming, both literal and referential, gives rise to an useful intertextual worldview, they go on to say. Like the oral tradition, this worldview values artistic production and storytelling as a communal process. Storytelling or history making, in other words, are not products of individual authors or the transcendental artistic genius, but rather are part of an ongoing living process of transmitting, collecting and presenting memories and historical imaginings of underground remains of histories and Black sociality that are otherwise marked by absence from the archive.

These gestures toward the remains refuse the imperative to historical mastery that is assumed to be the prerogative of Western modernity. The texts and movements that the texts are a part of instead encourage imaginings of relational and communal cosmologies in which revolution is conceptualized as processual and immanent rather than as discreet and determinant. Creative imaginings that emerge from within the space of Black struggle and Black sociality, in other words, configure relationality rather than individual authority as their basis. The "after" of revolution, then, becomes the horizon of the ongoing and communal labor of self-making and self-valuation within and despite ideological and material structures that aim to foreclose both. As these texts sit with both absence and memory in their representations of carrying on, they enact philosophical frameworks through which to initiate subterranean praxes toward the always unfolding project of freedom.

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[47] Bretta E. Smith-Shomade, Racquel Gates, and Miriam J. Petty, *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 122-123.

CHAPTER ONE

Invisible Memories: Black Feminist Thought and its Affective Flights

When Audre Lorde traveled to Russia in 1976, she met an Eskimo woman from the part of Russia closest to Alaska. The woman, Toni, sang a song during a talk she gave about her people, the Chukwo, only 14,000 left. “It sent a chill down my spine at the time,” Lorde writes in an essay about the trip, “because although there are 21 million Black Americans, I feel like we’re an endangered species, too, and how sad for our cultures to die.”[1] Lorde recounts how the two met at a dinner put on by the Union of Soviet Writers. They spoke intimately together all evening over their meal. They could not decipher one another’s words without their interpreters, two “blond Russian girls who smirked as they translated.”[2] And yet they made love, Lorde says, through their eyes, then their hands, touching each other’s knees, and soon, their lips, too. Toni made toast after toast to women and strength. She toasted to joy, to sorrow, to hope, and, it seems, to their bodies, which communicated more than their mediated words ever could. Somehow, Lorde wrote, she *felt connected.* She was certain that she and Toni were the only people in the room at that moment who shared the knowledge of being a people under threat.

While intensely personal and singular, this story represents the unifying principles of the theories of writing and political organizing that Lorde spent her life’s work developing. Her work insists, for example, on a constant and reverential duty to one’s body and mind, to an examination of what one feels as much as what one thinks, to the information that relations

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[1] Audre Lorde, “Notes from a Trip to Russia,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), 32.

[2] Lorde, “Notes from a Trip to Russia,” in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), 33.

between self and other hold, as necessary starting points for any struggle against oppression, against genocide, against erasure of the lives and histories of women like her, women like Toni. The holistic approach to healing and reparations in Lorde's work, I argue, develops a politics of affect that rejects the type of rationalist, dualistic thinking that is foundational to Western modernity's philosophical privileging of transcendental individualism and its subsequent creation of hierarchized categories of race.[3] Lorde honors instead relational and communal cosmologies, and the interactions of sensorial, emotional, and intellectual responses to the world as part of imminent and processual forms of knowing in her anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-racist political project of undoing the world as it is currently configured.

Lorde's politics of affect resonates with demands made by other Black feminist writers who were her contemporaries: The Combahee River Collective, for example, published in 1977 its now well-known declaration for an intersectionality that is committed to the inherent value of Black women. Just a year later, June Jordan issued her plea to define Black feminism as an act of self and communal love ("Where is the Love?"), and in 1983, Alice Walker published her seminal *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, in which she defined womanism — women who love women, women who love themselves, *Black* women committed to the wholeness of entire people — as apposed (rather than opposed) to feminism. These are among the many examples of

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[3] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257-337. Sylvia Wynter, along with members of the Latin Americanist "Coloniality of Power" group, describe this dualism as central to the racialized and gendered divisions of power and labor that began with colonization of the Americas and continues through neocolonial formations in the present. As mentioned in the introduction, note 7, Blackness, especially Black femininity, in the West is associated human traits such as sensuality, sexuality, and communality, which are considered "base" or "lesser." Whiteness, on the other hand, is associated with"civilized" traits such as rationality, morality, and individuality (with white femininity falling somewhere in between). As such, the debasement of the body and its associated functions produces subjects, both non-white and white, who are ontologically split from the start — with whiteness being associated with a "healthy" ability to maintain this split, and Blackness or proximity to Blackness being associated with the pathological.

Black feminist writings that, in their insistence on the political significance of communal and self-love, dismantle the subject-object dualism that acts as the philosophical basis of Western modernity, and as the alibi for its history of dehumanization of gendered and raced subjects. Such arguments prefigure by several decades the "affective turn" —declared by many theorists as a profoundly "new" way to deploy critical thought — which is in many ways committed to similar critiques of dualistic thinking.[4]

In this chapter, I aim to contribute to the development of a genealogy of affect theory that is attentive to these antecedents in Black feminist thought, offering a corrective to the ways in which affect theory typically is situated in intellectual histories as growing primarily out of late 1990s queer theory, on one hand, and debates around poststructuralism, on the other. Instead, I locate a politics of affect in Black feminist writings coming out of the post-Civil Rights era in the United States, which I argue begins roughly in 1968, when white Civil Rights activists began to turn attention away from Black struggle and toward the anti-War movement (rather than seeing, for example, the two struggles as related). The intensification in this period of revolutionary Black national and international struggles for liberation is often occluded by this shift in attention, as well as by premature celebrations of legislative implementation of anti-discrimination laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voter Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Additionally, histories of Black Power often focus primarily on the Black Panther Party and figures such as Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, whose militant politics were largely inspired by the success of African liberation movements and the Cuban

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[4] See Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003). Without focusing on its roots in colonialism and chattel slavery, Sedgwick laid the foundation for later queer theory that focuses on affect, arguing that dualistic thinking limits freedom — especially sexual freedom — and supports oppressive gendered constructions of identity.

Revolution, and which in turn inspired later movements such as the Caribbean Black Power Revolution in Trinidad and Tobago. Black feminist movements are often subsumed into those histories of Black Power, as well as histories of Women's liberation movements, understood as derivative of them, rather than integral to *and critical* of them. Black feminists, for example, were particularly critical of the male chauvinism and homophobia that pervaded much of the Black Power mentality, and of the racism and, again, homophobia that pervaded much of Second Wave feminism.

I turn to Lorde, Jordan, and Toni Morrison as examples of writers and intellectuals whose works and lives are representative of this early turn to the politics of affect, arguing that they not only offer compelling commentary on the workings of affect as political labor, but also are themselves powerfully affective, producing "affective flights" that move within and among readers, and become part of the affective circuits or "structures of feeling" that condition the different realities in which we live.[5] The study of rhetoric has long taught us to note that the force of words has such potential to become part of the circulation of cultural memories and histories, or part of "the social," as affect theorist Brian Massumi puts it.[6] The historical continuity of anti-Black racism however, demands a pointed examination of writings about Blackness, Black

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[5] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). I use Williams' term "structures of feeling" here to refer to the complex of systems of beliefs, ideologies, and competing hegemonies that often go unarticulated, but rather appear in senses of things or affective social relations; what Williams described in *Marxism and Literature* as the "affective elements of consciousness and relationships" (132). In my work, I emphasize that such structures are variable across social and cultural groups, and are in constant tension with competing local and global structures, as well as material and spatial conditions. Specifically, I argue that systemic and structural racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity are supported by fluid, but nevertheless dominant, structures of feeling, on the one hand, and contested by variable and also fluid structures of feeling as they manifest within marginalized communities, on the other.

[6] See Brian Massumi, "Requiem for Our Prospective Dead (Toward a Participatory Critique of Capitalism)," in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture,* eds. Eleanor Kaufman, Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998), 40-64.

history, and Black erasure, by and about Black women, which are part of the flow of thought and emotion that exists in constant tension with other affective circuits, including those produced through structures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

As anthropologist and affect theorist Kathleen Stewart writes, "Power is a thing of the senses. It lives as a capacity, or a yearning, or a festering resentment."[7] The works of the Black feminists that I treat in this chapter trace the "yearning" and the "festering resentment" that underlie the emotional economy of power — both the power of white supremacism and the sedimentation of anti-Blackness into the economy of modernity *and* the power of underground, fugitive resistances to them. In other words, their works provide counter-narratives to narratives of modernity — narratives that produce affects that function as "building blocks" of the drives, as Otto Kernberg has argued.[8] Black feminisms have long theorized and harnessed the sensory "power" of affects, or of these building blocks of drives, toward political projects of freedom that reside in relational and everyday interactions between things, ideas, and feelings, and specifically recognizes them as non-Eurocentric modes of being. Lorde, for example, writes in "Poetry is Not a Luxury":

> When we view living, in the european mode, only as a problem to be solved, we then rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.
>
> But as we become more in touch with out own ancient, black, non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we

[7] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 84.

[8] Otto F. Kernberg, "New Perspectives in Psychoanalytic Affect Theory" in *Emotion, Psychopathology, and Psychotherapy,* eds. Robert Plutchik and Henry Kellerman (Academic Press, 1990), 115-131.

> learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes.[9]

Later affect theorists such as Nigel Swift have also described the political project of studying affect as a project toward freedom and emancipation from the kind of "linerization of intent" that dominates Western thinking. Swift notes that affect theorist tend to be those who want to move away from a political philosophy in which there is a singular center, or in which the aim appears to be to reach a "point of clarity and unanimity about means and ends." They are those who:

> want to re-materialize democracy, those who want to think about the exercise of association, those who want to make performances in the interstices of everyday life, those who are intent on producing new and more challenging environments, those who want to redesign everyday things, those who, in other words, want to generate more space to be unprecedented, to love what aids fantasy, and so to gradually break down imaginative resistance.[10]

What is added to such a project when Black feminist theorizing of sensual and everyday experiences — of affect and emotion — are taken into consideration is the specific ways in which their work functions to undo the Eurocentric perspective and its concomitant attachment

[9] Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

[10] Nigel Swift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (New York: Routledge, 2008), vii-viii.

to anti-Black, heteropatriarchal structures of modernity — structures, which, consequently, erase Black feminist theorizing such as Lorde's from intellectual discourses.

Two primary concerns, then, prompt my investment in the drawing of an intellectual history of affect theory: One is that Black scholarship and literature, Black *feminist* scholarship and literature in particular, generally remain under-examined and under-cited in disciplinary discourses presumably not directly related to Black and African/Africana studies. And two is that the historiography of the Americas has in large part evacuated African diasporic subjects *as* subject, that is, as fully constituted, historical, social human beings. As Saidiya Hartman and others have noted, the bulk of 19th- and early 20th-century Black history in the West is written only through what can be extrapolated from ledgers and captains' logs, from property law and body counts, from that which was accounted for/written by captors and masters.[11] Such histories — or lack of histories — draws attention to what some Black scholars have noted as the impossibility of Black people ever occupying a "subject" position within Western modernity.[12] Black feminists, however, have long written from within the tension produced by the construction of the non-human subject in the face of Black resistance that is historiographically

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[11] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1-14. In this lyrical essay, Hartman discusses the difficulty inherent in telling the story of the slave, who usually passes unseen through the historical annals. In this case, a slave girl, "Venus," is named in passing simply as a *dead girl* in a legal indictment. Hartman says, "We stumble upon her in exorbitant circumstances that yield no picture of the everyday life, no pathway to her thoughts, no glimpse of the vulnerability of her face or of what looking at such a face might demand. We only know what can be extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from the world of her captors and masters and applied to her" (2). As I will detail later, Morrison, too, describes such concerns as the impetus for her writing of *Beloved*, which ultimately acts as a conflicted act of "rememorying" the untellable tale of the "interior life" of a slave.

[12] See Frank Wilderson's *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), and Jarad Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions Journal*, 5 (Fall/Winter 2011): 1-47, and Sexton, "Afro-pessimism: The Unclear Word," *Rhizomes* 29 (2016). Afro-pessimists such as Wilderson and Sexton, in fact, argue that such abjection of "the Black" from the sphere of the human is the discursive foundation of Western modernity.

illegible. Writers such as Morrison, for example, illuminate the scant evidence that *is* available — whether that which appears between the lines of those official texts, or that which is passed down through intergenerational memory — in order to imagine the "interior lives" of Black subjects.[13]

By centering the emergence of an articulated affect theory within Black feminist writing, I hope to emphasize the ways in which this persistent presence of absence in histories of intellectual traditions can be understood as a continuum of the absences that haunt historiography.[14] Further, histories of Black intellectual traditions suffer similar erasure in the afterlife of slavery.[15] On one hand, within the academy, what is known — what is understood as knowledge — is that which is authorized by the "masters," be they in the form of canonized texts, disciplinary discourses, or anointed intellectuals. This epistemology is based in rationalist traditions of Western modernity and privileges the transcendental, self-possessed individual subject of knowledge. Subsequently, it de-privileges collective or experiential forms of knowledge production. Given the importance of the oral tradition within African and African-diasporic cultures, as well as histories of forced illiteracy, collective and experiential forms of knowledge production are significant to the corpus of Black thought in the Americas, even while

[13] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *The Invention of Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2nd Edition, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1995): 92.

[14] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Morrison refers to such present absence in literature as an "Africanist presence" (6), which she argues shapes not just African American literature but the entire body of U.S. literary production — if not the entirety of 20th century U.S. cultural formations. Gesturing toward the critiques of dualistic thinking brought up by Lorde, Morrison notes that perhaps "the major and championed characteristics of our national literature — individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell — are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5).

[15] See Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

they are delegitimized and made absent from the academy. This delegitimization carries over to more "standard" forms of Black academic work, which struggles for recognition within academe. While certain gestures are made toward including Black history and cultural production in the university through, for example, the addition of "diversity" requirements in general education programs, its presence is mostly bracketed in area specializations such as, in the U.S. context, "African American history" or "African American literature" (without which there would be little or no engagement with this material). Further, interdisciplinary programs such as African American Studies or Ethnic Studies are frequently underfunded or defunded, under supported and under attack, making the absence of Black intellectual contributions from "mainstream" academic discourses all the more acutely "present."

This type of present absence might be thought of in relation to Hartman's description of the archive of Black history as a tomb, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history. Such operations of power require, in Fred Moten's description, attention to "the hold," "the break," or the space of dislocation or "blown standpoint" from which Blackness emerges.[16] The skeletal evidence of Black histories that do exist in canonical academe point to a rupture in Black subjectivity, to the moment of irreconcilable disruption that began with the first human chattel taken from African shores. The constitutive nature of the loss such a disruption engenders, Hartman points out, *makes* the African diaspora, and positions grief as an affect of transatlantic

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[16] Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 743-744. As Moten writes, "And so it is that we remain in the hold, in the break, as if entering again and again the broken world, to trace the visionary company and join it. This contrapuntal island, where we are marooned in search of maroonage, where we linger in stateless emergency, is our mobile, constant study, our lysed cell and held dislocation, our blown standpoint and lyred chapel. … Having defied degradation, the moment becomes a theory of the moment, of the feeling of a presence that is ungraspable in the way that it touches."

identification.[17] Hartman and Moten are among the contemporary scholars who continue the work begun by earlier Black feminists who ask after the affect produced through these absences and violences, and how they condition the possibilities of Black being in the present.[18]

Given this history of violent exclusion, I am somewhat wary of my own aim of positioning Black feminist thought *within* an intellectual genealogy of affect theory, an approach that finds a relatively comfortable home in an institution that historically is hostile to Black intellectual and cultural production.[19] Yet to not do so maintains the violence of a historical narrative that, by neglecting Black presence, perpetuates the raced and gendered structures that produce Blackness as socially (or as Moten would say *politically*) dead. As such, I approach Black feminism's absence in the genealogy of affect theory with attention to its specificity and its vulnerability to appropriation. Rather than wrestling a history of Black feminist thought into

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[17] Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 758.

[18] See Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 737-780 and Patricia J. Saunders, "Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 6, no.1 (2008). Note the difference between the two theorists, however. Moten is interested in recovering Black subjectivity, while Hartman questions the possibility *and desirability* of such a project. As Patricia J. Saunders notes in the preface to an interview with Hartman, "her work suggests that the very desire to know 'it' — the black subject — is a means of further effacing the suffering and pain of the slave whose body (though missing) is being called upon to provide the evidence that we (the readers) need in order to 'understand' slavery" (2). In other words, for Hartman, the project of recovering slave subjectivity is a project of effacing the irreconcilability of slavery with reason by means of attempts at making slavery legible, or "understandable" in some way.

Further, in distinction from Orlando Patterson's assertion in *Slavery and Social Death* and from later work by Hartman, Wilderson, and Sexton, Moten locates Black life as irreducibly social, lived "in the burial ground of the subject by those who, insofar as they are not subjects, are also not, in the interminable (as opposed to the last) analysis, 'death-bound,' as Abdul JanMohamed (2005) would say." And as such, "Social death is not imposed upon blackness by or from the standpoint or positionality of the political; rather, *it is the field of the political*, from which blackness is relegated to the supposedly undifferentiated mass or blob of the social" (739-740).

[19] It might seem odd to describe affect theory, largely a derivative of queer theory, as a dominant discourse. However, a brief survey of recent anthologies, conference topics, and course descriptions affirms the entrance of affect theory into mainstream academic discourses, even if the theory itself largely aims to upend that *status quo*. Further, my critique of the absence of Black feminist literature in the archive of affect is not to dismiss the work done by queer theorists, or to deny the hostility that they too have come upon in the academy, but rather to point to a history of erasure of Black voices from academic discourses.

affect theory and altering its composition along the way, I highlight specifically what the archive of Black feminist thought itself illuminates in relation to affect theory. Methodologically, then, I make every effort to privilege the terminology of the earlier Black feminists over that of contemporary affect theorists. When I do make use of more contemporary terminology, I do so either to reveal the lineage of a term's content as prefigured by Black feminists, or, in some cases, to utilize the term's now widely understood distillation of a complex concept.

Contemporary affect theorists, especially those concerned with the intersections of the biological sciences and the human sciences, tend to describe affect as a product of the body's innate biological response to outside stimuli, often removing or de-emphasizing the subject's agency. Massumi, for example, characterizes affect as autonomous "intensities" that, while related to the subject through the body, largely involve the body's *indeterminate* response to stimuli. Queer theorist Sara Ahmed by contrast argues that affect is not necessarily autonomous, but rather a bodily response that corresponds to preexisting and changing relations (economic, political, or cultural, for example) with the affecting object. Her interest in the cultural politics of emotions is more closely aligned with the Black feminist literature I examine here, which insists on the political relevance of intellectual critique of affective responses. Such critique involves taking seriously the examination of emotions, moods, and temperaments that are produced through exterior stimuli — intersubjective relations, encounters with environment, brushes with the historical, for example. Such critique provides "information" about objects of affective stimulation and their socio-historical character (Lorde); exposes under-acknowledged material conditions that affect quality of experience (Jordan); and unveils relationships between historical trauma and contemporary psychic damage (Morrison).

This chapter serves, in part, as an exposition of such intellectual labor, offering readings of literature (both fictional and non-fictional) produced through Black feminists' investigations into their own affective responses to structures of what bell hooks calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy."[20] At the same time, the chapter argues that those very structures of domination contribute to the conspicuous under-citing of Black feminists' intellectual, political, and philosophical contributions within the narrative of the genealogy of affect theory. (Jennifer C. Nash's 2011 essay "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love Politics, and Post-Intersectionality," and the more recent article by Claudia Garcia-Rojas, "(Un)Disciplined Futures: Women of Color Feminism as a Disruptive to White Affect Studies," are two notable exceptions.)[21] This despite clear evidence of the influence such work has had on affect theorists.

There is, of course, a cluster of scholars, especially scholars of color, whose work focuses on interrogating racial formations and who have become a part of the dominant archive of affect theory, including Ahmed, Tavia Nyong'o, Jasbir Puar, and José Muñoz. Additionally, Ann Cvetkovich devotes a chapter of her latest book to a discussion of depression in relation to racism, colonialism, slavery, and genocide, and has acknowledged Morrison and Black legal scholar Patricia Williams' work as foundational to her own methodologies. Lauren Berlant focuses on juridical citizenship and normative modes of belonging, which necessitates attention to racial assemblages. And before interest in affect could be said to constitute a "turn," Avery Gordon's compelling work on the sociology of haunting locates a literary theory of affect within Black feminist literature. Gordon cites Wahneema Lubiano, who also develops a theory of affect

[20] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981).

[21] Jennifer C. Nash, "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love Politics, and Post-Intersectionality," *Meridians* 11, no. 2 (2011): 1-24. Claudia Garcia-Rojas, "(Un)Disciplined Futures: Women of Color Feminism as a Disruptive to White Affect Studies," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 21, no. 3 (2017): 254-271.

in her discussion of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple.* Lubiano writes: "It seems to me that it is useful to consider engagement in the sentimental as the excessive, the surplus corrective, to an imposed stoicism on Afro-Americans. . . . Given the dearth of attention … to the emotional well-being of marginalized others, such whole-hearted engagement with emotion is a way of asserting a previously denied right to feel. . . ."[22]

However, despite the work being done on race by affect theorists, *genealogies* of affect theory usually neglect this history, tracing its roots either to a biological theory of innate affects put forth by psychologist Silvan Tompkins, which gained renewed interest in the early 1990s; or to related queer theory, which began emerging at the same time, and tends to focus on theories of affect related to emotions, embodiment, and everyday life; or to a Deleuzian framework of biological and relational sensory phenomena, which entered into the lexicon of contemporary affect theory in the early 2000s. More recently, studies of affect have developed within the neurosciences, as evidenced by emergent subfields such as neuropolitics, neuroaesthetics, and neurohistory. While the latter two strains are most strongly influenced by discourses of their respective disciplinary contexts, be they in humanities, social sciences or natural sciences, they also frequently share an association with the work of Massumi, who is a translator of Gilles Deleuze. Massumi follows Deleuze and Félix Guattari's description of affect as "forces" or "intensities" that pass from body to body (human and nonhuman alike), and that are "autonomous" in the sense that intentionality has little to do with the ways in which affect works on the body or on perception. Affect can be thought of as the circulation of these forces or intensities between bodies, to which bodies then respond, remaining in a constant state of

[22] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008), 220.

becoming through their encounters and interactions. For Massumi, affect is distinct from emotion in that emotion is contextual, and affect is situational — it is "the connecting thread of experience," or that which is in excess of a particular body, escaping it, and coming into relation with (affecting) other bodies.[23] Emotion is the personalized context of affect — the perception or naming that comes *after* an encounter charged with affect, too late for the subject to attribute meaning to the affect itself. The political dimension of this description of affect is of key interest here. As the recent anthology *Politics of Affect,* edited by Massumi, makes clear, affect is a political force, even if a "proto-political" one that must be "brought out" and contextualized beyond its autonomy.[24] I would argue that it is precisely this "bringing out" that is imperative to earlier Black feminist theorists.

The theorists of affect typically associated with queer theory do not necessarily disagree with Massumi's theorizing of affect as autonomous and lacking intentionality, and certainly not its political function, but rather are more concerned with understanding the relationship of affect to the emotive process, and the ways in which that process is linked to history, normative disciplinarity, cognition, and political life. These theorists might use the terms "emotion" and "affect" interchangeably, or they might note subtle differences between the two. They might ask how emotions work on the body, how they influence everyday life, how they participate in cognitive processes, or how they act as subjugating and subjectifying forces.

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[23] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 217.

[24] Massumi, "Preface," in *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015): ix.

Tomkins' work on categories of emotion and bodily responses is influential here, especially in the way affect theory was taken up in later psychoanalysis and queer theory.[25] Eve Sedgwick, in particular, uses Tompkins to help develop her work on "nondualistic thought" in literary and queer theory.[26] The "Public Feelings Group," a loose association of mostly feminist, queer and sexuality studies scholars, came together in the early 2000s mostly out of an interest in analyzing a shared sense of "political depression" that they felt marked the era. According to Cvetkovich, the group (which also includes Berlant, Rebecca Zorach, Deborah Gould, Mary Patten, Muñoz, and Lisa Duggan, among others) was less interested in analyzing the geopolitical conditions of the post-9/11 moment, and more interested in understanding the emotional dynamics surrounding it. What, she asks "makes it possible for people to vote for Bush or to assent to war, and how do these political decisions operate within the context of daily lives that are pervaded by a combination of anxiety and numbness?"[27] Such questions, she adds, are necessarily invested in the analysis of everyday life, of how "global politics and history manifest themselves at the level of lived affective experience," which she relates to queer theory's call for attention to the role of sexuality in public life. Finally, she notes the group is influenced by queer theory's "depathologizing" work and its revaluation of non-normative ways of living. "Queer theory," she says, "contributes to the more expansive definition of political life that Public Feelings also seeks to foster—that political identities are implicit within structures of feeling,

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[25] Silvan Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness (Vol. 1-IV)*, (New York: Springer Publishing, 1962, 1963, 1991, 1992).

[26] See Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

[27] Ann Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 460.

sensibilities, everyday forms of cultural expression and affiliation that may not take the form of recognizable organizations or institutions."[28]

The particular paradigm I wish to articulate understands the workings of affect as part of political, communal, and individual organizing and subject-formation that necessarily and always functions within raced and gendered configurations. The ways in which affect functions "autonomously" between bodies (be they human or non-human), for example, is nevertheless predicated on the ways in which raced and gendered structures of power situate those bodies, both intersubjectively and spatially. Jordan's lyric description of an architectural redesign of Harlem offers a compelling case study of the affecting power of built environments, and of the relationship of that power to the regulation of space and of the bodies that inhabit it, for example. The ghostly hauntings in Morrison's *Beloved,* as well, insist on the materiality of affective forces across space and time, and Lorde's explorations of emotions and sensory experiences assert their relationship to affective histories of slavery and anti-Black racism for Black and non-Black people alike.

Of Love and Anger

Jordan and Lorde's speeches on love and anger, respectively, are elucidating here. Both point specifically to the affective qualities of white supremacy and patriarchy, as well as of resistance and struggle. Both speeches were made to what they feared would be hostile audiences, and both were printed multiple times in a variety of anthologies and journals afterward, turning them into canonical texts in Black feminist studies today. The context of the speeches, and the historical

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[28] Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 461.

importance of the later printed texts, point to the affective lives of the texts, and the ways in which they continue to participate in the struggle that was at hand the day the speeches were given.

Lorde's speech, "Uses of Anger," was given before an audience made up of mostly (but certainly not entirely) white women at the 1981 annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association. That year's conference title, "Women Respond to Racism," was a response to the tensions that had been building between the organization's primarily white, middle-class membership, and marginalized non-white feminists and women's rights activists. While the title gestures toward hoped-for ruptures in structures of oppression, the conference itself, somewhat infamously, was organized in a deeply racist way, a problem that Lorde's speech addresses.

Lorde opens by stating that her response to racism is anger. She goes on to narrate a series of exchanges she has experienced that produced that anger. Some examples:

- I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman, says, "Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I cannot hear you." But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change? …
- I wheel my two-year-old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket in Eastchester in 1967, and a little white girl riding past in her mother's cart calls out excitedly, "Oh look, Mommy, a baby maid!" And your mother shushes you, but she does not correct you. And so fifteen years later, at a conference on racism, you

can still find that story humorous. But I hear your laughter is full of terror and dis-ease.

- A white academic welcomes the appearance of a collection of non-Black women of Color.* "It allows me to deal with racism without dealing with the harshness of Black women," she says to me.
- At an international cultural gathering of women, a well-known white american woman poet interrupts the reading of the work of women of Color to read her own poem, and then dashes off to an "important panel."[29]

The narrative device of placing her audience (and later her readers when the speech was reprinted in the anthology *Sister Outsider* in 1984) into these quotidian stories through the use of first and second person has the effect of circulating the affect that Lorde is describing, and in turn reproducing the anger and incredulity she herself felt. Her goal, she says, is not to generate guilt among her white audience, but rather to explore the affect that racism in general, and racism in the context of the conference specifically, engenders, and then to direct that affect toward change by, in part, re-educating her audience about the value of anger. Anger, she says, "is loaded with information and energy" and "[t]ranslated into action in the service of our vision and future [it] is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification" (127). Such translation necessitates looking toward (rather than away from) the objects that produce anger in the first place; that is, it necessitates turning toward and acknowledging those deeply rooted material and psychic structures that condition everyday interactions but are largely ignored or erased from view, even

[29] Lorde, "Uses of Anger" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), 125-126.

by well-meaning academics and feminist activists who otherwise envision themselves as champions of racial equality.

Lorde provides an example of the potential for the (mis)uses of — or turnings away from — anger: A white woman witnesses an act of racism that infuriates her, but rather than saying something, she remains quiet. Like an "undetonated bomb," Lorde says, the anger sits inside her, only to explode onto the first Black woman to walk into the room; in other words, the affect produced by an act of racism, while lacking intentionality *as* affect, is translated into displaced anger when it sits unexamined, ready for easy transference onto the historically and structurally pre-figured object of blame: the Black woman.

The white woman's anger and its transference holds information, Lorde notes. Initially, it tells that woman that her first reaction of outrage is the proper, liberal reaction to the racism that structures Western society. But her secondary response, blaming the Black woman for her rage, tells her that the same racism she condemns nevertheless structures *her* interior life as well. Leaving the anger unexamined, she is easily able transfer its object from racism to the raced other. To conflate Lorde's examples somewhat, a white woman at a conference on racism is able to say without irony to a Black woman: "Tell me how you feel, but don't say it too harshly. Tell me how you feel, but don't make me (the concerned non-Black questioner) uncomfortable. Tell me how you feel, but don't make me *feel you*. Because then I might feel your anger, too. And your message that, if I am to be ethical, my life would have to change; the object of my anger would have to be all those things — structural, material, social, emotional — that make me *me*." This realization is, as Lorde points out, terrifying; but, to take the pursuit of social justice seriously, she says, is to take anger and its rhizomatic relationship to structures of feeling

seriously.[30] For white women, this means developing a politics of affect that is imbricated with an ethics of allegiance with women of color. For both white women and women of color, this means drawing out the historical references to which that anger (along with other emotions that are responses to historical affects) relates to in order to examine it as both inside and outside the self, moving such emotions from the private space of the individual into the public space of the political.

This type of local and everyday politics of change resonates with Jordan's call for a politics of love in her 1978 speech on the historic panel "Feminism and the Black Woman Writer" at Howard University's *4th Annual Conference of Afro-American Writers*. While Lorde was addressing white feminists' racism, Jordan was concerned with the Black radicals, intellectuals, and artists' sexism and homophobia. She describes the scene of her speech in *Civil Wars*, where the written text is reprinted (having first been published in *Essence Magazine,* importantly reaching a wider, non-academic audience):

> Acklyn Lynch, Sonia Sanchez, Barbara Smith, and myself were the panelists chosen to present papers to the standing room only audience. … From phone calls and other kinds of gossip, I knew that the very scheduling of this seminar

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[30] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum Press, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari describe the organization of culture as rhizomatic rather than hierarchical. The rhizome, they say, includes the best and the worst of a thing. To understand culture as rhizome is to understand it as ceaselessly establishing "connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (7). There are no universals to establish cultural mores in this model, but rather relations of domination that produce normative cultural modes. I use this term in connection with Williams' "structures of feeling" to emphasize the ways in which those structures are established — and contested — in part through the ceaseless connections between bodies, institutions, object, etc., that affects such as anger produce.

> had managed to divide people into camps prepared for war. Folks were so jumpy, in fact, that when I walked into the theater I ran into several Black feminists and then several Black men who, I suppose, just to be safe, had decided not to speak to anyone outside the immediate circle of supportive friends they had brought with them.[31]

She walked in afraid that her words would be dismissed, that the audience would leave, balking at the hand she was about to extend. But she also walked in angry; angry that feminism was associated only with a woman's sexuality, and that lesbian sexuality, in the Black intellectual community, remained taboo. She was angry that Black women's sex lives were what was at issue, rather than their intellectual and artistic contributions, and that difference among Black people was a divisive rather than creative force. But her anger came from a place of love for herself and for the Black community and all the singular experiences through which it thrived and struggled in the post-Civil Rights era. And so she asked of that anger, *where is the love*? She asked this looking for very literal, even physical, answers: Where can one point and see love functioning affectively on bodies? Love, she says, must be something that can be verified in the ways in which one presents one's self to others who are different than that self. The type of self-love and love for others that she advocates is not simply about extending good will. It is about the hard, often dangerous work that *produces* love and self-valuation. She writes:

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[31] June Jordan, "Where is the Love? 1978" in *Civil Wars: Observations from the Frontlines of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 140.

> As a Black woman/feminist, I must look about me, with trembling, and with shocked anger, at the endless waste, the endless suffocation of my sisters: the bitter sufferings of hundreds of thousands of women who are the sole parents, the mothers of hundreds of thousands of children, the desolation and the futility of women trapped by demeaning, lowest-paying occupations, the unemployed, the bullied, the beaten, the battered, the ridiculed, the slandered, the trivialized, the raped, and the sterilized, the lost millions and multimillions of beautiful, creative, and momentous lives turned to ashes on the pyre of gender identity. I must look about me and, as a Black feminist, I must ask myself: *Where is the love?* How is my own lifework serving to end these tyrannies, these corrosions of sacred possibility?[32]

She goes on to describe what an *act* of Black self-love in the context of a literary conference might be: The resurrection of those Black women writers forgotten in the canons of history. Much like in Alice Walker's 1970 essay "Saving a Life that is Your Own," Jordan entreats her audience to unbury hidden histories of Black women's artistic production, from which, she says, Black women can learn so much about themselves.[33] Speaking of the great Harlem Renaissance poet Georgia Douglas Johnson, she asks, "who among us has ever heard of [her]? And is there anybody in this room who can tell me the name of two or three other women poets from the Harlem Renaissance? And why did she die, and why does the work of all women die with no

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[32] Jordan, "Where is the Love?" in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 144-145.

[33] Alice Walker, "Saving a Life that is Your Own," in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (Harcourt, 1983).

river carrying forward the records of such grace?”[34] Such sorrow, such loss in the words of the poet unknown in her lifetime, who wrote: “I'm folding up my little dreams within my heart tonight/And praying I may soon forget the torture of their sight,”[35] speaks to the greater sorrow of a system that teaches a people to fold up their dreams and devalue their lives. Jordan’s concentration on love is a particular appeal to direct the emotions produced through affective encounters with racist, sexist, and homophobic systems of oppression away from destructive emotions and toward emotions of self-valuation. She calls on her audience to dedicate their lives and their work to learning to love themselves and their pasts “well enough so that you will love me well enough so that we will know exactly where is the love: that it is here, between us, and growing stronger and growing stronger.”[36] With these words set in motion, the rest of the panel continued. No one walked out. The panel ended only because they ran out of time.

The Affective Environment and Living Community

The kind of self- and community-love that Jordan advocates, then, is one that works *on* the body and *through* the body toward the changing of sedimented attitudes, behaviors and structures of feelings, with changing material structures and everyday living conditions as the ultimate horizon. Her work on urban planning is born of this perspective. However, the work’s subsequent dismissal from the canons of architecture and design is born of a world in which “women’s work” — especially Black women’s work — “is all, finally, despised as nothing important, and

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[34] Jordan, “Where is the Love?” in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 145.

[35] Jordan, “Where is the Love?” in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 145.

[36] Jordan, “Where is the Love?” in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 146.

there is no trace, no echo of our days upon the earth."[37] Jordan's poetic description of the Harlem redesign project that she embarked upon with architect Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller, for example, was dismissed as "utopian" by the editors of *Esquire Magazine*, where it was published, and the project's architectural design was attributed not to Jordan and Fuller, but to Fuller alone. According to Jordan, she and Fuller fully intended the plans to be implemented as part of federal reparations "to the ravaged people of Harlem."[38] She titled her article "Skyrise for Harlem." *Esquire* renamed it "Instant Slum Clearance," with a subhead reading "R. Buckminster Fuller designs a total solution to an American dilemma: here, for instance, is how it would work for Harlem." None of the grace and sensitivity toward the people of Harlem expressed in the article is contained in those words. Nor is that grace expressed 50 years later in the words of a May 18, 2015 *Esquire* article titled "6 Wild Predictions of the Future from *Esquire*'s Archives," with the subhead: "Some were close, others not." Jordan's piece is listed as number six: "Giant towers will fix Harlem." Unwittingly signifying the desperate need to historically contextualize this entry, the only note accompanying the 2015 reprinting of Jordan's article is this: "An ambitious (and morally ambiguous) stab at redeveloping Harlem, the *Judge Dredd*-like towers from this article seem even more dystopian today." Far from "morally ambiguous" or dystopian (or utopian, as the earlier editors complained), the project was conceived by Jordan with the needs of the current Harlem residents as its primary concern. In the preface to a letter to Fuller published in *Civil Wars*, Jordan presciently notes that one of her worries was that any plan for redevelopment of a Black neighborhood almost certainly means the eviction of those Black

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[37] Jordan, "Where is the Love?" in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 145-146.

[38] Jordan, "Letter to R. Buckminster Fuller (1964)" in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 24.

people during reconstruction, and their inability to return when they are priced out of the new neighborhood. Together, Jordan and Fuller conceived of a way to build new buildings atop the old, while current residents could remain living in the lower portion of the towers. When the new buildings were complete, the residents would move up into them, and the old would be razed, freeing enormous ground for communal open space, something environmental psychologists and medical professionals have long noted as essential for healthy living.

Jordan's aim with her article describing the plans was to complement the visual presentation of the proposal, and "not simply explain/duplicate the visual presentation of our design."[39] She wanted to express the affective quality of what she envisioned, give a sense for the *feel* she expected to experience in the streets of New Harlem. And the feel she was after aimed at nothing less than the "exorcism of despair" from the city. The relationship between subject and object in living spaces "may actually determine the pace, pattern, and quality of living experience," she asserts in the article.[40] Architecture, in many ways, creates that relationship. Every housing unit in her design has at least 1,200 feet of space compared to the current (at the time) 720 feet per family. Each unit would include a deck, and every room would have a view. The units would begin at the tenth floor, above the dust level and highway systems, and from each of these "[h]anging gardens" both local rivers would be visible.[41] Jordan envisioned circular walkways rather than the grid-design of sidewalks and streets that produce "rigid confrontation of mass-against-mass" and that "deaden space into monotonous

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[39] Jordan, "Letter to R. Buckminster Fuller (1964)" in *Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 25.

[40] Jordan and R. Buckminster Fuller, "Instant Slum Clearance," *Esquire* 63, no. 4 (April 1965): 111.

[41] Jordan and Fuller, "Instant Slum Clearance," *Esquire* 63, no. 4 (April 1965): 111.

experience."[42] Jordan and Fuller also designed a roadway system that would disrupt the racial segregation of the highway and public transit systems, connecting Harlem to other communities and parts of the city that were otherwise nearly inaccessible for poor Harlem residents. Jordan closes the article with the following entreaty:

> Where we are physically is enmeshed with our deepest consciousness of self. There is no evading architecture, no meaningful denial of our position. You can build to defend the endurance of man, to protect his existence, to illuminate it. ... If man is to have not only a future but a destiny, it must be consciously and deliberately designed.[43]

Utopian? Perhaps so, but only because a world in which a physical environment deliberately designed toward communal living, especially *Black* communal living, was and remains but a thing of the (Black) imagination and outside the scope of a white imaginary, which continues to dominate architecture. Jordan's poetic rendering of her and Fuller's architectural design offers a sense of the openness and freedom at which they aimed. Her descriptions of the "hanging gardens" from which the flow of water is visible allow one to imagine a world in which different worlds are possible, and offer a glimpse at the affect such a space could promote, affect that evokes a life of flourish, rather than of mere survival. Jordan's poem "Sweetwater Poem Number

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[42] Jordan and Fuller, "Instant Slum Clearance," *Esquire* 63, no. 4 (April 1965): 111.

[43] Jordan and Fuller, "Instant Slum Clearance," *Esquire* 63, no. 4 (April 1965): 111.

One," on the other hand, expresses the affect she encounters through the denial of such a space, by willful raced and gendered neglect:

> You assume the buildings and / The small print roadways and / The cornered accidents / Of roof and oozing tar and ordinary concrete / Zigzag. Well. / It is not beautiful. / It never was. / These are the shaven / Private parts / The city show / Of what somebody means / When he don't even bother / Just to say / "I don't give a goddam" / (and) / "I hate you."[44]

The zig zags and oozing tar is, as Jordan implies, not only indicative of poorly planned built environment, but also a product of the assumption that the space in which Black people live, which is not and never was beautiful, is all that Black people either need or deserve. The experience of the space, in this regard, does double psychological damage. Not only is it damaging space in its design, but it serves as a constant reminder that the world by and large does not give a goddam.

Affective Hauntings

I turn now to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) as an example of the ways Black feminist projects that began in the late 1960s were taken up in the literature of later fictional works — works that also precede what is largely identified as the "affective turn" of the late 1990s, but in

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[44] Jordan, excerpt from a draft of the poem "Sweetwater Poem Number One," reprinted in Cheryl J. Fish, "Place, Emotion, and Environmental Justice in Harlem: June Jordan and Buckminster Fuller's 1965 'Architextual' Collaboration," *Discourse* 29, no. 2 & 3 (Spring and Fall 2007): 330-345.

much closer proximity to it. I look to *Beloved* in part because of its frequent citation by theorists of affect (Berlant and Ahmed, to name just two) as noteworthy for its affective work,[45] even if it is not specifically thought of as a text articulating or prefiguring affect theory, and in part because it joins the groups of novels about slavery that appeared "at an unstoppable rate" in the post-Civil Rights period from the late 1960s to the 1990s.[46] Arlene Keizer notes several converging factors for the rise of this group of texts. On the one hand, these texts began emerging at a time when the last of those who would have experienced New World slavery first-hand were passing away, and "the question of who would be a witness to slavery and how it would be remembered became critical." At the same time, there was the desire among African American writers to reclaim their own histories, which were "submerged under the totalizing narrative" of the West."[47] With increased access to educational opportunities following the Civil Rights Act came increased demands (however partially met, as previously discussed) for access to and ownership over those absented histories. Contemporary narratives of slavery, as Keizer refers to the texts, offer a form of counter-history to mainstream historiography, and a mode through which to imagine what is otherwise occluded.[48] On the other hand, the post-Civil Rights era also signifies a period in which revolution was at once at hand, and imagined to be immanent. Cuba's Revolution was a significant source of inspiration to Black Power movements,

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[45] See Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 66-67, and Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 79-83.

[46] Arnold Rampersad and Deborah McDowell, *Slavery and the Literary Imagination* (John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 144.

[47] Arlene R. Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5.

[48] Keizer, *Black Subjects* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 6.

for example, and the Grenada Revolution was a short but influential period in which Black people of the Americas witnessed the successful and peaceful establishment of a *Black* socialist government. In the United States, the Black Panther Party briefly but powerfully shook the tide of the white and Black political establishment alike. Many slave narratives and narratives of slavery written during this time period reflect the sense of revolution in the air, emphasizing the liberatory potential of slave uprisings and resistant or revolutionary figures. Keizer cites Hazel Carby, who argues that

> a narrative of slave rebellion can be read as a figure for the revolutionary change that has not come. [C.L.R.] James in the context of colonial politics, and [Arna] Bontemps, in the context of American oppression, were representing the collective acts of a black community as signs for future collective acts of rebellion and liberation.[49]

However, it is not just acts of open rebellion that were of interest to these types of narratives of slavery, but also acts that may not register as resist or as political, but nevertheless assert agency and self-affirmation, and what it means to be fully human when humanity is routinely denied.[50] This is often represented in novels of slavery through a turn toward the quotidian, or representations of everyday struggle as the condition of Black life. As Jordan and Lorde's earlier work attests, attention to emotional life is as central to a politics of resistance as the taking up of arms.

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[49] Keizer, *Black Subjects* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 8-9.

[50] Keizer, *Black Subjects* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3, 8-10.

As one such text, *Beloved,* as well as discourse surrounding it, offers insight into the political work that can be done by examining the "information" that affect holds. Both the narrative itself and Morrison's extensive discussions about her writing process, in fact, insist upon the examination of affect. Morrison makes clear, however, that the process is at once crucial to the articulation of histories and formulation of memories for African diasporic subjects *and* is psychically threatening, a labor that must be undertaken with great care and communal support.

I refer to "diaspora" here both in the immediate sense of geographical displacement of bodies, and in a more removed sense, in terms of historical displacement. This second meaning might be thought of as *deep* diaspora, whereby subjects experience dislocation intergenerationally as cultural memory. Through physical haunting in the form the ghost Beloved, as well as through the theorizing of "rememory" throughout the novel, *Beloved* ties personal histories of the protagonists to a mythical "we" of African diasporic peoples, suggesting that memory functions affectively, moving from body to body across time and space.

Like Lorde and Jordan, Morrison has often referred to the affective labor that creative expression performs. Literature, and the novel in particular, Morrison has said, can help provide direction in a disordered world — novels should be beautiful, but they also should *work*, helping to point the way toward wholeness and healing.[51] (58). Black music and oral storytelling were once privileged media in which affects specific to the Black experience were transmitted and would generate cultural memory, according to Morrison. However, she argues that Black music has been appropriated in such a way as to largely void it of specificity, and oral storytelling no

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[51] Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in *What Moves at the Margins: Selected Non-Fiction* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 58.

longer fits into the social fabric of Black life. "We don't live in places where we can hear [ancestral] stories anymore; parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological, archetypal stories that we heard years ago. But new information has to get out, and there are several ways to do it. One is the novel."[52] The novel has the potential for an "affective and participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience," Morrison goes on to observe, which requires "the reader to work *with* the author in the construction of the book" to ensure the affective force is meaningful or transformative.[53] The movement between text and reader, between what is said and left unsaid and then filled in by the reader, is what completes a novel, according to Morrison. This active relationality creates emotional charge, and the story then moves within affective circuits of history-making and memory-formation; it becomes part of cultural commentary and critique that shape subjective and intersubjective (thus political) positions and experiences.

Such an understanding of the role of the novel shapes the construction of *Beloved*, which is structured around precisely what is left out of history (extra-textually) and left unsaid (within the text). The novel itself is drawn from Morrison's own affective relationship to historical absences — the creative and constructive impulse to fill in the story where stories have been erased. As Morrison describes in "The Site of Memory," of all the historical documentation of the life of the slave, none note an interior life. Even slave narratives lack engagement with interiority, as the generic aims were primarily to garner sympathy from white abolitionists. In order to make the narratives palatable to white audiences, writers had to "drop a veil over [those]

[52] Morrison, "Rootedness," in *What Moves at the Margins* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 58.

[53] Morrison, "Rootedness," in *What Moves at the Margins* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 59.

proceedings too terrible to relate," Morrison notes.[54] *Beloved* aims to remove such a veil, and asks readers to work toward articulating a cultural memory that otherwise exists only as the lingering affect of absence, in the holes left behind by slave narratives, slave keeper's records, and newspaper reports — including the newspaper reports documenting the trial of Margaret Garner, the runaway slave who killed her child rather than let it be taken as slave again, which inspired the writing of *Beloved.*

Morrison worked through the affective presence of absence throughout her writing process. Using a technique she describes as "literary archeology," she creates a history of slave subjectivity in *Beloved* by taking seriously the "hints" of emotional and affective lives that exist between the lines of the written record, as well as that which she was able to draw from oral histories and her own experiences with her living ancestors. She takes seriously, she says, the "memories within," or what might be thought of as her own bumping into the "rememory," as protagonist Seth calls it in *Beloved*, that exists in the cultural practices of her intimate world. Quoting Zora Neal Hurston's opening passage from *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*, Morrison says, "Like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me."[55] The development of the story of Seth, in other words, is based as much on Morrison's own affective experience as a descendant of slavery as it is on the written record of Garner's life — she relied on what she came to *feel* and intuit through her brushing up against subjects and objects that hold historical, if incomplete, information through their cultural practices and meanings.

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[54] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *The Invention of Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2nd. Edition, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1995): 90-91.

[55] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *The Invention of Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2nd. Edition, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1995): 92.

Within the narrative of the novel, the affect of absence is theorized through Sethe's articulations of "rememory." More complicated than memory, rememory is shaped by histories of collective trauma and the experiences of violently uneven power relations that leave the former slaves who populate the novel haunted, scarred psychologically and physically. Despite the effort on the part of the former slaves to escape their memories and forge new worlds for themselves in the relative freedom of the north, it is always "there," as Sethe remarks, "outside my head" existing despite attempts at its erasure.[56] Like the imprint of the baby ghost's hands on a cake, rememory hovers as a physical presence in the landscape, detached from individual rememberers but shaping their relations with each other and their environments and showing up as affective sensory experiences.[57] "Someday, you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on," Sethe tells her daughter Denver. "So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else."[58] Through Sethe, Morrison attempts a negotiation with these denied and repressed personal and collective memories, the details of which exist only in fragments and circuits of feelings, only in stories, rumors and hints that are passed on between community members. The story of Sethe's killing of her child is one of the most devastating of many examples in the novel.

While many have read the novel as a declaration for the psychological necessity of recovering memory — both for the health of the novel's characters and of present-day readers — it is equally, I would argue, a meditation on the trauma that recovering memories can engender.

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[56] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 36.

[57] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 3.

[58] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 36.

Morrison theorizes the tension between the will to remember and the will to forget through the conflicting intergenerational needs of Sethe and Denver, Sethe's only remaining child. Denver lives in a state of arrested childhood for much of the novel, unable to engage with the world outside of 124 Bluestone Road, haunted by a family history that she knows only through whispers and backward glances. She is nearly consumed by those absences as they manifest in the physical form of her dead sister, the ghost Beloved, when she appears as a full grown woman. Her desire for Beloved, her desire to fill the gaps that Beloved's previous absence represented, threatens to overtake Denver's ability to exist in the present. Sethe as well is nearly consumed on Beloved's arrival. In an effort of self-preservation, Sethe works throughout Denver's childhood to maintain the gaps, to keep at bay those proceedings too terrible to relate. The past cannot, however, be fully contained. It appears in rememory, and in the very form of absence itself: the baby ghost Beloved. When Paul D. attempts to exorcise that ghost, it comes roaring back in the flesh as the grown woman Beloved, fully claiming Sethe with her arrival. Sethe becomes submersed within the (w)hole of her past, giving herself over to the girl who then "ate up [Sethe's] life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it."[59]

The metaphor of haunting in *Beloved,* then, suggests movement of affect across time and through generations. The devastating confrontation with the guilt, shame, and terror of the past that the grown, fleshly Beloved's arrival brings for Sethe is foreshadowed through her encounters with the affective forces, the rememory, produced by other seemingly innocuous objects. One long passage, for example, describes the affective force of the Ohio landscape:

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[59] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 250.

> [Sethe] worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately, her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly to rinse the camomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be on her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where her skin buckled like a washboard. . . . Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward the water. . . . Then something. The plash of water. The sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them … and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty.[60]

Natural beauty, which could serve for Sethe as a respite from the pain and horror of the human world, instead serves as catalyst by which the terror of remembering and the danger of forgetting combine. For Sethe, the "shameless beauty" of the plantation Sweet Home and the sycamores — of the "[b]oys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world" — is a physical manifestation of her conflicted relationship to memory: it is shameful to forget, but too painful to remember, and so memories are displaced and distorted. Rather than one of pleasure, her response to beauty's affect is guilt and suppressed grief: "[T]ry as she might to make it otherwise the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that."[61] Such a response implies what is later articulated by theorists as affect's autonomy, calling into

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[60] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 6.

[61] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 6.

question universalist assumptions about the pleasures of judgment, especially for those who have been systemically denied access to pleasure.

Ultimately the novel refuses any easy reconciliation. There is no sudden access to pleasure through cathartic confrontation with history or beauty. Even when Beloved's presence — both ghostly and fleshly — are finally exorcised from 124 Bluestone Road, the affective charge of her having existed remains, if only in the wind, in footprints by the creek, in the bittersweet everydayness of life as the novel's characters carry on.

The novel ends:

> This is not a story to pass on.
>
> Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go. They are so familiar. Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit. Take them out and they disappear as though nobody ever walked there.
>
> By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss.
>
> Beloved.[62]

As the second death of Beloved suggests, rememory is a remnant, an affective trace of a grief without end for the sixty million *and more*, as Morrison notes in the novel's dedication, who suffered under slavery and continue to suffer in its afterlife. In its representations of facing, and

[62] Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004), 275.

choosing *not* to face, traumatic memories, *Beloved* asks: What is the price of bearing witness to the affect that remains? What is the price of looking away?

Contemporary Black feminists such as Hartman continue to grapple with such questions in the present. Also pointing to the power of narration to affect across time and space, Hartman notes that stories of slavery are not stories about slaves themselves, nor about slavekeepers. They are stories about their descendants, and what their descendants make of the records that act as "failed witness" to the tragedy of slavery. At worst, they are

> about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes. The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history.[63]

These stories are the discourses of what Hortense Spillers calls the "passions of racism;" the structures of feelings that affectively maintain anti-Blackness. On the other hand, stories such as Morrison's, those that struggle to make new histories out of the archival tomb, out of the underground, are stories of slavery's survivors; its descendants who bump into the rememory that emerges from sycamore trees, from the landscape of a ruined Harlem, from the love between women who share no history but oppression. Can these types of narratives "provide an antidote to dishonor, and ... a way to 'exhume buried cries' and reanimate the dead? Or is narration its

[63] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 2.

own gift and its own end ... [a] way of living in the world in the aftermath of catastrophe and devastation?" Hartman asks.[64] Perhaps not remedy, she suggests, but rather, these stories are part of a historiographical operation that exists in "the conjunction of hope and defeat."[65] Narrative, in other words, can not ever speak the unspeakable or recover histories forever lost. It can, however, articulate affects of the past that remain, and draw from the information they provide. Such stories, entering into the affective circuits of the present, have the potential to undo dominant structures of feeling, including those related to cultures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and hetronormativity. An intellectual history of affect theory that tells the story of Black feminist thought within it, in its own small way, has the potential to do just that.

[64] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 3.

[65] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 14.

CHAPTER TWO

Black Self-Valuation and the L.A. Rebellion School of Film

In 1975, Julie Dash and Alile Sharon Larkin, two of the first women involved in the loose conglomerate of Black UCLA film school students that came to be known as the "L.A. Rebellion," released their "Project One" student films. Dash's *Four Women,* set to Nina Simone's song of the same title, features dancer Linda Martina Young as she incorporates choreography from across multiple cultural traditions into her critical rendition of four enduring Black female archetypes — the strong "Aunt Sarah," the tragic mulatto "Saffronia," the seductive "Sweet Thing," and the radical "Peaches." Larkin's *The Kitchen* unfolds in non-linear flashbacks, portraying with brutal honesty the psychological damage done to Black women by the unceasing barrage of images associated with white beauty culture and the concomitant white supremacist gender and race hierarchies that frame the world.

In their imaging of the violences generated by the amalgam of misogynistic representations of Black women and idealizations of white culture, each of the films expose with frankness what I argue is a thematic preoccupation of the L.A. Rebellion: The enduring tradition of gendered anti-Blackness that is a constituting force of Black life in the Americas, from chattel slavery, through the Civil Rights Movement, to the present. In Larkin's film, for example, the final images of a mother imprisoned in a mental hospital after her emotional and psychic state has finally given way under the weight of the unending pressure to fit into a white America that rejects Blackness and Black motherhood as part of the social order, refuses to reproduce popular progressivist histories that characterize the post-Civil Rights era as one shaped by

"revolutionary" social change. In doing so, the film openly challenges the Black *imago* on screen that remains dominate in cinema — those images that perpetually produce Blackness as ugly, deficient and shameful, and as the ahistorical, uncultured negative of whiteness.[1] This challenge was a central imperative to the first Black student filmmakers who began entering UCLA film school in the late 1960s through a newly inaugurated "ethnocommunications" program meant to attract students of color to the film school. The aim of the students and professors involved (independent filmmaker and scholar Elyseo Taylor and Third Cinema scholar Teshome Gabriel) was to create a "new Black independent cinema" that, like the Third Cinema they studied in the Latin American context, would become part of the revolutionary Black freedom struggle itself.[2] When Young pounds her first to the ground in Dash's *Four Women* and rises up to Simone's voice defiantly declaring "I AM PEACHES," the film sonically and visually announces this mission, while at the same time making it clear that Black *feminism* also must be part of the revolution, if it is to be revolutionary at all.

In what follows, I revisit the new Black cinema of the Rebellion in order to draw out the ways in which Black feminisms' call for revolutionary and resistant action emerges from its body

[1] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 1952, 2008), 125, 131. In particular, Franz Fanon describes the *imago* of Blackness as it circulates in popular media such as Tarzan films and children's comics in which the "savage," the wicked, the evil, etc., are always personified by Black or Indian characters.

[2] Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 10-11. Taylor's vision for the program, which he developed in collaboration with Colin Young, Chair of the Department of Theatre Arts, was to create a media production program specifically oriented to students of color and toward serving their communities, while also pointing to anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles abroad. He, along with Gabriel later on, organized screenings and discussions of African and other Third World films, encouraging students to draw connections between them and their own minoritized positions (11). The program, which administrators complained had a "preoccupation with ethnic participation" and an unrealistic budget, was nevertheless perceived by many students and faculty of color as underserved, the "step-child within the Theatre Arts Department — unwanted, neglected, and exploited." When Taylor was subsequently denied tenure and left UCLA, student filmmaker Ben Caldwell noted his firing in the epigraph to his thesis film, *I&I: An African Allegory* (1979), stating that it was "for racist reasons."

of work. In doing so, I argue that the film movement develops a Black feminist poetic that moves within radical Afrocentric Black liberation and feminist demands for undoing the epistemological frameworks of Western modernity that structure white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalism. To return to the L.A. Rebellion from a feminist perspective in the contemporary moment — a moment in which overt racism, misogynism, hypermasculinity, and homophobia have become the political order of the day, even while Civil Rights-era "gains" and the Barak Obama presidency are still pointed to as evidence of the eradication of racism and a "post-racial" social order, and in which, at the same time, Black independent films such as *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016), whose quiet, introspective interrogations of intersubjective Black queer relations garnered national attention and critical acclaim — is to reflect upon the continuity of the condition of gendered Blackness in the United States in general, and the role of Black filmmaking in particular. In other words, as Black bodies continue to be subject to gratuitous state-sanctioned violence today, standout films such as *Moonlight* also continue to offer counter narratives to the Black *imago*, and to the myth of a post-racial society.[3] At the same time, the rarity of such films being produced and reaching mass audiences — especially Black *women's* films — highlights the difficulty of getting this type of work funded, supported, and

[3] Farihah Zaman, "Song of Myself," *Film Comment* 52.2 (2016): 40. Like Charles Burnett's work, the cinematography and quiet storyline of *Moonlight* recalls the dehumanizing effects of racism, compulsory masculinity, and criminalization on Black urban communities in a deeply aesthetic yet personal manner, which rarely gets portrayed in popular "race" dramas, where narratives typically follow plot lines based on historical figures or moments (*Straight Outta Compton* [2015], *Selma* [Ava DuVernay, 2014], and *The Butler* [Lee Daniels, 2013], for example). As Zaman states, "*Moonlight* reminds us that, as people of color, we so rarely get to have these stories too — tales of epic romances, traumatic hurts, minor blessings."

distributed.[4] The films coming out of the L.A. Rebellion speak to similar political and artistic contradictions. While many received positive critical attention when they were released, most never gained much recognition beyond festival circuits, and the directors struggled after leaving UCLA to fund and produce new projects of their own. Of the three most well-known directors — Dash, Charles Burnett, and Haile Gerima — only the two men have directed multiple feature length films, and both have struggled to fund independent projects. Meanwhile, Dash has not been given the opportunity to direct another feature length theatrical release since her critically acclaimed *Daughters of the Dust* (1992), which was the first feature film by a Black woman to have theatrical release.

Politically, L.A. Rebellion films hover in a space between the excitement of possibility, the sense of *movement* brought by the heightened political activity of the Civil Rights era and the institutional opportunities the movement created (including those affirmative action opportunities that brought young Black filmmakers to UCLA in the first place), and the disappointments and sense of stasis wrought by the FBI's concerted attack on Black liberation movements, the splintering traumas of a lingering war, multiple assassinations, and the realization that landmark anti-discrimination legislations were proving to do relatively little to relieve the pressures of

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[4] *Moonlight*'s critical success speaks, perhaps, to the present contradictory political moment in which previously operative but largely latent racism, xenophobia, and homophobia has been mobilized and normalized under the Trump administration, while at the same time, unprecedented numbers of people have responded against such normalization. Similarly, in the wake of 2015-2016's #OscarsSoWhite debacle, substantive changes to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' membership and voting rules are addressing the Academy's dismal history of racism. That *Moonlight* is an exceptionally beautiful film, in years past, would not have guarantee such strong critical and box office success. The subsequent success of *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018) in the box office, and at the same time the lukewarm reception of *A Wrinkle in Time* (Ava DuVernay, 2018), already serve to suggest that the sea-change in Hollywood has yet to come. Only one exceptional Black film — an action film that follows the general trend of the popularity of superhero films — can be supported by the box office a year. That *A Wrinkle in Time* is a film by a Black woman director and features four women (three Black and one white) most certainly contributes to its subordination to *Black Panther.*

discriminatory housing practices, poor infrastructure, segregation, limited access to health and education, persistent un- and under-employment, excessive incarceration, and premature death in Black communities. The films and filmmaking practices of the L.A. Rebellion, then, evoke certain existential questions about the "after" of such a revolutionary moment by representing the socio-historical position of Black struggle as exceeding the limits of radicality and militancy. In other words, while the 1960s and 1970s mark a period of the condensation of *visible* political radicality, *struggle* is represented by these filmmakers as the very condition of Black life.

Focusing as much on quotidian aspects of Black life in America as on radical resistant activity, the films constitute a type of Black independent filmmaking that expresses the political as inextricable from everyday life, and thus bring to bear what Black feminists such as Audre Lorde and June Jordan were beginning to posit during the same time period: That struggle, or everyday acts of enduring are acts of great courage, that loving Blackness in a culture based on anti-Black hate is radical, and that conscious cultivation of and caring for alternatives to that hate — self-love, self-care, self-valuation — is part of a dynamic and active political process. Prefiguring contemporary discussions about activism and self-care, Lorde notes that self-care is not self-indulgence, but rather an act of self-preservation, "and *that* is an act of political warfare."[5] Some people, Lorde says, were never meant to survive. To survive, and to survive while keeping love for the self and love for the abjected community intact, is to labor politically against the white supremacist, patriarchal heteronormativity that depends on silencing, debasing, and rejecting difference. And to do so in the context of the Americas, in which Blackness is constructed as a category for justifying the commodification of a people, and in which,

[5] Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 131 (emphasis mine).

subsequently, Black people were never meant to survive as fully intact human beings, requires a complete undoing of the world as it is presently configured.

Afrocentric Feminism and Rituals of Self-Care in the L.A. Rebellion

Patricia Hill Collins has noted that the dominate epistemological structures of the world as we know it emerge from the white male standpoint, and privilege scientific rationalism as a legitimizing force. This privileging, in turn, de-emphasizes the type of holistic approach to knowledge and understanding the world that is advocated by Black feminists such as Jordan and Lorde. Collins describes the latter approaches as "Afrocentric feminism," in that they reflect "a core African value system that existed prior to and independently of racial oppression," as well as common experiences of oppression within Black communities that result from colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other systems of racial domination. "These two factors foster shared Afrocentric values that permeate the family structure, religious institutions, culture, and community life of Blacks in varying parts of Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and North America," she says, and develop the frameworks of an Afrocentric epistemology.[6] Further, she notes that

> Feminist scholars advance a similar argument by asserting that women share a history of gender oppression, primarily through sex/gender hierarchies. These experiences transcend divisions among women created by race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity and form the basis of a women's standpoint with a corresponding feminist consciousness and epistemology.

[6] Patricia Hill Collins, "Towards an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology," in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research,* eds. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin (AltaMira Press, 2003), 52.

> Because Black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women's standpoint should reflect elements of both traditions.[7]

Afrocentric feminist epistemologies, according Collins, emphasize experiential knowledge, ritual connections with the mind, body, and earth, and relationally rather than atomistic rational individualism, subject-object dualism, and linear narratives of progress. Many L.A. Rebellion films explore this type of epistemology through a shared thematic preoccupation with African and African American folklore, history, family, and community, as Toni Cade Bambara has said,[8] and through it develop an Afrocentric feminist poetics that emphasizes pan-African ritual and communal connection, and politics of self-valuation and self-invention.

Barbara McCullough's *Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification* (1979), for example, articulate this poetics in its explorations of elements of African value systems that survived slavery and its afterlife within the global diaspora from the perspective of a Los Angeles-based Black woman. From its location in an abandoned lot, what McCullough in a 1979 interview called a "wasteland" that signifies Black displacement,[9] to its evocation of female water-based figures of African diasporic spiritual iconography,[10] the film articulates an

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[7] Collins, "Towards an Afrocentric Feminist Epistomology," in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research,* eds. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin (AltaMira Press, 2003), 53.

[8] Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993): 93.

[9] Barbara McCullough on UCLA's "The View" (1979), www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/interviews/669.

[10] Jacqueline Stewart, "Water Ritual #1: An Urban Right of Purification," *UCLA Film and Television Archive*, www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/films/water-ritual-1-urban-rite-purification.

experience that is based specifically on the woman's relationship with her surroundings, while it nevertheless remains "unrooted" in place and time.[11] For example, *Water Ritual* opens with a black screen and the rhythmic sounds of crickets chirping and metal clashing before dissolving to a shot of a woman framed in medium focus by the remnants of a falling down house. The specificity of the film's location is made obscure by her simple dress and the outdoor surroundings of ruins and overgrown weeds; as Jacqueline Stewart notes, it seems she could be located somewhere in Africa or the Caribbean, or at some time in the past.[12] Soon, however, wider shots more clearly establish the chronotope as located in the film's contemporary moment and in a vacant lot in Los Angeles. The lot is in an area of Watts that had been cleared of houses and inhabitants (mostly African American) in order to make room for the Century Freeway in the early 1970s, a project that was then abandoned for more than a decade. The unrootedness that this play on temporality and geography suggests reflects the continuity of histories of irreconcilable natal alienation initiated with chattel slavery through reference to contemporary patterns of displacement that continuously disrupt Black community and family life.[13]

McCullough says that while the lot on which *Water Ritual #1* was set was abandoned, it nevertheless contained structures and objects that link it to its past as a community where people

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[11] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64-81. In my use of the term "unrooted" instead of "uprooted" or "disrooted," I follow Hortense Spillers' description of "ungendered" flesh, which indicates the violent removal of the slave commodity from the symbolic order of gender and race. "Unrooted," then, indicates the complete cutting of natal ties caused by the slave trade, and the re-ordering of slave bodies as ungendered flesh that do not have the capacity to maintain significant genealogical ties.

[12] Stewart, "Water Ritual #1: An Urban Right of Purification," *UCLA Film and Television Archive*, www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/films/water-ritual-1-urban-rite-purification.

[13] See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7, for a description of the slave relation and its origins in natal alienation.

once lived and went through their daily routines.[14] The rituals performed by the actress were spontaneously created. She would sit down with objects, some brought to the location and some found, and make something new, McCullough said. The spectator is offered glimpses of the remains of a broken record — Stevie Wonder's "Songs in the Keys of Life" — a fish head, broken glass, "bits of a deteriorating urban environment that when reassembled with other objects seemed to work. They had a beauty of their own when joined together in this circle of continuity."[15] The film's visual "layering of locations and temporalities,"[16] draws together histories and locations of forced relocation of Black people, from the shores of Africa to the condemned communities of Los Angeles, and refashions this double history of displacement into a story of ancestral and communal connections. Such conceptualizing of time and space as *plenum* has roots in African cosmologies that assert circularity, holism, and continuity, as opposed to Eurocentric ones based on linearity, disjunction, and discontinuity.[17]

The film culminates with Vidato disrobing, squatting in an abandoned home, and urinating while the camera focuses unflinchingly on her exposed genitals. Steward describes this "cleansing ritual" as an "attempt to expel the putrefaction she has absorbed from her physical

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[14] McCullough on UCLA's "The View" (1979), www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/interviews/669.

[15] McCullough on UCLA's "The View" (1979), www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/interviews/669.

[16] Stewart, "Water Ritual #1: An Urban Right of Purification," *UCLA Film and Television Archive*, www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/films/water-ritual-1-urban-rite-purification.

[17] See Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 81, for a discussion of her use of the term *plenum.*

See Nikitah O. Imani, "The Implications of Africa-Centered Conceptions of Time and Space for Quantitative Theorizing: Limitations of Paradigmatically-Bound Philosophical Meta-Assumptions," *Black Studies Faculty Publications* 8 (2012), http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/blackstudfacpub/8, for a discussion of the African conceptions of space and time.

environment, while symbolically cleansing the environment itself."[18] The ritual as performed by a Black woman — with her body being imaged graphically but non-sexually during the urination rite — might be thought metaphorically as a performance of cleansing the film of cinematic norms that render female bodies as agentless sexual objects for (white) men's pleasure. Further, by performing the private act of urination in the now-public/once-private space of a torn down home, the film transforms the personal cleansing ritual of urinating into a public, political statement regarding the conditions that led to the need for such a ritual in the first place — the systematic and violent displacement of Black people from both their ancestral homes and their contemporary domestic spaces.

Collins notes that among the contours of an Afrocentric feminist perspective is an emphasis on concrete, lived experience. The rituals performed in *Water Ritual #1* were part of an unchoreographed experiment in self-expression and improvisation that drew from the personal experiences of both the actress and the filmmaker. McCullough says that in addition to being inspired to make the film by watching a close friend experience a mental break, the film was also inspired by her interest in the ritualistic aspects of her Catholic upbringing, and what she thinks of as "cultural affinity" with ritual aspects of African spirituality. There were no "prescribed" or ethnographically researched aspects to the ritual preformed in the film, she says — it is not, in other words, "historically informed" by an outside authority; rather, it draws from knowledges within the two women that are culturally and emotionally informed by their personal experiences, as well as by common histories that draw from the experience of disrupted natal

[18] Stewart, "Water Ritual #1: An Urban Right of Purification," *UCLA Film and Television Archive*, www.cinema.ucla.edu/la-rebellion/films/water-ritual-1-urban-rite-purification.

connections to Africa.[19] This type of experiential knowledge, Collins points out, allows for "subjectivity between the knower and the known" to rest within the women themselves and their own innate understandings of and experiences with the world rather than in a higher authority who prescribes knowledge and abstracts it from experience.[20] Lorde describes a similar form of experiential knowledge in her speeches "Uses of Anger" and "Uses of the Erotic," in which she claims that specific knowledges reside within affects such as anger and eroticism.[21] McCullough's film suggests that ritualistic practices draw upon affect in order to evoke feeling and bodily sensation as objects for contemplation, and act as spaces in which knowledge is produced as much as absorbed. The film's unashamed focus on the cleansing moment of expulsion of waste presents Black women's bodies not as vessels of shame as is standard in non-Black cinema, but rather as part of an interconnected holistic system of relations. The self-valuation the film suggests, in other words, performs a type of spiritual healing from the wounds inflicted by historical and contemporary devaluation and displacement of Black women.

A later member of the L.A. Rebellion, Zeinabu irene Davis, also invites this type of contemplation of the role of the body in intellectual and emotional processes through her 1989 short film *Cycles.* Here, Davis draws attention to practices of consciously linking mind and body through ritual and community connection. Like *Water Ritual #1*, *Cycles* explores ritual as a physical enactment of self-valuation, portraying an African-inspired cleansing ritual that expresses exquisite care for the body. The film follows the day in the life of Rasheeda, a woman

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[19] Barbara McCullough Oral History, UCLA Film & Television Archive.

[20] Collins, "Towards an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology," in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research,* eds. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin (AltaMira Press, 2003), 52.

[21] See Chapter One of this dissertation for further discussion of affect in Lorde's Black feminist thought.

who is waiting for her period to begin while she fears she is pregnant. She finds a sense of purpose and peace in the solitary cleansing rituals of both her house and body as time passes erratically. In some scenes, the sound of the slow tick of a clock dominates the soundtrack while Davis' experimental use of stop motion and photography seems to freeze time in space, while, for example, Rasheeda's hand is stopped in midmotion, scrubbing a toilet. In other cases, the stop motion is displayed in rapid succession, offering a sense of lively animation that juxtaposes the quiet introspection of the other moments. The movement back and forth from quiet to frenzy is not jarring. Rather, the images expose Rasheeda lovingly in either extreme of her moments of self-indulgence, allowing space for her to treat her body and mind to a day of extended self-care in whatever form feels appropriate at the moment.

When Rasheeda lays down to rest, the film shifts from the interior space of the home — which represents Rasheeda's interiority as well — to a dream montage where she moves about in the open space of Los Angeles streets with two friends, one played by Davis herself, the other played by Davis' close friend, Dorris Alunda Johnson, who wrote the short diary entry that was inspiration for the film. As Rasheed flirts with and follows a man playing a djembe drum, the friends laughingly drag her away, and a series of images follow that display the women's affection and friendship for one another. After waking, Rasheeda finds that her period has begun, a physical manifestation of the line that is ritually repeated throughout the film: "You're doing okay, and you're going to get better." Samantha Sheppard notes that the dream sequence indicates a moment in which Rasheeda draws from the the ritual connections she makes between her mind and body during her cleansing ritual to also connect with the world of women around her, saying that "*Cycles* represents the personal and communal feelings of Black female

interiority, fusing the individual with the communal and spiritual with the everyday."[22] The film closes with extradiegetic women's voices, many of them L.A. Rebellion filmmakers, describing cravings that they say they indulge in during menstruation: Potatoes, good chocolate, protein, etc. The women here draw from personal experiences, creating a narrative and extrafilmic connections as women come together in community to pool their strengths, perduring together with love and self-valuation.

Becoming a (Feminist) L.A. Rebellion

Before McCullough, Davis, Dash and Larkin's entry into UCLA, a latent Black feminism focused on perduring, love, and self-valuation underlies many of the movement's early films. Burnett, for example, notes an impulse toward survival, and survival with love, in an interview about his filmmaking practice, where he describes the organizing motif of his work as "the power to endure:"

> The people that I grew up with worked and worked and worked. … It was all about survival. I wouldn't be here today if some distant relative had jumped over the boat in the middle passage. ... I look at those pictures of those slave boats, and ... I couldn't see myself lying in chains like that, on top of each other like that. I want to pay homage, because I don't think I could endure that. But the fact of the matter is, it was people I lived with that held their families together. They were church going, they provided and

[22] Samantha Sheppard, "Bruising Moments: Affect and The L.A. Rebellion," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema,* eds. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 245.

> shared whatever they had with other people who didn't have. And I admire that, and I wanted to show that these people are real human beings and they work despite the harshness, and they endured.[23]

Despite the anti-Black condition that founded the Americas, beginning with the middle passage's inauguration of race, which names Blackness as a category marking the non-human, and continuing to manifest in the present through state sanctioned violence, mass incarceration practices, unequal distribution of wealth, infrastructure, education, and health, *Black people endure,* he said; they carry on, and they do so through communal life.

As one of the earliest members of the collective and an active participant in many of the other students' films, Burnett's interest in this power to endure — or what I think of more precisely as the power to *perdure,* or persists *through* or *despite* something else *with change* — within Black family life and community characterizes much of the narrative and formal preoccupations of the movement. The final scene of his second student film, *Several Friends* (1969), set in Watts in the aftermath of the 1965 uprising, for example, is shot in the tight, enclosed space of a small kitchen, and is the first of what would become something of a visual hallmark of Burnett's cinematography. Close-ups of men sitting around a table, their bodies moving in and out of the frame, with the *mise-en-scène* of the table as much a focal point as the characters themselves, appear in *Several Friends*, in his seminal *Killer of Sheep* (1978), and in films such as Larkin's feature film, *A Different Image* (1982), for which he was cinematographer. The affect of these quotidian shots is palpable: The claustrophobic sense of immobility is

[23] "Jorgensen Guest Filmmaker Lecture Series — Charles Burnett," the Indiana University Cinema and the Black Film Center, Nov. 3, 2011.

magnified by long takes of time slowly, idly, futilely passing. Mechanical breakdown acts as a metaphor in many of Burnett's films for family life marked by immobility — particularly masculine immobility — within the ghettoized space of Black Los Angeles renders the drive to adhere to gender roles constructed by a hostile white patriarchy as psychically untenable. While Burnett's work tends to center on masculine subjects, his quiet focus on Black family life and spaces of the home and community mark a nascent feminism that is more fully developed in much of the work by the women directors who joined the program in the following years.

Burnett's earliest films, in fact, stand out from some the work by his contemporaries at UCLA precisely for their thematic focus on the everyday rather than on more pronounced political themes. Other early members of the Rebellion tended to focus more specifically on a type of radical filmmaking style that was influenced by Third Cinema, which the students studied under Elyseo Taylor and Teshome Gabriel, the film schools first Black professors, and its directive to use the camera as a weapon.[24] Gerima's *Hour Glass* (1971) and *Child of Resistance* (1972), and Larry Clark's *Tamu* (1970) and *As Above, So Below* (1973), for example, offer pointed political and social critique in their explorations of Black militant consciousness and insurgency. This first wave of Black film students at UCLA is also strongly marked by its masculine presence, not only in the fact that nearly all of the first admittees were men, but also

[24] Bernard Nicolas Oral History, UCLA Film & Television Archive. Nicolas, for example, notes that after he was exposed to theories about revolutionary filmmaking, he said he understood the potential of film to be an instrument of social change. His impetus for going to film school, he says, was precisely to be a revolutionary.

by what has been described as a highly charged, often aggressive environment.[25] The next wave of admittees, however, brought an influx of women, including Dash and Larkin, and later, Barbara McCullough, the late Melvonna Ballenger, Guy Abel-Bey, Jacqueline Frazier, and Zeinabu irene Davis. McCullough speculates that this move was in some measures made to satisfy newly created affirmative action initiatives by bringing in "double minority" students,[26] while Gabriel admits that there had been complaints by white professors about the perceived aggression of the male students. Women were brought in, he says, because faculty "didn't want to deal with the men anymore."[27] The implication, then, was that the women would be less confrontational, and perhaps less politically aggressive than the men. According to McCullough, while the women's filmmaking practices were no less politically salient, their approach did tend to be a bit "softer," with their material addressing a radical aesthetic not through appeal to insurgency but rather through its insistence on exposing and theorizing the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class as formative to Black women's experiences. The maturation of the feminism of the L.A. Rebellion, I argue, follows from this second wave of student admittees. Not only did the women filmmakers more directly address feminist thematics, such as in *Water Ritual #1,* but the films by male directors also beginning to show signs of more nuanced

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[25] McCullough Oral History, UCLA Film & Television Archive. McCullough describes the environment in the early years at UCLA film school as one in which the male students openly challenged instructors when they perceived or experienced conservative or racist perspectives. "You had Jamaa [Fanaka] on one hand, back in the classroom yelling at the instructor, you have Haile in the hallways being the professor that he actually became, and you know, basically, they were saying some stuff that was probably really true and things that need to be said, but it was a highly politically charged environment."

[26] Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jaqueline Najuma Stewart "Oral Histories," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (University of California Press 2015), 332.

[27] Field, "Rebellious Unlearning," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 90, 116n29.

— though not always unproblematic — explorations of gender politics by the mid-1970s as they began working alongside Black women directors.

For example, many of these films began narrativizing critiques Black feminists were positing of patriarchal ideologies that remained constitutive of many of the liberation movements of the era.[28] In 1969, for example, Frances Beal, who was a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, wrote her now well-known pamphlet "Black Women's Manifesto; Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," which dealt "with hurtful aspects of black male and female interrelations" and offered a plan to mitigate sexism and racism within SNCC. Beal emphasizes three points: that Black Women would not "exchange a white master for a Black master," that "the ideology of male supremacy was divisive and backward and had no place in the Black Movement" and that "having babies for the revolution" and "walking three steps behind your man" were concepts counterproductive to the struggle of black people.[29] Films of the Rebellion render these imperatives visible, often disrupting normative gender roles, but at times also drawing out or inscribing new problematics. Bernard Nicolas' innovative Project One film, *Daydream Therapy* (1977), for example, reconfigures Black women as primary agents of revolutionary change, rather than as supporting figures "behind their man," and yet still positions at least part of the strong female lead's role to be revolutionary mother (he notes in fact that he

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[28] Many of the films, in fact, pre-empt some of the most well-known criticisms of Black liberation and Black arts movements that began being produced later in the decade, and which call for intersectional (*avant la lettre)* analyses of race, gender, sex, and class oppressions (Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" and June Jordan's "Where is the Love?" in 1978, and Lorde's "Uses of Anger" in 1981, for example).

[29] Frances Beal, "Black Women's Manifesto; Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," S*isterhood is Powerful: An Analogy of Writing from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970): 340-353.

himself decided to have children at the service of the revolution): At the height of the central female character's self-possession, she is pictured while holding a child on her hip.[30]

The short film is free of dialogue (a requirement of Project One films was that they were to have no synched sound), but is set to Nina Simone's rendition of "Pirate Jenny" in order to offer it a narrative structure (Simone, in fact, is featured heavily throughout the Rebellion, itself a signal of the focus on strong Black female figures). It follows the day of an overworked, sexually harassed hotel maid who spends her lunch hour fantasizing revenge taken on the white hotel manager by an ensemble of Black militants whom the maid leads. As Allyson Nadia Field describes, it subverts "the Hollywood representation of the figure of the Black maid, who labors in the margins of the narrative and the frame, by centering both on the daily chores of such a worker and on her interior and intellectual space."[31] She goes on to say that *Daydream Therapy* can be seen as precursor to the feminist impulses of *Bush Mama* in that it treats the Black woman character's voice "as resistant, militant, and self-possessed."[32]

Daydream Therapy opens with a black and white shot of the central character, played by Marva Anderson, shot in black and white, as she vacuums an empty hotel room. Wearing a shapeless white maid's uniform, she concentrates on her work while a handheld camera follows her about the room, often at vacuum-level, angled up, which emphasizes the stooped shape of Anderson's back and shoulders as she labors. Her face is expressionless, and for one brief moment she looks up and stares for a beat at the camera, wryly acknowledging its gaze as

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[30] Bernard Nicolas Oral History, UCLA Film & Television Archive.

[31] Field, "Rebellious Unlearning," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 109.

[32] Field, "Rebellious Unlearning," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 110.

Simone croons with some contempt, "You people can watch while I'm scrubbing these floors/ And I'm scrubbing the floors while you're gawking." Moments later, as if the song is playing in Anderson's head, she looks up again and slows her work, thinking as Simon sings, "And you see me kinda grinnin' as I'm scrubbing/And you say, 'What's she got to grin?'/I'll tell ya." The scene cuts then to an image in washed out blue as waves crash on a rocky shore. Returning then to black and white, the film launches into the first scene of sexual harassment by the hotel manager. Tying together the scenes of labor with the scenes of sexual violence through the black and white stock emphasizes the mundanity of the act: It is as common to her as her everyday vacuuming and dusting. As the maid turns her back on the manager, she returns to her fantasy of waves crashing on the shore, the dark, grainy blue of her mind blotting out the actions taking place in the room.

The maid's fantasy becomes increasingly elaborate as the day continues, with its target beginning to spill onto systemic structures of exploitation that serve to support the types of individual acts of violences the hotel manager feels entitled to. Still shooting in black and white, the maid enters the city street and looks about her. Her gaze sweeps from a Bank of America sign, to EF Hutton (a stock brokerage firm) to a large veranda of a Los Angeles mansion. Her daydream now includes a collective response rather than a personal retreat: A "pirate" wearing a jacket depicting a pan-African liberation flag and carrying a machete, followed by three accomplices race through the marina where they come upon the manager on a park bench. The maid stands overhead on a bridge — and this is where she is imaged holding a child on her hip — flanked by two others, watching as the militants drag the man toward her. One militant, a woman, gazes up at her with a questioning look as Simone sings "They move in the shadows/

Where no one can see/And they're/chainin' up people/And they're bringin' em to me/Askin' me/Askin' me/"Kill them NOW, or LATER?" She gestures "yes" with her eyes as Simone sings, "Right now, right now!"

As the fantasy plays out in color, the film cuts back to a close up on the maids face as she slowly eats potato chips, entranced by the actions taking place within her mind. As she slowly comes out of her daze, and begins to head back to work, the line between fantasy and reality begins to blur: As she walks, Archie Shepp's "Things Have Got to Change" provides the soundtrack and the camera switches to a focus on her bare legs (exposed from the short maid's uniform) in movement, then seemlessly cuts to color stock and her covered by bright red slacks. It pans out slightly to include two other sets of legs in march-step behind her. From here, the film moves back and forth from black and white images of her in uniform walking back to work, to color images of her carrying Kwame Nkrumah's *Class Struggle in Africa*, back to black and white carrying the same book, again connecting her daily experiences of oppression with global systemic isssues. The same juxtaposition occurs with her carrying a protest sign that reads "Don't just dream, FIGHT for what you want." Next it repeats with her carrying a camera, and finally a gun (in reference to Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's injunction to use the camera as a rifle in their Third Cinema manifesto).[33] The final credits conclude the film with the title "The beginning," rather than "The end." The film's focus on Black women's experiences as exploited workers and sexual objects *and* as agents of militant change offer an intersectional analysis of Black women's race, gender, and class positions. The inclusion of the child in the film does not necessarily detract from this analysis: In fact, balancing the labor of childrearing

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[33] Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Towards a Third Cinema" in Movies and and Methods: An Anthology, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 44-64.

with the labor of social engagement is a primary issue of concern within Black feminist praxis. That the *woman* is holding the child as she directs the action below (rather than the man standing beside her), however, is somewhat unfortunate in its reproduction of the role of woman as above all a caregiver, despite the labor she is already performing in this scene as also the primary director of the militant action.

A year later, in 1978, Melvonna Ballenger's somewhat lighthearted Project One film, *Rain/Nyesha*, also offers the type of critique Beal's pamphlet addresses by providing a model for alternative distributions of labor. The film follows a young, fairly apathetic typist, as she moves about her days, tired from overwork and under-appreciation. Set to John Coltrane's "After the Rain," the typist muses throughout the film about rain and its impact on her day. Annoyed at first by the rain causing her to miss her bus, she then notes that it "isn't so bad," after she meets a young revolutionary man (played by Bernard Nicolas himself) who is handing out flyers, and with whom she briefly flirts. Frustrated by the tedium of her job and her inconsiderate white boss, she eventually joins up with the man she met on the street and develops both a revolutionary consciousness *and* a romantic relationship. The political statement of the film is in its refusal to then reproduce the role prescribed to the typist within the movement: In a final amusing scene, she makes her new love interest perform the secretarial labor she had earlier been consigned to, having him bring her coffee and type up a manifesto himself.

Other works, including those by arguably the three most well-known of the male filmmakers — Burnett, Gerima, and Billy Woodbury — also express a nascent, if somewhat uneven, feminist consciousness, particularly around issues of labor and the domestic field, and around the damaging effects of un- and under-employment and mass incarceration on male

characters. Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* and Woodbury's *Bless Their Little Hearts* (the screenplay of which was written by Burnett, who also served as its cinematographer)*,* for example, focus on psychic damage rendered by the inability of their male protagonists to satisfactorily enter into the public sphere and perform their perceived duties as head of the household. Each of the haunting neorealist films sensitively capture the intensity of damaged psychic life as Black men struggle to find meaningful work and purpose, and as Black women labor both outside and inside the home, struggling to claim either space as their own.

Bless Their Little Hearts, for example, follows Charlie Banks (Nate Hardmen) as he futilely searches for work while his wife, Andais (Kayee Moore) exhaustedly keeps the household together. As Samantha Sheppard points out, Andais is responsible for all the family's laborious tasks — she is, for the most part, the sole breadwinner, and when at home, she cooks and cleans, and performs the affective work of producing relationships and communication between the children, the family, and the community. Further, she "participates in the posturing that Charlie is 'the Man' (read: breadwinner) of the house, for the benefit of their kids."[34] Andais' overworked body is depicted in the film as constantly on the edge of breakdown, with her weariness often bursting through in bouts of anger directed toward her children, especially her only boy, upon whom she unleashes her frustrations with her husband's disengagement from the domestic sphere, berating him for messes and arguments that are only partially his responsibility, while the two girl children are left largely unscathed. Only in one scene, does Andais emotionally unleash this anger directly at its object, Charlie. In an attempt to claim her body for herself, and to make visible to Charlie the toll her overwork and his detachment is taking, she begs him to

[34] Sheppard, "Bruising Moments," in *L.A. Rebellion,* eds. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 231.

look at her, look at her hands, which are marked by the physical damage of her labor.[35] The potency of the scene, most of which was improvised, can be largely attributed to Andias' raw, emotionally charged delivery and Charlie's bumbling inability to respond. The moment of catharsis, however, does little to relieve the couple's tension. Charlie walks away from the argument, unable or unwilling to offer Andais the comfort she seeks.

Throughout the film, Andais as laborer is rendered largely invisible. As Sheppard notes, the film privileges her labor reality only in moments of transition from home to work,[36] emphasizing the purposefulness of her movement from one place to another. Every moment of Andais' day is structured by her imperative to meet the material needs of her family, which is juxtaposed by the somewhat aimless meanderings of Charlie's search for work that always already knows is futile. Each public wondering and its subsequent failure estranges himself further from the domestic sphere with every failure. The final scene, however, marks a moment of self-possession in which he radically refuses to participate in his alienation from the public, though not private, sphere any more. In an entrepreneurial endeavor, Charlie joins a group of fishermen who sell their catch at the side of the road. While this venture could, it seems, lead him and his family out of their desperate economic straits, he expresses contempt for the men's antics as they attempt to attract passers-by. The film closes as he turns his back to the camera and walks away, through the barren landscape of a vacant Los Angeles lot, and throwing his arm out in a gesture of resignation. As the other fishmongers make caricatures of themselves, he states with his disgusted gesture a radical "not this." There may not be any other options, as his fruitless

[35] Sheppard, "Bruising Moments," in *L.A. Rebellion,* eds. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 235.

[36] Sheppard, "Bruising Moments," in *L.A. Rebellion,* eds. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 231.

search for steady employment makes clear, but he chooses precarity over selling his body, his flesh, as labor. This, however, is a profoundly individual rather than communal choice; it is a privilege not available to Andais, whose increased burden by Charlie's turning away remains invisible while the camera settles on Charlie's back as he walks away before cutting to black.

Burnett's well-known *Killer of Sheep*, too, explores constructions of black masculinity and femininity against the backdrop of South Central Los Angeles, with scenes moving back and forth from a claustrophobic sense of immobility and despair produced through tight, unmoving close up shots in small spaces of the home, to a sense of jouissance and possibility among the children at play within the burnt out rubble left behind after the 1965 Watts Rebellion outside. Drawn-out scenes depicting adult boredom and helplessness are heightened in their contrast to the children's play, who find purpose in even the most mundane. The narrative, interspersed with shots of sheep moving as one toward the slaughterhouse, is one that is weighed down by a sense of inevitability and futility. In the home, the children, too, begin to mimic the adults in their weariness, with, for example, the son silently leaving the table during a meal, and the daughter, equally silently, gathering plates and dishes and placing them in the sink with a weary and slightly angry look toward her parents as they sit nearby, mired in their own exhaustion and sadnesses.

Like in *Bless Their Little Hearts*, this weariness is largely structured around the alienated status of the masculine subject in the United States, what Cynthia Young describes as citizenship defined by restriction rather than freedom (241),[37] and Michael T. Martin describes as "Black America's encounter with collective trauma and 'social death." In *Killer of Sheep*, he says, where

[37] Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 241.

"intimacy and desire are negated, reduced to elemental forms of emotional and material substance, Stan and family endure without prospect."[38] The deterioration of Stan's psychic state is allegorical to the slow deterioration of his home, specifically, and South Los Angeles, more generally. Stan's impotence against the forces of deterioration is punctuated in a scene in which he is physically unable to return his wife's desperate attempt at affection as they slowly dance to the sound of Dinah Washington's "This Bitter Earth." Her own unraveling, however, is positioned largely as a product of the effects of Stan's alienated status. Little attention given to the specifics of her day-to-day existence, or her labor as wife, mother, and worker — in fact, we do not know if she has a job outside the home and we never even learn her name. She is depicted out of the house only twice: Once as she stands on her front stoop and defends Stan against some neighborhood friends who want him to join them in some quick-money caper, and once during a failed attempt to leave the neighborhood for a trip to the race tracks with friends. The rest of the scenes in which she appears focus on her interiorization of Stan's depressive state; she is frequently depicted staring at reflective surfaces, checking her hair, lipstick and clothes, not out of vanity but out of worry that Stan's withdrawal is somehow a result of her perceived failure as a woman and wife. However, while the film certainly privileges Stan's perspective throughout its 81 minutes, the only brief moment of access to a character's interiority occurs with her interiror monologue just after she is rebuffed in the dancing scene. Picking up a pair of baby shoes that had been sitting on the nightstand by the bed, she narrates extradiegetically in a soft, broken voice:

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[38] Michael T. Martin, "Struggles for the Sign in the Black Atlantic: Los Angeles Collective of Black Filmmakers," in *L.A. Rebellion,* eds. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 209.

> Memories that don't seem mine, like half eaten cake and rabbit skin stretched on the backyard fences, my grandma, madear, madear, mydear dragging her shadow across the porch, standing bear headed under the sun, cleaning red catfish with white rum.

These memories, that don't seem "hers," are of a southern past, as indicated by her use of the word "Madear" to refer to her mother, and references to rabbit skins and catfish. This is a past, however, that Stan has taken pains at cutting the family off from (he berates his son at one point for using the term "Madear," stating that they ain't "country or something") in his desperate attempt to create for them a modern, middle class life. Her wistfulness, however, indicates a desire for something else; a time and place that were never hers, but that she imagines were simpler and more peaceful than what has become of their life in the barren space of Los Angeles. This brief moment of interiority encapsulates the ravageous effects of Black life in late capitalism where the "American dream" is always out of reach, and survival is the daily preoccupation. The anti-capitalism critique is specifically situated from the overworked, underpaid, and under appreciated woman's perspective in this film, even as Stan remains steadfast in his plodding movements to and from work in the brutal confines of the Solano meat packing plant.

Gerima's *Bush Mama* (1979), unlike the other two films, is situated primarily from the central female character's perspective as she faces the burden of maintaining the household in an untenable situation. Also unlike the other two films, Dorothy (Barbara O.) is imaged largely outside the home, walking the "occupied territory" of Los Angeles. The film's opening shot

establishes it as such with an image that is all-to familiar in the 21st century: Documentary-style footage of Gerima's crew as they are being harassed by the LAPD. From a far off, overhead angle, Gerima's cameramen are shown being patted down and searched with their hands up as more officers approach, at least one with a gun in hand. The long shot, fuzzy and wobbly, implies the precarious position from which this footage was taken, out of sight, hidden from the police below. Layered soundscape of helicopters, radio, and street noise, all slightly dominated by different voices reading a list of questions for welfare recipients ("Do you and your spouse reside together?" "Do you own a cooking stove, a refrigerator, a freezer?" "Has a medical doctor prescribed a special diet for you, your spouse, your child?") offer a painful reminder of the excesses of the law, its invasion that is not only immanent to the street below but that seeps into and polices the private space of the body and home as well.

Bush Mama's direct critique of the emerging demonization of welfare and other social service programs, which was initiated with discourses of the "welfare queen" that Ronald Regan introduced to the popular imaginary in 1976 situates Black women's bodies as part of larger systems of racism, exploitation, and state sanctioned violence. Dorothy spends her days fighting bureaucrats and welfare officers, humiliated by their probing questions as she attempts to gain some kind of financial footing. Her husband, T.C. (Johnny Withers), returns from Vietnam haunted by his experiences, and like many Black vets, he is unable to get a job. Soon, he is arrested for a crime he did not commit. Worn down by a world that refuses her a break, Dorothy wonders through the film in a daze, as the state slowly strips her of her self-respect and self-determination through its ceaseless invasive questions, its conscripting of her husband (first by the military and then by a judicial system that targets Black men), and its encroaching into her

body when it pressures her to abort her unborn child in order to maintain her welfare status. Internalizing the abuses, she blames herself, at first bemusedly dismissing her young neighbor T.C.'s burgeoning interests in local and pan-African liberation ideologies. She abruptly comes to a revolutionary consciousness, however, after the state snatches the last vestiges of her domestic and bodily autonomy from her when a white police officer enters her home and rapes her daughter, and she kills him. At this moment in which Dorothy experiences the absolute absence of autonomy, however, she also experiences a brief but consciousness-altering moment of absolute *freedom. As* Frank Wilderson describes, the moment in which Dorothy kills the white police offers, she enacts the "cleansing violence," described by Franz Fanon. According to Wilderson, the cinematic strategy that allows us to read the film as such is to saturate the scene with the flesh-on-flesh relationship of murder that historically defines intimacy between Black women and white men, which encourages (Black) spectators to "savor" the moment of violence beyond the duration of real-time.

> Dorothy does not blow the officer away with an automatic weapon but crawls on top of him—as he has been on top of her daughter—and stabs him to death with the blunt point of her umbrella. As he has exhausted, relieved, and renewed himself sexually at the expense of her daughter, she now exhausts, relieves, and renews her- self through the repeated thrust of her umbrella. To paraphrase Fanon, the violence cleanses her.[39]

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[39] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black :Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 126.

In the aftermath, when the state hadsmade Dorothy's condition of absolute internment clear (she is confined in a jail cell, separated from her home and child, after being beaten and most likely having lost her baby in the process) she nevertheless remains conscious of her self *as* self. As she writes to T.C.:

> It's not easy to win over people like me. And there's a lot of people like me. And we have many things to fight for just to live. … Remember you used to ask why I was always wearing a wig? All day, all night. When I eat, when I sleep. TC, the wig is off my head. The wig is off my head. I never saw what was under it, just what was on top. The glitter, the wig. The wig is off my head, TC. TC, I love you.

The wig is off, she says, her "bad" hair no longer bound by the symbol of white normative beauty. Alone in the cell, the absolute foreclosing of possibility of redemption for Dorothy does not foreclose her own experience of liberation and the autonomy produced through "cleansing violence." And yet, ultimately, it is not with the violence that she sits; it is with her love for T.C., which necessitates love herself — self-love produced through the process of her coming to revolutionary consciousness. The violence that produces this moment does not necessarily correspond with many Black feminist ideologies of love;[40] nevertheless, it does depict in the strongest possible of terms the condition of misogynistic anti-Blackness that structure Western modernity, and one Black women's momentary undoing of it.

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[40] See, for example, bell hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain," Bell Hooks Institute, May 9, 2016, accessed July 13, 2018. http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain.

Reinscribing Women's Autonomy

Many films throughout the L.A. Rebellion link the type of contemporary sexual violence and state control of women's bodies depicted in *Bush Mama* to long histories in which Black bodies are controlled, reproduced, and exploited for capital through sexual intimidation and rape. *African Women, USA* (1980) by Ijeoma Iloputaife, for example, draws connections between colonial histories of sexual exploitation and the diasporic condition through its connecting of the rape of the daughter of Nkoli Madu (Pamela Jones), Madu's own rape, and the rape of ancestors that came before her. Like in *Bush Mama*, the domestic space in this film is primarily imaged as dominated by women, with Madu, a Nigerian who has come to the United States to study dance, and her daughter sharing a home with a roommate, Uju (Anna Berty), who they cook and dine with. The space is invaded, however, when a man who had feigned professional interest in both women enters the apartment while the adults are absent and rapes the daughter. The final scene of the film evokes transnational, intergenerational suffering as Madu flees after learning about the rape, her screams intermixed with the sound of a baby's crying. When the police implore her to come back and help them find the rapist, she cries out repeatedly, "Which one?" Images of Madu's daughter and her women friends, as well as abusive men from the film, flash across the screen. Her voice echoes extradiegetically, crying out, "So you'll let them go on, again, and again, and again," as the screen splits into fractals, with images of the rapist, an African mask, a white man who had interviewed her earlier in the film for a job, the emergency room sign, and finally, her blinking eye being superimposed over her running figure, all while screams compete with the sound of Coltrane's horn playing "Reverend King." Her cry that this has happened before and will happen again and again, combined with the imagry of the Black rapist, the white

interviewer and the African mask suggest multiple forms of patriarchal domination, and its relationship to colonial constructions of Black masculinity as both hypersexual and inferior. The rapist, for example, brutally calls out during the act, "What's wrong, I ain't Black enough for you? Or maybe I'm too Black for you, huh?" At the same time, the probing questions from the white interviewer about why a Black African woman would bother coming to the United States to study dance, while he at the same time refuses to remember the name of the country she is from and offers her a job that is far below her level of expertise, are suggestive of the colonial roots of pervasive white supremacist patriarchy.

The suffering represented in this film has no resolve. However, the relationships between the women that are established in the earlier scenes, and the brief flash of women hugging that appears in the middle of the fevered montage while Madu runs, indicates that women have, historically, perdured through the violence of anti-blackness and misogyny together. The characters Yellow Mary (Barbara O.), Trula (Trula Hoosier), and Eula (Alva Rogers) in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1992) also represent violent sexual encounters, as well as resilience among and through communities of women. Eula is pregnant with a child that may be the result of her rape, Yellow Mary tells the story of her repeated rape when she was employed as a wet nurse, and the "high yellow skin" of Yellow Mary and her companion, Trulia, point to the long history of rape by white masters. The women's relationships — a sisterhood that is both familial and queer — however, serves as examples of alternative community formations within each other's loving embrace.

While by and large the L.A. Rebellion films neglect any treatment of lesbian relationships (with Yellow Mary and Trula being a notable exception), the relationships between women can

be read in many ways be read as “queer” in the sense that Barbara Smith evokes, drawing from Bertha Harris, in regard to Black women’s writing. If, for example, in women’s work,

> a sentence refuses to do what it is supposed to do, if there are strong images of women and if there is a refusal to be linear [and thus participate in hegemonic discourses of linear progress and scientific rationalism], the result is innately lesbian literature. … Not because women are ‘lovers,’ but because they are the central figures, are positively portrayed and have pivotal relationships with one another.[41]

Dash’s earlier film *Illusions* (1982) also performs this “lesbian” sensibility in its focus on the relationship between a Black singer, Esther Jeeter (Rosanne Katon), and a light-skinned producer’s assistant, Mignon Dupree (Lonette McKee), who is “passing” as white. Nick Davis, for example, points out a series of intense close ups and intimate gazing patterns between the women, which climaxes with a moment in which Mignon breaks with her character’s pattern of professionalism by fleeing the scene.[42] (160). The film ends with Mignon stating in an internal monologue, “We would meet again, Ester Jeeter and I, for it was she who helped me see beyond the shadows dancing on a white wall, to define what I had already come to know, and to take action without fearing.” The grammar of the film, then, “refuses to do what it is supposed to do” and instead suggests empowerment as being passed from a Black woman to a “white” one,

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[41] Barbara Smith, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,” *The Radical Feminist Teacher* 7 (March 1978), 23.

[42] Nick Davis, “The Face is a Politics: A Close-Up View of Julie Dash’s *Illusions,*” *Camera Obscura* 29, no. 2 (2014): 160.

reversing linear narratives of progress that assumes knowledge as being passed from white to Black. Within this reversal is also the suggestion that through sisterhood, women cultivate loving relationships that form the basis of subversive communities that reject patriarchal norms and racial hierarchies.

Re-Imaging Black Women on Screen

Alile Sharon Larkin's *A Different Image* also suggests alternative forms of relations in order to subvert patriarchal norms, but in this film she does so by representing the need not only for Black women to develop a feminist consciousness, but for Black men to as well. In doing so, the film offers a particularly powerful perspective on the political potential of intimacy and community, as well as the particular vulnerability Black women face when cultivating a politics of self-love and self-valuation in a patriarchal anti-Black world. The film opens with a long shot of a billboard depicting an idealized, nearly nude white woman. Viewed first from over the shoulder of a Black man standing on the street corner, the camera pans the billboard, then establishes the man's point of view through a shot-reverse-shot. The camera follows his gaze to a Black woman as she crosses the street. She is shot in medium focus, square in the screen, emphasizing her breasts as the focal point. The man, who it turns out is the principal male character, Vincent (Adisa Anderson), whips his head around to follow her as she passes, with the camera now focused on her rear end. Larkin immediately critiques this gaze by turning the camera full on the woman's face, whose expression subtly shifts from a look of slight annoyance, to a small smirk. Generating an "oppositional gaze," as bell hooks has described, the power of the man's invasive looking is further diminished as the extra-diegetic funk music (reminiscent of

that used to characterize women as sexual objects in Blaxploitation film) is replaced by an African woman singing, and the image is replaced by a montage of photographs of mostly Black women and Black families, some dressed in Western attire, some in African attire. These images, which primarily focus on the women's faces rather than their bodies, are repeated multiple times throughout the film. As Bambara points out, images of objectified women, particularly white women, invade the landscape of the film, drawing connections between misogynism and media-based racialized objectification of women.[43] An early scene includes a long sequence of the film's protagonist, Alana (Margot Saxton-Federella), walking to a bus stop, passing a variety of images, including a billboard of a bikini clad woman advertising a pool hall, which the camera lingers on briefly, and a hair salon decorated with large posters advertising Black women with long straight hair — a sign of racialized ideal beauty (similar to Larkin's critique in *The Kitchen*). Alana then sits at the bus stop with her legs spread comfortably wide. A little girl on the bench mimics her, much to the girl's caregiver's dismay, who looks at Alana reproachfully then forcefully closes the child's legs.

The film's narrative focuses on the familial relationship between Alana and Vincent — it is a love relationship, but a non-sexual one. Alana emphatically rejects the notion that men and women are unable to love each other outside of normative sexual paradigms, and in the early part of the film, Vincent seems to agree. He reads Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* to Alana, and says as a Black man he relates to the type of invisibility described. Alana replies that as a Black *woman* she relates: Men, she says, only see her body. "The rest is invisible." Vincent appears thoughtful.

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[43] Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993): 120.

The next shot is of a small boy looking at a billboard that depicts only a woman's butt and a bottle of tequila.

Throughout the film, however, Vincent is subject to a constant barrage of pressure to have sexual relations with Alana. He is depicted as in constant tension between his burgeoning political, pan-African consciousness, the constant imaging of women's objectified bodies, and social pressure to prove his manhood through sexual conquest. While he is shown to be developing a *Black* political consciousness, he fails, at least initially, to see the objectification of Black women as part of the racist system he is rejecting. When Vincent eventually begins touching Alana's body while she sleeps, he reproduces the objectification of the women who surround him, and participates in Alana's dehumanization, the making of her invisible. Alana heals from the encounter by immersing herself in her African-inspired art practice and by drawing strength from the photos of African women and her imagined connection to a homeland, deconstructing the natal alienation and displacement that characterize the afterlife of slavery. Vincent, however, seems to struggle to reconcile his behavior, depicted through Burnett's cinematography in a long, mostly silent, uncomfortable take, tightly framed while he plays cards with his friend.

While the film's action is driven by Alana, the narrative arch focuses on Vincent's coming to consciousness as a Black *feminist* man. It concludes with Vincent finally able to shed his objectifying gaze and really *see* Alana, as she beseeches him to do. However, the experience of having to teach Vincent has taken from Alana some of the initial freedom she felt in her body. While she meets Vincent's gaze in a mutual act of looking, she nevertheless closes her legs from her standard comfortable sitting position in a move expressing a newly acquired and

uncomfortable modesty. The friendship continues, but a divide between Black autonomy and female autonomy has become operative: Alana's project of self- and communal-valuation is tested by her recognition of enduring gendered divisions within projects of Black liberation.

The film closes with another montage of photos that include a long take of a photo of an African man and woman in traditional attire looking each other full in the face, implying an alternative, non-Western mode of relating. After the credits have rolled, just before the fade out, the film ends with a photo of Alana, sitting in the grass with her legs spread open. This sequence can be read in a couple of ways: On one hand, it represents Alana's strength and confidence in herself and her body, bolstered by her Afrocentric feminist consciousness. On the other hand, and not necessarily in contradiction to the first, it represents that strength and confidence, but only in photographic form, a still from a moment in time past. In other words, by juxtaposing the moving image of the film with the static image of the photograph, the film denies the easy linear narrative of progress represented in traditional narrative arcs of exposition-action-resolution. The optimistic futurity that Vincent's movement into a Black feminist conscious implies is cut by the return to the photograph, a memorialization of a Black feminist image that, in its staticity, represents its containment within white supremacist patriarchy. Alternative worlds *do* exist within the world that Alana constructs, but by closing with the static photo rather than a moving image, Larkin highlights both the encapsulation of that alternative world within the anti-Black patriarchal order and the ongoing freedom struggle within which Black women struggle and perdure.

“The beginning”: The Rebellion in Retrospect

When the UCLA Film and Television Archive embarked upon the restoration project of the L.A. Rebellion films in 2011, the physical states of the extant copies of many of films showed physical signs of the condition of anti-Blackness that is represented in the narratives themselves. Many of the films were lost over time, including Burnett’s first student film, while others were relegated to the archival abyss where they suffered poor storage conditions, buried in closets and dusty corners, and required significant restoration in order to be re-mastered. *Rain/(Nyesha)*, for example, was found in the vaults in the form of a tape that literally had to be baked in order to be digitized, according to Field.[44] Others had to be culled together by combining original prints with copies. The mark of neglect and the passage of time is physically imprinted on the films, appearing through jumps in action, streaks, scratch lines, dirt spots, and color fading.

These physical markers of perduring reflects a larger history of Black absence from historical archives. Film history, in particular, is marked by a lack of representation of Black film made for and by Black people. However, as the films of the Rebellion indicate, such an absence is not because these productions do not or can not exist, but rather because films made by and for Black people — especially Black women — have, for the most part, been devalued by (largely white) institutions. The resurrection of the L.A. Rebellion films reflects, on one hand, an institutional revaluing of Black cinematic art (due in no small part to the interest and dedication of core members of the Film and Television Archive at UCLA, and faculty and graduate students in the film school). On the other hand, however, this moment provides the opportunity to reflect on the problematic ebb and flow of institutional commercial interest in “exotic” art and symbolic

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[44] Field, “Rebellious Unlearning,” in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 39.

inclusion. Collins has long noted the ways in which increased interest in Black voices often signals interest in the expansion of new markets rather than the expansion of structural support for such voices, or interest in the alternative cosmologies and epistemologies that they posit.[45]

This observation can be broadened to the more general history of post-Civil Rights institutional adjustments, which were made to accommodate anti-discrimination legislation, but failed to produce lasting structural change — a history that also characterizes the L.A. Rebellion. Despite the success of the program in bringing more Black people to the UCLA film school, and despite the positive critical response many of the films received, the filmmakers found little financial support for independent projects that center Black people once they left UCLA, and many continue struggling to produce independent work today. Such political, Black-centered work is not, in other words, the type that typically opens new large, profitable markets. UCLA's ethno-communications initiative itself proved to be short lived, running only through the early 1980s.

The resonance of the films' narratives of neglect, displacement, and misogynistic anti-Black violence, with present-day gentrification, state-sanctioned violence, and ever-increasing incarceration rates of Black and Brown men and women, then, is intensified by the physical markers of age that are in the images, expressing the long passage of time between eras in which the political and libidinal economy continues to threaten Black life. When the ethno-communications program opened in 1968, it admitted the first Black students to the film program. Nearly 50 years later, in 2014, only three percent of UCLA students were Black, and in 2018, only two core faculty members in the School of Theatre, Film, and Television were Black.

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[45] See Collins, "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond," *The Black Scholar* 26, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1996), 9-17.

Black struggle is the legacy of the Americas. Inherited memory of slavery, the history of Jim Crow, the continuation of segregation, and contemporary forms of state-sanctioned violence all speak to a heritage through which Black people are barred from the category "human." What differentiates the police harassment depicted in the opening scene of *Bush Mama* or the archival footage of similar harassment in Clark's *Passing Through* from the ubiquitous footage of anti-Black police violence that populates social media today is its age, its indication of time passing while anti-Black violence endures. However, even within this enduring violence, the insistence that Black Lives *Matter*, as the contemporary U.S. Black feminist struggle has been hash-tagged, is to state a political impossibility that nevertheless produces possibility: Black lives are *matter*, not-quite-human objects within the logic of anti-Blackness, but so too do they *matter*, perduring within creative struggle, self-invention, and self-love.

CHAPTER THREE

Imagining Sara Gómez

There is a moment in the film *En la otra isla*, directed in 1968 by Afrocuban filmmaker Sara Gómez, in which one of her subjects, an opera singer trained at the *Instituto Superior de Arte*, uncomfortably describes a certain "apathy" he says he feels among his white female counterparts. He hesitates to attribute this apathy to racial prejudice, but he does question whether or not a Black man will ever be allowed to play great roles in productions like Verdi's *La Traviata* in Cuba. As Odette Casamayor-Cisneros describes, the scene is filmed in such a way that the viewer experiences a sense of intimacy with the singer, Rafael, feeling his discomfort and sadness as he tries to articulate his experiences while remaining within a revolutionary discourse that disavows post-Revolutionary racial discrimination. Gómez positions herself to the side of Rafael, Casamayor-Cisneros notes, causing him to turn his head away from the camera in order to answer her in a long, drawn-out conversation. The positioning of the camera maintains a distance between Gómez, Rafael, and the viewer. The dialogue, she says, "appears almost secret, just between the two of them and not open to the spectator, who instead has the impression of stumbling in — as a kind of voyeur — on an intimate conversation between two black individuals."[1]

Such a scene of intimacy encapsulates the subjective yet analytical filmmaking style of Gómez, and the tensions she aimed to reproduce in her films. The uncertain perspective that

[1] Casamayor-Cisneros, "Imagining the 'New Black Subject': Ethical Transformation and Raciality in the Post-Revolutionary Cuban Nation," in *Black Writing, Culture, and the State in Latin America*, ed. Jerome C. Branche (Vanderbelt University Press, 2015), 67.

Gómez draws out with Rafael, for example, sensitively reveals his difficult dual position as a revolutionary subject benefiting from a government work program, on one hand, and as a Black man experiencing social marginalization, on the other. Rafael is clearly uncomfortable admitting to the enduring struggle he experiences with racism out loud and on camera, given the context of post-1959 Cuba, where the socialist revolution was said to have eradicated racism. Gómez's cinematic stylings, however, allow for his confession to emerge in a way that places it within the revolutionary dialectic; Rafael's sadness is transformed by the end of the film to a subtle call to action against the remnants of racial discrimination. Rather than hopefully await for class equality to determine racial equality, Gómez incites Rafael to "shake off the fear of exposing his own suffering provoked by racial discrimination in present-day Cuba, and thereby make him capable of naming it and to be unafraid of fighting it," according to Casamayor-Cisneros.[2] In naming it, in other words, his sadness becomes recognizable as an affect of the structures of race that remain operational in Revolutionary Cuba. The filmic technique of inviting the spectator in to the intimate conversation between filmmaker and subject draws the spectator in to the circulation of that affect, and, as Casamayor-Cisneros, has the potential to evoke a political consciousness in spectators that is a racial consciousness as well.[3]

Even from within a revolutionary dialectic, however, this provocation to a racial consciousness, specifically a *Black* racial consciousness, in 1968 Cuba was a daring move. Speech taken to be directed against the Revolution could lead to harsh repercussions in the years

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[2] Odette Casamayor-Cisneros, "Imagining the 'New Black Subject': Ethical Transformation and Raciality in the Post-Revolutionary Cuban Nation," in *Black Writing, Culture, and the State in Latin America*, ed. Jerome C. Branche (Vanderbelt University Press, 2015), 68.

[3] Casamayor-Cisneros, "Imagining the 'New Black Subject': Ethical Transformation and Raciality in the Post-Revolutionary Cuban Nation," in *Black Writing, Culture, and the State in Latin America*, ed. Jerome C. Branche (Vanderbelt University Press, 2015), 68

following the Revolution, including, at its worst, imprisonment in the *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción* (UMAP) labor camps that operated between 1965 and 1968. While Fidel Castro initially spoke out directly against racism, declaring it a relic of imperialism and a threat to the economy, and enacted anti-discrimination laws within the first year of the revolution, he quickly declared that with class equality came racial equality, and for the next 25 years, a colorblind ideology upheld by post-independence but pre-Revolutionary celebrations of *mestizaje* as a sign of national unity prevailed. Official discourse on race was effectively silenced, practices associated with African traditions were taboo, and expressions of pan-Africanism were limited to expressions of socialist solidarity in ant-imperialist struggle.[4] Blackness as a topic for interrogation was made conspicuous only by its *absence* from official discourse in a majority Black or "mulatto" nation during a time of increased Black freedom struggles and Black internationalism.

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[4] Ana Serra, *The 'new Man' in Cuba,* (University Press of Florida, 2007), 135. In his March 23, 1959 "Speech at Havana Labor Rally," Castro spoke frankly about racial prejudice, stating that it "infected" the mentality of Cuban people at all social levels. Racism must be tackled radically, in a spirit of revolutionary love, in order to destroy the prejudices that had been handed down over the centuries, he said. He proposed that racism must be fought not only at the material level and in the workplace, but also at the social level, beginning in centers of education in effort to raise children who are free from the legacy of racism, and in recreational centers of all types where socialization occurs. He was emphatic that only with the social eradication of racism can a truly classless, unified society emerge. Only two days later, however, Castro made the grave error of succumbing to the backlash of white bourgeoisie who reportedly were made irate by the suggestion that Afrocubans and whites would dance together in social clubs. He qualified his remarks, stating, "Aquí con la única que van a tener que bailar, aunque no quieran, ¡es con la revolución!" (cited in Serra 135). While Castro did implement anti-discrimination laws during this period, he replaced direct discourse on race with the discourse of unity, subsuming racial differentiation into broader discussions of social equality. "Cubanos son más que blanco y más que negro," Castro said in that second speech. "¡Nosotros somos cubanos!" Identification with specific ethnic cultural forms were considered a danger to national unity, and bans on certain practices associated with Afrocuban culture were implemented. It would be another two and half decades until Castro specifically addressed race again in his speeches, and even then, only elusively when, according to Ana Serra, he alluded to the persistence of racial stereotyping and decried the exodus of Afrocubans in the Mariel boatlifts from April to October of 1980.

Gómez, by all accounts, was a dedicated revolutionary, but according to friends, she believed strongly that in order for the revolution to be an anti-imperialist force, it must confront imperialist structures of inequality on all fronts, including at the levels of race, gender, and class. Class and gender inequality were acceptable themes for critique in the years following the revolution, and dominated the thematics of much of her work, but the silence that prevailed around the topic of race made discussion of it taboo, with direct commentary on it grounds enough to be considered counter-revolutionary and subject to punishment. The subtlety with which Gómez treats Rafael's confession characterizes her approach to race. The trajectory of her body of work reflects increasingly delicate negotiations — as well as artistic acuity — in her work around the subject as she was also given increased financial and technical support by the state-run film institute, the *Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematigraficos* (ICAIC). This support culminated in her first, and sadly only, feature film, *De cierta manera*. In 1974, just as Gómez was nearing completion of postproduction on the film, she died of an acute asthma attack. When the film was given wide release several years later (it was pulled from its first round of distribution due to a technical problem with the print), it was critically embraced, celebrated as an example of revolutionary art in both narrative and form, and for its frank examination of the intersection of gender, race, and class relations, which critics are careful to point out emerge specifically from her unique position as an Afrocuban woman filmmaker (she was among only three Black filmmakers in ICAIC at the time, and the only woman in Cuba to make a feature film until Gloria Rolando, who is also Afrocuban, directed *Raíces de mi corazón* in 2001).

Such responses, however, layer Gómez's racial biography onto readings of the film's narrative. In what follows, I argue that the shocking death of the much loved filmmaker, together with the historical fact of the film being the first of its kind to be made by an Afrocuban woman, have functioned throughout the life of the film to produce affective readings of it that conjure up thematics that exist only peripherally in the actual text. Early commentary betray this fact: While it was first lauded by critics for portraying an Afrocuban perspective, it is not until well into the 1990s that the treatment of race in the film is given more than tertiary critical attention. And while these later readings applaud it as groundbreaking in its intersectional analysis of gender, class, and race, pointing to the interracial couple at the center of *De cierta manera* and the film's sharp critique of different forms of machismo, which Gómez links to class and race affiliations, these critics nevertheless provide little sustained analysis of the ways in which Blackness in particular is and *is not* made visible in the film. Instead, these critics too primarily point to Gómez's racial biography as evidence of its presumed intersectionality, and note that the mixed race couple who act as the film's protagonists is a sign of racial progressiveness, or discuss the film's treatment of the African-derived men's society, Abakuá, which is featured in several early scenes (a treatment that is, ironically, largely negative in its value judgment). These criticisms rarely mention the colorist negotiations Gómez made in the casting of this couple, nor do they draw direct connections between the taboo against Abakuá and taboos against Black Cuban cultural expression at large. Later critical engagements, such as that by Casmayor-Cisnero, Haseenah Ebrahim, Jafari Allen, Catherine Davies, and others, begin drawing out more informative analyses of how race is treated in Gómez's work, but tend to concentrate primarily on a single text rather than her body of work as a whole, or in comparison with the history of

ICAIC more broadly.[5] What is occluded by the earlier readings of Gómez's work is the ways in which she deftly *avoids* direct commentary on race in *De cierta manera,* even while she provided a racialized context within which to interrogate social and economic marginalization. The failure of critics to analyze the lack of direct racial commentary in *De cierta manera* functions to insert into the film a narrative that Gómez, I argue, ultimately was compelled to leave out in order to appeal to a mass audience and participate in the didactic function of revolutionary filmmaking.

By the time Gómez was filming *De cierta manera* in the early 1970s, she had already witnessed the censoring and institutionalization of fellow Afrocuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián, with whom she was a personal friend, and whose work satirically critiqued the Revolution by evoking histories of slavery within present day representations of field laborers.[6] Gómez also had first-hand experience with the censoring of her own work — her 1966 semi-autobiographical documentary, *Guanabacoa: Crónico de mi familia*, which directly discusses bourgeois racial prejudices, even among Afrocubans themselves, by pointing to buried histories of Black Cuban culture in Guanabacoa, and her 1972 *Mi Aporte*, which sharply critiques class posturing of the white and Black petit-bourgeoisie. Both were met with criticism, and were

[5] Allen's chapter on Gómez, for example, analyzes *De cierta manera* as a comparative text to his contemporary ethnography. Casamayor-Cisneros analyzes Gómez's work in relationship to Guillén Landrián's, but provides only brief readings of *Iré a Santiago* and *De cierta manera*. Ebrahim's early work on Gómez provides comparative analysis between Gómez's treatment of religion in *De cierta manera* and Rolando's treatment of it in her 1991 documentary, *Oggun: An Eternal Present.* Her later 2007 essay, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema," offers a brief but strong overview of the treatment of racial themes in post-Revolutionary Cuban film. Davies' comparison of *De cierta manera* and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Hasta cierto punto* is primarily concerned with the ways in which each film resists and reinscribes Cuban masculine cultures, although in doing so she does offer commentary on racialized gender norms.

[6] Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal and Inés María Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 197. In an interview with Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal, Inés María Martiatu, a close friend of Gómez's, said that when Guillén Landrián was first told about Gómez's death, he refused to believe it. He had been institutionalized at the time of her death, and it is said he was subject to electro-shock treatments. "Cuando salió … estaba tan mal que no creía lo de la muerte de Sara. Me dijo que era una intriga y que si yo estaba segura de que en el cementerio había una tumba que decía Sara Gómez."

subsequently buried in the vaults. *De cierta manera*, in turn, offers less explicit critiques of racial discrimination than her earlier works, and focuses primarily on marginalized communities rather than middle class bourgeois Black communities. While the film successfully, and in many ways brilliantly, critiques the material, social, and historical structures that result in what Cuban's refer to as *marginalidad*, its references to the racial component of those structures is implicit and does not directly tackle the material and ideological structures of white supremacy that continued to shape Cuban socio-economic relations in the post-Revolutionary period.[7]

By revisiting Gómez's early works alongside *De cierta manera*, and situating the oeuvre within the history of ICAIC, I hope to bring attention to the challenging political and artistic climate within which the filmmaker maneuvered. She did so while nevertheless deftly producing a body of work whose Revolutionary dialectics subtly reveal the specter of anti-Black racism that haunts the project of the "New Man."

The Early Years: ICAIC and a Revolutionary Aesthetic of Imperfection

When Gómez began working for ICAIC in 1961, the institute itself was only a few years old, having been set up by Castro two months after he took Havana in January 1959. Revolutionary

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[7] Jafari Allen, *Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 202. Racialization in Cuba, like in much of Latin America, follows loose rules of racial classification based on a person's phenotypic traits. Aside from the three main racial classifications, *negro/a*, *mulato/a*, and *blanco/a*, a variety of gradient differences are noted by terms such as *jaba(d)o*, which refers to "mulattos" with lighter skin, eyes, and hair, but with facial features and hair texture associated with Blackness, and *mulato blanconazo/a* refers to mulattos who could "pass" for white. Other terms are used to refer to people with Asian features, straight hair, kinky hair, large noses, small noses, full lips, thin lips, etc. *Mulato/a adelantado/a* (advanced mulatto) and *mulato/a atrasado/a* (backward mulatto) are often used to refer to lighter skinned or darker skinned "mulattos," respectively, particularly when the person being referred to is lighter or darker skinned than one or both of their parents. All of these terms, of course, imply a hierarchical trajectory toward an ideal of European whiteness. As Allen points out, the extensiveness and malleability of the system of racial classification points to its idiosyncratic nature, and the ways in which racial typography relies heavily on social indoctrination into the system of otherwise seemingly random codes of classification.

Cuba's dedication to cinema is well-documented, and has precedent in early 20th-century Soviet Socialism. Vladimir Lenin famously declared after the October Revolution, "Cinema, for us, is the most important of all the arts." This statement, as Michael Chanan notes, is not the product of cold, propagandism that many attribute to it, but rather reflects the ways in which "fantastic creative energy" was animated by revolutionary changes, "bringing forward in the process the first serious theoretical consideration of the medium."[8] Santiago Álvarez, one of Cuba's greatest documentary filmmakers and a founding member of ICAIC, is often compared to the great Soviet filmmaker and newsreel director Dziga Vertov. The comparison is apt, Álvarez has said. While he claims he did not see any of Vertov's films until several years after he made his most widely acclaimed documentaries, *Now!* (1965) and *LBJ* (1968), there are notable stylistic similarities. The explanation, he says, lies in the similarities of the situations — Vertov, too, was working in moment of highly charged revolutionary excitement, producing films for audiences who were entirely enthusiastic toward the art form, and with the financial and institutional backing of the state.[9]

The cinema-going public was large in Cuba, even before the Revolution, but with the Revolution it continued to grow. Despite its large audience, it is estimated that Cuba produced only 150 features prior to the Revolution, according to Julianne Burton.[10] Within its first year in existence, ICAIC participated in producing or distributing approximately 12 films, including

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[8] Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba* (BFI Publishing, 1986), 15

[9] Chanan, *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba* (BFI Publishing, 1986), 15

[10] Burton, "Part 1: Revolutionary Cuban Cinema," *Jump Cut,* no. 19 (1978): 17-20. According to Burton, in proportion to its population, Cuba had the largest cinema-going public in Latin America prior to the revolution. "A population of less than seven million produced the astonishing number of one and a half million moviegoers per week despite the fact that large segments of the rural population had never seen a single film," she notes.

Julio Garcia Espinoza's *La Vivienda* (1959), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Garcia Espinoza's *Esta tierra nuestra* (1959), which won international distinctions.[11] Within the first 17 years of the Revolution, ICAIC produced 74 full-length and 12 medium-length films, approximately 600 documentary shorts, and more than 800 weekly newsreels.[12] The newsreel department, headed by Álvarez, directed ten-minute newsreels of clear aesthetic value for mass distribution across the island once every week until the program was forced to shut down during Cuba's "Special Period" in the 1990s, when funding was drastically cut. Mobile cinema units traveled throughout the island setting up makeshift theaters to distribute films in areas where cinema had never before been seen; one of the Institute's early films, *Por primera vez* (1967) artfully documents the cultural work of this unit. Films such as this, which both participates in and records the unfolding of the Revolution, were prioritized by ICAIC upon its inception. The artistic avant-garde was tasked with providing models for a new socialist consciousness, and documentary film was thought to be a form uniquely capable of shaping modern citizenry, as Joshua Malitsky notes about both Soviet and Cuban nonfiction film.[13]

> In the clarity of its language and in its visual and narrative pleasures, [Soviet and Cuban officials] saw considerable agitational, propagandistic, and economic potential. On-location shooting, use of found footage material, and limited need

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[11] *Esta tierra nuestra* won the certificate of merit at International Agrarian Film Festival in Berlin in 1960, and the Jury's award for the Cuban film movement at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in 1961.

[12] Burton, "Part 1: Revolutionary Cuban Cinema," *Jump Cut,* no. 19 (1978): 17-20.

[13] Joshua Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 2-3.

> for elaborate sets and costumes: all this made documentaries and newsreels economically efficient in comparison to fiction films. And nonfiction film was thought to be consistent with Marxist-Leninist principles in that it grounded its artistic production in material reality.[14]

Documentary and newsreel productions also provided excellent training ground for new, young filmmakers who came up in the Revolution, such as Gómez. It was standard practice at ICAIC for trainees to work on several documentaries, first under the apprenticeship of more experienced directors, then as lead director, prior to be given the go ahead (and funding) for generally more expensive fiction projects. Gómez herself was trained by Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinoza, as well as by the French Left Bank filmmaker Agnès Varda, who visited the island in the early years of the Revolution.

The apprenticeship program was established with the intention of helping to cultivate a cinema that is clearly Cuban in form and content, even while filmmakers were encouraged to develop distinctive styles and unique modes of expression that would further the revolutionary cause. ICAIC, in fact, was given great latitude by the Castro government, with its decree explicitly stating it was to remain an autonomous body, "empowered to 'organize, establish and develop' a national film industry."[15] According to Enrique Colina, one of the fundamental clauses of *Ley 169*, which established ICAIC, was that it would develop a national cinema capable of bringing together Cuban cultural and revolutionary traditions. "The law also stresses the

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[14] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

[15] Chanan, *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba* (BFI Publishing, 1986), 20.

importance of decolonizing our country's movie screens, thus signaling the need for a kind of informational and cultural orientation, which would contribute, along with national film production, to the intellectual and cinematic development of our people," he said in an interview with *Jump Cut* (1980).

Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinoza, also founding members of ICAIC, were vanguards of the movement, bringing their training at the Roman *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* in the early 1950s back to Cuba where they began developing it into their own distinctive Cuban style. In Rome, the two studied Italian neorealism and co-directed their first film together, *El Mégano* (1955), which is largely considered the most important precursor to post-Revolutionary Cuban film. *El Mégano* was narrative in structure, but "acted" by non-professionals who played themselves onscreen. The blending of fiction and reality became a signature of later Cuban cinema, including Gutiérrez Alea's seminal *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and Gómez's *De cierta manera*, and is a form that García Espinosa theorized in his most important critical writing, "For an Imperfect Cinema" (1969). The well-known essay develops several goals of revolutionary cinematic art, including the creation of a cinema of social justice made for the "masses" that eschews the slick technical perfection of mainstream film and some art cinema, and requires the active participation of audience members in developing a film's meaning. Imperfect cinema, like the "aesthetic of hunger" articulated by Brazilian Glauber Rocha a few years before, and "Third Cinema" described by Argentines Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino that same year, proposes a cinema that is oppositional to films whose aesthetic perfection promotes passive consumption — what they consider the cinema of imperialism.[16] Writing in 1969, García Espinoza notes that

[16] Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Towards a Third Cinema" in Movies and and Methods: An Anthology, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 44-64.

"[t]he task currently at hand is to find out the conditions which will enable spectators to transform themselves into agents — not merely more active spectators, but genuine co-authors."[17] Such a task is manifest in Gómez's work, with the blending of narrative and non-fiction in her last work, as well as the personal, confessional style of her earlier works, inviting both affective and intellectual responses in spectators as a means of hailing them into the films' political projects.

This ideology of filmmaking corresponds precisely with Cuban revolutionary ideology; as the Soviet writer Nikolai Chuzhak notes, if cinema is to be revolutionary, it must be dynamic, existing in a constant state of becoming.[18] Cuban poet and philosopher Mirta Aguirre further argued in 1963 for a type of socialist realism that privileges not simply mimetic representation, but rather a certain truthfulness of reality that may not be readily apparent except through artistic renderings, and through the dynamic relationship between the work of art and its spectator. While agit-prop filmmaking is often accused of dogmatism, dogmatism, according to Aguirre, is as much the enemy of art as of science, and truth must perpetually be sought, for "no deja de ser gnoseológicamente peligroso considerar lícito el viaje hacia ella sólo por los caminos trillados."[19] While such a theory of art was embraced by Cuban filmmakers and ICAIC, it nevertheless represented their primary challenge: How to educate the public on revolutionary ideology when the ideology itself is in constant motion, responding to material, everyday struggles, and changing international and national political climates?

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[17] Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979): 25.

[18] Quoted in Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

[19] Mirta Aguirre, "Apuntos sobre la literatura y el arte," *De la Revista Cuba Socialista* año iii, no. 26 (October 1963): 2.

The evolution of post-Revolutionary cinema in both the USSR and Cuba reflect the difficulty of the task. According to Malitsky, each cinema followed roughly the same trajectory in their immediate post-Revolutionary years. Speaking strictly of non-fiction film, Malitsky notes that the first films made after each respective Revolution (from 1917-1921 for the Soviet Union, and 1959-1965 for Cuba) are "realist in form and driven by a need to forge a space for the imagination of collective action."[20] The second period (1922-1927 and 1965-1971) is characterized by new aesthetic strategies, by the urging of new national, supranational, and international alignments, by lessons in Marxist political economy, and by providing new understandings of the individual as laboring citizen. The third phase (1927-1928 and 1972-1974) "marks the moment in post-revolutionary socialist contexts in which leaders appear to have recognized that the previous communication strategies were not working as they and the revolutionary artists had hoped."[21] Filmmakers responded, Malitsky says, by privileging rhetorical clarity at the expense of directorial expressivity."[22] Burton also notes "diminishing tolerance for a liberal interpretation of artistic freedom" in the late 1960s in Cuba, and between the period of 1970 and 1974, a decline in formal experimentation.[23] Many refer to these years between 1971 and 1976 as "quinquenio gris" or the "five grey years" of Cuban cultural production, in which the arts scene was marked by a cultural authoritarianism stemming from Cuba's increased ties to Soviet socialism. By 1976, ICAIC lost its autonomy and began to be administered by the Ministry of Culture (although it ultimately was allowed to function

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[20] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 5.

[21] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 5.

[22] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 5-6.

[23] Burton, "Part 1: Revolutionary Cuban Cinema," *Jump Cut,* no. 19 (1978), 17-20.

essentially as an autonomous unit). The difficulty of creating efficient and expressive communication was an ongoing struggle, in other words, and was threatening to give way to the more "efficient" side of things by the early 1970s.

However, hints at what was to come appeared long before the grey years. Ebrahim notes that ICAIC already set a precedent as early as 1961 when it refused theatrical distribution of the documentary *P.M.*, a short film directed by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal, which was produced independently from ICAIC. While the film, which depicted the nightlife of the "*marginales"* of Havana, was perhaps "mildly offensive," according to Chanan, it was its particular racial commentary that had Cuban authorities concerned. The censorship of the film, he says, was justified on the grounds the film depicted "black people in roles associated with the state oppression from which they were in the process of liberation."[24] Such depictions did not match with Revolutionary discourse that such oppressions were *already* eliminated through the Revolution's anti-discrimination policies and the emergence of class equality. Ebrahim points out that what was particularly troublesome about *P.M.* to Cuban authorities was not just the depiction of racial inequalities, but rather the depiction of racial inequalities within contemporary Revolutionary Cuba. Other films that depict racism of the past or racism among Cuban exiles, such as Eduardo Manet's *El Negro* (a 1960 film about the history of racism in Cuba up to the Revolution) and Jesús Díaz's *Lejanía* (a film made in 1985 in which Cuban-American racism is depicted as counter-Revolutionary and regressive) were all considered acceptable.[25] Debate over *P.M.*'s censorship reached such heights as to lead Castro to his famous speech, "Words to the

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[24] Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 133.

[25] Haseenah Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema" *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 82 (April 2007): 109.

Intellectuals," which closed with the now famous lines "Within the Revolution, everything; against it, nothing." Much later, in the 1990s, Castro admitted that such a stance against criticism, especially in terms of criticism of the continuation of racism in Cuba, was counter-productive, but at the time, it was the attitude that prevailed, and this, too, became part of the filmmaking process.

Also indicative of shifting perspectives on how to best utilize film for the project of the Revolution between the late 1960s and early 1970s are filmmakers' responses to Álvarez's early documentaries *Now!* and *LBJ*. Corresponding with what Malitsky defines as the second, more aesthetically experimental period, the films develop what critics have called Álvarez's "nervous" montage style, and his signature use of "found footage," such as Hollywood movie clips, cartoons, and photographs, to build a layered narrative. According to Malitsky, some reviewers lauded the personal and poetic expressivity of the films, while others complained they were too subjective and disjointed. Over time, the film has come to be understood as a brilliant experiment in montage, sound, and editing, but early criticism that stated it and *LBJ* communicated "too personally, too complexly, too rapidly, too kaleidoscopically" had a noteworthy effect on subsequent filmmaking. Many documentarians began to "mark themselves against such rapid juxtapositions and complex narrative and rhetorical structures," and produce less subjective, more easily consumable films.[26]

While it was ultimately the subjective nature of the films that were pointed out in these criticisms, one can speculate about the ways in which the racial content of *Now!* influenced its initial cold reception. While commentators tend not to mention the content of *Now!*, it contains a

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[26] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Non-Fiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 191.

pointed critique of racial violence in the United States. It is set to the soundtrack of Lena Horne's "Now," which was banned from the airwaves in the United States for its open call to Black people to revolt, and might not have had the effect on white Cuban viewers that Álvarez had hoped, despite its sharp critique of the United States. At the same time that *Now!* and *LBJ* were circulating, Guillén Landrián was experiencing far more problematic reactions to his highly personal films, which were criticized also for their dizzying editing, frenetic soundtrack, and confusing messages. Like *Now!*, the racial content of Guillén Landrián's films are rarely mentioned in the criticism as another possible reason for their poor reception, but it is noteworthy that these films, too, made pointed reference to continued marginalization of Afrocubans. Guillén Landrián, who was nephew to the Revolutionary poet of *mestizaje*, Nicholas Guillén, was, by many accounts, a troubled individual. He most likely suffered from schizophrenia, and like many mentally ill individuals in Cuba, was accused of counter-Revolutionary tendencies. His work was censored, he was jailed and institutionalized multiple times (and perhaps subjected to electro-shock treatments), and eventually exiled. His 1968 *Coffea arábiga,* which was commissioned by ICAIC, is his most well-known film, only coming to be appreciated for its brilliant yet disturbing use of montage and dubbed sound in 2003, when Manuel Zayas resurrected the filmmaker in his documentary *Café con leche*. Perhaps best known for featuring the (banned, at the time) Beatle's song "Fool on the Hill" as images of Castro flash on screen, the film acts as a teasing critique of Castro's enthusiasm for *Cordón de la Habana*, an intensive campaign to develop a coffee industry near the capital. Having already dealt with disapproval, censorship, and a brief expulsion from ICAIC for his earlier, less experimental films, Guillén Landrián nonetheless went forward with *Coffea arábiga* in a way that ironically

demystifies both the coffee campaign and its references to what by then was standard Cuban rhetoric: That by creating class equality through workers programs such as this one, other forms of social equality, including racial and gender equality, would naturally follow. The film opens with a scene that draws comparison with plantation slavery and the coffee industry's contemporary workforce by juxtaposing photographic images of slave owners, and chains and shackles with footage of contemporary workers, or "the blacks!" as an inter-title placed between the images not-so-subtly proclaims.

The film is, in many ways, a study on movement, which acts as metaphor for the revolutionary process that Guillén Landrián presents as uneven and disconcerting. Bursts of sound and frantic nationalist activities are juxtaposed with long, photographic shots of single subjects, drawing out their individuality. As many of Gómez's films do, Guillén Landrián's films feature images of neighborhoods in the process of being torn down and built anew as part of the laudable but perhaps hasty national development plan that proved to be economically unsustainable (a failure that was, of course, largely predicated on the U.S. embargo against Cuba implemented in full in 1962), while also focusing on intimate and solitary activities of the inhabitants of the neighborhoods. These contrasting images of activity and stillness, sound and silence, oscillate between revolutionary fantasy and an incongruent reality on the ground.

Despite the censorship of *Coffea arábiga*, and Guillén Landrián being detained and held incommunicado for six months after its release, he did go on to make two more films with ICAIC before his exile (which in many ways speaks strongly to the desire among the Institute's leaders, including its head, Alfredo Guevara, to maintain freedom for critical stances while also fulfilling its mission of creating art for the Revolution). The film that Guillén Landrián attributes

to his exile is *Taller de Linea y 18* (1971), a subjective and experimental film made with high volume and chaotic sound that was released at the beginning of the grey period. While the subjective rather than nationalist perspective would have been a concern to Cuban officials, perhaps of equal concern would have been its strong critique of the shortcoming of worker's assemblies that were by the time becoming increasingly nonfunctional. In addition to offering explanation of the ways in which the factories function (set to a rather ominous soundtrack), the camera jumps in and out of an assembly meetings where the next general secretary is being nominated and debated. The current assembly leader notes that any nominee must be "screened" by the current assembly to have their fitness for services interrogated. A black inter-title interjects with large white font, imploring, "¿Esta ud. dispuesto a ser analizado por esta asamblea?" And then in even larger font: "¿Ud?" while a series of nominees approach the assembly board to state their case for nomination. After several men are nominated and accept the nomination, a Black woman, Maria Oday is nominated. The camera focuses on her for some time, establishing her as an authoritative presence at the plant. In the meantime, muffled extradiegetic narration can barely be heard in the background describing someone or something that is irresistible to women. Maria takes the microphone in front of the assembly and declines the nomination, noting that she has a son who is ill and she can not take time away from him. She is the only person to decline a nomination, and the only woman featured as a nominee, pointing obliquely to the unequal distribution of labor that persisted despite campaigns for women's equality. The inter-title question repeats itself: "¿Esta ud. dispuesto a ser analizado por esta asamblea? ¿Ud?" This time, however, it is followed by a quick succession of scenes and titles describing the fabrication of a vehicle, expressing a sense of frenetic energy, as if the factory itself continues to function with or

without the workers, despite their personal issues. Or, rather, it is as if the workers are in a constant state of catching up to the work that is being done, almost as if magically by their own hands. The interjections of the question — "Would you/YOU/be willing to be screened by this assembly?" —continue, and then, one or two words at a time, the statement: "La organización sindical tiene los mismos objetivos del partido pero es un organización menos selectiva porque en ella participan todos los obreros. El secretario general es escogido por la masa." Meanwhile, multiple voices are layered upon each other, as assembly members (including, prominently, Maria, who continues her leadership role despite refusing her nomination and screening) scramble to have their voices, concerns, and suggestions heard. A dominant voice finally breaks through, stating that the leader of the assembly must be a revolutionary, not just someone who is nice and liked by everyone. The image settles and freezes on one nominee's face as he stares directly into the camera, his brows furrowed. The image is cut again with an inter-title: "Y debe dar siempre una respuesta." The image then shifts to the Black man speaking on behalf of another nominee before the inter-title repeats for a final time: "¿Esta ud. dispuesto a ser analizado por esta asamblea? ¿Ud?"

While ostensibly a celebration of the power of the masses, Guillén Landrián's film confronts the prejudices that remain formative of such a system. Highlighting the assembly elections, intermixed with descriptions of the functioning of the factories at a frantic pace, adds a slightly chaotic sense to both the election and the production process. The repetition of the question, "Would you be willing to be screened by this assembly? YOU?" implies distrust between the workers and the assembly leaders. In an interview with Zayas shortly before his death, Guillén Landrián said that after the film was shown, "la radio cubana de esa época empezó

a criticarlo: 'que qué quería yo decir con la pregunta ¿quiere usted ser analizado por esta asamblea? A quién me dirigía.' Y fue terrible: '¿Qué quiere decir Guillén con esto?" In other words, Guillén Landrián's allegiance to Revolutionary ideology was beginning to be publicly questioned. Like previously censored films, the racial content of his work was not critiqued outright, but it would have stood out, particularly in his overt references to the continuity of slave labor and coffee laborers in *Coffea arábiga*. Instead, the films were openly condemned for their subjective nature, accused of bourgeois individualism that went against discourses of national unity, and criticized for the experimental editing style that disregarded the movement toward expository narratives aimed at recording the revolutionary process for historical preservation. I am arguing, however, that the films' subjectivity and uncomfortable editing style suggest Guillén Landrián's own complicated relationship with the Revolution, and his discomfort with the ways in which structures of racial bias continued to shape divisions of labor in post-Revolutionary Cuba. The tensions produced through the films' frenetic pacing and bold interstitial proclamations no doubt translated to discomfort among viewers, making palpable racial anxieties that discourses of national unity aimed to erase.

Gómez's *Poder local, poder popular* (1970) was made during roughly the same time period as *Taller de Linea y 18*. This film also focuses on the workers assemblies, but in a way that is somewhat less critical of them than Guillén Landrián's film. Chanan points out that while Gómez prioritizes the social and political functionality of her films, "whenever possible, a radical aesthetic is explored" that "emerges from within, so that the film can be grasped and still communicate on a popular level."[27] *Poder local, poder popular* is, however, the least

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[27] Chanan, *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba* (BFI Publishing, 1986), 284.

aesthetically radical of her films, taking a largely expository, distanced approach that reflects the general trend of early 1970s Cuban cinema described by Malitsky, and the cooling of aesthetic license described by Burton. A single scene, however, is reminiscent of Gómez's earlier signature style. A mulatto woman is being interviewed about whom she would like to see as the next president of her local assembly. She laughs a bit shyly and looks away from the camera, staring off into the distance. Hesitantly, she says she would like to see a woman in that position. Turning back to the camera, she laughs nervously again. "No sé por qué…" she says, but gives the camera a knowing look. The camera stays focused on her face for an extra beat, and captures the sentiment of her expression, which she does not articulate in words. Like the scene with Rafael in *En el otro isla*, Gómez here draws upon the uncertainty and discomfort of her subject, and implores the spectator to participate in the text by filling in the elliptical of the woman's thoughts.

Sarita's Santiago y Vuelta Abajo

In 1964, Gómez made her debut as primary director with *Iré a Santiago*. The film opens with an evocation of the first lines of Federico García Lorca's poem "Son de negros en Cuba": The lines "Cuando llegue la luna llena, iré a Santiago de Cuba/Ire a Santiago en un coche de agua negra" are painted in white on a dark outdoor wall. A young Black woman crosses in front of the words, then turns, and heads up a set of stairs. The film's credits are painted in playful graffiti-style on each of the steps, culminating as the woman reaches the top of the flight of stairs with the word, written vertically on a nearby pillar in all caps, SARITA. This nickname, by which virtually everyone knew Gómez, stands out in bright white on the wall. The film cuts to a series of images

of residents moving about on the streets of Santiago, with a handheld camera watching the action from a "(wo)man-on-the-street" point of view. The narrator, Victoria Nápoles, cuts in, speaking conversationally and using the first-person plural "nosotros." The effect is to place the spectator within the space of the film, as if the spectator and narrator are strolling the streets together while Nápoles describes the world of Santiago."Sí," she says, "dicen que somos de una isla donde la tierra tembló y los mulatos suelen a la yerba fresca. Aquí, nos habitamos al calor bebiendo los jugo fermentado de las raíces." The camera moves about with the people at market, bargaining, working, resting. Some ignore its presence, others pause with quick looks or long stares, still others pose playfully, enjoying the attention. A few back away and hide with trepidation. The residents in Santiago are primarily Black, and the demographics captured in Gómez's film reflect this fact. Her description of the people of Santiago continues, poetic, romantic, and admiring. "Reímos y hablamos en voz alta, con agresividad y orgullo. Nuestras mímicas son exagerados y gracioso. En mi isla, la siesta es un balance del mimbre y de la madera. Nuestras hogares son acogedores para recibir a compadre, al hermano." The soundtrack has switched to a jazzy piano interpretation of "Guantanamero" at this point, and the sequence is now set inside the private space of a home. The roving camera moves about among the people inside, focusing primarily on women and children, with some men passing by unfocused in the foreground.

It is within the domestic space of the home that Gómez begins to situate the specific racial character of Cuban identity. There is no doubt about the Antillean condition of Cuba, the narrator says, but that condition is based on legend, myth. "Sí, es cierta. Cuba es un isla de las antillas, y mulato. Mulato es un estado de ánimo." The camera lingers on an image of an elderly

Black woman in a rocking chair, smiling at the camera. The framing evokes a photographic portrait, holding the woman there, briefly suspended in time.

Gómez's focus on the "mulatto" state of mind at once fits within the Cuban identity politics of the time, and pushes against it. The film highlights the historic mixing of races that has come to define a distinctly Cuban understanding of racial classification, as well as the mixing of languages and cultural production in music, poetry, and myth that make up Cuban culture and history. However, the film does so by specifically making visible the African roots within this mixing, rather than subsuming them into a whitened mythology of Cuban identity. Gómez notes that the first people to arrive in Cuba landed on Santiago's shores, and that with the Spaniards came African slaves, and slaves from Haiti accompanying masters fleeing the Revolution. This emphasis on Blackness, and especially the history of Haitian slaves, departs from the doctrine of *mestizaje* that strategically avoids association with Haiti, its slave uprising, and its Black political leadership. As many Latin Americanist scholars have noted, José Martí's erasure of races in "Nuestro América," for example, results in an ideology of racial mixing that emphasizes the whitening of what José Vasconcelos later declares to be "la raza cósmica." Martí writes, "Our feet upon a rosary, our heads white, and our bodies a motley of Indian and criollo we boldly entered the community of nations," thus imaging the figure of the mestizo as grounded in Christianity by its feet, white in its intellect (as represented by the head), and brown in its brawn (represented by the body). Blackness here is visually erased. Martí does critique the privileging of European and North American knowledge production within independence movements, and mentions the need to "make a place for the able black." However, his overwhelming emphasis on

the "Indian" or "natural" man ultimately subsumes Blackness into a lightened mestizo whole, and neglects the history of slavery and the role of slave uprisings in independence movements.

Iré a Santiago interrupts the whitening of the image of mestizaje first though its focus on the French/Haitian influence, and next by asserting Santiago's place as the origin of Cuban culture, noting that not only is Santiago the site of the first arrival of the conquistadors, but also of poetry and "el son." At one point in the film, Gómez inserts what the narrator calls a "Mystical Interlude," in which she tells the myth of an African woman who appears every night in "Las Mucaras" dressed in a bathing suit and a headscarf, wanting to speak. The music accompanying the interlude shifts to the sound of a marching band and the narrator's voice takes on a stronger tone: "Pero la historia ha comenzado nuevo en Santiago." The image shifts to an all women's marching band moving through the streets of Santiago, juxtaposed shortly with a scene in which four men stand timidly on the side of the road, afraid, it seems, to cross. Santiago, where the first Blacks arrived in chains from Africa, the film suggests, is also the place where Black women fought for and gained the right to speak. Such an assertion interrupts the ideology of mestizaje, where women are figured as vessels for reproduction of the nation, rather than as producers themselves of culture and knowledge.

The image shifts abruptly to Carnival, a practice of open celebration of Afrocuban heritage that came to be understood as a *Cuban* tradition under discourses of national unity. The film, which was commissioned largely as a promotional tool to encourage visitors to travel to Santiago, ends with recommendations for tourists: Don't forget to climb the stairs of El Morro, to walk Padre Pico Street, or to visit the home of a Santiagan. And in July, she reminds the audience, there is Carnival, thus turning it into another attraction.

The film offers a direct celebration of Black culture, as well as direct commentary on the history of slavery and colonialism as foundational to Cuban culture. It functions, at the same time, squarely within the Revolutionary project of producing national unity — by returning to the streets of the city and advising tourists to visit the region and experience its richness, Gómez asserts Santiago and the mulatto as just as central to Cuban history and cultural production as Havana and the *mestizo*.

Shortly after *Iré a Santiago*, Gómez worked on her next project as lead director, *Excursión a Vuelta Abajo* (1965). In this film, Gómez's writing and directing credits are again listed simply as "Sarita," lending it a sense of informality and familiarity. The narrative offers a vision of the Vuelta Abajo region of Cuba that is based in Gómez's own memories, which are clearly laced with deep affection for the landscape and the people of the farming community. The opening lines, again narrated by Nápoles, speak of the hillocks of Viñales Valley, the traditional farmers there, and the long fields of tobacco. "Piñar del Rio [the providence that includes Viñales Valley] no es carnival, ni es el 'son,' ni es el ron. … Aquí, estoy mas cerca de la 'decima' [a type of Cuban poetry famous in the region] y a la guitarra." For me, the narrator goes on to say, Piñar del Rio is like an illustration in an almanac, an engraving in a history book, or the lid to a cigar box. Images of the valley, of tobacco growing, and of curing houses give way to images of hands at work rolling the dried plant. The somewhat romantic images of the valley and its inhabitants are briefly replaced by illustrations of distant peasants walking up a hill as the narrator notes that tobacco was offered as a warm welcome to Christopher Columbus. The next set of images include illustrations of the peasants taking up arms, and then, finally, one man hanging from a tree. With little change in tone, the narrator states plainly, "Entonces, el tabaco siguió las palmas,

las maracas, el azucar, y la imagen de Martí." The history of colonialism and struggle is then mapped on to the next set of images in the film — people working in town, standing idly smoking, and, of course, cultivating tobacco. Rather than remembering this history with despair, however, the narrator notes that she is quite proud, even pleased by what she says Fernando Ortiz calls "the magic of salvation" in his "Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar" The people's resilience, in other words, is what Gómez is invested in highlighting.

"Pero no basta"

In the mid-1960s, artistic expressivity remained prioritized among Cuban documentarians, and interrogations of the role of individuals as part of a laboring citizen body was still emphasized. With *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi familia* (1966), Gómez did just that, turning inward to examine the history of her own, largely middle class, Afrocuban family to explore the role of the Black bourgeoisie in Cuban society. This was a bold move, however, as the *P.M.* affair had made it clear that open discussion of racial inequalities within class structures was, at best, taboo. *Guanabacoa,* provides not only a portrait of racialized subjects, but indicates the operation of certain Afrocuban cultural forms associated with *marginalidad* at work within the middle classes, putting into question strict class-based delineations espoused by the Revolutionary government.

According to Gómez's friend and collaborator, Tomás González, "Nobody went untouched as she demystified the unholy and told the story of what had been pushed to the back of the closet through mulatto ideology and its petite-bourgeois pretensions. … Sara bared all that

the family had wanted to cast into deep oblivion." She dug "into drawers, coffers, trunks and charcoal etchings," he said, in order to develop a full picture of family life in her chronicle.[28]

The film opens with an ending of sorts. An inter-title states that on August 7, 1966, while Gómez was waiting for a copy *Guanabacoa* to be printed, the woman she calls Godmother, and who is a central subject of the film, died. She goes on to dedicate the film to her, but notes clearly, "pero no basta." In other words, dedicating the film to her alone is not enough. The opening credits are accompanied by photos and drawings of other family members, along with those of the godmother. The film is largely void of dialogue, making each moment of sparse commentary carry disproportionate weight. A long opening sequence that takes place in a concert hall, for example, depicts an orchestra performing for a large, diverse audience with no description as to its significance. The following sequence, like many of Gómez's documentaries, is meant to establish the locale. Various shots of people going about their business on the streets of Guanabacoa are followed by close ups of historical landmarks that signify the area's diverse history under imperialism: A stone bust of Ernest Hemingway, a cross on a hillside, a Star of David engraved on the side of a building. A long still of a plaque tells the story of "Calle Pepe Antonio," a street named after the hero of the popular resistance against England in 1762. The next set of images, many of which are difficult to discern due to poor preservation of the film, connect the histories of colonial encounters to the present with long shots of a crumbling fortification wall, of people milling about outside a cemetery, and of a Santería shrine. Briefly, the camera rests on a set of wooden pillories and stocks, reminding spectators that all of this

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[28] Tomás González, "Sara, one way or another," in *Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 132-133.

history is inextricably tied to the violence of the slave trade. The extra-diegetic symphonic soundtrack is replaced briefly here with distinctly African-inspired call and response, before being replaced again, this time by the singing of a boys' choir at rehearsal.

Seven and a half minutes in to the 13-minute film, the narration finally begins again. "Carlos Manuel; Ramiro; Carlos, mi padre; Cuca; Julia; Carlota; Berta; Sara; mi abuela Nena; Madrina." The camera focuses on a photograph of each person, while the narrator, presumably Gómez herself, names them. With *Madrina*, her voice goes soft, and the camera focuses on the image tightly. "Recuerdo visitar las casas de los tíos viejos con cuellos duros y pajaritas, y mis primas mulatas, enorme y distinguido," the narrator says. These "enormous and distinguished houses, were the kind where clarinets were kept in old leather cases that turned yellow in the end, she says, poetically emphasizing her family's middle-class, cultured background.

The images shift to *Madrina*, shrunken now, compared to the strong figure in the photographs, but laughing, smoking, enjoying, it seems, sharing her memories. According to Gómez, it is *Madrina* who imparts the rules of propriety upon the family, the code of conduct that matches the regales of the figure in the photographs. Gómez sits next to her Godmother, angled so that her back is mostly to the camera and the two can engage in intimate conversation. "Why didn't you dance the *masucamba*, or go to the *Teatro Carrál* as a young woman?" Gómez asks. Extradiegetically, the narrator answers: "Because those were societies for Blacks, *certain kinds* of Blacks." The image then shifts to that of Berta, a younger woman who is moving about her kitchen with ease, pouring Gómez a drink, smoking, chatting. Berta, the narrator says, is the favorite of all her cousins: "Porque como dice Cuca, ella no tiene compleja." Berta, it is clear, is one of *those* Blacks about whom *Madrina* spoke. With this brief dialogue and commentary,

Gómez closes, by stating that she must come to Guanabacoa and fight the necessity to always be "un negro distinto, superado." "I must come to Guanabacoa, and accept its total history," she says, "and then tell it." Gómez's subtle expression of respect for Black Cuban life that does not follow linear narratives of progress in which Blackness is assimilated into white Cuban culture, offers an alternative perspective on Cuban history and Afrocuban culture within the "unity" of post-Revolutionary Cuba in which *marginalidad* is synonymous with deviance, and Blackness a sign of both. In this way, Gómez's declaration that she must "say it," is a direct critique of official Cuban policy of silence on race.

While most of Gómez's films are relatively easy to obtain, even in the United States, in contrast, *Guanabacoa*, along with her 1972 film *Mi aporte*, remain largely unavailable. Neither film is mentioned in Chanan's extensive work on Cuban film of the era (although he does make passing mention to an unfinished trilogy on race, which might be referencing them and an unknown third film), and both are often absent from lists of her filmographies, although they have recently been added to ICAIC's Web listing of her works. A screening of *Mi aporte* was held in 2007 for 40 or so film students, which was the first time it was shown to an audience. A few personal copies are floating around, according to the late Inés María Martiatu, who told Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal during an interview that Santiago Álverz gave her a copy of it on DVD.[29] Most recently, in March 2018, it was screened at the International Documentary Film Festival at the Bibliothèque Centre Pompidou in France. The first mention of a screening of *Guanabacoa* that I have come across is in reference to a newspaper review of the 1990 Créteil Festival of Women's Films in Paris, which featured a tribute to Latin American women

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[29] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 191.

filmmakers, including Gómez.[30] It remained, however, largely unseen by the public until 2016, when it was included in an installation that focused on Agnès Varda's time in Cuba at the Cuban National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana. The removal of *Guanabacoa* from the normal circuits of film distribution in Cuba ironically reflects the films topic itself: That is, it reflects the disavowal of the whole of Cuba's racial past and present.

In the film, the effect of juxtaposing images of Gómez's own family members with establishing shots of historical sites in Guanabacoa works to establish Gómez's personal history as allegory for the history of Cuba more generally. In other words, this is not only the story of Gómez, but rather is that of Afrocubans as a whole. Martiatu notes that *Guanabacoa* is a film like no other. The documentary, she says,

> muestran imágenes antológicas de lo que es una familia negra como la suya, un tema que no aparecía en ninguna parte, ni siquiera en la literatura. Una familia de músicos, de Guanabacoa, que habla de las sociedades negras a la que pertenecían, de los distintos familiares y de las relaciones que tenían entre ellos y con la música siempre.[31]

That is, the film explores the "distinguished" Black Cubans of Gómez's family and their relationship to Cuban musical traditions, as well as their relationship to less openly discussed and "marginal" Black cultural formations. As González notes:

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[30] Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema" *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 82 (April 2007): 112.

[31] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 188.

> there's [*Madrina*], who molds herself as best she can into the new life, with an exaggerated pose that was in part born of violence and in part a defense against being misunderstood: the aunt [Berta] with the religion of Santaría and the culture of an ex-prostitute… The scandal it created was a preamble to her next marvelous documentary *Mi aporte* (*My Part)*, a biting attack on class postures, especially those of the petit-bourgeoisie.[32]

The qualifier during the opening dedication, "pero, no basta," then, is a reminder that celebrating only the lives of the "distinguished," or upper- and middle-class Blacks and mulattos like Madrina, "is not enough." Instead, the film implores Revolutionary Cuba to also celebrate the complexity of Afrocuban history and culture, and to consider its relationship to *marginalidad*.

Any exploration of Afrocuban culture and tradition that tied middle-class Afrocubans to cultures considered part of *el ambiante* ("the street") or part of "backward" (and thus counter-revolutionary) social formations, clearly were out of step with the taboo on discussions of race. However, the policy of silence around race complicates any strong assertion that it was in fact *Guanabacoa*'s commentary on race that led to it being censored. There are no recorded statements by ICAIC that give an official explanation for the film's censorship. The brief mention of it in the French newspaper *La Monde* in 1990, when it was screened at Créteil, notes

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[32] González, "Sara, one way or another," in *Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 132-133.

that it was the personal nature of the film that upset Cuban censors, not its racial content.[33] This critique would have been in-line with increasing disapproval of subjective filmmaking at the expensive of "objective" social realism. Like *P.M., Now!,* and many of Guillén Landrián's films, however, it seems unlikely that the racial content, rather than the films' subjectivity, was not of at least equal concern to officials.

Sara's Part

According to friends, however, Gómez was not one to be silenced.[34] After *Guanabacoa*, she went ahead with several more documentaries that address issues either specific to Afrocuban culture, or that continued her explorations of colonial histories and *marginalidad*. None, however, do so with such pointed revelation of the complexity of middle-class Afrocuban culture, and of committed Black Revolutionaries such as herself, as did *Mi aporte* and *Guanabacoa*. Her 1967 *...Y tenemos sabor* celebrates Cuba's African musical heritage, and anticipates the intimate stylings of *En la otra isla*. As Catherine Benamou points out, "Her physical presence as narrator and interlocutor on the soundtrack and occasionally in the frame helps convey a tone of informality, which elicits a casual, even complicitous response on the part of her film subjects, while inviting the uninitiated viewer to partake of otherwise recondite or parochial realms of experience" (76-77). The subjective, intimate nature of *this* film, however, was not critiqued or questioned, nor was her examination of Black cultural traditions. As Zuzana

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[33] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 196, and Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema" *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 82 (April 2007): 112.

[34] Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema" *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 82 (April 2007): 111.

Pick notes, documentaries about Black popular music were considered acceptable celebrations of Cuban cultural heritage — as long as those celebrations remained within a national framework.[35]

Her next set of documentaries, the *Isla de Piños* trilogy, focuses primarily on contemporary marginalized communities in the small islands just off the coast of Havana. The trilogy provides an intimate portrait of various people who inhabit the isolated island, which was home to Presidio Modelo, a "model" prison based on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon design. Both Raul and Fidel Castro were imprisoned there for a time, and it was the site of numerous hunger strikes early in the Revolutionary period, as inmates suffered under conditions of overcrowding. The island was renamed the Isla de Juventud in 1978 to indicate its transformation from an island penitentiary to an island dedicated to youth and re-education. Beginning with *En la otra isla*, the series continues Gómez's exploration into the connections between colonial histories and marginalized communities. The second film in the series, *Una isla para Miguel* (1968), is a portrait of the re-education of one particularly troubled child, Miguel, and offers pointed commentary about the burden of childrearing that so often falls to women alone. While both films provide intimate portraits of its subjects (which again was not subject to any critique, unlike *Guanabacoa*), only *En la otra isla* deals directly with questions of race, and then only with the brief scene of Rafael's shy confession during the 40 minute film.

The short *Isla del tesoro* (1969) is a poetic montage of images of the island before and after the Revolution, and documents the closing of the prison. The opening sequence firmly establishes the colonial history of agrarian exploitation as the title and credits are displayed over a series of still images of sketches of colonial invaders, photographs of officials from the Batista

[35] [35] Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 131.

regime, and then briefly the outside of the prison where two solitary bodies are visible in silhouette. Replacing the image of the prison is a series of stills of laborers of all races and genders cheerfully working on agricultural projects — a sign of the movement of Revolutionary ideology from punishment to re-education. As if to emphasize that point, the bright flute serving as the soundtrack is abruptly interrupted by a cacophony of instruments accompanied by the sound of breaking glass and clashing metal. The images on screen are replaced by film of bars falling from the prison's windows. Gómez then draws a direct line between colonial and imperial rule and the ideology of prison-as-punishment. As the film moves into the next sequence, which offers a brief history lesson on the various "pirates" who occupied the island during different periods (from colonizers, to sugar barons, to neoimperialists) before documenting the process of growing, picking, and packing fruit for internal consumption as well as for export. A brief image of the prison during its period of overcrowding flashes across the scene, and later, the camera tours its empty cells, focusing on artwork and poetry painted on the walls by prisoners. The Revolution, the film implies, is in the process of replacing piratical pillaging with cooperative farming, and oppressive prisons conditions with healthy labor opportunities. At the time of the film's release, the prison only recently was dangerously overcrowded and home to political prisoners and perceived dissidents, and programs such as UMAP had only recently been disbanded. While *Isla del tesoro* does not shy from the history of the prison, it does imply a decisive shift from ideologies of punishment to those of reform, something that also is made apparent in her sensitive yet uncritical portrait of the juvenile re-education camp in *Una isla para Miguel*. Gómez did not make any films about other reform centers and work centers that were operating at the time, such as UMAP, where gay and mentally ill Cubans (including Guillén

Landrián), ministers, priests, and others who were considered "counter-revolutionary," were housed under harsh conditions.[36]

Her next set of films includes *Poder local, poder popular*, which, as previously mentioned, is a short documentary on workers assemblies. *De Bateyes* is a documentary made shortly after, in 1971, about which there is almost no information readily available. Its title is listed in Gómez's filmography on ICAIC's official Web site, but with no accompanying information beyond its length (20 minutes). AfroCubaWeb, the most extensive online archive of AfroCuban cultural productions, lists it as a report "sobre la historia de los bateyes. Presencia y significación cultural de los inmigrantes."[37] It is not mentioned in any of the literature about Gómez or her work, to my knowledge. This lack of information suggests that ICAIC chose not to release the film, perhaps due to its subject matter — immigrant labor in sugar plantations, where conditions are typically harsh, and which was usually performed by Black Haitians. This film, in fact, could be part of the unfinished trilogy on race that that Chanan mentions but does not name.

Following *De Bateyes*, Gómez made *Un documental a proposito del transito* (1972), a fairly unremarkable expository documentary about changes to traffic control brought by the Revolution, although it does include some interesting commentary on plans to offer re-education programs to those who have been sanctioned for traffic offenses. Her next three films, made quickly in succession in 1972, however, are all noteworthy for their frank attention to women's issues. *Atención pre-natal* and *Año uno* speak directly to women about childbirth, lactation, and

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[36] Norberto Fuentes. *Dulces Guerreros Cubanos* (Barcelona: Cuarteles de invierno, 1999), 300-303, 337. Norberto Fuentes, who was a member of the intelligence directorate in Cuba, has estimated that UMAP interned approximately 35,000 Cubans in its nearly three years of operation, during which time he estimates that 507 ended up in psychiatric wards, 72 died from torture, and 180 committed suicide.

[37] "Sara Gómez," *AfroCubaWeb*, accessed June 25, 2018. www.afrocubaweb.com/saraGómez.htm.

raising children during their first year of life. Like many of her other films, these link Cuba's ideological roots — particularly its culture of machismo — to patriarchal colonial histories. Her third film of 1972, the allusive *Mi aporte*, was commissioned to be a propaganda film about the Federation of Cuban Women. Instead, according to Martiatu, Gómez offered critical analysis of the continuation of class and racial marginalization of women workers, soliciting the perspective of a vast array of women, rather than offering the singular (positive) view expected by ICAIC.[38] As mentioned, this film, to my knowledge, has never screened in the United States, nor are copies of it available. Martiatu describes the film as set largely around a table, where Gómez herself is positioned with a group of women, all of whom represent different sectors of workers, including office workers, scientists, factory workers, etc. Gómez is not just at the table directing the film, Martiatu says, but also as a representative herself of the labor of women filmmakers. in other words, she also represents her part in women's labor. Also included at the table is the charismatic Consuelito Vidal, according to Martiatu.

> Era una ironía haber puesto a Consuelito ahí, y entonces ella logra que los administradores de los centrales y los lugares donde las mujeres se incorporaban, dijeran la verdad: las incorporamos porque es una consigna pero estas mujeres se quedan dormidas, están embarazadas, no trabajan y entonces los hombres, como era consigna de la Federación hacían el trabajo de ellas y ellas durmiendo. Otras

[38] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 198.

> planteaban que necesitaban trabajar pero no había círculos infantiles suficientes y no tenían con quien dejar a sus hijos.[39] 198

The critique, then, was sharp. And Martiatu notes that she has no doubt that it was because of this critique that the film was never released in Cuba.

> Cuando Vilma [Espín, then head of the Federation of Cuban Women] vió el documental se quedó muerta porque esperaba un documental triunfalista y se encontró con una crítica. Sara le contestó allí en una reunión y le dijo, mire: Usted dice esto, esto y esto, porque usted tiene tantas criadas y tiene que sé yo y eso ni lo tengo yo ni la mayoría de las mujeres que están aquí. Ella puso a Sara de contrarrevolucionaria. 198

After the tension *Mi aporte* generated, Gómez followed up with another hard-hitting documentary, *Sobre horas extras y trabajo voluntario* (1973). It is difficult to know if Gómez was aware during the making of *Sobre horas* that the earlier film would not be released, but if so, that fact did little to reduce — and perhaps even inspired — her agitational aims in this follow up film, which offers a sharp critique of the misuse of overtime work, as well as the misuse of volunteer workers, utilizing the agitational style honed by Santiago Álverez. However, this film, as Chanan points out, "addresses everyone," rather than centering on the conditions of marginalized women, and in fact makes little critique of gender or racial inequalities. Her choice

[39] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 198.

to focus on a more "universal" subject was not necessarily a response to her earlier experiences with censorship. According to Martiatu, her interests were vast and varied, and so it is only natural that she would cover a broad array of topics.[40] However, by the time she was making *De cierta manera*, these earlier experiences, and perhaps the censorship she witnessed with Guillén Landrián, most certainly played a part in casting and narrative decisions.

"We want this film to get shown, right?"

According to Martiatu, if it were not for the support of Alfredo Guevara, director of ICAIC during the time Gómez was there, she surely would have been kicked out of the institute for the making of *Mi aporte*, if not sooner.

> En aquella época, botaban a cualquiera, a Tomás [González], que estaba casado con una muchacha canadiense o norteamericana, lo botaron del lugar donde vivía; a Nicolasito [Guillén Landrián] lo metieron preso, a Walterio [Carbonell] lo convirtieron en zombi, y Armando Entralgo, embajador, y un de los grandes africanistas que ha tenido Cuba, tuvo que venir a trabajar al teatro con Roberto Blanco.[41]

Guevara, however, continued to provide commissions to Gómez, even after *Mi aporte*. According to Martiatu, this support was perhaps not *only* due to Guevara's interest in Gómez's

[40] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 188.

[41] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 199.

work, although by all accounts he certainly *did* have tremendous respect for her. While censorship was common, officials nevertheless had to walk a careful line between outright rejection of critical art and support for artists who held sway among intellectuals and in popular culture. Martiatu recalls a meeting in which she, Gómez, González, and others were called before the Congress of Education and Culture, where the Congress acknowledged the artists as part of a Black Power movement.[42] The fear that such acknowledgement caused went both ways: The artists feared exile and institutionalization, while officials feared the threat to national unity that an organized Black Power movement conceivable would cause.

Complicity in a policy of silence on race among artists and intellectuals, then, was at least in part a result of self-preservation. At the same time, however, artists such as Gómez also perceived themselves as dedicated revolutionaries, and were therefore sympathetic with the desire to uphold the myth of national unity. Art, especially film, was a medium through which to make that myth a reality. According to Martiatu, "[Gómez] era verdaderamente revolucionaria. … Ella consideraba que el cine era algo muy importante y que la Revolución se podía perfeccionar, que se podía mejorar."[43] This is, ultimately, the revolutionary philosophy about which Aguirre wrote: If revolution, by definition, signifies motion, then critique is the engine of that motion. And for critique to be effective, it must reach the masses. *De cierta manera* was Gómez's effort at using the cinema to do just that.

De cierta manera was first conceived by Gómez in collaboration with González. They both drew from their own experiences, González wrote later in his posthumous love letter to

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[42] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014).

[43] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 201.

Gómez, titled “Sara, one way or another.” He recalls while plotting the film, Gómez saying: “We’ll do a film about a real screwed up couple … He has to be real marginal, from *el ambiente*. He’ll have a gold tooth … and she has to be all screwed up because of her middle-class background. A white woman with a jabao (high brown) …” When González asked why the character would not be Black, he says Gómez responded, “It would be too much … and we want this film to get shown, right?” In other words, to serve its didactic purpose, the narrative would have to speak to a broad audience without alienating any sector.[44]

According to González, the film was made in a frenzy of active collaboration between Gómez and other filmmakers and artists in her life. Her husband, Germinal Hernández did the sound, Gutiérrez Alea consulted, and completed the final edit with García Espinoza after her death, others participated in research, filming, and the soundtrack. “In reality, the group was pretty heterogenous,” González writes, “but what we had in common was the quest for our identity, that identity possessed by the most humble people, the *raison d’etre* of the revolution.”[45] Ultimately, Gómez’s goal was to probe the Revolution, to ask questions of its successes and its failures, and to propose that those failures be worked through, and continually scrutinized.

Such a sentiment is reflected in the film’s title. According to Pick, the title *De cierta manera* is a Spanish idiom that indicates “a certain way of looking at individual and collective reality.”[46] It was a term from the streets, from *el ambiente*, as Julio Machado, a long-time friend

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[44] González, “Sara, one way or another,” in *Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 134.

[45] González, “Sara, one way or another,” in *Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 133.

[46] Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 133.

of Gómez's, notes in a 2003 documentary on her life and work. Taking underdevelopment and neocolonialism as its point of departure, the film explores the subjectivity of the residents of Miraflores, a community that was being built out of the slums in the outskirts of Havana. The film's socio-psychological exploration of the residents attaches behaviors associated with *marginalidad* — most especially machismo — to historical and material conditions, *as well as* to lingering prejudices against these communities. As Pick notes, "the Cuban government's attempts to integrate marginals into the social process (mainly through improvements to housing and education) were not necessarily followed by changes in attitudes of and toward marginals."[47] Gómez's critique, then, was both of the residents' inability to shed old customs and traditions, but also of the revolutionaries' inability to shed old prejudice. The most common English translation of the film titles it *One Way or Another*, indicating that revolutionary change, including of Cuban consciousness, will occur in some manner, even if that manner is not yet known. The film's inconclusive ending speaks to this interpretation of the phrase, but it also speaks to the earliest English translation, *Sort Of*. This title has entirely different implications: Revolutionary change is occurring in Miraflores, but only sort of, and perhaps not with wholehearted dedication.

Like her earlier documentaries, *De cierta manera* focuses in part on the role of workers assemblies; her critique draws on discourses about the role of the laborer as Revolutionary. However, the development of a Revolutionary consciousness is portrayed as part of an ongoing and painful process for the central character, Mario, who ends up denouncing a friend to his local assembly. His inner turmoil is the subject of one of the film's primary storylines, as he has to

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[47] Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 131.

chose, on one hand, between loyalty to the friend, whose work ethic is questionable and whose ideology continues to be centered in *machista* culture, and, on the other hand, his commitment to the larger Revolutionary project. This tension is attributed largely — and in some cases disparagingly — to his *blanca* middle-class love interest, Yolanda, who Mario's friends blame for his changing attitudes, as well as to his strong attachments to Afrocuban religious traditions such as Abakuá, a men's secret religious society that was considered counter-Revolutionary.[48] While Mario does ultimately denounce Humberto, the film ends with him feeling conflicted about his actions, and his own *machista* attitude remains mostly intact. As Ana Serra notes, Mario's inner struggle with commitment to the Revolution is expressed in gendered terms: After speaking against Humberto, he is left feeling guilty, and emphatically states that by ratting him out, he "acted like a woman."[49] He takes out his frustration on Yolanda, with their relationship remaining in turmoil up to the film's very last moments. Rather than depicting a resolution to the problem of machismo, then, the film acknowledges its deep sedimentation in Cuban subject formation.

Yolanda, on the other hand, is a teacher sent from Havana to Mario's poor community. The conflict built around her storyline involves her frustration with the "marginal" figures whom she is sent to Miraflores to educate in Revolutionary ideology. Rather than solely blame the inhabitants of Miraflores for their "counter-Revolutionary" customs and habits, however, the

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[48] See Lilian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 262. By the late 1960s, Abukuá and other Afrocuban religious traditions were deemed to be associated with high levels of criminal activity, and by the 1970s, initiation into autonomous Black fraternities was considered criminal. Parents and religious godparents of children initiated into Santaría, for example, faced jail time for "teaching counterrevolutionary values to children." Autonomous Black community organizations not only were perceived as a threat to the national discourse of united *Cubanidad,* but the concern over Black organizing was also perceived as a potential political threat.

[49] Ana Serra, *The 'new Man' in Cuba,* (University Press of Florida, 2007), 140.

film also sharply critiques Yolanda's own ineffectual interventions with the families and children there, which is due largely to her petite-bourgeois prejudices. The tension between Yolanda and the residents, however, is represented as relating primarily to class and education differences, and not to race. Notably, the families Yolanda has the most difficult time connecting with are not Afrocuban, despite Black and mulatto families being the largest demographic in Miraflores, but rather are poor white families.

While Yolanda's difficulties with the families are expressed in class terms, the difficulties *within* the families are expressed in gendered terms. Her interactions are almost solely with the mothers, and their material and emotional struggles are expressed as being rooted in absentee or abusive fathers. The tensions between Yolanda and Mario also tend to be represented in class and gendered terms, rather than racial terms, despite their mixed-race coupling. Yolanda teases Mario for his machista posturing, and when she expresses distaste for his interest in Abakuá, she does not mention the official ban on practicing African religions, but rather notes that she is "an independent woman," implying that the traditions of the all-male society do not match with her (Revolutionary) expectations.

The film's critique of marginalization and its connections to deeply ingrained systems of male chauvinism, then, do not entirely challenge the subordination of race within class-based policy discourse or discourses of national unity. Its allocation of race to a visual (as imaged by the mixed race couple) but largely silent structure in the film, in some ways reproduces the ideology of mestizaje, in which the erasure of racial difference is made through imagery of a mixed-raced body that stands in as a symbol of national unity, even while the image of the body itself is informed by racial hierarchy. When *De cierta manera* was finally released in 1977, critic

Carlos Galiano noted that the three protagonists can be ranked as to their levels of attainment of revolutionary consciousness: Yolanda fully identifies with the revolutionary process, Mario is in transition phase, and "Humberto ... is the prototype of the alienated individual, a man who cannot, at least initially, adapt to the new norms of social conduct other than through coercion."[50] While Galiano's critique celebrates the way in which the film treats the "evolution" of revolutionary consciousness, he fails to note that each character's "degree of evolution" matches phenotypically with racialized hierarchies. Yolanda is the lightest-skinned character of the three. Mario is frequently described as jabao or a lighter-skinned mulatto with African features, and Humberto is a dark-skinned Afrocubano. Further, when Humberto leaves Miraflores to meet up with his lover, thus shirking his duties as a worker, he notes that he is heading to Oriente, the province of Santiago, where, it is implied, women are looser, more exotic; that is, they are Black. This characterization reinscribes — although does not necessarily condone — geographies of race in which Black women are located as sites of pleasure, and not, in this case, of revolutionary subjectivity.

One particularly telling scene, however, is noteworthy for the ways in which it complicates the racialized structure set up by the Yolanda-Mario-Humberto tryptic. Yolanda and Mario are on a date with another couple — a light-skinned mulatta (Migdalia) and a white man (Joe). Throughout the dinner, which takes place at a high-end restaurant, Mario is clearly uncomfortable with the rules and customs with which he is expected to be familiar. Despite this, the white man is portrayed as taking a keen interest in Mario, the two of them bonding in masculine conversation about the women they are dating. Joe warns Mario to take good care of

[50] Carlos Galiano, "One Way or Another: The Revolution in Action" *Jump Cut,* no. 19 (December 1978): 33.

Yolanda, who he says is “something special.” His date, on the other hand, he claims is “too hot,” a critique of her racialized class status and the presumed sexual zealousness that goes with it. In the meantime, in the bathroom, Migdalia is chastising Yolanda for dating Mario, a man from *el ambiente*, as signified by his gold tooth. “I am just as Revolutionary as you,” she says, “but, a man with a gold tooth? Things will be different for our kids, but now?” She turns back to the mirror in disgust.

In the restaurant, the two men continue to drink together. Mario toasts to the Revolution, “to the process, to all of this. To the process, because without it, we wouldn’t even be here, sitting together,” he says, implying without mentioning out-loud their class and racial difference. When the couples walk home later, Migdalia trails behind while the men dance and sing together. Yolanda eventually joins them. Feeling neglected and out of place, Migdalia stands alone on the Malecon. “Call to her,” Mario says to Joe, feeling bad for leaving her behind. When Joe refuses, Mario turns and calls her name. She stands alone, silent, hailed into Revolutionary ideology by the very man she earlier rejected as backward. The scene, ends with her remaining frozen in place, refusing the hail.

Clearly, it is Migdalia’s prejudice that is structured as “backward” in this scene. Joe, here, represents the white man of intellect and prosperity, Mario, the dark body of the people, and Yolanda, the mother of the nation, unifying them. Migdalia is separated from the fold, ironically, through both her class status (as lower than Joe’s) and her class prejudice (depicted as counter-Revolutionary). The critique is subtle, and in many ways, Migdalia is a scapegoat. Her refusal to act as a vessel of national unity leaves her outcasted, while Joe is embraced as part of the national triad, despite his raced and gendered rejection of Migdalia. The way in which the

camera lingers on Migdalia as she loiters alone by the seawall, however, invites the viewer to a begrudging sympathy for her. The double standard that she is subjected to suddenly is made apparent in her solitary figure. This irony of her being rejected is made all the more apparent in the following scene, when Yolanda herself expresses a large degree of class prejudice against the families with whom she is working in Miraflores.

A parallel scene occurs when Mario introduces Yolanda to the “real-life” Guillermo Diaz, a Black boxer-turned-singer who had spent some years in prison for killing a man who had molested his girlfriend. Diaz, who plays himself in the film, acts as the third member of this particular triad, darkening rather than whitening the configuration. Mario takes Yolanda to a concert where Diaz, who Yolanda seems to initially distain, performs the signature song that also later closes out the film, “Véndele.” The performance seems to bring the couple together after an argument, as the two of them sit closely together, smiling. A montage indicates Mario’s thought process during the scene as he remembers advice Diaz had given him earlier: If he wants to maintain his relationship with Yolanda, he must “véndele,” or leave old, pre-Revolutionary ideologies behind. Again, it is the most marginal, and Blackest, character of the three that Gómez has represent ideal Revolutionary ideology.

From Sarita to Sara and Back Again

Despite its entirely positive reception upon its popular release in 1977, Martiatu questions whether *De cierta manera* would have been so easily released, had Gómez not died. Prior to her death, some people were beginning to distance themselves from her, Martiatu says.

> Sobre todo la gente de mi generación, por si acaso, le tienen miedo hasta después de muerta. Nadie sabía que era lo qué era capaz de decir o criticar que no conviniera. Quizás haya molestado el tema racial, que en ese momento se decía que ponía en peligro la unidad de la nación.[51]

However, while there was a reluctance to engage with Gómez about racial politics while she lived, critics were quick to note the groundbreaking aspect of her gendered and racialized biography upon her death, pointing to it as a sign of Cuba's progressiveness. For example, Chijona and Rigoberto López, who were the first to review the film in *Cine Cubano*, ICAIC's official journal, when it was released, point to the exceptionality of her position as a Black woman filmmaker, and note that this position influenced her sensitive treatment of marginalized subjects, as well as influenced her critiques of pre-Revolutionary material and social conditions that derived from colonial exploitation. Other than noting her racial identity, however, neither of these early reviews analyze or critique the ways in which she does and *does not* tie race to those conditions.

Other early criticisms of the film, while certainly informative, tend to focus on it primarily as a revolutionary and/or feminist text, with little discussion of race. Julianne Burton's 1975 review in *Jump Cut* of the *Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema* radical film festival in Italy was the first English-language mention of *De cierta manera*, and among the first mentions of the film in general. While Burton does point out the film's narrative focus on "sex and ethnic culture in a society which has tried to downplay the existence of both racism and sexism while working

[51] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 196.

toward their elimination," the short review leaves little space for a full examination of the themes.[52] The same year that Chijona and López's articles were published, Carlos Galiano published a review in *Granma Weekly Review*, the official organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, which was republished in English in the March 1978 issue of *Jump Cut*. In the review, he lauded the film for its direct representation of marginalized characters, noting that it presents a "clash" between value systems of old and new value systems emerging out of the Revolution. He concedes that the film presents no conclusive solution to this clash, but he nevertheless prematurely declares that it depicts the "shantytowns" that "used to house" certain sectors of the population (without naming those sectors) but that no longer exist.[53] (33). Julia Lesage's "One Way or Another: dialectical, revolutionary, feminist" appeared shortly after in a 1979 addition of *Jump Cut*. Lesage concentrates on the feminist perspective of the film, arguing that it "examines the Cuban revolutionary process from the vantage point of the neighborhood and the domestic sphere, and it depicts the ways that revolutionary change is and must be effected in terms of what people as individuals know that they want."[54] Lesage only notes in passing that the majority of the population in the marginalized sectors of Havana are overwhelmingly Black. Like other critics, including E. Ann Kaplan and Anette Kuhn, her analysis centers primarily on formal aspects of the film, focusing on the dialectical function of the blending of documentary and fictional elements, the use of "real" people playing themselves (with and without scripts) alongside actors; and the integration of found footage of wrecking balls razing the Havana neighborhood that would soon become Miraflores. In 1980, Kalamu ya

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[52] Julianne Burton, "Part 1: Revolutionary Cuban Cinema," *Jump Cut,* no. 19 (1978): 17-20.

[53] Carlos Galiano, "The Revolution in Action," *Jump Cut,* no. 19 (1978): 33.

[54] Julia Lesage, "One Way or Another: dialectical, revolutionary, feminist," *Jump Cut*, no 20 (1978).

Salaam published “Cuban Cinema” in *The Black Scholar*, reporting back from a group of U.S. film critics who traveled to Cuba in 1978. While Salaam’s short description of *De cierta manera’*s exploration of the problem of social development is nevertheless thorough, he, too, turns to a description of Gómez’s biographical details (mistakingly identifying her as from the lower-classes) rather than an analysis of the film when attempting to describe its treatment of race. “As a lower class black woman in Cuba, Sara Gómez had seen Cuba from the bottom looking up, from the outside looking in, and once she got inside of ICAIC what she, as a politically conscious artist, showed to them (and the world) was different from what they had previously seen,” Salaam writes.[55] While it was most certainly different than what had previously been seen in most Cuban film up to that point, her perspective as a *middle*-class Black woman more likely informed her critique of the impediments to Revolutionary consciousness that are produced through lingering bourgeois preoccupations.

Also noting the role of author biography in the film’s reception, Hector Amaya notes that having the distinction of being the only feature fictional film directed by a woman in Cuba “provides strong context to the film’s reception, and its importance is illustrated by the actions the Cuban cultural workers took to highlight it.”[56] According to Amaya, *De cierta manera* is an important “women-centered film,” in that it both manifests the work of a woman director, and the work of women critics who discuss it, stating that most of issues 52–53 of *Cine Cubano* are dedicated to *De cierta manera,* and importantly features reviews by three women critics: Elena Díaz, Camila Henríquez Ureña, and Gabriela Pogolotti. “Echoing the struggles for

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[55] Kalamu ya Salaam, “Cuban Cinema,” *The Black Scholar* 11, no. 3 (1980): 90.

[56] Hector Amaya, *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance During the Cold War* (University of Illinois Press, 2010), 147.

transformation represented and narrativized by *Lucia*, *Cine Cubano* (and ICAIC) appears here as an institution in search of *conciencia*, struggling to move away from preconceived gender notions," which relegates women to specific roles that do not include critique, he says.[57] However, this assessment reveals a slip in Amaya's otherwise informative analysis of Cuban film reception: Issues 52 and 53 of *Cine Cubano* are not dedicated to *De cierta manera*, but rather to the other film that Amaya declares a "women's film," Humberto Solas' *Lucia*. The three women critics he refers to review *that* film, not Gómez's (the issues, in fact, were published before filming even began on *De cierta manera*). At risk of psychologizing Amaya's mistake, it is nevertheless indicative of the desire to attribute certain historical weight to Gómez's work based on her unique subject position.

Amaya's reading of the critical reception of the film in Spanish and English is, nonetheless, informative. He notes that along with her gender and race, Gómez's untimely death no doubt had an impact on the ways in which the film was reviewed. For example, unlike Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and Solas' *Lucia*, both of which were well-received but nevertheless subject to criticism, *De cierta manera* was uniformly lauded. "I imagine that reviewers assigned Gómez's film might have known from the outset that they could not comment negatively. The reviewer's duty then became to find an interpretive framework that would allow her/him to compliment director and film."[58] Amaya goes on to note that Gómez's death required a tribute, and that Lopez's review clearly is one. "His words are both emotional and caring. Both belonged to the same community for ten years, and during those years they discussed and shared

[57] Hector Amaya, *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance During the Cold War* (University of Illinois Press, 2010), 145.

[58] Hector Amaya, *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance During the Cold War* (University of Illinois Press, 2010), 147.

professional and political goals."[59] These critics' readings of Gómez's films, in other words, were inseparable from the emotional impact caused by the loss of Gómez herself. Her death turned her into something of a martyr for the revolution: As a successful Afrocuban woman filmmaker who was by all accounts a dedicated Revolutionary, she easily was made into a symbol of integration, unity, and Revolutionary progress. This was enabled, however, only by the condition of her silence. In other words, only in death could she be trusted not to challenge the use of her racialized and gendered body as symbol of national unity.

¿Donde está, Sara Gómez?

Race as a theme in Gómez's films did not became a topic for analysis until the 1990s, when open acknowledgement of *Afro*cuban cultural expressions was beginning to be accepted as part of *Cuban* culture, on one hand, and mainstream feminist film discourse began to be critiqued for its effacement of race as worthy of analysis, on the other.[60] Benamou's 1994 comparative analysis of gendered representations in Cuban films, for example, opens with a critique of the general lack of intersectional treatment of race and gender in the majority of Cuban films. She argues that Gómez is among the few filmmakers to focalize gender with race and cultural identity, pointing as evidence to the interracial relationship between Yolanda and Mario, as well as the film's affirmation that Afrocuban and other subalterns' ability to affirm that their own cultural

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[59] Hector Amaya, *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance During the Cold War* (University of Illinois Press, 2010), 151.

[60] Ebrahim, "Afrocuban Religions in Sara Gómez's *One Way or Another* and Gloria Rolando's *Oggun*" *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 22, 4 (1998): 243.

identities should not be subsumed within the Revolution's modernizing impulse.[61] The inclusion of "other subalterns" is a crucial aside in Benamou's comment, as it implies an observation I mentioned earlier, but that is largely left out of most readings of the film: That is, while the neighborhood of Miraflores would have been made up primarily of Black and mulatto residents, the portion of the film dedicated to Yolanda's work with neighborhood families centers largely on a white family (Lazaro and La Mejicana), and in many ways defocalizes Blackness as a constitutive feature of *marginalidad*.

Two examinations of *De cierta manera,* published in 1994 and 1998, treat race by way of their concentration on Afrocuban religion in the film. Martínez-Echazábal's 1994 article is primarily concerned with the secularization of religion in Cuban films, which she sees as "demoting the contemporary religious experience while promoting the 'historical' and the 'aesthetic' one."[62] Ebrahim's article builds on Martínez-Echazábal's reading, in which she argues that Gómez's treatment of Abakuá is clearly disapproving, while her treatment of Santería represents it as fairly seamlessly integrated into Cuban cultural life.[63] Ebrahim notes that this dual treatment of religion indicates that it is not necessarily a socialist disapproval of religion in general that Gómez was implying in her depiction of Abakuá, but rather a disapproval of Abukuá's *machista* values. By directly treating the machismo of Abakuá as a "backward" cultural form, the film is able to reject it on the basis of its gender bias without elaborating a

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[61] Catherine Benamou, "Cuban Cinema: On the Threshold of Gender," in *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory, and Cinema in the Third World,* eds. Diana Robin and Ira Jaffe (State University of New York Press, 1999), 83.

[62] Martínez-Echazábal, "The Politics of Afro-Cuban Religion in Contemporary Cuban Cinema," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 19.

[63] Ebrahim, "Afrocuban Religions in Sara Gómez's *One Way or Another* and Gloria Rolando's *Oggun*" *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 22, 4 (1998): 239-251

discussion of the Revolution's disapproval of African religion more generally. Ebrahim does, however, discusses in some detail the ways in which race is occluded from Cuban official discourse, and notes that Gómez herself both articulates and occludes issues of race in complex ways.

It is not until well into the 2000s, however, that race as a subject in Gómez's films begins to be analyzed directly. For example, Ebrahim's short 2007 article, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema," interrogates Gómez's casting decisions, making connections between the choice to cast a white-appearing woman and a light-skinned Black man and Gómez's desire to avoid scrutiny from censors.[64] Anthropologist Jafari Allen's 2011 ethnography *!Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* also provides sustained commentary on *De cierta manera*, noting that it was exceptional in its time. "In the film, race/color and gender in the new society is central, but is rarely made explicit — exemplifying the complexity of her thinking as a revolutionary black intellectual, and the tensions of the moment."[65] He goes on to provide a comparative analysis of the gender, sex, and race politics among characters in *De cierta manera* with contemporary subjects of his anthropological investigation.

Most recently, Martínez-Echazábal's interview with Martiatu discusses openly the circumstances of the censorship of *Guanabacoa* and *Mi aparte*, as well as the existence of a nascent Black Power movement in Cuba. When Martiatu notes that Cuban officials knew her, Gómez, and others as being involved in Black Power, Martínez-Echazábal expresses surprise,

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[64] Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema" *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 82 (April 2007): 107-118.

[65] Allen, *Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 103.

noting she has denied that such a movement existed in Cuba. Martiatu responds:

> ¿Quién lo niega? Lo había. Desde el momento en que la gente se manifestaba, en que se crearon obras de arte con los temas negros, en que se usaban ropas, peinados, et cetera, aunque los prohibían en escuelas y centros de trabajo. De forma muy incipiente y reprimida sí lo hubo. Si no lo hubiera habido a los funcionarios que reprimieron todo eso no les hubiera importado. Ellos sabían que ese estado de opinión de ciertos intelectuales y otros jóvenes negros existía. Recuerdo que se leían los libros de la negritud, los de Fanón, la Autobiografía de Malcolm X pasaba de mano en mano, y otros materiales tanto de la Negritud, como de Estados Unidos y del Caribe. A pesar de las críticas, de la represión y de que los botaran de las escuelas y centros de trabajo, había un deseo, una voluntad de reafirmase como negros, la belleza negra, et cetera.[66]

And yet, it was only moments before in the interview that Martiatu admitted that many people were afraid to associate with people like Gómez, saying later "sí nos llamaron el Black Power, que si teníamos el pelo así o asá. Había gente que tenía miedo. En fin, era una situación complicada."[67]

In 2005, a Swiss film crew released *¿Donde esta Sara Gómez?,* a film that treats its subject much like its subject treated her films — it takes spectators into the intimate spaces of

[66] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 197.

[67] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 196-197.

Gómez's life, interviewing family and friends, spending time on the streets in which she lived and worked, and intermixing historical footage, this time of Gómez herself, including family photographs and footage taken by Agnès Varda during her visit to the island. There are even brief moments of reenactments by actors, mixing documentary and fiction in Gómez fashion. Where is Sara Gómez?: friend, wife, mother, lover, and above all, filmmaker, the film asks. Pointedly, the film includes an extended clip from *En la otra isla*, reproducing the moment when Rafael laments that the women he has worked with felt that a white women playing a love scene with a Black man would be anti-aesthetic. The film briefly cuts to an image of Rafael working in a field, comfortable it seems, in his new position as laborer. But then comes the moment when he says shyly, "Listen, Sara, I have a question. Will I ever get to do *La Traviata*?" The camera lingers on him for a moment as he smiles and gazes off into some unknown future. And again like Gómez, the film does not answer the question directly.

Later clips incorporated into the documentary include the moment in *Guanabacoa* in which Santería shrines are pictured in succession with relics of slave shackles, and the later conversation with Gómez's *Madrina* in which her bourgeois pretensions against "certain kinds" of Black people are made clear. The interview immediately following is with Gloria Rolando, the only other Afrocuban woman to date to make a feature film in Cuba. Rolando cites *Guanabacoa* as being the film that most influenced her own direction as a filmmaker, not the more popular and readily accessible *De cierta manera*. Something about Gómez's work touched her, she says, because the first person to tell her about race in Cuba was her grandmother. "Yo me veo a Sara Gómez, ella misma, también sentado con el personaje de Madrina, preguntándole, interrogándole sobre las sociedades de color. Es una necesidad por saber, es una necesidad hacer que esas fotos

familiares hablen" This was something that touched her more than the theme of *marginalidad*, Rolando says, because this is her family history as well. Echoing the sentiment Gómez expresses with her final words in *Guanabacoa*, Rolando says there is an urge to know and discover details about the social lives of Black families in Cuba, past and present. This film inspired her to speak out, she says, and to investigate the history of her own family, which eventually culminated in her independently produced feature film, *Raíces de mi corazón* (2001).

This film, like *Guanabacoa*, also utilizes the family photograph as a structuring devise, allowing Rolando to tell the parallel story of the life of a Black single mother in contemporary Cuba, as well as the story of a fictional family (based on Rolando's actual family) who participated in the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC). PIC was the only political party composed of people of African descent outside Haiti in the early 20th century, and they rose up in resistance to racism and inequality that persisted in post-abolition Cuba. Demonized by the press, the party was rejected by mainstream society due to their quest to make racial inequality part of the national conversation in a moment when *mestizaje* was sedimenting as official ideology. In 1912, the group organized a demonstration for Black Cuban rights in Oriente. Met with violent repression, thousands of Black Cubans were slaughtered by the Cuban army and U.S. Marines, who described the demonstration as an anti-nationalist "negro race war." The story of the genocide was effectively silenced, with many families quietly surrendering memories of the dead to the dusty realm of family secrets. Like Gómez does in relation to her family in *Guanabacoa*, Rolando sifts through the little material evidence that remains of the event, indexically referencing the lived experience of it through shots that linger over images of newspaper clippings, family albums, and archival photos. And also like Gómez, this film

highlights not only the ways in which certain Black people were historically relegated to the margins, it also highlights the ways in which stories of those people are relegated to the margins as well. The telling of those stories, then, becomes part of the process of resistance.

Further along in *Donde está Sara Gómez*, Alfredo and Germinal take on the roles of filmmakers, and conduct an interview with Yesenia Seiler, an Afrocuban researcher studying Cuban marginality. Germinal notes that neither Seiler, nor Alfredo, nor himself are marginal subjects; they are educated and middle-class. How, as outsiders, he asks, are they are to understand marginality? In an impassioned response, Seiler declares that *marginalidad* is part of a cultural spectrum; it is a state of mind. To be marginal is to be touched by it, to claim it as part of your person, she says. "A mi me toca de la rumba, a mi me toca del tambor, a mi me toca de todo eso, y lo siento." Seiler goes on to say that Santaría, Abakuá, hip hop, and other Afrocuban cultural forms survive not despite being marginal but *because* they are marginal. In other words, from the margins, they resist cultural absorption and call into question official discourses of national unity. Seiler states emphatically, "La marginalidad tiene valores, valores humanos, valores existenciales importantícimos, y tiene valores porque proteje formes sociales que si se abrieran o se introdujeran en otros espacios desaparecerían." This conversation gets to the heart of what Gómez expresses in *Guanabacoa*. The film insists on the vibrancy and heterogeneity of Black Cuban cultural forms, celebrating both those of "high" culture (as symbolized by *Madrina*), and those of the margins (as symbolized by Berta). In both cases, Gómez's telling of these stories is a form of resistance, her way of ensuring their survival.

Gómez's work as a whole straddles the margins and the mainstream, with new, revolutionary filmic forms emerging from within that space of creative tension. The

revolutionary dialectics of her films, which refuse to silence the voices of the marginal, are credited by Seiler and Rolando as inspiring them to re-envision the margins — not as spaces to eradicate, but rather as spaces in which to cultivate valuable cultural forms. Even in 2005, however, when these middle-class Black Cubans identify themselves solidly and proudly with *marginalidad*, they do not specifically identify anti-Black racism as a structuring element of the margins. They *do* identify Black cultural forms such as hip hop as representative of symbolic marginality, but African heritage or Black identity is never specifically mentioned. Martínez-Echazábal notes that at the time of her interview with Martiatu, themes of racial inequality were beginning to be fashionable, less taboo, among artists and intellectuals. And yet, she says, discussion of the structuring forces that maintain Cuban *marginalidad* continues itself to be marginalized. "La pauperización económica y social de la población negra en Cuba … se agudiza cada día más, mientras que por otro lado (del que no se habla) aumentan las fortunas y con ellas la división de clases, a pesar de las palabras."[68] In other words, just as it is in *De cierta manera*, Blackness and its relation to social and economic inequality in Cuba today remains a thematic specter, addressed more completely than in 1974, but only in *one way or another*.

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[68] Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu, "¡Sara es mucha Sara!" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 182.

CHAPTER FOUR

Self-Invention and the Radical Leap in Revolutionary Grenada

I am not a prisoner of History. I should not seek therefore the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. — Frantz Fanon

In my mama's mouth, I saw the struggle for small things. — Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone*

Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place Not Here* (1996) opens with a first person description of an encounter between two women who meet during the Grenadian Revolution and soon become lovers. "Grace. Is grace, yes. And I take it, quiet, quiet, like thieving sugar," the interior monologue of Elizete reads, as she first notices Verlia in the fields, sneaking fervent glances while she raises her machete to hack away the cane.[1] She takes thieving glances, she thinks, like thieving sugar from the plantation, establishing her desires already as in opposition to the economic logic of her life as laborer. Later in the novel, Brand returns the reader to this same moment, but this time from Verlia's perspective. For Verlia, Elizete's arm swinging the machete in the air is not the grace of childlike thievery, but rather an "avenging grace." Elizete's musculature, her movements swinging into and through the cane, her connection to the land and earth, hacks away at the symbol of Caribbean enslavement and exploitation. This is the moment the two fall in love. It is also the moment that Brand signals love's limits: Just as Elizete's

[1] Dionne Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 3.

machete catches the sunlight, and Elizete and Verlia begin to imagine the taste of sweat and sugar, the taste of the other woman, the machete crashes down, and embeds itself in Elizete's foot, watering the canefield with blood.

This repeated scene, viewed from a different perspective, lays the complex groundwork for the novel's refusal to represent a singular, set, or prescribed mode of revolutionary or resistant living. Set in an unnamed Caribbean island, vaguely veiled but clearly meant to represent a fictionalized version of the island of Grenada during the early 1980s, the novel's story of love and revolution told primarily through the narratives of Elizete and Verlia opens the possibility of thinking affective, bodily relations as the ground upon which radical self-creation meets and refuses the totality of coloniality and its spacio-temporal racialization.[2] At the same time, the novel emphasizes that totality's seemingly limitless capacity to also reinvent itself. What other worlds are possible, the novel asks, within such irreparable confines? What "leaps" from this world are necessary, to borrow from the language of Franz Fanon in the epigraph above, and what are the stakes of the leaping?

In what follows, I ask these same questions in relation to multiple representations of the Grenadian Revolution and its aftermath, from Brand's novel, to Merle Collins' *The Colour of Forgetting* (1995),[3] to Steve McQueen's video installation *Carib's Leap* (2002).[4] I argue that in their reflections on revolutionary praxis, these novels and videos evoke understandings of revolutionary possibilities that assert intersubjective and communal practices of living and self-

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[2] See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257-337

[3] Merle Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995).

[4] Steve McQueen, *Carib's Leap/Western Deep,* 2002, Tate Museum, London.

invention among Caribbean subjects. Further, they emphasize these as being as much — or more — constitutive of radical or revolutionary praxis than the workings of state and party politics. Through intersubjective and communal imaginings, these works are able to ask the most difficult of political questions: How to reconcile, for example, the vast internal differences of experience among a people — differences, in other words, in practices of living shaped by a variety of intersections of identity categories — who nevertheless share the experience of global imperialism, colonialism, and histories of displacement? In what ways do those differences of experience also generate, in turn, differing relationships with racial and gendered codes as defined by particular Caribbean paradigms of coloniality? And finally, how can — or can? — such questions be thought in ways that open radical possibilities for alternative futures without foreclosing revolutionary living in the present?

For much Black America in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Grenada and its bloodless revolution was a symbol of radical political possibility for an anti-imperialist, socialist project specifically by and for Black people. And in the English-speaking Americas, its revolutionary message was all the more accessible than the various Latin American socialist and nationalist movements. However, the sudden and violent internal collapse of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) in October of 1983, culminating in the murder of PRG's leader Maurice Bishop and in the U.S. invasion of the tiny island nation two weeks later, points to the limits of state and party politics in a world that remains mired in neo-imperialist structures of coloniality. Further, as a site of "first contact," Grenadian geography is marked by memories of genocide and slavery. The island, as such, is frequently referenced as symbolic of colonialism's most violent and lasting legacy: The construction of Indigenous and Black bodies as extractable and

disposable objects; a construction that continues to produce subaltern racialized humans as always already extinct or excluded subjects within the logic of global capitalism in the present.[5]

Through their pointed yet indeterminate constructions of temporality and geography, these novels and videos challenge the basis of the universalizing gestures that establish and reinscribe such racialized subalternity. By layering the colonial past, the revolutionary present, and the indeterminable future in non-hierarchical and non-linear narratives of chronotopic disruption,[6] for example, the texts forgo constructions of teleological space-time that (re)produce colonized and enslaved Black and Indigenous peoples as history's underdeveloped (and thereby disposable) subjects. Instead, these novels evoke what Frantz Fanon describes as a "real leap" away from the "prison" of such histories. This leap, according to David Marriott, suggests a

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[5] Denise Ferreira da Silva. *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Miniapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007), xviii. While such a construction of Black and Indigenous subjects has been disavowed within contemporary (post)modern and multicultural ethical narratives, it nevertheless remains a constitutive effect of the "tools of universal reason" that structure the neo-imperial global world, as Denise Ferreira da Silva has described. Ferreira da Silva argues that post-modern accounts of racial subjection, even when articulating an emancipatory project such as that espoused by many Latin American and African socialist national liberation movements, including the Grenadian Revolution, remain within the conceptual confines of post-Enlightenment thought and its privileging of time and space as the primary descriptors of the world, and of science and history as the domain in which Man is produced as the sole "transparent" being capable of self-determination and self-reflection. Man's racialized Others are subsequently produced within the regime of capital by deeming certain physical traits associated with specific geographical regions as displaced in time, outside of History and the unfolding of Spirit, thus providing moral relief for the (white) universal subject as beneficiary of the violent exploitation of Black and Brown bodies. The overturning of racialized subjection can not be accomplished from within such conceptual apparatus, Ferreira da Silva argues. Rather, the world as it is conceptualized through Western science and historicity — that is, as teleologically unfolding in time and space — must be comprehended entirely anew.

[6] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 84-258. Bakhtin describes chronotope as the way in which time and space are represented in language, and especially literature. Chrontope, or "time space," he says, refers to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." Through artistic deployments of chronotope, "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84-85). Chronotopic disruptions, then, express space and time as part of a whole, but not necessarily as fused into singular points within a narrative. In other words, the whole is expansive rather than concrete, and time is fluid and mobile rather than "thickened."

moment of radical incomprehension in which invention comes into existence within the absolute unmaking of the world as we know it.[7] The "leap" into self-invention, then, might be thought of as an instantiation of Denise Ferreira da Silva's Black feminist poethics, in which she posits possibilities of conceiving the world anew, if Blackness were to be "emancipated from science and history" and made free to "wonder about another praxis and wander in the World, with the ethical mandate of opening up other ways of knowing and doing.[8] In this sense, self-invention can be thought of not as the invention of the self as an autonomous, rational, and self-determined being — thereby reinscribing the onto-epistemological structure of modernity's Eurocentric "universality" that is based in a subject-object dualism that debases the body and its role in intellectual and political processes. Rather, self-invention can be re-conceived as the creation of the whole of the self as a connected, relational, affecting and affectable being. The "leap" into self-invention, however, specifies the potential costs, both psychic and physical, of the radical project of unmaking the universalist category of Man. In other words, in a world predicated by anti-Blackness, the leap represents the very real possibility of undoing the self as much as the world.

Such a leap into self-invention is theorized throughout each of the texts' by their metaphorizing of a historical leap — the leap of the supposed "last" of the indigenous Carib people who jumped from the 40-meter high cliff overlooking Sauteurs Bay in northern Grenada

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[7] David Marriott, "No Lords A-Leaping: Fanon, C.L.R. James, and the Politics of Invention," *Humanities* 3 (2014): 518-519.

[8] Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 81, 93-94.

in 1651, rather than be taken as slaves by French colonizers.[9] Collin's *The Colour of Forgetting*, for example, opens and closes with this scenario,[10] from the site variously named Sauteurs (French for *jumpers*) Hill, Carib's Leap, and Leaper's Hill. The narrator indicates early on in the novel the erasure of indigenous history, noting that visitors to the area often look around and ask from where did the Carib's take that definitive leap. "Generally, ...people answered, around here so, indicating the expanse of green splendor,"[11] the narrator notes, going on to explain that this confusion is understandable, as there was no monument, no remembrance, to mark the place of such an act of defiance.[12] The climax of Brand's *In Another Place* also centers around a repeated leap from this site, and McQueen's video installation evokes the leap as well. The installation consists of two screens facing each other; one screen displays an empty, almost white sky, punctured occasionally by the image of a body falling, floating into nothingness as it enters one side of the screen and disappears into the other screen.

The death leaps represented in each of these texts, I argue, cannot be read as leaps of suicidal desperation, nor as tragic falls, as they might in conventional generic terms, when they

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[9] While the myth of Carib's leap is that those who jumped to their deaths in 1651 were the last of the indigenous Caribs, records indicate that the Carib people did, in fact, survive colonial genocide. Some were exiled to nearby islands, according to a treaty signed by Governor Charles Houel sieur de Petit Pré in 1660 (see *Traité conclu entre Charles Houel, gouverneur de la Guadeloupe et les Caraïbes 31 mars 1660,* Archives nationales d'outre mere, accessed July 15, 2018, http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ark:/61561/zn401b21xw). Others joined African maroon communities.

[10] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 13. I evoke Diana Taylor's use of the term "scenario" here to emphasize the ways in which repeated cultural and artistic references to Carib's leap replay the colonial encounter as it manifests in the contemporary imagination. According to Taylor, "scenarios exist as culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality." Rather than repeat the scene of encounter from a perspective that emphasizes authenticity or historical "Truth," these scenarios emphasize certain effects of the encounter.

[11] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 4.

[12] There is now a monument marking Leaper's Hill, complete with a cheerful sign bidding tourists welcome. The commodity function of the monument, unfortunately, detracts from the historical gravity of the location.

are evoked in the context of the Grenadian Revolution. As Jean Fisher notes in her description of McQueen's videos, the originary leap of the Caribs is "a syncopated act of defiance: from the Carib's perspective they have gone elsewhere, where the French cannot follow."[13] The Carib's leap, in this sense, is akin to the narrative of the flying Africans that appear in folktales, oral histories, and contemporary cultural productions. The myth centers around groups of African slaves or individual Africans who are said to have shaken off the shackles of slavery and taken flight, soaring across the sea back to their homelands.

On the other hand, as much as the texts repeat the evocation of resistance through reference to the leap, they nevertheless do not allow the act to function narratively as a climactic punctuation mark on either the contemporary moment or on colonial history. The texts remain open, in other words, refusing to narrate the leap as heroic or tragic, nor as a moment in which a story ends. Rather, they figure the leap in the context of life (and death) carrying on, both within the narrative of coloniality and the narrative of resistance: A tourist boat approaches the harbor ten years after the fall of the Grenadian Revolution in the conclusion of *The Colour of Forgetting*, and as passengers gaze up at the infamous cliff, a baby dies, a prophetess cannot distinguish the past from the future or the future from the present, and white birds endlessly circle a red rock.[14] In McQueen's videos, bodies fall through the first screen while on the second screen Grenadians go about their everyday business in Sauteurs. In Brand's novel, the leap is evoked through the memories of each of the novel's two central narrators, one who is subject of its contemporary reenactment and one who is its witness.

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[13] Jean Fisher and Steve McQueen, *Caribs' Leap/Western Deep* (Artangle, 1999), 119.

[14] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 214.

The metaphor of the leap challenges the onto-epistemological structures of modernity by building these various narratives within circular or expansive, rather than linear and teleological, senses of time — what Ferreira da Silva describes as *plenum*, or existence marked by virtuality.[15] The metaphor also challenges modernity's universalizing gesture by refusing to posit any singular revolutionary subjectivity or simple resolution to the complexity of revolutionary or resistant practices. The metaphor of the leap proposes, in other words, rethinking the world, or worlds, in ways that cannot be comprehended in advanced by valuing resistance without aim or futurity.

Such imaginings, I argue, resemble the perspective of Black theorists such as Fred Moten and Darieck Scott, whose work on the ontology of Blackness makes claims for the radical potential of states of abjection — something akin to what Scott calls "counterintuitive power," and Moten thinks through as a "social poetics of nothingness."[16] Counterintuitive power, or what he alternatively names *black power* (as apposed to Black Power, the political movement) is found within abjection such that the "constellation of tropes that we call *identity, body, race, nation* seem to reveal themselves as utterly penetrated and compromised … . 'Power' in this

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[15] Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference Without Separability," catalogue of the 32a São Paulo Art Biennial, *Incerteza viva* (*Living Uncertainty*), 58. As described in the Introduction, Ferreira da Silva draws from G.W. F. Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, describing *plenum* as a way of understanding the world as an infinite, unknowable, unordered composition. "After breaking through the glassy, formal fixed walls of the Understanding, released from the grip of certainty, the imagination may wonder about reassembling the fundamental components of everything to refigure the World as a complex whole without order. Let me consider a possibility: What if, instead of The Ordered World, we could image The World as a Plenum, an infinite composition in which each existant's singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all the other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time." The temporality of the novels and videos discussed here express precisely such an entanglement.

[16] See Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) and Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 737-780.

context thus assumes a form that seems repugnant or even nonsensical, for its conditions of appearance are defeat and violation."[17] To explore the power of the counterintuitive, Scott says, is to sidestep recourse to sense or reason, and value instead the creative power that emerges from acting on impossible decisions (he references, for example, Sethe's killing of her child in *Beloved*).[18] Moten, similarly argues for an "aesthetic sociology or a social poetics of nothingness" that animates from within the condition of subalternity. He asks, "What's the relationship between blackness, thingliness, nothingness and the (de/re)generative operations of what Deleuze might call *a life* in common?"[19] He goes on to offer a partial answer: "There are flights of fantasy in the hold of the ship: the ordinary fugue and fugitive run of the language lab, black phonographies' brutally experimental venue. Paraontological totality is still in the making. Present and unmade in presence, blackness is an instrument in the making."[20] In other words, from the space of abjection that is represented here as the hold of the slave ship, desperately necessary leaps into creative modes of experiencing life are produced — life experienced through the music of Black self-making (Don Cherry, Ed Blackwell, and Nathanial Mackey are Moten's muses here).

The constellation of texts I examine here draw from histories of the Anglophone Caribbean, generally, and Grenada, specifically, to represent and perform these moments of

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[17] Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 9.

[18] Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 13-14.

[19] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 742.

[20] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 743.

leaping. In doing so, they also make visible complex assemblages of race, gender, sexuality and class that produce conditions of subalternity and abjection, and animate political possibilities of Black thought and invention. Through their emphasis on multiple temporalities, bodily experiences, and intimacy within revolutionary praxis, they theorize appositional relationships to institutional party politics that value the incomprehensible or irrational — those resistant acts that exist for themselves, whether or not they can carry on into the future. In doing so, the texts posit a place of possibility in which self-invention and alternative worlds can exist within the nothingness that is the space of abjection.

Forward Ever, Backward Never

To better understand the ways in which the texts I treat in this chapter dramatize the creative potential of resistant Black thought outside institutional politics, I will first contextualize those institutions and their relationship to the Revolution and the conditions of its fall, which forms the background of their narratives. The Revolution was both an instantiation of revolutionary thinking that aimed to dismantle the chokehold of post-independence Western capitalist imperialism within the Caribbean, *and* a symbol of the impossibility of such a dismantling from within the confines of the world order as we know it. Many historians point to June 1983 as the beginning of the end of the Revolutionary project. This was when Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop traveled to the United States, some say seeking to smooth over strained

diplomatic relations, others say as part of a public relations campaign that he hoped would draw U.S. tourist dollars. In either case, two months later, he was dead.[21]

The decades leading up to the Revolution were characterized by accelerated decolonization and independence movements in the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa, as well as by an atmosphere in which formerly colonized peoples were establishing national and pan-regional identities. The Cuban Revolution inspired socialist organizing in the West, and Pan-Africanism and Black Power movements inspired solidarity among Black English-speaking West Indians. At the same time, many of these newly independent nations were beset by post-independence economic dependency, while they also struggled to form democratic governments. In Grenada, the nation's first independent government was met with strong opposition that contested the legitimacy of Prime Minister Eric Gairy's regime from the start. Gairy struck back against political opposition with police violence, leading to the killing, for example, of Rupert Bishop, Maurice Bishop's father, during one demonstration. When the latter Bishop successfully overthrew the Gairy regime on March 13, 1979 in a bloodless coup and set up the PRG, an arm of the New JEWEL Movement (NJM), Grenada began to stand as a symbol of political possibility for the Left in nearby Caribbean nations, especially among the Black West Indian populations. The revolution was also closely watched from the North. As Audre Lorde points out so eloquently in "Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report," the United States certainly could not have a *Black* nation in "its own backyard" daring a sovereign, democratic and socialist project. "White America has been long schooled in the dehumanization of Black people," Lorde reminds

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[21] See Gary Williams, "Brief Encounter: Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop's Visit to Washington," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 3 (August 2002) for a detailed description of the visit.

us. “A Black island nation? Why don’t be ridiculous!”[22] When Bishop was assassinated in October of 1983 by members of his own party, many of whom believed that his visit to Washington was a sign of his “soft” socialism, the United States did not hesitate to use the opportunity to exercise its will over the people of Grenada, invading the island less than two weeks later and assisting in setting up a Reagan-friendly regime. Some have argued that there is evidence of CIA involvement in Bishop’s arrest and subsequent murder.[23]

When Lorde discusses the U.S. perspective of the Grenadian revolution, she describes it as what might be thought of as a rehearsal — a small-scale version of what could become an international movement for democratic change, self-definition and autonomy in a region made up primarily of descendants of African slaves, Eastern Indian descendants of indentured servants, and Amerindians whose people and ways of life have been systematically erased since conquest. “What a bad example,” she writes, “a dangerous precedent, an independent Grenada would be for the peoples of Color in the Caribbean, in Central America, for those of us here in the United States.”[24] Brian Meeks, too, argues that the significance of Grenada for the Caribbean and among Western powers in the 1980s went far beyond Grenada’s status as a “micro-state.”[25] Its demographic and linguistic make-up — Black English speakers — made communication among and through its subjects particularly threatening to the global hierarchy of power relations that

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[22] Audre Lorde, “Grenada Revisited: An Interm Report,” *The Black Scholar* 15, no. 1 (January-February 1984): 23.

[23] Lorde, “Grenada Revisited: An Interm Report,” *The Black Scholar* 15, no. 1 (January-February 1984): 25.

[24] Lorde, “Grenada Revisited: An Interm Report,” *The Black Scholar* 15, no. 1 (January-February 1984): 23.

[25] Brian Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: An Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada* (University of West Indies Press, 1993), 2.

are centered geographically in the United States and ideologically in the dominant conditions of capitalism. During his trip to the United States, Bishop spoke at Hunter College in New York, making reference to a "secret report" by the U.S. state department that he had been given access to:

> That secret report made this point: that the Grenadian revolution is in one sense even worse – I'm using their language – than the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions because the people of Grenada and the leadership of Grenada speak English, and therefore can communicate directly with the people of the United States. But I want to tell you what that same report said that also made us very dangerous. That is that the people of Grenada and the leadership of Grenada are predominantly Black. …[I]f we have 95 percent of predominantly African origin in our country, than we can have a dangerous appeal to 30 million Black people in the United States. Now that aspect of the report, clearly, is one of the most sensible.[26]

Rather than merely representing a communist or military threat, the Grenadian Revolution also posed an ideological threat, bringing to bear the very terms through which political subjectivity emerges, and posing the possibility for a reconfiguration of the ways in which Black bodies are produced and apprehended within the condition of patriarchal anti-Blackness.

Numerous studies preoccupied with the question of how such a promising movement could self-implode so quickly and unexpectedly. Bishop was a charismatic leader, handsome, born of a middle-class, light-skinned family in a society highly stratified according to skin-color

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[26] Rupert Roopnaraine, "Resonances of Revolution," *Interventions* 12, no.1 (2010), 11-34.

and class. He was educated in London, and while abroad, became interested in mid-century African independence movements, the writings of Franz Fanon, Malcolm X, and Kwame Nkrumah (who coined the phrase "Forward ever, backward never" that became the mantra of the Revolution), the Black Power movement in the United States and the Black Power influenced "February Revolution" in Trinidad and Tobago. Upon returning to Grenada, he made the plight of the Black rural population his own. His commitment to Marxism-Leninism was of a fairly abstract nature, and according to Jorge Heine, his rhetoric was not staunchly socialist. He "spoke of the 'masses' rather than the 'working class,' of 'popular revolutionary democracy' rather than of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' of a 'mixed' rather than 'planned' economy," Heine points out.[27] Instead, Bishop turned to people like Bernard Coard, whom he felt had "mastered the intricacies of historical materialism," to deal with the "science" of politics.[28] Coard attended university in London at the same time as Bishop and also was highly influenced by the Black nationalist and liberation movements of the times. According to Heine, "Coard's unquestioned ability as an organizer and his thorough command of Marxist-Leninist lexicon had made him the undisputed number-two man in the party," second only to Bishop.[29] Bishop and Coard worked closely together in those early years, but a factionalism nevertheless emerged among those loyal to Coard and his more staunch Leninist stance, on one hand, and the masses of the people who

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[27] Jorge Heine, *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 222.

[28] Heine, *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 222.

[29] Heine, *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 224.

were loyal to Bishop on the other. This division, it could be said, sowed the seeds for the "self-defeating … fetish of secrecy" within the party, according to Roopnaraine.[30]

Bishop, however, appeared to trust Coard completely in the early years. Against the counsel of his closest confidants and family, he accepted Coard's advice to remove certain high ranking officials of the party and allowed Coard to make other controversial political decisions while functioning as acting prime minister when Bishop was abroad. Eventually, Bishop (temporarily) accepted a plan for joint leadership. However, when Bishop began to vacillate from his agreement to the joint leadership proposal, he was only criticized further for his irresolution and "bourgeois tendencies" and was accused of ignoring the will of the majority. This, on top of objections by General Hudson Austin, commander of the Grenadian Armed Forces, about Bishop's decision to try to forge closer ties with the United States, led eventually to his house arrest on October 13, 1983. When he was released seven days later, it was under Austin's command that soldiers opened fire on a crowd of Bishop supporters. It is unclear whether Bishop was killed in this initial gunfire, or if he was first taken prisoner and killed along with five others at Fort Rupert later on that day. His body was never found.

Leaping

The representation of the events leading up to the fall of the Revolution above repeats the ultimately impossible task rehearsed by many other commentators; that is, it attempts to uncover *just what happened* in Grenada by examining its political structures and the timeline of events leading up to October 13. Merle Collins describes the impossibility of such a task as the true

[30] Roopnaraine, "Resonances of Revolution," *Interventions* 12, no.1 (2010), 11.

trauma of the Revolution. Grappling with that trauma was in many ways the impetus behind her writing. Collins was already an accomplished poet in 1983, when she worked in the PRG Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following the murder of Bishop and the subsequent U.S. invasion of the island, Collins traveled to England where, rather than literature and poetry, she studied political science, earning a doctorate in Caribbean politics. Poetry, she said, felt inaccessible to her at the time. “When I was enthusiastic, the best way to express that enthusiasm was in poetry,” she wrote in an essay reflecting on her writing process. “[After the Revolution] that was gone; my writing turned toward a politics of existence.”[31] She notes in an interview that the spirit of the times were such that without sensational details about specific events and prominent actors, it seemed there was nothing to talk about. But it was between that sensationalism, in the space where living was going on, both among the politically engaged citizenry and those whose lives were politicized regardless of their own engagement with politics, where she found that the inventiveness of anti-imperialist struggle took place in ways that were not always comprehensible at the party level or expressed through traditional channels, such as news outlets.[32]

Her first novel, *Angel* (1987), emerged from her struggle to come to terms with these contradictions. While not autobiography, the novel relies heavily on her memories of growing up in Grenada and her interactions with the people around her, in an effort to “understand, dynamically, how events in Grenada during the neo-colonial and post-independence period could have led to the 1980s and beyond. It focuses on the loves of people not in the headlines,” and

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[31] Merle Collins, “Writing Fiction, Writing Reality,” *Caribbean Women Writers*, eds. M. Condé and T. Lonsdale, (Palgrave McMillan, 1999), 25.

[32] Betty Wilson, “An Interview with Merle Collins,” *Callaloo* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1993), 102.

helped her to realize "more fully how colonialism continues in a world that is often characterized as 'post-colonial.'"[33] The novel follows the life of Angel and her family across generations, each member representing different perspectives on the Revolution that relate to their experiences as (post)colonial, gendered, and raced subjects in different historical periods. Collins goes on to say:

> I wanted to write something, not any grand political treatise, but a story about everyday lives, about expressions of revolutionary ideas which are hardly ever voiced on political platforms or in an international forum, about expressions of neocolonial ideas which were perfectly understandable when one traced how naturally they were born from the experience of colonialism.[34]

Angel, then, attempts to understand revolutionary positionality through categories of class, race, gender, and age rather than political affiliation. By taking a multi-perspectival approach to the long lead up to the Revolution and the Revolutionary period itself, the novel avoids singular party politics that led, in many ways, to the internal conflicts within the PRG and the Revolution's ultimate demise. At the same time, through the novel, Collins grapples with her *own* internal conflicts, her own inability to reconcile her revolutionary ideology with the contradictory actuality of living revolution. *Angel*, Jacqueline Bishop notes during an interview with Collins, breaks down as it nears the end of the revolutionary period in the novel's timeline,

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[33] Collins, "Writing Fiction, Writing Reality," *Caribbean Women Writers*, eds. M. Condé and T. Lonsdale, (Palgrave McMillan, 1999), 25.

[34] Collins, "Writing Fiction, Writing Reality," *Caribbean Women Writers*, eds. M. Condé and T. Lonsdale, (Palgrave McMillan, 1999), 26.

becoming unresolved, as does her second novel, *The Colour of Forgetting* (1995), and a second edition of *Angel* published in 2011 in which Collins significantly reworks the second half of the novel. Collins agrees, stressing that there is a kind of incoherence surrounding the invasion itself, and following the PRG's collapse, an incoherence that haunts her in her own thoughts and work on the period.[35] Rather than a breakdown in form or narrative, however, I argue that the incoherence of the novels express a certain political incomprehensibility that the Revolution's collapse itself put into relief. The novels, in other words, illustrate a moment in which the contradictory needs of "a people" reflect their complexity, and thereby challenge the assumption of a unified Caribbean consciousness — itself a reductive assumption that reflects the colonial construction of colonized and enslaved peoples as less complex, less fully developed Others to the European universal, even within the ideology of the national liberation movement. As the novels illustrate, this internal coloniality, generated through the combination of the colonial encounter with chattel slavery, is compounded by global neoimperialism within which Grenada, as a primarily Black nation-state, is constructed as an illegitimate power. *The Colour of Forgetting* itself is constructed around conflicting needs of the formerly colonized and formerly enslaved. Like *Angel*, the narrative is based around the unfolding of a family's history and its relationship to land and community in the lead up to and aftermath of the Revolution. Each family member has conflicting needs that are based in histories of dispossession and forced migration, leading to disputes that the novel's narrator calls "land confusion." While some of these disputes turn bloody, others result in emotional strain between family members who love one another, but can not understand each other's political positions. The central character

[35] Jacqueline Bishop and Dolace Nicole McLean, "Working out Grenada: An Interview with Merle Collins," *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005), 56-59.

"Thunder," for example, sits forlornly with his father as they both stare out to sea. Thunder, a Party member, can not help but judge his father's desire to own land as a reactionary, petty-bourgeois response to the Revolution. His father, on the other hand, knows more intimately his family's history as not only propertyless, but as considered property themselves. The allegorical purpose of the argument is made clear when the novel's most liminal figure, Carib, cries out "Nation shall rise against Nation … Nation shall divide itself, and family against family. But bear up. It happen before. It always been happening."[36]

The ways in which Collins' novel layers personal and political histories and refuses them any resolution emphasizes the complexity of resistant activity, and pushes against the codes of "comprehensibility" that tend to structure assumptions about the workings of politics and revolution. *The Colour of Forgetting*, in particular, sets a scene in which the logics of linearity, transcendence, and reason are not privileged over circularity, immanence, and affectability. This is not, of course, to say that incomprehension in the novel itself is "real" invention, in the Fanonian sense, or that the now familiar postmodern style of open-endedness is revolutionary. Rather, Collins' continual return to the moment of incomprehensibility in her writing, and her refusal to construct a false comprehensibility within a context that begs for resolve, signals the possibility of a type of anti-historical reconfiguring that remains open to invention, or to

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[36] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 159.

"depetrification" of cultural life.[37] Here, the inventive space of memory takes the place of tidy historical narratives and political treatises, and draws from emotive, affective, and bodily encounters between figures whose abjection from grand historical narratives is what defines those narrative's very parameters.

The temporal fluidity of *The Colour of Forgetting*, most often seen through what might be thought of as the non-prophetizing of four generations of "seers," all named Carib, emphasizes the decolonizing gestures of inventive memory. The novel opens with the fourth (and last) of a line of women named Carib standing on Leaper's Hill, in the middle of the cemetery that occupies the space. "Blood in the north, blood to come in the south, and the blue crying red in between," she calls out in a refrain so familiar to the people of Paz (the fictional name Collins gives to the island) that for the most part, they have stopped hearing the words. "Look at them, Running and jumping. Jumping and screaming. You hear the voices coming up from the bush? Forgotten and consoled. Forgotten and drowned. And the blue crying red in between."[38] This call, mimicking that of her grandmother and great-grandmother before her, is thought vaguely by the townspeople to be a communion with the Amerindian Caribs of the past, when they bothered paying attention to Carib's words at all. The novel's omniscient narrator notes that "Caribs shouts of 'forgotten and drowned' was in the circumstances perfectly understandable," given the

[37] Marriott, "No Lords A-Leaping: Fanon, C.L.R. James, and the Politics of Invention," *Humanities* 3 (2014): 522. Marriott describes Fanon's view of revolution as a moment of invention "in which depetrification allows (reinvents) the discharge of an entirely new expenditure of muscular tensions which also allows new relations of love and pleasure, and new forms of aesthetic culture (music, poetry, and dance) to appear." While the novel's narrative incomprehensibility might not in itself generate "depetrification" in a collective sense, it does signal the possibility for such "discharge" by opening space for re-thinking the ways in which history is traditionally written and the values historiography traditionally upholds.

[38] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 3.

spot from which Carib often cried her lament. “Less understandable was Carib’s comment about ‘forgotten and consoled … But she may have been thinking of her own lonesome shout to her spirit friends as a consolation of sorts. Or it may even have been a forlorn plea for that needed consolation.”[39] Those forlorn friends, the narrator explains, are, after all, said to be Carib’s ancestors. This understanding of Carib’s lineage writes indigenous Caribs back into the present, and tells the story of the leap not as a moment of extinction, but rather as a continuous act of resistance, even if a forgotten one.

As the novel develops, the assumption that Carib’s cry is one of spiritual communion becomes less certain, something old people had long noted. Rather than communion with the past, they would say, Carib has the gift of prophecy. “[W]as Carib great-grandmother they say that used to act as a warning when things get too hot. Don’t watch Carib simple and all.”[40] By the novel’s end, however, Carib’s cry can be understood neither as communing nor prophesizing, but rather as something that refuses the marker of time altogether — it is a confused and an unending vision of the violent past and future playing out in the present. The red blood flowing between the sea and the sky is not only that of the native Caribs (though it is), nor is it only that of those who were wounded and killed during the Revolution’s collapse (though it is theirs, too), nor is that of past and future generations injured and exploited through coloniality, slavery and their afterlives, though it surely is theirs as well. It is the red blood of all of them, together, as a marker of a continuum of struggle among a people whose destinies are, within the seemingly limitless colonial paradigm, enchained and yet never fully encapsulated. Ten years after the

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[39] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 5.

[40] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 9.

collapse of the revolution, Carib cries, "It happened already. It not happening again … But is the children to know and to stop it." Quickly she adds, "The blue still taking … The blue still waiting. … It happening all the time. The blue still waiting."[41] She continues in this manner, standing in the hull of a boat that is heading toward the harbor, just under the cliff that marks Carib's Leap. It is going to be alright, she says over and over again. "Is the young people to stop the blue from crying red in between."[42]

Had Collins ended the novel simply with these words, perhaps Carib's voice could be read as hopeful prophesy or as teleological. However, the context of this final speech highlights the temporal expansiveness of her visions. While Carib cries these words, passengers are suddenly and violently ill as the boat lurches in reaction to an unexpected surge, courtesy of the spirit of the volcano Kick-em-Ginny that lies sleeping under the sea, it is said. A baby chokes on its own vomit and dies. A storm races in. Carib mutters quietly to herself about the blue, and the red, and the crying in-between. The novel, refuses resolution, either by consoling the spirits who haunt the present or by offering a narrative of futurity through the children — the children in this scene die or do not exist. Rather than repeat the Revolutionary slogan "Forward ever, backward never," the time of revolution in the novel is expansive time, existing with all other moments, past, present, and future, and encompassing the plurality of difference such expansiveness suggests.

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[41] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 213.

[42] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (Virago Press, 1995), 213.

Waiting

Like the expansive time in *The Colour of Forgetting*, Steve McQueen's video installation *Carib's Leap* expresses time as layered and circular, with the past seeming to inject itself into the present as daily activities slowly, patiently unfold on one of the installation's two screens. The two screens are situated such that they face each other, and their images play on a loop: The pale, almost white sky, punctuated by the occasional figure of a falling body repeats on the larger screen every 28 minutes and 53 seconds, while on the smaller screen, scenes depicting everyday contemporary life on the shore loops every 24 minutes and 12 seconds.

Beginning at dawn, the scenes of everyday life linger over the events of the morning. A rowboat moves across the frame, people mill about on shore, fishermen dump out the morning's catch. A child plays with a kite, a dog sleeps. Meanwhile, the figures float through the sky intermittently on the other screen, never shown leaping, never shown landing. Originally, the images were shown on a single screen, T.J. Demos notes. By splitting the images in later installations, he says:

> an interval is spatialized within the gallery, producing a gap inhabited by the viewer. The result is that the relation between the actual and the imaginary, between the facticity of each image and the possible connection between them, is rendered indeterminate, contingent upon its realization by the viewer.[43]

[43] T. J. Demos, "The Art of Darkness: On Steve McQueen," *October* 114 (Autumn, 2005): 81.

Spectator/participants, in other words, suture the images together through their consumption of one screen, then the other, and then back again. Viewers must draw from their own knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of the history of the harbor — to the leap of Caribs past — to make any historical connection between the two scenes. And while the location of the scene directs viewers toward the historical connection, the scenes of falling are edited in such a way as to leave open multiple signifying possibilities. The falling bodies have no discernible identity markers, for example. It is not clear whether they are male or female, dressed or nude, racially marked or unmarked. Nor is there any indication from where the bodies have leapt, nor when or to where they will fall: The landing is forever deferred by the unsynchronized loops of the videos. Each time the video of falling bodies repeats on one screen, it syncopates in a new space-time with the scenes of everyday life on the ground on the other screen. In this repetition-with-difference, the leap denies stable meaning through its always-shifting context, lending an uncanny sense of a happening that is still happening even as it happens again and again. Not unlike Carib's repeated vision of the blue and the red and the crying in-between, the events herald neither a future nor conclude a past, but rather insist on dwelling within an unpredictable present. The effect is to dramatize the empty space-time of abjection, or the nothingness into which abject bodies are flung.

David Marriott, in an essay titled "Waiting to Fall," argues in his reading of the first screen that such an effect renders the historical references of the videos indeterminate. Its repetition, he says:

> that neither takes us forward nor back: at the very moment that the figures appear and then disappear from the screen, too soon or too late, these are events where nothing happens, until it happens again, and then nothing happens; in fact, these falls inaugurate nothing but waiting, a sort of nonevent, an event of nothing which both calls for and annuls repetition. Dying without event, pure dying where nothing happens, as we wait for that dying to not happen again, the all-but-dying without meaning or possibility or interval.[44]

The indeterminacy of the bodies' origins or ends "dictates the delay — of landing which would allow burial and mourning to commence," Marriott goes on to argue.[45] For Marriott, the fall is pure event, a forever-deferral of the historical leap and landing to which it ostensibly refers. The falls are unending, he says, and "precisely because they fall into nothing it is impossible to read this nothing and its inconclusive greyish-white mist as anything else: neither loss nor negation, neither virtual or actual. The figures keep on falling, but this is a repetition that *neither takes us forward nor back*" (emphasis mine).[46] The black silhouettes against the white misty sky, in other words, eerily signify the nothingness to which Black bodies are grafted, their origins unknown and their burial deferred, marking a time and space outside of history. Rather than a threatening repetition of the colonial construction of Black bodies as without history and Black geography as primordial — what Orlando Patterson describes as social death — the falling figures offer

[44] Marriott, "Waiting to Fall," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2013), 214.

[45] Marriott, "Waiting to Fall," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2013), 215.

[46] Marriott, "Waiting to Fall," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2013), 214.

another perspective, one in which the non-event of the life and death of the figures inaugurate a thinking about time and space as expansive, "perpetually suspended in nonarrival."[47] The space of nonarrival images bodies "released from the grip of certainty," as Ferreira da Silva has described the space of virtuality, turning the absolute negation of Black bodies into an image of freedom within which "the imagination may wonder about reassembling the fundamental components of everything to refigure the World as a complex whole without order."[48]

However, while Marriott describes the figures as placed "against a background that is precisely *not* the world, adrift in gray white mists," the piece as a whole is unmistakable and purposefully "worlded": The figures' indeterminacy are grounded in the earthly presence of everyday events taking place on the second screen, repeatedly and differently aligned with the always-falling bodies. The geographic location as historical referent is emphasized through the instillation's title, *Carib's Leap,* with the distant past (of the Caribs) and the recent past (of the subjects on the beach) sutured to the spectatorial present through the viewer standing between the two screens. The deferral of landing and burial — the waiting without end — that Marriott draws attention to recalls not only the Caribs lost to the sea, but also those lost to the fall of the Grenadian Revolution, including Maurice Bishop, whose body was never recovered. As the images on the second screen scroll through, heading toward dusk, the camera pans to a funeral parlor. Empty and occupied coffins are visible to passersby, indexing the ritual of passage, the closure, that Bishop was denied. The revolutionary world of plenum, then, where the imagination

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[47] Marriott, "Waiting to Fall," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2013), 215.

[48] Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference Without Separability," catalogue of the 32a São Paulo Art Biennial, *Incerteza viva* (*Living Uncertainty*), 58.

can wonder about reordering the world, remains a space hovering alongside that of everyday living, the practical world in which Black bodies labor to survive.

As Fisher notes, early in the video on the second screen, the camera pans over plumes of smoke coming from the burning hull of a beached boat. Close-ups concentrate on the red of the fire and the black of pieces of charred wood and palm fronds. The video returns to the boat later as shadows of the day grow longer, with onlookers observing its smoldering remains. With these images appearing next to those of falling bodies, the past seems to "crowd one's thoughts: marooned, maroon, rebellions, plantations ablaze, desire for liberty kindled but now burned out," Fisher says.[49] The installation's repeated references to historic and contemporary death in the midst of an all-Black scene (as Fisher points out, there are no white tourists on this beach), manifests the totality of the labor of survival.

With the repeated, endless loop of the images of survival on land, however, images of creative living also crowd the screen. One man, for example, resolutely splits coconuts from which he fashions little sailboats for no apparent end other than to simply watch them float away. Even if — or perhaps because — its meaning is ultimately indeterminate, the repetition of art and action performed by this Black body outside the flow of global capital (again, no white tourists are here to offer cash in exchange for the boats), implies a mode of self-invention and resistance that is not determined by preconceived conceptions of subjectivity or revolutionary praxis. The resistance, instead, lies in this person's capacity for being without determinant purpose (for capital), even as bodies fall and boats burn — a moment in which the world as it is, is nevertheless imaged as a space in which creativity wonders about and reconfigures it.

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[49] Jean Fisher and Steve McQueen, *Caribs' Leap/Western Deep* (Artangle, 1999), 119.

Falling

Through Elizete and Verlia's narratives, *In Another Place Not Here* chronicles the possibilities of imaginatively reconfiguring the world through affective community building by way of queer romance, on one hand, and "movement" building and party politics, on the other. The novel unfolds as an extended meditation on the ways in which Elizete and Verlia's romance is entwined with socio-historical conditions that structure their queer relationship as outside Caribbean nationalist discourses, despite their deep imbrication in nationalist revolutionary activity. As noted, it opens from the perspective of Elizete, a sugarcane laborer who comes from "Nowhere" — the name bestowed upon the land by the great-grandmother of Adela, the woman to whom Elizete was "given" as a child, before she was then given to a man, Isaiah, who uses her body for sex and labor. Encapsulating her life situation in just a few lines, Elizete notes that she never wanted anything "big" from the world. "I born to clean Isaiah' house and work cane since I was a child and say what you want Isaiah feed me and all I have to do is lay down under him in the night and work cane in the day."[50] What makes her turn from this life, she will never know. "Bad spirit they say, bad spirit or blessed, it come, what make me notice Verlia's face spraying sweat in the four o'clock heat."[51] In Verlia, she finds belonging, a place in which she feels herself somewhere, rather than the "Nowhere" that is her inheritance.

Verlia, who came from a middle-class family and immigrated to Canada when she was 17, pushes Elizete to confront the historical conditions of her existence, to see the scars on her

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[50] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 4.

[51] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 4.

back and her legs, beaten into her by Isaiah and pressed into her by the blades of the sugarcane, as a history written on her body of imperialism, colonialism, and the legacy of slavery, rather than merely the inevitability of life on the island. Early in the novel, it is clear that each of the women approach the relationship according to differing needs: For Elizete, Verlia's love, her "grace," fills the nowhere spaces of the life that preceded their meeting, a life marked by emotional exclusions structured by colonial, gendered systems of servitude. Their relationship represents for her the possibility of something radically different. Verlia, on the other hand, fearing the repetition of objecthood, refuses to be Elizete's object of fulfillment. She instead redirects Elizete's energy toward the revolution to which she has dedicated her own life. For Verlia, then, Elizete's "avenging grace" represents parts of the revolutionary movement that, as a metropolitan diasporic subject, she feels alienated from. In an interior monologue, Verlia thinks:

> She needed a woman so earthbound that she would rename every plant she came upon. She needed someone who believed that the world could be made over as simply as that, as simply as deciding to do it, but more, not just knowing that it had to be done but needing it to be done and simply doing it.[52]

Romanticizing Elizete's (post)colonial subject position — she is so "earthbound" because she is geographically and onto-temporally closer to the colonial, in Verlia's mind — brings back to Verlia the sense of boundless possibility with which the movement had filled her when she first immigrated to Canada and encountered, with the movement, the words of Fanon, Che, the Last

[52] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 202.

Poets. She is, her interior monologue says, "weak with the beauty of [their] words. They wash every moment of fear away."[53] Through them:

> She knew that is was possible to leap, it had to be, out of the compulsion of things as they are or things as you might have met them. She knew that there had to be a way out that wasn't succumbing to apparitions or accepting one's fate. She wants to be awake.[54]

Her return to Grenada and her encounter with Elizete brought some of this romantic vision of possibility back to her after years of languishing in a movement that she felt was shrinking in Canada. Immersed in Black national liberation discourses, the worker, the peasant, "the people" that Elizete represented was, for her, surely a way out.

Unlike Elizete, then, Verlia longs for something "big," something that would separate her from the petrification of the "earth-bound stillness" of the legacy of grief, held "like mouthfuls of cool water" that the Caribbean had come to represent for her.[55] But like Elizete, she, too, recognizes that she must steal that bigness, like thieving sugar, if she is to have it at all. During her first Black Power march in Canada, she feels joy bubbling in her chest, "the crowd around her like sugar … sugar down her back … she wants to cry and all of her feels like melting into it, sugar."[56] After thirteen years of struggling for Black liberation, however, Verlia begins to feel a

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[53] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 157-158.

[54] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 159.

[55] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 123.

[56] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 167.

"stringiness" overtake her mind.[57] The Black Power cell that had held her together in its bigness had dwindled, "so many people lost to tiredness" and to "argument and blame for small, small failures."[58] She lived with a woman, Abena, who busied herself with "small things" — the everyday needs of people, women especially, who arrived in Canada in desperation. "Small things, Abena said, small things are the only things you can do sometimes," Verlia recalls. "It rankled and besides it wasn't true, but because she was tired, and sometimes so frightened, she'd fallen into it."[59] Such work, for Verlia, represents confinement to the world as it is, a giving-in to those structures that define her through anti-Blackness and coloniality, rather than a leaping from them. Domestic love, rather than revolutionary love, in other words, is akin to the closing in of a "small place getting smaller:"

> Nothing more hopeless than a house where some accustomed play-acting had to be done and repeated in every house across cities, forests, ice-caps, continents. Dull languages on tongues too lazy to say no and this is not how I'll live, tied to a single human being. I'll abandon air and light if I do; I'll not step out of this universe of duty then. No, she wasn't flesh like that, nothing as hopeless yet.[60]

To cling to a "single human being," the fleshiness of existence, for Verlia, is to let struggle give way to bare acceptance of the structures that keep her body in perpetual servitude. Reminiscent

[57] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 192.

[58] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 192.

[59] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 192.

[60] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 97-98.

of Hortense Spillers' groundbreaking work on gender, slavery, and Black sociality in which the "flesh" of the slave is theorized as the total objectification of the captive community, flesh for Verlia signifies objecthood and thingliness.[61] Rather than the hopelessness of the flesh, she seeks through the "universe of duty," the universe of revolution, a sense of movement, a sense of the possibility of creating another place that is, quite simply, *not this, not here*.

Elizete's drive to create an alternative world through the comfort of her lover functions in many ways as counterpoint to Verlia's drive to create a world in which that comfort is not necessary, with both reflecting differing experiences of the colonial condition. For Verlia, the need for comfort of the flesh serves as a reminder of the limits of singular personhood. For Elizete, on the other hand, comfort of the flesh makes more of the body than flesh; it is the sensation of being, the actualization of agency, and the possibility for something beyond the violent earthly laborious existence that had heretofore structured her world.

Critics often point to the background of revolution and queer love within the novel as a gesture toward a politics of hope. John Corr, for example, notes that Brand's exploration of the continuum between different kinds of "sense" (discursive sense as well as bodily sensation) emphasizes the body's "capacity to experience and influence the world" and to

> show how the potential for massive social change can be catalyzed at the minutest levels of the flesh. [Brand's] writing insists that the body is not merely a passive

[61] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64-81.

site upon which history is inscribed or across which signifying acts play out, but is a living source of hope for an anti-racist, anti-capitalist politics.[62]

Each characters' articulation of a politics of the flesh, in other words, gestures toward alternative sociality and toward the body as an active site in which history is constantly rewritten, rather than inscribed, thereby destabilizing its constitutive codes. However, despite Corr's assurance that the body does not act here as a passive site of history, the noun "hope" nevertheless implies a certain passivity: An awaiting for something to happen, for a world-changing moment that is always deferred to a future to come. Hope, for Verlia, is metaphorized through her critiques of the domestic space, which, even when expressed through queer love, signifies for her the confines of prescribed normative values, the "accustomed play-acting [that] had to be done and repeated."[63] This refusal of a differed future — the refusal of hope — suggests ways of thinking very personal forms of radical resistance that might not fall into easily definable categories of revolutionary futurity.

Like the leap taken by the Carib's in 1651, which broke with the logic of survival that maintained a certain continuity of colonial domination, Verlia resists U.S. imperial domination when her refusal of a politics of hope culminates in her death leap from the cliffs of Grenada. Constructed, from Verlia's perspective, as a moment of ecstatic flight away from the world as it is, her interior monologue at the moment of her death, which concludes the novel, reads:

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[62] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 113.

[63] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 98.

> She's leaping. She's tasting her own tears and she is weightless and deadly. She feels nothing except the bubble of a laugh each time she breathes. Her body is cool, cool in the air. Her body has fallen away, is just a line, an electric current, the sign of lightning left after lightening, a faultless arc to the deep turquoise deep. She doesn't need air. She is in some other place already, less torturous, less fleshy.[64]

By Verlia's logic, these last lines can not be read as tragedy. Rather, they must be read as a disruption of the layers of immediate and historical trauma that condition her life. Verlia, then, does not represent hope, but rather radical resistance in the now — even if that now is contained by a foreclosure of the future.

Verlia's leap recalls certain philosophical tendencies of the Black Power Movement, most particularly Huey P. Newton's theorizing of "revolutionary suicide" not as an act, but rather as something akin to an ontology, a way of being in the world — in this case, one that values human dignity such that to exist without it is impossible.[65] Not unlike the counterintuitive power of infanticide in *Beloved,* suicide again signifies the radical declaration of *not this*. In this sense, suicide as an act is the result of a political demand rather than a capitulation to despair. In other words, suicide (or infanticide) is presented as the falling away of the fleshly body toward collectively carrying on in dignity. Revolutionary suicide, by this view, is the most decisive of acts of self-love and self-invention — a counterintuitive power, to borrow from Scott. According

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[64] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 247.

[65] Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1973), 5.

to Newton, "the revolutionary suicide chooses life; he is, in the words of Nietzsche, 'an arrow of longing for another shore."[66]

Former Black Panther Chairwoman Elaine Brown, on the other hand, stresses the need for physical, bodily survival in order to perform the work of the Movement. Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight Los Angles* reproduces an interview with Brown, in which she states:

> My theme is
>
> that love of your people.
>
> Then you gonna have to realize that
>
> this may have to be a lifetime commitment
>
> and that the longer you live,
>
> the more you can do.[67]

The novel presents Elizete and Verlia as occupying each of these different poles. While both characters express revolutionary or alternative worlds as becoming actualized in the now, they also illuminate the problematics of thinking, on one hand, interpersonal relationships, and on the other, radical acts, as singular to revolutionary praxis. Verlia's death leap is ultimately experienced by Elizete as a fall — she struggles within a world that had been made new to her, an alternative world to those worlds of Isaiah and Adela, that is now devoid of the object that had

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[66] Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1973), 332.

[67] Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight Los Angeles (1992): A Search for American Character* (First Anchor Books, 1994), 230.

opened to her a "way of leaping into another life."[68] For Verlia, the leap is a defining moment that represents the survival of dignity (made collective not only through its revolutionary impetus, but also through its historical reference to the collective jump of the Carib people). For both, however, it is ultimately but a moment, one that passes quickly as life and struggles on the ground continue. The non-linearity of the narrative, which structures Verlia's leap as already having happened in the first half of the novel, and as about to happen in the second half, imparts a sense of time that understands the leap as existing in all other moments, not unlike the sense of layered time in *The Colour of Forgetting* and *Carib's Leap*. By foregrounding Elizete's grief, however, Verlia's euphoric leaping carries a certain weight. Radical self-invention, as Fanon points out, is necessarily violent, and violence takes its toll. Without passing judgement, the novel de-romanticizes the revolutionary vision, expressing it as encompassing both joy and mourning, both leaping and falling at once.

Flying

In each of the works, then, the moment of the leap — into incomprehension, into nothingness, into the arms of a woman — might be thought of as a metaphor for temporal and spatial expansiveness that reconfigure the ways in which the world can be imagined. The repeated call of each of the Carib's that the blue is forever crying red in-between gestures toward the inconceivable, the incomprehensible, the terrible suspicion that inherited suffering continually repeats itself even as the world carries on. The looping of McQueen's videos, too, suggests the everydayness of historical suffering while life and death continue unceasingly, even while bodies

[68] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 113.

fall through the sky. And the multiple narrativizing of Verlia's leap points to a grief that repeats and follows the colonial encounter well into its afterlife. An yet, each text also represents the "two faces of Blackness" that Ferreira da Silva theorizes: The face of slavery, objecthood, and nothingness that accompanies this deep, repetitious grief, but also the face of creativity and the unique capacity to think the world anew from a space of abjection, outside the confines and constraints of the presumed universal.[69] The myth of the flying African, the slave who soars free of chains across the sea and back to Africa, permeates African diasporic narratives. The leaps toward self-invention evoked in these narratives are reminiscent of these tales, where the racial spatio-temporality of coloniality is rejected, and the mythology of the body's ability to live on, to fly across multiple space-times, freed from its fleshly suffering, prevails. Collins, McQueen, and Brand, then, suggest revolutionary praxes that undo colonial/modern relations of time and space by emphasizing the creative capacity for self-invention that abjection produces: Birds soar high over red, red rocks. A man watches resolutely as his paper boats float out to sea. Verlia is ecstatic, floating, flying, laughing.

[69] Ferriera da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 85.

CHAPTER FIVE

Diasporic Communion and Intertextual Exchange in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and Julie Dash's *Daughters if the Dust*

A little more than halfway through Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Eli Peazant (Adisa Anderson) kneels in wet yellow leaves in his ancestor's graveyard, his face pressed to the earth, grieving. He weeps not for the dead in the graveyard but for the unborn child that grows in his wife's belly, the possible result of her rape by a white man. Nearby, a larger-than-life wooden statue of an Igbo figure floats in the brackish water, covered slightly by moss, hanging from it like green-black tulle. The figurehead, broken off from a slave ship, appears to be as much a part of the landscape as the water and the foliage that surrounds it. An iron collar is clasped around its neck.

Twenty-five years after *Daughters of the Dust* was first released, the figurehead reappears. Beached on the mainland of a Louisiana shore, it is embodied. Beyoncé Knowles lies still in the shoreline, her arms spread wide, shrouded in black tulle and seaweed, her face stony, a replica of the Igbo statue. "Baptize me," she says, whispering the poetry that is weaved throughout the visuals that accompany the album *Lemonade* (2016), "now that reconciliation is possible. If we're going to heal, let it be glorious."

This movement of the Igbo statue from *Daughters* to *Lemonade* marks a moment of chronotopic disruption; a moment in which space and time do not meet at a stable point, but rather dip in and out of contact, rippling like water dispersed by an unruly breeze. As the ocean foam gently laps against Beyoncé's still fingers, the story of the Igbo that was first told by

someone, somewhere, more than two centuries ago, continues, bearing the trace of its history even as it becomes something new in Beyoncé's performance. Its retelling in the time-space of *Lemonade*, like its retelling in *Daughters*, and in Carrie Mae Weems "Untitled (Ebo Landing)", and in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for a Widow* before that, and in countless other texts even before that, signifies the absorption and transformation of a text without origin. The story's meaning is deepened through citation, both anonymous and identifiable, such as in the almost verbatim retelling of Marshall's version of the story in *Daughters*, when Eula Peazant (Alva Rogers) speaks of the Africans who took one look at the land that would come to be known as the Americas, turned around and walked back across the sea to Africa.

In what follows, I argue that texts such as *Lemonade* and *Daughters* function as transhistorical and transgeographic sites and performances of what I am calling *diasporic communion*. Diasporic communion might be thought broadly as a process of transmission of stories, histories, and cultural codes via inter- and extratextual exchange that generates intimate relationships across time and space among diasporic subjects, even if those relationships are only imagined. Rather than an imagined *community*, as Benedict Anderson theorizes it, however, the relationships that emerge through diasporic communion do not require any physical or virtual trace of connection and are not toward nationalism. Rather, they are based on affects produced through contact with textual objects that are loosened from national space through their play with form (non-linear narrative, for example) and/or diasporic subject matter. While Anderson's imagined community, then, implies a certain degree of assumed proximity — it is imagined, he says, as an "inherently limited and sovereign" space within national borders[1] — diasporic

[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983, 2006), 5.

communion, as I develop it here, is immanent and autonomous; that is, it is itself unmoored, reflecting the texts' preoccupations with movement, origin, and (un)rootedness.[2]

Much like in the oral tradition, the intertextuality of diasporic communion privileges a communal and immanent form of textual production, rather than an individual, transcendent one. At the narrative level, diasporic communion emerges through deliberate intertextual references to previous works, as well as through less deliberate absorption of cultural texts into the narrative, something akin to what Julia Kristeva calls the "absorption" of previous texts into the fabric of the text at hand,[3] or what Roland Barthes describes as the "anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet already read" aspect of a text.[4] At the extratextual level, diasporic communion emerges through exchanges and reproductions of texts in everyday conversation, digital platforms and blogs, entertainment and academic journals, etc., as well as through reference to extratextual details related to a text, such as an author's or actor's personal biography.

Inter- and extratextual exchange clearly is not limited to African diasporic texts — Mikhail Bakhtin and Kristeva, who are credited as early theorizers of intertextuality, both analyze it by way of Russian and Western European modern novels, for example. Nor does the existence of this type of exchange necessarily mark what I am calling communion. Rather, I argue that diasporic communion emerges through intertextual and extratextual exchange specifically among African diasporic texts and among African diasporic subjects by developing chains of referentiality that link texts and subjects that have otherwise been scattered through

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[2] See Chapter 2, note 9 for a discussion of my use of the term "unrooted."

[3] Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialog and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader,* ed. Toril Moi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

[4] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *The Rustle of Language*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 60.

histories of violent dislocation and unrooting — what Orlando Patterson has described as natal alienation.[5] The texts, in other words, invite or encourage spectators or readers to link their own diasporic experiences to the texts, which both cultivates discursive relationships and participates in the creation of living Black archives that are otherwise historically marked by absence. By attending to the absences of the past, such an archive participates in what Saidiya Harman describes as "the incomplete project of freedom," or telling a history of the present in which the now is always interrupted by the past, and an imagined free state is always the status not of a time before captivity but rather an anticipated future to come.[6] This is not a project aiming to recover an unrecoverable past; rather it is "a narrative of what might have been or could have been … [it is] the impossibility that conditions … knowledge of the past and animates … desire for a liberate future."[7] By naming part of this process "diasporic communion," I hope to theorize one standpoint from which to interrogate the emotional, political, and artistic labor of such a freedom project.

I characterize the convergence of discursive relationships and archive making through texts as *communion* to stress its affective dimension. Black women, especially, have described the affect that is mobilized through contact with these types of diasporic texts (even when they are critical of them) as akin to something spiritual, or as producing emotionally-charged senses of connection and recognition among those who have experienced the transgenerational trauma

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[5] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7. Patterson writes: "I prefer the term 'natal alienation,' because it goes directly to the heart of what is critical in the slave's forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations. It also has the important nuance of a loss of native status, of deracination."

[6] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 4.

[7] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 13.

of disrupted kinship, as well as the more recent traumas of post-Jim Crow carceral society, anti-Black state-sanctioned violence, neo-imperialist exploitation, and forced or semi-forced migration within and throughout the Americas (resulting from, for example, war, environmental disaster, economic pressure, redlining, imminent domain, gentrification, etc.),[8] and have come into consciousness in a world in which Blackness is constructed as absence: absence of history, absence of white markers of beauty, absence of the capacities that characterize modern man. Diasporic texts draw counter-narratives to these dominant discourses, inviting spectators to envision the fullness of Black social, historical and political life.

To claim *Lemonade* as part of a project toward a liberated future might seem like a bit hyperbolic. The album is, after all, a product of the capitalist *tour de force* that is Beyoncé and the "BeyHive." The intimate, confessional nature in which Beyoncé laments the infidelity of a cheating husband, for example, can easily be read as an exploitative and carefully controlled marketing technique. As Alicia Wallace points out in a special "Close-up" section on Beyoncé in the Fall 2017 issue of *Black Camera*:

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[8] In Elle Magazine's "A Call and Response with Melissa Harris-Perry: The Pain and the Power of '*Lemonade*,'" for example, L. Joy Williams, president of the Brooklyn chapter of the NAACP, for example, says that after watching *Lemonade*, she thought "'Anybody else just wanna run in these streets and break everyone's chains?' When it was all over I sat on my couch and '...only church folk will understand this. You know that high you feel after the spirit moved? That's me right now, just rockin' on my couch." In the same article, Mychal Denzel Smith, author of *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching*, says, "What I see in Lemonade is Beyoncé collapsing the notions of separate humanities for black womanhood. This visual album is Beyoncé telling us that she doesn't see a distinction between the sexual, political, spiritual, and artistic selves." And Treva B. Lindsey, Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Ohio State University, notes, "Beyoncé is centering the South and also connecting this to the Black global South. She is unapologetic in her Blackness, her woman-ness, and her Southerness. *Lemonade* is an archive of Black womanhood/girlhood honed in the South. … The project asserts a complex, variegated, and infinitely generative space of Black kinship, creativity, resistance, and freedom dreams."

> People struggle to limn the distinction between the person and the brand, and this confusion may be her greatest success as it feeds intrigue and enthusiasm. … The magic is in the invisibility of the line between performer and person. We do not know where one ends and the other begins, or if they are one and the same. …Does [Beyoncé] endure the same struggles as many of her fans, or is she only using them to forge a deeper bond?[9]

Wallace, along with bell hooks, Mako Fitts Ward, and others, conclude that the album problematically reproduces capitalist ideology, commodifies Black struggle, and displays symptoms of colorist racial politics, all while exploiting the sense of intimacy that the album garners among her fans, ultimately undermining its feminist liberatory potential. In the same "Close up," Ward notes:

> [Beyoncé's] performance is rooted in the glamour of radicalism, not its actual implementation. While there is deep cultural longing for what she represents to thrive amidst a mediascape that historically has demonized Black women, Beyoncé's fetishized Black feminist radicalism has transformed the politics of social movements into a set of commodities that ultimately sustain her personal empire.[10]

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[9] Alicia Wallace, "A Critical View of Beyonce's "'Formation,'" *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 190. doi: 10.2979/blackcamera.9.1.12.

[10] Mako Fitts Ward, "Queen Bey and the New Niggerati: Ethics of Individualism in the Appropriation of Black Radicalism." *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 148. doi:10.2979/blackcamera.9.1.09.

For Wallace, "It is unfortunate that people are so starved for relatable and aspirational content that they are prepared to buy in, literally, to capitalist brands of social justice."[11]

Lemonade certainly is, ultimately, but a commodity — and one that exploits images of radical Black feminism for capital gain at that. However, to read it outside the question of Beyoncé's *personal* commitment to radical politics and instead in terms of its dialogue with a constellation of texts that foreground Black women's interiority, heterogeneity, strength and vulnerability, draws attention to a project in which Blackness signifies possibilities of narratives that are *other than* the master narratives Western epistemology and its teleology of the commodity. hooks, even in her critique, notes that "the construction of a powerfully symbolic black female sisterhood that resists invisibility, that refuses to be silent ... in and of itself is no small feat—it shifts the gaze of white mainstream culture. It challenges us all to look anew, to radically revision how we see the black female body."[12] The symbolic construction of Black female sisterhood in *Lemonade* is made all the more prescient by the discursive relationships that emerge around the text as a site of diasporic communion. Countless popular and scholarly articles, blogs, and exchanges (including discussion panels and screenings) followed the release of *Lemonade*. As Samantha Sheppard says in a screening and discussion held at Cornell University in 2016, *Lemonade* is "the visual album that launched what seemed like a thousand

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[11] Alicia Wallace, "A Critical View of Beyonce's "'Formation,'" *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 195. doi: 10.2979/blackcamera.9.1.12.

[12] bell hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain," bell hooks Institute, May 9, 2016, accessed July 13, 2018. http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain.

think pieces, a syllabus, and a boycott that no one participated in, as well as a search for who was that Becky with the good hair."[13]

The cult of the BeyHive that emerged within the digital world of Beyoncé fandom over the course of the past two decades took to new heights when the visual album dropped in February 2016, just after her controversial performance of "Formation" at that year's Super Bowl announced her alignment with the imagery of the Black Panthers and the contemporary Movement for Black Lives at a time when overt white supremacist movements have been buoyed by a presidential cabinet that refuses to even to disavow, let alone condemn such movements. Due in part to the album's candidness, Beyoncé fans were immediately enamored with what they felt was an intimate exploration of the pop star's "inner life." One *New Yorker* article, for example, declares that the album is "a window into the soul of an icon whose inner life has always seemed just out of reach."[14] Laying bare struggles with her relationship with her husband, Jay-Z, the article goes on to say, "*Lemonade* declares that misogyny is at its most potent and complex within the bonds of love." To be sure, the album — especially its lyrics — represents on the surface a reckoning between a woman scorned and the man she nevertheless continues to love. *Lemonade* consists of 12 songs, each with an accompanying video, that are bridged together through spoken poetry and interstitial "chapter" titles that appear between songs. The initial chapter, "Intuition," foreshadows the story of love and betrayal to come, with each subsequent chapter title being reminiscent of various stages of grief and healing, from "Anger" all the way to "Redemption." The allusions to Beyoncé's own life are not particularly

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[13] Oneka LaBennett, "The Aesthetics and Style of Race, Gender and Politics: Beyoncé's *Lemonade*" Roundtable, Cornell University, September 22, 2016, last accessed July 2, 2018, http://www.cornell.edu/video/beyonce-lemonade-aesthetics-style-race-gender-politics.

[14] Carrie Battan, "Beyoncé's *Lemonade* is a Revelation of Spirit," *The New Yorker* (April 24, 2016).

veiled: She tosses her wedding ring at the camera early in the album during the ferocious "Don't Hurt Yourself," while home footage of the couple's wedding and appearances of a loving Jay-Z toward the end of the album chronicle the marriage's trajectory toward reconciliation.

The "truth" of autobiography of the album, however, is somewhat beside — and even distracting from — the point. The complex allegory that *Lemonade* weaves through reference to (what may or may not be the truth of) Beyoncé's personal life might be thought of as an *aesthetic* technique (even if also a marketing technique) that exposes stories of imagined interiorities of the lives of multitudes of Black women of the diaspora. The "truth" of the imagined interiorities has less to do with its relevance to the truth of Beyoncé's personal life, and more to do with the constructed persona that she layers onto it to create the stories, something akin to what Uri McMillan calls performing as "avatar." The Black women performers McMillan describes "wield performance art — and their 'ambiguous status' as both real persons and 'theatrical representation(s)' — as an elastic means to create new racial and gender epistemologies."[15] Beyoncé's performance of the betrayed woman, while mapped on to her personal life and marriage to Jay-Z, is less about Beyoncé the person, and more about "Beyoncé" the avatar who wields her ambiguous status as both untouchable celebrity and as close confidant in order to perform a variety of stories of Black life in America in a way that speaks to fans on intimate terms while maintaining the fantasy about her. In a similar vein, Oneka LaBennett suggests that rather than thinking of the visual album as autobiographical, we might frame it instead as auto-*ethno*graphic, in the tradition of *Daughters* and in the tradition of Zora Neale Hurston. Like Sara Gómez's *Guanabacoa: crónica de mi familia* (1966), discussed in Chapter 3, in which she draws

[15] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 6.

from her own family portraits to explore the larger history of Black life in Cuba, Beyoncé gleans from her own experiences in her cultural milieu and the milieu of the South in order to create a complex story that links elements of her life with wider understandings of Black girlhood and Black womanhood.[16]

The allegory drawn by way of Beyoncé's personal life and the album's visual and lyrical narrative is weaved into cohesion through the words of the London based, Somali-born, Kenyan poet Warsan Shire. "You remind me of my father, a magician ... able to exist in two places at once," Beyoncé says slowly, deliberately. "In the tradition of men in my blood, you come home at 3 a.m. and lie to me. What are you hiding?" The specter of the cheating husband/father described lyrically is paired with fraught images: Plantations and forts occupied by Black women, some of whose ancestors could be the very slaves who built them; the Superdome, empty of the people who sought refuge there when the levees broke, but found only trauma instead; and mothers holding photographs of dead sons: Sybrina Fulton, Lezley McSpadden, Gwen Car… .[17] These expressions of devastation wrought by state-sanctioned violence and structural neglect, alienation, and familial rupture are juxtaposed with intermittent shots of long open spaces. Trees with moss dripping from their branches, like the tulle of the women's dresses, evoke the cruel beauty of the Antebellum South — the landscape at which the Igbo took one

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[16] LaBennett, "The Aesthetics and Style of Race, Gender and Politics: Beyoncé's *Lemonade*" Roundtable, Cornell University, September 22, 2016, last accessed July 2, 2018, http://www.cornell.edu/video/beyonce-lemonade-aesthetics-style-race-gender-politics.

[17] Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin, Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown, and Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner, are among the women who have been named "Mothers of the Movement." Members of a horrific club, each of their sons were killed gratuitously by state-sanctioned violence. The ellipticals in the list above represents all those mothers who are not featured in *Lemonade*, and to represent the terrible fact that the list continues to daily.

glance, and turned to walk back across the sea — while the Black women who stare back at the camera, who refuse to look away, evoke the beauty of resilience and resistance.

Disrupting the Middle Passage

Images of place in *Lemonade* acts as a metaphoric marker of diasporic communion, with references to the cultural milieu of the South, to the flow of bodies from Africa through the Caribbean, and to contemporary and historical anti-Black violence pointing to histories that take on new meaning when placed in different local spaces and time periods. Intertextual references to geographic spaces, landscapes, and built environments link stories of the diaspora and extend the ways that they excavate histories in which the lives of the enslaved and their descendants are otherwise written out through violence, silence, and the production of shame. Geographically, for example, *Lemonade* links New Orleans, where it was mostly shot, to Dataw Island through its reference to *Daughters*, where *it* was mostly shot. This then links Dataw Island's historical position as one of the last stops along the slave trade route to contemporary instances of anti-Black structural neglect in New Orleans that led to the absolute catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina. Further, *Daughters* links Dataw Island to the Southern Sea Islands more generally, which are off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, by way of its double relocating of Igbo Landing: First away from its historical site of St. Simons Island, and second from its literary site of Tatem Island in Marshall's *Praisesong. Praisesong* further widens the spatio-temporal frame, as protagonist Avey travels between Caribbean islands and dreams of the Middle Passage. As LaBennett notes, *Lemonade*'s cross-pollination of musical traditions also connects the Caribbean to the U.S. South and to Black urban spaces. The avatar Beyoncé serves as the symbolic link,

with her own personal biography also serving to draw together a variety of cultural and geographic locations as she sings “My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana/You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama” in the video “Formation.” These geographic chains of referentiality draws a map of diasporic relations that theorizes African American and African diasporic identity as expansive and fluid, even while remaining attentive to the specificity of experience.

Images of built environment in *Lemonade* also serve as a form of historical transposition. The video album opens with a tight shot of a rough triangular wooden wall. Focusing from the ground up, the camera follows the line of a long steel chain. The filtered bit of sky above is softened by the gentle sway of bald cypress trees, and the airy landscape of freedom is barred by chains and walls. The first few soft notes of a piano and non-lexical vocals gently break the silence before a bold red curtain suddenly disrupts the washed blue-green palette of the previous scene. The camera pulls back, and Beyoncé is alone on stage, folded on her knees and bathed by surrealistic light, indicating the story of dystopia to come. A jump-cut replaces the red-black stage with head-high grass, and Beyoncé stands again in the landscape of the South, wearing her black hoodie up. Her hand raises in a faint gesture of sadness or frustration, adjusting the hood and drawing attention to the now-iconic symbol of anti-Black violence since the killing of Trayvon Martin. Soon, Beyoncé begins speaking Shire’s words, while fleeting images of Black women dressed in elaborate Southern gothic gowns pose on plantation porches and within the fort’s cannon tunnels. The women gaze at the camera with varying degrees of directness, possessing, nonetheless, this space of the Confederate South. The transhistorical references to anti-Black violence, from the chain lining the wall of a Confederate fort, to the moss-laden

Louisiana state tree, to the symbol of contemporary state-sanctioned murder of young Black men, are emphasized further when Beyoncé begins speaking. "…The past and the future merge to meet us here. What luck. What a fucking curse."

The luck, the curse of which Beyoncé speaks travels rhizomatically throughout *Lemonade,* imaging different times and spaces as existing together in an expansive system that visions the world as wholly connected, rather than made up of discreet entities in time and disconnected space. This imagery in many ways disrupts linear spacetime epistemologies in which time is understood as an absolute physical quantity, and space is constituted by discreet objects that exist in time. Such an understanding of spacetime is the foundation for Western linear narratives of progress in which "culture" or "civilization" is understood as increasingly progressing in time through its mastery (i.e. commodification) of space and objects, thus serving as moral alibi for the colonial project. Annie McClintock has argued that colonial narratives of linear progress code Blackness as close to nature (i.e. dirt, waste, and disorder), and thus "backward" in time. The prerogative of Western imperial progression, then, is to transform nature/blackness into culture/commodity. This served first as the logic of slavery and racial hierarchy, and then as the logic of commodity fetishism in which Black subjects are hailed into movement from darkness (the "dark continent" of Africa) to lightness (Western enlightenment). Phenotypically, this movement corresponds to the privileging of light skin over dark, straight hair over natural, waif thin figures over full bodied — "the iconography of evolutionary progress from ape to angel."[18] According to Michelle M. Wright, contemporary deployments of the category of "Blackness" are also underpinned by this linear trajectory of spacetime in their

[18] Annie McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 217.

locating Black identity as emerging at a point in time through the transatlantic slave trade and then moving West to the Americas. Black Studies, she says, commonly takes this "Middle Passage epistemology" for granted, neglecting the phenomenology of Blackness, "that is, *when* and *where* it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations, both figurative and literal."[19] In the United States and the Caribbean, she says, the tendency is to locate Blackness within a linear narrative that is defined by overcoming obstacles through struggle, focusing primarily on slavery, colonialism, and the dominance of ancient African civilizations.[20] Such tendencies necessarily exclude Black identities that do not fit within the transatlantic geographic and sociopolitical timeline, or in the heteronormative, masculinist narratives that characterize histories of uplift.[21] European and U.S. Black Africans (particularly refugees and migrants) and their offspring, and U.S. or European Blacks of recent white or Caribbean descent, for example, are written out of the contemporary narrative of Blackness, as are Black people whose identities do not fit within a particular moment's normative definitions of Black progress. Queer Black agents of resistance rarely figure in Middle Passage epistemologies or in canonical Black studies texts, Wright notes, and Black women "are memorably present, just not as agents

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[19] Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3.

[20] Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 8.

[21] Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 12. Wright notes, "Indeed, *most* Black bodies are excluded from most discussions on Blackness because the majority of dominant discourses in Black studies, like most white discourses, implicitly or explicitly favor and focus on the heteropatriarchal male body as the Black norm in these histories and theories. It should be stressed that this exclusion is rarely accompanied by sexist or misogynist expressions. Unfortunately, these exclusions, conscious or not, can manifest many of the same effects that a deliberate and explicit bigotry would. When women, LGBTTQ (lesbian/gay/bisexual/ transgender/ transsexual/queer and questioning) Blacks, and other students of these narratives struggle to apply the examples and abstract theorizations to themselves and cannot, this implicit exclusion of their voices and experiences from the 'main narrative,' in spite of the occasional paragraph or perhaps chapter giving voice to their existence, reinforces a sense that they are somehow not 'normally' Black."

of progress; they are victims of racism whom the Middle Passage Black man is sworn to try to rescue or protect."[22] While *Lemonade*'s references are in many ways specific to histories of U.S. Black Americans whose ancestry traces to the Atlantic Slave trade, the visual album's focus on Black women and highlighting of Black queer images and voices, emerge by way of poetry written by a Somali woman who was born in Kenya, immigrated to England as a child, and now resides in the United States, an experience of displacement that disrupts the construct of Blackness as a particular form of African American-ness or Black Britishness. So, too, do multiple cameo's by Michaela DePrince, a ballet dancer who was adopted by a U.S. family from Sierra Leone after her parents were killed during the civil war, and Winnie Harlow, a Canadian model of Jamaican decent. Instead, they connect the construction of Blackness with multiple intersections of identities, and with contemporary migration patterns that stem from intertwined economic and environmental crises, famine, civil war, and international military interventionism in the Global South.

Shire's transnational biographical background is, of course, not central to the narrative, or even necessarily known to the casual viewer. However, like *Lemonade*'s strategic use of Beyoncé's personal life, biography is an extratextual component of a text's dialogic conversation, and uncovering artists' biographical backgrounds and linking them to their work is part of the pleasure derived from pop culture, as the Beyhive's response to *Lemonade* attests. Further, if *Lemonade* is thought of as auto-ethnography as LaBennet suggests, extratextual scrutiny of biography helps to weave together a heterogenous ethnography of Black life in the Americas with a nod toward experiential knowledge. It is, in fact, the expression of experience as

[22] Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 53.

knowledge, as well as the inclusion of LGBTQ voices, that LaBennet notes puts *Lemonade* in transnational conversation around Black feminism, which has "some roots in the South but … channel[s] throughout the globe." The album's "sonic reverberations" with a wide range of musicians and genres, including the Caribbean influences in the track "Hold Up," and the collaboration with The Weekend, who is Canadian of Ethiopian descent, on the track "6-inch Heels," also puts *Lemonade* in dialogue with the broader African diaspora, LaBennet says.

However, despite the gesture toward disrupting Middle Passage epistemology and normative conceptions of spacetime, *Lemonade* also models the logics of capitalist linear progress. Incorporating revolutionary imagery, such as symbols of Black Power, into its celebration of capital accumulation (she unabashedly promotes and celebrates various brands and business ventures of her or her husband's throughout the album, for example) serves to commodify and "civilize" them, appropriating them into the very socio-economic forms they seek to overturn. The power of Bey and her dancers appearing in Black Panther berets at Super Bowl 50, at a time when players were following Colin Kaepernick's lead by refusing to stand during the National Anthem, is largely undermined, for example, by the final lyric of "Formation:" "the best revenge is your paper."[23] By reinscribing capitalist ideology in which the accumulation of money is considered the best "revenge," not just with that final line, but also with lines such as "You just might be a Bill Gates in the making," the song empties the Black Panther iconography of its revolutionary socialist ideologies and replaces it with a politics of domination. The aestheticization of the Black female body in *Lemonade* also risks inscribing

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[23] It can be argued that dropping the song at the Super Bowl itself undermines its radicality, given the NFL's key role in the sports industrial complex, but that analysis dismisses the power of popular culture to ignite a radical consciousness in consumers.

commodity culture into otherwise radical imagery that celebrates the heterogeneity of Black beauty and rejects racialized normative standards of beauty.[24] Tennis star Serena Williams, for example, makes a cameo in the visual album, "twerking" with confidence down the elaborate hallway of the Madewood Plantation House. Clad in a black leotard, her muscular physique defies the appeal to white, normative femininity that values a waif-like figure. Images of DePrince moving gracefully across the grandstand of the Destrehan estate, of Harlow posed among the trees, and of both holding photographs of Black men are stunning not only in their composition within the background of the plantation estates, but also in their aesthetic rendering of the skin condition, vitiligo, that marks both of their bodies with large patches of skin that are void of pigmentation. Harlow's success in the fashion industry has drawn endless commentary, prompting many to declare the present a new age of inclusivity in the notoriously closed field. However, such expansive "inclusivity" points to the limits of the politics of inclusion given its commodity function. If, as McClintock argues, the prerogative of Western imperial progression

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[24] hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain," bell hooks Institute, May 9, 2016, accessed July 13, 2018. http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain. bell hooks' forceful observations on *Lemonade* note the tension between showcasing Black women's beauty, and showcasing Black bodies as commodity:

> Real life images of ordinary, overweight not dressed up bodies are placed within a visual backdrop that includes stylized, choreographed, fashion plate fantasy representations. Despite all the glamorous showcasing of Deep South antebellum fashion, when the show begins Beyoncé as star appears in sporty casual clothing, the controversial hoodie. Concurrently, the scantily-clothed dancing image of athlete Serena Williams also evokes sportswear. (Speaking of commodification, in the real life frame Beyoncé's new line of sportswear, Ivy Park, is in the process of being marketed right now).
>
> Lemonade offers viewers a visual extravaganza—a display of black female bodies that transgresses all boundaries. It's all about the body, and the body as commodity. This is certainly not radical or revolutionary. From slavery to the present day, black female bodies, clothed and unclothed, have been bought and sold. What makes this commodification different in *Lemonade* is intent; its purpose is to seduce, celebrate, and delight—to challenge the ongoing present day devaluation and dehumanization of the black female body. Throughout *Lemonade* the black female body is utterly-aestheticized—its beauty a powerful in your face confrontation.

is the transformation of nature into culture through commerce, then the aesthetic rendering of "alternative" forms of beauty draw it into the very consumer culture that radical art seeks to critique. More than evidence of liberatory moves toward inclusion, then, such renderings are evidence of capital endlessly reinventing itself, and serve, as hooks commented nearly three decades ago about appropriative commodity culture, as the "'spice' … that can liven up the dull dish that is white culture."[25] Close up images of Harlow's face, mouth encircled by loss of pigmentation, and her arms, marked with long strips of white, are often the focus of her poses, aesthetically exoticize Harlow's non-normative "ethnic" beauty (vitiligo is most noticeable in people who have darker skin) in such a way as to make it easily consumable to mainstream popular culture.

Multiple cameo's by the young model Ava Clarke, who was diagnosed with albinism as a toddler, more precisely exemplifies the circular process of commodification of difference and its relationship to linear narratives of progress: While her natural afro-style hair is celebrated in *Lemonade* as an homage to resistant Black culture ("I like my baby heir with baby hair and afros," Beyoncé playfully croons to images of her daughter Blue Ivy and Clarke frolicking through the plantations), the exotic whiteness of her appearance is what is often highlighted as a sign of her beauty. A publicity Web page (which as of 2017 had been taken down), for example, states that when Clarke was born, it was clear that she had "a gift": "Despite her parents' brown eyes and African-American decent, Ava appeared fair skinned, with blue-green eyes and bright pink lips. Although her hair was barely there, it was clearly blonde. Ava was breathtakingly

[25] hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21.

beautiful!"[26] As Nicole Fleetwood has noted, colorism such as this fixes "a scale of blackness based on dominant structuring principles of the field of vision," that "mark and decipher difference and value," based on gendered and raced hierarchies.[27] The visibility of Clarke's presumed proximity to whiteness, in other words, increases her value as commodity.

If, however, we again consider *Lemonade* as part of a constellation of texts, its display of the body as commodity can be read as the continuation of a history of its strategic use as agent of resistance as much as it can be read as capitulation to commodity culture and a reinscription of linear narratives of progress. *Lemonade*'s many references to *Daughters,* for example, include re-creations of scenes that focus on the character Yellow Mary (played by Barbara O.). *Daughters,* of course, is Julie Dash's first and only feature length film, and was the first film directed by a black woman to be distributed in theaters. It features a Gulluh family, the Peazants, at a picnic in 1902 on the day before many of the family members are set to migrate north to the mainland. The major conflict in *Daughters* is the tension between family members desiring to enter the world of "progress" by leaving Dataw Island and its connections to Africa behind, and those who wish to remain, and bear witness to that history. Yellow Mary perhaps best encompasses the tension between the desire to mend natal rupture by attending to lost ancestors and cultural traditions, on one hand, and the desire to enter the life of "culture" and the relative material comforts that is promised by modern narratives of progress, on the other. She also best represents the impossibility of either.

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[26] The Ava Clark, accessed May 2017, www.theavaclarke.com.

[27] Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3, 24.

As the wayward member of the Peazant family, Yellow Mary left the island when she was a young woman, and is described by her family as "ruint" because she is a prostitute and brothel owner. Returning to the island with her lover Trula (played by Trula Hoosier), we learn in the film that Yellow Mary became a prostitute after having been taken to Cuba as a wet nurse. Desperate to return home, she "fix the titty" in order to dry up her milk. The novel *Daughters of the Dust* (also by Dash and published one year after the film was released) picks up 20 years after the reunion, and tells the story in more detail: The master of the house repeatedly raped Yellow Mary before the mistress gave her money to make her disappear. It was with this money that she bought the brothel and began charging white men for Black women's services (which, as she points out, they were taking for free anyway).

Caroline Streeter notes that "mulatta" characters in African American fiction have long represented access to class mobility and the possibility of escaping the "stigma" of Blackness.[28] Yellow Mary, named as such because of her lighter skin, has access in Savanna to consumer culture through, on one hand, the peddling of bodies that represent exoticism for white clients, and on the other hand, through her own proximity to whiteness. At the same time, she risks losing access to her African cultural roots through alienation from her family. The "yellow" of Mary's skin is met with both envy and anger by the women of the Peazant family, summed up by Viola's muttered phrase, "All that yellow, wasted." Quoting Harryette Mullen, Streeter notes that this cryptic phrase:

[28] Caroline A. Streeter, "Was Your Mama Mulatto? Notes toward a Theory of Racialized Sexuality in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust,*" *Callaloo* 27, no. 3 (2004): 768.

speaks to the Peazant women's ambivalence about the constellation of traumatic associations invoked by Yellow Mary and Trula — including rape, incest, miscegenation, racial passing, homosexuality, and prostitution — 'when these experiences are perceived to be threats to collective identities as well as to the constructed continuity of tradition itself'[29]

Yellow Mary's arrival on the eve of the family's departure north, which for her cousin Viola (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) signifies the family's "first steps towards progress … [and] the culture, education and wealth of the mainland," brings a sense of foreboding to Viola's straight-laced Christian sensibilities, and dampens her optimistic gaze toward the future. Yellow Mary, in other words, signifies the threatening undercurrents of "progress," when progress is marked by the Western imperial teleology of the commodity. "I never had too much trouble making a dollar, you know," Yellow Mary says to Eula, hinting at her profession, at the choices she had to make to enter into the terrain of progress.

Shortly before this scene, Trula sits with Myown, one of the younger Peazant women, looking at a Sears Roebuck catalog, or "wish book." In one of her few spoken lines, she points at images in the catalog. "I wish I had this doll … I wish I had this doll … I wish I had this to go inside my house." Myown laughingly replies, "You don't have a house!" Dash's shooting script indicates that Trula responds back "like a little girl." "I wish I did. If I did, I'd put this bed inside my house. Then I wish I had a rabbit." The simple gesture of desire to possess, to own objects, speaks to a history of dispossession or what Paterson notes as a particular quality of social death:

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[29] Streeter, "Was Your Mama Mulatto? Notes toward a Theory of Racialized Sexuality in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust,*" *Callaloo* 27, no. 3 (2004): 772.

the juridical denial of the right to own. Yellow Mary's resistance of such social death, her means to ownership, emerges in the murky space of the commodified body.

Lemonade's "6 Inch Heels" tells a more ominous version of Yellow Mary's story. The past and the future merge again here, this time with a focus on movement between a futuristic city setting in which dark and pulsing red light brings Beyoncé and her entourage in and out of focus in various settings — in cars, on stages, in rooms of a brothel set on a plantation estate — wearing turn-of-the century Texas gothic gowns. The various images, juxtaposed with street scenes taken from Beyoncé's point of view in a limousine that linger over men loitering on city sidewalks at night, emphasize the relationship between women's working bodies, the sex industry, and sexual exploitation of Black women. About midway through the song, the last line of the chorus, "She don't gotta give it up, she professional," melts to a stop on the word "professional," refusing it the final syllable. In the brief moment of silence that follows, a series of images flash across the screen: A woman's hands creating a frame within the frame around a far off photo of man in a cowboy hat standing near the staircase of the brothel (eerily reminiscent of images of Beyoncé's own father in other scenes throughout the album); Beyoncé in a car lit by city lights; the same man in a cowboy hat walking down the brothel hallway; his shadow while a woman's hands reach out to him; then, more rapidly, the hallway lit in red, the word "LOSS," and a blurry red cross. The song begins again, just as the hallway payphone bursts into flames. The song ends with fire engulfing the ornate plantation brothel-home, Beyoncé and her dancers stand stone-faced on the porch. Faint sounds of birds chirping begin the next segment. A long, deep shot of a swampy marshland cuts to the profile of a pristine estate.

According to Dash, Yellow Mary's name is derived from the Yoruba deity or Orisa known as Yemonja. She is meant to signify the "Mother of the Sea, the Mother of Dreams, the Mother of Secrets" and she is isolated in an intermediate position in life.[30] Like Yellow Mary, the avatar Beyoncé performs as a transitional figure in *Lemonade*, making extensive references to Yoruba religious iconography and mythology, and embodying the Orisa known as Oshun. The recourse to mythology in both texts facilitates the drawing out of complicated and contradictory "interior lives" of Yellow Mary and the avatar Beyoncé by attributing to them the characteristics of the deities. Yemonja is an enormous source of energy. While she represents motherhood and nurturing instincts, and is said to have protected slaves as the crossed the Middle Passage, she also is a destructive force personified by hurricanes when crossed. Similarly, Oshun is a river goddess associated with golden/yellow colors, water, fertility, and both purity and sensuality. She has suffered deeply, through abuse and betrayal, and while she is known as a whimsical goddess of love, she is fierce and vindictive when crossed. Exactly six minutes into the album, during the track "Hold Up," Beyoncé, wearing a deep yellow Roberto Cavalli dress, bursts through enormous golden doors as water rushes past, announcing the presence of the Yoruba deity in the space of contemporary New Orleans. Exposing the paradoxical characteristics of Oshun, Beyoncé grabs a bat (which is named Hot Sauce) and, laughing whimsically, begins smashing all the property surrounding her. The pleasure Beyoncé expresses in destroying her surroundings is visceral. The destructive conclusion to "Six Inch Heels" also expresses the tensions symbolized by the deities: Yellow Mary and the avatar Beyoncé possess their own bodies and meet the material needs that are otherwise denied to them by recourse to the body as commodity. But the

[30] See juliedash.tv.

strength of ownership is false and slippery, undermined by the force of the economies of imperialism. The fantasy of destruction that Beyoncé acts out in each of these scenes manifests the desire to resist the overwhelming hail of an abusive system of capital.

Yellow Mary and Beyoncé, then, both represent the impossible condition of Blackness — the condition of being both commodity *and* creative agent of resistance. The gleeful devastation Beyoncé unleashes on cars and storefronts, brothels and plantations, bringing to mind images of looting during uprisings and natural disasters that represent a momentary breach of the reign of property. This, paired with the album's otherwise consistent celebration of commodity culture (beyond the Cavalli dress in "Hold Up, Beyoncé is attired in designer gear throughout the album, and makes repeated exultant references to those brands as well as to brands owned by her and her husband), exemplifies the relationship of "in-betweenness" that Yellow Mary's character also represents: That is, the emotionally taxing and contradictory desire to be admitted *as subject* into the world of capital exchange, when that world sets the very conditions of abjection from subjectivity in the first place.

Patricia J. Williams notes the psychic trauma wrought by such a position: "Reclaiming that from which one has been disinherited is a good thing. Self-possession in the full sense of that expression is the companion to self-knowledge. Yet claiming for myself a heritage the weft of whose genesis is my own disinheritance is a profoundly troubling paradox."[31] For Yellow Mary, the claim to material comforts in a world from which she is disinherited rests in large part on her skin color, itself is a product of the history of violent sexual encounter between white men and Black women. Beyoncé, too, has been accused of capitalizing on her "high yellow skin" in

[31] Williams, Patricia J. "On Being the Object of Property." *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 6-7.

her entry into the world of pop stardom. Wallace argues, in fact, that *Lemonade* reproduces the privileging of light skin and "good hair," despite Beyoncé's own gesture toward a rejection of colorist hierarchies in her now-famous reference to "Becky with the good hair" at the end of "Sorry." Referring to the line "My daddy Alabama. Mama Louisiana. You mix that Negro with that Creole, you get Texas 'Bama,'" in "Formation," Wallace says:

> In a world where many black people work toward whiteness, try to find familial connections to whiteness, and internalize racism in ways that require alterations in language, cadence of speech, body, hair texture, and complexion, it is troubling to draw attention to anything that may neutralize blackness or make it more palatable. Can you celebrate your blackness, and call on other black people to celebrate with you, while drawing a line between your father's blackness and your mother's creole identity?[32]

For Wallace, the separation of Creole identity within what is supposed to be a pro-Black space not only hints at colorist hierarchies that celebrate the whitening of the Black body and repeat colonial narratives of progress, but also attempts to celebrate Creole identity as detached from Blackness. Others, however, note that the liminal space in which mixed-race women like Beyoncé move *is* part of the Black experience, and that highlighting Creole identity moves in tandem with images in *Lemonade* that draw connections between Blackness and indigeneity. The appearance of the Mardi Gras Indian in the video, for example, calls attention to histories of

[32] [32] Alicia Wallace, "A Critical View of Beyonce's "'Formation,'" *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 192-193. doi:10.2979/blackcamera.9.1.12.

Native American and African American mixed cultural heritage as part of Creoleness — a history that often gets buried under the combined violences of the expunging of Indigeneity from U.S. history and racial classification standards that erase mixed identity via the persistence of a *de facto* one drop rule. Blogger T. Anyabwelé from *Black Girl Speaks* notes the colonial history that fuels colorism: the "division intentionally perpetuated through centuries of chattel slavery and forced miscegenation." Colorism is, she goes on to say, is "cancerous to the core. It is the vile excrement and pus of the layered wounds of an earthed history cloaked in colonialism," in that it both perpetuates racial hierarchy, and divisions within Black community. "If (we know that it is) the darker sister's struggle is that she is not seen as beautiful, the lighter sister's struggle is that she is not seen as black, by her own people."[33]

The work of texts like *Daughters* and *Lemonade* is to slowly, and of course always incompletely, unearth that history. In *Daughters*, for example, the relationship between Julian Last Child (M. Cochise Anderson), a member if the Cherokee Nation who will not leave the island, and Iona Peazant (Bahni Turpin) exposes the ruse of Native American extinction. Julian is not at all the "last child" on the island, and the implication of children to come between Julian and Iona (something confirmed in Dash's novel) indicates a continuation of both Indigenous and African lines of ancestry. The Mardi Gras Indian in *Lemonade* might be thought to represent the continuation of the cultural heritage of each in a new, hybrid form. Other scenes in *Lemonade* include shots of women sitting in enormous oak trees while dressed in white gowns, mimicking the scene in *Daughters* in which Yellow Mary sits idly in the crook of an oak next to Trula. Eula gazes up at them from the ground as Yellow Mary cautions her not to tell her husband who the

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[33] T. Anyabwelè, "Beyond Beyoncé: A Lesson In Colorism" *Black Girl Speaks* (February 9, 2016), accessed July 16, 2018, www.blackgirlspeaks.me/2016/02/beyond-beyonce-colorism-lesson.

white man was that raped her, if she did not want Eli to end up dangling from the very tree in which they sit.[34] "He doesn't need to know what could get him killed," she says. Trula looks on, a silent but notable presence: Her skin, even lighter than Yellow Mary's, also indicates a history of violated Black bodies.

In a moment of extreme tension in the film, Eula calls on the Peazant women to recognize their shared traumas and to embrace Yellow Mary back within the family fold. Distressed and clinging exhaustedly to her heavily pregnant belly, she burst out in anger: "If you are so ashamed of Yellow Mary 'cause she got ruined … Well, what do you say about me? Am I ruined, too?" The shooting script explains further: "The women freeze in mid-motion, their mouths open, gaping. Sexual abuse, a legacy of slavery, is a part of their unspoken history. Hearing Eula's words, the women are 'shamed' for Eli and respectfully turn their faces away from him."[35] Eula, however, does not hold back. She turns to look at each of the family members sitting and standing in the sand, circled around her.

> As far as this place is concerned, we never enjoyed our womanhood. . . Deep inside, we believed that they ruined our mothers, and their mothers before them. And we live our lives always expecting the worst because we feel we don't deserve any better. Deep inside we believe that even God can't heal the wounds of

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[34] This scene in *Daughters* is itself a part of an intertextual reference to Bill Gunn's vampire film *Ganja and Hess*, as Jacqueline Bobo has pointed out (143). The particular scene of note in *Ganja and Hess* involves a moment when the title character, Dr. Hess Greene (Duane Jones), attempts to talk his assistant, George Meda (Gunn), out of suicide as he sits in a large tree with a rope loosely looped over a branch. As Hess Greene gazes up at Meda, all of Meda that is visible are his legs, swinging slowly to and fro, conjuring up images of lynchings while Meda discusses his despair.

[35] Julie Dash *Daughters of the Dust Shooting Script* (Alexander Street Press, 1991), 82.

> our past or protect us from the world that put shackles on our feet. … Do you understand who we are, and what we have become? We're the daughters of those old dusty things Nana carries in her tin can. We carry too many scars from the past. Our past owns us. We wear our scars like armor, for protection. Our mother's scars, our sister's scars, our daughter's scars. . . Thick, hard, ugly scars that no one can pass through to ever hurt us again. Let's live our lives without living in the fold of old wounds.[36]

The dusty things of which they are all daughters, the archive of wounds that Yellow Mary earlier in the film spoke of boxing up in a pink satin case, and the remedies, the things that Nana keeps in tin jars, are layered upon one another in *Daughters*, vessels in which bits of the women's interior lives are stored.

Shortly after the scene of women lounging in trees, Beyoncé breaks into the powerful track "Freedom." She stands on stage alone, staring at the women around her who we had seen a few short minutes before gathered together to cook a large meal, just as the Peazant women do at along the shore. Her rage simmers just below the surface as she announces her intent to join the movement, crying out: "I'ma rain, gonna rain on your thunder/tell the storm I'm new/I'ma walk and march on the regular/Paint the white flags blue." Midway through the track, the images begin to cut between various images of DePrince in the midst of improvised dance, of women standing and staring stoically back at the camera, and of the same women posed in trees. "Freedoms" chorus channels Eula's exacerbation when Beyoncé calls out:

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[36] Julie Dash *Daughters of the Dust Shooting Script* (Alexander Street Press, 1991), 84.

> Freedom, Freedom, I can’t move/Freedom, cut me loose/Singin', freedom, freedom, where are you?/Cause I need freedom too/I break chains all by myself/ Won’t let my freedom rot in hell/I’mma keep running/Cause a winner don’t quit on themselves.

Eula, who Dash says represents the continuation of the Peazant family in both its secular and sacred unfolding,[37] carries in her body the wound of the everyday violence of dispossession, even of one’s own body (“the raping of colored women is as common as fish in the sea,” Yellow Mary notes wryly). And yet, she also carries the refusal of that dispossession. She embraces and protects her unborn child with all the fierceness that mother-love can conjure, a fierceness that reappears in “Freedom,” in images of mothers clinging to photos of their dead sons, of generations of women lovingly brushing one another’s hair, and of children at play, all in spaces that once stripped Black women of all their rights to themselves and their kin.

Familial reconciliation, in both texts, appears as the allegorical means toward a larger project of healing, toward breaking the “fucking curse,” and imagining worlds in which emancipation is possible. Shortly before Beyoncé washes up on shore, embodied as the Igbo statue, she asks in a voice over that recalls Eula’s plea to her family to emerge from the folds of old wounds: “Why do you deny yourself heaven? Why do you consider yourself undeserving? Why are you afraid of love? You think it is not possible for someone like you? But *you are the love of my life* …” A line of women dressed in white walk from the ocean shore out to the sea,

[37] See dashtv.com.

appearing, like the Igbo, to walk across the water's surface. "Now that reconciliation is possible … if we are going to heal, let it be glorious." Together, facing the expanse of the sea and holding hands, the women lift their arms. The image shifts to Beyoncé lying statue-like on shore, and she says, "1,000 girls raise their arms. Do you remember being born? Are you thankful for the hips that cracked? The deep velvet of your mother and her mother and her mother? There is a curse that will be broken." Neither *Daughters* nor *Lemonade* imply that healing means the disappearance of scars. Rather, for reconciliation to be possible, *if* there is to be healing, then it is in the turning out the folds of old wounds, it is in celebrating the threads of the stories that are untangled and tangled again as they are passed on from one text to another, from one generation to the next.

Daughters ends shortly after Eula's speech. While much of the Peazant family moves on with the crossing, Eula and Eli stay behind. So does Yellow Mary. The sun slowly sets over the ocean. Silhouetted against its reflection on the sea, Nana, Yellow Mary, and Eula walk, moving from one edge of the frame, across the beach, and out the other. When they are out of sight, the spirit of the unborn child enters, chasing after them into the world. In *Lemonade*, Beyoncé speaks:

> Grandmother, the alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life, conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kit. Broke the curse with your own two hands. You passed these instructions down to your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter.

> … True love brought salvation back into me. With every tear came redemption and my torturer became my remedy. So we're gonna heal.

As Eula's calls upon the characters in *Daughters* to acknowledge the dusty things in tin cans, passed from daughter to daughter, Beyoncé calls on daughters to find healing where it does not live — in the curse, in the scars of old wounds. This is the labor of diasporic communion; it is the telling and retelling of stories that form and re-form the connective tissue of the diaspora that colonialism, slavery and contemporary anti-Black violence rend but nevertheless fail to rupture. Even critiques of the moments in which a text such as *Lemonade* falls short of its revolutionary potential are part of a communion ignited by way of the stories referenced and created anew in its fabric. Such communion continues the impossible but nevertheless necessary project of imagining the past in order to sit with its presence in the present, and to sustain the always incomplete project of freedom.

POSTSCRIPT

Alice Walker once said that life and suffering are always teachers. She then immediately corrects herself, and notes that "life, suffering, *and joy*" (her emphasis) are teachers. Sadness, loneliness and joy are well-springs of creativity, of meaning, and of *use* in life, she goes on to say.[1] Each of the writers, filmmakers, and artists addressed in this dissertation put such emotions to use in their work, and through it develop a philosophy of perduring and a politics of carrying on in difference and change — sometimes radical change, as in the case of Dionne Brand's Verlia, who, at least momentarily, carries on in a joy that is "weightless and deadly," her body falling away, going to some other place, someplace that is not here, not *this*;[2] or sometimes change in the form of simple refusal to stay the debilitating course, as when Charlie in Billy Woodbury's *Bless Their Little Hearts* walks away, throwing his hand back in a radical gesture, also, of *not this.* Or, sometimes, perhaps, change comes through enormous and frightening leaps toward love in a hostile world, as when June Jordan walks into a room in which she was sure she would be dismissed, and asks with all sincerity, "where is the love?"

Walker writes of her struggles with depression, a deep drive to "give herself a little rest," and her plans for suicide as a young woman when she found herself pregnant and unable to obtain a legal abortion. She wrote incessantly during this time, producing what would become her first book of poems, *Once*. Poetry, creative production of the new, of the previously non-

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[1] Alice Walker, "A Talk: Convocation 1972," in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (Harcourt, 1983), 38.

[2] Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: First Grove Press, 1996), 247.

existent, became a mode of self-valuation for her, a way of reifying her own existence and the existence of those like her: the beaten, the oppressed, the suicidal. Lorde, too, writes of poetry as a means of survival.[3] Poetry invites writer and reader to enter a semiotic state that enlists intellect, sensation, and emotion in order to construction meaning and knowledge. Such holistic attention to individual experience in turn invites poet and reader to such attention to the world at large — to time and space as plenum.[4] The poetics of the texts treated in this dissertation, too, encourage considerations of the world through a holistic worldview, and thus propose counter narratives to Western epistemologies in which Afrocentric feminism forms the philosophical basis for undoing the world as a place in which living beings are harnessed as expendable objects for capital.

Such projects of undoing the world are not ones bent on annihilation for annihilation's sake; rather, they are *inventive* projects aimed at destroying the world *as it is* in order to create a world in which violent exclusion and expendability can find no moral justification. Such a method has been turned to as part of the always ongoing project of freedom and survival that members of the violently oppressed have enlisted for centuries in order to carry on. As Norman E. Whitten Jr., and Arlene Torres note, "with the first serious European settlement on the island of Hispaniola, the African diaspora in the Americas began with a seminal moment of self-liberation."[5] Among the cargo in a ship bound for Hispaniola in 1502 was the first "Afro-American maroon, an anonymous slave who 'escaped to the Indians [Taíno Arwaks] in the

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[3] See Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 3.

[4] See Denise Ferriera da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 81-97.

[5] Norman E. Whitten Jr., and Arlene Torres, "Blackness in the Americas," *Report on the Americas* 25, no. 4 (1992): 16.

mountainous interior soon after setting foot in the New World.'"[6] With the inauguration of this first maroon came also the first of countless autonomous, creative resistant Afro-Indigenous communities built to perdure within and in spite of the colonial, anti-Black order.

Contrary to popular histories that assume the near total — or *the* total— annihilation of indigenous culture, they in fact persist, often within these mixed-race Afro-Indigenous communities. As works such as Merle Collins *The Colour of Forgetting* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* suggest, slave histories and Indigenous histories are interconnected, as are their persistence in the afterlife of slavery and coloniality. Such interconnectedness among cultures and peoples who, like Lorde and the Chukwo woman, Toni, share the knowledge of being under threat, might be thought of as allegorical to a philosophical position from which the world can be apprehended anew, a position that insists on time-space as plenum rather than bounded, relations as interconnected rather than individual, and revolution as process rather than teleology. These are philosophies both of perdurance and invention.

The texts examined throughout this dissertation explore instantiations of these philosophies as the appear throughout the Americas, both in their geographical and temporal specificity, and in the ways that they traverse time and space. What emerges is a complex and always shifting map of Blackness as it was instantiated with European colonialism, maintained through global capitalism, and configured anew through U.S. imperialism. In both the Cuban and Grenadian context, for example, the racial categorization of Blackness and its subsequent relationship to patterns of socio-economic hierarchies are inextricably tied to colonial and neo-colonial control of the economies, infrastructures, employment opportunities, education systems,

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[6] Whitten Jr., and Torres, "Blackness in the Americas," *Report on the Americas* 25, no. 4 (1992): 16.

and medias of the colonized countries. Colorist hierarchies and racialized cultures of *machismo* in Cuba, for example, developed deeply entrenched social and economic stratification throughout Cuba in the post-independence era, when slaves were freed but remained positioned as exploitable bodies for labor, and women were refused the right to vote until 1933. After the Revolution, when racism was said to have been eradicated with the ostensible flattening of class difference, racial and gender stratification nevertheless continued to order society. While both women and Afrocubans experienced significant material improvements, as the title of Sara Gómez's *De cierta manera* makes clear, those improvements were revolutionary only "*sort of.*" Revolutionary Cuba continues today to struggle with heteropatriarchy, and until recently Blackness remained a topic that was taboo, an underground subject hinted at by artists like Gómez, but broached only with great care. Anti-Black racism in the United States has served to exacerbate the situation. With U.S. embargoes, poor and middle-class AfroCubans have felt the pressures of a struggling Cuban economy most acutely. Many have fled to the United States throughout the Revolution's nearly 60-year history, but unlike their lighter-skinned counterparts, who face U.S. anti-Hispanic biases, Black Cubans face U.S. anti-Black discrimination as well. Stemming from the Reconstruction era's pitting of poor whites against Blacks, such discrimination leaves many Black Cubans unable to obtain steady and well-paying work in the United States, and unable to send much needed money home. U.S. intervention in Grenada, too, exacerbated the eventual "failure" of the Revolution. While Maurice Bishop hoped to attract Black U.S. tourists to help boost the tiny island's economy, the Regan administration was strategically waiting for an opportunity to quell the Black socialist nation's global influence on Black liberation movements. With the fall of Bishop, then, came a U.S.-backed replacement

government that has failed to follow through with the infrastructural projects begun with the revolution that significantly improved everyday living conditions for the majority Black nation-state.

Within these pressures, however, Black artists and activists have carried on in struggle, refusing the narrative of revolutionary failure. The creative works they generate both explore and produce affects and intersubjective relations that rhizomatically connect artists and audiences across time and space, and act as conduits of a type of affective politics or "diasporic communion" that takes seriously the information that emotion and bodily sensation hold. Gómez's *Guanabacoa: crónica de mi familia* (1966), for example, brings to the surface histories of Afrocuban cultures that are buried within the Revolution's official policy of silence around race by drawing out stories of her own family's history and examining the intimate feelings those stories provoke. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, too, exhumes buried histories through her magical realist narrative of haunting, drawing on historical sources and newspaper accounts of the story of Margaret Garner to surface an imaginative reconstructions of an interiority that can never be fully recovered but nevertheless offers a counter-histories to those stories that otherwise deny the capacity for such interiority.

The imperative for this type of storytelling is nothing short of revolutionary. This perspective might appear hyperbolic; however, as Denise Ferreira da Silva suggests, such thought experiments, such re-arranging of the stories of the world, are necessary preconditions for untethering Blackness from the chains of Western modernity and its concomitant epistemological constraints. Telling the stories of the impossible, in other words, is part of an ongoing, fugitive project of imagining *and creating* the world otherwise; a project central to

Black feminist liberation dreams, and to praxes *already* unleashed, from the very earliest instantiations of resistance, such as when the Carib's leaped from Sauter's Hill in Grenada, to practices of resistances and everyday living in the slave quarters, to armed Revolution, to programs of Black liberation in the present, such as those inaugurated by Black Lives Matter and the Movement for Black Lives. Such praxes announce Blackness as an uncompromising space of sociality, of life, and of creativity, a space that refuses to beg entry into the aboveground spaces from which it has been abjected, and instead holds as its ultimate horizon the goal, as Fred Moten succinctly puts it, of turning this motherfucker out.[7]

Coda

I begin this dissertation with images of present-absence — untitled photographs, landscapes devoid of human inhabitants, and Black rituals of carrying on. I end now by evoking another kind of present-absence through a naming ritual that evokes those whose bodies have fallen to state-sanctioned anti-Black violence and neglect: Aiyana Mo'Nay Stanley-Jones (2002-2010), Oscar Grant (1987-2002), Trayvon Martin (1995-2012), Rekia Boyd (1990-2012), Shantel Davis (1990-2013), Kayla Moore (1972-2013), Kyam Livingston (1976-2013), Miriam Carey (1979-2013), Eric Garner (1970-2014), Michael Brown (1996-2014), Laquan McDonald (1997-2014), Michelle Cusseaux (1964-2014), Yvette Smith (1976-2014), Tamir Rice (2002-2015), Rumain Brisbon (1980-2014), Tony Robinson (1996-2015), Eric Harris (1971-2015), Freddie Gray (1989-2015), Walter Scott (1965-2015), Sandra Bland (1987-2015), Ralkina Jones (1978-2015), Bettie Jones (1960-2015), Tanisha Anderson (1978-2015), Philando

[7] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 740

Castile (1983-2016), Alton Sterling (1979-2016), Korryn Gaines (1993-2016), Terence Crutcher (1976-2016), Erica Garner (1990-2017), Stephon Clark (1995-2018) …

The naming of the dead follows the practice of Black protest movements like Say Her Name in order to make legible the effects of the contemporary world order. I end the list with an elliptical to indicate the terrible impossibility of ever compiling and archive all the names of those who have been lost, and in the terrible fact that the list grows daily. But with this list, I include another necessarily incomplete roll call of names to acknowledge and extended gestures of valuation and love to those Black women whose presences is also so often made absent, and who today persist, perdure and carry in the always ongoing and incomplete struggle for freedom: Kaavya Asoka, Moya Bailey, Frances Beal, Charlene A. Carruthers, Marcia Chatelain, Cathy Cohen, Laverne Cox, Kimberlé Crenchaw, Patrisse Cullors, Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Marley Dias, Myrlie Evers-Williams, Demita Frazier, Alicia Garza, Nikki Giovanni, Mary Hooks, Tamika D. Mallory, Janet Mock, Bree Newsome, Margo Okazawa-Rey, Assata Shakur, Beverly Guy Sheftall, Barbara Smith, Beverley Smith, Mavis Staples, Amandla Stenberg, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Opal Tometi, Maya Wiley, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard …

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