Radical Sense
Here Reader Volume 3

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The Document

Noor Hindi

The document mistranslates. You live / to collect your loved one's losses / Their archive. Their quiet. What did you leave behind, oh ache ? / Oh whimper? / You are everyone I kn(o/e)w. When I stood in Al Akhdar I heard the streets calling your name. I heard the men / stomping their feet & I wept & I wept & I wept across the Dead Sea, across (mis)memories of my mother pacing / that miserable street. Somewhere you are smoking argeela Playboy / sunglasses clasped to your shirt. Somewhere I am sleeping next to you & you are asking me about death & I am too young too young too young to know loss / & I promise you we'll live forever. There at the edge / of Jaafar Al-Husseini Street my father returns / home all briefcase & sweaty hands. Once, a rooftop wedding. Once, a certificate of death. My father collected / every report card of mine growing up — A Pleasure to Have in Class A Pleasure / to grow up in the states, a pleasure to be untouched by the news to hold a Certificate / of Participation for Your Obedience to the State. You Live Long Enough in the United States & You Mistake an Israeli Warplane for A Shooting Star my friend says / her eyes / offering me a photo of the Sea. In Amman, I Don't Have an Address to Your Grandmother's Home, my 3amo says, but I Can WhatsApp You the Coordinates. From Dearborn Ramleh is 5,977 miles or 9619.049 kilometers away / depending on who we audience. In Amman I was Case No. 2530400000131915 because I lost my Passport & when the man with a cigarette asks me where I lost it I mishear him / I mistranslate & I am afraid / to cough from the smoke in that too small room & lose another country not mine. The Air Here . . . I tell her . . . If It's Anything Like Cairo It's Like Sand + Salt + Warmth + Also Somehow Sweet. It Fills Your Lungs Different. It's Easier to Breathe, she tells me. In Palestine — I can't tell you about Palestine / I've never been but I have my Father's Documents to prove us / The documents that rename me / refuse me / spectacle our birth & our death The Document as map as fiction as shame as eviction Please Rate Your Experience Please / stand in this Assembly / Line of Loss / Please: We've all wanted to be loved / by an impossible thing / it's why the monarch butterflies keep following us around & This Is How It Is Habibti / Things Happen Until You Die / & All You Can Do Is Not Break

PROLOGUE

Cell number 7, solitary confinement. In my memory, it was not so small.

Now, standing before it, I am slow to understand. I lived there, cramped between those walls. I spent ten years of my life in that prison, a third of my days, a third of my nights.

I am back in Khiam, in southern Lebanon. A crowd presses around me. The dreaded prison, the agonizing symbol of the dark years of Israeli occupation, has become a site of pilgrimage. The mob of visitors mills about incredulously. They are moved, imagining the pain and suffering endured in that place. They wander through the rooms for interrogation and torture, the infamous dungeons through which so many men and women have already passed.

A week earlier, history had burst into the present. On May 22, 2000, Israel hastily pulled out of the zone in southern Lebanon it had occupied since 1978. In the weeks before the Israeli retreat, the Lebanese proxy militias had understood that they were running out of options, and that they would soon be left to fend for themselves. They began to lay down their arms and surrender to Hezbollah, now the spearhead of Lebanese resistance to the occupation. For the Israeli Army, losing the protection of the militias meant that the moment had come to cut their losses and get out. In less than 48 hours they abandoned their positions, dynamited their fortifications, and pulled back with no casualties to the other side of the border.

On their way, they might have noticed a man who had come to take stock of the disaster. He had returned too late from a trip to France, where he had brought his family to live. He was

powerless to check the tide of events. It was Antoine Lahad, the head of the Israeli-supported Lebanese auxiliaries, general of a dead army. He stood and cursed his former protectors for their treachery, cursed them for abandoning hundreds of men in the field—men who had fought, and often died, for a country not their own.

Our paths had crossed once before, twelve years earlier.

I was a communist student from a Greek Orthodox family, but above all I was Lebanese. Still a teenager, I had gone to fight against everything he stood for, against the foreign presence on my land. I paid for it with my freedom. I was thrown into a cell, without trial, and without knowing for how long.

Ten years of my life.

I have not spent a single day since I was freed without thinking of the camp, of those men and women who suffered there. My time in Khiam continues to haunt me, sometimes taking me by surprise. One morning in Paris, my temporary home, I received a package from Lebanon. Inside was a little cushion. I took it out of its box and put it on my desk, thinking no more about it. It looked like a simple present. Later in the day, I understood. I undid the seam of the cushion and took from inside the tiny scraps of paper scrawled with a handwriting that I immediately recognized.

It was my own. Tears of emotion welled up in my eyes. I spread the treasures out on my bed. Once again, I was there, with the smells, sights, and sounds of Khiam.

A part of me still locked up there had been released, rescued by a fellow prisoner when she was freed. They were my prison poems, written in secret. I had been unable to take them with me when the gates were abruptly opened.

That memory could still be in chains. Today, this book fulfills those words.

1 DEIR MIMAS

One day, I will return to Deir Mimas.

Deir Mimas, in southern Lebanon, was our village—a simple village of a hundred terrace-roofed homes and five churches, built into a hillside and surrounded by olive groves. Our house was off to the side, high up on the hill, but if you took a short tumble down the slope you'd find yourself right in a church steeple's shadow. My grandfather Hanna had built it himself. A cube of concrete and light-colored stones set with windows and doors, it was planted in the midst of leafy gardens and encircled by pomegranate trees. Standing nearby was a tall fig tree that bore fruit all year long. In that house of three rooms and a veranda, my grandparents had raised five children, including my father. The family home of my mother's parents was just nearby.

I spent my childhood holidays there, in that village.

I played, running with my cousins through the narrow streets. I helped my mother in the fields. I swam in the river down in the valley. I climbed to the top of the hill where, on the next ridge, I could see the Beaufort Castle, built by the Crusaders on the road to Jerusalem and held in those days by the Lebanese Army.

It was on one of these walks that I first visited Khiam, only a few miles from our village. It was a military camp like any other, an old garrison from the colonial days, a barracks perched high up among the oaks that towered above its surroundings. The market town of Khiam, the largest in the region, lay spread out at the foot of the camp. I remember some young soldiers on guard duty with whom we exchanged a few words. It wasn't a very memorable scene. I could never have imagined

what that fortress would come to mean to me fifteen years later.

And so passed my childhood summers in Deir Mimas, up until the Israeli invasion.

Our village was Christian, and our family was Greek-Orthodox—"Bechara" means "annunciation" in Arabic. At home, Aunt Adlahit took care of our religious education. She was a very pious woman who had thought about taking the holy orders, and although in the end she became a schoolteacher, she was always the nun of the family. I'm not observant, but I still consider her a beautiful picture of religion: open and serene. When Sunday came and it was time for church, Adlahit took us to pray with the Catholics because their parish was closest. But for me, in those days, religion really meant the holy feasts.

Every September 15th we would honor the village patron saint, a hermit named St. Mama. We wouldn't have missed that feast for anything in the world. On that day, all the children who had gone off to study or work in Beirut came home to Deir Mimas. The Becharas, known for our love of a good time, came like the rest. Off in the courtyard of a monastery dedicated to St. Mama, far away, buried deep in the olive groves, we'd eat, dance, and play music the whole night through. It could be quite a time; the men, though not only the men, would usually drink more *arak* than was wise. Finally, at daybreak, we'd get ready for the service and procession. Weddings, too, were times for religion and rejoicing. For seven days and seven nights, nearly the entire village toasted the union of my cousins Michel and Catherine. What an event it was!

They were married in 1976. In our collective memory, it remains the last great village wedding, belonging to that golden age broken by the war, the war which would first divide and then scatter us.

My grandfather Hanna was the living embodiment of this traditional world. His reputation was already well-established in Deir Mimas. He was known as a just man, but severe, often brutally so. One day, without his knowledge, my father's brother, Uncle Nayef, was having some fun—he had perched me, his four-year-old niece, on the kitchen table, and by offering me

little sips from a glass of *arak*, was encouraging me to dance. *Arak* was an adult's drink, forbidden to children, but I loved it and loved to dance, so I didn't need much convincing. But the joke was soon over. My grandfather returned unexpectedly, surprising my uncle. After giving me a slap, he chastised my uncle, smashing the glass of liquor to pieces on the ground. I was always afraid of him, and I know I wasn't alone. My grandfather was a man capable of striking any of his children, girl or boy. Even his daughters-in-law were not always safe from his fists. He had been a farmer for most of his life, but in his old age he had found a profession worthy of his character: guarding the vineyards from thieves and gleaners. Hardly anyone dared test his vigilance.

Grandfather Hanna was born at the beginning of the century, and had lived through the French mandate in Lebanon between the wars. Buried at the bottom of his papers was a certificate attesting his loyalty to the occupying power, received during his military service. While my grandmother Salima, obsessed with politics, might fume and rail against some party or other, my grandfather always stayed indifferent, aloof. Yet they shared so many stories, some of which could set them openly against each other. Hanna had always held the south Lebanese landowner Ahmed el-Assaad in high esteem. My grandmother ridiculed the man publicly. She could never forget how, when the villagers of his district had petitioned him for the opening of a school, he had replied haughtily, "My son Kamel attends school, and I consider that quite sufficient." Years later, my grandmother would often act out the scene for us, still as indignant as ever.

My father had left the village at a young age. When my neighbors asked me which of the Becharas was my father, I could see that his name, Fawaz, didn't mean much to them. He rarely visited his parents, unlike my mother, Najat, who had stayed close to her friends and family and took care to see them regularly. Of course, she was able to come to the village much more often than my father. He was forced to stay in Beirut and work when the rest of us—my two older brothers,

older sister, and myself—left the city.

Our trips to Deir Mimas were always real expeditions, even in a little country like Lebanon where one seldom travels more than thirty or forty miles.

We didn't, of course, own a car, so we would take our luggage on board one of the collective taxis that traversed the country. Whether for summer vacation or Christmas or Easter holidays, it was always an odyssey. It took nearly three hours for us to rejoin our village, along a road whose twists and turns became more tortuous as we approached the south's rocky escarpments. Our stopping-places were always the same: Saida, to buy pastries, and Nabatiya, for meat. We also brought bread from Beirut, the "modern" bread which I grew up with. I much preferred it to the bread of my grandfather's house, those great flour pancakes cooked under an iron dome, heated by a fire of wood and dried cow-dung.

But things always evened out. We never left Deir Mimas empty-handed, especially not at summer's end. During our holidays, we would plant and pick the fruits and vegetables that grew plentifully and were usually eaten locally. No house lacked its little plot of land, and anything could grow in that generous earth: corn, eggplants, tomatoes, zucchini, onions, thyme. But Deir Mimas' reputation came from the quality of its olives. The olive-harvest kept us busy for long days in October and early November. It was a tradition, an ancestral rite. Our olive oil was some of the best in the country. At home, too, my mother and her sisters-in-law would prepare dried spices and preserves that we would bring back to Beirut, reminding us of our summers in Deir Mimas.

Gathering dead wood from the olive groves was another of our tasks. Everyone worked to feed the kitchen hearth and boil the water for washing, helping my grandparents avoid the cares of winter. The men would regularly prune the olive-trees in order to improve next year's harvest. As a child, I was fascinated by the axe they used to cut the branches and prune the trunks. I would have given anything to use it myself, but it was doubly forbidden, for all children and especially for girls.

And so Deir Mimas was, for a long time, like paradise to me.

While the village was far from Beirut, it was only a short way from the Israeli frontier. A few miles further on the road through town and you reached the first border station. Of course for us, Israel was entirely out of the question. It was impossible to see Israeli land or houses from Deir Mimas; for that, you would have had to scale the ridge that separated us. But above all, I grew up during a very difficult period for the Arab countries, who at that time still hoped to drive the Israelis from all of what had been the British mandate of Palestine. The defeat of 1967, which saw the Israeli Army conquer the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the Sinai Desert and the Golan Heights, was met with shock and dismay. The Arab armies had already been beaten once in 1948, and had eagerly and actively prepared for revenge. Their disappointment was immense.

And yet, if one chose to follow back the thread of history, it had all started not far from our village. There, the first Jewish colonists supported by Edmund Rothschild had settled on land bought with varying degrees of honesty from the Arabs. In the Israeli village of Metulla, the closest to the border, they keep yellowing old photographs of the people they call "pioneers." I knew nothing of all that. But I heard my grandmother's endless lamentations of the past and her lost land, of the villagers torn from their villages when the state of Israel was created. And over and over again she would describe the atrocities committed by the Israeli troops against Lebanese civilians during the first Arab-Israeli war.

Later, when in 1978 the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) occupied the south of Lebanon—contravening UN resolutions and in defiance of international law—Israel became a more concrete reality for the people who had remained in Deir Mimas. Many of them tried to find work in Israel, the enemy camp. They could earn much higher wages there than at home. But their lives were hardly easy. Each day they would rise at dawn, enduring meticulous searches and hours of humiliating delays

at Israeli border stations, before reaching their workplace, where they would often be forced to labor at a punishing speed. Returning to Lebanon at the end of the day, they would again be forced to wait indefinitely at the border, while the Israeli soldiers, following the mind-numbing rules of security, glared at them suspiciously.

However, in the early 70s, my childhood years, no one in Deir Mimas would have imagined that less than a decade later invasion and then occupation were to be our fate.

It was as if our southern neighbors were hidden from view. Failing to drive them from what had become their land, we had driven them from our minds. In any case, it was no subject for children, and when the grownups discussed serious matters, we were sent to play outside. In that time, the young people went not to the south but to the north to study and find work, to Beirut. With the death of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Beirut had eclipsed Cairo as the most prominent Arab city. Cosmopolitan, intellectual, and rich, it was the beacon of the Middle East. But there were ominous rumblings, and divisions threatened its national unity. The Palestinian cause was the source of much controversy; the PLO had a strong presence in Lebanon after being expelled from Jordan during the Black September crisis of 1970. The divide between the Lebanese right and left grew ever sharper, bringing conflict to the schools, universities and streets. Different organizations were mobilized and the arms trade flourished. The situation was explosive.

Like many others from our village, we lived in a modest place in a southeastern suburb of Beirut called Shiyya. My father and his brothers had moved into a hastily constructed building of five floors. Our apartment was tiny, and the rooms seemed to shrink as the family grew. But on our father's income, we could never imagine moving to a house where we would each have our own room. In any case, we were used to living and sleeping together. When we visited my grandfather in the village, each family shared a single room, and everyone made do. Life was simple like this.

I didn't have much time to get attached to our house in Beirut. When the civil war began in 1975, Shiyya was at the center of the conflict. Rockets and mortars flew above our heads. With its walls riddled with bullets and breached by shells, its rooms looted and empty, our home was branded by the inexorable advance of war. The building was eventually reduced to a state of ruin. We had by this time moved back south, far from Beirut. Life went on in Deir Mimas as if nothing had changed, although my father stayed in the city to work as always, despite the bombs. He described for us the woes of our neighborhood. In our ransacked apartment, he was able to gaze upon the only two books left behind by thieves: the Bible and the Koran. Later on, my uncles tried to move back to their apartments, but to no avail. After a few months, the war again drove them away.

Our building no longer exists. It was torn down along with the surrounding apartments, and I would be hard pressed to point out its exact former location. When I returned to the places of my childhood, I recognized nothing, not the former site of the buildings, nor the open ground where we used to play, broken by a rail line linking Saida in the south with Tripoli to the north.

In the early years of the civil war, the changing times tossed us between Deir Mimas and temporary shelters in Beirut. We were refugees in our own city. Returning to our village once, in 1976, we went straight to a great-aunt's place. Her home, with its lovely garden, seemed so comfortable that I have memories of spending an entire year there, although it was only a few weeks. Before moving into the house in Beirut where my parents still live, we stayed at the home of one of my father's friends who had fled to Syria. There, in the West Beirut neighborhood of Mar Elias, it was calm enough even during the worst times of war. This was simply because no political party had its headquarters nearby, and therefore there were no potential targets.

In September of 1998, when I was freed from Khiam, I returned to that little apartment of two rooms and a terrace. I stay there whenever I come back to Beirut. After the "opera-

tion," I was not able to visit Deir Mimas, or any other place in the occupied zone. Nor was any member of my family able to do so, not until the Israeli army retreated from South Lebanon in 2000. It was as if we had been banished.

2 FAMILY

Does one's date of birth have an influence over the events of one's life? Having come into this world on June 15, 1967, I could well ask such a question.

My birthday was a day of defeat for the Arab world. On that day, the armies of Jordan, Egypt, and Syria were put to flight by the IDF. In Cairo, the faltering Gamal Abdel Nasser announced his resignation, leaving his beaten country dumb with shock. I was the youngest child, the baby of the family. My parents had married at the age of twenty in 1958. My brother Adnan was born a year later, followed by my sister Hanan, my brother Omar, and then myself. Perhaps it was as a token of hope that my parents called me Soha, or "star."

Of all the politicians in Lebanon, my favorite was none other than my father. He was a Communist and trade unionist, and had been so probably since his teens. I say "probably" because he didn't drum his beliefs into our ears—quite the contrary. He was a silent man, though always ready to struggle for the cause. Out of respect for his family, he participated in all the religious holidays of the village, and I only discovered his allegiance to the Party much later, when I myself thought of joining its ranks. I never dared ask my father the reasons for his political commitment.

Our village had the reputation of being a stronghold of the left, at least before the Israeli occupation of 1978. It was also a place where children were strongly encouraged to study. School grades were a matter of public knowledge, and they were always higher than in the surrounding villages. My father had been forced to abandon his studies after a dispute with a

soldier, but he remained passionately interested in books and learning. He was attracted to the intellectual milieu within the Party, which was particularly prominent towards the end of the 1950s. I would guess that he also supported the Party's doctrine privileging citizenship over religious affiliation.

My father has always worked in printing houses as a compositor or printer. He still goes to work each morning, although he could be enjoying a well-deserved retirement after all those years of war. For him, earning a living remains essential. My childhood memories are of a man totally absorbed by his profession.

I didn't see him much aside from Sundays when we would go out as a family, sometimes to the beach, but more often to visit relatives. Later, the civil war and its accompanying mortar fire made such visits impossible, and my father's political commitment abruptly became wound up with his work. The printing house *Al Hadath*, "The News," had been destroyed at the beginning of the conflict, and my father was hired by *Al Amal*, "Hope," another printer close to the Party. It kept going, through thick and thin, during the whole war, putting out the official Communist paper, *Nidaa* or "The Call." When the fighting chased us away, wrecking our home, we found refuge in an apartment belonging to this printing house.

My mother, blessed with a strong personality, was the head of the household. She was in charge of all decisions regarding the children. When I wanted to go on a hiking trip with some friends from my youth group, she refused permission. I had to wait until she was out of the house before asking my father, who never knew how to say no. Her mood was generally lighthearted, and she was always telling stories and making jokes. She never complained about the hardships of war, neither the cuts in water or electricity that put neighborly relations to the test, nor the bombardments. Unlike my father, she was not interested in politics. I know that in the last elections before the civil war, in 1972, she had voted for the left, but more to make her husband happy than from any deep conviction.

My mother quickly grew to find the Party somewhat invasive.

As a newlywed, she had been forced to pack her bags and follow my father to Syria—he and my uncle had been sent there on a secret mission. A counter-order forced the two militants to return abruptly to Beirut, which meant temporarily abandoning their young brides, each of whom had just had her first child. As the years passed, my mother's resentment against politics, which she wished to keep out of the home, only grew.

Unfortunately for her, our family's reputation was well established. When, in 1982, Bachir Gemayel was elected President of the Republic, his Phalangist supporters in Deir Mimas, where we then lived, came to gloat under our windows. "*Bashar, bashar, bashura, beit Beshara maqura,*" they chanted, "Have you heard the news? The Becharas are getting worried." Indeed, the victory of a right-wing Maronite candidate was a definite setback for the Communists.

From the beginning of the civil war, my parents were aware of the risks of political involvement. Our first taste came in April 1975, when a sniper began to fire from an attic near our first house, near what later became the front lines. He was a Phalangist named Issa. He brought terror to our neighborhood, firing with deadly accuracy. The railroad company suspended train service because of the risk, and to this day it has not resumed. After a month, pro-Syrian militias decided to dislodge the sniper, going through our neighborhood with a fine-toothed comb. My parents realized that we were the only family that didn't own weapons, not even a pistol or a simple hunting rifle. Eventually, Issa was captured. In my imagination, he would be executed in the place where he grew up, hanged as an example in front of all his neighbors. As for us, we had already taken refuge in Deir Mimas.

A short while later, a Phalangist friend of ours came to warn my father that he could be shot in reprisal, a kind of planned, symbolic assassination. My father spent two months barricaded inside the printing house; outside waited the men of Camille Chamoun, leader of another rightist Maronite movement. The printers' owner, Salim el-Laouzi, managed to get my father out in an official car belonging to the presidential palace. My

father was lucky. At around the same time, a colleague of his at the printers was gunned down by mistake.

My mother tried to make sure that none of her children were around when my father and his brothers talked politics. She didn't have a chance, at least not so far as my older brother and myself were concerned. Before the civil war began, my brother's school principal, another Phalangist, had struck the fourteen-year-old Adnan for talk judged to be too left-wing. Maybe it ran in the family. My father was not the only one at fault; my uncle Nayef, also a Communist, shared the responsibility. He was younger than my father, and worked with him at the printers.

The atmosphere at my uncle's was completely different than at home. Everyone in his house was involved in politics: himself, of course, but also his wife, Nawal, who was an activist with the Women's Union and a dedicated Party member. I discovered that world in the late seventies. After the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, I spent nearly all my summer vacations with them. When Uncle Nayef came to pick me up after school, he transported me into another world. It was a hectic life where I could have a hand in everything. My uncle's house was a gathering-place for meetings and discussions. There I would see my uncle Dawud and his wife Jamila, both of them militants. My grandmother would often tell us the story of their legendary wedding: when the family came down to the village to formally ask for Jamila's hand, she was in jail, having been arrested after a demonstration.

In the middle of the chaos of war, Nayef the activist and Nawal the feminist helped me discover political debate, ideals, and the concept of commitment. For this I have always been grateful.

I inherited my father's passion for politics, developing it at his brother's side. I also adopted my father's sense of discretion. A childhood memory has stuck with me. I was watching my brother Omar and a cousin play noisily in our living room. Suddenly, a shoe flew through the air, smashing a window. I ran excitedly to my mother, who was visiting a neighbor. I burst in and breathlessly told the whole story down to the last detail,

pointing the finger at the one responsible. Without blinking, my mother asked me to return home and wait for her. I held my tongue, a bit shamefaced. When my mother arrived, she ordered me to go and kneel in the bathroom, giving no reason. Those two hours seemed like an eternity to me. I asked myself what I might have done to deserve such a fate. When my father came home, I burst into tears. He let me get up, and told me to ask my mother the reasons for her punishment. Once again, I swore to her that I was not the guilty party, which only made her even angrier. She finally made it clear to me that one must never tell tales in front of other people—and above all one must never denounce another.

I don't know if it was because of this, but early on I decided never to share my secrets and my deepest feelings, not even with my parents, brothers, and sister, in spite of our closeness and affection.

All of us Bechara children led active lives, but each in his or her own way.

My brother Adnan was a teenager when Lebanon slid into civil war. He knew its difficulties at first hand, living through them all until his departure in 1978. My parents didn't want him close to the conflict, so he left for the security of the Soviet Union, to continue his studies in Kharkov. Because of our modest income, France, or especially America, was out of the question. The USSR was less expensive and more in line with my brother's beliefs. If he studied there, he could get a scholarship from the General Labor Confederation, to which my father belonged. His departure turned out to separate us for good. In Kharkov, he met a young woman, a Greek Cypriot named Tassola, and they were married. After finishing their studies in electrical engineering, they went to live in Cyprus. My brother later returned to Lebanon to look for work. When two of his friends were killed in an explosion, he decided to move permanently to Cyprus, his wife's home.

I learned all this later, after the camp.

My sister Hanan was very different. She was a good student,

and didn't reveal much of herself. Unlike my brother and myself, she was not active in politics. I was her confidante and her alibi when she wanted to go out with her friends and our mother needed convincing. My mother was always reassured if I left with Hanan, or at least if I said that I was going out with her. Whenever I wanted to help my sister, I would say that I was with her. The truth was our secret. Life went on, even during the civil war. My sister was having a serious love affair with our neighbor Pierre. He played the eccentric, which didn't help him much with my parents. But for nights on end, while everyone else slept, from balcony to balcony he would unburden his heart to my sister. After many months, they were finally able to come out in the open and get married.

But I was no longer there. I was in Khiam.

My other brother, Omar, always enjoyed the pleasures of life. He abandoned his studies after high school, preferring to go to work. He too went into printing, becoming a specialist in photo retouching. But his life was also shaken by the war, and it changed course after a bombardment in 1983. On that day, he and my mother took refuge on the second floor of our house. My father, my sister and I were on the third floor—we couldn't make it down in time. The bombs had begun to fall just as Hanan had decided to take a bath. During the bombardment, my mother was seriously injured in the elbow by a mortar blast. She was in the hospital for three months. From that moment on, Omar thought of only one thing: leaving Lebanon. He finally managed it in 1985. Four years later, in exile in West Berlin, he had front-row seats for the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Here again, only the faintest hint of such events reached me in my cell.

In different ways, I took after each of my brothers and my sister. I was the baby of the family, political like Adnan, athletic like Hanan, who was a fitness instructor before studying Arab literature, and I was a lover of life like Omar. I was always interested in sports. I started in track-and-field as a sprinter, and then turned to team sports like basketball and later ping-pong,

all while training in gymnastics. Sports gave me a feeling of freedom, which would come in handy in the years to follow.

I also took after my sister in her dedication to her studies. I was a fast learner, and in elementary and high school I was often the first in my class. I was interested in everything, although the natural sciences were my favorite. I focused on my schoolwork, sheltered by my mother from all the tumult that surrounded us. Our apartment was too small for friends to visit, and I didn't go out much, so I was able to spend a lot of time on my homework. My gift for mathematics even helped me early on to become independent from my parents. Starting when I was twelve, I earned pocket money through tutoring. With more students and more income, my success let me be self-sufficient at the age of fourteen. Before that, my brother Omar and my sister had helped me if I needed anything; my brother worked at the printers to make a little money, and my sister was on a scholarship. With my math tutoring, I made something of a name for myself in the neighborhood. My mother was overjoyed. When I was teaching or correcting homework, she thought, at least I wasn't thinking about politics.

At the age of twelve, however, I was elected president by the girls of my class at Fakr al-Din. The school, named after an old prince of Lebanon, was close to the front lines, but still kept up a high academic level. It was one of the best in Beirut, public or private. More than just a school, Fakr al-Din echoed all the political debates that shook the country. Its social life was intense, with non-stop festivals, discussions, and concerts. The school would also show up to every demonstration in Beirut, which was probably why I loved it so much.

Most likely, I was elected class president because I was active in organizing festivals, and because I sometimes represented my year in athletic events. I would often see this law confirmed—responsibility is always given to the most energetic, even if they don't desire it. I never liked to order people around or make decisions for others, but over the years I was increasingly forced to accept this kind of position. This happened to me as an activist in the Union of Democratic Youth, a

group tied to the Party which I was involved in around the same time. Practically against my will, I was elected to its National Council a few years later, at a point when I was trying to steer clear of entanglements and keep a low profile.

When I was sixteen, I went for the first time to a scout camp organized by the Union. This meant going against my mother, who was naturally suspicious of this organization because of its connections to the Party. The camp was near the sea, to the south of Beirut. I was in charge of the camping gear, so I came a few days early to make sure everything was ready for our trip. During the final night, the six of us who were there decided to launch a raid against a nearby camp run by another progressive group. I offered to distract the sentry. According to the rules, we were allowed to try and trick the counselors on guard, and capture other scouts or steal equipment. The camp that managed this proved its superiority.

It was midnight. Casually, I strolled over to the sentry, pretending just to have noticed their camp. The guard was a boy. I introduced myself, telling him I was on guard over at the camp run by the Union. I told him he should stretch his legs, and invited him for a tea in our tent. Falling into the trap, he left with me. With him gone and his friends sleeping like logs, my accomplices managed to make off with a tent, three earthenware jars, a chess set, and a hi-fi with speakers.

The next morning, the robbed scouts took some time before noticing that they had been hoodwinked. The alarm was sounded. When the sentry told them what had happened, they sent a party over to our camp. They demanded to see me, but in vain.

Hidden behind a tent, I watched the whole scene. Ali, our leader, generously returned to them the stolen goods, with the exception of the chess set which we kept as a trophy of war. The other camp thought about kidnapping me in revenge, but it was too late. We had already left.

You could call it my first feat of arms.

At the age of six, I discovered war.

I no longer have the child's eyes I saw through then, so my memory is both precise and unreal. I was in Deir Mimas, on vacation.

It was the Saint's day, the festival of Deir Mama, on September 15, 1973. As was our tradition, all my cousins came to stay at my grandparents' house. The songs and laughter of five women and twenty-five children filled the room. Our fathers were working in Beirut. We were supposed to join them the following day, taking our usual roundabout route.

That night was nothing but chaos and noise.

I remember hearing two words: "raids" and "Israelis." The Israeli air force had launched a new offensive against the PLO, who were running guerrilla training camps in the area. The planes came in waves for twelve hours, dropping their bombs not far from the village. We were all much too agitated to sleep. My mother and her sisters decided to distract us by baking bread. The supplies were meant for our trip to Beirut, but they fell prey to our restlessness—we ate them all up during that sleepless night.

When we climbed aboard the car the next day, we learned that the main road was blocked only a few minutes drive from the village. The Israeli bombs had targeted the Khardali Bridge, which spanned the Litani river, linking the South to the rest of the country. It was an unusual wooden bridge, and the sound of vehicles crossing it would cast a unique echo. I can still hear its "voice" ringing in my ears. It was one of the many little landmarks that dotted our voyage. Without the bridge, we had to cross the Bekaa Plain to the east before reaching Beirut, adding two hours to our trip.

The Khardali Bridge was never rebuilt. We found other routes to Deir Mimas, but that particular gap was never filled.

The war caught up with me again two years later, in the city of my birth. Clashes between Israelis and Palestinians had become frequent, but now there was fighting between Lebanese factions. We were caught at home during the first night of gunfire. It was most likely April 13, 1975, the date usu-

3 WAR

ally marked as the beginning of the civil war. We were living in our first apartment, in the neighborhood near Shiyya called Gallery Semaan. We took shelter from the bombing with a neighbor. Rocket fire lit up the sky. Although it was forbidden, I stuck my head out the window to see the flares and the cones of flame rising from the presidential palace not far from our house. It seemed like a marvelous show. We slept huddled together in a crowded room, and this unexpected and unusual situation delighted me. But the adults were in a daze, their eyes filled with fear. They kept telling us not to be afraid, while they were the ones who seemed worried. To keep up their courage, they told each other it would be better tomorrow, all this would soon end and things would go back to normal.

They could not have known that this night would last nearly fifteen years.

The weeks passed, bringing new flare-ups of violence. I learned first-hand the relentless uncertainty of bombs over a city—always blind to civilians.

Brontez Purnell

RAGE OF EVERY COLOR

You want to see me explode into colors, don't you?
If I could dream of every night and be so quick to silence it
annihilate each laid brick
of the house I retrofit
you deliberately misinterpret me, like, constantly
see me only as the man
who represents
the ten bridges I've burnt
but not the hundred that I've built
girl, fuck you
whether or not
multiplicity is
to your taste
I shall give you a feast

If you can get a handle on it, it's probably a door.
I'm wary of doors.
And doorways.

Doors are anticipated architectural technologies. They grant access, they permit exits. What's critical to note about doors is that they maintain the logic of the architectural frame. A building does not lose its integrity with the inclusion of a door. Doors are systemic agents granting mobility within familiar fields. As such, like the solutions we often offer to our most persistent civilizational challenges, doors allow us to shuffle within the already-known, to move the pieces around in the name of innovation, while maintaining the design.

Doors "behave."

You know what doesn't "behave"? Cracks. Architects don't design cracks, don't anticipate cracks. Cracks are not part of the furniture; they are the excessiveness of the frame. Design's ecstasy. They are neither external nor internal. Cracks are not "solutions," not guarantees or final answers. But something about them marks deterritorializing tensions, and obliquely traces out new realities.

Regeneration does its best work, I would suppose, not as a sign of clumsy replacements of lost things, a sprouting into empty space of an iteration of what was previously taken—as would be the case if we imagined the world to be composed of stable things that occasionally go missing. Within such an ontology, a world of infinite growth and progressive capture, absence is problematic—a void to be filled. Like Death to the author of Revelation: a final enemy to be vanquished. In this world, regeneration fits into an economy of named things, of saved things, accommodated within our systems, proper only to the extent that it serves "us."

But doesn't loss have a hidden life? A secret fermenting in its body like a fungal parasitoid in the chest of an insect? At what point does grieving become the choreography of a strange joy? Maybe loss is also infected. Infected with becoming. Maybe we need to think of loss in more fruitful ways. Maybe loss needs a new ontology. Maybe regeneration does its best work ... as a call to worship.

There are stowaway worlds tucked into the dense folds of the ordinary. Hidden lives, secret celebrations. Appliances conversing with each other when we've gone to sleep. Dolphins arguing about which experimental modality is more appropriate for studying the human that researches them. Spider cognitions braided into the arachnean corners of a decrepit apartment. Slave bones humming freedom beneath the asphalt of a post-racial utopia. Gut bacterial families whispering their desire to our brains. A zombie—the forbidden child of the crossroads, born at the site where empire meets magic—lurks at the peripheries of the modern. We can never be sure of what the world is doing next, what it is producing, what lines are being blurred, what categories are being composted. If we do not cultivate bewilderment, we will risk seeing things too clearly in a world and at a time when clarity often gets in the way.

A dry, browning, withering leaf still attached to the stem sustains marcescent relations with its tree. "Marcescence" names arboreal practices in which fading leaves no longer draw nourishment from their trees, and yet are kept in place, mesmerized in their wilting, unable to fall away as winter howls its piper's tune.

Something about marcescence hints at dominant practices, especially in justice-oriented movements, of seeking greater freedoms, greater expressibility, greater access, or greater representations within relations that no longer nourish. Within epistemologies that incarcerate futures. When this happens, when our labors are concerned exclusively with seeking more "freedom," we risk fortifying marcescent dynamics. We risk reproducing patterns that exceed the immediacy of resolutions.

Transformative differences may not always be tied to seeking greater freedoms or greater stability within familiar worlds. Quite to the contrary, it would seem that it is in the falling away, the descending, and the waltzing to the earth, that potential new worlds unfurl.

Cracks portend some kind of crossroads captivity: one has to be carried away, shapeshifted, crossed out, and "taken." From the perspective of marcescent freedom, this falling away might look like pathology, like something to be fixed, like an unfortunate deviation from proper society. But there's perhaps nothing more promising to the otherwise, to the prospects of new subjectivities than a leaf that has fallen off its branch. The monstrosity of a fallen leaf, torn away from its tree, is a prophecy of forests yet to come.

I will tell you a story now.

At first the gods pitied the tortoise, known in Yoruba folklore as Ijapa, when he rudely declared before their divine council that he could know "everything" there was to know about the world. They pitied him as the ocean pities a little frothing wave wanting to be as big as the ocean. They rolled their eyes, smacked their lips, and hissed. And not even in the polite way that our parents taught us to hide our disgust from its object. But then their pity slowly metastasized into a creeping worry as the redoubtable reptile stood his ground. Nothing they did or said to wean the rocking head of the tortoise from its destructive confidence could move him. Resigning themselves to their failure, they sent him on his way, urging him to try his luck.

True to form, Ijapa swung into action. He purchased for himself a gourd with a slender neck and a fat belly, tied a string to the thing, and left his home on an adventure to articulate his final theory of everything.

And so began Tortoise's quest to know everything once and for all. He met with Lion and asked her about her roar. How she did it. How she made it tremble and stretch out into the forest. When she opened her mouth to demonstrate the ferociousness of her pride, he took the information from the air with his magic and stuffed it into his gourd. Before the day was done, Tortoise had interviewed Tiger, Giraffe, Hippo, Man, Tree, Mountain, River, Sky, Moon, Sun, and Star. Each one donated a piece of its wisdom to Tortoise's gourd, which the old trickster promptly secured with his buckskin and string.

When a week of four days was over, Tortoise knew everything. His gourd simmered, glowed, and trembled with a strange engorgement. Believing himself to now be the wisest of all creatures, Tortoise decided

to hide his invaluable treasure away from prying eyes and jealous gods. He chose the Iroko tree, proud and tall, for the assignment. "I will climb to the height of this tree," said Tortoise to himself, "and camouflage my gourd amongst its rich foliage."

Wrapping his limbs a fraction of the way around the stubborn trunk of the tree, Tortoise's final lap soon proved more difficult than he had anticipated. No matter how hard he tried to get a grip, the tree resisted his abbreviated embrace. Nevertheless, the intoxication of the glowing gourd, hanging on his chest by a string, did not dim or grow faint. His eyes, swirling with the arousal for his beloved, were red with passion. He had traveled the entire cosmos in a week. Now at the foot of a mere tree, he was not to be stopped by a few muscular disadvantages—he, the conqueror of Thought itself!

In a bush nearby, the grasshopper—often considered the stupidest of all animals—watched Ijapa and his gourd. He wasn't bothered at first. There were better things to do than to watch the old fool fall flat on his face again and again. But it is often the case that when wisdom becomes too full of itself, it needs the intervention of the stupid to release it from the tyranny of its presumptions.

So, Grasshopper hopped out to the Tortoise, startling him.
"My friend!" Grasshopper bellowed. "What is it you are up to?"
Irritated by such a disreputable interruption, Tortoise grunted his disapproval. "Say what you want, trifling, and be on your way. This is none of your business."

Grasshopper seemed to be in thought for a while, and then he smiled. "I am sorry to bother you, wise friend. You see, I have been watching you try to climb this tree." He began to hop away. "Why don't you put the gourd around your back? See if that helps." And without further ado, Grasshopper skipped away.

The realization hit Tortoise harder than the time Elephant had slapped him away from a bowl of porridge at Hippo's house. Or the time he had leapt from the clouds—at a gathering hosted strictly for the birds—towards a small heap of sharp objects gathered on the ground.

Grasshopper's stupidity was equal to his archival mastery!

Of what use was it to own all knowledge when the merest of beings had won in a battle of wits? Perhaps there was no such thing as a final approximation of the world. Perhaps the idea of the world as a stable containment of pieces of insights that could be captured and fully controlled was itself a limited modality that excluded and obscured the promiscuously deep relationality implied in any act of knowing. Perhaps there was no stable content to be gained—and Grasshopper's stupidity, the dissonant quality of his happy-go-lucky ways, was wise in relation to his rigid attempts at containment. Perhaps wisdom itself was a thorn in the flesh, the cautionary finger-wag of a world that could not be known by one name.

Tortoise was already halfway up the tree, the gourd resting on his geometric shell, when he began to ponder the irony of his folly. When he reached the top of the Iroko tree, the clouds and the stars collected each other in a spiral in the heavens, heralding the irresistible arrival of the gods, who had come to see the end of Tortoise's ritual. With his head hung low, Tortoise unsheathed the string from the neck of the gourd and tossed away the skin that held everything together. In small melodic morsels of light, like fireflies floating in procession, the gourd's contents floated back into the world.

Wisdom is what remains when we've come to the end of everything we know.

Wisdom is not something we own, not a property of selves. It is an enlistment; an impersonal territorial asundering of bodies in their knowledge-making practices; a transversal crossing-through of the steady parallelity of the normal path. Like a saffron comet piercing the uneven obsidian of the night sky.

Wisdom is the place where the world kicks back, where something that resists the instrumentality of common sense bursts open and spills through—making a way.

"Being" is not the substrate of "becoming." There are no elite foundations. There are no summits to this climbing that are not already bridges to elsewheres; there are no valleys to arrive at that do not spill into otherwises. There are no ultimates that are not already penultimate. The edges are in the middle, in this wondrous meanwhile. And we must learn to live and yearn and think here.

The public is not a simple location, not a "place" nestled entirely within stable coordinates. Not a mere chalice or an orphaned container holding humans in their busy mobilities. Not a background to the theater of human sociality. Instead, the public is an imperative, a field of roaming intensities that convenes and composes bodies in their open-ended becomings.

We might suppose that when "we" move through "the city"; navigating its networks; braiding its sidewalks with hustling feet; reading chalked menus hastily slapped on windows; stopping at red lights and exhaling when they turn green; and, generally, shuffling from here to there, the "we" making these movements refers to complete, autonomous, self-directed individuals simply moving past a background of noise. But there is no pre-relational "we" in any independent sense. No intact identities moving atomically through Brownian fluids.[2] The concrete walls and asphalt roads and neon-lit signs around us are social actors with compositional powers. We are made in the interstitial loops and stitched in the creative inquiry of the public, which is always more-than-human.

2 Brownian motion in fluids is the random, chaotic movement of particles suspended in a fluid due to the bombardment of surrounding molecules. "Brownian Motion," ScienceDirect, accessed March 10, 2025, https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/physics-and-astronomy/brownian-motion.

We often speak about creativity as if it were a human thing, a matter of souls and their interior arpeggiations; a matter of isolated and independent individuals and their gilded geniuses; a matter of "talents" or hard work. Like Narcissus entranced by his own reflection in a pool of water, we suppose that the proper subject of creativity is the absolute self. From this presupposition, we anticipate that we can imagine ourselves out of our gridlock impasses.

But selves are not isolated objects in space; selves are entanglements of place-time. Selves are ecological propositions, meandering temporalities, geological musings, and multispecies arrangements. The individual is already a crossroads. When Jean-Marc Côté was commissioned to imagine the year 2000 in 1899, the images he produced—of flying vehicles and automated machines and their queerly fashioned operators—strikingly resembled the world he occupied. Those images were 1899's "Year 2000"; they were the speculative virtualities of Jean-Marc's thick present. Today, you might be able to notice tautological patterns in everything from how we tell stories to how we design movie trailers, how we compose agency and political action, how we dress ourselves up, how we design cars, and how we imagine the future.

The hypothetical year 3000 probably evokes in you either a dystopic world of rust and red-clawed trans-cyborgian-human tribes or, perhaps, lingers along the lines of utopian settlements, phallic towers silhouetted by a sun we can now control. Whatever it is, the images are not two-dimensional secretions of your "independent" mind, but shared molecular inquiries that connect bacteria, viruses, fungal entities, architectural arrangements, and more-than-human materials. In short, imagination is not human per se; creativity is a matter of

naturecultures,[3] which churn, think, yearn, and bleed—together. Non-localized rhizomatic processes that incarcerate, close in upon, cleave apart, and reconstitute—in and for a fleeting moment.

The kinds of creativities we need today are bound up in new alliances, new gestures, new cognitions, new fidelities, new gut bacteria, new infections, new kinds of gastronomic adventures, new shadows, new failures.

3 "Natureculture is a synthesis of nature and culture that recognizes their inseparability in ecological relationships that are both biophysically and socially formed. Natureculture is a concept that emerges from the scholarly interrogation of dualisms that are deeply embedded within the intellectual traditions of the sciences and humanities (e.g., human/animal; nature/culture)." Nicholas Malone and Kathryn Ovenden, "Nature-culture," in *The International Encyclopedia of Primatology*, ed. Agustín Fuentes (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119179313.wbprim0135. See also: Agustín Fuentes, "Naturalcultural Encounters in Bali: Monkeys, Temples, Tourists, and Ethnoprimatology," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2010): 600–624, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01071.x; and Donna J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

The earth is not a stable thing, a principled location locked into the subservience of playing backstage to human mobility. Instead, the earth is moving. And "it" is moving so irreverently that one might say the planet is becoming fugitive. That's why the cracks are showing up everywhere: cracks in settlement; cracks in neurotypicality; cracks in human exclusivity; cracks in democracy and the legitimacy of the nation-state; cracks in time; cracks in being.

I am convinced—in the creaturely ways that conviction marks a gesturing towards and a yearning in risky directions—that this loss of stability, this ontofugitivity of things, traces out a geophilosophy that invites a reconsideration of the premises that have conditioned experience, articulated civilizational problems, and instigated resolutions. Cracks become matters of ontogenesis, intercessory sites of what is to come and what is not quite done-with. We need a geophilosophy that cultivates ways of following cracks to where they might lead.

A crack is a rift in the fabric of spacetime, a sacred moment. It is sacred because it hints at the ongoing mobility of "all" things, and suggests that our image of the world, our images of white modernity, of capitalism, of slavery, of justice, of the future, of anything at all, are not static representations of something "objectively" true, but relationships of placemaking and worlding that have risks.

What this means is that what we, for instance, name and lionize as "modernity" doesn't refer to a fixed reality outside our sensemaking practices. Modernity is made up in part by our social analytics, by instigations in the environment, by things we are doing and things the world is doing to us. Modernity is a relationship, a social production. When we critique it, we are pointing out the ways our analysis of the world discloses to us the inadequacies of a social arrangement, how it for instance uses black and brown bodies as props, how it enlists white bodies as avatars of purity and ascension, how it doesn't grant us all stable grounds to stand upon.

However, we can very often get stuck in images: by treating modernity as a thing to be dismantled, dismissed, destroyed, we become so affixed to its "thingness" that we lose sight of how we are participating within "it," how even critique is a form of worldmaking that has preservative qualities. Images are never still. Indeed, by focusing on a thing as an image (in this instance, modernity), we obscure the ways "it" is changing, becoming different, never quite static, often beside itself, desirous of something else.

And this is what thinking along with cracks (going into cracks) allows us to do: to cultivate an aliveness and animacy that allow us to follow those delicate moments of spillage, when—to keep up with our example—modernity doesn't quite behave like itself. When modernity "fails" to keep up with itself.

None of us have it down; none of us can hold it together. We are the frothing, feathery edges of an explosion that is still fanning out into its own creases.

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They often say that there is no air in outer space. But isn't it remarkable that it is in those moments when I think of far-flung galaxies beyond the anxieties of survival, or the blackening mysteries of the expanse that stretches beyond the sonic playgrounds of Saturn's rings, and the terrifying roar of a black hole awakened by a cloud of dust—isn't it something that it is in these moments that I really breathe?

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Morality is ethics captured. First, ethics is flow, the ongoing drunken dance of the cosmos in its ephemeral immanence. In its differentiation from itself. What comes to matter (that is, how the material world becomes itself, or ontology) can be conceived as a matter of ethics. A mighty flow. A river.

Periodically, this dance of ethics circles around itself, spins on its axis, and then coagulates into a solid. Into laws and precepts. Into ideas of good and evil. Into fundamentalisms that pretend to be anchored to something deeper than the murky, loamy movement of things. Like an ice cube bobbing along in a river.

Morality is thus born of arrangements, of moving things which counterfeit stability. We are "good" or "bad" only within these dense fields of relations. Further still, the circuitous motions within these seemingly stable architectures become so impervious to other flows, other possibilities, other events, that they start to hollow out. When things get too solid, when being good preserves an architecture that does nothing

more than asserting its own primacy, then cracks emerge ... with a monstrous proposal: becoming sensuous. The ice cube is unable to sustain its solidity. The edges rupture, spill. And its organelles rejoin the riverine flow of things already coalescing into other shapes.

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The premises of peace are not founded on who's correct.

According to some accounts of their history, in precolonial Igboland, the Osu people were revered as a priestly sect dedicated to the service of the gods. They were separate from the people, the freeborn Nwadiala. One did not simply run into them or approach them in a trivial way. To do so might have brought curses on such a person. They were, in fact, untouchable.

Then, one day, Western traders pulled up to our shores. They came with a Bible and a pencil. A weaponized benevolence. Slowly, through the biopower of schooling and the threat of hell, local senses of the sacred began to shift. The altars were left undecorated; no one prayed to Amadioha any longer. No one held onto the breasts of Ala for milk. These fierce winds of change peeled away the veneer of respectability the Osu had as mediators of the divine. In a burnt nutshell, they were no longer untouchable—they had become untouchable.

A queer inflection in meanings. Hidden multiplicities. Emergent significations. The Osu's new "untouchability" was marked by disgust, a notion of uncleanliness and stigma. They were given separate seats in churches, and were not invited to the breaking of the kola. Sons and daughters of the freeborn were not allowed to marry into any family descended from the Osu people. A racialized Soot Black beneath Regular Black on African soil. "Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man Osu," writes Chinua Achebe, "a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children's children forever."[4]

The quantum leap from untouchability to untouchability hints at the universes hidden within the quotidian. The duplicity of the appropriate

4 Chinua Achebe writes in his 1960 novel *No Longer at Ease* about the ways the proselytization efforts of Christian missionaries led to self-hatred among Igbo people, and the invention of pathological untouchability among the Osu.

terminology. The mycelial quality of harm that exceeds efforts at "harm reduction."

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A profoundly respected elder and friend of mine deeply embedded within Peruvian spiritualities and shamanic cosmologies told me a story once: She was leading a party of women and men on a journey. Just as the journey was about to proceed, she insisted that women who were experiencing their periods should wait behind and not proceed with the excursion—given the intensity of the powers at work. Something blew wide open in that cohort; some of the participants were inflamed and offended by this instruction. "How dare you?" they cried. To them, it was a re-imposition of Western-styled exclusionary patriarchal dynamics. They called her names. She attempted to guide their thoughts to something more potent: the consideration that their protests, while legitimate, were nested within layers and sediments of social productions that occluded the hidden meanings of their so-called "exclusion." For this elder friend of mine, this "exclusion" was anything but a modern denial of rights and privileges. Like the way the Ojibwe people perform sacred seclusion rites when a young girl comes of age (rites that connect the motioning and tides of the moon to the murmurations of blood and bodies), or the way some cultures in Nigeria have grandmothers and mothers and aunts "beat up" a young mother who has just put to bed, that is, given birth—dipping her body in hot water and landing maternal blows on her in a painful massage (a practice that has been correlated with the low incidences of postpartum depression among these Nigerians, and which would probably be denounced as "evil" by the West)—this practice of "exclusion" that my friend tried to co-enact was an eco-metaphysical affirmation of great power-with-the-world, a sitting with the sites of tension and rupture, not a denial. Those women were—in the eyes of that moment and of my friend—untouchable. But their politics told them otherwise: that their specific experience exceeded (or rather, came before/preceded) the conditions of its possibility, and that as such to be excluded meant they were, well, untouchable.

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In my ongoing engagements with the so-called "West," with a certain strand of the English language, with a politics embedded within identitarian categories, and lingering codes of the colonial-universal lurking behind a kind progressive face, I have often had to navigate similar tensions with language, with sayability, with notions of identity and power so foreign to my Western audiences that it seemed the very thought of articulating them would make me implode! Born in a hybrid land of schizophrenic middles, I have known these tensions for a long time. For instance, my schooling taught me that power was tied to voice and how loudly one spoke or how effectively one was represented. But the subtle rhythms of my still-resilient cultural knowledges taught me otherwise: that those who spoke the loudest served the silent (the king does not scream in the marketplace: that is the work of the town crier). These subterranean insights taught me that if one wanted to know power, one had to go to the dark and dense places, not the light places. And that thinking of voice as a container of power—and therefore seeking volume as an expression of that power—was already anchored to a politics of the isolated self that believes voice to be a property of "individuals," instead of an intensity nested within wider fields of mattering.

In the modern West, I continue to with-ness a longing for a politics of emancipation, a beautiful intentionality that is nonetheless an extension of Enlightenment politics—a curious doubling-down on the parameters of the "Human." This "doubling-down" often shows up in the expectation that emancipation is convenient, that some kind of additive politics can be adopted—allowing its constituents to continue along more or less familiar lines of speaking and acting. Nothing too disruptive. For example, the Euro-American machine of climate accountability is still premised on the need to push back against nature-gone-wild, so that even when colorful mottos like "We Are Nature" are deployed by environmentally conscientious actors, the "real" practice unfolds as a centering of the security of human agents within built environments. What that apparatus of response-ability has birthed is a green-

washed economy, which fosters dopaminergic pathways of feeling that tell people in the industrial West they are good people if they recycle their trash—if they keep doing what they do, and if they never give up. What it doesn't tell them is that only 7–10 percent of materials trashed are recycled, and that most of these waste products end up in the refuse bin of progress: the Global South, the great subsidizer of Western righteousness. To most of us who look with curiosity upon the contemporary politics of the West, it often feels like installing solar panels on slave ships.

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I am convinced that just as a knot on a thread cannot unravel itself except by the disruptive interruption of something outside of it, the colonial enterprise of the "Human" and its many politics of accountability will mostly circle around itself—trapped in its own circularity, in its fixations with categories, in its anxieties about stepping over boundaries, in its shrivelling of abundance to the borders of a pixel ... all done in the holy name of justice. Ironically, I am also convinced that "being offended" is a way out—well, not by itself or in itself, but in the way being offended potentially disturbs the comfort of both the offended and the offender. If nothing disturbs the continuity of the modern and its citizens, it will continue to accommodate itself (in the words of Fred Moten) "violently (and sometimes amelioratively) [within its] quotidian" worlds.[5] Of course, there is something dangerous about presuming that Indigenous people have all the answers and therefore any form of difficulty that comes with processing (or translating) messages is merely the fault of Western thinkers. I refuse that. I don't have answers. We must critique and be critiqued. It is beautiful to be crossed out—that is what it means to be alive in a universe that is hostile to straight lines. I struggle with asking the right questions. None of us can claim answers—not even the gods. Additionally, the category or character of

5 Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.

the indigenous is not static or essential, but is also caught up and emergent and seeking.

What is principal to note here then is that when a people gets stuck, when a people gives language too much power, when harm reduction becomes the within-paradigm approach for framing a politics of care, the world in its unspeakable generosities often makes it possible for that stuckness to be haunted and broken open by the shadows of the otherwise. Yes, the Yoruba priest and priestess know menstruation as a "wound"—it is their festive way of celebrating the sickness of being whole; it is why power is nested in mothers, in "Awon Iya Wa"—a power so potent that only those who bleed and those they appoint can come close to "it"; it is their cosmology that thrives upon wounds—not wound-as-pathology (a strange Western inflection) but wound-as-unspeakable-creative-force-for-doing-beauty, wound-as-godflesh—and yes, wound-as-power-to-cause-great-damage to an enemy. And these my mothers would probably celebrate if someone got offended by that! They'd call Esu to dance in the opening.

The Global North needs the South—not because we have answers, but because we have different problems, different ways of speaking, and different ways of being in the world that trouble the monolithicity of the modern. We need each other. It is the only way we might thrive within worlds that know the untouchable are also—untouchable.

Place is a relationship between bodies that constitutes those bodies, not a static container that merely holds presence. To be in a place is to keep making maps to locate oneself there again and again, and being at home is always an exercise in cartography. So how do we find ourselves in modernity? We keep lists, we name things, we lose them, we filter out information, we adopt positions, we promise, we renege, we try out things. These exercises make "place" an ongoing socio-material dynamic. This suggests that to be displaced is not so much to be chased away from one's land (indeed, displacement can happen without being chased away), as it is to be interrupted by the imposition of a finished product, a complete map. This is the stuff of the colonial: the denial of place and the insertion of the frozen. The toxic gift of arrival.

Kwame Boateng

THE MIRACLE OF THE TOMB

Weight is the test result wrapped around my ankle,

dragging my body into the liquid abyss.

My father's tongue squeezes me into a prayer point

and this, too, shatters my blood like glass

I shape life into *easy to swallow* syllables like ARVs and

practise rebirth one pill at a time.

Everyday feels like Easter to the tomb that sits inside of me

and a God who watches me redo his miracle.

HORTENSE J. SPILLERS

MAMA'S BABY, PAPA'S MAYBE

an american grammar book

(1987)

I

Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.

W. E. B. DuBois predicted as early as 1903 that the twentieth century would be the century of the "color line." We could add to this spatiotemporal configuration another thematic of analogously terrible weight: if the "black woman" can be seen as a particular figuration of the split subject that psychoanalytic theory posits, then this century marks the site of "its" profoundest revelation. The problem before us is deceptively simple: the terms enclosed in quotation marks in the preceding paragraph isolate overdetermined nominative properties. Embedded in bizarre axiological ground, they demonstrate a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean. In that regard, the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property *plus*. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness. The personal pronouns are offered in the service of a collective function.

In certain human societies, a child's identity is determined through the line of the Mother, but the United States, from at least one author's point of view, is not one of them: "In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so far out of line with the *rest of American society*, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male, and in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well" [Moynihan 75; emphasis mine].

The notorious bastard, from Vico's banished Roman mothers of such sons, to Caliban, to Heathcliff, and Joe Christmas, has no official female equivalent.

Because the traditional rites and laws of inheritance rarely pertain to the female child, bastard status signals to those who need to know which son of the Father's is the legitimate heir and which one the impostor. For that reason, property seems wholly the business of the male. The "she" cannot, therefore, qualify for bastard, or "natural son" status, and that she cannot provides further insight into the coils and recoils of patriarchal wealth and fortune. According to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's celebrated "Report" of the late sixties, the "Negro Family" has no Father to speak of—his Name, his Law, his Symbolic function mark the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community, the "Report" maintains, and it is, surprisingly, the fault of the Daughter, or the female line. The stunning reversal of the castration thematic, displacing the Name and the Law of the Father to the Territory of the Mother and Daughter, becomes an aspect of the African-American female's misnaming. We attempt to undo this misnaming in order to reclaim the relationship between Fathers and Daughters within this social matrix for a quite different structure of cultural fictions. For Daughters and Fathers are here made to manifest the very same *rhetorical* symptoms of absence and denial, to embody the double and contrastive agencies of a *prescribed* internecine degradation. "Sapphire" enacts her "Old Man" in drag, just as her "Old Man" becomes "Sapphire" in outrageous caricature.

In other words, in the historic outline of dominance, the respective subject-positions of "female" and "male" adhere to no symbolic integrity. At a time when current critical discourses appear to compel us more and more decidedly toward gender "undecidability," it would appear reactionary, if not dumb, to insist on the integrity of female/male gender. But undressing these conflations of meaning, as they appear under the rule of dominance, would restore, as figurative possibility, not only Power to the Female (for Maternity), but also Power to the Male (for Paternity). We would gain, in short, the *potential* for gender differentiation as it might express itself along a range of stress points, including human biology in its intersection with the project of culture.

Though among the most readily available "whipping boys" of fairly recent public discourse concerning African-Americans and national policy, the "Moynihan Report" is by no means unprecedented in its conclusions; it belongs, rather, to a class of symbolic paradigms that 1) inscribe "ethnicity" as a scene of negation and 2) confirm the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements. In that regard, the "Report" pursues a behavioral rule of public documentary. Under the Moynihan rule, "ethnicity" itself identifies a total objectification of human and cultural motives—the "white" family, by implication, and the "Negro Family," by outright assertion, in a constant opposition of binary meanings. Apparently spontaneous, these "actants" are *wholly* generated, with neither past nor future, as tribal currents moving out of time. Moynihan's "families" are pure present and always tense. "Ethnicity" in this case freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and the affects of the Eternal. We could say, then, that in its powerful stillness, "ethnicity," from the point of view of the "Report," embodies nothing more than a mode of memorial time, as Roland Barthes outlines the dynamics of myth [see "Myth Today" 109–59; esp. 122–23]. As a signifier that has no movement in the field of signification, the use of "ethnicity" for the living becomes purely appreciative, although one would be unwise not to concede its dangerous and fatal effects.

"Ethnicity" perceived as mythical time enables a writer to perform a variety of conceptual moves all at once. Under its hegemony, the human body becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor. For example, Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" provides the descriptive strategy for the work's fourth chapter, which suggests that "underachievement" in black males of the lower classes is primarily the fault of black females, who achieve out of all proportion both to their numbers in the community and to the paradigmatic example before the nation: "Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. . . . A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage" [75]. Between charts and diagrams, we are asked to consider the impact of qualitative measure on the black male's performance on standardized examinations, matriculation in schools of higher and professional training, etc. Even though Moynihan sounds a critique on his own argument here, he quickly withdraws from its possibilities, suggesting that black males should reign because that is the way the majority culture carries things out: "It is clearly a disadvantage for a minority group to be operating under one principle, while the great majority of the population . . . is operating on another" [75]. Those persons living according to the perceived "matriarchal" pattern are, therefore, caught in a state of social "pathology."

Even though Daughters have their own agenda with reference to this order of Fathers (imagining for the moment that Moynihan's fiction—and others like it—does not represent an adequate one and that there *is*, once we dis-cover him, a Father here), my contention that these social and cultural subjects make doubles, unstable in their respective identities, in effect transports us to a common historical ground, the socio-political order of the New World. That order, with its human sequence written in blood, *represents* for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of *actual* mutilation, dismemberment, and exile. First of all, their New-World, diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body*—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome,* and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. But this body, at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses: 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; 4) as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.

But I would make a distinction in this case between "body" and "flesh" and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the "body" there is the "flesh," that zero degree

of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female—out of West African communities in concert with the African "middleman," we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the *flesh*, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding. If we think of the "flesh" as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or "escaped" overboard.

One of the most poignant aspects of William Goodell's contemporaneous study of the North American slave codes gives precise expression to the tortures and instruments of captivity. Reporting an instance of Jonathan Edward's observations on the tortures of enslavement, Goodell narrates: "The smack of the whip is all day long in the ears of those who are on the plantation, or in the vicinity; and it is used with such dexterity and severity as not only to lacerate the skin but to tear out small portions of the flesh at almost every stake" [22]. The anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose—eyes beaten out, arms, backs, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle, punctured; teeth missing, as the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, the bullet.

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually "transfers" from one generation to another, finding its various *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments? As Elaine Scarry describes the mechanisms of torture [Scarry 27–59], these lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a cultural *vestibularity* and the *culture*, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, "owners," "soul drivers," "overseers," and "men of God," apparently colludes with a protocol of "search and destroy." This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside.

The flesh is the concentration of "ethnicity" that contemporary critical discourses neither acknowledge nor discourse away. It is this "flesh and blood" entity, in the vestibule for "pre-view" of a colonized North America, that is essentially ejected from "The Female Body in Western Culture" [see Suleiman, ed.], but it makes good theory, or commemorative "herstory" to want to "forget," or to have failed to realize, that the African female subject, under these historic conditions, is not only the target of rape—in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind—but also the topic of specifically *externalized* acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of *male* brutality and torture inflected by other males. A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the "overseer," standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open, adds a lexical and living dimension to the narratives of women in culture and society [Davis 9]. This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh "ungendered"—offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations.

Among the myriad uses to which the enslaved community was put, Goodell identifies its value for medical research: "Assortments of diseased, *damaged*, and disabled Negroes, deemed incurable and otherwise worthless are *bought up*, it seems . . . by medical institutions, to be experimented and operated upon for purposes of 'medical education' and the interest of medical science" [86–87; Goodell's emphasis]. From the *Charleston Mercury* for October 12, 1838, Goodell notes this advertisement:

> 'To planters and others.—Wanted, fifty Negroes, any person, having sick Negroes, considered incurable by their respective physicians, and wishing to dispose of them, Dr. S. will *pay cash* for Negroes affected with scrofula, or king's evil, confirmed hypochondriasm, apoplexy, diseases of the liver, kidneys, spleen, stomach and intestines, bladder and its appendages, diarrhea, dysentery, etc. The *highest cash price will be paid*, on application as above.' at No. 110 Church Street, Charleston. [87; Goodell's emphasis]

This 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.

The captive body, then, brings into focus a gathering of social realities as well as a metaphor for value so thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases that distinctions between them are virtually useless. Even though the captive flesh/body has been "liberated," and no one need pretend that even the quotation marks do not *matter*; dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, show movement, as the human subject is "murdered" over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise. Faulkner's young Chick Mallison in *The Mansion* calls "it" other names—"the ancient subterrene atavistic fear—" [227]. And I would call it the Great Long National Shame. But people do not talk like that anymore—it is "embarrassing," just as the retrieval of mutilated female bodies will likely be "backward" for some people. Neither the shame-face of the embarrassed, nor the not-looking-back of the self-assured is of much interest to us, and will not help at all if rigor is our dream. We might concede, at the very least, that sticks and bricks *might* break our bones, but words will most certainly *kill* us.

The symbolic order that I wish to trace in this writing, calling it an "American grammar," begins at the "beginning," which is really a rupture and a radically different kind of cultural continuation. The massive demographic shifts, the violent formation of a modern African consciousness, that take place on the subsaharan Continent during the initiative strikes which open the Atlantic Slave Trade in the fifteenth century of our Christ, interrupted hundreds of years of black African culture. We write and think, then, about an outcome of aspects of African-American life in the United States under the pressure of those events. I might as well

add that the familiarity of this narrative does nothing to appease the hunger of recorded memory, nor does the persistence of the repeated rob these well-known, oft-told events of their power, even now, to startle, in a very real sense, every writing as revision makes the "discovery" all over again.

2

The narratives by African peoples and their descendants, though not as numerous from those early centuries of the "execrable trade" as the researcher would wish, suggest, in their rare occurrence, that the visual shock waves touched off when African and European "met" reverberated on both sides of the encounter. The narrative of the "Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself," first published in London in 1789, makes it quite clear that the first Europeans Equiano observed on what is now Nigerian soil were as unreal for him as he and others must have been for the European captors. The cruelty of "these white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair," of these "spirits," as the narrator would have it, occupies several pages of Equiano's attention, alongside a firsthand account of Nigerian interior life [27 ff.]. We are justified in regarding the outcome of Equiano's experience in the same light as he himself might have—as a "fall," as a veritable descent into the loss of communicative force.

If, as Todorov points out, the Mayan and Aztec peoples "lost control of communication" [61] in light of Spanish intervention, we could observe, similarly, that Vassa falls among men whose language is not only strange to him, but whose habits and practices strike him as "astonishing":

> [The sea, the slave ship] filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted to terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I was sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was different from any I had very heard), united to confirm me in this belief. [Equiano 27]

The captivating party does not only "earn" the right to dispose of the captive body as it sees fit, but gains, consequently, the right to name and "name" it: Equiano, for instance, identifies at least three different names that he is given in numerous passages between his Benin homeland and the Virginia colony, the latter and England—"Michael," "Jacob," "Gustavus Vassa" [35; 36].

The nicknames by which African-American women have been called, or regarded, or imagined on the New World scene—the opening lines of this essay provide examples—demonstrate the powers of distortion that the dominant community seizes as its unlawful prerogative. Moynihan's "Negro Family," then, borrows its narrative energies from the grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buried deep in the collective past, that come to surround and signify the captive person. Though there is no absolute point of chronological initiation, we might repeat certain familiar impression points that lend shape to the business

of dehumanized naming. Expecting to find direct and amplified reference to African women during the opening years of the Trade, the observer is disappointed time and again that this cultural subject is concealed beneath the mighty debris of the itemized account, between the lines of the massive logs of commercial enterprise that overrun the sense of clarity we believed we had gained concerning this collective humiliation. Elizabeth Donnan's enormous, four-volume documentation becomes a case in point.

Turning directly to this source, we discover what we had not expected to find—that this aspect of the search is rendered problematic and that observations of a field of manners and its related sociometries are an outgrowth of the industry of the "exterior other" [Todorov 3], called "anthropology" later on. The European males who laded and captained these galleys and who policed and corralled these human beings, in hundreds of vessels from Liverpool to Elmina, to Jamaica; from the Cayenne Islands, to the ports at Charleston and Salem, and for three centuries of human life, were not curious about this "cargo" that bled, packed like so many live sardines among the immovable objects. Such inveterate obscene blindness might be denied, point blank, as a possibility for anyone, except that we know it happened.

Donnan's first volume covers three centuries of European "discovery" and "conquest," beginning 50 years before pious Cristobal, Christum Ferens, the bearer of Christ, laid claim to what he thought was the "Indies." From Gomes Eannes de Azurara's "Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, 1441–1448" [Donnan 1:18–41], we learn that the Portuguese probably gain the dubious distinction of having introduced black Africans to the European market of servitude. We are also reminded that "Geography" is not a divine gift. Quite to the contrary, its boundaries were shifted during the European "Age of Conquest" in giddy desperation, according to the dictates of conquering armies, the edicts of prelates, the peculiar myopia of the medieval Christian mind. Looking for the "Nile River," for example, according to the fifteenth-century Portuguese notion, is someone's joke. For all that the pre-Columbian "explorers" knew about the science of navigation and geography, we are surprised that more parties of them did not end up "discovering" Europe. Perhaps, from a certain angle, that is precisely all that they found—an alternative reading of ego. The Portuguese, having little idea where the Nile ran, at least understood right away that there were men and women darker-skinned than themselves, but they were not specifically knowledgeable, or ingenious, about the various families and groupings represented by them. De Azurara records encounters with "Moors," "Mooresses," "Mulattoes," and people "black as Ethiops" [1:28], but it seems that the "Land of Guinea," or of "Black Men," or of "The Negroes" [1:35] was located anywhere southeast of Cape Verde, the Canaries, and the River Senegal, looking at an eighteenth-century European version of the subsaharan Continent along the West African coast [1:frontispiece].

Three genetic distinctions are available to the Portuguese eye, all along the riffs of melanin in the skin: in a field of captives, some of the observed are "white enough, fair to look upon, and well-proportioned." Others are less "white like mulattoes," and still others "black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) the images of a lower hemisphere" [1:28]. By implication, this "third man," standing for the most aberrant

phenotype to the observing eye, embodies the linguistic community most unknown to the European. Arabic translators among the Europeans could at least "talk" to the "Moors" and instruct them to ransom themselves, or else. . . .

Typically, there is in this grammar of description the perspective of "declension," not of simultaneity, and its point of initiation is solipsistic—it begins with a narrative self, in an apparent unity of feeling, and unlike Equiano, who also saw "ugly" when he looked out, this collective self uncovers the means by which to subjugate the "foreign code of conscience," whose most easily remarkable and irremediable difference is perceived in skin color. By the time of De Azurara's mid-fifteenth-century narrative and a century and a half before Shakespeare's "old black ram" of an Othello "tups" that "white ewe" of a Desdemona, the magic of skin color is already installed as a decisive factor in human dealings.

In De Azurara's narrative, we observe males looking at other males, as "female" is subsumed here under the general category of estrangement. Few places in these excerpts carve out a distinct female space, though there are moments of portrayal that perceive female captives in the implications of socio-cultural function. When the field of captives (referred to above) is divided among the spoilers, no heed is paid to relations, as fathers are separated from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from sisters and brothers, mothers from children—male and female. It seems clear that the political program of European Christianity promotes this hierarchical view among *males*, although it remains puzzling to us exactly how this version of Christianity transforms the "pagan" also into the "ugly." It appears that human beings came up with degrees of "fair" and then the "hideous," in its overtones of bestiality, as the opposite of "fair," all by themselves without stage direction, even though there is the curious and blazing exception of Nietzche's Socrates, who was Athens's ugliest and wisest and best citizen. The intimate choreography that the Portuguese narrator sets going between the "faithless" and the "ugly" transforms a partnership of dancers into a single figure. Once the "faithless," indiscriminate of the three stops of Portuguese skin color, are transported to Europe, they become an *altered* human factor:

> And so their lot was now quite contrary to what it had been, since before they had lived in perdition of soul and body; of their souls, in that they were yet pagans, without the clearness and the light of the Holy Faith; and of their bodies, in that they lived like beasts, without any custom of reasonable beings—for they had no knowledge of bread and wine, and they were without covering of clothes, or the lodgment of houses; and worse than all, through the great ignorance that was in them, in that they had no understanding of good, but only knew how to live in bestial sloth. [1:30]

The altered human factor renders an alterity of European ego, an invention, or "discovery" as decisive in the full range of its social implications as the birth of a newborn. According to the semantic alignments of the excerpted passage, personhood, for this European observer, locates an immediately outward and superficial determination, gauged by quite arbitrarily opposed and specular categories: that these "pagans" did not have "bread" and "wine" did not mean that they were feastless, as Equiano observes about the Benin diet, c. 1745, in the province of Essaka:

> Our manner of living is entirely plain; for as yet the natives are unacquainted with those refinements in cookery which debauch the taste; bullocks, goats, and poultry supply the greatest part of their food. (These constitute likewise the principal wealth of the country, as the chief articles of commerce.) The flesh is usually stewed in a pan; to make it savory we sometimes use pepper, and other spices, and we have salt made of wood ashes. Our vegetables are mostly plaintains, eadas, yams, beans and Indian corn. The head of the family usually eats alone; his wives and slaves have also their separate tables. . . . [Equiano 8]

Just as fufu serves the Ghanaian diet today as a starch-and-bread-substitute, palm wine (an item by the same name in the eighteenth-century palate of the Benin community) need not be Heitz Cellars Martha's Vineyard and vice-versa in order for a guest, say, to imagine that she has enjoyed. That African housing arrangements of the fifteenth century did not resemble those familiar to De Azurara's narrator need not have meant that the African communities he encountered were without dwellings. Again, Equiano's narrative suggests that by the middle of the eighteenth century, at least, African living patterns were not only quite distinct in their sociometrical implications, but that also their architectonics accurately reflected the climate and availability of resources in the local circumstance: "These houses never exceed one story in height; they are always built of wood, or stakes driven into the ground, crossed with wattles, and neatly plastered within and without" [9]. Hierarchical impulse in *both* De Azurara's and Equiano's narratives translates all *perceived* difference as a fundamental degradation *or* transcendence, but at least in Equiano's case, cultural practices are not observed in any intimate connection with skin color. For all intents and purposes, the politics of melanin, not isolated in its strange powers from the imperatives of a mercantile and competitive economics of European nation-states, will make of "transcendence" and "degradation" the basis of a historic violence that will rewrite the histories of modern Europe and black Africa. These mutually exclusive nominative elements come to rest on the same governing semantics . . . the ahistorical, or symptoms of the "sacred."

By August 1518, the Spanish king, Francisco de Los Covos, under the aegis of a powerful negation, could order "4000 negro slaves both male and female, provided they be Christians" to be taken to the Caribbean, "the islands and the mainland of the ocean sea already discovered or to be discovered" [Donnan 1:42]. Though the notorious "Middle Passage" appears to the investigator as a vast background without boundaries in time and space, we see it related in Donnan's accounts to the opening up of the entire Western hemisphere for the specific purposes of enslavement and colonization. De Azurara's narrative belongs, then, to a discourse of appropriation whose strategies will prove fatal to communities along the coastline of West Africa, stretching, according to Olaudah Equiano, "3400 miles, from Senegal to Angola, and [will include] a variety of kingdoms" [Equiano 5].

The conditions of the "Middle Passage" are among the most incredible narratives available to the student, as it remains not easily imaginable. Late in the chronicles of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Britain's Parliament entertained discussions concerning possible "regulations" for slave vessels. A Captain Perry visited the Liverpool port, and among the ships that he inspected was "The Brookes,"

probably the most well-known image of the slave galley with its representative *personae* etched into the drawing like so many cartoon figures. Elizabeth Donnan's second volume carries the "Brookes Plan," along with an elaborate delineation of its dimensions from the investigative reporting of Perry himself: "Let it now be supposed . . . further, that every man slave is to be allowed six feet by one foot four inches for room, every woman five feet ten by one foot four, every boy five feet by one foot two, and every girl four feet six by one foot . . . " [2:592, n]. The owner of "The Brookes," James Jones, had recommended that "five females be reckoned as four males, and three boys or girls as equal to two grown persons" [2:592].

These sealed inequalities complement the commanding terms of the dehumanizing, ungendering, and defacing project of African persons that De Azurara's narrator might have recognized. It has been pointed out to me that these measurements do reveal the application of the gender rule to the material conditions of passage, but I would suggest that "gendering" takes place within the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes. Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it "covers" in a particular place. Contrarily, the cargo of a ship might not be regarded as elements of the domestic, even though the vessel that carries it is sometimes romantically (ironically?) personified as "she." The human cargo of a slave vessel—in the fundamental effacement and remission of African family and proper names—offers a *counter*-narrative to notions of the domestic.

Those African persons in "Middle Passage" were literally suspended in the "oceanic," if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet "American" either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all. Inasmuch as, on any given day, we might imagine the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally "unmade," thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that "exposed" their destinies to an unknown course. Often enough for the captains of these galleys, navigational science of the day was not sufficient to guarantee the intended destination. We might say that the slave ship, its crew, and its human-as-cargo stand for a wild and unclaimed richness of *possibility* that is not interrupted, not "counted"/"accounted," or differentiated, until its movement gains the land thousands of miles away from the point of departure. Under these conditions, one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into "account" as *quantities*. The female in "Middle Passage," as the apparently smaller physical mass, occupies "less room" in a directly translatable money economy. But she is, nevertheless, quantifiable by the same rules of accounting as her male counterpart.

It is not only difficult for the student to find "female" in "Middle Passage," but also, as Herbert S. Klein observes, "African women did not enter the Atlantic slave trade in anything like the numbers of African men. At all ages, men outnumbered women on the slave ships bound for America from Africa" [Klein 29]. Though this observation does not change the reality of African women's captivity

and servitude in New World communities, it does provide a perspective from which to contemplate the *internal* African slave trade, which, according to Africanists, remained a predominantly *female* market. Klein nevertheless affirms that those females forced into the trade were segregated "from men for policing purposes" ["African Women" 35]. He claims that both "were allotted the same space between decks . . . and both were fed the same food" [35]. It is not altogether clear from Klein's observations *for whom* the "police" kept vigil. It is certainly known from evidence presented in Donnan's third volume ("New England and the Middle Colonies") that insurrection was both frequent and feared in passage, and we have not yet found a great deal of evidence to support a thesis that female captives participated in insurrectionary activity [see White 63–64]. Because it was the rule, however—not the exception—that the African female, in both indigenous African cultures and in what becomes her "home," performed tasks of hard physical labor—so much so that the quintessential "slave" is *not* a male, but a female—we wonder at the seeming docility of the subject, granting her a "feminization" that enslavement kept at bay. Indeed, across the spate of discourse that I examined for this writing, the acts of enslavement and responses to it comprise a more or less agonistic engagement of confrontational hostilities among males. The visual and historical evidence betrays the dominant discourse on the matter as incomplete, but *counter*-evidence is inadequate as well: the sexual violation of captive females and their own express rage against their oppressors did not constitute events that captains and their crews rushed to record in letters to their sponsoring companies, or sons on board in letters home to their New England mamas.

One suspects that there are several ways to snare a mockingbird, so that insurrection might have involved, from time to time, rather more subtle means than mutiny on the *Felicity,* for instance. At any rate, we get very little notion in the written record of the life of women, children, and infants in "Middle Passage," and no idea of the fate of the pregnant female captive and the unborn, which startling thematic bell hooks addresses in the opening chapter of her pathfinding work [see hooks 15–49]. From hooks's lead, however, we might guess that the "reproduction of mothering" in this historic instance carries few of the benefits of a *patriarchalized* female gender, which, from one point of view, is the *only* female gender there is.

The relative silence of the record on this point constitutes a portion of the disquieting lacunae that feminist investigation seeks to fill. Such silence is the nickname of distortion, of the unknown human factor that a revised public discourse would both undo *and* reveal. This cultural subject is inscribed historically as anonymity/anomie in various public documents of European-American mal(e)venture, from Portuguese De Azurara in the middle of the fifteenth century, to South Carolina's Henry Laurens in the eighteenth.

What confuses and enriches the picture is precisely the sameness of anonymous portrayal that adheres tenaciously across the division of gender. In the vertical columns of accounts and ledgers that comprise Donnan's work, the terms "Negroes" and "Slaves" denote a common status. For instance, entries in one account, from September 1700 through September 1702, are specifically descriptive of the names of the ships and the private traders in Barbados who will receive the stipulated goods, but "No. Negroes" and "Sum sold for per head" are so exactly

arithmetical that it is as if these additions and multiplications belong to the other side of an equation [Donnan 2:25]. One is struck by the detail and precision that characterize these accounts, as a narrative, or story, is always implied by a man or woman's name: "Wm. Webster," "John Dunn," "Thos. Brownbill," "Robt. Knowles." But the "other" side of the page, as it were, equally precise, throws no *fac*e in view. It seems that nothing breaks the uniformity in this guise. If in no other way, the destruction of the African name, of kin, of linguistic, and ritual connections is so obvious in the vital stats sheet that we tend to overlook it. Quite naturally, the trader is not interested, in any *semantic* sense, in this "baggage" that he must deliver, but that he is not is all the more reason to search out the metaphorical implications of *naming* as one of the key sources of a bitter Americanizing for African persons.

The loss of the indigenous name/land provides a metaphor of displacement for other human and cultural features and relations, including the displacement of the genitalia, the female's and the male's desire that engenders the future. The fact that the enslaved person's access to the issue of his/her own body is not entirely clear in this historic period throws in crisis all aspects of the blood relations, as captors apparently felt no obligation to acknowledge them. Actually trying to understand how the confusions of consanguinity worked becomes the project, because the outcome goes far to explain the rule of gender and its application to the African female in captivity.

3

Even though the essays in Claire C. Robertson's and Martin A. Klein's *Women and Slavery in Africa* have specifically to do with aspects of the internal African slave trade, some of their observations shed light on the captivities of the Diaspora. At least these observations have the benefit of altering the kind of questions we might ask of these silent chapters. For example, Robertson's essay, which opens the volume, discusses the term "slavery" in a wide variety of relationships. The enslaved person as *property* identifies the most familiar element of a most startling proposition. But to overlap *kinlessness* on the requirements of property might enlarge our view of the conditions of enslavement. Looking specifically at documents from the West African societies of Songhay and Dahomey, Claude Meillassoux elaborates several features of the property/kinless constellation that are highly suggestive for our own quite different purposes.

Meillassoux argues that "slavery creates an economic and social agent whose virtue lies in being outside the kinship system" ["Female Slavery," Robertson and Klein 50]. Because the Atlantic trade involved heterogeneous social and ethnic formations in an explicit power relationship, we certainly cannot mean "kinship system" in precisely the same way that Meillassoux observes at work within the intricate calculus of descent among West African societies. However, the idea becomes useful as a point of contemplation when we try to sharpen our own sense of the African female's reproductive uses within the diasporic enterprise of enslavement and the genetic reproduction of the enslaved. In effect, under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not "belong" to the Mother, nor is s/he "related" to the "owner," though the latter "possesses" it, and in the

African-American instance, often fathered it, *and*, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony. In the social outline that Meillassoux is pursuing, the offspring of the enslaved, "being unrelated both to their begetters and to their owners . . . , find themselves in the situation of being orphans" [50].

In the context of the United States, we could not say that the enslaved offspring was "orphaned," but the child does become, under the press of a patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal order, the man/woman on the boundary, whose human and familial status, by the very nature of the case, had yet to be defined. I would call this enforced state of breach another instance of vestibular cultural formation where "kinship" loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*. I certainly do not mean to say that African peoples in the New World did not maintain the powerful ties of sympathy that bind blood-relations in a network of feeling, of continuity. It is precisely *that* relationship—not customarily recognized by the code of slavery—that historians have long identified as the inviolable "Black Family" and further suggest that this structure remains one of the supreme social achievements of African-Americans under conditions of enslavement [see John Blassingame 79 ff.].

Indeed, the *revised* "Black Family" of enslavement has engendered an older tradition of historiographical and sociological writings than we usually think. Ironically enough, E. Franklin Frazier's *Negro Family in the United States* likely provides the closest *contemporary* narrative of conceptualization for the "Moynihan Report." Originally published in 1939, Frazier's work underwent two redactions in 1948 and 1966. Even though Frazier's outlook on this familial configuration remains basically sanguine, I would support Angela Davis's skeptical reading of Frazier's "Black Matriarchate" [Davis 14]. "*Except where the master's will was concerned*," Frazier contends, this matriarchal figure "developed a spirit of independence and a keen sense of her personal rights" [1966: 47; emphasis mine]. The "exception" in this instance tends to be overwhelming, as the African-American female's "dominance" and "strength" come to be interpreted by later generations, both black and white, oddly enough as a "pathology," as an instrument of castration. Frazier's larger point, we might suppose, is that African-Americans developed such resourcefulness under conditions of captivity that "family" must be conceded as one of their redoubtable social attainments. This line of interpretation is pursued by Blassingame and Eugene Genovese [*Roll, Jordan, Roll* 70–75], among other U.S. historians, and indeed assumes a centrality of focus in our own thinking about the impact and outcome of captivity.

It seems clear, however, that "Family," as we practice and understand it "in the West"—the *vertical* transfer of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of "cold cash," from *fathers* to *sons* and in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of *his* choice—becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community. In that sense, African peoples in the historic Diaspora had nothing to prove, *if* the point had been that they were not capable of "family" (read "civilization"), since it is stunningly evident, in Equiano's narrative, for instance, that Africans were not only capable of the concept and the practice of "family," including "slaves," but in modes of elaboration and naming that were at least as complex as those of the "nuclear family" "in the West."

Whether or not we decide that the support systems that African-Americans derived under conditions of captivity should be called "family," or something else, strikes me as supremely impertinent. The point remains that captive persons were *forced* into patterns of *dispersal*, beginning with the Trade itself, into the *horizontal* relatedness of language groups, discourse formations, bloodlines, names, and properties by the legal arrangements of enslavement. It is true that the most "well-meaning" of "masters" (and there must have been *some*) *could not, did not* alter the *ideological* and hegemonic mandates of dominance. It must be conceded that African-Americans, under the press of a hostile and compulsory patriarchal order, bound and determined to destroy them, or to preserve them only in the service and at the behest of the "master" class, exercised a degree of courage and will to survive that startles the imagination even now. Although it makes good revisionist history to read this tale *liberally*, it is probably truer than we know at this distance (and truer than contemporary social practice in the community would suggest on occasion) that the captive person developed, time and time again, certain ethical and sentimental features that tied her and him, *across* the landscape to others, often sold from hand to hand, of the same and different blood in a common fabric of memory and inspiration.

We might choose to call this connectedness "family," or "support structure," but that is a rather different case from the moves of a dominant symbolic order, pledged to maintain the supremacy of race. It is that order that forces "family" to modify itself when it does not mean family of the "master," or dominant enclave. It is this rhetorical and symbolic move that declares primacy over any other human and social claim, and in that political order of things, "kin," just as gender formation, has no decisive legal or social efficacy.

We return frequently to Frederick Douglass's careful elaborations of the arrangements of captivity, and we are astonished each reading by two dispersed, yet poignantly related, familial enactments that suggest a connection between "kinship" and "property." Douglass tells us early in the opening chapter of the 1845 *Narrative* that he was separated in infancy from his mother: "For what this separation is [sic] done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result" [22].

Perhaps one of the assertions that Meillassoux advances concerning indigenous African formations of enslavement might be turned as a question against the perspective of Douglass's witness: is the genetic reproduction of the slave and the recognition of the rights of the slave to his or her offspring a check on the *profitability* of slavery? And how so, if so? We see vaguely the route to framing a response, especially to the question's second half and perhaps to the first: the enslaved must not be permitted to perceive that he or she has any human rights that matter. Certainly if "kinship" were possible, the property relations would be undermined, since the offspring would then "belong" to a mother and a father. In the system that Douglass articulates, genetic reproduction becomes, then, not an elaboration of the life-principle in its cultural overlap, but an extension of the boundaries of proliferating properties. Meillassoux goes so far as to argue that "slavery exists where the slave class is reproduced through institutional apparatus: war and market" [50]. Since, in the United States, the market of slavery identified the chief institutional means for maintaining a class of enforced servile labor,

it seems that the biological reproduction of the enslaved was not alone sufficient to reenforce the *estate* of slavery. If, as Meillassoux contends, "femininity loses its sacredness in slavery" [64], then so does "motherhood" as female blood-rite/right. To that extent, the captive female body locates precisely a moment of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange. While this proposition is open to further exploration, suffice it to say now that this open exchange of female bodies in the raw offers a kind of Ur-text to the dynamics and signification and representation that the gendered female would unravel.

For Douglass, the loss of his mother eventuates in alienation from his brother and sister who live in the same house with him: "The early separation of us from our mother had well nigh blotted the fact of our relationship from our memories" [45]. What could this mean? The *physical* proximity of the siblings survives the mother's death. They grasp their connection in the physical sense, but Douglass appears to mean a *psychological* bonding whose success mandates the *mother's* presence. Could we say, then, that the *feeling* of kinship is *not* inevitable? That it describes a relationship that appears "natural," but must be "cultivated" under actual material conditions? If the child's humanity is mirrored initially in the eyes of its mother, or the maternal function, then we might be able to guess that the social subject grasps the whole dynamic of resemblance and kinship by way of the same source.

There is an amazing thematic synonymity on this point between aspects of Douglass's *Narrative* and Malcolm El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz's *Autobiography of Malcolm X* [21 ff.]. Through the loss of the mother, in the latter contemporary instance, to the institution of "insanity" and the state—a full century after Douglass's writing and under social conditions that might be designated a post-emancipation neo-enslavement—Malcolm and his siblings, robbed of their activist father in a kkk-like ambush, are not only widely dispersed across a makeshift social terrain, but also show symptoms of estrangement and "disremembering" that require many years to heal, and even then, only by way of Malcolm's prison ordeal turned, eventually, into a redemptive occurrence.

The destructive loss of the natural mother, whose biological/genetic relationship to the child remains unique and unambiguous, opens the enslaved young to social ambiguity and chaos: the ambiguity of his/her fatherhood and to a structure of other relational elements, now threatened, that would declare the young's connection to a genetic and historic future by way of his own siblings. That the father in Douglass's case was most likely the "master," not by any means special to Douglass, involves a hideous paradox. Fatherhood, at best a supreme cultural courtesy, attenuates here on the one hand into a monstrous accumulation of power on the other. One has been "made" and "bought" by disparate currencies, linking back to a common origin of exchange and domination. The denied genetic link becomes the chief strategy of an undenied ownership, as if the interrogation into the father's identity—the blank space where his proper name will fit—were answered by the fact, *de jure* of a material possession. "And this is done," Douglass asserts, "too obviously to administer to the [master's] own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable" [23].

Whether or not the captive female and/or her sexual oppressor derived "pleasure" from their seductions and couplings is not a question we can politely ask.

Whether or not "pleasure" is possible at all under conditions that I would aver as non-freedom for both or either of the parties has not been settled. Indeed, we could go so far as to entertain the very real possibility that "sexuality," as a term of implied relationship and desire, is dubiously appropriate, manageable, or accurate to any of the familial arrangements under a system of enslavement, from the master's family to the captive enclave. Under this arrangements, the customary lexis of sexuality, including "reproduction," "motherhood," "pleasure," and "desire" are thrown into unrelieved crisis.

If the testimony of Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs is to be believed, the official mistresses of slavery's "masters" constitute a privileged class of the tormented, if such contradiction can be entertained [Brent 29–35]. Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs recounts in the course of her narrative scenes from a "psychodrama," opposing herself and "Mrs. Flint," in what we have come to consider the classic alignment between captive woman and free. Suspecting that her husband, Dr. Flint, has sexual designs on the young Linda (and the doctor is nearly humorously incompetent at it, according to the story line), Mrs. Flint assumes the role of a perambulatory nightmare who visits the captive woman in the spirit of a veiled seduction. Mrs. Flint imitates the incubus who "rides" its victim in order to exact confession, expiation, and anything else that the immaterial power might want. (Gayle Jones's *Corregidora* [1975] weaves a contemporary fictional situation around the historic motif of entangled female sexualities.) This narrative scene from Brent's work, dictated to Lydia Maria Child, provides an instance of a repeated sequence, purportedly based on "real" life. But the scene in question appears to so commingle its signals with the fictive, with casebook narrative from psychoanalysis, that we are certain that the narrator has her hands on an explosive moment of New-World/U.S. history that feminist investigation is beginning to unravel. The narrator recalls:

> Sometimes I woke up, and found her bending over me. At other times she whispered in my ear, as though it were her husband who was speaking to me, and listened to hear what I would answer. If she startled me, on such occasion, she would slide stealthily away; and the next morning she would tell me I had been talking in my sleep, and ask who I was talking to. At last, I began to be fearful for my life. . . . [Brent 33]

The "jealous mistress" here (but "jealous" for whom?) forms an analogy with the "master" to the extent that male dominative modes give the male the material means to fully act out what the female might only *wish*. The mistress in the case of Brent's narrative becomes a metaphor for *his* madness that arises in the ecstasy of unchecked power. Mrs. Flint enacts a male alibi and prosthetic motion that is mobilized *at night*, at the material place of the dream work. In both male and female instances, the subject attempts to *inculcate* his or her will into the vulnerable, supine body. Though this is barely hinted on the surface of the text, we might say that Brent, between the lines of her narrative, demarcates a sexuality that is neuter-bound, inasmuch as it represents an open vulnerability to a gigantic sexualized repertoire that may be alternately expressed as male/female. Since the gendered female *exists for* the male, we might suggest that the ungendered female—in an amazing stroke of pansexual potential—might be invaded/raided by another *woman* or man.

If *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* were a novel, and not the memoirs of an escaped female captive, then we might say that "Mrs. Flint" is also the narrator's projection, her creation, so that for all her pious and correct umbrage toward the outrage of her captivity, some aspect of Linda Brent is released in a manifold repetition crisis that the doctor's wife comes to stand in for. In the case of both an imagined fiction and the narrative we have from Brent/Jacobs/Child, published only four years before the official proclamations of Freedom, we could say that African-American women's community and Anglo-American women's community, under certain shared cultural conditions, were the twin actants on a common psychic landscape, were subject to the same fabric of dread and humiliation. Neither could claim her body and its various productions—for quite different reasons, albeit—as her own, and in the case of the doctor's wife, *she* appears not to have wanted *her* body at all, but to desire to enter someone else's, specifically, Linda Brent's, in an apparently classic instance of sexual "jealousy" and appropriation. In fact, from one point of view, we cannot unravel one female's narrative from the other's, cannot decipher one without tripping over the other. In that sense, these "threads cable-strong" of an incestuous, interracial genealogy uncover slavery in the United States as one of the richest displays of the psychoanalytic dimensions of culture before the science of European psychoanalysis takes hold.

4

But just as we duly regard similarities between life conditions of American women—captive and free—we must observe those undeniable contrasts and differences so decisive that the African-American female's historic claim to the territory of womanhood and "femininity" still tends to rest too solidly on the subtle and shifting calibrations of a liberal ideology. Valerie Smith's reading of the tale of Linda Brent as a tale of "garreting" enables our notion that female gender for captive women's community is the tale writ between the lines and in the not-quite spaces of an American domesticity. It is this tale that we try to make clearer, or, keeping with the metaphor, "bring on line."

If the point is that the historic conditions of African-American women might be read as an unprecedented occasion in the national context, then gender and the arrangements of gender are both crucial and evasive. Holding, however, to a specialized reading of female gender as an *outcome* of a certain political, socio-cultural empowerment within the context of the United States, we would regard dispossession as the *loss* of gender, or one of the chief elements in an altered reading of gender: "Women are considered of no value, *unless* they continually increase their owner's stock. They were put on par with animals" [Brent 49; emphasis mine]. Linda Brent's witness appears to contradict the point I would make, but I am suggesting that even though the enslaved female reproduced other enslaved persons, we do not read "birth" in this instance as a reproduction of mothering precisely because the female, like the male, has been robbed of the parental right, the parental function. One treads dangerous ground in suggesting an equation between female gender and mothering; in fact, feminist inquiry/praxis and the actual day-to-day living of numberless American women—black and white—have gone far to break the enthrallment of a female subject-position to the theoretical

and actual situation of maternity. Our task here would be lightened considerably if we could simply slide over the powerful "No," the significant *exception*. In the historic formation to which I point, however, motherhood and female gendering/ungendering appear so intimately aligned that they seem to speak the same language. At least it is plausible to say that motherhood, while it does not exhaust the problematics of female gender, offers one prominent line of approach to it. I would go farther: Because African-American women experienced uncertainty regarding their infants' lives in the historic situation, gendering, in its coeval reference to African-American women, *insinuates* an implicit and unresolved puzzle both within current feminist discourse and within those discursive communities that investigate the entire problematics of culture. Are we mistaken to suspect that history—at least in this instance—repeats itself yet again?

Every feature of social and human differentiation disappears in public discourses regarding the African-American person, as we encounter, in the juridical codes of slavery, personality reified. William Goodell's study not only demonstrates the rhetorical and moral passions of the abolitionist project, but also lends insight into the corpus of law that underwrites enslavement. If "slave" is perceived as the essence of stillness (an early version of "ethnicity"), or of an undynamic human state, fixed in time and space, then the law articulates this impossibility as its inherent feature: "Slaves shall be deemed, sold, taken, reputed and adjudged in law to be *chattels personal*, in the hands of their owners and possessors, and their executors, administrators, and assigns, to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever" [23; Goodell emphasis].

Even though we tend to parody and simplify matters to behave as if the various civil codes of the slave-holding United States were monolithically informed, unified, and executed in their application, or that the "code" itself is spontaneously generated in an undivided historic moment, we read it nevertheless as exactly this: the *peak points*, the salient and characteristic features of a human and social procedure that evolves over a natural historical sequence and represents, consequently, the narrative *shorthand* of a transaction that is riddled, *in practice*, with contradictions, accident, and surprise. We could suppose that the legal encodations of enslavement stand for the statistically average case, that the legal code provides the *topics* of a project increasingly threatened and self-conscious. It is, perhaps, not by chance that the laws regarding slavery appear to crystallize in the precise moment when agitation against the arrangement becomes articulate in certain European and New-World communities. In that regard, the slave codes that Goodell describes are themselves an instance of the counter and isolated text that seeks to silence the contradictions and antitheses engendered by it. For example, aspects of Article 461 of the South Carolina Civil Code call attention to just the sort of uneasy oxymoronic character that the "peculiar institution" attempts to sustain in transforming *personality* into *property*.

1) The "slave" is movable by nature, but "immovable by the operation of law" [Goodell 24]. As I read this, law itself is compelled to a point of saturation, or a reverse zero degree, beyond which it cannot move in the behalf of the enslaved *or* the free. We recall, too, that the "master," under these perversions of judicial power, is impelled to *treat* the enslaved as property, and not as person. These laws stand for the kind of social formulation that armed forces will help excise from a living context in the campaigns of civil war. They also embody the untenable

human relationship that Henry David Thoreau believed occasioned acts of "civil disobedience," the moral philosophy to which Martin Luther King, Jr. would subscribe in the latter half of the twentieth century.

2) Slaves shall be *reputed* and *considered* real estate, "subject to be mortgaged, according to the rules prescribed by law" [Goodell 24]. I emphasize "reputed" and "considered" as predicate adjectives that invite attention because they denote a *contrivance,* not an intransitive "is," or the transfer of nominative property from one syntactic point to another by way of a weakened copulative. The status of the "reputed" can change, as it will significantly before the nineteenth century closes. The mood here—the "shall be"—is pointedly subjunctive, or the situation devoutly to be wished. The slave-holding class is forced, in time, to think and do something else in the narrative of violence that enslavement itself has been preparing for a couple of centuries.

Louisiana's and South Carolina's written codes offer a paradigm for praxis in those instances where a *written* text is missing. In that case, the "chattel principle has . . . been affirmed and maintained by the courts, and involved in legislative acts" [Goodell 25]. In Maryland, a legislative enactment of 1798 shows so forceful a synonymity of motives between branches of comparable governance that a line between "judicial" and "legislative" functions is useless to draw: "In case the personal property of a ward shall consist of specific articles, such as slaves, working beasts, animals of any kind, stock, furniture, plates, books, and so forth, the Court if it shall deem it advantageous to the ward, may at any time, pass an order for the sale thereof" [56]. This inanimate and corporate ownership—the voting district of a ward—is here spoken for, or might be, as a single slave-holding male in determinations concerning property.

The eye pauses, however, not so much at the provisions of this enactment as at the details of its delineation. Everywhere in the descriptive document, we are stunned by the simultaneity of disparate items in a grammatical series: "Slave" appears in the same context with beasts of burden, *all* and *any* animal(s), various livestock, and a virtually endless profusion of domestic content from the culinary item to the book. Unlike the taxonomy of Borges's "Certain Chinese encyclopedia," whose contemplation opens Foucault's *Order of Things,* these items from a certain American encyclopedia do not sustain discrete and localized "powers of contagion," nor has the ground of their concatenation been desiccated beneath them. That imposed uniformity comprises the shock, that somehow this mix of named things, live and inanimate, collapsed by contiguity to the same text of "realism," carries a disturbingly prominent item of misplacement. To that extent, the project of liberation for African-Americans has found urgency in two passionate motivations that are twinned—1) to break apart, to rupture violently the laws of American behavior that make such syntax possible; 2) to introduce a new *semantic* field/fold more appropriate to his/her own historic movement. I regard this twin compulsion as distinct, though related, moments of the very same narrative process that might appear as a concentration or a dispersal. The narratives of Linda Brent, Frederick Douglass, and Malcolm El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz (aspects of which are examined in this essay) each represent both narrative ambitions as they occur under the auspices of "author."

Relatedly, we might interpret the whole career of African-Americans, a decisive factor in national political life since the mid-seventeenth century, in light of the

intervening, *intruding* tale, or the tale—like Brent's "garret" space—"between the lines," which are already inscribed, as a *metaphor* of social and cultural management. According to this reading, gender, or sex-role assignation, or the clear differentiation of sexual stuff, sustained elsewhere in the culture, does not emerge for the African-American female in this historic instance, except indirectly, except as a way to reenforce through the process of birthing, "the reproduction of the relations of production" that involves "the reproduction of the values and behavior patterns necessary to maintain the system of hierarchy in its various aspects of gender, class, and race or ethnicity" [Margaret Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa," Robertson and Klein 121]. Following Strobel's lead, I would suggest that the foregoing identifies one of the three categories of reproductive labor that African-American females carry out under the regime of captivity. But this replication of ideology is never simple in the case of female subject-positions, and it appears to acquire a thickened layer of motives in the case of African-American females.

If we can account for an originary narrative and judicial principle that might have engendered a "Moynihan Report," many years into the twentieth century, we cannot do much better than look at Goodell's reading of the *partus sequitur ventrem*: the condition of the slave mother is "forever entailed on all her remotest posterity." This maxim of civil law, in Goodell's view, the "genuine and degrading principle of slavery, inasmuch as it places the slave upon a level with brute animals, prevails universally in the slave-holding states" [Goodell 27]. But what is the "condition" of the mother? Is it the "condition" of enslavement the writer means, or does he mean the "mark" and the "knowledge" of the *mother* upon the child that here translates into the culturally forbidden and impure? In an elision of terms, "mother" and "enslavement" are indistinct categories of the illegitimate inasmuch as each of these synonymous elements defines, in effect, a cultural situation that is *father-lacking*. Goodell, who does not only report this maxim of law as an aspect of his own factuality, but also regards it, as does Douglass, as a fundamental degradation, supposes descent and identity through the female line as comparable to a brute animality. Knowing already that there are human communities that align social reproductive procedure according to the line of the mother, and Goodell himself might have known it some years later, we can only conclude that the provisions of patriarchy, here exacerbated by the preponderant powers of an enslaving class, declare Mother Right, by definition, a negating feature of human community.

Even though we are not even talking about any of the matriarchal features of social production/reproduction—matrifocality, matrilinearity, matriarchy—when we speak of the enslaved person, we perceive that the dominant culture, in a fatal misunderstanding, assigns a matriarchist value where it does not belong; actually *misnames* the power of the female regarding the enslaved community. Such naming is false because the female could not, in fact, claim her child, and false, once again, because "motherhood" is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance.

The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the *mother*, *handed* by her in ways that he cannot escape, and in ways that the white American male is allowed to temporize by a fatherly reprieve. This human and historic development—the text that has been inscribed on the benighted heart of the

continent—takes us to the center of an inexorable difference in the depths of American women's community: the African-American woman, the mother, the daughter, becomes historically the powerful and shadowy evocation of a cultural synthesis long evaporated—the law of the Mother—only and precisely because legal enslavement removed the African-American male not so much from sight as from *mimetic* view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the Father's name, the Father's law.

Therefore, the female, in this order of things, breaks in upon the imagination with a forcefulness that marks both a denial and an "illegitimacy." Because of this peculiar American denial, the black American male embodies the *only* American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn *who* the female is within itself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble, against the odds of pulverization and murder, including her own. It is the heritage of the *mother* that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the power of "yes" to the "female" within.

This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain *representational* potentialities for African-Americans: 1) motherhood as female blood-rite is outraged, is denied, at the *very same time* that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment; 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's *banished* name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In this play of paradox, only the female stands *in the flesh*, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, *out* of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment.

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Like

Sasha Debevec-McKenney

As I led the man through
the crowded restaurant
and to his table at the back
he said, *you sure are packing*
us in here like on slave ships
when he could have said
anything else: packing us in here
like daisies into a grocery-store
bouquet, packed together
like the pages of a wet book,
like A-listers in a Wes Anderson movie,
like hemorrhoid cream in an unopened tube,
like pennies in a pickle jar,
like forty to fifty exuberant
rural children in an underfunded
classroom, like a family of polar bears
crowded together on a floating sheet of ice—
he could have said, even,
like your ass in those jeans.

Blood in a syringe, silver compact
vehicles on the beltline at rush hour,
styrofoam tight in its cardboard box.
Yes, I was packing him in there,
like textured ground-beef material
into a Taco Bell Grilled Stuft Burrito,
like Amish girls in the back of a white van
on the way to Walmart. Like bone regrowing
inside a plaster cast. Like the flames
in a fire, like the fingers in my fist.

✦ ✦ ✦

The Gardens in the Sands

(Theme for the essential dialogue with a poet)

The Gardens: The secret part of the poem, that solitude and grace that the storyteller keeps for himself. The place that he offers to the intuitive attention of She who reads omens, to the dissertations of the friend and the brother, in a fragile sharing.

The Sands: The drunken swirling of the world's engagements, where everyone chants and enchants. Suffering also all sufferings. The Sands are not infertile. They bring silence amidst all this noise round about.

✦ ✦ ✦

The Cry of the World

We are told, and it is true, that everything is disorganized, confused, decrepit, madness is everywhere, the blood the wind. We see it and we live it. But it is the whole world that is speaking to you, through so many gagged voices.

Wherever you turn, there is desolation. But you still turn.

Doubtless we then bring to the co-operation of all knowledge, when we make ourselves share it, what each of us has long meditated or proclaimed, and, in my case, those few premonitions that have led me to write and that I have constantly transcribed, or betrayed through my inadequacy, in writing.

The thought of hybridity, of the trembling value not only of hybrid cultures but, going further, of cultures of hybridity, which perhaps save us from the limitations or the intolerances that lie in wait for us, and will open up for us new spaces of relation.

The mutual impact of the techniques or the mentalities of the oral and the written, and the inspirations that these techniques have breathed into our traditions of writing and our outbursts of voices, gestures and cries.

The slow erosion of the absolutes of History, as the histories of peoples who have been disarmed, dominated or sometimes are purely and simply disappearing but have nevertheless burst onto the scene of our common theatre, have finally met up and contributed to changing the whole representation that we had of History and its system.

The more and more evident workings of what I have called creolization, overtaking us, unpredictable, and so far away from the boring syntheses,

already refuted by Victor Segalen,* that a moralizing thinking would have offered us.

The diffracted poetics of this Chaos-world that we share, on a level with and beyond so many conflicts and obsessions with death, and whose invariants we will have to discover.

The harmony and, just as persistent, the disharmonies that multilingualism generates in us, this new passion for our most secret voices and rhythms.

*

These are some of the echoes that have now resulted in our consenting to listen together to the cry of the world, knowing also that, as we listen, we understand that *from now on everyone can hear it*.

We do not always see, and usually we try not to see, the destitution of the world, in the forests of Rwanda and the streets of New York, in the underground workshops of Asia where the children do not grow up and the silent heights of the Andes, and in all the places of debasement, degradation and prostitution, and so many others that flash before our wide open eyes, but we cannot fail to admit that all this is making a noise, an unstoppable murmuring that we, without realizing it, mix into the mechanical, humdrum little tunes of our progress and our driftings.

Each one of us has his own reasons to listen to this cry, and these different approaches serve to change this sound of the world that we all, at the same time, hear where we are.

And these reasons, which we have seized on in the difficult passion of writing and creating, of living and struggling, are now becoming common places for us, that we are learning to share; but invaluable common places: against the disorders of the identitarian machines of which we are so often the prey, like for example the birthright, the purity of the race, the integrality, if not the integrity, of the dogma.

* Victor Segalen (1878–1919), an important influence on Glissant, was one of the first French thinkers to write about exoticism.

Our common places, even though today they are of no use, of absolutely no use against the concrete oppressions that stun the world, are nevertheless capable of changing the imagination* of human communities: it is through the imagination that we will ultimately conquer these derelictions that attack us, just as it already helps us, by shifting our sensibilities, to fight them.

This will be my first proposition: where systems and ideologies have failed, and without in any way giving up on the resistance or the fight that you must carry on in your particular place, let us extend the imagination by an infinite bursting forth and an infinite repetition of the themes of hybridity, multilingualism and creolization.

*

Those who meet up *here* always come from an 'over there', from the expanse of the world, and here they are, determined to bring to this 'here' the fragile knowledge that they have taken from over there. Fragile knowledge is not imperious science. We sense that we are following a trace.

So this is my second proposition:

That the thought of the *trace*, as opposed to systematic thought, acts as a wandering that guides us. We know that the trace is what puts us, all of us, wherever we come from, in Relation.

And for some people, over there, so far so near, right here, on the hidden face of the earth, the trace was lived as one of the places of survival. For example, for the descendants of the Africans transported into slavery into what would soon be called the New World, it was usually the only possible form of action.

*

* In English, 'the imaginary' is associated primarily with its use in the work of Lacan and Althusser, where it has a rather different meaning. I have therefore preferred to translate 'l'imaginaire' here as 'imagination', which should be understood not as the faculty of imagining but as a kind of distinctive repertoire of images that orientate one's thinking, in the sense in which we speak of 'the Romantic imagination', 'the Puritan imagination', etc.

(A whole chunk of reality, seized from a recalcitrant past, redistributed into every corner of life, repeated in each book:)

The trace is to the route as rebellion to the command, jubilation to the garrotte.

Those Africans transported to the Americas carried with them, over the Great Seas, the trace of their gods, of their customs, of their languages. Faced with the implacable disorder of the settler, they had the genius, arising from the suffering they endured, to make these traces fertile, creating – better than syntheses – outcomes that no-one expected.

The Creole languages are traces, opening up across the seas of the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean. Jazz music is a trace that has been recomposed and spread all over the world. And all the different kinds of music of this Caribbean and the Americas.

When these deported slaves marooned in the woods, leaving the Plantation, the traces they followed were not those of self-abandonment or despair, but nor were they those of pride or egotism. And they did not weigh on the new land as irreparable stigmas.

When we – I mean the Antilleans – rush into these traces of our undervalued histories, it is not in order to quickly outline a model of humanity that we would then oppose, in a ready-made fashion, to those other models that are forcibly imposed on us.

The trace is not an unfinished path where one stumbles helplessly, nor an alley closed on itself, bordering a territory. The trace goes into the land, which will never again be a territory. The trace is an opaque way of experiencing the branch and the wind: of being oneself, derived from the other. It is the truly disordered sand of utopia.

Trace thought enables us to move away from the strangulations of the system. It thus refutes the extremes of possession. It cracks open the absolute of time. It opens onto these diffracted times that human communities today are multiplying among themselves, through conflicts and miracles.

It is the violent wandering of the shared thought.

(Thus for me, from cry to word, from folk tale to poem, from *Soleil de la conscience* to the *Poétique du divers*, this same momentum.)*

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* *Soleil de la concience* (1956) was Glissant's first collection of essays, and *Introduction à une Poétique du divers* (1996) immediately precedes the *Traité du Tout-monde*.

*

If we abandon systematic thoughts, it is because we have realized that they have imposed, here and there, an absolute of Being, which was profundity, magnificence, and limitation.

*

So many communities under threat today have only the alternatives of, on the one hand, the tearing apart of their being, identitarian anarchy, war between nations and dogmas, and, on the other, a Roman peace imposed by force, an empty neutrality imposed on everything by an all-powerful, totalitarian, well-meaning Empire.

Are we reduced to these impossible choices? Do we not have the right and the means to live another dimension of humanity? But how?

*

As much as ever, masses of Negroes are threatened and oppressed because they are Negroes, Arabs because they are Arabs, Jews because they are Jews, Muslims because they are Muslims, Indians because they are Indians, and so on through the infinite diversities of the world. This litany is indeed never-ending.

The idea of identity as a single root provides the measure according to which these communities were enslaved by others, and in the name of which a number of them led their liberation struggles.

But could we not propose, against the single root that kills everything around it, an extension of the root into a rhizome,* which opens up Relation? It is not rootless: but it does not take over its surroundings.

Onto the imagination of single-root identity, let us graft this imagination of rhizome-identity.

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* Glissant borrows this term from *Mille Plateaux*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980).

Against Being, which asserts itself, let us show being, which attaches itself.*

Let us challenge both the returns of the nationalist repressed and the sterile universal peace of the Powerful.

In a world where so many communities find themselves mortally denied the right to any identity, it is paradoxical to propose the imagination of an identity-relation, an identity-rhizome. I believe however that this is indeed one of the passions of these oppressed communities, to believe in this moving beyond identity and to carry it along with their sufferings.

No need to bleat about a humanist vocation to understand this, quite simply.

*

I call *Chaos-World* the current clash of so many cultures set ablaze, pushing each other away, disappearing, but still persisting, sleeping or transforming themselves, slowly or at lightning speed: these bursts, these explosions whose principle or economy we have not yet begun to understand, and whose trajectory we cannot predict. The Whole-World, which is totalizing, is not (for us) total.

And I call *Poetics of Relation* this possibility of the imagination that leads us to conceive of the elusive 'worldness' of such a Chaos-World, at the same time as it allows us to pick up some detail from it, and in particular to sing the praises of our place, unfathomable and irreversible. Imagination is not a dream, or the emptiness of an illusion.

*

You will have realized that one of the traces of this Poetics goes through the common place. How many people at the same time, in opposite or convergent situations, are thinking the same things, asking the same questions. Everything is in everything, without being forcibly mixed together. You come up with an idea, they greedily take it up, it is theirs. They proclaim it. They claim it. This is what characterizes the common place. It mobilizes our imaginations better than any system of ideas, but

* Where Glissant distinguishes in the phenomenological sense between 'l'être' and 'l'étant' I have translated these terms as 'Being' and 'being' respectively.

only as long as you are looking out for it. Here are some that concern the connection between cultures in world-wide Relation.

For the first time, the semi-totality of human cultures are entirely and simultaneously put in contact and in effervescent reaction with one another.

(But there are still some closed places and some different *times*.)

The worldness, or totality, of the phenomenon defines its character: the exchanges between cultures are not subtle, the adoptions or rejections are fierce.

(The law of basic pleasure, individual or collective, reinforced or maintained by the mechanisms of power and persuasion, presides over both adoption and rejection.)

For the first time also, the peoples are completely conscious of the exchange. The television of everything intensifies these kinds of connections.

(If there are surreptitious echoes, they are quickly spotted.)

The interrelations are strengthened or weakened at a speed that is barely conceivable.

(In other words this speed gives us light in the frightening immobility of so many dizzying changes in the world.)

Whole groups of influences (the dominant ones) take shape, in some cases leading to a generalized standardization.

(Do not think that you can fight this just by exaggerating your separateness.)

Relation implies no *legitimizing* transcendence. If the places of power are invisible, the Centres of Law impose themselves nowhere.

(Also, Relation has no morality: it does not choose. And it does not have to define anything that would be its 'content'. Relation, because it is totalizing, is intransitive.)

The interrelations proceed largely through fractures and ruptures. They are even perhaps of a fractal nature: this is why our world is a chaos-world.

Their general economy and their momentum are those of *creolization*.

*

From these Archipelagos that I live in, risen up among so many others, I propose to you that we should think about this creolization.

*

An unstoppable process, which mixes the substance of the world, which joins up and changes the cultures of today's humanities. What Relation gives us to imagine, creolization has given us to experience.

Creolization does not lead to loss of identity, to a dilution of the being. It does not imply renunciation of the self. It suggests the distance (the going away) from the overwhelming fixities of Being.

Creolization is not something that disturbs a given culture from the inside, even if we know that a number of cultures have been and will be dominated, assimilated, brought to the brink of disappearance. Beyond these often disastrous conditions, it acts to maintain relations between two or more cultural 'zones', brought together in a meeting place, just as a Creole language functions on the basis of differentiated linguistic 'zones' to take from them its new substance.

It soon becomes clear that although there have always been places of creolization (cultural hybridities), that which interests us today concerns the world-totality, once this totality has been realized (mainly through the action of expanding Western cultures, that is to say, through the work of colonizations). Relation feeds the imagination, which has still to be imagined, of a creolization that is now generalized and does not weaken.

Creolization is unpredictable, it is never fixed, or stopped, or inscribed in essences or absolutes of identity. To accept that the being changes while remaining is not to veer towards an absolute. What remains in the changing or the change or the exchange is perhaps first of all the inclination or the daring to change.

I offer you the word creolization, to signify that unpredictability of completely new outcomes, that saves us from believing in an essence or the rigidity of exclusiveness.

*

This shimmering of the being splashes over into my way of using language: our common condition here is multilingualism.

From now on I write in the presence of all the world's languages, in the poignant nostalgia of their threatened future. I understand that there is no point in trying to learn as many of them as possible: multilingualism is not quantitative. It is one of the modes of the imagination. In the language I use to express myself, and even if it is the only one I possess, I no longer write in a monolingual fashion.

'Maintaining' languages, helping to save them from wearing out and disappearing, constitutes this imagination of which there is so much to say. Let us not believe that one language could, tomorrow and with no trouble, become universal: it would soon perish, under the very code that its generalized use would have brought about. Anglo-American pidgin first and foremost threatens the surprises, the leaps, the organic, energetic life, the precious weaknesses and the secret retreats of the English and American and Canadian and Australian, etc., language. Simplification, which facilitates exchanges, immediately distorts them.

*

The first meeting of the International Writers' Parliament, in Strasbourg in 1993, was not completely polyglot, but it was certainly multilingual.

It was not the first time that writers and intellectuals tried to come together in a conference or an assembly; history provides us with illustrious examples.

It was perhaps not the first time that people tried to restore the meaning of this word Parliament, not a place where one is elected, one votes and decides, but a place where one speaks [parle].

But it was the first time that such a Parliament also proposed to *listen*, quite simply – to what? We have already said: to the cry of the world.

Not theories, ideologies or powers – not a system or an idea of the world – but the huge entanglement, where one neither sacrifices oneself in lamentations nor gets carried away with hopes. The word of the world crying out, where the voice of every community is heard. The accumulation of common places, of displaced cries, of mortal silences, where one can understand that the power of States is not our true motive, and agree that our truths are not linked to power.

*

(And now having evoked languages under threat, *langages* on the way out, I come back to another of my torments and repeat something I have already said, like an echo streaked into a piece of chalk which in turn is carved from fragile limestone.* This is to magnify the openings that the exercise of translation creates between languages and *langages*):

Translation is like an art of flight, in other words, so eloquently, a renunciation that accomplishes.

Renunciation when the poem, transcribed into another language, has given up the greater part of its rhythm, its secret structures, its assonances, these accidents that are the chance and the permanence of writing.

We must accept these losses, and this renunciation is the part of oneself that in any poetics we give up to the other.

The art of translation teaches us the thinking of evasion, the practice of the trace, which, as against systematic thought, points the way to the uncertain, the threatened, which come together and strengthen us. Yes, translation, art of the approach and the light touch, is a way of frequenting the trace.

Against the absolute limitation of the concepts of 'Being', the art of translation brings together the 'being'. To trace in languages is to gather together the unpredictable in the world. Translation does not consist of reducing something to transparency, nor of course in joining up two systems of transparency.

Hence, this other proposition, which the practice of translation suggests: to set against the transparency of models the open opacity of irreducible existences.

*

I claim for everyone the right to *opacity*, which is not the same as closing oneself off.

It is a means of reacting against all the ways of reducing us to the false clarity of universal models.

I do not have to 'understand' anyone, individual, community, people – i.e. to 'take them with me' at the cost of smothering them, of losing them

* English has no equivalent for the distinction between 'langue' and 'langage', which is an important element in Glissant's discussion of language use. He uses 'langage' to denote the speaker's subjective attitude to the 'langue' (French, English, Creole, etc.) that s/he uses.

in a boring totality that I would be in charge of - in order to agree to live with them, to build with them, to take risks with them.

Let opacity, whether it be ours for the other or maybe the other's for us, not close down in obscurantism or apartheid; let it be a celebration, not a terror. Let the right to opacity, whereby Diversity will best be preserved and acceptance strengthened, be a lamp watching over our poetics.

*

All of this, that I have briefly recalled, serves only to open up the trace to other utterances. Here I am appealing to conjoined poetics. Our actions in the world will remain sterile if we do not change, as best we can, the imagination of the human communities that we constitute.

Proof of this for me is the people that Matta* assembled at the entrance to that Writers' Parliament, in Strasbourg in 1993. You were welcomed by the cry of a whole crowd. A people of statues, where the Inca headdress covered the Egyptian toga, where the sari from Africa was draped over the Inuit pose, where the mouldings of bronze or copper, yellow breathing and violet suffering, supported all kinds of stylized forms, recognizable and intermixed, coming from all over the world, springing from so many of the beauties of the world. These works were hybrid, their architecture revealed diversity, mobilized by an artist into an unhoped-for result. Yes. These statues brought together this cry.

A people that speaks like this is a country that shares.

* Roberto Matta (1911–2002) was a surrealist painter from Chile.

Archipelagic thinking suits the pace of our worlds. It has their ambiguity, their fragility, their drifting. It accepts the practice of the detour, which is not the same as fleeing or giving up. It recognizes the range of the imaginations of the Trace, which it ratifies. Does this mean giving up on self-government? No, it means being in harmony with the world as it is diffracted in archipelagos, precisely, these sorts of diversities in spatial expanses, which nevertheless rally coastlines and marry horizons. We become aware of what was so continental, so thick, weighing us down, in the sumptuous systematic thought that up until now has governed the History of human communities, and which is no longer adequate to our eruptions, our histories and our no less sumptuous wanderings. The thinking of the archipelago, the archipelagos, opens these seas up to us.

Even from the point of view of identity, the scope of the poem results from the search, wandering and often anxious, of conjunctions of forms and structures that allow an idea of the world, expressed in the poem's own place, to meet (or not) other ideas of the world. Writing draws the common places of the real together to found a rhetoric. Michel Leiris did this in his work. Maurice Roche also, in a different way.* Identity does not proclaim itself, in this domain of literature and forms of expression: it is operational. The proportion of the means of expression and their adequacy are stronger than mere proclamation. Advertising one's identity is nothing but uttering a threat if it is not also the measure of a way of speaking. When on the contrary we point to and inform the forms of our speaking, our identity is no longer based on an essence, it leads to Relation.

* Michel Leiris (1901–1990) was a surrealist poet and ethnographer; Maurice Roche (1924–1997) was a prose writer from the 1960s to the 1990s. Both were friends of Glissant.

THRILLING CONCLUSION

And when the end came it came silent but clear like bird prints on snow
and no one was surprised to see it arrive
and still friends lingered in doorways letting goodbyes go bad
and chirping cats were fed a second time just to be sure
and the family dogs formed a congress in the woods with the coyotes
and someone was careful to leave bubble wrap for children to burst
and the night watchman pretended his glasses fogged over as we passed
and it turned out the trees were unmemorable
and the government a trick of the light
and it was sorry, the ending, but it didn't know what for
and it was okay at least as much as we were
and we swam with it in whatever we had on under
and we kissed so hard we clanged teeth
and we ate without speaking
and then at last spoke all at once like an unkinked hose
and then it began, the ending, the way all creatures do, small
and angry at its own misunderstandings.

(Robert Wood Lynn)

(Denialist) War and (Genocidal) Peace

Anti-Denialist Coalition

In the long compendium of notions, discourses, practices, institutions and ideas which will have to be rethought in the midst of the ongoing *Nakba* and the intensification of its obliterative drive and planetary scope rendered undeniable in Gaza, across all of Palestine, stretching over the region (Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Artsakh, …) and in every part of our shared earth are the words "war" and "peace".

For anyone who has been sensitive to language and struggling for freedom with Palestinians, words like 'conflict', 'war' and 'peace' have always been recognized for what they have been, part of a larger arsenal of the terms and terminologies which obscure and mutilate our capacity to perceive this more than 100 year effort to future colonial, imperial impunity, premised on the erasure of Palestinian existence.

If the aims and objectives of *the Nakba* have always been planetary in reach, maintaining, preserving and securing a future for racial, colonial, supremacist, capitalist dominion over the earth; then these fragmentary notes wrestling with the functions, discursively and materially, of 'war' and 'peace' will have to begin from the experiences of the colonized.

For the colonized, racialized, colored and blackened peoples, abducted, displaced, occupied, 'the wretched of earth,'

'peace' has never simply been pacification and/or submission, swallowing, living with the structured oblivion/denial of the violence that has been committed and continues against them; 'peace' and 'war' have always been interchangeable, alternating phases of an ongoing process of attempted immiseration, exploitation, enslavement, effacement and extermination.

Rethinking our understanding of 'war' from the perspective of *the Nakba,* epicentered on the erasure of a multiplicity of communities and communalities of the 'Near-East' including Palestinians *and* as a planetary regime to maintain a colonial, supremacist, capitalist world ordering would neither repeat Carl Von Clausewitz's dictum, *war is the continuation of politics by other means*; nor uncritically adopt what Michel Foucault claimed in his 1975-76 Lectures at the Collège de France (*Society Must Be Defended)* as a conception preceding and inverted by Clausewitz, namely, *politics as the continuation of war by other means*.

It is true that it is precisely in the 'after' math of the Second 'World War' and the *regime*ntation of 'peace' or in the transition to the 'Cold War' that the perpetration of *the Nakba,* and the holocaust (sacrifice) of Palestinians as a means of refurbishing imperial dominion, is articulated.

It is also true that a global polity, including its correlated international, institutional, juridical, economic, cultural, discursive programs, conventions, arrangements are reengineered including the establishment of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, United Nations, UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the Marshall Plan, in 1945, GATT (General Agreement on Tariff and Trade, predecessor, foundations of the WTO), the 1947 adoption of the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, adoption of UDHP (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization April 4, 1949) and the establishment of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, December 8, 1949) to name a few.

Upon first glance, this would appear to be precisely politics, economics, culture as the continuation of war by other means. But if these initial years of the 'post' 'war' *1945-1949* mark the intensification of the obliterative violence against Palestinians initially declared by Balfour in *1917*, then clearly we see that the establishment of this global polity, including the basis to the 'Rules Based Order' previously called the 'International Liberal Order' (as synonymous with 'the Free World') is not only founded on and inseparable from the continuation of colonial violence but also constitutes *the Nakba* as foundational to a planetary *nomos* ('international order') to future it.

In this way, from the purview of *Planetary Nakba*, 'war' and 'politics' or what comes 'after,' would neither be understood as ends nor means, subordinating or privileging one over the other; rather they would be seen as indissociable, together forming part of an incessant effort, enlistment, entrenchment toward denial of the primary, underlying and ongoing genocidal violence that they both – as associated circumscribed fields of activity, notions, temporarilities, precepts, objects of 'scientific' and 'philosophical' discourses – hide, justify, naturalize.

At the heart of this 'reconstruction' effort, with its 'post' 'war' and 'after' 'auschwitz' is the perpetration of *the Nakba*. At the heart of the Nazi crime scene are white supremacists, imperialists, capitalists, but like the entire history of racially motivated violence, the ones incrminated and incarcerated will be the 'colored' folk. Its 'peace' then is this rehabilitation of a colonial international and the various forms of supremacy, racial, patriarchal, class, violence that liberal capitalism had and has always required. Therefore, fascism's roots in white supremacy, colonial, imperial butchery has to be disavowed, because this same liberal order has never stopped fighting to continue to future them. *The Nakba* is then, among other things, the name for this denialist account and world-making 'after' the Nazis, whereby fascism's *Ursprung*, as origin and as program, can never be acknowledged because that would risk to undo the very matrix of power that this 'post' attempted to

shore up. Here lies the basis of why fascism never ended, because racial supremacy and the genocidal violence immanent to it never began with the Nazis and it was never intended to be 'resolved' by *the Nakba* rather futured. Denialist 'war' and genocidal 'peace' have been nothing but its building blocks.

From the perspective of those designated 'undesirables' by the colonial powers, 'war,' 'diplomacy,' 'politics,' 'peace' all act as covers for the obliterative and extractive violence that has and will continue to be exacted upon them in different forms. So it is with little surprise that what precedes and comes 'after' 'war,' is part of a continuous effort to unsee *the Nakba* and the genocidal violence that futuring colonial imperial oversight and ownership has and will always demand.

Whether it is the annihilation of the Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians on the Eastern Front of the Ottoman Empire or Balfour's promissory declaration to unhome Palestinians in its Western Front ('First World War') or the killing and erasing of millions of anti-capitalists, Jews, Roma from Europe ('Second World War') or the massacres and ethnic 'cleansing' of Palestinians ('1948 Palestine War' '1948 Arab-Israeli War'), *the Nakba*'s denial and perpetration have been written not only through 'war' but also by all the imperial machinations 'before' and 'after' temporal and terminological confines of 'war.'

We will never arrest *the Nakba*, in the language of 'war' and 'peace' we will only future it.

What ties these distinct (yet indissociable for the colonized) temporalities and designations of 'war' and 'peace' together is the program for ownership over earth and the obliteration or subjection of the 'brutes' who are in the way. These non-people, or in the case of Balfour's Palestine, 'non' (Jewish) people, will be consigned to sacrifice (or, *Holocaust*), but it is a sacrifice that can never be avowed if this endless campaign of extraction by extermination or education is to be justified.

'War' forms part of a larger construction site of conjuring an image, 'a vast *mise-en-scène*' of adversarial, *dueling forces* (whether between competing empires or even in the cases designated as asymmetric), when in fact, what undergirds colonial and by extension imperial violence is a brutality premised primarily on the logic of taking from, eradicating, subjecting the designated 'ab-,' 'in-,' 'non-,' 'other,' 'lesser,' 'lower,' 'backward,' ~~human~~, by some right or might, whether racial, civilizational, scientific, biological, historical, moral, religious or providential.

The colonized, racialized, dehumanized who are earmarked for elimination *from* or education *into* the colonial world are the unseen or ob-scene (off-scene) of *the Nakba*'s *mise-en-scène* of 'war' and 'peace.'

What words like 'war' and 'peace' then serve to occlude, preclude is firstly our capacity to perceive this pervasive interconnected expansive constitutive violence of the colonial or settler colonial enterprise, sewn back together through *the Nakba* – in all its illegitimacy, brutality, coercive and cultural impositions – and secondly, what precedes this violence and remains primary, the very object of its obliterative drive, that is, the colonized's abilities to exist, subsist, resist and disorder attempts to impose the terms of order.

Witnessing the acceleration of the obliterative drive of *the Nakba* in Gaza and the 'Great Peace' which is a 'next' designated as 'after' – is among other things then a lesson in how words like 'war,' 'conflict,' 'ceasefire,' 'peace' have been so instrumental in reproducing and creating the conditions of unthinkability and imperceptibility of an immanent genocidal violence which lies at the heart of the project of 'White' 'Western' 'Civilization.'

Furthermore, these temporal and terminological designations have to be understood as absolutely critical in restricting any space to question the imposition or 'right to existence'

of a supremacist, colonial, militarized, legalized order, which full heartedly funds and arms genocide not only in Palestine, but also on a regional and planetary scale.

That one of the main protagonists of this systematic effort of extermination is an entity imagined and founded in collusion with forces who have never stopped conjuring genocide, denying Jewish belonging in Europe (i.e, *a people without a land*) and an unpeopled Palestine (i.e., *a land without a people*) is thus not an exception, but the rule of 'war' and 'peace' of the imperial, settler or corporate colonies.

For anyone capable of perceiving *the Nakba* in its long durée and duress, what preceded *Tufan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Flood)* has clearly been a genocide by attrition, siege, collective torture, imprisonment and episodic displacement, massacres. Equally, what proceeded it, as a response, by those committed to maintaining this ongoing *catastrophe*, would be an intensification and unapologetic articulation of its obliterative end point. Palestinians, as one of the structural objects of this obliterative drive have refused to accept this *telos* as perpetual detainees, refugees, victims.

Thus, to refer to the struggle, including the armed resistance of people fighting against genocidal violence, in the language of 'war,' including associated terms like 'ceasefire,' act as material barriers to the perception of and abolition of this regime of death – not just in Palestine but across a planet comprised of manufactured states, 'imagined communities' of oblivion and denial.

In the light of our notes here, even the systematic effort by the perpetrators and enablers of the extermination of life in Gaza to conjure images of the inhumanity of Palestinians refusing their obliteration and to attack those demanding 'ceasefire now,' was not only a refusal to stop the killing, but also a way of delimiting discourse and the perception of the genocide taking place 'before,' 'during' and in whatever would be designated as an 'after.'

Boxing-in the terms of struggle to 'ceasefire' – as an extension of vocabularies associated with 'war,' 'warring,' 'dueling' parties – are critical in reproducing the structural denial of the originary scope and ongoing …. of *the Nakba* as well as the resistance to it. They mutilate perception, as if there would be two sides firing and what would restore 'peace' would be to stop this firing, stop 'the war.' By associating the cessation of bombing as precursor to whatever could be called 'peace,' 'ceasefire now' becomes the terms of a death sentence, consigning the colonized to a condition of continued guilt for existing, for resisting; never holding to account, in any way, the perpetrators of this long reign of mass theft, terror and death that *the Nakba* names, futures. This unaccountability is not just in the delimitations of the territory called 'Gaza Strip' or 'Occupied Palestine' or 'Historical Palestine' but across all the sites of ongoing racialized supremacist colonial imperial brutality and thievery including within the pockets of exception inside the otherwise whitened centers of its metropoles.

Here again, the words 'war,' 'ceasefire,' 'peace' become discursive and material activities deployed to regulate, unsee, deny, distort the perception of and prolong the perpetration of the ongoing obliteration of Palestine and the preservation of *the Nakba as a planetary dispositif* of administering, *white* – washing it.

In Gaza and in all parts of the planet still occupied, terrorized, sanctioned by this 'colonial international' in-stated on *the Nakba*, there is no 'before' or 'after,' only an 'in-cessation of hostilities' toward the colonized.

In the blackened sites of the colony, the plantation, the reservation, the camp, the settler colony as well as its whitened, enlightened sites of higher education and culture, 'peace' and 'war' are not used to refer to the subjection or civilizing domestication of the 'native' or 'savage.' Nor are they used to name civilization's defense against the 'barbarian,' 'infidel' or 'terrorist' – rather their deployment (as notions as much as material practices) is the very means by which the figure

of 'native,' 'savage,' 'barbarian,' 'terrorist' are the sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit figures, axes upon which 'war' and 'peace' will alternate, oscillate to obliterate any outside or otherwise to the colonizer's conjured 'civilization' thus future.

Abolition and anti-colonial struggle are animated by the perpetual practices of affirming and reclaiming this outside and otherwise of the imposed 'civilization' 'future' 'war' 'peace' 'politics' 'prison' 'production' 'constitution' 'culture' 'denial' 'institution' 'terms' of the colony, the settler colony.

For the racialized and colonized, the revocability and reversibility of these impositions and the coercive, all encompassing – when deemed 'necessary' even genocidal – violence its 'self' 'preservation,' 'defense,' 'right to existence' purportedly 'requires,' is central to whatever could be understood as freedom.

If as Fanon argued, colonialism 'is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native' and that this violence is the 'natural state' of colonial rule, then the *planetary regime of Nakba* is the naturalization of this state of affairs in the 'after' math of the colonies' supremacist and fascist *chickens coming home to roost*.

The deployments of 'war' and 'peace' are instruments of that naturalization and the denial of the ongoingness of coloniality. The linguistically illogical 'war' on drugs and 'war' on terror only find their logic in the 'demonic grounds' from which *the Nakba* can be perceived.

In the ob-scene or off-scene of the *Nakba-cene*, there are, as Sylvia Wynter helps us recall *no humans involved*.

Genocide, is thus not understood here as a legal, colonial, imperially adopted juridical category, reserved for those who would be qualified by Western European Man as human, but as the immanent objective of colonial, settler colonial expansion, possession, claim of ownership, dominion, denial, evacuation, obliteration, 'purification' of/from a place and/or a peoples.

Genocide is also understood here as the basis and horizon of colonial pedagogy and culture. As long as the colonizer can continue, 'peace' is the trophy of the perpetrators and the catastrophe (literally *the Nakba*) of the survivors.

What we have been made to witness in Gaza is the basis of colonial knowledge and cultural production – what it obliterates is far more consequential than what it produces. It is what lies behind every syllabus, lesson plan, exposition and exhibition. Its dictate, those who seek an otherwise to the imposition of the future of the colony, face the abyss of total annihilation with total impunity, since they who contest this future, this imposition of civilization, are what is to be rendered futureless, what is to be exterminated.

Education and Cultural production, as they are integral to the production of discourse, thought and the denial that genocide is predicated on, fuelled by, are not instruments then of 'war' as much as they are parts of the construction of a monolith 'world order' that facilitates a field and discourse on and production of 'war' or 'wars' whose ultimate aim is to confuse and enlist victims of this foundational violence into partakers in it.

Moreover, knowledge and cultural production attempt to imbricate the 'accepted,' 'chosen,' 'qualified,' the 'educated,' 'acculturated,' 'recognized' of the colonized, in the designated times, conditions of 'peace' to seek 'security,' 'comfort,' 'a standing' in that imposition that *Nakba* names and futures rather than the regime's abolition.

The impositions, institutions, practices of *art* and *education* based epistemically, philosophically, materially on colonial, settler colonial, racial violence, theft, in this sense are not superfluous or external to the genocidal pedagogy of the enablers and perpetrators of the mass killings exhibited in Gaza rather they form the core of what we could call *genocidal culture*.

There is no genocide without a culture that authorizes, rationalizes, normalizes, relativizes, ignores, unsees, occludes,

denies it. *Art* or *education* and their institutions have not simply been playing their part in this genocide by suppressing speech, attacking, vilifying those attempting to stop it. They have been shaping the very architectures of sense deprivation, anesthetization, innocence, disavowal of their intimate role and genesis in genocide and the prolongation of *the Nakba.* What friends have elsewhere called the arts of whiteboxing.

Genocide and denial are inseparable. Where you see genocide, you will find denial. And the denial of that genocidal violence is at the heart of genocidal culture.

Denial is not simply negation. The socialization and the social life of foundational lies such as *a land without a people for a people without a land*, does not just negate or obliterate, it produces facts, institutions, infrastructures, discourses, cultures sewn up to reproduce it.

Whiteboxing is just one way of naming the instituting of forms of denial of that ongoing obliterative violence into the mind of 'colonizer' and 'native' alike. It names the technologies of unseeing, imperception, distortion within which the conditioning of a 'post' of 'war' or a 'peace' in an 'after' only insures that the brutality of unending coloniality, its refurbished, ongoing genocidal campaigns, which we call *the Nakba,* is naturalized and continues.

Studies of 'war' and 'peace,' 'violence' and 'non-violence,' even of *the Nakba* itself, in the cross-hairs of the practitioners of *whiteboxing* will only perpetuate the occlusion if not outright denial of its planetary expanse and, most critically, function.

Whiteboxing can be understood as the knowledge and cultural practices associated with what our friends engaged in decolonial thought have called the 'colonial matrix of power.' It could be understood as precisely what friends engaged in black study and anti-colonial struggle have

tried to think beyond – from Wynter's 'demonic grounds' of black feminist praxis to Katherine McKittrick's 'black methodologies' including even Aimé Césaire's exhortations toward a *pensée poétique*.

The exigency to forge this concept comes out of a need to name what the colonized lives, a veritable field of cultural and knowledge 'production' which is marked more by what it ignores than what it brings us closer to.

If *blackboxing* is the practice of isolating, enclosing a thing, a process, even a state of affairs to only understanding what input will produce a stable and/or desired outcome, irrespective of what happens 'inside;' then *whiteboxing* could be a practice of purporting to know a thing, illuminate it, bring light to it, producing an 'inside' [separated from its outside, from other things, a subject, an object, including the manners of approach, the time, the context, the entanglements, the intentions of the one(s) approaching] which not only mutilates the purported known, limits the capacities of the seeker or searcher of knowledge, from sensing, meaning, seeing feeling but also, most importantly, its main function is to help deny, distract, distance, even absence from the scene what needs our most urgent attention, what would be absolutely elemental to any sense making, including of what is being approached. It's a way of approaching, where the approach is marked more by all that it takes distance from in order to deny any possibility of approaching anything.

Here what is blackened is not a situation, a thing objectified, a context reduced, a process or state of affairs isolated, to a function, a desired end from a repeatable input. No, *whiteboxing* entails practices of 'bringing to light,' 'shedding light,' en-lightening, explaining, naming, discussing, knowing, perceiving whose main function is avoiding, denying, occluding, radically reducing the field of vision, of perception, of sensation and affection.

Within the confines of the 'white box,' whatever 'war' and 'peace' attempt to describe will be rendered inaccessible not

because the words are are void of any signification but rather because of what they hide from view.

In the light of this brief detour into the *whiteboxing* of 'war' and its correlated 'peace' or 'civility' thus 'politics' we can return to one of the points of reference in these assembled notes.

Clausewitz thought of 'war' as subordinate to 'politics' and the effort to impose will in the context of dueling forces, namely between states or even empires; then Foucault argued warfare was a more permanent condition and feature of 'society.' It is from here that he can argue that 'civil war' is a constant feature of modern 'politics' and what it tries to suppress and deny.

If we remain with Foucault and do not dismiss outright his thought – since clearly, he remained largely oblivious to *the Nakba* even as he was able to contribute some critical insights for perceiving it, confronting it – in the purview of *Planetary Nakba*, we would have to resituate the function, sense of 'civil war.'

On the one hand, Foucault allows us to arrive to an idea that the will to or the production of knowledge is part of larger field of power relations, with discourses having concrete effects, composing part of a subterranean 'civil war' and concurrently a denial of that 'war.' What seems to elude Foucault is that even still, the discourse on and production of 'civil war' as concept, notion, and material fact, just as 'war' itself, is an extension of that regime of denial.

What 'civil war' produces are 'sides' to a 'war' in which what is important is not what the 'warring' sides believe or stand for, the function is to force and generate an image of violence 'within' a 'society' in order to delimit that life world. 'Civil war' is among other things, discursively and materially the production of an inside, an outside, of an assumed consistent 'society' whose main function is to confuse, occlude, normalize, further entrench the colonial racial capitalist world ordering/sundering which *the Nakba* and its continuation attempts to hold together.

Whether it is through a microphysics of power or in generalizing or universalizing it within a global polity, 'civil war' does not break open the 'civility' (and by inference civilization) that is always in the service of producing and excluding its 'inhuman' other. On the contrary, it further entrenchesthe colonial injunction – *no humanity outside its terms and determinations* – renovated in the 'political-economic' doctrines of neo-liberal coloniality – *there is no outside.*

Remaining here close to the region – whether in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Yemen, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and so many worlds, communities held hostage by this planetary scheme – the function and production of 'civil war' much like 'war' as fact and discourse has been to make more imperceptible, confusing and render more irreversible this monolith 'world' that *Nakba* entrenches – including the very terms of society or social life it imposes, homogenizes and universalizes.

It is *the Nakba* and the partitions and borders it imposes which will produce as much the *within* isolated from a *without* (including the nation-state form which the colonial, imperial powers draw, redraw arbitrarily), as it will the violence which will be 'internalized.'

In some cases, the rift will be produced precisely between those who resist *the Nakba* and those who seek to reconcile, persist, profit in, by its *terms of order* (here the categories of authority, power, leadership explored by Cedric Robinson would just be one of many seminal points of reference). However, the main characteristic of 'civil war' will be neither the struggle between those who reconcile with and those who struggle against the *genocidal-denialist futurity* imposed by *the Nakba*; nor, will it be the enlistment of parties to obliterate one another – even if both of these are immanent to whatever goes by that name.

Rather, not unlike 'war,' the main aim of 'civil war' as process and object of discourse is the obliteration of the

capacity to perceive and to exit *the Nakba,* both in its *historicity* as well as its *futurity*.

Let us then return to the scene of the crime, so to speak, to *the Nakba* and how we might perceive the region outside the sense deprivation imposed by the terms of 'War' – 1948 Palestine 'War', 1948 Arab Israeli 'War', 1949 Syrian 'Coup', 1953 Iranian 'Coup', Baghdad 'Pact', Algerian 'War', 1956 'War' (or Suez 'Crisis'), North Yemen Civil 'War', 1963 Iraq 'Coup', Dhofar 'War', Six Day 'War', 1970 Omani 'Coup', Yom Kippur 'War', Western Sahara 'War', Lebanese 'Civil War', Camp David 'Accords', [Iranian Revolution] Soviet-Afghan 'War', Iran-Iraq 'War', Lebanon 'War', [First Intifada] First Gulf 'War', Oslo 'Accords', Algerian 'Civil War', [Second Intifada] 'War' on Terror, Afghanistan 'War', Second Gulf 'War', 2006 Lebanon 'War', Iraqi 'Civil War', Gaza 'War' (2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, 2023-), Somali 'Civil War', [Arab Revolutions] Syrian 'Civil War', Libyan 'Civil War', Yemeni 'Civil War', Abraham 'Accords', Second Nagorno-Karabakh 'War', Ethiopian 'Civil War', 2023 Azerbaijani 'Offensive', Sudan 'Civil War', 2024 Invasion of Lebanon, Iran-Israel 12 Day 'War', Gaza 'Peace' Plan …to name just a few of the regional episodes.

Moreover, let us rather begin to consider *the Nakba* as a historically rooted process, strategy, which develops, in the midst of the 'First World War,' to advance alternatively colluding and competing imperial interests, in equal measure conquering, carving up the Ottoman Empire (its 'discovered' resources and the 'under-humans' who were 'in the way') as well as eliminating the threats posed by insurgent anti-capitalist struggles and their potential contagion effect on anti-colonial movements.

The colonization, denial, obliteration of Palestine, as well as the genocide of the Armenians, Pontic Greeks, Assyrians, serves as the fulcrum upon which *the Nakba* is initiated as machination: tacitly positing with the Balfour Declaration

imperial ownership, dominion over the (not yet conquered) Ottoman Empire and its (sacrificable) peoples.

With this declaration, the British also tacitly propagate the eradication/indoctrination of Jewish life in Europe, demarcating the 'good' Jews as those who will agree they do not belong, partake in European culture unless they collaborate with the colonizing, b/ordering, extracting, domesticating ('making the desert bloom') of the region/planet, ideally transplanting themselves in Palestine. This is in full consistency with the anti-Jewish policies of the same 'Lord' Arthur Balfour himself, who in 1905 was critical in the passage of the Aliens Act which specifically attempted to prevent 'undesirable' immigrants, namely Jews, fleeing pogroms in the Russian Empire, from seeking, finding refuge in Britain.

But this is not all, this 'declaration' will tacitly prepare for the witch-hunts against the anti-capitalist insurgencies, giving legitimacy to the deracination and demonization of the 'International Jews' (in the language of Henry Ford, Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler alike) who precisely as anarchist, communist, bundist, socialist threaten 'global white supremacy' and 'colonial civilization.'

Fascisms – as 'internalizations' of this racial/colonial logic and violence, enlisting, enticing working masses, potential proletarians into racial belonging, into supremacist movements, capturing, channeling their discontent toward villifying, then eliminating the 'undersirables' who are the threat to, enemies of purity, of civilization – becoming one of the salient features of *the Nakba*.

By the 'Second World War' and its aftermath of millions killed, including Jews, Roma, Communists, Anarchists, Socialists and others deemed *Untermenschen* in Europe and millions eliminated by forces of Imperial violence crossing earth, by capitalism's counter revolutionary armies, militias, Fascists, Nazis, supremacists of all ilk, including Zionists; a denialist international 'order' is constructed, propelled, including the myth of a 'Year Zero,' whereby a tabula rasa of

international laws, norms, rights, including a United Nations, with various international powers, spheres of influence, declarations, conventions, councils, partitions, sovereignties are recognized. 1948, as the formalization of Apartheid in South Africa. 1948 as the CIA intervention in pre-empting electoral victory by the Communist, Socialist, Popular Front parties in Italy. 1948 whereby CIA supports the ongoing Greek 'Civil War' and the campaign of 'White Terror' to kill and eliminate partisans, communists, anarchists … 1948 as the mass displacement, theft, 'cleansing,' killing and incarceration of Palestinians, 'sacrificing' Palestinians for the crimes of Germans, Europeans and all those terrorists committed to maintaining imperial impunity, colonial-modernity and the 500 year crime wave of capitalist devastation.

Every 'coup,' every 'regime change,' every 'war' and 'peace' not just in the region, but nearly every corner of earth has been claimed, settled, fought, negotiated over/by the great accumulators of 'power' and 'wealth,' facilitated by their enriched and celebrated collaborators, in the long durée of colonial and imperial conquest.

The question remains in the purview of *Nakba* as a Planetary Regime and the denialist 'wars' and genocidal 'peace' it proliferates, whether the underseen and enduring resistance of the colonized can reclaim an otherwise outside the colony's imposed terms, temporalities, sentences, evaluations, determinations, pedagogies, culture and world b/ordering.

If *the Nakba* has sought, as our friend Samera Esmeir reminds us, 'not only to exterminate and destroy, but also to propel a particular kind of movement, psychic and bodily, into the future and away from the land as earth' then 'war' and 'peace' have been two of its primary weapons.

That the very foundations of the word 'war' in English and '*guerre*' in Latin based languages derives from the German '*werre*' and Frankish '*werru*' and the Indo-European (*wers-*), which designate more mixing up, disordering, con-

fusing, putting into disarray rather than combat, is one of the more enigmatic and instructive points of orientation toward an anti-denialist approach to perceiving and disactivating its uses and functions in futuring *the Nakba*.

In this sense, if we are to ever abolish all that has and continues to perpetrate *the Nakba*, we will have to reclaim our languages and imaginaries of struggle *beyond* their designated 'inside' and 'outside,' 'before' and 'after,' 'for' and 'against' of 'war' and 'peace.'

Maybe then the only 'after' we can dream and struggle toward is the *after Planetary Nakba*, before the colonial supremacist racial patriarchal capitalist world's long unending night of 'self' declared 'war' and proclaimed 'peace' in the name of pillaging, possessing and profiteering on the destruction of our worlds.

If return is our compass for *after Nakba*, then it can never be exercised by the permission or spatial-temporal determinations of the colonizer, including a 'here' and 'there' – 'then' and 'now'- it is rather enacted through the daily practices of abolition of the colony, including its regimentation and incarceration of earth and time.

As If to Misread Song
By Lotte L.S.

It felt so normal to be ‘inspected,’ ‘looked at,’
‘examined,’ ‘explored,’ ‘interrogated’—
why does the perceptually deprived brain play such tricks?
Still firing off, cleaning up the sopping wetness
of the clouds with a snuffed-out candle wick. The spider
can’t be frightened into a jar. Imagine remembering anything
about those years other than pure sensation—
could the tree do it? The stump of one fallen
nourished for centuries by its surroundings. After some
time I learned to pay attention to *ah* and *oh*
and *hey*—body demanding a toll when another
eventually wanted to enter. At last, to guess instead
of knowing—saying now when the feeling came
strongest: how I miss the future, it’s sideways surrender.
I have since only rarely seen the tree—it puts into my ears
the sounds of all the people living without me:
the dark oaks of the dining room, every knife buried
among the airport car park—letterboxes
where there should have been a lake. Imagine if
afterwards everything can be pure sensation:
sugar-fed and alive in its dismantling.

THE STRAIGHT MIND[1]

1980

In recent years in Paris, language as a phenomenon has dominated modern theoretical systems and the social sciences and has entered the political discussions of the lesbian and women's liberation movements. This is because it relates to an important political field where what is at play is power, or more than that, a network of powers, since there is a multiplicity of languages that constantly act upon the social reality. The importance of language as such as a political stake has only recently been perceived.[2] But the gigantic development of linguistics, the multiplication of schools of linguistics, the advent of the sciences of communication, and the technicality of the metalanguages that these sciences utilize, represent the symptoms of the importance of what is politically at stake. The science of language has invaded other sciences, such as anthropology through Lévi-Strauss, psychoanalysis through Lacan, and all the disciplines which have developed from the basis of structuralism.

The early semiology of Roland Barthes nearly escaped from linguistic domination to become a political analysis of the different systems of signs, to establish a relationship between this or that system of signs — for example, the myths of the petit

bourgeois class — and the class struggle within capitalism that this system tends to conceal. We were almost saved, for political semiology is a weapon (a method) that we need to analyze what is called ideology. But the miracle did not last. Rather than introducing into semiology concepts which are foreign to it — in this case Marxist concepts — Barthes quickly stated that semiology was only a branch of linguistics and that language was its only object.

Thus, the entire world is only a great register where the most diverse languages come to have themselves recorded, such as the language of the Unconscious,[3] the language of fashion, the language of the exchange of women where human beings are literally the signs which are used to communicate. These languages, or rather these discourses, fit into one another, interpenetrate one another, support one another, reinforce one another, auto-engender, and engender one another. Linguistics engenders semiology and structural linguistics, structural linguistics engenders structuralism, which engenders the Structural Unconscious. The ensemble of these discourses produces a confusing static for the oppressed, which makes them lose sight of the material cause of their oppression and plunges them into a kind of ahistoric vacuum.

For they produce a scientific reading of the social reality in which human beings are given as invariants, untouched by history and unworked by class conflicts, with identical psyches because genetically programmed. This psyche, equally untouched by history and unworked by class conflicts, provides the specialists, from the beginning of the twentieth century, with a whole arsenal of invariants: the symbolic language which very advantageously functions with very few elements, since, like dig-

its (0-9), the symbols "unconsciously" produced by the psyche are not very numerous. Therefore, these symbols are very easy to impose, through therapy and theorization, upon the collective and individual unconscious. We are taught that the Unconscious, with perfectly good taste, structures itself upon metaphors, for example, the name-of-the-father, the Oedipus complex, castration, the murder-or-death-of-the-father, the exchange of women, etc. If the Unconscious, however, is easy to control, it is not just by anybody. Similar to mystical revelations, the apparition of symbols in the psyche demands multiple interpretations. Only specialists can accomplish the deciphering of the Unconscious. Only they, the psychoanalysts, are allowed (authorized?) to organize and interpret psychic manifestations which will show the symbol in its full meaning. And while the symbolic language is extremely poor and essentially lacunary, the languages or metalanguages which interpret it are developing, each one of them, with a richness, a display, that only theological exegeses of the Bible have equalled.

Who gave the psychoanalysts their knowledge? For example, for Lacan, what he calls the "psychoanalytic discourse," or the "analytical experience," both "teach" him what he already knows. And each one teaches him what the other one taught him. But can we deny that Lacan scientifically discovered, through the "analytical experience" (somehow an experiment), the structures of the Unconscious? Will we be irresponsible enough to disregard the discourses of the psychoanalyzed people lying on their couches? In my opinion, there is no doubt that Lacan found in the Unconscious the structures he said he found there, since he had previously put them there. People who did not fall into the power of the psychoanalytical institution may

experience an immeasurable feeling of sadness at the degree of oppression (of manipulation) that the psychoanalyzed discourses show. In the analytical experience there is an oppressed person, the psychoanalyzed, whose need for communication is exploited and who (in the same way as the witches could, under torture, only repeat the language that the inquisitors wanted to hear) has no other choice, (if s/he does not want to destroy the implicit contract which allows her/him to communicate and which s/he needs), than to attempt to say what s/he is supposed to say. They say that this can last for a lifetime — cruel contract which constrains a human being to display her/his misery to an oppressor who is directly responsible for it, who exploits her/him economically, politically, ideologically and whose interpretation reduces this misery to a few figures of speech.

But can the need to communicate that this contract implies only be satisfied in the psychoanalytical situation, in being cured or "experimented" with? If we believe recent testimonies[4] by lesbians, feminists, and gay men, this is not the case. All their testimonies emphasize the political significance of the impossibility that lesbians, feminists, and gay men face in the attempt to communicate in heterosexual society, other than with a psychoanalyst. When the general state of things is understood (one is not sick or to be cured, one has an enemy) the result is that the oppressed person breaks the psychoanalytical contract. This is what appears in the testimonies, along with the teaching that the psychoanalytical contract was not a contract of consent but a forced one.

The discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality.[5] These

discourses speak about us and claim to say the truth in an apolitical field, as if anything of that which signifies could escape the political in this moment of history, and as if, in what concerns us, politically insignificant signs could exist. These discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms. Everything which puts them into question is at once disregarded as elementary. Our refusal of the totalizing interpretation of psychoanalysis makes the theoreticians say that we neglect the symbolic dimension. These discourses deny us every possibility of creating our own categories. But their most ferocious action is the unrelenting tyranny that they exert upon our physical and mental selves.

When we use the overgeneralizing term "ideology" to designate all the discourses of the dominating group, we relegate these discourses to the domain of Irreal Ideas; we forget the material (physical) violence that they directly do to the oppressed people, a violence produced by the abstract and "scientific" discourses as well as by the discourses of the mass media. I would like to insist on the material oppression of individuals by discourses, and I would like to underline its immediate effects through the example of pornography.

Pornographic images, films, magazine photos, publicity posters on the walls of the cities, constitute a discourse, and this discourse covers our world with its signs, and this discourse has a meaning: it signifies that women are dominated. Semioticians can interpret the system of this discourse, describe its disposition. What they read in that discourse are signs whose function is not to signify and which have no *raison d'être* except to be elements of a certain system or disposition. But for us this discourse is not divorced from the real as it is for semioticians. Not

only does it maintain very close relations with the social reality which is our oppression (economically and politically), but also it is in itself real since it is one of the aspects of oppression, since it exerts a precise power over us. The pornographic discourse is one of the strategies of violence which are exercised upon us: it humiliates, it degrades, it is a crime against our "humanity." As a harassing tactic it has another function, that of a warning. It orders us to stay in line, and it keeps those who would tend to forget who they are in step; it calls upon fear. These same experts in semiotics, referred to earlier, reproach us for confusing, when we demonstrate against pornography, the discourses with the reality. They do not see that this discourse *is* reality for us, one of the facets of the reality of our oppression. They believe that we are mistaken in our level of analysis.

I have chosen pornography as an example because its discourse is the most symptomatic and the most demonstrative of the violence which is done to us through discourses, as well as in the society at large. There is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and our minds, even if the discourse that produces it is abstract. It is one of the forms of domination, its very expression. I would say, rather, one of its exercises. All of the oppressed know this power and have had to deal with it. It is the one which says: you do not have the right to speech because your discourse is not scientific and not theoretical, you are on the wrong level of analysis, you are confusing discourse and reality, your discourse is naive, you misunderstand this or that science.

If the discourse of modern theoretical systems and social science exert a power upon us, it is because it works with concepts

which closely touch us. In spite of the historic advent of the lesbian, feminist, and gay liberation movements, whose proceedings have already upset the philosophical and political categories of the discourses of the social sciences, their categories (thus brutally put into question) are nevertheless utilized without examination by contemporary science. They function like primitive concepts in a conglomerate of all kinds of disciplines, theories, and current ideas that I will call the straight mind. (See *The Savage Mind* by Claude Lévi-Strauss.) They concern "woman," "man," "sex," "difference," and all of the series of concepts which bear this mark, including such concepts as "history," "culture," and the "real." And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis — a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship. I will call it the obligatory social relationship between "man" and "woman." (Here I refer to Ti-Grace Atkinson and her analysis of sexual intercourse as an institution.[6]) With its ineluctability as knowledge, as an obvious principle, as a given prior to any science, the straight mind develops a totalizing interpretation of history, social reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomena at the same time. I can only underline the oppressive character that the straight mind is clothed in in its tendency to immediately universalize its production of concepts into general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals. Thus one speaks of *the* exchange of women, *the* difference between the sexes, *the* symbolic order, *the* Unconscious, Desire, *Jouissance,* Culture,

History, giving an absolute meaning to these concepts when they are only categories founded upon heterosexuality, or thought which produces the difference between the sexes as a political and philosophical dogma.

The consequence of this tendency toward universality is that the straight mind cannot conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness, as well. Additionally, these unconscious processes are historically more and more imperative in what they teach us about ourselves through the instrumentality of specialists. The rhetoric which expresses them (and whose seduction I do not underestimate) envelops itself in myths, resorts to enigma, proceeds by accumulating metaphors, and its function is to poeticize the obligatory character of the "you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be."

In this thought, to reject the obligation of coitus and the institutions that this obligation has produced as necessary for the constitution of a society, is simply an impossibility, since to do this would mean to reject the possibility of the constitution of the other and to reject the "symbolic order," to make the constitution of meaning impossible, without which no one can maintain an internal coherence. Thus lesbianism, homosexuality, and the societies that we form cannot be thought of or spoken of, even though they have always existed. Thus, the straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality, represents its major interdiction. Thus, when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality.

Yes, straight society is based on the necessity of the different/other at every level. It cannot work economically, symbolically,

linguistically, or politically without this concept. This necessity of the different/other is an ontological one for the whole conglomerate of sciences and disciplines that I call the straight mind. But what is the different/other if not the dominated? For heterosexual society is the society which not only oppresses lesbians and gay men, it oppresses many different/others, it oppresses all women and many categories of men, all those who are in the position of the dominated. To constitute a difference and to control it is an "act of power, since it is essentially a normative act. Everybody tries to show the other as different. But not everybody succeeds in doing so. One has to be socially dominant to succeed in it."[7]

For example, the concept of difference between the sexes ontologically constitutes women into different/others. Men are not different, whites are not different, nor are the masters. But the blacks, as well as the slaves, are. This ontological characteristic of the difference between the sexes affects all the concepts which are part of the same conglomerate. But for us there is no such thing as being-woman or being-man. "Man" and "woman" are political concepts of opposition, and the copula which dialectically unites them is, at the same time, the one which abolishes them.[8] It is the class struggle between women and men which will abolish men and women.[9] The concept of difference has nothing ontological about it. It is only the way that the masters interpret a historical situation of domination. The function of difference is to mask at every level the conflicts of interest, including ideological ones.

In other words, for us, this means there cannot any longer be women and men, and that as classes and categories of thought or language they have to disappear, politically, economically, ide-

ologically. If we, as lesbians and gay men, continue to speak of ourselves and to conceive of ourselves as women and as men, we are instrumental in maintaining heterosexuality. I am sure that an economic and political transformation will not dedramatize these categories of language. Can we redeem *slave?* Can we redeem *nigger, negress?* How is *woman* different? Will we continue to write *white, master, man?* The transformation of economic relationships will not suffice. We must produce a political transformation of the key concepts, that is of the concepts which are strategic for us. For there is another order of materiality, that of language, and language is worked upon from within by these strategic concepts. It is at the same time tightly connected to the political field, where everything that concerns language, science and thought refers to the person as subjectivity and to her/his relationship to society. And we cannot leave this within the power of the straight mind or the thought of domination.

If among all the productions of the straight mind I especially challenge the models of the Structural Unconscious, it is because: at the moment in history when the domination of social groups can no longer appear as a logical necessity to the dominated, because they revolt, because they question the differences, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and their epigones call upon necessities which escape the control of consciousness and therefore the responsibility of individuals.

They call upon unconscious processes, for example, which require the exchange of women as a necessary condition for every society. According to them, that is what the unconscious tells us with authority, and the symbolic order, without which there is no meaning, no language, no society, depends on it. But what does women being exchanged mean if not that they are domi-

nated? No wonder then that there is only one Unconscious, and that it is heterosexual. It is an Unconscious which looks too consciously after the interests of the masters[10] in whom it lives for them to be dispossessed of their concepts so easily. Besides, domination is denied; there is no slavery of women, there is difference. To which I will answer with this statement made by a Rumanian peasant at a public meeting in 1848: "Why do the gentlemen say it was not slavery, for we know it to have been slavery, this sorrow that we have sorrowed." Yes, we know it, and this science of oppression cannot be taken away from us.

It is from this science that we must track down the "what-goes-without-saying" heterosexual, and (I paraphrase the early Roland Barthes) we must not bear "seeing Nature and History confused at every turn."[11] We must make it brutally apparent that psychoanalysis after Freud and particularly Lacan have rigidly turned their concepts into myths — Difference, Desire, the Name-of-the-father, etc. They have even "over-mythified" the myths, an operation that was necessary for them in order to systematically heterosexualize that personal dimension which suddenly emerged through the dominated individuals into the historical field, particularly through women, who started their struggle almost two centuries ago. And it has been done systematically, in a concert of interdisciplinarity, never more harmonious than since the heterosexual myths started to circulate with ease from one formal system to another, like sure values that can be invested in anthropology as well as in psychoanalysis and in all the social sciences.

This ensemble of heterosexual myths is a system of signs which uses figures of speech, and thus it can be politically studied from within the science of our oppression; "for-we-know-it-to-have-been-slavery" is the dynamic which introduces the diach-

ronism of history into the fixed discourse of eternal essences. This undertaking should somehow be a political semiology, although with "this sorrow that we have sorrowed" we work also at the level of language/manifesto, of language/action, that which transforms, that which makes history.

In the meantime, in the systems that seemed so eternal and universal that laws could be extracted from them, laws that could be stuffed into computers, and in any case for the moment stuffed into the unconscious machinery, in these systems, thanks to our action and our language, shifts are happening. Such a model, as for example, the exchange of women, reengulfs history in so violent and brutal a way that the whole system, which was believed to be formal, topples over into another dimension of knowledge. This dimension of history belongs to us, since somehow we have been designated, and since, as Lévi-Strauss said, we talk, let us say that we break off the heterosexual contract.

So, this is what lesbians say everywhere in this country and in some others, if not with theories at least through their social practice, whose repercussions upon straight culture and society are still unenvisionable. An anthropologist might say that we have to wait for fifty years. Yes, if one wants to universalize the functioning of these societies and make their invariants appear. Meanwhile the straight concepts are undermined. What is woman? Panic, general alarm for an active defense. Frankly, it is a problem that the lesbians do not have because of a change of perspective, and it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for "woman" has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.

ECSTASY

At the end of ecstasy
only the memory of ecstasy.
The tongue. The chorus.
The streets of flesh.
Blur of the highways.
Blue of the lakes.
Jesus's mother.
Jesus.
Our city of New York.
A pill. A dollar. A hundred.
Your father's face.
The bridges at night.
The heart outside the heart
and the VACANCY signs
with the NO right above.
How long till we get there?
How long is the night?
How fast will misery make us its keeper
when the memory of ecstasy wanes?
Like the summer that's over.
Like the green lights that pass.
Fireworks. Funerals. Weddings.
The freedom you looked for in people.
The freedom you lost when you did.
And after the lawns of childhood.
And after the graves ahead.
After whatever ecstasy is
and the feeling of knowledge.
Past pleasure. Past whatever
gets you off next.

15

ANIMAL SEX

Libido as desire and death

Elizabeth Grosz

If there's one thing that animals don't need more information on, it's sex. That's because sex holds no mystery.

(Freedman 1977: 9)

We make love only with worlds.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 294)

Sex continues to obsessively fascinate human subjects, even if, as Freedman suggests, it holds little mystery for animals. That it lacks mystery, that sexual acts and desires are ruled by natural impulses, impelled by instincts, part of a natural cycle of life, reproduction and death, may not in fact be as clear-cut and uncontentious as Freedman claims, even in the natural order. But even if it is true that sex holds no mystery for the animal (a claim which is not in any case self-evident: what would 'mystery' be to an animal?), it is clearly not true that sex, in animal or human form, holds no mystery for man.[1] Animals continue to haunt man's imagination, compel him to seek out their habits, preferences and cycles, and provide models and formulae by which he comes to represent his own desires, needs and excitements. The immense popularity of nature programmes on television, of books on various animal species, beloved or feared, and the work of naturalists recording data for scientific study, all testify to a pervasive fascination with the question of animal sex: how do animals *do it*? How do elephants make love (the standard old joke: very carefully)? How do snakes copulate? What are the pleasures of the orang-utang, the gorilla, the chimpanzee?

It is ironic that in the rich plethora of animal sex that has been thus far surveyed, two examples taken from the microcosmic insect world continue to haunt the imaginations and projections of men perhaps more than any other examples taken from ethology – the black widow spider and the praying mantis. These two species have come to represent an intimate and persistent link between sex and death, between pleasure and punishment, desire and revenge which may prove significant in understanding certain key details of male sexuality and desire, and, consequently,

given the differential and oppositional structure of sexual identities and positions, in specifying elements or features of female sexuality and subjectivity.

It will be my claim in this essay that any attempt to understand female sexual pleasures and desires on the models provided by male sexuality and pleasure risks producing a model of female sexuality that is both fundamentally reliant on heterosexual norms of sexual complementarity or opposition, and that reduces female sexuality and pleasure to models, goals and orientations appropriate for men and not women – models, in short, which reduce female sexuality to versions of male sexuality. Such manoeuvres short-circuit any acknowledgement of the range, scope and implications of erotic pleasure for understanding sexual difference. This is not to say that female and male sexualities must be regarded as two entirely distinct species, separate, sharing nothing in common, set up in absolute opposition, each with their own identities and features (an essentialist commitment): this would entail the possibility of attaining a precise and positive understanding of the independent features that characterize each sex (a project that has tempted many women, and perhaps even more men, to outline what they understand to be a universal, characteristic or essential femininity). Nor do I wish to suggest the contrary claim that the two sexes must be understood only in terms of each other, as mutually defined, reciprocally influential, each conforming to the other's needs and expectations (this is the dominant fantasy that has thus far governed the contemporary West's thinking about relations between the sexes, a fantasy that has left unacknowledged the social and representational constraints mitigating against any structural possibility of reciprocity).

Originally, I had planned to write this essay on female sexuality, and particularly on female orgasm. After much hope, and considerable anguish that I would be unable to evoke the languid pleasures and intense particularities of female orgasm – hardly a project for which the discipline of philosophy, or, for that matter, psychoanalysis, could provide adequate theoretical training! – I eventually abandoned this idea, partly because it seemed to me to be a project involving great disloyalty – speaking the (philosophically) unsayable, spilling the beans on a vast historical 'secret', about which many men and women have developed prurient interests – and partly because I realized that, at the very most, what I could produce would or could be read largely as autobiography, as the 'true confessions' of my own experience and have little more than anecdotal value. I could have no guarantees that my descriptions or analyses would have relevance to other women. Instead, in an attempt both to stay obliquely with my self-chosen topic, while avoiding these dangers and points of uneasiness, I decided to look at what seems entirely other to and completely different from women's pleasure and desire – at men, at insects – in an attempt, if not to say what female pleasure is, then at the least to say what it is not, to dispel accounts which bind women too closely to representations of men's or animals' sexuality, to clear the air of certain key projections, even if what is left is not a raw truth of women's desire but perhaps another layer in the complex overwriting of the inscriptions or representations that constitute the body or subjectivity. Thus,

instead of focusing on various representations of women's sexual pleasure (in literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, pornography and so on) or on personal experience, as many feminists have tended to, I decided to explore the work of two apparently unrelated male theorists whose candour and intellectual honesty have for some time impressed me, and whose work represents a rare combination of openly expressed personal obsession and scholarly rigour, the rigorous reading and analysis of their driving personal preoccupations:[2] Roger Caillois, the French sociologist and co-founder of the College de sociologie,[3] whose life-long preoccupation with insects, with the *femme fatale* and with rocks,[4] signals early anticipations of what might be considered a 'philosophy' or perhaps even an 'anthropology' of the posthuman; and Alphonso Lingis, distinguished American philosopher and translator of phenomenological theory (most notably, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas), the only professional philosopher I have read who writes openly yet philosophically, and at great length, about orgasm, bodily pleasures, lust and sexuality in its many permutations and extremes (transvestism, trans-sexualism, prostitution, pornography, pederasty, sado-masochism among them). Between them, Caillois and Lingis provide a coverage from among the most primitive and ancient of insects[5] to the most developed and enculturated of human sexual practices – a veritable panorama of sexual pleasures and practices which may help to specify what is masculine about representations of human, and non-human, sexualities.

HOLY INSECTS: LOVE AND THE PRAYING MANTIS

Caillois' pioneering contributions to ethology have long been recognized. His by now well-known analysis of the function of mimicry in the insect world[6] has proved salutary for any analysis of materiality that reduces it to instrumentality, any attempt to define form in terms of function, being in terms of *telos.* He shows, in this study and in a number of his earlier writings, that the particular characteristics defining an insect species – its colouring, its camouflage abilities, the organization of its sense organs, etc. – are always in excess of their survival value. There is a certain structural, anatomical or behavioural superabundance; perhaps it is the very excess or superfluity of life itself, at work over and above the survival needs of the organism:

> It is obvious that the utilitarian rôle of an object never completely justifies its form, or to put it another way, that the object always exceeds its instrumentality. Thus it is possible to discover in each object an irrational residue. . . .
>
> (Caillois 1990: 6)

This 'irrational residue', this going over the mark, this inherently exorbitant expenditure which functions in an economy of luxury becomes a locus of fascination for him. In his work on mimicry, Caillois makes it clear that an insect's ability to camouflage itself does not have survival value – it does not protect the creature from attack or death, and in fact may leave it open to even more hideous and unimaginable forms of death: he cites cases of the caterpillar cut in half by pruning shears, or the insect devoured by a member of its own species who mistakes it for a leaf. Camouflage is excessive to survival, just as the plumage of the peacock is excessive to sexual reproduction. Instead of demonstrating the finality of instinctual determinations, an existence defined in Darwinian terms, Caillois introduces an excessive, wanton dimension to his explanations of such features of animal existence. Camouflage, the capacity to imitate one's habitat or surroundings, far from performing an adaptative function, witnesses the captivation of a creature by its representations of and as space, its displacement from the centre, from a 'consciousness' of its place (in its body, located in space) to the perspective of another. The mimicking insect lives its camouflaged existence as not quite itself, as another.[7] In comparing the phenomenon of mimicry with the psychosis of legendary psychasthenia, Caillois suggests that there is a disintegration of the bond tying consciousness to its body: the subject feels outside him- or herself, what is inside may be perceived as coming from another.

Caillois, who described himself as an 'insect collector' (1990: 62), seems to have had a life-long fixation with the *Mantis religiosa,* or praying mantis. He claims to have been attracted to this species partly through frustrated curiosity: where he had lived as an adolescent, they were not to be found. His curiosity piqued, he was determined to possess, to see, to know. His description is couched in the terms of an impassioned epistemophilia: '[t]he difficulty of getting a specimen only increased my desire to possess one. I had to wait two years, and finally during a summer vacation in Royan I was thrilled to capture a fine *Mantis religiosa'* (1990: 63).

Part of the attraction the praying mantis holds, not only for Caillois, but for very many others, which may help to explain the insect's privileged status in the myths of many cultures,[8] is its close and curious association with femininity, with female sexuality, and, above all, with the fantasy of the *vagina dentata*; with orality, digestion and incorporation; and with women's (fantasized) jealousy of and power over men. Moreover, its richly evocative power, its ability to be used as a source of projections and an object of fantasy and speculation, a site for overdetermination (in Caillois' distinctive sense), must no doubt in part be attributed to its uncanny resemblance to the human form, the isomorphism of its limbs with human ones:

> of all insects it is the one whose form most reminds one of the human form, mainly because of the resemblance of its rapacious legs to human arms. As for its ordinary pose, it is not that of someone praying, as common consensus would have us believe (one does not pray lying on one's stomach), but that of a man making love [men on top!]. This alone is enough to justify an obscure

> and constant identification. One can now see why men have always been so interested in the mantis and its habits, and why it is so aptly associated as much with love as with hatred, whose ambivalent unity it condenses so admirably.
> (1990: 63)

The ambivalence is derived primarily from a narcissistic identification facilitated by the apparent resemblance of the mantis' posture to the human form; the closer this identification, the more horrifying are the consequences, for the more ominous is the fate of the human/male subject identifying with the mantis. Above all, what seems most to provoke Caillois' fascination are its terrifying nuptial habits, the well-known inclination of the female mantis to devour the male in the act of coitus. The female mantis is the most ungrateful of mates, engulfing and ultimately destroying her lover in a frenzy of self-seeking. This scene is of course rife with the possibilities of projection, and Caillois does not hesitate to suggest that the mantis may serve as an apt representation of the predatory and devouring female lover, who ingests and incorporates her mate, castrating or killing him in the process. The *femme fatale* writ small.[9] This small insect is heir to, and comes to embody, a whole series of fundamentally paranoid projections, whereby it is not the male subject or the phallus which threatens the female lover but, rather, the female lover who threatens the phallus. The father's castrating position *vis-à-vis* the son is transformed into the image of the devouring mother; the mother is no longer the potential object of rape, but the perpetrator of a *theft,* castrating the son and keeping his phallus for herself, in a kind of retaliation against the father's authority and law.[10]

Psychoanalytic theory is clear that this is not what the mother does to the son, but rather what the son fears of the (fantasmatic) mother, what he projects on to her. She, no less than the mantis, is the projective vehicle for his worst fears. This may help explain the anthropomorphic identification of the female mantis with the female human – a neutralization of his investment in the father's image as a threat and a danger, the cost of which is linking castration to the mother, producing the phallus and sexual pleasure in connection with mutilation or death. Indeed, for Caillois, this links the mantis to a series of other parasitic images – the bat, the vampire and the mandrake – which, by virtue of their resemblance to the human, particularly the male, form, renders them objects of projection and identification:

> The anthropomorphic appearance of an element seems to me an infallible source of its hold on the human imagination. This is the case, for example, with vampires and mandrakes and the legends about them. It is by no means coincidental, in my opinion, that the belief in bloodsucking specters uses a bat as a kind of natural point of reference. The anthropomorphism of the bat runs particularly deep and goes well beyond the level of a general structural identity (the presence of true hands with a thumb opposed to the other fingers, pectoral breasts, a periodic menstrual flow, a free hanging penis).
> (Caillois 1990: 73 n. 10)

But, in spite of this series of stereotypically feminine images, which focus on the role of the female mantis, the subject that is probably the object of his most intense fascination is the role and functioning of the amorously imperilled male.

The female mantis had been 'scientifically observed' since at least the sixteenth century in the act of decapitating the male, not only after or during coitus but even before! He would be devoured completely after copulation. For centuries it was believed that such acts of cannibalism could be described in terms of utility: needing protein to make the newly fertilized eggs grow, the female could find great quantities in devouring her mate. However, it seems more likely that the male's decapitation may well serve not only procreative but also specifically sexual functions for the female mantis:

> Dubois's theory . . . wonders whether the mantis's goal in decapitating the male before mating is not to obtain, through the ablation of the inhibitory centers of the brain, a better and longer execution of the spasmodic movements of coitus. So that in the final analysis it would be for the female the pleasure principle that would dictate the murder of her lover, whose body, moreover, she begins to eat during the very act of making love.
>
> (1990: 81–2)

The female decapitates the male to facilitate more vigorous coital movements! What seems to preoccupy Caillois most is the automatic nature of the male's sexual drive: headless, without a brain to take in representations or to undertake voluntary behaviour, it nonetheless doggedly persists in its automatic sexual movements, and is even able to utilize various autonomous strategies to evade danger and predators while nonetheless, in a certain sense at least, dead (but still kicking!):

> [t]he fact is that there are hardly any reactions that it is not also able to perform when decapitated. . . . In this condition, it can walk, regain its balance, move one of its threatened limbs autonomously, assume the spectral position, mate, lay eggs, build an ootheca, and, quite astoundingly, fall down in a false corpse-like immobility when confronted by danger or following a peripheral stimulation. I am deliberately using this indirect means of expressing myself because our language, it seems to me, has so much difficulty expressing, and our reason understanding, the fact that when dead, the mantis can simulate death.
>
> (1990: 82)

The automatism of this whole procedure strikes Caillois as one of the significant features of the mantis; not only can the mantis 'act dead' while decapitated, its sexual behaviour is induced reflexively, like a wind-up (sex) doll. It can perform its functions without the organizational structure of consciousness (whatever that

might mean in the case of the mantis), the structurings provided by a central nervous system or an intact perceptual apparatus.

The mantis is a perfect machine; not a machine for survival, but a sexual machine, a fucking machine (much as the shark is commonly referred to as the perfect feeding or killing machine), whose reaction, under threat of imminent death, is automatically coital. Yet, if the mantis is a human-like machine, an android, it is distinctively coded as female:

> Indeed, the assimilation of the mantis to an automaton – that is, in view of its anthropomorphism, to a female android – seems to me to be a consequence of the same affective theme: the conception of an artificial, mechanical, inanimate, and unconscious machine-woman incommensurable with man and other living creatures derives from a particular way of envisioning the relation between love and death, and, more precisely, from an ambivalent premonition of finding the one within the other, which is something I have every reason to believe.
>
> (Caillois 1990: 82)

Caillois posits a network of associations, an implicit linkage between the praying mantis, religiosity, food and orality, blood-sucking vampires, the mother who feeds the child, cannibalism, the *vagina dentata,* the devouring female, the *femme fatale,* the mechanisms of automatism and the female android. He has the insight to suggest, that this is not somehow a natural or innate set of connections, but largely a function of a constellation of concepts that have become inextricably linked, overdetermined in their mutual relations: by linking sexual pleasure to the concept of death and dying, by making sex something to die for, something that in itself is a kind of anticipation of death (the 'little death'), woman is thereby cast into the category of the non-human, the non-living, or a living threat of death.

LIBIDINAL INTENSITIES: THE DISARRAYS OF LOVE

Caillois' intuition about the formative character of the link between sexual pleasure, death and dying, finds clear confirmation in abundant examples in everyday life: the production of weapons on the model of the phallus, the functioning of the phallus as a weapon of war and retaliation, the very dependence of the function of the phallus on the castration complex, the operations of psychical impotence, the link between male orgasm and detumescence, the depletion of psychical energies after orgasm, the fantasmatic projection on to woman of phallic power during the act of intercourse,[11] the 'evolutionary' linkage of the death of the individual to the (sexual) reproduction of the species (the perceived link between sexuality and immortality) prefigure or attest to the tenacity of the link between desire and death.

In turning away from Caillois' musings about the praying mantis, I will now look in more detail at the work of Lingis on erotic sensibility, libido or lust to see if we can glean a better understanding of the connections between sexual pleasure and death, and, in a more challenging and difficult fashion, to see if these two terms might be extricated so that their relations of influence and their particular specificities and details, and thus their possibilities of transformation and change, may be explored.

Lingis distinguishes between corporeal needs and satisfactions, and lust or erotic desire. Corporeal gratification takes what it can get, lives in a world of means and ends, obtaining satisfaction from what is at hand. He links gratification or need to the functioning of the body-image or corporeal schema – and through it to anatomy, physiology and the capacity for movement[12] – which maps inner physiological and psychological functions on to the exterior or 'objective' movements, comportment and posture of the body through a mediating representational schema. Lingis makes it clear that the body-image provides the subject with an experience, not of its own body, but of the ways in which its body is perceived by others. The subject's experience of the body is irreducibly bound up with both the body's social status and its status in the eyes of others.

Libido or erotic desire involves a certain dis-quieting, troubling or unsettling of the body-image even while functioning in conformity with it. Rather than resolving itself, gratifying its urges as quickly and simply as possible, erotic craving seeks to prolong and extend itself beyond physiological need, to intensify and protract itself, to revel in 'pleasurable torment' (Lingis 1985a: 55). It no longer functions according to an 'intentional arc', according to the structures of signification, meaning, structure, pattern or purpose;[13] voluptuous desire fragments and dissolves the unity and utility of the organic body and the stabilized body-image. The limbs, erogenous zones, orifices of the other, provoke and entice, lure and beckon, breaking up the teleological, future-directed actions and plans of a task to perform. Sexuality, desire, cannot be seen in terms of a function, purpose or goal, for this is to reduce it to functionality; materiality, as I have already suggested following Caillois, is always in excess of function or goal. This is one of the problems with the sex-manual approach: 'how-to' books on sexuality presume a certain principle of the performance of a chore or task, not the uncovering of desire, which cannot be summarized, put into a formula or learned by rote. Lingis will argue that the voluptuous sense of disquiet engendered by and as lust disarrays and segments the resolve of a certain purposiveness, unhinging any determination of means and ends or goals.

Moreover, if libidinal impulses are fundamentally decomposing, desolidifying, liquefying the coherent organization of the body as it performs functional tasks, unhinging a certain intentionality, they are more dependent on the sphere of influence of otherness, on an other which, incidentally, need not be human but which cannot simply be classified as a passive object awaiting the impressions of an active desiring subject. The other, this otherness, solicits, beckons, implores, provokes and demands. The other lures, oscillates, presenting everything it has to

offer, disclosing the whole body without in fact giving up anything, without providing 'information' as such.[14]

Carnal experience is uncertain, non-teleological, undirected. While not entirely involuntary, it lacks the capacity to willingly succumb to conscious intentions or abstract decisions. It upsets plans, intentions, resolutions; it defies a logic of expediency and the regimes of signification (one often cannot say or know what it is that entices and allures, a gesture, a movement, a posture or look, which becomes loaded with more affect and impetus than is required to explain it). It is like an ever-increasing hunger, a hunger that supplements itself, feeds itself, on hunger, and can never be content with what it ingests, that defers gratification to perpetuate itself as craving, languishing in its erotic torments rather than hastening to quench them. Its temporality is neither that of development (one experience building on the last in order to create a direction or movement) nor that of investment (a relation between means and ends). Nor is it a system of recording or memory (erotic pleasures are evanescent, they are forgotten almost as they occur); the memory of 'what happened', or movements, setting, gestures, behaviour may be open to reminiscence, but the intensity of pleasure, the sensations of voluptuousness, the ache of desire have to be revivified in order to be recalled. In this case, there is not recollection or recreation, but always creation, production:

> Carnal intimacy is not a practical space; it does not open a field for action. The erotic movements are agitation that handles and fondles without keeping anything in its place, without extending its force outward and without going anywhere. Here nothing will be accomplished; one will waste time, unprofitably. Voluptuousness has no tasks and no objectives and leaves no heritage; after all the caresses and embraces, the carnal is left intact, virgin territory. ... It is not the locus from which would emerge the meaning of one's history.
>
> (Lingis 1985a: 67)

Erotic desire cannot be recorded or stored, cannot be the site for the production of information or knowledge. Masters and Johnson's empirical research on human sexuality can only measure and record physiological transformations, reactions, responses, bodily changes: it comes nowhere near to mapping desire. Desire's turbulent restlessness defies coding into signs, significations, meanings; it remains visceral, affective, which is not to say that it is in any way reducible to physiology. Resisting redeployment in pragmatic projects, it functions in its own ways, seeking to endlessly extend itself, to fill itself with intensity. But it is incapable of being filled up, completed, for it contains ineliminable traces of alterity: it is an otherness in the subject, triggered by an other, something that overtakes one, induces one to abandon what one has planned, and even what one understands, in exchange for its momentary evanescence, its dazzling agitations and stirring sensations. The other erupts into the subject, and interrupts all the subject's aims and goals:

> This very flesh, exposed and palpable, no longer sighing subtle meanings, heavy and panting, no longer illuminating a field of significance, incandescent with ardour, afflicts the physical and natural continuity, afflicts me and the phenomenal field I appropriate, as other. In the contact of our common flesh, the spasm of disorder that demoralises my position is a trace of radical alterity. The approach of the other is dismemberment of the natural body, fragmentation of the phenomenal field, derangement of the physical order, breakdown in the universal industry.
>
> (Lingis 1985a: 72)

If the sexual drive is object-directed, and takes for itself a specific, if interchangeable, series of objects, it is significant that eros, desire, has no objectives, no privileged objects, only a series of intensities. Having outlined the elements of a phenomenology of carnal experience relying on the various writings of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, Lingis shifts his focus in *Libido* (1985a) away from the structures of consciousness, intentionality and givenness to look more directly at what might be understood as a materialist analysis of sexual desire using the work of Lyotard and Deleuze and Guattari. He moves away from a framework which privileges the psyche and systems of representation, which understands carnality in terms of concepts, reasons, motives, causes, intentions, fantasies, projects – that is, in terms of interiority, however conceived – to one which privileges the erotogenic surface, the body's 'outside', its locus as a site for both the perception of the erotic (as phenomenology recognized) and also for the inscription and intensification of bodily regions.

The orgasmic body cannot be identified with the organic body, but is more an interference in and displacement of the body of 'nature'.[15] This is not the intervention of a supervising consciousness, but the reorganization or the rebinding of bodily energies, passing along the body's surface. Relying on a model established by Lyotard in *Libidinal Economy* (1993), where the subject is viewed in terms of the twisting, contortions and self-rotations of the Moebius strip,[16] Lingis refigures carnal desire in terms of the lateral ('horizontal') contamination of one erotogenic zone or bodily surface by another, rather than in terms of a horizontal relation between (bodily) surface and (psychical) depth. The intensification of one bodily region or zone induces an increase in the excitation of those contiguous with it. Significantly, the two or more interacting zones or regions need not be part of the one body but may come from different bodies and different substances. Their relations cannot be understood in terms of complementarity, the one completing the other (a pervasive model of the heterosexual relation since Aristophanes), for there can be no constitution of a totality, union or merging of the two. Each remains in its site, functioning in its own ways.

The relationship between these regions or zones cannot be understood in terms of domination, penetration, control or mastery, but rather in terms of *jealousy,* as one organ jealous of another, as the desire of organs and zones for the intensity and

excitations, the agitations and tumultuousness of others. We have here another version of a Derridean notion of the violence of difference itself, its constitutive tearing or etching of a surface: in order that one bodily part (whether an orifice, a hollow, a protuberance, a swollen region, a smooth surface) intensify its energetic expenditure, it must drain intensity from surrounding regions. It seems impossible to conceive of a situation in which there is an even intensity throughout the whole of the body, a situation of pure equilibrium or stasis: any activity at all 'prefers' or privileges some bodily regions over others, and even sedentary inactivity focuses on some parts of the body at the expense of others. This creates a gridding or marking of the body in terms of sites of uneven intensity, patterns or configurations of feeling, labyrinthine maps of voluptuous pleasures and fluxes. Each organ envies the intensity of its surrounding bodily context, craves enervation, seeks incandescence, wants itself to be charged with excitations:

> Every intensity induces intensities – jealousy of the vulva for the mouth, jealousy of the nipple for the fondled testicles, jealousy of the woman over the book her lover is writing, jealousy of the sun upon the closed shutters behind which the reader reads that book.
>
> (Lingis 1985a: 77)

Lingis seeks to evoke, to bring to discourse, to try to replay in words the intensities that charge all erotic encounters, whether the amorous relations of the carpenter to wood and tools, the attachment of the sadist to the whip, the linkage between the breast and a mouth, lips and tongue. There must be some coming together of disparate surfaces; the point of conjunction of two or more surfaces produces an intensification of both. It makes a hand a sexual organ, the fingers a site, not just for the production of pleasure in another, but for their own orgasmic intensities though they cannot be classified as a orifice or genital organ on a psychoanalytic or physiological model.[17] The hand, while in a sense 'jealous' of the pleasure it induces in the body it caresses, also participates in the very intensities it ignites in a vagina or around testicles: it does not simply induce pleasure in another, for another, but also always for itself. The contiguity of hand and region instils in both a yearning for intensity and a craving for more intensity that both enlivens them, rouses their 'jealousy' of each other and propels them into a path of unpredictable and restless movement.

These sites of intensity – potentially any region of the body including various internal organs – are intensified and excited, not simply by pleasure, through caresses, but also through the force and energy of pain. Pain is as capable, perhaps more so, of inscribing bodies as pleasure. Sadism and masochism intensify particular bodily regions – the buttocks being whipped, the hand that whips, the bound regions of the body in domination practices – not using pain as a displacement of or disguise for the pleasure principle, but where pain serves as a mode of corporeal intensification. We cannot readily differentiate the processes by

which pleasurable intensities are engendered from those by which painful intensity is produced. One craves repetition of these practices because the intensity is ephemeral, has no life span – it exists only in the moments of its occurrence, in the present (even if not as pure presence; rather, its status is as the evanescence of pure difference, the momentary shimmering and dazzling of a zone or orifice; it is the trace, the marking of a pathway, *frayage*). This repetition (or rather, the inherent openness of these practices to repetition ad infinitum) produces the intensity of affect, pleasure or pain, but can never repeat its initial occurrence. Each repetition engenders an experience or intensity, without any presumption of identity. Strictly speaking, exact repetition remains impossible.

Erotogenic zones do not desegment the fully functional organic body, for the organic body is itself a product of the organization and hierarchization of localized and particular libidinal zones: the organic, unified body is the provisional end-result of the alignments and coagulations of libidinal zones. These regions, moreover, continually intervene in the functioning of the organic body and its attendant body-image(s). Instead of adopting the psychoanalytic position, which takes erotogenic zones as nostalgic reminiscences of a pre-oedipal, infantile bodily organization – that is, instead of seeing the multiplicity of libidinal sites in terms of regression – these libidinal zones are continually in the process of being produced, renewed, transformed, through experimentation, practices, innovations, the accidents or contingencies of life itself, the coming together of surfaces, incisive practices, inscriptions. There is nothing particularly infantile about these regions, insofar as to be effective, to function as the sites of orgasmic intensity, they must continually be invested through activity, use.

Modes of greatest intensification of bodily zones occur, not through the operations of habitual activities, but through the unexpected, through the connection, conjunction and construction of unusual interfaces, through a kind of wild and experimental free play that re-marks, reinscribes orifices, glands, sinews, muscles differently, giving organs and bodily organization up to the intensities that threaten to overtake them, seeking the alien, otherness, the disparate in its extremes, to bring into play these intensities. The interruption and interaction of a surface with another, its disengagement from the circuit of organic functioning (where it operates within an hierarchical and systematic whole) so that it realigns itself in different networks and linkages performs the intensification of libidinal circulation that Lingis seeks. In this way, the subject's body ceases to be *a* body, and becomes the site of provocations and reactions, the site of intensive disruptions. The subject ceases to be a subject, giving way to pulsations, gyrations, fluxes, secretions, swellings, processes over which it can exert no control and to which it only wants to succumb. Its borders blur, seep, liquefy, so that, for a while at least, it is no longer clear where one organ, body or subject stops and another begins:

> To become passionate is to become an anonymous conductor of a circulation of libidinous effects, a dismembered body over which intensifications undergo their metamorphoses. There is not *a* libido that would be behind all that, and that could be identified with the consciousness or the intentional arc of the organism – none of these are the telos of the libidinal processes.
>
> (Lingis 1985a: 85)

Libido abdicates a certain sense of responsibility, the controlling operations of the ego and superego. It is not irrational, illogical or even nonrational; rather it exhibits a logic of its own that is governed by modes of intensification. It does not provide information or knowledge, although it probes (this may be part of the problem of the sexualized metaphor of knowledge-production as sexual conquest; conquest can only make sense where lust does not operate but something else does, the struggle for prestige, control). It breaches the innermost regions, secret parts, of the body, but does not learn anything. It learns only that it cannot hold on to what it craves. Lust cannot know itself, it does not know what it is or what it seeks. It does not discover or learn, but immerses itself, becomes. It resists pragmatics, any logic of functionality, of appropriation. Instead it insists on a certain formlessness, indeterminacy, that very excess of materiality that makes any creature resist reduction to its functions alone: it insists on an open responsiveness that can be viewed as a passivity or susceptibility to the appeals and resistances of the other. Lust throws one into the vagaries of the other's libidinal intensities.

Libidinal desire, the carnal caress, desire as corporeal intensification, then, is an interchange with an other whose surface intersects its own. It is opened up, in spite of itself, to the other, not as passive respondent but as coanimated, for the other's convulsions, spasms, joyous or painful encounters engender or contaminate bodily regions that are apparently unsusceptible. It is in this sense that we make love to worlds: the universe of an other is that which opens us up to and produces our own intensities; we are placed in a force field of intensities that we can only abandon with libidinal loss and in which we are enervated to become active and willing agents (or better, agencies). The other need not be human or even animal: the fetishist enters a universe of the animated, intensified object as rich and complex as (perhaps more so than) any other sexual relation. The point is that both a world and a body are opened up for redistribution, dis-organization, transformation; both are metamorphosed in the encounter, both become something other, something incapable of being determined in advance, and perhaps even in retrospect, but nonetheless that has perceptibly shifted and realigned. The sexual encounter cannot be regarded as an expedition, an adventure, a goal, or an investment, for it is a directionless mobilization of excitations with no guaranteed outcomes or 'results' (not even orgasm): 'Lust is the dissolute ecstasy by which the body's ligneous, ferric, coral state casts itself into a gelatinous, curdling, dissolving, liquefying, vaporizing, radioactive, solar and nocturnal state. *Exstase matérielle,* transubstantiation' (Lingis 1991: 15).

THE MURDEROUS LOVER, OR KISS ME DEADLY

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919) Freud raises the question of the necessary binding or linkage of the pleasure principle with the death drive. He links the accumulation of unbounded intensities or affects with unpleasure, and the relief or satisfaction of libidinal impulses with pleasure. He uses Fechner's constancy principle to suggest that the organism attempts to keep the quantity of energy or excitation as low as possible – not so low as to 'wind down', to approach death, but low enough not to 'overstimulate' the organism, causing it to seek all sorts of inappropriate outlets to vent the excessive energy which would otherwise accumulate. There is an entropic principle internally directing the organism towards simplicity and quiescence, impelling it gradually towards death. Life can be seen, on this Freudian scenario, as the limited deferment or delay of the death drive, the detour of the drive through the deferment provided by the pleasure principle. These two principles, Eros and Thanatos, life/pleasure and death/unpleasure, are both complementary and opposed: they function together, one operating through the other, and, as it were, against the interests of the other. The pleasure principle provides a way in which the death drive can express itself through the processes of gratification, in this 'unwinding' or diminution of psychical energies, and the death drive provides, as it were, the medium, the material – the accumulation of tension – through which the pleasure principle gains its satisfaction.

Paradoxically, the death drive and libido do not cancel out but reinforce each other. Libido or the life-drives produce self-preservative and pleasurable (respectively, instinctual and drive) processes which aim to protect the organism from dangers coming from without and from the unpleasant accumulation of energies from within the organism. In this sense, they allow the death drive to take its own course and its own time: they protect the organism from outside dangers, so that it can be carried towards death by its own immanent processes.

In Freud's phylogenetic perspective, sex or pleasure and death are internally linked. The pleasurable sexual activities of individuals are closely linked to the reproduction of the species, and the reproduction of the species is contingently dependent on the life, reproduction and death of individuals. Such an assumption has proved very strong in ethological studies: it is significant that the simplest of living organisms, amoeba and single-celled organisms, those which do not reproduce sexually through interchange with 'the opposite sex' but reproduce through the division of cells, are considered immortal. Sexuality introduces death into the world, or perhaps the converse: death is inevitable, and sexuality may function as a compensation for and supplement to death. Not only is the sexual act *grosso modo* linked to death and, through it, to the reproduction of the species, but more significantly for the purposes of my argument, the eroticism of orgasm – at least of male orgasm (the case of female orgasm is considerably more complicated and it is not clear to what degree it conforms to this model, if it does so at all) – is modelled by Freud on the build-up of excitation, the swelling of the sexual organ,

the accumulation of energies and fluids, their release and then the organ's detumescence and state of contentment.

The immediacy and the directness of this link between death and sex is perhaps the intriguing thing about the praying mantis: it provides a tangible example of the worst possible fears surrounding the ways in which sexuality and relations between the sexes are conceived, the most horrific consequences of amorous passion (even though it is not clear that the mantis is either amorous or passionate outside of any anthropomorphic projection). Severing this link between death and sexual desire is particularly crucial at this historical conjuncture, not only because of the constricting effects it has on female (not to mention male) sexuality, but also because of its potentially lethal effects within gay men's communities.[18]

Lingis has recognized the link between horror and lust: the transformative, transubstantiating effects of erotic attachments, desire, are echoed in the seeping out beyond boundaries and the dissolution of lines of bodily organization prompted by orgasmic dissolution. There is something about the compulsive incitements of sexuality that may bring one to the brink of disgust and to the abject, not only to accept but seek out activities, objects and bodily regions that one might in other contexts disdain. The melting of corporeal boundaries, the merging of body parts, the dripping apart of all the categories and forms that bind a subject to its body and provide it with a bodily integrity – so fascinating for the surrealists, not to mention the current android and cyborg fantasies that sell movies and feminist science fiction – are at once imperilled in a way that alarms and horrifies, and, at the same time, entices to the highest possible degree. This is what lust has in common with the appeal of illicit drugs: their intensity melts a certain subjective cohesion, the 'high' more or less obliterates key boundaries between the body and its others, more or less pleasurably and more or less temporarily.

Although his perspective admits a connection between horror and desire, Lingis resists the temptation to make the link between desire and death intrinsic, as psychoanalytic theory has tended to. This may prove particularly instructive insofar as, in the last ten years, Lingis has primarily published material either directly related to sexuality (in its broadest sense) (Lingis 1983, 1985a, 1991, 1992) or on the question of death (Lingis 1989) but has not attempted to link these two projects to each other. This may be because, in my understanding of his work on Eros, he is attempting, among other things, to disconnect the two, to sever the bond between sexual pleasure and the death drive, to think libido in terms other than the hydraulics of the Freudian model of sexual discharge or cathexis. All of Freud's works can be understood as a generalization of and abstraction from the model of male orgasm to the fundamental principle of life itself: the constancy principle, and indeed the pleasure principle, the notion of psychical investment or cathexis, the movements of repression which sever an ideational representative from its energetic intensity, all accord with this hydraulics of tumescence and detumescence. The death drive is not simply a 'new discovery' made by Freud in his later writings, for the notion of a

closed energetic system, an hydraulics, is already inscribed in his understanding of the pleasure principle even in his earliest psychoanalytic writings.

The fantasy of the *vagina dentata,* of the non-human status of woman as android, vampire or animal, the identification of female sexuality as voracious, insatiable, enigmatic, invisible and unknowable, cold, calculating, instrumental, castrator/decapitator of the male, dissimulatress or fake, predatory, engulfing mother, preying on male weakness, are all consequences of the ways in which male orgasm has functioned as the measure and representative of all sexualities and all modes of erotic encounter. Lingis' project is of relevance to the disentangling of masculinist and Freudian conceptions of sexuality, pleasure and desire insofar as it provides an understanding of (male) subjectivity and desire beyond and in breach of the opposition between pleasure and death.[19] He demonstrates that sexual passion is not reducible to the goal of sexual satiation, but lives and thrives on its own restless impetus. Orgasm need not be understood as the end of the sexual encounter, its final culmination and moment of conversion towards death or dissipation; instead it can be displaced to any and every region of the body, and, in addition, can be seen as a mode of transubstantiation, a conversion from solid to liquid:

> The supreme pleasure we can know, Freud said, and the model for all pleasure, orgasmic pleasure, comes when an excess tension built up, confined, compacted is abruptly released; the pleasure consists in a passage into the contentment and quiescence of death. Is not orgasm instead the passage into the uncontainment and unrest of liquidity and vapor – pleasure in exudations, secretions, exhalations? . . . Lust surges through a body in transubstantiation.
>
> (Lingis 1991: 15)

Caillois also recognizes, but goes no further in analysing or transforming the binding of the death drive to the pleasure principle in the masculine projection of woman as cold, mechanical, inanimate, machine-like. If we recall, such conceptions 'derive from a particular way of envisioning the relation between love and death, and, more precisely, from an ambivalent premonition of finding the one within the other' (Caillois 1990: 82), a particular, presumably not a universal or inevitable, relation between love and death which in principle can be disentangled. Love, or rather, erotic desire, can be reconsidered in terms that do not see it entwined with death.

The fantasy that binds sex to death so intimately, is the fantasy of a hydraulic sexuality, sexuality as a biologically regulated need or instinct, a compulsion, urge or mode of bodily release (the sneeze provides a paradigm). The apparently urgent and compulsive nature of sexual drives is implicit in the claim made by many men who rape, those who frequent prostitutes and those prostitutes who describe themselves as 'health workers', insofar as they justify their roles in terms of maintaining the 'health' of their clients. It is a model of sexuality based upon the

equation of sexual desire with orgasmic release, with instrumental or functional relief of the body. It is a model that men commonly transpose from their own lived experiences on to the experiences of women, and, moreover, it reappears in another guise in the current reclamation of female ejaculation by some feminists.[20] When eroticism is considered a programme, a means to an end ('foreplay'), a mode of conquest, a proof of virility or femininity, an inner drive that periodically erupts, or an impelling attraction to an object that exerts a 'magnetic' force (i.e., as actively compelling, or as passively seduced), it is reduced to versions of this hydraulic model.

The provocations and allure of the other can have no effect on the erotic receptivity of the subject without resonances with the intensities and surfaces of the subject's body. Indeed nothing seems sillier and less erotic than someone else's unreciprocated ardour or passion. The other cannot excite without the subject already being excited or excitable. The other cannot induce erotic impulses and caresses from the outside alone. I am not suggesting a necessary reciprocity here, but rather a co-implication. There is always equivocation and ambiguity in passion; on the one hand, the erotic is self-contained and selfabsorbed – lovers are closed off to the world, wrapped up in each other, disinterested in what is outside – yet on the other hand, in a contrary movement, eroticism and sensuality tend to spread out over many things, infecting all sorts of other relations.[21] Erotic desire is not simply a desire for recognition, the constitution of a message, an act of communication or exchange between subjects, a set of techniques for the transmission of intimacy; it is a mode of surface contact with things and substances, with a world, that engenders and induces transformations, intensifications, a becoming something other. Not simply a rise and fall, a waxing and waning, but movement, processes, transmutations. That is what constitutes the appeal and power of desire, its capacity to shake up, rearrange, reorganize the body's forms and sensations, to make the subject and body as such dissolve into something else, something other than what they are habitually. Sexual relations need not presume desire – habitual orgasmic practice, the so-called '8 minute average' of sexual intercourse in married or long-term couples,[22] is not the most conducive milieu for the ignition and exploration of desire; desire need not, indeed commonly does not, culminate in sexual intercourse but in production. Not the production of a child or a relationship, but the production of sensations never felt, alignments never thought, energies never tapped, regions never known.

NOTES

1 I use the terms 'man' and 'men' advisedly here, for it is not clear to me that such a fascination is a universal *human* concern; I do not even want to suggest that most men find animal sex fascinating, but, rather, the more limited claim, that such a fascination is a masculine one, that for *some* men, animal sex and even insect sex hold immense fascination because they represent motifs, themes and fantasies that are close to what

might be understood as a masculine imaginary, to a masculine mode of representation of self and other.

2 What seems rare is not the combination of scholarship and personal obsessional – this could be said to characterize much if not all theoretical and scientific discourse – but the open acknowledgement that the research is based on personal concerns.

3 For further details, and for reproductions and translations of some of his formative works on what might be understood as a sociology of the sacred, see Denis Hollier (1988).

4 See a quirkily personal book, written relatively late in his life, *The Writing of Stones* (1985).

5 The mantis species is probably among the earliest to appear on land:

> Mantidae were probably the first insects to appear on earth, given that the *Mantis protogea,* whose fossil prints were found in the oeningen Myocena, belongs to the paleodictyoptera group as defined by Scudder, and whose traces are manifest from the Carboniferous Age on.
>
> (Caillois 1990: 69)

6 See here Caillois (1984): I have discussed this analysis at some length in Grosz (1994b).

7 Lingis, in his dazzling evocative account of deep-sea diving in 'The Rapture of the Deep' (in Lingis 1983), provides something of an indirect confirmation of both the superabundance or excessiveness of camouflage and display and the irrelevance of an audience, an eye observing the spectacle:

> Before the plumage and display behaviors of the bird-of-paradise, before the coiled horns of the mountain sheep, one has to admit a specific development of the organism to capture another eye . . . there is a logic of ostentation over and beyond camouflage and semantic functions. The colorblind *octopus vulgaris* controls with twenty nervous systems the 2–3 million chromatophores, iridophores and leucophores fitted in its skin; only fifteen of these have been correlated with camouflage or emotional states. At rest in its lair, its skin invents continuous light shows. The sparked and streaked coral fish school and scatter as a surge of life dominated by a compulsion for exhibition, spectacle, parade.
>
> The most ornate skins are on nudibranchia, blind sea slugs. In the marine abysses, five or six miles below the last blue rays of the light, the fish and the crabs, almost all of them blind, illuminate their lustrous colors with their own bioluminescence, for no witness.
>
> (Lingis 1983: 9–10)

8 Caillois outlines a whole series of cultural associations regarding the mantis, which seem to place it in a privileged, if somewhat ambivalent social and theological position:

> sometimes the mantis is called an 'Italian girl' or a 'phantom', and less explicably a 'strawberry' or a 'madeleine'. More generally, an ambivalent attitude emerges: on the one hand the insect is regarded as sacred, whence its usual name of *prégo-Diéou* ('pray-to-God'), with its variants and corresponding expressions . . . on the other hand the insect is considered diabolic, as testified by the symmetrical name of *prégo-Diablé* ('pray-to-the-Devil').
>
> If we look now at the sayings used by children with respect to the mantis, we find two main themes: first, it is said to be a Prophetess who knows everything, and especially the whereabouts of the wolf, and secondly, it is assumed that it is praying because its mother died or drowned. On this last point the testimony is unanimous. . . .
>
> [For the Hottentots and Bushmen] the supreme deity and creator of the world is precisely the mantis, whose loves are, it seems, 'pleasing' and it is especially attached to the moon. . . . Note that its main function seems to be to obtain food for those who beg for it, and that in addition it was devoured and vomited alive by Kwaï-Hemm, the devouring god. So the accent seems definitely to be on digestion, which is hardly surprising when one knows about the incredible voracity of the insect, which is a prototype god. . . .
>
> (1990: 69–72)

9 Caillois will cite a series of remarkable case-studies from the annals of psychoanalysis, particularly examples of oral persecution mania, to make more explicit this link between the mantis, the *vagina dentata* and the *femme fatale*:

> Bychowski analyses a case of a victim who is convinced that he will be devoured by a prostitute before he has even approached her. I would be inclined more generally to link these fantasies with the development of most castration complexes that. . . commonly originate in the terror of the toothed vagina, given the assimilation of the entire body to the male member and likewise that of the mouth to the vagina are . . . classics of psychoanalysis.
>
> (1990: 78–9)

10 Rather ironically, Caillois' analysis at this point finds a linkage with Deleuze's early analysis of the structure of masochism in his analysis of Sacher von Masoch: he claims that masochism is not, as Freud suggests, an inverted homosexual desire for the father, who is disguised by the figure of the punishing mother, but rather, an attempt to psychically kill the father, insofar as it is the father that induces male and filial identifications in the son (see Deleuze 1989). Caillois explicitly connects the appeal of the praying mantis to the sado-masochistic complex.

11 Caillois quotes Paul Eluard, who

> admits to seeing the ideal sexual relationship in their love-making habits; the act of love, he says, diminishes the male and aggrandises the female, so it is natural that she should use her ephemeral superiority to devour him, or at least to kill him.
>
> (Caillois 1990: 79)

Freud makes a similar claim in his analyses of love relations and the 'tendency to debasement in the sphere of love'.

12 Lingis explicitly acknowledges the debt that such a conception of the body-image owes to the pioneering efforts of Schilder, Goldstein, Merleau-Ponty and others. I discuss this notion of the body-image in reference to the work of neuro-physiologists in Grosz (1994b).

13 While remaining critical of the Sartrean analysis of sexual desire as fundamentally appropriative, sadistic, the imposition on to the other which confirms one's consciousness and sense of self, Lingis nonetheless affirms Sartre's refusal to reduce sexuality and sexual pleasure to functional or pragmatic projects or goals:

> The movements of lust are incantations rather than techniques. . . . It is not the dexterity of the hands that is most captivating but a hand trailing over the other with trembling and indecisive movements. . . . A sex organ is not a tool; it is essential that penis and clitoris in erection, the vagina lubricating, not be activated voluntarily, used by a reflective consciousness. No fine, prehensile organ assembled with striated muscles can be a sex organ, Sartre says; a sex organ can only be part of a vegetative system.
>
> (Lingis 1985a: 25)

14 It is not clear that this Levinasian conception of alterity is not implicitly dependent on a certain feminization of the other, the Other as Femininity, as Woman. This is precisely the issue addressed by Derrida in his second paper on Levinas, and by Irigaray in her two papers on Levinas, 'The Fecundity of the Caress' (in Irigaray 1993) and 'Questions to Levinas' (Irigaray 1991).

15 In Lyotard's text (1993), the organic body does function as something of a pure plenitude, a prelapsarian given (which, if it is produced, is the effect of physiology, anatomy, neurology and biochemistry) or presence which is deflected by a secondary intervention, a structure not unlike that which is the object of Derrida's continuous criticisms.

16 The Moebius strip, incidentally, also a pervasive metaphor in some of Lacan's writings on the subject, is the driving model behind my own understanding of the mind/body relation in Grosz (1994b).

17 I have discussed some of the effects of severing the notion of sexual desire from the predominance of genitality, and the corresponding expansion of conceptions of desire and sexual pleasure into areas commonly assumed to be somehow outside the erotic, functioning in the desexualized and sublimated realm of 'public life' – the quasi-fetishistic attachment of the writer to the tools of writing, the bureaucrat to numbers, statistics, rules, in Grosz (1994a).

18 It is significant that in gay community responses to the AIDS crisis and the advocacy of 'safe sex' sexual practices, there has been considerable effort devoted to publicizing the fact that 'safe sex' does not necessarily imply more boring sex; that one need not court danger and possible death in the search for an ultimate sexual high: or rather, there are many bodily ways in which sexual and erotic relations remain intense and exciting without necessarily being life-imperilling.

19 It is not clear to me to what degree Lingis is prepared to limit the relevance and scope of his analysis of libido: while certainly much of what he says about the formlessness of sexual pleasure, the indeterminacy of the objectives of desire seems to me directly relevant to women and female sexuality, nonetheless it is also likely that much of his account, as (quasi-)autobiographical, is specifically limited to masculine experience.

20 See, for example, Shannon Bell (1991), who claims that women too can, with the right information and practice, achieve ejaculatory orgasms. While I do not doubt that some women, and perhaps, under certain circumstances, all women, are capable of orgasmic ejaculations, it is not clear why this should be regarded as an improvement on or progression from non-ejaculatory orgasms.

21 In his paper, 'Khajuraho' (1983), Lingis makes a similar point:

> It turns the most unlikely things into analogies or figures of lust so as to be able to excite itself anywhere; it even, in the case of fetishes, can displace itself entirely onto things remote from any possibility of interaction. It is as though the libidinous impulse is an exorbitant energy that tends not to satisfy itself and subside, like other desires and appetites, but to excite itself with its own function; everything gets infected with its trouble, even practical associations to work with tools, political relationships within institutions, pedagogical relationships over ideas, military alliances before the imminence of disaster and in the thirst for conquestion. Not only can the pursuit of riches or the investiture with political authority function as a means to obtain partners of flesh and blood, but cupidity and calculation themselves become lascivious.
>
> (1983: 50)

22 This statistic is cited in Marilyn Frye's analysis of the ways in which lesbian sexual relations do not count as proper or real 'sex' according to the implicit values and models of heterosexual intercourse (see Frye 1990).

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LINEARITY

The mistakes in a life line up
and there is a syntax. I cannot help but thinking
of the route I had meant to follow.

A system of notation results:
pure forms released to wander at will.
They do not speak to each other.
Randomly, darkness follows

and then light: pure forms released,
no longer in need of direction.
I kiss them goodbye.

(Norman Finkelstein)

MORE LESSONS FROM A STARFISH: PREFIXIAL FLESH AND TRANSSPECIATED SELVES

EVA HAYWARD

Mr. Muscle forcing bursting
Stingy thingy into little me, me, me
But just "ripple" said the cripple
As my jaw dropped to the ground
Smile smile

It's true I always wanted love to be
Hurtful
And it's true I always wanted love to be
Filled with pain
And bruises

Yes, so Cripple-Pig was happy
Screamed "I just completely love you!
And there's no rhyme or reason
I'm changing like the seasons
Watch! I'll even cut off my finger
It will grow back like a Starfish!
It will grow back like a Starfish!
It will grow back like a Starfish!"
Mr. Muscle, gazing boredly
And he checking time did punch me
And I sighed and bleeded like a windfall
Happy bleedy, happy bruisy

[WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly 36: 3 & 4 (Fall/Winter 2008)]

I am very happy
So please hit me
I am very happy
So please hurt me

I am very happy
So please hit me
I am very very happy
So come on hurt me

I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish

I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
Like a Starfish . . .

(Antony and the Johnsons 2000)

I call this piece a critical enmeshment rather than a personal account. For I want this to be a doing and a knowing that I get knotted into—a kind of phenomenological telling that grapples with the mundane and sublime. I am not only describing and articulating, not merely charting the geography, but am pulled into the fleshy gerunds of what I write out. That is to say, I am not telling my story; rather I'm simply entangling myself within the stitches of ongoing processes. I am here not to confess, but to confect.

As such, the following sections or interludes are not some teleological account of transsexual/trans-species becoming, or a disclosure of my stakes. Instead, it is in the encountering of my body with Antony's song, in the interacting of the text/sound and myself, in the changing patterns of lifeways that this essay is sense making. "Critical enmeshment" is always a verb just as it is also always situated and historical. And for this essay, critical enmeshment is a phenomenological compounding or

enfolding in which language, music, and matter are lively (even bumptious) relatings of what Donna Haraway calls, "others to each other" (2003).

A MOMENT OF SPECIES AND SEXES

I listen to the "The Cripple and the Starfish"; I find the layered tones of Antony's voice haunting and the lyrics startling: "I'll even cut off my finger"; "I'll grow back like a Starfish"; "Happy bleedy, happy bruisy." My iTunes player calls the song "alternative," that ambiguous, overpopulated term. The music "ripples" through styles and textures. Antony's voice vibrates (vibrato), fluctuating and undulating with emotional expressiveness: sometimes soft and tender and ripe with satiety and fulfillment ("I am very happy/So please hit me") then shifting in cadence to declarative, even triumphant ("I'll grow back like a Starfish"). Following the rise and fall of the song, Antony's voice shifts between low and high, deep and bright. His/her voice creates a waving space, a singing sea—the pace and rhythm of his/her phrasing expresses frenetic and calm movements, the periodicity or the punctuated changes of things and events, as with something gone adrift in its passage through material-discursive space, as a bloom of jellyfish carried by riptides and doldrums may be rinsed out to sea or washed up onto sand or rocks. Could it be that Antony sings the tones of whales calling, the syncopation of pods, the transfiguring surf? This is to ask, nearby Gaston Bachelard's (1983) own wonderings about the literal matter of meaning, how do the tone and the wording of "The Cripple and the Starfish" put us in touch with specific senses, things, places, and relations that it mentions or hints at?

And I wonder, thinking about the transsexual *trans*-formations and the starfish *re*-generations that are suggested in the song, what is the transformative and re-lational power of prefixes like "trans-" or "re-"? I want to understand how "re-" (as in "re-turn" or "re-new") and "trans-" (as in "elsewhere") are differently embodied. Beyond my own identity as a transsexual woman, or the political formation of transgender/transsexual, I am not certain about the ontological processes of bodily transformation (my own or others'). [1] How does *re*-assignment define transitioning for some trans-subjects? Moreover, I wonder if "starfish"—"I'll grow back like a Starfish"—or more properly "sea stars," might provide me (and maybe others) some prefixial lessons or guides through language, metaphor, and other tropological terrains. Do not some starfish regenerate themselves from injury? Is not the "cripple" of the song repairing him/

herself through the act of cutting? Is transsexual transformation also regenerative? Am I not in part a transsexual through the re-working and re-folding of my own body, my tissue, and my skin? In becoming transsexual, am I not also becoming "like a starfish" as the song suggests? When do metaphor and metonymy "ripple" into one another? Is the analogical device of "like-ness" ("like a starfish" or like a woman) too clumsy a rhetorical device for the kind of poetic and material enactments of trans-sexing/speciating?

These personal and scholarly questions are not maps for already chartered territories. In principle, this essay remains a work in progress. Tentatively and curiously, I am suggesting here that in some ways language, music, starfish, and myself encounter one another and share in the mutuality of our different materializations. By attending to the material nature of semiotic and embodied encounters, I hope to engage materialism at its most radical and come to recognize as precious the boundedness *of my flesh as part of the world*. This is to say, "we" (as in you and me) are ourselves specific parts of the world's ongoing refiguring; "we" are part of the world in its (and our) dynamic structuration, its (and our) differential becoming. It is my hope that this essay plays some small part in making explicit the embodied premises that we live in a process of constant enfolding and that it encourages a deeper and more expansive regard for ways that life comes together.

SOME NOTES FROM AN ARTIST

During an interview with *Velle Magazine*, Antony, the founder of Antony and the Johnsons, discusses the emergence of the band:

> The Johnsons' name is a reference to a hero of mine named Marsha P. Johnson, who was a street activist from the mid 60's all the way through to her death in the early 90's. Marsha P. Johnson was a street prostitute and a very visible figure on Christopher Street through the 70's and 80's, very renowned for her kindness. You know, her nickname was Saint Marsha. She was a very gregarious sort of outsider street presence and she was rumored to have thrown the first bottle in the Stonewall Riot—I mean whether that was true or not was a bone of contention among several different queens (Uchill 2007, 49).

Marsha Johnson, or Saint Marsha, and Sylvia Rivera, an important figure in the nascent transgender civil rights movement, started a group in 1970 called STAR, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.[2] In Antony's own words, a transgender legacy is written into the music group; she, an outsider, a queen of color, who threw the first bottle, who was murdered in 1992, structures the creative and political intent of the band. Johnson is Antony's hero, perhaps, and I say this only speculatively, an ego ideal.

About her/his creative process, Antony is clear to emphasize the collage quality of her/his music and sound.

> I think my creative process has always been what I've described as accumulative. I collect a lot of different shards and pieces, and I create something that feels meaningful to me by finding relationships between them and putting them into a kind of a collage. . . . You know, for me, I'm really drawn to singers that are full of feeling and are seeking transformation. I like transformative singing, you know, singing that starts one place and ends in another place (Uchill 2007, 50).

Classification is evaded for something more "transformative," something "that starts one place and ends in another place." "Trans-," a prefix weighted with across, beyond, through (into another state or place—*elsewhere*), does the now familiar work of suggesting the unclassifiable. To be *trans-* is to be transcending or surpassing particular impositions, whether empirical, rhetorical, or aesthetic. Antony speaks of the affective force of his/her transformation in songs and in singing. Transformations—not unlike transgenders—are produced through emotive forces. Shards and pieces (again, of something broken) are reworked into meaningful integrities, but not wholes.

In another interview, with the *Guardian* (Peschek 2007), Antony discusses her/his album *I Am a Bird Now*, which was included as an installation piece in the 2004 Whitney Biennial.[3] The record is described by Antony as "A record of transformations and survival. Its characters move between states—life and death, male and female, human and animal—searching for sanctuary and fulfillment"(Peschek 2005). Antony proposes transformation as a trope for reworking the relationality of male and female, of human and animal. Perhaps I am the only one hearing it, but in the texture of Antony's voice, in the instrumental variations, and in the

lyrics themselves, boundaries of sexual and species differences, artificial and authentic orderings, and nature and culture are affectively and literally *trans*-ed in "The Cripple and the Starfish."

"Trans-," as articulated by Antony, is meant to disturb purification practices; the well defined is confounded at multiple material and semiotic levels. Psychical and corporeal experiences are blended. For example, gender and the embodiment of gender are contingencies that may hold for a moment then fall away into another set of relationships. Species exist in taxonomic differences (*Homo sapiens sapiens* is not the same as *Octopus vulgaris*), but species are also *always already* constitutive of each other through the spaces and places we cohabit—this of course includes language and other semiotic registers (Haraway 2003). Indeed, species are relationships between species—relationality is worldhood. We are not human alone—we are human with many. Matter is not immutable, suggests Antony, it is discursive, allowing sexes and species to practice transmaterialization. The meat and meaning for humans and starfish have no structuring lack, no primordial division, but are sensuously intertwined.

BECOMING WITH STARFISH

After listening to the song, I am plunged into the trans-species implications of primate digits = starfish rays. Starfish (as material/discursive objects) work as interesting figures to theorize re-embodiment with (but they are not only here to think with; they "are fleshy material-semiotic presences") (Haraway 2003, 5). A few reminders: starfish (though not fish) are marine invertebrates that belong to kingdom *Animalia* and phylum *Echinodermata*, class *Asteroideae*. Starfish are capable of sexual and asexual reproduction. For sexually reproducing species, fertilization takes place externally with males and females releasing their gametes into the environment—broadcast spawning. The fertilized embryos form part of the zooplankton—the animal part of the pelagic. Some species of starfish also reproduce asexually by fission, often with part of a ray becoming detached and eventually developing into another individual. Fissioning has led to some notoriety.[4] Most species must have the central part of the body intact to be able to regenerate, but a few can grow an entire starfish from a single ray.

Although many echinoderms do not have many well-defined sensory inputs, they are sensitive to touch, light, temperature, orientation, and the status of water around them. The tube feet, spines, and pedicellaria

found on starfish are sensitive to touch, while eyespots on the ends of the rays are light sensitive. In this way, Antony's starfish rays may not just be stand-ins for penis = finger, but interventions in phallus = vision. Indeed, if becoming transsexual is becoming with starfish then some of that work is done with *fingery-eyes*.[5] No eyes, but their rays are full of luminous touch, of sensing, or rather of being literally *tact*, being touch; their rays respond to the surface effects, caressing. Their pedicellaria tremble and deform in the movements; gropes, manipulations, and reaches succeed one another. That is all to say, it is not that their sensing system is visually haptically embodied; rather their very *being* is a visual-haptic-sensory apparatus. The song might produce some notion of lack (some kind of castration), but more interestingly it also refigures the ocular-centrism needed for the recognizing self from other by becoming *with* starfish. Consequently, self and other are not easily ordered (as in speciation)—again, species of all sorts are constituted through encounters. Vision/touch/penis/phallus are at stake not simply through lack/castration, but also through speciation, through fingery-eyes. This kind of enfolding of gender/animality serves as shared zoontology (Wolfe 2003).

TRANS-ABLING

In "The Cripple and the Starfish," transformation is indeed a fusing of organisms, energies, and sexes. I am intrigued by the phrase "cut off my finger, it'll grow back like a starfish." Let us start with the cut—the "cripple" wants "Mr. Muscle" to "please hurt me," and "cripple" will "even cut off my finger." From what has been suggested by the song and Antony him/herself, I presume that "cripple" wants to transform through cutting (amputation or castration); the "cripple" can be heard as a transsexual/transgender MtF seeking transformation. At first, the cut finger leads me, and perhaps other listeners/readers, to think that the cut is an act of castration—the finger works as a substitute for the penis. "Cripple" wants to become a woman through the cutting off of her penis. Certainly, some transsexual women "cut off" their penises in order to have solidarity with females or become female themselves to name only some transsex formations.[6]

Perhaps some readers will worry that my reading the "Cripple" as a trans-subject will iterate the pathologization of trans-folks. For some transsexual/transgender subjects, originary gender assignments can feel disabling, even wounding. I'm speaking about this kind of traumatic

experience, not about transgressive exceptionalism (Halberstam 2005) in which gender/sex changes prompt revolutionary potential. I am simply returning to my own bodily knowledge—carnal logics—of pain and possibility, my own experience of becoming transsexual as a welcomed cut. And yet, I am concerned with how my own calculus of gender dis-phoria as dis-ability = yearned-for transformation codifies a naive understanding of disability (or dis-phoria) as intolerable. This troubles me. So, following Robert McRuer's (2006) vibrant work on queerness and disability, I want to suggest that disability theory has long refused, even relexified, the prefixial logics of "dis-." Indeed, McRuer recasts dis-ability as kinds of queer embodiments, initiating a resignification of cutting and amputation as forms of becoming that are not located in morbidity, fetishism, or wholeness. While I am not here by any means suggesting that on a foundational or formative level "trans" must always (or even frequently) embody disability, the song almost demands it. So although I might find my born-sex dis-abling, I also see my trans-sex as a cut-sex that "cripples" an imagined wholeness even while I find that position to be livable even desirable position rather than annexed or repudiated. This is to say, for me, I invite the cut that leaves sex-scars and other unfulfilled wishes so that I might live differently my gender dys-phoria, my dis-comforting born-sex. The "cripple" might yearn for transformation, to "diss" dysphoria, but the corporeal act and affect of transformation (as in a cut, for example) does not cure but trans-figures embodiment. Risking an unsetting union, I propose that *trans-abling* allows cut-sex (or even other kinds of transitions) to be something other than curative.[7]

CUTTING PREFIXES

Does "cut" *have* an onomatopoetic quality? Do we acoustically/haptically experience the sharp-edged tool slice, sever, nick, slash? When I read Susan Stryker's (1994) "The Surgeon Haunts My Dreams"—"As He falls upon me I see the knife glinting in His hand, and I know this water will soon be turning red. When I lift my hips to meet Him as He enters me, He will surely see that nothing other than my desire brings Him here"—the words cause my own "cut-sex" to ache.

I am not interested in how the cut in the song is an absence (as in castration) but rather in how cutting is a generative enactment of "grow[ing] back" or healing. The cut enacts trans-embodiment—to cut is not necessarily about castration, but an attempt to recast the self through

the cut body. The whole (body) and the part (cut) are metonymically bound in an attempt to trans-form in toto. However successful or not, however uncomfortable for listeners/readers, however seemingly masochistic, "cut off my finger" and "please hit me" can be understood as wished-for metamorphosis by the "cripple." To cut off the penis/finger is not to be an amputee, but to produce the conditions of physical and psychical regrowth. *The cut is possibility*. For some transsexual women, the cut is not so much an opening of the body, but a generative effort to *pull the body back through itself* in order to feel mending, to feel the growth of new margins. The cut is not just an action; the cut is part of the ongoing materialization by which a transsexual tentatively and mutably becomes. The cut cuts the meat (not primarily a visual operation for the embodied subject, but rather a proprioceptive one), and a space of psychical possibility is thereby created. From the first, a transsexual woman embodiment does not necessarily foreground a wish to look like or look more like a woman (namely, passing)—though for some transwomen this may indeed be a wish (fulfilled or not). The point of view of the looker (those who might read her) is not the most important feature of trans-subjectivity—the trans-woman wishes to be *of* her body, to speak from her body.

When I pay my surgeon to cut my penis into a neovagina, I am moving toward myself through myself. As the surgeon inserts the scalpel and cuts through the thickness of my tissue, my flesh immediately empurples. For weeks afterward, my groin remains discolored and swollen. Between the surgeon's efforts and my body's biomechanics, my cut spills blood and affect. My cut enacts a regeneration of my bodily boundaries—boundaries redrawn. Through my cut, I brush up against invocations and revelations; my cut is not passive—its very substance (materially and affectively) is generative and plays a significant role in my ongoing materialization. My cut is *of* my body, not the absence of parts of my body. The regenerative effort of my cut is discursive; my transfiguring cut is a material-discursive practice through which I am *of* my body and of my transself. My cut penis entails being and doing, materiality and affect, substance and form. My cut is generative within material limits but not with affective fixity; my tissues are mutable insofar as they are made of me and propel me to imagine an embodied elsewhere.

Not surprisingly, scholars, activists, students, and artists have questioned the meaning and significance of transsexual/transgender embodiment. Rather simplistically, it has been suggested that the pre-operative

transsexual feels constrained by the wrong body and desires a healed body, which is articulated as a male or a female form. According to this account, transsexual selfhood is entangled with images of bodily wholeness—what's more, there is an idea of inside and outside the body that are at odds (Prosser 1998). The body is a container—a body bag of nouns to keep the proper ones in order. The transsexual aspires to make the so-called defective body intact in order that it may be me. As Jay Prosser has suggested, it is undeniable that such agonizing experiences of disembodiment are true for some transsexuals; nor is it difficult to believe that transsexual alterations are not simply chosen, but rather are *the transformation of an unlivable, fragmented body into a livable whole* (Prosser 1998).

What I find troublesome about this articulation of transsexualism is not the trouble of containment; it is the limiting of the body to containment alone. To be comfortable in one's own body is not *only* to be restricted, limited, contained, or constrained as whole or complete. It is to be able to embody the body's multiplicities, its vicissitudes, its (our) ongoing process of materialization. The body (trans or not) is not a pure, coherent, and positive integrity. The important distinction is not the binary one between wrong body and right body, or between fragmentation and wholeness; it is instead a question of experiencing multiple and continually varying interactions between what can be defined indifferently as coherent transformation, decentered certainty, or limited possibility. Transsexuals do not transcend gender and sex. We create embodiment by not jumping *out* of our bodies, but by taking up a fold in our bodies, by folding (or cutting) ourselves, and creating a transformative scar of ourselves. There is no absolute division, but continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my different historical bodies. Again, I am *of* my body in order that I might experience a subjective, energetic transformation.

A transsexual (myself, for example) is never discontinuous from different states of embodiment, or at least I am only generally distinguished from different historical states of my own beingness.[8] If my subjective embodiment has always been transgender, then my material transformation is an attempt to congeal my differently trans-embodied experiences of body and mind. What I am suggesting when I say that embodiment is coherence is that I am always *of* my tissue even in its ongoing transformation. Whatever the transsexual grants to vision, subjective embodiment is always only partially visible.

Changeability is intrinsic to the transsexual body, at once its subject, its substance, and its limit. Our bodies are scarred, marked, and reworked into a livable gender trouble, sex trouble, or uneven epidermis. Transsexuals survive not because we become whole, but because we embody the reach and possibility of our layered experience—we have no choice. This is all to say, the transsexual body, my body, is a body created out of necessity, ingenuity, and survival—to carry the heft of my various social identities. I, like many transsexuals, may desire some mythic wholeness, but what is truly intact for me, what I live, what I must be part of, is a body pliant to a point, flexible within limits, constrained by language, articulation, flesh, history, and bone.

RE-FORMING METAPHOR

What are the differences between refraction and reflection as contemplative activities? How might a refracted relationship to a text function differently from a reflected one? "Refractory" defines behaviors and materials that are obstinate, unresponsive, and resistant. Evoking these terms simultaneously refocuses matter's stubborn, even blunt, capacity for demarcating externality and internality. In a cruder sense, "refraction" and "refractory" also share origins with "refractory period"—the period that follows effective stimulation, during which excitable tissue fails to respond to a stimulus of threshold intensity (Hayward 2005). Associated with sexual pleasure or "love life," the refractory period as expiration suggests the inertia of the entropic and the return toward the inanimate. Stillness that falls after excitation carries the residue of sensate experience. Sense is carnal; senses are refractory.

"I'll grow back like a starfish." From the start, I notice two things: first, my finger has been substituted for "I"; second, we have moved from the metonymy of the cut to the metaphor of trans-speciation. The starfish seemingly appears as a stand-in for transsexual transformation—the animal appears only as a tool for thinking about beingness. Let us not forget, the metaphor is a displacement: a nominative term is displaced from its everyday context and placed elsewhere so as to illuminate some other context through its reconfiguration. Thus, the relationship is based on the relationship of ideas rather than objects—metaphor does not owe any allegiance to the literal object. The "cut," in contrast, is structured by a metonymy of embodied correspondences and correlations. Metonymy is a tropological enactment quite different from metaphor. Metonymy

brings together two objects, each of which constitutes a separate whole; "metonymy" refers to conditions of correspondence: cause to effect, instrument to purpose, container to content, "cut" to trans-body.

I wonder if the starfish is more than metaphor (not that metaphor isn't enough). Playing on the side of zoomorphism, I wonder if being starfish shares in the ontological imaginary of becoming trans-sexed. I don't want to propose that transsexualism is the *same as* trans-speciation, but rather that both share in the materialization of the trans-figure described in "The Cripple and the Starfish." Both the starfish and the transsexual "grow back," differently but with similar phenomenological goals of bodily integrity and healing. Is it possible, and here I take a leap, that while the "cut" has a metonymic force in trans-embodiment, could not "like a starfish" also suggest a metonymy of trans-speciation? For example, literal animals are always part of figural animals; animals cannot be displaced by words; rather, words carry the nervous circuitries, the rhythms, the tempos of the literal. Animals are always constitutively formed in language—human and not, animal and not. Animals (though not necessarily animals alone—but that is for another series of essays) are bound in language such that language cuts into flesh but does not completely devour the body. The literal cut bleeds around the word "cut," which is where the conditions of subjective transformation emerge. Likewise, the starfish, an echinoderm, a regenerating body, an invertebrate that can in some species reproduce new individuals through bodily divisions, exceeds the metaphoricity of likeness because starfish is only ever partially digested, defined, explained, used by language.

How might the "cripple" yearn for *re*generation in order to *trans*-form? "I'll even cut off my finger. It will grow back like a starfish." To me, this is a literal instantiation of sea star biodynamic—s/he will *re*-grow her/his finger, but not necessarily *trans*-form her/his finger. In broader terms, s/he is also *re*-sexed body just as she/he also becomes subjectively trans-sexed. Although subtle, the work might be in how prefixes shape and reshape the prepositions of the discourse; *re-* is *of* the body, not *in* the body (as trans embodiment is often articulated—for example, "trapped in the wrong body"). "Re-" makes all enactments constitutive of the former (even if the form-er is an ongoing process of materialization). "Re-" might offer a more "rippling" approach to the limit and containment of the flesh. Regenerativity is a process that is enacted through and by containment (the body). In this way, regeneration is a re/iterative enactment

of not only growing *new* boundaries (rebodying), but also of imperiling static boundaries (subjective transformation). Regeneration can attend to desire, pathos, and trauma, but also to modes of corporeal intimacy, fleshy possibility, and most important, reembodiment.

Regeneration is something that both transsexuals and starfish do. Transsexuals and starfish do other kinds of prefixial relationships between inside/outside, subject/object, or predator/prey, but in "re-" they share a phenomenological experience of reshaping and reworking bodily boundaries. How might prefixes help us understand the ways that we (starfish, transsexuals, and others) autonomize and generate embodiment? Re-grow, re-differentiate, re-pattern, re-member, re-nucleate: our bodily structures, our biodynamics, are materially enacted through ongoing relationships with the world, as part of that world. Transsexuals and starfish challenge disembodied metaphors (such as like, resemblance, or simile), and propose how we are metonymically stitched to carnal substrates. *In other words, I'm not like a starfish; I am of a starfish. I am not trapped in my body; I am of my body.*

MEAT OF MEANING

I'm worried about how real starfish that roam clam beds literally matter here in my prose, in my enmeshmest of the many actors and presences whose doings resemble a coralline reef. Generations of spineless marine organisms, with their light-sensitive spots and neural webs, release their eggs into open waters, followed by larval feeding, will settle, eat each other and passers-by, and generate their own hungry drifters. When I say "Starfish," or describe their lifeways, how do these words retain the presences, properties, and behaviors of invertebrates undergoing metamorphosis? Perhaps it is a frivolous desire on my part, even ridiculous, to want to understand how words focus our attention, leading us to see/hear/feel interactions, requiring us to attend to a perpetual, worldly motion.

Here, thinking about Antony's "Starfish," I turn to mentors. Looking, listening, and living attentively in concert with "critters," Donna Haraway teaches us, might just give humans new forms of relationship practice to use productively both among themselves and with a menagerie of emergent others. The kind of relating she calls for has prepositional import: *worlds are of relationships*. The ontology of interrelationality, according to Haraway, is ongoing, constitutive, metamorphosing, living, and material. She articulates her verb-heavy practice of ontogenesis with the biologically flavored word "metaplasm," meaning "a change in a

word by adding, omitting, inverting, or transposing its letters, syllables, and sounds" (Haraway 2003, 20–21). The term is from the Greek *metaplasmos*, meaning remodeling or remolding. Metaplasm is a generic term for almost any kind of alteration in a word, intentional or unintentional. . . . Compare and contrast protoplasm, cytoplasm, neoplasm, and germplasm. There is a biological taste to metaplasm—just what I like in words about words. Flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds: these are joined in naturecultures. Metaplasm can signify a mistake, a stumbling, a troping that makes a fleshly difference. For example, a substitution in a string of bases in a nucleic acid can be a metaplasm, changing the meaning of a gene and altering the course of life.

Added to her fourth semiotic category of diffraction, set forth in *Modest Witness*, "metaplasm," according to Haraway, means, "the remodeling of dog and human flesh, remodeling the codes of life, in the history of companion species" (Haraway 2003, 20). Metaplasm: not as lofty or as graphic as diffraction, can cause the transformation of one type of differentiated tissue into another, such as granular inclusions within cytoplasm. Metaplasm entails the constitutive enactment of ontology and epistemology, materiality and intelligibility, substance and form, fungibility and sustainability. Metaplasm: sensual materiality enacted. Metaplasm is the intertwining and enmeshing of noumena and phenomena; that is, metaplasm is about materially activated—moving matter—ways of being, doing, and knowing. Metaplasm, says Haraway, gets its start from the interrelationship of human animals and nonhuman animals. Unlike diffraction, metaplasm begins in the sensual and carnal intercourse between and among species, constantly changing and reworking boundaries between subject and object, us and them, there and here, me and it. Intervening in the optic-driven epistemology engines of science studies and cultural theory, metaplasm gives Haraway's diffraction a whiff of fecundity, a meaty taste, intimacy, pleasure, pain, and hunger.

It would be wrong to read metaplasm as utopian. Haraway is precise when she talks about the life-and-death stakes of getting it wrong. Metaplasm is an approach to ethics that does not hold out an end story, a teleological end point. Rather, metaplasm attends to the ways that enactors (enfolded actors: constitutive of each other while differentiated: doing and knowing while being) constitute themselves through assemblages composed from biological and phenomenological entanglements. Metaplasm is ripe with relational shit, yolks, and cancerous metaplastic

pyloric glands. Metaplasms are ossifications, transformations, and keratinizations of raw sensation—hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching become fibrous, heteromorphic, and unruly. Metaplasm is a kind of enactment with relationship as part of the relationship, a practice of enfolding relationships in their ongoing materializations. However, the risks are high; the sticks and stones of relational *mattering* can disease the intestine with carcinoma and fill the bone with anemia and haematopoiesis. Metaplasm is a kind of trope that takes biology and semiotics very seriously—differences are material and discurive. It is ardent with consequence. Metaplasm is an enactment (as in enfolded action: diacritically invested and active in making sense and meaning *in and of the world*). It is this kind of iterative ontogenetic and epistemological entangling that Haraway calls for in "significant otherness," a thickly mediated/mediating way of being HumanAnimal in the contemporary moment.[9]

In concert with Haraway's call for fleshy difference and material semiotics, I turn to Akira Mizuta Lippit's important discussion of "animetaphor" (a play on "antimetaphor" and "animal metaphor," that is, animals exceed metaphoricity). Lippit writes, "The animetaphor is . . . never absorbed, sublimated, or introjected into the world but rather incorporated as a limit . . . . The animetaphoric figure is consumed literally rather than figuratively" (1998, 1115). The animetaphor (that which tries to speak for/about specific animals) is metonymic, foregrounding the ways that the lived being always already inhabits language, grammar, syntax, and metaphor. The animetaphor is about how animals *exist within* practices of signification—nonhuman animals are not merely subjected to primate language; nonhuman animals are always already reworking language. The real animal is constantly present in Adam's Genesis. Animals, in their own ways, inhabit language. Language emerges from an ontology that is ecological, *anima*, the animal den, the wave, and the invertebrate.

Lippit suggests that the animetaphor foregrounds the complex ways that animal representations are always haunted, vexed, reworked, and enfolded by real animals. Animals expose the limits of representation. Lippit shows how animality, animal spirits, and organisms themselves reside as real within representations. He writes:

> On the verge of words, the animal emits instead a stream of cries, affects, spirits, and magnetic fluids. What flows from the animal touches language without entering it, dissolving memory, like the

> unconscious, into a timeless present. The animal is magnetic because it draws the world-building subject toward an impossible convergence with the limits of world, toward a metaphysics of metaphor. The magnetic animal erases the limits of the metaphor, affecting an economy of the figure that is metamorphic rather than metaphoric. It forces a transformation of the figure (1120).

Lippit posits that metaphors and representations create spaces where nonhuman animals can be pointed to without naming, subsumed without securing. That is to say, the animetaphor, the living metaphor, is always pointing to a space (even if it is always already in language) outside language, exposing the limits of language.[10]

Working with the "antimetaphor" figure of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok (Abraham and Torok 1994), Lippit is suggesting here that animals in language are always transforming figure into flesh, always *disfiguring* representation. Animals are always troubling the language that attempts to name animals. In this way, nonhuman animals seem to put an oral void into language. Animals cannot be named without invoking the limits of the process of naming. This is not a tautology. Animals are *in and of* language and representation, but their lived bodies are always restoring words to beings. Lippit writes, "When the metaphoricity of the metaphor collapses, the concept becomes a metonymic thing that can be eaten" (1998, 1122). Because animality is often the measure by which humanity measures itself as such, animals in language rest at the edges of the mouth, my mouth; I taste the failure of language to describe animals and savor the presence of real animals flanking my sentences, my words. My language cannot digest the tissue and meat of nonhuman animals—a meal that cannot be digested.

Taking Lippit's "animetaphor" and applying it to "The Cripple and the Starfish," "starfish" points to the limits of representation, where "like a starfish" has corporeal meaning. The starfish referent is constantly touching me and devouring its representation. Antony's starfish is fiercely present as a regenerating body in the song about it. Eating and hearing are collapsed as phenomenological modes of encounter within this starfish song. Antony's starfish consumes me through the excess of its referentiality. The listening subject (myself, for example) is wholly or partially touched by the soma of the named starfish. The referent itself establishes itself as *that-which-is-reembodying-this*. As I listen to Antony's song, rather

than anthropomorphizing the starfish through identification, I am simultaneously chewing on and being chewed on by an economy of excess, carnality, and materiality.

The word "starfish" puts me in contact with starfish themselves—a kind of material imagination in which the word stems directly from matter. As Antony sings "starfish," the literal starfish resounds in his/her voice. The word maps out the dense tissue of starfish lifeways. For me, Antony intensifies the encounter, the meeting, between the bodies of species. "Like a starfish" enacts an artistry on the starfish and the subject of the animetaphor. That "I will grow back like a starfish" solicits both "I" and the starfish to inhabit those words; with those words we move into life. "I" is a word that finds roots in oneself; "starfish" transposes a literal element into a figural one. Out of the murmuring sensations of "The Cripple and the Starfish" come words and the babble of others that are uttered into oneself, into one's bone marrow, one's anatomy, and one's circadian rhythms. This *intra*-corporeality of starfish (material) and "starfish" (semiotic), of "I" and me, is a kind of loving, a kind of nearness that invokes a voluptuary of trans-speciation and imagines a co/passionate kind of presence. Language and music, then, enact a caressing, a sensuous immersing in the ardent materiality of worldhood.

RIPPLE

"Ripple":

1. A slight cut, scratch, or mark. Verb: to scratch slightly; to graze or ruffle.
2. A piece of shallow water in a river where rocks or sand-bars cause an obstruction; a shoal.
3. A light ruffling of the surface of water, such as is caused by a slight breeze; a wavelet.
4. A wave on the surface of a fluid the restoring force for which is provided by surface tension rather than by gravity, and which consequently has a wavelength shorter than that corresponding to the minimum speed of propagation.
5. A sound as of rippling water.
6. To mark with or as with ripples; to cause to undulate slightly. (Oxford English Dictionary)

"Ripple" creates the ruffling within the subject that allows "Happy bleedy, happy bruisy" to become the conditions for bodily regeneration, psychical transformation, and trans-speciation. "Ripple" tears and fiddles with the idea that language/representation is a cut between the phenomenal world and the knowing subject. "Ripple" with the "The Cripple and the Starfish" creates the carnal foundations for prefixial enactments that take meat and meaning seriously. The "cripple" and "like a starfish" provide an extreme collapse between the figural and the real. In other words, prefixes ("trans-" and "*re*-") are kinds of relationships that ripple and rupture the field of representation. The starfish and the transsexual point beyond the limits of language, allowing both figures to exceed any kind of palliative function (like a woman or "like a starfish").

The transsexual—again I speak of this experience not to the side of my body, but because of my body—energetically ripples the body, marks the meat, with *re*-form, *re*-grow, re-shape so that subjective transformation may occur: transition, transsex, *trans*-be; this is prefixial rippling. The prefix re- must take up the body in order that trans- might become. The starfish, depending on species, can *re*-grow a damaged ray. The lost ray, again in some species, may become another individual, rippling into another state of being. This is to say, the starfish changes its biogeometry in relationship to its environment—it is entangled and reshaped and transfigured through encounters. Moreover, the metonymic qualities of embodiment always links semiotics to matter. "Starfish" is a representation with tube feet; transsexual is an identity that bleeds and is cut.

"Ripple" reminds me of starfish locomotion. Starfish have hydraulic water vascular systems that facilitate movement. Ocean water comes into the system via the madreporite (a small opening in the aboral surfaces of starfish). Salt water is then circulated from the stone canal to the ring canal and into the radial canals. The radial canals carry water to the ampullae and provide suction to the tube feet. The tube feet latch on to surfaces and move in a wave, with one body section attaching to the surfaces as another releases. "Ripple" defines the biomechanics of tube feet.

"Ripple," on a somatic level, reminds me of my own physical vulnerability—my animate transsex flesh. Might I share this same somatic sensitivity with the starfish in the most basic sense of redressing harm: regeneration as an act of healing. Transsexing is an act of healing. This is some kind of mutuality—some kinds of shared ontology. Trans-morphic as zoomorphic—if we can understand the cut as an act of love, then can

we not imagine that "like a starfish" is an enactment of trans-speciating? We, transsexuals and starfish, are animate bodies; our bodies are experienced and come to be known through encounters with other animate bodies. These epistemological moves describe a shared phenomenological ontology. This is sensate intertwining-intercorporeal zones between these bodies in language and in experience. Starfish and transsexuals share worldhood both semiotic (as metonymic kinds) and phenomenological enactments—is this not some form of *inter*corporeality?

"It's true I always wanted love to be hurtful," says Antony in "The Cripple and the Starfish." If, as I hope I've illustrated here, the literal and the figural—the *matter that means* and the *meaning that means*—emerge as interlocking and dynamic. "Hurt" is not a masochistic enactment (or, at least, not this alone), but signals a breach in language, and a tear in the traditional subject/object formation. The material, the literal matter, of being, surfaces and resurfaces as a constitutive force that cannot be digested in the acid fluids of anthropic concerns. Animetaphor and metonymy apply a figurative sense as a literal one, while yet retaining the look or feel of figurality. A phenomenology of the rippling subject having and making sense of the song reveals to us the intercorporeal function of lived bodies—as both carnal and conscious, sensible and sentient—and how it is we can apprehend the sense of the song both figurally and literally.

Correlatively, a phenomenology of the experience of this lived intercorporeality and differentiation in the song exposes to us—in the metonymic articulations of language—the reversible and oscillating structure of the lived body's experience of language. To put it simply: in the act of making sense of the song, metonymy is to language as rippling is to lived bodies. Metonymy not only points to the gap between the figures of language and literal lived-bodies' experiences but also intercorporeally, rippling, bridges and intertwines a sensate ontology. Thus, "The Cripple and the Starfish" mobilizes, differentiates, and yet entangles lived bodies and language and foregrounds the intercorporeality of sensible matter and sensual meaning. As zoomorphic, *re*-morphic, and *trans*-morphic subjects, then, we possess an embodied knowledge that opens us beyond our discrete capacity for listening to a song, opens the song far beyond its containment in iTunes's "alternative," and opens language to a metonymic and biodynamic knowledge of specific origins and limits.

This is what my being transsexual knows about being a starfish.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I need to say a few things. First, I want to thank Susan Stryker for calling my attention to this song and suggesting that I write about it. Her guidance and editorial eye have been invaluable. Second, portions of this essay have appeared in a slightly different form in Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, ed., *Queering the Non/Human* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008) under the tile "Lessons from a Starfish." This current essay, "More Lessons from a Starfish," attempts to evolve some of the nascent ideas that I put forward in the first essay. In particular, I hope new readers will welcome my discussions of disability (as "cripple" is uncompromisingly named in the song), trans-species somaticity (how through metaphor and metonym flesh and signifier are joined), and a continued effort in the animate approximation of my own prose style.

NOTES

1. I use "transgender" and "transsexual" interchangeably in this essay. I do so not to elide the significant differences between these identities, but to foreground the shared concerns and desires for embodiment. This is to say, being transgender does not exclude bodily change, nor does being transsexual mean you will have sex reassignment surgery.

2. Here are several links that offer biographical material on the late Marsha P. Johnson: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsha_P._Johnson; an obituary, http://gender.org/remember/people/marshajohnson.html; a poem by Qwo-Li Driskill, http://www.lodestarquarterly.com/work/248/.

For a bio on Sylvia Rivera, which sadly is also an obituary, go to http://www.workers.org/ww/2002/sylvia0307.php.

My suggestion that STAR was a "transgender" political organization is a bit ahistorical, considering that "transgender" as a social identity was still only emerging during these years. However, too often gender-variant communities, and their contributions to social change, get lost in more traditional gay/lesbian historiographies. So, I risk playing the part of a "bad historian" in the hopes of encouraging more inclusive historical projects.

3. Antony and the Johnsons collaborated with filmmaker Charles Atlas and thirteen transwomen from New York City on a concert/live video installation staged in

London, Rome, and Paris. During "turning," Antony and the Johnsons present a concert while Charles Atlas creates live video portraits of each model. "turning" was first presented as a part of the 2004 Whitney Biennial in New York City.

4. A story of misunderstanding: starfish can be pests to fishers who make their living on the capture of mollusks, as starfish prey on these. The fishers would presumably kill starfish by chopping them up and disposing of them at sea, ultimately leading to their increased numbers. For more information, see Vicki Pearse, *Living Invertebrates* (Pacific Grove, CA.: Boxwood Press, 1987).

5. Elsewhere I have described "fingery-eyes" as making seeing analogous to touching; fingery-eyes, optical groping, or tactful eyes haptically and visually orient the sensual body across mediums. This kind of seeing through/across/with interfaces requires a perception that navigates by constantly referencing the medium of the environment. Fingery-eyes are about closeness, near proximities—visual distance is not an option here.

6. I use "solidarity" to suggest something other than identification. I'm not suggesting that transsexual women do not become female (some certainly do), but I want to hold out the possibility that the transsexual woman can also become a kind of woman *made of* her various ontologies. I want to value the experience of becoming transsexual as something particular to transsexuals, even as that experience is constitutive of other sexes and their constitutiveness—together all the way down. This line of reasoning is explored in Sandy Stone's (1993) formative essay "The Empire Strikes Back."

7. So much more needs to be said about the relationship between transgender/transsexual subjectivities and disability (and its subtending theories of). I hope the reader recognizes my brief reflections as an attempt to tenderly unpack this potentially volatile issue. I am currently working on an essay on "Trans-abling" in which I further explicate the "noncurative, but wished-for aims" of transitioning.

8. I am not suggesting that "male privilege" is carried into female embodiment—I am not making a sociocultural argument about authenticity. The debate that many MtFs continue to express a perspective on the world that derives from socialization as members of a privileged sex class remains molten. I encourage readers interested in this theme to consult Stryker and Whittle's (2006) excellent anthology *The Transgender Reader*.

9. I do not know if this term, or collapse of terms, has been coined elsewhere (surely it has). I deploy this neologism (in the spirit of "technoscience" or "natureculture") to foreground the constitutive nature of these terms as well as the different histories and institutions that form and reform their meanings. Moreover, I use the compound term to suggest that in an encounter between human and animal, both entities become enyolked in one another, become "fleshed out" (as Merleau-Ponty might say), become literally *of* one another.

10. Lippit is working from Jacques Derrida's (2000, 1991) work on the limits of subjectivity.

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