

Propter Nos

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Introduction:

Insurgency / Exhaustion

This issue of *Propter Nos* offers a collection of essays, poetry, artwork, and experimental prose that meditates on the interrelated phenomena of insurgency and exhaustion. We use the term “insurgency” to describe an approach to political struggle that works through decentralized networks and across multiple contexts to abolish a society structured in dominance. Some contributors use the term with a more specific meaning, referring to a form of revolutionary warfare wherein various groups—both “above-ground” and clandestine—combine their political resources with the principled use of violence to achieve strategic objectives. Yet while insurgency remains a key thematic framing this issue, many contributors explore *exhaustion* as an inherent aspect of building substantive opposition to the dominant culture—its state and military, its laws and mode of production, its moral and aesthetic values. What exactly are the long-term implications of our most cherished approaches to organizing, education, and cultural praxis? Are the current paradigms, strategies, and tactics of radical political work at all sustainable? What if we admit that we are burnt out?

In a period when liberal and critical discourses seem fixated on a politics of “action,” we cannot afford to neglect or ignore the exhausted body, the body that breaks-down, the body that strains, that labors in unending struggle. Stress, fatigue, burnout, war-weariness, and emotional expenditure are all inherent elements of building mass movements against anti-blackness, white supremacy, colonialism, racial capitalism, and cis-heteropatriarchy. As in all aspects of life, without the proper diagnosis, healing, care, and rest, the effects of exhaustion can weaken the capacity of movements to effectively guard against the forces of counterinsurgency.

Neither ironically nor coincidentally, the very process of compiling this issue was marked by extreme instances of exhaustion and distress. In fact, our decision to make “exhaustion” a theme of this issue was informed by two of our members developing chronic illnesses. It was partially because of this—and because several writers initially penned for publication had to drop for one reason or another—that we were forced to put the project on hold for some months. Against the newfound urgency of the day, our small group still thought it best not to rush or expedite its release for the sake of “timeliness,” “productivity,” or “sustaining momentum.” When the World is becoming ever-so politicized, enraged, and emboldened, what would it mean if we made room to consider the implications of exhaustion in the processes of building insurgency? What direction would our struggles take if we troubled the insistence on an ever-approaching future plentitude?

Our collective does not pose these questions as an exercise in fatalism, although we do embrace the negative, “unproductive,” and nihilistic dimensions of Black politics. This year’s publication of *Propter Nos* seeks only to cultivate a more mindful, principled, and composed political culture in our existing communities of struggle. Toward a different understanding of the “We” that informs our shared political consciousness. Toward a new poetics of the *propter nos*.

Works Cited

Isaac Ginsberg Miller

I chose not to cite [site of violence].

I chose the sight of the Statue
of Liberty from the ferry. I chose Ellis Island
not La Frontera. I chose not to
cite Anzaldúa, Lorde, Fanon, Wynter, Du Bois, Spillers, Césaire, Boggs,
Etcetera.

I chose the sight of the same.
I chose to avert my eyes. I chose to stare.

Choice is fictive. It was
 the slave ports
 the lynch mobs
 the red lines
 that made us.

*Europe is literally the creation
of the Third World,*
says Fanon.

I chose to cite my Ethnic Studies major.

I chose not to cite that one time in high school
when my friends said...

I chose to cite my ethnic friend.

I chose not to cite that one time my aunt said...

I chose to speak at the protest.

I chose not to cite that one time my kind
old Hebrew School teacher started talking about...

I chose to pick my battles.

Is there a point at which art becomes betrayal,
a point where betrayal becomes an art?

I chose not to cite.

Or I did, out of guilt.
Or I did, out of self-righteousness.

And when the Panthers held the gun.
And when AIM held the gun.
And when Mandela held the gun.
And when Leila Khaled held the gun.
And when Marissa Alexander held the gun.
And when Korryn Gaines held the gun.

What did I choose?

On the Prospect of Weaponized Death

John Gillespie

I.

When the idea for this essay originally came to me, I was at a neighborhood vigil for the late rapper Lor Scoota, an influential figure in the Baltimore hip hop scene.¹ After hours of Black tears and suffering, due to the murder of yet another Black person, a burst of black joy emerged as if from the ashes, as folks listened to Scoota's hit single "Bird Flu" on repeat, and danced around the neighborhood. This burst of black joy must have shook the entire city. Consequently, the Black mourners-turned-dancers were met by the police state issuing a curfew, forcing everyone to go home. The police, in riot gear, surrounded the mourners with guns pointed in their direction and helicopters that circled the West Baltimore neighborhood. Newscasters and cameras poured into the neighborhood as flashing lights beamed down throughout the darkness, where the shiny metallic balloons that read "SCOOTA" still danced in the wind. We were occupied in every direction.

There had been no riots, but the police prepared for war as if Baltimore was burning. I could not help but be mesmerized at the militarized guns, the riot shields, the coordination and discipline of the force. I could not help but observe the size and number of police officers-turned-domestic-military. I could not help but be enamored by the spectacular power of the State, and recognize this as the social utility of occupation—to stiffen black existence, to sustain the simulation of white superiority and black inferiority. I could not help but think about the need for a revolution. I was taken by an impulse to destroy the simulation and return to a new Real—a "zero degree of transformation," a "turn toward blackness."² Yet I was also struck by the thought that if a revolution were to come, we could never win.

We could never win a revolution, and the death that swallowed Lor Scoota is the same unceasing death that surrounds the people who mourned him, and anyone who attempts to challenge the anti-Black world. It was not easy to come to this conclusion. I still obtain glimmers of hope for the future, but the historical record shows that if the future is anything like the past, the only thing guaranteed is fungibility and accumulation. I remember running home, crying, and writing the beginning sketches of what would become this essay. These sketches became the building blocks for a theory of *weaponization*—one blackened answer to the question of "how should we live" in the unending age of anti-blackness. I did not write this out of self-righteous radicalism. In fact, I believe that those who write radicalism self-righteously forget that, "Normally people are not radical, normally people are not

moving against the system: normally people are just trying to live, to have a bit of romance and to feed their kids.”³ I wrote this out of the sad belief that once we have lost all hope in the prospect of black lives ever being able to live, to matter, to sustain romance and feed their families without an unmoving proximity to death, once anti-Blackness has sucked every bit of spirit we have dry, our only hope is to lose hope, to recognize we cannot win. The end of the World begins once we recognize that a Black sentence is a death sentence, and learn to weaponize it.

II.

*learning to die
in the anthropocene
must be done
for those who
were never invited
to the
anthropos too*

—Anthropos

Black life is lived in a white hyper-reality. By this I mean, black life is lived inside a constituted white fiction which concretizes itself as fact. Black life is a life lived in non-existence; blackness “exists” as a symbol of death that *is, but is not*. Blackness “exists” only insofar as White Being structures it onto a map of anti-black violence.⁴ Achille Mbembe corroborates this in his *Critique of Black Reason*, stating:

Racism consists, most of all, in substituting what is with something else, with another reality. It has the power to distort the real and to fix affect, but it is also a form of psychic derangement, the mechanism through which the repressed suddenly surfaces. When the racist sees the Black person, he does not see that the Black person is not there, does not exist, and is just a sign of a pathological fixation on the absence of a relationship. We must therefore consider race as being both beside and beyond being.⁵

The reality that replaces that which *is* is a white hyper-reality. This white hyper-realism fixes blackness as “a sign of a pathological fixation.” White hyper-realism is the paradigm whereby consciousness is unable to distinguish between the fictions created by White Being and the Real.

It is this fact that permits black death to be subsumed in simulations by each and every (analytic) encounter with Whiteness and the World. Questions like, “Can the Black suffer?” and “Is it capable for the Black to be wronged?” arise due to the

inability to access a grammar of suffering to communicate a harm that has never ended, a harm that can never end without ending the World itself. It is for this reason that viral videos of black death, more than opening the possibility for liberal notions of justice, seem to suture the relationship between the mythical and the real that perpetuates itself through the reification of black trauma. Black death, more than deconstructing the ontics of the Human, seems to extend its hyper-reality. Black death makes it harder to distinguish white fictions from any sense of real harm being done to human flesh. The Black is meant to experience its death over and over and over again; and the World itself recycles all its fictions-as-the-Real. Put differently, the White World subjects the Black to perpetual, gratuitous violence, and then uses that violence as evidence to further suggest that the Black is not Human. *For how can a Human endure such a thing?* The experience of gratuitous violence secures the semiotics of the white hyper-reality. White Disneyland stays intact.

Blackness exists at the nexus of fact and fiction, possibility and (non)value, inclusion and exclusion. Blackness is trapped even in saying it's trapped because the "trapped-ness" of the Black extends to locations where the diction and syntax of White "words don't go."⁶ The Black does not have the grammar to speak against where and how it is trapped since Blackness can only articulate itself through the semiotics of Whiteness. That White Being continues to center black death as the matrix of possibility for its hyper-realist structure indexes the promise of death insofar that White Being is promised futurity. The Black was rendered fungible through the conjunction of the political and the libidinal economy of the anti-Black world. Blackness gave birth to the commodity and the economy of signification that structures the cartography of the Human's coordinates. This could be said to be *a still birth*, insofar as the nature of Black life in a white hyper-reality is conducted on a plane that guarantees natal alienation, social, and ontological death. The Black body lives to die; the specter of death shadows it everywhere.

What matters crucially here, in our invocation of the hyper-real, is the importance of the Symbolic. The Symbolic is what "structures the libidinal economy of civil society."⁷ The Symbolic here is understood as "the representational process" that structures "the curriculum and order of knowledge" and/or "the descriptive statement of the human" in our contemporary World.⁸ And in this World, white symbolism is everywhere. In fact, in an anti-Black paradigm, white symbolism is everything. White symbolism over-determines itself as the Symbolic itself, and denounces anything that challenges its genre-specific mode of knowing, seeing and understanding the World. In other words, white symbolism holds a monopoly on the Symbolic in ways that operate "lawlikely so within the terms of their/our order-specific modes of adaptive cognition-for, truth-for."⁹ There is no outside to whiteness, to white semiotics, to white constructs of value and reality, to white structuring of libidinal value. And for this reason, like Wilderson, "[I] am more interested in the symbolic value of Whiteness (and the absence of Blackness's value)..."¹⁰ in a world of white hyper-reality.

If Blackness is lived in the hyper-real, then there is a hyper-intensification—an *overrepresentation*—of semiology that dictates the coercive violence of the Black’s (non)existence. The semiotics of White Being is the factitious fiction that simulates the entire World. White Being and black death are part of a globally blood-soaked symbolic exchange that has extended itself over the terrain of the World to such an extent that there can be no distinguishing between the Real and the Non-Real. White Being is that Being for whom ontological capacity exists, whereas the Black is the antithesis to Being, that fleshly matter whose essence is *incapacity*.¹¹

If “language is the house of being,”¹² as Heidegger puts it, then Blackness is trapped at the very center of White Being. Dionne Brand puts it concisely when she writes, “We are people without a translator. The language we use already contains our demise and any response contains that demise as each response emboldens and strengthens the language it hopes to undermine.”¹³ This abject positionality was codified through a violence so epochal that Modernity itself can be said to have been inaugurated through it. However, at the same time, “the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it.”¹⁴ That black death and anti-blackness exist in this liminal positionality posits the impossible possibility of a rupture in the moment. For that which is inside the structure, only through being outside the structure, enables the possibility of both sedimentation and disorientation. Jacques Derrida writes, “The function of this center was not only to orient; balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure.”¹⁵ If black death centers the structure, then it is somewhere in the perfection and expansion of this antagonism (the inside-outside antagonism) that the cartography of gratuitous anti-Black violence is laid out. What might happen when what orients the structure becomes insurgent, attacking the structure through that which centers its very Being? What might happen if black death became weaponized in order to further limit the freeplay of the structure—the expansion of White Being?

Afro-Pessimist thinkers, in favor of a diagnostic analysis, tend to veer away from the tradition of critical social theory that prescribes solutions to the analysis in the conclusion of their work. However, one finds throughout Afro-Pessimist literature a battle cry, a prophetic vision, a pulsing pessimist hope for the “end of the World.” For if Whiteness ended Worlds through its colonial simulations and violent transmutations of Africans into Blacks, then the only way out is an end to the White World. White Being is irredeemable, and so is the World it fosters. Sexton says, “In a world structured by the twin axioms of white superiority and black inferiority, of white existence and black non-existence, a world structured by a negative categorical imperative—‘above all, don’t be black’—in this world, the zero degree of transformation is the turn toward blackness, a turn toward the shame, as it were, that ‘resides in the idea that ‘I am thought of as less than human.’”¹⁶ It’s only through black vigilance that the simulacra of White Being is made clear and the spectacle of

gratuitous freedom is made visible. It is somewhere in this structural antagonism, that on the one hand conditions the possibility of the World, and on the other hand conditions the possibility of its end, its limitations, its disorientation, that we found the language to say the unsayable and do the undoable. As Frank Wilderson reminds us:

Black Studies in general and Afro-Pessimism in particular present non-Black academics with more than an intellectual problem. It presents them with an existential problem. The reason is because there's an aspect of Afro-Pessimism that we don't talk about...which is that were you to follow it to its logical conclusion, it's calling for the end of the world...it wants the death of everyone else in the same way that we experience our death, so that one could not liberate Blacks through Afro-Pessimism and be who one was on the other side of that. That's the unspoken dynamic of Afro-Pessimism.¹⁷

If we are engaging in a war in which the symbolic value, the semiotics of this World itself, positions “the Black as death personified, the White as personification of diversity, of life itself,”¹⁸ then resistance needs an “unspoken dynamic.” It needs a space where “words don't go”—a form of guerrilla linguistics, a submarined syntax, an undercommon communication. Perhaps, here, where the conversation is blackened, and the theory is phobogenic, and the journal is *Propter Nos*, we can allow ourselves to excavate insurgent dictions still lost in the lingua franca of White Being, but full of the specter of black terror, black disorientation.

If the Black is death personified, then what might happen if we weaponized our death? What might happen if we recognized the inevitability of that death? What if we began to think that the non-uniqueness of that death was an opening towards the “end of Humanity?” In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Jean Baudrillard writes, “When global power monopolizes the situation to this extent, when there is such a formidable condensation of all functions in the technocratic machinery, and when no alternative form of thinking is allowed, what other way is there but a terroristic situational transfer?”¹⁹ Terrorism consists of the militaristic tactics used by those who are facing globalized White Being with asymmetrical technologies of terror, violence, intimidation and war. A terrorist is any armed vigilante willing to rupture the system of semiotics through an equally cofounding semiotic. A semiotic that returns one to the “desert of the [Black] Real”—where a “project of total disorder” is unleashed upon the semiotic system.²⁰ Black terrorism is a violence that re-appropriates the death embedded in the Black's ontological incapacity in order to enable the possibility of a radical capacity—gratuitous freedom. White Being itself is a decentralized onto-epistemic deployment of violence, and if violent insurgency is necessary, then the decentralized approach of the black terrorist is necessary to counter the terror of White Being. This being said, black terrorism is perhaps better understood as *counter-terror terrorism*. We do not have the power to end the World with life. We

only have the power to end the World through death. As Baudrillard writes, “The radical difference is that the terrorist, while they have at their disposal weapons that are the system’s own, possess a further lethal weapon: their own deaths.”²¹

The United States has an international military force, a storehouse of nuclear arms, and the capacity, within their police state alone, to “terrorize” not just one block in Baltimore, but the whole entire world. Black terrorism is what happens when we heed the Afro-Pessimist call that “A living death is as much a death as it is a living,”²² it is what happens when we take seriously the unsayable in Afro-Pessimism. Black Terrorism is (non)ontological fugitivity that disavows any need to focus on social life—black terrorism steals black death itself from White Being. It is for this reason that Baudrillard speaks to his own White Being and the specter of terror when he says:

When Western culture sees all of its values extinguished one by one, it turns inward on itself in the very worst way. Our death is an extinction, an annihilation. Herein lies our poverty. When a singularity throws its own death into the ring, it escapes this slow extermination, it dies its own natural death. This is an immense game of double or quits. In committing suicide, the singularity suicides the other at the same time—we might say that the terrorist acts literally ‘suicided’ the West. A death for a death, then, but transfigured by the symbolic stakes. ‘We have already devastated our world, what more do you want?’ says Muray. But precisely, we have devastated this world, it still has to be destroyed. Destroyed symbolically. This is not at all the same undertaking. And though we did the first part, only others are going to be able to do the second.²³

We are the others. Tasked with the (un)fortunate task of ending White hyper-realism, the White World, and White Being. Well aware that if White Fascism continues the project of black annihilation, the only choice we will have is to fight. Not because we want to, but because we have to. But, ultimately, we must remember the words of Huey Newton: “[T]he first lesson a revolutionary must learn is that he is a doomed man.”²⁴

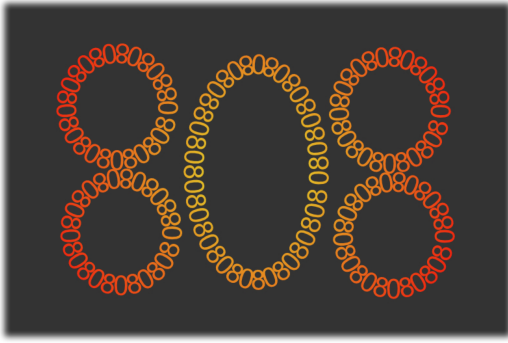
In the age of Trump, the perfection of slavery reaches its horizon.²⁵ The disavowal of the lives of refugees is White Being attempting to reconcile the “Nation-State” simulation with the free track and flow of bodies it’s been attempting to murder; the deportation of undocumented immigrants in conjunction with the materialization of borders is White Being attempting to secure its linguistic and economic integrity; the rise of the private prison and the militarization of the police force is White Being attempting to innovate the system of enslavement and necropolitics for the 21st Century; the plundering of indigenous land and bodies is White Being attempting to finish off the project of genocide; the disregard for the Earth is White Being ensuring the Anthropocene will also be the Apocalypse. Trump is a reinvigoration, a call to arms, for White Being, and White Being can only be “destroyed symbolically.” Black terrorism transfigures the symbolic stakes because it

steals away that condition of White Being's possibility in a kind of fugitivity that is a zero-transformation into Blackness. This being said, we all know that the only thing that follows the absolute loss of hope is this Black Spring, this Neo-Fanonian violence, this blackened terroristic situational transfer. In Baudrillard's words, in the Age of Trump, let us remember the gift of immorality, "Terrorism is immoral. The World Trade Center event, that symbolic challenge, is immoral, and it is a response to a globalization which is itself immoral. So, let us be immoral..."²⁶



- ¹ Lorn Scoota was a famous Baltimore rapper, known for his hit single "Bird Flu," who was murdered in Northeast Baltimore.
- ² Jared Sexton, "Ante- Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts," *Lateral 1* (2012) <http://lateral.culturalstudiesassociation.org/issue1/content/sexton.html>
- ³ Frank B. Wilderson III, "'We're Trying to Destroy the World' Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson."
- ⁴ Dylan Rodríguez, "Policing and the Violence of White Being," *Propter Nos* 1.1 (2016): 8-18.
- ⁵ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 32.
- ⁶ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 42.
- ⁷ Frank Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and The Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 15.
- ⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/ Power/ Truth/ Freedom." *CR: The New Centennial Review* (2003): 326.
- ⁹ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/ Power/ Truth/ Freedom," 295.
- ¹⁰ Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 16.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ¹² Martin Heidegger, "Letter to Humanism," http://pacificinstitute.org/pdf/Letter_on_%20Humanism.pdf
- ¹³ Dionne Brand, "An Ars Poetica from the Blue Clerk," 61.
- ¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," <http://www.csudh.edu/ccauthen/576f13/DrrdaSSP.pdf>
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Jared Sexton, "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts."
- ¹⁷ Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Inside-Outside of Civil Society": An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III," *Black Studies Papers* 2:1 (2016): 20-21.
- ¹⁸ Wilderson III, *Red, White, & Black*, 43.
- ¹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, New York: Verso, 2003, 8-9.
- ²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1961, 2.
- ²¹ Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, 20.
- ²² Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism" *InTensions Journal* 5.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ²⁴ Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*. New York: Penguin Books, 1973, 3.
- ²⁵ Anthony Paul Farley, "Perfecting Slavery," *Loyola University of Chicago Law Journal* 36 (2004): 225.
- ²⁶ Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, 12.

Image credit: Ray Zilli (2017)



808s & Heartbreak

*Katherine McKittrick &
Alexander G. Weheliye*

In an article about the Roland TR-808, discontinued by Roland in 1984, Kurt James Werner, Jonathan S. Abel, and Julius O. Smith III, write that the drum machine was “considered somewhat of a flop—despite significant voice design innovations, disappointing sales and a lukewarm critical reception seemed clear indicators that digitally-sampled drum machines were the future.”¹ Centralizing an analysis of the circuits, sub-circuits, and software of the Roland TR-808, the authors suggest that, since its discontinuation there has been an inability to digitally replicate the analog sounds of the Roland TR-808. The authors take the machine apart, break it up, and think about inabilities, noting that misinformation and misconceptions about the sound, the beats, the bass of the original 808s has led to the inability to emulate it.² They find remnants of Ace Tone’s 1964 R1 Rhythm Ace. They write, “A bass drum note is produced when the μ PD650C-085 CPU applies a common trigger and (logic high) instrument data to the trigger logic.”³ They pay close attention to the circuit behavior of the 808. They emulate.

The authors dive into the mechanic circuitry and deep beats and bass of the Roland TR-808 drum machine, but say little about its significance for the musical, sonic, and textural sciences that are imagined alongside the unit. We thus consider the insights developed in “A Physically-Informed, Circuit-Bendable, Digital Model of the Roland TR-808 Bass Drum Circuit,” and overlay them with the mathematics of Black life, in order to think through the mechanics of emulation with and outside of itself. This is especially meaningful, since a “lack of interest drove second-hand prices [for the TR-808] down and made it an attractive source of beats for techno and hip-hop producers.”⁴ Emulation, in this sense, honors black creative labor and invention—the boom-bap-blunk-clap of 808s—as diasporic literacy, yet also understands this work as a series of inaccurate repetitions that disclose the awful, the hurtful, and the intrusive.⁵ Emulations, like 808s, are injuriously loving. We situate the 808s as one of many enunciations of black studies, as heavy waves and vibrations that intersect with and interrupt black life discursively and physiologically, as heartbreak.

Heartbreak captures, at least a little, those injuriously loving emulations of what it means to be Black and human within the context of white supremacy. Heartbreak works with and in excess of the bio-mythological heart, the hollow muscular organ and its narratives of affectively variegated tenderness and loss. Heartbreak represents the reverberating echoes of our collective plantocratic historical pasts in the present. Heartbreak elucidates how the violence of racial capitalism inaccurately reproduces black life. Heartbreak bursts apart. Heartbreak is feeling outside of oneself. Heartbreak is the demand to feel outside of ones' individuated self. Heart/////break cannot be recuperated. Heartbreak fails the heartbroken. Heartbreak waits. It sounds. It envelops us like the thumping bass of the TR-808. Heartbreak cannot be repaired or resisted. It emulates but defies emulation.

Boom.

Before House and Techno musics, before Hip-Hop, before Miami Bass, before Electro, I hear and feel R&B group Blaque's 1999 song "808." Before getting to the song's historical significance, I want to emphasize how the track's music and lyrics amplify the pleasure and joy of feeling the thump of the 808-machine, of sensing its meta/physical reverberations around and through the flesh:

*'Cause I'll be goin' boom like an 808
Be makin' circles like a figure 8
You know it feels good from head to toe
Now hold on to me baby here we go
You'll be goin' boom baby boom baby boom
And I'll be goin' ooh baby ooh baby ooh
(check it out)*

Blaque's song encodes the flesh-memory of the innumerable hours I've spent listening to music made with the TR-808 in clubs, in living rooms, on headphones while walking, hearing/feeling the 808s boom from passing cars, etc. and the sheer enjoyment derived from it in a way that is difficult to cordon off into words on the page. Blaque's song achieves this feat by analogizing the fleshy neural feelings set off by the boom of the 808, because "it feels good from head to toe," and the internal neuro-viscous reward system derived from love and sex. By conjuring the power of Blaque's superlative skills at moving their audience, the song also imagines a different kind of physical sensation:

*See what I believe is
We was granted the power
What's that? Power, wha...
Ha, the power to make you dance*

Like this
*Like this? Like what, though? Like no? Like a Sssshhhh?*⁶

Love and sex are always knotted to broken hearts, because the throb of feeling good, from dome to foot, has a painful musicological history. The heart (muscle) and its narratives of loss and tenderness—tender losses—move to, stop with, pause on, slide across the boom of racial-sexual violence. Heartbreak, then, is always already part of the 808s Black circuitry, boomingly amplifying joy and pain, sunshine and rain.⁷ The thump, the boom, create shivering circuits of pleasure laced with damage, loss, sorrow.

“808” was written by Robert Sylvester Kelly, who preyed on young Black girls from Chicago’s South Side and secretly married his protégé Aaliyah Dana Haughton when she was a teenager. The members of Blaque were very young when this song was released, the youngest member being sixteen. While Kelly appears in the music video for “808,” it is not clear how much interaction occurred between him and the members of Blaque. The bitter irony of Kelly’s predatory ways is that as an artist, he has been extremely adept at writing songs from “female perspectives”—for example, his duet with Sparkle “Be Careful,” Nivea’s “Laundromat,” several songs for the Changing Faces, or his own “When a Woman’s Fed Up.”⁸ How does being a sexual predator, who referred to himself as the pied piper of R&B, correlate with Kelly’s adeptness for writing songs for Black women performers?⁹ Rather than thinking that this cross-gender groking is something that supersedes or mitigates Kelly’s predation, we want to insist that this tendency contributes to R. Kelly’s continued violation and sexual assault of numerous Black women and girls. It is tantamount to not shush the many different forms of violation in this context, since they represent the structural conditions of possibility for sexual violence but also remain significant in their own “right,” even while they are too often drowned out by the focus on the physical aspects of violence, sexual and otherwise. What structures and repertoires must be in place in order for acts of sexual violence to occur and what acts of violation (of trust, of corporeal boundaries, of confidence, and so on) precede physical/sexual violence?¹⁰ What modes of violation follow the brutalizations, for instance, when family members and friends refuse to believe victims, or when state apparatuses vilify and criminalize survivors? Where do broken hearts go? They probably cannot find their way home.¹¹

[F]or black girls, home is both refuge and where your most intimate betrayals happen. You cannot turn off that setting. It is the dining room at your family’s house, served with a side of your uncle’s famous ribs. Home is where they love you until you’re a ho.¹²

Kelly’s musical ability for cross-gender identification feeds into and cannot be disentangled from his predatory actions. It is not per chance that Kelly would often

prey on young girls after Lena Mae McLin's gospel choir classes at Kenwood Academy in Chicago, his alma mater, playing the role of musical mentor in order to gain favor and groom his victims.¹³ This raises the general question we are uncomfortably left with: in what ways do desire, sexuality, violence, and ungendering coexist in (Black) life and in relationship to the TR-808? Kelly's oeuvre also includes several cuts besides "808" that deploy machinery and technology within the context of love and sexuality ("You Remind Me of My Jeep," "Ignition," etc.) that extend the tradition of sex machines or feeling computer blue, because there must be something wrong with the machinery.¹⁴ Considering that Kelly, like many other Black celebrities, claims that he himself was a victim of sexual violence, are there ways to think about racism as not only being engulfed by increased "group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death," but also the extreme susceptibility to many different forms of sexual violence and violation.¹⁵ Perhaps not being able to elude sexual violence is the ghost in the machine of this particular version of kinship, to emulate Saidiya Hartman's memorable aphorism.¹⁶

What if the kind of heartbreak Kelly violently enacted cannot be resisted or repaired? What if it just settles in, awful, hurtful, and intrusive? Receding at certain moments, like the driving away of a car with an elaborate booming system, only to abruptly reappear at the most inopportune situations, its reverberations shaking you up to core when you least expect it. What do we do with that? Can the 808s and the mechanics of the deep boom, signal—at least in a small way—something else? This is sexual violence writ large. This is violence that is purposefully enacted within the context of longstanding intelligible plantocratic logics, where multiple affective and structural registers of Black love are always dragged through and into and across the sexual trauma of racial capitalism. I don't want this. We don't want this. Can the 808s and the mechanics of the deep boom, signal something else without losing the messed up vicious stagnancy of the predation (or the sinister twin practice of forgetting and/or excusing the violence either in the name of art/musical genius or racial solidarity)? Perhaps this is where we learn, at least momentarily, that black life and love are not something you can have, but something you do and can never get.¹⁷ Perhaps that which is awful and hurtful and intrusive, as unresisted heartbreak, should stand alone (un-flee-able), in plain sight and as negative affect, with the difficult knowledge that the act of naming violence does not engender the kind of reparation sexual violence requires, particularly if we take into account the countless acts of violation that precede, accompany, and follow sexual violence. Thus, predation represents a brutality in itself, unrepaired, intelligibly negative, and with a booming soundtrack—even in the unspeakability...like a ssshhh. How do we, who watch this and narrate this and hear this and live this, come to terms with the irreparable? Coming to terms with the unrecoupable means, above all else, having to exist with it and necessarily going on living. What cannot not be possessed does not follow the laws of redemption, instead it lingers as living in and with the after-life of the TR-808's sonorous echo. Living in and with. Something you do and can never possess.

Blaque have stated that their name is an acronym for Believing in Life and Achieving a Quest for Unity in Everything. Blaque member, Natina Reed, was killed when a car hit her as she was crossing the street on October 26, 2012.¹⁸ In addition, the group was mentored by Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes, who was tragically killed in a car accident in 2002 and who had set her boyfriend’s Atlanta mansion on fire in 1994 after a violent dispute, which had its basis in Lopes’s heartbreak.¹⁹ Is it possible to believe in (Black) life when surrounded by death and violence? Blaque are now also signifiers for the disappearance of R&B singing groups, or the last great flowering of R&B singing groups at the turn of the millennium (Destiny’s Child, 3LW, 702, B2K, 112, and more—many with abbreviated band names wherein the numbers signify a particular history, place, or identity). While much of this is the consequence of “simple” economics—it is cheaper for R&B singers to multi-track one voice instead of paying several group members to sing harmonies; it is less expensive for rappers sing their own hooks through Auto-Tune rather than paying an R&B singer to do so—it also highlights the continued devaluation of R&B music as an art form, especially Black women’s creative and affective labor, which are so central to this genre. Where is the appreciation for Black women R&B singers’ sounding of the strenuous labor of both love and heartbreak?²⁰ How does the Black female voice carry out the care work of Black women’s labor, which cannot be recognized as such, as Saidiya Hartman argues? Where is the love for that something you do?²¹

The importation of the TR-808 sound into Black musical cultures is often attributed to Afrika Bambaataa’s “Planet Rock” (1982), which replays and emulates two different Kraftwerk tracks (“Numbers” and “Trans-Europe Express”). In 2016, several men came forward to state that Bambaataa had sexually molested them when they were as young as thirteen.²² As young boys, all of the men told of difficult family circumstances and declared that Bambaataa had taken on a parental role in their lives and served as their mentor before he began to sexually abuse them for extended periods of time. The narrative of these survivors becomes part of the computing that structures the boom of the TR-808s; desire and pleasure are qualified by the significant yet variable expression of sexual violence/violation as and with technology. Names are fading...Aaliyah, the unnamed young girls from Chicago’s Southside, Bambaataa’s awful and injurious sonic boom, and the unlisted and untenderness.

Rewind and come again, re-rewind. Marvin Gaye’s 1982 “Sexual Healing,” was one of first songs that featured the TR-808 drum machine. It was also Gaye’s last hit before he was shot by his father, with whom he had a contentious relationship, with a gun that he had given to his father as a present in 1984.

“My father,” Marvin told me in Europe in 1982 during a discussion of “Sexual Healing,” “likes to wear women’s clothing. As you well know, that doesn’t mean he’s homosexual. In fact, my father was always known as a ladies’ man. He simply likes to dress up. What he does in private, I really don’t know-nor do I care to know. You met

him at a time when he was relatively cool about it. There have been other periods when his hair was very long and curled under, and when he seemed quite adamant in showing the world the girlish side of himself. That may have been to further embarrass me. I find the situation all the more difficult because, to tell you the truth, I have the same fascination with women's clothes. In my case, that has nothing to do with any attraction for men. Sexually, men don't interest me. But seeing myself as a woman is something that intrigues me. It's also something I fear. I indulge myself only at the most discreet and intimate moments. Afterward, I must bear the guilt and shame for weeks. After all, indulgence of the flesh is wicked, no matter what your kick. The hot stuff is lethal. I've never been able to stay away from the hot stuff."²³

Gaye was heartbroken for most of his life, in part, due to his father's visible ungendering, so much so that he added an "e" to his last name. The extreme physical violence meted out to him by Marvin Pentz Gay Sr. resulted in Gaye suffering from extreme anxiety and stage fright and also in Gaye extending the abuse in different forms to the relationship with his much younger second wife, Jan Gaye.²⁴

Perhaps 808s soundtrack black studies and provide a technology, or boom, of blackness that organizes itself through heartbreak—actuating both heart muscles and a kind of ongoing hurtful tenderness engrained in the flesh. With this, 808s provide aural glimpses and moments of heartbreak that cannot be forgotten—they are plain in sight, harmfully—and situate sexual violence as a terrain that demands a response that is not invested in prior injured states.²⁵ Responses and alternatives to injury are awful and difficult and forever; they emerge as song, story, grooving, crying, fight, jumping, quietness, laughing, poem. And more. Always more. This is living, necessarily living, and finding our way through earlier modes of heartbreaking damage that comprise the mattering of Black life, though not exclusively so. Where is the love?

Shhhh.

808s are one way to think about black life as an invitation to listen. The book *Phonographies* provides a way to imagine how technology—most crudely, machines—are enunciations of black life. The book uses sonics, or flows, to delineate this enunciation of life within the context of racial violence and modernity. These ideas also emerge in relation to vocoders, drum kits, LinnDrums, 808s, clap machines and other VSTs. How do these sounds, vibrations, and machines offer us a genre of being human that does not begin with objecthood? Heart/////break. What do 808s do to us? And how do mechanics-machines refuse black humanity (the logics of the middle passage and plantation slavery did and continue to roboticize black people) while demanding that objectification cannot/should not define black life (I can never be your robot).²⁶ These questions are not exactly new, of course—there is a really long

and comprehensive list of scholars who think about the mechanization, objectification, and commodification of black and other marginalized people and longstanding resistances to practices of dehumanization. But the sounds and vibrations can also engender “flesh memory”—and this overlaps but is very different than what M. NourbeSe Philip calls bodymemory, right?—which interrupts the objectification-resistance dualism by asking how sound or vibrations, the 808s and the clap machines, are not simply extra-human devices or technological appendages that refine or degrade humanness as cyborg.²⁷ Instead the 808s narrate life, Black life. So, the VSTs—the sounds and beats and grooves they make—are not outside us or of us, but praxis. The story—the stories told above—cannot be told without the deep boom, clap, unspeakable yet audible heartbreak. Like a sssshh—eviscerated, ear-piercing silence.

Avoiding a linear-afro-future-post-humanist territory—by giving technology as purely embodied by machines too much clout—how do we talk or write or think about loving, desperately, the unspeakability of music and the loudness of heartbreak. The 808s are not the answer but they might help us sort this through. With this, we must refuse disciplinary and epistemological bifurcations (the tendency to analytically separate the sciences, for example, from poetics), to study autopoiesis and self-replicating systems, and to think about the mechanics of blackness outside corporeal black politics, where our broken flesh or our degraded bodies are either liberatory devices or signifiers of anti-blackness. Heartbreak. So, to rephrase: what do 808s do to us, physiologically, psychically, poetically? In what ways do the 808s contribute to the mattering forces of Black life?

Jumping.

Sylvia Wynter. Her first use of the term “the science of the word” appears (I think) in her 1999 essay “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, The Puzzle of Conscious Experience, of ‘Identity’ and What it’s Like to be ‘Black.’”²⁸ In this essay Wynter thinks through how Fanon’s understanding of selfhood disrupts a teleologically biocentric, and fundamentally anti-black, understanding of the human, and how his writings open up the entangled workings of physiology and narrative. While Wynter explores these entanglements in most of her writings—she writes, often, that humans are hybrid beings, simultaneously bios and mythois—“Towards the Sociogenic Principle” offers a sustained discussion of the ways in which practices of racism and anti-blackness are narratively connected to the physiological and neurobiological sciences. This is to say that the larger symbolic belief system (what we might call our Eurocentric origin stories or cosmogonies, whether theological or Darwinian or both) of which anti-blackness is a part, is constitutive of, not separate from, the naturally scientific (what we might call flesh and blood and brain) aspects

of humanness. We reflexly experience the knowledge system we are part of. Remember, too, this belief system is lawfully instituted: how we know our selves and each other, how we believe in, how we reflexly respond to the world around us, functions to stably reproduce the existing order; we navigate that order as though it is natural and outside of our selves and outside our story-making abilities...but it is we who make the world what it is, it is we who believe in, desperately, (and thus naturalize) the prevailing biocentric belief system.²⁹ However, this world-making only occurs within and against the constraints of our current biocentric order.

The entanglements Wynter explores do not situate the human on a biocentric frame (which is one of natural selection wherein some people are more evolved than others, some people are more human than others, some people are closer to humanity than others; where the sciences are neutral and stories and poetics are not neutral, and so on). In Wynter's formulation of the human, an extension of and mashing-up of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, we are biologic-storytellers. We did not, to give an obvious example, evolve from prelinguistic to linguistic beings; humans have always been storytellers. In the long conversation in *On Being Human as Praxis*, she thinks about this in relation to the markings in Blombos Cave—clearly written 77,000-year-old linguistic communications scribed by humans.³⁰ The conceptual leap Wynter offers calls into question our entire order of being: the crude and longstanding commitment to the biocentric belief system that naturalizes black people as unevolved and less-than-human is totally undone if humans are not absolutely sutured to an evolutionary apes-to-Aryan system of knowledge. The science of the word thus underlines two overlapping analytics: the deep connections between narrative and neurobiology and physiology (reflexly); the disruption of biocentric systems of knowledge (we are not what they say we are).

Working with Wynter's conceptualization of the science of the word, 808s and other music inventions and reinventions evidence and enunciate black life. The practice of loving, desperately, the unspeakability of music, is found, in part, in our neurobiological and physiological and intellectual response to that music and music makers. Our neurobiological and physiological and intellectual response to the deep boom, clap, blip, which is untracked and everywhere and seeping into us and emanating outward and beckoning friendships and starting fights and teaching and storying and moving and keeping a beat (offbeat) and heartbreak. The science of the word imagines a different beginning from which to think through black music and technologies as well as other analytical questions. It is a total refusal of objecthood (as our black origin story, as our archive, as our future, more heartbreak, "the suffocating reification," Fanon wrote) and, therefore, provides a pathway to imagine black life as human cosmogony:

I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I was made to give and they prescribe for me the humility of the cripple. When I opened my eyes yesterday I saw the sky in total revulsion. I tried to get up but

*eviscerated silence surged toward me with paralyzed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep.*³¹

Wreckage.

It has been argued that music shapes and moves and repairs our neurosystem.³² With music, memory and language and words are built and rebuilt.³³ With music, neurons are strengthened and reattached. With music. I have argued elsewhere, working with Wynter's *Black Metamorphosis*, that the connections and wires and threads, between music and self and environment and others, not only conceptually subverts plantocratic and white supremacist (market) systems, but they also provide a way to track black life as livingness (and thus outside narratives of dysselection).³⁴ More specifically, music, music making, music sharing, music dancing, music jumping, music singing—the act of loving music deeply, the act of feeling and loving music intensely—is one way black communities physiologically and neurobiologically navigate racist worlds. I do not think there is specificity of or to black neurobiologies and physiologies. I am not suggesting that. But I do think that the conditions of being black—the experience and living memory of the abyss, to borrow from Édouard Glissant—has opened up attachments to musical narratives-genealogies-sounds that we should pay attention to.³⁵ For me, this is a radical reinvention of the self and our embodied knowledge! It is humanizing. So, if music shapes and moves and repairs our brains and bones and blood and nerves, if the boom of the TR-808 breaks our heart and jumps and moves us as we love music deeply and intensely, is this not a kind of neurophysiological resistance, refusal, or fugitivity within the praxis of Black life, at least fleetingly? What do we learn from and about each other in these moments of heartbreak and love? What do we pass on, what do we keep to ourselves, in order to practice black livingness in a world that refuses black life? How do we tell each other this feeling might be or is forever? Do we tell each other heartbreak might be forever? Is pain forever?³⁶ How do we share fugitivity and waywardness?

With all of this in mind what we want to notice is not solely the consequences of violence—the fucked up predatory acts and stunningly quiet (as I see it) wreckage of violation experienced by those violated. The consequences and wreckage matter, deeply. But we must also ask ourselves, at the same time, without throwing that wreckage in the bin, under what conditions does human life become victim-wreckage and, as well, how do we tell this story by centralizing the ways in which our present system of knowledge rewards—physiologically! Socially!—violation. What is it about our colonial plantocratic system of knowledge that enacts violation as an articulation of black masculinity (not black men, black masculinity), and how does this interface with black masculinity's ungendering in relation to white supremacy? And how, in this wreckage that is, in fact, black life, do we find enunciations of humanity and the

unmet promises of freedom. Heartbreak is not, then, a signifier of racial oppression or love lost. It is not a noun. Heartbreak is an aesthetic-physiological practice. It is sorrow song. It untangles that violence, it does not describe violence for profit. Because in order even begin to do justice to this physio-aesthetic praxis, to Black life, it must exceed and unsettle the accumulative logic of cis-heteropatriarchal racial capitalism.

We have to ask ourselves: how do we want to know this—sexual violence, racist sexual violence—differently and in a way that does not replicate the violence. This is what I want to get to. This is very hard for me. I don't know. I still feel the alibis piling up. How do we tell the story outside of the splash of sexual violence (and thus anti-blackness), since summoning the violence encountered by Black folks is so often bullied into doing the psychic, physiological, and affective dirty work for white supremacy? Whenever there is some type of crisis around "intimate" violences in particular, Black folks are summoned as ciphers through which that labor is accomplished without it having to affect the actual structures of white supremacy. Instead of confronting the many violences, sexual and otherwise, white men and women committed against Black female persons ("high crimes against the flesh," Spillers calls it), the broken and torn black person, lynched, stands in as representative-knowable-enclosed-locked-down violence. Rather than reproducing the violence or accumulatively enumerating it, we seek to "tell a story about degraded matter and dishonored life that doesn't delight and titillate, but instead ventures toward another mode of writing..." other modes of being, other modes of living in and living with.³⁷ Living on.

We Don't Have Much of a Relationship Now.

Robyn Rihanna Fenty embodies a number of admirable qualities as a performer and public figure, however, none are as "savage" and awe-inspiring as the way she navigated the public scrutiny after Chris Brown brutalized her within an inch of her life in 2009 and the photos of her badly bruised and swollen face and body were leaked to TMZ by the LAPD.³⁸ Fenty was 21 at the time. She shouldn't have had to do this. Like a shhhh: eviscerated silence. Fenty refused again and again to become the proper and respectable poster child for victims of intimate partner violence, even though she was continually vilified as a "crazy Island woman" and confronted with her violated past and the images thereof as incontrovertible proof. In other words, the mainstream media demanded that she publicly provide the affective labor of being a violated Black woman by performing victimhood in very specific ways that would vilify Brown; she did neither. Fenty's broken face and her broken heart—violence and violation => violation as violence, and vice versa—did not drive the invasive media queries and publicity. Rather, as we know and is so often the case, her (awful, hurtful)

story of violence served as an occasion to discuss the larger problem of intimate partner violence, and, of course, to prove the pathology of Black folks and Black life. Violation.

Fenty has, instead, addressed the thorny complexities of the imbrication of sexuality and violence through her music and music videos (“Man Down,” “S&M,” “Love on the Brain,” and “Bitch Better Have My Money” are only the most prominent). Retrospectively, Fenty said the following about her relationship with Brown after she was violently violated:

[I thought] maybe I’m one of those people built to handle shit like this. Maybe I’m the person who’s almost the guardian angel to this person, to be there when they’re not strong enough, when they’re not understanding the world, when they just need someone to encourage them in a positive way and say the right thing. [I thought I could change him,] a hundred percent. I was very protective of him. I felt that people didn’t understand him. Even after...But you know, you realize after a while that in that situation you’re the enemy. You want the best for them, but if you remind them of their failures, or if you remind them of bad moments in their life, or even if you say I’m willing to put up with something, they think less of you — because they know you don’t deserve what they’re going to give. And if you put up with it, maybe you are agreeing that you [deserve] this, and that’s when I finally had to say, ‘Uh-oh, I was stupid thinking I was built for this.’ Sometimes you just have to walk away. [Now,] I don’t hate him. I will care about him until the day I die. We’re not friends, but it’s not like we’re enemies. We don’t have much of a relationship now.³⁹

Slowly jumping from believing that she was “one of those people built to handle shit like this” to realizing that she “was stupid thinking I was built for this,” Fenty refuses being (and thus cannot be) conscripted into the longstanding narrative of the Black-super-woman-machine, who feels no pain, who does all the care work, who labors on behalf of everyone except herself. Instead, she implicitly states, “I can never be your robot.” She sits with and lives on and with the heartbreak, moving on but never completely leaving the scene. Sorry. At this time, we are no longer accepting repair jobs. Heart/////Break. Over the years Fenty has emphasized both her own heartbreak and her heartbreak over the way Brown, someone she loved, was rendered monstrous by the mainstream media. Her insights and struggles are meaningful, especially considering how white men—the Afflecks and the Polanskis and the rest—who exhibit similar violent behavior in a range of their heterosexual relationships, are seldom treated the same way. Bringin’ on the heartbreak, I repeat softly under my breath: she shouldn’t have had to do this, she really shouldn’t.... Are you ready to be heartbroken?⁴⁰

In 2010 there was a huge poster in the halls of my department at Queen’s University. The huge poster was of Fenty’s broken face. After seeing the poster the first time, I did not return to it; Fenty remained in my pathway but I did not look at the poster or read the text that narrated and explained her brokenness. Other posters

about “Gender Studies,” such as indigenous activism, fat shaming, queer cultures, Muslim women and feminism, accompanied the Fenty poster. The posters were part of a big class project wherein, from my understanding, the students pick a topic related to the course, highlight important images and ideas about that topic, and place all this information on a huge poster. My knowledge of poster assignments and projects comes from the discipline of geography. The Association of American Geographers has poster guidelines that the posters in the hallway, in my view, emulated: posters make a unified, coherent statement; materials, both textual and visual, should be of professional quality and be clearly legible from a distance of four feet (4’); text should be limited to brief statements; graphic materials will be displayed on a 4’ x 8’ poster board (landscape-oriented only). The only poster that depicted black women featured Fenty’s damaged, bashed in face. Fenty’s encasing and entombment in the hallway poster serve as synecdoches of these broader currents, since her public image is wedded to violence and violation, we and she are not allowed to forget, there’s no reprieve from this ongoing heartbreak. What gets lost in the shuffle is the labor of heartbreak that the poster and Fenty are forced to perform, all without her consent.⁴¹ As quiet as it’s kept, we continue living, regardless of whether we found love in hopeful place or not, intensely feeling the thumping boom of heartbreak (flesh encasing that hollow organ, un-flee-ing. Jump.).

The chorus of Fenty’s “We Found Love” repeats the following line over and over: “We found love in a hopeless place.”⁴² The bass drum does not appear until one minute and eight seconds—zeroes, ones, and eights—into the song, and its booming entry is preceded by crescendo of cascading keyboards as well as a drum roll, so central to House music. All these factors combined generate intense sonic tension so that the arrival of the bass drum registers as both like relief and like punishment. In this way, the structure of “We Found Love” approximates finding love: the flowing discharge of endorphins and resulting euphoria but also evokes the violence of being thumped by the beat in a hopeless place. Heart/////Break. Add to this Fenty’s voice, which remains almost impassive, displaying a “cool affect” that sounds like it is resisting the booming rush of the song structure/instrumentation. It is as if Fenty’s vocalizing is physically/physiologically refusing the unacknowledged care work demanded from the Black female voice in popular music. The track’s music video features scenes from a volatile heterosexual intimate relationship in which the lovers are portrayed by Fenty and a model/actor (Dudley O’Shaughnessy, who has an uncanny resemblance to Chris Brown). In addition to the unmistakable timbre of Fenty’s voice, the alarm bells, the central keyboard riff—which resembles a siren—and the stark contrast between Fenty’s vocals and music on this track amplify the joy and the heartbreak of living, continuing to exist and subsist. I was always struck by the following line: “Feel the heartbeat in my mind.” Does this mean that the neurological system emulates, synthesizes the beat of the heart, the thump of the bass?⁴³ Is it a heartbeat of pleasure (we found love; living) or the throb of pain (hopeless place, fear, trauma)? Most likely it’s both, mixed and engineered at

different volumes and intensities, depending on the time of day, not overcoming but surviving, living with, breathing in, subsisting through. Boom, like an 808.

Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah has observed how young Black female fans of Beyoncé relate to Fenty in the aftermath of the visible violence she experienced. She writes:

I'm not certain they really hate Rihanna, or find joy in her hurt — instead I think what they really hate is that Rihanna knows firsthand, like so many women and girls, and perhaps like so many of them, that being violently hit by a man doesn't ever feel like a kiss. It feels the opposite. It is a humiliation that is impossible to forget. So what I think the Hive hates about Rihanna is that there is no fun, no fantasy in that kind of knowledge of womanhood, just a reflection of the real but all-too-often silent life they too must wade through as young women of color in America.⁴⁴

These reactions to Fenty underscore yet another layer, dimension, facet of the labor demanded of her: transcending, overcoming violence, violation and heartbreak. The way Fenty was treated in the aftermath of her brutal violation—Chris Brown's assault, the leaking of the photos by the police, and the way she was treated by the media—forms a part of ungendering, given that Black women are thought to be inured to pain, deserving of violence, and thus not qualified for protection in the same way as white women. As Beth Richie writes:

Black women in vulnerable positions within disadvantaged communities fall so far from the gaze that is now sympathetic to some women who experience violence that they have virtually no right to safety, protections, or redress when they are victimized. At best, they are relegated to the status of undeserving. More often, those Black women with the least privilege, who live in the most dangerous situations, are criminalized instead of being protected or supported.⁴⁵

But care work is still violently expected, injuriously demanded. There is a beautiful and heartbreaking part in the 2014 film *Girlhood* (*Bande de filles*) that centers around Fenty's song "Diamonds" that highlights the joy and pain of Black livingness.⁴⁶ While much of the film adopts an anthropological lens on the Black life of French teenage girls, residing on the outskirts of Paris, this scene imagines a momentary and clearly limited instant of free livingness. With her new friends Lady, Adiatou and Fily, the film's protagonist, Marieme, rents a hotel room in Paris so that they can escape for a night the strictures of anti-Black racism, misogyny, family, work, and school that govern their lives. At one point during the evening, Lady, Adiatou and Fily begin listening, dancing, and lip-syncing to Fenty's song, while Marieme sits on the bed and watches them. Marieme then joins the other three girls, as they all joyously dance, embrace each other, and mime the words: "Shine bright like a diamond/Shining bright like a diamond/We're beautiful like diamonds in the sky."⁴⁷ The scene is bathed in gorgeous blue light, which serves to heighten the boom and rush of pleasure of the moment, and to visually distinguish it from the heartbreak of the

characters' everyday lives, the specters of violence and violation. Finally, as the song and scene move towards an ending, viewers not only hear Fenty's voice on the soundtrack but Lady, Adiatou, Marieme, and Fily singing along with the song's English language lyrics with audible French accents: "Feel the warmth, we'll never die. We're like diamonds in the sky." Living on.

LinnDrums.

Prince did not like Roland TR-808 drum machines. He preferred LinnDrum machines.

"Flesh memory" can be linked to and interfaced with NourbeSe Philip's "bodymemory." The flesh, though, does something different than the body conceptually: it marks the specificity of Black human life in its entanglements with the various forms of matter. Hortense Spillers distinguishes between body and flesh, and, initially, for Spillers, the flesh was primarily the space of objecthood and the object.⁴⁸ In *Habeas Viscus* and Spillers' more recent writings, the flesh emerges not as a utopian zone or even an exclusively positive one, but as a realm of possibility, she calls it empathy, for Black life that is not beholden to inclusion into the category of the Man-as-human (to use Sylvia Wynter's phrasing). So while the body remains an elusive mirage, an unattainable abstraction for those situated in the shadows of freedom, the flesh offers a liminal domain not beholden to inclusion in discourses and institutions designed to kill us. The flesh rescued the TR-808 from obsolescence.

One way to understand Black culture's relationship to technology is through the way that especially Black music/sound humanizes by enfleshing supposedly discrete, abstract, rigid, inhuman machines by making them usable in heretofore nonexistent modalities, whether this is the turntable, the player piano, or the 808.⁴⁹ Take the way that Brandy intonates the 808 on this particular track that she recorded with Timbaland in 2011:

*You hear me from a block away, I still got getaway
Baby can you hear me now, can you hear me now?
Baby can you hear me now, can you hear me now?*⁵⁰

Not one of the many Internet lyric sites provides transcriptions of Brandy's rhythmic harmonic ad-libs: *eeightt-ohh-eeightt—eeightt-eeightt*, sung in her unmistakable husky tone and reoccurring for the duration of the song; they only archive the alphabetic words. Clearly, this is not the science of the word as imagined by Wynter's elaboration of Césaire—but it does allow us to think about the mechanics of voice and how Brandy's "*eeightt-ohh-eeightt—eeightt-eeightt*" parallels and is purposed for

non-linguistic beats. The tone of Brandy’s voice and her intonation are fundamental to how the song works, how it achieves its effects in the flesh. It is also fundamental to shifting the signification of the machine and envisioning what the machine can and cannot do. Emulating the sensation of the TR-808, Brandy’s vocal apparatus, like Blaque’s, undertakes the care work of humanizing the technology. This can be likened to, but does not twin, how current mobile technologies become and are incorporated into humanness via their use in Black popular music.⁵¹ Jayson Greene’s recent commentary seems to willfully misunderstand Fenty’s use of Bajan Creole while also pointing to her singing voice (known as “Rihanna Voice”) as technology: “Rihanna Voice has become an industry-wide idea, a creative property like the Korg synth or LinnDrum, that the quick-working line cooks of the pop industry daub onto tracks like hot sauce from squeeze bottle” (emphases added).⁵² Comparing “Rihanna Voice” to using hot sauce feeds too easily into the “crazy Island woman” trope mentioned previously. Calling up other condiments in this context—soy sauce, mayonnaise, whatever—would be wisecrack; these are inventions only ingested, seemingly, by non-black people. The hot sauce squeeze bottle so perfectly recalls that crude Fanonian moment (good eatin’, zone of non-being) by refusing Fanonian subtleties (upurge, we are not, actually, zones of non-being!). There are, too, altogether different registers of analogy available by imagining the use of “Rihanna Voice” as adding flecks of gold or glitter to the mix, for instance...or grasping for but not reaching a kind of shimmering poetics. Shine bright like diamond. In addition, besides conjuring histories of Black enslavement, the description of “Rihanna Voice” as a “creative property” in the vein of LinnDrums and Korg synthesizers disregards that the latter technologies are ownable and owned objects from which the Linn Electronics and Korg corporations derive substantial pecuniary profit whereas Fenty does not. Boom like an 808. Here, too, we take Black women’s creative imagining of space—the beat, intention of Brandy’s eeightt-ohh-eeightt and “Rihanna Voice”—to undo the supposedly empty and/or inhuman Black geographies of sound.⁵³ In this way, both spheres facilitate the imagining of the flesh or Black life “as cosmogony.”

(human + machines + human heart) x rhythm ⇔ technology

Heartbreak.

Spreading fast and there’s no cure (and there’s no cure)
No need to run from heartache (It’s gonna get ya)
It’s gonna get you, get you for sure
(Everybody, everybody sing it, yeah)⁵⁴

Openness and messiness and incompleteness are a pleasure, especially when theorized alongside the inflexible and thick category of race, but it is awful and painful to live open and undone. I had an exchange with two black poets about two very different things. And these exchanges made me think about the many ideas I have gathered to learn about race and theorize about race and live as racialized, in day-to-day (scholarly and non-scholarly) contexts. These terms. I remember them mostly from graduate school. They were sometimes coveted, sometimes rejected. But they all sought to “destabilize” race and/or blackness. It goes something like this: race is fluid and third space and liminal, and blackness is fragmented and unfinished and on the threshold, and race is hybrid-on-the-border-messy and black is fractured, incomplete, flexible. And I thought: it is painful and harmful to live like that, isn’t it? It hurts to live always undone and unfinished. It is heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking even when the impossibility is joyful or you catch a glimpse of a life outside that inflexible weight.

Afro-Scottish poet and novelist Jackie Kay writes about this perpetual state of destabilized unbelonging in a poem from her 1993 collection, *Other Lovers*, entitled “In my Country.” A video of Kay reading this and another poem provide context, wherein Kay, who was adopted in the 1950s by white Scottish parents, narrates several stories of white people relaying to her that being Black and being Scottish are a contradiction. For instance, a white woman asking her mother “Is that your daughter?” and demanding to know from Kay: “Where do you come from?”⁵⁵ As a Black person in Scotland, Kay is an interloper, always already undone and unfinished:

a woman passed round me
in a slow watchful circle,
as if I were a superstition;
or the worst dregs of her imagination,
so when she finally spoke
her words spliced into bars
of an old wheel. A segment of air.
Where do you come from?
‘Here,’ I said, ‘Here. These parts.’⁵⁶

My former graduate student, Kara Melton, calls this “moving through.” She explores black mobility as a kind of constrained possibility with “moving through” underscoring the physical cost of navigating the geographies of racism and anti-blackness.⁵⁷ What is the physiological cost? Is the claim to or of “these parts” possible for black people? What other geographic options are there? No return. Heartbreak.⁵⁸

Eight

The flesh is struggle for me. Why is that? Spillers gave us the flesh newly. The flesh in her well-known and well-cited important essay, “Mama’s Baby,” is an undoing of the captive (enslaved) body. Reading that essay, I remember thinking, unlike the body, flesh “does” something outside of captivity, outside the terms of plantocratic commodification. This is memory work for me, as I have only recently read work on Spillers, rather than Spillers herself (perhaps I am a heretic for not returning, just as I am a heretic for not adoring James Baldwin—who I respect but do not adore). Of course, you explore the work of flesh and enfleshment deeply in *Habeas*. I am not afraid to share that I struggled with this book; it was difficult for me to teach, to be very specific, and I had some difficulty connecting Wynter to Spillers (my confession is that perhaps my overinvestment in the former has displaced the latter). That aside, I keep thinking about the flesh that encases the body and, as well, what is at stake in understanding the body and flesh as, analytically and theoretically, connectedly disconnected. I guess I worry about privileging the flesh. When I read Wynter on flesh, I connect it to ritual and rites—gendered storytelling practices that reify humanity in genre specific terms. So the flesh is marked by knowledge, yet it is not, in its entirety, knowledge itself. Instead, Wynter asks (me) how flesh has been folded into prevailing systems of knowledge (29rivy29gateing Spillers’ inventions) as it elicits a purely biocentric system as the fiction through which a new worldview

Spillers and Wynter are very different in terms of their modes of thought, how they think and write; though, they both do love long complexly interlaced sentences. What first connected their oeuvres for me were their considerations of Black Studies, which for very different reasons departed from most, if not all other analyses of this anti-disciplinary “field.”⁵⁹ Both thinkers are acutely attuned the histories of Black Studies in the university and Spillers’ question about the status and scope of object of study in Black Studies was answered for me by Wynter’s insistence on making the human—both the countless different forms of heart/////break caused by Man and the coeval existence of other genres of the human in Black life—the focal point of Black thinking and action. This is why I started my discussion of Wynter and Spillers in *Habeas Viscus* with their theorizations of Black studies rather than other parts of their theoretical apparatuses. Wynter’s discussion of the flesh is not the same as Spillers’s, and my reading of the flesh departs from both their interpretations, even as it builds on them. More specially, the flesh exemplifies, for me, the science of the word, because of its invocation of biology and the foundational mythologies of the Abrahamic religions, specifically their enmeshment in the annals of colonialism and thus in sociogenic inscriptions of particular modes of humanness. Wynter writes about it in terms of the bifurcation between the fallen flesh and redeemed spirit that initially marks the difference between the celibate clergy “as the embodiment of the

must be engendered. The flesh, then, tells a story, but it must not be the story. I want more praxis, and I am uncertain the flesh can provide that praxis outside of the biocentric codes that render it so richly meaningful. I have come to despise the body, as an analytical site—and I am repeatedly disappointed and terrified because it is always present in my refusal. I do not think the flesh and the body are the same, but I keep seeing bodies thrown everywhere, all over the page, without anything in them, not even eyes or throats or muscles or blood or bones, just empty bags of flesh. No hearts! Heartless! Too many times analyses of the body, the black body, replicate that singular Fanonian crisis (look, look, look! Look at blackness! Look! LOOK!) without using the lens he begins *Black Skin* with (our genetic and social development are shaped by prevailing systems of knowledge, beside ontogeny and phylogeny stands sociogeny, black-skin-white-masks, there is no singularity). This is why your discussion of intonation matters to me, a lot—because intonation is not just the enunciation and performance of “look!”; intonation (“look!”) is reflexly felt (heartbreak) (which is not exactly affect, is it, but can be studied as such?) Fanon centers the biologic without privileging it as the only way to be or know or live black. Reading him with Wynter allows us to notice how he does something really fantastic with the social production of race precisely because he does not lean on biology (skin) to wholly understand blackness, but rather understands sociogeny as constituting and thus relational to the biological story

Spirit” and the non-celibate laity “as the embodiment of the Fallen Flesh” during the European Middle Ages.⁶⁰ Later this master code transmutes into “reason/sensuality, rationality/irrationality in the reoccupied place of the matrix code of Redeemed Spirit/Fallen Flesh...thus creating “the new ‘idea of order’ on whose basis the coloniality of being, enacted by the dynamics of the relation between Man—overrepresented as the generic, ostensibly supracultural human—and its subjugated Human Others (i.e., Indians and Negroes).”⁶¹ For Spillers the divergence between body and flesh represents “the central [distinction] between captive and liberated subject-positions” in the aftermath of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery in the Americas.⁶² She also adds the dimension of ungendering to the concept of the flesh, writing “this materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh ‘ungendered’—offers a praxis and a theory; text for living and for dying.”⁶³ Finally, “the flesh” moves us away from debates about “dehumanization” and all the insufferable body blah-blah-blah in academic discourse. The flesh is not merely inert violated matter but praxis incarnate. In several writings, Wynter uses flesh in this way, describing hybrid bios-mythois humanness as theory made flesh, for instance, when she writes: “The positive verbal meanings attributed to their respective modes of kind are alchemically transformed into living flesh, as its members all reflexly subjectively experience themselves, in the mimetically desirable, because opiate-rewarded, placebo terms of that mode of symbolic life prescribed

of our skin. This, for me, provides a different way of thinking about race and blackness, because the body in itself, by itself, (heartless), cannot sustain Fanon's and Wynter's nuanced worldviews. We can thus demand a different humanity that is already here, relational to but not of the prevailing biocentric order... black life is the praxis of refusing such an order. Heart-full and heartbroken. Look! Blap. Squonk.

by the storytelling code."⁶⁴ For me the term flesh conjures mattering movements in Black that resolutely defy the purely biocentric, precisely because of its complicated histories. At the same time, flesh provides openings for different formings and matterings beyond both Man and to some extent the human. My work continues to center the ungendered flesh of Black life as praxis. Living in, living with. Boom.

Maybe one way to think race or Blackness is that it functions by making the biologic reflexly real in the domain of social production: Blackness enfleshes social production; Black life socializes the biologic outside the terms of dysselection. Trying to make it real but compared to what?⁶⁵

So, we are talking about relationality, and how extra-human devices and intense narratives of love allow us to notice what is beautifully human about those who have never been free. This sense of being, in relation to technologies—including technologies that are bound up in unpleasant stories, like the TR-808—adds a layer to what we know about black humanity. What we know, really well, is dehumanizing objecthood and innovative resistance and the complex navigation of the structural, gendered, colonial, plantocratic workings of racial capitalism. What extra-human devices and narratives expose is an analytical pathway that is in articulation with black humanity; that is, a lens or a framework or a worldview that is cognizant of, but does not seek results or answers that are beholden to either oppression or resistance. Put slightly differently, these extra-human devices and narratives expose navigation without dwelling on its oppression-resistance poles, they expose what kind of mechanisms and schemas and sounds and instruments (musical and not) help make this world navigable for those who are, in most instances, disciplined and surveyed and always imagined as static-in-place (look!). These extra-human devices are succor. Mark Campbell discusses these kinds of possibilities through his work on turntables and mix tapes.⁶⁶ He argues, really beautifully, how the found objects and technologies, which inform and enhance black cultural production and music making, provide us with new ways of narrating humanity. This account does not split the 808s from the performer, it does not deny the disappointing and repurposed and sometimes awful and brutal history of 808s, it does not focus on the empty "body" that is manipulating or repurposing or playing the 808s. Instead this narration of humanity understands these moments, people, histories, beats, disappointments, as co-instituting each other which, in turn, reframes blackness outside existing calcified and superfluous and normative white supremacist guidelines (measured vis-à-vis Man-as-human). With this, we have to ask, how is the navigation made and how does

the navigation feel? How does the succor offer relief or joy or sadness or heartbreak or anger or the intensely beautiful, physiologically? This is, for me, a mathematics of black humanity that already is; or the arithmetic of Black life that will have been.

*We gon keep it bumpin while the 808 is jumpin'*⁶⁷

Wicked Mathematics.

*You + me's not just arithmetic
it's wicked mathematics
the combinations we could do
would make your maths look like ABC*⁶⁸

In some ways we are splitting and overlapping racial processes (enfleshment and navigation) in order to work out how extra-human technologies figure into black life and humanity. I have been working with mathematics and other number systems to try and think through these kinds of tensions and analytical difficulties. Mathematics is, for me, an unfamiliar system of knowledge. I am not a mathematician, but I am curious about how practices of categorization are not always, for the unfree, equated with knowable classificatory systems that capture and seal off their abjection. Mathematics underwrites multiple strands of Cartesian logics and positivism, and, in terms of time and place, the practice of slavery is situated firmly amidst European empiricism, various kinds of human and non-human data collection, and matters of fact. In many ways, mathematics enumerates commodification and dispossession through accounting and making black fact. As noted above, the economy of black objecthood is long studied and theorized. My question is, how do we think outside that system, if only transitorily, to draw attention to black life? How has the practice of counting numbers—not even mathematics, per se—fooled us into replicating black objecthood by rewarding (academic and otherwise) systems of accumulation? Here we can stack up a whole bunch of numbers: middle passage ledgers, the lashes and the cotton bails, counted the uncountable Black trans-sex-worker deaths, the ten or sixty or seven men and boys shot in the back in March 2014, the seven thousand, in 1998, women with broken faces, the red records. Why are we only noticing those accounts that cannot bear black life (the ledger)? We must, of course. We must unforget these numbers. But we also know, for example, that the field of mathematics is vast (algebra, calculus, geometry, logic, computation, graph theory, chaos theory, statistics, and much much more), so why attach black history and black experience and black bodies and black flesh only to a plantocratic accounting system that denies these other ways of knowing numbers? This is not, then, about refuting mathematics; it is about

imagining black life from the perspective of struggle. For me, the science of the word uses and dwells on that accounting system as a way to explode knowable mathematical solutions (noticing the hugeness of this system of knowledge and numbers, infinities and pi, the irresolvable), insisting that the word (poetics, narrative) is implicit to that how we count what we count (we are responsible for, we make and adore, the accounts and the accounting). At the same time, the science of the word interrupts that system by noticing how sometimes it cannot capture other ways of poetic relational knowing; the science of the word thus seeks out the ways black people have understood themselves in numerical and mathematical ways that are not so easily sutured to plantocratic and colonial accounting systems.⁶⁹ Black life and love are not something you can have, but something you do and can never get. This returns me to the 8o8s or the LinnDrum machines or eeightt-ohh-eeightt/eeightt-eeightt: here are mathematics—measured and unmeasured bam, drop, eeightt—that reveal a new or different register of black life (I hope!): That, perhaps, is wicked mathematics.

Wicked mathematics. Trying to calculate the incalculable, that which cannot be captured by or in the sociogenic code of Man, but discloses and creates human life as Black life. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Sun Ra come to mind in terms of “wicked mathematics,” since they all use mathematics, numbers, calculations, tabulations, charts, tables with and against the master-codes of Man. Of course, on the other side, stand slave ship registers, or school teacher’s ledger in Morrison’s *Beloved*, which lists in different columns the animal and human characteristics of the enslaved.⁷⁰ And numbers are different from mathematics but they co-constitute one another to make meaning, to tell the story, to bend or calcify how we know the world. Du Bois and Wells-Barnett both deployed numbers to show how Black Life in the late 19th-century US was constituted by economic, political, sexual, and physical violence. In her autobiography, Wells-Barnett states that she uses “the statistics of lynching [to] prove that according to the charges given, not one-third of the men and women lynched are charged with assaults on white women, and brand that statement as a falsehood invented by the lynchers to justify acts of cruelty and outrage.”⁷¹ While we’ve now come to realize the futility of this particular numbers game, which is why there’s still the need to show that Black lives matter via the incessant cumulative enumeration of Black deaths, there is a inventiveness and en fleshed livingness to Wells-Barnett’s and Du Bois’s mathematics.⁷²

Outside biocentric ledgers and coloniality, there is also the long tradition playing the numbers in Afro-diasporic and other communities (Italian lotto, policy, bolita, playing the bug, and so on). In *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois writes: “Gambling goes on almost openly in the slum sections and occasions, perhaps, more quarreling and crime than any other single cause...” He then goes on to quote at length an article from the Public Ledger:

Hundreds of poor people every day place upon the infatuating lottery money that had better be spent for food and clothing. They actually deny themselves the necessities of life to gamble away their meagre income with small chance of getting any return.... Many children go hungry and with insufficient clothing as a result of policy playing...The policy evil is, to my mind, the very worst that exists in our large cities as affecting the poorer classes of people.⁷³

Clearly, these numbers perturb Du Bois, but he also states in another context: “history writes itself in figures and diagrams,” for which one needs numbers, for sure. Such a shame Du Bois could not see the history being written in the numeric playing of the bug. Or is the playing the bug in the system, the conjuring of other a-systems, maybe they’re eeightt-ohh-eeightt—eeightt-eeightt wedged between Black Life as world-mattering and Black Life as world(de)forming? Racial capitalism draws a line between sorting and playing, accounting and gambling, the (ledger) books and the (scoreboard) books. The numbers are inhabited; mathematics provides a method that determines the outcome. Heart/////Break.

Cardiomyopathy.

*Something’s Jumpin’ in your Shirt.*⁷⁴

I read somewhere that you can die from heartbreak. You can die of a broken heart. Heartbreak can lead to depression, mental health struggles, and heart disease just as they can and do often produce irreparable heart/////break. The American Heart Association calls this “broken heart syndrome.”⁷⁵

Broken heart syndrome can lead to severe, short-term heart muscle failure.

Broken heart syndrome is usually treatable.

The most common signs and symptoms of broken heart syndrome are chest pain and shortness of breath. You can experience these things even if you have no history of heart disease.

In broken heart syndrome, a part of your heart temporarily enlarges and doesn’t pump well, while the rest of your heart functions normally or with even more forceful contractions.

I have always known we could die from a broken heart. We may not go the way of all flesh by and through and because of heartbreak. We may just die a little—those moments when our heart doesn’t pump well, the shortness of breath, the constricted, stifling circuits of chest pain. I realized, too, I cannot sufficiently work through contradictory workings of love and anticipatory loss and so I get stuck, mid-heartbreak. My heart keeps breaking, over and over, every single day. I can only

explain the feeling as cold air being shot through my upper chest. Freezing cold air moving through my chest, day after day. It is not simply sorrow. It opens up, too, with possibilities. Last summer, I woke up in the middle of the night with excruciating pains in my chest. My first thought was: heart attack (family history, predisposition, stress, and alla that) rather than heart////break, because the purely physical is more readily available as a diagnosis in a biocentric world. The throbbing aches got worse whenever I tried to lay down. I waited to call the doctor's office until the morning, because I didn't want to wake my sleeping daughters and subject them to the potential heartbreak of having to worry about the health of their parent at such a young age. After many hours of agony and speculation via numerous medical websites, my physician confirmed to me that I was afflicted with was an acute case of heartburn. Since heartburn is not a direct result of that particular hollow muscle, it was always a mystery to me why it was called that in English. As consequence of experiencing its painful boom so intensely in and around my heart, I finally understood viscerally why this condition was named heartburn, and how it differed from yet may be related to heart////break.

Can I get another take?

I wasn't being honest in the last paragraph, taking an easy way out and not truly resting with heart////break. My full armor was still on, it's dazzling and beautiful.⁷⁶ My heartburn was related to heart///break. It has been almost ten years now: Lawyers. Department of Children and Family Services. Police. Doctors. Custody evaluators. Therapists. More lawyers. At some point, I am forced to justify to Them why my experience of sexual violation/violence and my queerness do not make me an unfit parent...Eviscerated silence. Boom. Heart////break.

This why I write and speak about ungendering/Blackqueerness and sexual violence/violation in detached, hushed scholarly tonalities—armor on, decked out in those gorgeously abstract gold fronts, like a shhh—, while knowing that I do so because they mark the core of who I am. There I is, living in, living with.⁷⁷ I try to strip off the armor slowly, carefully but it's difficult. The armor has merged with my “natural” body, blanketing my flesh, enshrining my psyche, encasing that hollow muscle. Fuck a cyborg, though, really. Boom...Like What?

Sitting on an airplane, I pause watching *Moonlight* for what must be the tenth time; it reduces me to not just tears but abject bawling face and all the emotions associated with it.⁷⁸ As opposed to Mary J., I can't even pretend that I'm not gon cry.⁷⁹ Granted, I sob at many things: everything from Black Ink Crew, to Hortense Spillers' sentences, to the worst manipulative Disney movies; and I still haven't been able to listen to Prince's “Conditions of the Heart” or “Sometimes It Snows in April” since his passing almost 18 months ago. Simply thinking about these songs brings tears to my eyes. Still. And, while I have many intellectual reservations about Barry Jenkins's film and its reception, my critical shield washes away with blubbering, messy, tears whenever I enter the world of this film. Undone every time, *Moonlight* hits me like the full weight of twenty 808s; boooooom; heart////break. The film shatters my heart,

for myself, for all sensitive femme/feminine Black boys and splinters at a world so intent on violently destroying our too-muchness, on paralyzing our wings, brutally overseeing how our softness congeals into a tough, protective veneer. Where do you go when your being is too much for this world? Where? Where is our love?

Though supremely frustrated that we do not see an adult version of the Chiron played so brilliantly by Ashton Sanders in the second part of the film's triptych, I understand why the Trevante Rhodes's Chiron in the third part must so fiercely don his thick sheath of masculinity. For some of us it's not protuberant triceps and gold-plated grills but intricate theoretical vernaculars, themselves extensions of necessary-for-survival-street-corner-verbal-dexterities, tumbling out our mouths and dripping from our fingers, that are supposed enshrine us like intellectual superpowers. Still the same function. We were never meant to survive into adulthood, at least not as sensitive femme/feminine Black boys. How do you inhabit a universe, where you can't even be imagined utopically (like a grown Chiron portrayed by Ashton Sanders), let alone tenderly, lovingly?

So, I began to weep for myself and all the Black boys like me, reflexly re-collecting palpably, physically, physiologically, what it felt like, what it still sometimes feels like to spend hours assembling and wedging into your armor just to walk down the block, or to simply enter a room full of strangers, because something between Infinity and Nothingness might pop off, sometimes a word, other times a look or a slight bodily movement. I inspect my armor again, now roughly four decades old, sensing that it has become a little too tight, a bit itchy, ripped there, chipped here, and worn out all over. Living in, living with...heart/////break, possibilities, openings:

This is why you and I and we dance. We'll go out to the floor.⁸⁰

Loving intensely and then monumental loss. Loving quietly, consistently and then booming hurt. We can also go the way of the flesh. We can die from a broken heart. This is terrifying, particularly if understood in relation to the heartbreaking history that underlies TR-808s. 808s break hearts. Boom. Jump. Succor. This is part of what we want to understand and patiently learn. The long histories of racial violence, the looming and real violations, the heart and the 808s, the mathematics and the flesh, the science of the word—these are sites that may not ordinarily understood or thought together, but when they are, they reveal black life and black livingness as shifting locations enfleshed by the arteries of enduringly heartbreaking and joyful routes and roots. The hollow muscular organ filled up.



Gratitude: Ray Zilli, Nick Mitchell, Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, Kris Manjapra, Demetrius Eudell, and Simone Browne.

- ¹ Kurt James Werner, Jonathan S. Abel, Julius O. Smith III, “A Physically-Informed, Circuit-Bendable, Digital Model of the Roland TR-808 Bass Drum Circuit,” *Conference Proceedings of the 17th International Conference on Digital Audio Effects (DAFx-14)*, Erlangen, Germany, September 1-5, 2014: 1-8; On April 1, 2017, in the midst of writing this piece, Ikutaro Kakehashi, founder of the Roland Corporation and Ace Electronic Industries, died. Kakehashi developed the Roland TR-808, the Roland CR-78, MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), and many other instrument technologies including the R1 Rhythm Ace that, in part, underlies the TR-808.
- ² Kurt James Werner, Jonathan S. Abel, Julius O. Smith III, “A Physically-Informed,” 1.
- ³ Kurt James Werner, Jonathan S. Abel, Julius O. Smith III, “A Physically-Informed,” 2.
- ⁴ Kurt James Werner, Jonathan S. Abel, Julius O. Smith III, “A Physically-Informed,” 1.
- ⁵ Vèvè A Clark, “Developing Diaspora Literacy: Allusion in Maryse Conde’s *Heremakhonon*.” In *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990.
- ⁶ Kelly Rowland, “Like This,” from *Ms. Kelly*; Mya, “My Love Is Like Wo,” from *Moodring*; Something for the People, “My Love is the Shhh!,” from *This Time It’s Personal*.
- ⁷ Maze ft. Frankie Beverly, “Joy and Pain,” from *Joy and Pain*.
- ⁸ Sparkle’s niece was one of the first girls to accuse Kelly of sexual abuse and Sparkle later testified against Kelly during his 2008 trial for child pornography charges.
- ⁹ Kelly’s recorded output contains just as many, if not more, misogynist entries, for instance “Feelin’ on Yo Booty” or “It Seems Like You’re Ready.” On the R. Kelly as pied piper and the Pied Piper legend see see: Chris Heath, “Why R. Kelly Calls himself ‘the Pied Piper of R & B’,” in *GQ*, February 3, 2016: <http://www.gq.com/story/why-r-kelly-calls-himself-pied-piper>.
- ¹⁰ Beth Richie shows how intimate households, communities, and the state often work in concert to create a “violence matrix,” which consists of “physical assaults against women,” different forms of “sexual aggression,” and emotional exploitation. Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation*. New York: New York University Press, 2012, 132-133.
- ¹¹ Whitney Houston, “Where Do Broken Hearts Go?,” from *Whitney*.
- ¹² Tressie McMillan Cottom, “How We Make Black Girls Grow Up Too Fast,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/29/opinion/Sunday/how-we-make-black-girls-grow-up-too-fast.html>. See also: Jim DeRogatis, “R. Kelly Is Holding Women Against Their Will In A ‘Cult,’” *Parents Told Police* *BuzzFeed* (July 17, 2017): https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimderogatis/parents-told-police-r-kelly-is-keeping-women-in-a-cult?utm_term=.vnpb9kp5Y#.qa591lOqB.
- ¹³ Jessica Hopper, “Read the ‘Stomach-Churning’ Sexual Assault Accusations Against R. Kelly in Full.” *Village Voice* (16 Dec. 2013).
- ¹⁴ Prince, “Computer Blue,” from *Purple Rain*.
- ¹⁵ Chris Heath, “The Confessions of R. Kelly” *GQ Magazine*, January 20, 2016 <http://www.gq.com/story/r-kelly-confessions>. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Race and Globalization.” In *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World*, edited by Ronald John Johnston, Peter James Taylor, and Michael Watts, 261-274. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002, 261. See also: Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice*.
- ¹⁶ “Slaves were the ghosts in the machine of kinship.” Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 139.
- ¹⁷ Katherine McKittrick, “Fantastic/Still/Life: On Richard Iton (A Working Paper).” *Contemporary Political Theory* (2015): 28; En Vogue, “My Lovin’ (You’re Never Gonna Get It)” from *Funky Divas*.
- ¹⁸ See <http://www.mtv.com/news/1696376/natina-reed-blaque-dead/>.

- ¹⁹ Sidney Madden, "Today in Hip-Hop: Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes Burns Down Andre Rison's Mansion." *XXL* 9 (June 2015).
- ²⁰ "It scares me to feel this way," Tina Turner, "What's Love Got to Do With It?," from *Private Dancer*
- ²¹ Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors" *Souls* 18:1 (2016): 166-173. Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway, "Where Is the Love?" In her 1978 essay that carries the same title as this song, June Jordan writes: "as a Black feminist, I must ask myself: *Where is the love?* How is my own lifework serving to end these tyrannies, these corrosions of sacred possibility?" June Jordan, *Civil Wars: Observations from the Front Lines of America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.
- ²² Dan Rys, "Afrika Bambaataa Sexual Abuse Allegations: What's Been Said, Disputed & What's Next." *Billboard Magazine* (10 May 2016). <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7364592/afrika-bambaataa-abuse-allegations>.
- ²³ David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985, 18. cf. Rinaldo Walcott, "Black Men in Frocks: Sexing Race in a Gay Ghetto (Toronto)." In *Claiming Space: Racialization in Canadian Cities*, edited by Cheryl Teelucksingh, 121-134. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006.
- ²⁴ See Jan Gaye and David Ritz. *After the Dance: My Life with Marvin Gaye*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015.
- ²⁵ cf. Dina Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013.
- ²⁶ Kanye West, "RoboCop," from *808s and Heartbreak*.
- ²⁷ Marlene NourbeSe Philip, "Dis Place: The Space Between." In *Feminist Measures: Soundings in Poetry and Theory*, edited by Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. 287-316. See also: Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 46-52.
- ²⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be 'Black.'" In *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*. Edited by Mercedes F. Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana. London; New York: Routledge, 2001, 30-66. See also: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952] and Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, translated by Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972 [1955]. Aimé Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge." In *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, edited by Michael Richardson, 134-146. Translated by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski. New York: Verso, 1996 [1946].
- ²⁹ See Sylvia Wynter, interview by David Scott. "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter." *Small Axe* 4:2 (2000): 119-207.
- ³⁰ Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations." *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Ed. Katherine McKittrick. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015; 9-89.
- ³¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (119). On "suffocating reification" see pp. 89.
- ³² Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. New York: Vintage, 2007; David J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. New York: Plume, 2007; Aniruddh D. Patel, *Music, Language and the Brain*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- ³³ This is in contradistinction to "dysgraphia" (the inability to write due to brain damage or disorder, deployed by Christina Sharpe) and "aphasia" (a communication disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that contain language, a word deployed by Frank B. Wilderson III). Here, I think, Sylvia Wynter's *science of the word* is especially helpful. In my understanding, dysgraphia-aphasia are mobilized by Sharpe and Wilderson as "literary" or "theoretical" terms that help them think about anti-blackness and other forms of oppression. These terms help the authors tease out how some people cannot *see or write or imagine* black humanity. These terms are *applied to* our existing biocentric system. These terms help the authors make sense of black dehumanization. These terms help the authors work out how when some folks see black, they can only enunciate it in relation to hegemonic white supremacist normative conceptions of humanity. Yet both terms, dysgraphia and aphasia, carry the heavy clinical weight that is

paired with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and other neuroatypicalities. In addition to the taxing weight laid on those who are cast, in these scholarly works, as neurologically damaged and imperfect (disabled)—a move which refuses human-impairment as an alternative form of humanity—I want to suggest that if they were informed in any way by Wynter’s framework they would have (perhaps) shied away from deploying-and-emptying these terms. Or, *alternatively and definitely more interestingly*, the authors may have understood these terms as *simultaneously* clinical-narrative. One cannot discount the clinical underpinnings of these terms—no matter how hard one tries! So, what is at stake, for (black and non-black) neuroatypical and non-neurotypical people, for (black and non-black) people with learning disabilities, for neurotypical (black and non-black) people when brain dysfunction, symbolically, explains racism or anti-blackness or the inability to “see” or “read” black “correctly”? What happens when “illness” or “disorder” explains why we, or why they, hate? How are race and disability — impairment as the embodiment of blackness or impairment as projection of anti-blackness—being analytically mobilized to understand racial violence? And how do we grapple with the unsettling numbers, the math, the accumulations, the reams of paper that read: black folks with impairments are more likely to be incarcerated, murdered by police, and so on? What of the story of violence resulting in brain damage, communication disorder, the inability to write? What Wynter taught me [Katherine] is that the bifurcation of science and poetics is a kind of disciplined brutality. I have spent a lot of time thinking about how the willful separation of the literary and the scientific does the work of colonial positivism—suggesting, explicitly, that there are kinds and types of discreet knowledge while also hiving off ways of knowing and being. So, dysgraphia-aphasia can *never* be simply symbolic or metaphoric or literary. They are deeply clinical, and they are lived, too, as *clinically-poetic* narratives within our prevailing system of knowledge that despises difference. If we trust Wynter’s formulation of bios-mythois [and I, Katherine, do]—it means these terms are *always* bios-mythois. Just as the 808s cannot be dislodged from that awful violence and be rendered “pure technology” and without history, the clinical-medical-neurological-and-*poetic* contours of impairment and neuroatypicality-non-neurotypicality cannot be dislodged from dysgraphia-aphasia. If this (a metaphorically impaired humanity) informs the analytical frame then, theoretically, it risks reflexly reproducing a dehumanizing law-like logic wherein ability and neurotypicality *actualize* what it means to be totally and fully human. This not only legitimizes biocentric corporeal categories in hierarchical terms, it also fails to imagine relational struggles across a range of corporeal and racial identifications. Singularity is required and Man-as-human restfully and stably reproduces itself at the apex of this formulation. With this, the trope of the “disorder”—which is being mobilized as a way to understand, say, racism or anti-blackness or scripts that degrade blackness—is locked into a biocentric frame, with disability, neuroatypicality, illegibility, in fact, inadvertently positioning the authors of the symbolic-literary dysgraphia-aphasia as normally and normatively able, typical, legible, non-disordered! Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016; Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents.” *InTensions Journal* 5 (2011), <http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/frankbwildersoniiiarticle.pdf>. See also: Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations.” In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 9-89.

³⁴ Katherine McKittrick, “Rebellion/Invention/Groove.” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Platform for Criticism*, 20 (2016): 79-91.

³⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

³⁶ “No pain is forever.” Rihanna, “Hard,” feat. Young Jeezy, from *Rated R*.

³⁷ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts.” *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 7.

³⁸ Much of our thoughts on Fenty were inspired by Alisa Bierria’s “‘Where Them Bloggers At’: Reflections

- on Rihanna, Accountability, and Survivor Subjectivity.” *Social Justice*, 37:4; Nicole R. Fleetwood, “The Case of Rihanna: Erotic Violence and Black Female Desire.” *African American Review* 45:3 (2012): 419-435; Hannah Black, *Dark Pool Party*. Los Angeles: Dominica Publishing, 2016; Chris Randle, “‘I Feel Like Everything Shouldn’t Exist’: An Interview with Hannah Black.” *Hazlitt* (23 August 2016).
- ³⁹ Alyssa Bailey, “Rihanna Talks Chris Brown, Staying Single, and Why She’s Not Having Casual Sex.” *ELLE* (6 October 2015).
- ⁴⁰ Mariah Carey, “Bringin’ on the Heartbreak,” from *Charmbracelet*, and Lloyd Cole and the Commotions, “Are You Ready to Be Heartbroken,” from *Rattlesnakes*.
- ⁴¹ Similarly, in 2014 a surveillance video of Janay Rice being brutally beaten by her husband, football player Ray Rice, in an elevator was made public by TMZ and circulated widely on social media.
- ⁴² Rihanna, “We Found Love,” from *Talk That Talk*.
- ⁴³ cf. Prince, “Sex in the Summer,” on *Emancipation*. Several scientists and theorists have postulated that humans can not only discern lower frequencies better than high ones, but that this is partially a consequence of fetuses hearing the lower frequencies of the mother’s heartbeat and of her voice in utero, which is crucial for early neural development. See Michael J. Hove, et al. “Superior Time Perception for Lower Musical Pitch Explains Why Bass-Ranged Instruments Lay down Musical Rhythms.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111:28 (2014): 10383-10388.
- ⁴⁴ Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, “How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You: The BeyHive.” *NPR.org: The Record Music News from NPR* (17 Mar. 2014).
- ⁴⁵ Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice*, 21-22. Similarly, Bierria remarks: “Black women who are victims of violence are not simply accused of bringing it upon themselves, they are dis-positioned as its perpetrator... Seemingly, when black women are violated, their experiences of it and testimonies of resilience and resistance are vulnerable to politics that define their actions as instigating the violence.” Bierria, 106
- ⁴⁶ Though I’m not sure whether this is apocryphal or not, Fenty was so enamored with this scene that she did not charge a licensing fee for the film’s use of “Diamonds” in its entirety, as is customary. This is complicated by the fact that the director of the film is a white French woman, Céline Sciamma. I raise this primarily to bring into focus the labor requested of Fenty in this context.
- ⁴⁷ Rihanna, “Diamonds,” from *Unapologetic*.
- ⁴⁸ Hortense J. Spillers, “‘Mama’s Baby Papa’s Maybe’: An American Grammar Book.” In *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003 [1987], 203-229.
- ⁴⁹ This is really different than the idea of “the cyborg” which is, for both of us, a figure that extends the colonial project precisely because it seeks to dislodge itself from the flesh, denies practices of black and non-black servitude, even if sutured to these enfleshments and embodied racial economies in abstract refusal.
- ⁵⁰ Timbaland, feat. Brandy “808”
- ⁵¹ Alexander G. Weheliye, “Rhythms of Relation.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies, Volume 2*. edited by Sumanth Gopinath and Jason Stanyek, 361-379. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- ⁵² Jayson Greene, “Is Rihanna the Most Influential Pop Singer of the Last Decade? Turn Your Ear a Certain Way and You Can Hear Her Everywhere.” *Pitchfork*. While Fenty has spoken about feeling the need to ‘tone down’ using the inflections of her mother tongue, Bajan Creole, both in her singing and speech, it bears mentioning that she has consistently recorded songs (“Dem Haters,” “Man Down,” etc.), beginning with her 2005 debut single “Pon de Replay,” that have deployed Bajan Creole (and other Afro-Caribbean intonations). Fenty has also collaborated with Caribbean artists such as Dwane Husbands and Vyb Kartel
- ⁵³ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 121-141.
- ⁵⁴ New Edition, “N.E. Heartbreak,” from *Heart Break*.
- ⁵⁵ Pamela Robertson-Pearce, “Jackie Kay,” In *Person: 30 Poets*, DVD format. London: Bloodaxe Books, 2008.
- ⁵⁶ Jackie Kay, *Other Lovers*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993, 24.

- ⁵⁷ Kara Melton, *'A Kind of Logic, A Kind of Dominant Logic': Navigating Colonialism, Honoring Black Mobility, and Thinking on Moving Through*, MA Thesis, Queen's University, 2016.
- ⁵⁸ Katherine McKittrick, "Worn Out." *Southeastern Geographer* 57:1 (2017): 96-100. See also: Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging*. Toronto: Doubleday, 2002.
- ⁵⁹ Hortense J. Spillers, "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Post-Date (1994)." In *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, 428-470. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project." In *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, edited by Lewis Ricardo Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, 107-169. Boulder: Paradigm, 2006.
- ⁶⁰ Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3:3 (2003): 257-337; 278.
- ⁶¹ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 287-88.
- ⁶² Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 206.
- ⁶³ Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 208. While Spillers highlights the specificity of the ungendering of Black women here, a different part of the essay she refers to the "ungendering and defacing project of African persons." Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 214.
- ⁶⁴ Wynter and McKittrick. "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?" 34. Variations of this phrase also appear in the following essays: Sylvia Wynter, "Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text after Man;" "'Genital Mutilation' or 'Symbolic Birth?' Female Circumcision, Lost Origins, and the Aculturalism of Feminist/Western Thought;" *Human Being as Noun? Or Being Human as Praxis—Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtake: A Manifesto*; "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, The King of Castile a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the Caribbean Rethinking Modernity;" "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice." For access to Wynter's articles and essays free of charge, please mail a request to True Leap Press. *Our collective is recirculating scanned copies of articles for educational purposes only.
- ⁶⁵ Roberta Flack, "Compared to What?," from *First Take*.
- ⁶⁶ Mark V. Campbell, "Everything's Connected: A Relationality Remix, A Praxis." *The CLR James Journal* 20:1/2 (2014): 97-114.
- ⁶⁷ Kelis, "Bossy," from *Kelis Was Here*.
- ⁶⁸ Nicolette, "Wicked Mathematics," from *Now is Early*.
- ⁶⁹ This also points to mathematics that are not fully sutured to colonial accounting systems—African fractals or "anumeric" cultures, for example—which points to other ways of knowing. See: Mike Vuolo. "What Happens When a Language Has No Numbers?" *Slate* (16 Oct. 2013); Misty Sol, "Hidden Figure: A Meditation on Genius and the African Origin of Math." *Philadelphia Printworks* (26 February 2017).
- ⁷⁰ Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. New York: Plume, 1987.
- ⁷¹ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, 136.
- ⁷² W.E.B. Du Bois, "A Program for a Sociological Society." *W.E.B. Du Bois Papers*. "A software bug is an error, flaw, failure or fault in a computer program or system that causes it to produce an incorrect or unexpected result, or to behave in unintended ways." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software_bug.
- ⁷³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*. Philadelphia: Publications of the University of Pennsylvania, 1899, 265.
- ⁷⁴ Malcolm McLaren and the Bootzilla Orchestra, "Something's Jumpin' in Your Shirt."
- ⁷⁵ American Heart Association, "Is Broken Heart Syndrome Real?" http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/Cardiomyopathy/Is-Broken-Heart-Syndrome-Real_UCM_448547_Article.jsp#.WNk5fv21vfY. See also: Iain M. Carey, Stephen DeWilde, Tess Harris, Christina R. Victor, Derek G. Cook, "Increased Risk of Acute Cardiovascular Events After Partner

Bereavement: A Matched Cohort Study." *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174:4 (2014): 598-605.

⁷⁶ Dawn Richard, *Armor On*.

⁷⁷ The Notorious B.I.G., "One More Chance (Remix)."

⁷⁸ *Moonlight*. Barry Jenkins, dir. Lionsgate, 2016.

⁷⁹ Mary J. Blige, "Not Gon' Cry," from *Waiting to Exhale (Original Soundtrack Album)*.

⁸⁰ Kanye West, "Paranoid," from *808s and Heartbreak*.

Visual Schematics

Heriberto “Sharky” Garcia

[letter dated 4-16-17]

Revolutionary Greetings to You. My name is Heriberto Garcia. I’m a politikal prisoner that holds the AEH here in California. I’m dedicated to the movement/struggle with the international view of ending oppression—anti-imperialism. I became politicized thru my experiences from Jury Hall, to CYA, Level 4 Yards, and SHU’s in California.

Sincerely,



[letter dated 7-25-17]

I’m a 26 year-old (Brown) anti-imperialist organizer, theorist, and artist with a politikal line that revolves around five principles: peace, unity, growth, internationalism, and independence. I became radicalized throughout my incarceration. I began questioning things such as daily struggles of the people “inside”/“outside,” methods and politiks. The more i continued with my quest for understanding, i realized how the struggle of all oppressed peoples are connected to the mass struggle against imperialism. It is this questioning of mine that has opened my eyes to the still unfolding truth. It is this constant questioning that has made me the human being that i am today. I know what i want to do in life, and that is to fight imperialism and liberate the people. To abolish the systems of White Being, to achieve emancipation. I don’t do this for glorification, ratings, to be “controversial” or to give my life meaning. I do it because it’s what is right. That is freedom. As a person who is consciously oppressed, resisting is what i do. I fight whether it is thru theorizing, literature, teaching, or learning, on the ground or from this cell, spreading the message of unity and revolution in this time of movement. This is my life.

I come from a line of migrant family. On my mom’s side, i’m German/Spanish, from my Dad’s side Mexican. I was born in Michoacán, City of Uruapan (Mexico). I traveled back and forward from Mexico to the U.S. throughout my childhood, living in struggle. Mom is a hard worker. My father is a federal prisoner, also a hard worker. I was introduced to the gang life at the age of 11. I ended incarcerated at the age of 16 and have been down ever since.



This piece represents our culture. A city within a city, representing class/ status. Her mouth is stitched shut, attempting to convey a message, but cannot. Attempting to seek understanding, we search within only to see we are self-destructing with our ways. Enslaved with chains from wrist to wrist, appearing out of a mushroom cloud used to colonize and destroy the people. The four corners: owl (for wisdom)—sand creek (for time)—masks (for Anonymous) —a hand holding a ball (for game).

[cont. letter dated 7-25-17]

Being introduced to politik behind the wall and meeting people from different walks of life, i started reinventing myself as a New Man and accepted everything i ever knew to be false, including religion. Throughout this time of reflection, i switched up my politik, changed my perspective. I began practicing my theories of resistance and organizing. After our hunger strikes here in Cali, my politik evolved and my perspective became international. I started reaching out seeking educational material and providing critical analysis on organizing prisoners (the “leadership,” etc.), while i was inside the SHU dungeons. I’m still evolving with the struggle and will continue as long as i’m alive.

[letter dated 8-28-17]

We all walk different paths, alleys, dirt roads, or simply carve our way to the present. I don’t think we need to experience the same things to understand where We are each coming from or who We are. We can learn from each other’s differences and determinations on where We’re trying to be—the things that We are doing *now*, the work that We put in to make the today of tomorrow a better now.

While professionals analyze our situation in the struggle attempting to understand it, We live it. We’re not part of the privileged that have the luxury to educate ourselves, or drop time to write about (no my bad—the time to “articulate”) contradictions; but, for the most part, We the bandannas understand our fucked-up situation can be thanked to the Suits and Ties up on the roof of that sky scrapper. Yet, once you introduce revolutionary knowledge to a Bandana, she/he becomes a devoted comrade of the international struggle, who understands that political power comes from the barrel of a gun. Now transformed into this new conscious, principled, and commune-minded being (a New Man), the Bandana being that she/he was now is a comrade who will do anything and everything to transform/evolve their fellow Bandanas, so they may achieve a higher level of consciousness as this New Man.

I create art—narrative, talk, paint, sketch, draw, theorize, conceptualize—for the people and because i love it. I like the process of materializing an idea. When it comes down to art, i take pride, time, and dedication. There are times when a piece might take me weeks to finish and times which take only hours. I know most imagine prisoners just sitting on their asses and watching T.V. and consuming, which is true in a way. But for “active” prisoners, we pick up the slack of others, then we deal with these pigs always trying to shove us in a box somewhere. I’ve been kicked out of “rehab” groups, creative writing classes, “church,” etc., which are all places that can be converted into semi-seminars for revolutionary study. I pose a problem to the class and we share dialogue, or i provide input on a subject containing revolutionary elements. So mysteriously, my name is no longer on the list. I’ve been dealing with strip-searches, harassment, cell searches, “hate” and that bullshit. I don’t care, i

understand the risk of spitting truth and/or living in defiance of (white) imperialist authority. I embrace the struggle and the learning process—and for those times i bleed, it is then that i know i am alive. I make the best out of the situation i find myself in. I'm not going to stop creating.

In Solidarity,




[letter dated 8-3-17]

I think that there are three levels of politikal organizing here in Cali prisons. The first, to achieve unity, respect, and understanding amongst the oppressed. Second, to build the politikal consciousness of the people. Third, to mobilize the people towards emancipation thru radical sets of politiks. Right now, we are at work on level two.

1) The first level of struggle is one of peace and unity. In prisons here in Cali, this was exercised throughout the hunger strikes. But didn't really make an impact until the ones in 2011. Which is when the "Agreement to End Hostilities" came into effect. Due to the influence that prisoners have out there, we can expect that what happens in prisons is then practiced on the street amongst the barrios-neighborhoods. To achieve peace and unity amongst the oppressed and therefore spreading this practice to the rest of the public.

2) This is the level of knowledge and growth, where we convert the prisons into some type of school, an educational campus so that all that come in can study, learn and become part of a teacher-student/student-teacher method and way of life, as opposed to the banking system of education practiced in capitalist society. This

will revolutionize the incarcerated masses, whom will then take this new set of politiks to the neighborhoods-barrios to which they return, transforming the ghettos.

3) This is the level of mobilization. Once level 1-2 have been accomplished, level 3 is the key to revolutionary emancipation. The land stolen from the people will be returned to the people. The masses will own the means of production. Institutions from the people for the people will be in every hood. New table of laws for the masses will be set by the oppressed. This will come only after ending imperialism, and, as we know, imperialism will not hand over power. It is up to us to take it. To achieve this, we must practice this line not only locally, but at an international level to bring independence to all. This last level is a battle and only through practice we'll know what we're up against here at home and how to defeat it.

The schematics I have presented to you outline a blueprint for the three levels of prison organizing, as I sit in my cell struggling achieve this. Struggling to be free, to stay sane. If not this, then what? Wait for the day of inclusiveness and make it a holiday? Reform a law, pass a bill, recycling the carrot of a pipe dream? Allow the colonialism, genocide, and displacement of people to continue? Should I just suppress my feelings, my ideas, my being? Turn my cheek and be happy to plainly exist? Miserable, but existing. Eating, drinking, consuming crap—but existing. Fuck that! I will do what I can. I will attempt what I can't learn from the process and do it again. For the love of humanity, for the love of freedom, for the love of abolition.

Respectfully,





This piece represents peace and unity, towards our goal of ending imperialism. How movements are born in the most oppressive of environments, such as the SHU, and are carried on to the neighborhoods we are from, the ones we return to. Peace and unity across national lines and recognizing the true enemy.

DIVISIBLE:

Breaking Up the United States

Bromma

As U.S. politics lurches rapidly to the right, worried residents wonder about getting out. Friends talk among themselves about moving to Canada, Europe, Mexico—anywhere to escape Trumpland. Taking a different angle, some activists propose separating the “blue states” from the “red states,” essentially redrawing the map of North America. One plan calls for the West Coast to secede. Others lobby for California to become an independent country. So far, most radicals don’t seem too serious about these exit strategies. But they do have a serious aspect. For one thing, if things keep getting worse, some of us might be forced to flee. What’s optional now could become a necessity.

But whether that happens or not, U.S. borders are going to be the focus of intense political struggle in the coming period. We already see it happening. The borders are brute physical expressions of the authority of the empire and its state. So naturally they are zones of contention, especially in times of social stress. Principled radicals in North America have always challenged the U.S.’s arrogant territorial claims and its corrupt settler nationalism. Right now, as the lives of hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees are thrown into turmoil by the Trump regime, we’re forcefully reminded that this challenge is no abstraction. It’s a concrete practical obligation.

So it makes sense for us to think creatively (and disloyally) about the borders of the empire we live in. With or without Trump, we should never adopt the oppressors’ borders as our unchangeable destiny. But we need to generate better solutions than hunkering down with Democrats in “blue” California, or searching for a friendlier, more progressive home overseas. Our strategy must be more radical than that.

It won’t last forever

The U.S. isn’t a legitimate nation. It was formed by war criminals and human traffickers who raped and pillaged their way across the continent. It became rich through genocidal land grabs, slavery, white supremacy and colonialism. The U.S.’s imposed imperial borders and its colonial claims are buttressed by white capitalists’ economic dominance and the overwhelming power of their military. But those circumstances won’t last forever.

Every empire falls eventually. And today the U.S. is a declining superpower, wobbling on the edge of economic and social collapse. Its industrial base is hollowed out; its infrastructure and educational systems are crumbling. Imperial rivals are snapping at its heels. Its environment and food supply are compromised. Its corrupt health care “system” is in chaos. Its rulers, in their insatiable hunger for obscene profits, have become addicted to elaborate financial swindles that are more and more vulnerable to global economic shocks. The current US regime’s greedy, blundering imperial foreign policy threatens to ignite major wars, which probably won’t turn out well for them.

The New Deal “social contract” between U.S. capitalists and their white population is being phased out. Capitalists don’t want to pay for it any more. They’re rolling the dice on a meaner and cheaper version of the “American Dream” for the white masses, even though that has already caused greater social instability. They’re counting on naked racism to maintain white loyalty, and on naked force to contain the emerging non-white majority. But reactionary populism, repression and race conflict have volatile side effects; they lead to unexpected consequences.

Rapid change

When empires fall, they can fall fast and fall hard. It wasn’t that long ago that the Soviet Union was a major superpower, rivaling the U.S. in military power and geostrategic influence. Starting in 1985, during a period of economic stagnation and military overextension, Chairman Mikhail Gorbachev and his crew decided to shake things up with a new set of economic, political and foreign policies that they thought would “make the U.S.S.R. great again.” But as it turned out, they had underestimated the underlying weakness of the U.S.S.R.’s economy, and overestimated its social cohesion. Over the course of just six years, the Soviet Union collapsed. Not only was the Soviet Union officially dissolved into more than a dozen sovereign countries, but some of those countries sub-divided further into separate nations along old historical lines. For instance, Yugoslavia broke down initially into Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro; after further secessions there are now seven independent states within its former borders. Czechoslovakia divided into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. On the other hand, East Germany reunited with West Germany. Some former Soviet countries are still allies of the Russian Federation, while others joined NATO. What had seemed like an established order with fixed borders changed almost overnight.

There are lots of differences between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S., of course. But this empire will also fall someday, unable to survive its own centrifugal forces and its own geopolitical overextension. As with the Soviet Union, that fall may happen sooner than we expect. Today’s volatile political and economic turmoil could easily spiral into depression, world war, total fascism or civil war. Fragmentation and division could spike suddenly and gain momentum quickly, like they did in the U.S.S.R.

Not “our” country

Will the collapse of the U.S. as a political entity be good or bad? Well, clearly it could have a variety of outcomes, depending on how it happens, and the strength of all the active social forces. But a disintegrating U.S. certainly offers opportunities for oppressed people and for revolutionaries—if we’re prepared. One thing’s for sure: for activists serious about fighting oppression, the U.S. isn’t “our” country. We don’t pledge allegiance to it. We don’t consider it “one nation under God” or “indivisible.” We don’t celebrate the Euro-settler conquest of North America. The U.S. is a prison-house of nations, held together by white supremacy and imperialism. If it falls apart, that’s no reason to mourn. In fact, we shouldn’t wait to see if the U.S. disintegrates on its own. We should be strategizing right now about breaking it up. We should be trying to make it happen, on our terms.

Fault lines

What will the dismemberment of the U.S. look like? There are lots of theoretical possibilities, with different timelines. But more than likely, a breakup will happen along the deep national fault lines that already exist.

1. *During the genocidal removal of Native peoples from their lands, more than 370 treaties were ratified between the U.S. and Indian nations. These treaties were coerced or fraudulently obtained. And afterwards, as we know, the treaties were systematically violated to facilitate additional settler land grabs. According to the federal government’s own research, the land that was never legally ceded, even under duress, by Native peoples to the U.S., amounts to approximately one third of the land mass of the contiguous 48 states (without even considering Indigenous land in Hawai’i or Alaska). There’s no way that the injustices done to Indigenous peoples in North America can be reversed without the reestablishment of full Native self-determination, and the return of huge tracts of stolen land throughout the continent (including Canada and Mexico). That alone requires breaking down the existing borders of the settler state.*

2. *In 1848, the U.S. militarily imposed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on Mexico. This treaty forced Mexico to turn over more than half of its entire land area to the U.S., including California, parts of Texas, half of New Mexico, most of Arizona, Nevada and Utah and parts of Wyoming and Colorado—525,000 square miles. As many Mexicans say, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.” Today the Trump regime is fixated on building a “physically imposing” wall running for thousands of miles along the entire artificial U.S./Mexico border. This wall-building obsession isn’t a sign of strength, but of weakness. It reflects insecurity about*

the empire's ability to sustain white power and to dominate the peoples of Latin America in the future. Mexicans have the right to live, work and travel freely within their national territory—on both sides of the illegitimate boundary that currently divides it. Mexicans, Chican@, and Indigenous peoples must decide their own futures on the land stolen from them, with secession from the U.S. as an active option.

3. Descendants of African slaves have never received the 40 acres and a mule promised to them at the end of the Civil War. And the Black population has never been treated as citizens by the ruling class or the white population as a whole. In fact, over the course of generations of exploitation and brutal oppression, African Americans were forged into an internal colony of the U.S.; they evolved into a rebellious nation considered both alien and dangerous by settler society. African American communities exist under occupation by the U.S. state. Widespread police terror, systematic discrimination, mass incarceration, gentrification and relentless racism are everyday features of African American life. This constant genocidal assault has been unable to destroy the Black Nation. African American revolutionary nationalists of many tendencies have been fighting for an independent territorial homeland in the Black Belt South for hundreds of years. This is an entirely just claim, which repudiates and de-legitimizes the existing borders of the U.S. Given the historical importance of the Black liberation struggle, the demand for a Black/New Afrikan national territory may play a key role in the deconstruction of the settler state.

4. Puerto Rico is an “unincorporated territory” owned by the U.S. In other words, it's a colony. Its 3.5 million residents aren't allowed to vote for President, Vice President, House of Representatives or Senate, even though Congress exerts “legal” control over the island. There are now over 5 million Puerto Rican nationals living on the U.S. mainland, roughly 10 percent of the total Latin@ population there. Most retain strong ties to the island. There have been imperial military bases on Puerto Rico for generations. The U.S. has crushed several waves of revolutionary struggle, and still rules with an iron fist. The federal government, taking advantage of a deep economic crisis on the island, is currently making plans to cut Puerto Ricans out of any vestiges of control over their own economy. The Puerto Rican diaspora inside the U.S. is also heavily oppressed, facing conditions similar to those confronting African Americans. But Puerto Rico's right to independence is recognized all over the world. The desire for national freedom for Puerto Rico is strong, with new forms of resistance appearing every year. The Puerto Rican liberation movement could play an important role in breaking down the US's territorial structure as well as its imperial arrogance.

5. *Hawai'i and Alaska are colonial territories that weren't formally absorbed into the U.S. until 1959. Alaska doesn't even have a territorial connection to the rest of the country, requiring an overland passage through Canada. After the U.S. purchased it from Russia in 1867, Alaska was established in the form of a "military district," which pursued a vicious genocidal policy toward resident Indigenous peoples that continues today. Hawai'i, of course, is a distant island violently wrested away from its Native people in order to generate profits for U.S. capitalists and help them project military force throughout the Pacific Rim. As the U.S. settler state begins to weaken, both Alaska and Hawai'i will likely see a strengthening of existing Indigenous resistance, and renewed demands for independence. The same applies to the Marshall Islands, US Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Guam.*

6. *The U.S. has a long ugly history of imposing segregation, pogroms, deportations, internment, and savage exploitation on any peoples it classifies as non-white, including descendants of Chinese, Japanese, Aleuts, Filipinos, Arabs, Central Americans and many other nationalities. The lives of millions of national minority residents have been heavily impacted by systemic discrimination and racist violence. Breaking down this institutionalized white supremacy can only be accomplished by demolishing the U.S. settler state and the white nationalism that's fundamental to it.*

Breaking it down

There's no unanimous formula for revolutionizing the borders of the U.S. A territorial breakout by one oppressed nationality could set off land struggles by other nationalities. Or a chaotic disruption of the social order might lead to the rise of insurgencies for self-defense and independent community-building. One thing we do know is that the necessary negotiations and decisions about redrawing the map of a dying settler state belong in the hands of oppressed nations and peoples, not the white settler population. The Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika provides one illustration of how conflicting and overlapping land claims might be resolved:

It shall be the policy of the Provisional Government to recognize the just claims of the American Indian nations and other oppressed nations for land in North America. It shall be the policy of the Provisional Government to negotiate with the American Indian Nations the claims which conflict with the claims of the New Afrikan nation and to resolve these claims in the spirit of justice, brotherhood, and mutual revolutionary commitment to the human and natural rights of all oppressed nations in North America.

In the meantime, all radicals, including white radicals, should be struggling to secede—both mentally and physically—from the U.S. Because practically speaking, it's not just the U.S. ruling elite that we have to overthrow; it's the settler nation itself.

As activists of conscience, we should reject political schemes that promise to keep the U.S. intact, while somehow turning it into a “progressive” country. These “left” patriotic scenarios aren't realistic or honest. They're based on the pretext that the world's deadliest imperialist settler state can turn into its opposite; that the bulk of the white settler population will surrender its beloved race privileges, its imperial benefits, and its domination of land and resources in order to lift up the oppressed and return what was stolen. There's no support to be found anywhere in U.S. history for this fantasy.

Instead, we need an entirely different alignment: the oppressed peoples of the U.S. empire fighting for self-determination, plus a rebellious white minority acting in solidarity, committed to tearing down colonialism and white supremacy. It's within that alignment that we all can contribute to the empire's revolutionary demolition and find a path to freedom.

Internationalism has always been close to the heart of radical politics. In the long run, we strive to break down arbitrary and unnecessary barriers that divide peoples from each other. Some of us envision a time when nations and borders as we know them are unnecessary. But internationalism doesn't mean we sweep the U.S. empire's constant drive to conquer, liquidate or subordinate oppressed nations and nationalities under the rug. For radicals, internationalism is based first of all on the establishment of justice among nations. It's a voluntary unity of equals—something which can only become a reality if all parties are exercising self-determination.

This is something white radicals in particular must grasp as a matter of principle. Otherwise, we find ourselves utterly compromised: promoting supposedly progressive politics without fundamentally and fully repudiating the ruling class's own “internationalist” program of genocide, colonialism, forced assimilation and white domination. That's how some white leftists end up, through twisted and opportunist logic, blaming oppressed peoples for “divisiveness.”

Native and national liberation movements face many challenges as they confront modern imperialism. In some cases they've been weakened by neo-colonialism and internal divisions, and struggle to regroup and rebuild. Still, given their deep-rooted tenacity, and their strategic position astride the main contradictions in imperial society, these movements are currently the main forces capable of leading an anti-imperialist breakdown of the U.S.

That breakdown can also be significantly advanced by creating and defending enclaves where people of color, women, gender non-conformists and radicals struggle to create diverse forms of independence and autonomy.

Unfortunately, on a practical level, the radical Right is ahead of us here. Many die-hard fundamentalists and neo-fascists have already started building enclaves of their own. They've grasped a harsh reality: that in a chaotic, deteriorating, violent

society, a group's chances of survival increase according to their social unity, self-sufficiency, control of territory, and capability for self-defense.

With or without our intervention, the U.S. will disintegrate eventually. If it happens without us planning it, or even expecting it, we could be disoriented and caught in the crossfire. It's far better to be prepared and proactive. In coming years, as the empire weakens, many strategies for revolutionary change will be proposed, discussed, and attempted. The breakup of the U.S. must be central to those strategies.



This essay first appeared on the Kersplebedeb website (www.kersplebedeb.com). Other writings of Bromma's are also available on the Kersplebedeb site, and in print through www.leftwingbooks.net.

Recommended Reading:

J Sakai, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat*
Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire*
Ward Churchill, *I Am Indigenist*
Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the US*
Sanyika Shakur, "Who Are You?"
Butch Lee, *The Coming of Black Genocide*
Provisional Government, Republic of New Afrika, *The Code of Umoja/Black Constitution*
Kersplebedeb, "Black Genocide and the Alt-Right"
Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*
Nelson Denis, *War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony*
Oscar Lopez Rivera, *Between Torture and Resistance*
Natasha Lycia Ora Bannan, "The United States Makes the Case for Why Puerto Rico is Still its Colony"
Michael Kioni Dudley & Kioni K. Agard, *A Call for Hawaiian Sovereignty*
J Sakai, *Learning From an Unimportant Minority: Race Politics Beyond the White/Black Paradigm*

Dancing for Sovereignty

Jessica Fremland

On October 28, 2016, just days after hundreds of water protectors¹ were arrested and physically assaulted by the Morton County Police Department, leaders of the No Dakota Access Pipeline (NODAPL) movement called on jingle dress dancers to come to the resistance camps adjacent to the Standing Rock Reservation. A large conglomerate of approximately 50 dancers arrived to dance on the frontlines of the action just a day later, with police and armored vehicles just down the road. In this paper, I ask: How can we understand the jingle dress dancers' movements across colonial configurations of space and time as the embodiment of an indigenous radical tradition? I contend that while the U.S. settler colonial state perpetually demands that indigenous people disappear through processes of assimilation and physical elimination, the act of dancing on the frontlines of a fight for Native sovereignty forces the state to acknowledge a level of indigenous autonomy and incongruity with white settler society.

The form of dance practiced in this contested space serves as a simultaneous embodied remembrance and imagining. The jingle dress dancers call on the memory of ancestors and cultural teachings to collapse impositions of settler time, space, and patriarchy. The act of dancing in the tradition of ancestors conjures a double presence that recalls the resistance of ancestors and proves that bodies not only remember the violence and pain of colonial conquest, but also the power of indigenous knowledge to subvert and overcome settler-colonial structures. Hence, the dance proves powerful because of its insistence on refusing to be regulated by normative colonial movements. This form of dance, as it accesses embodied memory, gives shape to the notion of indigenous autonomy as it generates the power to move between planes and provides the freedom to define oneself and to determine the parameters of indigenous identity. It legitimates the freedom to practice spiritual traditions *regardless of restrictions imposed by the settler government.*

Ultimately, the jingle dress dancers engage in an indigenous radical tradition of imagining an alternative mode of existence rooted in non-heteronormative interpretations of spatial and temporal relations and connectivity. Heteronormative space restricts mobility, especially for Native women. It seeks to confine them to designated domesticated spaces. In the same vein, heteronormative capitalistic notions of temporality are normally calibrated through ideas of sexual and economic productivity; however, this works differently for Natives. Natives are denied both coeval temporality and future temporality. They are primarily talked about as existing in a "tragic" past.² For jingle dress dancers to so visibly move across this contested space and call upon ancestral knowledge in their imaginings of futurity is to fundamentally challenge colonial heteropatriarchal space and time. In other words,

their movements and embodied memories map an unbounded spatial-temporal plane traditionally restricted by the settler state. Additionally, where heteronormative expressions of connectivity emphasize intimate relationships amongst men and women, the jingle dress dancers in the context of the NODAPL movement, express non-hierarchical connections that go beyond the human. Their movements engage a connection between the water, the Earth, ancestors, and animals. Thus, they connect not just to humans, but to energy and to other sentient life forces. These connections assert a precarious freedom, as it is incredibly powerful to be able to assert sovereignty through these reclamations of space, temporality, and futurity; however, these assertions are met with extreme repression to suppress sovereign claims.

This article explores the extent to which the jingle dress dancers conform to Jaqueline Shea Murphy's conception of "doing indigeneity."³ This concept encompasses an understanding of indigeneity as more than a static identity. Rather, much like Maile Arvin's notion of an *analytics of indigeneity*, this idea engages indigeneity as something in-process, generative, and imaginative—rooted in traditional "stories protocols, epistemologies, and reciprocal responsivities."⁴ As such, to "do" indigeneity is a performative process of using indigenous methods of engaging with the world to ground and envision decolonial possibilities. I hope to illustrate that this method (re)maps—as in constructs and re-signifies—an indigenous feminist space over patriarchal social, geographic, and bodily colonial arrangements. The act of dancing, laughing, and loving in the face of immanent threats to life, freedom, and sovereignty is emblematic of an adamant rejection of the settler's terms of order.

This topic necessitates a theoretical analysis of cultural production because the NODAPL movement relied so heavily on images and videos to spread their message. This movement has relied greatly on social media to garner support and to hold the state accountable for its inherent violence. Thus, the videos I am analyzing are found on news outlets and social media sites like Twitter. It should be noted that in contrast to many forms of analysis, I will not be detailing the cultural aspects and meanings of the jingle dress. While this form of analysis may be important in some instances, there has already been scholarship that speaks to this topic. Furthermore, the goal of my paper is not to make the jingle dress dance a "legible" form of cultural expression. In fact, making the dance legible runs counter to the claim I wish to make—that it is, in part, the *illegibility of the dance* that makes it so powerfully subversive to the white settler state. Thus, this paper engages in an extension of Audra Simpson's theory of "ethnographic refusal," by refusing to unpack the anthropological genesis of the jingle dress for a racist academic audience.⁵ This work is not meant to make sense of the jingle dress dance in a way that facilitates cultural appropriation. Rather, my analysis aims to draw attention to the jingle dress dancers and their filmmakers as proponents of forceful assertions of sovereignty.

To ground this analysis, it is important to describe what I am tentatively calling an indigenous *radical tradition*. This term derives from Cedric Robinson's discussion of the "Black radical tradition." Robinson describes this tradition as Black

people's revolutionary practice of consistently resisting the terms of order that premise their oppression by obstinately opposing the worldviews that rationalize white supremacist mythology (i.e. scientific racism, liberal-democratic nation-building, American manifest destiny, and so on).⁶ Robinson explains that the root of Black resistance is located in a distinctly African consciousness, which in turn facilitates what Ashon Crawley, among many others, calls an imagining of being/existing "otherwise."⁷ We see a *similar* form of consciousness existing in various Native-led resistance movements, particularly in the actions engaged by NODAPL water protectors. Their resistance gives us insight into the process of imagining an "otherwise" realm of existence, in contrast to the terms of settler colonial order. Though the oppression faced by Black people in the United States should not be assumed commensurate with the oppression experienced by Natives, there is comparable overlap in traditions of resistance. Like the Black movements described by Robinson, which are influenced by a metamorphosized African consciousness, Native people have also held-on to—and consistently (re)constructed—indigenous consciousness. This consciousness is mobilized for resistance to the destructive forces of settler colonialism. The NODAPL movement, and other movements like it, are underpinned by a Native-based ontology,⁸ as evidenced by NODAPL's insistence on prayer based resistance, their emphasis on the power of women, and the assertion of a symbiotic relationship between men, women, ancestors and the Earth's resources. Thus, any analysis of Native social movements must acknowledge both their grounding in indigenous epistemologies and their locus within a tradition of radical resistance.

Before I commence the discussion of the jingle dress dancers, it is important to also call attention to the inextricably gendered context of the NODAPL movement. First, it is important to note that Native women still experience sexual assault at rates higher than any other demographic in the United States.⁹ There is a trend of increased sexual assault when pipelines are built adjacent to Native communities. In the North Dakota Bakken oil fields, "man camps" provide shelter to the primarily male temporary workforce. The communities adjacent to these camps have experienced increased levels of sexual violence, prostitution, and drug use.¹⁰ Many of the activists arguing against the Dakota Access Pipeline have used this as an example of how the Dakota Access Pipeline not only poses environmental risks, but also heightens the risk of patriarchal-misogynist violence against Native women.¹¹ Instances of sexual assault have long been used as tools of settler colonial governance and rule, and many scholars have called attention to the interrelation between this violence and the lethal human conquest of Mother Earth.

Despite the resistance of water protectors and the threat of environmental pollution Dakota Access insisted on building the pipeline. The phallic representation of a drill digging into Mother Earth against her resistance has serious undertones of sexual assault. These violations in conjunction with the violence enacted on Native women are indicative of the sense of entitlement settler society claims in relation to

Native women and Native land. They never seek permission from Native people to make the land “productive.” Rather, they appeal to the colonial government whose interests are always invested in asserting rightful claim to indigenous land. Since Native ideology sees the Earth as just as sentient as humanity, the violation of either is an egregious offense. Thus, it is ever more powerful to see Native women responding to such offenses in the form of social movements. Yet this also means they continue to bear the brunt of state repression in quotidian, day-to-day life. This is certainly true at Standing Rock, where it seems the heaviest exactions of violence were exerted on women’s bodies. By enacting violence against Native women, who are often the leaders of resistance movements, and in many cases considered the cultural bearers of Native societies, the colonial project aims to repress the indigenous radical tradition. Still, even in the face of this violence the women at Standing Rock continued to unsettle patriarchal logics and the coherence of settler self-knowledge, thereby engaging in an indigenous radical tradition that is also rooted in Native feminist praxis.

The jingle dress dancers exemplify the spirit of this Native feminist praxis. As discussed above, the American settler colonial project involves intricate injections of heteropatriarchy and hetero-paternalism into the structure of Native communities;¹² however, the NODAPL movement has worked to subvert those arrangements in unique and notable ways. Both videos I examine involve powerful and strategic choices in terms of how and where the jingle dress dancers are filmed. For example, the jingle dress dancers and organizers of the action chose to position the dancers on the frontlines rather than dancing in the camps, or in spaces considered more “safe”. This is impressively dissident considering it refuses to be regulated by the threat of violence. This choice, when compounded with the filming choices, becomes an even more subversive move.

In the first video,¹³ the dancers are focused in the foreground and take up most of the frame; however, just beyond the dancers we see what appear to be military vehicles on the hilltops and a barricade created by the police to restrict the water protectors from moving into the construction zone of the pipeline.¹⁴ By foregrounding the women in the video, the colonial social arrangements of heteropatriarchy are overturned. In this arrangement, the matriarchal traditions of the Očeti Šakówin¹⁵ are given primacy over settler colonial heteropatriarchal structures. Furthermore, although there are several men in the frame, they are standing in supportive roles in a circle surrounding the dancers, and we do not see any of the predominantly white male police force. By reversing the social organization, and by positioning men and the police vehicles in the background, the dancers and filmmakers collectively redefine whiteness and patriarchy. By dancing on the land before the instruments of settler colonial violence, these Native women call out the white supremacist settler state for its violence, hypocrisy, illegitimacy, and inability to assert dominance over Natives. This new interpretation of whiteness is part of the (re)mapping of space discussed by Mishuana Goeman. Goeman explains

(re)mapping space as the labor of generating new possibilities. She writes: “(re)mapping is not just about regaining that which was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures.”¹⁶

Thus, Native women engage in an act of (re)mapping by calling on dance as the embodiment of both traditional *and* contemporary indigenous epistemologies of resistance. The US has been heavily invested in establishing a heteronormative patriarchal social structure; however, it’s important to recognize the interconnections between social and physical space, as for Natives, the colonization of social space is just as important as the colonization of physical space. The colonial configurations of social space are integral to the dispossession of Native women in particular, as many Native women lost their independence and their rights to own and maintain property through redefining women’s roles according to the European standard.¹⁷ Thus, to (re)map a more indigenous social space is to also imagine a (re)mapping of physical space.

This physical space is further (re)mapped through the application of Jacqueline Shea Murphy’s discussion of “doing indigeneity.” According to Shea Murphy, “Indigenous dancers’ bodies...are a location of ways of being and knowing held in bodies and everyday movements. And movement practices...are a tool for locating and unearthing these ways of knowing.”¹⁸ In this sense, it is not only the location of the filming and dancing, but also the very movements the dancers employ that (re)map space. In particular, the fact that the dancers are engaged in unified, but improvisational dance, and that their regalia is vastly different from person to person, makes their dance practice less legible, predictable, and controllable, and therefore, it can be regarded as threatening to the state. The spontaneity of the dancers also introduces the notion of Native temporalities that are not confined by settler colonial conceptions of normative, progressive linear time. Such normative conceptions of time are important to the settler state because of its predictability, as opposed to the more multi-dimensional indigenous conceptions of time. This form of dance disrupts the state’s ability to expect and manipulate a future, as the future becomes tangled with the present and thus, becomes unregulated by the confines of colonial temporality and spatial organization. Hence, this form of dance compels an interpretation of indigeneity and Native futurities as multiple, contingent, and constantly being formed and re-calibrated. By disavowing colonial conceptions of linear time where the future is inevitable, the Jingle dress dancers call on indigenous epistemologies to produce an imagining of an indigeneity yet to come, and for this reason the dance can be considered to be “doing indigeneity” rather than simply being an indigenous performance. The latter assumes a more stagnant identity while the former acknowledges indigeneity as resilient, inventive, and fluctuating.

This indigeneity yet to come is further enunciated through the slogan *Mni Wiconi, Water is Life*. This slogan invokes a notion of time that is antagonistic to capitalist notions of time. Settler capitalist ideologies of time place primacy over

instantaneous extractive values, while the indigenous perspective espoused by *Mni Wiconi* calls attention to time's continuity and generative power. Where Dakota Access ignores the environmental and health consequences of building this pipeline that will affect present and future Native generations, the indigenous consciousness informing the efforts of water protectors' is bound up with a consideration of future generations. This consideration tethers the future to the present and continuously disturbs hegemonic structures of power maintained through the pervasive acceptance of linear time within settler society.

The most noticeable aspect of the second video is the cinematography.¹⁹ Rather than panning across the dancers or looking down on them, the video focuses primarily on the dancer's feet, and scrolls up to occasionally film the dancers' faces. This modality of filming from the bottom up reverses colonial implementations of a top-down hierarchical structure, and is indicative of an indigenous consciousness that focuses more on grass-roots organizational systems. This combined method of filming and dancing makes (re)mapping its central tool of decolonization. Colonial logics of seeing tend to be more removed from subjects and spaces in order to capture the entirety of a performance, and can be connected to the desire to manipulate and control the future. For example, James Scott, in his text *Seeing Like a State*, comments on the goal of states to map space with the purpose of creating legibility, control, and to facilitate military planning, especially in instances of social unrest.²⁰ In order to do this, state planning of cityscapes necessitates the use of airborne tools to capture entire spaces and involves a heavy emphasis on "straight lines and hard right angles."²¹ The choice to film only portions of dancers' bodies and to film from various angles defies the colonial desire to create orderly and controllable space. Thus, the jingle dress dancers and the film makers use the camera from below to (re)map space as illegible and uncontrollable—as free and sovereign. It thus locates power in illegibility and invisibility. I contend that the choice to film in a spatially adjacent position to the dancers exploits the camera's inability to fully capture the dancers' essence as insurgent, unruly, imaginative, and powerful. As such, the dancers' bodies, the embodied knowledges of their movements, and the ancestors who dance alongside them can be defined as excess by the colonial state, and the indigenous futurities their bodies create refuse to be subsumed under colonial logics. The video merely provides a glimpse into their embodied knowledge by filming several dancers' feet and portions of their bodies, but it cannot fully capture their complexity. While the camera provides the opportunity to compress space-time so viewers can connect to the movement, its inability to fully contain the dancers' bodies indicates that the camera, as a colonial apparatus, is fundamentally unable to regulate Native bodies. Thus, the dancers' movement through contested and surveilled space signifies their refusal to be governed by colonial logics and a decision to move on their own terms.

Therefore, I assert that the NODAPL jingle dress dancers both enact and provide a model for an inhabitation of the indigenous radical tradition. Their movements and (re)mappings of both social and physical space reveal the limits of

settler colonial logics of violence, heteropatriarchy, and containment. The embodied knowledge and futures created through the dancers' movements invoke spirits of ancestors past, and together they envision futures unknown. These ghosts, like the "lawless" dancers who conjured them, move freely between planes unable to be controlled or made visible. Their autonomy lies in the choice to become visible when it suits them, but they cannot be *made* legible. The dancers' refusal to be made legible creates an affinity between them and the ghosts they conjure. Ghosts and dancing water protectors move on their own terms, to their own beat, and according to their own time. Their movements, remembrances, and visions of the future transport them through closed portals to realms untraveled. The settler state can't follow them there. They are free.



First and foremost, this publication would not have been possible without the water protectors who risked their lives and livelihoods to advocate for Native sovereignty and the protection of Mother Earth's resources. To them I'd like to say: Wopida tayka ečičiyapi ye. I am especially grateful to Antonia Juhász and Simon Moya-Smith who created and made the important videos I analyze in this article available to the public. The personal conversations I had with each of these filmmakers illuminated their commitment to Native feminist values and the project of decolonization that are reflected in the videos. I look forward to continuing conversations with the filmmakers to build upon the analysis presented in this article.

- ¹ The term "water protector" is itself a method of resistance in its refusal to be defined by settler society's definition of resistance/right/wrong/legitimacy/illegitimacy.
- ² Mark Rifkin. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke University Press 2017, p. vii.
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We Are Not Americans

Cordero K. Holmes

We are not Americans. As I write this letter from inside the prison industrial complex, I dig deep within to share a truth that is overlooked by far too many. This truth, *the truth*, will be mistaken for rebel rousing “rhetoric” to those who possess the American mentality. Yet, this truth, *my truth*, is intended to be soul-stimulating sentiment for the masses in their fight against Babylon—the United States of America. Sisters and brothers, black and native, straight and queer, cis or trans. We are not Americans. It has long been said that America is Babylon. America is Babylon. America is not our home, America is our *captor!*

By saying America is not our home but our captor, I am invoking a longstanding truth passed down by those comrades in the struggle before us. In the biblical story, Babylon was an empire that—like the U.S.—embodied decadence, evil, idol worship, and greed. Much like the European invasion of Africa and the enslavement of black Africans—or the overseers policing our neighborhoods today, locking us up in prisons—Babylon ransacked Jerusalem and carried the people of Judah into captivity. This knowledge, infused with my experience as a captive of the imperialist state, has taught me that We the enslaved and colonized, imprisoned and warehoused masses are forced to live in circumstances of perpetual misery, degradation, inactivity, and death so that White(end) citizens in the system of capitalism/imperialism can accumulate more wealth, having more vacations, and indulge in more pleasures.

There is, in fact, a “doubleness” to the American law that preserves the equilibrium of this genocidal situation, with unwritten racial laws spawned by a notion of humanity rooted in the capitalist profit motive. This longstanding tradition of devaluing humans, animals, and nature, while consuming endlessly authorizes a chauvinistic style of relating to others, enabling a systemic pattern of misogynistic passions, pleasures, and voyeuristic desires. This is the fascist “fetish structure” of U.S. Americanism, this is the Babylonian culture that rears the mentality of the beast! A selfish, greedy, piggish mentality is the work of Babylon, seducing us into the most self-destructive and suicidal of urges. This American mentality captures our minds at a young age. Many of us wind up in permanent psychological bondage to American whiteness. Many of us end up dying in confusion. It is this kind of system that bears and rears the beast otherwise known as the American mentality.

Amerikkkan ideology penetrates the innermost dimensions of the psyche through an invasively punitive and qualitatively anti-human carceral violence. State terror thoroughly envelopes our communities, schools, workplaces, and family settings. As an insurgent inhabiting the “underside” of civil society, this American

“way of life” is the enemy of my entire way of being. As members of a colonized, enslaved, or otherwise imprisoned/policed peoples, *this American way of life is the enemy of our entire way of being!* The fascist mentality of U.S. Americanism—this decadent white-supremacist misogynist capitalist piggishness—must be smashed, abolished, buried, and stamped out for good.

Sisters and brothers, America is not our home. America is Babylon. America is the beast that is disintegrating our collective spirit and essence. Sisters and Brothers, we must break free of this mentality that has made us slaves to the idea of an American “good life,” or “white life.” We must choose instead to walk in the footsteps of our ancestors, those who struggled for liberation before us. Learning from the great ones that came before us will lead us to even more profound strategies for enacting social change. We are taught by the great ones that change can only be catalyzed by deep reflection and self-understanding, coupled with an increase in the revolutionary “self-activity” of the people. The great ones teach that once someone is finally conscious of their oppression, this knowledge is not only weaponized, but it is “passed down.” From neighbor to neighbor, comrade to comrade, generation to generation.

We must tell the truth. We must be truth-walkers. “We,” the imprisoned and systematically policed of the earth—the wretched of this universe—are the living embodiment of abolitionism. We are not Americans. We are not patriots. We are neither Yankees nor Confederates. We cannot be docile and will not be domesticated. *WE ARE NOT AMERICANS! WE ARE NOT AMERICANS!*

WE ARE NOT AMERICANS!

Unspeakable Truths

Soweto Satir

across the nation
from one coast to another
there are Women and Men
who wake at dawn behind concrete walls
before most purchase their
morning cup of coffee
these odious communities
are hidden in plain sight
as you drive to work in the morning
chances are you pass within a short distance
and never realize it
there are signs but they are vague
they do not read
BROKEN HOMES
or
LONELINESS
they will not read
UNCONSTITUTIONAL
nor
UNJUSTIFIED
there are no signs that
something is wrong
yet behind these walls Men and Women
rise with something to prove
every day these People stand tall
face to face
chest to chest
and boast of past accomplishments and conquests
they look toward the future with more than hope
you could call them dreamers
perhaps they are
unrealistic
but they have not given up
they can not give up because
we protect what we love
so, they spend their days in reverie
let their fear spill into their dreams
and when they wake
they never give voice to the
unspeakable truths.

Anarchist Organizing Across Prison Walls

In Conversation with Chicago Anarchist Black Cross

True Leap Editorial Collective (TLP): For readers that don't know, can you explain what the Anarchist Black Cross is? What has been the primary function of the federation over the years, and how long has the chapter in Chicago been active?

Chicago Anarchist Black Cross (C-ABC): Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) actually began as the “Anarchist Red Cross” in Tsarist Russia. The group existed to help support prisoners and organize for self-defense. During the Russian Civil War, the name was changed to Anarchist Black Cross, to stop the confusion between them and the “Red Cross” relief organization. The group then sort of died off in the 1930s, but resurfaced in the 1960s in Britain, where they helped aid Spanish revolutionaries fighting against Franco. It spread to North America in the eighties and now there are at least twenty chapters that we know of in North America alone, as well as chapters in Europe, South America, Australia and elsewhere.

Chicago ABC, specifically, has been around since 2006. It has served many different purposes over the years and the function has changed as needs change. Prison is meant to be a lonely and isolating experience. It is meant to break us down and disconnect us from the world outside. We work to break down this barrier by keeping communication with folks on the inside. We organize events to raise money for prisoners, do letter writing nights, organize noise demos outside of prisons, help prisoners organize themselves on the inside, distribute free literature on a weekly basis, run a pen-pal program, and a whole host of other things. We wish to both support those who are imprisoned and provide solidarity when prisoners rise up and resist on the inside.

However, I should clarify that Chicago ABC is not actually part of the Anarchist Black Cross Federation. The reason for this dates back many years to a rift that sort of developed over what constitutes a “political prisoner” and who we should be supporting. This rift has largely been settled since then, but resulting from this, we simply never became part of the federation. Our chapter believes that all prisoners are inherently political due to the nature of the prison industrial complex (PIC). Criminalizing communities and locking people up is always an inherently political act. As a result, we choose to support anyone who writes us to the best of our ability. The type of solidarity and support that we offer may differ, but we are always working towards freedom for all prisoners.

TLP: How does your group understand itself within the broader terrain of progressive-to-radical movements in Chicago? Can you share some key struggles that your organization has participated in over the years?

C-ABC: Well, liberals generally don't like us, because our name has the scary A-word in it, which is fine, we don't like them either. But we also haven't totally given up on them... [laughter] ...In addition to doing work with prisoners, we also do a lot of tabling at events to try and get information about anarchism, prison abolition, anti-fascist work, direct action tactics, and lots of other topics. At the end of the day, though, we are anarchists and we pick our friends accordingly. The most recent struggle which we put a lot of effort into was helping support prisoners organizing the September 9th prison strike. We recognize that exploitation of prisoners for their labor is one aspect of the continuation of racial chattel slavery. Slavery did not die in 1863, and these rebellions and strikes will continue to grow until it does. Over a year of planning went into making this nationally coordinated strike happen and it took a lot of communication between those on the "inside" and those on the "outside." The initiative was spearheaded by prisoners and facilitated largely by the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, a committee of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Many folks from various ABC chapters also participated in this organizing. The strike turned out to be the largest prison strike in US history, and showed the sort of collective power that prisoners can have when they organize.

TLP: While there is a lot that can be unpacked here, especially in terms of the continuities between slavery and the prison industrial complex, maybe for now we should stick with the point that you ended on: the fact that prisoners are organizing...and this has always been the case. A lot of self-described activists in the "free world" seem to miss this. It's fucking infuriating how so many people still have no idea that the strikes even took place last Fall. From hunger strikes to other more insurrectionary tactics being taken up by prisoners all over the country, this is some of the most dynamic and important political work going on! And it also should go without mentioning that the work of families and loved ones of prisoners, formerly imprisoned people, and radicals organizing with prisoners is certainly crucial in the equation. But this work takes place largely off the radar of most progressive organizations.

In this regard, it is incredibly important for readers to know about the work that groups like Anarchist Black Cross take up in order to build (and sustain) horizontal connections across prison walls. And this reminds me of a famous quote from George Jackson, which I'd like to recite briefly:

A good deal of this has to do with our ability [as prisoners] to communicate to the people on the street... Oh yeah we can fight, but if we're isolated, if the state is successful in accomplishing that, the results are usually not constructive in terms of proving our point. We fight and we die,

but that's not the point. The point is, however, the face of what we confront, to fight and win. That's the real objective: not just to make statements, no matter how noble, but to destroy the system that oppresses us. By any means available to us. And to do this, we must be connected, in contact with and communication with those in struggle on the outside. We must be mutually supporting because we're all in this together. It's all one struggle at base.

So, as Jackson is saying, whether the political work takes place “inside” or “outside,” it is really all one struggle at base, and Anarchist Black Cross provides one example of a model for actualizing this theoretical point. Now I'm curious to ask, what is your chapter's take on direct action? What does that look like for ABC? What other tactical and strategic lines does Chicago Anarchist Black Cross engage or support?

C-ABC: Direct action gets the goods! We differ from liberal prisoner support groups in that we choose to directly support those who use militant tactics in the struggle for liberation. In the context of prison struggle, a recent example of solid praxis that comes to mind was in Pittsburgh at Alleghany County Jail. About eighty prisoners began a work refusal and released a list of demands that included more case workers, better medical services, and a legitimate grievance procedure. After those on the outside heard of this sit-in, they took to the jail in masks, smashed windows of the jail, a security camera, and several police vehicles. Similar models of solidarity occurred around the September 9th prison strike where people all over the US and even other continents took action in solidarity with those on the inside rising up. This took the form of noise demos and marches, as well as direct attacks on prisons and those who profit off prison labor. This is the type of solidarity that can produce results.

In recognizing the gravity of the struggles we are engaged in, we must recognize that a diverse range of tactics must be used if we want to win. We don't believe in codes of non-violence because violence is already here and is constantly held over our heads every day. The police and the state are violent institutions. They maintain their control through the threat of violence. Peaceful codes on non-violence are not going to get us out of the situation we are in. The state holds up non-violent protest as a model to strive for precisely because it does not challenge their power. So often in history, liberal groups will seek to co-opt revolutionary movements by seeking to police the tactics used and bring individuals back into the political system. Many NGOs and liberal groups today work as pressure valves in this way, driving people who are righteously angry back into the system, rather than organizing to fight against it. We must resist this cooptation and organize autonomously and militantly. This inevitably means coming up against the state as they struggle to maintain control. We recognize this and believe this solidifies the importance of groups like the Anarchist Black Cross.

TLP: We appreciate how Anarchist Black Cross chapters over the years have emphasized a type of solidarity with prisoners that is measured in action not just in rhetoric. Organizing and materially supporting folks inside is difficult work to sustain, and—depending on one’s organizational capacity—can also be quite exhausting. But it is so important to showcase groups such as ABC, because you also provide working examples of how radical organizations can operate and sustain themselves without liberal donor funding or registering for “non-profit” status. There are a handful of groups that could provide models, but what is important here to showcase is how there are outlets and methods to doing abolitionist work that are still “grassroots” and not totally institutionalized—work that is not based on relentless grant writing or housed solely in universities. Could you maybe speak a little about some of the failures and successes you have experienced in trying to sustain an organization without much external financial support? I think a lot of people looking to engage in political work that is not connected to the academic and non-profit industrial complexes would benefit a great deal from hearing about some of your group’s experiences.

C-ABC: How to secure funds is certainly one of the great questions in anarchist organizing. Luckily for us our costs are relatively low. Right now the majority of our money goes towards postage. We sustain ourselves by having a benefit show or two a year, and through donations when tabling at events. Being connected to a network of radicals definitely helps a ton in securing materials. Someone almost always has a friend with a hookup on the things you need. If not, there is almost always a way to get the things you need for free if you try hard enough.

TLP: What do you think the purpose, goals, and strategies of an anarchist organization should be? What kind of form or infrastructure do you think it should embody?

C-ABC: Anarchist organizations take on a ton of different forms. All of them can be useful in some way if they pose a threat to our enemies. We generally operate rather informally and like this type of organizing as opposed to rigid membership type groups, but we work with these types of groups as well. I would say I am personally less concerned with formalizing everything, than I am with taking action. All types of organizing are useful, in so far as they produce action. We can’t sit around and wait for a magic number of members to take action. The fight is happening here and now!

TLP: Has exhaustion or burnout ever been an issue for members of your organization? How have ya’ll dealt with these things?

C-ABC: Burnout is definitely something real that we face. We have seen quite a few people put a lot of energy into this and simply get tired of doing it. It can be

exhausting and stressful at times and I honestly don't think we have any good solutions to this. The best we can do is try and make things fun and flexible. Being able to experience fun and joy together is something I think is really important for groups to be able to exist long term. So much of the work we do in these movements can be boring and tedious. We need to make sure to have time to experience joy together. Mobile street dance parties come to mind as something that brings people out in a way that is both conflictual and also just really fun. We probably can and should do more in this area to help folks avoid burnout, but the reality is that a lot of the work is not always exciting.

TLP: Thanks for taking the time to do this interview. Maybe we'll wrap this interview up with one last question. What do you understand to be the most important role that the Anarchist Black Cross can play in the current political moment...both nationally...and in local struggles against racist state terror in Chicago?

C-ABC: We find ourselves in an obviously important historical moment. Anarchists are starting to find themselves on the front page of the *New York Times*, in viral videos on the internet, and in many other places we are maybe not used to being. The tactics that we use are becoming more widely acceptable. While this is really wonderful to see, we also know that this means that repression is inevitable. The state won't simply give up control and when a threat is perceived to be growing, history tells us they will do everything they can to squash it. While this speaks to the importance of groups like ABC, we also need to be doing our best to organize for self-defense in our communities. We need to be able to defend ourselves not only against the state, but also against far-Right groups as well. Sometimes defending ourselves also means going on the offensive against these groups. We can't simply wait around for the fight to come to us. We know that the state and the far-Right want to see our movements destroyed and we must be proactive about it.

We also need to work to build ways to keep our movements alive within prison. If we take it as evident that we will experience a wave of repression, we must work to understand how we can see prison as an extension of our struggle rather than the end of it. How can we continue to build our movements within prisons? How can we help prison rebellions grow and support those who engage in resistance? These things take a lot of effort and a lot of organizing but we should think about these strategies as we gear up for the fight ahead. There are more people pissed off and looking for ways to plug in now than maybe ever before. We must be willing to build and grow with these folks and create a force capable of withstanding oppression. This regime is not going to go peacefully and we must prepare for the fight ahead.

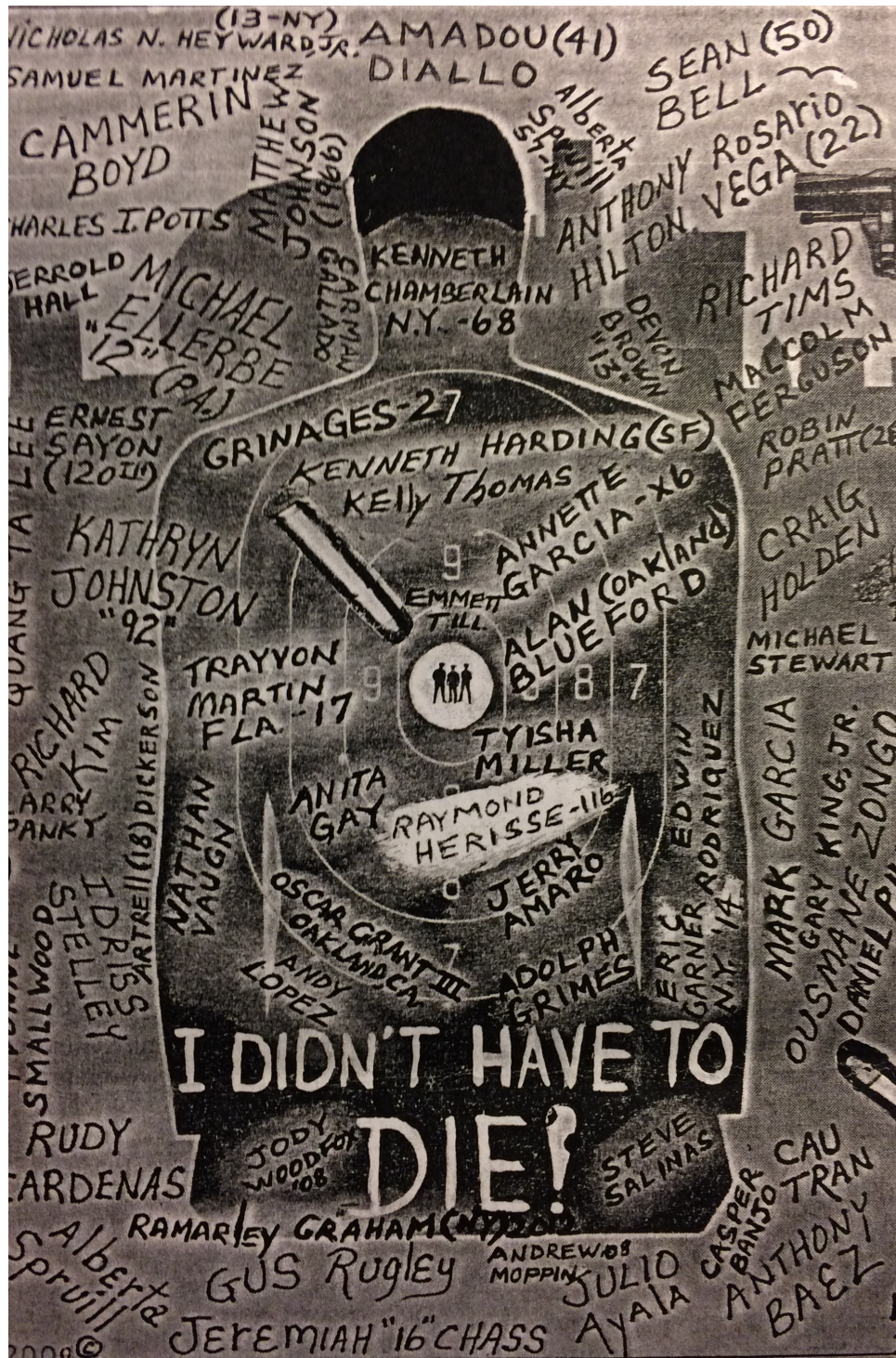


Image credit: James P. Anderson, P.O. Box C-11400, 4EY9, San Quentin, CA 94974

Even the End of the World will be Blamed on Niggas...

J'Sun Howard

the day will come & it won't be biblical—
no trumpets, seals broken, or winged
horsemen to set blood to flames or ice.
god will be silent or he'll possess
our black bodies & silently alter how it
knows suffering a latent form of immortality
in need of waking; alter it to outlast
the cruelest of imaginations. we'll be
a chorus of naked creatures promenading
into the firmament to cloak ourselves
in moonlight. asphodels will crown our heads
& litter the blackening heavens. & hymns.
no hymns will be sung because hymns
won't be needed for extinction. new holy text
are if you can find a prophet to scribe it.
how foolish to believe this day wouldn't come!
they can imagine everything but their
own demise? the fierce fuschia glint in our bleeding
eyes will be enough to send them to nothing.
& we will hear it thunderously & thunderously
until their last breaths. we won't have time
to contemplate exhaustion or claim
to be saviors. the day will come
& we'll be standing on our porches
passing a blunt & drinking hennessy
as we know the end is ours. as we genesis
a tomorrow, an eternity in the constellations.

*

it was the first time i felt i could win.
face to face with a shadow blacker than mine.
i always knew there was at least one way
to follow it. to wait. trick it into believing
it was god. as i stare at these three moons
orchestrating the glitter violet & cerise
of our sunless sky, i know i've only ever
needed my body to outlive what tried to name
me a weapon. most angels can wear out
at least a thousand demons; i exceeded them by mere
four thousand. it doesn't countervail the blood
slavery left to irrigate earth & grow dinosaurs
& deadly flowers of what used to be we were lucky
to not meet. i shot the first one in both his eyes;
his mother shrieked & wept like mary, like black mothers
who knew their sons would be waiting for them here.
after the first one, i didn't feel anything. or i felt
power was the last thing that made me whole.
if i knew what i know now, i'd probably would've
made it here a long time ago. it's exhausting
to suffer & survive. to wake up & live with death.
everytime i clean my wings, i bless my weakness,
remember how easy it is to spell "nigger" by shooting
a gun six times into the bodies that only knows
us shadows, & wait & wait & wait some more...

Our Oakland, Our Solutions

*Stop the Injunctions Coalition**

Introduction

In February 2010, City Attorney John Russo, with the support of the Police Department, publicly announced plans to institute gang injunctions in the city of Oakland, California. The first of these injunctions delineated a 100-block “safety zone” in North Oakland, a historically Black community bordering a wealthy shopping district. The injunction named 14 Black men, one Vietnamese man, and 70 “John Does”—people who could be added at a later date—and the entire “Northside Oakland” gang. Approved in October 2010, the North Oakland injunction remains in temporary status.¹

In October 2010, the Oakland City Attorney’s office announced a second injunction in the Fruitvale/San Antonio district—a predominately Latina/o neighborhood with a large immigrant population. This injunction sought to greatly expand the reach of this policing tool, both geographically and numerically, as it delineated a 400-block “safety zone” and named 42 individual men and the Norteños street gang as an unincorporated association. A preliminary injunction was filed against five of the named individuals in September 2011, followed by a preliminary injunction against the remaining 37 named individuals in February of 2012. The preliminary injunction also sues the Norteños street gang as an unincorporated association.²

All told, the City Attorney planned to implement at least 11 injunctions across the city before the end of 2010. However, when the first injunction was announced, political organizations, community members, lawyers, and some of the defendants immediately organized against it. Understanding that policing is never a viable remedy to neighborhood problems, community members began educating themselves about the history of gang injunctions and what they might look like in Oakland. With this knowledge they started educating the public via street outreach and use of the media, and began discussing non-police alternatives to addressing violence and harm that support strong, healthy communities. In this piece we will first lay out what gang injunctions are as well as to detail the historical background to this type of policing, followed by an analysis of the fight against injunctions in Oakland.

Part One

Gang Injunctions Come to Oakland

What are gang injunctions?

A gang injunction is a civil suit filed against a group of people the authorities deem a public nuisance. It prohibits them from participating in certain activities in a defined “safety zone.”³ Barred activities usually include a combination of previously legal and already-illegal actions, such as: being outside during court-determined curfew hours; loitering; appearing in public with anyone police have labeled a gang member (including people not named in the injunction); possessing drugs; and wearing colors that law enforcement associates with the gang in question. In some cases, exceptions are made for attending church, school, and work, but these exceptions may not always include travel to and from these destinations, or, if they do, the individual is still subject to harassment until their destination is confirmed by a police officer. Individuals that violate the injunction can face up to six months in jail and/or a fine of \$1000—without a trial.

Gang injunctions are tools of suppression policing and are rapidly proliferating across California and the U.S. Suppression policing is the practice of aggressively delimiting activities that cops determine to be disorderly (such as loitering, vandalism, or congregating in groups) with the idea that suppressing these activities will prevent “serious crime.” Suppression tactics include stop and frisk, cuffing or detaining people without arresting them, pressuring people to consent to police searches, or establishing curfews or restrictions on where people can travel or congregate. Suppression policing is sometimes also referred to as “order maintenance policing” or “quality of life policing.” It has the effect of increasing police contact with and control over communities of color, often leading to imprisonment.

The classification of gang injunctions as civil suits creates difficult conditions both for the named individuals and their communities. Because they are not criminal proceedings, the defendants are not entitled to free, court-appointed attorneys, or to jury trials. Further, the burden of proof is lower than in a criminal trial: “clear and convincing” rather than “beyond a reasonable doubt.”⁴

Most gang injunctions include an “opt-out” clause. Opt-out provisions ostensibly allow those named on gang injunctions to demonstrate that they have severed ties with the gang. The supposed benefits of opting out include decreased stops and/or searches by police, the ability to have stronger ties to family and friends when not confined by the stipulations of the injunction zone and more options in terms of employment or education and housing. However, opt-out criteria, which are subject to the corroboration by police and the District Attorney’s office, require that defendants prove that they have not had any contact with law

enforcement for two full years after the injunction was filed (even if they had no contact with law enforcement before) and that they are not gang members.⁵ Additionally, defendants must pay a filing fee of some hundreds of dollars to participate. The opt-out process puts both the evidentiary and the financial burden onto the named individual. Additionally, the opt-out process can include informing on the activities and associations of other people, and ignores the complexities of involvement with gangs and of negotiating an exit from these organizations. Further, the public naming of people as gang members poses a number of problems: future harassment by law enforcement, exposure to retaliation from rival gangs, and barriers to employment and similar forms of social exclusion.

Ultimately, gang injunctions subject entire neighborhoods to increased surveillance and harassment as police are granted extensive discretion to stop, interrogate, and gather information on people in the injunction zone. The information they collect goes into classified databases such as CAL/GANG, which the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) characterizes as a “secret blacklist.”⁶ Police do not have to receive the approval of a judge or a magistrate to add someone to the database, nor do they have to notify the individual that they have been listed in one. These databases can have terrible consequences for people if they interact with police at a future date, even if they have no prior arrest record, and even if they are not suspected of a crime.

The Los Angeles City Attorney’s office filed the first gang injunction in 1987, and there have been over 150 filed in California since. They have been legally challenged on numerous occasions by defense attorneys and third-party litigators like the ACLU. In 1994 Oakland sought an injunction against the “B Street Boys” gang, and the ACLU contested it, saying that injunctions “flagrantly violate the rights of groups targeted specifically because of their age, ethnicity and relationships.”⁷ The court sided with the ACLU and declined to grant the order, concluding that such an injunction would be “overbroad, vague, and therefore unconstitutional.”⁸ The 1997 case of *People ex rel Gallo v Carlos Acuna* challenged the constitutionality of gang injunctions, arguing that injunctions violate defendants’ First Amendment right to free assembly. In this case, however, the California Supreme Court upheld the injunctions, finding that gang activity falls under the definition of a public nuisance. This ruling set a green-light legal precedent for future injunctions.

Despite numerous studies on injunctions, there is no conclusive evidence to demonstrate that they significantly decrease violence.⁹ Police and media reports of injunctions improving safety are seldom backed by significant or convincing evidence.¹⁰ Cheryl Maxson has written that stories of reductions in crime through use of injunctions “are often compelling, but are never buttressed with supporting evidence that meets minimal scientific standards of evaluation.”¹¹ Maxson’s research team found little support for a positive effect when they researched patterns of violence before and after an injunction was implemented in San Bernardino,

California. In fact, negative effects were observed in areas adjoining the safety zone.¹² Other studies highlight the fundamental contradiction that gang injunctions not only fail to reduce violence in the safety zones but also force the activities they are designed to control into the immediately surrounding neighborhoods, as had occurred with the North Oakland injunction by 2011.¹³

The ACLU similarly found that after an injunction was introduced in the San Fernando Valley, crime decreased temporarily, but then rose again.¹⁴ In addition, gang suppression models have been criticized because findings show that in areas where suppression is used, diversion programs fall by the wayside.¹⁵

Most telling, an investigation by the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* found the city's gang injunctions had not reduced violence in targeted neighborhoods. However, Oakland Police Chief Anthony Batts—who had introduced the injunctions when working as chief in Long Beach—pointed to the Long Beach injunctions as successes.¹⁶ Likewise, the Oakland City Council was twice presented with dismal statistics revealing that violent crime had increased in North Oakland since the temporary injunction had been in place, neither politicians nor police made any move to de-authorize the injunctions.¹⁷

Clearly perception often trumps reality: in response to the statistics showing violent crime had gone *up* in the North Oakland safety zone since the injunction went into effect, one Oakland City Council member said that she would vote to continue the injunctions because her constituents and outside corporate interests interested in settling in Oakland *perceived* that crime had decreased.¹⁸ In our experience during City Council meetings, these constituents were usually members of the Chamber of Commerce, members of Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPCs; organizations with pre-existing, information-sharing relationships with the OPD), homeowners, and even people who do not live in the injunction zones. By contrast, during the same period, we heard story after story of young people of color terrorized by the police. Unfortunately, constituents who for reasons of race or class privilege are not directly subject to suppression policing can often be complicit with. As municipal governments continue to adopt gang injunctions instead of investing in effective safety programs planned and implemented by communities themselves, it becomes clearer and clearer that reducing violence isn't their actual goal.

The Historical Significance of Injunctions and Suppression-Style Policing

Gang injunctions are part of a long history of racialized police suppression in low-income communities of color. Racist attacks against Black residents in Los Angeles, California in the 1950s set the scene for what we now relate to as street gangs. White young men were known to cruise Black neighborhoods in the city, harassing and beating up the Black residents. The white police force had no interest

in addressing this racist violence, so Black residents organized their own groups for self-protection.¹⁹

In the 1960s, the aggressive and repressive presence of the police in Black communities was foundational to the formation of the Black Panther Party. Self-defense had long been a primary issue of concern in Black urban—and rural—areas, and police repression (as well as white supremacist terrorism) escalated community violence. According to historians Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, “The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders reported that forty-three race-related uprising occurred in the United States during 1966...only 15 were reported in 1964.”²⁰ According to author Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar in *Black Power*, most of these rebellions were sparked by cases of police violence.²¹

After years of patient, nonviolent tactics won only limited state reforms, many Black activists concluded that the government of the U.S. and its constitution were, to paraphrase Huey Newton, unwilling and unable to incorporate racial minorities.²² “All of these efforts,” he wrote in *In Defense of Self-Defense: Executive Mandate Number One*, “have been answered by more repression, deceit, and hypocrisy.”²³ While resistance has always been a feature of Black history in the United States, the urban rebellions of 1960s indicated a new level of confrontation with systematic exertions of white supremacy and the violence that persisted throughout and, in spite of, the Civil Rights Movement.

The Black Panther Party was one of many organizations that were openly critical of the established order and voiced dissension towards the government’s domestic and foreign policies. The Third World Left, as the social movements for self-determination led by people of color identified themselves at the time, saw U.S. police forces and the FBI as the repressive enemy that reinforced/enforced structural inequality and daily racism. The Black Panther Party identified with revolutionary struggles globally and allied itself with other radical organizations such as the Brown Berets, the Young Lords Party, the Young Patriots, and the American Indian Movement, which were all challenging the systemic oppression of people of color in the United States and worldwide. Communities of color organized together to provide for the needs that the state had historically, repeatedly, and systematically failed to meet. This approach attracted aggressive attention from the repressive apparatus of the U.S. government—most famously, the FBI’s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). COINTELPRO consolidated federal, state, and local police efforts to infiltrate, watch, imprison, provoke, create conflict between, and assassinate leaders and activists in attempts to neutralize progressive and radical organizations, with a particular emphasis on Black radical organization.²⁴ The state through its federal and local policing agencies, sought to suppress these movements with aggressive and decisive actions that would splinter, weaken, and ultimately destroy them. The ability of the state to determine what did and did not constitute criminal behavior was crucial to its ability to maintain political power.²⁵

As citizens of the United States, Civil Rights Movement participants demanded equal access to the institutions regulated by the state. In contrast, revolutionary Black Nationalism and the Third World Left recognized that structural oppression was fundamental to the system and demanded a *transformation* of the state and social institutions. Federal, state, and local police had differing responses to these movements. Yet, street-level, highly public violence and orchestrated, federally sponsored disruption served to illustrate the militarized tactical foundation for the suppression model of policing. These models were often intimately connected to the suppression models employed by the U.S. military in places like Vietnam—wherein populations would be strategically pushed into cordoned off areas, their movements restricted and highly surveilled so as to both pacify their ability to resist military occupation while also attempting to sever their contact with organized insurgents (this methodology—also used by the apartheid regime in South Africa, by Israel in the occupied territories, and presently by the U.S. in Iraq—has often been characterized by its abject failure to address its intended effect, and its actual stroking of insurgency).

In the 1980s, unemployment and poverty rates across the United States remained high as the federal government slashed social spending, seriously depleting housing subsidies, training and employment service, as well as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. With industries closing factories and moving labor overseas, manufacturing was no longer an employment sector that could provide working class and union jobs to the urban people of color in California. The simultaneous state repression of Third World Left movements for self-determination created a climate in which poor communities of color were being decimated both politically and economically.

The systematic movement of drugs into these areas, in some cases directly related to U.S. foreign policy (most famously, the emergence of crack cocaine in Los Angeles being a result of U.S. aid to right wing death squads in Central America)²⁶ spurred an informal economy that promised economic opportunity, in spite of its illegality and potentially lethal danger. In *City of Quartz*, Los Angeles historian Mike Davis writes, “The Crips and the Bloods are the bastard offspring of the political parties of the 1960s. Most of the gangs were born out of the demise of those parties. Out of the ashes of the Black Panther Party came the Crips and the Bloods and the other gangs.”²⁷ As a result, the local and federal criminalization of explicitly Third World Left formations shifted to target street organizations, ushering in a war on gangs.

A series of laws in the 1980s and ‘90s funneled additional funding to local police agencies, making it possible for them to become increasingly militarized. More and more, they incorporated SWAT teams and military equipment into routine policing and sought out training from military units worldwide. These policy investments paved the way for the proliferation of gang injunctions. In 1988, the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Protection (STEP) Act instituted felony

prosecution of active gang members, felony penalties against adults who coerce youth into joining a gang, and possible life terms in prison for murder convictions involving drive-by shootings.²⁸ The law also outlined penalties for graffiti and the sale of illegal weapons. Then the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 formed the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and implemented the devastating Three Strikes law and the Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which amplified the crackdown on gang activity and provided increased funds for local gang enforcement.²⁹

Today, nearly every police department in California has an anti-gang unit, many funded and supported through the 1992 FBI Safe Streets Violent Crime initiative. Following September 11, 2001, the federal government has additionally offered specific funding streams for gang enforcement and incentives for local police collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This collaboration exposes defendants to “terror enhancement” penalties for a varied number of charges, including some gang-related offenses.³⁰ Culturally and politically the lines between “terrorist”, “insurgent”, “immigrant”, and “gang-member” have been aggressively blurred. Communities, particularly poor communities of color, find their neighborhoods being viewed by police as warzones, replete with military hardware and technology, as well as theories and strategies of containment, neutralization, and restriction of movement.

Why We Oppose Injunctions

While law enforcement, city governments, and the media tout the supposed benefits of gang injunctions, they rarely mention the devastating negative effects. Injunctions lead to increased police harassment and brutality, decreased community unity, family separation, racial profiling, and gentrification. Individuals named in the injunction often find it impossible to get a job, especially since the injunctions appear on background checks.

Injunction enforcement relies on visual identification of alleged gang members and gives law enforcement an incredible amount of discretion. Gang injunctions lead to the increased harassment of people who fit the description of anyone on the list, in effect amounting to racial profiling.³¹ They sustain white supremacy by stigmatizing entire groups of people as probable criminals. Young men of color are disproportionately labelled as gang members, and the consequences are felt by family, friends, and community members. While whites make up a significant share of actual gang membership, they are rarely identified as gang members by police. No gang injunction in California’s history has ever targeted a white gang or person.³²

In the long-term, gang injunctions frequently usher in a wave of gentrification. The first injunction in North Oakland specifically cited that as an

intended outcome. A joint report by the Oakland City Attorney's Office and the OPD, delivered to the Public Safety Committee of the Oakland City Council on February 11, 2010, stated that "providing additional law enforcement tools and resources at the local level to improve public safety and eradicate criminal street gangs will help create a better environment for economic growth and development."³³ Redevelopment, also sometimes called "urban renewal," historically has forcibly displaced poor and working class populations, turning over their land to wealthy redevelopers for free or a below-market-value price. Even though levels of violence may increase or stay the same with a gang injunction in place, white and middle to upper class people perceive that the police are "doing something about crime," so they feel safer and move in.

Proponents of the injunctions explicitly support "blight" policing in North Oakland. Some praise the economic changes that accompany expulsion of poorer people from foreclosed properties and gladly to welcome in "professionals...those who have steady employment, income and reserves in the bank."³⁴ Meanwhile, people of color are pushed out of neighborhoods and as they feel more threatened due to intensified surveillance and increased police presence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar push-outs have occurred in those neighborhoods where injunctions were imposed in San Francisco—in the Mission, Western Addition, and Hunter's Point.

Finally, gang injunctions consume a tremendous amount of resources from city budgets that could build strong, stable and healthy communities.³⁵ In fact, the actual amount of money spent on injunctions is often hard to quantify when considering the multiple pots (City Attorney and police department staff time, costs of patrols, litigation costs, etc.) from which the funding is allocated. City officials, we have found, are resistant to push for disclosure of these various amounts, obscuring the real costs of injunctions and to avoiding any accountability. Despite the fact that injunctions have not been proven to be an effective violence prevention tool, municipalities often choose to implement injunctions at the expense of violence prevention programs or community-based programs such as youth centers.³⁶ Oakland continues to experience a serious budget shortfall, and yet, the city favors investing more money in the police department, rather than supporting the library, education systems or Parks and Recreation.

The civic participation of named individuals as well as that of their families is invalidated by the criminalizing effects of injunction. As such, their experiences of police harassment, raids, and imprisonment fail to be taken into account as evidence of the negative effects of injunctions. This type of social and economic isolation, which also undermines community cohesion and stability, is more likely to cause, rather than reduce violence. The growing tensions of isolation, disunity, instability, and violence have an extremely corrosive effect on the ground from which individuals and neighborhoods could organize toward changing their conditions in the short, medium, and long term. When viewed in this way, it can be

argued that injunctions are not actually intended to reduce violence, but rather are specifically designed to target communities of color for economic and social dissolution.

Part Two
Resisting Injunctions

The Fight Begins

In August 2009, the City of Oakland appointed Anthony Batts as the Chief of Police. As Police Chief in Long Beach, CA, Batts had implemented gang injunctions. Working in concert with Oakland City Attorney John Russo, Batts attempted to use injunctions in Oakland as part of his strategic plan to target “gangs, drugs and guns.” Batts embarked on an extensive public relations campaign, speaking publicly to neighborhood associations and holding press conferences to support this initiative, while labeling Oakland one of the most dangerous cities in the United States.

In February 2010, John Russo began his own public relations campaign to push gang injunctions, meeting with police-aligned groups like the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPCs) and members of the Oakland Neighborhood Watch Steering Committee. Russo filed both injunctions on behalf of the People of California, allowing him to pursue the suits without having the approval of City Council or the Mayor while drawing down scarce city funds to litigate and enforce the injunctions. As of June 2011, the litigation cost of the injunctions has topped \$2 million.

In addition to naming entire gangs, Oakland’s gang injunctions name specific individuals who are allegedly affiliated with “North Side Oakland” and the Norteños. Initially, both injunctions named an additional 60-70 John Does, allowing individuals to be added on a rolling and indefinite basis. The City Attorney’s office repeatedly claimed that the injunctions only named adults and would only target adults, yet already youth in North Oakland have reported being stopped by the police and asked if they were named in the injunction.³⁷

Police intervention into the East Oakland injunction began early in the process. In an atypical move, the City Attorney used the OPD to deliver documents notifying defendants that they were being named in the injunction. The result was that the OPD began “multitasking”: they would stop by an individual’s home to deliver the legal papers, and then proceed to search the residence with as many as eight cops at a time. Stop the Injunction Coalition’s legal team began receiving calls from unrepresented defendants, and heard stories about how the police had interrogated their younger siblings, terrified their families, and ransacked their homes.

Those defendants who were bold enough to contest the gang injunctions were met with the force of multiple sectors of the prison industrial complex. For example, a parole officer learned that a defendant targeted by the Fruitvale injunction and a co-defendant had been stopped by police on their way to a meeting with their defense attorney. When the defendant next appeared in court to fight against being named on the injunction, the parole officer claimed he had violated his parole by associating with a “known gang member” and was arrested. The co-defendant in question had never been convicted of a gang crime and did not have any “gang conditions” in his probation agreement. The logic here was that because these men were both defendants in the gang injunction case, one could be arrested for “associating” with the other. The assumption is that both defendants are guilty until proven innocent. The defendant that was arrested had been working with the coalition and had just previously given several interviews to media. Upon his arrest, the City Attorney used his twitter account during working hours to mock the defendant. The defendant spent several months in jail and prison before being cleared of the parole violation.

Organizing Opposition

Almost as soon City Attorney Russo announced his plan to unleash injunctions across Oakland, community members and organizations began to speak out and organize, forming the Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC). This broad coalition—composed of organizations, youth, lawyers, named defendants, and other community members—mounted a three-pronged campaign against the injunctions. To date, this is the only campaign to challenge injunctions collectively (rather than each defendant hiring a private attorney) and has informed similar struggles from Santa Barbara to Los Angeles and Sacramento.

STIC understood that increasing police discretion would negatively affect entire communities through the act of policing itself, would drain funds from social services, and facilitate gentrification.³⁸ With that understanding in mind, we took up both informing our neighbors about the impacts of the injunctions to bolster support for our campaign and to reduce the isolation people named on the list and their families faced as a result of being targeted by the injunctions.

Very early in the process we reached a crucial consensus that we would struggle to defeat the injunctions themselves, and not just try to remove individual people from the list. While the fight in the court forced us to defend individuals, as a coalition we never argued on the basis of innocence or guilt. Instead, we held firm that people who had caused harm to others were still a part of our communities and needed strong support and resources rather than policing and imprisonment. In this vein, advocating for concrete alternatives to reduce violence was always a central part of our strategy, and we looked to coalition members who had been imprisoned, as well as youth who were targeted by policing, to provide this

expertise in what strategies could have helped them avoid police violence or imprisonment, had they been available.

We used grassroots organizing and legal strategies that worked in communication with and in support of each other, though not always explicitly. Sometimes this meant that the organizing contingent had to push the public dialogue in ways that the limitations of legal discourse and procedure would not allow. Sometimes the legal team had to prioritize serving the immediate, representational needs of their clients—the named individuals—in ways that further entrenched the discourse in legal bureaucracy, which the grassroots movement could not publicly valorize. Consistent media work supported all of these approaches as we aimed to defeat the injunctions—in the courthouse, with the City Council, and in the public discourse.

Mounting Resistance

Gang injunctions were introduced in Oakland just as a large, vibrant grassroots movement against police brutality had been reawakened after the murder of Oscar Grant III—execution style, as he lay face down, handcuffed and restrained on a subway platform—by a public transit cop. His murder was witnessed and recorded by hundreds of people, who disseminated images and video widely. Longstanding distrust of police coupled with the overwhelming attention to Oscar Grant’s death put state efforts to immobilize and displace communities of color in sharp relief and provided the context for the struggle against gang injunctions.

While the organizing in responses to the Grant killing and those against gang injunctions maintained separate identities and courses of action, the Black-led “Justice for Oscar Grant” movement regularly turned out to STIC meetings, town halls, City Council meetings, and other actions to offer support. Likewise, from the beginning STIC’s struggle was against the use of policing to address social, economic, and political problems, not just against the use of gang injunctions. While the injunctions provided a worthy target, organizing against the injunctions was also consistently a way to generate opposition to the police state and to develop meaningful community-based solutions to violence.

An organization of formerly imprisoned people, many of whom had personal experience with gangs, called the first meetings of what would become Stop the Injunctions Coalition. The coalition drew from several community organizations’ membership bases in Oakland in collaboration with interested individuals from the North Oakland area. STIC was also in contact with organizers who had fought against gang injunctions in neighboring San Francisco. A woman who ran a community center within the injunction zone and had personal connections with the families of many of the young men named in the injunction provided meeting space. While she wasn’t a formal member of the coalition, she consistently connected us with people who would be directly affected by the

injunction, informed us about community events that we should attend, provided neighborhood history, and gave us tips for building trust in the neighborhood. With a regular meeting place established, we quickly formed media, legal, and outreach teams, and began creating flyers, information packets, talking points, and a petition against the injunctions.

Coalition members developed a set of demands to frame the campaign in North Oakland. The demands included: an end to the use of gang injunctions and removal of people from the gang database; community participation in decision-making affecting Oakland residents; increased support for community programs; an end to gentrification and an increase in safe, affordable housing; police accountability; and enforcement of Oakland's status as a sanctuary city, including non-cooperation with ICE. Having unified demands that were determined collectively by the coalition was crucial to ensuring that we could focus our messaging and campaign strategy.

We developed messages stemming from the demands and used them to inform language for flyers and outreach efforts. Because the coalition emerged from people representing a variety of politics and perspectives, the work to develop coherent messages that all coalition members could get behind was difficult. We wrestled with tensions between what we thought could be winning messages and articulations of what the coalition actually wanted. We struggled to achieve a balance between concrete details and rhetoric. And we debated as to what kind of language would resonate most strongly with the neighbors.

We divided our media effort into two streams: working with the press and developing propaganda. We pursued traditional tactics such as sending press releases, holding press conferences, speaking on radio shows, and writing letters to the editor and op-eds. We also developed fact sheets, rebuttal statements to the City Attorney, a Know Your Rights pocket guide addressing issues related to the injunctions, and outreach flyers. We created a blog (stoptheinjunction.wordpress.com) that served as a repository for all the tools we were developing, and which we also used to publish our own statements about the injunctions, to announce upcoming mobilizations, and to launch the campaign's audio and video media. Working with a local radio personality, STIC also held a "people's town hall" broadcast from the Oakland City Council chamber. During the meeting community members testified about the effects of policing on their communities and offered ideas about what alternatives to policing would make their neighborhoods safer.

Strong messages are only as powerful as their messengers, however. The coalition developed a group of key spokespeople that could offer statements and quotes, speak at press conferences, give interviews, and act as the faces of the movement. STIC's spokespeople included neighbors living in the injunction zone, a parent of one of the named defendants, lawyers, and formerly imprisoned people. We trained them on speaking to media outlets and practiced using the messages in

response to a variety of situations. These trainings were good opportunities to prepare coalition members for interviews; they also helped us hone our messaging and tailor our talking points.

Early on, our media strategy focused primarily on community education. Since the City Attorney snuck the temporary North Oakland injunction through with minimal public input, many neighbors did not know that an injunction was to be put in place, or what it would do. In the press we focused on highlighting the anti-democratic nature of the process of implementing the injunctions. As we became more cohesive as a coalition, our press work and propaganda became less about merely sharing information and more about proactively offering analysis and suggesting alternatives to the injunctions. The coalition took up the slogan, “Our Oakland, Our Solutions,” as a way to express the centrality of our struggle for self-determination within the fight to eliminate injunctions.

In our early street outreach efforts, we began door-knocking, talking to small business owners and people on the street, going into corner stores and barber shops and cafes, and regularly visiting a flea market that was close to the injunction zone. We also spoke at every community forum we could and presented workshops for organizations and classrooms. We passed out flyers, talked to people about the injunction, invited them to events, and collected petition signatures. Sometimes we had posters to pass out or hang up in businesses. Later on, our outreach teams would each stick to a specific few-block area to build relationships and familiarity with the neighbors.

Competing Narratives

People in North Oakland were eager to share their views on policing and its impacts when we did door-to-door canvassing and general outreach at local shops and flea markets. Listening to their stories strengthened our resolve and our ability to talk confidently to a variety of audiences. Documenting individual accounts of police violence was a key strategy to move community members, the City Council, and the media to envision what gang injunction enforcement would look like in North Oakland. It also helped us counter the biggest lie that gang injunction proponents were telling: that the injunction would only affect the individuals who were named by it. The effort to counter that particular misinformation campaign was present in everything we did. Luckily, many North Oakland residents, especially youth of color, were clear that they would be the targets of any increased policing in their neighborhoods whether or not they had been named in the injunction.

Stop the Injunctions Coalition’s role was also to help shift the debate so that the terrain on which grassroots organizing took place was one that we were shaping, rather than the Oakland Police Department and the City Attorney’s office. In order to do this, we listened closely to how different sets of people talked about

policing, gang injunctions, violence, and interventions so we could be flexible and targeted with our messaging as we moved from audience to audience. Youth groups and local artists made beautiful posters and banners, community members were as spokespeople, hundreds of people were mobilized, and we started to help shape the story the media was telling about the injunctions.

The City Attorney's office was caught off guard by STIC's large and loud presence against the North Oakland injunction and immediately tried to discredit us by saying that we didn't care about gang violence. While we had been talking with neighbors, allies, and the media about gang injunctions being a waste of resources, we began to see that we needed stronger language about alternative solutions to gang violence. We fortified our arguments by presenting examples of local organizations working with gang-affected youth—without involving cops. These included a community center bringing youth from different neighborhoods together for a weekly dinner and political education, and an arts center providing after school programming. We offered these organizations and others as strong community and youth empowerment resources and collaborated with them in our organizing efforts. City officials were not receptive to these ideas, but the public often was. By highlighting local groups' programs, we forged key alliances that were crucial in building broad-based movement.

In and Out of Court

Alongside these community efforts, STIC's legal strategy always played a defined role in the campaign, developing from a relationship between organizers from targeted communities and legal advocates. At its core, the approach was based on the shared assumption that litigation could not be the primary path to eliminating the injunctions, and that building power and unity at the community level is the only way to make lasting change. At the same time, since courts are where the gang injunctions are prosecuted, we had little choice but to fight there as well and to work with attorneys to bring community voices into that forum.

From the beginning of the struggle we used the court dates as opportunities to rally against the proposed injunctions, build momentum, and gather media attention. Community mobilizations to court and rallies outside the courthouse were important parts of an integrated legal and organizing strategy during the North Oakland hearing and continue to be part of STIC's strategy. A consistent and strong community presence offered support to the defendants, let the judge know his decisions were being monitored, and also gave the coalition opportunities to voice our side of the story, developing rally speakers and media spokespeople in the process.

As we grew, our coalition began to shape the very terms of the debate. We produced educational flyers and videos, screened movies on the policing of youth and street organizations, held Know Your Rights events, and created police

complaint reporting forms and an anonymous police abuse hotline for Oakland residents. The cumulative effect led to clear calls for neighborhood self-determination being heard in City Hall, in the press, and beyond.

Moving East

The lessons we learned organizing against the North Oakland injunction left us well-positioned to fight when the City Attorney announced plans for a second injunction, this time in the Fruitvale/San Antonio neighborhoods of East Oakland.

Fruitvale already had established networks that were tapped by organizers from the neighborhood to spread information and mobilize people. These networks were based on long-standing relationships with community-based organizations in the injunction zone, including some that had direct connections to many of the defendants. Although the Fruitvale neighborhood has experienced some development, it had not experience the decades of destabilizing, fragmenting, and disenfranchising gentrification that the North Oakland neighborhood had.

When the second injunction was announced, Fruitvale organizers and residents had already seen the results of the North Oakland injunction and understood what it would mean to give police even more authority. Fruitvale is a predominantly Latina/o community that is heavily impacted by the collaboration between local cops and ICE agents. In relationship to recent city-sponsored economic redevelopment projects in the area, Fruitvale residents saw a heightened police presence—and with it increased racial profiling, harassment, checkpoints, raids, imprisonment, and deportations, and police killings.³⁹

Years earlier, in 2007, several organizations with broad working-class, Third World constituencies—many of them based in the Fruitvale—joined to form the Oakland Sin Fronteras Coalition. The focus of the alliance was to bring attention to the attacks on migrants and show their relationship to militarization, imprisonment, and police violence. When the injunctions hit, many of these organizations understood the importance of stopping yet another attempt to augment policing powers. Member groups of the Sin Fronteras Coalition took the lead in gathering together educators, community members and youth groups, including those working with gang-impacted and gang-affiliated youth, to discuss strategies and community solutions. They came to a North Oakland STIC screening of *Bastards of the Party*, a film STIC had been showing with ally organizations to deepen a shared historical analysis of injunctions. After the film, the group from the Fruitvale continued to visit North Oakland STIC meetings to learn what strategies had been successful in the North and to initiate collaboration and tool sharing. The groups ultimately joined forces and STIC expanded our focus to include East Oakland.

Several lawyers took the Fruitvale/San Antonio cases on a *pro bono* basis, offering substantially more legal support than defendants had when fighting the

North Oakland injunction. The attorneys met with gang outreach workers to learn more about the individuals named on the list. The legal team began by representing a single defendant, hoping to get his name removed from the injunction, but soon realized that they couldn't effectively litigate the case that way. They realized the only way to challenge the scope of the injunction and the various restrictive terms was to represent as many of the defendants as possible.

The court system inherently individualizes social and economic problems, so the legal team had no choice but to try to prove that their individual clients were no longer gang members, were innocent of their charges, or had been rehabilitated—or else, to highlight school- or job-related reasons the injunction shouldn't be applied. At the community level, organizing and messaging were shaped to make sure that this individualization did not leave anyone behind; we fought for more community resources and argued that the injunctions were illegitimate. This combined pressure forced the judge to waive the \$945 court fees.

By the time the City Attorney pushed for the East Oakland injunction, we had already learned some important lessons for our media and public education work. We knew that consistent core messages and reliable, articulate spokespeople were our strongest assets. As the organizing began to incorporate the struggle in East Oakland, we worked with community organizers in the Fruitvale to modify STIC's messages to integrate their language and priorities. We expanded our pool of spokespeople to include defendants in the new injunction, as well as young people, youth advocates, and others from East Oakland. We also consolidated demands from the two neighborhoods:

1. Stop the injunctions and all police violence.
2. Community self-determination: We know what our communities need; we have our own solutions.
3. Defend immigrant communities. No deportations or collaboration with ICE.
4. Stop gentrification.
5. Accountability from city government and increased decision-making power for all Oakland residents.

Shaping Public Discourse

Fighting the injunctions in the press could only work as one means of drawing attention to the issue. Drawing on the long, vibrant history of cultural resistance in Oakland, art, music, and performance have become crucial pieces of STIC's media work. Creating a visual language for the campaign was as important as solid talking points. We joined forces with an artists' collective to create campaign posters, and coalition members in both neighborhoods held banner-making parties to ensure that our public presence was as dynamic and colorful as the coalition itself. Local musicians wrote songs and shot videos specifically for the anti-

injunction effort. Youth organizers created chants based on popular songs, including a coalition favorite based on Cali Swag District's "Teach Me How to Dougie." Members of a local cultural center helped coordinate street theater performances for our rallies and incorporated an anti-injunction storyline into their youth theater group's year-end performance. Artists from that same cultural center have also collaborated with defendants named in the East Oakland injunction to design murals in the injunction zone.

As we refined our demands, talking points, and strategy, we knew that we had to educate and include the community that would be impacted by the injunctions. We began by conducting town halls where we disseminated information, developed strategy and demands, and collected ideas about ways to mitigate violence in the neighborhoods without increased policing. To organize the town halls we began by outreaching to the defendants, their families and friends, community elders, and gang-affected and gang-affiliated youth. Through this process we were able to get a number of defendants to lead pieces of the organizing work, tell their stories in community settings, become media spokespeople, and educate young people about the affect the gang injunctions had on their lives, their families, and on the broader community.

We all agreed on the need for activities during which we could shape the public discourse, rather than just showing up whenever the City Attorney or police chief spoke about the injunctions. Youth took the lead in creating spaces where young people could develop ideas for actions and led the planning and training for them. Some actions followed those tested in North Oakland, including press conferences, marches, City Hall and court mobilizations, as well as street theater, educational workshops, banner drops, wheat pasting, and community bike rides through the injunction zones.

A Week of Action

Because City Council is supposed to direct the City Attorney's office, we knew that it was important to get Council members to take a public stance on the injunctions. We began driving a wedge between the unpopular City Attorney and the City Council. The City Council and the newly-elected mayor initially dodged the issue by saying that they hadn't been briefed on the injunctions, and therefore could not speak about it. We began mobilizing hundreds of community members once or twice a month to attend the City Council Public Safety Committee meetings and to speak against the injunctions.

During this period, our messaging gelled among our supporters, and a large and very diverse crowd seemed to speak with a single voice. After several months, we were able to pressure the Public Safety Committee, and later the entire City Council, to request further information about the injunctions from the City Attorney's office and the Oakland Police Department. When the report was

released, it showed that after one year the injunctions had cost \$760,000. We gained substantial ground on our argument that injunctions are a waste of resources in a cash-strapped city, and we used the informational hearing to offer our own report on the financial and social costs, as well as our suggested alternatives.

Meanwhile, the youth organizers suggested a “Week of Action” to educate and stir up energy among community members and to put pressure on city officials. This week in March 2011 became one of the most memorable moments in the campaign and generated energy not only among Oaklanders, but also among people fighting injunctions in neighboring cities.

The week was designed to build community support and culminated in a mass rally. We opened the week with a press conference highlighting the voices of teachers and emphasizing the trade-offs between education spending and the money spent on the injunctions. We also took the opportunity to reiterate that injunctions were not driven, recommended, or desired by the neighbors who would be most impacted by them. The next day we held bike rides in the North and East Oakland injunction zones to continue informing community members about this issue. The cyclists made stops at schools and other key community institutions in the zones. On Wednesday, we conducted more than 35 workshops throughout the Oakland school system, reaching at least 500 youth during which STIC discussed the injunctions and collected suggestions for addressing violence in our neighborhoods. These responses were turned into a report that was submitted by STIC youth members to the city later that month. Wednesday ended with a youth concert to create a safe and fun place for young people to enjoy themselves as a means of highlighting how rare such events are for the youth in Oakland.

Thursday we held a vigil for people affected by violence. It was attended by residents who had been hurt by all forms of violence, including families of those who have died at the hands of the Oakland police. The vigil demonstrated a key part of our strategy—showing that we, too, have been impacted by violence and care deeply about the solutions to it. Rejecting policing as a response to violence is foundational to our rejection of the gang injunction strategy. The vigil helped us reiterate that policing causes harm; that policing will only augment violence, not quell it.

The Week of Action culminated with a youth-led action in which young people walked out of school and marched through the East Oakland injunction zone, taking over nine major intersections, before arriving at the STIC demonstration. Over 500 people gathered in a main city plaza to rally against gang injunctions. The rally featured street theater, hip hop acts, and speakers.

Marking Progress

In spring 2011, after more than a year of controversy, City Council succumbed to pressure to bring the issue to a full vote, with the potential of defunding injunctions entirely. With only two weeks notice, we seriously stepped up our outreach. STIC and our allies made hundreds of calls and sent hundreds of emails to the City Council members and the mayor opposing the injunctions—and policing more broadly. We asked our allies to outreach to their members and to commit to speaking out against the injunctions.

The night of the vote, 30 community organizations sent representatives to testify against the injunctions, and 300 community members turned out, with more than 150 staying until midnight to speak to the City Council. While we lost the vote 4-3, the City Council also voted that no more injunctions could go forward without an independent review of the proposed East Oakland and temporary North Oakland injunctions. They also ordered that all John Does must be removed from both injunctions.

While these may seem small steps, they represent the most effective challenge to gang injunctions to date. Striking the John Does from the injunction limits the discretion police may apply in targeting potential defendants and thus limits the formal means through which police may exert their power. Instating a check system—“no more gang injunctions without an independent review”—actually halted hasty implementation of additional injunctions later that summer, thus representing a real strategic win; we curbed the ability of politicians to deploy injunctions at will.

In the course of the campaign, we faced many challenges, not the least of which was deeply ingrained support for policing among city officials. Additionally, the City Attorney’s office was equipped with substantial resources for a propaganda offensive against us. The fight has been constant, with various battlegrounds, and there have been months during which we would ask people to turn out once a week to court hearings, City Council meetings and even committee meetings within City Council. Maintaining energy and momentum and making sure that we were consistently reflecting on strategy and not just jumping from action to action were serious concerns that we struggled with. Another large challenge was making sure that as we fought this policing strategy we also continued providing support to the defendants and their families, especially those who were becoming primary targets due to their involvement in resistance work.

In North Oakland specifically, we had large challenges to overcome. We were unable to create sustained relationships with defendants named on the list for several reasons: *Pro bono* legal representation had not been available in that case and many of the people named were already imprisoned. We had a largely white outreach team trying to make meaningful, yet quick, connections in a working and middle class Black neighborhood experiencing gentrification. That this particular

North Oakland community had been worn down from decades of trauma, including the deadly police repression of the Black Panthers, also had an effect on organizing. Moreover, after the City Council decision, many people were deeply discouraged. Because so much of our base is made up of people who are generally excluded from decision-making, this disappointment had a serious impact on momentum. Yet the gains Oaklanders have made in our struggle against gang injunctions put us in a strong position for the next phase of our ongoing fight.

In August 2011, two City Council members proposed amending the May 17 vote and introducing two new injunctions. They also simultaneously proposed a day and night youth curfew and anti-loitering legislation. Calling upon our allies again and reminding them of our show of power just months earlier, we mobilized hundreds of concerned Oaklanders to City Hall in early October to speak out against all the proposals. We stayed at the microphone until midnight, challenging the racist nature of the policies and showing them to be exclusionary tools that would inflict more violence on communities already feeling the burden of policing. We also stressed how irresponsible it would be to funnel more funding toward new injunctions without having done the review of the existing ones. The City Council voted to send all three measures back to the Public Safety Committee for further review. As of June 2012, they have not pursued these proposals any further.

By uniting courtroom and grassroots organizing strategies under core demands linking gang injunctions to the systemic violence of policing, gentrification, the criminalization of immigrants, and lack of access to decision-making, the Stop the Injunctions Coalition sustained and grew itself and generated new possibilities for future struggles against state violence in Oakland and elsewhere.

Part Three

Lessons Learned*

When we look forward at what is next, we draw on some important lessons. Strong, clear, consistent messages are our most effective tools in making our case. When we speak in our own words using our own language, rather than that of the state, we are able to establish the terms of the fight and put ourselves in the position to take the offense rather than continually responding to our adversaries. Using the media, we have been able to help keep the political priorities of the campaign focused and clearly articulated across neighborhoods, organizations, and events, helping provide a picture of the coalition as unified. We kept opposition to the injunctions at the forefront of public discussion for over a year. We garnered attention and solidarity from communities across California, the U.S., and the world.

Our messages are only as strong as our messengers. Our effectiveness has come from our spokespeople remembering that they are delivering the messages of the coalition and not promoting themselves. Our coalition members did not lose sight of this. And we do not need to rely on corporate media outlets to engage local communities. We successfully combined self-made media with corporate media to provide a wide range of pieces in a variety of formats to communicate why injunctions are such a violent, dangerous policing tool. Creative use of self-made media can be powerful in subverting dominant messages. Most of all, our campaign is best served when media tactics follow the organizing strategy rather than trying to lead it.

In the courtroom, we were able to learn lessons from other legal fights and to wage the first “people’s” legal struggle against gang injunctions. By staying connected with the grassroots organizing, going over language and possible legal strategies, and taking much direction from the community, the legal team was able to bring the politics into and out of the courtroom—bringing defendants into the organizing, exposing the injustice of injunctions themselves, and creating time and space for the rest of us to move strongly in City Hall and in the media. We have to remember: most gang injunctions are implemented in a matter of weeks, with hearings often lasting only minutes. The Fruitvale courtroom struggle lasted many, many months and is far from over. While we have not been able to defeat the injunctions in court, we have scaled them back; the Fruitvale injunction is perhaps the weakest ever to be imposed.

When the City Attorney announced his gang injunction plans, he did so with a puffed-out chest and expecting no resistance. Because of the community’s organizing efforts, things have changed. Oakland has only two temporary injunctions, instead of the ten proposed. The once-arrogant City Attorney, John Russo, left town to take a job in a neighboring city, and Anthony Batts, the police chief who brought gang injunctions with him from Long Beach, resigned soon after. In the media, injunctions are almost always preceded by the adjective “controversial” and followed by comments about their costliness and unpopularity. Most Oaklanders now know what a gang injunction is, and more and more people are against them. Future injunctions seem unlikely.

Fighting Hard, Fighting Smart

Anti-injunction organizing has required a systemic analysis of policing and power that is challenging but that also creates many opportunities. By working to understand the systems that gang injunctions are a part of, as well as the histories of those systems, we were able to keep an eye on a bigger picture even as we were required to take specific actions in the here and now. In order to fight against the injunctions, we had to think and plan and act strategically. We had to ask: Why gang injunctions? Why now? Where do these things come from? Where are they

going? We had to learn some history. We had to educate ourselves politically. We had to figure out ways to respectfully navigate cultural and linguistic barriers.

For many of us, hanging around City Hall wasn't how we necessarily wanted to spend our Tuesday evenings and the courtroom was one of the last places we would go willingly. Many of us had never talked to press before. Many of us had never sat through hours of planning meetings or done much organizing at all. But by building an organizing framework that valued collectivity, leadership development, accountability, and discipline we were able to engage with these challenges and weaknesses and to turn that engagement into strength. One of the tests of that strength will be our ability to learn further lessons and apply them in the future. Another test will be our ability to communicate these lessons and have them applied by others in different locations.

In our grassroots organizing work, we learned how to make decisions as a coalition, build the leadership of a variety of people, and ignite the participation of other organizations for mobilizations. We learned that the city government, specifically the OPD and the City Attorney, were very well resourced, but were often lumbering and clumsy. While we know they are able to smash you hard if you're under their boot, we also learned that we could beat them in creativity, predict their moves, get out ahead, and outflank and out-sprint them. This knowledge was inspiring and we gained a lot of support and momentum in that process. But morale and momentum are hard to sustain, especially in the face of defeats—however technical and short-term.

The Future is Unwritten

The immediate future of STIC will be to monitor, de-legitimize and smash the existing injunctions; defend against the slim possibility of future injunctions; and continue to build and highlight all the community-based work happening to fight violence and harm in Oakland. Just as we learned a great deal from other cities' struggles, STIC has been contacted by organizers in cities throughout California beginning or continuing to fight injunctions in their communities. While much of the organizing in Oakland has been within the starkly delineated zones where the injunctions have been imposed, the ideas and strategies developed here could be useful elsewhere.

We hope that just as we learned from others, we will be able to share what we have learned. We hope that others will be able to improve on those lessons and strike decisive victories against gang injunctions all over the country. We hope that those victories will act as a basis for further gains against the violence of policing and toward fundamental shifts in power.

The idea of self-determination remains at the heart of how we understand and articulate our fight against gang injunctions. It helps us to remember that this fight is as much about building what we want as it is about tearing down what we

do not want. Self-determination by definition is a long-haul proposition, but it is surely attainable and definitely worth the struggle.



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Abolishing Policing in Oakland

Critical Resistance-Oakland

In loving memory of Rose Braz,
August 4, 1961 - May 3, 2017

“Dismantle, change, build” is the refrain that succinctly describes Critical Resistance’s abolitionist praxis. To us, abolition is a long-term vision as well as a strategy that can be applied in the day-to-day work of organizing—and winning—campaigns in our communities. We are a national organization, but the work of dismantling, changing, and building happens locally through our chapters. One example is the Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC), which existed from 2010 to 2012 in Oakland to fight the use of gang injunctions across the city. Critical Resistance-Oakland worked in coalition with over a dozen other groups to resist the criminalization of Black and Brown communities and demand a reinvestment in their well-being and self-determination instead. Through a multi-pronged abolitionist strategy, STIC successfully made Oakland the first city in the country to completely end the use of gang injunctions as a policing tactic.

We compiled responses from organizers in STIC to gain insights into what has happened since the victory. Organizers share their lessons from this recent historic campaign against policing. To clarify briefly: “policing,” in an abolitionist framework, is just one of the many institutions and social practices that constitute the U.S. prison industrial complex (PIC). By framing this project as an inquiry into the strategy of anti-policing insurgency in the East Bay Area, our respondents explore its implications in the broader movement for PIC abolition. The organizers point out STIC was not an isolated campaign, but rather built upon the “dual power” generated by prior work against the policing of Oakland youth and parallel struggles against solitary confinement in California prisons. Moreover, the legacy of the Black Panther Party—whose vision called for abolishing the racist capitalist state, ending U.S. imperialism, domestic warfare, and decriminalizing liberationist and sovereignty struggles—runs deep within the grassroots political cultures here in Oakland.

STIC built upon this genealogy of resisting state violence by persistently invoking Oakland’s lineage of liberation movements *without* mystifying or appropriating them in an exploitative way. This is important to highlight because many tendencies of the establishment Left are currently domesticating the history of these movements, the story of the Black Panther Party in particular. We actively strive to be non-participants in this new wave of Panther appropriation, opting for a relation to our local histories that learns from rather than systematizes or naively mimics the Party’s approach to praxis.

Since the very last gang injunctions were taken off the books in 2015, anti-policing work has only grown stronger in Oakland. The coalition's strategy of demanding an end to policing *as well as* a reinvestment in communities created a genuine space for healing and well-being in anti-policing work. This grew into new organizations like Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ) and projects like the Fruitvale community garden. Critical Resistance-Oakland also launched the Oakland Power Projects in 2014, which worked with community members who were impacted by the gang injunctions to further build community power and well-being without relying on the police. The Oakland Power Projects has worked with health-care providers to develop workshops and toolkits for building community power to intervene in health crises without police and 911. Additionally, we created a workshop called the "Abolition of Policing" to continue popular education around strategies to make PIC abolition a reality.¹ As we continue organizing against policing, prisons, and surveillance in the Bay Area, it is crucial to remember and learn from the fight against gang injunctions. Seize the time! This work is far from over.

"Anti-Policing" is Not a Dirty Word:
Some Initial Reflections on Organizing with STIC

Critical Resistance (CR): What did you learn from STIC about the ways the PIC operates and the ways it could be resisted?

Sagnicthe Salazar (SS): One huge lesson that I learned from the work with STIC was the connection between policing, prisons and gentrification. Learning about the dynamics around the country around gang injunctions and how in cities that have been gentrified there has been a prerequisite of increased policing and policies to either lock up or scare off a population, was incredibly clear. It was also really clear how certain communities get demonized and dehumanized as a way to build up a rhetoric and a story that justifies the need for increased policing. Fear and the false sense of safety that cops and prisons create for some people have been the gateway to allow cops license to do inhumane operations that disrupt entire communities and engage with individuals in inhumane ways. This story of fear for lack of safety is never backed up by actual dynamics on the ground. For example, in Oakland youth crime has decreased tremendously, yet the fear mongering around the street violence has used "youth" as a scapegoat to justify the increase of curfews and increase policing.

Though I already knew the power of centering and empowering the voice of those most impacted, it was definitely revelatory for me to witness the power of educating, organizing, and bringing to the forefront those most impacted. Working with the guys that were listed on the injunctions was not only powerful for our community in Fruitvale, it led to the creation of an organization, invigorated and

created a sense of urgency to youth organizers by showing a tangible need for action by bringing the guys around, and it led to the building of new leaders, as guys on the injunction list saw a whole community backing them up.

Though there were many more lessons, one other lesson I want to highlight was the strength of having a multi-pronged strategy. Doing work where we had grassroots organizing, legal and media work led to Oakland being the first city in the country to defeat a gang injunction and it allowed services to be provided to the guys on the list while never compromising our message and larger goal to remove the injunctions completely.

Woods Ervin (WE): Part of doing work with STIC was learning about the history of policing and the targeting of street orgs/gangs as part of validating police expansion. I learned about the sinister use of city civil court orders for the purpose of targeting Black and Brown communities—removing one’s right to legal representation when being identified as deserving of added policing. Also, I learned a tremendous amount about the gang validation process—the ways that almost any combination of attributes can arbitrarily get you validated and the impossibility of getting off—as well as the increased likelihood of imprisonment with police contact and penalties while in prison because of said validation.

I also learned about the ways in which a city can blanket target a specific area for an extra layer of policing and the impact that this has on communities of color. The gang injunction on some members of the community also affected everyone associated with those people within the area of the injunction. This dramatically increased the likelihood of community members leaving their neighborhood because of the experience of intensified policing. Unsurprisingly, the boundaries of the North Oakland Injunction are the exact same boundaries of the touted “NOBE,” [North Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville] otherwise known as the “hippest” place to live in the East Bay. The direct link between policing and gentrification was made very stark by watching this development unfold during our fight.

On a more positive note, I learned some powerful lessons in resistance, definitely via youth organizing. I learned about the history of Prop 21 in the Bay and the impact of youth organizing that went into protesting the passing of this law in the state.² This left behind a number of linked youth organizations with a tradition of organizing for youth self-determination. Due to this tradition, we were able to engage youth as a coalition via multiple workshops provided in schools and community centers. The youth then mobilized this information accordingly, self-organizing walkouts on protest days and becoming a powerful force when the city proposed a curfew as part of policing package alongside the gang injunctions.

Lastly, the work that was done by the legal team in relationship with the community organizers really helped me to understand the potential for “inside-outside” strategy. The way that the attorneys prioritized the needs of the codefendants on the injunction list while working to not undermine what the

coalition was doing made our work that much stronger, ensuring that we'd be able to achieve our goals.

Jay Donahue (JD): One of the biggest things I learned from organizing with the Stop the Injunctions Coalition is historically the PIC is used to enforce the larger overall project of social and economic control of people of color, poor people, queer people and others. Gang suppression tactics began to be used heavily in the 1980s to target street organizations that are ultimately the descendants of radical Third World Left organizations of the 1960s and 70s. The 1980s saw a confluence of government disinvestment in social and economic programs, the systematic movement of drugs into urban areas (sometimes directly related to U.S. foreign policy), and continued repression of Third World left movements for self-determination. It was this confluence that set the stage for the war on gangs, which was really another era of the war on the self-determination of people of color. We can draw parallels from how gang injunctions work in cities like Oakland and Los Angeles, particularly when we look at the geographic locations targeted for injunctions. In the case of the North Oakland injunction, the area, a historically black neighborhood, was being targeted for gentrification. The injunction was a way to make living in that area for Black people untenable and to further push out that community. The city also knew that because of years of repression and targeting that there was a lack of community organizing infrastructure and political power in those neighborhoods. Similarly, the San Antonio and Fruitvale neighborhoods where the East Oakland gang injunction was placed were also being targeted for gentrification, however, there is a long history of strong community organizing and cultural resistance in these neighborhoods, which I believe the city underestimated.

I also learned, or rather it was reinforced, that because the PIC works in many ways or has many tentacles that it reaches into every aspect of our lives, there are many places to attack the PIC and many ways to fight. I think we saw this quite clearly in the three pronged strategy that STIC employed. We had a grassroots strategy that used mobilizations, art and culture and work with youth as tactics. We had a media strategy that sought to both lift up the voices of those most impacted by the injunctions (those named and their family members) and to bring the language that we were using around the injunctions into the mainstream (for instance, the use of the word "controversial" in the media). Finally, we had a legal strategy that worked to get people named in the injunction off, but that also understood its limitations in the face of organizing against the PIC.

CR: How did PIC abolition inform your work during the campaign and after?

SS: Though we read in books how the demonization of a scapegoat population allows for the creation of policies that lead to mass incarceration often without any factual data, the gang injunctions showed me how this work in real time and real life. Many of the guys on the gang injunction list who were deemed the toughest criminals that

we the city needed to fear, were often never even in gangs and the only fault they had was being born in the “wrong neighborhood.” This was not a story anyone could tell those of us in the Fruitvale, these were our realities. We knew and grew up with the men that were named on that list and many of them were squares that might have had minor offenses and or had been pushed out of Oakland schools. Yet, the gang injunctions were creating the story that if we locked these folks up our communities would be safer.

We know what jails do to our folks and we know that policing and jails will only bring about more trauma and violence in our community, so our work in this campaign was also about educating our community not only about the injunctions and about the lies that they had sold our community, but also about the actual impact of policing and prisons.

With the guys on the list and other community, a huge effort of our campaigns was to both publicize and show to our own community both the fact that we already have solutions that do not include prisons or cops, and what those solutions look like.

Through block parties, murals, and responding to instance of violence on the street, we were able to galvanize community around the importance of our own solutions and the dangers of us supporting the PIC and relying on or supporting police.

WE: I learned about how the city and country targets those they identify as gang members, labelling them as the “worst of the worst” and deserving of an extra layer of policing, thereby validating the existence and expansion of the PIC. PIC abolition demands of us to imagine a world without punishment—meaning that even those deemed the “worst of the worst” require community to think expansively about those that make up community, what are root causes of harm that need to be addressed, and a community member’s capacity to transform and change after engaging in harm. This politic urges us to start with those the state deems “the worst of the worst” and work to do our strongest organizing here to reveal the PIC as an agent engaging in massive perpetual harm for the purposes of maintaining the socio-economic status quo.

This came into play a year later when the 2011 hunger strikes were launched by the organizers at Pelican Bay.³ There is a through line via the CalGang⁴ database specifically but through a larger politic that connects the gang injunctions via gang validation to the prison within a prison—solitary confinement or administrative segregation.

The struggle the hunger strikers took against their treatment within solitary confinement meant combating this narrative of “the worst of the worst” inside of prison, reclaiming their own dignity and humanity through their struggle with the California Department of Corrections. It also served to reframe who was the true perpetrator of egregious harms given that they were willing to starve themselves

rather spend any more time being treated the way that the California prison system treated them.

This politic definitely informed the communications and organizing work that CR was able to participate in support the strikers win their demands.

JD: I think the coalition overall and Critical Resistance more specifically really pushed to maintain abolitionist strategies as part of this campaign. We did this in a few ways, so maybe I'll touch on just a couple. First, we resisted the pitting of one group of people who were named against another. This happens often in struggles against the PIC where one group of people is "bad" and deserves the punishment the state is seeking and the other is "good" and deserves to be spared this punishment. This emerged in the injunctions struggle as some people who were named were truly part of a gang and others were falsely accused. We sought to bring all of the named people to the organizing table while simultaneously providing historical and current local context for the emergence of street organizations in Oakland. Additionally, we sought to center the messaging for the campaign around the fact that injunctions are attacks on communities of color and youth of color.

We also pursued abolitionist reforms to the injunctions in the face of resistance by the city to ending them altogether. An example of this was getting the city to remove the use of "John Does" from the injunctions. The "John Does" were used as place holders to allow the city to add more people to the injunctions down the line. This was huge victory. Finally, I think we recognized that abolishing the PIC and even incremental steps towards that goal are a long haul struggle. This campaign took years to achieve the final victory of the city taking the injunctions off the books as a tool for policing in Oakland.

CR: How do you see STIC's anti-policing work to be part of ongoing liberation struggles in Oakland?

SS: I think the work of STIC led to the creation of strong alliances around the city around anti-policing work, abolition work, and work to support home grown solutions. These alliances have stuck around and strengthened work around gentrification, building up and building on solutions like community gardens, community response, safety models, and the work around the larger fight around policing and the militarization of cops.⁵

The lessons learned through this campaign and the success this campaign had has strengthened our ongoing work in the city and has served as a model to follow in other campaigns where we both want to serve the people without compromising our values and larger goals.

Also the success of the campaign led to the creation of CURYJ (Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice) which is an organization that employs gang impacted youth to do anti-violence work in the community and it has at its leadership

guys who were named on the injunction list and got politicized. This organization is still around today and continues the work around education and organizing to heal our communities and battle the PIC in its different forms.

WE: There are two ways that the legacy of STIC lives on within CR. First, with our organizing in the Stop Urban Shield Coalition. There's an overlap in organizations and organizers, a sharp articulation of the negative impact of policing on communities of color, whether it be everyday policing to extreme instances of policing and the way that scapegoating and fear-mongering is mobilized to expand police powers.

Also the anti-policing work of STIC lives on through the Oakland Power Projects.⁶ The Oakland Power Projects were developed directly after STIC closed with a people's victory. Part of the project's initial development was by interviewing allies that mobilized as part of STIC in order determine what is a project that articulates what Oakland needs more of while eroding the power of policing. This question and dreams and schemes with STIC allies led to shaping out this project, which asks community members to decouple policing from what it claims to do, and lift up and fund resources that actually keep communities safe, healthy, and whole.

JD: The work of STIC really solidified anti-policing work in Oakland in the wake of the uprisings following the murder of Oscar Grant. STIC was born in a city that was already policing resistant, and the strength of our organizing ensured that this resistance is more targeted and strategic. The work of STIC also served to solidify various coalitions or to pave the way for coalition work that before might not have been possible, specifically the Stop Urban Shield Coalition and Third World Resistance. I believe that STIC organizing also paved the way for the emergence of other formations such as the Anti-Police Terror Project and the Oakland Power Projects. STIC's organizing made it clear that Oakland residents were ready and willing to resist policing by building their skills and tools to not use the police as a default response to harm.



¹ The "Abolition of Policing" workshop materials are available on the CR website: <http://criticalresistance.org/abolish-policing/>.

² Proposition 21 was a statewide measure that passed in March 2000, severely increasing punishment for young people over 14. The law is a true example of being "tough on crime" by mandating adult trials for young people convicted of murder, and eliminating certain civil liberties previously extended to youth such as confidentiality and informal probation. Under Prop 21, people labeled as "gang members" or affiliates similarly had their rights stripped away and mandated to receive harsher punishments.

- ³ Critical Resistance-Oakland organized in support of the 2011 Pelican Bay Hunger Strike on the outside through the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition. For more information see on the strikes and ongoing struggles against solitary in California and beyond visit: <https://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/>.
- ⁴ “CalGang” refers to a state-level database of suspected “gang members and affiliates” which problematically employs the same logic of gang injunctions by criminalizing street organizations and increasing the reach of policing into communities. Listing over 150,000 individuals, CalGang has been called out for frequent inaccuracies and a general lack of transparency as it is overseen by the very law enforcement agencies that use it.
- ⁵ The Stop Urban Shield Coalition has actively organized against one of the largest military weapons and trainings expo held in Alameda County since 2014, building on the anti-policing frameworks of STIC. See more at: <http://stopurbanshield.org/>.
- ⁶ Find out more about the Oakland Power Projects on the CR website: <http://criticalresistance.org/chapters/cr-oakland/the-oakland-power-projects/>.

The Left's “Theoretical” Problem

Jasson Perez

I started organizing at 19-years old, and have been organizing for about 16 years. In my early years, I was trained by the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) through Southwest Youth Collaborative, in Chicago. The CTWO came up in response to the Alinsky model of organizing—which was anti-ideology and dealt with class in only the most liberal sense. The Center for Third World Organizing felt doing organizing around racism, sexism, and imperialism was essential to building working class power—particularly among working class people of color. An example of CTWO's work on the media and discourse end is the website *Colorlines*. I then organized with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and was member of Batey Urbano, a Puerto Rican-led activist space in Humboldt Park working to fight gentrification. If you have been by Humboldt you can see that we lost, and they won. And by “them,” I mean white Hipster America. From there, I became a youth organizer for a few years in Uptown, doing work to stop school closings. Lost that fight too—most the schools got closed. Then I went SEIU, and finally started winning bargaining campaigns with support staff at Chicago Public Schools, the Park District, and at University of Illinois, Chicago. Lastly, I was an organizer with Black Youth Project 100, a national Black-led, Black-only organization that works within an abolitionist Black queer feminist politics.

I share all of this in order to show that I have lost a lot of campaigns and won some, too; I have done some good organizing and some bad organizing, as well. I once had a trainer tell me “just because you have organized for a long time, doesn't mean you are good at organizing.” That always stuck with me. I share all of this because those experiences inform my beliefs and biases (sometimes they are one and the same) about how we can transform society within our lifetime.

I believe that building power for transformative social change, by which I mean socialist reform or revolution, comes from base-building organizing. I want to organize the majorities of people in our country, not just the current self-identified “left” that one finds in professional progressive left organizations, leftist activist groups and coalitions, and on leftist media websites, magazines, and social media. I want to create, build, and learn strategies and utilize tactics that engage with people who aren't using the social media networks that we are a part of, who don't listen to the leftist podcasts we listen to, and who don't interact with the traditional progressive and leftist outlets that we use when we are speaking to our vision of a socialist world.

I was taught that as an organizer I should have a general vision and political program for how society can be organized in a more just and democratic way. That

vision and program is informed by various ideologies and analyses that are rooted in the political organizing traditions of socialism, feminism, abolition and decolonization. I was also taught that ideologies, analysis, theories, and political traditions mean nothing if you are not committed to learning, building and sustaining the craft of deep organizing, whether it is structure-based or movement-based (which includes building workers strikes and mass direct actions that consistently disrupt elite power at a large scale, rather than just protest and oppositional electoral politics). Organizing means that our focus is on the majorities of people who are not yet with us in fighting for either a progressive, leftist, radical, or revolutionary political platform. It means engaging them face-to-face, in conversation, and building workplace power, community power, and electoral power through democratically ran organizations, formations, and mass campaigns that seek to strategically confront the forces of capital and the state.

I am about winning an abolitionist, decolonial, socialist future *now*, and I do believe that the various traditions of organizing I was taught can meaningfully contribute to such a worthwhile political project.

The Problem the Left Thinks It Has

The left thinks that it lacks the correct meta-theory, ideological disposition, and frame of analysis. You see this most clearly demonstrated in the constant debates on *class-centric politics vs. identity politics*, which is just another iteration of the *anti-capitalism vs. anti-oppression politics* debate. This debate posits that if we arrive at the correct sets of questions, then the Left can be great again. This debate rests on the assumption that the correct strategy and tactics—and our capacity to enact said strategy and tactics—primarily flows from having the proper ideology and analysis. There is a guiding assumption that ideology, analysis, and theory are the main causal mechanisms for building a strong left in this country. In my opinion, both sides are complicit in these assumptions, and both sides are wrong.

The anti-identity politics, anti-intersectionality position is just as hyperbolic as saying leftist politics are primarily a white political project, or that because Eugene Debs may or may not have said something racist, we shouldn't work to build a socialist project. This debate allows for the Black anti-identity politics punditry of the likes of Adolph Reed, Cedric Johnson, Barbara Fields, Karen Fields, and R.L. Stephens, that speaks largely to a white Marxist audience and readership to validate their disagreements with identity politics as more than just disagreements, but as part of a deeper neoliberal pro-capitalist politics and the cause of the left's inability to build power. On the other end of the spectrum, it allows for a punditry that claims only theorizations from those who are most marginalized can be the basis of an effective politics, strategy, and tactics. It also paints any insistence of the primacy of class or

socialist politics as a thing that white people do, or as a marker of racism or sexism, and posits that the downfall of leftist politics in this country is a product of the white left.

As I stated earlier, the issue with this debate is that it portrays itself as building better theories and approaches of social change. I don't think it's actually doing that. In fact, I think that it—at best—produces good meta-theory and reveals some of the pitfalls of popular pet-ideologies. At worst, it becomes about people increasing their visibility and caché within the leftist and social justice culture industry, which produces its own version of a professional punditry class who do the work of brokerage politics—posturing either as the anti-identity politics spokesperson or on the anti-class politics spokesperson. I think this discourse is great at getting likes, retweets, and filling up comment sections. I think it does little to inform the debates around the connection between ideology, theories of change, and organizational orientations to mass struggle. It does little to help us better understand the leftist organizing traditions of non-professional bottom-up organizing that uses mass civil disobedience, workers strikes, and electoral politics that engage the masses of people, and scales from local to national to international victories.

The assertions against identity politics that come from these debates are coupled with the pronouncement that class politics—that is, anti-capitalist downward distributional politics—are less likely to be co-opted for neoliberal, capitalist, or imperialist ends. But I think the history of the AFL-CIO; the current support from significant parts of labor for the Dakota Access Pipeline; the second international; the creation of a privatized pension and healthcare system for union workers in this country; in conjunction with the decision by labor leadership to stop publically agitating for public pensions and healthcare, all speak to the ability for leftist class politics in the United States to be *co-opted* toward capitalist ends. One could make an easy argument that labor union leadership functions as an elite broker of working class power and interests in service to capitalist power. I could use all of these examples and say “*haha, see leftist class politics ain't shit, look how the state co-opts them, look how the professional managerial class of labor leaders capitulate to capital,*” and dismiss leftist class politics. However, I would say that is short-sighted and just wrong—just as short-sighted and wrong as those who dismiss “intersectionality” because Hillary now uses the term. My point being, all forms of what can be called leftist ideologies and analyses along the anti-capitalist/anti-oppression/class politics/identity politics/intersectionality spectrum have their strengths and their weakness. For me, it's a matter of how, when, and to what degree do they inform one's vision for changing the world and one's plan to get there. Still, such ideologies, analyses, and theories are pointless without organizational, institutional, and personal commitment to developing and practicing deep organizing.

Much like “All my skin folk ain't my kinfolk,” I would just as easily argue “not all working-class folk are my kinfolk.” And this is why we say the Marxist axiom that there is difference between class *in itself* and a class *for itself*. One's relationship to the

means of production doesn't mean one is automatically in the position to have a better set of politics, analysis, ideology. They are just in a better strategic position to build power against capitalism. But that building of power, and the solidarity that comes with it, is only achieved through good organizing in conjunction with ideology.

To organize people in service of a leftist project and to act in such a manner, does not primarily come from getting people to adopt a uniform set of "proper" analytical frameworks concerning the relationship between race, gender, and class. Some people have this, and some people don't. I have had non-Black workers who deeply believed Black men needed to pull up their pants and also deserve some form of welfare/basic income and a job guarantee. I have had Black workers who believed Black people need their own businesses and country, but also were willing to go on strike and believed that building a durable solidarity with white coworkers at UIC was needed for that. My point being, people can hold contradictory ideological and analytical frameworks for explaining the world and how they relate to the world and how they act to change it. People can believe racism is the motor of capitalism or that capitalism is the motor of racism. People can believe racism is rooted in the political economy, or that systemic racism can function outside of the political economy. Neither statement gives you much practical insight on learning how to build the people power necessary to end racism or capitalism. Understanding and learning the craft of mass direct action, community organizing, and labor organizing at the scale that covers the local to global is what does.

The Problem the Left Really Has

My contention is that today's Left doesn't have an analysis, ideology, or theory deficit. Rather, it has a skills, ability, and capacity deficit when it comes to the basics of militant membership-based organizing, and building organizations, formations, campaigns and movements that can win social majorities.

In many ways, the framing of these debates comes from an ideology and theory-centric reading of leftist, radical, revolutionary and progressive politics, instead of a reading that also centers the strategy-, tactics-, skills-, organization-, and formation-building aspects of movement work and an understanding of how people develop the capacity to do this work. Such a reading shows that the main causal mechanisms for disruptive political upsurge in the United States during the 20th century was the ability to develop the capacity of organizing skills within leftist spaces, and act on such skills strategically and tactically. This, I believe, explains the strike upsurges in the 1930's and 40's and militant sustained civil disobedience, armed insurgency, rioting, strikes and bombings in the 60's and early 70's.

What's sad is that we have recently had plethora of books that speak to this concern and try to correct it. *Direct Action* by LA Kaufmann; *No Shortcuts* by Jane Mclevey; *This is Uprising* by Paul and Mark Engler; *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne

Marie Brown; *Hegemony How To* by Jonathon Smucker; *Another Politics* by Chris Dixon; and *Rules for Revolutionaries* by Becky Bond and Zack Exley. There is an article by Kate Aronoff that seeks to contextualize all these different books and account for their strengths and weakness. Book reviews and podcasts about these books have also come here and there. Unfortunately, progressive/leftist presses and everyday debates on the left, do not prioritize this kind of discussion, let alone reading, it seems. I think investing more time in study groups, reading, writing, tweeting, Facebooking and learning about historical organizing methods and approaches, and debating about which ones are best for our present-day political circumstances, is far more productive than engaging in circular debates surrounding identity politics vs class politics, or whether systems of oppression (i.e. colonialism, anti-Blackness, heteropatriarchy) are rooted in the political economy or libidinal economy. These analyses are important for understanding key dynamics on the structural sources of domination, but I do not believe they illuminate a meaningful path to building the power we need to make a beginning at meaningful reforms, let alone total liberation and revolution as defined by abolition, decolonization, socialism, anarchism or communism.

activists in the present. How did the newspaper articulate a shared experience of reality between disparately situated communities of struggle in this mid-twentieth century period of uprisings and revolt? How did the newspaper-medium aid in the coordination of disparately situated counter-hegemonic blocs, politico-military cells, and iconoclastic fighting formations? What was the political impact of *The Black Panther* in the Party's art of operations?³

The Black Panther: Black Community News Service was the weekly publication of the Black Panther Party. Founded in 1967 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, the Party was first named the "Black Panther Party for Self-Defense," in line with its policy of armed self-defense and promotion of community self-determination for working class Black people.⁴ The paper was printed in San Francisco and distributed largely within the borders of the United States. Eventually, issues were also distributed internationally. Although Oakland is where the Party was headquartered, the newspaper was first printed as a tool to educate and organize the Black community in the city of Richmond, after the racist police homicide of Black teenager Denzel Dowell. For some time, it was printed irregularly until a weekly schedule for distribution was developed in 1969. Although the logistical dimensions of the publishing process are not our principal object of concern, a cursory review of its earliest list of editorial staff illuminates the peculiar immediacies and conditions of duress that contextualize the politics put forward in each issue of the newspaper.

For the entirety of its life in circulation, the newspaper's publishing process was marked by frequent and sometime unexplainable changes in the composition of its editorial staff; a demonstrable result of the overwhelmingly brutal state violence inflicted upon Party members (and their families and supporters) since its earliest of days.⁵ This is apparent merely by glancing at the first listing of its 1967 editorial staff. It follows: "Minister of Defense, Huey P. Newton (Oakland County Jail); Chairman, Bobby Seale (Santa Rita Prison Farm); Editor, Minister of Information (*Underground*); Assistant Editor, Kathleen Neal; Revolutionary Artist/Layout, Emory."⁶ The overlap between sites of racist state captivity—prisons, jails, and detention centers—and the Party's "free-world" bases of operation were uniquely conjoined, conditioning the lived truth articulated in each issue of *The Black Panther*.

To its core, the Party's strategic culture was intertwined with and intentional in developing what Dylan Rodríguez calls "radical prison praxis."⁷ This term refers to the embodied "theoretical practices that emerge from imprisoned liberationists' sustained and historical confrontations with, insurrection against, and dis- or re-articulations of the regimes of (legitimated and illicit) state violence inscribed and signified by the regime of the prison."⁸ What qualifies the discourse of *The Black Panther* as inhabiting this lineage of radical (intellectual) praxis is the fact that its staff was always partially situated at the "base" of the state's "punitive white supremacist mode of production."⁹ In other words, the newspaper's editors comprised a counter-hegemonic bloc whom, as Rodríguez notes, spoke "truth to power" in ways

inextricably shaped by and in unending struggle against the emergent warzones, carceral forms, and (un)free worlds which increasingly began to counter-pose U.S. civil society's conception of "freedom" by the late-1960s. Moreover, radical prison praxis is notably a *discursive-material* force that generates a critique of modern social formation capable of destabilizing the presumed legitimacy, respectability, and coherence of a normatively white U.S. order.



WE HAVE TO WAGE A STRUGGLE INSIDE THE JAILS AND PRISONS, SIMULTANEOUS WITH THE STRUGGLE IN THE STREETS



THE BIRTH OF A REVOLUTIONARY

We speak to you today as scorpions of San Quentin's Cadre. To acknowledge the birth of Huey, a brave and strong revolutionary. For those of you who lied and said your leader Malcolm X is dead. We say, silence your tongue before your necks get wrung. Our People's Revolution is no game, and Malcolm, Huey, the B. P. F. are the same. One dies, one is born, there is no change, we'll struggle until we break our chains. When Huey P. Newton was born our cause marched on, and things brightened somehow. We'll fight, die, but not utter a cry; No force can stop us now.

All Power To The People
RPP-SAN QUENTIN CADRE

THE SAN QUENTIN BRANCH OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY OPENS!

A new era has dawned in the United States. Discrimination, repression and liberation has reached the door of America. In a world's new, most just and free nation of liberation. Historical conditions have forced the conflicting aspects of American society to the point of explosion. Now only the struggle are picking which side they wish to fight on, the side of the forces of oppression, repression and liberation or with the forces of liberation - the people's just cause of freedom. Because this contradiction is already raised to the level of open military encounters - revolutionaries shouting it out with the high, revolutionary being increased for selling papers, revolutionaries increasing the goods that have been ordered from the community - many brothers are being locked up in the numerous prisons and jails of the United States.

The increase in revolutionary praxis has progressively increased the level of political consciousness throughout the world. In San Quentin, because of its large population, its getting its share of political prisoners, Reagan's government and his puppet police administration and will cause of this and also its effect. The awareness creates a representative atmosphere throughout the house. Here in San Quentin we are finding that repression and force, although it has been provided from the time our comrades founded this nation. William and James Milton made the first American revolution. For freedom, it has succeeded, culminating with a work of story-book edge of horror. The new cause and period for locking brothers in the hole is "possession of inflammatory literature." In possession of inflammatory literature is, of course, revolutionary, and in it our foundation because we are trying to bring our incarcerated brothers up to a higher level of consciousness. They now know change their altered ideas of individual material gain through exploitation of the Black community.

The day we sit and stare who associated closely with the cadre here taking on a new complexion, a new method in social conditions. We are becoming more disciplined and are starting to think around the strategy of establishing revolutionary political power for Black people. The prisoners that once we established the necessary political power they can no longer exist and oppress us. They will not be able to keep our structure in prison and only one longer. They also realize that once thousands of angry Black people revolutionaries, we are going to bring the machinery of oppression to a screeching halt, through means, force, but justified means.

This movement takes on a familiar form. They catch a group of brothers who are these revolutionaries, then establish this knowledge into special letters, labeled "millions, hundreds, revolutionaries and Black Panthers," along with photographs. This information is kept in the basement (a central command headquarters here in Quantico, similar to the Pentagon for the U.S. Army headquarters). Whenever the pigs get the ink or urge they dig and take and prevent. It is systematically checked and corrected. If the whole done in a procedure whereby they go take a person's cell and search it thoroughly, digging up the beds, looking at all of the pictures of the walls and generally making a pigskin mess. They sit down and read revolutionary documents, personal writing and anything else, trying to find something shocking against the present social order. That is then labeled "inflammatory literature", and the names of the material is labeled in the "book" at the Adjustment Center to suit a high level of imprisonment in the KKK Klansmen and Disappointed Red Prison Camp leaders.

Since a man's struggle reflect his attitude and his writings mirror both, we are politically aware individuals will have this so-called inflammatory literature in our possession on hundred percent of the room. This word the brothers were able off the part of James Ellison, Huey P. Newton, Charles Jackson, J.P. Trotter and Eddie Childers. All were charged with having revolutionary material in their possession. There was one a time when we kept out in our cells and destroy all writings in hope that we could keep the book from coming down. That time has passed. Now we realize that this pig has no love which we as oppressed people are bound to respect. The comrades are thought in order to view of historical inevitable revolution - liberation. We see destruction and all of his reactionary, fascist ruling dogs, because we will continue to write and educate whenever we are among the masses and revolutionaries of the repression monsters and representatives happening behind it. It is time that we as people stand up and fight off the fascist structure. We are right, history has proven he-

The Black Panther's deconstructive project was sustained by the consistent publication of statements and communiqués written by imprisoned members of the Party, press releases recounting police harassment and torture of ordinary working and idle Black people, leaked documents highlighting the forces of state counter-insurgency, and the circulation of theoretical and strategic analysis developed by imprisoned activists. Consistency in the re-presentation of the U.S. state through the optics of an anti-fascist and importantly anti-patriotic Black politics, pushed for a *paradigm shift* in the ways Leftist cultural producers represented liberal-democratic capitalist nation-building. For the Black Panther Party, white American capitalist society was engaged in an historic struggle to preserve their unmerited entitlements over planetary life, land, and the meaning of personhood. This struggle was principally enacted through the practices of land occupation, population displacement, and (proto-)genocidal warfare. Ushering in a Black revolutionary vanguardist program and grammar, the theoretical lexis of the Party included a vernacular of internationalist anti-imperialism, advocating for a global coalition to

abolish the anti-Black genocide of U.S. fascism, civilization, and nation-building. For a civilian public interpellated by the creeping assimilation of the Civil Rights Movement into the discursive structures of the (neo)liberal corporate state, this was an essential and necessary task of intellectual work.

The Party's principles of struggle beautifully ran against-the-grain of a burgeoning liberal racial sensibility that stubbornly refused to give up on its pacifist codes of non-violence and policies of gradualist anti-racist/anti-violence reform. Instead of supporting and/or further entrenching the post-sixties institutionalization of Black insurgency,¹⁰ the *Black Community News Service* served as a site of imagining and inspiring a mode of struggle that located Black populations in the United States as the motor of Socialist world revolution. It provided an information clearinghouse for news coverage of global struggles against Western colonialism and imperialism, supporting movements for decolonization, indigenous sovereignty, national liberation, and non-Eurocentric articulations of solidarity and mutual aid.

The general techniques of material-discursive maneuver mobilized by the Black Panther Party reveal a significantly overlooked aspect of the Party's strategic thought, what literary critic and politico-cultural theorist Hortense J. Spillers calls "discursive positioning." She writes the following passage to localize the context of symbolic structural violence that makes the Panther's iconoclastic activist practice necessary:

"[R]ace," as the anti-essentialists have persistently misunderstood, never had much to do with bodies, as skin color...actually only facilitates an imperative that has emerged otherwise..."[B]eyond" the violating and that laid on the stigmata of a recognition that was misrecognition, or the regard that was disregard, there was a semiosis of procedure that had enabled such a moment in the first place. The marking, the branding, the whipping—all instruments of a terrorist regime—were more deeply that—to get in somebody's face in that way would have to be centuries in the making that would have had little to do, though it's difficult to believe—with the biochemistry of pigmentation, hair texture, lip thickness, and the indicial measure of the nostrils, but everything to do with those "unacknowledged legislators" of a discursive and an economic discipline.¹¹

For Spillers, theorizing racial and gender formation means contemplating the existence of deep-structural dynamics rather than simply material culture, historical contingency, and political choice. Spillers insists that we must instead look at the "semiosis of procedure" and "unacknowledged legislators" which normalize the proto-genocidal (racial) cultural structures of modern liberal humanism. Within her formula, the discursive regimes of "race"—the symbolic apparatus that renders a subject "dominant" or "subordinate," *not* because anyone was once more superior than another, but because it was *installed* to preserve European/Euro-American power—appear to be the result of an originary set of political decisions made during the early epochs of European land-ecological conquest and modern racial slavery. As

such, modernity’s historical regimes of violence have only been reinforced, as Spillers remarks, by “words, words, words”¹² (and the tropes they impart meaning to). In this context, the act of discursive positioning becomes a principle means of warfare in revolutionary struggles over social power.



The positioning of the “body” in discourse was tacitly understood by artists and editors of *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* as a primary and essential (rather than marginal or trivial) site of struggle.¹³ Theorizing the Party’s approach to sculpting, adapting, and reworking the materiality of discourse in the cross-hairs of belligerent state repression, Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglas speaks to the overarching strategy that guided the insurgent aesthetics promoted by the newspaper’s staff:

Besides fighting enemy, the Black Panther Party is doing propaganda for the masses of Black people. The form of propaganda I’m about to refer to is called art, such as painting, sketching, etc. The Black Panther Party calls it revolutionary art—this kind of art enlightens the party to continue its vigorous attack against the enemy, as well as educate the masses of Black people—we do this by showing them through pictures—“The Correct Handling of the Revolution”...We try to create an atmosphere for the vast majority of Black people—who aren’t readers but activists—through their observation of our work, they feel they have the right to destroy the enemy.¹⁴

The notion of propaganda invoked by Douglas is quite different than that of American militarists and bourgeois social theorists. In accordance with the Party’s protocols of revolutionary cultural production, it is important to note that a principal strategy employed in newspaper was the visual rewriting of everyday Black people into positions in which they are active participants in processes of radical economic, cultural, and socio-political change. We also see this revalorizing practice complimented by a persistent iconoclastic devalorization of the various symbols of capitalist decadence, white supremacist apartheid, and anti-Black fascist morality

embodied by U.S. civil society and a nascent law-and-order state. This latter strategy was implemented through discursive tactics that depersonalized the symbol of the “police officer”—one of the many structural/institutional bodies that terrorize Black populations on a regular basis—as a racist “pig,” comical “swine,” and the guardian of decadent, greedy, and distrustful capitalist rats. As chief methodologies utilized in the Party’s cultural arsenal for self-defensive Black revolutionary struggle, these basic reorienting gestures attempted to “reverse the Gaze” of a white racial optics that requires the slow pulse of anti-Black degradation, humiliation, and physiological/physic violation to preserve its fabricated integrity, transparency, and singular humanness.



Yet it is also important to emphasize how the newspaper’s formal aesthetics did not hold transformative potential in-and-of-itself, as much as it enabled the newspaper to become a *medium* through which disparately situated communities of struggle acquire the capacity to interact with the Party’s strategic analysis, political education, military theory, program, and general revolutionary principles. Departing from Paulo Freire’s classic formulation of a non-hierarchical revolutionist pedagogy, I briefly highlight some aspects of the newspaper’s project of political education that were useful and can be appropriated, emboldened, and/or redeployed by present-day oppositional movements. Freire describes the “correct” method for political leadership as one that works against the vulgar definition of propaganda as managing, baiting, or manipulating the masses. Instead, he remarks upon the practice of mass-based political education in the following way:

The oppressed, who have been shaped by a death-affirming climate of oppression, must find through their struggle a way to life affirming humanization, which does not lie simply in having more to eat (although it does involve having more to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reeducated them to things. In order to regain their

humanity, they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings...

The struggle begins with men's recognition that they have been destroyed. Propaganda [in the vulgar sense], management, manipulation—all arms of domination—cannot be the instruments of their rehumanization. The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers (in this instance the revolutionary leadership can manipulate the students (in this instance, the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the student themselves.¹⁵

Experimenting with and configuring sustainable ways to continue collective projects for political education and theoretical work in the face of imminent state terror and repression is a unique challenge for any organization, especially if their objective is “demolishing the colonist's sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory.”¹⁶ Even if the shortcomings of a movement are realized by its participants or its output of deconstructive knowledge production is sustained in a relatively consistent manner, the state is the final arbiter of any revolutionary situation. This is by way of its monopoly on the so-called “legitimate” use of force and instrumentalization by ruling elites for the enforcement of late-capitalist social reproduction, white freedom/mobility, and the enduring structures of settler occupation.

Here Assata Shakur's 1986 autobiography offers a much-needed point of departure for contemporary activists, noting the importance of remaining principled in one's actions and separating “above” from “underground” political-intellectual work. She writes:

Just because you believe in self-defense doesn't mean you let yourself be sucked into defending yourself on the enemy's terms. One of the [Black Panther] Party's major weaknesses, I thought, was the failure to clearly differentiate between aboveground political struggle and underground, clandestine military struggle....An aboveground political organization can't wage guerrilla war any more than an underground army can do aboveground political work. Although the two must work together, they must have completely separate structures, and any links between the two must remain secret. Educating the people about the necessity for self-defense and for armed struggle was one thing. But maintaining a policy of defending Party offices against insurmountable odds was another. Of course, if the police just came in and started shooting, defending yourself made sense. But the point is to try to prevent that from happening.¹⁷

The most important lesson we might glean from our speculation on the symbolic power of *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* may be in recognizing the newspaper's potential to communicate with other organizations in the mass struggle

without establishing any traceable link to the infrastructure of clandestine organization. In the epoch of mass information warfare and government-monitored email, tweeting, and digital sociality, establishing the infrastructure needed to build an objectively “unified” politico-military front against colonialism, racial slavery/imprisonment, structural apartheid, and white supremacist domestic warfare is a critical task that we as (aspiring) revolutionaries should pursue in the coming years. Contemporary radical organizations should consider developing a means and language that enables activists, intellectuals, and other political workers to speak across platforms without any noticeable fingerprint or paper trail. Whether through a return to print-based mediums of public pedagogy (as opposed to operations based 100% online) or by making accessible the technical skills necessary for encrypting and transmitting messages and information, the directions one might take this suggestion are infinite.¹⁸ By turning to a short analysis of the Party’s repurposing of the famous map-image, entitled “GUERRILLA WAR IN THE U.S.A.,” I conclude this article with an analysis of some ways and means that autonomous movement builders can develop the social basis for mass insurrectionary, revolutionary, and liberation struggle(s).

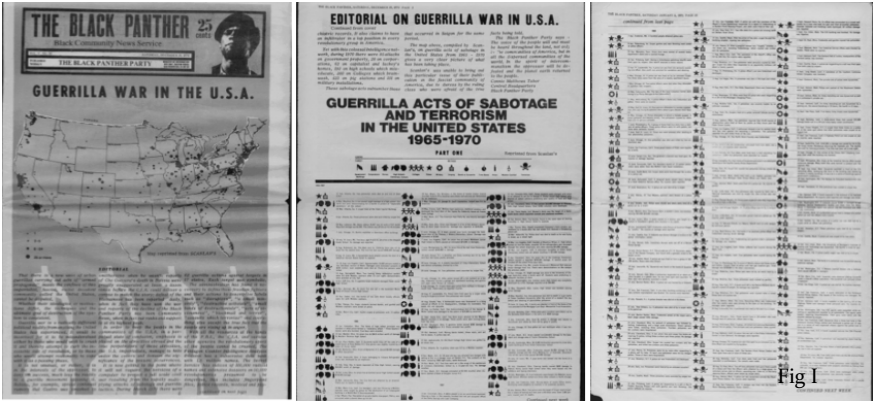


Fig I

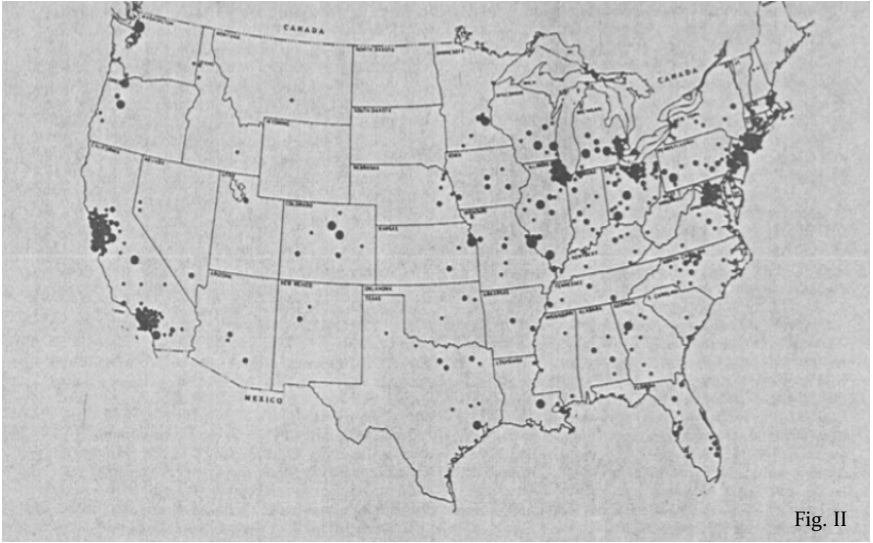


Fig. II

The map-image in Fig. II displays instances of counter-hegemonic/anti-state uprising and armed tactical operations initiated by oppressed and resisting sectors of U.S. society between 1965 and 1970. This insurgent coalition gradually emerged in opposition to the racist capitalist state during the middle twentieth-century, spearheaded by the efforts of Black liberationist fighting formations. Originally intended to be published in the magazine *Scalan's*, "GUERRILLA WAR IN THE U.S.A." was rejected by over 50 potential publisher. Fortunately, the piece was salvaged and released in a two-part editorial for *The Black Panther*.¹⁹

A vulgar analysis of the map's function as an aesthetic object would likely interpret it as an example of effective radical propaganda. And indeed, such a reading would not entirely miss the mark. After all, "radical propaganda"—if we define radicalism as a viewpoint that interprets the world in terms of the *foundational and systemic*—is a term reserved for an image/text that compels the other toward critical thought and action. Yet by interpreting the map's functionality as merely propaganda, scholars conceal the dynamism of its effects, both willed and unintended, in the play of signification. Fixing attention to the symbolic power of the map-object allows us to speculate upon the social implications of its aesthetic elements, rhetorical structures, and underlying discursive strategies, which in turn reveals how this narrative technology opened new avenues for political dissidence, autonomous movements, and insurgency-building in the theater of revolutionary struggle.

On the one hand, the map's visual schematics are published in juxtaposition with the Black Panther Party's deconstructive analysis of white settler mythology in ways that render visible the emergent coordinates of a laterally-aligned insurgency that was (at least in scale and scope) prior unbeknownst to its participants. As can be seen in Fig. I, the Party editor's first visible statements provide a useful case in point. Invoking a notion of propaganda as "revolutionary art," the editors of *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* illuminate how a "new wave of urban guerrillas carrying out acts of 'armed propaganda' inside the confines of [the] imperialist, fascist, racist decadent community called the United States,"²⁰ was becoming an increasingly indisputable fact. "Whether their ideologies or motivations differ, the techniques and the ultimate goal of destruction of the system is consistent."²¹ Within this editorial spread, similar statements are woven into the discursive structure of the map-image imparting shape, meaning, and conceptual stability to what was an otherwise amorphous constellation of uprisings and anti-authoritarian fighting formations proliferating within and across nation-state borders.

On the other hand, we can also see the map's schematization of disparate insurgencies operating in ways that serve a concrete social function for Left-political opposition. As white settler society began to reassert military, political, moral, economic, and racial dominion over colonized (and poor) people amidst compounding "crises" in the U.S. national form during the middle-to-late 1960s, it is not hard to imagine the map-image, embedded within the newspaper, held the potential for circulating, collating, and re-theorizing the terms of strategy within this

blooming insurrection. To further illuminate the specific historical situation enveloping this articulation of consciousness and revolutionary People's War, I would like to reproduce a brief section from the editorial at length. In the following passage, the newspaper appears to be the center-piece of a flowering insurgent cultural apparatus which cultivated a shared consciousness of opposition to the existing state, law, and order. The statement follows:

It is not unusual, or rather, it is in the interests of the oppressor, to deny the success, much less the reality to a guerrilla movement opposing it...In order to keep the people in the communities of the USA in a perpetual state of confusion, emphasis is placed on the atrocities abroad and the true perpetrators of these atrocities, the US imperialists, manage to hide under the covers and demean the significance of the present occurrences...

It is now getting to that point where it will not require the services of a computer to project a full scale civil war resulting from the rapidly multiplying attacks of sabotage and guerrilla tactics. During March 1970 there were 62 guerrilla actions against targets in 17 states. Each target was symbolic...The administration has found it necessary to define these freedom fighters and their actions by descriptive labels such as "disrupters," "a small minority," "destructive activists," "acts of viciousness," "Blackmail and terror," "assaults which terrorize" and everything else except the true fact that the people are rising in anger...

With all the resources at the hands of the FBI and CIA and various other agencies the revolutionary spirit of the people cannot be crushed...[Even considering the US government's] colossal Intelligence network, during 1970 there were 85 attacks on government property, 28 on corporations, 62 on capitalist and lackey's homes, 192 on high schools which miseducate, 280 on colleges which brainwash, 423 on pig stations and 101 on military installations...These sabotage acts outnumber those that occurred in Saigon for the same period...

The map above, compiled by *Scalan's*, on guerrilla acts of sabotage in the United States from 1965-1970 gives a very clear picture of what has been taking place. The Black Panther Party says—The voice of the people will and must be heard throughout the land, not only in the communities of America, but in all the dispersed communities of the world. In the spirit of intercommunalism the oppressor will be defeated and the planet earth returned to the people.²²

In this historical and theoretical context, the republished map of "GUERRILLA WAR IN THE U.S.A." clearly appears to be a technology fundamental to insurgent cohesion.²³ In its circulation throughout a human geography that was literally and figuratively under siege, the map-image became a medium—or mediating device—through which a broad array of anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and (I would argue increasingly feminist) anti-imperialist formations became legible and coherent to itself as a larger, simultaneously emerging community of struggle. That is, an emerging "social movement" realized itself as an object of knowledge, autonomous of any direct corporate or government-funded resources. Additionally, we might argue

that the Black Panther Party's appropriation and re-contextualization of the map-image performs a number of other important strategic and logistical functions, such as *reconnaissance*, *unit coordination*, and *terrain analysis*. I would also argue this component provided the mass struggle with a source of intentionally public intel that could be incorporated into the frameworks of clandestine political formations, collectively analyzed to modify strategy, and then later tested and revised in practice, through subsequent tactical operations.

The modus operandi of the re-narrativized map-image, and the particular way the image operated in (and worked upon) the public discourse opens this analysis up to a more robust consideration of *The Black Panther* newspaper's functionality in the play of strategy and tactics more generally. Recall that it is extremely probable that the map-image, published in the context of the Black Panther Party's theoretical analysis, operates as a modality linking various underground cells and counter-hegemonic blocs through indirect lines of pedagogy and communication. It is not a stretch to argue that creating more narrative-political technologies that function in the ways described in this article can make the theory-practice-theory sequence a broader (as in "mass") collective experience shared between different people and organizations with relatively divergent visions of progressive social change.

What we are being forced to confront today is the grave possibility that the numerous regimes of imperial and domestic war-waging that buttress the white locality of the American "homeland" (i.e. Wars on "Drugs," on "Gangs," on "Terror," etc.) may simply overwhelm the quasi-hegemonic grammars of protest, coalition, social justice, and activism. It is from an orientation and approach to praxis which takes seriously the demands of developing awareness of the social aspects of insurgency and revolutionary movement-building that the warfare condition may become not an obstacle, but a point of departure, confrontation, or even radical possibility. Understanding the functionality of *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* in the Party's art of operations is one of many places where we can begin to discern how this urgent task might be further enabled in the current historic conjuncture. From the so-called "victories" and "failures" of past communities of struggle, we must continue to draw lessons, inspiration, and insight. Onward we march in the intellectual struggle!



Special thanks to Tyrone S. Palmer and F. Delali Kumavie for feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and special thanks to everyone at the Southern California Library for allowing me to spend last summer looking through their archival collections of *The Black Panther*. The SoCal Library holds an incredible array of archival documents and makes accessible histories of struggle against racism and other systems of oppression. It also exists as an important space for serious intellectual work and the making of radical community. The library holds a number of important collections, including the entire collected newspapers of *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service*. Check them out at: <http://www.socallib.org/>.

- ¹ “Pedagogical” is just a fancy way of calling something educational. The Panther newspaper was, among many other things, a vital tool of mass political education.
- ² This paper is written from a belief that the war of position is a component within a larger politico-military “war of maneuver.” For more on the concepts of “war of position” and “war of maneuver” see: Daniel Egan, “Rethinking War of Maneuver/War of Position: Gramsci and the Military Metaphor.” *Critical Sociology* 40:4 (2014): 521-538; *Antonio Gramsci, Selected Writings: 1916-1935*, edited by David Forgacs. New York University Press, 2000, esp. Part 2, “Prison Writings,” Chapter 5, “Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc” and Chapter 6, “The Art and Science of Politics”; Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach.” In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 143- 145. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978 [1845]; V.I. Lenin, “Guerrilla Warfare.” In *V.I. Lenin: Collected Works* (vol. 11), edited by Clemens Dutt, 213-222. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972 [1906]; Mao Tse-tung, “On Guerrilla Warfare.” In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (vol. 9) Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967 [1937]; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]; Amílcar Cabral. “National Liberation and Culture.” *Transition* 45 (1974).
- ³ For more on the concept of the “art of operations” (or *operational art*) see: T. Derbent. *Categories of Revolutionary Military Policy*, translated by Kersplebedeb. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2006; Michael R. Matheny, “The Roots of Modern Operational Art”; and Bruce W. Menning, “Operational Art’s Origins.” In *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, edited by Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips, 3-18. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2005. For more on the *art/science of revolutionary warfare and counter-warfare* generally see: Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982 [1832]; Donald E. Davis and Walter S.G. Kohn, “Lenin’s “Notebook on Clausewitz”; Vo Nguyen Giap. “People’s War, People’s Army.” In *The Military Art of People’s War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap*, 101-116. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970; Che Guevara, “Organization of the Guerrilla Front.” In *Guerrilla Warfare*, 95-129. Melbourne; New York: Ocean Press, 2006 [1961]; H. von Dach Bern, “Organization and Operation of the Civilian Resistance Movement.” In *Total Resistance: Swiss Army Guide to Guerrilla Warfare and Underground Operations*, edited by R.K. Brown. Boulder: Paladin Press, 1965; Carlos Marighella, “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla.” In *Terror and Urban Guerrillas: A Study of Tactics and Documents*, edited by Jay Mallin. Florida: University of Miami Press, 1982; Robert Taber. *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*. Dulles: Brassey’s, Inc., 2002 [1965]; Kwame Nkrumah, “Organisation for Revolutionary Warfare.” In *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*. New York: International Publishers, 1968.

For a critical deconstruction of the coloniality, misogyny, and/or phallogocentric militarism present in each of above citations see: Cynthia Enloe and Carol Cohn. “A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28:4 (2003); Comrade Parvati and Butch Lee. *People’s War... Women’s War?: Two Texts By Comrade Parvati Of The Communist Party Of Nepal (Maoist) With Commentary By Butch Lee*. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2006; Butch Lee. *On Military Strategy of Women and Children*, 65-116. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2003; Butch Lee. “The Re-Biography of Harriet Tubman.” In *Jailbreak Out of History: The Re-Biography of Harriet Tubman & the Evil of Female Loaferism*. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2015; E. Tani and Kaé Sera. *False Nationalism, False Internationalism: Class Contradictions in the Armed Struggle*. Seeds Beneath the Snow, 1985; Assata Shakur. *Assata: an Autobiography*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987; Dylan Rodríguez. “The Terms of Engagement: Warfare, White Locality, and Abolition.” *Critical Sociology* 36:1 (2009): 151-173.

For a primer on the literature of military “counterinsurgency theory” see: David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. London; New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1964; Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping*. London: Faber & Faber, 2010 [1971]; David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. London; New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1964; Ian F. W. Beckett. *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents since 1750*. London: Routledge, 2001; Paul Staniland. “Organizing Insurgency.” In *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*, 1-10. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

- ⁴ Bobby Seale. *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991 [1970].
- ⁵ Please see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, eds. *Agents of Repression: the FBI's Secret War against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. Boston: South End Press, 1988.
- ⁶ As seen in *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* (23 November 1967): 11.
- ⁷ Dylan E. Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ McAdam, Doug. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- ¹¹ Hortense J. Spillers. "Peter's Pans: Eating in the Diaspora." *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. (2003) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 21.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ See also Kara Keeling's *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- ¹⁴ Cited in Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Black Panthers Speak*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1970. For a great introduction to the artwork of Emory Douglas, see: *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007.
- ¹⁵ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin, 1996 [1970]. 10
- ¹⁶ Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963 [1961].
- ¹⁷ Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1986.
- ¹⁸ The Party's approach to pedagogy of course was not without its own flaws. As Shakur notes, the political education (PE) program in the Party were not perfect. She notes how there were three sectors of PE internal to the organization: 1) community classes, 2) classes for BPP cadre, and 3) PE classes for Party leadership. After being forced underground, continuing her political work in a cell of the Black Liberation Army, and eventually being captured by (and successfully escaping) the U.S. prison regime, she reflects on the problems she noticed in her acclaimed autobiography. On page 221 to 223, we see Shakur arguing:
 ...the problem lies in the fact that the BPP had no systematic approach to political education. They were reading the *Red Book* but didn't know who Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, and Nat Turner were. They talked about intercommunalism but still really believed that the Civil War was fought to free the slaves. A whole lot of them barely understood any kind of history, Black, African or otherwise. Huey Newton had written that politics was war without bloodshed and that war was politics with bloodshed. To a lot of Panthers, however struggle consisted of only two aspects: picking up the gun and serving the people...That was the main reason many Party members, in my opinion, underestimated the need to unite with other Black organizations and to struggle around various community issues...I am convinced that a systematic program for political education, ranging from the simples to the highest level, is imperative for any successful organization or movement for Black liberation in this country. The Party has some of the most politically conscious sisters and brothers as members, but in some ways, it failed to spread the consciousness to the cadre in general. I also thought was a real shame the BPP didn't teach Panther organizing and mobilizing techniques. Some members were natural geniuses at organizing people, but they were usually the busiest comrades with the most responsibility. Part of the problem was that the Party has grown so fast that there wasn't a lot of time to come up with step-by-step approaches to things. The other part of the problem was that almost from its inception, the BPP was under attack from the U.S. government.
- ¹⁹ "GUERRILLA WAR IN THE U.S.A." *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* (Nov. 1970/Jan. 1971)
- ²⁰ Ibid., 1.

²¹ Ibid., 1.

²² Ibid., 1-2.

²³ “Insurgent cohesion” is a term that refers to the shared sense of belonging, collectivity, and consciousness that is shared amongst the participants or members of an insurgent revolutionary movement. This term is a play on the military concept developed in Paul Staniland’s *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*. It is a theoretically flawed text, no doubt, but the concept of “cohesion” amongst revolutionaries is quite useful for our purposes here.

A Brief Ride

R.J. Eldridge

For it to operate as affect, impulse, and speculum, race must become image, form, surface, figure and—especially—a structure of the imagination. And it is as a structure of the imagination that it escapes the limitations of the concrete, of what is sensed, of the finite, even as it participates within and manifests itself most immediately through the senses. Its power comes from its capacity to produce schizophrenic objects constantly, peopling and repeopling the world with substitutes, beings to point to, to break in, in a hopeless attempt to support a failing *I*.

Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*

Thoughts grow out of my head, pass through the skin, curled like follicles. It's late in the year, and I'm yearning. Not jobless, but directionless enough that when the high sun wakes me with its heat, I lean into a question that's been sitting on my spirit. What are you going to do? I've got a couple of hours to kill before my meeting up north at the non-profit where I work part-time, so I'm leaving the Southside early to indulge in one of my favorite Chicago pastimes: watching the tourists, businesspeople, and stragglers along Michigan Avenue make their way.

I step on the 6 at 56th and Lake Park, heading downtown. There aren't many people on the bus. A couple of elderly women in brimmed hats toward the front. Tension loosens in their brows as their eyes meet mine in greeting. Good morning. Toward the middle of the bus, a guy in a green visor and apron, early twenties at most, between work and home, I think. The apron is dirty. His hairy forearms are crossed at his belly, and his head leans back into a barred clutch of light over his closed eyes. Across from him, a middle-aged black woman in a Bette Midler wig sits hand-in-hand with two white toddlers, a boy and a girl, who squirm on either side of her. The rest blend in, looking out the window or into their books, their faces the veils of public strangers who'd rather not be disturbed. Near the back, I find the aisle-facing seat where I'll sit for this ride. I slide my bag from my shoulders and rest it at my feet. When I raise my eyes, I notice, across from me, how through the windows sunlight runs diagonally across a brown layering of jackets, a torn swaddling from which strings hang like sinew. And within this heap, breathing, resting, putrid, a man.

A sparse beard frames his stress-wrinkled face. His head shines bald in the middle, but he's probably younger than he looks. Drugs, I assume—heroin, meth—I'm no expert. Blue space on either side of him marks the boundary. He gazes—yellow clear eyes almost neon against his dark skin—out the window behind me, and seems not to notice or care that I'm looking at him.

A sharp stench emanates from him. A mingling of human waste and sweat and refuse. In summer, when everybody's outside in the heat, you sometimes smell in the train stations, or in the alleys near the late night free spots, or downtown, in the quieter streets between the Harold Washington Library and the Metropolitan

Correctional Center, a scent like it. Sometimes it fills a whole train car and everybody waiting at that section of the platform knows as soon as the doors open. You get on and it hits you, you look around and then you see: the waste-spreading body, heap slumped on the seat. I've done it. I've run from the stench to a different car so I could breathe without inhaling the fumes. But it's inescapable. You smell it once and you've got to deal at least with the memory of it after.

Ten years ago, I went on a study abroad trip to Ghana. Standing in the bowels of Elmina Castle, I listened in my group of thirteen to the guide detail how the people who were kept here, our ancestors perhaps, starved to bones in order that they might be more easily packed when the time came. They put the men and the women in separate holds—he called them dungeons—under the chapel where the slave traders worshipped. The traders held them there, sometimes for weeks, as they awaited the ships whose cargo, if they survived, they were to be. *There were no lavatories of course*, the guide said. *You went where you stood*. His hand in the dark directed our gaze to a line two feet up the wall. *The waste piled to here*. No scent from those days remained, of course, but standing there, the smells around us took on a different sense, and the complaints of my fellow study abroaders about the way the city smelled, its waste, its blackness, formed in me an impression, a memory that returns as I watch the man across from me watch the road beyond my window.

As I look at this man, his mouth moves, and from it comes a surprisingly slight voice, hardly more than a whisper. He seems to be talking, but I don't understand what he's saying. Looking forward behind or beyond me, he mouths to thin air something that tenses his jaws, and dilates a crisis in his eyes. It's almost as though he's bickering with an intimate, a lover, perhaps, and because it might draw attention otherwise, he keeps the words low and close. But they build on each other, these words, until finally, and suddenly, he explodes:

“You always... *SHIT!*”

His teeth clench, raw and ruined. His eyebrows furrow. He looks around, I think, to see who's seen him. He meets my gaze and his face softens in brief recognition before his look glazes, and he fades again into mutters.

What, in that moment when he saw me, did he see? A youngish man, black like him. Smooth-faced, scant beard on a chin. Clean shirt, clean enough that light from the sun reflects it almost white. Voyeur eyes. A tension: Chicago on a black body: a redundant history, a history of lows as deep as its legends' highs are high. Could he see that I'm also an outsider, a transplant from another place? Could he see what brims under the white shirt I wear, a heart that stirs for, but doesn't claim him? He's not too much older than I am. Could he see if I felt what it cost to give him up?

He's still muttering, but now he jerks at the punctuated words, his whole layered body a flaky beetle-like marionette, pulled by an unkind hand. Up then down, jittering as though shaken from cold and tiny impulses running around inside him.

Then, looking straight ahead, he screams: “They tryin to kill me! Tryin to kill me! AHHHHHHHHH!”

My stomach drops loose into my pelvis. The woman in the Bette Midler wig embraces the frightened and intrigued children in her charge. The boy weasles a peek over her arm. Other folks look on at what is, for our brief ride, a mundane spectacle. Some don't even turn their head. Anybody who can't see that it's common knows at least to act otherwise. Nobody here wants to seem soft, though we all are—softer, we must be, than what breaks us.

The man stops screaming. His body goes limp in the layers. Sunlight traces his form as the bus rounds a curve. His bottom lip hangs and he stares forward, his eyes resting, slightly unevenly, on a plane I can't see.

I wonder here again what he'd seen, what he's seeing, and what it could mean to be his kind, invisible but for a smell, but for a voice you overhear asking for change in a cup, selling *STREETWISE* magazines on the corner, black and discarded on public transit and sidewalks to be stepped over on the way to somewhere. They're all over this city, these street people, reminders of failure common enough to be stereotypical. Or archetypal: the black and drugged, underclass de-personalized person is, in our culture's impoverished imagination, kin to the welfare mother and her son the gang banger, whose bloodshed legend has nicknamed one incarnation of this city *Chiraq*. They are those for whom public sympathy fails, the poor always with us while the alms go elsewhere. They are the chaos to this city's order, a stimulus to style when it's time to power up the political ritual, to fade into shadows when the city wants to face the world. When I walk past the quiet ones prostrating with their handwritten signs, they ask for change and I say *Sorry I don't have any cash*. And it's true, most of the time. They say *I'm trying to get something to eat* and I imagine coldly all the things one might consume. Brooks called it *the human incondition*. As with the human, so with her city. If you're not careful, it'll eat your money, your job, your reputation, your home, your very soundness of mind. It was the mayor, after all, I remember, who closed those mental institutions and schools on the Southside, releasing so many to the brutal way of things.

I want to talk to the man. I want to know if he ever believed he had a chance. Had his mother, his grandmother? Perhaps once he'd been a man of some station, or at least the hope of it. What were the particulars of his decline? Did he choose them? Did they choose him? Does it matter now? How long before he lost his battle against the images of civility? Maybe someone had stopped taking care of him. Maybe someone passed away, or gave up when he got to be too expensive to support. I've heard stories. I've seen how clear eyes cloud from use, how outfits start to repeat, one day after another, age into holes and dirt, a sign something's taken hold. It's deviously easy to lose your way.

So much goes unsaid. The city in its habits moves along as though by magic. A planned magic, I think: rule by the laws of the universe of men. From the mayor down to the street person, a timeless order of being. But is it so? Is it, rather, immanent, this order? Is there beyond this order a wider dimension only those whose minds are said to be broken may discover? What does it mean for a mind to work well in this place?

What kind of mind works well here? What kind breaks?

He curses and jitters and I know in this moment he's alone. He'll likely die alone. Maybe someone will kill him. If so, it will not be an act of mercy. It will be the same as a swarm of antibodies killing an intrusive virus. The same as a horde of wasps, activated, assailing a bird who's disturbed their nest. He doesn't matter—he's crazy and poor and black. I know this, and that's why when my stop comes up, I get off without a word. I step off the bus, through the doors into a cold day. I take his suffering as a lesson, a warning.

Contributors

James P. Anderson is an artist, intellectual, and organizer currently imprisoned at San Quentin State Prison, CA. His art and commentary has appeared in numerous local and national media venues. He can be reached by mail at the following address: P.O. Box C-11400, 4EY9, San Quentin, CA 94974. Mail our comrade some love, kind words, and good stuff to read!

Bromma is a writer affiliated with the Canada-based radical press Kersplebedeb. Their work is available for purchase on the website www.kersplebedeb.com, or in print through www.leftwingbooks.net.

Chicago Anarchist Black Cross is a deliberately anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, and prison-abolitionist anarchist organization based in Chicago, IL. The Anarchist Black Cross has been an underground movement at the forefront of the solidarity efforts for political prisoners and prisoners of war. Mail can be sent to: Chicago-ABC, 1321 N. Milwaukee Ave., PMB 460, Chicago, IL 60622. Check out their page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ChicagoABC/>.

Critical Resistance-Oakland is one chapter of a larger national organization that seeks to build an international movement to abolish the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. They believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, their work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of an international abolitionist movement requires that it reflect the communities most affected by the PIC. Because of that CR employs strategies to abolish the PIC and does not support any work that extends its life or scope.

Jay Donahue is a member of the Oakland chapter of Critical Resistance and has fought the violence of policing and imprisonment through local campaigns and coalitions such as the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition and the Bay Area Committee to Stop Political Repression. He participated in the Stop the Injunctions Campaign by supporting media and communications work. Jay currently lives in Geneva, NY.

R.J. Eldridge is a writer and scholar of literature and critical theory. RJ has engaged widely on the role of the arts in constructing identity, and seeks to contribute to contemporary discussions in performance, history, race, ontology and myth. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Vinyl*, *Apogee Journal*, *AFROPUNK*, *Obsidian*, *the Offing*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Transition*, *wildness* and others. He is a contributing essayist to *The Whiskey of our Discontent: Gwendolyn Brooks as Conscience and Change Agent* (2017), edited by Quraysh Ali Lansana and Georgia A. Popoff. His current projects include an ongoing photographic study and documentation of Chicago dance party and cultural institution Party Noire, and works in multiple disciplines that inquire about yearning and the Black mind in a moment of acute structural shifts.

Woods Ervin is a black genderqueer trans person and organizer. Woods is currently doing active work to dismantle the prison industrial complex and come up with transformative practices for addressing legacies of community and systemic harm with the TGI Justice Project and Critical Resistance. Woods uses they/them pronouns.

Jessica Fremland is a student and scholar-activist working in Southern California. Her research is influenced by Native feminist theory, Black critical theory, (Indigenous) performance theory, and social movements. Her current work seeks to contextualize present-tense Native (feminist) resistance efforts within a broader context of radical assertions of Native sovereignty.

Heriberto Garcia is 26-year old anti-imperialist organizer, theorist, and artist. He is a political prisoner who became radicalized throughout his incarceration in California. He has dedicated his life to struggling and building revolutionary movements with the international view of ending oppression. He can be reached by mail at: Heriberto Garcia, #G36724, Facility/Bed C-6-112, California State Prison-Sacramento, P.O. Box 290066, Represa, CA 95671.

John Gillespie is an undergraduate researcher at Towson University. He has published work in *The Nation*, *Ezibota*, *The Activist*, *Grub Street Literary Arts Magazine*, and more. Most recently, he self-published his debut collection of poetry *Black Sisyphus*—a book that weaves together the poetic and the autobiographical in order to give breadth to the experience of anti-Black violence, love, depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, dread, and redemption. His creative and academic works address Black psycho-politics and suicide, the relationship between scientific developments and anti-Blackness, and radical Black aesthetics.

Casey Goonan is a white abolitionist/anti-imperialist student and scholar-activist presently living in Chicago, IL. He is a member of True Leap Press and an editor for *Propter Nos*.

Cordero K. Holmes a.k.a. M.A.C.C. JESUS is an imprisoned radical intellectual who works to educate people about the protracted apocalypse of U.S. imperialism. He can be reached by mail at Cordero Holmes, ADC# 241926, Yuma/Dakota, P.O. Box 8909, San Luis, AZ, 85349. His mailing address may change unexpectedly, so double check online before sending.

J'Sun Howard is a dancemaker and poet living in Chicago, IL. His work can be seen in *The Body*, *Manifold*, *Bird's Thump*, *3rd Language*, *Calamus Journal*, *Inkwell*, *Garland Court Review*, and *Storyglossia*.

Isaac Ginsberg Miller is a writer and student currently living in Chicago, IL. His poems have appeared in *Muzzle Magazine*, *Callaloo*, *The Collagist*, and *Watershed Review*.

Jonah Mixon-Webster is a poet, performer, conceptual artist, and educator from Flint, MI. He is the author of *Stereo(TYPE)* (Ahsahta Press, 2018), and is a Ph.D. candidate in English Studies at Illinois State University. He has been awarded fellowships from Vermont Studio Center, The Conversation Literary Festival, and Callaloo Writer's Workshop. His poetry and hybrid works are featured or forthcoming in *Barzakh Journal*, *Muzzle*, *Callaloo*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Shade Journal*, *Assaracus*, *LARB's Voluble*, *Best New Poets 2017*, and *Best American Experimental Writing 2018*. Along with Casey Rocheteau, he is a founding member of the multidisciplinary black arts collective CTTNN Club (Can't Take These Niggas Nowhere).

Katherine McKittrick is Associate Professor of Gender Studies at Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. She is the author of *Demonic Grounds* (2006) and edited/ contributed to the collection *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (2015). She is currently writing *Dear Science and Other Stories*.

Tyrone S. Palmer is a writer and student currently living in Chicago, IL. He is a member of True Leap Press and editor of *Propter Nos*.

Jasson Perez is a student and activist who intends to build a Black freedom movement in our lifetime. He does this through education on structural and institutional anti-Blackness, as well as teaching others how to sustain campaigns of mass disobedience that address state violence and call for socialist reform or revolution. Perez studies Economics, Mathematics, and Black Studies at the University of Illinois, Chicago. He has worked as an organizer with the Black Youth Project 100, SEIU Local 73, and Multicultural Youth Project. His life's work is animated by a desire to abolish police and prisons, stop gentrification, and fight for economic justice and equitable public-school funding.

Sagnicthe Salazar is a first generation undocumented migrant Xicana from East Oakland by way of Guadalajara, Jalisco. He is a grassroots organizer and educator who has dedicated the last 18 years of his life to organizing for cultural, educational, work and human rights of Raza communities and communities throughout. He organizes with Xicana Moratorium Coalition developing Xicana change agents and building with different communities through various coalition work. He was the Dean of Restorative Discipline and School Culture at Castlemont High School and now the Director of Restorative Discipline at Elmhurst Community Prep in East Oakland.

Soweto Satir is a political prisoner currently incarcerated at California City Correctional Facility (CAC) and can be reached by mail at: Soweto Satir (Anthony Velarde), B4-A-110 (AY9131), P.O. Box 2610, California City, CA. 93505. Send our comrade some props, love, and good energy!

Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC) was a diverse group of organizations, families, and concerned community members that joined together to fight gang injunctions in Oakland, CA. To learn more about STIC's historic victory against the racist "anti-gang" movement visit <https://stoptheinjunction.wordpress.com/>.

Alexander G. Weheliye is professor of African American Studies at Northwestern University. He is the author of *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (2005) and *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014).

Mlondoloji "Mlondi" Zondi is a student and scholar currently living in Chicago, Illinois. Mlondi holds an MFA in Dance from the University of California, Irvine, and works as a movement artist. Mlondi is a member of True Leap Press and editor of *Propter Nos*.

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