“Living Enfleshment Otherwise:” Articulating Embodiment Across Transatlantic Modernisms

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the language authors employ to describe visceral experience in the literature of the past century and asks: how does the way we articulate embodiment reveal the ways we push against our received notions about the body, and how does our language in turn shape the reality of the human body and even shift our definitions of the human? Through an examination of a variety of interdisciplinary texts—novels, poetry, songs, film, live performance, archival documents—I discover a particular resonance between Afrofuturist and modernist models for embodiment that suggest an alternate genealogy of modernist authorship based on a shared aesthetic and ethical project of revisioning the human. The texts this project examines reveal the degree to which the concept of the human body is in no way essentially or naturally true, and has historically been a racializing, exclusionary construct; this dissertation does the essential work of teasing out just how bodies are constructed, identifying three structures that materialize modernist bodies anew. The first chapter describes the undulatory body, tracing the way that waves structure embodiment in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Sun Ra's music and poetry. The second chapter, which links Mina Loy's poetry, Janelle Monáe's music videos, and Douglas Kearney's verse and nonfiction, focuses on the possibilities and limitations of our increasing enmeshment with machines. The final chapter theorizes the horrified body through Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, positing that horror has the potential to productively erode boundaries between bodies. Re-centering the body as a foundational critical concern for modernism and literary studies more broadly reveals the sinews that animate texts by Black and white authors alike, illuminates the long history of resistance to the hegemonic constructions of the body, and provides building blocks for negotiating a twenty-first century subjectivity that goes beyond the previously established boundaries of the human.

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Introduction: Language, Viscerality, and Materializing Bodies Otherwise

This dissertation project knits together two disparate aesthetic genres—modernism and Afrofuturism—through my observation of the surprising resonances between their language for embodiment that suggest an alternate genealogy of modernist authorship based on a shared aesthetic and ethical project of revisioning the human. Close-reading the visceral across the 20th century reveals the body as a key site for contesting the contradictions inherent in the processes of codifying race, gender, and sexuality through language; in their articulations of the human body, I argue, Black and white authors alike illuminate strategies of resistance to hegemonic constructions of the body that have startling consequences for our understanding of both formal and corporal categorizations. My research re-centers the body as a foundational critical concern for modernism and literary studies more broadly, engaging with and intervening in previous feminist, queer, and critical race theories. I argue that this focus is essential given that the "the body" and "the human" are concepts constructed discursively and historically wielded as agents of exclusion and violence. I suggest that transatlantic modernity is defined not only through cultural exchange, performance practices, or the flow of capital, but through shared frameworks for embodiment which unite aesthetic categories as diverse as Italian Futurism, mid-century experimental jazz, and Afrofuturist poetics. The three articulations of embodiment this project identifies—the undulatory body, the decay-machine, and the horrified body—are not mere metaphors for embodiment but material conditions through which bodies are made legible as racialized and gendered.

While the stakes of a project like this can seem abstract—what is the impact of noting linguistic resonance between literary movements?—I would argue that there might be nothing more elemental or essential than reckoning with how we articulate the body and where we delimit the human. The questions that shape our contemporary political sphere are at bottom questions about the interplay between how we speak ourselves into being and how the world we're creating in turn creates us. We reckon with how we ought to limit the reach of technologies we've invented, where to locate the shifting boundary between the enhanced memory computers offer and uncanny cyborg embodiment. In debates about the rights of transgender athletes, we come up against the techne of gender and the mind-bending work of re-visioning humanness beyond gender as its primary structure. As we reconsider our relationship to the natural world in the third century[1] of the Anthropocene, we are ever more aware of the porous boundaries between the ourselves and our environment, the way everything from hormones to plastic microparticles transverse the barriers between earth and human. And as our wars and droughts intensify refugee crises in every corner of the world, we are faced again and again with questions about how we police the boundaries of our nations in concert with the boundaries of the human—how do Central American children become animalized as they're caged, what has rendered Black bodies un-mournable and unremarked as they fall into the Mediterranean? Only by recognizing the structures we've articulated which make

[1] If were to count the Anthropocene as beginning with the Industrial Revolution. Others have suggested an earlier start date for a geological era defined by human intervention—the European colonization of the Americas—or have cited the detonation of the first atomic bomb and the intensification of human impact on the earth that followed World War II as the beginning of the Anthropocene.

bodies matter can we begin to undo their violences, salvage their possibilities, and acknowledge the instability and malleability of a category as essential as the human body.

This project is animated by a question that has been bouncing around my mind for fifteen years, ever since I read Virginia Woolf's proclamation that English had no means of describing a headache: what is the perceived incommensurability between language and embodiment? And why and how, if this lacuna exists, do we attempt to bridge it, to communicate our bodily experience to each other through words? I'm often attracted to texts that present startling representations of viscerality, texts that make me shiver and tingle, but also texts that deliver me the language for myself that I didn't know I was missing—a confirmation of experience of being rendered in the words that make you feel less alone in your body. Reading Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* as a freshman in college, I was moved and shaken by her insight that torture is the process of unmaking your world so utterly that subjectivity and meaning disintegrate. She cites that same Virginia Woolf observation that language "runs dry" when it comes to capturing the experience of a headache and communicating it to a fellow human—we approximate, but pain ultimately blots out our descriptive abilities. Scarry builds her argument on the logic that pain is that which defies language, and the linguistic and creative realm is the key to reestablishing a self in the wake of torture or other extraordinary and unmaking pain. I am powerfully persuaded by the idea that re-articulating yourself is the antidote to violent unmaking, the notion that language has healing powers beyond anything else. It certainly would make literary professions noble. But does Scarry's conviction that language and

pain are mutually exclusive territory re-inscribe an old Cartesian divide between body and mind?

Similarly, when I push on Woolf's breezy proclamation that language can't do pain, I pause: what does that mean? Language *is* asked to represent pain, time and time again (language is also asked to represent extreme pleasure, another limit-case for articulation). The more I reflected on this, the more I became certain that I love Woolf's work largely because of the way that it captures a sense of the physical reality of being human: her famous opening to *Mrs. Dalloway* is powerful because of the way it harnesses the bodily experience of a day in June, the hubbub and bustle and sense of possibility in a task, the confusion of the city hovering at the edge of your perception, the way recollections of June mornings past structure your experience of the one you're living, the vibrations of passing time rippling across your day. Perhaps language is inadequate to the task, but that certainly doesn't stop us from trying. Woolf and her compatriots invent new forms in an attempt to better capture the experience of living and being embodied, bending language to their will through neologisms and grammars which articulate the too-muchness of modernity. Is there some sense in which the headache isn't experienceable fully, because we haven't satisfactorily put it into language? What's the relationship between how we describe ourselves and what we can feel viscerally? Can we write or speak ourselves a new embodiment?

Against the background of these constantly swirling questions, I saw an exhibit at the Studio Museum in Harlem simply titled "Women" in the fall of 2013. The show was built around a series of portraits by Houston-based artist Robert Pruitt, realist drawings of

Black women rendered on brown paper that looked almost like a grocery bag,[2] some larger than life and others the size of standard photographs. There was something homespun, intimate about their life-like faces, the loving rendering of the particularities of their features and their bodies, and the simple materials he employed. The women are not smiling and are not always looking at the portraitist, but when they are, it is with regal defiance, a hint of challenge in their direct gaze. And each woman wears a headdress—some are sculpted extensions of their own hair, others fanciful hats of varying sizes and improbability. They're dramatic and elegant, often geometric and spiraling and simultaneously reminiscent of the crowns of West African kings, African women carrying vessels on their heads, art deco buildings, and mid-century fantasies of a computerized future. In combination with the women's clothing, which brings pops of color to the muted tones through African prints or brightly rendered images of planets, these headdresses suggest an intrinsic link between embodied Black femininity, cosmic connection and technological prowess, and a history of majesty, empire, and artistry. They make the fleshy intimacy of these women's bodies architectural, marrying futurism and history in a single image. There's also something undeniably old-fashioned about the sepia-toned backgrounds, the framing that looks almost like early photographed portraits, where the subjects regarded the camera with a seriousness we rarely see today. One headdress reminded me powerfully of the Chrysler Building—I remembered Janelle Monáe's face on the cover of *ArchAndroid*, staring at me from beneath a crown that looks like the skyline of Lang's *Metropolis*. A towering hairstyle reminded me of the Italian

[2] A sly acknowledgement of the infamous brown paper bag test for determining desirably light skin, perhaps? Or simply a revised neutral, a better blank slate for drawing people of color.

futurist Boccioni's spiraling towers in his sculpture "Development of a Bottle in Space," and more broadly of Futurist delight with spring and spirals and the potential energy they encoded. Why turn to distinctly modernist visual rhetorics to capture these women? What is Pruitt noticing and positing about how we architect bodies, and particularly Black women's bodies, by creating a vision of the present that cites modernist images of futurity? What kinds of embodiment do these portraits articulate, how does the aesthetic and material work they're doing resonate with the linguistic work that so draws me to Woolf and other authors of the visceral?

As I began to investigate this resonance between Afrofuturist embodiment and modernism, I found myself returning again to the questions about the relationships between viscerality and language, how bodies are formed on the page. To what degree do new visions and speculations about embodiment materialize our lived reality? Where is their power? Do our images for ourselves curtail and dictate what how we can feel our embodiments? What kinds of violence do received concepts about the body perform, how does it delimit the possibilities of forging new relationalities? The texts I read in this project consistently demonstrate that the body is and always has been a slippery, unstable category that doesn't easily cohere—the deconstruction of the category of the body isn't merely a theoretical move, but something immanent to our descriptions of ourselves. The Body and The Human are concepts constructed discursively and historically wielded as agents of exclusion and violence; this projects reveals the alternate materialities of our real and present embodiments articulated through literary practices, the viscerality that exceeds the ideology. Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote that one is not born, but

becomes, a woman—it's an observation about the constructedness of gender that extends to the entirety of being and becoming human. One is not born, but becomes, a body—and just how those bodies are articulated, how they come to matter is of crucial importance for illuminating who and what we deem valuable and worthy and how we might rescript our relationships to each other and to the natural world. This project brings together various traditions devoted to challenging the limits of the body, drawing on biopolitics and deconstructionist continental philosophy, Black feminisms, posthumanism, Afrofuturism, affect theory, and performance studies to come to terms with the ways we might rethink embodiment and grapple with the possibilities of the flesh, grounding theoretical arguments in the work of contemporary artists as well as in canonical texts to attend to the very present struggles over whose body comes to matter, and how.[3]

This dissertation proceeds in three sections, thematically tied through structuring frameworks I identify for modernist embodiment: the undulatory body, the body as decay-machine, and the horrified body. In the first chatper, I unite Virginia Woolf, Ralph Ellison, and Sun Ra by identifying waves—sound waves, oceanic waves, and subatomic particulate waves—as a structure through which modernist embodiment manifests. Drawing on 1920s discoveries in quantum physics about the wave structure of matter as well as Woolf's descriptions of fragmented, dissipated embodiment through wave

[3] This construction—bodies coming to matter—calls on Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, a text that has become so influential and canonical in the fields of literary and performance studies that I almost forget it's the necessary foundation for the questions I'm asking in this project. Butler's opening assertion that bodies "tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appear[s] to be quite central to what bodies 'are'" (ix) echoes the way this project wrestles with the slipperiness of the term body and argues for tracing this movement of the boundaries; Butler's insights about the relationship between discourse, materiality, and performance make this project possible. Along with Spillers, Butler ushers in the idea that bodies come to be human through gender, and that destabilizing gender in fact disrupts the category of the human utterly.

imagery, I argue that her novel *The Waves* depicts modernist subjectivity defined not by adherence to the individualist body but by movement and relationality. I link Woolf's oceanic waves to sound waves, examining how Ellison deploys waves to rematerialize Jack-the-Bear in *Invisible Man*—whether they be the vibrations of Louis Armstrong music that stir Jack out of hibernation to find form in the introduction, or the violent shake of an electrical current reshaping his consciousness after the explosion at the paint factory. Ellison writes a world where Blackness forsakes visibility as the only means of asserting selfhood and finds action and actualization in wave forms. The final section of the chapter builds on Ellison's concepts about Black embodiment by reading the poetry and music of avant-garde jazz musician Sun Ra, who literally believed race manifested through vibration, and that Blackness resonated at its own frequency that allowed for travel (through music) to outer space. Ra creates a vibrational model for embodiment, initiates an Afrofuturist philosophy of the body, and describes a program for lasting freedom.

Inspired by Donna Haraway's conception of the cyborg as a liberatory model for feminist embodiment, I read Mina Loy's poetry, Janelle Monáe's music, and Douglas Kearney's poems and prose to develop a model of the body as what I term the decay-machine in the second section of my dissertation. I argue that the key to navigating our enmeshment with technology is to recognize that the body is itself a machine that paradoxically creates its own undoing. Mina Loy's poetry negotiates a posthumanist feminism, describing an embodiment that complicates the mechanization of the body that the Italian Futurists idolized while refusing to fetishize essentialist notions that tie

femininity indelibly to the bodily. Noting the aesthetic, formal, and theoretical resonances between early-twentieth century Futurism and contemporary Afrofuturism, I turn to musician Janelle Monáe. Naming herself a "dirty computer" in her most recent album, her work identifies the tension between embracing cyborg embodiment and insisting the on dirt, mess, and funk that define organic lifeforms. Finally, I consider Douglas Kearney's oeuvre, which offers an unparalleled articulation of how the Black body machines its way to being, naming the tragedy and the utopic possibility encoded in being all too human and never human enough.

The final chapter attends to horror as a site for disintegrating the rigid physical and theoretical boundaries of the human body. Horror—a word derived from the Latin *horrere,* to shudder or shiver—works on the edges of bodies, making us want to jump out of our skin and reminding us of the fragile barriers between self and other. Djuna Barnes' 1937 novel *Nightwood* features characters desperately searching for forms beyond the human, sleepwalking like zombies through decaying Europe. The people who populate Barnes' world are rendered horrific through their improper gender expression, destructive despair, and inertia so intense they threaten to become fungus, but these sites of horrific decomposition are also places of possibility to imagine embodiment anew. I pair *Nightwood* with Jewelle Gomez's vampire novel *The Gilda Stories*, which centers on a runaway slave who gets bitten by a vampire to save her from death and adopted into a multiracial, queer vampire world. Referring back to Stoker's genre-defining *Dracula,* I examine Barnes' and Gomez's shared interest in horrific female figures, unruly bodies that overflow their boundaries, and the circulation of blood which creates non-biological

(and non-human) families. Far beyond merely animating texts, the alternate constructions of embodiment these authors provide are building blocks for negotiating a twenty-first century subjectivity that exceeds previously established boundaries of the human.

I gravitated towards the word articulation to describe what I was attempting to do in this project because it functions like the word assemblage to imply a shifting, machinic formation that encompasses many non-like elements, marrying material objects to concepts and histories, but it carries the connotation of discursive formation.[4] By leaning on this term I mean to emphasize the materiality of our language—these are joints, we are making them—and the discursive basis of our embodiment—we are assemblages of self and circumstance, and how we can speak ourselves is who we can be. I also relish the fact that motion is essential to the anatomic definition of articulation: the joining of two things that makes motion possible. It seemed like such fertile ground, such an elegant chiming of the physical and the linguistic, that I went searching for who else had used it and why—was it a 'theory' and was I stepping on toes, or is it more of a concept floating in the critical ether? Stuart Hall is the primary architect of the concept of articulation in critical theory, but introducing Hall immediately conjures arguments about ideology, a

[4] Assemblage is a Deleuze and Guattari term from *A Thousand Plateaus* that's been widely adapted to imply an ever-shifting amalgamation or articulation of disparate parts temporarily adhering as a concept, an object, even a body. It feels like the right terminology for a quantum world, a way of speaking about formations that acknowledges the fuzzy, interdependent boundaries of our knowledges, our ideologies, ourselves. Lines of flight—another Deleuzian term that emerges from time to time in this project—are the vectors through which assemblages disassemble, the escape route from a system that seems contained or fixed (although it never really is). The term 'machine' emphasizes the volatility of the assemblage, its relationality to other assemblages and the gravitational pull at its edges—two separate assemblages might machine themselves together, and Deleuze and Guattari name master cultural concepts war-machines, love-machines, implying a drive or an engine-like force subsuming and reterritorializing these assemblages. Confusingly enough, they refer to their own book as both an assemblage and a machine; it seems partially a question of scale.

term I rarely use in this project, and his use of articulation—and image he derives from what the Brits would call an articulated lorry—is much more interested in maintaining distinction between disparate parts, seeing articulation as a temporary linkage. I am more compelled by continuities than by separation, noticing the ways that our articulations create resonance and reverberation across space and time. I offer articulation with a nod towards Hall and the capacious and useful ways that he deploys the term, but with a distinctly different valence to my own usage—one that highlights the inherent relationship between discursive and material formations of embodiment, our agency in imagining bodies anew, and the movement and motion that unusual jointings between structures of embodiment might engender.

This project is premised on close reading, the classic building block of literary study, but the logic that drives the juxtaposition of these close readings is a logic of articulation, of jointing together material-discursive regimes of embodiment in service of making our calcified understandings of the body and the human fluid once again. This project proceeds by asking questions about the efficacy of our articulations and providing new relationalities: what happens if we trace a history of body as articulated around undulation? Around the uneasy crux of the machinic and the organic? If we joint together narratives of horrification? How might these new articulations provide movement? I'm articulating modernism anew by jointing Afrofuturist and modernist projects in a way that I hope allows for motion—movement beyond a disjuncture based in temporal separation, movement and play within the discursive field of the body, movement that

shifts the ground of the human and unyokes it from racializing assemblages which have made the body a tool of oppression and exclusion.

The body in literature: how we get to now

The next subsection of the introduction will attempt to weave together the disparate theoretical threads that have been essential for this project's development. My discussion of artistic genres or theoretical subfields will necessarily be brief and far from exhaustive, more gestures toward directions for further exploration and suggestions about potentially useful juxtapositions of thought than a comprehensive treatment of any of the rich bodies of work I'm drawing on.

This project advances from the idea that the body is underthought in literary study and has something to offer us if we attend to it. But where does this assertion come from? How has the body been constructed as an object of knowledge (or an object outside literary knowledge)? As a discipline, English has made what has been termed a material or affective turn, a move back towards considering the body after centuries of dismissing it from our analysis. Just as doctors have discovered that the brain and the body are not as separate as we might like to think, literary critics have recognized that many of our emotional and intellectual assessments are inseparable from our physical reality—that there may be little division between these two realms at all, counter the received Enlightenment wisdom of Descartes and his predecessors who predicate being on knowing, tying aliveness to brain in opposition to body. It's also a reaction against the "linguistic turn" of the 1970s-90s, perhaps best exemplified by post-structuralists like

Derrida who build arguments through language and its traces, arguing that the physical world is a manifestation of our language and epistemologies. A focus on affect swings us back the other direction, emphasizing the physical and the material as the basis of our linguistic and emotional reality. Brian Massumi's version of affect, which uses neuroscientific studies that conclude that physical action in fact precedes emotion, lays the ground for work that takes the materiality of visceral reaction seriously as a cultural and political force, like Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*.[5] I draw on affect theory and the related concept of somatechnics[6] to emphasize the inseparability of motion and emotion, embodiment and subjectivity—the dream of being a brain in a jar, of transcending embodiment, is an impossible and misguided fantasy that ignores the material substrate of language and emotion.

Affect theory is widely influential beyond English literature departments, notably in fields that study film and performance; this project borrows liberally from performance studies because it attends to the body explicitly, takes seriously the alchemy between words and action, and provides a framework for thinking about bodies in space. By invoking performance studies, I mean to call on both Austin's famous definition of the performative utterance as language that makes reality—as in a couple saying "I do" and manifesting a marriage under the eyes of law—and on the way performance studies more

[5] Sianne Ngai's 2005 book *Ugly Feelings* puts affect theory thoroughly on the map for literary analysis, investigating the affects produced by aesthetic objects and their political ramifications and making the emotion produced through literature a subject of serious study.

[6] Somatechnics is a term coined by Australian feminist theorists Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray to describe the interplay between body and technics—everything from machines to epistemologies that structure our ways of knowing. I speak to this concept more completely in my second chapter.

broadly suggests that speech acts and embodied acts are part of the same continuum. Performance studies methodologies have been particularly useful in keeping this work materially grounded and reminding me to read in three dimensions, especially when analyzing music videos and live performance. Affect theory also has antecedents in feminist scholarship, and particularly the work of women of color, which puts the lie to the idea that we are all experiencing literature in the same way, making similar assessments about its effects and its successes, by insistently reminding us that white male Western bodies are not the only bodies present and reading. As feminist critics like Elizabeth Grosz highlighted in the 1990s, bodies have always been present in literature—it's just that those literatures which feature visceral experience, like romance novels or pulp fiction, have been minoritized and dismissed. Audre Lorde's work repeatedly emphasized the bodily and the intimate as essential critical tools, as in her essay "Uses of the Erotic." And the ur-collection of women of color feminism, *This Bridge Called My Back*, speaks beautifully and essentially to the impossibility of checking lived experience at the door and of bringing one's whole self to the work of cultural and critical study.

Accordingly, the most salient and well-known critiques of The Body and The Human are born in Black feminisms, perhaps most famously through Sylvia Wynter's notion of Man as a genre of being and Hortense Spiller's field-defining essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." Wynter's argument is born out of a rejection of poststructuralism within Black studies: Blackness can't be known in the same epistemology that structures whiteness because its separateness was created by its exclusion from the realm of humanity, and thus the Black subject is not available for deconstruction in the same

manner. Harkening back to Fanon, she claims that our sociogenic code devalues Blackness, leading to the "unbearable wrongness of being" that is the lived experience of being in a Black body, circumscribed to the "wrong genre" of humanity. Capital-M Man is overrepresented as the only possible genre of humanity, and thus human and Man become conflated. Under this system, flesh is the othered space, the tendency in women, peasants, and (eventually) people of color that justifies their oppression and makes them the outside to Man.[7] Black Studies, Wynter argues, should be devoted to exposing that we are actors in the creation of the ideology of Man, and as such, we can dismantle the ideology that maintains the association of Blackness with a fleshy, irrational, genre of humanity.

Spillers posits the category of flesh itself as the genre of the (sub)human that Blackness occupies. She makes her argument for Black bodies' exception from the human by thinking through the intersections of Blackness and gender, revealing the impossibility of motherhood and proper femininity for Black bodies through a reading of the Moynihan Report and the brutal history of the Middle Passage. She calls flesh "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse" (67) and situates Black flesh as the site of wounding and ripping. Black women are rendered illegible as feminine through the skin-rending beatings they received

[7]Wynter details how these rejected genres of humanity transform across time: where flesh was associated with sin in the premodern order, it becomes irrationality in the Enlightenment, an era which substituted Man for God and reclaimed the Earth not as the bastion of fleshly sin that is the fixed abject of the moving celestial bodies, but rather part of their motion. But this elevation of the earth required a new geography that relocated the other/irrational/flesh, and Africa and Blackness became the spaces of sin and the excesses of the flesh within this earthly order. The goal of Black Studies, Wynter argues, is to step outside the ideology that maintains the equivalence between Man and human just as the space between Man and Christian were separated in the early modern era.

and the impossibility of their motherhood under a system of slavery which makes their children property of their masters. Gender, Spillers implies, is an essential pillar for maintaining a place in the hierarchy of the human; without its protections, Black people are made mere flesh, the building blocks of life without bodily form. This view of Blackness can seem ontologically stuck, condemning Black bodies to a space outside the human, siloed and separate from life.

But being outside or beyond the narrow confines of the human needn't be tragic. Alexander Weheliye's 2014 monograph *Habeas Viscus* is a foundational substrate for this project because of the way he weaves together ideas from Black studies and from biopolitical theory to arrive at a theory of flesh imbued with possibility and potential. My title is drawn from his text: "How might we go about thinking and living enfleshment otherwise so as to usher in different genres of the human," Weheliye asks (2). His reclamation of the flesh as "the ether that holds together the world of Man while at the same time forming the condition of possibility for this world's demise" (40) speaks eloquently to the potential I find encoded in the materiality of embodiment and the problematics of turning again to hyper-embodiment as a method for liberation. The book is centered on the assertion that biopolitical thought in the mold of Agamben and Foucault violently elides racialization and renders biopolitics an imprecise tool for thinking the human by ignoring the minority discourses that have long theorized from the position of the flesh. The field of biopolitics builds on Michel Foucault's assertion that power after the sovereign era stems from controlling populations—rather than exercising power by sentencing someone to death, power comes from making live and letting die,

selecting who survives and who is passively allowed to expire through disinvestment by the state. Scholars like Achille Mbembe have rightly taken issue with the way that Foucault ignores race in his theorization of biopolitics and have often critiqued him for overstating the rupture between forms of power—how is the extrajudicial killing of Black people at the hands of the police state not an exercise of sovereign power, or the right to make die?—but I find his core insight helpful for conceptualizing the body in our contemporary moment. The body is measured, documented, ever-perfecting itself in the name of a healthier and more manageable population. Judith Butler's concept of which lives are grievable and which are disposable, or Elizabeth Povinelli's ideas about who is overexposed to death are nuanced and particularized responses to Foucault's biopolitical thesis.

Most vital for my project is the way biopolitical thinking gets taken up by Black studies scholars as a means of thinking racialization: is Blackness a marker of ungrievable life, coding for exposure to death? Christina Sharpe's notion of Blackness "in the wake" of slavery,[8] or Saidiya Hartman's "afterlife of property" are in some sense biopolitical understandings of race—they posit race as a means of defining a population and letting them die, or at least disinvesting in making them live. This dissertation is interested in mapping the language that marks these bodies as disposable (or as may be more accurately active voiced, targets them for death) and attending to the ways that disposable bodies reassert their materiality through articulating enfleshment anew. Weheliye expands and disrupts biopolitical thinking by reading Spillers, Wynter and

[8] More on Sharpe soon; see pg. 29

other Black feminist theorists of embodiment to conclude that "The flesh, rather than displacing bare life or civil death, excavates the social (after)life of these categories: it represents racializing assemblages of subjection that can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds" (2). He wants to resist making agency and subjectivity the goal, asking that we understand the nuance of "manifold occurrences of freedom in zones of indistinction" (2) and get away from language that valorizes self-determination as the ultimate form of being. Like Weheliye, I posit the forms of embodiment in this dissertation not as a program for agency or freedom but as a recognition of alternate paths that enfleshment has always taken within the world of Man, and a curiosity about what the end of that world might offer. Or as Sun Ra would say: It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?

My thinking about the role of race in embodiment owes much to Weheliye's limning of race and racialization, as well as his discussion of why Black studies is the field in which he locates his work. He outlines a conception of race that centers the human and the body as its primary field of operation: "I construe race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west… The idea of racializing assemblages…construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (3-4). Thinking race primarily as a process of

determining which bodies become human helps me understand the centrality of Blackness and Black studies to this project which is ultimately invested in embodiment rather than race as such. Weheliye seeks to make both the human and Blackness into objects of knowledge rather than ontological fixities: "Blackness, however, cannot be defined as primarily empirical nor understood as the nonproperty of particular subjects, but should be understood as an integral structuring assemblage of the modern human" (31). By attending to race and racialization, we might "disarticulate the human from Man, thus metamorphosing humanity into a relational object of knowledge" (32); Black studies, Weheliye convincingly argues, must be intimately invested in the project of identifying the structuring assemblages of the human. Like Weheliye, I am profoundly interested in "what different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain" (8). In many ways, this dissertation answers this question through attending to literary and cultural texts, tracing the modalities of the human that emerge in and through language: the undulatory body, the decay-machine, the horrified body.

I turn to Afrofuturism because it answers this call to articulate Blackness otherwise: it is an artistic movement that imagines other possibilities for Blackness, casting Black bodies into space or backward and forward in time to explore alternate or speculative histories. Afrofuturist artists often literalize the alienation Black people experience in the aftermath of slavery by inventing extraterrestrial origin stories or depicting Black bodies meshed with machines. The term 'Afrofuturism' seems to have

been coined in 1994 by the music critic Mark Dery, and the artistic movement is often associated with music first and foremost. Texts like Kodwo Eshun's *More Brilliant Than the Sun*, John Akomfrah's film *The Last Angel of History*,[9] and the music coming out of the Detroit house scene in the 90s are early examples of Afrofuturist thought which center on mediation in sound production. Alexander Weheliye's 2002 book *Phonographies* is one exemplary text which takes up the questions posed about recording technologies, Black vocality, and the techno-futures of the Black voice through sampling, mechanized music-making, and the legacy of work-songs, talking drums, and other musical speech-acts essential to Black history and identity in the circum-Atlantic world. The sociologist Alondra Nelson edited a 2002 special edition of *Social Text* called *FutureText*, which grew out of a listserv devoted to the topic and marks Afrofuturism's emergence as an object of sustained scholarly attention. This moment of Afrofuturist articulation at the turn of the millennium is particularly concerned with addressing the emerging digital divide and dismantling associations between Blackness and the primitive premodern which oppose Black embodiment to technological advancement. Nelson describes the uncomfortable histories of futurisms past which dream of a disembodied future—or rather, a hypermasculine, hyperwhite dream of a machinic future where race and gender have conveniently ceased to exist. Afrofuturism separates itself from this fate by refusing to condemn the past in its conception of the future, in fact

[9] This title references Walter Benjamin's posthumously published 1940 essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History," itself a response to Paul Klee's 1920 print "Angelus Novus." Benjamin sees the angel of history as a creature with its eyes on the past being swept irrevocably into the future, staring intently at the horrors we cannot ever fully leave behind. Afrofuturism is a movement that roots its vision of the future in knowledge of the past, as Akomfrah is telegraphing through his title.

upending the very concept of linear progress and exposing the violence of teleology. Ishmael Reed uses the word necromancy—reviving the dead—to describe his authorial intent, "using the past the explain the present and to prophesize about the future" (Nelson 7). By acknowledging that the past is not static or ever truly in the past and by attending to racializing assemblages which necessarily shape our present and our future, Afrofuturism becomes a form that can encompass all manner of speculative projects.

Nelson settles on the broad definition that Afrofuturism refers to "African American voices with other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come" (9). This tremendous breadth is part of what makes Afrofuturism an essential genre for this project and allows me to trace the influence of Afrofuturistic thinking to historical moments long before the term was codified. This dissertation asks that we see Afrofuturism not as an exclusively contemporary phenomenon, but as speculative tradition with deep roots in transatlantic Blackness. Tavia N'yongo offers a poignant explanation of the importance of the speculative mode for Black bodies: "we speculate because we were objects of speculation: bought and sold, killed and quartered, collateralized and securitized, used, impregnated, aborted, discarded. Bodies that were speculated in became speculative bodies" (101). Futurity provides a necessary path out of bare life, out of an unbearable wrongness of being, and this form of imagining other possibilities for inhabiting and articulating the human is at least as old as the concept of Blackness.

It is this lineage of thought that elucidates how non-white bodies have been banished from humanism that inspires my use of the term "posthuman" to mean beyond

or in addition to humanism—more like a post-show talk, a reckoning or continuation of the human in a way that calls its continued efficacy into question. I sometimes use the word posthuman in this project, and sometimes more-than-human; I don't mean to imply a sequential relationship to humanness when I use those terms, or to in any way suggest that the physical manifestations of our embodiment ought to be transcended. I use posthumanism in the manner that Rosi Braidotti favors, to mean any form of thinking human embodiment that exceeds the genre of Man. It is not after humanism, it merely overflows the strictures of the human. I don't make a final ruling in the scope of this project about whether humanism is redeemable from its history of exclusion;[10] but I do find that much of Afrofuturist cultural production centers on the freeing acknowledgment that Blackness never has been human, and the dream of futurity where it needn't pretend to want to be.

Modernity, modernism, and the human

[10] The idea that the human body is a hierarchy which does harm isn't relegated to Black studies. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Body without Organs is one of the first ways I encountered the idea of the structure of the body as a hierarchy to be dismantled. The phrase calls to mind an emptiness, a lack that I don't think telegraphs their central insight—a Body without Organs is a body dis-organized, not a body emptied. The word organ suggests organ-ization, hierarchy, a purposeful delineation of a body and its functions, and Deleuze and Guattari see this as a catastrophic loss of possibility. Strive to be organism, not body, to release your flesh from the tyranny of its strict roles and hierarchies that make heart and mind the center, anus the embarrassing exist, and seek another relationality between the elements of yourself and their functions, new desiring-machines and assemblages of being. They are careful to point out that the Body without Organs isn't something to be attained, but rather a limit-state, a dream of utter dis-organization. That they suggest becoming BwO happens through hard drugs, sadomasochism, or other provocative rendings of the body makes their concept difficult to assimilate and not universally appealing. I only occasionally use the term BwO, preferring dis-organized to get at the same sense of upending internal bodily hierarchies.

In investigating the relationship between Afrofuturism and modernism, I came to realize that what I'm calling Afrofuturism—a speculative relationship to Blackness, an imagining of alternate enfleshment—is in fact a project that stretches back to the roots of modernity and the beginnings of the racializing assemblages we are so familiar with today. The transatlantic slave trade is core to the formation of modernity, and because of their inextricably linked roots, Black culture isn't outside or accessory to white modernity at all—though sustained attention to Blackness and its role within modernity disrupts the boundaries of the modern, just as it disrupts the boundaries of the body. Paul Gilroy's foundational text *The Black Atlantic*, which inaugurates the study of the circum-Atlantic world as an academic subdiscipline, is built on this assertion. Gilroy argues that "there is little attention given to the possibility that much of what is identified as postmodern may have been foreshadowed, or prefigured, in the lineaments of modernity itself… the history and expressive culture of the African diaspora, the practice of racial slavery, or the narratives of European imperial conquest may require all simple periodisations of the modern and the postmodern to be drastically rethought" (42). The impossibility of separating modernity, modernism, and post-modernism for Black bodies suggests Afrofuturism is a legible as a modernist project.

Many other thinkers of the transatlantic have pointed to a similar discomfort with the imposition of divisions between periods of modernity onto Black experiences of living. In his book *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, Richard Iton draws a parallel between the impulse to periodize and other forms of hierarchization and containment: "This eagerness to draw boundaries in and around time should lead us to investigate what

it is that is being discounted and marginalized in order to make these borders hold" (289). As I will argue throughout this dissertation, resistance to hierarchies of the body go hand in hand with disruptions of linear time, and Iton similarly locates the speculative nature of Black embodiment as a challenge to the modern: "separately and in tandem, blackness and the fantastic work to disrupt the bodily imperialisms of the colonial and corrupt the related, innocent representations of the modern" (290). Through the lens of embodiment, the teleology of modernity and post-modernity breaks down entirely. In her excellent study of early modern counter-narratives of embodiment in the Americas, *Ariel's Ecology*, Monique Allewaert argues that "although poststructuralist accounts of the body are formed on and against historically prior modernist accounts of the body, my claim is that this tropical understanding of the body is formed simultaneously with, and thus is not predicated on, the understanding of the body as an enclosed and organic form" (20). Allewaert asserts that this other mapping of the body—what she terms the parahuman forms of embodiment that the indigenous and Black peoples of the early Americas recognized and nurtured—has always been present coincidentally with the genre of Man. This idea is borne out by literary descriptions of the visceral, as this project demonstrates.

Nonetheless, I see value in the complexity and diffuseness of the term modern, its echoes of The Modern, which we haven't yet shaken—as our allegiance to the human displays. Stuart Hall offers a defense of the continued use of the word "modern" to encompass a postmodern moment, saying that he wants to "be able to retain the term 'modernity' to refer to the long history—the longue durée" (355-57) of the "old certainties [that] began to run into trouble from the 1900s onwards." I appreciate Hall's

gloss of the timeline of modernity, extending into now from a century ago to describe the ongoing destabilization of a singular truth. Bruno Latour famously argues that we have never been modern, seeking to trouble the idea that there has been even historical development or that there is a hard division between the pre-modern and the world as we experience it today. The corollary argument to Latour's negation of modernity, and one I find more useful here, is that we are *still* modern—the certainties that we see early modernists fight to enforce and establish, the certainties that never were for so much of the world, still don't exist or exist unevenly. We are yet modern bodies, if by modern we mean shaped in and through the constructs, concepts, and lived realities of capitalism as ushered in by the circum-Atlantic slave trade. This is not to say that postmodernity isn't a useful way to think about the shifts within modernity that come with the end of the Second World War and the atomic bomb, with an intensification of financialization and abstraction; it's an invitation to acknowledge the postmodern and posthuman presence in moments that don't fit the timeline, to see continuity between the projects of resistance to the world of Man across the modern.

This project begins its focus during the literary era we call modernism within the broader category of modernity for a few key reasons. For my purposes, modernism refers to the literary and artistic production in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, characterized by the erosion of the idea of a singular truth or order and the fragmentation of teleological narrative. Modernist texts often grapple with dissolution—of empires in the wake of the First World War, of colonial order, of the rigid boundaries of gendered behavior, of belief systems. It's also a time of rapid technological change,

featuring the introduction of communication tools like the typewriter, the telegraph, the phonograph, telephone, and radio, advances in the speed of transportation through the car and the airplane, and transformations in what work means and how it structure our life through the Taylor system—think of Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, his body jerking in rhythm to the factory line as he walks home from his day of work. It's a time of anxiety about bodies and their bounds. The mechanized weaponry of World War I wrought unimaginable destruction on bodies, blasting people asunder with machine guns or eating through their flesh with poisonous gases, as war poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon so memorably documented. The development of cinema makes bodies accessible and viewable, their movement capturable[11] and re-playable at various speeds. Even advances in medicine like the x-ray rendered the body more transparent, fragmented, available to voyeuristic pleasure.[12] Often, modernist relationships to viscerality or embodiment have taken a second seat to research that centers developments in psychology, foregrounding modernist aesthetic practices like stream of consciousness, collage, or cubism as ways of thinking or seeing rather than ways of feeling or becoming. But these transformations in representational technique and aesthetics cannot be separated from material reality; they both react to and create the conditions of embodiment that modernism engenders. In fact, I will argue that to read modernism through embodiment is to theorize an alternate mapping of the project of modernity, and

[11] See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, for a comparative look at the movie camera and the machine gun in structuring the body.
[12] See Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, and Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, for more about the relationship between modernism, embodiment, and advances in imaging technology.

to see modernism as a particularly concentrated and intensified moment of resistance to the genre of Man and the codification of The Body.

I'm not alone in my interest in modernist embodiment and its instabilities and possibilities. In the introduction to their recent collection *Affective Materialities,* Molly Volanth Hall and Kara Watts articulate the case for modernism as a seat of study for contemporary affect theory and other disciplines engaged with thinking materiality and embodiment: "scholarship's abandonment of modernism's varied, incongruous, and mutational conceptions of bodies has meant that contemporary theorists assume that the body, prior to contemporary understandings, was singular and petrified. The modernist body was far from stable, however, functioning instead as what we may recognize today as both ecocriticism's fleshly, material site and affect's processual "becoming" (1). They go on to read "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot's quintessential modern poem, as an articulation of a body that flies in the face of assumptions about even white masculine stability within the category of Man—a body etherized, non-agential, constituted by the dirty yellow smoke of London. Hall and Watts emphasize that the turn of the twentieth century is a time of incredible upheaval in articulations of embodiment in a new century, and it is this emergent challenge to the hierarchy of the body that makes modernist texts so richly visceral. *Affective Materialities* hopes to offer "a new way to theorize and a new way to read—insofar as the two can be distinguished," by attending "to the ways in which a body signifies… in a peculiarly modernist fashion" (21). I share in their assertion that "twentieth-century literary modernists addressed critical aesthetic, political, and philosophical concerns as convergent on the body" (6)—this dissertation

attempts to identify the mechanisms and metaphors through which the body is made material, and to recognize the de- and reconceptualization of embodiment as an engine of continuity across the longue durée of modernism.

Why think Afrofuturism and modernism together?

In addition to my own observations of the aesthetic, formal, and corporeal resonances between Afrofuturism and modernism which begin this introduction, I turn to other thinkers of speculative or fabulational Blackness to investigate the chiming between Afrofuturist and modernist articulations of embodiment.[13] Richard Iton grounds his concept of the Black fantastic in "notions of being that are inevitably aligned within, in conversation with, again, and articulated beyond the boundaries of the modern," particularly pointing to the early and mid-twentieth century surrealist movement as a parallel aesthetic form to Black embodiment because of the way it fuses the dream world and the mundane, offering what he suggests is a "obvious reference point and source of sustenance" for imagining new possibilities for Blackness (16). His concept about form resonates with Tavia N'yongo's observation about the Black body as inherently speculative—the same word Ian Baucom takes up in his *Specters of the Atlantic* to theorize the relationship between Blackness and the emergence of global capitalism. The way Baucom periodizes modernity through the enmeshment of capital and racialization

[13] Saidiya Hartman develops the concept of critical fabulation, a process of imagining and speculation based on archival research, to acknowledge and accommodate the silences in the archives, the impossibilities of accessing sanctioned knowledge about Black lives when they weren't considered human, recorded as tally marks and sale items rather than people worthy of history.

further cements the argument for reading works from the early 20th century alongside contemporary Afrofuturist production.

Specters of the Atlantic uses the *Zong* and its insurance claim for the lives of 132 enslaved Africans, thrown overboard as they ran low on food, as a case study for exploring the cruel logics of transatlantic slavery and the origins of finance capitalism. Since the book's publication in 2005, M. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem, *Zong!,* has made the mundanely horrific voyage infamous in cultural studies circles, and what was once an obscure historical moment has become shorthand for the way that slavery configured people as property and made human life into commodity. Baucom argues that the slave trade defines what he terms the long 20th century, a period of time he paradoxically traces to the late 18th century. Building on Benjamin's argument about the 19th century and the rise of the commodity as a temporal extension of the 17th century and the Baroque logics of allegory[14]—things are not themselves but their exchange value—Baucom posits that the 20th century continues and intensifies the 18th century's invention of finance capital through the slave trade. Bringing together Frederic Jameson's theory of the political unconscious and the persistence of past forms and Ernst Bloch's ideas about the noncontemporaneity of the contemporary to itself (that is, the accumulation of pastness that makes 'now' multiple and uneven development inevitable) with Benjamin's notion that history does not dissipate over time but rather intensifies, he proposes an undulation[15] of intensification that makes the 20th century a distillation and expansion of

[14] See my chapter on *Nightwood* for another application of this observation about Benjamin's argument about Baroque style and allegory.

[15] As I detail in my first chapter, my conceptualization of the undulatory body is not only about the wave-like descriptions and motions of embodiment but also about an undulating or sinusoidal relationship to time

18th century logics of speculative capital, and by extension, speculative forms of all kinds. Further, he maps a model of accumulation that Giovanni Arrighi develops from Marx's famous M-C-M formulation onto the oscillations of form and style that Benjamin observes. This model of capital's cycles of accumulation paired with revolutions in epistemological forms leads Baucom to conclude that the 1750s-80s, the 1890-1920s, and the time from roughly 1980-present (i.e. the first decade of the 21st century) are times of hyper- financialization and speculation.

That means that our present is "a moment in which present time finds stored and accumulated within itself a nonsynchronous array of past times… more than structurally like the antecedent high finance moments whose value forms and capital logics it recuperates… a present time which, in fully Benjaminian sense, inherits its nonimmediate past by intensifying it, by "perfecting" its capital protocols, "practicalizing" its epistemology, realizing its phenomenology as the culture logic "of the entire social-material world'" (29). Baucom uses this image of the oscillation and accumulation of time and capital to illustrate the synchronicity between the *Zong*'s 1783 voyage and 2005, but what about the turn of the 20th century, that other intensification of speculation? Though Baucom develops the sinusoidal imagery of his oscillating time in conjunction with the waves that buoyed the *Zong*, the waves that claimed the lives of those 132 enslaved people—his final chapter, "The Sea is History" opens with readings of Walcott and Glissant—he doesn't dwell in the implications of waves as the structuring material of our most speculative moments, or about the narrative forms that this wave-structure of

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and history. Baucom, and by extension Benjamin, are important theorists of what I might call undulatory temporality.

time might suggest. If we follow Baucom's logic, doesn't it seem that modernist artistic production ought to share more than a passing resemblance to contemporary forms? Doesn't it make perfect sense that the exclusion of Black bodies from humanity, as made so evident on board the *Zong*, has only accumulated and intensified in our present moment, returned with a vengeance in the murders of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Casey Goodson, Daunte Wright? This project sets out to find the alternate forms, the counter-speculations that arise in these moments of intensification, the echoes of history in our corporal and literary forms.

I also take inspiration from Saidiya Hartman's methodologically inventive 2019 book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, which makes a similar case for the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century as a period of bodily de-formation, a moment where the regime of the body is visibly and vigorously challenged by the flesh—Black embodiments that refuse to be orderly, bounded, gendered, embodiments that exceed and overflow insistently. The acts of creation and beautification that the book documents and fabulates are Afrofuturity in action, a refusal to be enclosed in the limitations of the body and an insistence on imagining new possibilities for Black life. Like Hartman, I want to emphasize that Blackness and its enfleshment is key to the conceptualization and existence of modernism as well as modernity. She calls her project a "dream book for existing otherwise" and locates her subjects in the "decades between 1890 and 1935 [that] were decisive in determining black futures" (xv), characterizing these years as "the threshold of a new era" (31). In contradistinction to the W.E.B.

DuBois school of social scientistic progress and the New Negro Movement's emphasis on subjectivity and individual genius, Hartman identifies the possibility for another form of protest and self-determination, a form that rejects the logics of Man and insists on the waywardness and ungovernability. Importantly, she's also arguing that this wayward Black embodiment isn't a result of modernism but the necessary ground upon which literary modernisms were built: "…before white folks journeyed uptown to get a taste of the other, before F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Radclyffe Hall and Henry Miller, before black communists and socialists preaching on Harlem street corners noticed girls like Mattie, eager as any to hear news of a future world—this reconstruction of intimate life commenced. After the slave ship and the plantation, the third revolution of black intimate life unfolded in the city" (61). Hartman's "revolution in a minor key," this remaking of intimate space that she suggests is the basis for modernism's possibilities, is an intensification of resistance to the genre of Man and the epistemology of the body.

On time and theories of history

Alternate articulations of the body necessitate alternate relationships to time and temporality. In particular, the embodiments I trace in this project share a sense of temporal capaciousness and dwelling with the ongoing past which captures the legacy and trauma of the violence of the hierarchized, racialized body and the tyranny of the genre of Man. Rupturing the sense of self as finite and bound within skin, allowing for recognition of our more-than-humanness, casts doubt on the linearity of time and the finality of death. In particular, Walter Benjamin's insight that time does not pass, but

rather accumulates, makes its way into the thinking of many of my interlocutors; this sense of an accumulated now, an embodiment that doesn't understand itself cut off from the past, is key to each articulation of embodiment this project centers. Naming the undulatory body, I identify waves as circular, recapitulating, pulling sediment from the accumulated time of the ocean floor and tossing it to the surface, taking Derek Walcott's much-quoted assertion that "the sea is history" seriously and drawing from Édouard Glissant's vision of the ocean which resists the watery-grave imagery that dominates our thinking about the ocean's vast depths while nonetheless acknowledging the pain that structures the transatlantic's ongoing-now: "In actual fact the abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green" (6). Thinking the body as decay-machine grapples with the perpetual sense of our organic body's fragility and tendency toward decomposition in tension with the ever-present, endlessly distributed sense of self as informatic and embedded in machine that's so characteristic of modern existence. The horrified body, as I define it, relies on refiguring and rejecting reproductive teleology and thinking the possibilities of circulation of others' histories through your own being.

Christina Sharpe's 2016 monograph *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* names this extended now-time "the wake" of slavery. "The wake" wraps language around the sense of time as accumulation and offers inspired expression to the same connections I've been limning in this introduction between the formation of the transatlantic as a geographic space, modern schema of temporality, and structure of contested embodiment.

With its contemporary resonance with the concept of being woke, and the immediate connotations of the processes of death and mourning, of ships and their material legacies, of endurance in the face of disaster, the phrase "in the wake" becomes an articulation for the time and space in which Black life is lived. Like Spillers, Weheliye, and other thinkers of Black futurity and persistence who ground the experience of Black parahumanity in the ongoing legacy of the Middle Passage, Sharpe is less interested in reclamations of Black subjecthood than in mapping how Black lives are actually lived within this framework and grappling with what kinds of knowledges and resistances to the human are immanent to Black life: "to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery as yet unresolved unfolding… I argue that rather than seeking a resolution to blackness's ongoing and irresolvable abjection, one might approach Black being in the wake as a form of consciousness" (14). In order to perform this "wake work," Sharpe turns to texts that "do not seek to explain or resolved the question of this exclusion [from the human] in terms of assimilation, inclusion or civil or human rights, but rather depict aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity" (14). Whiteness is an articulation that forms "a grammar that cohered in and around the human" (81), in contrast to the lacunae of grammars for articulating Blackness, or what Sharpe calls "the inability of language to cohere around the bodies and the suffering of those Black people who live and die in the wake and whose everyday acts insist Black life into the wake" (96). That this language is unavailable, that humanity

is inarticulable to Blackness[16] is part of what this dissertation investigates: what is the language of the wake, then? What kind of grammar might we apply? Like Sharpe, I turn to texts that do not seek to explain or resolve but to offer aesthetic form to the paradoxes and possibilities of living enfleshment otherwise.

Coda

As I hope will be clear as this project progresses, none of the articulations of embodiment that I name are fully distinct from one another. They share more than they distinguish: all are articulations of body beyond the bounds of the skin, beyond linear temporality, beyond hierarchy and organization. I could make an argument that each of these articulations are a subset of the undulatory body, the vibrational, wave-like mode ushered in by "the sea is history" and the accumulation of time around the watery depths of the Atlantic that birth modernity and the racializing assemblages we know so intimately today. Pushing at the boundaries of these articulations threatens to disintegrate them into one another: is the watery motion of waves part of the decay of the machine? Is the horror of the transatlantic slave trade not predicated on the undulatory body? Is the process of horrification distinct from the disintegrating decay of the human machine? This slippage is necessarily part of the motion a project like this one hopes to engender. I find myself returning again and again to Glissant's central image of relation, and of the crucial role of poetics in creating relationality and possibility:

[16] Sharpe writes this in the context of discussing a speech given by Barack Obama; the fact that Blackness is inarticulable even (and perhaps especially) by the first Black president bears mentioning.

> This is why we stay with poetry. And despite our consenting to all the indisputable technologies; despite seeing the political leap that must be managed, the horror of hunger and ignorance, torture and massacre to be conquered, the full load of knowledge to be tamed, the weight of every piece of machinery that we shall finally control, and the exhausting flashes as we pass from one era to another—from forest to city, from story to computer—at the bow there is still something we now share: this murmur, cloud or rain or peaceful smoke. We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone. 9

My goal is to provide a set of articulations that's generative for other thinking about the futures of the body and the human, to speak possible attachments and arrangements of embodiment so that we might recognize them in our encounters with art and in our own visceral experience of the world. I hope that this mode of thinking invites play and experimentation, invites us to feel our lively materiality formed with and through the words we consume and create. Please remix and respond to the articulations I offer here in any way that feels true to your experience of reading, speaking, and being embodied.

The Undulatory Body as Modernist Analytic

In this chapter, I will trace the way that what I'm calling the undulatory body—a notion of embodiment that expands the category of the body and presents new possibilities for human subjectivity based on the structuring image of waves—manifests across twentieth century literatures. I begin with Virginia Woolf's aptly titled *The Waves* and proceed to investigate how Ralph Ellison and Sun Ra deploy wave forms to articulate Black embodiment in the latter half of the twentieth century. Though their manifestations of the undulatory body are quite distinct, each of these authors relies on waves and the vibrations they produce to release the body from its fixity, suggesting a means of resistance to the racialized and classed status quo. Because wave motion is simultaneously circular and horizontal, they also suggest new relationships to time, bringing the sediment of the ocean floor to the surface, lifting the past into the present and recasting what is past as what is future.[17] As Heisenberg's uncertainty principle describes—an influential model which certainly affected Virginia Woolf's conception of the world and provided one new lens for thinking embodiment in the twentieth century—when bodies are understood to have wave properties, they become impossible to pin down with certainty, their distinction from one another no longer measurable or quantifiable.

[17] Édouard Glissant does beautiful work with the notion that 'the sea is history' (Derek Walcott), using the ocean's relationship to modernity and time as the structuring force for his concept of the poetics of relation. Elizabeth DeLoughrey's 2010 article "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity" and Gaston Bachelard's "Water and Dreams" are other sources that develop concepts of water as an element which "remembers the dead" (Bachelard) and "merge[s] the human subject of the past and the present" (DeLoughrey). Christina Sharpe, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Saidiya Hartman are other notable contemporary theorists who think about the way the ocean shifts understandings of time as it shapes our understandings of modernity, race, and the continuous presence of the past.

On a certain level, this insight about transatlantic bodies as wave-beings is literally true: humans are mostly made of water. Our blood surges through the pump of a heart, a mechanism we could liken to a wave-making machine. The very notion of the transatlantic as a historical and theoretical category is premised on our ability to cross an ocean and the new political and economic realities this journey engendered. But what I want to point to is the way that this understanding of bodies provides a counterweight to the Enlightenment construction of the hierarchized body which Sylvia Wynter calls the "genre of Man," an undercurrent which makes clear the ways that the boundaries of the body have been contested since their imposition. As theorists like Alexander Weheliye and Hortense Spillers have elucidated, and as I detail in the introduction to this dissertation, the concept of the body is just that—a concept, a discipline—that is in no way essentially or naturally true. By using the undulatory body as a heuristic, I hope to illuminate the long history and continuity of resistance to the codification of the body; by representing the modernist body as undulatory, the authors I engage are participating in a long transatlantic tradition of casting the body as oceanic or vibratory.[18]

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[18] To provide one canonical example, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and other tales of shipwreck like *Twelfth Night*, being tossed by waves upends relationships to time and provides new possibilities for gender presentation and racialization. Time operates differently on the island, and bodies are far less fixed than they are away from the influence of the waves. In the places on the island touched by the sea the undulatory body emerges, where past and present collapse and histories of oppression surface. *The Tempest* recurs as a touchstone text across modernism not simply because it provides a dramatization of the encounter of colonization but because it illustrates a counter-narrative to Enlightenment depictions of the genre of Man and foreshadows the ways in which the sea will shape a transatlantic modernity, shifting the boundaries of the body as people traverse oceans. The theoretical return to *The Tempest* throughout the twentieth century emphasizes the centrality of the figure of waves as a structure for transatlantic being. The much-studied character of Caliban has been used as an exploration of racialization and the efficacy of making nonconforming bodies monstrous since Shakespeare's 1610 play, used to signify difference across centuries of modernity. Most famously, Aimé Césaire rewrites Shakespeare in his midcentury epic *Une Tempête*, making Caliban a primary narrator as he grapples with Caribbean identity and maps differing ideologies about Black power and revolution versus reform through Caliban and Ariel's divergent experiences of oppression. Frantz Fanon structures the third chapter of his *Black Skin, White Masks* as a

What I find particularly valuable in Woolf, Ellison, and Ra is their commitment to wave-being not only as a model for embodiment, or a metaphor for the state of being modern, but as a structure which in fact materializes the body anew. If we follow Wynter, Spillers, and Weheliye in the belief that bodies are not born but made, then the question of just how these bodies are made material becomes essential. I assert that viewing waves as the building blocks of the modernist body allows new recognitions of continuity between Woolf and her compatriots high modernist project for freeing the feminine bourgeois body from its strictures in the early twentieth century and the writings of authors like Ellison and Ra that seek new models for Black embodiment, providing an alternate genealogy of modernist authorship based on the rupture of the body.

"I am the Foam": Quantum Embodiment in Woolf's Waves

Virginia Woolf punctuates her novel, *The Waves*, with descriptions of the sea at different times throughout the day that serve most obviously as a metaphor for the

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riposte to a book by Octave Mannoni on the psychology of colonization called *Prospero and Caliban* and takes up the figure of Caliban repeatedly across his oeuvre. Caliban is depicted as materially enmeshed with the island, monstrous partially in his connection to the land and his ability to extend his sympathies to the nonhuman, and Monique Allewaert's *Ariel's Ecology* uses these figures from *The Tempest* as analogues for indigenous and Black embodiments that challenge the separation of the human and the ecological. Silvia Federici's landmark feminist text *Caliban and the Witch* draws parallels between the exploitation of Caliban and the extractive relationship to land in *The Tempest* and the enforcement of enclosure policies which shift women's relationship to labor and rob them of bodily autonomy. British film director Peter Greenaway returns again to the narrative in his 1991 adaptation *Prospero's Books,* which focuses on the relationships between written and codified knowledge, embodiment, and fleshy carnality, making sumptuous visual parallels between human bodies, water, and the ink which grants Prospero his power. We return *The Tempest* and particularly to the figure of Caliban time and again because of the way he confronts western humanism and begins to provide a model for a new mode of transatlantic embodiment.

passage of a life.[19] She does verbally what an impressionist painter does visually, tracking the play of light across the ocean and sky to evoke emotion and signal to her reader that time has passed and they're about to enter the characters' lives in a new stage of development. "The waves fell with a regular thud," she writes as the characters transition into maturity, her language mimicking the mundane responsibilities of a life now defined by duty and work: "They fell with the concussion of horses' hooves on the turf… They swept the beach with steel blue and diamond-tipped water. They drew in an out with the energy, the muscularity of an engine…" (TW 108). It's an artful technique that functions almost like an establishing shot in a film, returning with a difference to the place of their childhood and the foundation of their friendship. The sea is the narrative glue for the text, providing an anchor in time in the midst of dialogue and reflections that resist easy temporalization and purposefully blur the boundaries of time and space. In *The Waves,* Woolf fully develops the significance of water and waves as the passage of time that is a motif through her work; while *To the Lighthouse* is her most overt engagement with the way that waves describe temporality, most of her other novels engage this imagery as well. In *Mrs. Dalloway,* originally entitled *The Hours,* time ripples in concentric, wave-like circles as Big Ben chimes and Clarissa fancies herself a mermaid, relinquishing herself to waves. In *Jacob's Room*, key scenes of maturation into adulthood and male bonding happen at sea on Timmy Durrant's yacht, and the ocean represents a

[19] This dual timeline that Woolf asks her reader to follow, a single day running parallel with a lifetime, already destabilizes the sense that time operates linearly. Jane Marcus notes this in her essay "Britannia Rules the Waves," and Woolf's presentation of simultaneously unfolding timelines forms part of the basis for the argument that she's theorizing time and characters as "quantum," a term used often by critics like Derek Ryan, Marilyn Slutzky Zucker, Kristin Czarnecki, and other Woolf scholars engaged in her relationship to discoveries in physics.

space of nostalgia and eternal return since Jacob's childhood home in Scarborough is so defined by its relationship to the ocean. Even in a text as abstract as *Orlando*, the possibility of time travel and bodily fluidity arrives with Sasha via the Thames, her departure and the thaw of the frozen river marking a new relationship to watery time where Orlando is fixed as the world rushes by: "Orlando could do nothing for some time but watch the appalling race of waters as it hurled itself past him" (65).

But beyond its function as the establishing image and the point of return that anchors her unusually structured novel in time and space, waves perform key work for Woolf as she develops characters and the rules of this slippery world that they inhabit. She describes the ocean as a piece of cloth which first appears smooth and taut but reveals its wrinkles as the sun begins to illuminate the ocean. The image recalls emerging from sleep, once-smooth sheets rippled by the shape of a human body. Woolf goes on to confirm this connection, cementing the parallel between ocean waves and the rhythm of human existence: "the wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously" (7). She personifies the lighted sky even more overtly, introducing the idea that morning light is in fact "the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon" who had "raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan" (7). This is a distinctly human vision of the ocean and nature more broadly, an approachable, domestic world of rumpled sheets and fan blades extended to describe the potentially fearsome North Sea. Vitally, however, this extended metaphor between sea and human functions in both directions—not only is the sea analogous to domestic space, humans in this novel behave

an awful lot like waves. Woolf introduces this structuring concept subtly at the end of her very first paragraph: “the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually” (7). This circular, repetitive, and deeply intertwined rhythm of waves is the rhythm of life for Woolf’s central six characters, attuned to each other’s movements and fancies since childhood, and never really free of this interdependence.

The Waves demonstrates its commitment to uninterrupted connection and free-flowing discourse between the characters immediately in its formal structure. The novel mostly unfolds in dialogue or quoted thought, with extremely simple dialogue tags (said Rhoda, said Louis) that provide rhythmic punctuation to the characters’ lyric musings and cue the reader without interrupting continuity. At the novel’s outset, each character is allowed one statement about what they sense that begins with “I” and centers their own individual perception—“I see a ring,” “I see a crimson tassel,” or “I hear something stamping”—before Woolf abandons the “I” in favor of broader observations: “Islands of light are swimming on the grass.” The characters quickly relinquish individuality in order to create a kaleidoscopic image of that morning, their relationships to one another and to the natural world; one observation follows closely on the heels of another, each declaration roughly the same number of syllables (twenty in each sentence) mimicking the pulsating, lulling rhythm of waves: “The grey-shelled snail draws across the path and flattens the blades behind him,” said Rhoda. “And burning lights from the window-panes flash in and out on the grasses,” said Louis” (TW 10). This elegant, wave-like rhythm continues beyond the structural or metaphoric, however. The children’s descriptions of

their own bodies and experience of the world is replete with watery imagery. Bernard makes the connection between the rhythm of their language and their indistinct embodiment: "But when we sit together, close," said Bernard, "we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (TW 16). This is an articulation of what it feels like to be on the point of falling into one another, cresting into something new. Physical proximity allows language to bleed and blend, edges blurring and substance undefined and yet still material, a territory of bodies and words.[20]

This articulation of the self as a wave continues throughout the novel, well-beyond the childhood years that are perhaps more commonly characterized by a shifting, misty sense of boundaries. Rhoda describes herself most literally as a wave in her young adult years, saying: "Like a ribbon of weed I am flung far every time the door opens. The wave breaks. I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this room" (TW 107). Wave-being allows her an articulation for her sense of simultaneity, a structure and logic for a sense of self that is "not composed enough" (TW 107) to be singular and individual. She is distributed among rocks, made up of the foam, the wave, and the seaweed the waves carry all at once. Beyond providing a rhythm for the unfolding of a life or a metaphor for the connection between childhood friends, waves suggest a structure around which to articulate a mode of embodiment that senses itself as distributed or fragmentary.

[20] Bernard's use of the term territory to describe this melded state of being conjures Deleuze's notion of deterritorialization; see the introduction and chapter three for more on Deleuze.

Waves also quite literally compose the human body—not only are we famously majority water, we also are of course made up of atomic particles that themselves move like waves, according the theories of quantum physics. Many critics have noted the coincidence between Virginia Woolf's first references to writing a book called *The Waves* and the publication of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Niels Bohr's further development of his model for atomic structure that confirmed de Broglie's theory about electrons' wave properties in 1927.[21] The Woolfs certainly entertained guests like Albert Einstein and other physical scientists from Leonard's circle at Cambridge, and as such, it's likely that Virginia Woolf would have been quite aware of the developments in contemporary physics.[22] While this connection between Woolf's prose and themes and physics' new hypotheses about the complex interaction between the individual and the crowd/cloud has been frequently observed, few critics have fully investigated what it means that our bodies are made up of these unfixed, relational quantum particles. More than merely draw on quantum theories, *The Waves* theorizes the human body as a wave-being, composed of particles that behave like waves, uniting our bodies through vibration with the wider world and dissolving distinctions between subject and object, individual

[21] The degree to which waves perhaps effected or composed the human body was a matter of considerable scientific curiosity in the late 1920s. A French doctor of the blood most known for his work on venereal disease, Dr. P.E. Morhardt, was glossed in the December 1927 issue of *Popular Science Magazine* and subsequently in newspapers as far flung as Colorado, saying that our blood contained tides just like the oceans, likely also governed by the moon. He based his theory of bodily tides on the fact that blood temperature and pressure rises in the middle of the day and recedes at dusk and dawn, regardless of human work schedule or climate. While I can't find many contemporary accounts of blood tides, Dr. Morhardt's theory demonstrates scientific interest in the potential of wave structures in the biological sciences.

[22] I don't mention the biographical details to suggest that Woolf was directly inspired to write *The Waves* because of conversations she'd had about physics or that we ought to interpret meaning through the lens of her intentions, simply to note that waves were en vogue as a theoretical model as she was writing this novel.

and group, human and nature. Woolf articulates the liberatory potential of understanding transatlantic modernist embodiment as indelibly shaped by waves in all their vibratory guises. I argue that conceiving of the body as undulatory allows Woolf to recognize bodily materiality as inherently unfixed in time and space, enmeshed with other beings, and engendered by the flow and movement of desire. The figuration of the undulatory body also allows us to read her experimentation with novelistic form in *The Waves* not only as an exploration of the interior consciousnesses of a collection of friends, but as an important contribution to ongoing battles about the relationship between subjectivity, materiality, and agency, and an early foray into posthumanism that sets the stage for later literary explorations at the boundaries of the human.

The relationship between physics' description of the quantum and Woolf's articulation of modern bodies as impossible to fix or pin down isn't a new observation; Jane Marcus, a foremost feminist Woolf scholar, made a sweeping claim for *The Waves'* investment in a quantum body in her 1989 essay "Britannia Rules *The Waves*," which she positions primarily as a reclamation of Woolf from her status as a minor writer in the modernist canon. Marcus asserts that *The Waves* is very much a "30s novel," concerned with race, class, and gender inequity that belies our image of Woolf as an upper-class novelist only interested in formal experimentation in order to capture consciousness and formations of the bourgeois self. Almost as an aside to her larger claim, Marcus states:

> *The Waves* not only welcomes science into art but actually creates "the quantum self" in incorporating the new physics and wave theory into the reader's perception of a set of six characters who merge into one, and a kind of "quantum

> text" presenting the relativity of time in a doubled temporal structure in which the reader is expected to collate the simultaneous rise and setting of the sun in one day, in the "interludes"," with the experience of "listening in" on several minds thinking at once and over a lifetime in the text. I am making some major claims about the text, but it certainly is a remarkable literary feat. Read against the cosmic oscillations of light waves and ocean waves of an indifferent universe, the words of the soliloquies of human struggle and striving are experienced through the ear, the rhythm carrying the meaning in waves of sound. 63

Marcus writes in the late 1980s, well before the rise of new materialism and the wider trend of reading Woolf as inspired by the natural or scientific world, and her decisive acknowledgement of Woolf's formal feats is excellent reading. But despite her investment in proving that *The Waves* is a novel deeply concerned with relationality and dedicated to unraveling the solidity of the British imperialist subject, Marcus does little with the image of the "quantum self." Instead, she focuses on a reading of the text as a broad satire of Bernard, the writer figure, seeing his eloquence and poetic renderings of self as a portrait of the impotence of British letters and the establishment's romanticized complicity in the colonial project. Her reading of Woolf's six friends is ungenerous to say the least; in another brief line, she refers to each of the women in the novel as archetypes of colonial support, naming Jinny a prostitute in a move that has become a flashpoint for feminist Woolf scholarship ever since.[23] She sees "fear of contamination" as the motivating force behind modernist writing and each character's actions, reading their

[23] See Rohman, Beer for examples of this. I take this point up later in the chapter as I discuss Jinny as a model for movement and liveliness, and her relationship to vibration.

wave-being as a source of extreme anxiety and distress, and the oscillation she identifies as a threat to the self (Marcus 85).

This is where I must diverge from Marcus; despite her attempt to disrupt simple Marxist readings of Woolf that insist on dichotomy and uphold binaries between categories like realist and antirealist, political and bourgeois, she retains an investment in the dialectic of self and other that stands in stark contrast with her notion of the quantum self. Marcus refuses to engage the possibility that a distributed, wave-self might in fact be a source of joy for these characters because she does not read with attention to the visceral. She sees the wave-self as a metaphor for consciousness, but the novel clearly demonstrates that the characters experience their *embodiment* as wave-like. As Marilyn Slutzky Zucker suggests, perhaps the issue with our reading of Woolf is that we don't tend to take her "antirealism" seriously enough, choosing to read her poetics as reaching for impossibilities instead of describing lived ambiguities and complexities.

Counter Marcus, many passages in the novel depict joyous undulatory bodies, and not all are narrated by Jinny, the character most overtly associated with the fleshly and carnal. Bernard describes bath time thus:

> Water pours down the runnel of my spine. Bright arrows of sensation shoot on either side. I am covered with warm flesh. My dry crannies are wetted; my cold body is warmed; it is sluiced and gleaming. Water descends and sheets me like an eel. Now hot towels envelop me, and their roughness, as I rub my back, makes my blood purr. Rich and heavy sensations form on the roof of my mind; down showers the day--the woods; and Elvedon; Susan and the pigeon. Pouring down

> the walls of my mind, running together, the day falls copious, resplendent. Now I tie my pyjamas loosely round me, and lie under this thin sheet afloat in the shallow light which is like a film of water drawn over my eyes by a wave. 26-27

The distinction between water and flesh breaks down quickly, as Bernard describes himself "covered with warm flesh" as Mrs. Constable pours water over his head, rendering him eel-like. He senses his blood as lively, purring and vibrating. And most interestingly, perhaps, this undulation between water and flesh extends to his mind, as he describes consciousness as a process of sluicing that mimics the fall of water. The waves surround him and he is of them, as they animate his blood, his thoughts, his sight. Jinny describes her experience of being an undulatory body as a speeding up, a sense of rise and fall in conjunction with the natural world that often evokes dance:

> Everything in my body seems thinned out with running and triumph. My blood must be bright red, whipped up, slapping against my ribs. My soles tingle, as if wire rings opened and shut in my feet. I see every blade of grass very clear. But the pulse drums so in my forehead, behind my eyes, that everything dances--the net, the grass; your faces leap like butterflies; the trees seem to jump up and down. There is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph… Now the tide sinks. Now the trees come to earth; the brisk waves that slap my ribs rock more gently, and my heart rides at anchor, like a sailing-boat whose sails slide slowly down on to the white deck. The game is over. We must go to tea now. 46

She feels her blood as waves, and sensing her own circulation extends her body into the world as she recognizes their shared rippling movement. As her excitement wanes and her heartbeat returns to normal, she retains this sense of structure, the waves now falling past their crest, her heart anchored in their oscillation. Jinny revels in her wave-being as an adult as well, especially in moments of social interaction, where once again, undulation emerges from within her own body to envelop the broader world:

> Now with a little jerk, like a limpet broken from a rock, I am broken off: I fall with him; I am carried off. We yield to this slow flood. We go in and out of this hesitating music. Rocks break the current of the dance; it jars, it shivers. In and out, we are swept now into this large figure; it holds us together; we cannot step outside its sinuous, its hesitating, its abrupt, its perfectly encircling walls. Our bodies, his hard, mine flowing, are pressed together within its body; it holds us together; and then lengthening out, in smooth, in sinuous folds, rolls us between it, on and on. 107

The figure she describes holding she and her dance partner has no previous referent, nor does "this slow flood;" it's as if the movement of their bodies trigger a flood, their own undulatory being flowing outward, meeting resistance, and finally getting swept up in the tides, circling and yet long and sinuous, language which mimics Woolf's descriptions of waves at the opening of the novel and in subsequent italicizing interludes. She flows as she dances, rolling and oscillating with another body and aware of herself bound by something beyond her own skin. For both Jinny and Bernard, sensing themselves as structured by waves and flowing beyond the strict confines of their bodies, blurring the

boundaries between self and nature, self and other, is not ridden with anxiety. It is delicious, as their blood purrs and rocks, as they find themselves enmeshed with connection with bedclothes, trees, other people. This is not a tragic fragmentation of the self, but an embodied knowledge that allowing the self to flow beyond the body yields great pleasure. There is no attempt here to return to the singular identity; if anything, Jinny's deflated "The game is over. We must go to tea now," suggests that anchoring your heart within a single, rigid body and denying the undulation of embodiment is what's distressing.

Marcus rightfully acknowledges Woolf's novel as an innovation in modernist prose and understanding of self, but to justify her reading of *The Waves* as a novel that mourns instead of celebrates the loss of singular, capital-M Man, she suggests that perhaps we ought to think of *The Waves* as a postmodernist text, considering that it's beyond any attempt to rectify empire or reunify the distributed self. Rather than reclassifying *The Waves*, I assert that *The Waves* demonstrates a reticent strain within modernism that unites this text to developments on the other side of the Atlantic, particularly in African American letters, and to contemporary discourses in Afrofuturism and other forms of speculative or posthumanist artistic production. If the project of high modernism, as Marcus asserts through her reading of Andreas Hussyen, is to avoid contamination, then it follows that the threat of contamination must be real and present—avoiding the breakdown of the hierarchy of the human is of course only in the interest of those already deemed fully human. Therefore the counter-project of modernism is to move beyond a hierarchical and fixed understanding of the human body, and *The Waves*

participates in this counter-project, presenting the undulatory body as a means of refiguring the boundaries of the human. I find it less helpful to argue over the periodization of modernism and post-modernism than to expand our understanding of transatlantic modernism as a whole by acknowledging the undulatory body as a construct that unites texts across wide swathes of time.

Thinkers following in Marcus' wake have further developed the idea of the quantum self, particularly as literary studies took a turn for the material around the turn of the millennium following the abstraction of the linguistic turn. Woolf scholars engaged in new materialist theories, animal studies, and ecocriticism have been particularly eager to read Woolf's work as reflective of her lived reality and interaction with the daily world in early twentieth-century England, and Derek Ryan presents one of the most enticing and rigorous arguments for Virginia Woolf's engagement with contemporary science in his chapter "Quantum Reality and Posthuman Life."[24] Ultimately, Ryan hews to a Deleuzian line of argument, using Barad to claim that *The Waves* demonstrates Deleuze's notion of

[24] In *The Waves*, Ryan sees the formation of difference, the constant negotiation between and around self and other in new assemblages and becomings as Woolf's version of life itself, vitality expressed as difference rather than sameness. He links Woolf's writing to Karen Barad's notion of intra-action, which suggests that agency is not tied to an individual object or subject but created through the interactions between a web of entities. Coining the term allows her to cast off the notion of inherent difference or boundedness between agents, suggesting that like Bohr's model of the atom and other early work in quantum physics, values are co-determinate; just as we cannot measure location separate from momentum, but must see them as mutually creating one another, a quantum world of intra-action is one in which "things to do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties" (Barad 814). Ryan elegantly illustrates the resonance between Barad's concept of intra-action and the way that characters form in *The Waves*, six friends creating identities that are inextricably linked to each other and the natural world surrounding them, effectively doing away with distinctions between individuals and between the human and the non-human. Ryan takes it as a given that Woolf would have been exposed to new scientific developments by her brother and his circle of erudite Cambridge friends who become the Bloomsbury group and by newspapers, and points to her frequent use of atom imagery throughout her writing and a 1928 diary entry where she writes that she seeks to "saturate every atom… say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea" (172) in order bolster his case for Woolf's conscious use of quantum physics in her novel.

pure immanence, resolving a tension in new materialism and vitalism by demonstrating the ways that immanent life can nonetheless leave room for difference.[25] I find his analysis rich and useful, but despite his acknowledgement of Woolf's indebtedness to contemporary quantum theory, he makes little of the fact that one of the primary building blocks of quantum physics itself—the insight that all matter behaves as a wave—inspires her title. Waves structure the body and are the mechanism by which the characters arrive at immanence, which for Ryan and Woolf, is also to say how they arrive at difference. They are the means of becoming, a new way of thinking how matter becomes materialized through the particular frequencies and characteristics of waves.

Other critics engaged with Woolf's quantum inspiration often get caught up in arguing the nuances of which theory in the nascent field of subatomic physics most directly influenced Woolf's language and narrative structure. While Paul Tolliver Brown presents a convincing account linking Mrs. Ramsey's conception of self in *To the Lighthouse* to a genre of physics that pushes beyond the limitations of Einstein's theory of relativity, he does not think through the way quantum understandings of the world might destabilize subjectivity and have material effects on how people experience embodiment, instead relegating waves to metaphor. He draws parallels between Mr. Ramsey's empiricism and continued belief in the solidity of the world and the fixed relations between things and people in contrast to Mrs. Ramsey's distributed sense of

[25] New materialism and vitalism are often criticized, particularly by "old" materialist Marxists, for failing to account for difference and doing away with boundary and hierarchy in ways that threaten the political efficacy of humanism. The argument tends to unfold like this: if the same vitalist force animates plastics humans have created, starfish, and humans themselves, who's to say that human life is worth more than a plastic bag? As is clear from the lines of argument this dissertation pursues, I find there are plenty of ways to value life while questioning the tenets of humanism that would insist on rigid hierarchical thinking.

self, knitted together with other people around the table, needing their presence to know herself. Brown references the way that this new physics that goes beyond fixed relations of relative position is best described by wave structure but makes little of this connection. He remarks that "[Mrs. Ramsey] has the capacity to retain her individuality like a point or disperse herself like a wave that inhabits the space of all points" (Brown 49) and connects this ability to revelations in quantum physics about the wave properties of all matter, but he relegates waves to a metaphor serving to illuminate science: "The waves and points in Woolf's novels… are exacting metaphors for the perplexing and exciting discoveries in science made during the first third of the twentieth century when relativity successfully usurped Newton's conception of absolute time and quantum interconnectedness profoundly problematized the notion of objectivity" (51). On the contrary, Woolf is not writing the Ramsey's contrasting experiences of life and knowing through the image of waves in order to further explain physics. I would suggest that the waves are not simply metaphors for science but an insight into the physical condition of living in the early twentieth century, shedding the particulate existence Brown associates with Victorianism through the figure of Mr. Ramsey (and by extension, Leslie Stephen) for Mrs. Ramsey's sense of self as ebbing and flowing, intertwined with her guests and even with a beam of light.

Marilyn Slutzky Zucker reckons with Woolf's insistence on wave-being as more than metaphorical, requesting that we '"normalize' her language of uncertainty" (151) as vital to her project, while nonetheless keeping her discussion firmly rooted in Woolf's linguistic and epistemological interventions. Zucker sees Heisenberg and his famous

uncertainty principle[26] as Woolf's most analogous counterpart in science, developing the idea of Woolf's "uncertainty principle of language" by illustrating the many moments in *To the Lighthouse* where Woolf writes elusive passages that often are interpreted as metaphor, given their physical improbability, and instead arguing that we ought to see these "word equations [as asking] us to question entirely the notion of … epistemologic hegemony" (150). I would take this insight a step further and say that this indicates that for Woolf and the six central figures in *The Waves*, wave-being is not merely a metaphor, an impossible dream of being more-than-human, but a serious ontological intervention and that necessarily effects not only the linguistic realm, but also forms the basis of a new embodiment.

Carrie Rohman is one of the few critics who engages Woolf's use of quantum mechanics as a means of reading the body, though she is most interested in the image of the moth, Woolf's original working title for the novel, as the governing structure for embodiment. Where Brown and Zucker primarily are invested in Woolf's formal and philosophic inspiration, Rohman describes Woolf as someone who "dances with language" (17), and apt assertion considering that Woolf herself thought of writing *The Waves* as writing "to a rhythm not a plot" (Rohman quoting Henke 15). Using Elizabeth Grosz and Gilles Deleuze as inspiration, Rohman suggests that vibration, dance, may be the most creative, life-giving form of expression for Woolf's characters, and uses this framework to resuscitate Jinny from the taint of excessive sexual energy and claims that

[26] Heisenberg wrote: "The familiar classification of the world into subject and object, inner and outer world, body and soul, somehow no longer quite applies" (quoted by Zucker, 147), and Zucker uses this insight as a catalyst for discussing how Woolf's fiction likewise dissolves these distinctions through a distinctive commitment to ambiguous language.

she is a prostitute.[27] Life is made through movement, and Jinny, the dancer, fluttering through social engagements, is the liveliest of them all. Rohman's foregrounding of the bodily and claim that *The Waves* is about making life through movement is essential, and as she emphasizes in her reclamation of Jinny as a creative force, the working title *The Moth* reveal's the centrality of vibration and movement for Woolf in the novel. The image of fluttering or hovering is omnipresent in descriptions of characters and of the waves themselves, so why the change of title? What do waves allow that moths do not?

Waves, unlike moths, are the very engine of vibration. Where a moth remains a metaphor for the way her characters interact, waves structure their being. As Gillian Beer helpfully describes in her study of wave theory and the rise of modernism, waves move both horizontally and laterally. Furthermore, waves don't transform as literally as a moth does, changing from caterpillar to moth in a teleological, unidirectional metamorphosis; waves are endless, persisting rather than morphing into anything else, recycling and recapitulating the same material, a kind of motion that is also stasis. Waves bring the sediment of the ocean floor to the surface, lifting the past into the present and recasting what is past into the future. And through this rupture of linear time, waves describe bodies that are necessarily indistinct from one another. As Heisenberg's uncertainty principle expresses, bodies are ultimately unknowable, as momentum confuses any notion of precisely mappable location and conversely, a singular location makes momentum untraceable. Thus, in a quantum world of waves, the unmappable nature of singular bodies disrupts our idea of time as composed of a series of individual, linear

[27] See my previous discussion of Jane Marcus' essay "Brittania Rules the Waves."

moments just as the model of time proposed by waves (circular, recapitulated) makes bodies indistinct. Though we can measure the amplitude of a wave and map a single oscillation, treating waves as singular entities is a tool for scientific modeling, not a reflection of wave behavior. The nature of de Borglie's insight in his 1924 thesis is that matter has wave properties and particle properties—there is a particle-wave duality, a condition of being both/and that describes the behavior of matter. Because of waves' motion which is both forward-moving and circular, bringing past to the surface as they flow into the future, they are an excellent model for a quantum world that rests on paradoxes: as Albert Einstein described, "we have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them explains the phenomena of light, but together they both do" (Einstein and Infed 263).

Woolf comes to this same paradox—contradictory pictures of reality—through her intimate descriptions of being embodied, of being composed of matter that behaves as waves, and her depiction of the undulatory body allows for a resolution to a paradox that haunts the modernist novel and the humanities: the tension between self and other, individualism and community, subjectivity and objectivity. Woolf does not dissolve the subject but demonstrates the way in which we are always already behaving as both particular and wave-like in any moment, blurring the boundaries of ourselves as we crest into others. The undulatory bodies that populate *The Waves* create a world where time is nonlinear and one's self is materially distributed across past and present. This lived sense of simultaneity has deep implications for understanding subjectivity, and Woolf's

undulatory bodies theorize a means of pushing back against the tyranny of Man and the hierarchized body partially through their rupturing of time.

Rosi Braidotti is particularly illuminating about this connection between rupturing the linearity of time and the expansion of the definition of the body in her work on posthumanism. Although posthumanism is a framework I sometimes shy away from because of its connotation of disembodiment or rejection of the human, Braidotti might suggest that the undulatory body is another means of writing the posthuman body, and critics who take up virtuality, like Patricia Clough or Alexander Galloway could even argue that this distributed self I'm describing is an emergent understanding of the twentieth century body as virtual. While I want to insist on the materiality of Woolf's undulatory body, a materiality often elided in virtual studies, Woolf's clear depictions of self as distributed across time and between bodies, both human and otherwise, foreshadow contemporary understandings of our bodies as partially composed of information, extended across networks, and interpolated by digital technologies. Similarly, the word "posthuman" often connotes the fetishization of a technologized body and provokes fears from feminist and humanist camps of leaving materiality behind us. But for Braidotti, the posthuman refers to any concept of embodiment which leaves Enlightenment constructs of the singular version of human behind in a "theory of subjectivity that does not rely on classical Humanism and carefully avoids anthropocentrism" (*Posthuman* 56)—a project very much in line with my own. She primarily uses a Deleuzian framework of becoming to think beyond the human, considering how becoming-earth, becoming-machine, and becoming-animal might

unlock means of understanding our material condition. Her insight about how time becomes non-linear in a posthuman embodiment is particular pertinent here. To be an undulatory body, aware of being structured by rhythms of waves and materially enmeshed in the natural world is to "shift the temporal parameters away from the expectation of continuity which sustains the discipline of history, to contemplate the idea of extinction, that is to say, a future without 'us,'" and this reconfiguration of time calls for "recompositions of both subjectivity and community" (83). Woolf's characters reflect an awareness of their own tenuous rootedness in the present and a fluid relationship with time through their sense of self as enmeshed with animal, vegetable, and geological realms, or in Braidotti's terms, "becoming-earth."

Bernard illuminates the relationship between time and wave-being over the course of a long meditation as he walks through London as a young man, roughly a third of the way through the course of his life and the novel. He has just gotten engaged, a marker of adulthood and a moment when Bernard might emerge from the swirl of his six closest childhood friends in favor of intimacy shared only with a heterosexual partner. The lyrical passage that directly precedes this section declares the sun risen, the waves now regular and energetic, almost machine-like, bright light revealing "a fanatical existence" with "mass and edge. Here was the boss of a chair, here the bulk of a cupboard" (TW 110). But what seems to be an eruption of solidity and clarity is nonetheless characterized by a sense of being intimately tied to rhythms beyond the individual body. In one of the books' most quintessentially modernist moments, as Bernard wanders the city playing the flaneur, he senses himself as a part of a conglomeration more than as an individual: "But

we roar on. We are about to explode in the flanks of the city like a shell in the side of some ponderous, maternal, majestic animal" (TW 111). While his sentiment relies heavily on metaphors of the city as female, and of himself and his fellow (mostly male) passengers on a train as able to penetrate or wound, Bernard nonetheless identifies as a resident of the maternal and the animal, his own "roaring" allying him with the wildness of the city. He revels in the comparative ease with which he sheds his own identity as he walks through London, and he notes that "the surface of my mind slops along like a pale-grey stream… I cannot remember my past, my nose, or the colour of my eyes, or what my general opinion of myself is" (113). As his ego softens and expands, his sense of time shifts:

> And, what is this moment of time, this particular day in which I have found myself caught? The growl of traffic might be any uproar—forest trees or the roar of wild beasts. Time has whizzed back an inch or two on its reel; our short progress has been cancelled. I think also that our bodies are in truth naked. We are only lightly covered with buttoned cloth; and beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence.
>
> It is, however, true that my dreaming, my tentative advance like one carried beneath the surface of a stream, is interrupted, torn, pricked and plucked at by sensations, spontaneous and irrelevant, of curiosity, greed, desire, irresponsible as in sleep. (I covet that bag--etc.) No, but I wish to go under; to visit the profound depths; once in a while to exercise my prerogative not always to act, but to explore; to hear vague, ancestral sounds of boughs creaking, of mammoths; to

> indulge impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding—impossible to those who act. Am I not, as I walk, trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy, which, unmoored as I am from a private being, bid me embrace these engrossed flocks; these starers and trippers; these errand-boys and furtive and fugitive girls who, ignoring their doom, look in at shop-windows? 113-114

Time begins to collapse, as the markers of contemporariness and civilization melt into forests or beasts, and Bernard feels time as sedimented layers, his clothes mimicking the veneer of pavement over the "shells, bones and silence" within the earth, and implicitly through Woolf's semicolon, within himself. He moves quickly from the image of circular time flying back on a reel like rewinding a film to a more overtly watery metaphor. He isn't just floating on a stream, he is under its surface, and he ties the depth of water to the sedimentary, archeological time of his earlier musings: it is by being undulatory, immersing himself in wateriness, that the "ancestral sounds" infiltrate the present. And it is through this infiltration of the past into the present that he can name the "strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy" which unmoor him from private being and make him materially, viscerally aware of himself as part of a flock of humanity.

This is not the first instance in which Bernard and the other narrators feel themselves distributed simultaneously between a hyper-present embodiment and an ancient world. In an early childhood reverie, Bernard's language is even more visceral and literal:

> The flowers swim like fish made up of light upon the dark, green waters. I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here by eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear tramplings, tremblings, stirrings round me. 12

Here, Bernard's image for himself is not precisely a wave, but a flower stalk, rooted in earth that is also "dark, green waters." Rather than earth functioning as a source of stability or wholeness, Bernard emphasizes the earth's movement and multiplicity, the way it sends vibrations through his being and contains metal, mud, clay. He senses himself as distributed through strata of the earth and atmosphere, his ribs in the earth and his eyes leaves. And this distribution is not simply through space, but also necessarily through time. Below the earth, time accumulates and pools, and ancient Egypt surges with life. He is very clear that he exists across times, Egyptian civilization just as present as the English garden where he plays. This is Woolf's first introduction of Egyptian imagery which recurs throughout the novel, and particularly of the Nile as a metonymic representation of ancientness, African-ness, and femininity, literalized through the figures of the women carrying water jugs. This gesture towards Egypt recalls the resurgent modernist interest in Egypt after the excavation of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 and the

way that Egypt serves as a space that can be repurposed for so many different racializing narratives—situated literally on the continent of Africa, it can be made into a cipher for Blackness, Orientalized as part of the Ottoman east positioned against the adjacent Christian Holy Land, alternately revered as a cradle of civilization and expression and discarded as backwards, feminized, and morally corrupt.

References to the Nile appear ten times in the text, and as Evelyn Haller points out, Egyptian imagery is omnipresent in Woolf's writing more broadly. Egypt had loomed large in the British imagination since Nelson's 1801 defeat of Napoleon and seizure of the Rosetta Stone, but with the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb Egypt came back into fashion, becoming an aesthetic inspiration for the Art Deco movement and for the Italian Futurists, who were enamored of ancient Egyptian advances in technology. Egypt is also the home of the Suez Canal, which allowed Britain access to its South Asian colonies, and through which Percival, the novel's dubious hero and representative of British colonialism, almost certainly would have passed. Evelyn Haller ignores the colonial significance in Woolf's fixation on Egypt in favor of reading Woolf's work as the reworking of the Isis myth, arguing that she self-consciously embraced Isis as an icon of female creativity, on trend with the modernist literary trend towards mythological inspiration as exemplified by T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and James Joyce. More recent analyses of *The Waves* engage its imperialist content—Percival dies while acting as a governor of a state in India—and make connections between Woolf's feminism, female embodiment in her novels, and the feminization of colonial space. Renée Dickinson argues that "the feminine is inherent in the work of empire and the

interludes of *The Waves* both explore and undermine that relationship… Woolf here deploys her experiments with narrative and form to recover the image of the feminine from its uses by imperialism" (55). While it's a worthy project to point to connections between empire and feminization, Woolf's use of Egyptian imagery in *The Waves* does more to disrupt subjectivity and notions of gendered bodies than to recover the feminine. For instance, Louis links his sense of distributed embodiment on a train ride home from school back to Egypt:

> But my body passes vagrant as a bird's shadow. I should be transient as the shadow on the meadow, soon fading, soon darkening and dying there where it meets the wood, were it not that I coerce my brain to form in my forehead; I force myself to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment… in the long, long history that began in Egypt, in the time of the Pharaohs, when women carried red pitchers to the Nile. I seem already to have lived many thousand years. But if I now shut my eyes, if I fail to realize the meeting-place of past and present, that I sit in a third-class railway carriage full of boys going home for the holiday, human history is defrauded of a moment's vision. (70-71)

In this instance, the body would like to become-bird, or even the shadow of a bird, but a sense of responsibility to continuous, singular consciousness coerces the body back into its organism. Louis displaces the sense of being stretched over thousands of years to the time of the Pharaohs in favor of the duty to record the passing of time and make history happen through the articulation of the meeting place between past and present. This temporal confusion occurs on a train, a technology whose invention greatly altered

perceptions of time and space. Intertwined with this technology of transit which collapses time, Louis becomes animal. Here, the co-presence of ancient Egypt allows for a partial expansion beyond the organism.

Later in the text, Louis connects Egypt more explicitly with the materialization of a posthuman being through technology: "I, now a duke, now Plato, companion to Socrates; the tramp of dark men and yellow men migrating east, west, north and south; the eternal procession, women going with attaché cases down the Strand as they went once with pitchers to the Nile… I am half in love with the typewriter and the telephone. With letters and cables and brief but courteous commands on the telephone to Paris, Berlin, New York, I have fused my many lives into one" (181-82). Louis' admittedly orientalist imaginings position himself as a modern aristocrat, a Greek philosopher, and multiplies his being into brown male figures spreading across the earth and women traipsing down a thoroughfare carrying a technology of containment and transfer. Woolf disrupts his singularity as well as his racial and gender identities, calling once again on Egypt as a site of connection across time. (It is worth noting that she uses the Nile as a stand-in for ancientness as if women did not still walk along the Nile to fetch water, problematically continuing the racist notion that to be non-Western is to be ancient). But curiously, what can unite these various lives is technology. Through the typewriter and the telephone, new technologies of communication, Louis fuses his being. In this sense, any body Louis might be said to possess is only possibly virtual, materialized in and through his technologies.

Woolf's personal preoccupation with Egypt in this novel returns always to the Nile, the longest river in the world and a structuring force for civilization. Just as the ocean and waves of their coastal British home become the prevailing means for thinking their own embodiment, these six narrators script the Nile as their point of connection to the deep past, the waterways of their own bodies and world bleeding into this other time and space. Wave bodies can traverse time and space, collapsing the distance between early twentieth century England and Egypt, both ancient and current, through a shared structural resonance, or wavelength. In this sense, I would suggest that Woolf perhaps borrows her conception of Egypt less from Yeats and more from Harlem Renaissance writers like Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes, who so explicitly reclaim Egypt as a space of Black power, and frequently refer to water as a key source of that power. "I've known rivers," Hughes wrote in 1920 in his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." "I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the / flow of human blood in human veins. / My soul has grown deep like the rivers." Water precedes blood for Hughes, and souls mimic a river's depth, suggesting that like Woolf, he sees human embodiment as derived from water. This homage to Harlem Renaissance imagery indicates an embrace not only of the colonial themes central to *The Waves* through Percival's career and death and Louis' commonwealth parentage, but also an emergent transatlantic understanding of the ties and resonances between Blackness, water, literary movements in Harlem, and British colonial exploits. By repeatedly returning to Egypt as a site of connection and shared embodiment, Woolf expands the reach of her novel far beyond England and the

shadow of India to encompass a world intertwined by its waterways, and bodies resonant with one another through their wave forms.

In addition to the Nile as a watery figure for the simultaneity of ancientness in the present, Woolf often writes time itself as wave-like, looping and circular more than flowing directionally like a river. Rhoda makes the connection between time and circularity explicit as she sits in a classroom doing math:

> Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire and I am outside of it, crying "Oh save me from being blown forever outside the loop of time!... And as she stares at the chalk figures, her mind lodges in those white circles; it steps through those loops into emptiness, alone. They have no meaning for her. She has no answer for them. She has no body as the others have. 21-22

Rhoda sits before the blackboard bewildered by arithmetic, in a rare passage early in the novel that describes isolation and aloneness. Once again, in this world structured by the sea, time is a loop, and the novel itself moves progressively through a day, a single revolution of the earth. Yet within this single closed cycle, images and events repeat, recurring rhythmically but with a difference, like waves breaking in different places along the shore as the tide surges and recedes.

Rhoda demonstrates the dangers of the closed circuit with her fear of time existing within a single cycle. The double possibility of the word "join" lingers for just a moment before

Woolf clarifies—Rhoda has not joined the world, she has joined together the ends of the loop, closing herself out of time and thus out of the world.

Rhoda is the character who articulates the link between subjectivity, materiality, and the looping of time most clearly; she has a hobby of floating flowers on the surface of water, and Woolf likens her to those flowers in their delicateness repeatedly. The danger in life is not being subsumed by waves, but rather floating upon them, refusing to join the cyclical looping of time and thus becoming disembodied. Louis, watching Rhoda struggle, makes the connection between her mind being stuck in the surface of the white circles and what he perceives as her lack of body. Without being in the loop, so to speak, Rhoda cannot be fully embodied. Sensing yourself as part of wave-time is essential to being a self, in Woolf's watery world. Similarly, Rhoda describes her inability or unwillingness to see her own face in the mirror and to acknowledge herself as corporeal: "'That is my face,' said Rhoda, 'in the looking-glass behind Susan's shoulder—that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face… I shift and change and am seen through in a second'" (43). She sees herself as not fully present or solid, outside of the embedded, embodied structure the others inhabit. Woolf links Rhoda's frequent refusal of undulatory being with her inability to see herself as participating in time which not only loops but oscillates, moving forward as well as circularly. Waves provide a means of acknowledging times' accumulations and the past's present-ness while insisting on motion as a key to full embodiment.

Rhoda has a slippery, complex relationship to her own existence, and sometimes articulates waves as almost antagonistic to her survival.[28] Where Jinny revels in the vibrations of her body, Rhoda sometimes finds that water undoes her: "Also, in the middle, cadaverous, awful, lay the gray puddle in the courtyard, when, holding and envelope in my hand, I carried a message. I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me" (64). Faced with water, Rhoda finds herself undone, unable to pull together an identity. This passage recalls a much more standard metaphor for water, as a place that unravels the self—like the Congo River for Marlowe or the waters of the gulf for Edna Pontillier, water creates a dangerous dissolution of the component parts of a self, creating metaphoric or literal death. But Rhoda's relationship to watery being is far from stagnant: "Look, there is the chest of drawers. Let me pull myself out of these waters. But they heap themselves upon me; they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths, with people pursuing, pursuing" (28). In one of the clearest passages linking waves to materiality rather than to disappearance, Rhoda describes awaking from a dream where her mind has wandered and fully re-inhabiting her body as having waves heap themselves upon her. The chest of drawers, the material, domestic space of her bedroom, is the space of water. Water has shoulders, scarcely differentiated from the human form, and to be a body is to be stretched and tumbled, to be a long wave with other wave-people pursuing you. Though for Rhoda this certainly has a nightmarish

[28] Rhoda kills herself in her middle age, a fact reported only obliquely by Bernard. It's hard not to read parallels between Rhoda and Woolf herself, especially considering Rhoda's uniquely antagonistic relationship to the waves that function as a structure of human existence and Woolf's ultimate decision to commit suicide by drowning herself in the Ouse River.

quality, her description of what it is to be embodied, awake, and living is one of the clearest Woolf offers—to be human is to be wave-tossed and reassembled. Importantly this is an image of moving water, and that oscillation is what separates the puddle from the waves. While a puddle can subsume identity, waves propel it. Waves return Rhoda to her body and provide a structure to what she articulates as the difficult work of living.

Rhoda articulates an increasingly precise sense of self as watery, describing her own being and not the framework of her world as undulatory and wave-like. In Rhoda's happiest moments, she articulates herself as liquid and flowing, desiring connection beyond herself: "There is some check in the flow of my being; a deep stream presses on some obstacle; it jerks; it tugs; some knot in the centre resists. Oh, this is pain, this is anguish! I faint, I fail. Now my body thaws; I am unsealed, I am incandescent. Now the stream pours in a deep tide fertilizing, opening the shut, forcing the tight-folded, flooding free. To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body?" (57) She names her body as porous, and this passage demonstrates the degree to which Rhoda envisions herself as made of water. Not only does she flow, she needs to flow outward toward someone else and realize the connecting effects of her porousness. Her language isn't merely metaphorically watery, but quite literal, as she describes herself as "thawing… flooding," releasing tension in a "deep stream" pressing against an obstacle to its progress. Her thawing brings about a high tide, re-introducing the oceanic into her watery imagery. This scene unfolds as a teenage Rhoda lies in bed after a long and alienating day at school. The language of flow, of fainting, and of fertilization connotes fecundity and recalls common descriptors of budding female sexuality—it

wouldn't be a stretch to read this as a scene of masturbation, and the final line as a longing for partnership, further suggesting that to be an undulatory body is to be communally constructed and enmeshed with others. Rhoda's experience of self as liquid, flowing, and distributed echoes instances of wave-being that each of the characters experience, reintegrating her with the group and delivering her back into the body that Louis claimed she did not have as he watched her struggle with arithmetic as a child. This passage depicts sexual release not as a dissipation or diminishment but as plenitude, a spilling over that wants to be shared, a triumph of the flow toward the collective over the knot of the singular.

A full articulation of a theory of the undulatory body begins to coalesce in Bernard's final monologue, which concludes the novel. This concluding section returns to a singular voice, breaking the novel's formal structure of character's voices merging unannounced, though Bernard retains a kind of free indirect discourse with the thoughts of his friends. And though Woolf writes Bernard in a singular voice, this hardly indicates a singular, unified body. He reflects: "I could worship my hand even, with its fan of bones laced by blue mysterious veins and its astonishing look of aptness, suppleness and ability to curl softly of suddenly crush—its infinite sensibility" (290-91). It's a beautiful, lyric description of a hand, one that prompts a reader almost instinctively to glance toward their own hand, feeling its power and searching out its mystery. But the description is also curiously divorced from ownership or subjectivity. Bernard does not say "*my* ability to curl softly," removing agency from himself and destabilizing the body as a unified organism that he controls. The hand seems relatively autonomous, something

miraculously attached to him which is to be admired and perhaps feared. But this model for becoming posthuman—sensing oneself, to some degree, as a body without organs[29]—can paint a picture of human being that is uncomfortably close to the machine, and prompt questions about how to account for will and subjectivity.

Woolf struggled mightily with the conclusion of the novel,[30] and her choice to end with the solo voice of Bernard, the writer, has been interpreted variously: some see it as a representation of the ultimate loneliness of living and surviving beyond your friends, an echo of Conrad's famous modernist exhortation that we "live as we die, alone." Others suggest Bernard's conclusion is Woolf needing to assure herself of the artist's survival and worth, a project in justifying the value of artistic practice. Still others understand the final passages as a reflection not on Woolf's psychology but on Bernard's, the white man author, now aged, needing to have the final word, ultimately repressing the wave-like embodiment of his friends and his younger self in favor of a unified narrative that asserts his singular will. I'm compelled by this reading but find it important to note that this isn't a soliloquy—Bernard is speaking to someone, he's not alone. He's in a restaurant, and he cannot place the stranger he's speaking to except for a vague sense that they've met before on a ship heading to Africa: "Strange that the face of a person, whom I scarcely know save that I think we met once on the gangway of a ship bound for Africa…" (293). In this sense, even his final interactions are structured by waves, and by the condition of being a transatlantic body. Ships to and from Africa are an essential building block of

[29] See the introduction to this dissertation for a brief gloss of this Deleuze and Guattari term, which will recur occasionally throughout this project as a way to think about the dis-organized, non-hierarchical body.
[30] See Virginia Woolf's diaries vol. 3 and 4, particularly entries from the fall of 1931 that demonstrate her nervousness about how to tackle Bernard's monologue.

transatlantic existence, and as I discussed in the introduction, early theorizations of the body as vibratory emerge from enslaved people's sense of self as intrinsically altered by that initial transatlantic voyage. Woolf is implicitly acknowledging the centrality of the Middle Passage to transatlantic embodiment through this curious choice to have Bernard end his life in the company of someone with whom he shared an experience of waves on the way to Africa.

During this narration to the stranger from the trip to Africa, Bernard wrestles aloud with what it means to be an undulatory body and to feel yourself as a wave-being in conjunction with your friends:

> "And then Neville, Jinny, Susan and I as a wave breaks, burst asunder, surrendered—to the next leaf, to the precise bird, to a child with a hoop, to a prancing dog, to the warmth that is hoarded in woods after a hot day, to the lights twisted like white ribbon on rippled waters… the sound of the chorus came across the water and I felt leap up that old impulse, which has moved me all my life, to be thrown up and down on the roar of other people's voices, singing the same song; to be tossed up and down on the roar of almost senseless merriment… But not now. No! I could not collect myself; I could not distinguish myself; I could not help letting fall the things that had made me a minute ago eager… I could not recover myself from that endless throwing away, dissipation, flooding forth without our willing it and rushing soundlessly away out there under the arches of the bridge, round some clump of trees or an island, out where seabirds sit on stakes, over the roughened water to become waves in the sea—I could not recover

> myself from that dissipation. So we parted. Was this then, this streaming away mixed with Susan, Jinny, Neville, Rhoda, Louis, a sort of death? A new assembly of elements? Some hint of what was to come? 278-79

Bernard describes his emergence into adulthood as a rejection of being indistinguishable. He acknowledges his deep desire to be "thrown up and down on the roar of other people's voices," uniting the image of the oscillating ocean wave with sounds waves and returning to the language of the "roar" which signifies a sense of unity with the past, and with a new understanding of self in time. Being a properly disciplined adult body required Bernard to give up the up and down, the wave motion of his body that united him with others, for a linear progression of time and motion. He resists becoming "waves in the sea" by insisting on collecting himself, assembling a singular body that can be distinguished and separated not only from his friends but from "some clump of trees of an island" and from "seabirds [sitting] on stakes," reaffirming the hierarchy of the human body over the animal or the plant. Where flooding forth is described as the essence of life by Rhoda and Jinny, Bernard articulates flooding as a dissipation and something he does not will, asserting agency as something he cannot grasp within the structure of wave-being. But as this reflection ends, Bernard returns to his theme: that he finds himself once again inextricably mixed with his friends. Is it death, or a new assembly of elements? By acknowledging his body as wave-like and flowing, he gives rise the possibility that the dissolution he's experiencing may in fact be simply a new assemblage of being, a new way to be a body, instead of (or in addition to) death.

In the final paragraph of the novel, Bernard finds a solution for the seeming dissonance between wave-being and subjectivity or agency, uniting the language of the waves with a singular subject that can articulate desires and individuality in a full embrace of his undulatory body : "And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back" (297). Here, Bernard returns to narrating a self constituted by waves. This image is not without complication: the wave morphs quickly into a horse, a symbol associated with Percival's death, with martial rule and British colonialism, and for all his realization about his condition as an undulatory self, Bernard retains his complicity in systems of oppression. But importantly, this surging wave is associated with desire, and specifically, with aliveness. The desire buoys him against death, the wave of his life cresting once more before coming to rest on the shore. The shore, static and stable, is where Bernard will dissolve, and here it is water that structures his vitality, keeping him afloat. While acknowledging wave-being helps Bernard supersede his own body and connect him to others, the fact that he's undulatory, that the wave rises within him, is what preserves movement and desire as opposed to the stagnation of death.

For Woolf, waves articulate a subjectivity that fiercely insists on aliveness—the connection to others that the dissolution of bodily boundaries allows doesn't result in a passive acceptance of life as cyclical and death as inevitable. This is one of the great theoretical interventions of her description of the undulatory body: it doesn't do away with subjectivity, but scripts will as the surge of a wave and desire as motion. Where new

materialist and posthumanist discourses are often accused of evacuating humans of political agency or devaluing human life, Woolf proposes a model of embodiment that moves beyond simple oscillation between the poles of subjectivity and objectivity without sacrificing agency. Ultimately for Woolf, agency relies on the flow of desire within and across the materiality of our being, which she illustrates through the undulatory bodies of these six characters. This idea that agency vacillates between people and is reliant on relationality suggests that the formulation of the undulatory body goes well beyond a revisioning of genre or a tracing of countercurrents of modernity; the undulatory body provides a model for the formation of communities that acknowledge our inherent, material connectedness not only to one another but to our environs without collapsing difference into an unknowable, undifferentiating same. The vitality of motion to determining selfhood and the centrality of oscillation and relationality in articulating embodiment is particularly essential as we consider the undulatory body in a new context—as a means of negotiating Black embodiment beyond the violent bounds of the human.

Manifesting Music: Oscillation as Form

Invisible Man illustrates a series of dichotomies that structure mid-century Black life: visible/invisible, black/white, old or South/new or North, powerful/powerless. Many excellent scholars of the novel—John S. Wright's deft and nuanced criticism comes to mind—have long focused on the resolution of these dialectics, using the language of transcendence inherited from Hegel to address the invisible man's final realization that

his invisibility could have power, and his resulting willingness to return to the world from the depths of his hole. But Ellison is careful to blur any strict delineations that lead to Manichean generalizations; as he tells us, the secret to the whitest of white paints is a single drop of black, a sentiment that seems to me to exceed the language of transcendence or any presumption of final resolution and fixed truth. Instead, I'm interested in dwelling in the space of endless oscillation which Ellison describes as the invisible man's lived experience, and by extension theorizes as the space of Black embodiment in mid-century America.

Given America's long history of dehumanizing Black bodies by emphasizing their physicality, Ellison understandably steers away from fetishizing embodiment or lingering on descriptions of the Black body for much of the text, preferring to highlight Black intellect and political prowess through the invisible man's unparalleled oratory skills. The invisible man expresses both a deep gratefulness and a gentle disgust at Mary in her representation of female Blackness, corpulent, associated with the overwhelming smells of food, almost smothering him with her care. What he dislikes about people like Mary is his inability to separate himself from her, the way women's love means "they seldom know where their personalities end and yours begins" (IM 316). Despite this surface disgust with embodiment as associated with excess, femininity, or sinfulness (as in the infamous Trueblood scene of incest), the novel's central question, as implied in its title, is ultimately about the (im)possibility of Black embodiment: why does being Black in America mean feeling, and in fact becoming, invisible? What is it like to inhabit a body that's being erased? How can Black people reclaim existence?

Ellison's answers to these questions are less about sight, I argue, than about touch—the sense that defines our boundedness as individuals—and time. His remedies for invisibility aren't about being seen, exactly, but about coming alive again through vibration that illuminates the body's edges and helps it flicker into existence. The very revivification Ellison presents in the prologue and epilogue happens through music and through the theft of power in the form of light, and the narrator describes his body recomposed as through light waves and sound waves, brought to life by oscillation. This stands in stark contrast to the scene in the hospital, following the 'accident' in the paint factory, where our protagonist is given electric shock treatment, literally shot through with electricity waves, but with the aim of deadening his sense even as they reanimate his body. In key moments in the plot, most notably in the wake of Tod Clifton's death, when the invisible man begins to come to terms with his own invisibility, the motif of oscillation returns, signaling a shift in how he thinks about his own aliveness and embodiment. Where Virginia Woolf presents the undulatory body as a largely positive model for embodiment that pushes us closer to understanding our connection to other matter and other human beings, Ellison's embrace of wave-being is far more dubious; as a Black man, waves have engendered his racialization and dehumanization, been a structuring force in the creating 'the wake' of enslavement in which he lives. When is vibration a powerful means of asserting alternate embodiment, and when is it employed to materialize Blackness against the will of those who dream of escaping the confines of the body? As we can trace not only in *Invisible Man* but also in sections of *Juneteenth* and his essays about his own relationship to music, Ellison writes undulatory being as a

means of liberation from dichotomy, writing oscillation as the basis of his characters' material existence even as he articulates a model for Black humanity that eschews hyper-embodiment.

Ralph Ellison is perhaps the preeminent author of Black subjectivity in the twentieth century. *Invisible Man*, the only novel he published during his lifetime, draws immediate attention to the predicament of Black being in post-Civil War America, beating Chicago sociologists to this theorization by a decade: to be a Black man in this country is to be hypervisible and invisible simultaneously, everywhere and nowhere. Ellison is careful to define his central conceit in his opening line: "I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms" (3). That is, his protagonist is fleshy, impossible to see but nonetheless embodied. Furthermore, Ellison is emphatic that this invisibility is not a metaphor but a reality of his narrator's physical being. But how does this Black body materialize if not through vision? The prologue begins to answer this question, and through its destabilizing narrative structure and focus on music, Ellison constructs an alternate means of materialization of the self, a way for Blackness to reject the visible as the only category of being and claim an embodiment rooted in something else.

As the novel opens, our protagonist is in his home, listening to music. His home is more than a little unusual; it's a hole in the ground, lit by no fewer than 1,369 lightbulbs, which our narrator likes to fill with sound: "There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole, and when I have music I want to feel its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body" (8). This description of music as vibration emphasizes the structure of sound

waves, their minute displacement of air that can produce a full-body experience of immersion in sound.

Being touched by vibrations of sound is how the invisible man experiences himself and knows that he's alive. He describes a kind of oscillation on a grand scale he performs when he is least sure of his embodiment: "Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist… It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back… You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you" (*IM* 3). I picture this bumping to and fro between people, punching back as a means of demanding connection, as the protagonist winding through life like a pinball in a game, oscillating between the rails as he barrels toward the end of the course. Additionally, he makes himself known not by shining a light on his body or making himself big or flashy, but through his voice. The world is made up of sound and contact with others (violent though it may be), and to join its vibration is to make noise and bump into people. In fact, noise and contact are how you become embodied.

Jack-the-Bear, as the invisible man asks to be addressed due to his extended "hibernation" in his hole, has realized that the key to action and to regaining the world lies in recognizing the power of sound waves, and acknowledging that his ability to act is structured by their energy. Capturing oscillation is, quite literally, harnessing power. After a lifetime of prizing individuality and directness, learning to enter the straight and narrow world of whiteness and to discipline himself into an acceptable, unified

Enlightenment body, his recognition remains tenuous and vexed, and he is careful to temper it with tales of caution. He recounts a dream where a girl's face expands, "becoming a formless mass while her eyes ran in bilious jelly up the chimney. And so it is with me. Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility" (*IM* 7). Jack-the-Bear is careful to warn against formlessness or disintegrating the body completely into mass; he's not romanticizing disappearance by avowing his undulatory body but emphasizing the value in recognizing an alternate form of embodiment, one that upends individualism and boundedness in favor of form as the rhythm and oscillation that makes up sound and light.

He describes his enmeshment with music, saying: "That night I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths" (IM 9). Through its motion and wave structure, music creates depth, expanding the body in space and not just in time. It offers an alternate space where invisibility is not a barrier to embodiment. Through the space Louis Armstrong's music opens, Jack-the-Bear takes us on a journey across time that collapses African American history into the present, nestling the past between the beats of the music. The vision begins in a church, an archetypal preacher figure testifying to the ambiguity of Blackness: "Black will make you… /Black… /… or black will un-make you" (IM 10). It becomes the story of an old enslaved woman who has born children fathered by her master confusedly mourning the master's death, oscillating between her love for him as the

father of her children and her hatred for his cruelty and power. The rhythm of the music becomes the rhythm of footsteps, spurring Jack-the-Bear's ascent out of the depths as he flees their pounding. Though he paints a nightmarish picture of music's power, its rhythm painfully unrelenting, he attributes action to its insistence: "At first I was afraid; this familiar music had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable, and yet had I lingered there beneath the surface I might have attempted to act" (IM 13). Here, music has the power to force him to act, its rhythm reanimating him after hibernation. Music has a surface and it can suck you into its depths, a space that seems dangerous but in fact provides the pulsating structure of action and living. In this watery metaphor, beneath the surface does not represent dissolution, death, or destruction, but a font of power and action.

Alexander Weheliye makes much of this concept that contemporary Black bodies are structured by musical form in his 2002 monograph *Phonographies*. He thinks through how Blackness is constructed by the mechanization of music through the phonograph and other modern recording technologies, looking to this node of Black cultural practice in order to tease out Blackness' ambiguous relationship to Western modernity as both its engine and its outside. Like Paul Gilroy, who grants music a particular privilege within Black cultural production because of its non-representational qualities, which he argues make it a more adept vehicle for expressing the horrors of slavery and forcing confrontation with the complexity of Black experience, Weheliye values the sonic as the Black form par excellence.[31] He claims that "the sonic remains an important zone from

[31] Gilroy articulates this in the third chapter of *The Black Atlantic*.

and through which to theorize the fundamentality of Afro-diasporic formations to the currents of Western modernity, since the field remains, to put it bluntly, the principal modality in which Afro-diasporic cultures have been articulated" (5). Ellison endorses this view of African American culture transmitted primarily through rhythm and technologies of sound in an essay collected in *Living with Music* drawn from fragments of the novel that was to become *Juneteenth*, describing drums as the only form of language available to enslaved people: "Drums that talked like a telegraph. Drums that could reach across the country like a church bell sound. Drums that told the new almost before it happened! Drums that spoke with big voices like big men! Drums like a conscience and a deep heart-beat that knew right from wrong. Drums that told glad tidings! Drums that sent the news of trouble speeding home! Drums that told us *our* time and told us where we were…" (203). Toni Morrison makes a case for Black people as some of the most advanced users of communications technology before the twentieth century, calling enslaved peoples "the first moderns" because of their experience of forced, rapid modernization through colonialism and because of their use of drums to shrink a globalized world and transmit messages through rhythm long before the invention of the telegraph (Small Acts 178-181).

John S. Wright likewise makes strong claims for the centrality of music not only in Ellison's work but in the invention of modernity: "Music—bound more than any of the other arts to time and timing—was for Ellison, even more than for his music-minded novelistic exemplar Andre Malraux, that expressive penetration into ultimate reality whose forms, patterns of evolution, traditions, and metamorphoses supplied the clues not

only to the souls of black folk but to the rhythms and style and soul of modern civilization" (Wright 125). We see this emphasis on rhythm as the "ultimate reality" in an essay critiquing LeRoi Jones' (later Amiri Baraka) *Blues People*, where Ellison rests his case on the vitalism and humanizing power of music and Black sound:

> 'A slave,' writes Jones, 'cannot be a man.' But what, one might ask, of those moments when he feels his metabolism aroused by the rising of the sap in spring? What of his identity among other slaves? With his wife? And isn't it closer to the truth that far from considering themselves only in terms of that abstraction, 'a slave', the enslaved really thought themselves as *men* who had been unjustly enslaved?... Slavery was a most vicious system, and those who endured and survived it a tough people, but in was not (and this is important for Negroes to remember for the sake of their own sense of who and what their grandparents were) a state of absolute repression. A slave was, to the extent that he was a musician, one who expressed himself in music, a man who realized himself in the world of sound. LwM 128

Ellison's wording in that final sentence—"a man who realized himself in the world of sound"—suggests his belief in the materiality of sound and its ability to engender a new form of humanity. Crucially, this is a version of man animated by connection rather than individuation, either with his fellow enslaved people or with the natural world, his own metabolism dependent on the flow of sap. Ellison takes issue with Jones' narrow definition of man and looks to sound and the liquid rhythms of the natural world for alternate nodes of identification and embodiment.

Weheliye attributes Black embodiment through sound to this ambivalence about an enslaved man's relationship to the signifier man. He argues that Black musicians, already divorced from notions of "linearity, progress, and the like" (8) that dictated Western sound aesthetics because of their expulsion beyond the category of Man, were positioned perfectly to "(re)mix the divide between the ephemerality and materiality of technologized sound in the twentieth century" (8). Furthermore, he posits that sound is the medium through which Black futurity is determined, affirming that sonic invention is key to the evolution of Black subjectivity and freedom: "In sonic Afro-modernity, sound, for a variety of social, ontological, historical, and aesthetic reasons (as a general rule, the *why* is never quite as important as the *how* here), holds out more flexible and future-directed provenances of Black subjects' relation to and participation in the creation of Western modernity" (11). Weheliye uses Ellison as a prime example of this engagement with mechanized sound in order to forge new Black subjectivity that gestures towards a freer future. He sees prior scholarly interest in Ellison's use of music as too focused on the call and response structures of jazz or the blues, and underinvested in the modes of musical transmission, arguing that the grooves of the record and the mechanization of Armstrong's voice are essential to understanding the relationship to time and subjectivity Ellison explores. I appreciate Weheliye's commitment to materiality and his insistence on balancing analysis of content with analysis of form, and I share his belief that the sonic is a space of Black subject creation worth examining. However, I want to take up the *why* that he parenthetically dismisses—I would argue that sound is a tool for shaping future embodiments precisely because of its wave structure and tactility.

Weheliye begins to supply a reason that music is such a privileged category for Black subjectivity, but doesn't complete his line of thought; following Stuart Hall's call for alternatives to visual and representational media in order to "turn the mechanisms of fixed racial signification against the themselves, in order to begin to constitute new subjectivities," (50) Weheliye argues that "sound occupies a privileged place precisely because it manages to augment an inferior Black subjectivity—a subjectivity created by racist ideologies in the field of vision..." (50). I concur that the sonic opens new nodes of being and distributes selfhood beyond the mind or the eye, but how does it do this? Steven Connor describes sound as "omnipresent, non-directional, and mobile, where vision is intermittent, separative, and fixating" in his essay "The Modern Auditory I," which explores sound as the paradigmatic sense of modern subject creation, contra many accounts of modernity with focus on the ocular to the exclusion of other senses.[32] Connor argues that "the dependence of sound upon the principles of resonance, transmission and induction implies the mutuality and transparency of objects and bodies in space" (207), presenting a counterpoint to the eye which fixes and disciplines bodies in space. Precisely because sound is a vibration, a wave structure, it is always relational, transmitted through media that interact with one another intimately. Sound augments the subject by demonstrating this relationality physically, uniting self with other through vibration. As Jack-the-Bear describes, music enters the body, shifting its relationship to time and space through the oscillation of sound waves, and allowing for a new, more distributed form

[32] As Connor rightly points out, even suspicious accounts of the ocular that draw attention to its violences and seek to question its authority, like Foucault's description of the panopticon or Lacan's mirrors, critique vision by turning vision against itself rather than seeking alternate modes of perception.

which engenders aliveness, action, and the end of hibernation. In Jack-the-Bear's vision, the Black body of the future has indeed slipped a groove, embracing the sonic structures of time and being presaged by the drums of their African ancestors and finding form through an embodiment articulated by sound waves.

As Wright emphasizes, one key feature of the undulatory sonic body is its alternate relationship to time. As many critics before me have discussed, Ellison consciously employs a jazz structure in his novel, riffing on themes and returning to major motifs throughout his novel, cycling through repetitions with slight differences.[33] This technique is perhaps even more evident in his unfinished novel *Juneteenth*, which returns recursively to scenes from a dying senator's childhood, refracting history through many different angles. But beyond the episodic, cyclical macro-structure of the novel, Ellison describes Jack-the-Bear's state—and by extension, the state of being Black in America—as one which inherently dictates a non-linear sense of time: "Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music" (*IM* 8). Jazz operates not only as a model for storytelling for

[33] For analyses of *Invisible Man* as a jazz novel, see Robert G. O'Meally *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, Columbia University Press, 1998; A. Timothy Spaulding "Embracing Chaos in Narrative Form: The Bebop Aesthetic in Ralph Ellison's 'Invisible Man,'" *Callaloo*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2004, pp. 481–501; James Smethurst, "'Formal Renditions': Revisiting the Baraka-Ellison Debate," *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2019, pp. 41–59; and Michael Germana, *Ralph Ellison: Temporal Technologist*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

Ellison, but as a means of explaining time's relationship to invisibility; hovering ahead of or slightly behind the beat is jazz's signature innovation, and this sonic pattern likewise structures Jack-the-Bear's invisible embodiment. He describes these moments of being off-beat as breaks, introducing a turn of phrase that has been particularly influential in Black cultural studies since Fred Moten's 2003 monograph *In the Break*, which theorizes Black radicalism as located precisely in this space where time gathers in eddies and nodes—the break, the space of suspension. These nodes in the flow could be said to mimic the way a wave breaks, water suspended before it crashes against a shore, an irregular cycle.

Continuing this liquid image of the break, the invisible man describes time flowing over him like a rushing river, and he recognizes his invisibility for the first time while he's under the surface, so to speak, looking around inside one of these breaks. Moten uses Ellison as an entrance point into his analysis of Amiri Baraka's oeuvre (curiously enough, given Ellison's frequent critiques of Baraka), which he describes as taking place within the break. He alights on the concept that Jack-the-Bear's music-infused hole is an incubator for action, calm before the storm, calling it a display of the break and "a very definite seizure and advent, a musical caesura that demands precisely that immersive lingering that, according to Ralph Ellison, is a necessary preface to action" (85). This caesura is a "temporal-spatial discontinuity" and a "generative break, one wherein action becomes possible, one in which it is our duty to linger… That break allows, indeed demands, a fundamental reorientation… by way of an improvisation through the very idea of logical structure in a way that is way past normal ontology or

time: so that what I'm into here is the anarchronic improvisation of ensemble that exists in the tragic and elegiac" (99). This heady theorization of the break jams a few important concepts into a short space: the break is itself a kind of elegy for tragedy, but not a stuck place of inaction. Rather, the break reorients times and space, requiring a new ontology of self that is both anarchic and anachronistic, and crucially, part of an ensemble. Living in the break, or "outside the groove of history," as Ellison describes it (443), upends linear time and any sense of a unified, continuous body. As Moten calls for in his introductory remarks on the auditory in Frederick Douglass' narrative, "The broken circle demands a new analytic (way of listening to the music)… Douglass (and, by extension, Roach and Brown and the entire line of mastery's disruptive, oppositional, anoriginal recording) was already sexually cut and augmented, already anticipated and improvised, already re-en-gendered by the sound of the one who comes before him, the one we keep calling on to arrive again, here and now…" (24). We need a new analytic to describe bodies inhabiting the break, and new means of listening to their stories that are marked indelibly by anachronism,[34] always already living in and amongst the sounds of the past.

Invisible Man belies an obvious structural critique of time and temporality, as it unfolds its story primarily linearly and functions as a bildungsroman of sorts, as the protagonist leaves school, moves to New York, and eventually finds work as a communist organizer and agitator with the Brotherhood. But in a subversion of the standard form of the genre, time is troubled by the invisible man's societal invisibility

[34] Weheliye's argument in *Phonographies* develops this idea about perpetual anachronism and time by looking to recorded music, riffing on notions of the break and hip-hop DJing techniques to illuminate Black artists' play with temporal reorientation vis a vis recorded music.

and the resulting relationship to materiality, and thus divergent sense of space and time. He encounters perpetual reminders of his own corporeal insignificance and persistent relegation to sub-citizenship as he constantly attempts to out-perform and out-run the legacies of slavery which will not cease to haunt him, from Norton's dismissiveness to Mary's blackface piggy bank. In fact, Jack-the-Bear explicitly lays out a theory of time in his prologue, a theory built on recurrence, cycle, and contradiction. "These two spots [Broadway and the Empire State Building] are among the darkest of our whole civilization—pardon me, our whole *culture* (an important distinction, I've heard)—which might sound like a hoax, or a contradiction, but that (by contradiction, I mean) is how the world moves: Not like an arrow, but a boomerang. (Beware those who speak of the spiral of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy.) I know; I have been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness" (6). In this tightly constructed passage, Ellison eviscerates the idea of linear time and progress. By parenthetically identifying a distinction between culture and civilization, he reminds us that the notion of civilization depends on "culture" as its underside. Where civilization represents a linear progression towards an ever-more-civilized apex of order, culture is a coded term for anything in excess of civilization, practices that resist the logic of linearity.

Even his grammar enforces a cyclical, recurrent structure, parenthetical statements intervening at regular intervals, semicolons, colons, and long-dashes creating a sense of rhythmic continuity between sentences. He casts the spiral aside—still too progressive, ever-tighter circles leading to inexorably to a single point. Boomerang time

is violent in its cycles, sending you back to the beginning when you'd thought you'd come so far, a cycle we see repeated time and time again as Jack-the-Bear faces setbacks that return him to invisibility at every turn. Like the invisible man, though, a boomerang does not trace the same path coming and going; rather, its trajectory is basically circular. As the invisible man descends into his hole for the first time at the very end of novel, he explicitly links this boomerang time to waves, acknowledging time's complicatedly cyclical trajectory: "Great invisible waves of time flowed over me, but that morning never came" (567). In this deviation from linearity lies possibility, knowledge about the nature of time that allows Jack-the-Bear to see "the darkness of the lightness."

But long before he articulates the wave-structure of time, we see it in action. When the police murder Tod Clifton, the invisible man's fellow Brotherhood organizer, Jack-the-Bear begins to acknowledge the way a racism he has hoped to repress to the past continues to enact violence against Black bodies, and the way that this racialization forces a shifted embodiment and relationship to time. Clifton has been missing for some days, and the invisible man is concerned. He finds him on a street corner, doing a minstrel show that features a flimsy dancing doll: "A grinning doll of orange-and-black tissue paper with thin flat cardboard disks forming its head and feet and which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face" (431). The doll embodies everything the invisible man has been resisting—Blackness as all body, no brain, a mask with no depth or interiority, sensual and loose. He is infuriated and bewildered that a friend could betray their ideals like this

and perform such a degrading stereotype. Clifton goes backwards, dropping into a repressed past: “How on earth could he drop from the Brotherhood to this in so short a time? And why if he had to fall back did he try to carry the whole structure with him?... It was as though he had chosen—how had he put it that night with Ras?—to fall outside of *history*” (434, emphasis original). His insistence that Clifton is reversing the course of progress demonstrates his investment in a teleological history, a belief that the terror symbolized by the battle royal, representative of centuries of dehumanization of Black bodies, can stay in the murky past.

As the invisible man wanders the streets in his shock after witnessing Tod’s murder, his sense of progressive time begins to shift. He descends into the subway, his “mind plunging… hearing the roar of trains passing” (438), entering a metaphorical instance of Moten’s break, diving beneath the smooth surface to grapple with a node in the progress of time. The platform vibrates, blurring the edges of his being just as music does in the opening sequence. The invisible man harps on this notion that Tod has exited history, now using the train as a metaphor for historical progress: “Why had he chosen to step off the platform and fall beneath the train? Why did he choose to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history?” This line of thought leads him to his first open acknowledgment that history is written by the powerful, and that it may not in fact record his lived truth: “actually it is only the known, the seen, the heard and only those events that the recorder regards as important that are put down, those lies his keepers keep their power by” (439). Would it be so terrible to buck this history, to choose to live outside of it? As he watches the Black men

on the subway platform, with undulatory bodies "like that of deep-sea divers suffering from the bends" (440), he encounters three in zoot suits, "whose bodies seemed—what had one of my teachers said of me?—'You're like one of these African sculptures, distorted in the interest of a design'" (440). They walk an alternate embodiment, distorted, submerged, and curiously tied to Africa, to both a primitive past and a highly stylized, design-conscious present. This carries into their speech, a "jived-up transitional language" in which they think "transitional thoughts, though perhaps they dream the same old ancient dreams." He concludes that "they were men out of time," and this realization leads him to "tremble so violently I had to lean against a refuse can" (441). These men oscillate between a past and a present or even a future, demonstrating a rejection of teleological time that shakes the invisible man to his core.

He emerges from the subway, deeply disoriented by the boomeranging of time, into a surging crowd: "Forgotten names sang through my head like forgotten scenes in a dream. I moved with the crowd, the sweat pouring off of me, listening to the grinding roar of traffic; the growing sound of a record shop loudspeaker blaring a languid blues. I stopped. Was this all that would be recorded? Was this the only true history of the times, a mood blared by trumpets, trombones, saxophones and drums, a song with turgid, inadequate words? My mind flowed. It was as though in this short block I was forced to walk past everyone I'd ever known..." (443). It's as if the vibration of the subway, of the zoot suiters themselves, has inhabited his body. The roar of traffic doesn't explicitly mimic the roar of the prehistoric forest as it does for Woolf, but it does introduce a meditation on time and history through the catalyst of sound waves and a cyclical,

distributed being. He contemplates the possibility that history is a blaring mood rather than a straight, logical line, and that perhaps the call-and-response, repetitive popular music genres of his day best represent the kind of recurrence and anachronism he's experiencing. His encounter with the music and this new vision of history shifts his thought, as he feels his consciousness flowing like liquid, and the figures of his life recur, time slowing to a crawl and pausing to highlight past relationships and names that come flooding forward. He's slipping into a break, cresting a wave, pausing in elegiac space to reorient his being without Tod. This reflection leads to an even more radical realization about his own embodiment: "Perhaps, like them, I was a throwback, a small distant meteorite that died several hundred years ago and now lived only by virtue of the light that speeds through space as too great a pace to realize that its source has becomes a piece of lead…" (442). In an instance where light becomes the structuring wave force for the undulatory body, Jack-the-Bear aligns himself with zoot suiters as an anachronism, both here in the train and deep into space. He exists by virtue of waves, speeding along to grant him form and life, which render his body already dead and alive, simultaneously inhabiting the present and fixed hundreds of years ago. Over the next few days, as our protagonist comes to terms with his new understanding of history and rejects progressive notions of time, he completes his transformation and recognizes the potential power in the materiality of his own undulatory embodiment. In a famous sequence of realization, he claims new purpose for his invisible materiality: "Oh, I'd serve them well and I'd make invisibility felt if not seen, and they'd learn that it could be as polluting as a decaying body, or a piece of bad meat in a stew" (509).

The invisible man presages this realization of the power his (im)materiality holds in one of the first instances where he explicitly links nonlinear time to alternate embodiment: “I bent forward, suddenly conscious of my legs in new blue trousers. But how do you know they’re your legs? What’s your name? I thought, making a sad joke with myself… For it was as though I were looking at my own legs for the first time—independent objects that could of their own volitions lead me to safety or danger… Then it was as though I stood simultaneously at opposite ends of a tunnel. I seemed to view myself from the distance of the campus while yet sitting there on a bench in the old arena” (334-5). This passage demonstrates the inherent link between sensing yourself as a distributed and dissolved and living within cyclical, boomerang time. He recalls a moment in his life when he was racked with literal shock waves on the operating table in the hospital, echoing “what’s your name?” to himself as he experiences he view his legs independent from a unified embodiment. He recognizes the contrivance of the body, suddenly sensing that perhaps his boundaries are as disposable as his Brotherhood pseudonym. This dissociation provokes a doubling over of time, as he describes being back at college even as he sits in his new suit, with his new name, about to give a speech. He makes the connection that inhabiting an undulatory, distributed body forces him to experience times’ simultaneity, even as cyclical time reveals this new embodiment; he eventually comes to name this mutually engendered time/space of Black embodiment as invisibility.

Clifton seems to have realized that the structure of the Brotherhood and progressive modernity in which the invisible man has such faith relies on the

disposability of Black bodies. Clifton's realization echoes contemporary biopolitical discourse, the idea that political power is enacted through designating which kinds of bodies are allowed or encouraged to survive and which are earmarked for disposal.[35] Biopolitics deals with life in the aggregate, mapping populations rather than individuals, and it will "derive its knowledge from, and define its power's field of intervention in terms of, the birth rate, the mortality rate, various biological disabilities, and the effects of the environment" (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 245). Institutionalized racism, as defined by Foucault, is the process by which the state decides who to let die. Achille Mbembe responds to Foucault's theorization of biopolitics by coining the term necropolitics—as the word suggests, he wants to emphasize death, and critiques Foucault's language of "letting die" by insisting that state power does not passively allow death but works to create its conditions. Necropolitics argues that some populations must die in order that others may live, and that certain people are "subjected to conditions of life conferring up on them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe 40, emphasis original). Mbembe distinguishes the plantation as one of the testing grounds for necropolitical control, where violence is "an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror. Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life" (21). In *Invisible Man*, the battle royal at the outset of the novel demonstrates the extent to which this capricious, terrorizing destruction structures Black life; in Tod's death scene, Ellison shows us that the plantation has colonized the streets as well as local government and the academy,

[35] Foucault coins the term biopolitics, claiming that we now live under mode of power that he describes as making bodies live and letting them die, a reversal of an earlier mode of sovereignty which displays its power by proving its right to end life.

extending its necropolitical control across space and time and infiltrating every facet of American life.

Jack-the-Bear articulates his own hunch that Tod has recognized his expendability through his encounter with the zoot suiters in the subway, men who are "outside, in the dark with Sambo,[36] the dancing paper doll; taking it on the lambo with my fallen brother, Tod Clifton (Tod, Tod) running and dodging the forces of history instead of making a dominating stand" (441). Perhaps when history marks your body for erasure, the only way to live is to dodge its necropolitical force, to slip tracks and find another rhythm and time. Ellison even displays this alternate time in his prose, letting rhyme turn the elegiac sentence back on itself, Sambo and Tod alive together in the sound of being off-track and outside of progressive historical time. In his final moments, Clifton performs his understanding that he is a body marked for death, a member of a population that must be kept as flimsy and destructible as a dancing paper doll in order that whiteness maintain supremacy. The unusual spelling of Clifton's first name—Tod, with one d, is German for "death"—clues us into to his zombified existence, and his disposability becomes apparent when a policeman pursues and shoots Clifton for the simple crime of being Black and making a spectacle of himself. His death leaves no ripple in the world, like he was already gone: "Across the street the crowd still churned" (438), unruffled by the expected

[36] The figure of Sambo recurs throughout this chapter, and in fact, the dissertation more generally, because of the way the dancing Black body, particularly the jerky, almost electrified movement of a doll or puppet, encapsulates the vibration I'm describing as a key element of the undulatory body. By performing this dance, Tod instates himself as a body to be shot, marks himself as outside biopolitical citizenship. Sun Ra is fascinated by the figure of Sambo, frequently using the name in his "word equations." As the next section discusses, Sambo's electrified motion could be thought of as machinic, not-quite-human not only through baseness but through a disturbing connection to technology or the cyborg, and Douglas Kearney's concept of "weaponizing the black gestus" explicitly riffs on the power embedded in the erratic, staggering embodiment of a Sambo figure as a kind of bodily refusal of order.

termination of Black life. The invisible man's invisibility, his ghost-like presence, is no accident; his liminal embodiment is what it feels like to live social death.[37]

Clifton's demise suggests a reading of *Invisible Man* that presages Afropessimism, a philosophy of Blackness built on biopolitical notions of race based on the ideas of Mbembe, Frank Wilderson III, and Jared Sexton. The term does not connote inaction or utter despair, as the name might suggest, but rather theorizes Blackness as an ontological condition of erasure or death, inherently opposed to and thus not resolvable with a humanist model. Though Clifton's murder purports the efficacy of the Afropessimist notion that the only way to plunge outside the structures that make Black life into social death is to complete the process of dying on your own terms, the invisible man does not ascribe to this philosophy. In the novel's final few surreal pages, as he plunges into a manhole while being pursued by policeman, he does arrive at a clear articulation of his own ghostly embodiment and the condition of social death: "This is the way it's always been, only now I know it… It's a kind of death without hanging, I thought, a death alive" (566). He realizes he cannot escape, and dreams that the people from his past are dismembering and castrating him, but he awakes to realize that "in spite of the dream, I was whole" (571). He's in a hole, whole, and ready, he tells us in his epilogue, to emerge from hibernation.

Crucially, the invisible man's plunge outside of history does not kill him. As he reminded us hundreds of pages ago, in the prologue, "it is incorrect to assume that, because I'm invisible and live in a hole, I am dead" (6). While he hibernates, he literally

[37] Calling this state of death-in-life "social death" is Orlando Patterson's innovation in his 1982 book *Slavery and Social Death*. In my experience, it's the most widely used terminology to describe this concept.

subverts power, stealing electricity from Monopolated Power & Light. Underground, he's found a way to hack into the system of history that requires his elimination. Christina Sharpe, who often gets lumped in with Afropessimist thinkers but who similarly refuses to ascribe to the notion that Black death is the only way to survive Black life, writes that Black living happens "in the wake": in the wake of the slave ships that traversed the middle passage, in a perpetual state of wake for the dead, and as awake and living in spite of the "insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation" of Black life (Sharpe 14). Riffing on Saidiya Hartman's statement that she's living in the "afterlife of slavery,"[38] Sharpe poignantly theorizes Black life as living "in the afterlife of property," grappling with how to claim life when you're descended not from people but from things. The invisible man's emergence from hibernation is vigorous awakeness, a means of staying alive in the wake of death and refusing to succumb to necropolitical power that marks him for dead, as just another disposable thing. Sharpe explains that she is "interested in plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death, and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially" (13). The invisible man ruptures the immanence of death through music, which fights against the negation of Black being by returning him to his body through its vibration. The forces of invisibility and social death can be resisted by subscribing to rhythms outside of progressive history and insisting on the materiality of Black being brought into existence through wave structures.

[38] This concept is from Hartman's 2008 book *Lose Your Mother*, which traces the slave trade through the lens of a trip she took to Ghana.

Ellison further develops his commitment to resisting necropolitical control through the vibratory Black body in the fragments of text that were to become his posthumous novel *Juneteenth*. The novel centers around the reminiscences of Bliss, later a conservative politician who goes by the name Sunraider, the adopted son of a dynamic preacher. Ellison takes on politics, religion, and their intertwining explicitly, providing another manifestation of vibration as the primary source and structure of life rooted in Biblical text:

> "Because in all their blasting they could not blast away one solitary vibration of God's true word… We heard it down among the roots and among the rocks. We heard it in the sand and in the clay. We heard it in the falling rain and in the rising sun. On the high ground and in the gullies. We heard it lying moldering and corrupted in the earth. We heard it sounding like a bugle call to wake up the dead. Crying, Doooooo! Ay, do these dry bones live!... And if they ask you in the city why we praise the Lord with bass drums and bass trombones tell them we were rebirthed dancing, we were rebirthed crying affirmation of the Word, quickening our transcended flesh… We were rebirthed from the earth of this land and revivified by the Word. So now we had a new language and a new song to put flesh on our bones…" (LwM 209)

For Daddy Hickman, flesh is a product of the rollicking vibration of God's Word, best accessed here on Earth through music (and perhaps through the rhythmic parallelism of his own sermons). To live at all is to live with and through music, and flesh itself cannot

exist without song to vibrate it into existence. [39] Through Daddy Hickman, Ellison demonstrates a philosophy that meshes this deeply felt knowledge of the undulatory body with Christianity, a theology so often characterized by teleology and the casting off of flesh as sinful. In a reclamation of Black embodiment as a means of accessing enlightenment through an intimate understanding of time's nonlinearity, Ellison positions Black bodies as uniquely able to inherit civilization and particularly Christianity: "What's wrong with these folks, Bliss, is they can't stand continuity, not the true kind that binds man to man and to Jesus and to God. My great-great-grandaddy was probably a savage eating human flesh, and bastardy, denied joy and shame, and humanity had to be mixed with my name a thousand times in the turmoil of slavery, and out of all that I'm a preacher. It's a mystery but it's based on fact, it happened body to body, belly to belly over the long years" (J 162). Daddy Hickman holds the tension between a narrative of progressive history and the full acknowledgment that history lives within us all—if there is any progress, it is only insomuch as we materially incorporate our history into our bodies, passing knowledge through bellies as we weave interconnections between people. This model for embodiment based on oscillation and recursive, cyclical rhythm requires a different orientation to the progression of time, and Daddy Hickman ends his Juneteenth sermonizing with a prophecy of sorts: "Time will come round when we'll have to be their eyes; time will swing and turn back around. I tell you, time shall swing and spiral back around…" (LwM 212). Like Jack-the-Bear's boomerang image, time doesn't merely spiral it actually reverses course, turning around on an axis, and this turning is associated

[39] For a more detailed discussion of the term flesh and the history of its use in relation to embodiment, see the introduction to this dissertation.

with a new material reality of shared enfleshment—"we'll have to be their eyes." Time and embodiment are inextricably linked; when the time comes from a new understanding of the body, and thus of racialized hierarchies, time itself will change course.

My analysis of waves as structuring and affirming of life, agents that open liberatory possibility for embodiment and free bodies from oppressive teleology is complicated by the horrifying presence of wave-like language to describe electric shocks throughout the novel. In addition to the Battle Royal scene at the outset of the novel, the way the jerky dances of the Sambo dolls and other minstrel movement mimic electrified bodies,[40] and the omnipresent threat of death at the hands of the state in the electric chair, the most explicit description of a body animated by waves comes during the invisible man's stint in a freakishly sterile, white hospital following the explosion at the paint factory. In this case, there is nothing positive whatsoever about being an undulatory body: "There was no avoiding the shock and I rolled with the agitated tide, out into the blackness" (238). In the bowels of the paint factory, Lucius Brockway tells the invisible man that "we the machines inside the machine" (217), and now our protagonist lies in the hospital, literally inside a machine, being reanimated by electric shocks. The machine is inside him, meshed with his being and simultaneously giving and threatening life. The shocks both revivify him and perform a non-surgical frontal lobotomy, making him live but blurring the edges of existence beyond the breaking point: "Where did my body end

[40] In *Scottsboro Boys*, a musical that got little play or attention because of its difficult content and propensity to elicit laughter from audiences where I think it meant to induce tears, there's a memorable tap dance number, performed in a style of minstrel tomfoolery and exaggerated blackface, as the accused go to their death in the electric chair. This connection between minstrelsy, demarcation for premature death, electrification, and the rapid vibration of tap dance also forms a visual and rhythmic motif in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, another cultural artefact that I don't think gets its due.

and the crystal and white world begin? Thoughts evaded me, hiding in the vast stretch of clinical whiteness to which I seemed connected only by a scale of receding grays. No sounds beyond the sluggish inner roar of the blood" (238). Crucially, he's divorced from sound waves, those structuring forces of his embodiment. When he finally accesses sound, he grows warmer, life returning slowly: "The voices droned harmoniously. Was it a radio I heard—a phonograph? The *vox humana* of a hidden organ? If so, what organ and where? I felt warm" (234). He associates the life-giving force first with the phonograph, and then with the low buzz of an organ, technologies of sound he has relied on to structure his invisibility at other moments in his life.

Despite the shock's coercive violence and ability to unravel his boundedness, they nonetheless provide structure to his dissolution: "A tremor shook me; it was as though he had suddenly given a name to, had organized the vagueness that drifted through my head…" (239). Waves organize life, for better or worse. His seasickness continues beyond the hospital as he lurches back into the world: "And I felt that I would fall, had fallen, moved now as against a current sweeping swiftly against me… Things whirled too fast around me. My mind went alternately bright and blank in slow rolling waves" (249). This dizzy rambling propels him into Mary's arms, and thereby leads him towards the Brotherhood, the plot propelled forward by this whirling current. Of course, the novel proper (that is chapter one, not the prologue) opens with the infamous Battle Royal sequence, where Jack-the-Bear's relationship to the pulsating light and sound of his New York City den is turned on its head. In the scene, his hometown big-wigs bring the invisible man to their meeting on the premise that he is to give a speech to compete for a

scholarship, but instead, they sexually degrade and taunt him before making him fight his peers while blindfolded, and then scramble to pick fake coins off of an electrified surface that riddles his body with shocks: “A hot, violent force tore through my body, shaking me like a wet rat. The rug was electrified. The hair bristled up on my head as I shook myself free. My muscles jumped, my nerves jangled, writhed” (27). But the invisible man learns “that I could contain the electricity—a contradiction, but it works” (27), a passing sentiment that in fact encapsulates a new philosophy of embodiment the invisible man develops even as child: with sight and light decentered by being blindfolded, you must embody the contradiction of the undulatory body, let yourself expand to include the new frequency. It’s a decidedly darker and more pragmatic view of wave motion as a tool for dismantling hegemonic Man than we see offered by Woolf.

Ellison’s treatment of light illustrates this ambivalence about how to best go about describing and re-forming the twentieth century body. His central thematic is, of course, invisibility, a condition that is characterized in physics by waves of light behaving aberrantly; where they should be bouncing off of a solid body and conveying that information to our eyes, they’re not. As would be expected in a novel about race relations in midcentury America, motifs pitting lightness against darkness recur time and time again, and often mimic our standard associations of light with knowledge and clarity and darkness with ignorance and danger. For instance, in the prologue Jack-the-Bear proclaims that “The truth is the light and the light is the truth” (7), presenting a tautology that defines lightness and truthfulness through one another, not only linking the concepts but rendering them identical. Much of Ellison’s rhetoric still enforces the language so

often engaged by civil rights workers and by major figures in the Harlem Renaissance that suggests the key to equality in this country is to make people see the plight of the Black man, to open their eyes to his excellence and worthiness as an individual and as a contributor to society. And perhaps the most powerful and memorable image from the prologue is not the Louis Armstrong record but the 1369 lightbulbs in his hole running on stolen power. How does light function then in this novel and in Ellison's vision for embodiment?

Ellison acknowledges the trickiness of light through Jack-the-Bear's ambivalence about invisibility. He tells us: "And I love light. Perhaps you'll thinking it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form" (6). Perhaps some of this love for light can be explained by the fact that light is a wave, like sound. Just as Jack-the-Bear craves the vibration of sound to structure his being and bring him to life, he recognizes that light likewise gives rise to form through its physical makeup. In fact, light was the first phenomena used to develop the wave-particle theory, as nineteenth century physicist Thomas Young conducted the first thought experiments that unseated Newtonian physics and paved the way for quantum physics by demonstrating that light behaved as both a particle and a wave (Barad 99-101). This simultaneity is what makes light such a fascinating tool for Ellison; it is always already both a wave and a particle. Light is both a quantifiable object (particle) and a diffraction across time and space, just as the invisible man is both fighting to be seen and recognized as an individual making choices and urging us to understand that any sense of individuality is in fact structured by

waves—that is, bodies come to matter through structures that render them unbounded, diffracted through and intertwined with others and with the world around them, and perhaps even invisible. This set of contradictions and Ellison's surprisingly holistic, phenomenological view reflects developments in quantum physics that emphasize that this really is (to the extent that we can claim any scientific truth in a constantly shifting universe) how subatomic particles function. It also disturbs the notion that the episodic cycles of hope and disappointment that make up the plot could be transcended or superseded in a neat resolution of a dialectic, instead demonstrating a comfort with finding answers in the space of both/and rather than either/or. When Ellison writes about light, he often emphasizes its pulsating, flickering qualities, asking us to see the waves in what seems solid and continuous. In *Invisible Man*, light flutters, sputters, teases, casts deep shadows—light always makes you aware of what it cannot or does not light.

Ellison writes about light particularly compellingly in relation to film in *Juneteenth*. Young Bliss becomes obsessed with the idea that his long-lost mother is an actress, convinced he sees her inside the screen the first time he is allowed to go to the movie theatre. His eventual involvement in politics and his surety that he can manipulate truth stems not only from his life with Daddy Hickman as a highly theatrical child preacher, but from his early career as a film producer inspired by his search for his mother, structuring his life through light. Ellison writes eloquently of the twentieth-century body transformed by the flickering light of the cinema:

> And again as I look through the beam of pulsing light into the close-up looming wide across the distant yet intimate screen, I'm enthralled and sweetly

> disintegrated like motes in the sunlight and I listen, as when in the box, straining to hear some sound from her moving lips, holding my breath to catch some faint intonation of her voice above the printed word which Daddy Hickman reads softly to me, explaining the action. And I knew anguish. Yes. There was the wavery beam of light. There was the smokelike weaving of the light now more real than flesh or stone or pain pouring at a slant down to the living screen. (244-5)

Bliss describes himself as disintegrated, wavering, structuring himself anew through the materiality of light which makes the screen alive, more real than flesh. While there's something nightmarish in this depiction of light's power, it's also enthralling to feel oneself taken apart by the phenomenon, distributed differently and newly aligned with the life light engenders on screen. He describes the sense of bodily expansion Bliss feels: "Then it happened, I went out of me, up and around like a butterfly in a curve of flight and there was moss in the trees and a single bird flipped its tail and flew up an away, and I was drawn through the wall and into the action" (238). The flickering light of the movie projector structures a new way of being for Bliss, a vibrational, fluttery embodiment that can be drawn into action outside himself, sense his connection to the natural world and to other people.

In *Juneteenth*, Ellison explores more explicitly the potential light has as a path to undulatory embodiment that he suggests in *Invisible Man*, melding light and vibration as he emphasizes light's wave properties and its potential to materialize a new embodied reality. Ellison's theorization of light's relation to materiality and touch reminds me of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's final work on phenomenology, *The Visible and the Invisible*, in

which he develops the concept of flesh as a means of thinking through the space of visibility. Instead of reinstating the vision/touch dichotomy, which maps onto the classic division between mind and body, flesh becomes the mediating force between subject and object. The fleshiness of my hand, for instance, meets the fleshiness of the table it touches, the essence of each entity present to the other, mediating perception. Flesh implies a depth that goes far beyond the surface, a deep touch between subject and object and a substantive extension of being beyond the confines of skin or surface. This version of flesh provides a theory of perception that emphasizes transfer, mutuality, and elemental Being. Flesh even provides a theory for language that posits that words create meaning only as they rub up against each other, as their contingent histories interact (Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray). But despite this emphasis on touch, as Merleau-Ponty's title implies, he's most interested ultimately in using flesh to reassess how vision and visibility manifest: "A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively… My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" (Merleau-Ponty 138). As he illustrates elliptically here, it is the intertwining between the visible and the invisible, the multiplicity and ultimate tangibility of the visible, which makes it a valuable mode of perception. Vibration and oscillation—the wave-structures shared by light and sound—are the key to enfleshing the visible, resolving the tension between the supremacy of sight and the necessity of materiality. Ellison's invisible man, given form by the vibration of sound waves working in conjunction with refraction of

light, expresses this intertwining of the sensible and the invisible in his very being, erasing long-held distinctions between vision as knowledge and individual and touch as base, brute, and mass. Light, with its particle-wave behavior, enables multifaceted vision that relies not only on sight but acknowledges the structuring power of touch, vibration, and kinship. The undulatory body is an articulation of embodiment that allows Ellison to resist relegating Blackness to hyper-embodiment, demonstrating purchase on the powerful realm of sight, light, and knowledge through vibrational being.

"Are Negroes Sound?" Negating Blackness, Be-Earthing Bodies

Sun Ra inspired cult-level devotion from his band and fans and succeeded in creating a mythology surrounding his own existence that rivaled any god's: "I have a gift to offer this planet and music is one of the bridges to the treasure house of it," he proclaimed on a flyer advertising his first album. "I am doing what I am supposed to do, I am being what I came here to be. Those who are in tune with Nature can hear what those who are not in tune cannot hear, and then they will know the meaning of the natural beist. The space sea has many sounds of beistness. The Akasa, the unknown acoustics, the alter-planes of isness are all part of everything, the everything and the nothingness of Space Outer" (Alton Abraham Collection, 10.10). Ra styled himself a prophet and preached a gospel that acknowledged African American's alienation from the United States and the promise of a better life if Black folks returned to their ancestral homeland, except Ra literalized this always-already alienated status for the space-age: his program for everlasting freedom was to relocate to another planet through the power of music to

create a new society among the stars. His ideas were informed by his autodidactic explorations of mythology, modernist literature, and the Bible, and his critiques are sharp but often infused with a kind of street-preacher flamboyance and esoteric mysticism which makes it easy to dismiss his philosophies as the ravings of an eccentric with a gift for music. But his poetry and lyrics in fact develop a theory of Black embodiment that literalizes the concept of the undulatory body, defining Blackness as materialized through the vibration of sound and uniquely capable of motion through wave forms.

By earthly reckoning, he was born Herman Blount in Montgomery, Alabama in 1914. By his own account, he was born on Saturn, and was sent to earth to communicate its imminent demise to its inhabitants. He and his band (which he called an orchestra, spelled Arkestra) always performed decked out in costumes vaguely reminiscent of ancient Egyptian garb, dazzling in gold and sapphire lame and mirrored headdresses. His interpretation of Egypt is somehow futuristic and anachronistic all at once, a now-quaint space-age sheen applied to a Jazz Age high-fashion iteration of Egyptian royal costuming. Music critics widely recognize his music as a revolutionary force in jazz, introducing electronic instrumentation into avant-garde jazz composition, hewing to the big-band format of his youth in an era primarily defined by the more intimate bebop combo and renowned composer-soloists like Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker. Sun Ra's innovations paved the way for funk, and the garish exuberance of bands like Earth Wind and Fire are easily traceable to Ra's influence. His 1974 film with director John Coney, *Space is the Place*, brought his vision of the ills plaguing Black communities and his belief in the revolutionary potential of music and space travel to a (slightly) broader

audience and cemented his place as a pioneer of a genre that would come to be called Afrofuturism.

Ra's commitment to his origin story provided a tangible metaphor for the alienation and rejection Black citizens experienced at the hands of state-sanctioned racism, and his steadfast belief that Black people ought to abandon the earth in favor of a corner of the universe with "better vibrations," where the glory of African civilization could flourish as it had in Egypt, presented an even more radical vision of return to the motherland, like Marcus Garvey turned up to eleven. His focus on returning to space also suggested that African Americans had a place in the increasingly technologized world, turning racist stereotypes about Black inability to grasp sophisticated math and science because of their overdetermined proximity to jungles and ancientness on their heads. He even submitted a grant application to NASA to travel to the international space station as a visiting artist, citing himself as a "tone scientist" who had undergone an educational program of "space orientation" and urging NASA to heed his warning that "without the proper type of music your program will be more difficult than need be" (Alton Abraham Collection, box 13 folder 8).

But despite his reputation as a vital musical innovator and the grandfather of Afrofuturist philosophies, very little attention has been paid to the hundreds of poems and dozens of pages of prose he produced over his lifetime. Much of his writing remains unpublished, housed at the University of Chicago where his lifelong friend and business manager Alton Abraham donated his papers upon his death. In 2005, a group of European scholars published an edited a volume of his poetry, *The Immeasurable Equation*, making

his writing available to a wider audience for the first time. “Sun Ra’s poetry has hardly been read, much less studied or argued over, within the realms of recorded scholarship and literature,” James L. Wolf notes in his introduction (IE 3). He attributes this partially to the poems’ high degree of abstraction, Ra’s distaste for concrete nouns and his irreverence for notions of reality. Certainly, Ra requires work, and it can be easy to wonder if the work is worth it. His abstractions and word-play prove frustrating about as often as they prove enlightening, and he’s apt to lose even the most dedicated reader with verses like “Every plane is a plane / Planet three is Plane T three / T, then, is a symbol for the plane earth” (IE 303). Paul Youngquist is the only scholar thus far who has taken Ra’s poetry up in a book-length text; John Szwed’s much-respected biography doesn’t attempt literary criticism. Even Youngquist, primarily a scholar of British Romanticism, doesn’t devote himself exclusively to Ra’s literary output, but writes a rather meandering text that rehashes much of Szwed’s biographical material in the service of making a broader argument about Ra’s literary merit. Like Wolf, Youngquist chalks disinterest in Ra’s poetry up to its inaccessibility and alienating dismissal of standard forms. But he traces a line of poetic inheritance nonetheless, claiming that Ra’s true precursors “are poets of the British romantic tradition, in particular those prone to cosmological reference and mythic sweep” (76) citing William Blake as an especially apt comparison. Youngquist focuses on their shared interest in myth, their outsider-status with regards to the publishing industry, and their tendency toward simplistic, epic language. While the Blake analogy offers some context for this style of heavily philosophical verse and is clearly intended to lend historical weight and canonical legitimacy to Ra’s poetry, the

comparison doesn't extend much farther than superficial observations about commitment to mythic imagery. I will instead argue for reading Ra's poetry as a philosophy of Black being, a vital companion to his music in creating a radical new program for embodiment in the twenty-first century and beyond. What seems like an almost impossible, nonsensical tension in Ra's poetry between the nihilist negation of Black being and an abundant, overflowing sense of vitality provides the central frisson in Ra's ontology of Black bodies as "sound beings," and anticipates some of the central concerns of Afropessimism by a couple decades. His literalization of the undulatory body, his belief that people are quite literally made up of vibration and that tapping into that vibration is a source of transit just as oceans have been, provides a materialist, visceral model for Black being that incorporates that vibratory tension between negation and almost manic aliveness as a central feature of Blackness. It is precisely through the undulatory body and vibration as a structure of embodiment that Ra creates a model for posthuman becoming, initiates an Afrofuturist philosophy of the body, and describes a program for lasting freedom.

Sun Ra insistently disavows the material body, starting with his own personal history. Any reference to the conditions of his childhood in Alabama, his stint in prison during World War II after claiming conscientious objector status, or his relationship to his mother violated the mythic origins he scripted for himself and placed him in uncomfortable proximity to the tawdry business of living a life on Earth, caring for a body that needed clothing and food and comfort. "By the way," he states in an aside inserted in cursive script into a typed document, "I could sue a lot of people who have

falsely stated I was born Herman Blount" (box 11 folder 6). Sun Ra was a son of Saturn, a creature from another dimension who arrived on Earth as a prophet of our imminent destruction; he could hardly lower himself to matters of the flesh. "I think I am here but even that thought might be some pro-creators [sic] dream-blueprint designed for cosmo-computer-reference," he explains. "The essence of me is of the ETERNAL SPIRIT BEING" (11.6). In his earliest poem on record, "The Neglected Plane of Wisdom," Ra lays out his philosophy of music, describing it as the platonic ideal of art forms, the key to communion with a spiritual realm: "Music is a plane of wisdom, because music is a universal language, it is a language of honor, it is a noble precept, a gift of the Airy Kingdom, music is air… Music is not material, Music is Spiritual. / Music is a living soul force. / That which is of the soul is the greater light / The light of greater instruction… / The light of culture and beauty / The light of intensity and living power. / The name of Music is Art" (11.4 or IE 250). This poem, written perhaps as early as 1955, rehearses a familiar set of tropes about art as effervescent, transcendent, and capable of connecting us to divinity. He relies heavily on light imagery, playing on dichotomies of light and darkness that parallel Biblical exaltations of the heavens and condemnations of the fleshly and earthly. Music is the language of the soul, it is a gift from on high that in turn becomes the best in humans—not their bodies, but their spiritual essence. It's language that reifies the categories of the Enlightenment: heaven, light, culture in opposition to the earthly realm, the heaviness of materiality, bare existence.

Sun Ra didn't see himself as an acolyte of Western thought, however; rather, he was a voracious consumer of information about all manner of spiritual systems,

fascinated by the mythological structures underpinning various societies, and invested in reclaiming the value in a broad swath of spiritual practices. Unsurprisingly given his name and costuming, he focused particularly on Egyptian mythology, copying out hieroglyphics in notebooks between scribbled song lyrics (13.13) and making detailed notes about the ancient world culled from every history book he could get his hands on at the Chicago Public Library. But he was also fascinated by the Zodiac, writing serious treatises on the meaning of shift into the Age of Aquarius (made famous, of course, by the song from the 1967 musical *Hair*) (13.12). He encouraged Chicago youth to take interest in the occult, to embrace the "depth of myth and symbol" as a means to "cope with the stress and problems of their environment and master the world around them" (11.2). He wanted them to cultivate their powers of "WHITE magic," which includes telekenisis, telepathy, clairvoyance, ESP, numerology, and even curiously, scientology. In this sense, Ra's program for self-improvement through spiritual exploration seems like a mid-century extension of the seances of the turn of the century, or the widespread interest in vaguely Eastern mysticism among elite intellectual circles in the 1920s: add a sprinkling of Orientalized philosophy to a well-worn program of Western thought that encourages the dismissal of bodily, earthly want in favor of a heady connection with the beyond.[41]

[41] I'm thinking particularly here of Gurdjieff, a fascinating spiritualist figure who gained great following in the 1920s who keeps popping up just beyond the edges of this project. Gurdjieff prescribed a series of movements, perhaps inspired by whirling dervishes near his Central Asian homeland, which were designed to free you from your body. Jean Toomer commented on his experiences of spiritual transcendence through Gurdjieff's teachings extensively in his diaries, housed at the Schomburg Library, and Gurdjieff is rumored to be the last person to have seen Katherine Mansfield alive.

And yet: all of this headiness and overt rejection of the bodily is directly contradicted by Ra's other major theory of music: music is vibration, vibration quickens life, and thus, music and other vibrations makes life material. He rehearses this idea over and over in his poetry, and extensions of this central tenant give rise to almost all of his thought, music, and writing. In the final stanza of "Twin Vibrations," he states this relationship between vibration and being more directly than usual: "If it is to see, to be, to know: / The vibration will let you know. / The vibration will let you see. / The vibration will let you be / The vibration will let you be" (12.5). He attacks this same concept in a far more complex and mind-bending set of substitutions in "The Cosmic Beist," making sound, vibration, and rhythm the ontological underpinnings for existence: "The sound mind is the vibrating consequence of the rhythm / The rhythm is the sound / And the vibration is the rhythm. / The sound mind is the co-ordinate mind / The vibrate principle of the ultimate be / To be is the word of isness / To be is the world of the create / To create is to be… The vibration is the movement of the sound / And the sound is the vibration of the movement / And the movement is the vibration of the sound / The movement is the cause / And the reason is the Y / Why? / The Y is the B / Thus speaks the Cosmic Beist" (IE 108). Creation is born of vibration and sound, and "isness" results from this creation as motion, which in turn creates sound. It's a cyclical model of existence, sound vibrations and movements birthing being which itself moves and vibrates: existence as a mode of creation. It's a radically material, life-affirming philosophy. His choice to rechristen being as "isness" lets his reader experience vibration of their lips, the hard sibilance of "isness" making motion articulate.

In his poem "Vibration of the Ray," he expands this series of connections beyond musical vibration, citing light waves as another source of vibratory insemination: "Like spores the rays strike the earth / And forms of being take shape to be… / Being raises itself accordingly / According to the vibration / Of the ray to which it synchronizes itself" (11.19). This poem begins to articulate another key component of vibrational being for Ra; the patterns of vibration determine something, their precise wavelength like a genetic key that codes for certain kinds of being, a system of difference determined by frequency. This idea takes its most radical form in Ra's 1974 film *Space is the Place,* which proposes a plan for colonizing another planet (among a great many other things—the film simultaneously inhabits three different genres and loosely interrelated plots as a concert film, a science fiction battle for the planet, and as a classic Blaxploitation flick). Ra's plan is to transport the Black people of earth to another planet through the power of soundwaves, dematerializing them through vibration and then reconstituting them on another planet, where "the vibrations are different" (*Space is the Place* 01:25). This will work, according to Ra, because vibrational frequency is a key determiner of racial difference. White people could potentially come along, but only if they tune their vibrations up to a frequency that would allow for their "transmolecularization" alongside Black folks. In fact, even more precisely than that, each body has a frequency that can build or destroy it, its vibrations tuned perfectly to a tone that holds the power of creation. "these invisible sound-vibrations have Great power over concrete matter. they can Both Build and destroy," he writes in an untitled treatise typed hastily on paper from Mount Sinai Hospital. "a tone will finally be reached which will cause the hearer to to [sic] feel a

distinct vibration in the Back of the lower part of the head, each time that not[e] is struct [sic]. the vibration will be felt. that note is the 'key-note' of the person whom it so effects. it is struct slowly and smoothingly it will Build and rest the Body, tone the nerves and Restore Health. if, on the other hand it be sounded in a domant [sic] way, loud and long enough, it will kill as surely as a Bullet from a pistol" (15.9). Clearly, in Ra's conception of the of the world, vibrations are the fabric of life, a structure that arranges matter so particularly that is responsible for creating and destroying different forms of being.

The second half of the poem furthers another one of Ra's complex and recurring concepts: "Shadows are like images / In an abstract way they are images of the sun / The images are of darkness in pastel-black / Images are sometimes invisible… / The light is as the darkness" (11.19). Ra is fascinated by contradiction, by the negative that paradoxically becomes equated with the image itself. Shadows play a particular role in his poetry, as he begins to work through the contradictions he poses for himself—how does light as vibration and lifeforce exclude the Black man? How to square an insistence on spirituality over and above the bodily with a material, movement-based, physics-inspired theory of embodiment? The idea he's beginning to articulate, that "pastel-black" bodies in America are in fact an embodiment of the light, is a formulation he returns to in his poem "Jazz in Silhouette." The second stanza reads: "The shadows too [sic] shape / Took shape and danced / Away from the things / Which only seemed to be, / And all at once / The shadows found that they were not / Shadows at all / But living suns concealed by clouds / Living being with living minds of their own" (11.4). What if shadows aren't

dependent on something else for form at all, but rather balls of energy in their own right, vibrating with life? The line break after "they were not" provides a satisfying suspension in negation before resolving; is there power also in simply being "not"?

Equations and abstractions are some of Ra's most reliable logical tools, and as we've already seen, he frequently uses substitutions and slippages between homonyms to weave new meanings out of familiar phrases. Continuing with his shadow motif, he articulates the connection between shadows and what he calls synonyms in his worldview: "Being under Guard is sometimes like being under Guard / Because of the similar vibration of the sound of the words. / Words are real and like people words have shadows / And sometimes these shadows are vibrational synonyms. / Take care, the shadow – synonyms overflow / From the world of illusion" (11.11). While I can't make sense of the first line of this poem (perhaps he meant to type underground in the second instance of the phrase? Perhaps the repetition is in fact slyly intentional?), he introduces a couple of key ideas into his philosophical repertoire. The first is the idea that words are real (more about this later), and the second, that shadows are vibrational synonyms, substantiates his reasoning behind his frequent logical leaps through substitutions based on sound. It's a trick he relies on heavily, and he uses this transitive identity technique across genres and mediums. Ra fills pages upon pages of his notebooks with mathematical equations that frequently substitute reducible fractions for their reduced form and then work the reduction through, or equations that demonstrate identities or prove the same result time and again. He thinks of his poems as "word equations," and similarly likes to maintain balance on either side of his equal sign, treating his shadow-

synonyms like trigonometric identities of equivalent fractions. This literary device encapsulates his broader philosophical project; what if we attend to the shadowy sides of the structures of the Enlightenment we know so well? What if we live in the space that is the vibration created as two similar but different meanings and sounds rub up against each other? Just as his words emphasize the wavering crunch of sonic vibration, so too does his music. One of the first musicians to incorporate electronic instrumentation into jazz, Ra and his band created new instruments—they look almost like tiny tenor saxophones or a toy clarinet[42]—which make an oscillating sound, reminiscent of the liquidy vibration we associate with a flying saucer. Ra's scores are full of trills set only half-tones apart, creating riotous vibrations for his audience as slightly different sound frequencies interact and bounce off of one another. He directs flautists and saxophonists to overblow, creating an explosive warbling that adds to the literal vibrational intensity of his music. It's easy to believe that this force of sound might have the power to molecularize, to transport you somewhere new.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the connections he's established between Blackness, shadows, and synonym, Ra is particularly keen on this technique of substitution when untangling his thoughts on the nature of Blackness. "Sambo = samba = zambo = zombo = little black sambo = zombo = zombie," he writes in a notebook, with a marginal note that "s =z" (13.12). "Ace in the hole = whale = Jonah in the Whale = Jonah

[42] I attended one of the Arkestra's concerts at the San Francisco Jazz Center on August 6, 2017, which is where I gained much of this knowledge about what their instruments look like and the particular directions musicians are given. The band is now lead by 94-year old Marshall Allen, one of the musicians Alton Abraham notes had "been with [Sun Ra] from the beginning" (13.13), meaning since about 1958, and the first set was mostly from the *Space is the Place* album.

in the Hole. Hole = whole = pit = grave = crate = whole = whore" and "Colored = dyed = died." These identities can slip and slide in any direction, such that 'crate' might be equated with 'whore,' or 'whale' or 'samba' with 'zombie.' It's sonic word association as philosophical truth, taking sound and a word's cultural resonance as the primary essence of its communication and its being—words are real, by which I think he means alive, vibrational. He takes these lists to their logical extension in his poems and notably in his prose, developing a theory of Blackness based on the sounds of words that we use to speak about Blackness. In a treatise that begins "Jesus Said, 'Let the Negro Bury the Negro,'" Ra sets up a Socratic conversation between himself and a would-be inquirer. To the question about whether the Bible mentions the Negro, Ra gives an answer that hinges on the supposed equivalence between C and G in ancient Greek: "But according the Genesis C and G are interchangeable and for this reason the words of Jesus also reads, 'Let the Negro bury the Necro.' … In the present day language, the sentence just quoted reads: 'Let the dead bury the dead'… Unfortunately for the Negro the word Negro means dead body … The Cemetery itself is named after this word Negro or Necropolis or City of the dead… If you like death and like being one of the Living dead then call yourself a Negro and continue to be rejected by the world as first class citizens" (13.1). In a despairing and unsparing condemnation, Ra equates Blackness with death. There is no substantiation that C and G really were interchangeable letters in ancient Biblical languages, but nonetheless, this method of sonic substitution leads Ra to the conclusion that the Negro is a dead man walking. Sambo, zombie, Negro, necro, colored, died.

But lest we get too comfortable inhabiting any one of Ra's many contradictory philosophies, remember: though the Negro may be dead, he is also a body, and bodies are composed of vibration. In fact, for Ra, the undulatory body is indelibly tied to the rhythms of the earth, a curious naturalism given his reverence for space-age gleam and his propensity to doodle rockets in the corners of his notebooks. But rather than use this interrelation with the natural world to justify an essentialist or deified view of the singular body, Ra delivers a version of the human imbricated with the earth, constructed by its vibrations, which is of course only one strain of vibration in the cosmos. Like race, it seems, planets have their own frequencies, their own distinguishing vibrations. Nathan Ragain's 2013 article investigating the relationship between Sun Ra's writings and other writers associated with the Black Arts movement like Henry Dumas begins to trace the ramifications of the earth's powers to engender the body. One of Ragain's central points of connection between Dumas and Ra is through Dumas' story "The Metagenesis of Sunra," which is a fable of Ra's origins and work on an Earth-like planet, a myth-making project in its own right. Ragain traces Ra and Dumas' shared investment in the ontology of Blackness, describing their frequent association between Blackness and death, a formulation that would come to be defined as a tenant of Afropessimism after Frank Wilderson III's definition of the term in his 2008 book *Icognegro*. Likewise, Ragain points to an emergent new materialism in both Ra and Dumas' work, describing their philosophy of Black being as "opposed to an organic naturalism" (553) but nonetheless reliant on "a philosophy of nature as a way out" (545) of the stultification of conscripting

all Black bodies to death, citing a naturalistic model for revolution as a storm as a way to make Black liberation natural and inevitable.

John S. Wright also picks up on Sun Ra's influence on Dumas' philosophies and prose in his introduction to the only published collection of Dumas' stories, *Echo Tree*: "One crucial aspect of Sun Ra's influence on Dumas seems to have been that Dumas was encouraged to adopt a metaphysics that was simultaneously more self-consciously "African"—on a temporal spectrum traceable form the ancient Egyptian to the modern Yoruba worlds—and yet more "scientific," as science has been redefined within the paradigm shift from Newtonian to quantum mechanics, and as it has in turn redefined the possibilities of literary and mythopoetic creation" (Wright xxx). Where Ragain is interested in Ra's vitalism, Wright identifies this "paradigm shift" to a quantum model of existence. Summarizing the influence of quantum mechanics for Ra, he writes: "Sun Ra's oracular worldview, shaped by the popular currents of Atomic Age "cosmic awareness" and post-World War II scientific discovery in astrophysics and genetic engineering, resonates to a quantum universe of boundlessness and metamorphosis for which the self is the most intimate and most mysterious metaphor" (Wright xxxi). I find Wright's focus on the importance of the quantum, the wave-structure of being, insightful and compelling, but I don't follow the logic that quantum understandings of the world necessarily create hyper individualism—in fact, quite the opposite, as I've explored earlier through *The Waves* and Ralph Ellison's novels. Ragain notes this rejection of individualism as well; Ra deflects from the self, relaying through his poetry an ontology not rooted in the individual but in the vibrations of the natural world. Ragain doesn't

name Ra's interest in a wave or quantum model for the world quite so explicitly, but he does identify the continuum between sound and energy as the driving force in this new materialist ontology of Blackness, complicating the relationship beyond a Hegelian dialectic that seeks transcendence: "It is unclear, though, what sort of genesis is at work in the movement between sound and energy: Who makes, and what do they make, in this process of becoming?" (553). His description of Ra's version of genesis as a process of becoming seems particularly apt, and ties Ra to posthumanist discourses rooted in Deleuze and Guattari's notions of becoming. He cites "the peculiar ontic status of sound, here existing as a "point" but also as a wave, suggesting time, trajectory, and force. Whatever form of the collective this linguistic and aural performance attempts to call into being, it at the very least involves a remodeling of the historical dialectic based on sound itself and likewise attempts to fashion a new, dynamic concept of being, with the formation of the collective involving a struggle with a dialectic of being and nonbeing, signs and time" (555). While Ragain makes excellent observations about the essential status of sound and Ra's eschewing of the simple dialectic, his analysis stops just short of fully theorizing this "dynamic concept of being." I argue that it is exactly this ontic status of sound as a wave that forms the structure of Ra's vision for Black embodiment. The movement of soundwaves is the genesis, the means of materializing and becoming that defines Black existence and rescues it from condemnation to the grave.

In addition to word equations that link Blackness to death, Ra favors substitutions that play between be and earth, amalgamating the words to create be-earth, read as berth, homophonous with birth. There are layers of resonance and meaning here, but let's begin

with be and earth. As we noted earlier thinking through Ragain's comparison between Ra and Dumas, Ra repeatedly describes existence of stemming from the earth's vibrations, like in his poem "The Synchronized Earth." "I lay on earth / Press my face to the ground / And feel the pulse of it / Arise strong, / Strong," he writes. "From the magnetism of its strength, / Arise and walk away / With head high / And shoulders proud / Proud to have dreamed my dreams / Proud to have heard the synchronized-rhythms / Of the moving earth. / At last I know, / It is a Cosmic sphere" (13.4). The pulse of the earth and the currents of its magnetism propel his body into uprightness and order, stacks head upon shoulders, and reveals their shared movement and their shared place within the universe. The earth confirms its place in the cosmos through its ability to animate his being. And in return, Ra envisions elements of the human body constituting the earth itself in a mutual dance of vibratory creation. "The arm thrust itself through the dry-baked earth / Its fingers move and reached toward space / And searched like eyes / In far places for the sight of beauty… / Suddenly the arm played music / Sounds the world have never heard before / And yet / The world knew the meaning of the sounds / The sounds commanded / An other weigh of the potential way." An arm, divorced from the rest of the hierarchy of the body, reaches up and through its movement, transforms into eyes, vibrates with sound that shifts the world, carves new depths, paths into the possibilities in this plane. Ra's commitment to a world that materializes through the human embodiment, just as the organization of the human body is made possible through the vibrations of the world, interrogates agency from every angle, demonstrating a new mode of body which is cannot be divorced from the planet it inhabits. This particular mode of earthly

embodiment illustrates Rosi Braidotti's emphasis on posthumanism as becoming-earth, reconsidering subjectivity in the Anthropocene as the "issue that is immanent to all others, in so far as the earth is our middle and common ground. This is the 'milieu' for all of us, human and non-human inhabitant of this particular planet, in this particular era. The planetary opens onto the cosmic in an immanent materialist dimension" (Braidotti 81). Sun Ra's vision of the disembodied arm as musician conjuring the vibrations that reshape the earth and his continuum between the earthly and the cosmic through those very vibrations begin to answer Braidotti's central question: "what would a geo-centered subject look like?" (81). Geo-centered subjectivity is perhaps undulatory, materialized through vibration, and resonant through and between planetary dimensions.

Ra not only describes the embodiment determined by resonance and vibration, but often turns quite literally to waves as a structure of the body, melding his commitment to becoming-earth with his belief in vibration as determinant of difference. "New sounds cause new vibrations / Like ripples on a lake" he writes in "On Solar Planes" (11.12), linking sound waves and water waves. He makes this connection yet more explicit in "The Sound Image," saying "The waves of sound are like waves of water in the ocean / There is a tide and time of sound…" (12.5), transforming vibration from mere ripples to full-blown waves, and beginning to hint at the way wave-being shifts time and tide, necessitating a new relationship to temporality. Importantly, "The music is not only just music. / It touches and projects other dimensions / Time-zone eternities and cosmo-infinity spiral-parallels / The parallels are feels/fields of parables, which are instruments / For the instruments are not only just instruments / The people are the instrument." These

waves project being into other dimensions, and in a series of circular statements, the people are revealed as the instrument, the producers of these vibrations. This turn to waves as the key image for vibration, which structures life for Ra and allows for travel between dimensions, provides parallels between the space journeys Ra preaches as the key to liberation and the voyage Black folks endured in the Middle Passage. As Paul Gilroy suggests in his emphasis on the slave trade as the foundational act of transatlantic connection, the Middle Passage creates Blackness as a concept, structures hierarchies of embodiment that place Blackness at their base, and makes Blackness marked through its interaction with Whiteness. Theorists like Christina Sharpe, who describes Black being as perpetually "in the wake" of the ships that transported Africans to American shores, further bolster the notion that the Middle Passage is the determining event for Black being. In this sense, Blackness is brought into being through waves—it is this ocean journey that imbues Blackness with meaning, and as Hortense Spillers famously suggests, describes its being by stripping it of the markers of the bodily, de-gendering and dis-embodying Black being. Spillers describes the flaying of the Black body as that which renders it flesh, a complicated category that like Ra's contradictory notions of Blackness as nothingness and as an overabundance of vibration, can be read as both tragedy and possibility. While flesh indeed represents a body broken open, undone, there is potential in this undoing to recognize a new means of being embodied; Spillers ask her reader to contemplate what the decoupling of gender from body might allow, for instance.[43] Black bodies are made flesh through their encounter with waves, and I argue

[43] The introduction to this dissertation contains a much more nuanced and in-depth discussion of Spillers and other theorists of the Black body in relation to the Middle Passage.

for Ra, waves in turn restructure Black embodiment in their image, rendering them vibratory and uniquely able to travel in and through waves. Ra riffs on the Middle Passage as a space that creates Blackness and the undulatory Black body subtly but repeatedly. His choice to begin a series of word equations with "Jonah in the Whale" is not a coincidence, but a metaphor for the ships of the Middle Passage, enslaved people caught like Jonah in the belly of the beast.[44] It is no coincidence that his band is always referred to as the Arkestra and that he speaks of traveling through space in an ark, harkening back to Noah and his most famous of ships, another commonly used Biblical image for the trials of the Middle Passage. He writes of the future as a time when Black people will "take the helm / of a new ship / Like the lash of a whip we'll be suddenly / on the way / And lightning-journey to / Yet another-other-friendly shore" (11.11). This time, he will drive the ship, and can align himself with the whip rather than its victim, traveling through the vibrations of light-current rather than ocean waves to some other (perhaps truly friendly) shore. Rather than in the hold, he has "sailed the seas / That have no end / Found the end that has no beginning / A thing that is and is" ("Stratum" 13.4). Perhaps most telling is one of Ra's favorite word equations, the slippage between be-earthed, berthed, and birthed. "Those who are be-earthed / Are be-earthed / Berthed… / They are phonetically birthed in their berth," he writes, linking his notion of vibratory beistness to an experience of the berth, waves ushering in a birth. Matter travels through sound waves

[44] This connection occurred to me while listening to Alexis Pauline Gumbs read from a new series of poems, as yet untitled, on September 27, 2018 during a conversation with Fred Moten at the University of Minnesota. She focuses on the whale and whale song as an image for her ancestors, many of whom survived the Middle Passage, and references the frequent use of whales and the Jonah story in African American culture as an image for slave ships.

or ocean waves or light waves, aligning itself with their frequencies in order to become isness, life structured by its berth on the ship to birth on earth.

But despite my account of Ra's embrace of the undulatory body as a source of freedom and expansion for Black being, Sun Ra's relationship to Blackness is perpetually perplexing and contradictory. He returns to his equation between Blackness, death, and nothingness throughout his long career as a writer and musician, and often maintains what indeed seems like disdain for the materiality of the Black body and a willingness to support systems of thought that denigrate Blackness as a less evolved life form. Ra writes a series of notes outlining a hierarchy of vibrations based on planetary distance from the sun, the source of energy in our solar system and the most vital force in his cosmos—he of course derives his name from the Sun, relishing its homophony with Son, both a refraction of his childhood nickname Sonny and an attempt to elevate himself to the status of a savior of earth's people. This cosmology suggests a belief in exactly the kind of stratification that I am arguing his music and commitment to vibration resists, and occasionally, his rhetoric is troublingly comfortable with the tropes of racist thought. "each life-wave however," he writes, "remains definitely within its own borders" (15.9), defining an ontology of the undulatory body that nonetheless upholds singularity and individualism. But despite his insistence that there are evolutionary "straglers" [sic] who compose "the lower Races and species of and kingdom," he also believes that "the life which is now man passed through stages analogous to the to the minerl, plant, and Animal kingdoms… straglers left along the way who had failed to Reach the necessary standered to keep abrest the crest wave of Evolution there is no halting" (15.9). These

life-waves seem to morph, to crest and become something new, rearranging their particles to a new frequency. This emphasis on the importance of movement for vitality, in contrast to his previous statements about the fixedness of vibrational (and thus racial) categories, belies the idea that Ra has fully bought into hierarchies of existence amongst humans and between other life forms.

Just as Spillers turns to flesh to negate the importance of The Body for Black people while exploring new potential for Black being, Ra adopts the concept of flesh in order to square his competing desires and observations about Black life: he wants his music to help Black folks transcend their material conditions, while acknowledging that Black being is materialized through the very wave vibrations his music produces; he insists that the Negro is nothing, but that the world has much to learn from the Ethiops, Egyptians, and other civilizations he calls great Negro kingdoms. Riffing on associations with the word zero, a symbol always associated with the earth for Ra because of its globular shape, he reasons: "Zero is the lowest point by the standard of comparison. Negroes are zero. Zero means the seed. The seed is the name of the son. The son is Israel. Negroes are Israel. They're zero." By the theory of transitivity, Ra's favorite trick, if Israel is the flesh, and Negroes are Israel, then Negroes are flesh, which somehow also equals zero. Once again, Spillers' insights about flesh begins to make sense of this logic, the equation between flesh, nothingness, and words. If flesh is what happens when the layered meanings and structures of the body are stripped away violently, then can we perhaps square this idea that Negroes are nothing with a desire to shed the

overdetermined markers of being something, being Human? Is there freedom in being no-thing?

While Ra certainly does not clarify his relationship to flesh explicitly, he does title a poem "The Flesh," returning again to an equation between Israel and a substitution of L for R:

> Israel… Is Ra El?... Ra Is El…
> El is Ra…
> L is R…
> Flesh is fresh is new…
> The word that was made flesh was made fresh
> It is the new… new test… new tester…
> New Testament… The testament new…
> The Word… words… words made fresh…
> Made again… The recreate…the recreation
> The Word was made fresh…
> Thus is the Cosmic reach…
> Dark meanings brought to light…
> See the mystery
> Hear the sound duplicity…
> The double opposite parallel. 11.19

This poem almost enacts the freshness of words, stumbling into meaning as he tests syllables in various combinations. He provides his reader something like a mission statement: "words made fresh" that bring "dark meaning," look at the shadow-side, and invite us into a parallel universe of meaning-making where everything is doubled. In combination with an early poem, "Alert," that refers to words as a form of magic, praising the "easy flow of them: / Rush… ebbing like a tide / Rush… receding" (11.11), he weaves links yet again between waves, words, flesh, and the shadowy darkness that is both nothing and everything.

His technique is a form of signifying, to use Henry Louis Gates' often-referenced formulation. To signify is to add a meta-level of interpretation, to self-reflexively comment on the place of language through language in a way that often escapes detection by the dominant definers of that language. It's an intertextual, metaphorical means of producing meaning, and as Gates describes: "Thinking about the black concept of Signifyin(g) is a bit like stumbling unaware into a hall of mirrors: the sign itself appears to be doubled, at the very least, and (re)doubled upon ever closer examination. It is not the sign itself, however, which has multiplied. If orientation prevails over madness, we soon realize that only the signifier has been doubled and (re)doubled, a signifier in this instance that is silent, a "sound-image"[45] as Saussure defines the signifier, but a "sound-image" sans the sound" (200). In a fantastical meta-reflexive move, Ra loves to switch out the word "sign" in his work, frequently replacing it with the spelling "sine," as in sine wave. He signifies on the very building block of signification, the sign, suggesting instead that waves, not signs, are the basic units of meaning. This sound (truthful) duplicity provides a key to Ra's project: the Negro is both no-thing and he yet is sound, brought into truth and material existence through waves, both oceanic and sonic. The Negro is flesh structured by waves, the undulatory body which by virtue of its state of no-thing-ness, its refusal of hierarchy, can travel through signs/sines beyond the realm of this earth, and beyond time itself.

[45] Ra titles multiple poems "Sound-Image" and uses the term frequently. I can't prove that he is knowingly signifying on Saussure's theories, but I wouldn't put it past him; he had an extensive personal library that included texts by continental philosophers and he took great pride in his rigorous program of self-education.

Ra's focus on the way the undulatory body unfixes time is perhaps his most radical and significant innovation. As we've seen in Woolf and Ellison, conceiving of embodiment structured by waves necessarily disrupts the notion of linear time—reflecting theories in quantum physics and the circular, recurrent nature of waves, history doesn't move in one direction for the undulatory body. But Ra takes this insight to a new level, eschewing earthly time completely and famously proclaiming in the opening to his film *Space is the Place*: "It's after the end of the world! Don't you know that yet?" The lyric repeats, sung by June Tyson with playfully varied emphasis in each iteration: "It's *after* the end of the world! Don't you know *that* yet? It's after the *end* of the world! Don't *you* know that yet?" In his opening monologue, signifiers of past and present intermingle with impunity. The action opens on Sun Ra wandering through the forests of another planet, the place where Sun Ra and his followers intend to move. It is not a chromium space age fantasy of cyborg-being but an Edenic, pre-historic forest. Friendly-looking creatures that resemble oversized floating tadpoles inhabit this lush landscape, aliens reminiscent of the earliest stages of animal life on earth. Sun Ra himself is decked out in regal gold, with a headdress that clearly replicates the Egyptian god's, and a collar of tech gadgetry in matching gold. The only other inhabitants of the planet are a couple of floating black-robed spectres with mirrors in place of faces. They look like the no-face characters of Japanese anime, in turn modeled after actors in the ancient puppetry and performance practices of Noh and bunraku. After Sun Ra has explained his plan for moving Black folks to this planet, he says that "equation wise, the first thing to do is to consider time as officially ended. We awake on the other side of time" (02:06). For Ra,

vibration has the power not only to cut across space but to render historical time irrelevant. On this planet, ancient Egypt coexists with prehistoric-looking aliens and robed figures that recall past performance practices and futuristic digitality through their mirrored inter-faces.

Importantly, it is only after his proclamation that time has ended that Sun Ra broadens his plan for inter-planetary migration from Black people alone to "the whole planet" (02:26). The complete erasure of the category of time allows for the final negation of Blackness, rendering color no-thing once and for all. A different vibration in a different space can materialize the flesh in a way that restores an Edenic beginning that does not necessarily result in expulsion, damnation from the light into the darkness, and therefore does not force the equation between death and freedom from earthly troubles. Ra's poem "The Garden of Eatened" rehearses this logic where Eden becomes the grave: "Alas, for those within the Garden of Eden / The Eden Garden / The Eating Garden / Necropolis: the Eating Garden / Where bones and flesh of the inhabitants are Eaten" (13.4). Anthony Reed likewise sees *Space is the Place* as presenting a new grammar for Black utopia and freedom, primarily focusing on how Ra's film and music might be politically programmatic for Black freedom movements. But in a coda to his argument, he takes up Ra's poetics more minutely, calling our attention to a rather obscure Sun Ra ditty about nuclear war that ends with the couplet "It's a motherfucker, don't you know / If they push that button, your ass gotta go." It's a darkly funny summation of the possibilities of nuclear annihilation: quite literally, your ass, here a metonym for the self, will be no more in the event of a nuclear explosion, but also, what happens to the concept

of an ass? In a nuclear era, shaped by quantum rules, what kind of bodies do we all have? What kind of selves will we be without our conceptions of self? As Reed asks: “What good is a free mind if you don’t have an ass to follow it, or a there within which to be free? The call is to think of a time after the end of the world, when all the forms that presently concern us are gone, a moment similar to that “Great Gettin’ Up Morning” the spirituals sang of. This draws attention to new possibilities and new obligations to unlink freedom and death: “when the United States be talking about peace, it’s talking about death. They mean that kind of peace.” How do we imagine a freedom that is not the freedom of the grave?” (137). Ra answers that question himself, through his difficult poetics of vibration that ask us to reconceive the body as flesh that is endlessly transposable to new keys, new planets, new dimensions. Freedom looks like condemning the hierarchical concept of The Body and linear temporality which keeps Blackness twinned with death, imagining a new birth/berth where being is made manifest through vibration and not through racial formations.

Chapter 2: Decay-Machines: Forging a Material Posthumanism

Modernists gave us the cyborg and the robot, images of mechanized life that manifested modern anxieties about the increasingly obvious melding of man with machine. Robots in their current form are the invention of Czech playwright Karel Čapek, who adapted the word from the Czech robota, meaning forced labor, to describe the automatons in his 1920 play *R.U.R.* Robots have their root in concern about the further alienation of humans from their labor and about a potential for systems of slavery or serfdom to return through the use of artificial intelligence in what was supposed to be a brave new century where indentured servitude (at least of white people) was a thing of the past. If we worked with machines, drove in machines, and increasingly relied on mechanized devices even within our own houses, where could we draw the line? Charlie Chaplin's famous sequence with the lunch machine in *Modern Times* turns this anxiety into comedy, revealing the tragicomic fate of a civilization that integrates itself with the machinic too completely and the perils awaiting those bodies that don't readily adapt to their infiltration by the machinic. Cyborgs are closely related to robots and androids, but the cyborg (unlike the android) relies on feedback—it's cybernetic, a machine that incorporates information and suggests enmeshment with and enhancement of a system understood as human (unlike a robot, which is clearly machine, a cyborg usually has skin or a skin-like covering obscuring its gears). This passing for human or more-than-human quality of the cyborg combines powerfully with anxieties about gender and gendered performance; the female cyborg becomes distinctly horrific because of its pleasingly human aesthetic and sexual characteristics in contrast with its unfeelingness or lack of

emotion. The modernist cyborg encapsulates anxiety about women's increasing participation in the workforce, externalizing fears about the "new woman" and her efficiency and financial independence coupled with her desirability and sexual promiscuousness. The image of the cyborg identifies a lack of maternal feeling or emotional caretaking as dangerous, making the machine woman into a figure that taunts and manipulates men, and implicitly enforcing an idea that women are cold, fickle, and not to be trusted or seen as fully human. Trilby's susceptibility to hypnosis and her robotic obedience to Svengali comes to mind as an example of proto-cyborgian character of the New Woman era, as does Mina Harker, the young heroine of Dracula; however, her narrative is redeemed as she marries Jonathan Murray, exits the trance that renders her body cold and her mind open to penetration and returns to appropriately feminine feeling.[46]

The most recognizable theoretical work on cyborgs is Donna Haraway's 1985 "Cyborg Manifesto," which reclaims the figure as a helpful antidote to a naturalizing, essentialist view of femininity espoused in the wake of the hippie movement. Haraway examines how harmful the image of the woman as goddess can be, pointing to the retrograde notion of females as intrinsically connected to nature and arguing for the revolutionary potential of the cyborg to break down gendered dichotomies in our understanding of the human, acknowledge our embeddedness in a technologized world,

[46] Jennifer Jodell's work on cyborgs as figures of mediation and transference of knowledges picks up on this thread particularly lucidly, and she develops the idea of the mediatrix which lays an important foundation for the connection between the cyborg of early twentieth century science fiction and later, Afrofuturist imaginings of the posthuman female body as not only cyborgian but virtualized.

and question the boundaries of the human being and the naturalization of the category of human as separate from machine, animal, or plant. Ridley Scott's 1982 *Bladerunner,* an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is another cultural touchstone for contemporary interest in the figure of the cyborg which updates the cold, dangerous woman for an information-age audience living in a cybernetic world. Haraway famously concludes that she'd "rather be a cyborg than a goddess," rejecting identifications with nature and wholeness and Edenic perfection in favor of a model of feminism that argues that "'we' do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole" (Haraway 297). Haraway's text is foundational for third wave feminism, for the idea of posthumanism, and for animal studies, among other intellectual movements of the twenty-first century, because her embrace of the cyborg allows for radical rethinking of western conceptions of embodiment. She acknowledges her debt to science fiction, and particularly to writing by Black women like Octavia Butler and Audre Lorde (who is not conventionally understood as a science fiction writer, but Haraway sees as crafting a cyborg identity in *Sister Outsider* and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*). She even develops the idea that perhaps to be a woman of color is to be a cyborg—to acknowledge the way that your body is constructed through racialized technologies of knowing, to grapple with being seen as akin to the animal. This kind of thinking, when not fully understood, risks reifying the negative associations between women of color and improper, unfeeling femininity, but this unity between the cyborg and the racialized other is ultimately

another means of accessing Spiller's conception of flesh or Wynter's désêtre.[47] While some of Haraway's longing for a cyborg future now seems naïve (Silicon Valley has not, in fact, turned out to be a hotbed of advancement for women of color, nor has it rejected the militarization of technological innovation, and it has not come to pass that the cyborg body can escape the biopolitical regime), her central insights are vital: the cyborg body comes into being where boundaries are confused, and insists on the pleasure of that transgression, refusing unitary identity in favor of a "disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (Haraway 302).

The image of the cyborg, and Haraway's celebration of it, suggests a dependence on a cybernetic world—perhaps it breaks down the boundaries of the human, moving our concept of self well beyond skin, but nonetheless suggests that we are looped in a teleological world of feedback and learning, perfecting ourselves based on inputs or our further interpenetration with information stimuli. But Haraway dismisses this idea, arguing for a model of cyborg being that embraces noise rather than rejecting it:

> Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. This is why cyborg politics insists on noise and advocates pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western'

[47] See the Introduction for a gloss of Wynter and Spillers, and the third chapter for a more in-depth discussion of Spillers' concept of flesh.

> identity, of nature and culture, or mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. 312

I find this realization that the excess and the pollution, the couplings that do not result in recognizable forms, are part of a politics of subversion particularly fascinating because it counteracts Haraway's earlier claim that "cyborgs are ether, quintessence;" here, she embraces a materiality of pollution, noise, and 'failed' couplings and communications that makes us question the streamlined, disembodied image the word cyborg often conjures. What do we do with the mess at the edges of the cyborg body, with the noise it generates? What does it feel like, then, to be a cyborg in a world still governed by gods? How do we acknowledge our virtuality and the techne that structure our bodies while embracing the noise and insisting on "a powerful, infidel heteroglossia"? (316) This chapter traces a version of the cyborg body—what I'm calling the decay-machine—across the past century, examining the contours of the "spiral dance" between machinic and organic, the freedom represented by embracing the technologized body in tension with the mess and decay of our material reality. I am also calling on Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the body as desiring-machine because of their useful insistence on the machinic as always in flux. "There is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or drains off part of this flow," they write, and that agent of connection is desire which "constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmented and fragmentary" (Anti-Oedipus 5). Modernism is frequently typified as a time when aesthetics attempted to mourn and reform the fragmentary self, but the authors in this dissertation find endless potential in allowing the

fragmentary to reign and acknowledging that "the breaks in the process are productive, and are reassemblies in and of themselves" (Anti-Oedipus 42). This focus on the break and the reforming, the process of rearticulating the desiring machine and centering its dissipation, is what the decay-machine hopes to encapsulate. This chapter investigates the body as something that "machines" or produces decay, an assemblage that is always decomposing and recomposing itself, and a something that inhabits the hyphen between decay and machine. I look to Mina Loy as exemplar of early twentieth-century formulations of the body as decay-machine and to Janelle Monáe and Douglas Kearney as thinkers who have brought the decay-machine into relief as a way of thinking through Afrofuturist theories of the body and antiracist practices.

Another essential term that guides my thought in this chapter (and in the dissertation more broadly) is somatechnics, a conceptual framework outlined by Nikki Sullivan, Samantha Murray, and a cohort of feminist scholars predominantly based in Australia that attempts to mediate the supposed dichotomy between the biological and the technical. It arose out of debates between the second wave feminist concept that women could not be equal until their biological connection to child-bearing and reproduction was severed and an anti-technology (and often anti-capitalist) strain of feminist thought that would argue that any technologized modification to women's bodies, including sex-reassignment surgery, plastic surgery, and reproductive technologies are tools of the patriarchy designed to control female embodiment for its own nefarious ends. The position that women must be freed from reproductive duties through technological enhancement is stated perhaps most fiercely by Shulamith Firestone in her landmark

1970 book *The Dialectic of Sex,* in which she argues that new technologies of gestation and child bearing must be developed in order to re-engineer the social relations between men and women. In contemporary debates, this kind of logic often feeds a transhumanist desire to supersede embodiment and thus radically alter the very idea of human reproduction; like other forms of transhumanism, feminist transhumanism completely ignores the materiality of the body in its desire to transcend the binds of reproductive labor.[48] Conversely, technophobic feminists essentialize female biology and seem unaware of the ways that bodies are of course already mediated by technologies. Somatechnics draws attention to the way that both of these factions fail to understand the deep enmeshment of the biological and the technical, not only from a medical standpoint but through an epistemological lens, building on Bernard Stiegler's popularization of the term "techne" as a means of thinking through the technologies of knowing that structure our world. As the name somatechnics would suggest, "what has begun to emerge through the critiques of popular common-sense understandings of the body, technology, and the relation between them, is the notion of a chiasmatic interdependence of soma and techné: of bodily-being (or corporealities) as always already technologized, and technologies as always already enfleshed" (3). I find somatechnics an essential encapsulation of the interpenetration of the biological and the technical that neither demonizes nor valorizes

[48] Transhumanism is a branch of thought that wants to overcome materiality or 'enhance' the human body through technological advancement—it's the 'brains in jars' or uploaded consciousness version of posthumanism. Transhumanism often comes to mind when people hear the term 'posthuman' because of its popularity in science fiction films and the very real questions we grapple with about the development of artificial intelligence and integration of AI into our daily life. Projects like Martine Rothblatt's BINA48 (fascinating for its reproduction of gender and race, even as it seeks to transcend materiality) and the work of thinkers like sociologist James Hughes and robotics professor Hans Moravec are characteristic examples of transhumanist thought.

the technical or the biological, and a tremendously useful framework for thinking about embodiment across modernist literature.

The "Geometric Chimaera" of Futurist Feminist Embodiment

> "I believe there are certain guidebooks we should take with us as we navigate our way toward the next century, and that Loy's is one of them. I think her poems have a relevance to the formation of a new modernity, and that she might yet prove to be the poet of her century…" Conover xx.

Roger Conover, Mina Loy's foremost advocate in the scholarly world, readily acknowledges Loy's difficulty and her magic. Her poetry is arresting, jagged and unexpected, familiar and alien all at the same time. She requires much from her readers while giving up little, and her work inspires the same kind of cultish admiration and in-group speculation that her person did in her lifetime. Though Loy has certainly entered the fringes of the canon in the thirty-five years since Conover's 1983 rediscovery of her work, she's still an acquired taste, typically mentioned after contemporaries like Marianne Moore and H.D. as an also-ran who flamed out, more famous for her sexual exploits and personal allegiances than her work. She earned a place in the Norton Anthology in 2008, a major marker of acceptance within the field of literature, but curiously, they chose to publish her "Feminist Manifesto" rather than any of her poetry, casting her as a writer of political polemics and a piece of the contextual puzzle that explains the upheaval of the post-World War I literary landscape rather than focusing on her as an artist in her own right. Conover is left waiting for the world to realize the extent of her excellence, hoping that they'll come to understand how essential her words are not only to a thorough examination of the previous century but as we move forward. His case

for Loy as the "poet of her century" seems rooted precisely in her rootlessness and her forays into a wide variety of stylistic and aesthetic programs that came to define modernism, from Futurism to Dada to surrealism to social-realist observations of tramps in the Bowery.[49] But Conover lets his readers come to their own conclusion about what qualifies her as our guide to a new century, and what it could mean that her poems are going to be indispensable in the "formation of a new modernity." What inspires this devotion to Loy and the confidence that her work holds the key to both the previous century and out present moment?

I suggest that Loy's poetry and prose continue to resonate because of her intimate insight into the contradictions of twentieth-century embodiment. She creates the modernist body as hybrid, always already machinic and yet decaying, angular and fractured and yet deeply relational and interdependent. She's interested in how the modernist body is constituted by information and code (what many current theorists might call virtualized) and how these technics have always existed, thinking about the way that social constructions like virginity constitute a technics in and of themselves, and insisting on the fleshy foundations of the machinic body. She shows us a cyborg self that's shockingly familiar, revealing the mundane robotics of our lives without fully condemning or embracing them. She finds Italian Futurism fatally flawed, not least

[49] This dissertation doesn't focus Loy's own complicated personal relationship with identity and home—she's a British woman born to Hungarian Jews who flees to the continent as soon as she can, spending time in France and Germany before settling in Italy in the early years of the twentieth century and then moving to New York before heading to Mexico and briefly, to Argentina, back to Italy, back to New York, before ending her life in Aspen, Colorado—but her personal rootlessness is worth considering alongside her stylistic voraciousness. Maeera Schreiber is perhaps the best-known scholar of Loy, Jewishness, and displacement, but there's plenty of critical attention paid to the transience and transnationalism of Loy herself.

because of the hubris and misogyny of its leaders, many of whom were her lovers, but is drawn to its embrace of the human as machine, and her feminist reconfiguration of pre-war Futurist concepts render a far more nuanced exploration of the emerging modernist body. She insists on decay as a prized characteristic of embodiment that rubs right up against our machine selves and asks her readers to hold these two formulations side by side. For Loy, modernist bodies are created by the tension between decay and machine and the refusal to relegate either to the past or celebrate either as the only model for the future.

Loy's poetry is both mind-bendingly complex and refreshingly cheeky. Her juxtapositions capture the delight and the terror of contemporary being that seems to be both moving at the speed of light and troublingly retrograde all at the same time. The title of her the only collection of poetry published in her lifetime, alternately *The Last Lunar Baedeker* or *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, encapsulates the temporal play that characterizes much of her poetry as well as the mixture of the fantastic and the mundane. She would not live to see humanity land on the moon, but she asks us to imagine a Baedeker guide, that prototypically Victorian, casually imperialist traveler's book, for the moon. Not only does her title ask us to envision this retrograde guide to a future space, she suggests that it was lost—that the past perhaps contained hints to a future that we are only now discovering. The titular poem, "Lunar Baedeker," imagines the moon an underworld, an "eye-white sky-light / white-light district / of lunar lusts" that nonetheless retains its association with virginity and holds the Orientalized past of "onyx-eyed Odalisques" and "pharaohs tombstones." As the title of her collection suggests, the moon does heavy-

lifting for Loy, its combination of coldness, removal, and fecundity encapsulating much of her thought about models for female embodiment at the dawn of the twentieth century. She's self-conscious about her reliance on the moon, closing "Lunar Baedeker" with the lines: "Pocked with personification / the fossil virgin of the skies / waxes and wanes— — — —" (82). It's as if her repeated insistence on the moon as a symbol of feminine embodiment and contradiction scars its surface, and the "lunar lusts" taking place on the surface of the moon contrast with the virginity repeated associated with its cold luminescence. The moon encodes this combination of voluptuousness with the technical, juxtaposing "adolescent thighs" and "satirical draperies," exaggerated images of tawdry fin-de-siècle lust, with the "Stellectric signs" of a newly neon modernity, electric and machinic. The moon decays with every lunar cycle, decomposing its body into nothing—and of course, the moon is deeply tied to the feminine through this shared menstrual cycle of decay.[50] But the moon is also electric, avowedly un-organic, and that allows Loy to investigate the somatechnic structure of virginity, the other primary vector of feminine embodiment that runs counter to the moon's seductive decay. Virginity functions as a synecdoche for the idea that the categorizations and valuations of the human body, particular the female body, are fictions designed to control and discipline embodiment.

In a testament to the centrality of moon in Loy's image of the modernist body, she closes her collection with a poem called "Moreover, The Moon" that not only makes corpses moon-like but makes the moon itself into a corpse in a reflexive move that once

[50] The connection between lunar motion and the tides is worth noting here. I could make a case for Loy as another writer of the undulatory body, and I invite readers to continue to consider how the argument of the previous section carries over and applies to this decay-machine model for embodiment as well.

again disrupts the idea that bodies are patterned after nature rather than constitutive of it. The moon is a corpse, something deceased and thereby machinic—silver, glistening, geometrically perfect, rendered metallic in its death. This metallic decay is transfixing, drawing "us under" and "infecting" us as it ignites our sensory apparatus, "touching nerve-terminals / to thermal icicles." Yet this stimulation doesn't awaken and enliven us, but coerces us like a coma, makes us moon-like as an "inverse dawn / suffuse the self; / our every corpuscle become an elf." The moon both governs and infuses modern embodiment, and its effects permeate our very blood cells. We are constituted by its fluorescent mechanization which makes us corpse-like, the near homonym "corpuscle" reinforcing this connection. But then: our cellular composition becomes "elf," self without an s, magical, and most importantly, full of multiple creatures with their own consciousnesses, their own identities. We are made into a collection of elfin cells rather than a unified whole, an image that conjures a mystical forest, a space of both quiet decay and mystical reinvention.

In sharp contradistinction from the feminine imagery conjured by the moon and a title like *Lost Lunar Baedeker*, Mina Loy was for a time closely allied with Italian Futurists, the group of thinkers associated with F.T. Marinetti and his manifesto that declares speed, war, and violent assault its aesthetic principles and eschews everything that comes before the present moment as gangrenous and dangerous. The Futurists' disregard for the stuffiness and conservatism of the European art scene in the pre-war years was thrilling and necessary; the Italian Futurists offered a young Loy disillusioned

with Paris a rallying cry towards something bold and fresh.[51] While Futurist writing can feel almost comically sophomoric and hypermasculine—"We went up to the three snorting machines to caress their breasts," Marinetti writes, in an unironic love-letter to his car—it also offers wild new ways of thinking about embodiment and temporality that are clear inspirations for Loy's reckoning with the modernist body.[52] "Time and Space died yesterday," Marinetti declares, and he describes "adventurous steamers sniffing the horizon" and "the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions" perpetuated by "great crowds agitated by work, pleasure, and revolt" who live in time to the "nocturnal vibration of the arsenal of workshops beneath their violent electric moons." Loy's enmeshment with the movement coalesced in 1913, the same year that the famous Armory Show in New York brought modernism to America. She found Marinetti's pomposity laughable but demonstrates her allegiance with the movement in her first poem accepted for publication, which was printed in Stieglitz's *Camera Work* in 1914 at the behest of Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein. The poem mimics many of Futurism's chief tenets and devotion to progress and characteristic manifesto-like stylization:

> There is no Life or Death
> Only activity
> And in the absolute
> Is no declivity.
> There is no Love or Lust

[51] Loy's childhood was marked by her parent's middle-class strivings and the importance of maintaining a veneer of Victorian propriety, and her young adulthood left her often in the artistic shadow of her first husband, Stephen Haweis. Like Virginia Woolf (who was likewise born in 1882), Loy reacts strongly against the "damnable Victorians" responsible for raising her, both in the radical shape her love life took and in her work.

[52] In his article, "How Avant-Gardes End—and Begin: Italian Futurism in Historical Perspective," Walter L. Adamson argues that Futurism is the first of the twentieth-century avant-gardes and an essential source of inspiration for vorticism, De Stijl, Dada, and surrealism. The first five years of the Futurist movement before the First World War and the death of Umberto Boccioni and Antonio Sant'Elia are considered especially fertile ground for the development of artistic philosophies that would go on to define modernism.

Only propensity
Who would possess
Is a nonentity.
There is no First or Last
Only equality
And who would rule
Joins the majority.
There is no Space or Time
Only intensity,
And tame things
Have no immensity.

This proclamation in poetic form is unusually sing-song for Loy, with its end-rhymes and rhythmic regularity that make it read like a series of riddles or aphorisms. While her commitments are certainly Futurist, she nonetheless differentiates her personal philosophy by complicating a teleological relationship to progress and futurity and insistently refusing binaries. Her opening sentence declares a vitalist stance towards existence, with live-ness imparted through motion. There's a radical non-hierarchical bent to her vision, which doesn't square with Marinetti's famous self-importance; those who seek to dominate will die, she suggests. The poem insistently disrupts notions of causality and progression, implicitly questioning an orientation towards futurity: if there is no space and time, how are we to be acolytes of the future? If there is no first and last, how do we map time and space, how do we orient ourselves? While this poem doesn't develop a theory of embodiment explicitly, it anticipates the complications that Futurists would later encounter about how to account for the human body in a machine utopia and circumvents them by refusing to align with the notion of past and future at all. The world Loy paints for us in this poem cannot be attributed exclusively to a Futurist vision, but

instead reads like a graph of relative intensities, an unfixable, quantum world that reinterprets the possibilities of Futurism through a non-hierarchical lens.[53]

Loy played with concepts about what an embodied commitment to Futurism would look like or imply, and in her collected papers at the Beineke Library, there are fragments of writing that are likely first drafts of "Lions' Jaws"[54] that seem to be structured around the components of a journey on a train, with headings like "Platform," "Compartment," and "Journey" differentiating her musings. It's an allegorical, fantastical, semi-autobiographical exploration: "She had got into the Flabbergast world, where everything seemed to be worked by a piston—hiding away from herself in this man's jacket, she was caught in the machinery of his urgent identification with motor-frenzy; and dropped consciousness of everything but Rush—... The rhyme of railway circulated with her blood—in rhythmic audience to symphonic cohesion of noise—she relaxed peaceable to the newly orchestral." To be a Futurist body is to be made hybrid with mechanisms of speed themselves, and this form of embodiment will require syncing your circulatory system to the circulation of people and goods through the mechanism of

[53] Futurism's primary interest in speed and motion demonstrates its commitment to rethinking the relationships between space and time, and I don't mean to be overly reductive in my assertions about Futurism's teleological impulses. Architect Angiolo Mazzoni said that "futurism is the dynamic expression of movement" (cited in Sandro Marpillero, "The Guggenheim's Architectonic Futurisms," 24 July 2014)—a concept that aligns more with the quantum relationship to time that I see in Loy's work. In her 2015 article "The Past Future of Futurist Movement Photography," Katja Müller-Helle argues that Futurist movement photography "opens up unexpected horizons of the future" which nonetheless confronts "the present of the past with the present of the future" by producing images and aesthetic objects that espouse futurist visions with intentionally anachronistic technologies—for example, proclaiming the wonders of cinema while turning again to stop-motion photography to aestheticize movement. Futurism in the post-war, Marinetti-dominated, tilting-toward-Fascism moment is easier to lambast and reduce than the complex and exciting impulses of Futurist production from about 1909-1914, where the contradictions of being temporally oriented toward the future were more richly explored.

[54] "Lions' Jaws" was an extended satire of the Futurist movement, renamed the Flabbergast movement, published in the *Little Review* in the Sept.-Dec. 1920 issue.

the railroad. It's a body that comes into being through the noise of mechanization and materializes through the working of pistons, exactly the kind of man/machine hybrid that Futurists anticipated gleefully through their valorization of planes, trains and other "systems of rush" that had the potential to leave disrupt embodiment and leave you in a perpetual state of "Flabbergast." But crucially, and problematically for Loy, the only way you reach this world and this form of embodiment is by stowing yourself away on a man's coattails and getting caught up in his identifications with motors. The rhythm of the railway dictating circulation becomes dystopian and parasitic viewed through this lens, rendering the Futurist body necessarily and only male, and also strangely weak and passive, succumbing to the seductions of the railways as it transplants its rhythms into your very blood.

In the same year that Loy was experimenting with writing a Futurist dream of train-embodiment, she wrote "Parturition," a poem about childbirth that grapples with the frustration of writing about pain and the ruptures in ego provoked both by intensity of feeling and by the experience of becoming a mother. "I am the centre / of a circle of pain / Exceeding its boundaries in every direction," she writes. As the poem progresses, her sense of self relaxes further as the pain intensifies the expansion of her boundaries and as her child is born, confusing the edges of self and other, but also, curiously, of living and dead and of animal and human. As her child comes away from her body, "Rises from the sub-conscious / Impression of a cat / With blind kittens / Among her legs / Same undulating life-stir / I am that cat." In the moment of childbirth, she becomes cat-like, united to its animality through a wave-like lifeforce. And then: "Rises from the sub-

conscious / Impression of small animal carcass / Covered with blue-bottles / --Epicurean- - / And through the insects / Waves that same undulation of living / Death / Life/ I am knowing / All about / Unfolding" (7). This association with animal morphs into an association with death, which in turn gives rise to a new life, feasting on remains. The process of birth makes you into a ridiculous and impotent goddess, a death of self and an assumption into motherhood: "Each woman-of-the-people / Wearing a halo / A ludicrous little halo / Of which she is sublimely unaware" (7). How then, do women find a futurist embodiment? The options seem to be through sublimation of self by men and technologies of speed, which will infiltrate your very blood if you let them, or through another form of parasitism—the child that makes you into a "small animal carcass" as it nourishes itself on your remains. Loy's poetry tries to find a possibility for embodiment that resists mechanized, masculine control even as it refuses the expansion of our understanding of the body by means of pain, sacrifice, or essentialist nonsense that makes women into goddesses through childbirth. How exactly could poetry conceptualize a body that acknowledges its somatechnics without seeking to outrun the perpetual decay that of course characterizes human bodies?

Loy's early poem "Three Moments in Paris," which begins a far more autobiographical, naturalistic mode than much of her later work, lays out a framework for the contrary modes of decay and machine that the modern feminine body encodes. The poem begins with a section called "One O'Clock at Night," and the speaker drifts in and out of consciousness, leaning against a lover who is holding forth, feeling his voice as much as hearing it. The boundaries between their bodies seem to melt into one another in

"dynamic decomposition" which is ruptured as her lover reasserts his subjectivity, clearing his throat deafeningly. With tongue firmly in cheek, Loy describes the "Beautiful half-hour of being a mere woman / The animal woman… the security imparted physical heat / Indifferent to cerebral gymnastics" (15). Though men discuss "plastic velocity," they shore up a self by relegating women to something animal, devoid of brain power, and must reassert their individual, superior bodies by refusing a kind of decomposition which would reveal the nonsense of the bodily boundaries they enforce. The next section, "Café de Néant," develops this motif of femininity and decay. Flickering flames on "coffin tables" lean to the "breath of baited bodies" inhabiting a "factitious chamber of DEATH" (16). The final stanza makes the connection between feminine bodies and decay overt: "While the brandy cherries / In winking glasses / Are decomposing / Harmoniously / With the flesh of the spectators/ There is one / Who… / Prophetically blossoms in perfect putrefaction" (17). Female bodies embrace the decay inherent in life instead of falling into the impossible myth of outrunning death with speed and talk. While this image of feminine decay is not exactly positive, at least its honest. And yet: the final section, "Magasins du Louvre," takes a turn which complicates Loy's portrait of femininity, resisting the easy equation between female bodies and natural, decaying softness, in-step with the world of plants and animals. "All the virgin eyes in the world are made of glass," she writes. Set in a hotel that has become a department store, Loy leans into the parallel between the women who once inhabited this hotel and the dolls that now line its shelves. No longer naturalistic, women are also "propped against banisters / walls and pillars… / … composite babies with arms extended," inert combinations of

parts “seeing nothing / Between parted fringes.” To be a woman is to be a decomposing doll. As two prostitutes (perhaps former frequenters of this hotel/store?) pass by, “They see the dolls / and for a moment their eyes relax / To a flicker of elements unconditionally primeval” (18). The acknowledgment of the compositeness of feminine identity returns us again to naturalistic imagery of the primeval. Importantly, the speaker tells us at the outset of the poem, speaking to her lover, “Though you had never possessed me / I had belonged to you since the beginning of time”; she is virginal, though that designation is of course only relevant or possible through her “belonging” to men. Virgin eyes are glass not only because women are metaphorically and, in the space of the poem, literally dolls, but because female embodiment is aware of the technics that undergird its conception—virginity makes women categorizable and reveals how bodies are always machinic, articulations of disparate parts imbued with social significance. There is nothing natural about women’s bodies, and yet, these are the bodies that can recognize and embrace decay and demonstrate our imbrication with natural forms, be they our lovers, animals, or cherries.

Loy also explored this question through reflections on her colleague’s art, interrogating the idea that perhaps artistic production is one way that men attempt to evade decay, leaving something solid in their wake. Loy’s ekphrastic poetry is anthologized more than the rest of her challenging work—I hazard this is partially because it at least gives the reader a visual referent as another key to her often obscure meaning—but it has also contributed to critics dismissing her as a poet who is a hanger-on, a lover of art and design but not much of an artist in her own right. But even in her

early ekphrastic poetry, Loy is interested in art for its ability to theorize new forms of embodiment, curious about the way that Futurism and Cubism can forge the same kinds of connections in visual media that she articulates in language. "Brancusi's Golden Bird" is one of her best-known poems, and it's often interpreted straightforwardly as an admiring ode to Brancusi's sleek sculpture. But, as we see in "Parturition" and in her unpublished early prose, a healthy dose of skepticism lurks beneath the surface of her words. Brancusi's sculpture is "an absolute act / of art," an "aesthetic archetype," and the product of "immaculate conception," silent but shrill "as the aggressive light / strikes / its significance" (79-80). It's all machine, a living creature made almost painfully surface, a "gong / of polished hyperaesthesia" which is flightless, motionless, because "the ultimate rhythm / has lopped the extremities / of crest and claw / from / the nucleus of flight" (79). A Futurist insistence on sleekness may render objects hypnotically beautiful, but rather than representing forward motion or refusing mere aesthetics, birds become motionless, incapable of progress. Loy subtly anticipates Benjamin's concerns about art in the age of mechanical reproduction and shiny objects' potentially fascist politics, recognizing that this object seems to arise out of nowhere as if created by a god; it has no "unique existence in a particular place" or traces of the human touch that make up on object's aura and situate it in relation to human history (Benjamin 448). Her veiled critique of the shininess and aggressive exteriority calls to mind Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of texxture[55]—a way to speak of an object that is "dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being" (14)—in contrast to her

[55] Sedgwick's texxture reminds me of Merleau-Ponty's theorization of the fleshiness of the visual and the depth he ascribes to touch in addition to Benjamin's concept of the aura.

articulation of a contemporary aesthetic that worships an aesthetic of smoothness and surface that slips seamlessly through capitalist structures. For Sedgwick, and I would argue for Loy, excessive shine is the texture of neoliberal space, dangerous for its seeming monopoly on aesthetics and its refusal of anything except seamless integration with machines. What seems like speed and progress is in fact stasis, a flightless bird.

Loy sees more texxture in her good friend Wyndham Lewis' painting, and her ekphrastic poem "Starry Sky of Windham Lewis" outlines the contradictions she prizes in modernist depictions of embodiment. She writes: "who raised / these rocks of human mist / pyramidical survivors / in the cyclorama of space… Jehovah's seven days / err in your entrails / of geometric Chimeras," likening Lewis himself to a god-figure[56] creating a hybrid humanity that is reminiscent of rock and mist simultaneously, substantial and ephemeral and enmeshed with geological formation, surviving in the starkness of outer space. The juxtaposition of "entrails," graphic and visceral, with the hard angularity of "geometric" reinforces the logic of rocks of mist, and the further introduction of Chimeras—Grecian fire-breathing creatures so impossible that their name substitutes for any illusory delusion—suggests the dangerous desirability of an embodiment both human and geologic, meltingly soft and prehistorically solid. Her 1915 poem "Human Cylinders" reads almost like an imagined encounter between the kinds of figures that Lewis' painting depicts: "Where each extrudes beyond the tangible / One thin pale trail of

[56] She does this in "Brancusi's Golden Bird" as well, suggesting that "some patient peasant God / had rubbed and rubbed / the Alpha and Omega / of Form / into a lump of metal." I think that her references to artists as gods is at least partially ironic (though it also urges us to take seriously the power of art to articulate a body), but a mistakenly literalized reading of Loy's hypermasculine god/artists enforces the idea that her work predominantly builds on the artistic accomplishments of men and contributes to her frequent relegation to the status of accessory to modernist poetics.

speculation / From among us we have sent out / Into the enervating dusk / One little whining beast / Whose longing / Is to slink back to antediluvian burrow / And one elastic tentacle of intuition / To quiver among the stars… / Or which of us / Would not / Receiving the holy-ghost Catch it and caging / Lose it / Or in the problematic / Destroy the Universe / With a solution" (40-41) The extruded bodies of these lovers, these human cylinders that remind readers of an industrialized version of Lewis' "rocks of human mist" with boundaries blurring where the tangible melts into something else, produce a curious relationship to time through their proximity. They send into a dusk that marks the decay of the day a speculation that is also a beast, this time not slouching toward Bethlehem, but slinking underground to a time before the Christian era, before the demarcation of time and a contemporary understanding of teleological historical progress. Contradictorily, one tentacle of this watery beast reaches up into the stars, spanning from under the ocean to high above the earth's surface, but also metaphorically spanning the vastness of time, reaching up to stars who send light from the future. This poem is riddled with contradiction and impossibility, but that's precisely the tension Loy intends, and the tense negotiation she imagines necessary for these human cylinders that we are: we should not seek the resolution of this tension between human and machine, past and present, embodiment and thought, for that would rend the fabric of the universe.

Even at her most tender and intimate Loy is dedicated to explicating the mechanics of the modernist body. Perhaps Loy's most studied and noted work, "Songs to Joannes" rocked the publishing world when it's first four "songs" appeared in *Others* in 1917 with its visceral descriptions of love-making. Like so much of Loy's work, there's

something almost quaint or naïve about publishing a cycle of love poetry as World War I is at its height and as her lovers and colleagues of the Futurist movement eschewed notions of romance as sentimental, feminized nonsense that was irrelevant to a modernity characterized by speed, perpetual motion, and violent rupture. But these poems, while indebted to masters of the form like Shakespeare or Petrarch, are not concerned with exalting love in the abstract but with how bodies are created and dissolved through acts of love making, how motion exists in miniature, where lovemaking creates the body-as-machine. While John Donne is perhaps her most obvious precursor because of his complex, improbable juxtaposition of words and his irreverence for the separation of the sacred and the profane, Loy's cycle of songs redefines rules of meter, rhyme, and aesthetics in service of interrogating and delivering new form to these songs of the body. And vitally, Loy writes sex from a woman's point of view, provoking comparisons to Sappho from reviewers across the century. Writing about Loy's contribution to poetics and her handling of explicitly sexual content in contrast to her contemporary D.H. Lawrence, Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes that Loy's poetic structure resists the narrative centrality of orgasm, presenting a distinctly feminine relationship to sex as unfolding over time rather than singularly climactic. DuPlessis also credits Loy with a Foucauldian insight about the constructedness and historical specificity of even something as seemingly primal and unmediated as sex, noting that "no human act is natural in an unmediated way" (64) and that Loy's *Love Song* details the particularities and diversity of sexual experience rather than essentializing sex as monolithic. This isn't merely the tracing of a love story gone sour, where intimacy hardness into unfeeling, mechanized

sex, but a far more complex meditation on what forms our embodiment desires. When does desire look like rot? When like a factory? How do we balance melting with sparking? What kind of bodies and boundaries do those desires require and what are their pleasures and their dangers?

The thirty-four songs that compose the cycle follow no set length; though most lines run between seven and ten syllables and most poems are a couple of six- to ten-line stanzas long, in an extremely loose homage to the sonnet form, they hew to no discernable pattern except their own rhythm and musicality. The poem infamously opens with the image of "Pig Cupid," the cherub of love reduced to a fleshy animal "rooting erotic garbage" to sow its seed "in mucous membrane" (LB 53). The speaker revels in the squishy excess of sex, her lover's penis insistently "rooting" until it erupts in "white star-topped / Among wild oats" into her own mucous-lined sex. Loy works toward her theory of modernist embodiment from the outset of this poem, going on to describe semen as "eternity in a sky-rocket / Constellations in an ocean / whose rivers run no fresher / than a trickle of saliva. / These are suspect places" (53). The penis, both pig and rocket, contains genetic codes for all eternity, every gamete capable of producing a miniature world. Her zoom-in on the microcosmic worlds of sexual union juxtaposed with the image of constellations and sky-rockets slams her reader back and forth between extremes of scale in a distinctly scientific, twentieth-century manner: with the microscope and telescope, we know our bodies in relation to the unseeably large and the unseeably small. It's a move that reminds me of Carl Sagan's famous opening to his *Cosmos*, where he zooms out on a Chicago park until it becomes infinitesimally small to reinforce the minute scale

of life on earth, as well as an image that once again recalls the title of her collection, the Lunar Baedeker that unites space exploration with the feminized everyday of the Victorian household. In another signature move, Loy asks us to see space and oceans as in some ways analogous; the water reflects the sky, and thus constellations exist in oceans as well, but also, the moon that forms such a significant symbolic backbone of this collection influences the tides, marrying these vast, dark spaces not just through imagery but through scientific reality.[57] Once again, Loy asks her reader to see the moon as analogous to female embodiment, leaning on an old trope but infusing it with new contradictions. The moon governs the flows of the tides and the cycles of the female reproductive system, and it has long represented virginal purity, coldness, and mystery as it glows unattainably white in the night sky. The moon decays each month, but it also regenerates, and does so on a schedule so mappable that we base our calendar on it; this process confuses the organic and the mechanistic, revealing the intimate interweaving of the kind of decay we associate with nature and the predictable, clockwork rigidity of a machine even in our most feminized symbol. She enforces this contradiction in lines like "Irredeemable pledges / Of pubescent consummations / Rot / To the recurrent moon / Bleach / To the pure white / Wickedness of pain" (XXIII 62). The moon is an agent of decay even as it sanitizes, bleaches, and reveals the starkness of human being. In a similar vein the "oceans" of semen we would expect to infuse the coldness of the moon with new life and bring male vitality and possibility to stillness fail; the rivers of semen run dry and

[57] As I've noted in a previous footnote, though I have not chosen to structure my analysis of Loy's contributions to modernist embodiment around the concept of the undulatory body developed in previous chapters, I find continued resonance between that model and her depictions of embodiment; the moon and tide parallels here speak particularly clearly to the undulatory structure of the body.

fetid, no fresher than "a trickle of saliva." She draws us once again from the vast and epic spaces of eternity, rockets, and oceans to a sticky, stuck formulation of what it is to live: decaying, rotting, like a stream would be if it were reduced to a trickle of spittle.[58]

The next song makes this contradiction explicit: "The skin-sack / In which wanton duality / packed / All the completion of my infructuous impulses." This "skin-sack," which seems to function both as a literal description of her lover's testicles and as a metonym for his human form, is full of a promiscuous doubling and contradiction, wanton disregard for desires of completion, both a sly dig at her own dissatisfaction and lack of "completion" within their sexual union and a reflection of a broader truth about the inherent diffuseness and contradiction of being a human body. "Something the shape of a man" she continues, "to the casual vulgarity of the merely observant / More of a clock-work mechanism / Running down against time / to which I am not paced. / My finger-tips are numb from fretting your hair / A God's door-mat / On the threshold of your mind." There's something vulgar and incomplete about seeing man as a machine merely counting out the hours of life, and yet, as we will learn over the course of the poem, so is the idea of a God-like mind, separated from the body by a godly threshold. Interestingly, her extremities have lost their capacity for feeling where they interact with his body, erasing the perception of separateness between them and confusing the boundaries of their existence in a way that the rooting of Pig Cupid could not. This

[58] Deleuze and Guattari use similar language to describe the interplay between flow and stoppage that characterizes the body as desiring machine: "Amniotic fluid spilling out of the sac and kidney stones; flowing hair; a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit or urine that are produced by partial object and constantly cut off by other partial objects, which in turn produce other flows… Every 'object' presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow, the fragmentation of the object" (Anti-Oedipus 5-6). The spittle and sperm imagery is so reminiscent of Loy's work that I wonder if they were influenced by her poetry as they articulated the concept of the desiring machine.

moment renders a new image of intimacy outside the immediate framework of copulation, and this song introduces another recurring contradiction of what it is to be a body: God-like and mechanical, bounded by time and infinite. The following song continues to develop a framework of religious imagery:

> We might have coupled
> In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
> Or broken flesh with one another
> At the profane communion table
> Where wine is spill'd on promiscuous lips
>
> We might have given birth to a butterfly
> With the daily news
> Printed in blood on its wings

The image of "breaking flesh" both literalizes the ceremony of the eucharist, an image that Loy returns to again and again throughout her poetry, and suggests that to procreate is to break flesh, a fascinating departure from the image of sexual unity as wholeness or completion. In coupling, human bodies reveal themselves to be collections of flesh available for shaping and molding—as I've discussed previously in relation to Hortense Spiller's work, flesh is a useful analytic for unthinking the hierarchy of the body, emphasizing the materiality of embodiment while resisting the unity of "the body." This refusal of sanctified, unified being is made more evident in the following stanza, which suggests that their union might result in something other than human: a butterfly, a symbol of flighty fancy nonetheless defined by the grotesquerie of the mundane, the news emblazoned on its wings in blood. These are the things that make up a body: possibility, flights of fancy, the mundane horror of the daily news (particularly in 1917). Loy continues her foray into identification of an embodiment that exceeds the human in her

fourth song, the final movement in the originally published quartet. She describes an "unimaginable family" emblazoned on an ornate ceiling, "Bird-like abortions / With human throats / And Wisdom's eyes / Who wore lamp-shade red dresses / And woolen hair" (54). At first, these creatures seem to be further manifestations of lovemaking, the bloody butterfly of the previous song mutating into a bird-like abortion and taking on a decidedly sinister air. But then, the speaker proclaims her identification with these creatures: "But for the abominable shadows / I would have lived / Among their fearful furniture / To teach them to tell me their secrets." Perhaps this collection of flesh is not such a fearsome amalgamation after all, but rather a model for embodiment that we might aspire to if we only knew the secret of "Wisdom's eyes."

"Come to me" Loy's speaker implores her lover, "There is something / I have got to tell you and I can't tell / Something taking shape / Something that has a new name / A new dimension" (57). As she searches for language for a new form of relational embodiment, something to name a sense of self that extends beyond self, she requires her lover's presence so that she might articulate their collective embodiment as it takes on dimension. This stanza could be a summary of Loy's entire project in *Lunar Baedeker*: the process of trying to articulate and make familiar something as wild as the moon, a new way of feeling embodied through relationship to another, something hesitating and emergent somewhere in-between language and materiality, man and machine. Her lover, it seems, is wary of her desire, aware of the power that embodied presence provides for articulation: "Oh that's right" she begins, dripping with sarcasm, "Keep away from me Please give me a push / Don't let me understand you Don't realise me / Or we might

tumble together / Depersonalized / Identical / Into the terrific Nirvana / Me you – you – me" (58 XIII). If he were to realize her, to acknowledge and materialize her being through that co-presence, he would risk expanding his boundaries beyond the limits of a singular body. She contrasts this familiar image of lovers tumbling into one another such that all differentiation between them is erased with "the impact of lighted bodies / Knocking sparks off each other / In chaos" (59 XIV), once again demonstrating the tension between the different kinds of delight to be found in decaying bodily boundaries and rigidifying them. The image of "knocking sparks" conjures bodies made of steel or flint, moving parts in a factory of love in contrast with the tumbling nirvana of the previous poem.

She literalizes this implication two songs later: "Licking the Arno / The little rosy / Tongue of Dawn / Interferes with our eyelashes," she begins, eroticizing Homer as fingers become tongues. "We twiddle to it / Round and round / Faster / And turn into machines" (XXV 63). While the definition of "twiddle" here is somewhat ambiguous, it implies lazy relaxedness and quick circular motions with the fingers (which we've already been instructed to read here as interchangeable with the tongue); it reads like a lazy session of morning lovemaking, building to an orgasm that turns the lovers into machines. In contrast to the Pig Cupid of the opening stanza rooting through decay, here sex makes you machine, "with steel eyes" and "cool plains" like a sheet of metal. Nature is not something we are, but something outside of ourselves that we move towards: "We sidle up / To Nature -- -- -- that irate pornographist" (XXVI 63). She invokes discoveries in quantum physics which disrupted the idea of fixed bodies, fixed states, and inherent

divisions between types of matter, describing the inconceivability of the concept of a nucleus alongside the "hands of races" which "Drop off from / Immodifiable plastic," the apparent fixity of our substance questioned in the contradictory phrase "immodifiable plastic" which suggests both the plasticity of the human form and our uneasy relationship to non-human materials as constitutive of our bodies. All of this adds up to "NOTHING" the poem proclaims loudly at its center, mimicking the nothing/nucleus at the center of all matter as it materializes her claims about the simultaneous absence and presence of substance that characterizes a quantum age.

In a passage that reads almost like a dream sequence, the speaker encounters steps that "go up for ever / And they are white," and realizes that she herself is "smelt to synthetic / Whiteness / Of my / Emergence / And I am burnt quite white / In the climacteric / Withdrawal of your sun" (XXVIII 64). She's like a clockwork angel, climbing endless white stairs in a sterile heaven, but also smelt like metal and burned white as in a furnace. She returns again to the cluster of images that link female embodiment to the moon and the machine, invoking a dark side of the heavenly, a cold nature beyond the reach of the earth: like the moon, she is white and glowing in the absence of a sun. This clockwork angel of the night sky contrasts with the body of her lover, who despite being her sun is himself unnatural, decrepit: "But a white towel / Wipes the cymophanous sweat / --Mist rise of living-- / From your / Etiolate body" (XXVIII 65). His sweat is luminescent, and his body is emaciated and white as if deprived of his own light. Her organic imagery produces an alien vision of aliveness, presenting him in a state of supernatural decay. In a plea to the forces of evolution, she

calls for a new form of embodiment that does away with gendered difference while remaining materially realized. In the world she longs for, a world governed by the moon, she hopes that we will "breed such sons and daughter / As shall jibber at each other / Uninterpretable cryptonyms" where communication is reinvented through alternate embodiments such that they might utilize "homophonous hiccoughs" and "suppose that tears / Are snowdrops of molasses / Or anything / Than human insufficiencies begging dorsal vertebrae" (XXIX 65). In this world, "Let meeting be the turning / To the antipodean / And Form a blurr / Anything." She emphasizes the materiality of embodiment but is unspecific about its form, reveling in the possibility of a kind of embodiment that wouldn't distinguish gender or even species, letting any imaginable form through its desire for intelligibility and its encounter with other forms. She even demonstrates her disregard for conventions of her own form by doubling the r at the end of "blurr," modeling a different form that nonetheless communicates. She takes her request for the expansion of human boundaries even further as she describes how these creatures would "clash together / From their incognitoes / In seismic orgasm," demolishing not only the artificial categorizations that separate men from women and human from animal but likening humans to geological formations that might cause earthquakes as they encounter one another.

Loy's exploration of the inextricability of machine and decay in her understanding of human embodiment is perhaps most thoroughly explored in her only novel, *Insel*, published posthumously in 1991 but written sporadically between roughly 1940 and the end of her life in 1966. *Insel* features a mysterious character of the same

name, loosely based on the surrealist artist Richard Oelze, and set in mid-1930s Paris where the impending doom of the German occupation is already hanging heavy in the air. The novel is overtly preoccupied with the slipperiness of human form and its curious materializations and what intimacy does to the boundaries of the self. *Insel* pushes the limits of its form as well, and often feels like a lyric, novel-length poem, given its exquisite attention to rhythm and image and its complete lack of interest in anything like a conventional plot. Mrs. Jones, a stand-in for both the reader and Loy herself, meets Insel, a struggling but brilliant surrealist painter, as he is painting a portrait in order to fund a set of false teeth. He is physically repulsive and yet dazzlingly attractive in his aura. He occupies a liminal kind of space between aliveness and death, seeming to suck life almost vampirically from Mrs. Jones at times, and at others to restore her youth. Mrs. Jones notes the interplay between hard and soft, machine and decay in her first substantive meeting with him, when he unexpectedly calls at her house: "He's again the primordial soft-machine without the protective overall of the daily job in which his fellows wend their way to some extent unbattered by this sphere of activity" (23). In a return to the central imagery of her poetry, Loy describes Insel as having "a lunar giggle that never precisely applied to anything" (153). Like the moon, he is otherworldly and familiar, cold and removed and yet in a perpetual state of decay, feminized in his ethereality and untouchability. He navigates the industrialized capitalist world not by changing himself to fit into it, but instead by projecting what Mrs. Jones diagnoses as his own 'naturalness' onto the world, his body reclaiming the city and its machines in a kind of assemblage emanating from Insel himself: "this metal forest of coin bearing machinery

will partially revert to the condition of nature preserved in him, and show patches of moss as if he had projected there some of the verdure rooted in him" (24). Insel functions like fungus or some other decomposer of the forest floor, and it is his ability to disintegrate his environs—just as his teeth are emblematically disintegrating—that makes Insel dangerously seductive. He is a decay-machine, his body quite literally a machine that produces decay and decomposes food, people, environs, and time.

As Mrs. Jones learns, Insel has a penchant for boneless meat, or "fleish ohne Knochen" as he requests in his native German, but no matter how "much food you sunk in him it no more seemed to amalgamate with him than would a concrete mass with a gaseous compound" (49). Nothing sticks to him, even as food seems to sink into him, his amorphous mass overwhelming the already torn apart bits of meat like a physical representation of the digestion process which disintegrates and decomposes meat and makes it a building block for human flesh. We get this image of Insel as assemblage of flesh in varying stages of decomposition literalized as Mrs. Jones describes that "Shaken with an unearthly anxiety, this creature of so divine a degradation, set upon himself with his queer hands and began to pull off his face. For those whose flesh is their rags, it is not pitiable to undress. As Insel dropped the scabs of his peculiar astral carbonization upon the table, his cheeks torn down, in bits upon the marble" (97). The novel asks us to take this seriously, to contemplate the possibility that flesh is something we might remove and reassemble, calling attention to our bodies as curious assemblages of stardust that might as well belong on marble as in a face.

Though incidents like this suggest Insel would be a source of horror or disgust, he in fact represents a childish effervescence for Mrs. Jones, as if his strange embodiment might be capable of disintegrating time and returning us to something youthful, natural, or less mediated. After a long evening with Insel, she notes that she feels almost impossibly light: "The painless buoyancy lasted well into the night when, as I sat calmly at work in my hotel bedroom, I unexpectedly disintegrated. My body, which had hitherto made upon itself the impression of a compact mass, springing a multiplicity of rifts, changed to a fractional covering I can only compare to the spines of a porcupine; or rather vibrant streamers on which my density in plastic undulation was being carried away—perhaps into infinity…." In this passage, she becomes gaseous, as she had described Insel himself before, and in the moment of disintegration, she reaches for an improbable metaphor of animal embodiment, and then perhaps becomes electricity, streaming away in vibrational wave formations. In conjunction with her own disintegration and becoming-undulatory, Mrs. Jones observes the way that time and embodiment construct one another for Insel. She describes the odd foreshortening of his body as he reaches for a watch: "Behind the curtain in the corner, carefully secreted under empty boxes, neatly stacked, was his wristwatch. He did not bring it out—his arm seemed in some Einsteinian contraction to shorten the necessary distance for focusing the hands. It was seven o'clock. I took my leave. Insel, astonished as if this were the first break in a timeless conversation, snapped in half; or at least bowed like a poplar in a sudden gale; his dessicated limbs the branches" (135). Returning to time has the power to

break Insel, ruining his lugubrious stretching through time and space and his ability to decompose those around him.

Sarah Crangle reads *Insel* as an exploration of this extended relationship to time, calling Loy's novelistic world one of "endless carnival" that upends hierarchies of all kinds. Crangle reads with an eye towards the future, declaring that Loy anticipates later thinkers like George Bataille in her radical dismissal of bodily and temporal integrity and embrace of excess. Crangle is also interested in how risibility functions in Insel, a term she borrows from Bergson to think about the way that laughter marks an overflow of human-ness. Where other critics have characterized laughter in the modern novel as a space for reknitting a self fractured by the newly machinic, post-war world, Crangle sees laughter functioning for Loy the way Bataille later describes it: "to laugh in the midst of life's anguish is to attain the ecstasy that undermines subjective sovereignty, enabling us to transcend the self" (46). Citing Bergson, Crangle also asserts that "humanity becomes laughable when it inadvertently behaves in a machine-like fashion" (45), suggesting a causative relationship between machinic bodies, laughter, and what she calls transcending the self. I would argue that Loy significantly complicates the trajectory laid out from machine to transcendence by way of laughter, instead emphasizing through Mrs Jones' rejection of Insel and insistence on her own bodily materiality the impossibility of transcendence and an embrace of the body's possibility for transformation without dissolution. Insel's excessive appetites, complete disregard for time, and desire to transcend fleshiness renders him putrescent in the extreme, all possibility for life evaporated: "His emaciation no longer of flesh had become an exteriorized act of the

flesh in which the last ooze of the spermatic juices might have been, in some fearful enervation, spent. Instead of being suffused with that liquidity of relief following upon embrace, his eyes, in some ultimate heat, were boiled to the creamy, soiled putrescence of stale oysters in a stew" (170). He is stale, stuck in time, even producing heat like so much compost somehow clinging to life. Transcendence is not possible; bodies are machines of decay.

To unstick herself from Insel's hold on time, Mrs Jones must reassert her own timeline and her bodily existence in its frameworks. In their penultimate encounter, when Mrs Jones realizes that her own artistic practice is impossible under the conditions of their friendship, and that the bodily and temporal decay he oozes threatens to remove her from the material world essential to art, she fully articulates Insel's unusual embodiment as a function of his ability to stretch time: "Only now I remarked… that prolongation of time I so often experienced in the company of Insel, for at present there was no aquarium diffusion, none of that virtually giggling attainment to Nirvana. No x-ray excursion nor any fractionation. His mediumship concentrated in a sole manifestation. This interference with time. I could not make out whether the cause was a shift in the relative tempos of a cosmic and microcosmic "pulsation"…" (173) Loy suggests that alternate temporality and embodiment are in reciprocal relationship: "Insel's brain floated up from his head, unraveled, projected its convolutions. They straightened in endless lines across a limitless canvas, a map of imminent direction. On the whole of space were only a few signboards on which grew hands, alive and beckoning… 'I don't know where you are…' I was saying,… 'I have existed before my time.'" (175). Insel's brain can float, which produces

a new kind of time-space continuum, and this time-map can grow hands, manifesting fractured bodies through its new arrangement of space. Mrs Jones describes Insel's time warp as a form of "depredatory radioactivity" (178), another image of Insel's form of time manipulation and wish for transcendence of the material as a kind of x-ray power to map the body by depleting it and hastening its decay. Mrs Jones breaks this spell by asserting her own material condition, first by reclaiming her own timeline, in which she is aware of her existence now instead of the "before my time" she experiences in Insel's manipulations. "I *had* to leave Insel, it was ten to eight" (176) she announces, closing the chapter and finally breaking his dictatorial hold on a timeline that speeds her decay and urges her to seek enlightenment only through removal from the world.

Mrs Jones decides instead to live on her own terms, in a timeline that will decay her differently; the next time she sees Insel, she has been hard at work on the book she is writing, and in response to his query about how it's going, she explains to him that "Man muss reif sein—One must be ripe" (177). Rather than the language of putrescence and sticky decay associated with Insel, she claims for herself a phrase that indicates comfort with the fullness of time—ripe, or in a literal translation, mature. Insel's reaction to this claiming of her own timeline and acceptance of her own maturity and ripeness for life is monumental: "I felt Insel crack as if he had been *shot* alert. 'Can she possibly mean it,' I could 'hear' him ask himself as he wheeled toward me, noticing *me* for the *first* time; and then convinced, as I stood a little exalted on the corner of the street, decide, 'Here is a woman with whom there is absolutely *nothing* to be done'" (177). By choosing her own relationship to the passage of time, accepting the way it marks her body, she resists his

desire to preemptively subsume her into ether. It is in fact Mrs Jones' acceptance of the machinic, the clockwork rhythms she clings to as a structure of her own embodiment, that allows her to enter into right relationship with decay, embracing its excesses enough to become assured of her own existence in the ripeness of time.

Insel isn't the first instance where Loy uses the image of the x-ray to try to get at the modernist body's negotiation of decay, machine, and materializing a self within an increasingly unknowable temporality. In "Gertrude Stein," one of Loy's most instructive poems about how she views the meshing of materiality and language, she writes: "Curie / of the laboratory / of vocabulary / she crushed / the tonnage / of consciousness / congealed to phrases / to extract / a radium of the word." It's an extended comparison that understands Stein as a figure akin to Marie Curie, someone who develops a means to see through things in order to arrive at their essence. As the x-ray reveals our bones, our bodily structures, so Stein reveals consciousness as excess weight that ought to be compressed, rather than suggesting that consciousness is the heart of the matter. It's a telling commentary which once again emphasizes Loy's commitment to bodily materiality, privileging Curie and her x-ray as the governing image for understanding developments in literature. This poem also renders language (and its analogue here, the body) as strangely metallic or machinic. These are things that can be worked on in a laboratory, tonnage that can be compressed and made to deliver a new kind of molecule, wordsmiths like some materials engineer tinkering with a new alloy. In her book *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture,* Lisa Cartwright suggests that the x-ray was instrumental in forming a new visual vocabulary which shifted how people

think about mortality, gender, and time. For a time around the turn of the twentieth century, it was immensely popular to give an x-ray to a loved one, a portrait of your skeleton as a marker of affection. These images were sometimes considered obscene, particularly when they were images of women, because they both unnervingly erased sexual difference and displayed an image of the body that was nuder than nude, if you will. Cartwright calls this "a distinctively skeletal erotics" of "sexualized death" (123), further enforcing the logic that because x-rays are a penetrative and extractive technology, the x-ray subject is inherently feminized, complicatedly hyper-feminine in their decomposing earthiness and magnificently undifferentiated from male angularity in their skeletal form. In this poem, Loy echoes the anxieties and wonder of the x-ray and the way that it renders the body both oddly machinic—bodies without flesh are hard to differentiate from one another, and the kind of imaging Muybridge produced that Cartwright demonstrates was a precursor to the invention of cinema is decidedly robotic and angular—and also in a state of decay—skeletons serve as memento mori in everything from Roman architecture to Shakespearean tragedy, and the technology employed in x-rays literally eats away at your living body. Modern embodiment is characterized by collapsing the flesh and the excess and extracting an essence that is both uncannily robotic and a reminder of our inevitable decay. Rather than bolster dreams of immortality through the image of the machinic body, Loy emphasizes the way that embodiment is always already decay, the slow deterioration and dissembling of self.

Loy's fascination with the x-ray as a model for both language and modernist embodiment is reminiscent of artists like the Hungarian Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, one of the

most instrumental photographers and designers associated with the middle-period of the Bauhaus school. His photograms attempt to capture "vision in motion," and involve a process of exposure that leaves white space where opaque objects interfere with the transmission of light. The resulting images look like fleshy x-rays almost, stark grey-scale images that defamiliarize the human body and domestic objects. These photograms capture motion, like Muybridge's images, but also emphasize the materiality of embodiment, as the fleshiness of the objects at hand resists interpenetration by light. His long exposures make everyday objects like pipes or tangles of wire and string into skeletal structures by imbuing them with movement, and make bodies look two dimensional and machine-like. Moholy-Nagy also developed a theory of theatrical performance that emphasized a figure he calls the "mechanized eccentric," an organism as machinic assemblage of body and sound, light, motion, other objects. "Man… should be permitted to represent himself as a phenomenon of spirit and mind through his intellectual and spiritual capacities" (279) Moholy-Nagy argued, centralizing constant motion and the dizzying combinations of body-machines found in the circus as his ideal theatrical form. In combination with his still skeletal photograms that blur boundaries between motion and stillness, body and object, Moholy-Nagy articulates a visual world that riffs on the same insights as Loy's praise for Stein.

Capturing x-ray language, decaying the body-machine to render it at once decomposable and all the more technic also upends ideas about longevity, survival, and time. X-rays encode this through their complicated relationship to health and human preservation; of course, the technology was invented in order to detect illness and cure it,

but its cancer-causing rays threaten to decompose the body more quickly. But cancer is a disease characterized by too-muchness, cells morphing and reproducing too fast, death through an excess of the wrong kind of life. X-rays try to preserve your life and, in the process, render you as an image of death: the skeleton.

In her late work, Loy engages more overtly with the way that death invades life particularly for the poor, hashing out a proto-biopolitical reading of the bodies that characterize lower Manhattan's rampant poverty. "On Third Avenue" begins '"You should have disappeared years ago"—' (109), an address that seems to be as much directed at Loy herself, fading in professional reputation by the 1940s, as to the Bowery bums she describes. She describes bodies as mass, a classically modernist image of melting into a crowd of "heedless incognito / of shuffling shadow-bodies," but this speaker seems to view this crowd from above, bucking the street-level observations of the flaneur for the kind of description reminiscent of a surveillance state watching humanity in the abstract. This mass respires, but its breath is metallic, "preceding the eroded bronze contours / of their other aromas" and mixing with "monstrous air."

Her subsequent poem "Mass-Production on 14th Street" takes up much the same imagery, making humans into a "pedestrian ocean" of "tidal passing" and "robot turn[s]" (112) that are scarcely differentiated from the flows of capital and the consumer goods, the "foliage of mass-production" intermixing freely with the actual plant and human life along the boulevard. In her most indelible image from this paired set of poems, Loy calls this mass of humanity an "electric fungus," summing up the circuitry and pulsating predictability of this organic form which decays with machine-like regularity. Rather than

Jacob Riis-style portraits of poverty or Weegee-esque images of city streets designed to place the reader at a human scale and let them become part of the action, Loy's New York is a complex mass of flows, a desiring-machine itself, and humans are just one element in the assemblage that can be tracked, measured, allowed to decay or encouraged to grow. From the speakers' remove, time becomes trivial, insignificant, something you can take off: "Time, the contortive tailor, / on and off, / clowned with sweat-sculptured cloth / to press / upon these irreparable dummies / an eerie undress / of mummies / half unwound" (109-110). Time personified drapes itself—but is nonetheless rigid, sculptural—onto bodies that reveal their decay eerily as they live. In these poems, Loy captures time in the Anthropocene, a time when humans are acutely aware of their own inevitable becoming-earth even as the earth is increasingly machinic, governed by human technologies.

Imagery that depicts humanity as rigid, stony, increasingly corpse even in life recurs frequently in her later poetry as she articulates a modernist embodiment in the wake of the cybernetic war-machines developed in the second world war which radically alter our understanding of the fixity of time, the longevity of the human race. In her poem entitled "Photo after Pogrom," Loy explicitly examines the relationship between monument and decay, the machine and the intimacy of the body:

> Arrangement by rage
> of human rubble
>
> the false-eternal statues of the slain
> until they putrify.
>
> Tossed on a pile of dead,
> one woman,

her body hacked to utter beauty
oddly by murder,

attains the absolute smile
of dispossession:

The marble pause before the extinct haven
Death's drear
erasure of fear,

the unassumed
composure
the purposeless peace
sealing the faces of corpses—

Corpses are virgin.

The opening sentence ruptures grammatical sense—"Arrangement by rage of human rubble the false-eternal statues of the slain until they putrify"—presenting an arrangement of words that mimics the fractured bodies in the image. These are human rubble, architecture reduced to its component parts and rearticulated unrecognizably by rage. In their state of decay, these elements of the human body both rot and harden back into stone as she cleverly signals with the misspelling of putrify that combines petrify and putrefy. Her reflection on virginity and death echoes one of her earliest published poems, "Three Moments in Paris," which develops this theory of the body as decay-machine as it pertains particularly to female embodiment. This poem is also a rare reflection of Loy's own Jewishness; likely written around 1945, it feels like mourning for victims of pogroms carried out under Soviet rule in addition to imagery emerging out of concentration camps as the second world war concluded. As we've established, Loy's deployment of virginity typically codes for the ways that female bodies are always already cyborg, objectified, cold, and materialized through a particular technics that

constructs feminine value through virginity. This parallel between corpses and virginity asks us to contemplate the violence of virginity as a bodily construct and to once again collapse the space between decay and machine, to recognize the way that even these bodies are cogs in a machine and even war-machines decay.

In another 1945 poem, "Time-Bomb," presumably composed in the wake of the Hiroshima bombing, Loy articulates the relationship between decay-machine embodiment and time most overtly, making the link between a world where atoms can be split and the end of unidirectional time. The poem reads:

> The present moment
> is an explosion,
> a scission
> of past and future
>
> leaving those valorous disreputables,
> the ruins,
>
> sentinels
> in an unknown dawn
> strewn with prophecy.
>
> Only the momentary
> goggle of death
> fixes the fugitive
> momentum.

Presentness becomes unfixable in a world governed by quantum logics, in bodies that are disintegrating and remaking at all times. Explosion feels inevitable, the bomb irrevocably rupturing linear time and making now into a perpetual interplay between past a future, the present a palimpsest of ruin and prophecy which is only realizable through death. It seems like a bleak conclusion, a poem that leaves little room for articulating materiality

as it abstracts from the language of the body. But she introduces the language of fugitivity, a terminology adopted widely by Black studies scholars in the twenty-first century to adapt Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of flight" to a specifically Black context, recalling the histories of fugitivity for enslaved people barred from existence as human beings under United States law. For theorists like Fred Moten, fugitivity describes elusive spaces of escape that allow for a more fully realized Black embodiment beyond the confines of capitalist space and time. As it was for Woolf, momentum is perhaps the key to a new subjectivity for Loy, a way to duck and dodge the definitions the world has available for you, an embodiment that insists on perpetually machining itself anew, allowing all those unnecessary prophecies about what it is to be woman, to be human, to fall away.

In addition to her aesthetic investments in modernism and her cyborg alter ego, this relationship to a fugitive, flexible embodiment that traverses time links Janelle Monáe's and Mina Loy's projects. Monáe takes up this language of fugitivity and enacts the layered multiplicity of a post Time-Bomb world, investigating the way that acknowledging the body as decay-machine reciprocally necessitates and is shaped by this post-nuclear time.

Dirty Computers, Black Automatons: Negotiating Afrofuturist Agency

Suggesting a formulation for Black bodies as machines treads dangerous ground: given the histories of racialization that objectify Black bodies and render them robots for

the production of capital, it is perhaps deeply paradoxical to look to Black artists as thinkers of cyborg bodies with utopian potential. As I articulated at the outset of this chapter, I think of the decay-machine in the context of Haraway's cyborg in order to emphasize the machinic as a means of forging new subjectivities beyond the thus-far limited definition of the merely human and to suggest that certain bodies have long had to reckon with the efficacy and possibility in finding new embodiment through incorporating machinic logics. Tavia N'yongo elegantly sums up the historical necessity that births Afrofuturism and posthuman articulations of Black embodiment: "we speculate because we were objects of speculation: bought and sold, killed and quartered, collateralized and securitized, used, impregnated, aborted, discarded. Bodies that were speculated in became speculative bodies" (101). But what does it mean to speculate a body that reincorporates some of the logics of the machine that were used so effectively to racialize Black bodies as insensitive to pain, endlessly exploitable for labor, and possessing a brute strength that had to be disciplined and controlled? Uri McMillan, a scholar of performance and literature, presents a particularly clear framing of the loaded relationship between objecthood and Blackness, arguing "for rescrambling the dichotomy between objectified bodies or embodied subjects by reimagining objecthood as a performance-based method that disrupts presumptive knowledges of black subjectivity. What happens, I ask, if we reimagine black objecthood as a way toward agency rather than its antithesis, as a strategy rather than simply a primal site of injury?" (9). I find his suggestion that objecthood might be reimagined through Black performance fruitful as we move into this next section, which focuses on Janelle Monáe, a musician and

performer, and the poetry of Douglas Kearney, who is a performer in his own right and whose poems perform the work of imagining new forms on the page. How is the acknowledgement of body as decay-machine a way towards agency, a formulation that opens possibility for reclaiming Black embodiment?

Janelle Monáe is perhaps the most commercially successful current musician associated with Afrofuturism. Since 2018, she has firmly entered the national consciousness through her performances in Barry Jenkins' Oscar-winning film *Moonlight*, her friendship with the likes of Lupita N'yongo, her music film *Dirty Computer*, and her celebrated articulation of a Black queer identity. Though her embrace by mainstream media is relatively recent, she has been a cutting-edge talent in the Atlanta and Kansas City Black music scenes and a much-theorized practitioner of Afrofuturist philosophies for the past fifteen years. I was introduced to Janelle Monáe in late high school. I had just seen Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* for the first time, and I felt inordinately proud of my recognition of her album title (Metropolis, ever so subtle) and the imagery packed into the ziggurat-shaped headdress she wears on the album cover. When I saw her music video for the song *Many Moons*, I was thrilled to have my suspicions confirmed: she has an android alter ego, a further riff on Lang, and the future world she renders calls on art deco structures heavily. These two aesthetic projects, separated by eighty years and created by radically different artists—one a white man living in pre-Reich Germany and the other a young Black woman out of Atlanta—were fascinated by some of the same questions about what it means to be a body, the possibilities and terrors of the melding of human body and machine, and even shared an aesthetic sensibility. Years later, at an

exhibit of Robert Pruitt's at the Harlem Studio Museum, his drawings of Black women decked out in futuristic art deco headdresses that drew on west African sculpture, Babylonian pyramids, and the Empire State Building, and *2001: A Space Odyssey* in equal measure, I was struck again by the resonances between Afrofuturist and modernist aesthetics. My questions about why Monáe and other Afrofuturists have gravitated toward the 1920s, a paradigmatic age of modernism, as such an influential aesthetic base gave rise the first iterations of this dissertation's argument: our contemporary moment in history and our current concerns about the sanctity of the body recall and require modernism because we are still grappling with the posthumanist paradigms it sets in motion. Monáe's oeuvre makes the most indisputable connections between modernist and Afrofuturist articulations of the body beyond the human of all the artists this dissertation examines; she develops a theory of the body that connects her vision of the future to the concerns of the past, demonstrating the continuity between her work to reconceive the Black body and high modernism's fascination with and horror of the machinic, creating fiercely material, unrelentingly feminist model for posthuman embodiment.

Like Mina Loy, Monáe shares a commitment to the cyborg as a tool for reclaiming visceral, material knowledge, paradoxically using the machinic in service of expanding the definition of the human in an acknowledgement of our somatechnic entanglements. In what is perhaps her most elegant encapsulation of her theory of embodiment yet, Monáe's "dirty computer" is a close cousin to my own idea of the decay-machine: a virtualized, technic self that nonetheless is characterized by mess, dirt, and inevitable obsolescence. In conjunction with her repeated insistence on the

realization of selfhood through a fleshy body materialized through movement and as a source of testimony, Monáe's version of Afrofuturist posthumanism celebrates Black female embodiment even as it dissolves categories like gender and pushes past the limits of the human. Perhaps the most notable example of Monáe's posthumanism is her alter ego Cindi Mayweather. Her 2008 music video "Many Moons" introduces her audience to Cindi, who wears a tuxedo and her hair in a pompadour and seems none too committed to gendered boundaries. The video begins with a supertitle announcing the Annual Android Auction in Metropolis, a version of Lang's invented setting and an homage to his robotically doubled female lead.[59] The auction house looks like a fashion show, with models—whose clothes *and* bodies are for sale—parading in front of a mixed-race array of wealthy bidders. Cindi is invited on stage to perform as models walk the catwalk, and she changes her skin from her manufactured whiteness to black just before she steps on stage. Before the music has begun, the overlay of historically available roles for Black bodies is dizzying. Black women are slaves on the auction block, less than human and available for purchase; they are models a la Tyra Banks or Naomi Campbell, whose beauty is commodified if it fits the standards of the market; and they are entertainers self-consciously performing an image of Blackness. Monáe's fictional time draws not only on Lang's 1920s moment and his now-nostalgic conception of the year 2026, but also riffs on the 1980s Tokyo/Los Angeles hybrid of *Blade Runner*, explicitly referencing the film's visual vocabulary by including images of a white horse reminiscent of Decker's

[59] *Metropolis* was heavily influenced by the aesthetics and the philosophies of the Italian Futurists (another extended connection between Monáe and Loy) who dreamed of melding man and machine in an orgiastic celebration of speed, power, and war—and with whom Afrofuturism uneasily shares a nominal resemblance.

unicorn hallucination. The overlayed temporality becomes even more concrete as we see fragments of Cindi's face superimposed with black and white images of protest from the past hundred years of American history. Through Cindi Mayweather, Monáe clearly engages the histories of Black embodiment, particularly Black female embodiment, as always already mechanized and commodified, and demonstrates a version of the future where the past is omnipresent.

Even in videos that don't call on Cindi Mayweather to explore becoming-machine, Monáe plays with time to disrupt the fixity of her subjectivity without forsaking embodiment. In an article called "Vessels of Transfer," futurist musicologist Tobias van Veen celebrates Monáe's frequent play with temporal markers from across Black music traditions, collapsing and confusing ideas of lineage and citation. Van Veen cites a moment in Monáe's video for "Tightrope" in which she "accepts a cape brought to her on-stage, as if shouldering the mantle of James Brown across generations and genders" (33). This recalls music journalist Greg Tate's interest in sampling technologies as "the creation of digitized race memory… a way of collapsing all eras of black music onto a chip… being able to reference all those areas of sound and previous generations of creators simultaneously" (Akomfrah 35:19). Through technologies as diverse as microchips and capes, the histories of Black cultural production can live simultaneously in the present. However, van Veen's analysis of Janelle Monáe, which repeatedly emphasizes her links to both James Brown and Michael Jackson, doesn't give her enough credit for pushing the boundaries of performance beyond practices of citationality and into a posthumanist machinic-becoming. In trying to establish a contrast between Detroit

techno's reliance on metaphors of the alien and Janelle Monáe's insistence on embodied performance, van Veen elides the importance of her own gendered, racialized body. She is not simple a "vessel of transfer" for the memory of Michael Jackson and James Brown—she is a Black woman, and her navigation of that subject identity even through an embrace of overtly posthumanist longings offers a way forward for thinking beyond the human without discarding embodiment.

In her video for "Q.U.E.E.N.," which features Erykah Badu as the punnily named Badoula Oblongata, Monáe sings about dance as a mode of freedom and self-expression in what seems to be an uncomplicated celebration of the Black female body and self-love. She explicitly evokes the genre of the freedom song, and repeats "Even if it makes others uncomfortable/I will love who I am," insisting on a particular and bounded subjectivity separate from others. But the visual signifiers and the lyrics in the final two stanzas of the song nuance this call for liberal subjectivity. The video opens with the conceit that Monáe and her friends are time traveling rebels who spread freedom through song, and they've been trapped in a museum display by a futuristic repressive regime. A voiceover explains that Monáe and her crew at Wondaland are exercising a kind of fugitivity by ducking historical time. Recalling the history of live dioramas of slave life and other museum displays of animalized Black bodies,[60] Monáe and her colleagues have been frozen and put behind glass. A cool, scholarly voice announces: "It's hard to stop rebels that time travel, but we at the time counsel pride ourselves on doing just that. Welcome to

[60] I'm thinking first of the so-called Hottentot Venus, Saartjie Baartman, whose skeleton was on display at the Musee de Homme in Paris until 2002, almost two centuries after her death. I'm also reminded of the scene in Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad* where Cora (temporarily renamed Bessie) works as a living model in a diorama about slave life in fictionalized antebellum South Carolina.

the living museum, where legendary rebels from throughout history have been frozen in suspended animation. Here in this particular exhibit, you'll find members of Wondaland…" Monáe's song goes on to articulate a form of embodiment that resists fixity in time, one that is fugitive but not ephemeral, encompassing a "scission of past and future" (Loy) through its insistence on motion—in this case, through dance. Just as the models in "Many Moons" present a catalogue of Black embodiments across time, the fugitive members of Wondaland inhabit many eras of Blackness simultaneously: Monáe is dressed in a variation on her standard tuxedo outfit with a Napoleonic-style military jacket; some of her friends are painted white and wearing swimming trunks, like futuristic mermaids or perhaps like dancers of the Karo tribe of Ethiopia who cover themselves in white clay, and others still are dressed in contemporary formal wear. Her coterie of backup dancers are wearing short black and white color-blocked turtleneck dresses with heavy Twiggy-style eye makeup and matching sixties-esque hair. Erykah Badu is decked out in a vaguely Egyptian toga and then a flowing disco-era jumpsuit, also in white and adorned with gold jewelry that is both futuristic and reminiscent of Nefertiti.

As Badu and Monáe begin the final verses of the song, they stand together in front of a wall of clocks, all showing different times simultaneously. Erykah Badu sings "pharaohs, it ain't my tomb…we got the drums so tight/Baby, here comes the freedom song, too strong we moving on/Baby this melody will show you another way/Been 'droids far too long—come home and sing your song/But you gotta testify because the booty don't lie/No, no the booty don't lie." Monáe answers with a verse that calls on

Nefertiti, Harriet Tubman, and Marvin Gaye as icons of Black freedom movements and but concludes with a more complex statement about identity: "Categorize me, I defy every label…We rising up now, you gotta deal you gotta cope/Will you be electric sheep? Electric ladies, will you sleep/Or will you preach?" Though celebrating famous historical figures and her own individuality, here Monáe resists categorization and draws on the famous Philip K. Dick novel before resolving the song with a call for her fans to find a voice—though given the song's insistence that "the booty don't lie," I posit that preaching might take the form of dancing. While using the frequent Afrofuturist analogy to Egypt as a marker of Black excellence and explicitly situating the video in a world where history is omnipresent and time unfixed, Monáe and Badu insist on a return to the body even as they dream of "rising up" like Sun Ra to another planet. For Black women, whose bodies have been scripted as disposable, unruly, and wrong for so long, the posthumanist valorization of the cyborg over the goddess may ring false. Subjectivity isn't something to be superseded for those who never had it, nor are bodies to be so easily discarded as many of the members of the Detroit techno scene would dream. For Monáe, the body is a tool for testifying: "the booty don't lie."

But as is evident through Monáe's creation of Cindi Mayweather and her clear disruption of gendered expectations through her costume choices, the fleshiness she celebrates is radically different than a standard "Black is beautiful" message rooted in identity politics and an uncomplicated embrace of humanist discourses of liberation. Even as Monáe is uninterested in relinquishing the language of subjectivity, she posits a body that is always already virtual, not fixed in its identity but performing its

materialization through technologies of the voice and citational practices that eliminate any distinction between the past and future of Black music. Unlike Sun Ra's unironic adoption of a kingly persona, Monáe's body is always in a state of becoming and dissolving, even as she proclaims herself Queen[61]—she manifests the notion that "bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena" (Barad 823). Following Barad's concept that "all bodies come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity—its performativity" (823), Monáe performs posthumanist gestures toward becoming-machine in order to make her body matter in its diasporic multiplicity. She is slave, cyborg, queen, commander, freedom fighter, Fritz Lang character, Harrison Ford, Nefertiti; she is sexy, androgynous, dangerous, sweet, subversive, pop-y, accessible yet encoded. By following in an Afrofuturist tradition that proclaims an end to time, she overcomes one of the movement's central tensions; she becomes-posthuman without relinquishing her materiality, insisting on the power of Black embodiment even as she dissolves its boundaries.

Previous scholars of Monáe's work have likewise focused on identifying the way she walks the line between celebrating the Black body and sublimating it into digital forms. Cassandra Jones is rather more suspicious of materiality than I am and sees Monáe's fugitivity and her revolutionary power as stemming from her virtuality. Rather than seeing her as becoming-machine, Jones emphasizes Monáe's becoming-virtual, deploying a digitized embodiment in order to elude capture in the physical realm—but virtuality and materiality needn't be in direct opposition, as Monáe's decay-machine

[61] The title of the song, "Q.U.E.E.N," is actually an acronym that stands for Queer, Untouchables, Emigrants, Excommunicated, and Negroid.

embodiment illuminates. Like I do, Jones critiques van Veen's flattening of Monáe's body and desire to see her as simply a vessel for the transference of Black history, but she scripts digital technologies as a form of resistance to control represented by the museum. She's rerouting the connection between Blackness and materiality and whiteness and digital prowess by drawing parallels between western colonial control and the material space of the museum, and positing Black resistance through digitized media that Wondaland has disguised as songs, emotion pictures, and works of art. Jones calls Monáe a "digital griot," a name that gestures to the figure of the West African travelling storyteller and Adam J. Banks' conception of a figure that "unites the past, present, and future, refuses the digital divide as a barrier to black engagement with technology, and utilizes a specifically African American rhetoric" (Jones 43). The digital griot metaphor does helpful work in understanding Monáe as part of a tradition of African American rhetorics that utilize the digital, broadly construed. As scholars of the virtual N. Katherine Hayles, Patricia Clough, and Anna Munster would remind us, the virtual or digital doesn't imply disembodiment, but rather a form of materiality that acknowledges its interpenetration by information. Extrapolating from this definition of the virtual, we could think of Blackness (and for that matter, any overdetermined definition of the body) as necessarily virtual, brought into being only through systems of information and categorization, elusive in the literal realm: Black bodies only exist through the systems of racialization (the "information" or "cultural input") that create them as such. Through this logic of the virtual, the distance between my emphasis on materiality and Jones' insistence on the virtual as a model for Black freedom begins to collapse.

Some of Jones' most insightful analysis emerges in her conclusion, where she riffs on the image of a skull in the museum that transforms into a record player, its gold tooth—a marker of Blackness residually inscribed at the skeletal level—becoming the "needle," the mechanism for producing sound and thus liberation for the time-traveling rebels. This skull doesn't function to limit Blackness by tying it unilaterally to ancientness and embodiment, but rather we should "read the skull record player as a moment that rewrites historical narrative of Blackness as anti-technological, that raids the museums of the past that have showcased the bodies and body parts of Africans and African Americans, denying them full humanity, and reinvents these bodies into literal technologies of liberation" (Jones 67). Here, Jones closes the loop between the digital and the embodied, illustrating the way that the fragmented Black body, in a literal state of decay, is in fact always already cyborgian, imbued with technological possibility through its metonymic Blackness, cheekily encapsulated by the gold tooth.

One of the risks associated with unbridled celebration of dematerialized, purely virtual contemporary visions of Blackness is the way it plays into the hands of neoliberal structures. Is digitality really a mode of resistance in an era where information is like currency, or is becoming-virtual not an act of fugitivity at all, but a dream of embodiment that leaves you all too vulnerable to cooptation by capital? Daylanne English and Alvin (Ava) Kim take up the question of the efficacy of Afrofuturist dreams of virtuality in our contemporary moment and see Monáe as updating and resolving central tensions in funk and in Afrofuturism itself; they use the term "neo-Afrofuturism" to describe what they see as Monáe's adept negotiation of cyborg embodiment in a postmodern age. They

locate figures like Sun Ra and George Clinton at the heart of Afrofuturism, emphasizing their outer space origin stories and insistence on being firmly outside earthly, capitalist spheres of production. Monáe, however, "tips on the tightrope" between complicity and resistance, developing a program for liberation that understands her inevitable imbrication in late capitalist modes of production, as demonstrated through Monáe's role as a performer and a "model" for auction at the end of "Many Moons." They argue that where it was possible for Clinton and other P-Funk artists to serve their funk "uncut"—original, intact, and with all its connotations of unadulterated masculinity—Monáe inhabits a postmodern, late capitalist world that requires she cut the funk into something more digestible, more accessible, and more inclusive, perhaps edging us toward Jameson's impossible "postmodern or technological sublime." Especially as Monáe's star has risen to astronomical heights in the past year, their analysis seems fair—with roles in Oscar winning films, music videos series released on BET, and one of the top hits of summer 2018, she's not exactly a fringe figure, or someone operating from outside the status quo. English and Kim elucidate the different material conditions of the beginning of Monáe's career, like her own control over her record label and the way that twenty-first century digital technologies have made that possible, to describe why and how staying rooted on this planet, in this mess, might be far more appealing for her than it was to the P-Funk collective of the 1970s.

But Monáe's approach, her willingness and in fact desire to be "cut," says something more about not just an evolving relationship to capital but also proposes a different concept of embodiment. Rather than provide us with "fresh, funky optimism"

(English and Kim 229), the cut body is a somatechnic acknowledgment that to be "uncut" was always a fantasy. Not only are we all already virtual, but for Black bodies in particular, the cut is the condition of embodied existence. Calling once again upon Hortense Spillers' vital work, we see how the lash of the whip, or the cut, reduces Blackness to the flesh, thereby stripping it of gender and genre. Monáe's "cut" is not merely an optimistic image of postmodern digital synthesis, but a reminder of the impossibility and undesirability of a hierarchical, hegemonic body for Black people who have been made flesh.

Monáe's "e-motion picture" *Dirty Computer* weaves together the cyborg and notions of the organic body in the most clearly articulated iteration of the decaying machine her work has yet presented. In fact, "dirty computer" is a pretty close conceptual synonym to the decay-machine, performing the same work of depicting the human body as virtualized, technical, and yet always resistant, full of cruft in the code. Monáe, who starred in the 2017 film *Hidden Figures* which highlights Black women's roles in the moon landing, is almost certainly referencing the history of Black women employed by NASA as the first "computers," re-literalizing the word to mean those who compute numbers. The historical fact that these employees were called "computers" reinforces the notion that Blackness is metaphysically essential for contemporary computing—Black is the zero to white's one, the labor that makes mechanization possible, the (wo)man in the machine, if you will. Achille Mbembe's recent book *Critique of Black Reason* takes the common observation that Blackness is invented as a means of differentiating whiteness, the opposite of a binary system of thinking ushered in by Enlightenment codifications of

reason that left little room for gray area, and pushes on that distinction, asking that we recognize the way Blackness is also part of producing its own kind of reason. He describes two elements to what he names Black reason: Blackness as whiteness conceives of it, and Blackness reclaimed by Black people. He says that "Black reason names not only a collection of discourses but also practices—the daily work that consisted in invention, telling, repeating, and creating variations on the formulas, texts, and rituals whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and site of savage exteriority, who was therefore set up for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization" (28). In response to this familiar racializing assemblage, Mbembe names a Black reason emerging from within this narrative of Blackness: "That is the other side of Black reason—the place where writing seeks to exorcise the demon of the first narrative and the structure of subjection within it, the place where writing struggles to evoke, save, activate, and reactualize original experience (tradition) and find the truth of the self no longer outside of the self but standing on its own ground" (29). These are the liberation projects of the nineteen sixties, the formation of African diasporic identity, the unearthing of history, forging an archive from fragments, and development of Black studies departments and production of art about Black experience. Mbembe cites Negritude as a movement "whose function was to save from total decay what had been condemned to insignificance. As conjuration, announcement, and protest, the cry expressed the will of the enslaved and the colonized to escape resignation, to *form a body*, to produce themselves as a free and sovereign community" (32-33, emphasis original). To save yourselves from decay, form a body—it's a fascinating metaphor that

doesn't quite hold up to reason. What kind of body saves you from decay? Is that possible? Clearly for Mbembe, this is not merely a singular body, but a body politic.[62] But it is also asking for a materiality to emerge out of this flip side of Black reason, a body brought into being through structures of Blackness. The other essential and innovative ingredient in Mbembe's concept of Black reason is his deft acknowledgment that under a contemporary regime of increasing biopolitical control, many of the attributes associated with Blackness—like a machine and an animal at the same time, a designation for surplus bodies necessary for capitalist modes of production, the subhuman basis from which wealth is extracted—is in fact a category that applies to much of the subaltern today, and a category is growing at an alarming rate. I argue that Monáe takes on this puzzle about how to form a Black body that resists the decay of Black history while acknowledging a body's mutability and its imbrication with capital and machine. Dirty computers might be the answer to Mbembe's critique, a means of embodiment that takes Black reason into a post-body, post-reason era.

Critical reaction to *Dirty Computer* is often filtered through Monáe's public coming out in the spring of 2018 and her widely rumored relationship with her costar Tessa Thompson. Reviewers often relied on rhetorics of authenticity, asserting that Monáe had dropped the android alter-ego as she more fully embraced her queerness, and that *Dirty Computer* is a proclamation of identity that announces Monáe's emergence into an untroubled, unified self. While there may be some merit in the idea that Monáe is sharing more of herself publicly as her own success cements and as national attitudes

[62] This works best as a bilingual French/English pun, especially when we add the knowledge that so much of contemporary Black ontology has taken an Afropessimist approach: corps/corpse

toward queerness have shifted over the past decade, the concept that Monáe's embodiment is somehow more "natural" or organic now because she isn't overtly referencing Mayweather as frequently misses the point entirely. In fact, her 2013 album *The Electric Lady* lays the groundwork for the parallels between Monáe's understanding of queerness and android embodiment; it is structured loosely around an underground radio morning show for the city's android population, represented by a spoken track of a radio personality named DJ Crash Crash who takes callers to the show and announces a party that evening featuring none other than a fugitive Cindi Mayweather, who is mostly referred to in code as the Electric Lady. While the album as a whole makes a case for the enmeshment of posthuman embodiment and a queer future, Crash overtly articulates the connection between cyborg existence and queerness when a caller criticizes cyborg sexuality and love as disgusting, playing on common contemporary rhetorics about the indecency of queer unions and the history of disgust directed toward policing miscegenation in this country.

About two-thirds of the way through the album, a young man calls in to Crash Crash's show on WDRD (The Droid) and announces angrily that "Robot love is queer!" DJ Crash makes him repeat his comment, and then there's laughter in the background, guffaws that sound like agreement or at least not refutation, before he answers, "How do you know robot love is queer if you haven't tried it?" The album has been building towards a moment like this without quite articulating it, and the caller can't ruffle any feathers because Crash and his crew clearly find absolutely nothing wrong with the designation queer. In addition to the relationship between androids as marginalized

bodies in this fictional Metropolis and queer bodies' marginalization in our own, Monáe is directing her audience to acknowledge the way cyborg bodies are inherently queered through their acknowledgement of our inextricability from machines. What else could robot love be, if not queer, with all its connotations of strangeness, rejection of the status quo, and interest in revealing gender as a set of performative choices? While the term queer can be so overused in deconstructionist theory that it ceases to have any meaning, I find Monáe's claiming of the term useful partially because she roots it still in love, in bodies, and in desire for a kind of love that creates new linkages, new assemblages, new loops of behavior and interpenetrations between the human and nonhuman. For Monáe, robot love allows an exploration of a form of embodiment that decays the rigidified boundaries between gender expression, between human and nonhuman in order to form new desiring machines that refigure embodiment. Furthermore, the fact that radio is such a vital lifeblood for the android community and that the DJ's affect closely mimics that of morning drive shows directed at Black audiences is no accident. As Alexander Weheliye details, radio and technologies of musical capture are an analogue for Black embodiment, a medium distributed across waves that "refracts technosonically the shape-shifting textures of blackness in Western modernity as hyper(dis)embodied and (in)human" (30). By privileging radio as the medium of connection and thereby emphasizing the technologies of recording that make her album possible, Monáe is scripting the body of the Black entertainer as necessarily cyborgian and queered.

Calling the film an "e-motion picture" also clues us into Monáe's revisioning of humanness. On a very basic level, she's speaking to the digitality of her motion picture,

an electronic version of an antiquated term for film. E-motion also takes emotion, one of the primary designators of humanness in science fiction narratives concerned with clones, android, and other human facsimiles, and renders it electronic, like an e-mail. It asks us to see the word motion embedded in emotion, a move often made by the Massumian branch of affect theory that emphasizes feeling not as something intrinsic to the human soul, but as the byproduct of literal motion and interchanging relationship between objects: we feel how we feel not because of our brains, but because of our bodies, or as Monáe might say, "the booty don't lie." The film juxtaposes Monáe as a character named Jane 57821 (who may or may not be analogous to Cindi Mayweather) in a slightly futuristic world where resisters to a sanitized government regime of sameness are being rounded up and brought to facilities where they are "cleaned"—their memories scrubbed of their pernicious activities as they're restored to factory state. The plot of the film unfolds through Jane's memories being brought up on a screen by employees of the sanitation center, watched, and then erased. As her memories slowly slip away, Jane attempts to rekindle recognition in her nurse, a fellow cyborg woman who appears in her video memories as a close friend and lover but seems unable to recall her. In 2018, it's difficult not to read the mostly female-staffed detention center as riffing on the Hulu adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*. Their costuming is nun-like, and the women who run the space are clearly complicit in the detention of their fellow female-bodied cyborgs like the midwives of Atwood's world. The detention center uses a gas to perform the final stage of forgetting, in a damning analogy to Hitler's final solution, and a sort of warning about the logic of detention centers and the inevitability of violence in forced acculturation—

viewers can't help but see parallels to the detention centers along the southern borders of the United States, whose policies of family separation became widely understood in the months following the video's release. The detention center is aggressively white, and bodies are clothed to de-emphasize gendered difference; it's invested in a kind of cleansing that unsurprisingly unites an idealized machine state with whiteness and androgyny, perpetuating these categories as the unmarked factory settings of existence.

As in her earlier work, *Dirty Computer* retains an allegiance to art deco stylings and Egyptian iconography. As the film begins, Monáe provides voiceover which explains that people are now referred to as computers labeled dirty if they fail to conform and taken in for cleaning. It's only a matter of time, she tells us, the word "time" hovering on the screen, the sentence left unfinished. The camera zooms up a menacing looking tower, straight from Lang's visual vocabulary, and we follow the action indoors to a blandly contemporary white hallways, people by women in white uniforms reminiscent of Egyptian gods, long folds of cloth hanging down their fronts, and headdresses of tessellated metal polygons, like art deco chainmail. They hold blue flames and conduct a body on a what looks like a futuristic funeral pyre or operating table. When Monáe—the body on the table—fails to fully comply with the orders emanating from wall-mounted speakers, she is dosed with "Nevermind," a gas that invades her memories and uploads them to a machine where two white men, low-level employees of this system, are directed to observe and erase her memories. This is the frame for entering each more traditional music video: they're all flashbacks to Monáe's memories, told in an order that reveals a narrative about how we've gotten here. In the opening memory, Monáe and a

friend are riding in their pink hovercar when they're stopped by a drone police officer who demands their identification. After being given the all-clear, they unload more friends from the trunk of the car and set off for a party populated predominantly by people of color, many of whom sport signifiers of queerness—piercings, partially shaved and dyed hair, gender-bending clothing. Monáe sings that she wants a "crazy, classic life," decked out in a kind of Harajuku punk getup, very 1990s Vivienne Westwood. We encounter what looks like a high priestess performing rights, all in white with a hat that communicates wild west and zoot suit all at once, framed by a space that looks like the nave of a church. Even within the space of Monáe's memory, time is hard to pinpoint or track, as signifiers from different eras overlap. Unlike *ArchAndroid*, an album explicitly set seven hundred years in the future, *Dirty Computer* feels like an extended now, separated from our reality only by degree.

Her song "Screwed" announces her commitment to physicality and embodied power as an antidote to erasure and the biopolitical control exercised by the drone police, who have broken up the party and followed Monáe and her band of friends into the next day. "Let's get screwed," she sings, "You fucked the world up now, we'll fuck it all back down." She wears a shirt that proclaims "subject not object," which underscores the way that sex here functions not to objectify women but as a form of embodied agency and political power. "Sex, body, we're gonna crash your party," she announces, reasserting the vital materiality of her embodiment and the way that very fact of material presence crashes the computerized drones that seem to govern Monáe's world. "Everything is sex, except sex, which is power": this is an anthem of vital materialism, a more assertive

version of "the booty don't lie" that announces the power bodies have to resist and "fuck back down" that which has been fucked up. But this is not a dream of uninterrupted or essentialist embodiment, but sex that is inherently technologized, mediated: "I live my life in a magazine, I live my life on a TV screen, I live my life on birth control." This is a cyborg body, virtualized through magazine and television, hormones altered by "technological" intervention like birth control.

Like Mina Loy, Monáe relies on the moon as a key image for the decay-machine. The white building where memories are wiped clean is called the House of the New Dawn, a space where the moon, in all its coded femininity and amalgamation of decay and cold inevitability, disappears. Recall that one of Monáe's first high production music videos is for "Many Moons," a song which describes an underground life that is reminiscent of Lang's Metropolis but also enslaved people escaping in the night on the underground railroad, guided by the moon. Once again, fugitivity and moon time and cyborg embodiment are tied together, moons representing an elusive freedom possible through an embrace of a body that's mechanically predictable, cold and mysterious, voluptuous and virginal all at the same time. That there are many moons also implies existence on a different planet that our own, a dream of a place where there is more than one path to freedom illuminated in the night sky and for time-fugitives to take. Monáe embraces an interplanetary vision for Black people and her own brand of female embodiment in the song "Django Jane," singing "I suggest they put our flag on a whole 'nother planet." Sitting on a throne decked out in rich jewel tones and flanked by a cadre of women in leathers reminiscent of images of the Black Panther Party, Monáe articulates

a feminist Black nationalism that is so endlessly generative and creative that it could manifest new worlds, just as it has created this one: “We gave you life, we gave you birth / We gave you God, we gave you Earth / We femme the future, don't make it worse / You want the world? Well, what's it worth?” Against this generative, organic imagery about birth, Monáe’s coterie moves robotically, in perfect unison, decidedly android in their angularity. The video messes with gender signifiers on every level, Monáe positioned like an African king in a dim underground lair, wearing a magenta tuxedo, flanked by bodyguards somehow reminiscent of a harem, perhaps due to the sumptuous fabrics and ancient-world elegance of their surroundings. “Remember when they said that I looked to mannish?” she raps, before asserting that it’s time to “let the vagina have a monologue,” never shying away from centralizing female anatomy as power, her own face is mirrored on a vulva and as she sings from a vagina’s point of view. “We gon’ start a motherfucking pussy riot, or we gon’ have to put them on a pussy diet” she proclaims at the opening of the song, martializing slang for female anatomy and the possibility of female pleasure through oral sex as a source of political action and utopian world-building; riots and orgasms are the ingredients for life on a whole ’nother planet, the Black female body ferociously material and therefore uniquely able to travel through time and space to new beginnings. This pussy is gonna fuck it all back down, but perhaps not on earth.

If the “booty don’t lie,” then “pynk is the truth you can’t hide,” a further development of the somatechnic pussy power articulated in “Django Jane” and the centrality of the body to Monáe’s rubric of truth and power. The video opens as Monáe

and her friends descend on a desert mobile home resort in a 50s sedan remade as a hover car. As usual, temporal signifiers are all kinds of confused, the lag of 1950s styling and color palette pulling against the futuristic hairstyles and transportation. Monáe is dressed in black stripes and has moon and star ornaments in her hair, just as she was in the QUEEN video, further uniting these two songs as part of the same philosophical project and recalling the moon symbolism which once again functions a cipher for the female body as machinic and organic. The scene is suffused in soft pink light, which casts a hyper-feminine, dreamy glow over the sequence but also reminds me of the images captured on Mars of rosy deserts. This space feels like the utopian world Django Jane suggests she could rule, filled exclusively with women of color and powered by female pleasure. QUEEN hinted at queer desire with its line "Am I freak because I love watching Mary?" but "Pynk" fully embraces and articulates a politics of women loving other women. If there was any confusion about the intent of the song through its lyrics, the video features Monáe and friends in ruffled pants that clearly mimic the vulva and closes with suggestive images of grapefruit halves, orchids, and a pink frosted donut with a finger stuck through its hole.

"Pynk" gets cited as evidence of Monáe's fully-formed lesbian feminist identity, but as we know, she has been queering love and finding power in female embodiment throughout her career. Where many reviewers see *Dirty Computer* as a break from Monáe's Cindi Mayweather persona and her reliance on the android as a liberatory image of Black female embodiment, cyborg embodiment is still key to Monáe's vision, and fluidity and queerness have always been characteristic of the cyborg in her world. "Pynk"

puts the contradictions inherent in being a decay-machine (or dirty computer) on full display: though Monáe and her cadre of dancers in are decked out in pink velvet leotards and flouncy, labial pants, their movements are like clockwork, or like a jerky time lapse video of a flower blooming. The song itself is a soft, controlled whisper against a robotic, insistent click-track. Mayweather lurks in every movement, asking us to believe in bodies where there's nothing oppositional or irreconcilable about vaginas and cyborgs. "So here we are in the car, leaving traces of us down the boulevard, I wanna fall through the stars" she sings, suggesting we really might be on a whole 'nother planet, and in a place where embodiment leaves traces, can be distributed down a road without tearing us apart.

In the next scene, Monáe and her crew are in a plush pink bedroom, and Monáe is wearing her hair in futuristic Harajuku buns, a rugby shirt, and briefs printed with the words "SEX CELLS" in block letters, pubic hair exceeding the cloth at her groin, a confusing mash up of sex and science. The underwear is like a label, controverting the common marketing wisdom "sex sells" by simply indicating that "sex cells" live here, and juxtaposing that scientistic literalness with pubic hair, a sight so rare in music videos or any mainstream visual media that it has the capacity for shock, even in a video so clearly about female genitalia.[63] It is also draws our attention to a cellular level, and

[63] Activists in the trans community have sometimes critiqued "Pynk" for its emphasis on vaginas and vulvas as synonymous with womanhood—the video disrupts this narrative slightly by featuring two dancers in pink leotards without labia pants and showing one dancer swinging a phallic pink bat between her legs, implying that the womyn of pynk may not have vaginas and may have penises. But they are subtle moments in what is otherwise a very genitalia-focused celebration of femininity. While I certainly grant that Monáe is not featuring trans experience in her work, I see the playfulness in her relationship to gender, sexuality, and humanness as in conversation with the expansions of gendered identity that trans activists have foregrounded in the past couple of decades. As I've argued, I see "Pynk" as a continuation and not a dismissal of Monáe's exploration of posthuman becoming, far more complicated than a simple embrace of pussy power.

implicitly questions assumptions about gender and sex; what do sex cells or scientific defenses of gender have to do with erotics, or with genitalia? “Pink is where all of it starts, crazy, pink like the holes of your heart” Monáe sings, consistently contrasting images of organic wholeness and peons to vaginas as the “great cosmic mother,” as another pair of underwear proclaims, with the fragility and nonsensicality of the human body. Of course our heart has holes (how else would blood flow?), but we never speak of them or imagine the heart as anything less than whole and unified. Monáe weaves together the competing motifs about truth, embodiment, and traces that bodies leave in the final, spoken verse of the song: “I donate my truth to you like I’m rich… When we made love we left many traces … pink is the truth you can’t hide.” Though the song in many ways can feel like a humanistic plea for mutual recognition of our basic human truths (“deep inside, we’re all just pink”), the way pink functions multiply in the song disrupts this easy humanism. Pink is metonymic for female power realized through embodiment that is also knowledge: pink is the truth, radical knowledge. But this form of the body, based in the truth of pink, has holes, leaves traces, and distributes itself as it drives, as it makes love, expanding outward even as it codes for something impossibly, radically inner. “Pynk” imagines a depth of exchange between bodies that goes beyond a “tongue going down” or a “finger in your—,” seeking truth in the erasure of bodily boundaries made possible in an otherworldly desert, where hover cars exist, you fall through stars, and herky-jerky motion calls attention to the constructedness of human machines.

Monáe seems to be offering a new musical genre with Pynk as well—as she sings "Boy it's cool, if you got blue, we got the pynk," I can't help but figure pink as a repudiation and detournement of the blues. Just as English and Kim suggest that Monáe is reclaiming funk as a feminized genre, reading "now we want our funk cut" as a rejection of rhetorics of Black masculinity based in authenticity and faux-wholeness, I'd like to suggest that pink is a form of music that revises the blues and turns it on its head. Where the blues very often figures femininity as a tongue-in-cheek symbol for devilishness or forces of temptation, pink becomes the original, the truth, that which is necessary for life. Where the blues rely on half tones and organic slides, Pynk is tight, controlled, precise. Pynk takes the sadness of the blues and flips it, suggesting an Afrofuturist vision that rejects an Afropessimist script that relegates Black bodies to the always already dead, burdened intransigently by their history of being outside the human. Monáe's pink music creates synthesized, crisp beats that takes sees rosiness in the blues' sadness—why mourn a lack of humanity when you could embrace an identity as something already more-than-human, a body that exceeds all previously known bounds?

"we couldn't form/ ulate our bodies"

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of contemporary poet and performer Douglas Kearney because he riffs endlessly on the connections between the messy decay of embodiment and its technologization, the way that the body, particularly the Black body, becomes a decay-machine. He is intimately interested in the overlap between high modernist sensibilities and the early 20th century use of collage and contemporary Afrofuturism's aesthetic, and his poetry graphically, sonically, and conceptually grapples with the same questions about mess, machine, Blackness, our continued imbrication in modernist forms, and the deep historical roots of posthuman conception of the body that Monáe explores through her music and her Cindi Mayweather alter-ego and that Mina Loy investigates by inventing a feminist futurist embodiment. The quote above that became the title of this section—"we couldn't form/ ulate our bodies"—gets at the problem of representing and articulating a satisfactory Black embodiment which Kearney addresses through every form available to him, theorizing possible formulations through myriad formal experiments, through poetry, non-fiction, performance, and myth. The way that Kearney leaves "ulate" hanging, away from form, not only visually depicts the fractured impossibility of singular identity or uncomplicated embodiment for Black people but recalls a mourning ululation, a cry at the midst of this poetic attempt at collaging together a new body.

Kearney is so articulate about his own work and so clear about the way that poetry and theory are co-constitutive that it can feel superfluous or presumptuous to theorize his work further; however, his poetry illustrates both formally and thematically the complexities of articulating Black embodiment between the animality of decay and the

both painful and hopeful technologizing of the machine that it feels like the perfect encapsulation of the decay-machine, the dirty computer, the geometric chimera that I argue is a structure for posthumanist becoming across modernisms.

Kearney's poem "Afrofuturism" is perhaps the most quintessential example of his thematic and formal concerns, though he utilizes collage repeatedly throughout his work, and his non-fiction/poetry hybrid book *Mess And Mess And* articulates a theory of shit and mess as the noise that is essential to the function of the human machine. In permutations of the same phrase repeated with different emphasis, Kearney presents what might be the most fundamental questions of Afrofuturist longing: the staccato, hopeful repetition of "Take me to / Take me to /"—a dream of departure that is homophonic with a dream of inclusion, 'take me too'—with possible destinations struck through, and the concluding whine of "Are we *there* yet? Are we *we* yet? Are we *we* there? Are we here *yet* there? There, there." His punning overtly references a classic of 1920s fiction, as he writes "zip zip zip off the planetation, / beyond the stairs to nigga heaven" (26), mashing up the planet and the plantation and implying that intergalactic exploration might be the only escape from the deeply imbedded structures of racism while riffing on Led Zeppelin's classic rock anthem and Carl van Vechten's notoriously named 1926 novel about life in Harlem. He uses Monáe's spelling of Q.U.E.E.N, adopting her acronym and layering new meanings and intertexts on Black women's embrace of the word "queen." Moses (now toting "*her* raygun") and the pharaohs make appearances, the archetypical characters of Afrofuturist imaginings returning to finally, finally bring freedom to Egypt-land, wherever that may be. "it's an escape craft / from now&then / by way of

then&soon" he writes, concretizing time as space, articulating futurism's investment in revisioning history by finding new ground, and dramatizing the endless deferment which perhaps undermines futurism's potential as a revolutionary force; is all it can envision a movement from the present and the past, the occasional ok-ness of now and then, to the past and the near future, the glorification of historical figures like Moses and pharaohs as the blueprint for a dream perpetually out of reach? What about the now and soon, the now and now? What if we're there, and yet…?

Around the edges of the text, inscribed upside down, the wounds of the present and the very near past hover, the messy underbelly of the Afrofuturist dream: "who you callin BUCK Rogers? / who you callin StarBUCK?!" What happens to that history, that then and now? Does the history embedded in our language somehow fall away once we exit the earth's atmosphere or will these accidental resonances of anti-Black racism encode themselves in even our dreams of new horizons, new timelines? He leaves the text itself messy, evidence of strike outs inviting you to make out the words underneath, the final publication mimicking the scratch paper of initial composition, a further disruption of teleological notions of completion or progressive time, a revision caught in process. Making these palimpsests of meaning apparent visually echoes and reinforces the endless punning and double, triple, quadruple entendres on which Kearney relies to deliver much of the heft of his meaning. They are struck out, grouped together with brackets and arrows that don't lead to anywhere, juxtaposed or overlayed at forty-five degrees, forcing simultaneous encounter. It's a technique overtly indebted to the modernist collage and the ripped-from-the-headlines aesthetic of early-twentieth century

manifestos.[64] It's also a clear continuation of the forms of layering and citationality that characterize hip hop, and his homage to both of these artistic traditions creates a structural link between modernist collage and hip hop music-making that echoes the connections I've been limning between high modernist and more contemporary conceptions of the collaged, machined, perpetually tenuous body.

Kearney calls this collage technique that he exercises to full effect in "Afrofuturism" Eye Weather. It "indicates a pervasive simultaneity, not an interruption," and the blacked-out words "haunt the verse" (Mess And 82-83). Eye Weather suggests that we could read these poems like cloud formations floating past our field of vision, their concrete form endlessly interpretable, and it contains the homophonic meaning "I weather," as in I weather the storm, or I am, whether or not you condone it.[65] The synecdochal play of eye and I and his desire to give the reader the agency to perceive the poem as pervasive simultaneity that of course must be stitched together in some kind of order feels like a microcosm of the process of self-making in the twenty-first century. Which elements of our perception will make up ourselves in this moment, which of our haunted histories and recurring desires will come to the fore in our current articulation? How will we knit the fragments of history, pop-culture, and speech that are available to us into an I? Through Eye Weather, Kearney makes clear the way that collage forms suggest a new structure not only for meaning-make but for self-making.

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[64] Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto," which I don't dwell on in this chapter, is a prime example of this form, with heavy use of capitalization and exclamation point to concretize the emphatic, cacophonous tone of her essay.

[65] I can't help but think of the Weather Underground and Weathermen (the antiracist, anti-imperialist action group that grew out of SDS and other student movements of the late 1960s) as well—"you don't need to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows"

In his nonfiction text *Mess And Mess And* (which is no less poetic than his poetry, despite its designation as a kind of extended craft essay), he articulates more explicitly for his readers just what this self-making he suggests through his formal explorations might look like, and how it is that Black bodies in particular need Eye Weather. "A body machines its way to making with blood," he writes. "The slaveship was such a body. Into the belly of the ship—the hull—people eaten, consumed, in an attempt to turn them into shit, a process that would abet the robust development of racism. And in the bowels of these ships, dysentery swift as a colony of rats—the bloody flux—blood in the captive's shit, an illness in the belly in the belly" (28). Kearney's use of the word "machines" as a verb exemplifies the logic of Afrofuturist bodies, indelibly linked to Afro-past bodies machined into sub-being by the slaveship. To machine is to make or operate upon something with a machine, and here, the referent is confused. The body is a machine, in a Deleuzian sense, and its motor oil is blood. But likewise, the body is machined by the structures and "bodies" that articulate it as a body. Machines like the slaveship, which Kearney suggests crafts the body for racist formations through its spatial hierarchies, sluice blood and shit across its decks, rendering the bodies on board part and parcel of their environment. Thinking with Sara Ahmed about the stickiness of disgust and the ease of transfer between bodies in close proximities,[66] we see how the slaveship both machines the body in its image, creating a hierarchized organization with shit and blood resting at the bottom, and how the notion of the body in turn "machines" itself, turning

[66] My next chapter continues this line of thought about transfer and exchange between bodies and forms, with a particular emphasis on the circulation of blood more specifically, since it is a such a weighty topic in the history of transatlantic racial formation.

into a reproductive organ of the ship's logic both literally through the seeds of future generations held in the mess of the "belly of the belly," and more metaphorically, as it incorporates a logic of body that abjects mess and the organs associated with it.[67] The way the slave ship represents a womb, the ultimate liminal and abjected space, has been widely theorized by Black feminist theorists like Hortense Spillers, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Saidiya Hartman, but Kearney places particular emphasis on mess and the way that mess itself is liminal: "*What the hell is this mess? Clean up this mess. You are making a mess*. In each case, Order's displacement is in eyeshot of its reinstatement. Perhaps an easy, if messy, way to understand mess is as the passage from Order to garbage. Mess, thus, is liminal" (Mess And 18). I find this tension between order and disintegration that mess holds particularly useful, and perhaps another way of thinking through articulating a body in the hyphenated space of the decay-machine.

Kearney makes the connection between his poems' written structure and his philosophy of mess as both the product and the raw material of his creative process:

> I make my poems to make a way through what I often perceive as mess. This is not the only reason to make a poem, but it's what I'm usually doing. That "way through" I hope worries certain Orders I find odious—sometimes even versions of my own. There is a shitload of codes, a mess of messages, yet the din of it isn't necessarily noise—that is, it is a signal to be understood. A literacy to develop. If

[67] I'm drawing heavily here on Deleuze and Guattari and their concept of the body without organs. The BwO attempts to name this implicit hierarchy of the body, figure out the way the body is organ-ized in order to resist logics that promote brain, heart, and other centers of enlightenment consciousness over genital organs, digestive organs, and other elements of our bodies associated with mess.

> my writing makes a mess of things, it's not to flee understanding, but to map (mis)understanding as a verb. Mess And 29

Kearney's project of "mapping misunderstanding" is an excellent encapsulation of how the decay-machine of modernist embodiment might be expressed as an aesthetic principal. The decay-machine attempts to order mess, mapping what it misses, making maps that are inherently messy and missing pieces. Even as the writing body machines its way to new understandings, making something out of mess, it also disintegrates and dissolves prior structures, worrying orders with its ability to turn all it touches to joyful noise. Noise becomes a key concept for Kearney as well as he wrestles with defining Black bodies beyond mess and decay without forsaking the muck. Blackness has so often been associated with excess, with a lack of decorum and more precisely, with excessive noise. Like so many of our racializing structures, this state of excessive noisiness is reviled and desired, a marker of animality and of freedom of expression that paradoxically renders Black bodies more "human" in their capacity for artistry. Kearney references Sianne Ngai and her work on at various points in his theorization of his poetic practice, and her concept of animatedness as it relates to racializing bodies seems particularly apropos here; Ngai presents the crucial insight that "the 'thinging' of the body in order to construct it, counter-intuitively, as impassioned is deployed… as a strategy of shifting the status of this body from thing to human, as if the racialized, hence already objectified body's reobjectification, in being animated, were paradoxically necessary to emphasize its personhood or subjectivity" (Ugly Feelings 99). Noise humanizes Blackness, while also condemning it to sub-humanity.

Kearney isn't interested in condemning noise or excess, as his embrace of visual noise through Eye Weather suggests, and he reflects that his formal experimentation emerges out of a suspicion that "perhaps accumulation rights things, or makes them, at least truer" (Mess And 49). Since at least the end of the second World War and Norman Wiener's *Cybernetics,* we've presumed that information and truth is what emerges when we successfully shut out the noise and distinguish something unique, but Kearney's theory of mess and meaning instead suggests that the noise is the truth, the din is the point. Like Monáe suggests through the term dirty computer, embracing noise as information shifts our understanding of a posthuman, machinic embodiment. What if we're noise machines? Kearney begins to entertain those questions in a series of definitions of neologisms in which he's turned to the prefix "in-" to "din-", which he derives from din, as in noise, and dingy and dung, as in dirty or dark. He coins words like dincognito: "a quality in which the signal is actively disguised as noise;… similarly, to be dincognegro is to be a black person disguised as blackness—thus rendered as noise, though signal" (Mess And 32). Here, he closes the loop between the particularity of Black embodiment, the inheritance of mess, and an embrace of being the dirt in the machine, the noise that ought to be recognized as the message.

Kearney takes this juxtaposition between Blackness and the noise machine a step further by literalizing the metaphor and suggesting that the Black body is a radio: "the first black to speak the word *radio* / knew it meant the same as *blood*. / the first black to know *blood* meant *radio*, / claimed *radio* meant *love*, to better lure you… the first blacks to realize they were *blacks* became radios / at once, singing something that could never

be english… the first black you heard was a radio / and did not speak english even if it did: radios cannot speak" (Black Automaton). His logic claims that radio is what flows in Black veins, which in turn seeps from radios dangerously, a machine made alive by its association with Blackness, a machine that seems almost an agent of decay, wringing Black life dry by subsuming its blood. But Blackness is also a machine for transmitting: sending waves back across oceans, communicating whiteness to itself, and yet silenced, immobilized, made thing. The idea that Black embodiment is a technology of sound isn't unique; as Alexander Weheliye so persuasively documents in *Phonographies*, "It is precisely this conflict between the phonograph's material and ephemeral dimensions… that makes it such a crucial site for the articulation of black cultural practices for the twentieth century. For, in many way, the phonograph refract technosonically the shape-shifting textures of blackness in Western modernity as hyper(dis)embodied and (in)human" (30). Kearney's particular focus on radio rather than another technologies of recorded sound ties his vision of Black embodiment to Janelle Monáe's, whose use of a radio DJ as the narrative glue for her album *Electric Lady* indicates the privileged place radio occupies in relation to Blackness and materiality, and ties back to Ellison, Ra, and the previous chapter's concept of undulatory embodiment.

In another move that unites the wave and the machine, Kearney describes the condition of Black embodiment and movement as being caught in the in between, the both/and, the oscillation of the hyphen. In a chapter entitled "Weaponizing the Negro Gestus," Kearney characterizes the physical repertoire of Blackness as the defined by the shake, the shimmy, the shuffle, the stagger, and the stutter. He's excellent at naming the

ways that language and embodiment work in tandem, writing about the shake implicit in the vibration of Hughes' famous query about dreams deferred: "*or does it explode*?", and the stutter as not only a characteristic of fractured speech but a gesture of withholding information, slowing the presumed linearity of information delivery through the body as well as the voice. Like mess, these modes of Black embodiment suggest liminality, possibility, and refusal of inherited order. They look and sound like a machine in disrepair: the stutter of the skipping record player, the staggering shudder of an engine on its last legs, the shuffle of the wind-up toy grinding to a halt.

As if in response to McMillan's injunction to "reimagine black objecthood as a way toward agency rather than its antithesis," Kearney weaponizes negro gestus to approach thingness and toy with the edges of objectification in his live performances, especially in an invented form where he accompanies video he's spliced and diced anew, taking familiar cultural moments to the chopping block and delivering them back to us with their violences made obvious. I'm thinking in particular of witnessing Kearney's performance of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" at the Louisville Conference on Literature Since 1900 in February 2019, just as the HBO documentary that seemed to deliver conclusive proof of Jackson's long-suspected child molestation was about to air. Kearney's performance was like embodied erasure poetry, taking pieces of Jackson's short film and fracturing them into soundbites and gestures that are present but obscured in the original. His presence on the stage double Jackson's on the screen, and it's

unnerving to see Jackson's distinct, highly plastic embodiment[68] mimicked in Kearney's contrasting body.

Kearney's version of Jackson illuminates the creepily animatronic nature of "Thriller," the zombies more machine than decay, the characteristic head jerk like clockwork. His revisioning of "Thriller" displays the machinery of the patriarchy working through the video, emphasizing Jackson's calculated coercion and the cold, lifeless quality of his smile, repeating his assertion that "I'm not like other guys" to unnerving effect and zeroing in on his sustained smile and insistence that "I'm having a good time" when his girlfriend asks to leave the movie theater. Lines like "I could thrill you more than any ghoul would ever dare try" take on new resonance in this reworked version that demonstrates the menace behind Jackson's lyrics and a complete disregard for female personhood. Kearney performs Jackson's dance moves, thousand-watt smile, and wide-eyed faux-innocence, growing increasingly sweaty and frantic as the video draws towards its end in the ninth minute; in real time, and in Kearney's body, Jackson's facial expressions looks like a parody of blackface characters, or like the wide-eyed desperation of the Black shells of people in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*. Kearney's "Thriller" goes beyond revealing the monster inside Jackson or his complicity in misogynoir through this embodied doubling that illuminates the complex play of objectification and hypersexualization for Black men, forcing his audience to reckon with a Black man's ambivalent relationship to deploying self as object. As he performs Jackson, he

[68] Part of what we are drawn to and repulsed by in Jackson is this endless plasticity; his versatility and ability to abandon many markers of Blackness makes his status as King of Pop possible, and also what ultimately ruins him—he becomes literally too plastic as his nose shrinks and shrinks, and too malleable, not solid enough in his racial or sexual identity.

demonstrates the malleability of bodies, particularly Black bodies, and their social construction; how does taking "Thriller" apart, breaking this performance into a series of gestures, show us something new about the kind of body-machine Jackson deploys? Though in some sense Kearney's erasure performances seem like a departure from his own poetic practice, both forms are deeply invested in re-articulating bodies. Kearney's performance of his poems mimics the machining, or articulating of elements and sounds, that his poems present on the page. His use of collage makes it visually apparent that his poems are flexible, in process, a combination of choices that can are always being articulated otherwise. It's poem as machine, forging new bodies called "poem" with each new look, each performance.

His work with Black gestus as machine in disrepair calls on a history of eliding the boundary between Blackness and automation, both in order to justify the exploitation of Black labor and as a source of entertainment in freak shows, a way to explore the liminal edges of human embodiment without threatening the sanctity of the white body. Uri McMillan delivers a fascinating reading of Joice Heth, a performer in P.T. Barnum's show billed as George Washington's wet nurse and the oldest Black woman alive. She was supposedly over a century old at the time of her exhibition, and as McMillan details, her popularity with audiences was based partially on their incredulity about her veracity as a human being. Barnum understood this, and in a troubling move, spread rumors that Heth wasn't a person at all but an automaton, further confounding the boundaries between Blackness, personhood, and notions of living or embodied memory of nationhood and national origin. McMillan describes that the "sudden appearance of black

automatons in the United States, meanwhile, was undeniably connected to the emergence of blackface minstrelcy as an increasingly beloved racialized expressive form" (48-9), and goes on to describe the conflation of Black movement as jerky, mechanized, and subhuman even as it was fetishized for its too muchness and perceived hyper-expressiveness. He also narrates Heth's "decayed bodily morphology" as "elastic enough to buttress both descriptions and their attendant discourses" (51), suggesting that the particular possibilities for Heth's brutal objectification have to do not with her shininess, but with her decay; her elderly state coupled with her femininity and Blackness convinced people of her inherent unnaturalness, her sagging skin and fragile bones evidence not of human fragility but of fraud. Kearney's poetry in *Black Automaton* similarly upends expectations about how and where objecthood can be deployed as a performative technique for "forsaking ontological certitude for the variously embodied" (McMillan 226), confusing the boundaries and opposition between decay and machine.

In a poem that gets right to the heart of his thesis about Black embodiment, Kearney uses John Henry, the Black folk hero who worked himself to death competing against a machine to hammer rock into railroad tunnels, as paradigmatic of the Black automaton. In this settler-colonial space built with enslaved labor, John Henry realizes "every city here built of bones / blood erupted flesh interred the end / of the line John just like you pictured it / natural man death ain't the robots' and every body here built of stone" (52). Man melds with hammer because every body here is machined, built of and on stone, and conversely, cities are fueled by bones. John Henry's inevitable death—the decay of his "never alive" body which is so unavoidably marked for disposal that to name

it dead is almost oxymoronic—is nonetheless an eruption of flesh, and his insistence that death is "natural" and that it will never belong to "the robots" reasserts his fleshy materiality. In Kearney's poem, John Henry's desire for the naturalness of decay even as he names his machined, cyborgian embodiment encapsulates the vexed notion of the Black body as decay-machine in a world built on racialized hierarchies of embodiment.

The collection pays close attention to the built environments of contemporary Blackness, these cities "built on bones" that the John Henry's of the world helped created. The cover of *The Black Automaton* is etched with a stark, almost comic-book city silhouette, fire licking up the side of a building and a looming giant of a man, fist raised, and these city images return, inked illustrations of the top of a skyline intervening between text. The final poem series of the collection capitalizes on this imagery, beginning with "Recycling the City." "was a time I would eat anything / torn from my body, as a city / recycles its bricks after trauma," the poem begins, setting up an immediate parallel between the body and the modern city. It tumbles words together, forging new bodies out of cities, new cities out of bodies, before concluding: "city, after trauma / recycles its iron, those bones torn / from a city as though—a body: / those swords and bones, gypsum, gems. trauma: / a torn time recycled. a body / as a city, torn into a thing." Trauma unites the city and the body through its endless revisitation, keeping them locked in variations of the same time. The poems recycles its language, the same words and images coalescing into units of meaning, until the body becomes the city, which is of course, a thing. "II. City" plays with the thingness of a city, beginning "yesterday, I woke and believed I was a city, a green one." This vision of the city is one

that water flows through, one experienced with others, people with parents who "teach your child that people can be places, can be coppices / can be groves, a stand of trees" in a scrambling of possibilities that bring the city back to life, makes it something that negotiates thingness and agency differently. Meshing with the city in fact allows for profoundly human connection: "I was a forest whose roots hadn't destroyed / a green city but had tasted it into themselves, even as I did, / when I found myself at the mouth of the place you are called river. / and when I drank to be changed, I became a gully, right there" (86-87).

This series reads like an update on Loy's "Human Cylinders," a reflection from nearly a century later about what it is the be machined to a skyline and navigate an unresolvable tension between the ancient organicism of forest, rivers, "antediluvian burrows" (Loy) and our obviously constructed city environments and city selves.

The final poem in the collection, "VI. City," takes a turn that once again ties Kearney's vision to Loy's. It's heavy with mourning, seemingly for unborn or aborted children: "in the city of dented infants / to-be, the clocks have all stopped. / the eyes' tears, geometric and foul. dirty / tractor-trailers lumber up, urgent— / the skid marks, the shards and fluid / —with crooked cargo. keep reversing / into fire hydrants. keep humping / over the curb." This isn't the recurrent time of trauma, but absolute stillness, an absence of life and time juxtaposed with the urgency of machines, the imperfection of their articulation with life. They continue where life is barren, where "kitchen doorway's warped" and "my woman, stirring her empty iron pot" (91) cannot beget anything, only the tractor's doing any "humping." As Loy suggests in *Insel*, it is suspension and silence,

stopped time, that risk disintegrating and decaying the human to the point of unrecognizability. Is it perhaps better to embrace the reciprocal construction between cities and human, to align yourself with the tempos of the machine, than to risk stasis?[69]

Kearney's distinctly melancholic take on the temporality of machinic, built worlds demonstrates a longing for slowness and rootedness that can seem at odds with the willing embrace of the technic. But the Black Automaton is a machine that refuses to cordon off organicism or disavow a relationship to what Tavia N'yongo calls "dark time, deep time," and is another version of what I'm attempting to encapsulate through the language of decay. N'yongo glosses what he sees as separate ways that Black authors and theorists have "gathered up the past with its present in disjunctive synthesis" that demonstrates the "fabulative process by which any act of recollection branches off in all directions, foiling any effort to cohere the narrative of the past into a single, stable, and linear story" (99-100), calling one technique of disjuncture new materialist and another evolutionary or speculative. He sees the new materialist version of time and embodiment as one "that extends agency beyond the human into profuse networks and assemblages, dispersed across living and nonliving things" and the evolutionary as displacing "life from the finite body to much vaster horizons and deeper archaeologies of time" (100).

[69] N.K. Jemisin's short story "A City Born Great" takes up similar questions but envisions a far more symbiotic relationship between the cities we have made home, imagining cities personified by their inhabitants, being birthed like post-industrial velveteen rabbits when they become real enough to merit an independent existence. The story follows a young gay, impoverished, Black man living in a version of New York saturated with cops, rapidly gentrifying—it could be our present moment denaturalized, or perhaps a very near future. After meeting Paulo, an older man who smells like favelas and cigarettes and turns out to be an enfleshment of the Brazilian city of Sao Paolo, he learns that he is going to become New York City, which is waiting to be born. In a violent but triumphant conclusion, he merges with the city itself, realizing that "there is no gap between me and the city anymore" and that "we cannot be stopped from becoming" (Jemisin). In Jemisin's depiction, the city isn't antithetical to human reproduction but engenders it, creating people in its image and simultaneously finding its truest articulation in (post)human form.

Kearney (and for that matter Loy and Monáe) often conjoins imagery of sedimented time and assembled time as he writes about Black embodiment, and this simultaneous depth and breadth of temporal expansion might lead us to what N'yongo characterizes as "anarchaeology of objectification" that plays fast and loose with order, messing with the unfolding of time and our assumption about progress from object to subject and back again through a process of decay.

What if it's all quite a bit more fluid than that? Once again, water emerges as a central image that structures Black embodiment, and as I discuss at length in section one, undulatory bodies suggest a transformed temporal relativity that likewise allows for strategic shifts between subject and object. Kearney's series entitled "Floodsongs" begins with a poem called "Canal Rats' Chantey" that undulates, graphically presenting the "all the way down" that is perhaps where Black life dwells below a rippling surface of demands aimed at "that," the rhythmic repetition of the designator for a thing—that—cataloguing the objectification that defines Blackness and renders it less than human. "Swimchant for Nigger Mer-Folk" plays with legends that describe the enslaved Black people tossed overboard during the Atlantic slave trade as mermaids, living on in a hybrid body beneath the waves. Like the first poem in the series, its graphic representation on the page is vital, its layout suggesting depth, sinking, and undulation. The layers of signification Kearney suggests are so rich and multifaceted they bear almost endless examination: he textures this poem with hauntings of juju, duppies, the visual rhyme of the Black dialect 'omen for women and omens, and a complex mash up of a set of lyrics that sound like they could be from a vaudevillian blackface routine with

T.S. Eliot's ragged claws, "scuttlin cross the flo of silent seas," once again making manifest the intimate linkages between modernist form and the decomposition of Black bodies. The bottom layer of sediment, the ocean floor of this poem, reads: "they's comp'ny haintin haintin/can't re-member/o they's comp'ny haintin haintin/the stains won't wash out." Built directly on that level is a message from Thee Management (that is, your management) addressed to "nigger mermaids, mermen & merninnies chained like hooked & sinked sardinnies: DO NOT BLEED IN THE SEA. THE STAINS WON'T WASH OUT. WE AIN'T'NT RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR MESS." The double negative of the final apostrophe that makes this read "ain't not" twists the entire logic of the warning. The sonic near-rhyme of "haintin" and "hatin" confuses the haunting—is it by lost ancestors? By haters? Kearney brings back the spelling of re-member that emphasizes recollection across time as a means of remaking the body, the work of putting back together that which has been dis-membered by thee management. The ocean's flow and its floor, the sustenance of life, is characterized by dismembered Black bodies trying to re-member, putting themselves back together and machining new bodies out of the mess of fin(e)s, blood stains, fish bones, Eliot quotations, Poseidon mythology. The stains won't wash out—this is permanently mess, mess white people ain't not responsible for, but it is also the possibility, perhaps, of a body-otherwise. The tie between time and place becomes most apparent in the poem "RE*FU*GEE*," where Kearney writes that "it seeks asylum from a when / not a where. still, time / seeps in to place like lost family / portraits deep in mud, sepia into sepia. / tally poplar rings, every year a new spiral, / going back to mark a progress" (64). This is dark time, sepia toned, sedimented, and

nonlinear, going back a kind of progress, a spiraling return that marks a reckoning with the fact that "here is gone and took IT with it." What is it to be a body out of place and therefore out of time? What would we name progress as re-membering?

"Floodsong 5: Bullfrog's Liturgy of the Eucharist" attempts this re-membering, builds a body not of bread and wine but of the watery things that Kearney machines into Blackness. Like Loy, he turns to the form of the eucharist as a model for thinking a resurrection and re-membering, imagining bodies manifest through geological and animal materiality: "my heart of trembling mud, my blood of falling sand, my mind of teeming fens, my hands of moulding stones, my bones of melting song, my tongue of humming ghosts, my throat of burning eggs, my legs of diving wings, my lungs of rain: this ruin—too—is will. This flesh, serpent's. this flesh, fish's. this flesh, rodent's. this skin is nowhere; the insides, everywhere, out" (67). This molding, falling, trembling thing of swamps, this mess of disparate being is in fact will, a knitted subjectivity that coheres without skin. It's subject beyond body, a dismissal of envelopes for being, a wavering, unstable bundle of will that incorporates memory, rodent, mud. It is enfleshment, finding its otherwise.

As Kearney's work demonstrates by strategically deploying the thingness of Black being and the messy proximity of body to machine alongside the wavery, disintegrating fleshiness of our materiality, thinking the body as decay-machine lets us linger in the indeterminate space of the hyphen. It asks us to see the techne in the organic, the goddess materialized in code. The decay-machine emphasizes the plasticity of our racializing assemblages, the degree to which something as naturalized as our skin is shot

through with informatics, and that our racialized bodies are always already virtual. It musses up the lines between object and subject and asks us to hold the uncomfortable possibility that risking an object-state might be instrumental in rescrambling the code of the human. The next section reads texts that depict these liminal embodiments that live in the shuddering space of the hyphen—what I'm calling the horrified body. How do we articulate these embodiments that are dis-membered, that re-member? How is the potential for enfleshment otherwise encoded in our images of monstrosity, and which particular horrors haunt the transatlantic modern body?

I turn once more to Kearney as a kind of coda toward horror. One of his projects in progress thinks about his lycanthropy—what he calls a "disorder" (in quotation marks) "in which someone believes they are a werewolf," immediately establishing the werewolf as a dis-ordered body, a creature of the mess. He is also quick to emphasize that he's not really operating in the space of metaphor: he wants to be a werewolf, cannot remember not wanting, and sees writing as a means to practice and manifest this embodiment. He dwells in prepositions, trying to find the right articulation between wolf and person, find the language and the movement that will materialize the relationality between animal and man that yields the "otherwise" of his longing. Kearney's essay works through the machining of body through words that materialize, through actions that become language, in much the same way this project attempts to name articulations of self. He concludes that "the words alone won't do it. You need something else. Something rubbed in. The words only take you to the edge of it. The words are a spell, a trigger, but not the thing itself, not the memory in your hands of what you've never been able to make them do."

The horrified body deals in those memories that aren't, in the mythologies of the body that circulate across the Atlantic and bring our flesh into being. "There is so much me in my stomach," Kearney writes, reflecting on his practice of biting his nails, the wolfishness of it. "More, perhaps, than what I've spat out." The horrified body articulates enfleshment in terms of ingesting the self, cannibalism, vampirism, the desire to be wolf—juxtapositions of mouth, word, and flesh that exceed the bounds of the skin and dwell in the tremulous possibility of living with and through horror.

The Horrified Body

"The horror! The horror!" is one of the most recognizable and enigmatic lines of modernist text. Written just as the twentieth century was dawning, Conrad's vision feels eerily prophetic: literary modernism reckons with new horrors at every turn as its architects attempt to write a world upended. The mechanized weaponry of World War I leaves bodies and minds mangled and the earth rent open. The slow dissolution of European empire forces a confrontation with the horrors that colonial exploitation and the legacy of slavery have wrought, and the racist formations they leave in their wake. Freud's theories of the subconscious and the Oedipal complex suggest that horror lurks in our bodies from birth, death drives and fears of castration seething just below the surface. Where Freud is interested in unearthing the hidden depths of horror, I'm curious about our surfaces: horror certainly works in and through the body, but more specifically, it works on the body's edges and boundaries. The word horror can be traced back to the Sanskrit *harsate,* to bristle. The Latin *horrere* means to bristle with fear, shudder, or have erect hairs on the skin, and in English, the word originally connoted a feeling of disgust. To be horrified is to feel your skin prickle, to be hyperaware of your boundaries and the possibility that they could be traversed. Julia Kristeva's 1982 book *Powers of Horror* mines this etymology to similar ends, and she theorizes the abject—that which is neither subject nor object but must be rejected and cast out in order to define the body's boundaries—as a result of horror's power. Building on the concept of abjection, Sara Ahmed's defining work on the concept of disgust further articulates how much horror constitutes a process of boundary formation in the presence of something that is

threateningly other: disgust "shows us how the boundaries that allow the distinction between subjects and objects are undone" and is a "slippage which would threaten the ontology of 'being apart' from others" (87). What if the horror to which Kurtz refers, the horror that suffuses so much of modernism, is that white male bodies have slipped and begun to recognize that the ontology of "being apart" is mere fiction? The horrified body, then, is not a site of tragic dissolution but of potential and recognition that an ontology of the human as defined, hierarchized, and demarcated from other life forms is unsustainable. Read this way, the horrified body is instrumental in deconstructing the hegemonic concept of the human body based in racializing formations which relegate Black and brown bodies to less than human. Materializing the ghost or the haunt by thinking with Kristeva's theory of abjection, Ahmed's notion of disgust, and Spillers' flesh, the horrified body contains and circulates history, performing new ways of living with the past.

Thus far, the ghost is the most familiar literary critical application of horror as theory, and it is an excellent tool for interrogating what isn't present, what won't show itself—all the invisible hands that capitalism elides and erases in its products and its ideology, the lives that history refuses to acknowledge, a name for the felt sense that to live under late capitalism and American empire is to be haunted by the sins of the past. The ghost or palimpsest or spectre is an especially useful figure for thinking about the temporal confusion of hypermodernity, the dizzying sense that generations of trauma are housed in so many of our mundane objects. Derrida's hauntology and Avery Gordon's work on the ghost and spectrality are probably the most cited examples of thought about

horror as a force of temporal disruption in critical theory circles. The palimpsest and archaeological strata are related, more material means of thinking about the presentness of pastness, the ways that previous marks and significations ghost or surface in our contemporary understanding. The horrified body is a ghostly or haunted body, in this sense—it encodes pastness, whether through vampirism or some other regurgitation or recirculation of history. But the Derridean language of hauntology can be so abstracted, and frequently so reliant on the linguistic and graphic as its point of analysis that it's a less than satisfactory basis for interrogating assumptions about embodiment. Alexander Weheliye reflected on his own pulling away from the language of ghosting in a seminar in March of 2017, wondering if hauntology puts too much onus on the dead—he cited June Jordan, asking "what do we do, we who did not die?", searching for a model for thinking the past that presences the present.[70] What's more, the ghost once again individualizes where we might seek multiplicity, suggesting the story of a single life, a personal pain that needs avenging by remaining on earth rather than a relational understanding of the way the material remains of the past circulate in the present. What happens at the level of the skin, where we are first alerted to horror? What potential does that prickle hold?

Gordon wants the ghost to do material work—the book is called *Ghostly Matters*, after all—and she convincingly enfleshes the haunt through an extended reading of *Beloved*, probably the most iconic and analyzed ghost story of our literary era. Morrison's novel is endlessly mineable, redolent with new insight even on the umpteenth

[70] Weheliye came to a graduate seminar at the University of Minnesota taught by Dr. Suvadip Sinha on March 31, 2017. I sat in on the seminar and am quoting Weheliye from notes I took.

read. Beloved seems to be a ghost, but is very much a body, wetting the bed, fucking, demanding sustenance, bearing scars. Gordon argues that we must "broach carefully and cautiously the desires of the ghost itself" in order to reckon with the "amnesiac conditions of American freedom" based on the suppression of slavery as the based upon which capitalism, "a market whose exchange relations continue to transform the living into the dead," rests (169). The ghost is an embodiment of history, she argues, a discipline unlike other distinctly modernist social sciences because "It is always a site of struggle and contradiction between the living and the ghostly, a struggle whose resolution has to remain partial to the living, even when the living can only partially grasp the source of the ghost's power" (184). The language of ghostliness strains at the materiality of desire and struggle, and I find myself longing for terminology that retains the temporal instability of the ghost while making its materiality more present. Furthermore, I'm interested in the living who are caught in the struggle with history, who are haunted—what do we call those who have recognized the ghost and gone to meet it, recognized that the very boundaries of their own bodies are determined by its absent presence? What I hope to accomplish with the horrified body is to articulate these liminal creatures on both sides of the veil, the horrified and horrifying material presence of history. Gordon closes her chapter on *Beloved* with this poetic invocation: "To be haunted is to make choices within those spiraling determinations that make the present waver. To be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects. To be haunted is to experience the glue of the "If you were me and I were you" logic come undone… the ghostly matter will not go away. It is waiting for you and it will shadow you and it will outwit all your smart moves as that

jungle grows thicker and deeper. Until you too stage a shared word, a something to be done in time and for another worlding" (190). This chapter (and this dissertation as a whole) seek to stage a shared word, to articulate something that allows for new worlds.

I look to Kristeva's description of the powers of horror in an attempt to materialize the ghost, to grapple with how haunting operates at the level of the body. In contrast to the simple object, the abject or "the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). The abject is that which must be pushed out or risk this collapse of signification that would dissolve the ego; the abject thus also serves as "my safeguard, the primer of my culture" (2). Kristeva goes on to describe this slippery concept as that from which "my body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (3)—here she uses feces or vomit as an example of the kind of substances which might be abject, forming a border between internal and external, self and that which must be expelled to preserve self. But the abject needn't be so clearly disgusting as excrement. In fact, the erosion of categories and hierarchies of animality is a key element of Kristeva's understanding of the abjection: "The abject confronts us, on the one hand," Kristeva writes, "with those fragile states where man strays onto the territory of the animal" (12). The power of horror hinges on the identification of the abject and its exclusion; in Kristeva's view, horror is what animates liveliness, what we flee from and reject to define a bounded self. The texts I center in this section—Djuna Barnes' 1937 novel *Nightwood* and Jewelle Gomez's 1991 *The Gilda Stories*—investigate characters living in and through the power of horror, dancing on the border between alive and dead, animal and human. Sara Ahmed describes disgust as the

affective, embodied response to the powers of horror, emphasizing the performative nature of disgust as a marker of abjection—a body pulls away from the object, rejecting the disgusting thing as that which it is not. Disgusting things require performative disavowal partially because they're so difficult to dissociate from, a quality she calls "stickiness." Ahmed builds on Elizabeth Grosz's insights about our fear of being subsumed to argue that what is truly horrifying is that slimy or sticky things threaten to undermine order and boundaries: "slimy things become disgusting only given the maintenance of an order of things, which allows such absorption to become threatening" (90). Disgust not only creates boundaries between bodies, but also hierarchizes them: "disgust reactions are not only about objects that seem to threaten the boundary lines of subjects, they are also about objects that seem 'lower' than or below the subject… lowness becomes associated with lower regions of the body as it becomes associated with other bodies and other spaces" (88-89). As we will see, both *Nightwood* and *The Gilda Stories* feature underworlds, often spaces that are literally underground or in the dark, characterized by the presence of unctuous bodily fluids stubbornly out of place. The stickiness of disgust, that quality of horror, offers an affective, material basis for haunting.

But what about those bodies that have always been ciphers for horror, long suspected of shapeshifting, demonic potential, unnatural skin? What possible use can there be in dwelling in horror for those already rendered abject? Thinking with Hortense Spillers once again illuminates the potential in horror. Her haunting image of an enslaved woman being whipped, the rending of her skin marking her other than woman, other than

human, is one anchoring reality of the horrified Black body—tearing skin makes you flesh rather than human, the horrification of the category operating at the level of the skin. She calls flesh "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse" (67). Skin and its color becomes a mask for the marked flesh, enclosing its wounds in a categorized, recognized form of the body. She locates a key difference between white and Black women's bodies in this exteriorized, fleshly injury; unlike the threat of rape that unites feminized bodies, only Black women are historically subject to public brutalization of their flesh, and it is this "materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh 'ungendered'" that both removes Black women from gendered narratives and provides the escape route from being a gendered body (68). Black women are rendered illegible as feminine through the brutality of this beating, alongside the impossibility of their motherhood under a system of slavery which makes their children property of their masters. And gender, Spillers implies, is an essential pillar for maintaining a place in the hierarchy of the human; without its protections, Black people are made mere flesh, the building blocks of life without form.

Spillers has been hugely foundational for Afropessimist theories that conclude that Black life is a condition of social death, and some of the more committedly pessimistic accounts of Blackness use her conception of "flesh" and the horrific description of the process of enfleshment as evidence of the irretrievability of Black life in America.[71] While becoming flesh is indeed an ontological condition in Spillers'

[71] Orlando Patterson and Jared Sexton are key thinkers of Black life as social death; see their work, especially Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* and Sexton's "The Social Life of Social Death" for more

account, it is important to remember that it is a condition which is made—and thus one which can presumably be un-made. Spillers' conclusion belies the idea that becoming flesh is without possibility, or even necessarily a negative or undesirable state of being. As I will argue, Spillers' flesh holds possibility alongside abjection, revealing the power of horror to reorient categories of embodiment. I look to Jewelle Gomez's fabulous reimagining of the vampire as a Black lesbian figure as a vision for the potential power of the horrified body; what does doing Christina Sharpe's "wake work" mean for the undead? How does literalizing and embracing embodied horror demonstrate the incredible power of horror to reanimate the concept of the body into a posthuman form, inhabitable by all?

Another project that resonates with my attempt to posit horrification as a process of becoming is Katherine McKittrick's centering of the demonic in her 2006 monograph *Demonic Ground*. She borrows the concept of the demonic from Sylvia Wynter as a means to destabilize and reclaim geographic orientations, to more accurately reflect the impact that Blackness has had on the construction of space and place—in fact, the utter imbrication of space and geographic study with the codification of the genre of the human. Demonic is not an obvious word to get at this, with all its connotations of satanic possession. But McKittrick draws on its mathematical significance as "a working system that cannot have a determined, or knowable, outcome. The demonic, then, is a non-deterministic schema… the demonic invites a slightly different conceptual pathway—

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on this idea. Afropessimist uses of the flesh often build on Agamben's theorization of bare life in the concentration camp in *Homo Sacer* and on Achille Mbembe's concept of necroplitics, which makes a case for the plantation as the original death camp.

while retaining its supernatural etymology—and acts to identify a system (social, geographic, technological) that can only unfold and produce an outcome if uncertainty, or (dis)organization, or something supernaturally demonic, is integral to the methodology" (xxiv). This is a mightily complex way to arrive at the idea that "the ways in which the subaltern live are not marginal/other to regulatory classificatory systems, but instead integral to them," but I am inspired by her commitment to the language of the supernatural or monstrous, her desire to enflesh the ghost in the machine of geographic epistemology (xxv). McKittrick uses the demonic to free us from a binary, a system that prescribes margin and center as the only ways to make sense of spatialized identity. She sees in Wynter's analysis the possibility for something beyond a biocentric model, despite "how seriously she takes the flesh-and-blood human species" (135)—if we can learn to think in demonic systems which do not fall into the inside/outside, either/or which force the marginal to strive to become the center and in doing so reproduce the violences of a system which insists that the center must hold, we can recognize that "new forms of life, occupying interhuman ground (beneath *all* of our feet), can perhaps put forward a new worldview from the perspective of the species—that is, from outside the logic of biocentric models: not as *genre* or *mode* of human but as human" (135). The horrified body is my language for describing these forms of life that occupy what McKittrick calls demonic ground—the demons, if you will.

The two central texts I read as illustrative of the horrified body use differing forms of demon to explore the possibilities of horrification. I do not mean to insist that the wolfish, cannibalistic body of Robin Vote in *Nightwood* is directly mappable to the

vampires of *The Gilda Stories*, but I am interested in the way these diverse horrified bodies become materializations of the modernist knowledge that the human is a demonic system. Monstrosity and its depictions have been central to literary analysis since its inception, and I have often questioned myself about why the texts I focus on in this chapter are worthy of particular attention for the way that they enflesh horror. What I've come to is that these novels commit to the monstrous not as an outside or an inversion, but as a viable means of rematerializing the human, a goal, a model for modernist embodiment worthy of embrace and practice. They present horror's possibilities alongside its terror and discomfort and provide a template for living otherwise—one that's been there all along, if we just knew how to articulate it.

"Eaten Death Returning": Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Cannibal

Like Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes has historically been read as a modernist most interesting for her relations and connections to her (more famous) peers. Both authors lived committedly transatlantic lives, exchanging citizenships and sitting at the center of modernist social circles before fading into obscurity after the Second World War and dying unremarked. Barnes began her career as a journalist, famous for stunts like being voluntarily force-fed to give her readers insight into the experience of suffragettes on hunger strike whose bodies were being forcibly sustained by the state. She interviewed James Joyce in 1921, she was friends with Eliot and Pound, and most essentially to her legacy, she was in Natalie Barney's inner circle, a core member of the lesbian avant-

garde in Paris in the interwar years.[72] Her satirical *Ladies Almanack* is an account of the women she knew and their foibles, written like an early-modern book of saints and juxtaposed with bawdy drawings in her own Aubrey Beardsley-inspired style. Her 1937 *Nightwood* is her most canonized work, perhaps partially because it is vouched for by a famous man: T.S. Eliot's introduction is invariably advertised on the cover of the book. And while Eliot and Barnes are perhaps superficially similar in their brand of erudite modernism, love for the old country, and devotion to ornate religious imagery, Barnes offers a radically different vision for the potential of the modernist body. Unlike Eliot's mournful elegy for the blasted modern male body in the "The Hollow Men," or the images of the English body etherized, impotent, and fractured in Prufrock, Barnes revels in dissolution and celebrates bodily atrophy. *Nightwood* revolves around the horrified and horrifying body of Robin Vote, which exerts a curiously seductive magnetism through its decay and voracious willingness to become abject, shaded with lycanthropy and cannibalistic desire.

Though *Nightwood* is hardly participating in the tropes of the horror genre—it has the barest semblance of plot, little mystery or suspense, and no supernatural occurrences

[72] Natalie Clifford Barney held a Friday salon in Paris for the first six decades of the 20th century. Beginning in 1909, the salon was hosted 20 Rue Jacob in the Latin Quarter, and the pavilion and the columned Temple of Friendship in the garden became iconic sites of modernist performance. She explicitly featured women's work that otherwise went under-appreciated in the male-dominated modernist circles of Paris' expat artist community (though Eliot, Pound, and Valéry were frequent attendees too, and Joyce and Rilke and Fitzgerald and all the major modernist players also made appearances). In 1927, Barney founded the Académie des Femmes in response to The French Academy's refusal to honor women writers. Mina Loy is one of the honorees of the Académie des Femmes, along with Colette, Gertrude Stein, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus and Djuna Barnes (*Ladies Almanack* also features a Mina Loy character among the many lightly disguised portraits of famous women in the Paris set). Barney was known for her commitment to polyamory and her open lesbianism; her most lasting and famous relationships were with the symbolist poet Renée Vivien, Olive Custance (later Lady Alfred Douglas – yes, married to Oscar Wilde's lover), painter Romaine Brooks, and Dolly Wilde (yes, Oscar Wilde's niece). Her life is at least partial inspiration for Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness*.

or recognizable monsters—it has been categorized as horrific since its earliest reviews. In his effusive introduction to the first edition of the novel, T.S. Eliot writes that the book has a "quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" (viii). It's the last line of his introduction, and though he clearly means it to be a compliment, he does not precisely define what he means by horror, or where he detects it in the novel—perhaps, though he claims to be above such simplistic condemnations and sins of pride, he has fallen into the trap of characterizing the trio at the center of the novel as "a horrid sideshow of freaks" (Eliot vii). Perhaps he is referencing his earlier comment about the unbounded structure of the genre-defying novel, a horrific "freak show" of genre (and gender) indeterminacy. Even more on the nose, given my definition of the horrified body as one that resists the bounded structure of skin, is Jeanette Winterson's preface 2006 edition of the book: "*Nightwood* opens a place that does not easily skin over," she writes, praising the novel as a text that is lodged within her, unshakeable. It's a novel that wounds, somehow, the opens the body to new possibility through its very form. Counter to Eliot's reading, which casts *Nightwood*'s gender and genre defying bodies as tragic, I offer a discussion of how horror becomes a constructive force in the articulation of queer bodies, and how the breaking of boundaries that so entices and repulses Eliot opens new models for embodiment and subjectivity. Far from being a disembodied figure of the uncanny, the subconscious, or the death drive, as many psychoanalytic critics have posited, I see Robin Vote as a highly embodied argument for the possibilities of horrification. Her refusal of heteronormative futurity, her continual association with the mouth as a site of cannibalistic consumption, and her final lupine

transformation rejects the logics of confinement through language or skin that delimit and depress Dr. O'Connor and her other compatriots in Europe's queer underworlds.

Barnes' text begins in a decidedly gothic setting: a Viennese noblewoman, Hedvig, gives birth to a son in a red velvet canopied bed and promptly dies, leaving him orphaned in a decaying Europe that increasingly eschews nobility. Adding to the general air of decay is a fixation with blood and lineage, the material facts of birth suffusing the opening chapter and our introduction to Felix Volkbein. Hedvig manifests her place in the world through blood, Vienna flowing through her: "Hedvig had played the waltzes… in the tempo of her blood, rapid and rising—that quick mannerliness of touch associated with the playing of the Viennese…" (8). Her instrument is "sprawled over the thick dragon's-blood pile of rugs from Madrid" and the room is furnished in "rich and bloody wood" (8). Blood is the defining element of the room, as if Hedvig's body were inside-out and could manifest its blood through the walls, like the military men of her country who "seem to breathe from the inside out" (6). In this world, blood rules: as Carrie Rohman writes, "It is the physical make-up of the body here—bodily *matter*—that infuses aristocratic birthrights with value as cultural capital. Thus, aristocracy is materialized or rendered powerful through bodies that are "purely" bred" (134-5). The description of fractured statues which festoon the house only adds to the sense that the bodies in this blood-obsessed world are out of order, inverted: "The long rococo halls, giddy with plush and whorled designs in gold, were peopled with Roman fragments, white and disassociated; a runner's leg, the chilly half-turned head of a matron stricken at the bosom, the blind bold sockets of the eyes given a pupil by every shifting shadow so

that what they looked upon was an act of the sun" (8). And in fact, though Felix will inherit his mother's fixation with blood as a determiner of worth and nobility, it's all built on a lie: his father, Guido, is a Jewish Italian[73] who has only pretended to a barony. The aristocracy is "white and disassociated," held together by false notions of shared blood. The opening chapter's obsession with the proper circulation of blood sets up questions about how we delineate bodies and how've they come to matter, and through Guido's deception, suggests that these received structures are riddled with lies and instabilities.

The fragmentation and instability of bodies only intensifies as our cast of characters grows. Felix, now grown, living in Berlin, and utterly obsessed with European history and nobility, goes to a café with his friend Frau Mann, the Duchess of Broadback, on the promise of meeting an Italian Count. But instead of the Count, they meet a loquacious gynecologist named Dr. Matthew O'Connor, who gives a description of the body disjointed and jumbled: "I, as a medical man, know in what pocket a man keeps his heart and soul, and in what jostle of the liver, kidneys and genitalia these pockets are pilfered. There is no pure sorrow. Why? It is bedfellow to lungs, lights, bones, guts and gall!" (25). Emotion is dependent on the arrangement of the body, manifested through the

[73] Guido and Felix's Jewishness, and Barnes' often uncomfortable replication of ideas about Jews as inherently placeless and lost, self-hating, or racially pre-destined for melancholy, has been the subject of much scholarly work. See Maren Tova Linett's *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* (Cambridge, 2007), Lara Trubowitz's article "In Search of 'the Jew' in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" (Modern Fiction Studies 51.2) and to a lesser extent, Katherine Fama's "Melancholic Remedies: Djuna Barnes's Nightwood as Narrative Theory" (Journal of Modern Literature 37.2) and Jane Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus" (in *Hearts of Darkness*: *White Women Write Race*). Of course, modernism more broadly has a fraught relationship with antisemitism; Ezra Pound is the most infamous example, and D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot likewise wrote and espoused overtly anti-Semitic ideas, but even Natalie Barney, who I discussed in the previous footnote and was herself a quarter Jewish, wrote admiringly of fascist policies during the war. Djuna Barnes fits into this mess, and participates in perpetuating some of the ugly stereotypes about Jewishness that circulated widely in modernist circles.

flesh and impossible to isolate from the "guts and gall." Not only are the boundaries of the flesh and the spirit indistinguishable, the lines between human and object are increasingly unclear. Felix's friend Frau Mann is a trapeze artist who seems to have merged with her medium: "something of the bar was in her wrists, the tan bark in her walk, as if the air, by its very lightness, by its very non-resistance, were an almost insurmountable problem, making her body, though slight and compact, seem much heavier than that of women who stay up on the ground. In her face was the tense expression of an organism surviving in an alien element" (16). Bodies are transformable, malleable to their profession and penetrable by the inanimate. Frau Mann's integration with her costume makes her appear almost edible: "She seemed to have a skin that was the pattern of her costume: a bodice of lozenges, red and yellow… one somehow felt they ran through her as the design runs through hard holiday candies…" (16). In an almost comically Freudian link, the doctor reacts to seeing Frau Mann's consumable, confectionary body by telling the story of a Black performer named Nikka (sonically, a Germanification of the n-word). Nikka's body is overdetermined by almost every possible marker of Blackness, difference, and desirability. His "ill-concealed loin cloth all abulge" (19) is the only clothing he wears, though his body is covered in tattoos; his skin is a surface for inscription. Legend has it that his penis is tattooed with the word Desdemona, a literal, literary figuration of supposed Black male desire for white women. Matthew dwells on the details of Nikka's tattoos, directing our focus again and again to the skin, its rupture, and its significance for inscribing the body and its bounds. Jane Marcus reads Nikka's tattoos as an invocation of the abject, citing Kristeva on tattooing

as a technique for defining the edges of the body and ascribing it meaning: "*Nightwood*'s project is a remaking of gender and race categories of selfhood and it is preoccupied with skin as a blank page… Marking the body seems to enact opposite meanings, a symbolic separation from the mother as in Kristeva's use of the term "semiotic"… But it also marks the return of the repressed savage and unconscious desire" (Marcus 93). While I'm not compelled by psychoanalytic frameworks to think about embodiment, Marcus' insight emphasizes that skin is a key site for delineating the abject. Barnes has showed us the lie of bloodlines and the foolishness of the way bodies have been formulated through the aristocracy. Felix's introduction into the bohemian nightlife of Berlin deepens the question about how bodies are materialized, if not through the blood: through their professions, through their emotions, through their desirability, through their skin and the ways skin becomes analogous to story, the legible, inscribable surface of the human.[74]

Against this backdrop of bodily disruption enters Robin Vote. Enter is too active a word—she exerts a gravitational pull that draws Felix and Matthew to her even as she lies unconscious on a bed, a move indicative of the mysterious power she holds over every character in the novel. Robin marks a transition from the carnivalesque inversions of the Continental underworld to a more clearly sinister, horrified and horrifying embodiment. Now in Paris, Felix and Matthew are called to Robin's bedside because the

[74] With this framework established, the early chapters' racialization of Jewishness and suggestion that the Jew is a pathetic figure of melancholic longing, always skirting the outside of history, always wandering in search of a home, perhaps feel less stable, less like assertion and more like attempts at meaning making. Is this old story right? Can we fashion a body for Felix out of histories of Jewish exclusion? With the hindsight of history, the stories told about Jewishness in 1937 and whether it was inherent, materialized in and through the body, can't be more important. Perhaps Felix's attraction to Robin's utter refusal of the body as we know it and insistence on horrification is attributable to his own understanding that despite his obsession with the powers of the past it cannot serve him and does not reflect his own longings and his sense of his own embodiment.

hotel staff cannot revive her. Immediately, there is something uncanny about her: an air of death and decay surround her, blocking out the frenetic liveliness of Paris that bustles just outside her window. She is so still it's as if she were already decomposing:

> The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. 38

She's indistinguishable from plants, like the earth is already reclaiming her, making her part of the muck that characterizes the abject. Robin captivates Felix, a baron obsessed with the crumbling legacy of European nobility and connection to the past, partially because of this stillness reminiscent of death. Barnes makes the link between Robin and death even more explicit just a few pages later: "Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache—we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers" (41). Not only does she embody death-like immobility, she *is* death regurgitated. Robin is thus zombie-like in her passive and immobile embodiment and return from the dead, but also somehow vampiric or cannibalistic; she has eaten death, and the blood of our ancestors coat her lips. Curiously, Robin inspires cannibalistic desire in others as well, and "our head and jaws ache" with the effort of avoiding the temptation to consume her, and in turn, create connection to the flesh of our ancestors

which gave rise to our own bodies. Robin is a conduit for a cross-temporal longing, an eroticized, enfleshed representation of a desire to consume your own lineage in order to contain the histories of your own engendering. But Robin's corpse-like passivity is countered by a fierce animality. Even with her eyelids shut, her eyes are "still faintly clear and timeless behind the lids—the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beast who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye" (41). Not only her eyes, but her whole person is not recognizably human: "Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience… a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth; as the unicorn is neither man nor beast deprived, but human hunger pressing its breast to its prey" (41). Robin is roving, uncontained hunger defined by movement, unfixable and uncategorizable through memory and language. She is both hyper-embodied and dissolute, somehow bestial and effervescent at the same time, but nevertheless abjected through her animality and her vegetal disintegration.

Robin seems to pull the people who love her apart as she wanders through life in a stupor, destabilizing their sense of self and bringing them in dangerous contact with death through her eerily decaying physicality. Her zombie-vampire-parasite body resists categorization, and part of the horror that Nora and Felix experience is a complete inability to pin Robin down, to identify her as a self with desires. Critics share her lovers' frustration: because Robin is such an enigma, a lacuna at the center of the novel, it's tempting to read Robin as a personification of the id, or of the death drive—an object-less bundle of longing—as psychoanalytic theorists like Teresa de Lauretis have often done.

But this reading elides Robin's physicality, suggesting that the rejection of the legibly human must necessarily mean the absence of embodiment. It fails to attend to the very precise (if infuriatingly strange) substances through which Robin's body does materialize: earth-flesh, fungi, a trepidation of flesh, hunger as it encounters prey. Casting Robin as disembodied also avoids reckoning with the very material (often troublingly tangible) objects of her strange longings—Robin wants to sink her teeth into the past, wants "the successive arms of women" to pull herself out of the realm of death, wants an unnameable intimacy with animals. This is not the amorphous concept of desire but longing for proximity with flesh which would disorient and disjoint her humanity. Her body is consistently described as out of place, out of order. "When she touched a thing, her hands seemed to take the place of the eye," disrupting the privileging of sight so often elevated as the highest form of human sensory experience (46). "Her clothes were of a period that he count not quite place," as if she resists containment in temporal structures (46). Her "hand [is] somehow older and wiser than her body," and she is forever splaying about, limbs akimbo and seemingly disconnected from her core. Her indeterminate embodiment is indelibly tied to her out-of-timeness, as if this sprawling body crosses time zones, pieces of her scattered across the earth. Felix cannot hold her attention, which "had already been taken by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had no known setting" (48). She is has "the body of a boy;" gender cannot possibly remain legible in a body this resistant to markers of the human.

Robin marries Felix and moves to Berlin but stays with him only long enough to bear him a son before leaving him and meeting Nora, an American expat, at a circus. Tellingly, their moment of first encounter happens as Robin stares down a lion:

> Then as one powerful lioness came to the turn of the bars, exactly opposite the girl, she turned her furious great head with its yellow eyes afire and went down, her paws thrust through the bars and, as she regarded the girl, as if a river were falling behind impassable heat, her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface. At that the girl rose straight up. Nora took her hand. "Let's get out of here!" the girl said, and still holding her hand Nora took her out. In the lobby Nora said, "My name is Nora Flood," and she waited. After a pause the girl said, "I'm Robin Vote." She looked about her distractedly. "I don't want to be here." 60

This moment of connection shared between Robin and the lion underscores the association between Robin and the bestial, and rehearses the relationship between the abject and animal, the lion literally lowering itself before Robin. The boundary between Robin and lion isn't skin, but impassable heat, heat which contains emotion and stops a river of tears (an image that that feels significant given its resonance with Nora's last name, Flood). "I don't want to be here" is perhaps the truest statement Robin could possibly make about herself, and foreshadows her relationship with Nora—it's not that Robin doesn't want to be at all, but that she doesn't, can't, want to be *here*, claiming a name and inhabiting a moment in time. Together they travel to Paris, where they rent an apartment and fall deeply, irrevocably in love—or perhaps more accurately, Nora falls so

in love that "in Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora's blood" (72). This sense of Robin as out of time, becoming-earth and driven by need for blood and consumption pervades their intense relationship.

With Nora as with Felix, Robin is not quite alive, wandering the streets at night, drinking herself into stupors, drawing other women to her with her seductive monstrosity. Robin seems able to worm her way into other people's lives like a parasite, feeding off of their aliveness as she wanders the earth. Nora worries that Robin might "lose the scent of home" in her night ramblings like a dog who has wandered too far from home and has dreams of "taking the body of Robin down with her into it, as the ground things take the corpse, with minute persistence, down into the earth, leaving a pattern of it on the grass, as if they stitched as they descended" (62). Nora goes on walks of her own in the hopes that she might "bring Robin back by the very velocity of the beating of her heart" as if Robin can be tempted by the lure of blood (67). Robin infects those around her with the abjection of death and decay, and repeatedly, death is figured as bestial—from the fossil imagery which is the imprint of an animal once-living to the sense that Robin and Nora are already living a waking death: "Death went with them, together and alone" (63).

Evidence of Robin's infidelities literally ruptures Nora's sense of self: "Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and disremembering, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her volition, but dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body" (70). She is dis(re)membered and unable to assert will, her body melting into pieces beyond her

control, forced into literally lowering herself in imitation of the state of animal abjection which Robin embodies. This shifting, destabilized embodiment has ramifications for Nora's grasp on temporal and spatial distinctions as well; Nora becomes so dependent on Robin that she thinks of Robin as part of her own body: "As an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forebear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce. As the wrist longs, so her heart longed, and dressing she would go out into the night that she might be 'beside herself,' skirting the cafe in which she would catch a glimpse of Robin" (75-76). Her movement materializes her anguish, as she pursues Robin across the city hoping to be in physical proximity to an exteriorized self, enacting what it looks like to be "beside herself" with grief. This wonderfully complex sentiment also gets at the horrified body's necessary disruption of linear temporality, the experience of futurity infused with a longing for a future-precluded. The infectious horror of Robin's body is the presence of death among us, the fossils and ghosts which cannot be excised from our lifeblood.

In addition to this refusal of boundaries between animal and human, female and male, flesh and discourse, the characters of *Nightwood* refuse linear temporality. The title of the book, *Nightwood*, already suggests a setting for a ghost story, a dark place where space and time are suspended among the trees. I have briefly referenced Dr. O'Connor's affinity for night as a space of indeterminacy, and Robin's zombie-like nightcrawling, but she's also ghost-like, haunting the present with an embodiment that evokes the past. After Robin awakes from her vegetative state on the bed, Felix notes that even when she is alert "she yet carried the quality of the 'way back' as animals do" (52-53). Though he is an

aficionado of local history, he finds himself flustered when trying to recount the past to Robin: "He tried to explain to her what Vienna had been before the war; what it must have been before he was born; yet his memory was confused and hazy, and he found himself repeating what he had read" (54). It's as if Robin defies time, as if her presence halts its progression and order. Though Robin and Nora are typically foils for each other, they share a status as a repository of the past; Barnes describes Nora as having the beliefs of "an early Christian" (66) and a face that has "the wood in the work; the tree coming forward in her, an undocumented record of time" (65). And Matthew uses tales of the night to confuse and confound time, turning it into an assemblage like his dis-organized body rather than hierarchized, linear time. "The night has been going on for a long time," he informs Nora, describing a "blood-letting in the side streets to some wild princess in a night shift of velvet" and "pheasants' necks and goslings' beaks dangling against the hocks of the gallants" (88), a past that is ever-present in the darkness.

Though every character in *Nightwood* participates in the disorganization of temporality, Robin's unruly, uncategorizable body resists time most vigorously and obviously. As Felix recalls Robin to Matthew years later, he says: "There was in her every movement a slight drag, as if the past were a web about her, as there is a web of time about a very old building" (149). I do not think the word drag is incidental here; Barnes repeatedly emphasizes Robin's boyish looks, which here are intimately connected to her refusal to be in time. Elizabeth Freeman theorizes queer temporalities as lag, stoppages in the smooth, capitalist surface of time that are "visible in the forms of interruption… are points of resistance to this temporal order that, in turn, propose other

possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically" (Freeman xxii). Furthermore, she suggests that drag performance enacts "a story about a bygone form of gender" (69) simultaneous with your own gender presentation, an adoption of the past in service of queering the present. Nora recounts a dream that mashes up a memory of her grandmother in drag, the atemporal quality of queerness, and a troubling eroticization of her own foremother through the figure of Robin in a moment that unites Freeman's concept of drag with the image of Robin as cannibalizing the past:

> With this figure of her grandmother who was not entirely her recalled grandmother went one of her childhood, when she had run into her at the corner of the house—the grandmother who, for some unknown reason, was dressed as a man, wearing a billycock and a corked moustache, ridiculous and plump in tight trousers and a red waistcoat, her arms spread saying with a leer of love, "My little sweetheart!"—her grandmother "drawn upon" as a prehistoric ruin is drawn upon, symbolizing her life out of her life, and which now appeared to Nora as something being done to Robin, Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain. 69

Robin's body, shrouded in a ghostly web of the past, drags in refusal of heteronormative, reproductive time. This becomes most apparent in a scene where she shatters a doll, a representation of a reproductive future. Nora recounts her horrifying display of refusal:

> I would find her standing in the middle of the room in boy's clothes, rocking from foot to food, holding the doll she had given us—'our child'—high above her

> head, as if she would cast it down, a look of fury on her face… She picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it; and then, as I came crying behind her, she kicked it, its china head all in dust… 184

Robin, in drag, smashes heteronormative futurity, refusing to be fixed in a generation. But like her monstrous embodiment, her horrific behavior carves out space for something alternative: an animal-becoming that shatters the concept of a unified, hierarchized body and brings her into relation with other dis-organized being.

This refusal of futurity would seem to point to the kind of queer nihilism celebrated by Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, but Robin is in fact a figure for something much more complex than a refusal of reproductive imperatives or the decomposition of the notion of selfhood. Elizabeth Freeman offers a trenchant critique of the refusal of queer rejection of family: "emphasis on destroying the figure (the ego, the self, the child, the political horizon) makes the antisocial thesis a somewhat reactionary queer theoretical drive toward a high modernist politics of the nonrepresentational… those with the heaviest burden of embodiment are least able to reach even a queer apotheosis of self-negation" (171). Barnes doesn't posit queerness as radical in itself, though queerness is perhaps necessary and inevitable for any embodiment which horrifies the boundaries of the human so utterly. As Carrie Rohman points out, the novel doesn't posit lesbianism as free of the problems of heterosexual alliance or as a panacea for possessive investment[75]

[75] I borrow this construction from George Lipsitz's term "possessive investment in whiteness." Just as investment in whiteness and white supremacy has gone unmarked and unnamed because of the way it succeeded in establishing itself as neutral, defending and shoring up the boundaries of the human marks a material and ideological allegiance to a hegemonic way of articulating the body (despite it perhaps being in conflict with your best interests) which hides behind its perceived naturalness.

in the human; rather "it is the larger question of identity itself, and what abjections our identities require, that frames the deep ideological structure of the novel" (148). This form of queerness doesn't want to flip the script within the already established linguistic bounds—if heterosexuality is life, fine then, we'll be death!—but seeks to redefine the possibilities for understanding relationality across time, legitimizing an erotics of the past as well as erotic investment in the future. Freeman argues that "*Nightwood* proffers instead what we might be called a *hypersocial thesis* grounded in baptism and the Eucharist as figures for a radically corporealized relationality, an inhabitation by and of the other rather than a self-shattering… to inhabit or be inhabited by others includes a visceral reckoning with their pasts" (168-9). This insight sanctions and sanctifies the invocations of cannibalism and vampirism that follow Robin wherever she goes, translates Robin's eerie ability to taste "the blood on the lips of our forefathers" into the familiar marriage between past, present, and future that structures Christian dogma.

Robin leaves Nora for a particularly odious woman named Jenny Petherbridge, another American who is likened to a vulture, feeding off of other people's lives for her own pathetic entertainment. But this new relationship does nothing to jolt Robin out of her stupefied embodiment, and she takes Jenny's provocations "as if she had no will" (83). Nora describes her as "something dormant, protected by the arms of successive women," as if Robin is lying in wait before taking on her fully horrific form. The novel becomes a series of conversations between Nora and Dr. O'Connor as Nora seeks to process Robin's departure, and Robin's strange embodiment becomes more and more explicitly linked to something non- or more-than-human. In the most outright

acknowledgement of her difference, Matthew declares that "Robin was outside the 'human type'—a wild thing caught in a woman's skin" (155). Nora senses that Robin is in her truest form when she is her least organized as human and confesses that she wishes Robin would that "Die now, so you will be quiet, so you will not be touched again by dirty hands, so you will not take my heart and your body and let them be nosed by dogs—die now, then you will be mine forever.' (What right has anyone to that?)" She stopped. "She was mine only when she was drunk, Matthew, and had passed out. That's the terrible thing, that finally she was mine only when she was dead drunk" (154). Nora critiques her own possessiveness even as she admits her fear that it is really Robin who has possessed her, taken her heart in to earth, let it comingle with dogs. Nora's corpse imagery echoes Matthew's pronouncement that "Nora will leave that girl some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (113). The visceral imagery of Nora and Robin's remains mixing in the guts of a single dog, the becoming-earth becoming-animal meshing of substance elegantly synthesizes the novels preoccupations with death, abjection, and animality and prefigures Robin's dramatic, inscrutable fate.

In the final scene of the novel Robin's uncanny somnambulist embodiment resolves into something entirely non-human, or more-than-human, her becoming-animal literalized in her final act. Now living with Jenny in America, Robin has taken to wandering the countryside where she knows Nora's childhood farmstead is located. "Robin walked the open country… pulling at the flowers, speaking in a low voice to the animals. Those that came near, she grasped, straining their fur back until their eyes were

narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck" (177). This physical encounter with an animal being marks an unusual level of assertion and action for Robin. The sympathy between her body and the animal's intensifies: one day, she hears Nora's dog, and follows it to a dilapidated barn, where she proceeds to fight it, dog-like:

> And down she went, until her head swung against his; on all fours now, dragging her knees. The veins stood out on in her neck, under her ears, swelled in her arms, and wide and throbbing rose up on her fingers as she moved forward… Then she began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head… and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. 210-11

This is perhaps the first time Robin shows true volition of any kind in the novel. She lowers herself to the ground to meet the dog and begins snarling and growling, becoming increasingly dog-like until they collapse together, limbs muddled, all eyes red with tears. It's also the first time we've seen Robin cry, or emote at all. After years of wandering, half-dead, she chooses an embodiment: dog-woman. This cross-species identification and longing toward becoming-animal resists hierarchies that position the human body as fixed, normative, and above all other life forms. Deleuze and Guattari call becoming-animal a modality of molecularization, a resistance to the way the human has overvalued

the singularity and hyper-individuality of an organism; by embracing a morphing physicality that recalls humanity's inherent animality, you become-animal only in the collective, allying yourself with a "complex aggregate: the becomings-animal of men, packs of animals, elephants and rats, winds and tempests, bacteria sowing contagion" (Deleuze and Guattari 243). That Robin's animal form is the dog holds yet more significance: the concept of the wolf man or werewolf is one of the oldest images of monstrosity, referenced in some of the earliest recorded proto Indo-European legends. The transformation is painful, and often focuses on the horror of feeling hair push out of human skin, the boundaries of the body becoming literally fuzzy as skin gives way. Deleuze and Guattari develop their theory of multiplicity through animal-becoming by critiquing Freud's analysis of the famous Wolf-Man case:

> In the Wolf-Man's dream it is the denuded tree upon which the wolves are perched. It is also the skin as envelope or ring, and the sock as reversible surface. It can be a house or part of a house, any number of things, anything…. The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization. Lice hopping on the beach. Skin colonies. The full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities. The problem of the unconscious has most certainly nothing to do with generation but rather peopling, population. It is an affair of world-wide population on the full body of the earth, not organic familial generation. 30

The meandering, associational logic of their chapter "1914: One or Several Wolves?" makes a series of connections as they lay out the case for a re-interpretation of becoming-

wolf: between the year 1914, the misinterpretation of Wolf Man as an individual instead of a multiplicity, Virginia Woolf's writing about being apart from and embedded in the crowd, the modern body as a skin envelope, and the body without organs. Some of these leaps seem incidental, like the homonym logic of Wolf and Woolf, but there's something compelling about the particular horrors and anxieties that modernity seems to provoke, the figure of the wolf as a metonym for multiplicity, and the recognition of the body without organs. Their major critique of Freud's interpretation is his insistence on singularity, the reduction of what is clearly a pack of wolves, terrifying and thrilling in their multiplicity, into a Father. Robin's transformation into not just an animal, but a very wolf-like dog, and her intense communion with a another being, seems like an overt critique of Freud on similar grounds to Deleuze and Guattari's complaint forty years hence. Jane Marcus offers a reading of *Nightwood* as an extended critique of Freud and Viennese obsession with psychoanalysis, and while I find that reading ultimately limited, Nora's becoming-wolf certainly reads as a riposte to Freud's famous Wolf Man and the centrality of wolfishness as a signifier for individualism (as in 'lone wolf'). Where Robin has been isolated, she is now united in a world-wide assemblage of becomings; what could be read as a horrific transformation, a degradation into dog-being, is in fact a rebirth for Robin from the brink of death into a world of embodied connection. Deleuze and Guattari also tie their population-oriented vision of wolf embodiment to an earth-level consciousness which rejects "familial generation," much more interested in being a part of a rhizomatic conglomeration of being than in linear, temporal concepts of reproductive time. Once again, Robin's embodiment anticipates this critique, as she

performs her rejection of heteronormative family and teleological time well before her full transformation into wolfishness.

In contrast to Robin's body which is horrifically empty of signifiers with decodable meaning until her final transformation, Dr. Matthew Mighty-grain-of-salt Dante O'Connor is the bard of the novel, overflowing with words and offering commentary on the nature of narrative at every turn. His name even overflows limits, comically hyphenated. He describes himself as an assemblage, his body not full of organs but of places, times, animals: "What an autopsy I'll make, with everything all which way in my bowels! A kidney and a shoe case of the Roman races; a liver and a long-spent whisper, a gall and a wrack of scolds from Milano… And the lining of my belly, flocked with the locks cut off love in odd places that I've come on, a bird's nest to lay my lost eggs in…" (127). He is Frankensteinian, an amalgamation of elements that do not belong to a singular, organ-ized body.[76] He is also a crossdresser, a devout Catholic, a disbarred gynecologist, and an ex-priest. When Nora goes to visit him in desperation and loneliness one night when Robin is wandering, this is what she finds:

> On a maple dresser, certainly not of European make, lay a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments… From the half-open drawers of this chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace, which gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered

[76] My hyphenation nods to the concept of bodily organs as epistemological, organizing categories of embodiment through their discrete identities; I find this word play one of the most valuable insights of Deleuze and Guattari's off-putting concept of the body without organs, a state of being that has less to do with evisceration than with resisting the hierarchy and striation implied by organ-ization. A body without organs is an aspirational goal, a limit case of life, "that which remains when you take everything away" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 151).

> venery… yet this room was also muscular, a cross between a chambre à coucher and a boxer's training camp… every object seems to be battling its own compression… (100)

The juxtaposition of the masculine power of forceps as a tool for disciplining the female body, the sexualized undergarments, and the pervasive sense of containment and suffocation are indicative of a man struggling against the strictures of gendered embodiment. He believes in the night and the power of darkness, where his longing for indeterminacy can flourish as the shadows blur distinctions between man and woman, sinner and saint, narrative and action. In contrast to Robin's queer embodiment as silence and stillness, Matthew is queerness as excess, resisting boundaries not through a refusal of the human or of language but through too-muchness. Matthew seems to hew to a version of queer politics which revels in transgression and in the carnivalesque[77]—literally, as we see in the opening scene with Frau Mann—as tools of revolution. He is a creature of the night and the clearest proponent of night as a space of productive inversion. He luxuriates in horror, his room almost a parody of underworld delights and subconscious fears. Marcus goes so far as to suggest that O'Connor is a representation of Freud's talking cure, hungrily circling the darkness and throwing more and more and more language at the root of Nora's devastation after the loss of Robin—the chapter

[77] Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque describes the medieval carnival as a space of upended norms, a sanctioned space of excess and overflow characterized by inversions of social order, of gender presentation, of sacred and profane, arguing that the space of the carnival was essential for challenging established power. Mary Russo's 1994 book *The Female Grostesque* considers the carnivalesque as a feminist critique, thinking through the language of spectacle as it is applied to the female body, and considers the efficacy and strategy of deploying the spectacularized grotesque body as an inverted form of feminized power.

"Watchmen, What of the Night?" is virtually a monologue, twenty pages of illogical verbiage from Matthew.

While there's something appealing about seeing O'Connor as a skewering of Freud's often-suspect analysis of women's desire, this sets him apart from embodiment, as if his verbal excesses might define him over and above his own relationship to the dis-organized, horrified body. In a telling scene, Matthew narrates how he took out his penis in a church, insisting on fleshiness even at the site of confession. According to Michel Foucault's theory of scientia sexualis in *History of Sexuality,* over the course of modernity confession takes the place of the bodily, turning sexuality into something disembodied that we're compelled to speak in lieu of enacting. Our many discourses of sex "do not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its exercise" (*History of Sexuality* 45), as discussing sex becomes a means of regulating and tabulating the body and dictating what it can do.[78] But in this fascinating scene of confession, Dr. O'Connor deserts his signature verbal voluptuousness, defying Foucault: "Kneeling in a dark corner, bending my head over and down, I spoke to Tiny O'Toole because it was his turn; I had tried everything else. There was nothing for it this time but to make him face the mystery so it could see him clear as it saw me" (Barnes 165). He presents Tiny O'Toole, his penis, to the creator, a confession of the flesh made

[78] Elizabeth Freeman has an excellent discussion of the relationship between confession as a technology of the modern man and the concept of queerness as a death drive or negation: "Rather, confession has worked, historically, to produce the very ideal of personhood necessary for the queerly impersonal, self-unmaking, death-seeking drive to do its work. It is not possible to have the second without the first" (*Beside You* 170). My concept of horrification is aimed at getting beyond the technology of confession and thus beyond the negation of body and evacuation of the material (the way Deleuze and Guattari's lines of flight are often deployed) as a method of transcending the human.

literal, and a transgression of boundaries between the sacred and the profane, a refusal to dissociate flesh from the soul. By refusing to privilege language, his body articulates a form of sexuality that attempts to evade epistemological power, unspoken and therefore unsanctioned. But his triumph isn't lasting, as he turns to speech and a renunciation of embodiment: "This would be a fine world, Lord, if you could get everybody out of it," Matthew pleads, placing his faith once again in transcendence and in a desire to get the 'body' out of the business of living (141). He reasserts the boundaries between human and other as he departs the momentarily carnivalesque space of the church, asking: "Have I been simple like an animal, God, or have I been thinking?" (141).

Matthew longs to "trace himself back by his sediment, vegetable and animal, and so find himself the odour of wine in its two travels, in and out, packed down beneath an air that has not changed its position during that strategy" (107). He resents the violences of the organized body, of being forced to think of himself as distinct from his shit and piss, insisting on delineation between confession and sex, organizing himself into a hierarchized embodiment that isn't a "cross between." Matthew is a body on its way to horrification, his penchant for the for the ontology of the night and his rejoicing in the abjections of the carnivalesque disrupted by his allegiance to the old formula: animal, or thought?

Despite his ability to sense his embodiment as improper and horrific, O'Connor ultimately resists becoming-otherwise through his hopeless devotion to language as a tool for scripting the self. He is endlessly inscribing and re-inscribing his edges, voraciously cataloguing and claiming new elements of self in allegiance what is ultimately an

expansive, individualist understanding of embodiment. He privileges language as a vehicle for meaning, where Robin rejects language as the organizer of knowledge, renounces the logics of the human and actually becomes otherwise by enacting a new kind of relationality. Her embodiment makes a case for the cannibalistic mouth, a site of ingestion and integration where the blood and flesh of ancestors materialize a body that does not seek to transcend embodiment through language or speak its way out of history, does not differentiate human from earth or animal. Robin becomes the dog in whose stomach our collective flesh comingles. She functions almost like an answer to Matthew's (and the novel's) implicit question: How else could one put the mouth to work, to materialize a body differently instead of merely narrating it as night-like, aberrant, and thus queered? What kind of material relations to others might this suggest, and can a novel, a form necessarily devoted to language, embody those relations?

Even critics who engage deeply with *Nightwood* often preface their work by describing how they "could not go on reading" (de Lauretis) or calling the text "haphazard" and "gratuitous" (Cole); it's a tradition that goes back to Eliot's introduction, which dwells on the horror of the form as well as the horror of the characters themselves. There is something soporific about the hugely long, inverted sentences, something self-consciously old-fashioned and lulling, which mimics the sleepwalking quality of life in the novel and the nightworlds it depicts. Many critics have invoked the baroque to describe *Nightwood*'s rococo linguistic stylings, but Kate Armond takes this insight a step farther, arguing not only for a baroque approach to sentence structure but a commitment to allegorical substitution that supplants the symbolic.

"Writing structured by allegory follows random collections of disjunctive images that proceed without any definite teleology" (864), she claims, drawing a connection between *Nightwood'*s cascading nouns and Benjamin's definition of the baroque through the history of the German tragic form of Trauerspiel. Dr. Matthew O'Connor, with his embrace of verbal excess, displays an approach to speech and meaning-making that most closely aligns with the form of the novel itself. His long-winded philosophizing takes unexpected turns and he becomes increasingly opaque as he offers more concrete detail. The following passage is characteristic of his meandering, and the way it resists causative constructions in favor of overlapping nouns which accumulate to give the semblance of sense:

> And you look down and choose your feet, and, ten to one, you find a bird with a light wing, or an old duck with a wooden knee, or something that has been mournful for years. What? I've held argument with others at long tables all night through about the particular merits of one district over another for such things, of one cottage over another for such things. And do you supposed I was agreed with, and had anyone any other one's ideas? There was as much disagreement as there might have been had we all been selecting a new order of government. Jed would say North, and Jod would say South, and me sitting between them going mad because I am a doctor and a collector and a talker of Latin, and a sort of petropus of the twilight and a phsyiognomist that can't be flustered by the wrong feature on the right fact, and I said that the best port was at the Place de la Bastille. 98-99

Even at his most forthcoming and direct, Matthew resolves ideas through likenesses that don't serve to clarify, but to introduce new or conflicting images. People rarely quote an entire Matthew sentence, both because they're long and because they're frustratingly opaque. For instance, here is the entirety of Matthew's diagnosis of Robin's inhumanity, referenced earlier: "Robin was outside the 'human type'—a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain; like the paralysed man in Coney Island (take away a man's conformity and you take away his remedy) who had to lie on his back in a box, but the box was lined with velvet, his fingers jewelled with stones, and suspended over him where he could never take his eyes off, a sky-blue mounted mirror, for he wanted to enjoy his own 'difference'" (155). Armond asks us to attend to "the disruptive force of figural language" (869) rather than its symbolic function, the way that it fractures meaning or creates a kaleidoscope of disjointed images rather than a transcendent whole or truth. Mimicking this penchant for substitution, Armond argues that the dismembered body, which figures so often in Matthew's speeches, functions as an embodied equivalent for allegorical style. Meaning is an accumulation of distinct and improbable parts that should not be made to add up to a falsely unified whole united under symbolic regimes—allegory as a form of resistance to modern codifications of the human. This is a book that might have been a dance, a project in language that questions the possibilities of language as an engine of meaning-making and sense.

The doctor's final descent into abjection, at the conclusion of the penultimate chapter instructively titled "Go Down, Matthew," is his renunciation of the powers of the word and the glimmer of recognition of the full possibilities of the horrified body, not

only as a joyous queering of the human and embrace of the carnivalesque inversions of the night but as the only viable alternative to the doomed project of transcendence through language. Matthew is immensely drunk and launches into a final monologue at the café. He is investigating the possibilities of substitution in the physical world, allegory personified, asking: "Who's to say that I'm not my brother's wife's husband and that his children were not fathered in my lap? Is it not to his honour that he strikes me as myself?" (170). He has just left Nora, who explained to him where she's been searching for Robin, what she's come to understand. She reiterates the way Robin threatened to become substitute for her embodied self, that if she had not left they "would have forgotten our lives in the extremity of memory, moulted our parts, as figures in the waxworks are moulted down to their story, so we would have broken down to our love" (167). Unlike earlier insistences that she and Robin were the same which were based in a conviction about physical entanglement and mixed up body parts, Nora now names a danger in becoming memory, shedding physical existence and melting down into the symbolic or the linguistic. They risked losing embodiment to story, language eroding materiality entirely and subsuming Nora into the narrative of Nora and Robin. Nora also claims that "Robin is incest too; that is one of her powers. In her, past time records, and past time is relative to us all" (166), rearticulating Robin as a dangerously erotic container for the blood of ancestors and recalling her own dream about having sex with her grandmother. It's the most explicit articulation of time as relative and relational and Robin as an embodied reckoning with that relationality.

It is with Nora's realization echoing in his head that Matthew enters the café, grappling with the limits of linguistic substitution and the risk of being "moulted down to story." In addition to musing on the possibility of incest as a form of deep love and honor, he tells a story that seems to be a complete non-sequitor in the course of his speech: "The other time was when Catherine the Great sent for me to bleed her. She took to the leech with rowdy Saxon abandon, saying: 'Let him drink; I've always wanted to be in two places at once!'" "For Heaven's sake," the ex-priest said. "Remember your century at least!" (173) This interlude (there is no antecedent, no 'first time' he implies) unites characteristics of the horrified body that we've seen attributed to Robin: human blood intermixing with the animal, Catherine's desire to be distributed across space, the disruption of linear temporal progression that would allow the doctor to coexist with Catherine the Great. With Catherine and Robin as examples, Matthew arrives at an edict: "If you don't want to suffer you should tear yourself apart" (174). Though he's long felt himself to be a dis-organized body, he suffers because he seeks to unite the parts of himself under the regime of language and order—he's worried about what kind of corpse he'll make, whether he'll be legible to the conductor of his autopsy so as to ultimately be rendered a proper member of the biopolitical state. Matthew's final words confirm his conviction that he's been using his mouth all wrong, seeking transcendence where the only possibility was distribution: "Now that you have all heard what you wanted to hear, can't you let me loose now, let me go? I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing… I know, it's all over, everything over, and nobody knows it but me—drunk as a fiddler's bitch—lasted too long—… the end—mark my words—now *nothing,*

but wrath and weeping!" (175). Perhaps the greatest moment of pathos comes in his realization that telling his life is not living it, that his words have "lasted too long" and verbosity cannot be a substitute for embodiment. Once again, Matthew continues his function as a stand-in for the concept of narration and storytelling; all that remains of the novel after his exit is the short coda of Robin's transformation, a hyper-embodied, tearful encounter. Matthew is "let loose," and perhaps, without his hold on the story and the story's hold on him, he may become the bitch he already is, his journey toward horrification paralleling Robin's own animal-becoming.

Thus Robin's becoming-dog functions not only as a prescription for transmuting the boundaries of the human by embracing the animal, but as a commitment to the powers of horror to offer an alternative to Matthew's melancholic relationship to language. Robin has already staked her anti-language position, in a rare moment of volition as she snaps at Jenny, whose prattling is a signal for her detestability: "Shut up," Robin said, putting her hand on her knee. "Shut up, you don't know what you're talking about. You talk all the time and you never know anything. It's such an awful weakness with you. Identifying yourself with God!" (82) To rely on language is to reject the task of being embodied, of risking horrification—it's a cowardice and a misplaced desire for transcendence. Here's another way to be a mouth, the book suggests: go down, become nothing but wrath and weeping. The final chapter-let is called "The Possessed," perhaps the most overtly 'horror' imagery of the entire novel, and its language is markedly less ostentatious and more physical, more direct. As in the beginning, we've got a gothic setting par excellence, a "decaying chapel" and the yelping of a dog in the night which

sets the edges of Nora's body aquiver: "Nora bent forward, listening; she began to shiver." The transformation takes place in a chapel, improbably full of Catholic iconography in the American west complete with "a contrived altar, before a Madonna, two candles" (178), imagery steeped in the substitutional possibilities of the Eucharist, the becoming-flesh of the words through a form of sanctioned possession from beyond the grave. Robin's abjection, her literal lowering, is emphasized again and again: "Robin began going down. Sliding down she went; down, her hair swinging… then head down, dragging her forelocks in the dust…" Robin's becoming is a becoming of the mouth: the dog's mouth is "open, his tongue slung sideways over his sharp bright teeth," and barking begins her transmutation. She whimpers alongside him, "crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head" (180), repeatedly aligning her mouth and its functions with that of the dog's. The power in horrification lies not only in exceeding the edges of the human or acknowledging the animal within but in repudiating the idea that it is through language and telling that we become. The horrified mouth is an organ for nipping, biting, sucking, whimpering, crying, consuming, tasting, a site of alchemy where language, sustenance, sex meet and mix and become inextricable—it gives us form, literally the site for ingestion of everything that makes our bodies matter. Perhaps this is a riposte to Eliot's conviction that the whimper marks the end of the world; what if the whimper is another kind of beginning?

Promiscuous Circulation: Vampiric Erotics as More-than-Human Being

Where my reading of *Nightwood* theorized the horrified body as a state of possibility, potential, and becoming, this next section addresses an already-monstrous, fully horrific body: the vampire. In particular, I focus on the Black female vampire in Jewelle Gomez's 1991 novel *The Gilda Stories*. Where *Nightwood* is not overtly a horror story, it's suffused with a dark indeterminacy, an ungraspable quality of the liminal. *The Gilda Stories* is overtly a horror story, but it's scarcely horrific at all in tone—this disjuncture between tone and subject builds Gomez's thesis that to live as a Black woman is to be horrified and horrifying, always already cast as vampiric. Unlike the characters of *Nightwood*, who struggle toward posthuman embodiment that rejects language as the primary mode of knowledge, Gomez begins at the end, the transformation complete within the first chapter of the novel. Instead of asking how we might become more-than-human through the power of horror, her novel asks how Black women who are necessarily already more-than-human might exercise the power inherent in their horrified forms. Freed from the strictures of the human, how can we learn to notice the violences of its construction? How could family, temporality, and race be remade through the freedom of horrified embodiment?

Gomez is a direct writer, and she leaves little possibility for misunderstanding in the accessible clarity of her prose. Analyzing *The Gilda Stories* can seem almost superfluous because of the immediacy of Gomez's vision for a better world; there's not much digging needed to understand which evils Gomez sees as the root of the world's pain, and to receive the lesson that a queered family structure that understands itself in

kinship with history and with the earth itself is one key to moving forward. I've often taught one of Gomez's short stories, "Chicago 1927," a Gilda tale that reads like a discarded chapter of the novel. It places Gilda in a nightclub on the Southside of Chicago, where she initiates proprietor Benny into the vampire family to save him from a fatal shooting, discovering his queerness and his love for Morris, the co-owner of the bar, in the process. It's fast-past, tight, and eminently readable, and students frequently assert that there's not much to analyze beyond the surface of this deceptively simple story. Perhaps they're inured to vampire narratives after growing up in the peak vampire revival years epitomized by the *Twilight* series, but Gomez's choice to adopt the vampire as a means of exploring Black femininity and lesbianism strikes me as fresh and brave, no matter how many times I read her; her reclamation of the vampire is a fascinating repudiation of many of the of Dracula tropes that permeate our cultural understanding of this particular form of monstrosity. Where Dracula is male, cold, sexy because of his relationship to death and his body's inanimate stoniness, Gomez's vampires are undeniably warm, vigorous, and sexy through their connection to life, their incorporation of a multiplicity of lives into a singular body. Where the vampire is usually cast as a thief and a violator who forcibly takes blood, Gomez's vampires enter into a symbiotic relationship with their sources of sustenance, leaving a new thought or direction to pursue in return for blood. Her use of vampire tropes returns the vampire to its roots in Black mythology and provide a rich vein to mine as Gomez explores racialization, queerness, and the fetish of blood in American history. *The Gilda Stories* takes the familiar accusation that Black women and queer people are liabilities on society who bleed the

system dry and owns it. The novel asks its readers to grapple with what the implications of Black queer women as blood suckers really are—what if that weren't metaphor, but an attempt to access something about what it is to be a Black body in our world, a body sustained by generations of trauma flowing through its veins?[79]

Hortense Spillers' concept of flesh, a cornerstone of my thinking about modern embodiment, is in a sense an exploration of the powers of horror to remake the body and an articulation of Black femininity as powerfully monstrous. She concludes "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" by returning to the image of Sapphire as a version of monstrosity worthy of embrace: "In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. Actually *claiming* monstrosity… "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment" (80). The Sapphire figure, fierce and angry and unrecognizably female through her domineering and even abusive interactions with men, is the "monster" that Black women always already are in a racialized hierarchy that robs them of the protections of constructs of femininity. Sapphire is never divorced from her opposite, the Jezebel image of Black femininity as hypersexualized and lascivious—embrace of sexual power produces the same result as unfeminine harshness, casting Black women outside of legible femininity and therefore outside of category of the human. Black women's bodies are always already horrified, splayed open, improperly contained, illegible, turned away

[79] Recent studies in the field of epigenetics have made the case that stress hormones and other physical markers of generational trauma are inheritable, and that genetics are actually affected by occurrences in our lives. Increasingly, the idea that our bodies are haunted by the trauma our ancestor's endured is not only the realm of fiction. For further information, see the research coming out of Dr. Oliver Rando's lab at the University of Massachusetts and the work of Dr. Tracey Bale at the Center for Epigenetic Research in Child Health and Brain Development at the University of Maryland.

from as objects of disgust and fear. What Spillers identifies by naming this horrification "flesh" is that Black women's embodiment is in fact the building block for imagining something new. Without the possibility of gender, as it has been conceived by white supremacy, how might the material substance of bodies come to matter and cohere in new ways? How is enfleshment power? Unlike the characters in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, who are seeking horrification, the Black woman at the center of *The Gilda Stories* is ahead of the monstrosity curve: Gomez names the monstrosity "vampire," acknowledging the shared legacy of the Sapphire and the Jezebel, and the novel is a tale of materializing flesh anew, watching Gilda become. She ends the tale still horrified and horrifying, but with family created on her own terms, and gender roles exploded and reformed into something livable. It is through learning to fully embrace her horrification and the erotic power of flesh that Gilda can achieve the forms of relationality that make her feel fully human.

The circulation of blood and its ambiguous relationship to the creation of family and the formation of race is another major thread that I trace as I tease out the particular significance of the vampire as a manifestation of the Black horrified body. As Spillers observes, "The fact that the enslaved person's access to the issue of his/her own body is not entirely clear in this historic period throws in crisis all aspects of the blood relations… Actually trying to understand how the confusions of consanguinity worked becomes the project" (73). Gomez brings this crisis of consanguinity to life through Gilda, granting her access not only to her own body but to all bodies, making their boundaries penetrable just as Gilda's ancestors had been. But rather than use this power

to enact revenge on those responsible for her enfleshment, Gilda is ushered into a community of vampires that uses blood to create new relations, structuring their families through mutual (and carefully considered) exchange of fluids and thereby upending hierarchical, patriarchal modes of relationality.

In our contemporary moment, thirty years after Gomez wrote *The Gilda Stories*, the figure of the Black female vampire doesn't feel quite as improbable; other authors have followed suit (most notably Octavia Butler with her 2005 *Fledgling* and Tananarive Due with her 1997 *My Soul to Keep*) as science fiction and fantasy by Black women has finally been recognized and read more widely. Alexis Pauline Gumbs reflects on the courage of Gomez's radical embrace of the vampire in her afterword to the 25th anniversary edition of the book: "What kind of bravery did it take to write a novel about a black woman vampire in an era when people were making their political careers off of depictions of how black women and their inner city offspring were sucking lifeblood out of American capitalism? What kind of bravery did it take to write a black lesbian vampire novel in a time period when the rise of the religious right was impacting publication norms and restrictive public funding by equating lesbian and gay art with pornography?" (255). Another revelation of Gomez's technique is that she embraces these pejoratives designed to keep Black women (especially Black queer women) in their place, claiming the uncanny desirability and danger of the vampire for Black femininity. In a wonderful irony, Gilda's existence is lively—full of soirees, champagne, exchanges of big ideas, companionship and relationship building—in ways that many people who are in fact living only dream of. Gomez acknowledges the omnipresence of death for Black women

and turns it into freedom. As Gumbs says, Gilda "provides depth and flesh to the nightmares of narrow-minded people who police the definition of blackness, and steals back the power and threat of black feminine difference. In other words, if the definitions of blackness, femininity, and queerness are *death* in the eyes of the dominant culture, Gomez offers another way of being black, queer, and feminine by creating the *undead*" (256).

Though vampirism has become synonymous with Dracula for most Western readers and thus vampires are implicitly white and male, the vampire is a creature with roots in Afrodiasporic culture. In fact, the original vampires were exclusively Black and female, and Gomez's Gilda revivifies a distinctly Black Atlantic vampiric tradition which circulates and makes material the ways Black women's bodies becomes horrified and horrifying in the wake of slavery. Giselle Liza Anatol's 2015 book *The Things That Fly in the Night* details the diverse history of vampires and considers the potency and political efficacy of associating Black women with demonic creatures who suck life from upstanding members of society. Anatol is particularly interested in the soucouyant or soucriant, a Caribbean folk figure who takes the form of a grumpy, witch-like elderly woman by day but by night sheds her skin, becomes a ball of flame, and flies through the world sucking her victim's blood. She details the potency of the slow depletion of blood as an analog for the kind of waking death experienced by enslaved people, suggesting soucouyant stories arose from the "slow and torturous draining of their literal blood through punishing beatings" (7-8). The emphasis on shedding skin has multivalent resonance in the context of enslavement as well: flayed bodies were all too

commonplace; skin color was the justification for rendering Black bodies less than human, and thus fantasies of escaping skin were powerful; and to be "without skin" was a way of obliquely referencing whiteness (as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, where the "man without skin" is a frequent feature in Beloved's confused recollections of her life before 124). The vampire figure's femininity was an outsourcing of fear surrounding menstruation and the potency of women's fertile bodies. Anatol notes the resonance between many African folk traditions that hold that menstruating women are literally hot and have the power to set fire to crops and the soucouyant's transformation into a ball of fire. As the figure of the soucouyant got picked up by European colonizers, it became further layered with their own anxieties and suppositions, and tales of blood sucking were often merged with European fears of cannibalism. Many traveler's accounts describe the land itself as vampiric, darkly feminine and likely to devour men whole, with frequent references to indigenous women with vagina dentata (Anatol 6).

Of course, the powerful taboo against miscegenation is another major anxiety which animates soucouyant and vampire mythology.[80] In a budding system of racialization which relied on blood quanta to determine "Indian-ness" and the one-drop rule to disqualify anyone with even the minutest portion of African ancestry from full humanity, the potential for contamination by Blackness loomed large. This, perhaps more than any other factor, necessitates that the vampire be a Black woman in disguise: wily,

[80] Ingesting the blood of enslaved Africans was also a powerful tool for abolitionists, who frequently used constructions that likened drinking sweetened tea to drinking Black blood and otherwise built campaigns that suggested that ingesting the products of slave labor was its own form of cannibalism (see Anatol's Introduction for more). The linkage between blood and exploitative or extractive industries is still very much alive today in the successful branding of African diamonds as "blood diamonds" or the anti-war slogan "no blood for oil," though these phrases take on a distinctly different valence when there is no implication of actually ingesting blood along with comestibles.

hypersexualized, sneakily shedding their skin and tricking you into mixing your essence with hers, populating the New World with a horrifically racially indeterminate population that she will claim for her own. Anatol notes that this anxiety about the mixing of bodily fluids extended even to the common practice of using Black women as wet nurses for white babies, with preachers, moralists, and physicians warning that "her blood may be corrupted, or considering the influence which the milk may have with respect to the disposition, as well as health, of their little ones" (Braithwaite, quoting Long, in Anatol 107). She traces the evolution of the vampire narrative up to Stoker's *Dracula*, reminding us that many a vampire tale rose to popularity before Stoker's novel came to define the genre. Anatol notes the explicit demonization of otherized women in *Carmilla* and other earlier nineteenth-century texts that draw more clearly on travel narratives of colonizers in the West Indies and illustrates how Blackness and unruly feminine sexuality are sublimated to the level of metaphor by the publication of Stoker's *Dracula*, erasing the legacy of Caribbean folklore from our contemporary understanding of the vampire.

Gomez's choice to revive the Black female vampire isn't a rejection of the Dracula tale, but a recuperation of its origins which make clear the vampire's cultural specificity as a creature of the Black Atlantic. In her book *Black Atlantic Speculative Fiction*, Ingrid Thaler echoes this argument that the vampires of *The Gilda Stories* are emblematic of Black subject positions within the transatlantic world. She sees vampirism as producing a "Third Space of in-betweenness" (61) which demonstrates the co-construction of Afro and European literary traditions, noting that the novel reads "the vampire and the black female (ex-)slave as nineteenth-century nonsynchronic tropes… It

highlights the similarities between the speculative trope of the vampire and the subject of the slave narrative" (62). Thaler locates these similarities in the texts' non-linear approach to time and interest in movement and relocation as central to experiences of both Blackness and modernity. Thinking with Anatol and Thaler, I want to consider the way that the Gomez's vampires offer a material manifestation of the condition of living in the wake of slavery and provide a distinctly transatlantic vision for the future rooted in a Black female embodiment that both contains and circulates the racist wounds of American history.

Despite my conviction that the vampire does essential and particular work for Black embodiment, I found myself reluctant to step into the over-determined world of the vampire: they're are almost too obvious a trope, too predictable a horrified. Vampires intermingle your blood with theirs, disrupt the boundaries of bodies as well as the sacred delineation between the living and the dead, embodying horrifyingly liminal states and making the human body's vulnerabilities all too clear. There's something indefatigably attractive about the vampire, and we seem to go through cyclical societal infatuations with vampires: Stoker's *Dracula*, published just as the twentieth century was beginning; and then Nosferatu, perhaps the first horror film; blaxploitation films like *Ganja and Hess*, or even *Queen of the Damned*; Ann Rice's *Interviews with a Vampire*; and most recently, the tween-lit *Twilight* series which kicked off a spate of supernatural romances geared at young adults. The vampire's perennial popularity might have something to do with its tremendous flexibility. It is an endlessly riffable signifier, available and attachable to all kinds of meanings. The vampire has been deployed as a metaphor for

capitalist accumulation, the rich feasting on the labor of the working class and amassing wealth without performing work; the vampire is also a symbol for an (often racialized) underclass leeching off capitalism's productivity. The vampire is male power depleting and deflowering femininity; the vampire is also feminized, associated with darkness and mysterious powers of seduction, clinging on to more vital forms of life for its existence—the vampire's body is distilled need. The vampire also feminizes its victims by making them into bodies that provide sustenance—one of the most indelible images of vampiric perversion is a vampire suckling blood from its victim's breast in a distorted mother and child tableau. Shannon Winnubst identifies the vampire's power in precisely this resistance to firm categorization and fixture through knowledge: "The vampire is thus neither subject nor Other. The vampire, that crosser of boundaries extraordinaire, is forever haunting because he is forever beyond the grasp of straight white male subjectivity. The vampire infects his blood, alters his spirit and—damned most of all—exceeded his concepts. And exceeding them, he always carries the power to expose them, to expose them and their anxieties—about blood, about boundaries, about kinship and purity and control, about the racing of sex and the sexing of race" (9). The vampire is thus perhaps the ultimate figure of horror, lurking in a space of abject liminality and endlessly shifting shape to avoid capture.

Try as I might to evade the vampire, it's exposing my anxieties too: that I'm treading familiar cultural ground, exposing my own shameful seduction by the this tried-and-true version of horror. But the combination of blood rupturing bodily boundaries, the implication of miscegenation, and the power and dangers of circulation that Winnubst

identifies as the vampire's semiotic power which exceeds control by established knowledge systems is an essential ingredient in thinking through the particularities of the legacy of slavery, that very American horror. The vampire's power to horrify comes not only from its ability to supersede the skin envelope, but particularly from this promiscuous circulation—not only that blood leaves your body, but that it *enters someone else's and then gets passed who knows where*, an element of yourself used as a definer of racial and gendered identity that is horrific less because it has ruptured your bounds than because it continues its life beyond you. To begin to consider this question of how circulation (of information, of blood, of capital, of genetic code) inflects horror and to investigate the tensions between Gomez's conceptualization of vampirism and our canonical version of the legend, I turn to the ur-source of vampire lore in Western literature: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

As critics have been emphasizing since the 1980s, *Dracula* is remarkable among vampire novels because of its narrative innovations and its unusual investment in various writing and recording technologies. David Seed's 1985 article "Narrative Method of Dracula" spots a hole in literary criticism of the novel to that point: while much had been made of Dracula's psycho-sexual significance, not many readers were paying close attention to the way that narrative structure functions to reinforce the value placed on the circulation of information. The first half of the novel is composed of an accumulation of fractured accounts, which often retread the same timeline and incorporate fragments gathered from multiple sources. There is no overarching narrator uniting these fragments, and they're presented as if they've been found—we learn in the second half of the book

that the account we're reading is in fact what has been pieced together by Mina. As the novel picks up steam, uniting its heroes in one place, the narrative becomes far more linear, what Franco Moretti terms a collective narration that no longer differentiates much between the idiosyncrasies of narrative voice. The breakthrough that allows for this narrative smoothing is Mina's insistence on putting the various accounts of events in order, and on typing them up and making copies: "In this matter dates are everything, and I think if we get all our material ready, and have every item put in chronological order, we have done much" (224). The driving force of good in this novel is not so much daring or moral certainty but modern bureaucratic organizational techniques which allow information to be processed quickly and put into like forms.

Van Helsing lavishes Mina's letter writing with praise, declaring that through her words alone he understand that she is "one of God's women fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egoist…" (188). There is direct correspondence between the written word and truth in this novel, and Mina is a conduit of truth through her mastery of contemporary communication techniques and her facility at expediting the circulation of information. Lucy and Mina are established as foils at every turn—where Lucy is blonde and voluptuous, Mina is dark and petite. Where Lucy is careless in her spelling and her communications, Mina is precise. Unsurprisingly, these Manichean tropes are extend to the descriptions of their embodiment—where Lucy is body, Mina is mind. Lucy's three suitors fight for supremacy in their control of her prized body, vying for the opportunity of physical intimacy through literally sharing

blood with her to revive her after vampire attacks. Through the exchange of blood, the men are united and form a more overtly homoerotic bond, their blood mixing in a level of bodily contact made acceptably heteronormative only through Lucy's presence. Lucy is implicitly coded as loose—she's circulated too much, and the circulation is material, fleshy. Unlike Lucy, whose body is both too known and rendered unknowable through her unmappable nighttime wanderings and her unrecorded, unwritten trysts with Dracula, Mina is rendered transparent through her insistent recording, her proper channeling of circulation in its disembodied, bloodless form. Ultimately, her feminine excellence surpasses even Lucy's clear desirability because of her status as a tool for accessing truth.

Mina is a medium for men's emotions and needs, a recording tool in her own right. We see this not only through her literal function as a secretary, but through her position as a translator or external processing drive for men's emotional discovery. "I suppose there is something in woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood," Mina reflects (229). Lord Godalming proceeds to unburden himself of his feelings as Mina sits with his sobbing head resting on her bosom and she comforts him as if he were her child. She functions as a source of maternal comfort but also as a conduit for his own understanding of himself:

> He told me that for days and nights past – weary days and sleepless nights – he had been unable to speak with anyone, as a man must speak in his time of sorrow. There was no woman whose sympathy could be given to him… "I know now how I suffered," he said, as he dried his eyes, "but I do not know even yet – and none

> other can ever know – how much your sweet sympathy has been to me to-day. I shall know better in time; and believe me that, though I am not ungrateful now, my gratitude will grow with my understanding." 230

It is through her passive presence that Godalming can translate his own emotional response into understanding, a process which apparently only a woman like Mina can facilitate. Quincey Morris reinforces this notion of Mina as emotional code-breaker when he declares that "no one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart" (231). Mina's memory seems preternaturally excellent and activated through dint of will: "Jonathan's friend on the Exeter News told him that memory was everything in such work – that you must be able to put down exactly almost every world spoken, even if you had to refine some of it afterwards. Here was a rare interview; I shall try to record it *verbatim*" (181). We are asked to understand Mina as a recording technology herself, capable of rendering truth through her shorthand. In a moment that unites the image of Mina as recording technology and Mina as emotional processing system, Mina's embodied experience of listening to Dr. Seward's phonograph diary allows her to translate the unruly body into the crisp truth of the written word: "That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to almighty God. No one must hear them spoken ever again! See, I have tried to be useful. I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did" (222). Mina can take the beating of a heart and render it information; it's almost as if she is more machine than the "cruel" phonograph who can tell her of Seward's sorrow. By the conclusion of the novel, her

transformation is complete: her function is reduced to acting as an antenna for Dracula, confirming his whereabouts through her increasingly staticky telepathic connection to him.

Mina's personification of the freedom of information and knowledge stands in direct contrast to the anxiety about the multiplicity of Dracula's body and the horror of his literal insertion into circulatory systems. Her goodness is predicated on her ability to take the complex and reduce it to the understandable, to make what is multiple singular through the circulation of information, and the novel insistently emphasizes the value of complete transparency between each of the vampire hunters, merging them into one mind and combining their shared talents into one vampire-fighting entity. The unified powers of good are in the inverse of the central horrified body of the novel, one of multiplicity, excess, and unmappable boundary crossing. This is most evident, perhaps, in the way that Dracula can shape shift, and particularly, the way his mass can multiply into a cloud of bats, a proliferation of sewer rats, a pack of wolves. It's an external confirmation of the horror of his hybrid body, composed of many lives, the blood of many uneasily united in his veins. His fraternity with the wolves in the Carpathians once again calls to mind Deleuze and Guattari's critique of Freud's misreading of the Wolf Man and their use of the wolf as a symbol for becoming-multiple, becoming-animal, and rejecting the bounded individuality of the modernist subject. In this sense, Dracula's horror and his seductive possibility lies in much the same multiplicity and rejection of singular boundedness and heteronormative time that frees Robin from her misery.

But the novel vacillates on Dracula's relationship to circulation—he seems to be horrific in both his stasis (he's a corpse, he interrupts natural blood flow, he lives insistently in the pre-modern era) and in his proliferation and movement (he can be multiple, he infects the present with the past, he moves across space too fast). Franco Moretti's reading of Dracula as pure capital, accumulation in its most illogical and feudal form, exemplifies this tension about the value of circulation in the novel. Moretti's description of Dracula's stubborn refusal to circulate is initially persuasive: Dracula acts in utter isolation and refuses to engage with modern forms of wage labor which would disseminate capital, his castle hides piles of gold accumulated through centuries of life, and the image of capital itself surging back to life and re-animating an increasingly monopolistic form of economic control as the twentieth century dawns is certainly enticing from a metaphorical standpoint. Reading Marx alongside Freud to consider the libidinal echoes in the way we think about capital and the inextricability of economies of desire and economies of capital further nuance his claims. I take issue with some of his assertions (Dracula doesn't employ servants in his house, but he certainly is willing to compensate earth-movers, for instance), but what's most intriguing and important about Moretti's claim is that it rests on ideas about circulation or the lack thereof. Dracula's great crime, in the eyes of bourgeois Englishmen, is his resistance to the circulation of money, the way he siphons capital to the grave instead of keeping it in motion. But Dracula's monstrosity is based on his unnatural interruption and redirection of the circulatory system. He feeds off the blood of others, subsuming their life into his own interminable one—but he also redistributes his blood, creating strange, promiscuous

linkages between bodies and disrupting the sacrosanct individualism that Moretti argues Dracula personifies. At the crux of almost any reading of *Dracula* is this ambivalence about circulation and its role in the novel. Is it to be desired? Is it the balm that renders Dracula impotent, as the circulation of knowledge between the cast of vampire hunters would suggest? Is the circulation of bodies emphasized by the speed of train travel, the easy internationalism of Quincey Morris and Dr. Van Helsing, something to be celebrated? Or is it to be reviled, as this slippery transgression of national boundaries is what allows Dracula to infiltrate England?

This narrative and critical ambivalence about the significance of circulation in its many guises echoes contemporary conversations about the problems of embracing circulation as the antidote to accumulative capitalism and insatiable greed. The dangers of emphasizing flow and the disruption of boundaries as an undisputed net good has been soundly critiqued for seeming to endorse free market capitalism and the troubling logics of endless exchange which divorce material reality from value—all that's solid melts into air. Circulation and multiplicity-based programs for freedom can smack of a naïve 1990s vision of the globalizing world, with much misplaced hope that cultural exchange could produce justice without attention to the material realities of capitalist accumulation and alienation that make mutuality impossible.[81] As Stoker's *Dracula* indicates, circulation and our relationship to it is a vital facet of modernist embodiment. To what degree may

[81] This is the logic behind a materialist critique of Gilroy: illuminating the ways that the Atlantic is a space of a cultural circulation as well as the exchange of capital does little to remedy the core economic inequities which are the direct result of the slave trade. Critical conversations about the terms circulation and flow provoke a similar argument—to uncritically celebrate circulation would be to bolster neoliberal capitalism's fetishization of the free market and to elide many of the violent means of enforcing circulation (of goods, people, and blood) in the name of an amorphous 'greater good'; to demonize it would be to buy into dangerous isolationism and hyper-individualism.

we be porous and open? Where are the benefits, and where the terrifying limits, of the circulation of information, peoples, blood?

Gomez's vampire world is likewise built on the vital importance of circulation, but she reclaims its horrifying powers of circulation by emphasizing its materiality, making the process of taking blood an exchange with lasting consequences for both vampire and human rather than an exclusively extractive process: the cardinal rule for vampires is to always leave something in return for blood they take, a realization as simple as a direction to pursue, a jolt of confidence, or a new outlook on a relationship. Vampires are deeply aware of the histories and legacies of the blood they've taken, that they are made material through the lifeforce and memories that once sustained the people with whom they "share the blood." This agential becoming through the blood of others implies that the vampire body is an engine for the recombination of history, an experiment in performing embodiment anew by hacking the circulatory system. The material consequences of circulation are first introduced through setting. The novel begins in New Orleans, a city sometimes thought of as the northern tip of the Caribbean rather than the southern reaches of the United States, and a space that instantly conjures images of mixing, creole culture, and possibility for the disruption of hierarchy. Its associations with the folk traditions of the Caribbean and as a seat of voodoo practice in American culture are certainly on Gomez's mind as well; she's consciously rooting her vampire lore in the traditions of the soucouyant which Anatol details so thoroughly. And Gilda Sr. runs a brothel, which does further work in establishing the thematization of

circulation, exchange, transference, and reproduction, magnifying associations with New Orleans as a site of exchange and inversion.

Similarly, performance theorist Joseph Roach's 1996 book *Cities of the Dead* centers New Orleans a site of intensified kinetic, embodied memory for the practices that have shaped the circum-Atlantic world. He locates specific spaces within the cityscape as performative vortices, akin to Bakhtin's concept of ludic spaces of the carnivalesque, but with addition of the idea that the historical practices that have created circum-Atlantic culture are not passive, dead, and observable from a distance but alive and negotiable in our bodies. The circum-Atlantic is most visible in our embodied responses to these performative vortices, and Roach identifies cemeteries, marketplaces, and red-light districts as exemplary sites of "spatially induced carnival" (Roach 28) that allow us to encounter our performances of culture most obviously—precisely the spaces that Gomez accesses through Gilda. In an important departure from the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, Roach is careful to emphasize that New Orleans is not a place of exception where our inversions are tolerated and purged, but a codification of cultural practices that are central to our performance of everyday life. "Cities of the dead are primarily for the living," he claims. "They exist not only as artifacts, such as cemeteries and commemorative landmarks, but also as behaviors" (xiii), centering quotidian interaction and embodied performance as the key to unearthing the histories of these circulatory spaces: "[the circum-Atlantic] economic and cultural system entailed vast movements of people and commodities to experimental destinations, the consequences of which continue to visit themselves upon the material and human fabric of the cities inhabited by their successors.

As the most visible evidence of an oceanic interculture…performance reveals what it means to live through memory in cities of the dead" (xi-xii).

Gomez's text literalizes Roach's idea that "the voices of the dead may speak freely now only through the bodies of the living" (xiii)—the blood of generations flows through Gilda's body as she becomes an amalgamation of these voices of the dead, blurring the boundaries between the living and the dead through her own undead embodiment. Furthermore, Gilda's entire existence plays out in these transitory ludic spaces or performative vortices: she's like a walking funeral rite, perpetually re-enacting burial and birth with each sunrise; she has been a commodified product of these marketplaces that determine subjecthood and objecthood; and she makes her home in a red-light district, a space where circulation and exchange are manifested physically. In fact, Gilda's vampiric embodiment is circum-Atlantic performance—it's a citational, recapitulating practice of materialization that incorporates all the horrifying histories of our collective past.[82] The agency in performance—the capture and recombination, the process of disidentification which José Muñoz so helpfully introduced in performance studies vocabulary—is part of what makes the vampire such a powerful figure for

[82] Foundational performance theorist Richard Schechner defined performance as "twice-behaved behavior" or restored behavior, attempting to capture what makes mimesis and how performance is distinct from action. This definition has been challenged as people grapple with what "twice-behaved" means for agency, choice, and creativity—can something be performed the same way twice? Isn't variation part of what we value about live performance? How does mimetic practice evolve? Many theorists have built on Schechner's basic framework, but José Muñoz and his work on disidentification has perhaps traveled best beyond the bounds of performance studies. Muñoz uses drag and other forms of queer performance to think about the way performances of gender are processes of disidentification, restored behavior with essential differences that both allude to and transform the action's original meaning. These imperfect restorations intervene on the circulation of signification and allow subject formation through simultaneous embrace and rejection of all that has come before—hyperfemme drag personas that demonstrate the ludicrous constructedness of the feminine while accurately reproducing its tropes, or blackface performances by Black performers which recapture the performance of Blackness for Black people.

Gomez. This is wake work, as Christina Sharpe terms it, the process of building life within and through the shadow of slavery, feeding on and re-combining the history we've made, transforming it through the substance of your body.

The substance of a body—what constitutes its recognition, makes a person come to matter as human, and how we codify and define the boundaries of monstrosity—is necessarily at the center of a novel which opens with a scene of vampiric transformation. One of the few memories Gilda can recall of her life on a plantation with her mother is the answer to her question about white folks being unable to differentiate between lard and butter: "'They ain't been here long 'nough. They just barely human. Maybe not even. They suck up the world, don't taste it"' (11). Her mother casts whiteness as vampiric, sucking up the world and its resources without even noticing or caring. White people, who have spent so much energy differentiating between people and creating hierarchies of humanity, cannot even distinguish the taste of butter from pure animal fat on their morning pancakes. This vision of who and what is vampiric also flips the timeline of horror: sucking up the world is a function of immaturity, vampiric greed a marker of not being on earth long enough rather than being embodied for an unnaturally long time.

This memory comes to Girl as she is struggling against her rapist, an unnamed white man who recognizes her vulnerability when he discovers her in a barn as she runs from the plantation in Mississippi. The novel begins with this traumatic event, wasting no time plunging its readers into a space of terror where the rules of time and the boundaries of the body are edging into liminal space. Gomez writes a third person omniscience that dares to hew closely to the rapist's consciousness, describing how he misinterprets her

initial acquiescence and the fire in her eyes as desire. In fact, her eyes are "seeing into both the past and the future" as she realizes what's about to happen to her, connected across time by the long history and continued inevitability of rape in a patriarchal world well before her vampirism literalizes her timelessness. Just as her relationship to time is expansive, Girl's body shape shifts: "He started to enter her, but before his hand finished pulling her open, while it still tingled with the softness of her insides, she entered him with her heart which was now a wood-handled knife" (11). Gomez does not turn to metaphor but asks her reader to follow this transformation: the engine of Girl's horrified body becomes knife and kills its attacker. As she lies pinned beneath his weight, the blood draining from his body, she names the bloodbath a rebirth: "It was like the first time her mother had been able to give her a real bath… Now the blood washing slowly down her breastbone and soaking into the floor below was like that bath—a cleansing… Looking down at the blood soaking her shirt and trousers she felt no disgust" (12). The clear womb imagery of her mother bathing her in warm water and the fact that the blood holds no fear for her marks this rape as the moment of horrification, the actual moment of birth into monstrosity long before her transformation into a vampire. Gomez describes the way trauma makes us shake, blurs the edges of reality: "The Girl held the slippery wood of the knife in her hand as he body began to shake in the dream/memory. She sobbed, trying to understand what she should do next. How to hide the blood and still move on" (12). That final clause—how to hide the blood and still move on—is something of a catalyst for the novel and for the utopic vision of vampirism. Who says you always

have to hide the blood? What if you can acknowledge the blood, and still move on? What if you can embrace horrification as the first step of creating embodiment anew?

Girl is woken from her dream/memory, covered in blood, by Gilda, who is a whole lot of new embodiment all at once. Gilda can speak to Girl without speaking, upending everything Girl thinks she understands: "She had heard of people who could talk without speaking but never expected a white to be able to do it. This one was a puzzlement to her: the dark eyes and pale skin. Her face was painted in colors like a mask, but she wore men's breeches and a heavy jacket. Gilda moved in her small-boned frame like a team of horses pulling a load on a sodden road: gentle and relentless" (13). Gilda, who is later described as Creole, is a jumble of signifiers, made up but masculine, appearing white but containing a kind of magic Girl associates only with Blackness. She is multitudinous, muddled, seeming to house many souls within her small stature. In an echo of Spillers, Gilda's consistently indeterminate gender is key in the Girl's entre into the horrified world, a space where gender still signifies but is differently constructed than anything Girl has encountered before, or even anything her mother might know or understand: "The Girl thought for a moment: *This is a man! A little man!* Gilda laughed out loud at the idea in the Girl's head and said, 'No, I'm a woman.' Then without speaking aloud she said, *I am a woman, you know that. And you know I am a woman as no other you have known, nor has your mother known, in life or death. I am a woman as you are, and more*" (16). Just as gender is dislocated, so too is time: "But behind the dark brown of Gilda's eyes the Girl recognized forests, ancient roots and arrows, images she had never seen before" (16). Like the structures for embodiment discussed in the previous

two chapters of this dissertation, the horrified body is unmoored from time, its material expansiveness necessitating temporal dislocation. In Gilda's literally horrific body, we understand (though Girl does not yet) that this temporal multiplicity is the result of the many centuries of blood that flow through her veins. Girl's first encounter with Gilda inaugurates an experience of the horrified body, awakening her into a world suffused with blood where a creature like Gilda is possible. Though the moment of her transformation into a vampire won't come for years, Gilda's discovery of Girl lying in a pool of her attempted rapist's blood is a symbolic rebirth into a horrified embodiment that Gilda personifies.

Vampiric motherhood transcends biological reproduction and requires that new vampires pass through death en route to rebirth; this troubling of motherhood echoes and answers Spillers' argument about the impossibility of motherhood for Black women marked by the legacy of the Middle Passage. In her analysis of Moynihan, Spillers identifies that his anxiety about Black motherhood and its inadequacy stems both from its historical impossibility—it is incommensurable to be both enslaved and in possession of your own children—and from the way that the (enforced) absence of the figure of the Black father leaves the spectre of Black mother's sexuality floating like a free radical, ready to attach improperly to male children. "The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the *mother*, *handed* by her in ways that he cannot escape," Spillers writes, echoing the sticky mother-mark Moynihan fears in her own language (79).[83]

[83] I'm reminded again of Ahmed's description of disgust as a horrified recoiling from something that's sticky—Moynihan is disgusted, horrified by the fact of Black femininity and the possibility that it might stick inappropriately to men.

Gomez relishes this confusion, using vampirism to encode and embrace the Black maternal. Gilda's line is exclusively matrilineal—she even takes her "mother's" name, legitimizing the matriarchy that Spillers so rightly points out is an impossibility (though a convenient bogeyman) under American legacies of slavery.

In a particularly radical move, Gomez does not seek to excise the spectre of sexuality from motherly relations but incorporates the erotic into her formation of family. Gilda's initiation as a vampire introduces us to the erotics of vampiric motherhood. The Girl "curled her long body in Gilda's lap like a child safe in her mother's arms" before Gilda makes an incision in her chest and holds Girl's head to it, commanding her "Now you must drink" and referring to Girl as "suckling" (46). Gilda dies her final death, leaving the completion of the transformation to Bird so that Girl is "biologically" both of their children, the product of their shared blood. The second description of suckling complicates the mother and child dynamic by recalling Bird and Gilda's sexual relationship and Bird's mourning of her lover: "Bird stood tense, her body a bronze rod, dull and aching, her full length of flesh and hair calling out for hours… In her ear was the soft sigh of pleasure she recognized from many mornings of their past together, the low whisper of her name, then silence. She knew the knife-edged sun rays stripped the flesh from Gilda's bones. The heat seared through Bird, lightning on the skin and in her marrow. Then, like the gradual receding of menstrual pain, Bird's muscles slackened and her breathing slowed" (48). Bird's mourning is physical, her body described as taut and aching, and the release she achieves is in her lovers' sigh and localized in her reproductive organs, likened to menstrual pain. Bird's blood exchange with Gilda

functions both as a birth and an erotic transference: “She made a small incision beneath the right [breast] and pressed the Girl’s mouth to it. The throbbing in her chest because synchronous with the Girl’s breathing… Bird repeated the exchange, taking from her as Gilda had done and returning the blood to complete the process. She finally lay her head back on the pillows, holding the Girl in her arms, and rested. Their breathing and heartbeats sounded as one for an hour or more before their bodies again found their own rhythms” (49). Their syncing of their breath and heartrates and the time it takes for their bodies to return to autonomy feels distinctly sexual. In full acknowledgement of this erotic transference, Girl is renamed Gilda, taking the place of Bird’s lover (and vampiric mother) nominally even as she also becomes Bird’s symbolic daughter.

This blurring between mother and lover is much more explicit when Bird and Gilda meet again a century later. I quote at length from their encounter because it feels so central to Gomez’s project about the vital importance of the erotic for materializing embodiment anew:

> The soft touch of Bird’s hand on her brow felt, for a moment, as if it were her mother’s. Bird then stroked her neck, slipping softly to her back and rubbing the tender spot just below the hairline where the nerves came together, sparking a tingle inside her thighs… Gilda’s was a full body, and Bird was enthralled by the reality of it. She sliced beneath the right breast and watched, through the thick darkness, the blood which stood even thicker against Gilda’s dark skin. She hungrily drew the life through her parted lips into her body. This was a desire not unlike their need for the blood, but she had already had her share. It was not

> unlike but less single-minded. She felt the love almost as motherly affection, yet there was more. As the blood flowed from Gilda's body into Bird's, they both understood the need—it was for completion… The present no longer existed: her life was a line stretched through time—humming with the wind, taut and delicate, strong and wiry…
>
> She pressed Gilda's mouth to the red slash, letting the blood wash across Gilda's face. Soon Gilda drank eagerly, filling herself, and as she did her hand massaged Bird's breast, first touching the nipple gently with curiosity, then roughly. She wanted to know this body that gave her life. Her heart welled with their blood, a tide between two shores. To an outsider the sight may have been one of horror: their faces red and shining, their eyes unfocused and black, the sound of their bodies slick with wetness, tight with life. Yet it was birth. The mother finally able to bring her child into the world, to look at her. It was not death that claimed Gilda. It was Bird. She wiped Gilda's body with a sponge, washing away the blood and sweat. She lingered over her as she would a child. She whispered sweet words to her as she might a lover. 138-140

From the initial confusion between Bird's hand and her mother's to the final lines which explicitly juxtapose the image of mother and lover, Gomez asks her reader to see the erotic in birth and the creation of family through sex: wet, slick, lifegiving, and crucially, a means of accessing something atemporal and nonlinear. Like the characters of *Nightwood*, the vampires seek the horrification of heteronormative timelines, but unlike Barnes, Gomez reincorporates the possibility of motherhood and claims the possibility of

reproduction for homosexual sex. By acknowledging the beautiful horror of wanting to "know this body that gave her life," Gomez locates a version of motherhood that refuses to demonize or bracket sexuality.

Gomez is explicit about her debt to Audre Lorde's ideas in "Uses of the Erotic," a treatise which insists on the productive and essential nature of erotic energy in creation and interrelation. Lorde writes: "To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a Kleenex. And when we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us." Gomez transforms this central insight about sharing and makes it a cornerstone of Gilda's vampirism—vampires always refer to "sharing the blood" and not to taking, and they feel with the people who nourish them. To suck someone's blood is to participate in an experience with them, not to use and dispose of them. Lorde sees the condemnation of erotic energy as a tool for keeping women disconnected from each other and from the extent of their power: "Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex." Gomez literalizes this danger of the erotically charged, relationally aware women as a monster, identifying the vampire as a projection of the fear of the power of the erotic to forge new structures of feeling and experiences of interconnected embodiment. Lorde argues that reclaiming the embodied power of the erotic "within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama." It's as if Gomez took Lorde's challenge to recast the tired stories our culture tells

about sex, miscegenation, and the horror of bodily exchange and invented Gilda, a model for genuine change in erotic, dangerous, vampiric form.

When Gilda herself welcomes a new member into their vampire family, the relationship between erotic energy and becoming-vampire is completely transparent. Her first taste of Julius, who will become her brother/son, is almost fit for the pages of a (heterosexual) romance novel: "She ran her hand across his body making his flesh tingle. Julius held her tightly, his lips seeking hers. His body responded as a man's, and she lay across his lean thighs and chest providing a comforting sensation... As the moment approached when his mind provided the gratification his body hungered for, she sliced across the flesh of his neck with her fingernail and watched the blood ease slowly to the surface. She pressed her lips eagerly to the wound and drew the life from him as his body exploded with the joy of his imagination" (178). His ejaculation coincides with her suckling in a way that makes her the receiving, submissive party even as she holds the power of everlasting life. Lest her relationship to Julius be read as conventionally heterosexual or playing into expected fantasies of vampiric transgression, Julius' final transformation returns to the image of Gilda as mother and as agential sex partner:

> Gilda stopped, bit her own tongue, and kissed him hard, breaking the skin inside his lip. She thrust her tongue into his mouth. He took back his blood, now mixed with hers, gagging on its sweet texture. Gilda pulled back again—two times more—to draw the blood from the wound in his neck. Each time she took him closer to the edge of life, letting Julius feel that perimeter and the abyss beyond it. She drew out his life and wait for him to make a sign of protest… But he only

> opened wider for her… Gilda pulled her shirt from her chest and sliced an opening below her breast. She pressed Julius to her, waiting to feel the power of his mouth taking in the life she offered. He began to suck at the blood insistently, finally understanding the power that moved between them. Electricity surged through him. His head pounded, blocking out all thought until he heard Gilda speaking inside of him. 192

Here, Gilda is the penetrator, breaking his skin, thrusting her tongue, controlling his experience of the coming abyss which is both death and orgasm. He opens wider to welcome this, and then understands that he must suckle, initiating his ability to share her thoughts and fully cross the boundaries between himself and others. Julius is brother, lover, child all at once, a queer reimagining of family relationships which does not eschew the power of the erotic as an agent of mutuality and care.

In a satisfying riposte to *Dracula's* insistence on maintaining firm antagonism between mind and body, the vampires' fleshy carnality is inseparable from their mental flexibility and prowess; the horrified body becomes a tool of communication in and of itself, a literalization of the concept of body language that emphasizes modes of knowing in and through embodiment. Where the heroes of *Dracula* seek to contain the horrifying body and ensure that their own bodies do not become horrified through a fortress of words and transparent, modern communication techniques, Gilda and her kind communicate through their bodies, embracing the telepathic connection that seems an easy extension of the exchange of blood. There is no distinction between bodily and mental comingling. Gilda even tries her hand at being an author after her first century and

a half of life, living with another vampire in New Hampshire and writing under the pen name Abby Bird, in homage to her mother and mentor. She writes romance novels—novels of the flesh, you might say, novels designed to get the blood pumping—because "it was one of the few forms of literature the populace still followed" (219). In Gomez's version of 2020, she guesses that the *New York Times* folded a decade before (not quite, but prescient about the collapse of journalism and our 'post-truth' moment) and the world in the midst of a climate crisis (spot on, except she presumes we've done more to avert it). In addition to being a means of connecting people to their bodies, writing romance novels is a way for Gilda to connect with fans and create community. Gomez's construction of Abby Bird's fanbase accurately anticipates the importance of fan culture, its domination by femme folks, and fandom's intimate relationship with erotica. While Abby Bird is a recluse who communicates with her audience only through electronic means, she is once again creating intimate space for women based in and through the body.

Moreover, Gilda sees her writing as way of keeping the past alive, her work an extension of her own experience and embodiment. "Having conspired to forget their pasts," Gomez writes of the Americans of 2020, "the generations plowed ahead at top speed to some mythical future as if the wild west existed in the stars. Gilda had written the stories of their history, cloaking it in adventure and mysticism, and they sold" (220). In her use of "wild west," Gomez encapsulates the genocidal settler-colonial roots of American expansion, condemning us to repeat that history even as we venture beyond the earth if we do not learn to acknowledge the history we carry in our bodies. But Abby

Bird's cover is finally blown, and she recognizes that words will not be enough, not to help suture "the nation around [her that] is dissolving" (229). As she leaves her writing life, she "looked at thing being left behind, touched surfaces as if memories might be absorbed through her fingertips" (230). As she decides where to venture next, to the north or to the south, she decides south is necessary, even as contact with that space frightens her: "Touching this part of her past, even briefly, would help her go forward" (231). The memories of a dear home now housed in her body, she needs to touch a place that is also a time; writing isn't sufficient anymore to the weight of history. In a reversal of *Dracula*'s hierarchy, the body will discover what words cannot. The horrified body alone can hope to combat the dissolution of the United States and the end of the world as we know it, knowing literally in its veins what an imperial attitude towards future worlds will manifest.

As Gilda discovers, all the glorious horrification of bodies, all the promiscuous circulation and exchange of fluids can't overcome the inevitability of environmental collapse, the effects of greed and unfettered capitalism on the planet. In a disturbingly prescient description of the temporal crisis that comes with climate disaster, Gomez writes: "This horror was slavery come again. The psychological impact of having no distant future to contemplate was staggering. People had grown restless and impatient with themselves, then surly and ruthless. Finally, they had discovered the existence of the Vampire… the full transfusion of their blood gave eternal life to the hungry rich, who now sent out the Hunters to capture them" (235). She is very clear about the dangers of circulation in an American cultural context, its inevitable commodification and capture

by capital—no naïve embrace of flows, lines of flight, or communitarian erotics can stave off this disaster. In the year 2050, the earth has been destroyed so thoroughly by extractive capitalism that everyone who can is escaping "off-world," and Gilda is hiding in a network of caves to escape detection. She despairs that nothing has been learned in the past two centuries, that even the powers of horrification are commodifiable in a world that has doubled down on carceral capitalism. The logics of slavery, its presumption that labor should be extracted at the least possible cost to produce wealth for the few, has never ceased to circulate. If anything, the hierarchies of the human which Gilda and her vampire kin sought to disrupt and complicate have been hardened—now humans can distance themselves from the earth that defined them by taking a rocket to another planet, literally positioning themselves above the rest.

Despite this depressingly accurate vision of the future, the novel doesn't end with hopelessness. The key to futurity is to fully embrace monstrosity and reject the fatal flaws of the human. Gilda's "time was spent learning to be more than human. She saw more deeply into life, further into the past and through lies. But the future was as much a mystery to her as to anyone—a delicious reason for being, she thought" (243). Gomez fully articulates her vision for the "more than human" in the final few pages of the novel. Gilda, who has spent the first two hundred years of her infinite lifetime learning to be among humans, recognizes the limitations of the category that is based so irrevocably in notions of modernity that grants humanity only tenuously and to certain bodies. She spends time learning to embrace horrification, coming to terms with her always-already horrified existence in the wake of the intersecting violences of slavery and gender. Gilda

never really was human, as Gilda Sr. seems to realize implicitly, and it takes her the better part of two centuries to allow horror to be her strength.

Her full embrace of her horrified body is cemented through an act of creation. Gilda has been deeply hesitant to use her powers of horror, but in her acceptance that more-than-human is the only way of accessing futurity, she acts decisively when she comes across Ermis, a brown woman like herself who has attempted suicide because she was "unloved in a dying and unloving world" (247). Sensing a spark of hope left in Ermis, she shares the blood with her, making her part of the vampire family and leading her on a journey out of the United States to find Julius, Bird, and the others in South America. This act of transformation confirms the theories that Gilda has been slowly building for herself: becoming more-than-human is life-saving and being willing to horrify the body in fact preserves it, granting belonging and love once it's free of its human boundaries. With Ermis at her side and her new dedication to being more-than-human, Gilda has the strength the leave the country she has always called home, a space that felt so core to her being that she could not previously imagine leaving it behind. Like her willingness to leave the human behind, she finds that the nation-state no longer holds much meaning, and is just another border to be transgressed in search of relationality: "Once all of them were together," Gilda knows, "they would plan a future much different from the one envisioned by the Government" (242). As they trek south through Mexico, in a reversal of the migrations from central America that are so demonized today, we learn that Panama has become part of Mexico; national boundaries, like the boundaries of the human, are malleable and ultimately disposable.

The novel ends with a declaration at once hopeful and depressingly meagre: "Gilda was no longer fleeing for her life" (252). She is, in fact, fleeing, and she isn't, in fact, alive—but in the circum-Atlantic world inexorably shaped by the legacies of the Middle Passage, escaping toward family and not merely away from disaster and trading human life for an acknowledgment of her inescapable extra-humanity and the omnipresence of death for Black bodies is Gilda's greatest triumph. In her preface to the 25th anniversary edition, Gomez writes that "we must learn how to break through the surface, find the deep dangerous place where blood flows without hurting one other, and share all that we know and love in order to survive" (xiii). Gilda has learned this lesson, and it has set her free from the pursuit of the impossible: life, at least as lived through the exclusionary violence of the Human Body. Horrified and horrifying, her vampire embodiment inhabits this deep and dangerous place of flow and circulation, breaking through the skin's surface with all its hieroglyphics of hurt to fashion a self that knows through loving, through sensual exchange, and through circulating the wounds of the past, diffusing their power by sharing their pain and reincorporating their truth as she creates the future. Gilda knows that blood and flesh are not states of irredeemable abjection but the essential repertoire in her more-than-human performance of relational embodiment.

Of the structures of embodiment this project articulates, the horrified body offers most explicit access to what Tavia N'yongo calls "dark time, deep time" through its circulation of blood and of knowledge, its alternate logics of reproduction. As Gomez emphasizes through Gilda's embodiment of circum-Atlantic visceral memory, attending

to horrified bodies is essential in avoiding the cyclical repetition of our histories of imperial expansion and disregard for non-human life. Like Gilda, Robin and Matthew and the rest of their monstrously queer Parisian coterie sense that horrification—of language, of body, of order—is essential for transforming a world reeling from the cancer of European imperialism, teetering on the brink of worldwide war and genocide. Robin yearns for the kind of vampiric embodiment that Gilda embraces, seeking intimacies that result not in the reproduction of bodies but in the possibility to access enfleshment-otherwise and upend the temporal divisions that disguise history as harmless and defunct. As Gilda suckles at her mother's neck, Robin too makes her mouth into a machine of circulation and a site for the performance of history by becoming "eaten death returning," becoming-dog. Through these texts, we find an articulation of embodiment that shows us the power of the liminal, shuddering body-in-becoming, the material wisdom accessible through an embrace of the horrified.

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