A Sensuous Melancholia: A Structured Feeling

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Dedication

Dedicated to and in memory of Roman Christian Castillo. I'll carry you forever.

Dedicated to and in memory of Florence Forrest. May I embody your wit.

Acknowledgements

This project has taken years longer than intended which is also to say I have had the privilege to meet and know so many more who have made this possible.

I have been lucky to have so many faculty guide me and this project over the years. Jen Nash entered my life in August of 2014. Hers was the first graduate seminar I took and before classes even started she assigned Depression: A Public Feeling and I thought it was fitting. The significance of Jen's Theory and Emotions graduate seminar, and my subsequent coursework with her, can't be understated for this project. The course took up the affective turn from a Black feminist perspective that moved from Patricia J William's Alchemy of Race and Rights, Saidiya Hartman's Lose Your Mother, and Lisa Mari Cacho's Social Death to Deborah Gound's Moving Politics, José Esteban Muñoz's Cruising Utopia, and Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" and The Cancer Journals. In sharing her notes from our class on melancholia, Jen offered generative grounding and the specific grammatical/syntactical configuration of the epigraph for this project's introduction and in italics no less. It was Jen's feedback on that first response paper that signaled that this was where I belonged. Robert McRuer has served as my primary advisor for years and it is his thinking, in meetings, through his written work, and elsewhere, that has given me the aspirations required to complete this project. In early moments it was hearing Robert's thinking aloud that affirmed my own. I arrived at GW knowing my interest in the body because how could queerness be possible if not enacted through the body? I would come to find that I had been unknowingly following a path Robert had paved and continue finding myself on that path. I would not have applied to the Department of English if it were not for David Mitchell's encouragement and early

support as I tried to find my writerly voice and navigate a field I would come to call home, disability studies. His advice and guidance, whenever I received it, always pushed me to be and do more and to seize the opportunities before me. Robert and David secured me necessary time off to rest and think and rest more. For years this project was set aside, it wasn't until a meeting with Amber Musser, in what was once Jen's office, where I found this project again; where I said out loud that the only important, honest, and, maybe even, fearless thing I've ever written was what would become this project. Amber's course on affect, precarity, and queer of color critique was an intellectual revelry and her insights helped me make the connections and distinctions that would become the heart of this project. Amber's writing showed me what was possible and this project is made possible because of hers. While Manuel Cuellar joined this project late his guidance reoriented me at the time I needed it most. His support and affirmation are the reason this project has reached completion. Manuel, in such a short time, modeled everything I hope to be as a scholar. Holly Dugan's care and attention is something I can't express enough thanks for. Towards the end of this project it was her presence that helped me keep moving forward. Calvin Warren is who I credit with making me a dangerous thinker. His courses on Afropessimism and Methods would become a foundation that I still hesitantly, cautiously reside on. In our short overlapping time in the department Jeffrey J Cohen and Ayanna Thompson showed me kindness, care, and a critical eye that contributed to the earliest version of this project. Tara Wallace and Gayle Wald offered advice and aid throughout my graduate career for which I am grateful. Melani McAlister was chair of American Studies when I entered the program and offered invaluable advice, guidance, and affirmation. Chris Sten and Edlie Wong's courses

introduced me to literature that were formative to my thinking of queerness and Blackness on the page. Jonathan Hsy's course on disability and art was my first experience as a TA and it was there I taught at GW for the first time in a trying time. Before I entered the department it was Jennifer James who I met first and who showed me respect and kindness that offered early validation. In the social spaces that I find so difficult to navigate it was Jennifer that treated me like my work mattered and proceeded to introduce me to the next person she saw having only met me minutes earlier. I will always remember this early affirmation.

While at GW I have found rich friendship and comradery with Amanda Figueroa, Sara Arwatani, Theodora Danylevich, K. Tyler Christensen, Elizabeth Tevault, Rachael Nebraska Lynch, and Rachel Canter.

A deep thanks to Joshua Benson. His friendship and rigor is a reason for many good things within this project and many others. So much of my progress as a scholar was made possible because of our rigorous and deeply fun conversations. It is only in hindsight that I have begun to understand how vital Joshua was to my survival and flourishing. The next shot and a beer are on me.

There's a special appreciation I have for paperwork and Nicole Davidson did so much to ensure it all worked. Connie Kibler was simply magic.

My ability to pay my bills in the summer, afford to attend conferences, and go on critical trips to Prague and Liverpool were in no small part thanks to Jen and Tara's advice and deft navigation of GW.

My position at Georgetown, which I consider to be an intellectual home, was made possible by Theodora's generosity and aid. At Georgetown I have been supported

by and in conversation with many I am honored to call colleagues. In Women's and Gender Studies: You-me Park, April Sizemore-Barber, and Sara Collina. In Disability Studies: Jennifer Natalya Fink, Julia Watts Belser, and Quill Kukla. Libbie Rifkin and Nadia E Brown, in their roles as Directors, have offered me vital support both at the start of my time at Georgetown and now. It was Libbie who welcomed me to Georgetown the first time. I had the distinct privilege of being trusted to guide three senior capstones while at Georgetown. Thank you to Josie Mills, Rachel Harris, and Maggie Cullina for trusting me with your projects. Thanks to my many students who offered me the space to think with them.

At American University, where I have been so lucky to teach courses on material found within this project in the Department of Critical Race, Gender & Culture Studies, I offer thanks to my directors Mary Ellen Curtin and Amy Barber for all their support.

I too must thank Tanja Ajo and Leon Hilton who have been role models in how to do disability studies and be generous scholars. David Bolt welcomed me to Liverpool in what would be an experience that enabled my current trajectory.

Beyond the academy there have been many. In this time where I can't go dancing I found a place to move to music thanks to LaNae. Brynn and Matt remain my best friends through it all. Joey Enríquez is one of my dearest friends. They have been a source of deep intellectual and frank conversations at any hour. Joey's artistic work makes up the center of the third chapter and I am grateful beyond words for their abiding friendship. Meagan and Keely have been with me since just after the first start and I am ever grateful for their advice and care. There is not much to say about what it is to be siblings. What a thing to share. To my parents, I can't imagine having done this without

their unending love and support. The older I become the more I hope to be like them in so many ways. All of my degrees bear my dad's name, James Forrest. This degree is possible because of my mom, Michelle Forrest.

Abstract of Dissertation

A Sensuous Melancholia: A Structured Feeling

A Sensuous Melancholia imagines melancholia away from a pathology rooted in the mind and forges a theory of social relations which strives towards a plural selfhood with the dead to challenge the hegemony of Enlightenment thought through an alternative episteme. The project gathers a capacious archive of what I call melancholia art works spanning poetry, performance, and fine art by 20th and 21st century writers and artists centered around Black, Brown, queer, and sick imaginations. These works act as rehearsals of different and more just worlds and highlight the ways melancholia is already all around us as a structure of feeling ready to emerge.

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Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.[1]

-José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

I am proposing that melancholia for blacks, queers, or any queers of color, is not a pathology but an integral part of everyday lives.... It is this melancholia that is part if our process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians, and gay men...It is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names – and in our names.[2]

-José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications*

For me, the arrival is the moment where all the components of humanity—not just the African ones—consent to the idea that it is possible to be one and multiple at the same time; that you can be yourself and the other; that you can be the same and the different. When that battle—because it is a battle, not a military but a spiritual one—when that battle is won, a great many accidents in human history will have ended, will be abolished.[3]

-Édouard Glissant, "One World in Relation"

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[1] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York New York University Press, 2009), 1.

[2] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 74.

[3] Édouard Glissant, "One World in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," Translated by Christopher Winks, *Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28 (spring 2011): 6.

Preface: Finding a Feeling

This project has two origins. First, in 2014. Before I left California to start my Master's in American Studies at GW I meant to tell someone how much he meant to me. That I loved him. I didn't and after moving to DC he suddenly died. I was waiting in line for my GW ID when I found out via a Facebook group message. I didn't have the means to attend his service back in California. All I could do was cry and wonder how I could ever stop. Was I becoming a melancholic? I began to wonder what it might mean to melancholize, to do melancholia as a practice or a way of life. What would it be to live a life beyond myself?

Years later, I thought about making a pilgrimage of sorts to California but learned there was no grave to visit or put flowers on. His ashes are with his parents and because of my queerness visiting became untenable. How would I show up at his parents house and explain that I loved him years ago? Explain how I could love him and not say goodbye? How to explain that we held hands constantly, were bus seatmates for a year and when the bus was cold we'd share a blanket and sleep on each other, that I glowed when I smiled with him? I couldn't. I didn't know how. I still don't. One thing I did began to understand is that queer theory could not explain him nor us. It took something more. He never came out. I don't have words to describe our relationship except that we cared for one another. We discussed sexuality fleetingly late at night talking on AIM to no conclusion, because is there ever a conclusion? I can only imagine us together, imagine us queer, through something like a queer of color critique. So, this dissertation is for him and possible because of him. This is one way that I can practice my melancholia.

One way I can carry him and offer others a blueprint of how we might carry the lost with us. One way we can "consent not to being a single being."[4]

The second came June 12th, 2016. I was with my then boyfriend at LA Pride the day after the Pulse massacre and every performer and speaker talked about how proud they were of everyone. How brave we were. Pride, not grief, filled the air with Carly Rae Jepson closing things out with high flying yearning for more. She asked us to run away with her but what and who would we be running away from? Something was off. The ego of our "emotional habitus" detached so easily from this loss.[5] It was the clearest moment where homomajoritarian forces, ideology I daresay, grinded up against something I had been feeling. After this I began to find other moments, objects, and relations that made me feel the same. Some of those things comprise the repertoire for this project. There were times where these objects had been "taken as private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating" by many, at times myself, but, critically, I believe that there is at this time no "later stage" for melancholia where it has become "formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations" so I set out to offer my perspective on what I see to be a "social experience which is still in process."[6]
This project is about a way of life. In particular, it's about the life I've led in the wake of sudden and still unexplained death. This project is also about the endurance and

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[4] Édouard Glissant, "One World in Relation" quoted in Fred Moten, *Consent Not to Be a Single Being* quoted in Amber Musser, "Dysfunctional Blackness: Toward Being-with and Relational Freedom," Syndicate Network, January 20, 2021.

[5] Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 10.

[6] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

exhaustion of grief. As I reach the end I realize what a toll this has taken on me. This project is a once in a lifetime offering, may it suffice.

Introduction: Feeling Melancholia

It's sometime before the COVID-19 pandemic. I haven't really been to sleep yet and it's at least 2am. I realize that there is a piece of evidence that proves what we had was real and not just some made up story in my head or something private and unspoken. Something I could look at and know. It's a minimally designed family tree that showed the lines of care that held together a chosen family. The two of us were at the center with a line between us showing we were married and that we had a son. I remember that because of how dense the tree was it required that we, two squares, be in the middle for it to have any coherence as we were both promiscuous with our care. In many ways we were the progenitors of a family that lasted for years, a family that returned to mourn you when I could not. I can picture it almost well enough to recreate it, almost isn't enough. I am scouring Facebook and even MySpace going back nearly a decade and through hundreds of pictures posted by people I hadn't spoken to in at least that long to no avail. Hours later I'm crying realizing that it's gone or at least beyond my grasp.

For years after August of 2014 I'd been trying to create an archive that proves…something. I was in many ways hoping that once I had the archive I'll know what it can prove. But AIM no longer exists and MySpace is essentially impossible to navigate so many years later. All that I have left is a handful of photographs and having those is more luck than anything.[1] So, what was left of him? What do I do with the parts of him that are absent? How can I know anything when all I have is my memory? What

[1] I lack words to describe how thankful I am to Ally Heraper who always kept her camera close before camera phones existed. The few pictures I have are because of her efforts which, at times, were unknown to me. I am grateful I was unaware. In August of 2014 I was able to see pictures that had never been posted and were never shared with me, that they had never been shared feels telling. So much of my memory has no corresponding documentation except two of those pictures. In the second picture I am looking at the camera, smiling.

was left of him was all of the official documentation that we, or at least I, avoided being captured by. "I could say after a famous philosopher that what we know of [him] in [his] many guises amounts to 'little more than a register of [his] encounter with power'" and that it provides "a meager sketch of [his] existence…But I want to say more than this" and to do that I must change the orientation.[2] Because the official documentation is not all that is left. I remember what it felt like to hold his hand. I remember the tone of his voice when he was excited. I remember the way he moved. What is left of my partner is also the ephemeral and that too is a kind of evidence.[3]

So I no longer attempt to prove what I know, instead I remember how the world felt when we were together. I imagine a "way of living" with you even now that you are gone that is "full of tender [and] passionate feelings…perceived by the senses."[4] Through this project I try and fail to imagine a whole world where we might have been together; I try and fail to imagine the world we all deserve. Thus, this project embraces a distrust of the archive because the metaphysical infrastructure that this project critiques resides, metaphorically, literally, and etymologically, in the archive.[5] This project recognizes the

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[2] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, Volume 2 No. 2 (June 2008): 2. I quote from Hartman knowing that the stakes of Hartman's piece and my own is what might be understood within Afropessimsim as a "ruse of analogy." Despite this, my aim is to deploy Hartman as a starting point as the piece seeks an alternative to the famous philosopher (Michel Foucault) as stand in for western epistemes which I too seek. There are ways of overlap, the way his presumed heterosexuality was so firm that our behavior, which I now believe to have been humorously obvious, was not seen as being rooted in anything real or substantial. The archive, such as the shrine his parents have erected in his childhood bedroom, only tells a particular story of him and because of rules of evidence this becomes real. By beginning with "Venus" I do not intend to align with analogy but rather consider the way the episteme of the archive informs far beyond any literal box or singular room of boxes. The entire modern world, including my own situation, has the archive as its condition of possibility. My turn to the ephemera is a turn away from the world.

[3] José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory,* Volume 8 No. 2 (1996): 5-16.

[4] OED Online s.vv. 5, 2, 1a "Sensuous." https://www-oed-com.proxygw.wrlc.org/view/Entry/176027?redirectedFrom=sensuous&

[5] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, 26 (June 2008): 2.

ways canons too are a kind of archive that aims to capture and exclude. Rather than the archive, which can only fail me, this project joins a performance studies tradition of queer of color critique where disappearance, death, and absence are fundamental. So, a sensuous melancholia looks to make its own way. To canonize the dead in its own way by bringing them back. What greater way to honor the dead than to never allow them to disappear into history, obscurity, or oblivion.

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In her 2020 Pulitzer Prize winning book of poetry, *Postcolonial Love Poem,* Mojave poet and thinker Natalie Diaz offers a stark, if implicit, rebuttal to and refusal of western notions of ontology as she asserts "We carry the river, its body of water, in our body."[6] The "we" and "our" that Diaz proclaims refers to her people but also signifies a collective from which there is no distinct individual; they are all the river and the river is in all of them. They are from and of the river which means they are of and from one another. Diaz continues, "*We carry the river, its body of water, in our body.* I do not mean to invoke the Droste effect—this is not a picture of a river within a picture of a river./I mean *river* as a verb. A happening. It is moving within me right now."[7] It is this configuration of collectivity that undergirds this project because I too carry someone in my body.[8] He is a happening in the present tense who ebbs and flows within me just like a river and sometimes he pours from my eyes because unlike the river he is already gone. And I confess, I cannot carry all of him because he is not mine. He is not some lost

[6] Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: University of Graywolf Press Press, 2020), 47.
[7] Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: University of Graywolf Press Press, 2020), 48.
[8] The term body for this project is a complicated one as there are multiple fields represented in this project and each has its own means of understanding and deploying the term. Here I echo Diaz's word choice for continuity and aesthetics but I imagine "body" capaciously to represent the entirety of self.

object for which I can incorporate, possess, and control because like Diaz's river he is moving within many. Diaz continues, "This is not juxtaposition. Body and water are not two unlike things—they are more than close together or side by side. They are same—body, being, energy, prayer, current, motion, medicine./The body is beyond six senses. Is sensual."[9] Here and there I begin.[10]

In his introduction to *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault charts the trajectory of madness from the ship of fools which carried "madmen" from port to port to the hospital which confined them. Like his other projects, *Madness and Civilization* perform a genealogy which, rather than offer a history of events, aims to understand how a particular socio-political formation came into being. Foucault notes that "the denunciation of madness (la folie) becomes the general form of criticism."[11] Foucault's aim here is to explore the ways madness has moved through Western thinking as the ancillary concept from which "civilization" could understand itself and be made. Many of his observations feel pointed even today such as when he notes that "interest in cure and in exclusion coincide: madmen were confined in the holy locus of a miracle" which prefigured many key concepts within disability studies including the religious, social, and medical model. Critical to this project is the way madness becomes a placeholder where undesirable people and things can be made legible in order to maintain order. What this enables for 18th century Enlightenment thinkings is an organizational model to build from which has hierarchy so built in it is perceived to be a priori.

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[9] Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: University of Graywolf Press Press, 2020), 48.

[10] I borrow this phrase from Alexandra Vasquez's introduction of Fred Moten at the inaugural José Esteban Muñoz memorial lecture series. This phrase marks the beginning of an ongoing memorial and so I too use it here. https://vimeo.com/158920941

[11] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 13.

In the concluding chapter, "The Birth of the Asylum," Foucault draws connections between the disciplinary forces of medicine and the longstanding perception of madmen which converge in the 18th century explaining that "The asylum no longer punished the madman's guilt, it is true; but it did more, it organized that guilt; it organized it for the madman as a consciousness of himself, and as a non-reciprocal relation to the keeper; it organized it for the man of reason as an awareness of the Other, a therapeutic intervention in the madman's existence. In other words, by this guilt the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and to the Other; and, from the acknowledgment of his status as object, from the awareness of his guilt, the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason."[12] What Foucault is unpacking here is that there was a shift from the madman being guilty of his madness in an ontological sense towards being guilty of not overcoming his madness thus placing a burden on the "man of reason." This shift also indicated that there was an ability to move from madman to a man of reason through an awareness of himself. Further, this meant that change was possible and while a burden was placed on the man of reason, it was this very burden that enabled the figure of such a man to emerge juxtaposed to the madman. Rather than being ontologically mad, the madman could become or at least enter the realm of reason which enabled a kind of moralism. The madman should embrace reason. This idea of curing madness persisted and in the conclusion Foucault brings us to the inheritor of this tradition of reason, Sigmund Freud: "all nineteenth-century psychiatry really converges on Freud, the first man to accept in all its seriousness the reality of the physician-patient couple, the first to

[12] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 247.

consent not to look away nor to investigate elsewhere, the first not to attempt to hide it in a psychiatric theory that more or less harmonized with the rest of medical knowledge; the first to follow its consequences with absolute rigor. Freud demystified all the other asylum structures: he abolished silence and observation, he eliminated madness's recognition of itself in the mirror of its own spectacle, he silenced the instances of condemnation. But on the other hand he exploited the structure that enveloped the medical personage; he amplified its thaumaturgical virtues, preparing for its omnipotence a quasi-divine status. He focussed upon this single presence—concealed behind the patient and above him, in an absence that is also a total presence—all the powers that had been distributed in the collective existence of the asylum; he transformed this into an absolute Observation, a pure and circumspect Silence, a Judge who punishes and rewards in a judgment that does not even condescend to language; he made it the Mirror in which madness, in an almost motionless movement, clings to and casts off itself…To the doctor, Freud transferred all the structures Pinel and Tuke had set up within confinement. He did deliver the patient from the existence of the asylum within which his "liberators" had alienated him; but he did not deliver him from what was essential in this existence; he regrouped its powers, extended them to the maximum by uniting them in the doctor's hands; he created the psychoanalytical situation where, by an inspired short-circuit, alienation becomes disalienating because, in the doctor, it becomes a subject…Psychoanalysis can unravel some of the forms of madness; it remains a stranger to the sovereign enterprise of unreason. It can neither liberate nor transcribe, nor most certainly explain, what is essential in this enterprise."[13]

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[13] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 277-278. For a more thorough accounting of the way Freud was a continuation of

For Freud, like other Enlightenment thinkers, he positions himself, through psychoanalysis, as the embodiment of Reason and aims to intervene on the unreasonable couple of the mourner and lost object to return the patient to a proper relationship such that the patient returns to "his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason."[14] I see this approach, this critique of Freud by Foucault, as part of a larger poststructuralist/postmodern turn within critical theory. It is this same turn that ushers in the fields of queer theory and crip theory. Taking up Foucault's work within *Madness and Civilization* might cause us to better examine how melancholia works within Frued's work and Freud himself as a modernist thinker, modernism here being broadly understood to be an application of hard science methodology to the social world. Modernist thinking aims to offer strong theories that can explain something like the human condition. This can be seen in Freud's writing on melancholia where he explains how similar mourning and melancholia are in their symptoms leading him to need to explain the difference: "It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological."[15] This explanation, put in simplistic terms, amounts to mourning being more legible with correct behavior given the priorities placed on someone. Mourning does not become pathological because it does not interfere with common understandings about labor and value whereas melancholia is described as a "disturbance of self-regard."[16] To Freud, this disturbance must be cured

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Enlightenment thinking and the influence of Immanuel Kant on Sigmund Freud see Alfred Tauber's *Freud, the Reluctant Philosopher*.

[14] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 247.

[15] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 244.

[16] Ibid

such that the individual can be recentered and that cure can only come from the intervention and to do this Freud "exploited the structure that enveloped the medical personage; he amplified it's thaumaturgical virtues, preparing for its omnipotence a quasi-divine status. He focussed upon this single presence—concealed behind the patient and above him, in an absence that is also a total presence—all the powers that had been distributed in the collective existence of the asylum." Freud aimed to make himself the very embodiment of Reason and the Asylum such that through his intervention "the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason."[17] Through this I see Freud and Foucault occupying modernist and postmodernist understandings of melancholia. Yet Foucault's critique accounts and schematizes modernist thinking and the way power and knowledge are mobilized by such thinking and this is not enough.

While I dive deeper into the way queer of color critique grounds this project and the ways that it critiques thinking that emerges from Foucault and Judith Butler in the following section it is necessary to articulate how a sensuous melancholia is distinct from Freudian melancholia or Foucault's critique of Freud. Rather than attempting to chart the way that madness, and subsequently melancholia, become technologies of discipline or follow some assertion as to the pathology and moral failing of either, we might ask what madness and melancholia might make possible. How might madness and melancholia be generative modes of living under the world that Foucault articulates?

One answer can be found in the opening of La Marr Jurelle Bruce's "Mad Is a Place; or, the Slave Ship Tows the Ship of Fools" where Bruce too looks to Foucault's

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[17] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 247

Madness and Civilization. Bruce notes the ways that "a tragic diaspora of madness: a scattering of captive beings across sovereign borders and over bodies of water, inciting dispossession, abjection, and also novel subjectivities that transgress Western codes of sanity and sovereignty" "rings uncannily familiar" "to the scholar of black modernity."[18] I see this observation as an implicit critique of the ways Foucault's approach to knowledge ultimately fails to offer a substantial enough challenge as, through his genealogical work, he potentially reifies the very structures of knowledge that he critiques. Bruce continues offering a useful definition and distinction for this project: "I distinguish 'reason' from 'Reason.' Whereas the former describes the generic process of cogitation within a given system of logic, Reason signifies a hegemonic, Eurocentric, Enlightenment-rooted episteme of transcendental objectivism that is too-often entangled—from those very roots—with antiblack, misogynist, colonialist, and other pernicious ideologies. As such, Reason is often pretext for the systematic subjugation of persons deemed unreasonable or mad."[19] So, if a Freudian modernist melancholia extends from Reason and a postmodern Foucauldian accounting of madness and civilization questions reason then a sensuous melancholia explicitly aims to challenge Reason and offer alternative formulation of social and metaphysical belonging. While madness becomes central to Bruce's article, I aim to highlight ways that Freudian melancholia occupies the same signifying position as madness such that a remixing of Bruce's conclusions about madness prove apt: "Whereas rationalists tend to discredit and depoliticize the [melancholic], a [sensuous] methodology centers that [melancholic]

[18] La Marr Jurelle Bruce, "Mad Is a Place; or, the Slave Ship Tows the Ship of Fools,"*American Quarterly* Vol 69 no 2 (2017): 303.
[19] La Marr Jurelle Bruce, "Mad Is a Place; or, the Slave Ship Tows the Ship of Fools,"*American Quarterly* Vol 69 no 2 (2017): 304

within projects of critique and liberation."[20] Sensuousness, like madness, offers an alternative way of understanding, imagining, and enacting the world rooted not in a structure of knowledge but rather in a structure of feeling. Rather than aim for a cure, a sensuous melancholia insists on being singular plural rather than a pathological problem of incoherence. Rather than view melancholia as a harmful destabilizing force to identity and some social order, this project questions whose concepts of identity and the social order that follow benefit and how a sensuous melancholia might lead us to create newer and better worlds.

Following José Esteban Muñoz and Jonathan Flatley's work, this project refuses melancholia as pathology favoring instead a belief that melancholia works as a longstanding counter-hegemonic structure of feeling.[21] To do this, "A Sensuous Melancholia" looks to art, broadly understood to be cultural objects that are performative in the sense that they produce a series of effects within the discursive and material fields, as providing the occasion to bring back the dead as a happening upon the world. This happening challenges notions of a single distinguishable self and asks how a world ending philosophy of a-ontological collectivity might emerge. Queer of color critique and Afropessimsim come together to form the assumption that guides this project: this antagonistic world is not enough and must end.[22] How this world ends or the means by

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[20] La Marr Jurelle Bruce, "Mad Is a Place; or, the Slave Ship Tows the Ship of Fools,"*American Quarterly* Vol 69 no 2 (2017): 306

[21] See José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999) and Jonathan Flately, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Boston: Harvard Univeersity Press, 2008).

[22] For more on queer of color critique see E Patrick Johnson's "Quare Studies," Cathay Cohen's "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?", and Amber Musser's *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance.* For more on Afropessimism see Frank B Wilderon III's *Red, White, and Black and* Calvin Warren's "Onticide" and *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*. For some critiques of Afropessimism see also Amber Musser's *Sensual Excess* and "Beyond

which it ends prove elusive with only flashes of otherwise which are quickly snuffed out leaving only traces. Further, this project asserts that Sigmund Freud exists as part of a continuation of Enlightenment thinking which, through force, fear, and violence, laid the ground for the current metaphysical infrastructure centered on concepts such as individuality and property.[23] It is that force, fear, and violence which turns some people into just a trace. This project, as part of a queer of color critique, refuses some totalizing understanding of hegemonic culture and engages in a tradition filled with undercommons, otherwise thinking, counter-publics, and counter-hegemonies to assert that as long as there has been such infrastructure there have also been what Sara Ahmed might describe as "desire lines," the unpaved path which exists because those before us have already begun the work of imagining and enacting some other world, a world that is on some other horizon.[24] Staying with Ahmed's work on a queer phenomonology, I imagine the art under examination in this dissertation as counter-cairns indicating a path towards the end of this world which might come into focus when the existing infrastructure is

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Desire," Patrice D Douglass' "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying," and Fred Moten's "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh).

[23] "Freedoms Yet to Come" from Lisa Lowe's *Intimacies of Four Continents*, "Shouting" from Ashon Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility,* and La Marr Jurelle Bruce "Mad Is a Place; or, the Slave Ship Tows the Ship of Fools" heavily influence my thinking about Enlightenment thought.

[24] For more work on undercommons, otherwise thinking, counter-publics, and counter-hegemonies, respectively, see Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Ashon Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* together with José Esteban Muñoz's *The Sense of Brown*, Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, and bell hooks' *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* alongside Raymond William's "Hegemony" from *Marxism and Literature*. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 19-20. Ahmed describes desire lines as used in landscape architecture as "unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow…Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point." This dissertation, following Michel Foucault, José Esteban Muñoz, and Amber Jamilla Musser, does not use the term desire except when found in citations as a means of recognizing the importance of the term while also seeking to divest from the libidinal economy that desire emerges from.

revealed as "flat and impoverished" and our loved ones are brought back and taken within us despite it.[25] And I do not mean taken in metaphorically. This is no metaphor but an entire reconfiguration of the self into a plurality contained within a body.

This project aims to offer a blueprint, find brief rehearsals, and sow the seeds of attack through an attention to moments in art where the dead are, however briefly, summoned forth to remind us that "indeed something is missing."[26] Taken together, the chapters of this dissertation attend to cultural work that makes absences present and deploys different theoretical perspectives which takes up these various counter-cairns "to map a world where one is allowed to cast pictures of utopia and to include such pictures in any map of the social."[27] While I do not know the exact way these paths end, the cultural objects within this project offer some potentialities. To me this inability to know a finite end aligns with performance studies scholarship and the idea of a sustained doing towards and past the horizon of this world.

The four chapters that make up "A Sensuous Melancholia" all open the same way. I offer a provocation that emerges from my own embodied knowledge whether it be

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[25] Rock cairns are often formalized and managed by federal or state run entities. The National Park Services explains that "the rock cairns at national parks like El Malpais, Hawaii Volcanoes, and Acadia are carefully maintained by park staff to keep hikers like you on the correct path." I describe the art at the center of this project as counter-cairns as I am specifically not interested in the "correct path" because, as the sourcing makes clear, the correct path is often designated and maintained by the very same disciplinary forces that produce the force, fear, and violence mentioned above. Further, the NPS explains that "Other parks, like Capitol Reef National Park in Utah, don't build or maintain rock cairns and warn visitors to not rely on these rock piles to guide their hike." This dissertation does not heed such warnings and asks the reader to rely on the counter-cairns I have built. "Rock Cairns," National Park Service, Last revised July 24, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/articles/rockcairns.htm. For more on the way nature within what is now the United States is maintained by entities such as the National Park Service see Jake Kosek's *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 11.

[26] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

[27] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 40.

dancing, activism, sex, going to a gallery, or watching TV with a lover. My aim is to invest in my reader. To show them glimpses of myself such that they might grow to trust me and trust that this project, as impossible as it is, is worth undertaking with me. The chapters of this dissertation may prove useful or generative alone but they are meant to be read together in the order that they appear. While this project is organized as an escalation, that is not to suggest that the fields that each chapter engages with form any kind of hierarchy. The ordering is a result of my course of study and writing along with the financial and temporal realities of completing the dissertation. I could imagine these chapters being endlessly rewritten in any number of permutations.[28] That there must be an order to these chapters represents a necessary failure of this project as legibility within the field requires an alignment with forms that discipline knowledge in specific ways. The Coda offers a brief "working confrontation" with the rest of the project as it takes up the ways this dissertation might need to fail.[29]

Origin Stories

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* José Esteban Muñoz asserts: "my theoretical understanding of disidentification has been, as I have stated, informed by the structure of feeling that is melancholia."[30] But that assertion

[28] In an act of self generosity, I imagine that, in part, this project has taken so long because of how many other permutations I considered. There are ways that this can be seen as self indulgent, and it is. But I also hope that it is a testament to the care with which I approach this project.

[29] As a general idea, this project fails for the same reasons that gender, ability, and affect fail; it has, despite my best efforts, come into being out from and been captured within discourse. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1999), vii-xxxiii. Rober McRuer, Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 9-10. Brady James Forrest, "Crip Feelings/Feeling Crip," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* Vol 14 no 1 (2020): 77-78.

[30] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 51.

starts the section "Melancholia's Work" on page 51 at the very end of the first chapter and despite him twice making the assertion that melancholia is a structure of feeling within that paragraph it goes unexplained. Until that point in the book Muñoz had mentioned melancholia scarcely. Other than once referencing melancholia casually using the language and schematization of Sigmund Freud, Muñoz raises the idea in the title of a section, once in the introduction where he offers a one sentence summary of the second chapter "Photographies of Mourning," and once in the introduction where he remarks that "disidentification does not dispel those ideological contradictory elements; rather, like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life."[31] The third instance, especially his desire to invest an object with new life, offers some provocations but we are left with an opaque comparison between the two as they both relate to some kind of object; not much of an explanation other than disidentification being distinct from the ideologies of identification. Within the second chapter, the one where Muñoz most takes up melancholia, Muñoz gives the reader two important footnotes as he works his way through analysis of the way photography offers the space for Black queer mourning and ambivalence. One cites Raymond Williams which Muñoz uses to offer a lengthy quote as to the definition of a structure of feeling as a process and the second where Muñoz describes Judith Butler's thinking of melancholia in *Gender Trouble* as what enabled his work on melancholia. Notably, Butler's thinking of Melancholia is deeply rooted in Sigmund Frued's work which is the reason I believe that Muñoz describes the final section as a "rethinking" of melancholia where he offers, as stated in the epigraph, a way

[31] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 12.

to consider melancholia as a process and mechanism without detailing how that mechanism might work or what goes into such a process. What Muñoz certainly does accomplish is a move askew from Butler as the rethinking shifts melancholia away from moralistic pathology and towards Douglass Crip's concept of mourning and militancy and a structure of feeling. Is it this "rethinking" of melancholia that leads to melancholia as a structure of feeling that somehow also inaugurates and undergirds his entire thinking of disidentification? Yes, but the way melancholia acts as a kind of temporal mobius strip that both begins and ends Muñoz's work leaves questions upon questions. In a way, Muñoz ends the chapter with the information, the polemic call, with which to return to the start and better understand how disidentification operates. The structure of feeling that is melancholia informs, arguably, the entire book project but the rethinking from which melancholia as a process and mechanism emerges marks the end of the chapter and these ideas are not explicated further. Despite brief, if compelling, meditations on melancholia in "Melancholia's Work" and "Rethinking Melancholia" Muñoz never actually details the ways that melancholia is a structure of feeling nor offer clear answers to the questions that emerge from that statement such as: How is melancholia a structure of feeling? What does melancholia as a structure of feeling entail? What the consequences of such an understanding of melancholia might bring about? What is the relationship between this structure of feeling and ideology or hegemony? If the theoretical understanding of melancholia undergirds disidentification then how does melancholia relate to queers of color and a performance of politics? It is here that this dissertation intervenes and builds.

In *Marxism and Literature* Raymond Williams gives a brief but dense eight page accounting of structures of feeling. He begins by delineating the social and the personal through temporality. He notes that the social exists in the "habitual past tense" as the major institutions, ideologies, and formations are all seen as "always past, in the sense that [the social] is always formed."[32] Williams arrives at this distinction between social and personal: If the social is the fixed and explicit—the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions—all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective.'"[33] A structure of feeling then, as opposed to ideology which exists in the fixed and explicit past of the social, exists in the interstitial space between personal and social. To better understand how a structure of feeling may emerge, Williams turns to art as it is both "explicit and finished forms…but it is not only that, to complete their inherent process, we have to make them present, in specifically 'active' readings."[34] Art then becomes the place from which a structure of feeling may emerge because it can occupy multiple temporalities or, put differently, art has the ability to be performative. If, like melancholia, disidentification is a structure of feeling that enables a "*process* relating the continuity of social formations within a work of art" then a look to *Disidentification* shows the centrality of a range of artistic forms.[35] Throughout the text Muñoz does not only assert his own acts of disidentification but also the way works of art can be read as doing disidentificatory work. Ultimately, disidentification is a

[32] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.
[33] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.
[34] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129.
[35] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 207n3.

"cultural hypothesis" and is proven out through an attention to the way Muñoz activates a range of artistic forms to highlight an emerging "mode of dealing with dominant ideology" for minoritized people.[36] For Muñoz, disidentification needs to be a structure of feeling because it is only as a structure of feeling that it can exist beyond ideology and the past of the social while still being able to intervene on it because, as Muñoz explains, "instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within."[37]

If art can be both past and present with the present having performative potential while being the location from which a structure of feeling might come into existence then it has some particular parallels to the formation of both queer theory and queer of color critique. It could be said that art contains both being and becoming and this double resource not only gains the attention of Muñoz in *Disidentifications* but also E Patrick Johnson in his seminal article "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother." It is this distinction between being and becoming, performativity and performance, that is a central dividing line between queer theory and queer of color critique with queer of color critique deploying becoming and performance to offer a thicker, meatier theory of resistance and the social. To explore how art accentuates this key tension within the field of queer theory, I turn to two key

[36] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132. José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 11.
[37] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 11.

articles within the field "Critically Queer," Judith Butler's article appearing in the first issue of Gay and Lesbian Quarterly, and the aforementioned "Quare Studies." I turn to these because of how pervasive Butler is in both *Disidentifications* and "Quare Theory" and because *Disidentifications* is the final citation in Johnson's section on performativity and performance. Johnson pointedly highlights that Foucault "acknowledges that discourse has the potential to disrupt power" before turning to Muñoz to root such a disruption in power, particular within the Black Radical Tradition, in performance. After deploying disidentifications to consider Black resistance against white supremacy Johnson offers a synthesis, "Taken together, performance and quare theories alert us to the ways in which these disidentificatory performances serve material ends, and they do this work by accounting for the context in which these performances occur…Moreover, quare theory focuses attention on the social consequences of those performances. It is one thing to do drag on the club stage but quite another to embody a drag queen identity on the street. Bodies are sites of discursive effects, but they are sites of social ones as well."[38]

I see Butler's work being attentive to the social formation of gender that exists as always formed. This echos the epigraph of "Critically Queer" which initiates not only this article but the entirety of *GLQ*: "discourse is not life; it's time is not yours."[39] Put differently, discourse, and therefore gender, are not yours as they are not personal decisions but social formations. Judith Butler's concepts of gender performativity and gender trouble now undergird contemporary queer thinking and it can be seen spilling

[38] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1993): 13.
[39] Judith Butler, "'Critically Queer" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 17.

over into a number of other fields. It is gender trouble that Robert McRuer takes up as he ushers crip theory into the academy with *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. McRuer's concept of ability trouble, and my own idea of affect trouble, will come more to the fore in Chapter two but understanding that crip theory emerges from this particular vein of queer theory heps us understand how something like crip of color critique might emerge as another foil that attends to racialization. Gender performativity has been likewise remixed and played with to imagine racial performativity like that offered in Muñoz's *Disidentifications* and Johnson's "Quare Theory." A key difference between these expansions on Butler and Butler's own work can be seen in the way they engage with art. The art of drag in particular offers a problem of thought for Butler and her thinking about gender. In "Critically Queer" Butler revisits drag to address what she believes to be "misapprehension" about her earlier writing on drag and gender performatvity.[40] I see this understandable misapprehension arising because of a misalignment on Butler's part. Butler's work aims to offer a continuation of the genealogies of Foucault and, rather than sexuality, Butler aims her focus on gender as it emerges from and through discourse. The issue here is that Butler's primary interest is one of accounting and indexing the way that power and knowledge create and continue not only gender but the entire heterosexual matrix. A drag performer explicitly aims to unsettle, undermine, and challenge the heterosexual matrix and concepts of gender through their artistic practice.[41] If Raymond Williams' dividing line between ideology

[40] Judith Butler, "'Critically Queer" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 21.

[41] Butler of course notes that "the critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders, as if a sheer increase in numbers would do the job, but rather with the exposure of the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals…failure to approximate the norm, however, is not the same as the subversion of the norm." In saying that drag performer explicitly aims to

and structures of feeling is the distinction between the "past" and "present" then Butler's concepts of gender trouble and gender performativity are those that can be found in the" habitual past tense" of discourse. Butler's work could be said to be delimiting the reach and scope of an ideology of gender and therefore the present as seen in art is beyond that scope. Consequently, to take up and apply gender performativity on the art of drag as she does in *Gender Trouble* proves difficult, so difficult that she must return to it in Critically Queer and attempt to clarify. The misalignment, or, to circle back and think with disability studies, "misfit" then is that gender performativty is unable to completely account for the way that art, including drag, is both past and present.[42] Importantly, the origins of gender performativity and large swaths of Butler's work on gender are not rooted in art, expression, or creativity but "Critically Queer" specifically begins with the enactment of law as it's object of analysis. By no means is Butler disinterested in something like resistance or agency but those things occur in performance and not performativity as "the question of subversion, of working the weakness in the norm, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation."[43] What might such a performance look like? What does performance, as opposed to performativity, make possible within queer thought?

I see E. Patrick Johnson in 2001 and José Muñoz in 1999 representing origin points of an emerging field that is focused not on the performative or discourse but rather

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challenge the heterosexual matrix and gender itself I mean that drag necessarily challenges those things but such a challenge may be expected by dominant forces.

[42] In this context misfit first appears in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's "Misfits: A feminist materialist disability concept" and then Margaret Price takes it up in "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain." Price in particular looks to find the value in misfitting and the way that context defines how things do and don't fit and the shape of what things, or people, must fit into. I would add that I do not believe that Butler's project as it relates to gender is to account for something like drag except in the ways it might elucidate her main arguments.

[43] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 26.

performance and a counter discourse. The turn of the century ushered in a turn within the field that would eventually become known as queer of color critique but at the time we might understand Johnson and Muñoz identifying a particular structure of feeling. While Muñoz is more explicit in his engagements with the term and, I think, identifies disidentification as a structure of feeling, Johnson goes "out on a limb" to reconceptualize the very young field of queer studies. Johnson launches a true critique of Butler and the field at the time more broadly as opposed to Muñoz explicitly describing Butler's thinking as enabling his work. These different approaches certainly yield different outcomes and Johnson's results in a different genealogy of queer thinking that specifically does not go through Butler and Foucault. This can be most obviously seen in the way Johnson evokes the idea of interpellation noting that "I used to answer to 'queer,'' but when I was hailed by that naming, interpellated in that moment, I felt as if I was being called 'out of my name.' I needed something with more 'soul,' more 'bang,' something closer to 'home.'"[44] Johnson's choice to articulate queer as something he is interpellated into is itself a critique of the way queer, as an identity, subsumes Johnson through a flattening of difference.[45] More pointedly, however, is Johnson's grammatical structuring which references Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation and directly involves ideology. In this instance I read Johnson as explaining the way that queer studies is/has become a kind of ideology that expects Johnson to identify with it, to respond to the hail. Althusser's influence on Judith Butler is everywhere apparent but notably Butler begins the second section of Critically Queer stating: "The term "queer"

[44] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1993): 2.
[45] This kind of flattening is taken up in Cathy Cohon's ''Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" which Johnson excerpts as an epigraph.

emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, within performativity."[46] Butler here is arguing that queer as interpellation exists within the ever-changing power dynamics of discourse as constituted through performatvity, namely performative speech acts. The effect of this is that Butler neatly positions queer and queerness within a particular Western context and while she does articulate why this is necessary, it highlights the way the term queer can be "never fully owned" because of the way discourse acts as a chorus to support particular performative acts, it significantly limits the "radical political potential" of the term.[47] Because of this, I do not see Johnson's evocation of being hailed as being on accident given that his critique is, in part, about the way the discipline has "race trouble." Additionally the popular articulation of Althusser's interpellation involves being hailed by a police officer who represents not just the state but the ideology of the state which is, in part, white supremacy. Johnson shades queer studies by associating it with police and western thought more broadly.

While Johnson does not arrive at quare in the first instance through art he does come to the term through another instance of the personal, the way his grandmother says the word queer. This is part of the way Johnson begins to scaffold quare studies as rooted in a particular embodied context that eschews the western genealogy that Butler joins and extends. Quare literally emerges from his grandmother's lips. Rather than imagine an ideology that he is hailed into, Johnson begins with the personal and moves through what

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[46] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 18.

[47] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1993): 1. Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3 (1997): 451.

would become an alternative genealogy of queer theory that he names and constructs as explicitly attentive to race. This is doubly important because Johnson has a fundamental first principles difference with queer theory and even with the term/identifier queer. We can see this difference articulated in two ways. First, Johnson's epigraphs and citations directly tell the reader that Black people thought the word was inculcated with whiteness and even those who the term tries to hail align with Johnson's thinking with Cathy Cohen remarking "I find the label 'queer' fraught with unspoken assumptions which inhibit the radical political potential of this category" and Johnson recalling in a footnote: "At the 'Black Queer Studies at the Millennium Conference'...many of the conference attendees were disturbed by the organizers' choice of 'queer' for the title of a conference on black sexuality. So ardent was their disapproval that it became a subject of debate during one of the panels."[48] I find this significant because part of what was being resisted was not only the term and it's particular baggage but with the baggage brought by this kind of queer studies more broadly. We can see this come to bear when Johnson, like Muñoz, challenges the thinking of John Champagne. Johnson takes aim at Champagne's *The Ethics of Marginality* for the way Champagne discredits the lived visceral experience of Essex Hemphill as Hemphill gave a speech at the 1990 OUTWRITE.[49] As Johnson notes, Hemphill's speech critiqued the work of Mapplethorpe's photographs of Black

[48] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 1. E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 21n4.

[49] The overlap here between Johnson and Muñoz is striking. Like Johnson, Muñoz also critiques Champagne's inability to think or consider race when discussing Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* and in Johnson's critique of Champagne he cites Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer's "True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality.'' Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* is at the heart of the second chapter of *Disidentification* where Muñoz also analyzes the same Mapplethorpe photographs at the center of Essex Hemphill's talk at OUTWRITE.

men and during the speech Hemphill begins to cry. Johnson turns to bell hooks to explain how style, or aesthetics, "in the context of white institutions" are seen as a lack of substance or an attempt to hide over the lack of substance.[50] For Champagne Hemphill's tears broke the proper decorum of rigorous academia and were therefore unable to muster rigor. This sets up Champagne for the reader before Johnson follows Champagne to Marlon Riggs *Tongues Untied* which ultimately boils down to a similar problem that Judith Butler's work has with art: it lacks the capacity to imagine the present. Champagne fails to recognize the ways class, race, and queerness all work together that comes to a head when Johnson points out the ways Champagne fails to understand the ways that class within a Black community might be performed and lived differently. In juxtaposition, Johnson's quare theory "would not only critique the concept of ''race'' as historically contingent and socially and culturally constructed/performed, it would also address the mate- rial effects of race in a white supremacist society."

The second way comes out of the first. Part of the baggage that queer studies brings with it is its indebtedness to an Enlightenment ideology rooted in the individual subject.[51] When Butler describes queer as a kind of hail she makes a point to note that the hail is a performative. Queer, as a slur, gains its meaning and power from the way it can emerge through discourse. It's emergence is enabled by the power that enables the slur as speech act to succeed. After all, queer is "never fully owned" and even someone who is proudly queer can be made queer again and made queer differently through the hail. In

[50] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 7.

[51] It is here where Afropessimism as defined by Frank Wilderson would offer an explicit intervention as to the impossibility of a Black subject. While I don't necessarily disagree with some key tenets of Afropessimism, I also don't think, in this moment, that Johnson does either. This is taken up in Chapter 4.

describing the later writings of Foucault which come to inform Butler, Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips point out "subjectivities are not the source of power's exercises; instead, they are what power aims to produce."[52] This production of identity and difference in the service of a particular cishetero hegemony is built around the concept of the individual and it is here where Johnson intervenes. Rather than Butler, Foucault, and Althuser, Johnson turns to Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga's theory in the flesh to account for how "racism and classism affect how we experience and theorize the world." This theory in the flesh most pointedly helps authorize the way Johson builds a theory around his grandmother's voice made all the more pointed when Johnson notes, speaking of queers of color, "although we share with our white queer peers sexual oppression, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color also share racial oppression with other members of our community. We cannot afford to abandon them simply because they are heterosexual."[53] Put differently, Johnson is noting the importance not of individuals or individualism or a particular identity but "communal ties" which "can, in fact, be important to one's survival"[54] As if turning to Cathy Cohen's "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" to disassemble the way queer theory and queer activism had taken shape in the final decades of the 20th century does not put a fine enough point on the end of the section titled "Race Trouble," Johnson then turns to the end of Audre Lorde's writing where she, in Johnson's words, proclaims: "Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary

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[52] Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, Intimacies (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 64.
[53] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 18.
[54] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 6. Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3 (1997): 450.

armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist. [. . .] I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch the terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices." In addition to this clarion call to think about community through and with difference as opposed to the compulsion of individualization I also imagine the way Lorde's piece ends Johnson's "Race Trouble" section, as if the theorizing of queer theory until that point was in need of dismantling.[55] If we continue with this thinking then we might arrive right back at Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House": "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable." This intertextual reading of Johnson and his citations helps explain why Johnson feels it necessary to articulate quare studies in the way he does. He is "disturbed by [Butler's] theory's failure to articulate a meatier politics of resistance" because of the way Butler's theorizing holds similar base assumptions about the world as Foucault, Freud, and, I will argue, Immanuel Kant. Their work relies on a single individual where even the concept of the individual can only come about through "differentiating

[55] In his 2003 monograph *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity,* Johnson makes the Luthur Vandross lyrics "A house is not a home" one of the epigraphs to the third chapter. Thinking that chapter alongside the master's house from Lorde and the way Johnson evokes ideas of houses and homes within Black queer culture might offer further ways of analyzing and critiquing metaphysical infrastructure or grammar.

violence."[56] It is this violence, the violence of discourse creating individuals that Johnsons and I refuse to allow to undergird our theory.

Repertoire and Method

As this project took shape the repertoire evolved into one of its more opaque elements.[57] To begin to outline the contours of this repertoire I turn again to José Muñoz's *Disidentifications* and in particular the moment where he begins to consider the work of mourning. Muñoz's elaborates what the work of mourning would be from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective and here I quote from Chapter 2 at length:

"In 1915, Freud introduced a theory of mourning that is, like much of Freud, implicitly heterosexist yet riddled with queer possibilities. He writes: 'Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved one, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.' Mourning, unlike

[56] In Chapter 4 I tackle the complications that arise through attempting a queer of color project that attends and resists Afropessimism but this concept of differentiating violence, or the violence that is necessary to create difference through the creation of a distinction between of the self and other, can be seen in this section in my attention to the ways that, for Butler, when queer as a slur is spoken it does not just create difference but it creates an evaluative rather than a statistical difference that can act as a mechanism that polices the boundaries of the normal or, even, the human. Calvin Warren, "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 23.3 (2017) 394-396, 405-413.

[57] My choice to use repertoire instead of archive is intentional as the archive, as mentioned above, is a vehicle and locus of the thing I aim to critique. My use is informed by a commitment to imaging art as a doing rather than a static object and by Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Taylor offers an important articulation of what performance studies might enable: "My particular investment in performance studies derives less from what it is than what it allows us to do. By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by 'knowledge.' This move, for starters, might prepare us to challenge the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies. As I suggest in this study, writing has paradoxically come to stand in for and against embodiment…The rift, I submit, does not lie between the written and spoken word, but between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)...The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and repro- duction of knowledge by "being there," being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and trans- forms choreographies of meaning." Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 16, 19, 20.

melancholia, which he marks as pathological, is a process in which an object or abstraction becomes absent and the withdrawal of libido from the object becomes necessary. But these demands cannot be enacted at once; libido detaches bit by bit, perpetuating a mode of unreality; because, while the process oflibido removal is transpiring, the lost object/abstraction persists. It is, in its simplest formulation, a gradual letting go. This process becomes the work of mourning. Van DerZee's and Mapplethorpe's pictures, for radically different reasons, symbolically represent and stand in as "works" of mourning. In Freud's initial definition, melancholia spills into the realm of the pathological because it resembles a mourning that does not know when to stop."[58] Muñoz begins his work on melancholia by identifying two photographers whose work can be seen as doing the work of mourning such that he can then disidentify with this very concept: "Disidentification shares structures of feeling with a Freudian melancholia, but the cultural formations I am discussing are not, in the Freudian sense, the 'work of mourning.' Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis describe the work of mourning as an 'intrapsychic process, occurring after the loss of a loved object, whereby the subject gradually manages to detach itself from this object.' The works of mourning that I am discussing offer no such escape from the lott object. Rather, the lost object returns with a vengeance."[59] I see this return of the lost object as the force of performance being activated. In Muñoz's case, this means that the art under his consideration, both the fine art of Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat and the photography and videography of Isaac Julien and James Van Der Zee, does not just offer some kind of accounting of the

[58] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 63.
[59] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 52.

past or articulate a kind of artistic expression attentive to racialization but rather attends to the way art becomes activated in the present and brings the dead back to do work on the present. This can also be seen in Johnson's attention to Marlon Riggs' *Black Is…Black Ain't* when Johnson remarks how "Rigg's body is also a site of becoming" as the film "resurrects Riggs' body such that when the film is screened at universities, shown to health care providers, viewed in black communities or rebroadcast on PBS, the terms and the stakes for how we think about identity and its relation to HIV/AIDS are altered."[60] So critical is Riggs' artistic endeavor to Johnson formulation of quare theory that Johnson refers to it as "an example of quare theory operationalized."[61]

Both Muñoz and Johnson turn to art as their primary archive for sketching out structures of feeling that would eventually become known as queer of color critique. This project joins them and as such attends to a range of artistic expression with a specific eye towards what this art performs. The repertoire for this project, following both Williams and Muñoz, might be understood as an repertoire of mourning as it specifically gathers pieces of artistic works that also serve as works of mourning.[62] Important is the time in which Johnson and Muñoz write and the way they are identifying not just a structure of feeling but a counter discourse on the rise and they discern their respective structures from art happening in the midst of multiple culture wars occurring

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[60] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 17.

[61] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2001): 14.

[62] The prevalence of the word "work" here does not go unnoticed. In particular, the scholars that Muñoz builds on describe mourning as a thing that requires work as opposed to labor which, helpfully, aligns with the way art can be described as works of art rather than a labor of art. The way work can be both noun and verb is taken advantage of here by both me and Muñoz and that such a noun/verb possibility undergirds our current understanding of "queer" feels significant. For more on the distinction between work and labor see Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 11-14.

in the late 1980s. Muñoz specifically notes that "Black gay male cultural productions experienced a boom of sorts in the late 1980s and early 1990s." We can see other booms occurring at this time with the rise of ACT UP, the proliferation of videorecording technology that had enabled the rise of New Queer Cinema, the inception point for the mainstreaming of Black and Latinx ballroom culture with the making of Paris is Burning, a hyper focused Reagan administration which ushered neoliberalism into the US after it had been violently exported to Chile and Latin America more broadly.

I too turn to art to sketch out melancholia as a structure of feeling and while my repertoire is roughly thirty years after it fundamentally attends to the same core issues and that is not an accident. I do not shy away from the way this project directly continues what Muñoz inaugurated in *Disidentifications* and believe that the continuity between the forces that Muñoz aimed to work on and against and the institutions, ideologies, and formations that this project challenges is not an accident in the same way that the archives maintain a kind of continuity. This continuity is both the odd continuity between the United States in the late 1980s in the aftermath of Reagan and my own current moment still in the aftermath of Reagan but in a moment also inundated with not new culture wars and also the way I understand both Muñoz's and my own project as aiming to articulate a particular kind of subjugated knowledge. This continuity can be helpfully explained using Michel Foucault's understanding of subjugated knowledge, as taken up by pioneering trans historian and theorist Susan Stryker's "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies." I turn to Stryker to define subjugated knowledge for two reasons. First, my aim is to maintain a critical distance from Foucault given that this project is both made possible by his work while it also aims

at the entire canon that he belongs to and Stryker offers a particular recontextualization of Foucault through a minoritized position within the US academy at the end of the 20th century. Stryker's citation practice again affirms the centrality of Foucault and Butler as subjugated knowledge and performativty constitute important starting points for Stryker's thinking in this piece that serves as the introduction to yet another offshoot of queer theory: transgender studies. Second, because Stryker's piece also attends to a critical moment of dissatisfaction with queer theory, both the theoretical apparati and those within the burgeoning discipline, and Stryker explicitly critiques the field in ways that echo Johnson.[63]

In a way, Stryker, Johnson, and Muñoz are all identifying the way queer theory, will all its radical possibility and potential, maintains itself through the subjugation of more subjugated knowledges knowledges. Rather embark on a paranoid reading that aims to discover, uncover, and expose the ways queer theory's emergence required the further subjugation of multiply marginalized folks, I imagine this as simply part of queer theory's baggage. Like Johnson, my aim is to forge ahead differently knowing some other fleshy archive and canon can be found and created.

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[63] Stryker opens: "In 1995, I found myself standing in line for my turn at the microphone in the Proshansky Auditorium of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. I had just attended a panel discussion on "Gender and the Homosexual Role," moderated by Randolph Trumbach, whose speakers consisted of Will Roscoe, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey, Ramon Gutierrez, Elizabeth Kennedy, and Martin Manalansan. I had heard a great many interesting things about fairies and berdaches (as two-spirit Native Americans were still being called), Corn Mothers and molly-houses, passionate female friendships, butch-femme dyads, and the Southeast Asian gay diaspora, but I was nevertheless standing in line to register a protest. Each of the panelists was an intellectual star in his or her own right, but they were not, I thought, taken collectively, a very gender-diverse lot. From my perspective, with a recently claimed transsexual identity, they all looked pretty much the same: like nontransgender people. A new wave of transgender scholarship, part of a broader queer intellectual movement was, by that point in time, already a few years old. Why were there no transgender speakers on the panel? Why was the entire discussion of "gender diversity" subsumed within a discussion of sexual desire—as if the only reason to express gender was to signal the mode of one's attractions and availabilities to potential sex partners?"

In "(De)Subjugated Knowledges," Stryker explains that trans studies exemplifies what Foucault referred to as "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges" noting that subjugated knowledges come in two forms.[64] The first is "historical contents that have been masked or buried in functional coherences or formal systemizations." One such way trans knowledge has been subjugated was the raiding of the German Institute of Sexology in 1933 by Nazi forces.[65] Nazi demonstrators and youth then took thousands of books and documents and burned them in the streets. The loss of that archive dealt a long lasting blow to trans people all to allegedly provide greater national coherence in the service of an fascist ethno-nationalism that necessitated a strict understanding of gender.

Stryker explains that Foucault describes the second, and the one primarily taken up by this project, as "whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges, naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity." If melancholia, after Freud, is a pathology that requires some kind of psychoanalytic intervention to resolve then what Freud is offering is a continuation of a telos of subjugation. All kinds of grief and mourning that deviate from what Freud considered "normal affect mourning" defined by the due course of mourning that ends in a timely fashion. Mourning that is "privatized, heterosexualized, teleologized and 'task-oriented'" contributes directly to the existing and formed

[64] Insurrection in our current moment in the wake of January 6th, 2020 has a different valence to it but, and I return to this critical term in Chapter 3, we might consider an insurrection akin to the way indigenous people on Turtle Island in in the late 18th century were imagined to be under the prerogative of the King of England and the alleged insurrection of native peoples against the colonists is named in the Declaration of Independence.

[65] Lucy Diavolo,"LGBTQ Institute in Germany Was Burned Down by Nazis," *Teen Vogue,* 2007, online, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/lgbtq-institute-in-germany-was-burned-down-by-nazis.

hegemony.[66] Put differently, Freud's creation of the distinction between mourning and melancholia, deeply informed by Freud's desire for him and his work to be viewed as a kind of science, was a kind of differentiating violence aimed at subjugating knowledge. Melancholia has the potential to obstructs productivity and offers ways of thinking about the self that is necessitated by collectivity: a lost person being incorporated into the melancholic such that they don't have to be alone and without them.

My approach to art that results in identifying melancholia as a structure of feeling despite subjugation is close reading informed by two guiding concepts: the reparative and weakness. The reparative comes from Eve Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You" by way of José Esteban Muñoz's "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position." Central to Sedgwick's working with the reparative is through the psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein and Silvan Tomkins. When Sedgwick asks "how are we to understand paranoia in such a way as to situate it as one kind of epistemological practice among other, alternative ones?" it is Klein who offers her the language of positions, later taken up by Muñoz in his thinking of racialization and affect in *The Sense of Brown*. Sedgwick notes that "positions will be useful for [her] purpose of discussing paranoid and reparative critical practices, not as theoretical ideologies (and certainly not as stable personality types of critics), but as changing and heterogeneous relational stances." Sedgwick goes on to highlight the way that Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* may be a prime example of a

[66] Michael Moon,"Memorial Rags, Memorial Rages, unpublished.manuscript cited in José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 67.

paranoid reading given its "repeated and scouringly thorough demonstrations…that there can have been no moment prior to the imposition of the totalizing Law of gender difference." Given this, and the way reparative reading has been taken up by queer of color theorists, a reparative reading over a paranoid one makes sense for this project. Further, a reparative approach aligns with my investment in melancholia as a process of social relation. Melancholia as I imagine it is a commitment to enliven and carry the dead rather than let them be lost and forgotten. As Muñoz explains in "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position," "one should be cognizant of the three different modes of reparation that Klein distinguishes" and that the third of which is what he "wish[ed] to promote for the fields of inquiry discussed in [his] essay, one "grounded in love for the object." Love may be too open ended a word so Muñoz clarifies Klein's thinking for the reader and it is this definition that best accentuates the way melancholia, and a reparative reading, operates, "love for Klein is thus not just a romantic abstraction; it is indeed a kind of striving for belonging that does not ignore the various obstacles that the subject must overcome to achieve the most provisional belonging." What obstacles must then be overcome for melancholia are not inconsequential as a provisional belonging with the dead might require an entire rethinking of the world. When Muñoz describes a structure of feeling, such as disidentification, quare theory, and melancholia, as a"*process* relating the continuity of social formations within a work of art" that process might be understood as the process of belonging.[67] For the viewer, for me, understanding the art under

[67] José Esteban Muñoz, D*isidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesotta Press, 1999), 207n3.

examination in this project is to understand how love as a striving for belonging takes shape in a world shaped by Enlightenment hostile to subjugated people and thinking.

Weakness, too, emerges from Eve Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" when Sedgwick describes paranoia in relation to Silvan Tomkins' work on affect theory: "paranoia is offered as the example par excellence of what Tomkins refers to as 'strong affect theory.'"[68] Since this project builds from a reparative and not a paranoid reading the move to weakness as a reading practice seems straightforward since, as offered by Sedgwick, paranoia is to a strong theory as reparative is to a weak theory. But this needs to be unpacked further. For Tomkins a strong theory is understood by the "size and topology of the domain that it organizes and its methods of determining that domain."[69] While a weak theory can only account for particular "'near' phenomena," a strong theory is far reaching in what it can account for.[70] The domain of a strong theory is not only large, a far reach, but the way it is organized is totalizing. Sedgwick describes strong theory as "more highly organized and expandable by analogies evacuated of certain qualities." I see this to mean that strong and weak theories handle difference differently. A strong theory sees everything before it as within its domain and in order to do that it must flatten difference such that all things fit within this one strong theory. This project embraces weakness in this Tomkinsian way in the sense that all of the art objects are about a particular circumstance. Sedgwick hones in on Tomkins explaining a weak theory by giving the example of "look both ways before you cross the street" as a

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[68] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003), 133.
[69] Silvan Tomkins in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003), 134.
[70] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003), 120n11.

weak theory. The domain here is a street that one is looking to cross and the theory is weak because there are parameters for it that prevent it from being mobilized in other situations. While this can be extrapolated, as Sedgwick does, to include when you are biking or driving the domain remains relatively the same you have a specific task that can be taken up in many ways but the theory "look both ways" can, without evacuating qualities, hold true. Likewise, this project looks to the task of mourning and while mourning is taken up in the art objects in many ways they are all equally near phenomena of related qualities. While the particulars may differ, the fundamental phenomena undertaken by all the art objects under examination is that each grapples with the aftermath of death of minoritized people.[71] This project embraces another kind of weakness. The entire argument could be wrong. Not in every instance but rather I concede that a sensuous melancholia might not be viable and sometimes grief needs to end. The Coda of this project takes up this particular weakness.

A necessary caveat must be made however. While I believe that this project embraces a kind of weakness in that it might be wrong and that it only can be taken up within particular situations in the wake of death, the current organizing principles of our world are filled with violence and death, with biopolitical and necropolitical realities that are difficult to elude or escape by all of the different actors, real and fictionalized, within this project. The weakness of this project only becomes totalizing because how often this world and the structures that uphold it kill, assassinate, maim, and annihilate minoritized

[71] Rather than describe people by their statistical minority or majority status I follow Muñoz and use the term minoritized throughout this project to signal, in line with subjugation, that something social is happening. Rather than being part of a real or imagined minority I think of people as being made to be or feel minor as a result of dominant power.

people. In this way, weakness becomes strength but always tentative because the forces that this project thinks against are daunting in scope and depth.

And a final note. It is my hope that you read this aloud thus making "I" and "you" plural. Maybe then we can carry some of them together.

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To both cite and echo Joshua Chambers-Letson, "your death was tragic, brutal in its suddenness. But in spite of what people might think, there was nothing mythic about it. It was mundane. You were another gay brown man dead before fifty. To say that queer and trans of color death is mundane is not to diminish their horror, but on the contrary to name the shocking fact of this kind of death's everydayness. Trans and queer of color life is lived in constant and close proximity to death."

Your death was so sudden and you died so much younger than fifty. You never even saw thirty. I do not know exactly how you died, I just know you should still be here with us. That your parents shouldn't have had to bury their son. Because not all violence is interpersonal. Your death speaks to a pervasive politics of death. Where minoritized people, immigrants, and Brown selves are disallowed a future. So, this project refuses that disallowal. This project is meant to carry you and convince us all that we could imagine and enact a world where all the dead within this project might still be with us. I would trade it all to bring you back, but I continue to fail at that task. So, accept this offering, this way of life, this sensuous melancholia.

Chapter 1: Melancholia Dancing and a Refusal to Run

This chapter sets out to argue that a sensuous melancholia acts as an ideology in the making which comes about as an embodied feeling that pulls one out of normal time and affective comportment. A sensuous melancholia comes from performances which produce different epistemic possibilities. This is to say that, following Raymond Williams, artistic work can exist both as a fixed entity within the realm of the social and also as an active mediation of the still forming present and personal worlds. Artistic work can only become activated and performed when experienced and made to signify its meaning anew for the audience. Rather than view art as passive or inevitable, I position art within what Raymond William's outlines as a the third category of cultural analysis, a social analysis "in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior." To make this argument, this chapter offers a series of attempts to identify normative understandings of identity and desire before pivoting to alternative ways of knowing the self. Namely, this is done through an oscillation throughout the chapter between different temporal moments to deploy both in form and content an embodied, cross-temporal call and response. The call and response, as will be seen in particular through my reading of queer of color theorist Marcos Gonzales' work alongside gay historian John D'Emilio's, builds on José Esteban Muñoz's own work on a call and response being a modality of melancholia. Thinking with the concept of call and response in relation to melancholia within *Looking for Langston*, José Muñoz explains "*Looking for Langston's* cinematic structure as a transhistorical and transnational "weave like" texture be understood as a product of the discomfort caused by traditional Western

genre constraints that Gilroy locates in popular modernism: 'The problem of genre is there in the desire to transcend key Western categories: nar-rative, documental, history and literature, ethics and politics.'" Like Muñoz's, I am interested in exposing the ways a call and response resists narrativity and history in the ways it refuses to foreclose past to the past. Key to a sensuous melancholia is an insistence on refusing such foreclosure; the call and response is one modality of a sensuous melancholia because of this being out of a normative Western sense of temporal sequentiality.

Further, I turn to instances of dancing and singing as a cultural practice with the potential to shift our feelings and temporality especially when dancing and singing are viewed as a mode of signification across time. Dancing and singing, as embodied performances that elude capture and a settled singular definition within the field of the discursive, aligns with E Patrick Johnson's idea that when 'gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color ''talk back,'' whether using the ''tools of the master'' (Lorde 110) or the vernacular on the street, their voices, singularly or collectively, do not exist in some vacuous wasteland of discursivity."[72] It is this collective that I see coming about through the varying instance of call and response where performances not only offer a means of talking back but evokes the call of the dead which yearns for a response that the artists I consider offer.

The chapter breaks down into two main sections which each set out to offer an example of what a different temporality and affect produces. In the first, I turn to my own teaching practice to outline a way of imagining desire through the body instead of through discourse. To do this I delineate hunger and thirst as alternative embodied

[72]E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1993): 11.

feelings to desire as a means of describing the yearning for a plural self. After offering these key terms as an example of how to imagine alternative epistemic vocabulary, the following section then looks to the dance floor and two scholars who produce different epistemes from it. Through this contrast I aim to show an alternative to concepts of identity and pragmatism that can be found in a different way of understanding temporality. The first section ends with a story that aims to theorize how dancing and dancing with loss can place us in a different relation to the world through staying with the dead longer. The second section combines all of the components of the first to explore how dancing and performance in the wake of crisis, rather than running into the future, can be a counter cairn to another world. I offer readings of music by Drake to outline a melancholic temporality centering repetition and a kind of dancing in place that is juxtaposed to Carly Rae Jepson's calls to run away with her. I do this by recounting and exploring my own experience at the LA Pride Festival the day after the Pulse massacre. I do this to show how a transtemporal call and response that never leaves the present can offer another way of accounting for and understanding time. Rather than listen to Jepson who is speaking to a living audience, I position Gallant's falsetto as a singing to and with the dead as a means of dancing with them for longer to keep them with us longer.

Central to this work is the distinction between the existing episteme rooted in identity formation which itself rests on the Afropessimist claim that because of the transatlantic slave trade which turned Black bodies into flesh, instantiated natal alienation, and made Black people into ontological nothingness. Because of this there needs to be an alternative to identity because at the heart of this is the pornotrope and "the violence and projection that produce the pornotrope require at their core a subject

who desires and who thereby objectifies and possesses others through this desire."[73] Moving through identity, sexuality, or desire would only further entrench the very thinking that undergirds much of this world. This becomes especially true when thinking of how to take in the dead. Rather than view the dead as objects to be desired or mastered through incorporation into the self, this project imagines a way of living in plurality with the dead in non-objectifying ways not rooted in possession but rather an ethical obligation to eliminate the conditions that resulted in their death. The first section I begin by working through the work of Amber Musser and Natalie Diaz to begin to sketch out what something other than desire, desiring an object, and a desire to objectify the dead might look like.

To think with affect rather than identity does not remove the possibility of a majoritarian affective sphere which has its own compulsions which can be understood through something like compulsory heterosexuality or compulsory able-bodiedness. In fact, compulsory able-bodiedness also speaks to the impulse to police affective variance and difference into normal modes of emotional comportment. I have explored this elsewhere but for this chapter suffice it to say that a simple escape into affect would prove insufficient without the subsequent attention to racialized affect which are unpacked in the subsequent sections.[74] Turning to affect does however shift priorities towards the body and "precognitive sensory experience and relations to surroundings."[75] Further, affect offers the potential for "noticing and describing the places where it feels

[73] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 7.
[74] Brady James Forrest, "Crip Feelings/ Feeling Crip," Special Issue on Disability and the Emotions. Ed. David Bolt. Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies 14.1 (2020): 75-90.
[75] Ann Cvetkovish, *Depression: a public feeling,* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 4.

like something else is happening, and passing on strategies for survival."[76] This attention to when something else is happening, or when someone becomes a happening and causes something else to come about, lays at the center of this project thus approaching the world through the mode of the affective becomes critical. And, while there is a necessary attention to existing structures, this chapter also thinks alongside Kathleen Stewarts's call to consider the quotidian, such as dancing and singing, "following the surfaces and textures of everyday life rather than exposing the putative realities of underlying structures."[77] This is to say that this chapter identifies the way identity can come into being as it relates to queerness but that there may be a way of imagining queerness through the affective field to different ends if we consider embodied performance as a site of worldbuilding. Kathleen Stewart's locating of ordinary affects move parallel to a sensuous melancholia as both "are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of…they 'do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures.'"[78] The works under examination of this chapter enable the dead to exert pressure on the living as a happening.

If, as José Esteban Muñoz informs us, "we know time through the field of the affective, and affect is tightly bound to temporality" then our feelings, like those of grief or melancholia, inform our understanding of time.[79] For Sigmund Freud one of the very problems of melancholia is that it shifts one's thinking about time and Freud positions

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[76] Ann Cvetkovish, *Depression: a public feeling,* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 6.
[77] Ann Cvetkovish, *Depression: a public feeling,* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 5.
[78] Kathleen Stewart, Ordinary Affects (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 2-3.
[79] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 187.

this as a negative as it prevents someone from returning to society within the proper time frame. Rather than align with Freud, this chapter seeks to flesh out what that other temporality might produce. To do this I juxtapose John D'Emilio's historical accounting of gay identity with Marcos Gonsalez's speculative fiction of the past to show how dance floors can be the sites of multiple epistemes depending on the affect and temporality being mobilized. Gonzalez's writing centers grief and joy as productive sites from which to theorize and begin to create new ways of knowing queerness rooted in a stylized and conditional past tense as opposed to the history of identity formation. Further, I see D'Emilio's attention to identity and subsequent community formation as a precursor to my own experience at the 2016 LA Pride Festival. At this festival there was a coherent gay identity that, as the name suggests, is rooted in the affective valence of pride with two different performers calling for different temporalities: Gallant positing what I see as a refusal to move on whereas the headliner for that day, Carly Rae Jepson, literally calls on the audience to run away with her. Part 1 of this chapter ends with a kind of autohistoria of my own where dancing and a club become a brief example of a sensuous melancholia as an entire club activates "I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)" anew in the wake of Whitney Houston's death to bring her back and keep her with us even for just four minutes and fifty-one seconds. Part 2, after having sketched necessary components of a sensuous melancholia, turns to the aforementioned concert to provide a final example of how a sensuous melancholia comes about in the midst of homonormative affect and temporality inflected by racialization.

Part 1

Embodied Feelings

The enactment of a better world, however brief, occurs in this project through the modality of the performative and performance. While these terms are often associated with identities there is greater potential for them than a way of describing how identities become concretized. Throughout this chapter, and the project more broadly, citation is deployed as a mode of substantiating a plural self through the call and response. Rather than a Butlerian idea of citation as a the pulling down of power through discourse to authorize and bring into being the self such that it succeeds and is legible within discourse and social relations, this project imagines how a citational practice might create incoherence because rather than concretizing identity it acts to turn one into many.[80] The individual self brought into being through performative identity categories can only ever be a redeployment of the master's tools and I must assert that citation is not a single tool but rather a tactic. This tactic can be deployed as part of a larger strategy that aligns with or challenges Western Hegemony. We might call this a mode of disidentification but I believe it is more accurate to describe it as a form of non identification as the goal is not to identify with and reconstitute a single new sovereign self but rather to refuse the idea of sovereignty over self in favor of multiplicity. To think with citation as incoherence might cause us pause. Who is performing or singing and dancing and are they doing so alone or is there an "open mesh of possibilities" being created that might enable multiple to exist in one through a transhistorical citational practice that moves through and with affect instead of identity?[81] How might a call and response with the dead enable a

[80] This idea of resisting coherence through a citational practice is a reference to a 2019 talk by Amber Jamilla Musser. Amber Jamilla Musser, "Sensual Excess Moving Through the Flesh to Elsewhere," Lecture. Studium Generale Reitveld Academia, 2019.

[81] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Tendencies (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 7.

different social organization stemming not from the paved path but rather through lines into the past born out of hunger and thirst for some "otherwise world"?[82]

The art under examination within this project act as a rehearsal which is to say a brief performance of otherwise where performance can be understood through Peggy Phelan's definition which has subsequently taken up by scholars of queer of color critique: "the ontology of performance was disappearance and that performance itself represented a unique mode of representation without reproduction."[83] As I locate a sensuous melancholia within art which by its very nature disappears and is attending to the disappeared and lost, a sensuous melancholia can then be imagined as eluding capture by discourse or other regimes of hegemonic power. Further, the aim of this citation practice is to represent to the world another way of imagining the self in plurality while recognizing the impossibility of reproducing the dead. Importantly, this means that a sensuous melancholia, like Amber Musser's brown jouissance, "is what violence produces and cannot incorporate."[84] As an affect then, following José Esteban Muñoz, it can be an alternative to identity and the way identity formation seizes and forms you within a discursive field. This is critical as identity formation is an organizing principle, as a method of discipline, will yield particular effects; namely, a perpetualization of power that authorizes and controls knowledge, which is to say your own ability to know the world and yourself within it.

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[82] Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (New York: Fordham UP, 2016).

[83] Versions of this phrase can be found in a number of texts but the specific wording being cited here is from both José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 98 and Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 98

[84] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 9.

A sensuous melancholia needs to be performative as a way of life, a mode of being that has effects and occurs through space and time. It also needs to involve some kind of effect in order to find its way into the future through discourse while evading capture by it. A tentative and hesitant repurposing of Butlerian performativity, like citation, enables us to see the art within this project as a repetition of the self as plural. This new plural self exists not through a repetition of stylized performances but rather through a repetition of a relationality with the dead. By way of example, I turn to the opening of Amber Musser's *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* where Musser takes up Billie #21, a photograph by Lyle Ashton Harris. Musser grapples with the difficulty of knowing Holiday through the photograph and notes that "Holiday is expected to index—in a formation that Moten describes as what the audience 'want[s] to hear and what they already know'—something about the relationship between black women and pain and pleasure"[85] before telling her reader that the photograph is Harris and that "through posture, make-up, and props, Harris allows us to conjure Holiday as a mode of dual embodiment, a citation, if you will."[86] This conjuring which acts as a citation, a performance if you will, forces the viewer to grapple with their perceived knowledge that the photograph is of course Billie Holiday is not entirely true. Musser continues on this idea: "This is a self-created in and through relationality with Holiday. It is a plural self; it is not Harris performing as Holiday, but Harris using a citation of Holiday to move toward an embodiment of hunger."[87] Musser locates that hunger

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[85] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 2.

[86] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 2.

[87] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 5.

specifically in the lips of Harris/Holiday as she "want[s] to read the parted lips as invoking a self that hungers."[88] Musser, through engagements with Alex Weheliye and Lauren Berlant, arrives at this hunger as an alternative to desire such that hunger is "constitutive of a type of selfhood that coalesces—even as it gnaws at the edges—in this state of openness and insatiability" "that takes joy and pain in this gesture of radical openness toward otherness. This, fleshy mixture of self-production, insatiability, joy, and pain, is brown jouissance."[89] It is this same hunger, this bodily feeling, that fuels a sensuous melancholia as it embraces an openness with the dead to call into existence and make present a plural self.

Like Musser's brown jouissance, a sensuous melancholia imagines a self that is porous to and hungers for those who are lost. We might say that it thirsts as well. Like the hunger that comes from Harris/Holiday's lips, Mojave thinker and poet Natalie Diaz locates thirst within the body: "The ache of thirst, though, translates to all bodies along the same paths—the tongue, the throat, the kidneys."[90] To navigate translation, Diaz turns to Jacques Derrida and John Berger to unpack the seeming impossibility to translate not just the image of a river but its meaning for her people. Diaz, citing Berger, explains "true translation is not a binary affair between two languages but a triangular affair. The third point of the triangle being what lay behind the words of the original text before it was written. True translation demands a return to the pre-verbal…Pre-verbal was when

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[88] 4. That Musser turns to Harris/Holiday's lips draws attention to the mouth as the embodiment of this queer of color thinking and I am reminded that "quare theory" too emerged from the lips of E Patrick Johnson's grandmother.

[89] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 5.

[90] Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: University of Graywolf Press Press, 2020), 47.

the body was more than a body and possible. One of its possibilities was to hold a river within it."[91] This positioning of the river as a thing we can hold within us as only possible before language, before discourse, aligns with Musser's theorizing of Harris/Holiday as being opaque and resistant to tidy regimes of knowledge. And, continuing my positioning of Diaz against notions of ontology, she tells us that "we must go to the third place that is the river…If I was created to hold the Colorado River, to carry its rushing inside me, if the very shape of my throat, of my thighs is for wetness, how can I say who I am if the river is gone?"[92] It is this same thirst, this bodily feeling, that fuels a sensuous melancholia as it embraces an openness with the dead to call into existence and make present a plural self.

How can I say who I am if my dead are gone? A sensuous melancholia begins with the belief that the body contains a plurality. And in the face of metaphysical and physical violence, it hungers and thirsts. Through this hunger and thirst a sensuous melancholia lays claim to the future and so likewise to do melancholia is to be a doing towards the future, a laying claim onto it. To do melancholia, to raise the dead, to bring them with you, is to assert their place in the future that was taken from them. It is to make space in yourself for another so that they may continue despite violence and neglect. In their death a decision was made about who owns and controls the future and to do melancholia is to refuse them such a future, it refuses them their sovereignty over it. It asserts a different future, even one they cannot see or know until it comes for them. Not like they came for the now dead though…maybe, and that is certainly what they fear. To

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[91] Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: University of Graywolf Press Press, 2020), 48-49.

[92] Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: University of Graywolf Press Press, 2020), 50.

do melancholia is to imagine a future where the lost wouldn't have been lost and there is no fear or worry of such losses happening again. To do melancholia is to imagine a world where such performances no longer carry the burden of the fight. It is a recurring and at times durational performance that may only end when the world does. That performance, however fleeting, moves you into the future if only for a moment. It refuses to foreclose someone to the past where they can be nearly forgotten by those who fear memories and remembrance because they know deep down that their existence as such can only be maintained by forgetting and moving on as if nothing ever happened. As if your people, your lover, your grandmother, your father, or your friend never existed. They were a threat. Are you? Doing melancholia is a doing towards the end of the world, and end of the metaphysical infrastructure that is enlightenment thought.

Dance Floor Epistemes

I have been teaching queer studies for about 4 years now. Crafting a syllabus that introduces people to queer worlds is a responsibility I never take lightly but the early classes were not always successful. In recent years I've begun to figure out how to balance my more queer anti-hierarchical perspectives with the realities of leading a class of folks brand new to the field. That's begun to mean that I have to teach them theory using myself and my experiences as the vehicle. I do this not to navel gaze but to show them that their lived experience matters and that it is a place to theorize from. More tangibly, this has usually led to two admissions by me. First, the entire class revolves around dancing. Every primary source we encounter, from Barry Jenkins *Moonlight* to the ballroom scenes in *Paris is Burning* to the Brazilian coming of age film *The Way He*

Looks, gives them the chance to think and write about what it means to move through the world and to dance. Second, I tell them when the material of the class makes me cry and make space for them to join me in thinking about the way emotions shape the world and our place in it just as much as identity. Implicit in the course, eventually made explicit by me, is that dancing is hardly neutral. From the places we dance to how we learn how to dance to the way our bodies do and don't move as we dance all emerge from and are informed by structures of power and knowledge rooted in anti-Blackness, racial capitalism, colonization, ableism, homophobia, and, the embarrassing, "et cetera."[93] And despite this, maybe because of this, I keep bringing them, and now you, to the dance floor.

One place to start thinking about the formation of the queer dance floor is through John D'Emilio's "Capitalism and Gay Identity" where D'Emilio asks "How do we avoid remaining the scapegoats, the political victims of the social instability that capitalism generates? How can we take this contradictory relationship and use it to move toward liberation?" and begins his answer with two assertions: "Gay men and lesbians exist on social terrain beyond the boundaries of the heterosexual nuclear family. Our communities have formed in that social space."[94] One such social space that D'Emilio highlights is the emergence of gay and lesbian bars in the early 20th century. But that social space, while seemingly outside the scope of the heterosexual nuclear family, ultimately reifies the concept of identity. D'Emilio locates gay identity formation as occurring as a result of capitalism enabling certain workers to have unallocated time and money which leads to

[93] John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983),110.

[94] John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983),110.

community formation and the creation of businesses that cater to such communities.[95] D'Emilio explains that identity can be understood as emerging from three interlocking occurances: that gays and lesbians "call themselves gay," "see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity."[96] Put differently, discourse expanded and proliferated itself such that new populations could be brought into existence without being a threat to the social order.[97] Ultimately, D'Emilio, like Foucault and Butler, offers an accounting of the metaphysical infrastructure and only glimpses of something like agency or resistance. What then is produced in excess of this infrastructure? What other course might we chart besides "homosexual desire" that "coalesce[s] into a personal identity?[98] What "desire lines" are to be found in and through the gay bar? How might we imagine a bar or a dance floor or a pride festival through a hunger for more than this world can offer?

Rather than the knowable past via history we might, following Saidiya Hartman's work in "Venus in Two Acts," consider moving into the conditional tense. Rather than

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[95] D'Emilio places considerable attention on the way capitalism and its free labor system enable the conditions of identity. This is certainly true in a sense as I think capitalism requires identity formation just as identity formation enables a way of creating and knowing value. Though more could be done to explore how unions and various communist and socialist undertakings also enabled the formation of social spaces. Most importantly in my mind is the formation of the 5 day work week and the way a kind of pure capitalism would not allow the time and space for a social world outside of the bourgeoisie's ability to engage in leisure. That D'Emilio uses the idea of a social space rather than a leisure space might offer a useful framing.

[96] John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 102.

[97] That queer and trans people continue to be vulnerable populations that experience varying degrees of violence does not disprove that discourse aims to reduce the threat of a new, potentially insurgent, population. If anything, this highlights and bears out Foucault and Achille Mbembe's concepts of bio- and necropolitics, respectively. That a population is subordinated by discourse also highlights the way discourse undergirds its very existence.

[98] John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 105.

following D'Emilio through social spaces that become the place of identity, we might instead turn to Marcos Gonsalez's "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano." In it Gonsalez offers a moving tribute to the life his queer uncle could have had if not for homophobia and governmental and societal failures related to height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Throughout, Gonsalez speculates an alternative past where not only had his uncle survived but he had been there to help teach queerness and queer culture to Gonsalez. Gonsalez explains that "speculation, as a way of writing, analyzing, and imagining, is a powerful tool for recovering the lives of marginalized people."[99] Similar to this project, Gonsalez recognized that what is lost is not only his uncle but any record about the life he lived except a couple photographs and in the wake of that loss Gonsalez has to imagine the world differently as "speculation becomes a way in which to bring to life that which was never made to come to life, made to be stuck forever as a police report, a sociological survey, a philanthropist's diary."[100] But, if there is nothing left of someone, "Where do I start?"[101]

To imagine his uncle Cano, Gonsalez turns to the body. Rather than imagine how his uncle identified or how he could be found in the archive, Gonsalez opens with a queer repertoire of dance in the conditional past tense about his uncle: "he had to have

[99] Marcos Gonsalez, "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano," *Catapult,* 2019, https://catapult.co/stories/queer-pasts-speculation-history-paris-is-burning-legacy-marcos-santiago-gonsalez.

[100] Marcos Gonsalez, "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano," *Catapult,* 2019, https://catapult.co/stories/queer-pasts-speculation-history-paris-is-burning-legacy-marcos-santiago-gonsalez.

[101] Marcos Gonsalez, "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano," *Catapult,* 2019, https://catapult.co/stories/queer-pasts-speculation-history-paris-is-burning-legacy-marcos-santiago-gonsalez.

danced."[102] The past tense here matters too as Gonzalez, like this project, builds from a mode of queer of color critique initatied by José Esteban Muñoz but aims not at some future on the horizon but another temporal understanding of queerness not necessitating some utopic future. While it is not quite Muñoz's utopian hermeneutic it does prioritize close detailed reading and a particular kind of autohistoria-teoría that can be found throughout Muñoz's work. Rather than the future, this project aligns with Gonsalez to consider what it might take to engage the world through a different kind of temporality that resists a more normative teleological understanding of loss, mourning, and self creation. The past here is not isolated from the present however as Gonsalez explains his own positionality having been born after his uncle died concedes,"But what do I know?...I, who came of age in the time of the Pulse Nightclub massacre, fearing every time I get a little loose, a little free of body, that bullets will enter my body and the bodies of those I care about. I, who speculate on a man I never knew and will never know and yet yearn to know." So, what do we do with the dead who we can no longer know? Gonsález brings him back in a way. Imagines him in a different world where he is alive. Creates a different timeline where they were together. He creates an affective citational history and a way to evoke his uncle to better know himself or to find joy despite the machinations of the world that took him.

While Gonsalez speculates about his past he places himself within the timeline of that past which happened differently. He yearns to know his uncle and rather than accept his uncle's archival nothingness he enters into a call and response practice which lies at

[102] Marcos Gonsalez, "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano," *Catapult,* 2019, https://catapult.co/stories/queer-pasts-speculation-history-paris-is-burning-legacy-marcos-santiago-gonsalez.

the heart of Muñoz's work on melancholia noting that "it would be worthwhile to consider these texts as tangled within a complicated transhistorical dialogue— something akin to Gayl Jones's definition of a traditional African-American oral trope known as 'call-and-response,' the antiphonal back-and-forth pattern which exists in many African American oral tradition-al forms, from sermon to interjective folk tale to blues, jazz and spirituals and so on. In the sermonic tradition, the preacher calls in a fixed or improvised refrain, while the congregation responds, in either fixed and formulaic or spontaneous words and phrases."[103] This temporal and communal configuration hold with Gonsalez but rather than an African American oral tradition he imagines a somatic embodied tradition of queer Puerto Rican dance in New York City. While melancholia is not named within Gonsalez's piece I see the temporal structuring resonating with the central claims of a sensuous melancholia for this project. Gonsalez does not simply speculate about the life his uncle must have lived but rather, he imagines the ways his uncle can be brought about as a happening that can serve as a spark for an alternative imagining of the world. Through the piece Gonsalez carries through on Hartman's notion of a critical fabulation. Ultimately, he refuses to leave his uncle to the oblivion of the archive and takes up the question that organizes "Venus in Two Acts:" "was it better to leave them as I found them?" Gonsalez answers no, he imagined that his uncle had to have danced just like Gonsalez does now. Rather than only imagine a "queer inheritance" as revolving around absence and pain, Gonsalez "wants to believe that [he] inherited too ways of feeling joy, ways of finding pleasure, ways of being with other queers in raucous and wild ways."

[103] Marcos Gonsalez, "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano," *Catapult,* 2019, https://catapult.co/stories/queer-pasts-speculation-history-paris-is-burning-legacy-marcos-santiago-gonsalez.

Gonsalez takes up and takes in his uncle, he reconstructs himself as part of a different kind of queer lineage full of joy where his uncle "would have [and maybe now has] [taken] [Gonsalez] out for [his] first time at the queer club, letting [him] sip on his drink, telling [him] the chisme of the men he slept with."[104] I see Gonsalez's attention to his affective inheritance of sadness and grief and his hunger for joy as a citational practice of self world making. In the wake of absence he conjures his uncle anew to ensure a rich affective history filled with wild and raucous ways of dancing and being with other queers. The way that Gonsalez raises his uncle from the oblivion of the archive is one of affective citation. And these wild and raucous ways can be seen in the way Gonsalez imagines his uncle's life but this attention to wilderness and sonic volume rooted in grief and joy are part of another tradition. A tradition of the resistance of the object.

A Brief Story that Theorizes about Dancing

It is 2022 and I have not gone dancing in years, I probably wouldn't even know where in the city to go dancing anymore. I begin here and now to name my own yearning and to mark the time that has passed since the summer of 2016 when this chapter started. I am quite different now as the relationship that enabled this chapter ended like a slow motion plane crash; he jumped with the only parachute and didn't tell me until he was safely on the ground while I was still falling. It is harder still to write about Pulse and queerness now because I have such anger about the governmental and societal failures on COVID-19 as it is these failures that has resulted in me being deeply isolated for years

[104] Marcos Gonsalez, "Speculating on Queer Pasts to Achieve a Queer Eternity for My Tío Cano," *Catapult,* 2019, https://catapult.co/stories/queer-pasts-speculation-history-paris-is-burning-legacy-marcos-santiago-gonsalez.

and unable to go dancing or see my family or go to the bars I used to write in. It is hard to write about dancing when clubs and bars are not quite safe enough for me yet. It is hard to remember and inhabit that grief and vulnerability I had all those years ago. So, before we go back to 2016 there are a few stops we need to make. I need to remember what it felt like to go dancing.[105]

I didn't start dancing until 2011 when I finally found what would become my newest family. It's a Thursday night, or maybe Saturday, and we've all been texting. This was before uber and lyft so we'd call one of the taxi or limo services to go to clubs but we could only afford it if enough people went and split the cost. We'd engage in what I can only describe as a queer/femme ritual of asking who was going, what they were wearing, and where people wanted to go before we met at someone's apartment to pre-game and take a final shot before we piled into the limo. All of us were queer, of color, trans, or some delightful combination so taking a limo to the club was a particular kind of glamorous joy. We'd start our nights at Maddison's in Downtown Santa Barbara for "2 for 4 before midnight" and because we were running on some other kind of time we tended to get there at 11:50pm. Some would run to the bathroom while others got as many drinks as they could carry since we had other destinations on the schedule where drinks were prohibitively expensive.

There wasn't much partner dancing with us, we were all dancing together and often we'd find out who could best spin and twirl and graze the floor. Sometimes someone would fall, it was often me, but we'd pick them up with a swiftness and keep dancing such that no one would be the wiser. We were all queerer than we knew so

[105] Juana María Rodríguez's "Gesture in Mambo Time" from *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* constitute the condition of possibility for this chapter.

Wildcat, the only gay bar in the area which was also known as the Shitty Kitty on Sundays, was always on the horizon for the night. We just had to make some stops along the way until we were all ready. We had to do our partying due diligence by checking off the other clubs first, say hi to straight friends at the other bars, and let the alcohol sink in.[106] But eventually, without fail, we'd end up dancing at Wildcat where they played the music we yearned to dance to and where the smoke machines were going such that there was always plausible deniability for whatever queer encounter one of us might have found ourself in. And I found myself in such an encounter rather often given my proclaimed heterosexuality. I never really came out, I just danced and kissed and trusted that on that dance floor I would be taken care of. I am not an especially skilled dancer, I stumbled and fell more often than I should admit, but I have a particular idiosyncratic pleasure when an artist plays with rhythm and key so Wildcat, with its DJs mixing genres and artists, contained a myriad of pleasures for me.

[106] I imagine this section as offering an echo of Jill Dolan's "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative" and placing Wildcat as the queer horizon of our night is not unintentional given this projects engagement with José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity.* My description of due diligence and ritual builds from what Dolan describes as the utopic promise of performance. My recounting of these nights out are rehearsals of different worlds where we can end closer to the then and there of which Muñoz writes. Dolan asks "How, then, can a utopic promise or possibility be advanced in the space of performance" and offers the following quote from Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* as a kind of answer that I have remixed replacing to fit with my club going experience: When people [go to the Shitty Kitty] they are acknowledging that [the club] takes place at special times in special places. Surrounding a show are special observances, practices, and rituals that lead into the performance and away from it. Not only getting to [Downtown], but entering the building itself involves ceremony: ticket-taking, passing through the gates, performing rituals, finding a place from which to watch: all this . . . frames and defines the performance. Ending the show and going away also involve ceremony: applause or some formal way to conclude the performance and wipe away the reality of the show, re-establishing in its place the reality of everyday life." And, of course, there is the ending of the introduction of "Gesture in Mambo Time" where Rodriguez explains "before we get to the sex, there are certain social conventions that I wish to impose. Think of them as foreplay, if you will. Before we can fuck, we have to talk just a bit, and more importantly, we have to dance." We were engaging in a social dance practice towards queerness.

One night my friend spotted someone across the dance floor and before I knew it, through his particular queer knowhow, I was dancing with him. I was no longer dancing to the music on my own and that came with certain responsibilities. I couldn't stumble and move however I wanted because we moved together now. And questions inevitably emerge when two men dance together: which one of you…leads? And who follows? Who is grinding on who and can other people join in? Do you switch or do you have your roles for better or worse? Sometimes the music makes you learn something new about your partner. When a new song comes with a totally different tempo, rhythm, and sound do you and your partner continue to dance? You've both had a few and you want to keep grinding but what do you do? It's not slow enough to slow down but not fast enough to keep going like before or vice versa. Do you stop and go get another drink? Do you make the rounds through the bar to see and be seen? Do you go out back and hope you can bum both a cigarette and a light from someone? Or, do you stay on the floor and find a new way to move with them? I always preferred the latter. Why break the spell when you can discover new magic together? We'd usually face each other when we danced, like it was just the two of us, so it was less of who led more like who was leading. And I remember his surprise, his joyful laugh, after I said no, let's keep dancing before I slowed us down and cast a new spell in halftime.

Not long after my partner and I stopped dancing together I was back at Wildcat and learned that earlier that day Whitney Houston had died. Suddenly everything changed and the next moment, when "I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)" came on, we were all dancing differently. I hadn't found a new dance partner yet and was yearning for someone to dance with again. I'd gotten a taste of what it felt like to dance

with somebody. I'd felt the heat with somebody and now maybe loneliness was calling me too. I was hearing the song anew and even on the day of her passing we kept her with us just a bit longer. Together we made an offering of movement, song, and heat. We danced for her like we'd danced for nothing and no one else that night. A room of queers proclaimed: Yes, we wanna to dance with you Whitney. We'll keep dancing with you and loving you forever.

Part 2

Melancholic Dancing and a Refusal to Run

> "The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound;—and as frequently in the one as in the other."
> -Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*[107]

His falsetto makes it difficult to understand any of the words and it is a wonder how he sustains it as he dances; his Blackness stark against the whiteness of all those who came before and after him. We might ask of this performance, of ourselves, "what is it in the falsetto that thins and threatens to abolish the voice but the wear of so much reaching for heaven?"[108] What higher power has overtaken him? What might he accomplish with this reach for heaven? His Blackness, a stark contrast to anyone else who had taken that

[107] Quoted in Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 20.

[108] Fred Moten, "Black Moanin' in *Loss* ed. David L Eng and David Kazanjian, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 60.

stage that he so graciously graced before the small sea of whiteness before him. As if to challenge anyone else to sing higher or dance harder, he performs a set that might be described as a pure climax with no end in sight. But this is not to say that he has tapped into some ecstatic mode of being nor some kind of self shattering jouissance. Those things, Being and sovereignty, are disallowed to him. More precisely he embodies grief itself through his voice and body making longing and urgent calls to those who were alive only 24 hours before. Rather than speak of bravery or pride, this Black dissatisfied plural self refuses any address as if knowing that words alone could only insult and discipline. This white and disinterested audience is not his audience. His audience is the dead. This performance of a Black falsetto "explore[d] a redemptive, unworded realm—a meta-word, if you will—where the implied critique of the momentary eclipse of the word curiously rescues, restores and renews it: a new word, a new world."[109]

The voice, the dancing, and the grief stricken fury which fuels the two, emerges through Gallant's 2016 performance at LA Pride the day after the massacre at Pulse nightclub. One might say that Gallant performs a transcendental divinity such that he might escape the hold of whatever ship or power aims for his capture. That hold might be the very crowd which cannot understand his call. But, Gallant is not divine and, to think with Hortense Spillers and through the pornotrope, he is disallowed Being itself as his is a legacy of body made flesh. This might help us as we attempt to understand how the entire world came into focus for me that day. But, as I am wont to do, I have moved too far ahead. I keep falling out of time but maybe getting lost in time "we can understand queerness itself as being filled with the intention to be lost. Queerness is

[109] Fred Moten, "Black Moanin' in *Loss* ed. David L Eng and David Kazanjian, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 60.

illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds' mapping of space. Queerness is lost in space or lost in relation to the space of heteronormativity…Freedmen escaping slavery got lost too, and this is a salient reverberation between queerness and racialization."[110] Maybe we'll stay lost just a bit longer…

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I am in my childhood bedroom crying as I watch Anderson Cooper on the scene at the Pulse nightclub after the horrific massacre earlier that night. This is a recording that I feel I must watch. I imagine that in this moment Anderson Cooper acts as representative for queer people and is meant to enable a catharsis for queer and straight people alike. But despite his queerness he also stands in for a particular majoritarian affect: whiteness. Unlike Essex Hemphill at OUTWRITE, this performance of tears is meant to represent an end or at least the beginning of the end because these Latinx deaths are only legible and mournable through Cooper but only in the short time after their death.[111] The message: we need to move on. We need to keep moving on. We are to watch Anderson Cooper cry and know that, in line with Judith Butler's understanding of mourning and the national psyche, these people are, conditionally, people now. His tears have brought them to us as worthy of empathy. As Cooper reads the names he gradually but surely breaks down in tears on our screen. Him and his tears perform the appropriate affective response such that he can guide us all to detach and move on. Cooper is doing the work of mourning and the news clip enacts a kind of body genre for queer people. But, which queer people?

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[110] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 72.

[111] This reference to Essex Hemphill nods to E Patrick Johnson's analysis of his speech and the way that John Champagne incorrectly read it as manipulative in its expressiveness.

Cooper's ghostly skin and somehow whiter hair are in stark contrast to those who he is mourning. The more he breaks down in tears the easier it is to forgive his mispronunciations of the names of the dead…or is it? His tongue and lips cannot do justice to the names of the dead in what might be the final time their names are ever said in public, or at least this publicly. So how can he defend them? How can he ever truly mourn them when his tongue betrays him? Are his tears not about his own unfounded fears? Cooper, a Vanderbilt, would likely never come close to the danger and death that those at Pulse experienced that night and yet he is the one on our screen. Cooper serves as a representative of the majoritarian affective sphere as a kind of performance of obituary. On obituaries Judith Butler's work on the role of obituaries in newspapers is instructive. Butler asserts that "we have to consider the obituary as an act of nation-building."[112] Butler then turns to a case study where Palestinian citizen had obituaries rejected because they were involved in an Israeli offensive. Butler uses this example and others to arrive at the conclusion that "what follows as well from prohibitions on avowing grief in public is an effective mandate in favor of a generalized melancholia."[113] Butler's point here is that without being able to grieve publicly melancholia becomes all that is available since without the ability to grieve in a nationally recognized fashion there can never be any moving on. Butler's conclusions then yield two results. The first is that Anderson Cooper's position as a privileged white cis man locates grieving not within the communities impacted by the massacre but within the public majoritarian sphere. Cooper's public grieving enables a moving on for the white majoritarian public sphere

[112] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York:Verso, 2004), 34

[113] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York:Verso, 2004), 37.

and, following Butler, imposes "an effective mandate in favor of a generalized melancholia."[114] The second is that Cooper serves as a way of disavowing melancholia as a survival strategy or the potential for a melancholic practice of resisting the forces that cause this violence because the victims of the massacre have been incorporated into the national identity via an on air obituary making then grievable and human.[115]

Cooper's tears work on me but only for a night. My tears give way to something else, something more complicated because just earlier that day I had felt, for the first time since 2014, a kind of melancholia rooted in a refusal to leave the dead behind. A refusal to move on and forget. Cooper speaks their names such that we might move on. Whereas Cooper turns their name into a too soon eulogy, Gallant refuses language itself and wails them an ode. An ode to all that they were and might have been. An ode to grief. Such calls to move on or forget are not uncommon when those who have died are racialized, queer, trans, immigrant, and, again, the embarrassing "etc." Slavery and concentration camps and internment camps and and and all must be moved on from. Those things are in the past because those people can be relegated to the past because the future does not belong to them. Even after Cooper's tears are shed, the media would for years attempt to resolve this massacre in the hopes of moving on. Whether it be discovering the true motive of the killer or finding some kind of closure for the survivors, the aim was to place this violence in the past. So, I refuse. Would you come back when the person calling your name could not say it like your mother? Would you respond to the hail of a white gay man with riches beyond your imagination? No, and nor should you. This

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[114] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York:Verso, 2004), 37.

[115] For more on grief and "the human" see Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York:Verso, 2004), 38.

chapter enacts a refusal by continually starting and embracing an aversion to some far off horizon where the dead cannot go.

Let me take you back to the start of that day. When the massacre and the dead were still as close to the present as possible and before Cooper attempted to exhume them from our psyche and bury them in his white tears. To do this, I craft an intertextual theory rooted in Gloria Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría, a story that theorizes. This story weaves together the many things happening in the hours and days after the Pulse massacre to attempt to imagine a way of calling the dead without ever needing their names because this theory refuses a hail. Instead this section relies on temporal loops and the grief made into an embodied dancing sound. I begin and begin and begin because my aim is to question who benefits when we move on. Who is left behind?

This section imagines what might come from a moment that I experienced so viscerally that also became a cultural touchstone for a country now consumed by gun violence, homophobia and transphobia, and a new culture war where there are not enough armaments coming from the left to fight back fascism which is also to say Liberalism. In particular, how might we conceptualize dancing and running as metaphors that can be mobilized to do different kinds of political work in the wake of tragic and unprecedented loss? How might we fend off the seduction of both nihilism and an untethered hope verging on escapism? What would it mean for queer people, and minoritzed people more generally, to abandon pride in favor of some other affective mode? I believe that a new form of melancholia, one rooted in sensuousness, will offer generative answers.

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The day after the Pulse massacre I woke in my then boyfriend's bed and heard the news while getting ready for the LA Pride Festival. Upon arriving I saw that the festival was not so covertly segregated and featured only one artist of color on the main stage, Gallant. My boyfriend and I had chosen this day because of a select few artists we knew. I wanted to see Big Freedia, Gallant, and Carly Rae Jepson. Big Freedia was up first but not on the main stage. We had to walk to the other side of the festival, through the "Latin" stage, to get to the "hip hop" stage. I wonder if there was a reason for such a distance. Would there be a problem if the stages were closer? What, exactly, is the problem. Or, who? Or could you even imagine, a hip hop performer on the main stage? What was coming into focus was that entire nations came into being around those stages. Whole communities brought together by rhythm, sound, and the moving dancing body. And when we got to where Big Freedia was supposed to perform she was nowhere in sight. We checked the program and realized that the official time had no pull over this stage; it was running on its own time and as long as the music was playing and there were bodies moving to it, no one seemed to even notice. In thinking about the time we can also explore the way time and affect can be understood as co-constitutive since "we know time through the field of the affective, and affect is tightly bound to temporality."[116]

To think of the affect of the stage as the affect of the nation is to make a claim about an imagined community that comes into being in alterity. In particular, alterity to the very concept of identity itself. To further explain this I turn to José Esteban Muñoz's Feeling Brown articles which, like this project, works with Raymond Williams' concept of structure of feeling. Muñoz asks, following Spivak, if the subaltern can feel and we

[116] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 187.

might ask if the subaltern can sing or dance? Is it singing and dancing if there is no audience that recognizes it as such? In the wake of disengagement, at best, how does a nation still come into being? How can we dance a nation when the majoritarian sphere does not believe that such a nation is worth existing?[117]

Turning through Muñoz's Feeling Brown articles, it is noteworthy that Muñoz articulates how there is a white hegemony that is rooted not only in ideology or what Foucault might refer to as discourse but also the "national affect" which must be properly performed and abided. Muñoz explains that "what unites and consolidates oppositional groups is not simply the fact of identity but the way in which they perform affect, especially in relation to an official 'national affect' that is aligned with a hegemonic class. Latina/o (and other minoritarian) theatre and performance set out to specify and describe ethnic difference and resistance not in terms of simple being, but through the more nuanced route of feeling."[118] What I take this to mean for the LA Pride festival is that there were oppositional groups, the "hip hop" and "Latin" stages, that came into being through the music and dancing central to those spaces; the theatre and performance embodied in the audiences. If this is true then the main stage represents a majoritarian sphere which is also to say a national white affect.

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We tried to wait, to stay long enough to at least hear one song by the Queen Diva, but Gallant was set to go on the main stage and I had seen Big Freedia live before and

[117] This concept of dancing the nation is borrowed from Manuel R Cuellar's *Imagine Otherwise* interview. More on this can be found within Cuellar's *Choreographing Mexico: Festive Performances and Dancing Histories of a Nation*.

[118] José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)," Theatre Journal 52, no 1, 168.

Gallant couldn't be missed. But, to explore how melancholia might be mapped onto Gallant we need a slight detour through a song so inescapable that summer, Drake's "One Dance" off of his fourth studio album *Views*; this chapter embraces that inescapability and takes up the song as the temporal framework of a sensuous melancholia. In disidentifying with this song's focus on heterosexual relationships, love, and loss the song's call to resist leaving the current moment towards other places or times can be remapped. I posit "One Dance" as an articulation of queer temporality that can be mobilized towards a sensuous melancholia, namely a dwelling in time after catastrophe.[119]

Drake's One Dance utilizes the structure of a song to create an alternative sense of time. By definition the chorus repeats itself but in its repetition it also contradicts itself.

///That's why I need a one dance

Got a Hennessy in my hand

One more time 'fore I go

Higher powers taking a hold on me

I need a one dance

Got a Hennessy in my hand

One more time 'fore I go

Higher powers taking a hold on me///

Drake continually calls for one more time, one dance, that never seems fulfilled, so he calls for one more. It is as if time repeats itself, the one dance both presumably occurs and is always being called for as if it wasn't, isn't ever enough. Because of this,

[119] For more on queer temporalities see J Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place*, Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds,* and the Queer Temporalities Special Issue of *GLQ* volume 13 number 2-3.

when I put the song on a loop Drake never stops dancing. We might say that Drake, or at least Gallant, get "lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality."[120] And, maybe even further, lost from the evidentiary logic of homonormativity or a homomajoritarian mode of belonging rooted in whiteness and transcendence.

In the first verse we learn that Drake is on the verge of going OT, out of town, but remains always wanting just one more dance. In this verse of the song Drake croons //I pray to make it back in one piece//I pray, I pray//. The fear of not returning in one piece, or maybe more accurately not returning the same or returning not having the same feelings as when he left; is why he needs one more dance. The future he imagines is uncertain and potentially violent and because of that he attempts to delay it throughout the song with the chorus. This fear was probably not one that was held by the dancers in Pulse, to think of Drake's song (was it playing at one point during the night?) as an allegory for the yearning to dance and never leave the temple that is a queer nightclub. The nightclub was a haven, the one place possibly free or freeing. Some of those who did not make it back in one piece might not have been out, the club was a necessary space. This may be a space for what Saidiya Hartman names critical fabulation, were the people in Pulse also wanting always one more dance? Did they never want the night to end or maybe they never wanted to leave but knew eventually they had to, some didn't.

////One more time 'fore I go

Higher powers taking a hold on me////

[120] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 81.

The second verse expands on Drake's uncertainty of a future away from the fictive love interest.

/You know you gotta stick by me/

/Soon as you see the text, reply me/

/I don't wanna spend time fighting/

/We've got no time/

It is that they may lose contact or begin to fight because their only means of communicating will be through text. The chorus follows, that's why he needs one dance, one more time because this future is not the one where he can take his maybe one day lost love, he wants to remain when and where he currently is.

On its own Drake's song seems to be temporally stuck without much bearing on melancholia but if being temporally stuck is due to the potential loss of the love interest then if we disidentify with the song and place it in the context of Gallant performing at LA Pride it can take on a new life. I propose an expansion of the love interest from a single person to a group of people, perhaps those killed at Pulse Nightclub with Gallant as the melancholic whose performance calls those in the audience to join him. Evoking Jean Luc Nancy's idea of "being singular plural" may aid in altering Drake's song from a heterosexual love for one person into a love for community and people within the community that Gallant may have never met yet nonetheless he exists with, as the audience can choose to exist with Gallant.[121] Maybe something like a nation could form

[121] On Nancy's notion of being with José Esteban Muñoz writes, "For Nancy the post-phenomenological category of being singular plural addresses the way in which the singularity that marks a singular existence is always coterminously plural—which is to say that an entity registers as both particular in its difference but at the same time always relational to other singularities." José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 10.

out of a shared sense of loss. Gallant, performing at the LA Pride Festival, enters the field of queerness. He was with us in a time of grief and fear and the meaning of his performance becomes shared and put with, or maybe beside, to think with Eve Sedgwick, the death and pride of queerness.

As Gallant sings and dances, with the LA Pride audience notable uninterested in him having stopped moving nearly altogether, he does not make the calls to the dead alone. Or, rather, he does not simply engage with the dead of the Pulse massacre but rather, he performs a citational practice, or a call-and-response, with a trans temporal Black diaspora that includes those slaves chosen to go to the Old Farm House who sing wild songs. Gallant's singing does not reverberate through the audience but rather through time to join a grief filled chorus eager for and simultaneously enacting the joy of being lost or at least in a temporary abscondence. While the Old Farm House is the destination, I consider it to be akin to the finality of Anderson Coopers tears. Both are the logical destinations both culturally and geographically. But it is not the destination that concerns me or this chapter. Rather, it is the dancing and singing that occurs within the Dense Old Wood and the singing and dancing done by Gallant. To position the Old Farm House against the Dense Old Wood is to offer a spacial allegory for epistemic worlds. A sensuous melancholia can be located not in the official record or the Old Farm House run by white settler masters nor the overbearing and unconcerned white LA Pride audience. A sensuous melancholia can be found where people dance and sing such that the entire world reverberates with their song if only for a short time. I position Gonsalez's imagining of his uncle's wild and raucous ways as being unintelligible within the normative understandings and histories of the world and so too are those of the slaves

chosen to go to the Great Farm House and Gallant singing and dancing a new nation even when that imagined community is not present in that moment for him.

For Gallant the highest joy was apparent in the festivities, the atmosphere was one of pride, of course but also resistance and revelry. It also would be hard to ignore the way the high in higher power that Drake croons can also signify musical pitch, Gallant's falsetto is renowned and can even lead to an inability to understand the words he's singing because of the pitch he sings it at, the slaves in the Dense Old Wood haunt this sound and are made present through it.[122] The deepest sadness can't be ignored either, it was hard to avoid the way Pulse haunted the festival, there was an attempted bombing of LA Pride that we only learned about after it had been stopped. The MCs and nearly every performer had memorized lines to say about Pulse and being proud of the festival goers for coming in spite of the attack. Through his high energy dancing and fearless singing it felt as though Gallant was bent on a refusal of such niceties and instead aimed to raise the dead, to perform an embodied sensuous melancholia for the audience. As mentioned earlier, Gallant seemed overcome by a higher power, or maybe he was being overcome by the taking in of the dead. His dancing seemed too wild to allow for him to sing and yet there he was dancing and singing causing a marked disruption to the parade of white straight performers. Gallant gives us the opportunity to think of alternative positions and orientations away from pride or ecstasy and an easily accessible understanding of the future.

[122] For more on pitch and the grain of voice see Roland Barthes' "The Grain of the Voice." For more on the grain of the voice of Black performers see Fred Moten's *In the Break* and Amber Musser's *Sensual Excess*.

Douglass, Gallant, and Drake, and Gonsalez and his tio Cano form a dense network of somatic and sonic call-and-responses which is also to say that they are emerging from a counter hegemonic tradition that relies on avoiding capture and summoning the dead to be present with them. These lyrics, song, and dance together can then be juxtaposed against other work by José Esteban Muñoz alongside the lyrics and white affect of Carly Rae Jepson who got to be the final voice of the festival as the headliner and closer. Muñoz and Jepson end their respective transcendental love affairs with their audience which desire some utopic future by asking a question of their audiences. Will you take ecstasy with me? Will you run away with me? Unlike Gallant's deathly audience, Muñoz and Jepson rely on the same syntactical configuration where they can tell their living reading and listening audience that "we must vacate the here and now for a then and there."[123] Rather than Drake always yearning for one more dance before the party ends Jepson desires to leave: "I wanna go, get out of here, I'm sick of the party, party." She tells the listener that she wants to run away with them. A key difference here is that the audience is different for Muñoz and Jepson. Muñoz and Jepson's audience are still alive and breathing and right there in front of them, right there with them. The calls to run away and take ecstasy are both temporal and spacial but they rely on some idea of transcendentalism that finds its origins in Enlightenment thinking. There is an affective difference. There is an affective privilege of being able to feel with the still living breathing love. To not be overcome by the dead as a matter of practice.

In their critique of Muñoz's Feeling Brown articles, Ren Ellis Neyra asks: "Can the semiosis of US-Latinx brownness operate without Afro-Caribbean and African

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[123] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 185.

American thought?"[124] I take this question seriously as I attempt to move through both Blackness and Brownness to articulate a sensuous melancholia that can also attend to my own loss as a white queer settler. That a sensuous melancholia attempts to offer such a far reaching theory of the world means there are moments where it and I must acknowledge that "there are impasses" and that "signs can grow from breaks."[125] But in this moment I hope to distinguish between what I see as the key distinction between Muñoz and Jepson's calls compared to those I am asserting are being made by Gallant. Both Muñoz and Jepson's rely on a kind of reordering by Western thought of what is left in the wake of catastrophe. Jepson desires to leave the party and asks us to run away from her. We might consider how she is asking us to run away while Drake asks us to keep dancing. Muñoz asks us to take ecstasy with him and leave the here and now. But, who would be left behind? How do these ideas of ecstasy and running abide the very metaphysical infrastructure that enables an anti-Black world that structured and organized the conditions of the slaves chosen to go to the Old Farm House? Like Gonsalez, I wonder how we might need to look to the past instead of the future to imagine a "queer forever." To answer this we must affirm our refusal. We cannot run or take ecstasy because there is still work to do here.

Placing Gallant within the lineage of the slaves singing of the dense old wood redoubles the embodied aspect of this melancholia, the pull to remember slavery and the articulations of violence in its wake is a melancholic one. The refusal to forget or leave the dead behind through sound comes to a unique intersection with Gallant as black

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[124] Ren Ellis Neyra, "the question of ethics in the semiotics of brownness," Small Axe Salon 35 (2020).

[125] Ren Ellis Neyra, "the question of ethics in the semiotics of brownness," Small Axe Salon 35 (2020).

melancholia—or as I will describe in chapter four, a melancholia of the flesh—intersecting with a brown melancholia—the focus of chapter three. To read Black, Latin@, and/also queer sound through the temporality of One Dance is to position melancholia as a dwelling with the present moment knowing that the future is not the priority if there is not the time taken to assure that it can be survived and that everyone, dead and alive, can be taken then and there. In the first verse of One Dance Drake promises to his love interest that he never runs away even when he is away. To put this temporal "never" in the service of melancholia would mean a promise to the dead, those who are away, that they will never be left behind in favor of a dash towards some promised better future. To replace Drake's love interest with the victims of the massacre at Pulse enables melancholia to take form. Gallant's singing and dancing provides the entry way for the rest of us to take pause. Rather than tell the audience to run away, Gallant's performance calls for us to dance, sing, and remain in spite of and in the wake of violence. Gallant's performance dares us to attend to our dead and learn that melancholia means honoring them before we run ahead. Gallant's dancing compels us to feel the pull of melancholia and dance just one more, one more, one more time with one another before we run away, or…take ecstasy.

Chapter 2: A Practiced Melancholia: Bringing the Dead to Your Bedroom

"Desire to touch and be touched by the amorous other is always also the desire to touch another world."[126]
-Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch"

To articulate a sensuous melancholia, this chapter sets out on a journey through two different films about HIV/AIDS, David France's documentary *How to Survive a Plague* and Robert Campillo's work of historical fiction *120 BPM.* I choose these two films not only because they are about the same era, though in different geographic locations, but also because they offer two different understandings of melancholia. In the introduction I outlined the way that a sensuous melancholia is distinct from a Freudian melancholia rooted in a kind of Western philosophical modernism and a Foucauldian postmodern approach to melancholia as an extension and signifier of madness. This chapter continues to highlight the way a sensuous melancholia is distinct from others, namely, Douglass Crimp's thinking of mourning and militancy which I see being articulated most strongly by documentaries like *How to Survive a Plague* and Jim Hubbard's *United in Anger.* I choose France's documentary, rather than Hubbard's, because I believe that part of what a sensuous melancholia offers is especially distinct from the world that France aims to document. *How to Survive a Plague* enables a sharper

[126] Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch, or, Writing Touch," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24, no. 2-3 (2014): 233. The Oxford English Dictionary offers two main definitions for amorous: A1a-Of a person: feeling or expressing love (now esp. sexual love or desire) for a particular person or thing; in love, full of love. And A1b-Of a person: devoted to or preoccupied by love, sex, or flirtation; frequently in love; (sometimes more strongly) lascivious; promiscuous. So, while I resist the language of desire, in this chapter I embrace the idea of a fullness of love for someone and also, sometimes more strongly, a kind of promiscuousness. Promiscuousness here does not simply relate to sex but rather a promiscuousness of self. A promiscuity of care that can only take flight through plurality with not only your own dead but the dead of those you care for. This chapter implicitly thinks through such promiscuity as its archive. This other world requires such a promiscuity with ourselves.

contrast which, hopefully, will enable a clearer understanding of what this project seeks to argue for.

Critical to a sensuous melancholia is a being out of normative time, what Elizabeth Freeman might refer to as chrononormativity "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts." Freeman continues, "Schedules, calendars, times zones, and even wristwatches inculcate…forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege." We might think of chrononormativity as being the normalization of straight and able-bodied time which assumes and presumes that specific life events, such as weddings and funerals, occur at a specific time and in a particular pattern and rhythm. Enlightenment time. This time, pattern, and rhythm "shape flesh into legible, acceptable embodiment." This embodiment becomes an impossibility for those living with AIDS as their bodily needs far exceed what the medical establishment and doctors were capable of supporting. One result of a failure to have your flesh shaped into legible, acceptable embodiment is having your body put into black trash bags when you die, being buried in an unmarked grave, or being cremated such that all that's left of you are ashes. Refusing to or being unable to be shaped undergirds sensuous melancholia as a structure of feeling which Freeman understands as the idea that "social change can be felt…and that it appears alongside dominant structures in the uncanny persistence of obsolete formations and the proleptic, partial emergence of new ones." Instead of viewing the move from flesh to ashes as a failure of a sensuous melancholia I look to those very moments as sites of possibility where the societal battles become most accentuated and where a sensuous melancholia can and must be practiced. The dominant structure of how funerals are supposed to be the

end of someone's life and that a life should follow chrononormativity accedes not only to normative sense of time but also contributes to a larger formation of the world as we know it.

One such dominant structure is the very form of documentary which lays claim to facts and a sense of reality by choosing how a story is to be told, what counts as evidence, and how the story comes to be resolved. Likewise, the figure of the child and reproductive futurity offer modes of understanding temporality that cannot comport with the out of timeliness that a sensuous melancholia requires. Under examination in this paper are funerals that go on for too long and weaponize the dead such that we can "take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names – and in our names."

Important to an examination of *How to Survive a Plague* is a distinction between the archival footage used and the directorial decisions such as the use of voiceovers and soundtrack. Through my reading of *How to Survive a Plague* I explore how figures like Bob Rafsky in the archival footage offer glimpses of a sensuous melancholia which I see being undermined by the documentary itself. This becomes important because the story telling of the documentary relies on empathy to craft the narrative and positions "drugs in bodies" as the ultimate end goal. Despite the documentary containing more revolutionary calls for healthcare as a human right and the importance of continuing to make love in an epidemic, the documentary gradually shift the political goals to ones that aim for incorporation into a heterosexual world and accedes to the capitalist imperatives of pharmaceutical companies as the end of the fight by placing that at the end of the documentary. While the funerals refuse chrononormativity, the figure of Bob Rafsky within the documentary is presented as a family man fighting to stay alive and be with his

heterosexual family. This offers a clear distinction between the more anarchistic and embodied moments of the archival footage and the way that footage contributes to a larger narrative that, through biomedical intervention, aims to normalize those within ACT UP such that they can be incorporated into the national psyche via the documentary. Likewise, the use of a reveal in the form of showing AIDS activists like Peter Staley and Mark Harington positions the way the pharmaceutical solution, making AIDS chronic and endemic, is the resolution to not only the film but also the AIDS epidemic itself. The documentary necessarily must end but in that ending it makes a claim about how the epidemic "ended." The documentary necessarily must end but in that ending it makes a claim about how the epidemic "ended" thus making it possible for some to return to work, family, and society in general. Notably, those who survived remark at the end of the documentary that they seemed lost once protease inhibitors were created. They had been a part of a non-normative community and even family structure that actively combated the government and large portions of society and now all that awaits them is the droll of normalcy.

Empathy plays a central role throughout *How to Survive a Plague*. I deploy empathy in two ways. First I position empathy as a continuation of the history that Deborah Gould articulates in *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS.* This means that empathy is the third era of the emotional history of HIV/AIDS following grief and anger. I explore this in greater detail below but crucial is the idea that due to the endemic and chronic nature of HIV/AIDS it is now less urgent to fight back and fight AIDS because AIDS is allegedly under control. The issue of this narrative is that it opens up the possibility of ACT UP being forgotten. I see *How to Survive a Plague*

being released in 2012 as supporting this claim. In a post AIDS moment after the end of the long 20th century there is a risk of not only ACT UP and the fight against AIDS being forgotten but a backsliding of cultural acceptance and understanding of queer people because there is not an active fight forward besides pragmatic neoliberal activism centered on a rights-based framework. This means that there must be a mode of understanding ACT UP and the fight against AIDS in our current moment that does not rely on grief or anger. It is here where empathy enters as a means of ensuring the continued humanity of those who are still being seroconverted, living with, and dying of AIDS.

This approach to empathy is not a new phenomena and it is within this other history that the second deployment of empathy emerges; empathy as a disciplinary apparatus. In *ACTS of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*, David Román too turns to a structure of feeling to explore his viewing of *Angels in America.* Through a close reading of the different characters on stage Román identifies two parallel emotions moving through the play—hope and empathy. Of hope, Román builds on Judith Butler's work thinking through a cultural psyche of the nation and explains "in these attempts to revise the cultural psyche, when people with AIDS and their supporters contest the regimes of power sustaining AIDS, hope emerges as a political means to bring about social change. In this context, to watch *Angels in America* on the eve of the 1992 presidential elections was to participate in a public ritual of hope."[127] While hope does not emerge as a key term within this chapter it is worth considering the ways that hope's affective sibling joy moves through this project as a precursor of sorts. That there is joy

[127] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 206.

might signal that there is a wellspring of hope being tapped into. This joy might be the thing that fuels the emergence of hope. Implicit in a sensuous melancholia is a sense of hope not in some naive form but more closely related to a concrete utopia as deployed by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.[128]

On the other side of hope is a nefarious kind of hope, which I align with empathy, rooted not in some imagining of a queer future free of death and suffering caused by HIV/AIDS but rather a mode of empathizing with those living with HIV/AIDS only through those who are heterosexual or HIV-. This kind of hope/empathy places those living with AIDS as being at the mercy of those who are not because they require their care and must conform to normative scripts of affective and bodily comportment that are legible to a majoritarian world. This is the work of *How to Survive a Plague*. Román draws our attention to this phenomena noting: "such a system sanctions compassion under the condition of altruism and constructs this altruism exclusively within the private domain. Unfortunately, this model reinvigorates a binarism between those who care and those who need care. Those who need care are disciplined under this system for hope of care."[129] As I explore in the following section, this becomes operationalized in *How to Survive a Plague* to domesticate and sanitize Bob Rafsky by placing him and his activism always in relation to heterosexuality and reproductive futurity, namely, his daughter. Román finds similar figures within *Angels in America* and, thinking with that character of Hannah Pitt, argues that "to rely on the kindness of strangers, as Hannah Pitt so glibly retorts, succumbs to a system of feeling where hope and compassion are produced

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[128] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York New York University Press, 2009), 3-4.
[129] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 215.

arbitrarily and without consistency; they remain optional sentiments leisurely offered to people with AIDS in the spirit of tolerance, a systematic effect of a politics of containment where people with AIDS are defined as expendable others." While *How to Survive a Plague* does not position those living with AIDS as expendable, it does position their lives as only being meaningful if they are part of the mainstream heterosexual world. And as such, we might ask, what about those who are not Bob Rafsky? What about those who do not have a daughter or who do not conform to the archetype of the father and family man? *How to Survive a Plague* aims to tell a normalizing story where pharmaceutical companies and heterosexuality are saviors which directly contradicts the words of Bob Rafsky in the wake of his confrontation with then presidential candidate Bill Clinton.

How to Survive a Plague embraces a kind of mourning and militancy that Douglass Crimp articulates in his article of the same name. Crimp argues against the kind of Freudian malaise as pathological and tells us in the final paragraph of his essay "the fact that our militancy may be a means of dangerous denial in no way suggests that activism is unwarranted. There is no question but that we must fight the unspeakable violence we incur from the society in which we find ourselves. But if we understand that violence is able to reap its horrible reward through the very psychic mechanisms that make us a part of this society, then we must also be able to recognize—along with our rage—our terror, our guilt, and our profound sadness. Militancy, of course, then, but mourning too: mourning *and* militancy."[130] I see this ending that Crimp offers as, alongside the nefarious hope articulated by Román, guiding themes of *How to Survive a*

[130] Douglass Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2002), 149.

Plague. Importantly for this project, mourning and militancy both have an end. Eventually protease inhibitors are discovered and people do stop dying in such catastrophic numbers and with the end of mourning so too does the militancy end. This ending of mourning, militancy, and anger is what sets the stage for a 21st century where *How to Survive a Plague* becomes both needed and problematic. Ultimately, empathy guides the viewer to care not for the dead or those dying from HIV/AIDS but rather those that are left behind, often heterosexual. Rather than fight for a reformed world, a sensuous melancholia envisions the fight being against the world at its very foundation because it is the fracturing violence of identity difference that enables empathy to take form and be a mode of disciplining the "other."

A sensuous melancholia does not reject Crimp but attempts to extend his thinking. Rather than an end in sight, as is possible and expected with both mourning and militancy, this chapter argues that a sensuous melancholia can be a practiced way of life.[131] To do this I turn to another 21st century representation of the fight against HIV/AIDS: *120 BPM*. Rather than the telos towards normalization, *120 BPM* offers a genre breaking scene that shows a way of practicing melancholia such that the mourning and militancy is never ending because the dead are never forgotten or left behind. To ensure their remembrance, this film engages in a ritualized resurrection. Following Lisa Duggan's "Queering the State" which argues for a religiosity of queerness rooted not in identity but in the way a belief is put into practice: "a right to practices expressive of those beliefs."[132] If a religious identity comprises the right to practice the identity then we

[131] This formulation is a reference to Michel Foucault's "Friendship as a Way of Life"
[132] Judith Butler, "Queering the State" *Social Text*, no. 39 (1994): 12.

might understand it not as an identity at all but rather simply a capturing of a manifested and embodied belief through the logics of discourse and identity formation. If we view it this way then we might join Dugan in reconceptualizing not only queerness as practice but also melancholia and, in particular, a sensuous melancholia that becomes manifest through a ritual of mourning the dead that does not simply recognize loss but resurrects the dead such that they can be made present in the world and brought into the self as a kind of counter-jouissance. Such a presence enables them to not only exist in relation to the individual mourner but to a collective however small who participate and witness this ritual. This collective can then continue the mourning practice for as long as is needed or sustainable. As opposed to working against a society that enacts violence, a sensuous melancholia looks to carry the dead into battle against it with the end of the world on the horizon. The dead must be carried until that otherwise world is reached and they "may rest in peace at last" on the other side of that warm glowing horizon.[133]

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The day I turned three years old Bob Rafsky died. I cannot remember my third birthday but I know that I was attending a private Christian preschool at the time. I couldn't know what world was happening around me but now…I can't help but imagine the ways people were fighting and dying when I was being taught to write the letter Y and failing. What did my parents do? How do I tell them what their vote for Reagan means to me? That the silence that formed my very being was the result of the people they proclaimed to support? That their trajectory to middle class white suburbia also meant that I would live a majority of my life until now in fear? That my parents

[133] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

supported the death of my people? But, my mom is also my people. Like so many others, I can't abandon my family because of a single issue. I can't afford to do so. So, I owe it to you, those who died, in part because of my lineage which is filled with violence and pain, to think about whose death enabled the very conditions of my coming into being. The people who died such that I might eventually know a life unimaginable to them. A life full of fear and silence, yes, except for maybe you. And you may be gone, but I am bringing you back. I am engaging in a citational practice in the hope that I may be granted the authority to make it so. Because my citation of you is a kind of citation in and of itself.

This is why when I teach *How to Survive a Plague* I no longer hide the fact that I cry everytime. I explain to my students that I teach this documentary at least twice a year so I know what is in store for me. This documentary that does the needed work of setting out to record what really happened, some version of reality, about ACT UP, about a group of people who rose up and changed the world. I tell them that I have a ritual. I get a bottle of wine and usually start drinking before I even press play. I know the moments I will end up rewatching once or twice or maybe for an hour. That one moment early on, the only time that the now canonical chant "Act UP, Fight Back, Fight AIDS" was remixed and had something else snuck in: make love.[134] These commands speak to a way of life rooted in not only a kind of radical politic but a radical, maybe even revolutionary, joy such that as painful as the fight may be there are ways of acting and creating joy and pleasure. I tell them that if nothing else gets me before the Ashes Action then that surely does. I invite them to be vulnerable. To share when they cried because I have to believe

[134] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

they had, how could you not? Doesn't this documentary, in the great tradition of ACT UP, take aim at our emotions? In one class, after I'd let the students see more of me than I usually allow, we began to ask what meaning our tears have for these people in the documentary who are long dead or still alive and well because of pharmaceutical companies? I believe it matters because we have entered a third era in the HIV/AIDS history of emotions: empathy. We must cry because we must see them as human. This is a documentary about ACT UP, about a people who changed the world. But it is not them that validate their own humanity. Rather, it is a middle aged white woman carrying the ashes of her dead son; a young blonde haired girl wailing at her father's funeral. Because it is hard to be angry with an endemic virus where allegedly no one dies anymore. There is no longer a need to occupy a cathedral in the midst of mass or take over a federal building because the drugs are now in bodies. So, we need to cry.

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A middle aged white woman is in the midst of a crowd of gay men. Some resplendent in leather armor or jean jackets with pink triangles adorning their back or gray and somber ACT UP t-shirts which demand our voice. She opens a small box to show her son's ashes; all that is left of her son can fit in her hand. Couldn't that have been my mom holding me one last time? The protesters march to the White House before the many layers of fences which have now been erected. They get to the metal rod iron that divides the epicenter of American political power from the people it is allegedly meant to represent and protect. The woman is not alone as a number of people are carrying an assortment of urns and makeshift urns. Upon arriving at the fence their ranks have been infiltrated by police on horseback with clubs drawn to beat the protestors away

from the fence. Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame![135] As the protesters sit down to ensure the horses cannot trample them they shout at the police and form a human wall around those carrying the dead. They chant "bringing the dead to your door" and the real action begins.[136] For those ashes are not there for some ceremony or to attempt to make police more averse towards violence, we know that impossible, but rather they are the very weapons of this battle. In a moment of seeming unparalleled sacrifice and courage, the protestors touch their loved one a final time as they take handfuls of their ashes and throw them onto the White House lawn as if to make material the chant: shame! Through this performance of mourning and militancy there is a need to touch their lost loved one one final time even though all that is left is ashes. This need is also a need to touch and enact a better world where they could touch not ashes but flesh. Where they could touch the face of their lover just like they used to do every day. In the face of this impossibility, the dead are brought back one final time to fight back against the world that abandoned them. Even after their death they are made present, made into a happening, with the aid of their loved ones.

Often the ashes were divided up between different people. Family members or friends may want to keep the ashes but sometimes the deceased left instructions that their death should not be the end of their fight. That their ashes or body will be used one final time to fight AIDS. I tell my students that I don't think I could do it. They don't know how serious of a question that is for me because they do not know who I have lost and the way he was laid to rest without being able to say goodbye. But sometimes my voice

[135] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.
[136] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

catches and maybe I've taught them to close read well enough. How could you have the last of your love in your hands and throw it at the very people who took them from you? What commitment it must take to give over the last of your loved one and have their final resting place be on the White House lawn or, more likely, some White House dumpster or sewer after the lawn has been cleaned. Maybe it's one final curse. Leaving the dead to haunt all those who would come to inhabit the power to enact a necropolitical reality. And the thing about ashes though is that water does not necessarily wash them away. The water can solidify ashes so even after the action was over the dead were still resisting being erased. It rained the next day, as if the world was crying like those AIDS activists did the day before, and those ashes solidified and became rocks that proved difficult to remove. These might be counter-cairns. The ashes, now rocks, show a path to a world where none of this was necessary.

Bob Rafksy asks of us: "what does a decent society do with people who hurt themselves because they're human, who smoke too much, who eat too much, who drive carelessly, who don't have safe sex? I think the answer is that a decent society doesn't put people out to pasture and let them die because they've done a human thing."[137] He's dancing with his young daughter. It's the father-daughter dance that she will never get at her wedding because our society puts Bob Rafsky out to pasture.[138] Bob Rafsky seems to be the only person to have his own leitmotif in the documentary. Beautiful strings wrap around him as he dances because the soundtrack knows something we don't, that Bob Rafsky does not survive. But, these strings are not only his. They only begin to be played

[137] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.
[138] Even writing this, I have begun to cry.

when Rafsky is with his daughter. The strings begin the work of empathy that is so central to the documentary.

How to Survive a Plague is filled with pivotal moments and in so many it is Bob Rafsky who accentuates the scene. When a man is being evicted because his name is not on the lease with his now dead lover it is Bob Rafsky that takes the stage to preach of the power within the room and how it is available to all. During the occupation of a pharmaceutical headquarters it is Rafsky who forcefully asks "do you see this dark mark on my forehead? It's Kaposi Sarcoma."[139] Rafsky is asking this of a pharma executive but the audience too must face this question. Do we see it? Do we know what year this archived footage is from? Do we know that the KS lesion means that Rafsky will die?

When Dr. Anthony Fauci visits an ACT UP meeting it is Rafsky who poses a question of responsibility and ethics and it is only his question and Fauci's response that we hear in the documentary: "I may be wrong, Dr. Fauci, but it's my understanding that thousands of people died from pneumonia because there was no priority within the government, or within the medical system as a whole, to push the known preventative treatments for a long time. Now those thousands of people are dead. It would seem to me that someone who was within the government while that took place, as you were, must have on their conscience these deaths."[140]As Rafsky makes this incisive and confrontational comment the camera pans to every ACT UP member we have met along the way throughout the documentary including firebrand Larry Kramer who looks on pensively. It is Rafsky who comes to stand in as the representative of ACT UP who

[139] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.
[140] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

launches an ethical challenge to Fauci about government and medical failure. It is Rafsky who “heckels" Bill Clinton in a presidential primary debate by daring to be a person living with AIDS and reminding Clinton that “we’re dying in this state” and asking “what are you going to do about AIDS?” “Bill, we’re dying of neglect,” which is really to say, Rafsky will die from this neglect whereas what Bill is “dying of is ambition.”[141] Clinton, not understanding that anger is the point, insists Rafsky, with his visible KS lesion, calm down.

In what appears to be the ACT UP debrief after the action we might think that it is Rafsky running for president and not Clinton as he is asked to take the stage to a standing ovation. After he jokes of Clinton’s claim on intelligence and authority he pivots and refuses to recognize Clinton as some kind of savior explaining that “it’s always important to say that we all know that the names of the people who might save our lives are not Bill Clinton, Jerry Brown, etc. The names of the people who might save our lives are Iris Long, Mark Harrington, Peter Staley, etc. And they are the ones who will be remembered as the heroes of this epidemic, as well as those who have gone before.”[142] Rafsky creates an alternative mythos that relies on the dead, those who have gone before, as a kind of citational practice that places Long, Harrington, and Staley as the latest iteration of heroes whose deeds will outlive their names. In this moment Rafsky offers a blueprint for how remembrance becomes a political force against the normativizing pull of elections rooted in civil rights discourses and respectability being one more form of chrononormativity.

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[141] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.
[142] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

There are a number of funerals that refuse to be contained within the traditional form, including the Ashes Action, and Bob Rafsky is central to two. At the first Rafsky serves as the eulogizer of Mark Fisher in front of George HW Bush's campaign headquarters. It is as much a curse as eulogy as Rafsky defiantly damns Bush. The funeral starts with a viewing at Judson Memorial Church and the room is quiet with only the shuffling of clothes. ACT UP is prepared as ever with a sea of black umbrellas to protect everyone, including Fisher, from the rain as they carry the open casket from the church, through the streets, and to the door of Bush's headquarters. Rafsky and those around him are wearing jackets telling us that the rain has come along with the cold. This cold and rain to someone with a compromised immune system poses a risk, a risk that is necessary to ensure the political funeral. But Rafsky announces that this political funeral is not for Fisher as this is a celebration of Fisher's "undying anger" but rather this is a political funeral for Bush.[143] As Rafsky gives an impassioned eulogy the camera offers us a close up of his face. He is holding a microphone and surrounded by friends holding him close to keep him warm and dry as he curses the man whose name curdles his breath. Visible again are the KS lesions and it is the first time we hear Rafsky say that he will die. Rafsky ends the eulogy by articulating a sensuous melancholia, an embodied melancholia that refuses to move on. This is a melancholia that can only end when the world does and until then the dead must be taken in, given safe harbor, and fought for. Fighting for the dead means fighting against death, against the conditions that refused them the life we all deserve. Fisher has died of AIDS, as will Rafsky but their spirit and souls cannot be captured or killed because they are carried alongside "as those who have

[143] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

gone before." They will haunt Bush and all those responsible and demand the epidemic end. Rafsky ends his eulogy:

"Standing by Mark's body we put this curse on you. Mark's spirit will haunt you until the end of your days so that in the moment of your defeat you'll remember our defeats. And in the moments of your death you'll remember our deaths. As for Mark, when the living can no longer speak, the dead may speak for them. Mark's voice is here with us, as is the voice of Pericles, who two millennia ago mourned the Athenian soldiers who didn't have to die, and in whose death he was complicit but who had the nobility to say that their memorial was the whole earth. Let the whole earth hear us now. We beg, we pray, we demand that this epidemic end! Not just so we may live, but so that Mark's soul may rest in peace at last. In anger and in grief, this fight is not over till all of us are saved. Act up. Fight Back. Fight AIDS."[144]

Building out of ancient Greece, a tried and true mythos of the eternal gay, Rafsky does not merely articulate the ways that Bush and his ilk are responsible for the seemingly unending violence that Rafsky knows will take him. He positions this funeral for Bush's career as having the potential to change the entire world. Empathy appears, subtly, again as Rafsky imagines the entire world being a memorial for all those needlessly lost to AIDS. As if the only appropriate recourse is for the entire world to mourn and be rebuilt from those ashes turned counter-carns on the White House lawn.

But, something is missing here and it's Bob Rafsky's leitmotif. In this moment where Rafsky proclaims his own death and curses Bush there are no strings playing. Only

[144] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

rain and Rafsky's voice. The documentary recognizes this and the very next scene the strings start as Rafsky is walking with his daughter to lunch and the strings transform him from the man who heckled Clinton and cursed Bush to a loving dad of a giggly young girl. We have to remember his daughter because soon after Mark Fisher's funeral we arrive at Bob Rafsky's. The church is nearly empty except for his daughter. The documentary begins its own visual eulogy with the strings playing still as it shows Rafsky arguing with Clinton and a picture of his obituary in a major newspaper.

Rafsky has died of AIDS and we are in the church but…the leitmotif is still playing. Because the leitmotif is not his, it belongs to his daughter. A young blonde white girl wearing a rainbow windbreaker, she's only a few years older than I was on that day and her world has been shattered. She wails in the church as her mom hoists her up to console and to carry her out of the church. The camera shifts and zooms in and out searching for her face. For the tears running down her face; as if those tears are the evidence that Bob Rafsky should still be alive. Because in our cultural imaginary her tears are worse than his death. In the wake of Rafsky's death we might realize that this documentary posits that his entire life becomes meaningful because of who he left behind. The problem with his death is not its meaninglessness or the unnecessariness but rather that a young white girl is now without a father. Rafsky can only truly come into any sense of subjectivity in the final instance through heterosexuality and a reproductive futurity when he is already dead and off screen.

My students are eyeing the clock; they know we only have a few minutes left but they do me the kindness of not packing up yet. We've been through something together now. We arrived at the uncomfortable reason for many of our tears. That there is now a

young fatherless girl and so much of the loss does not revolve around those who died of AIDS but the heterosexual family members they leave behind. I know my time is almost up so I take us back to the first moment where this leitmotif plays. Rafsky is in the private space of the heterosexual home with his daughter and ex-wife. They look just like any normal family. He doesn't have KS lesions yet and he and his ex-wife take turns sitting on the ground with their daughter between their legs and rocking back and forth. The daughter says that he doesn't do it as well as her mother. We then hear Rafsky's voice as a voiceover on this private scene: "I know this sounds ironic, considering it ended in divorce, but I think it is fair to say it is the only really successful love affair of my life."[145] Knowing that these strings are not for him but rather for the result of this heterosexual love affair I begin to wonder aloud what it might feel like as a queer man to have slept with or dated or loved Bob Rafsky. How much would it hurt to see the man who led this fight never be allowed by the documentary to acknowledge on screen his love of men? That this central figure of this definitive documentary about ACT UP and HIV/AIDS revolves not around a queerness but a kind of yearning and affirmation of the heterosexual pair is the final provocation I have for them because the class is over and we only have so much time. But, still, something is missing. The whole world is still not yet a memorial even as we have seen glimpses of it, rehearsals of it. We have given pharmaceutical companies dozens of billions of dollars for the privilege of some having biopolitics instead of necropolitics. The solidified ashes on the White House lawn are long gone and additional fences make such an action impossible to launch again.

[145] How to Survive a Plague, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

If *How to Survive a Plague* proves unsatisfactory then I shall make another offering. Rather than bringing the dead to your door—rather than bringing their physical remains to use as weapons against a negligent state or politician—what if we brought our dead to each other. How might we find melancholia not in the ashes of the dead or the wail of a young girl but in some sensuous life of yearning "to touch and be touched by the amorous other" and a hunger "to touch another world" through the traces that we share?[146]

"Unrequited touch is an unrequited world."[147]
-Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch"

Like many, I discovered Robin Campillo's deeply moving *120 BPM* by way of Barry Jenkins' tweets in 2017. Jenkins, whose mother is HIV+, rawly spoke of the film as he live tweeted his experience watching it: "Fuuuuuuuuuug I just had to pause BPM because this scene just destroyed me. DE.....STROYED. I shouldn't drink because it's late but I need to room service a glass of something before I head back in. Damn."[148] Damn indeed. Jenkins continued: "I have my wine now. I needed it after that."[149] I take comfort knowing that my viewing practice of pausing, drinking, and diving back in is

[146] Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch, or, Writing Touch," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24, no. 2-3 (2014): 233.
[147] Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch, or, Writing Touch," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24, no. 2-3 (2014): 233.
[148] Zach Sharf, "Barry Jenkins Doesn't Get How 'BPM (Beats Per Minute)' Got Snubbed at the Oscars: 'How is This Not the Film of the Moment?,'" Indiewire, December 25, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/barry-jenkins-reviews-bpm-beats-per-minute-oscar-foreign-language-1201910896/.
[149] Zach Sharf, "Barry Jenkins Doesn't Get How 'BPM (Beats Per Minute)' Got Snubbed at the Oscars: 'How is This Not the Film of the Moment?,'" Indiewire, December 25, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/barry-jenkins-reviews-bpm-beats-per-minute-oscar-foreign-language-1201910896/.

shared with the *Moonlight* director. Despite being "snubbed" in Jenkins' words, the film made waves both in its home of France but also across the Atlantic in the United States, thanks certainly in part to Jenkins' moving live reaction.[150] This chapter spins out across the Atlantic for two reasons. First because, I would argue, the film spins out to the United States and offers a much needed intervention into the visual culture of AIDS which is filled with documentaries and archival footage that has its limitations as I previously outlined. Second, because the film so clearly offers an example of what it might look like on screen to see a sensuous melancholia at work.

Campillo's direction might be one reason for the film's success and of interest to this chapter. Rather than documentary, Campillo mobilizes historical fiction to create a world familiar to him as he was involved in ACT UP Paris through the 1980s. Unlike *How to Survive a Plague*, *120 BPM* does not aim to document what "really" happened but, rather, I see it as aiming to tell a truth that was also articulated by Gregg Bordowitz in Deborah Gould's *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*: "ACT UP was everything. ACT UP was home. ACT UP was part of a supportive climate. It was a place to find sex. It was a place to have discussions. [To] form friendships which are still dear to me. I mean, it was just everything. It was all that it could possibly be. [ACT UP/NY] was huge. The meetings were just packed. You had to touch a hundred bodies to get across the room, it was a very erotically charged place to be. And that was part of it. I was into it. I was into that kind of politics. I had heard about revolutionary joy, but here

[150] Zach Sharf, "Barry Jenkins Doesn't Get How 'BPM (Beats Per Minute)' Got Snubbed at the Oscars: 'How is This Not the Film of the Moment?,'" Indiewire, December 25, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/barry-jenkins-reviews-bpm-beats-per-minute-oscar-foreign-language-1201910896/.

was my time to experience it. I just loved it. . . . It was life-saving. It was a place to go to get support. It was a place to put all of my energies into. . . ."[151] It is this erotic touching that Campillo leans into rather than a chronological timeline that offered a telos of deradicalization and a yielding to capitalist profit motives. Campillo aims to tell the truth. And this truth required not a valorization of action and resistance but a simple story of what happens when you can't be Peter Staley or Bob Rafsky. What happens when your impending death stops you from attending those meetings that Bordowitz hails and instead you just need to keep feeling like you're dancing with someone who loves you even when your body fails and you can't stand up anymore.[152] This is the story that Campillo offers.

That this story is historical fiction becomes more and more necessary as the story progresses. To do historical fiction is to tell a history that could have and might have been. It enables Campillo to create the world that was true without acceding to the strictures of a reality that wished him, his characters, and probably me dead. Like Marcos Gonsalez, Campillo can find the beauty through the pain and terror of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through a queer storytelling that Barry Jenkin identifies in his tweets; the making of "little gestures of the eye (the characters' and ours) that flutter by." [153]

Like *How to Survive a Plague*, 120 BPM begins with activism. Members of ACT UP, including Sean a thin, pretty, and defiant queer HIV+ man, are in an ACT UP weekly

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[151] Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 184.

[152] I am crying again.

[153] Zach Sharf, "Barry Jenkins Doesn't Get How 'BPM (Beats Per Minute)' Got Snubbed at the Oscars: 'How is This Not the Film of the Moment?,'" Indiewire, December 25, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/barry-jenkins-reviews-bpm-beats-per-minute-oscar-foreign-language-1201910896/.

meeting where they are debriefing the latest direct action that ended with fake blood covering the speaker whose organization has failed those living with HIV/AIDS; who Sean and others had handcuffed to a part of the stage that he was standing on, a kind of violence viewed as scandalous. And while direct action sets the pace for the beginning of this two and a half hour long film, the actions ultimately fade away as Nathan, one of the newest HIV- members of ACT UP, and Sean meet, try to fuck, and fall in love. And I do not say love lightly here. This kind of love is not of the Westian variety because the film gradually moves more and more into the private sphere but, critically, unlike Bob Rafsky's heterosexual home, Nathan and Sean must scrape together a living as Sean's HIV develops into AIDS and he begins to slowly die. Nathan never leaves him and is with him in the end. But, I've gone too far ahead. We need to go back.

It is now Campillo's Paris in the early 1990s. Classes at a high school are almost over when a group of AIDS activists entered the classroom to tell, not ask, the teacher that they are there to teach safe sex. As they hurriedly explain condoms, lube, and dental dams and the risks of HIV and pass out pamphlets and condoms, the bell rings. Outside on the quad there are more of them passing out pamphlets and condoms while two, including a mother of a teenager who is HIV+, confront the school principal about a lack of sex education and condoms in contradiction of official recommendations. Cameras and reports have encircled them, ensuring documentation, alongside activists holding Silence=Death signs and chanting "Teenagers at Risk" and "Condoms in High School."[154] Nathan is in a gray ACT UP Paris shirt passing out condoms and pamphlets telling those walking by to protect themselves and to use condoms and when he runs of

[154] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

anal sex pamphlets Sean, in a denim jacket, steps over to offer one. A girl walks by and rejects it, them, announcing that she's "no fag…I won't catch your AIDS shit."[155] Without a moment's hesitation Sean, who had been looking on, firmly grabs and holds Nathan's head to bring him in for a kiss that lasts just long enough to disgust the girl and make a statement before he lets go, shakes his head, and turns back to handing out condoms and pamphlets. Nathan takes a beat to realize what has happened and then still can't quite take his eyes off Sean despite him having walked away. This is where the "little gestures of the eye (the characters' and ours) that flutter by" truly begin.[156]

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Revolutionary joy in the heat of a protest is not easy to embody. It is hard to be joyful when fighting daunting powers that would sooner erase you then listen to you. To embody this joy does not come naturally, at least not to me. From the outside looking in it might seem as though activists are performing herculean feats through sheer willpower and a commitment to justice or some other abstract idea that so often is summoned when difficult things must be done. But, this is simply not true. For every 8 hour meeting that goes until 3am the night before your early morning class, the class that has homework that you still have not done, there is dancing in a friend's apartment with some new cute member of the group who has a fire you so clearly remember. And fire doesn't diminish when shared, it only grows. Or, you're at a conference where you attend panel after panel, workshop after workshop. They're about the racism deeply embedded in the

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[155] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

[156] Zach Sharf, "Barry Jenkins Doesn't Get How 'BPM (Beats Per Minute)' Got Snubbed at the Oscars: 'How is This Not the Film of the Moment?,'" Indiewire, December 25, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/barry-jenkins-reviews-bpm-beats-per-minute-oscar-foreign-language-1201910896/.

California Master Plan or the need to disaggregate data to enable entire communities to become seen (at great risk) or how to link arms with your comrades in a circle where you all face in so you can be there together because it is this configuration that makes you all most immovable by police, the state, together. But there is a pleasure as embedded as that racism because all the while you know you're hosting the after party. That you saw the sexiest guy until you saw the next one. And you know you'll see them later when you can attempt swagger as you walk up and offer them the hidden away private handle of Southern Comfort that's only for you and yours…and everyone who might be you and yours. This can be exhausting work but I was brought into a family that knew how to sustain ourselves with one another. I learned not to consent to being a single being long before I had ever heard of Fred Moten or Édouard Glissant; but, I learned it through conviviality. So, as I watch this protest at a high school and as I see the little gestures between Nathan and Sean I know where this film is truly heading. The activism is no red herring, certainly not. It is the very condition of possibility of all that is to come and there is so much more to come.

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Nathan is still on the quad and trying to coyly look at Sean as house music begins playing at a cool 120 beats per minute. The music takes us to the dark nightclub full of small scattered rainbow lights where all of ACT UP Paris can be found smoking, dancing, and kissing one another. The camera pans up and down showing them dancing slowly and fast at the same time depending how the music has moved them. They have all lost the jean jackets and all other things that might constrict them. We eventually are taken to Sean who spins and bends and moves with the camera such that he also moves

around the dance floor never quite landing on a dance partner until he and Nathan have made their way to one another. Sean spins one more time right in front of Nathan and stops and simply looks at Nathan before he reaches his hands above his head. All as if to say, I know you want me and here I am. They begin to dance together, their shoulders and arms moving to the same rhythm. As they get closer together the camera pans down away from the lights and focuses on their hands as they reach for the hem of one another's shirt and begin to lift them up. But something else has happened that's not easily noticed yet. It is here where Campillo leaves historical fiction behind because, like the political funerals of ACT UP, what must happen next is more than the genre can contain or capture.

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Taking someone home and fucking on screen usually has a rhythm to it. This rhythm is not by accident as queer porn star and public thinker Ty Mitchell tells us: "We learn some things from TV and movies: men cum quickly, consistently, often uncontrollably, and women do not appear to cum at all, just moan and wince a lot. And we learn from porn, from money shots that sync narrative to sexual climax."[157] Put differently, even queer or gay porn often follows the same timeline where you fuck, uninterrupted, until the man (the top) cums. What is spoken should only be things that contribute to and further sync and reify that narrative: fuck me harder, don't stop, no it's lower, I'm going to cum.[158] There is a telos such that ideas of sex end up being taught in

[157] Ty Mitchell, "Safe for Work Content from Twitter's Favorite Vers Porn Star," Cakeboy, Cakeboy Magazine, June 19, 2018, http://cakeboymag.com/posts/cumming-together.

[158] It may be worth noting that film is so directed that Georgina Kleege makes a point of noting in Sight Unseen how film is often times more accessible that the real world because of how directed all components of it are towards the narrative.

such a way that they conform to the priorities of the world.[159] We might ask: what does this kind of sex produce? What are the series of effects that it instantiates? Especially within non-reproductive partners, when there is no child to be had, what comes of it? And, more importantly, what becomes possible when this emaciated fucking telos is disregarded for something else? I argue that when Sean and Nathan leave these narratives behind they end up enacting a sensuous melancholia. But I've gotten ahead of myself, again. We have to go back to the club and see how Sean and Nathan go from a hot, sweaty, and beautiful club to enacting a mode of unbecoming with one another that may be a rehearsal for some otherwise world.

This divergence from chrononormativity might be productively adhered to Ellen Samuels' work on crip time where she articulates that "crip time is grief time" and "grief time emerged with modernity as a temporal and affective state juxtaposed to progressive, mechanical time."[160] Samuels', writing about her dying mother, notes "the way the days slowed and swelled unbearably around her death, or how the years piled up afterward, always too much, never enough."[161] Likewise, those living with AIDS had their sense of time distorted opening up the possibility to question how a society could "put them out to pasture" in Rafsky's words.

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The camera pans down as Sean and Nathan try to take off each other's shirt. We might imagine ourselves in that club, eager to see that glimpse of body that appears just above the line of their jeans. We're looking on, eager to see what's to come and just

[159] See Linda Williams' Screening Sex
[160] Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017).
[161] Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017).

maybe we can join them. Campillo places us in the position of a cruising onlooker. But Sean and Nathan never give us a look, they are only seeing each other and gradually if suddenly, the camera pans back up and the background is slightly darker as their shirts are pulled over their head. And then Nathan is pushing Sean backwards. And we have left the club and been transported to Sean's bedroom. Nathan has pushed Sean back onto his bed and now they're sitting getting their pants off with urgency. The frantic nature of it all, the skipped time, and the feeling of being transported can be seen as mirroring that drunken haze they might be feeling. Drunk on alcohol maybe but also likely drunk on each other and the endorphins of the day's activism. Already, time has slipped away or at least become enjambed because one of them does not have time to walk or drive or take a cab home.

Nathan goes to suck Sean only to have Sean stop him so he can get a condom. Sean says he prefers it but I don't know anyone who prefers getting head with a condom on. Nathan seems to agree. Sean says it's safer only to have Nathan ask which is it: preference or safety?[162] Maybe it's both. That Sean frames safety as a preference, as if knowing he cannot pass on HIV is a kind of pleasure alongside Nathan's mouth. Sean, being a good partner, goes to grab a condom as Nathan is sucking his cock. He puts it on Nathan and goes down on him for a bit before he has to stop because Nathan is making him feel too good to do anything other than lay back. It is here where the normative sex narrative is first interrupted as Nathan brings Sean to climax and his cum goes in a condom that he ties off and throws out. Sean tries to return the favor but Nathan laughs

[162] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

and explains that he can't cum from head with a condom on before asking "who is that woman?" and points to a photograph on Sean's wall just next to his bed.

Sean explains that the photograph is his mother and that it was taken when they lived in Chile. Nathan learns that Sean's father is Chilean and that they lived there until Sean and his mother moved back to France when he was 15 years old. Nathan, clearly looking to keep the conversation going, points to another picture on Sean's wall. This one is of Sean and Nathan tells him he looks cute in it. We see the photo briefly before the camera shows Sean moving closer to Nathan, laying on him with his arms down on the bed to keep his body up and arches as to see the photograph. But what we see is his back. Highly accentuated spine and shoulder blades tell us that Sean is not just thin but ill and underweight. But still beautiful. Nathan begins to touch and caress the side of Sean's body as he asks how old Sean was in the photo. "Fifteen…one year later, I got infected."[163]

With this answer the historical fiction gives way to a sensuous melancholia. I argue that it is this shift in genre that enables a sensuous melancholia because, like the funeral, historical fiction still accedes to the metaphysical infrastructure of the world. A sensuous melancholia does not owe the world such deference.

Nathan asks "who was it?" and Sean explains that it was his maths teacher, that they were in love.[164] He was sixteen and it was his first time when he seroconverted him. The camera pans down and suddenly a new hand enters the scene and caresses Sean's lower back and ass. His math teacher has been brought back and made material in Sean's

[163] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.
[164] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

room as Sean explains his seroconversion. While he explains that his teacher had a baby at home with his wife and that he likely didn't know that he was positive Sean's first time with him is recreated on screen. This materialization of his seroconversion shows the audience how it happened and how much care his math teacher had for him as he slowly caresses, kisses, and fucks Sean while Sean is also laying on Nathan. Sean becomes plural at this moment. One Sean lays on Nathan and recounts while the other lays on Nathan and is fucked. We are still in the bed in Sean's bedroom but the math teacher simply emerged from Sean's telling: "we were in love. I trusted him. And he trusted me."[165] We, as the audience, are offered no information as to how this man was brought into being, onto the screen. And, importantly, Campillo does not make this a flashback. Rather than accept unrequited touch and the accompanying unrequited world, Campillo embarks on a scene that brings about an impossible touching and an impossible world, if only as a glimpse, as a rehearsal of what the world might have been. Maybe Sean and his past lover would have met Nathan at a bar and brought him home with them where they could all be together, if not for a failed response by the French state.

The lost lover is brought back by Sean to be touched one more time and while Nathan and the teacher are never on screen together we might wonder if Nathan too can see him. What would it matter if Nathan could see this man that Sean loved? What would it do for Nathan to see Sean's seroconversion restaged for him? For us? Sean does not have his teacher's body to use as a weapon against the state but he can conjure him again for Nathan, and for us, to show the way they cared for each other. To show how even through the care and love and trust there can be unknown violence. What comes next?

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[165] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

What do we do when people do a "human thing"?[166] What must Nathan do when society inevitably fails to keep Sean alive just like it failed to keep Sean and his teacher safe from a deadly virus? How are we all changed by Sean bringing his teacher back such that we all now must carry not just the idea of him but his very embodiment which necessarily includes the virus that will surely kill him? These questions which make demands of us all about the kind of life we are to live are made possible by Sean practicing a sensuous melancholia.

So much of this scene is about overcoming the impossibility of touch whether it be Sean and Nathan navigating their serodiscordance to protect Nathan or the summoning of the dead to touch them again with one another. In a 2003 question and answer session at Eastern Michigan University José Esteban Muñoz asks "What is it to enact a mode of touching that isn't about mastery, that isn't about foreclosure, that isn't about fusing, that isn't about collapsing things?"[167] I posit that Sean and Nathan offer an answer to this question.

This rehearsal of an otherwise world where the dead are still with them ends abruptly as does Sean's explanation as an alarm goes off. It is time for Sean to take AZT so he reaches for his pills on the nightstand along with a large water bottle kept nearby. The hookup is broken by a recounting of infection and this recounting is subsequently interrupted by the reality of AIDS. That Sean is taking AZT means that we are back to historical fiction and with that means we have also gotten a glimpse of what point in the HIV/AIDS epidemic we are in. That Sean takes AZT and has been positive for at least 4

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[166] *How to Survive a Plague*, Dir. David France, (2012; New York, NY: IFC Films, 2012), online.

[167] José Esteban Muñoz, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= tVQmeO1m9NU, quoted in Hypatia Vourloumis, "Ten Theses on Touch, or, Writing Touch," Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory 24, nos. 2 and 3 (2014): 237, doi: 10.1080/0740770X.2014.973755.

years means that he will likely not survive long enough for the protease inhibitors to be made available. This is one of the first moments in the movie where we get confirmation that there will be no happy ending.

While Sean swallows the AZT Nathan notes how the teacher was older and should have known. Honing in on the clear power difference and seemingly skeptical of this love and trust with a man who passed on a deadly virus, Nathan attempts to place blame or responsibility on the teacher for infecting Sean but Sean embraces a kind of agency often denied to queer children and explains how there is no one person who is responsible.[168] They are both 100% responsible because "what did we know?".[169] Nathan, wanting to absolve his new lover of his own death, shifts responsibility from them to the State. Sean agrees with the critique but shifts from the serious reality of a failed state, "yes, and now we're fucking."[170]

And fucking they are. Sean gets on top of Nathan and straddles him. He puts a condom on him then lube and rides him until Nathan flips them over so Sean is on his back moaning and writhing in pleasure. This second act of their hook up disrupts the idea that that the scene ends when the top cums or that two men fucking have to cum together. Each of them cum in a way that feels good to them and the other helps and cares and trusts them to get there. Pornography and sex on screen rarely have a second act after a climax. Usually the scene ends or the video is stopped or someone pulls out a cigarette and lights it as they lay under covers. But not this scene. The narrative arc(h), the plot, is

[168] See Juana María Rodríguez's *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* pages 29-68.
[169] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.
[170] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

queered but moreso cripped by a desire to continue to suck and share and fuck and share again. Because we've arrived at the next moment of resurrection.

As Nathan and Sean are hot, sweaty, and catching their breath, with Nathan caressing Sean's hair, Sean can't help but chuckle and ask "Am I your first poz?"[171] This question mirrors the way that Sean's first time was with an unknowing poz man. It initiates and mirrors that first time with a difference, namely, a condom. But it does more, this evocation of "first" enables Nathan to answer, queerly, "it depends." It enables Nathan to share his own story of his first and signals the start of a new story to be told and a new lover to be brought back into the bedroom with them.

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On firsts, David Román offers a useful frame in the "Official Histories" section of his introduction to *Acts of Interventions.* When thinking about the significance of the way HIV/AIDS is narrated in a kind of chronology Román begins with theatre historian Thomas Postlewait's explanation that "'narrativity' is not merely a technique, borrowed from literature, but instead a condition of our temporal understanding of individual and social experience" and Román extends: "And not just for theatre history. In many ways, the discourses of theatre history resemble the medical discourses of AIDS."[172] This understanding of narrativity also becomes useful for this genre bending film about AIDS as we visually see time jump, skip, return, and emjbamb throughout this scene. Román continues this section identifying all of the different ways that AIDS, both the epidemic and the virus, have multiple and overlapping starting points depending on how it is

[171] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.
[172] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), xvii.

conceptualized. Does one begin with the first medical record that has the words AIDS? Or, do we begin with the first known case before the term AIDS was created and adopted? Do we begin with a positive test? Or, do we begin with the first KS lesion?

Román continues noting that these origin points are not neutral but rather "each is based on a logical sequential ordering that is both selective and self-serving, and ideologically constructed as unmarked."[173] We might consider the casual, potentially, humorous way that Sean asks about Nathan's first. The film does not find these question very remarkable on the surface. It is as casual as asking about any other experience with sex. There may even be a way that the film buys into ideologies of a teleological understanding of AIDS as an inevitability whether that be encounter or seroconversion. *120 BPM* certainly has a narrative form and arc and, as Román notes, "narratives of AIDS are always problematic, whether they arise from science or the media. Narratives of AIDS are always representations of AIDS, and as Cindy Patton makes clear, 'representations of AIDS at every level—in the media, in the science, in the cultural assumptions manifest in the effects of institutional process—are multiple and discontinuous.'"[174] This should give us pause as we continue looking to this scene from *120 BPM.* Román concludes that "it is important to recognize that the information gathered from the official occasions of HIV and AIDS may discipline us into certain responses."[175] So within this pause we should consider the ways we are being disciplined not only by *How to Survive a Plague*, but also *120 BPM*.

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[173] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), xix.
[174] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), xix.
[175] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), xix.

As Sean and Nathan narrate their own histories of HIV/AIDS we might be able to describe this as rehearsing the very problematics that Román warns of. However, I turn again to the move from historical fiction to something more. While the world of the film comports with the reality of medical discourses, namely the difficulty to work with pharmaceutical companies, these moments within Sean's bedroom do not need to agree with such priorities. For Sean and Nathan to ask about "firsts" is not to create some false sense of discipline or articulate an origin point of either of their relationships to HIV/AIDS. Rather, these moments articulate a refusal to leave these other, possibly dead, men behind when the current necropolitical reality would abandon them to themselves. Rather than instantiating an official beginning or calling these men into being through their diagnosis, Sean and Nathan summon them back in the moments in which they cared most deeply for them. Rather than abide a sense of chronology, Campillo offers a world in which time is cripped and queered because it is only through a refusal to abide normative time that some other world might come into focus. The individual and social experience that Campillo creates is one where firsts do not create some kind of starting point but rather are a way of building solidarity through the lived reality of medical discourses and material conditions that only come into being through the necessary neglect of a nation state. In order to sustain itself the state must put people out to pasture to preserve the sense of self for the majoritarian minority. When the state fails, when the world fails, our individual and social experience necessarily deviates and any discussion of firsts is a strategic shadowing of normative temporal understandings. Nathan's "it depends" calls into being the messy complicated ways people, even HIV- people, lived with AIDS. It depends on refusing the chronology of AIDS while also playing with the

idea that HIV/AIDS has a single identifiable start or end. This embracing of a messy complicated temporality enables the kind of conjuring of the dead so central to a sensuous melancholia. Rather than concede to a time where the long gone lovers must be left behind, a sensuous melancholia looks for ways to reanimate and restage their presence in the world. A happening that can be summoned not just in the height of civil disobedience and activism but also in the bedroom of a new and beautiful lover.

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This time a younger man, maybe twenty years old. Nathan explains that the man wanted it without a condom. The camera cuts up above Nathan and Sean in the room and suddenly there is smoke in the room from a cigarette but it is neither Nathan nor Sean's. This new man has materialized into the room and onto the bed as he smokes the cigarette that would normally be held by Nathan or Sean. Campillo again refuses the flashback in favor of bringing the man into the space to touch and be touched again by Nathan while Sean maybe looks on.

The man explains that he didn't like his perfectly angular jaw, either representative of the deep insecurity of a young queer man or an obvious ploy for Nathan to reach out and touch his jaw as he compliments him. "It's too pointy. Too jutting."[176] he says as he leans his chin towards Nathan, an invitation to be touched. Though this is also Nathan's recounting so is it an invitation to be touched by the man or a yearning to touch the young man by Nathan as he tells the story of his "first poz"? And Nathan does compliment him, does care for him, does reach out and touch this amorous other such that again the scene refuses unrequitedness. Nathan places his hand on the back of his

[176] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

head and bring him down into bed with him as Nathan runs his hand down his back. Nathan then tells Sean "I saw small patches on his back" and how he tried to gently tell the man, remind him, to get tested every year.[177] This was met with anger and frustration that can only come from a place of fear and knowing and not wanting to know. The man was angry to be reminded of what was killing him. Nathan' hands, still moving up and down the man's back, linger around the kaposi sarcoma lesions on the small of his back. As if to try and heal him through this loving touch knowing that this man is likely already gone. This act of kindness might not be recognized by the man but it is no longer for the man. This rehearsal of tender touching is for Sean. The man was angry to be reminded of what was killing him. Upon hearing that the man was angry and that Nathan didn't push the matter any further Sean wraps his arms around Nathan and rolls them over so that Sean can be on top and asks "what more could you say? That he was positive?" to which Nathan responds "He wasn't just poz. He was sick."[178] This distinction between poz and sick has yet to be made between them but now that the distinction has been made it impacts Sean because he too is sick. He tells Nathan that he too has KS lesions and is glad that Nathan hasn't seen them yet. These KS lesions tell the same story that they tell on Bob Rafsky. The rehersal, the requited touch, has ended. Sean is brought back to the reality of his eventual death and Nathan must now also know this fact as well as do we the cruising voyeurs who have been allowed to watch thus far.

This evening has changed Nathan and Sean for the rest of the film. They are now squarely a pair such that even the jealous leader of ACT UP Paris calls Sean Nathan's

[177] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.
[178] *120 BPM*, Dir. Robert Campillo (2017: France: Memento Films, 2017), online.

annoying husband. Nathan in particular from then on refers to Sean as sick instead of poz including when they are at a direct action and Sean is being hauled into a police van. Their activism and relationship intensifies after having shown each other how much they can care and love. But also how their care and love can bend the rules of the world itself and bring back the dead. As if to say, Look, there they are. They could still be here just as easily as anyone else who is still alive. You brought them back to show each other and to show us all that they could still be alive and here and fucking. We carry them with us not just for the battles but also for ourselves and each other. We carry them so that they may be brought back to remind us to fight and love. We carry them so that on the day of our victory they can see what they've made possible. We carry them because they deserve to see us free and in love. So we can bring them back so they too can be free and loved. We've turned our dead into the most powerful weapons of ash and corpse and cry but we also bring them back at night in our small bedrooms with new lovers. With these new and maybe one time lovers we bring them back so that they might be shared so that if we too are taken you will never be lost.

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You take your AZT which is required because a man seroconverted you yet you talk lovingly about him. He gave you this virus that will surely kill you but blame does not rest on his shoulders. Rather than for blame, he is brought back to touch you again. To touch and love and share because he is not a virus. He is not the state that abandons your people. He is just a man who wanted you and who you wanted in return. So you bring him back. You introduce him to your new love. You find joy and pleasure with him again because the world, the state, the homophobes want you both dead and bringing him

back refused them this. You bring him back because you know you too will need to be brought back. So you show your new love what remembrance looks like and he shows you too in return. By the end, out of the four of you, only this new love will be left alive but now he can carry you. Carry your ashes, carry your anger, carry you with care. Act up. Fight Back. Fight AIDS. Act up. Fight Back. Make Love.

Chapter 3: The Matrilineal and Performing Brown Melancholia

Part 1

The Matrilineal: Paula Gunn Allen, the 27th Grievance, and Leaving the Wise Latina

Who is your mother?

This question opens and is the organizing structure for Paula Gunn Allen's "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism" which asserts that the idea of the matrilineal within indigenous society not only informs and constitutes the indigenous self but also offers a governing structure that's influence can be seen on the United States. This is to say, only by existing in plurality with your "mother" can you come to know yourself. This question and its importance offer an alternative starting point to not only organize a society but also organize knowledge as "naming your own mother (or her equivalent) enables people to place you precisely within the universal web of your life, in each of its dimensions: cultural, spiritual, personal, and historical."[179] I see this naming as not only to name a person but also, as Allen notes, the term mother "refers in every individual case to an entire generation of women whose psychic, and consequently physical, 'shape' made the psychic existence of the following generation possible."[180] The matrilineal offers a critical alternative to the patriarchal society of Europe and the United States with the centrality of male heirs and property rights.[181] Within Allen's

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[179] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

[180] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

[181] When I say Europe and the United States I mean both English and Virginian understandings of inheritance as Partus complicates matters but ultimately results in an upholding of the patriarchal society even if inheritance is known through the mother. I do not mean to diminish the role of the mother within

accounting, the mother becomes the avenue and means by which to enter this otherwise world that is both past in her accounting of historical documents but also in our present as laws, government structures, and even the American dream bear the trace of indigenous influence. More importantly for this project, however, is how indigenous peoples create sensuous and plural life worlds as they seek to answer Allen's critical question: who is your mother?

Allen's question and the significance that she places on the figure of the mother is not without critique. In "Paula Gunn Allen's Grandmothers of the Light: Falling through the Void" Michelle Campbell Toohey compiles and analyzes much of this critique and offers useful rebuttals. Two critiques in particular are worth attending to for this chapter. First, in Toohey's article she explains that "Mando Sevillano discounts what he calls her ethnic approach to literature on the grounds that her definitions of ceremonial literature and sacred discourse are similar to strong traditions in the Western world and can be 'explained with confidence by a non-Indian reader by using an archetypal mode of analysis.'"[182] While I don't fully align with this critique I do find the underlying assumptions of it useful and explanatory for "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism" as in it Allen looks to present a historical accounting that allows settler readers to incorporate indigenous socio-political projects into a long North American governing tradition. By doing this Allen does mobilize an "archetypal mode of analysis" which creates a continuum of thinkers that would be seen by many as strange bedfellows. Like women of color feminisms and lesbian feminisms of the time, Allen also relies on a

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the Antebellum south but rather articulate how that system was not theirs but rather placed upon them for particular Western aims.

[182] Michelle Campbell Toohey, "Paula Gunn Allen's Grandmothers of the Light: Falling through the Void," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* no 12, 3 (2000), 35.

tenuous continuum that forges generalities with the aim of creating acceptance and inclusion as a remedy for the violent exclusionary tactics seen throughout US history. Adrienne Rich and Gloria Anzaldúa in particular look to create analytic tools like a lesbian continuum or the idea of the bridge between difference. Allen, Rich, and Anzaldúa's efforts to attend to difference and the material consequences of difference alongside the ways histories of difference inform these material consequences serve as foundational idea to queer of color critique and, rather than view them as attempts to flatten or assimilate I see them as opportunities "to make use of a category that can be called into question, made to account for what it excludes."[183] It is no small task to call into question these foundational ideas of indigenous, lesbian, and woman of color feminisms but what lies within these continuums and categories becomes richer for it.

Second, the centrality of the mother in Allen's work and her claims about gynocentricity of indigenous tribes comes under question as Toohey succinctly highlights the tensions that emerge from these claims as "many anthropologists dispute Allen's tenacious insistence that most Native American nations were gynocentric. Such a manipulation of facts, they suggest, indicates a fundamental dishonesty to bolster Allen's tribal feminist political agenda. Even her own tribal community questions if Allen is selling out their interests to the white gay and lesbian community by her association with this issue."[184] Rather than agree or disagree with this critique, I look to approach Allen's work with an attunement to the reparative and ask what does Allen make possible with these claims about the world? I see Allen as offering the figure of the mother as a

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[183] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in Diana Fuss, ed., Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories (New York: Routledge, 1991), 19.

[184] Michelle Campbell Toohey, "Paula Gunn Allen's Grandmothers of the Light: Falling through the Void," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* no 12, 3 (2000), 36.

potentiality, a locus into otherwise. Allen's provocative claim becomes a moment to reorient ourselves and imagine how society might be reorganized through a rejection of patriarchy and euro-imperialist familial and social structures.

Knowing and naming your mother, and her lineage, is to know and name the world and your place in it, it is a shibboleth, a watchword, to something we might understand to be latinidad. For Juana María Rodríguez latinidad "serves to define a particular geopolitical experience but it also contains within it the complexities and contradictions of immigration, (post)(neo)colonialism, race, color, legal status, class, nation, language, and the politics of location."[185] What is key to this definition is that what constitutes latinidad is a particular experience which is to say an experience of brownness. The complexities and contradictions in Rodríguez's definition poses a problem as through these complexities and contradictions it becomes difficult to demarcate where latinidad begins and ends. Rather than attempt to demarcate latinidad in terms of identity, this chapter turns to José Esteban Muñoz's notion of latinidad as anti-identitarian and rooted in affect: "Feeling brown, the idea of feeling brown, is my attempt to begin to conceptualize this mode of belonging that I conveniently index elsewhere as the concept of latinidad."[186] By framing latinidad as a mode of belonging available to those who feel brown, the contours of latinidad begin to align with the way of knowing the matrilineal offered by Allen. For those living at Laguna Pueblo or within indigenous societies more broadly the matrilineal enables a way to historically situate yourself and your feelings as it indicates to you and others where you belong.

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[185] Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 10.
[186] José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham: Duke UP, 2020), 39.

Brownness, this feeling of belonging to latinidad and to those who feel like you, plays a central role through the work of all Muñoz, Allen, and Rodríguez but its centrality comes into sharp focus in the way it is "a path that does not conform to the conventions of a majoritarian public sphere and the national affect it sponsors."[187] These conventions are not unfamiliar as they emerge from the very conditions that necessitated Allen to articulate the importance of knowing your mother and remembering an indigenous history of the United States. One way to see how the majoritarian public sphere and national affect within the United States come to be is to explore the different historical contexts and matrices. To say this differently, we must ask who are the mothers of these affects. Allen explains that "among the Keres, 'context' and 'matrix' are equivalent terms, and both refer to approximately the same thing as knowing your derivation and place. Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society."[188] Allen explains this in the second person and while it is possible and generative to explore what it might mean for the reader, I want to address the larger aims of Allen's chapter, namely, that the feminisms present in the United States, and the United States itself, are rooted in indigeneity. Allen poses the who is your mother question not only to the reader but also to the United States itself and its subsequent and foundational ideologies. Who is your mother becomes the shibboleth for latinidad but for white feminisms in the United States must be viewed as reliant on white settler patriarchy. Allen claims that the white feminisms of the United

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[187] Ibid. xviii.

[188] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

States have red roots but when you're a white feminist that thing that "enables people to place you precisely within the universal web of your life, in each of its dimensions: cultural, spiritual, personal, and historical" is your whiteness.[189] The latinidad of whiteness is the settler state and all that its power secures and Enlightenment thought, an ideological force that undergirds whiteness, demarcates the limits and boundaries of the majoritarian public sphere forms and the national affect.

While Allen's chapter critiques ideas of US exceptionalism it does so with an interest at greater historical specificity as to the ways indigenous feminisms, which is to say indigenous ideology, influences the United States. These specifics act as evidence for a larger humanist argument that the chapter rests on and its ultimate objective is inclusion into an imagined national narrative and affect rooted not in difference but in shared humanity. To do this Allen creates a continuum of disparate thinkers, John Locke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Emma Goldman, Thomas Jefferson, Audre Lorde, and Cherrie Moraga to name a representative few, that are meant to represent all philosophies, cultures, and peoples. The aim of this continuum is to shore up a sense of humanity where all envision a "country where there are 'no soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons, no lawsuits...All are equal and free.'"[190] While Allen pointedly attributes this vision as being of the Grandmothers' society I see these things in tension as the continuum fails to cohere as Jefferson, and the enlightenment thought he represents, would not see humanity in Audre

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[189] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

[190] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

Lorde or Cherrie Moraga. While the continuum does implicitly assert that Western philosophical traditions and indigenous religious traditions surrounding the deity Iyatiku as equally worthy of inclusion into her continuum, Allen's generosity to other kinds of knowledges and people are not returned. Two examples throw into sharp relief how this continuum fails: first, Declaration Independence, with Thomas Jefferson as a key writer no less, and second, the senate hearing on the confirmation of Latina Jurist Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court.

In the 27th and final grievance of the Declaration of Independence Jefferson and the framers make clear what they thought of indigenous people. They could not imagine indigenous resistance to their colonization but rather see resistance to settler colonial aims as a "domestic insurrection" being undertaken by "merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions" "excited" by King George III.[191] According to this grievance, the indigenous peoples could only be engaging in violence because they are under the sway of King George III and they were already imagined as incorporated under the colonies implicit rule and guilty of insurrection against said rule. They are positioned as being unable to "make use of one's own understanding without the help of another" with that other being the King or the colonies themselves; independence and sovereignty are impossibilities for indigenous people.[192] This evacuates any potential for justified resistance to the settler colonial ambitions and force of the British colonies and asserts a dichotomy between enlightened and unenlightened. Jefferson and the other framers turn Allen's

[191] Thomas Jefferson, et al, July 4, Copy of Declaration of Independence. -07-04, 1776. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000159/.
[192] Thomas Jefferson, et al, July 4, Copy of Declaration of Independence. -07-04, 1776. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000159/.

Grandmother society into a society ruled by warfare in the founding moments of the United States where what is proper and good is what is at stake. Notably, these grievances to the King were dismissed and as they go unresolved the only remaining strategy is to abandon the existing power dynamics that make a grievance possible and violently revolt. The very thing the colonies enact they simultaneously refuse to indigenous people.

We can find this same ideology reverberating in a more contemporary example by turning to José Esteban Muñoz's reading of the Senate hearing for now Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Sotomayor had given talks at universities where she extolled the value of the experience of a wise Latina and that was the basis for outrage from Republican Senators. Despite Allen, rightly, pointing that the governing structures of the United States are indebted to indigenous peoples it should surprise few that that debt goes ignored by that very government and elicits outrage. Muñoz sees this outrage being rooted in the idea that "a jurist who did not claim universality in the fashion in which white men could was an invalid adjudicator."[193] This knowledge that Sotomayor gestures to is embodied in the figure of the wise Latina, probably a mother or grandmother or aunt who has the lived experience so valued by Morraga. This experience cannot be valid within the United States Judicial System at the same time that originalist judicial philosophy has become near required for conservative judges endorsed by organizations like the Federalist Society. Originalism which can, and should, be understood as not just the belief that the constitution should be interpreted as it was originally written but as a reassertion of Enlightenment thought as articulated by slave owning settlers. The wise

[193] José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham: Duke UP, 2020), 100.

latina in Sotomayor's talk is viewed as being in line with the "merciless Indian Savages" and how could a people ruled by war and not laws have anything to offer the Supreme Court. Muñoz articulates the knowledge Sotomayor evokes as the "'otherwiseness' of brownness" and looks to otherwise as a to "render the production and performance of knowledge that does not conform to the mimetic coordinates assigned to both the designations 'wise' and 'other.'"[194] The effect of this is that even while Muñoz sees Sotomayor performing Brownness within her confirmation hearing, she ultimately intends to join the US Supreme Court and must carefully, and Brownly, maneuver herself towards confirmation. Sotomayor's brownness here can be thought of as a kind of disidentificatory practice; a performance of propriety in ceding that "only reason and the law should ever be applied" while refusing to allow senators opposed to her nomination to get a rise from her.[195] Her performance succeeds because she knows what must be said, how to undermine expectations of how she says it, and refuses to deign the process with a charged affective response that Senators like Tom Coburn try to evoke through racist caricature. The case of Sotomayor's senate hearing highlights the antagonisms present in Allen's continuum. It also highlights how the US Government remains committed to subjugating difference and ultimately requires Sotomayor to abandon her feelings towards and the authority of the wise Latina to be synthesized into the highest echelon of the United States judicial system. Sotomayor must, briefly, trade knowing her mother for the founding fathers. While Allen positions her list of scholars, public thinkers, and activists as having some shared commitment to equality and freedom it's

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid, 111.

clear that those who claim Jefferson and Locke imagine their knowledge as the sole knowledge of worth. They systematize knowledge rooted in reason and logic, which is another way to say they are engaging in a valuation of things and only valuable things are allowed entry into knowledge and all else is subjugated.

Even as Allen concedes that when indigenous civilization is mentioned little or nothing crosses the mind of Americans, a sign of how successful the subjugation is and was, her chapter looks to have the histories of indigenous civilization adhered to those of the US nation state and made known. She claims that the issue is one of memory and how different societies imagine memory but, again, Allen concedes that the general impetus of the United States is to forget indigenous people and societies to the past. What eventually becomes clear is that the impetus for the chapter itself is that the American answer is that her mother is someone like Susan B Anthony and not the Matrons of the Iroquois Confederation. Articulating this answer and highlighting the hurdles that Allen faces within her writing is not to discredit or criticize Allen's drive to more fully tell the history of the United States and the way indigenous feminisms could offer a fruitful origin and legacy to the women aiming to resist patriarchal forces. More nearly, my aim is to show how Allen's questions and writing provides an accounting of how brownness could never be the national affect because the nation and its majoritarian public does not see it as its lineage. As such, the historical narrative of the United States does not offer a sense of belonging even to those whose culture, technology, and systems of governance informed the founding of the country. The United States and all its

possible mothers, including Republican Mothers, fail to provide context or lineage to those who feel brown, those within latinidad.

According to Allen knowing your mother is to know your position in the world and to know the world itself but Allen also highlights how averse the United States is in allowing indigenous mothers, both as literal relations and as representations of otherwise ways of thinking, from being known. This imposition to not know can be seen through acts of genocide whether they be the forced removal of children from their families to laws prohibiting language other than English from being spoken in schools to violent dispossession and mass murder. It can also be seen through attempted assimilation into that majoritarian public sphere which necessitates leaving brownness and the matrilineal behind. Allen accurately notes that the "American idea that the best and the brightest should willingly reject and repudiate their origins leads to an allied idea—that history, like everything in the past, is of little value and should be forgotten as quickly as possible."[196] Put differently, those who are enlightened will not dwell on the past nor those of the past and detaching, forgetting, and moving on become imperative. And, while imperative, this mechanism is not equally feasible nor sensible to everyone. This American idea that Allen articulates emerges from an Enlightenment tradition.

The Enlightenment tradition is exemplified in Allen's continuum by Jefferson and Locke but, taking cues from Lisa Lowe and Ashon Crawley, I include Immanual Kant and also Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Signmund Freud. My aim here is not to create a strict philosophical history but rather index what is produced from what I see as three

[196] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

influential articulations of Enlightenment. Kant's categorical imperative asserts that one should "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[197] Put differently, one should act in such a way that would will everyone else to obey the laws one sets out in all situations. While it is possible to see this as a kind of golden rule where you should not do anything you would not want others to do, it goes further. The underlying assumption is the imposition of one rational subject ideas of what should or should not be done over others and in all circumstances. In some circumstances this can feel benign like don't steal or murder but because it universalizes it is specifically disinterested in handling difference whether that be different situations or different historical and material conditions. To return to the example of the 27th grievance, we could imagine a law emerging from the categorical imperative that violent insurrection is forbidden. But who decides what is an insurrection? The founders imagined indigenous peoples' violence against them as an insurrection but that can only be true if those indigenous peoples recognized the authority or the colonies. Their violence emerges not from insurrection but from the very idea that they reject colonial authority and rule. What undergirds the categorical imperative is the power to impose a will and not some idea of universal rightness. The categorical imperative paired with Kant's claims about enlightenment being about not some abstract idea of maturity but about civil and legal maturity create the situation where subjugation is not just theoretically a categorical imperative but becomes a means of rationalizing colonial violence: the white man's burden and duty to "care" for colonial subjects.

[197] Kant's Moral Philosophy, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/.

In “On the Social Compact" Rousseau opens and frames the chapter asking “How to find a form of association that defends and protects the person and goods of each associate with all the common force, and by means of which each, uniting with all, nonetheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before?”[198] He sets out to solve the problem of a society that can be thought of as being singular plural because for Rousseau that is a problem to be solved as “each man’s force and freedom are the primary instruments of his self-preservation.”[199] While the social contract may offer a resolution to this alleged problem, it is the very idea that this is a problem that I take issue with. In line with Kant’s idea of the enlightened man, Rousseau’s question positions being an individual free from the influence or will of another as paramount. The social compact only becomes necessary and possible because of a valuation made by Rousseau that individuality matters over a commons. While Rousseau’s influence over the founding of the United States is debated it’s clear that the Declaration of Independence and other founding documents aim to produce a world using these same value judgements. The founding documents ultimately become tantamount to creating a restrictive covenant over the body public thus creating the majoritarian public sphere and the national affect of which Muñoz writes.

Freud, not to be outdone, doesn’t merely see the importance of being enlightened in a Kantian sense or identify the problems entailed with being singular plural as Rouseau does but expands the reach of this thinking beyond the material world and tries to catch the dead into this enlightenment web. In “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud describes

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[198] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John T. Scott, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two Discourses and the Social Contract* (ChicagoThe University of Chicago Press, 2012), 172.
[199] Ibid.

mourning and melancholia as two conditions that have the same cause, "the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."[200] Freud distinguishes them from each other, with melancholia being pathologized and qualifying as worth referring to medical treatment, by the lapse of time. Mourning ends through overcoming the loss over time and "the work of mourning is completed when the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."[201] When mourning fails, which is to say it fails to end and free the ego, it becomes melancholia. But who, or what, can be free? If being unhindered or unrelated to the dead is understood as freedom then Freud's understanding can be better understood within an Enlightenment's context. Rather than see freedom as a moral obligation to care for one another or a responsibility to a collective, Freud sees freedom as an invidious right to be obtained and held, like property.

Allen's insightful observation that the United States demands that the "best and the brightest should willingly reject and repudiate their origins"[202] feels as much a critique of the US as it does a critique of Freud's early theories of mourning. Grief is supposed to end and that ending comes from the imperative to reach a supposed synthesis through work with a psychoanalyst. The psychoanalyst guides the analysand through the loss such that they can detach from it and move on from it. Failure to do this or a refusal to engage in this process leaves one open to pathological mourning: melancholia.

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[200] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 243.
[201] Ibid, 245.
[202] Paula Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *History is a Weapon,* https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/allenredrootsofwhitefeminism.html#:~:text=Of%20course%2C%20your%20mother%20is,of%20the%20following%20generation%20possible.

Within the space of the body public the difference between normalcy and pathology becomes clear: "the discretion to mourn and grieve is no small claim on the political."[203] Those who can lay claim to the political, those that are part of the restrictive covenant of Enlightenment, whiteness, and the settler state, can mourn and grieve at their discretion. So, for Brown selves to mourn they are laying claim to what Enlightenment thinking refuses them. To mourn then, brownly, even when your attempts to do so align with proper comportment and behavior, is to engage in an act of insurrection which exists outside of the proper dialectic.

You're supposed to remove yourself from the lost love object and move on. You're supposed to air your grievances to a higher power, such as an analyst or a government, in the hope that they listen and offer a resolution. But when grieving is disallowed or pathologized in any form what avenue is left for resolution? This failing causes me to care little for dialectics in this chapter because what can dialectics do except affirm what's already possible? A dialectic results in a kind of resolution predicated on incorporation and reform but for many incorporation isn't available and even if it is at what cost does that availability materialize? If there is always a trace of the thesis in any synthesis then can a dialectic ever offer the kind of transformational potential which might be necessary to disentangle the world from legacies and ideologies of violence and unjust hierarchies? Does a dialectic not concede what futures are possible before it really even begins? What is a dialectic for fascism and white supremacy if not an escape hatch into the future? We can see the nefariousness of attempting a dialectic in Allen's work, the 27th grievance, and the Sotomayor hearing. Allen's attempt to locate the red roots of

[203] Asma Abbas, *Liberalism and Human Suffering: Materialist Reflections on Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

white feminism can also be framed as an assertion of indignous feminism as a thesis with white feminism as a synthesis but that the red roots are lost and erased highlights the pitfall in such an approach. These red roots are an antithesis that become synthesized into the US state and then forgotten. I see this pathologization of mourning as a means to refuse the legitimacy to all who refuse synthesis, tout court. Refusing any legitimacy of any mourning obscures the sharpness with which melancholia could be wielded to question and upend the protective covenant brought onto the world by Enlightenment. It would seem that any future synthesis or resolution positions lines of flight out of the hold as merely fantasy designed to give an illusion of flight without being able to actually leave the ground. If you are unable to answer Allen's question, if you don't know and can't name your mother, it is not an accident but the result of this Enlightenment tradition. All that is left is melancholia. It is from the imposition to not know otherwise, to not know your mother, that mexicanx artist Joey Enríquez emerges and with them, a Brown melancholia.

Part 2

Performing Brown Melancholia

"He buried them alongside their mexicanidad."
-Joey Enríquez, personal correspondence and writing

What if melancholia were in the air, just like love? like revolution? like a commons? Not as some kind of depressing fog, no, but that crisp clear smell of cool night

air.[204] Because melancholia might be that thing that allows us to imagine what love looks like in public when "private loss is reconstructed and becomes public art."[205] Because melancholia has always been with us which is to say there have always been those of us who grieve longer than people think we should. What if melancholia was never a pathology but a structure of feeling too dangerous to be left alone? To be allowed to live and grow into some other kind of world, some otherwise world. What if we unseat the longstanding and violent hegemony of not just Frued but the enlightenment thought that he continued?

This chapter argues for a brown melancholia. A way of life emerging in a kind of capacious commons rooted not in identity but in a shared experience of what it is to live in the world. Melancholia as the means to feel Brown again despite whiteness' attempt to conquer or incorporate everything. Brown melancholia as a feeling, as a performative, as an imperative. A melancholia that enables a remembering of brownness despite assimilation and settler logics of land as property and indigenous people as nonexistent. As that which signals a particular structure of feeling that emerges from the intertwined sense of brownness and melancholia. Which is also to say a structured feeling that calls us to action and that call, in whatever form it arrives to us in, asks us to stay with our love until you "consent to the idea that it is possible to be one and multiple at the same time; that you can be yourself and the other; that you can be the same and the different" and

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[204] Because odor molecules travel slower in cold air the smell I'm describing is, serendipitously, not actually a smell but the absence of smell. Absence or loss within utopian thinking, and within my own imagining of melancholia, enables a particular line of questions as to what should or could be there or what was there and why it is not there anymore.

[205] 170

enter those battles that Muñoz foresages.[206] We can see this structure of feeling through works of art that challenge compulsions to perform proprieties of whiteness and affect. The Brown of Brown melancholia indexes the ways racialization impacts if and how brown subjects not only mourn but are placed in positions where mourning, especially mourning the dead, occurs due to greater violence against Brown peoples and the decreased life expectancies due to additional more pervasive less sensational socio-political factors such as environmental racism, the school to prison pipeline, and racism within the medical industrial complex. Brown melancholia can be imagined as a refusal of whiteness' imperative for racialized subjects to forget, move on, and detach for the sake of attempting such proper subjecthood but, more pointedly, is the way Brown melancholia reorients towards an alternative way of structuring the world where such imperatives and the metaphysical infrastructure rooted in white supremacy that demands them are nonexistent.

Brown melancholia is not a given and it is not inherently necessary or needed but it would be a mistake to think of it as purely reactionary either. Brown melancholia is a process of realignment towards traditions, knowledges, and ways of life that existed and continue to exist despite subjugation. It becomes an imperative because of Sigmund Freud and the ways he continues what Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau set out to do. The three of them share a contradiction. They all wish to be singular while asserting to others they too must be singular. As Ashon Crawley notes, "Kant's theory of Enlightenment was founded upon the escape from sociality and sociability in order to think oneself alone. The scholar, the philosopher, the subject would emerge when that

[206] Édouard Glissant, "One World in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," Translated by Christopher Winks, *Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28 (spring 2011): 6.

individual thinks for himself without the aid of others."[207] But what is Kant's body of work if not also the desire to impose the idea of the individual, the implicit assumption of ideological hegemony. Hidden in all of their work is that the very thing that makes their work possible: the imposition of their thought onto others. Rationality dictates singularity but by following their advice you fail because you have bought into an intellectual and ideological belief that is impossible without them, your very subjecthood is predicated on their aid, but to not take their advice and to engage in a commons of some kind is in direct opposition to their assertion such that they capture you and label you unenlightened, pathological, or worse, expendable or disposable, outside of the realm of their humanity.

Melancholia is the pathological incorporation of the lost other into ourselves which is to say a refusal to be purely singular. Freud would have us refuse them refuge. Tell us we are pathological. We lack reason. We lack an analyst through which to reach synthesis. We have fallen from enlightenment, entered into "self-incurred immaturity...unable to make use of [our] own understanding without the guidance of another."[208] But we must see through this trap. The problem here is not that we are unable to make use of our own understanding without the guidance of another. The problem is that we are choosing a different guide that enlightenment thinking can only view as exploitable or killable. We are leaving their dialectic for a new home.

More and more I smell those cool nights and looking back I know others could feel it too. I looked close to home and found a century old adobe ruin with a garden of

[207] Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 121.
[208] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'"

shining glass flowers, all built by hands, inside a gallery. I found Brown melancholia emerging from grief that might be never ending. To do this next part, I have to tell you about one of my dearest friends. I ask you to care for them as I have tried to do. I trust that you will.

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In 1914 in the borderlands of Las Cruces, New Mexico a man, Mariano, murdered his wife, Carmen, and daughter, Herminia, and buried them under their adobe. One hundred years later, their descendent Joey Enríquez would come to learn about them and their own mexicanx indigenous identity. Enríquez, after visiting the ruined adobe, began the work of rememory and grief. For their 2020 MFA thesis exhibition, *desierto desierto*, they took up the arduous and painstaking work of building a ruin by hand. Months of difficult manual labor fabricating each brick and then stacking them to the ceiling of the exhibition space. On the other side of the space, allegorically, they created and placed glass flora indigenous to the southwest facing extinction due to settler colonialism, climate change, and an further emerging fascist ideology bent on demarcating space through the destruction of ancient cacti and trees and the erection of a wall. I take up *desierto desierto*, the artistic process that produced it, and the accompanying written thesis as a paramount example of a work of mourning that performs Brown melancholia. Like the works under consideration by José Esteban Muñoz in "The Melancholia of Race," *desierto desierto* "[offers] no such escape from the lost object. Rather, the lost object returns with a vengeance. It is floated as an ideal, a call to collectivize, an identity-affirming example."[209] Like brown jouissance, brown melancholia is constituted through

[209] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 52.

"minoritarian knowledge productions and epistemologies of sensuality" as Enriguez's artistic practice and the art itself embody and perform otherwiseness of both brownness and melancholia. What is produced through *desierto desierto* is both knowledge and sensuality, a brown melancholia.

Melancholia as an avenue to the performance of brownness and brownness as that which undergirds the way melancholia can be performed.

When you walk into the oddly shaped gallery space before you see any signage or direction you see an imposing brown ruin made of bricks imposing itself against the sheer whiteness of the gallery walls that extend on either side of it. At its tallest the ruin only just exceeds the divider wall. Despite the adobe ruin being the exhibition there is many times more white wall space than there is brown brick. The large brown adobe bricks are stacked to the ceiling and through careful crafting they appear to be far older than they are. Some are broken as if weather worn. Others are strewn about the bottom as if they had fallen as the adobe home had fallen into disarray. In the only corner of the adobe ruin is a pile of dirt and broken bricks on top of a perfectly recreated newspaper from 1917. The title, barely visible through the dirt and wooden fallen wooden planks partially reads "urdered wife…daughter buried bodies under s…" Murdered Wife and Daughter. Bodies Buried Under…The entire front page has been recreated but only small parts are visible through the dirt and new remnants of the adobe ruin. The dirt that covers the newspaper as well as the dirt and sand that comprises the environs of the glass flowers grinds against the propriety of the Gallery. Enríquez has commented that it is only because this show was a thesis in a university gallery that they were allowed to bring dirt into the gallery,

even then there were rules in place about keeping the gallery "clean." Recreating this in a private or even publicly funded gallery would be an impossibility.

In their thesis that accompanies the gallery exhibition Enríquez explains, and I quote here at length: "without proper access to southern New Mexican raw materials and a hot, dry environment, I tweaked the traditional process of making New Mexican adobe brick to suit the limitations of working in a studio space and the transition to winter weather on the east coast...For the raw materials, I substituted desert soil, sand, and clay for processed versions of those three materials as an act of desperation to preserve my memory of the fragmented wall at the property in New Mexico. Measuring the materials by getting into a rhythm of tacit conversation between hand and dirt, until there was a close proportion of dirt to soil to sand to water, each batch of bricks came out different with slight variations in color, size, density, and durability.

Exhaustion overcame me as I struggled to mix batch after batch (each batch producing two bricks). Back-breaking and gut-wrenching for hours on end two to three times a week, the process eventually became ingrained in my muscle memory and I established a subconscious rhythm of mixing, pouring, mixing, pouring, mixing, pouring repeatedly. My hands dried out, cracked, and bled."[210]

I think of Enríquez's artistic practice as what Crawley might call "a zone of choreosonic possibility." A rich but painful embodied practice, the very kind of practice that Kant is so averse to as he "preferred the amateriality of the physical object, as its realness has the capacity to be the very hindrance of thought. Nothing's got to be real for Kant, he's no

[210] Joey Enríquez, MFA Thesis, unpublished.

Patty LaBelle."[211] No Patty LaBelle indeed but in this description of what it takes to build a ruin it is the real that becomes the occasion for thought. The real doesn't get in the way, it is the way. In Enríquez's work I see reverberations of the key idea of theories in the flesh so central to woman of color feminism and queer of color critique. There can be no theory without attending to the flesh it emerges from.

One way of thinking about Enríquez's embodiment is to further think of the process that created not only the bricks but the glass flowers that populate the other side of the gallery. The flowers, in all their ethereal and ghostly visage, represent the nature that is being so rapidly destroyed but their literal creation required Enríquez's own body to also be placed in danger. The flowers are made of woven fiberglass sheets which, when taken to with a blowtorch, emit toxic fumes. Enríquez, in hindsight, imagines the flowers are representative of the kind of beauty that can only emerge from trial and pain not to justify violence but rather to personify what it is to perform a brown melancholia through an artistic practice. This is to say that Enríquez recognized that the land superseded their own individual needs and to accurately represent the land such that settlers might understand what is to come given the current trajectory. To remember his ancestors is also to remember the land that they were buried in and the flowers and plants that are still being buried under colonization.

In "La Prieta," Gloria Anzaldúa too attends to the dead. She tells her reader: "I dig a grave, bury my first love, a German Shepherd. Burry the second, third, and fourth dog. The last one retching in the backyard, going into convulsions from insecticide

[211] Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 111.

poisoning. I buried him beside the others, five mounds in a row crowned with crosses I'd fashioned from twigs.

No more pets, no more loves—I court death now."[212] Enríquez too courts death or more accurately, the dead. He builds a ruined adobe and crowns the exhibition with flowers they'd fashioned from fiberglass. The entire gallery producing an incoherence yes but, more pointedly, a misrecognition. Of misrecognition, Muñoz writes that "sometimes misrecognition can be tactical Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture" and explains that "subject who is hailed by the ideology cops' cry of "hey, you" may respond with a tactical misrecognition like the one that Molina offers Valentin in Manuel Puig's Kitt of the Spider Woman. Valentin commands his gay cell mate to 'Be a man!' Molina, a seasoned *loca*, responds to his command by exclaiming: 'A man! Where do you see a man!' Such a tactical misrecognition permits a subject to demystify the dominant publicity, exposing it as a 'discursively pre-constituted' space that often maintains strict and oppressive hierar-chies within the social."[213] This kind of misrecognition becomes operationalized differently within Enríquez's work. Any hail, an attempt to bring the art into the real of what is discursively pre-constituted will inevitably fail. The flowers are not flowers. The adobe bricks are not "real" adobe bricks. The ruin cannot be a ruin. This kind of incongruous citational practice enables a browned hail to their ancestors. Rather than call them into whiteness or the gallery itself, the art offers another adobe ruin near the desert in which their ancestors might instead call home.

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[212] Gloria E. Anzaldúa, eds AnaLouise Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 43.

[213] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 95.

Within the gallery space the brownness of the dirt, bricks, and sand offers a refuge where Enríquez's ancestors might be imagined as being buried under instead of their actual burial site which is laced with violence and desire to assimilate as Mariano, after killing them, fled to California and began to assimilate. The leaving behind of brownness and the burying of his wife and daughter were an act of psychic and physical harm. Enríquez's work sidesteps identity and instead focuses on color, the land, offering a new resting place for them where they can return to brownness just as Enríquez themself returns to it through this instillation.

The public brownness of Enríquez's work evokes another brown queer disabled artist, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who is taken up by Muñoz in "Performing Disidentity" of which the title of this chapter references. I must note here that Enríquez's work has often been compared to Gonzalez-Torres because of their shared identity. In speaking with Enríquez about this chapter they expressed deep dissatisfaction being compared to another artist because they share an identity category. As if their work must be related because they are expected to respond to the same hails. For Muñoz however, Gonzalez - Torres' disinterest in identity causes Muñoz to imagine the ways that Gonzalez-Torres engages in disidentity noting, "Gonzalez-Torres rejected the very tenets of identity" and instead, for Muñoz, embraces a disidentity "predicated on transparency and the everyday instead of the more familiar models of minority identity that invoke exotic colors and rituals."[214] Like Untitled, 1991 which was places on a billboard and comprised an empty but previously slept in bed and his other works "untitled" works about his partner who died of AIDS which feature clocks and lightbulbs, Enríquez focuses on a kind of

[214] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 166.

everyday quotidian art subject. While there might be some excess within the size of the adobe ruin and the haunting beauty of the flowers, there are no exotic colors or rituals. Arguably, it is the white walls of the gallery space which seem to be the most exotic given the way Enríquez aims to bring about a desert in the space. What is foreign and exotic to the desert is whiteness like that of the walls. Rather than attempt identity, Enríquez too performs a disidentity through the art and artistic practice. Enríquez's push back against comparisons with Gonzalez-Torres come from a resistance to the flattening of difference even between the two. Rather than flatten that difference, I evoke Gonzalez-Torres to highlight the ways that affect, brownness, and melancholia can be found by those who refuse hails into dominant publicity and identities.

That Gonzalez-Torres and Enríquez both embrace and mobilize a kind of brownness in their world too speaks to a mode of feeling. While I argue that Enríquez's art specifically enables a kind of remembering of their indigenous ancestors enables a new resting place for them both within Enríquez and the art itself, the brownness that melancholia enables also signals other modes of existing. Of the brownness of Gonzalez-Torres and Muñoz, Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tania Nyong'o muse, "it is as if, against the whiteness of the wall, the boy in 'Untitled' (Madrid 1971) is becoming brown such that the work comes to radiate a sense of immanence and brown becoming."[215] I too imagine Enríquez, who only came to know their brownness as a teenager, creating work that speaks to a brown becoming. And it is here that I imagine *desierto desierto* emanating a brown becoming that only becomes possible through a connection to the

[215] José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham: Duke UP, 2020), xiv.

dead who make them brown. It is through remembrance that Enríquez can become brown and, as if an offering, the art itself becomes brown against the white gallery walls.

The brownness becomes a beacon to the dead that there is now a person who remembers and honors them. Who knows they suffered and that they were violently ripped from their home and buried under it. Who knows what it is to have something ripped from them and try to get it back, to try and become brown again and remain with the dead and their brownness forever. Rather than be lost to violence, Enríquez brings brownness back with a vengeance which offers a new home and throws into relief the stark contrast between the whiteness in which his family tried to fade into and proclaims no. Enríquez places their body on the line to craft bricks and flowers for their ancestors even in the dead of winter. The performances and instillations of [Enríquez] achieve a tactical misrecognition of dominant publicity's public/private binary" and they "refused to limit [their] grief to a privatized self."[216] Rather than leave this grief to a private space, Enríquez "invites us to leave what is known about identity and environment behind, and engage in a space of magical memorial."[217]

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I think of building a ruin as doing the impossible. In their thesis, Enríquez tells us "A ruin is a leftover of a collection of artifacts. Specifically, a ruin "must initially be a work of architecture," no matter how well known or how large that architecture may have been. As well, a ruin, after being constructed as an architecture and then abandoned, is a combination of human-made edifice and nature-made overgrowth with an obvious unity

[216] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 169.
[217] Joey Enríquez, https://www.joeyenriquez.com/desierto-desierto

between the building and nature. We wonder, “what happened here?” instead of, “what will happen here?”” There was no work of architecture and within the gallery space there is no unity between it and nature. Enríquez’s adobe ruin is a performative. It engages in a citational practice of mourning. Like Harris’ citation of Holiday, Enríquez approximates the materials of the adobe and the practice of making bricks and cites the centuries old adobe in New Mexico. The building of a ruin approaches the point where we might think to ask what happened here but it also opens the space to ask what will happen here next? Through this ruin the what happened here question offers a new answer. The history of this ruin was not one of murder and abandonment but love enough to bleed, to bring about a ruin not through decay but through the work of melancholia. The building of the ruin is impossible as is the literal raising of the dead. But I see this ruin as the emergence of Carmen and Herminia, covered in mud alongside that woman “interred for centuries, presumed dead” looking to smell every flower, a physical marker that concludes and begins the work of melancholia. We might think of it as a ruin under erasure, and it is this that provides a new resting place for Carmen and Herminia’s not underneath it but within as a vehicle for Enríquez to reconstruct themself, make room for them, to take them with them.

What will happen here next?

What could be next but battles we must wage in their names?

A Brief Interjection

We've been dancing. We followed all the social conventions, or at least the ones I think are worth it. I took you to some protest somewhere before we ended up back in bed. In the spirit of the unending first queer date we found ourselves still together going to an art exhibition where we saw the most beautiful haunted garden. Now we're sitting on the couch wondering how much longer this may go. Will we blink and years will have passed? Will we get busy and realize that this long weekend of sorts is all that we needed? Will we be satiated or is this something we will continue to hunger and thirst

for? These are large questions so let's just watch some TV. Netflix and chill. *Black Mirror* might be a bit much but we've been through a fair amount already haven't we? And "San Junipero" was so beautiful and queer so let's give this next season a try. I've heard good things about "Black Museum." I'll go and get some wine and maybe a snack and be right back…

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Thus far the chapters of this dissertation have revolved around the enactment of a sensuous melancholia as its examples. The missing piece then is what occurs after a sensuous melancholia is enacted and the battle that Muñoz foresages is on the horizon or maybe it's already here and been here waiting for us. If chapter one asserts that it takes time to take in your dead and reconstruct yourself into a plurality then there may be a point where such a plurality is reached. Haven't we spent a lot of time together? What then? If a sensuous melancholia is to emerge as a structure of feeling then what or who is it structured towards? Or, maybe more pointedly, what are these battles we must go into for them and ourselves? This chapter looks to instances where a sensuous melancholia is becoming finalized or is already in the works and a battle is on the very near horizon. "Black Museum" follows Nish, the episode's protagonist, as she seemingly runs out of energy for her car to continue driving and has to pull over to charge it. It seems as though this was an accident and that she ends up waiting for the nearby museum to open just in an attempt to keep herself occupied. This all proves a ruse not only for the antagonist, Rolo Haynes, but also for the audience. We do not know that this is all an elaborate plan on Nish's part. A plan potentially years in the making. She has come to save her father from the legal and contractual virtual enslavement of Rolo Haynes, kill Haynes, and burn

down his terrifying museum of criminal artifacts. All the while, Nish has successfully taken her mother's consciousness inside of her despite her mother committing suicide. Nish has already done the work of bringing the dead, her mother, inside herself. What is left are the conditions that led to her mother's death and her father's enslavement: the physical and epistemic apparatus of the museum and the man who becomes the embodiment of a Western episteme.

Viewing the episode once is not enough to fully understand it as the big reveal that Nish's mother has been residing inside of her mind the entire episode. But I asked you what we should watch. We've both seen this before which is why we picked it. If something else happens along the way it won't matter if we skip over some things because we've seen it…or have we? But maybe we'll find something new. Maybe this second viewing, together, will do something different. Maybe we'll have to ask one another if we carry anyone inside of us. Maybe we'll wonder if we would , could, or must burn down the world too…but there are more social and academic conventions. I need to set a stage for Nish to enact her sensuous melancholia on. That stage begins in the spring of 2022 and goes all the way back to one of the earliest cases of insurance law, and a slave ship called Zong, and the way NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, collection of poems that reworks the Gregson v Gilbert case to bend it, twists and wrings it out, to produce something else from the violence besides the violence.

Chapter 4: Melancholia of the Flesh

> As Judith Butler reminds us, a life must be registered as livable to be mourned at all; put differently, it is shared humanity that secures the circuit of synecdoche, empathy, and grief.[218]
> -Calvin Warren, "Onticide" 2017

> While I am swayed by Butler's formulation of gender performativity, I am disturbed by her theory's failure to articulate a meatier politics of resistance.[219]
> -E Patrick Johnson, "Quare Theory" 2001[220]

> As I understand it, a history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing.[221]
> -Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"

In what follows I rehearse an Afropessimist reading of Ketanji Brown Jackson and others. My aim is to expose how the outcome of abiding by the rules and institutions of this world will only lead to this world being reproduced. I intend to show how Jackson can be read as an example of the limits of not only this world but of Afropessimism itself. At times, I find myself seduced by this strong theory. I am informed by thinkers like Calvin Warren but also find that ultimately this reading offers nothing but a dead end. My hope is that in turning to "Black Museum," the final episode of the fourth season of

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[218] Calvin Warren, "Onticide," *GLQ,* 23, no. 3 (2017): 404.

[219] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1993): 10.

[220] That these two citations hinge upon representations and deployment of disability via an attention to the body and mind in order to articulate their perspectives about Blackness and queerness is not lost on me. Notably, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains "the one thing most people do know about being disabled is that they don't want to be that. Yet disability is everywhere once you start noticing it" and Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer note that "Cripistemology is everywhere in theory, once you start looking for it." Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Becoming Disabled." Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, "Cripistemologies: Introduction."

[221] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, 26 (June 2008): 4.

Netflix's *Black Mirror,* and M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* there might be something more to be gleaned than pessimism or nihilism. Something in excess of the violence of the pornotrope, maybe even something sensual.

On April 8th, 2022 then Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson gave a speech on her confirmation by the US Senate to the US Supreme Court as an Associate Justice. In it she positions herself as a culmination of US history to this point: "It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a Black woman to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. But we've made it. We've made it. All of us."[222] Her quotation of Maya Angelou—"I do so now while bringing the gifts my ancestors gave. I am the dream and the hope of the slave"—garnered particular attention appearing in headlines and the caption for multiple videos and articles. What is the dream and hope of the slave? It can be inferred that the dream and hope is inclusion into the project of the nation state. We might posit that such inclusion is possible and the direct result of the 14th Amendment. And thus, Jackson, Barack Obama, and Kamala Harris act as a particular teleological assertion about the possible future of the US body politic after the 14th Amendment. However, what does the 14th Amendment achieve and for what purpose?

I posit that *Dred Scott v Sandford*, which denied Black people personhood and citizenship through a denial of standing before the court, acts as an example of the antagonisms described by Frank Wilderson in *Red, White and Black* and a continuation of the literal and dialectical thesis of the nation state. The 14th amendment then acts as its antithesis such that the original political community may look different but its fundamental tenets remain unchanged. If so, then Jackson's inclusion, the very

[222] https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/08/us/politics/ketanji-brown-jackson-biden.html

possibility of her inclusion, could be seen as the ~~synthesis~~.[223] However, the 14th amendment and the overarching dialectic I see it a part of, does not fundamentally change the core antagonism as can be found in not only the amendment itself but also in the one preceding it:

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction…All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."[224]

What is upheld here is that slavery may exist under conditions as defined by the United States Government and that "no state shall deprive any person of property without due process of law."

So, while Jackson may be conditionally understood as a person under the law the condition of that personhood lies with the government. This means that Jackson's ability to maintain her personhood rests in her compliance with the enslavement of others and the protection of that enslavement by the same law that maintains her personhood. The 14th Amendment simply alters the conditions under which she is and remains a "being for" the law. But those altered conditions are such that she too may sit on the court, own property, and benefit from the enslavement of others if only conditionally or, necessarily as her and Clarence Thomas' presence offers a ruse against fungibility. They too may appear to enter into a libidinal economy rooted in the desiring of things. Possibly another

[223] I place synthesis under erasure, following Calvin Warren, because ultimately what the actual synthesis of the 14th Amendment is is the securing of the category of the huma.n Warren, in "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence" notes,"The human-being is the Hegelian 'synthesis' of this dialectical violence."

[224] U.S. Const. Amendment XIII § 2

articulation of onticide in the making or an evocation of what Calvin Warren describes as a distortion of a distortion or "interdiction," a "censorship to be inarticulate."[225] This is to say, Jackson and Thomas function to assert equal justice under the law to distort or shroud the metaphysical underpinning.

The 13th and 14th amendment maintains the fundamental conditions of possibility for the nation state, namely, what Roger B. Taney refers to as the "political community." These amendments shift the way that political community is defined, a violation of law must occur in order to become a slave, but ultimately the core constitutive elements of the political community remain unchanged. The community continues and part of its continuation relies on the controlled presence of certain Black people to maintain the interdiction. The Supreme Court, including Clarence Thomas and Ketanji Brown Jackson, "functions as guardian and interpreter of the Constitution."[226] What is guarded and interpreted is not only the constitution then but also the metaphysical infrastructure that enables its existence. The constitution stands in and acts as yet another "interdiction."

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[225] Calvin Warren, "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 23.3 (2017) 394, 405-413. Calvin Warren, Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2018), 77.

[226] https://www.supremecourt.gov/about/about.aspx
About the Court

"EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW" - These words, written above the main entrance to the Supreme Court Building, express the ultimate responsibility of the Supreme Court of the United States. The Court is the highest tribunal in the Nation for all cases and controversies arising under the Constitution or the laws of the United States. As the final arbiter of the law, the Court is charged with ensuring the American people the promise of equal justice under law and, thereby, also functions as guardian and interpreter of the Constitution.

The Supreme Court consists of the Chief Justice of the United States and such number of Associate Justices as may be fixed by Congress. The number of Associate Justices is currently fixed at eight (28 U. S. C. §1). Power to nominate the Justices is vested in the President of the United States, and appointments are made with the advice and consent of the Senate.

If this post 14th body politic is nothing but a revision of the same then what is lost in this moment of the telos of the body, which is to say it's the endurance of humanism, is a citation of what is lost through the transformation of body to flesh. It would seem as though nothing is lost or, at least, what is lost doesn't appear to prevent the ascension of Black people into the upper echelons of political power. If individual ascension to the presidency, vice presidency, and the court is the dream and hope of the slave then how do we understand the condition of those dreams and hopes? Where or what is the "it" that Jackson's "we" have made it to? And who is "all of us"? Is this in fact the hope and dream of the slave? Is it the hope and dream of Obama, Harris, and now Jackson? And, importantly, if Jackson, Obama, and Harris, following Hortense Spillers, do in fact lack a body and remain rendered flesh then what is a sensuous melancholia of the flesh? What is lost that flesh attempts to bring into itself and refuses to relinquish? Rather than accept the metaphysical and ontological reality that emerges from "differentiating violence," I turn to Amber Musser's engagement in *Sensual Excess* with the pornotrope and her asking, as a rejoinder to Afropessimism: "what it might be to take the violence of the pornotrope and the accompanying impossibility of sovereign subjectivity seriously while dwelling in the selfhoods, intimacies, and knowledge systems that emerge from thinking with the flesh?"[227] And I add: what selfhoods, intimacies, and knowledge systems do emerge from a thinking with the dead or those who lack even flesh? How might we think about mourning the dead through enfleshment? Are Black people unmournable beyond

[227] Calvin Warren, "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 23.3 (2017) 394-396, 405-413. Amber Jamilla Musser, Sexual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 9.

the Du Bosian veil or can mourning even happen for those whom sovereign subjectivity is an impossibility?

This chapter takes up these questions and, building out of the work of Hortense Spillers, Calvin Warren, Christina Sharpe, and Amber Musser, proposes that what is lost are the conditions of possibility for a world without antagonistic violence, without fungibility. Further, what is missing are all those lost from the various forms of deaths made possible due to their enfleshment and subsequent fungibility. What flesh refuses to relinquish might also signal the efforts that must be undertaken to ensure that refusal of the conditions of death succeeds. By any means necessary. Importantly, what is lost is not the body because the body can only come into being through the contradistinction, the relation, it has with flesh. I imagine a melancholia of the flesh to describe the unending mourning that emerges out of the consequences of enfleshment alongside it attending to the ways Blackness orients melancholia not only to the dead but also towards abolition which is to say the performance of a melancholia of the flesh. A melancholia of the flesh is a melancholia rooted in sticky sensual attachments that rejects notions of a single autonomous individual that can own or be owned. This chapter ultimately argues that to enact and perform such a melancholia necessarily requires not just an acknowledgement of metaphysical antagonisms but also a violent counterweight to end the "matrix of (im)possibility" responsible for the creation and maintenance of the difference between "humanism and fungibility."

A Piece of Black Studies

It is 2014 and I am sitting in Jennifer Christine Nash's Theory and Emotions course which, as I now know, was emerging from Nash's interests in Black Feminism and feeling that culminated in 2019 with the publication of *Black Feminism Reimagined*. Its introduction "Feeling Black Feminism" in particular resonated with me and this project as it acts as a moment of queer referential play with "Feeling Utopia," the introduction José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* which I first encountered in her class. The syllabus that taught me how to think became a book that offered me both an intellectual homecoming and rehearsal on how to undertake this chapter on Black thought. As Nash is wont to do, she begins by providing a deft intellectual history of intersectionality and the ways it has moved and influenced both intellectual thought across disciplines and the university itself. While the book primarily concerns intersectionality, her narration of Black Study in the section aptly titled "Black Studies" stands out to me as a map of the field that I want to expand. If this project is about how people feel and practice melancholia in the specific sense of a lost loved one then it is ultimately a project about the dead and the way they are taken up or understood. Fitting squarely at the intersection of queer theory, queer of color critique, and Black Sexuality Studies, what is the relationship between this project and the field? So, first the field.

In "Black Studies" Nash hones in on the way death and loss have been taken up by the field noting that the "field's current orientation toward afropessimism engages black feminist theory largely through the work of Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, and Sylvia Wynter, often at the expense of a robust engagement with other black feminist debates, dialogue, and disagreement."[228] Though I would note that

[228] Jennifer Christine Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined (Durham: Duke University Press. 2019), 20.

in the case of Hartman there seems to be a divide between which works are taken up by who, I imagine Hartman at an epicenter of Black studies because of how different sub fields have taken up her different and vast work for their own projects, myself included. The two that might be seen as most explicit examples of this are *Scenes of Subjection* largely taken up by Afropessimists as a foundation ofBlackness as being always already available for violence undergirding perpetual social death. The other might be "Venus in Two Acts" where Hartman herself grapples with the impossibility of knowing or feeling or saving those who were made into living objects. Both projects become starting points for a growing concern about what death means within the field and the contested ways conceptions of death and dying are being taken up.

Nash turns us to one way this has taken shape via Spillers: "Drawing on this particular body of black feminist theory, afropessimist scholarship often unsettles the category of "black woman" entirely by foregrounding Spillers's concept of ungendering, a term that describes how the Middle Passage transformed gendered black bodies into ungendered black flesh."[229] Rather than contest the ways Spiller is being used, Nash notes that Samantha Pinto has raised an attention to the enthusiasm with which Afropessimists have taken up Spillers work to create a blockage. Nash points out that "This 'enthusiastic' investment in ungendering unfolds in a moment when black feminism urgently theorizes the 'dead and the dying,' and when ungendering is mobilized to imagine how black life is lived alongside—or even within—spaces of death."[230] Sticking with this ungendering, Nash continues her narration of the field by introducing

[229] Jennifer Christine Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined (Durham: Duke University Press. 2019), 20.
[230] Jennifer Christine Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined (Durham: Duke University Press. 2019), 20.

the reader to Patrice D. Douglass' concept of Black gender "to capture how gender itself is a category for Humans. The violence of ungendering is a domain for the captive, those who died in the hold of the ship and continue dying by the wayside of gender."[231] If this is true of gender, though Nash doesn't seem certain, then what of sexuality? What if sexuality too is "a category for Humans. The violence of [asexualizing] is a domain for the captive, those who died in the hold of the ship and continue dying by the wayside of [sexuality]." [232] What is Black gender to Quareness? Queare theory which emerges out of the work of Audre Lorde and, notably, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's theories of the flesh. If quare theory is of the flesh or grapples with the reality of enfleshment hen this could be seen as, like the Musser quote about the pornotrope, a unknowingly preemptive rejoinder to Afropessimsim. If so, then maybe I'm onto something with the epigraphs.

Calvin Warren's "Onticide" in particular might be worth taking up then since Warren becomes the stand in for Afropessimism for Nash despite Warren being a Black nihilist and someone like Frank Wilderson or Jared Sexton being the more obvious choice. So why organize and present Afropessimism through Warren? What does Warren produce or make possible that Wilderson or Sexton do not? One answer is that, in the final instance and the final citation of *Ontological Terror*, Warren turns not to Wilderson or Sexton or even Spillers but, surprisingly, Ashon Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath*. Crawley's monograph takes up a critiques Enlightenment thought in particular and notes the contradiction between the thinking of Immanuel Kant

[231] Jennifer Christine Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined (Durham: Duke University Press. 2019), 21.
[232] Jennifer Christine Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined (Durham: Duke University Press. 2019), 21.

and the way he actually goes about living a life. For Crawley, Kant's thinking does not need to be real. It does not need to be of the flesh as Johnson explores but rather it can be abstracted into mere thought or turned away from. Crawley can be seen as a "yes, and" to Black nihilism or Afropessimism in the way it acknowledges the thinkers of a western episteme as being a particular kind of ground from which many reside but he ultimately refuses to concede that that is all there is or can be. The breath for Crawley, the living breathing breath, becomes a site of excess that violence, the pornotrope, and fungibility can't snuff out. If Musser, Johnson, and Natalie Diaz all return to the body, specifically the lips and mouth, then Crawley too can be thought of as within an embodied tradition that emerges not from some a priori but the lips which shout, speak, drink, and part.

Amber Musser, who is no stranger to an intellectual debate with Warren, explains Warren's devastatingly smart and aptly titled *Ontological Terror* noting that for Afropessimism "blackness operates as the antithesis to the project of the human (and affiliated entities including gender, affect, and subjectivity)" and Warren's project in particular "focuses on the non-relation between blackness and Being.[233] For Warren, Black Being emerges as pure function, the antithesis of Being. Warren elaborates, "the function of black(ness) is to give form to a terrifying formlessness (nothing). Being claims function as its property (all functions rely on Being, according to this logic, for philosophical presentation), but the aim of black nihilism is to expose the unbridgeable rift between Being and function for blackness."[234] Ultimately, what this produces is a kind of dialectic relation. Being comes to know itself through Nothingness and the

[233] Amber Musser, "Beyond Desire: Blackness and Form," Post45 Issue 45 Part 1.
[234] Amber Musser, "Beyond Desire: Blackness and Form," Post45 Issue 45 Part 1

resulting synthesis is the creation of the world as we know it where certain people have sovereign subjectivity and certain other people are fungible and can only be a being for rather than a being in their own right.

But, haven't we and the field been here before? Working with a dialectic as if they aren't custom designed by fascistic forces to ensure their own futurity? If the dialectic is one of the master's tools then I am not surprised that Warren's project can be understood as a deep reification of the hegemony of ontology, identity, and the individual. It should be no surprise then that Warren ultimately relies on scholars such as Butler and Martin Heidegger. If Blackness for Warren is always a space of negation then, as Musser notes, "blackness has no way to produce its own forms. Interpolated into the negative space others have designated for it, blackness can at best produce a mode of expressivity through catachresis: the activation of a dense mode of over-representation that cloaks, but cannot coalesce into its own form."[235] One way to imagine this negative space is that of a prison cell or museum exhibition where objects and living property are held. They are within the hold and rather than attempt some mystic flight from the hold we might also consider burning the buildings down. These places are, after all, the places where Hartman locates the epistemes that undergird the world that enabled the concept of property and the individual to exist.[236] Hartman worries that engaging with those epistemes would reify them and redouble their violence. Warren might be seen as doing just that. But, violence, or the burning of epistemic property would destroy the literalized negative space that Musser articulates as the necessity on which Black Nihilism rests.

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[235] Amber Musser, "Beyond Desire: Blackness and Form," Post45 Issue 45 Part 1

[236] See Saidiya Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" 1-14.

Rather than a synthesis then there might be an enactment of the antagonism at the heart of Afropessimism akin to the way, for Lisa Lowe, the Haitian revolution signaled a time and place where the world might have ended.[237]

What can dialectics do except affirm what's already possible? Do they not concede before they even begin? What is a dialectic to a fasicst if not an escape hatch into the future? What world could we hope for that's also allowable under regimes of synthesis? In a way I'm just echoing Audre Lorde "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable."[238] It was Warren who taught me to approach an argument not from its trunk or branches, but from the root and the ground beneath it…but…didn't Angela Davis already tell me that at one of those protests?

A Failure to Exume: Melancholia, Drowned Flesh, and Enjambment

> "I am interested in how we imagine ways of knowing that past, in excess of the fictions of the archive, but not only that. I am interested, too, in the ways we recognize the many manifestations of that fiction and that excess, that past not yet past, in the present."[239]
>
> -Christina Sharpe

M. NoubeSe Philip's 2008 book of poetry, *Zong!*, offers us an instance of melancholia of the flesh. It interrogates what is left and what can be taken in when the

[237] See Lisa Lowe's "Freedoms Yet to Come" in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*
[238] Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 110-111.
[239] Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2016), 13.

body, flesh, and bones are gone. All that remains is a ship log and a lawsuit. But what also remains is formless waiting to take shape. Philip sets her sight on turning a terrible nothingness into a plural self. Philip performs what Patricia J William's may imagine as "alchemy of race and rights" such that her single body becomes a vessel to restage the drowning body made flesh and give it new life. To save whatever can be saved from the oblivion of the ocean and bring it inside her even as the task might require the performance of drowning herself and coming back up to beg for water.

In Zong!, Philip takes the language found in the Gregson v Gilbert court case which decided a dispute about an insurance claim made on living cargo, enslaved Africans, after they had been mercilessly thrown overboard in fear that the crew would run out of water if they were kept aboard. The case would become a foundational one for insurance law, which is also to say property law. Philip, after years of travel and research, took the full text of the ruling of the case and made it into poems only using the words of the ruling. This section positions *Zong!* as a text of resurrection aimed at bringing back the dead. Philip, in the Notanda, the final section which is the only that is made up of prose, announces her want of the bones of those thrown overboard and explains that due to the pressure and ecological reality of the Atlantic Ocean that this is impossible. Likely, their bones have been broken down to sediment and are still within the ocean. In the wake of this, Philip does all she can to bring them back without their body. In the book itself this entails poems that attend to the pain and anger she imagines the dead must feel as well as her giving the dead names such that they can be better remembered or acknowledged. Through this section I wonder what a melancholia of the flesh might mean when even the flesh is gone and all that is left is the idea of these enslaved Africans

now circulating through the ocean. I look to the text itself to explore how Philip brings the dead back through the very case that consigned them to oblivion as lost "cargo" and a performance Philip does of "Zong! #1" which centers on the very concept of water, both the water in which the dead reside and also the want of water that causes them to be thrown overboard in the first place.

In Zong!, melancholia goes unnamed however it haunts the text given the attention Philip spends on mourning both within the project and in the work that went into it. Philip's attention goes towards mourning, not necessarily how much mourning occurs or how long the mourning occurs, both seem beyond the frame of the text as time seems to bend the space of the poems. Melancholia's definition, or rather the labeling of something or someone as melancholic, remains subjective given its rootedness in pathology. Melancholia is defined in relation to mourning, excessive mourning gets labeled as a pathological disposition. Standard grammar could be said to act in a similar way then, if the ruling of Gregson v. Gilbert follows standard grammar and as such it is the norm then that could leave *Zong!* in a similar relation. I see *Zong!* as enabling what Christina Sharpe names "wake work," a "mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives."[240] Through *Zong!,* M. NourbeSe Philip inhabits the episteme that comes in the wake of slavery, as seen most especially in her self-reflexive and methodological section titled "Notanda." The bulk of her book however ruptures the discursive field that constitutes our episteme which is, according to Hortense Spillers, grammar.

[240] Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2016), 18.

Given that the book, minus the Notonda, consists only of the words from the Gregson v Gilbert case and that the book ends with the text of the case, what would it mean to consider the book as not going anywhere but doing a kind of dancing that I articulate in chapter 1. This dancing, like that of Gallant in chapter 1, produces incoherence between Philip and the dead who she tries, and I argue succeeds, in bringing back in some way. By the end Philip hasn't gone anywhere, she stays with the original case. Zong!, the book, does not go anywhere but that maybe its power as opposed to Zong the ship. The ship had a destination and on the way towards the destination the ship's crew inflicted mass violence. The book does not have a destination, it does however do reparative work "in the service of mourning."[241]

In her introduction to *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed notes the ways "absolute" space is not objective and that things, and people, are located, placed, directed, oriented, and aligned according to "agreement[s] about how we measure space and time."[242] Philip's aim is to undermine not the case itself but the judicial system in which the case exists through the form and grammar of her poems, most notably through enjambment. When Ahmed notes that "social conflict can often be experienced as being 'out of time' as well as "out of place" with others" it would seem that this out-ness aligns with melancholia's improper temporality and enjambment's improper space.[243] Enjambment could be understood as a dis-positioning of grammar.

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[241] M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 202.
[242] Sara Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2006), 5-24.
[243] Sara Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2006), 13.

Moving on and letting go are standard rhetorical devices used by majoritarian groups as a means of not only erasing incidents from the popular imaginary but also from individual or community memories. One major result of this erasure, in the case of slavery, would be the inability to understand that, as Christina Sharpe notes in the epigraph, the past is in fact impossible because it is remains the present. Rather than gradually move on into the future, the melancholic internalizes what is lost and changes itself so that it is both stuck in the past with what is lost while also remaining in the present as a new plural subject. And, as I have argued in earlier chapter, sets its sights on the future that was disclosed from those stuck in the past.

The melancholic dwells too long and Philip's poems take up space in ways that evoke "disorder, illogic, and irrationality" as a means of highlighting the lie that is objectiveness in both grammar and also the judicial system that enabled people to be "cargo."[244] Philip encounters the impossibility Hartman discusses in "Venus in Two Acts" and in the face of that impossibility also recognizes the inevitable failure of narration and must turn to critical fabulation. Critical fabulation being another way to articulate a series of events that dislodges them from our understandings of proper time and order. We might think of this in terms of Amber Musser's discussion of Harris/Holiday. Musser notes that there is an expected way in which she and Fred Moten see people understanding Harris/Holiday as being in relation to pain but this is disrupted through citation that produces incoherence. Likewise, Zong! intentionally breaks the narrative of the Gregson v Gilbert ruling into tiny pieces to see what else could be possible. With its rejection of narrative, and even grammar, Zong! reshapes not only the

[244] M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 197.

story but the very idea that this story could be told by anyone since those who could truthfully tell it are long dead in the ocean. Philip remarks that the legal ruling is the tombstone in part because it is the "one public marker of the murder of those Africans on board the Zong, locating it in a specific time and place."[245] We might then think of Philip's work as attempting to create an alternative tombstone emerging from a citational practice that centers the lost rather than some idea of property.

Philip's performances are prime examples of wake work, with the poems of *Zong!* brought to life, "we might imagine otherwise from what we know now in the wake of slavery."[246] These performances also extend the life of *Zong!*, no longer only a book of poems published in 2008 but now a performance that travels and continues. Like Marlon Riggs and E Patrick Johnson's work on performance, *Zong!* when performed becomes a happening that can continue to make new meaning over time. If this book continues in different iterations then we could say that the wake has yet to end and then we may ask if the wake can or will ever end? Does this continued performance and wake work constitute melancholia? One answer to this would be, on whose terms is the pathologic defined? The same powers that define pathological also defined the human, excluding Black people, then a rejection of melancholia may be in order. However, what if melancholia was rooted in the flesh and thought of as "a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names."[247] In many ways Zong! could be a new tombstone for those murdered, it contains the ruling at the end while also so much more made up of just

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[245] M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 194.
[246] Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2016), 18.
[247] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 74.

that ruling. So rather than *Zong!* taking the place of a tombstone, I argue that it may challenge that idea that this tombstone could exist. It might be that Philip wishes to bring the dead into the present with her. Or, resist the Law as the final resting place for these people.

The book, like a dance, can be imagined as a gesture because "it is nothing more than the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporal movements. The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such."[248] The book as endurance seems especially apt, the book takes a certain stamina to read, the enjambment makes it difficult to follow and takes time, reading it aloud proves difficult as the text does not read easily because of the ways it differs from normal sentence structure and its lack of standard punctuation. Agamben continues defining gesture as "essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language."[249] Given Philip's distrust of language and the ways the poems exceed language the book fits into this definition surprisingly well. Philip asserts that "in Zong!, the African, transformed into a thing by the law, is re-transformed, miraculously, back into a human."[250] While I am wary of this claim, I think at its core there is a truth to it. Through the gesture of this emjammed poetry something miraculous happens as Philip begins to figure out how to bring the enslaved Africans back. If not materially then back into her such that she might keep them as safe as she can from Law.

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[248] Giorgio Agamben, Means Without End: Notes on Politics, (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota UP, 2000), 69.
[249] Giorgio Agamben, Means Without End: Notes on Politics, (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota UP, 2000), 69.
[250] M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 196.

"Zong #1" can be read as someone begging for water due to thirst (as was the case on the Zong) or as someone being brought out from the water and back from the dead. Exhumation gets you a body but with exaquamation there isn't a body so what can be gotten? The idea of exaquatmation is a crazy or mad endeavor because it's impossible. There isn't a body (both because of the time since the death and also the conditions of death). Exaquamation can't bring someone back as human because they're ontologically and biologically dead. Zong!, as a type of anagrammatical blackness, brings the dead back into the world differently, it imagines the dead back while leaving property and concepts of the individual in the ocean where they might sink. The court case, representing Law, killed them ontologically and the slave trade killed them biologically. Another court case can't change that because such a tactic would still fall within the anti-black metaphysical infrastructure via the legal system created to transform person to object. But exaquamation can bring back something otherwise. As a counter to the court case and the violence of Zong, Philip offers the poetry of Zong!, "Zong! bears witness to the 'resurfacing of the drowned and the oppressed' and transforms the desiccated, legal report into a cacophony of voices—wail, cries, moans, and shouts that had earlier been banned from the [original] text."

If the reader were to read the poem out loud it may appear that the reader had a stutter or their mouth was somehow obstructed. The poem's ending becomes recognizable as "water water water water of want," the official reason that the enslaved Africans were thrown overboard was for "want of water."[251] Philip reading the poem enacts a refusal, a refusal to allow the enslaved Africans thrown overboard to remain in

[251]M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 4, 210.

the water. Philip asks, "does this mean that unlike being interred, once you're underwater there is no retrieval—that you can never 'exhume from water?"[252] As if to answer her own question "Zong! #1" is exaquamation, an exhumation from the water. This exaquamation can be perceived as a refusal to let someone go uncared for in a grave that is not their own, an exaquamation challenges the temporality asserted by the legal document even if it is only a metaphorical or non physical one. Philip brings the dead back, if only for the time that she performs Zong!. In one comment on the Google Books website for Zong! the commenter explains "I felt I was witnessing a medium, listening to the slow rhythmic cadence of someone almost in trance." In performing "Zong! #1" Philip enacts a type of prosopopoeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech," that leads to what José Muñoz refers to as a "transhistorical call-and-response."[253] The comments on Zong!'s Google Book referred to this as Philip being a medium, the effects are the same, through her text and performance Philip summons the dead. It is fitting then that the first poem directly addresses both the cause and reason for death, water and wanting it. Philip brings to live an enslaved African thrown overboard and in response to the ultimate question the now alive, and free, African, still recovering from the water and trauma, names water.

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I hope you like Cabernet because it's all I had laying around. Oh you've got the episode pulled up already, great. You've seen this before right? Ok, wonderful

[252] M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 201.
[253] José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota UP, 1998), 65.

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A Melancholia of the Flesh

> On a dusty stretch of highway, a traveler stumbles across a museum that boasts rare criminal artifacts—and a disturbing main attraction.
>
> -Black Museum episode description

It is on this dusty stretch of highway where we first see what appears to just be Nish, the protagonist to the season four finale of the Netflix anthology show *Black Mirror.* As she cruises down the highway we can hear the Naked Eyes' Always Something There to Remind Me and as we get closer to Nish we can see that she is singing along to the song knowingly. What the audience does not know yet is that this song is not for her; this song is for her mother who now resides within Nish's mind after her suicide. The song is for her mother and the subject of the song's longing is not Nish but Nish's father, Clayton Leigh. We might imagine that Nish is that something that always reminds her mother of the love she has for Nish's father despite him supposedly being dead. This song about memory and remembrance through the quotidian places, streets, and cafes speaks to an inescapable and unresolvable dilemma for Nish and her mother that would not normally be reconcilable: that Clayton is dead. Or, he is supposed to be.

What could we say about a Black man who is "supposed" to be dead in a country that relies on his abjection as the ground from which flowers and grass that populate the yards behind white picket fences that he may never know. How can Nish reconcile that her father is technically supposed to be dead because he was executed by the state while

also holding that he should still be alive and well because he was not guilty of a crime? And now, her father has become that disturbing main attraction. What would you do if someone used contract law to steal your father from you? From his final rest? From the grave except that his body remains unexhumed because the contract was only for his mind. Clayton's body, his fleshy materiality, remains in the ground but his mind has been brought back to life and placed within a grotesque virtual body that can somehow still feel pain.

It is no accident that Nish is on the way or that she is playing that song for her mother. While the audience might be led to believe that Nish is simply on a trip and has to stop to charge her car this is a ruse. Nish plays the song for her mother because she is on the way to find and free her father. This is no accident; this is a plan to strike a blow at the very conditions of the world and in this battle Nish has come prepared to succeed.

The episode followa Nish as she takes a tour through Rolo Haynes's museum that houses exhibits featuring cutting edge and controversial technological inventions. As Haynes shows Nish three different exhibits he explains the stories behind them: a doctor who received an implant allowing him to feel what other people feel in the hopes that he can better treat patients but ends up killing homeless people for pleasure, a woman left paralyzed after a car crash chooses to undergo an experimental treatment that eventually results in her mind being trapped in a stuffed animal, and finally, a black man on death row named Clayton Leigh signing over the rights to his consciousness in exchange for money for his family. The tour enables Haynes to create a technological progress narrative in an attempt to put forward an ends justify the means understanding of his work, even if the means was death and violence.

Each exhibit on Haynes' tour shows the way that through technology a clearer and clearer breaking of a bodymind was made possible and at times the breaking could be aimed to benefit people who are ill or considered disabled lending weight to some transhumanist project. However none of these benefits last and usually the technology leads to death or an even worse embodied reality for those involved with it.

The final exhibit displays Clayton Leigh. Leigh, while facing the death sentence for a crime he did not commit, signs over his consciousness in exchange for money to support his family after he is executed. The fourteenth amendment cannot protect Leigh from execution or enslavement but Leigh likely didn't imagine enslavement coming after the execution. And isn't the very legal system that captured and killed him the one that was built to enforce contracts around human property? Isn't this the same system that takes Gregson v Gilbert as an origin point? Isn't Haynes the enemy Walter Benjamin warned us about? Someone even the dead will not be safe from. After Leigh's execution he wakes up in a jail cell constructed in Haynes museum having been brought back as a hologram to be executed—lynched—by museum visitors in perpetuity as a convicted criminal. Haynes explains that when the museum visitors execute Leigh they got to leave with a keychain that had a copy of Leigh's consciousness from the moment they pulled the lever. Like body parts of lynched black people during Jim Crow, the keychain acts as a keepsake and symbol of the execution of a black person found guilty of a crime they didn't commit or being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

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This disturbing main attraction becomes an allegory for the world. The previous exhibitions posed questions of what it is to be human within a biopolitical context. The

lives of the doctor and the disabled woman are controlled and determined by Haynes and his technology. But this is not the end. The true end to this technology telos is not biopolitics but rather necropolitics. Instead of Foucault's genealogy of the prison and forms of punishment this episode ends within a museum where a jail cell and Clayton Leigh have become an exhibition of knowledge, domination, and constant and recurring death. And not just an exhibition but an attraction as if it were a show, a freak show maybe, or a lynching.

This distinction between bio- and necropolitics brings into sharp focus the disparity between the white characters and their particular ends. The doctor and disabled woman may not have had the happy ending they believed they could achieve with this new technology but they are bound and protected by a legal system. When Haynes shows a stuffed animal that still has a woman's mind inside it he notes that he can't destroy it or kill her because there are human rights laws that protect her because she cannot consent. But what of Clayton's lack of ability to consent? That was taken from him first by that same legal system which imprisoned and executed him for a crime he did not commit. As if this was not enough, Haynes misleads Clayton into signing over his mind without informing Clayton what could be done. This consent by Clayton, this legal contract, is made under false pretenses or without adequate knowledge and as such the contract should not be enforceable but how does the dead have standing in court? How does a Black man have standing in court even when he is alive?

Clayton, like Henrietta Lacks, has had his body stolen from him for "science." And this theft, this turning of flesh into extracted information such that it might be called intellectual property, seems to be legal because Clayton signed a piece of paper. So, when

he is resurrected back into a jail cell suddenly even death cannot save him from enslavement. As he tries to understand how he can still be alive he begins to notice that he is only somewhat back. His new holographic body is merely a representation of his mind which has been converted into data that can be reproduced, copy pasted such that he could potentially become present in every museum. This holographic body however does not mean he cannot have pain inflicted onto him.

This pain comes in the form of a kind of lynching. Clayton Leigh was executed using an electric chair because he was convinced of killing a young white woman. This electric chair is virtually conjured whenever a visitor pays the nominal fee to get the pleasure of electrocuting him again. As if they too can be part of some perverse justice by rekilling him. As Robyn Wiegman notes, "lynching is about the law-both the towering patrolman who renarrates the body and sadistically claims it as sign of his own power and the Symbolic as law, the site of normativity and sanctioned desire, of prohibition and taboo. In the circuit of relations that governs lynching in the United States, the law as legal discourse and disciplinary practice subtends the Symbolic arena, marking out a topos of bodies and identities that not only defines and circumscribes social and political behavior but also punishes transgression, from its wildest possibility to its most benign threat."[254] Clayton is painfully executed over and over again because it enables the average person to take part in some grand idea of justice under the law. But we might, following Calvin Warren, change Wiegman's law to Law as a means of signifying that the law being followed here is not a legal one but rather something rooted deeper within both the American project and the American psyche. This Law is what formulates the

[254] Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), 81.

political community that Taney relies upon to deny the possibility of citizenship, of political possibility, for Black people. Seen this way, Claytons unending death sentence serves to reify a racial and symbolic order that serves to dominate and attempt to destroy Blackness.

The transgression that Clayton was convinced for, which he did not actually commit, was the most stereotypical of crimes to falsely charge a Black man of, the death of a white woman. Which we might also say is the assault on whiteness itself as this assault is on both whiteness and the feminine property of whiteness. Clayton becomes a symbol and warning of what can now come of transgression. The death sentence is no longer the end. If anything the death sentence within Haynes' world is just the beginning of a new kind of onto-juridical enslavement where Clayton and any others are kept to continue to be a being for the Law until they have been so destroyed that they cease to function. We can only imagine that Clayton has a backup of Clayton on a hard drive somewhere such that he can always bring him back just as he was when he first signed over his mind.

Clayton, virtually present within the jail cell within a museum, becomes an allegory for the distinction between Being and Nothingness that Calvin Warren explores and exposes within *Ontological Terror*. Of this nothingness and Black Nihilism, Warren explains that "the function of black(ness) is to give form to a terrifying formlessness (nothing). Being claims function as its property (all functions rely on Being, according to this logic, for philosophical presentation), but the aim of Black nihilism is to expose the unbridgeable rift between Being and the function of Blackness."[255] This rift can be

[255] Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror* (Durham: Duke UP, 2018), 6.

clearly scene within "Black Museum" as Clayton, a formless amalgamation of information, is made into a being for the museum visitors. Not only is he made visible in prison clothes for their gawking but, at any moment, he is strapped back into the electric chair with the visitor holding the switch to distribute a cruel and unusual punishment that kills him without killing him because he can always be brought back by Haynes having remembered the pain of electricity just imposed onto him. Amber Musser notes that Warren "argues that continental philosophy's framing of the question of Being has elided the possibility of Black Being such that blackness exists contra to Being…blackness has no way to produce its own forms. Interpolated into the negative space others have designated for it, blackness can at best produce a mode of expressivity through catachresis: the activation of a dense mode of over-representation that cloaks, but cannot coalesce into its own form."[256] We might imagine Clayton as so formless that he can do nothing but fit into whatever space Haynes has designated for it, Clayton's mind.

This space is not reserved for the jail cell in the museum because in the tradition of lynching, Haynes has souvenirs ready for the museum goers such that they can not only remember their time at the museum and their experience killing a "murderer" but also the moment when Clayton is in excruciating pain. Haynes has created this "main attraction" such that it produces a small electronic keychain that houses a copy of Clayton's mind in pain. As if from a gumball machine costing only a quarter, Clayton's mind is made into an object again and shattered into pieces for the enjoyment of the visitor. Following a legacy of keeping souvenirs from lynchings in the forms of body parts or postcards, the small tamagotchi looking device both offers the visual of Clayton's

[256] Amber Musser, "Dysfunctional Blackness: Toward Being-with and Relational Freedom," *Syndicate* (2021), https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/ontological-terror/.

face in pain and a copy of his mind from that moment. In some kind of perverse forced jouissance Clayton is shattered over and over again in the service of white pleasure. And this pleasure does not end here. As Haynes' museum lost popularity due to protests in the wake of it becoming known that Clayton did not commit the murder he had to find other ways of making a profit. Rather than close the museum he allowed people to do more than execute Clayton. Before, there was a time limit to ensure that the file that was Clayton's mind was not corrupted. This also prevented the worst pain from being inflicted on Clayton. But, these new visitors were white supremacists and white sadists who specifically wanted to inflect that pain which would not just kill but destroy. As if feeling ontological terror, these men were able to come as close as anyone ever had to destroy the nothingness that Warren describes as Black nonbeing. Gradually, after this pain and violence that begins to obliterate Clayton, his mind and the file that contains it becomes so deteriorated that the once lucid Clayton can no longer speak and can only hide in a fetal position on the far side of his cell. This is the position that Nish finds her father in and only spurs on her violence and retribution.

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The episode climaxes with Nish announcing that she is Leigh's daughter and that she had just poisoned Haynes. Nish has disabled the AC and brought in poisoned water that she had given to Haynes early on in the tour. Before his dies Nish extracts his consciousness, puts it in the cell that held her father before, and pulls the lever on the electric chair so his consciousness remains forever tortured as her father's now is. Or, at least until the museum burns down. As Nish leaves she sets the museum to catch fire.

When Nish gets to her car with the museum in flames behind her she adjusts the rear view mirror to see and then talk with her deceased mother who we only then learn has had her consciousness placed into Nish's body. Nish, in taking her dead mother inside of her and launching a fight against the man and institution that held the enslaved mind of her father accomplishes not only a sensuous melancholia but begins the battle that our dead must be carried into. But what about her father and countless others who are gone in ways that impede or prevent them from being taken in and carried? What are the consequences of that? What about justice or accountability? Is it just the museum that must be burned or the whole world?

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The responses to this fiery ending and the episode more generally were largely negative noting that the episode "assumes the worst of human nature, implying that people are innately wired to prefer justice in vindictive form," the stories in the episode "illuminate nothing interesting, settling instead on the claim that everyone enjoys inflicting cruelty, given the chance," and that it is the "worst episode of the season...its story hinges on people repeatedly choosing to be stupid and/or evil."[257] The power dynamics of the show, the afterlives of slavery, are left forgotten or ignored in favor of a crypto universalist script aimed at policing, disciplining, and discouraging Black violence and uprising. Through these reviews it becomes clear that at some level the world

[257] Sophie Gilbert, "Black Mirror: 'Black Museum' Is a Throwback to Episodes Past," The Atlantic, December 31, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/12/black-mirror-black-museum-is-a-throwback-to-episodes-past/549389/; R.D., "'Black Mirror' continues to excel at limited world-building," The Economist, January 3rd, 2018; Zack Handlen, "Black Mirror ends its fourth season with a dud," The AV Club, December 29th, 2017; Sonia Saraiya, TV Review: 'Black Mirror' Season 4 on Netflix, Variety, December 23rd, 2017, https://variety.com/2017/tv/reviews/black-mirror-season-4-netflix-tv-review-1202648385/.

recognizes the potential threat that Black people pose to world order and aims to disallow that horizon and perform a "both sides" approach to violence eerily familiar with the tried and true method of Tucker Carlson and his ilk. What is being made implicitly unavailable with these critiques is the ability to imagine Nish as part of a long tradition of rioting which, in the words of Rinaldo Walcott, "embodies a tradition of Black refusal and resistance, and just as importantly, as a way for Black people to reanimate and alter the worlds in which they find themselves."[258] So, what would happen if an army of one-breasted women descended upon Congress and demanded that the use of carcinogenic, fat-stored hormones in beef-feed be outlawed? No, sorry that was Lorde again, I meant, what would happen if an army of Black women carrying their dead inside of them descended upon Congress and demanded reparations and an end to the US state…or else? Is that not the fear? Did the episode offer a rehearsal of a world that's closer than we know? Or is the State so fragile that speculative fiction on Netflix could cause it all to come crashing down. But would we be so surprised to hear that a world that is full of troubles, gender, ability, affect, might be in some trouble itself?

With Nish we see a critique of the primacy of a type of dialectic telos.[259] We might imagine Leigh as representing that negation. Both a nonphysical holograph and conscious flesh, Leigh is interpolated into the negative space another has designated for…it? Has Leigh been made flesh yet again despite not having a body? This negative space, this antithesis to the Human, is that of a jail cell where white sadists and fascists

[258] Rinaldo Walcott, *On Property* (Windsor: Biblioasis, 2021), 51.

[259] My thinking of Nish as a type of embodied futurity counter to a narrative that requires synthesis draws on Lisa Lowe, "Freedoms Yet to Come," in *Intimacies of Four Continents,* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015), 135-175.

can pay to engage in a particular anti-Black fantasy, being able to lynch, kill, and torture a living representation of Blackness seemingly forever. Eventually Haynes faces some concerned liberal backlash and to keep his museum running he allows white men to tortue Leigh for longer and longer eventually causing permanent damage to his consciousness leaving him always in pain and on the brink of a death despite him having already died and there being no escape from the museum.

Nish, when faced with the impossibility of recovering a version of her father not in pain, still tries to save him from this new form of enslavement and violence. In the wake of her inevitable failure she chooses to burn the museum to the ground as it represents the possibility of further enslavement. Rather than come to terms with Haynes or respect the contract her father signed, Nish sees the underlying antagonisms. The museum, and the world it represents, must be set ablaze. The jail cell that might come to represent the space of negation becomes the final resting place for Hayes before the very possibility of such a space, and the Museum that is literally made possible because of it are all turned to ash as the Naked Eyes' "Always Something There to Remind Me" plays again. Nish and her mother might continue to remind one another of Nish's father. And with every remembrance there is also the remembrance that there are more copies of Clayton out there, likely all over the country. As Nish drives off we might imagine that she is on a mission to find the rest and kill everyone and burn everything that keeps her father imprisoned and in pain.

Nish does not desire synthesis, she does want to come to an agreement or resolution with Haynes, but rather she kills him and destroys his museum that functioned

as a symbol of the ways certain populations are subject to the will of those in power. As the episode ends, rather than turn the mirror it to admire her work, she turns the mirror so she can see herself and her mother, who had committed suicide after seeing Clayton Leigh at the museum.[260] She looks in the mirror to commune with her mother and allow her mother to see her.

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So, what would you do if someone stole your father which led to the death of your mother by her own hand? Would you devote a portion of your life to finding them both and taking them inside you? Would you use the very tools that stole your father if it meant getting him back? Would you track down all those who desired his pain? Would you burn down the museums because they all have a jail or prison in them somewhere? We shouldn't run away or take ecstasy, but should we burn down a museum? An archive? The world?

Or, "in the end, was it better to leave them as I found[him]?[261] Nish does not think so. Nish does not only free her father, kill Rolo Haynes, and burn down the museum but she might also be leaving to finish her task. To find all those who took pieces of her father in pain and ensure that they too pay for their violences. That the episode ends like it begins, with Nish and her mother driving down a dusty stretch of highway while

[260] The show portrays this as Nish's mother sitting in a chair inside of her head seeing what Nish sees as if it was on a movie screen. This depiction echos artist, activist, and scholar Angelica Becerra's artwork titled "Resilience En La Frente" and points to further connections between the experiences and representations of minoritzed people within the US and US media and shared struggle in the face of debilitating forces. Both Becerra's art and the ending of "Black Museum" also point towards the joy found in cross generation connection. The accompanying caption to Becerra's piece says, in part, "we are the product of the love and sweat of our ancestors." (angelicaisaibecerra, October 15th, 2015, https://www.instagram.com/p/8n5ddiE8jR/?taken-by=angelicaisaibecerra.)

[261] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, Volume 2 No. 2 (June 2008): 10.

“There’s Always Something There To Remind” me plays signals to the audience that this is not over. This might never be over. It now means doubly because before Nish kills Haynes she makes a copy of him in pain to carry with her. Now she has her own souvenir to remind her of what was done to her father. Now her and her mother need to go finish this reconciliation and ensure that Clayton Leigh can finally rest. What this ending articulates is a need to end the world or to engage in such violence that the world begins to unravel. Nish has identified the way she, her mother, and her father were all viewed as nothing and now nothing has its sights set on all that can lay claim to Being.

Conclusion: Reflection

This dissertation aims to offer a sketch of the world and draw out glimpses of some other world being rehearsed. Rather than imagine oneself as an individual, a hallmark of post-Enlightenment thought, who possesses and desires this project takes up and reformulates melancholia. Rather than view melancholia as a pathology I imagine it in line with José Esteban Muñoz's definition found in the epitaph of this project. Melancholia, in a freudian sense, disrupts the concept of a single individual self with agency and the rhythm and ordering of capitalist imperatives towards reproductive futurity. Rather than leave melancholia as a malady of the mind I imagine it to be an embodied experience. I imagine this move in line with a number of subfield's response to early queer theory. Trans studies rejected and rejects Butler because their thinking lacks materiality. Affect studies, of the Sedgwickian variety, begins with the preverbal feelings of the body. Queer of color critique at times views Butler as disturbing and makes the move towards the body, in particular the racialized queer body as the locus of theory making. That these things run parallel with each other also highlight a difficulty, how to speak across disciplines and hold their particularities while making larger claims about the world.

At the start of the project I made a simple if bold claim. There is someone else inside of me. Following the lead of Amber Musser and José Esteban Muñoz I imagine a plural self. In a way Musser's Sensual excess offers a useful corollary. For Musser brown jouissance is excess sensation that emerges and cannot be captured in its entirety by the pornotrope. I view a sensuous melancholia similarly. In the wake of violence, of death,

there is excess sensation. Indeed it is this excess that in part defines melancholia for Freud. I view the excess differently. For me this excess is the excess of the individual. Rather than having someone excised from you as you grieve, a sensuous melancholia imagines them staying with you. That you are changed forever because of it.

I organized this project around Raymond William's notion of a structure of feeling, a feeling that cannot be formed into an ideology but still a way of moving through the world and understanding it through the senses. Much like Muñoz's Brown feelings seen in chapter 3, a sensuous melancholia has long existed as a social process in progress and can be found within art as a performative force. We might think of as a way of life. Throughout this project is it through the body that a sensuous melancholia comes to the fore and it is through the body where new epistemologies emerge. What Amber Musser might call epistemologies of fleshiness. A main kind of knowledge that I see emerging from loss is that this world fails and for minoritized people who face social death survival is not a personal endeavor. What becomes partially knowable is another way of inhabiting the world. Melancholia refuses to let go and in the cases of the case studies offered in this dissertation that refusal is also a made of worldmaking, or at least rehearsals of what worlds might be possible even if just out of our grasp.

The archive of this project could be described, to quote Musser again, esoteric aesthetic archive. In a way these are objects I have encountered while living a life but they are also instances where a sensuous melancholia was palpable for me. The archive for this project is intentionally capacious and aims to traverse genre and form to show how a sensuous melancholia can be felt everywhere if we are attuned to it. This can make for an unruly dissertation at times. The cultural objects are occasions to understand the

way death and violence are not total, there is something else that exceeds capture. The instances of death and violence attended to in the dissertation grow more existential from chapter to chapter but central to them all are minoritarian people holding the dead and remembering them and in their remembrance we can see another way that the world can be organized. For instance, in chapter two in the face of impending death the main characters of 120 BPM luxuriate in touch and engage in reciprocal storytelling as a mode of not only building a bond but also sharing the lives of past lovers. In this instance the dead come back on screen to be touched and caressed. What is modeled in the small bedroom they inhabit is a way of caring and protecting the sick in the face of a disinterested and liable government. In a moment where no one, not even medical professionals, would touch someone with HIV, what is rehearsed here is a world without moralizing and fear.

Method has been a difficult concept for me. When I explained this difficulty to Calvin Warren he explained that a method is just like the approach. How do I approach these cultural objects and make sense of them. Here Eve Sedgwick comes to be central for me. Her explication of paranoid and reparative reading has proved central. The reparative, taken up so forcefully by Muñoz, aims not to uncover, it is not archaeology where the correct answer can be found if enough digging can be done. My aim is not to find some essential correct essence of these objects, my aim is to imagine what they make possible. What they do within a cultural landscape. Throughout there are whispers of some of the tried and true approaches to queer theory. I invest in resignification, citation, and questions to explore how one of the things the cultural objects in this project do is

show how to be singular plural. I also often turn to the senses. To this end at times I imagine description as a kind of theory making.

I imagine this dissertation as a first draft of a book project. The project is not perfect and there are tensions within it. The dissertation is pulled by two strong theories: afropessimism and queer utopianism. There are times where this project does not offer a clear enough path between these theories and the tensions that arise have been illuminating for me. Some things that have become clear is that this project is odd. Part of that oddness is how central I am in it. In writing this I had difficulty finding the right tone and rhythm so I decided to write as if I was speaking. This ultimately means that as the dissertation moves on and traverses different fields and objects I am less and less present in it which leaves dissonance within the chapters. Part of this dissonance is also due to completing theories and ideologies. The impact of my divergent mentors over the years have left me trepidatious. That the pieces of this project were written over the better part of a decade means that part of the tone shift that might be evident is also a result of shifting perspectives on some critical ideas. One thing that this has given me however is a sprawling project that has forced me to grapple with interdisciplinarity, competing theories of the Human and the social, and the time to imagine this project in a way where I don't need to be as central to it. This project took many shapes and names over the years. It is arguably more in the spirit of a second book project at times. In coming to the conclusion of this project I can begin to see the contours of the book project clearer.

In chapter one, I articulate melancholia as an embodied feeling of out-of-timeness that highlights the ways queer people were repeatedly called to move on after the Pulse nightclub massacre. Chapter two extends this out-of-timeness by turning to archival

footage and filmic representations of ACT UPs protests to argue that familiar forms and genres that demarcate our sense of time, like the funeral and historical fiction, buckle and become works of mourning. The third chapter, Brown Melancholia and the Matrilineal, builds on the previous chapter's engagement with form and genre but considers Enlightenment ideology as a category that cannot contain melancholia and instead thinks with Paula Gunn Allen and José Esteban Muñoz to trace an alternative melancholic ideology rooted in brown matriliny. Chapter four, "Melancholia of the Flesh: Abolition, Performance, and a Burning Museum," asks what a melancholia of the flesh, rooted in a Black Study tradition, would demand of the living in order to make end the world that turned bodies into flesh. Building on Black sexuality studies scholar Amber Musser's work I ask, what selfhoods, intimacies, and knowledge systems emerge from thinking with the dead? To articulate one answer, I turn to poetry and visual culture where Blackness is represented without a body to interrogate questions of Black ontology, debility, and expanding afterlives of slavery. Together with the other chapters, the project seeks to chart the kind of world melancholia would produce and what lines of thinking—even unpopular or dangerous ones that unsettle what might otherwise be considered natural or common sensical—become thinkable.

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