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Sondra Perry

Epilogue

"Black people need a mythocracy, not a democracy because they'll never make it in history... Truth is not permissible for me to use because I'm not righteous and holy, I'm evil, that's because I'm black and I'm not subscribed to any types of righteousness. I've never been righteous, I'll never be righteous. So now I'm evil, I'm the incarnation of evil, I'm black, I'm following [the] dictionary. Now I'm dealing with equations: I can't go around telling you I'm right or good when the dictionary is telling everyone around the world that everything black is evil and wicked. So then I come and say yes, so what? Yes I'm wicked. Yes I'm evil. I'm not going to be converted. I'm not going to subscribe to righteousness. I don't want to go to heaven. Because good folks don't ever do nothin' but be good, and they always failin', and they always getting killed, and they frustrated. So all I see on this planet is something evil like the white man being successful and successful and successful and I see evil killing black men every day, destroying him. Why should I be good? No, it's better for me to come to the white race and say, "Yes, we evil people should sit down to the table and talk together. You evil, I'm evil too. Now them other folks you dealing with are good black folks, I'm not good and you're not good. We understand one another."

Sun Ra at UC Berkeley in 1971

Sondra Perry makes video installations and works out of Houston, Texas and her hometown of Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

each rep of the metal graze the length of his head. In actuality he is already doing this slowly.

There are many things turning over in my head; and you were the only one really capable of turning me on. And she was the only one really capable of loving me. And he, who I first spoke of the tragedy to, he deepened the silence. And I will not admit that I've been taken from.

Three siblings on a train play a game they made up. It involves slapping each other in complex ways. They are my complexion… and so many words pass between them. The youngest boy says: oh shit, I still have one more life because I didn't know. This is a game where they give each other many lives.

And I just think You, you are not allowed to not know.

Sable Elyse Smith is an interdisciplinary artist and writer based in New York. Her practice considers memory and trauma while enacting an undoing of language. She works from the archive of her own body creating new syntax for knowing and not knowing, thereby marking the difference between witnessing and watching. To see is unbearable. She has performed at the Museum of Modern Art, the New Museum, Eyebeam, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA. Her work has also been screened at Birkbeck Cinema in collaboration with the Serpentine Galleries, London, Artist Television Access, San Francisco, and MoMA Ps1, New York. Her writing has been published in Radical Teacher, Studio Magazine and No Tofu Magazine and she is currently working on her first book. Smith has received grants & fellowships from Creative Capital, the Queens Museum, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Franklin Furnace Fund, and Art Matters. She is currently part-time faculty at Parsons The New School for Design.

An artist whose body and work has inhabited The Kitchen for decades recently described our building's primary value as being a "non-space." A space which has been seeped in history but exists only as itself. This was something that drew him back again and again, that there was freedom to let it be, or to transform it completely. Either way, it would be accepted as-is. This quality may once have been more common in the city, but now seems less appealing to those in charge of creating spaces. The line between character and branding is quite fine, and it's very easy to talk about space. Everyone needs it, everyone wants something from it, and no one can escape from its effects. But a non-space is far more difficult to maintain, like a truly neutral expression. One faux finish, one drifting gaze, and it all collapses.

We have a ghost that lives in the gallery. It is a fireman named Edward J. Tuite who died on duty in 1970, when the building was a movie studio (i.e. another deliberate non-space.) I have a friend whose father often worked in this studio in the late 1970s. (I haven't yet asked him if he remembers the ghost's presence during this time.) As an art director on Brian de Palma's Dressed to Kill, he had to chop up an Audi to fit in our same elevator, then reassemble it for a street scene on the second floor, in what is now the gallery. The street outside the building was perhaps not street-like enough at that time, and it seemed easier to start from scratch. The movie takes place in Manhattan.

I know at least one artist has purposely sought out the ghost, back in 2005 when white walls were placed within a black box theater to create a gallery. She found it during a smudging cere-mony, in the northwest corner. It seems to enjoy a sense of order,

to gaze. I do not apologize for this gaze either. [I consume his image] There is a tear, which has worked its way to the corner of his shuttered right eye. This is the eye closest to me. It is the moistness of this veiled eye that forces me to struggle quietly in my seat and the eyelashes that remind me of a younger cousin now estranged. A boy, something happened to and there are many of us that things have happened too.

And so I gaze on at the boy. Replace him for this boy cousin of mine. Laugh, because they are both men now, fated and posturing in different ways. There is broken language in the world for these two.

Recently I cut a disjointed sample of Al Greens love and Happiness. I am thinking about the function of the refrain. Thinking of how easy music lends itself to being remembered. And played it over a tender image of my father cutting his hair with a buzzer. I take the buzz out the video and slow it down so that we watch each rep of the metal graze the length of his head. In actuality he is already doing this slowly.

The authentic parts of him are caught in this grooming. These are the things he shares with me. (He knows no other way to speak)

I feel satiated when a woman calls me handsome. When she strokes my face and looks into me. I did not tell my sister about these desires on that drive. I left a languid gap to pick up the work. Let the thin white border of a polaroid picture pick up the slack of what's missing in the composition.

I thought a lot about wading in the gap [and not the water]. The San Andreas fault has always been interesting to me in this way. It is a place we pass through on our way to prison.

These faults are cracks in the earth. "These faults are commonly found in collision zones, where tectonic plates push up mountain ranges…" and the San Andreas fault is visible from space and so our imperfections are known when we photograph ourselves from outside of our self. Faults are evidence that sometimes a plate can shift and that's comforting, to know that the crust of the earth, at times, requires movement. Requires a slippage…

Rotation, rewinding a record by placing two fingers across its grooves and slowly pulling back, applying the slightest pressure. Rotation, as in turning—a turning over.

Recently I cut a disjointed sample of Al Green's love and Happiness. I am thinking about the function of the refrain. Thinking of how easy music lends itself to being remembered. And played it over a tender image of my father cutting his hair with a buzzer. I take the buzz out the video and slow it down so that we watch

Sable Elyse Smith

And Here Is A List Of Names

This was the first time I spoke about the way he entered me. Standing here in front of you all. Hair close cropped and a T-shirt depicting two women erotically licking an ice cream cone, leaking slowing down fingers. Phallic centric or suggestive I know. However, I know that my body is a loud foil around this imagery, constructing a more transgressive frame. I think this. I do.

I talked about screaming and slapping and then a long silence filling in the space around me, around him, pushing up against the shell of a car; while my left hand assumed a slight tremor. I always knew I could never be a painter. I often speak about silence and long gaps in memory.

I remember we were two women driving once—four hours to visit a father; two strangers toward an even stranger destination. It was on this trip that we talked about our recreational use of drugs. There are no connections to be drawn here. It was on this trip that she told me about her encounters with women in Brazil.

I float in a space that obfuscates the realities of my movements on this earth, my details. I have forgotten or put away all the details. I have made tight little labels for each occurrence, giving them assigned language. Maybe this has taught me to be distant.

Distance. I write this on a plane thousands of feet in the air, suspended between two places, carving into me like a Detroit tree branch cut across my face in childhood: Los Angeles and New York. I write this as I stare into the face of my young olive skinned neighbor seated beside me, arms folded across his tray table his face points in my direction. His eyelashes are long and beautiful. They give him a softness, a naiveté of this grounded world. There are things I know about him. He hurts me in a way but I continue

Poor Meme Rich Meme (aka Toward a Black Circulationism)

"There is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation."

Jean-Luc Nancy

Black people love social media, and social media love black people. According to a 2015 Pew survey, 47 percent of Instagram users are black. Twitter is more evenly distributed but still mostly minority-driven. Alongside the rise of the meme in internet culture, we have witnessed black-user-produced content drift toward center stage. Not only is blackness broadly attracted to the internet, technology, and the future at large—exemplified by the rich traditions of Afro-futurist literature, house music, hip-hop videos, and more—but the internet is a prime condition for black culture to thrive.

What makes for this condition? Some, like Kodwo Eshun and John Akomfrah, say that the African diaspora prefigures digital networks in its effects on bodies and subjectivities. We, as black people, are no strangers to the alienation of a mediated selfhood. We have much experience with mass surveillance, a condition that the white avant-garde would have us believe is a recent development in state control. The diaspora is "a precursor to the post-industrial drive toward fluxes and deterritorialization," as British Afrofuturists claim, meaning that blackness was always ahead of its time, always already a networked culture and always already dematerialized, thanks to the Middle Passage. In Black Marxism, Cedric Robinson wrote of the "ontological totality" or collective being of blackness—the preservation of which, he argued, is the primary charge of the Black Radical tradition.

Tarika Wilson. Dontre Hamilton.

There is one grim moral question left for us to answer. No other question will matter until this one can be faced:

Aiyana Stanley-Jones.

Surrender…or nah?

Robert Jones, Jr. is a writer from Brooklyn, New York. He earned both his B.F.A. in creative writing and M.F.A. in fiction from Brooklyn College. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Gawker*, *The Grio*, and the *Feminist Wire*. He is the creator of the social justice social media community, Son of Baldwin, which can be found on Facebook, Google Plus, Instagram, Medium, Tumblr, and Twitter. His first novel is in the revision stage and he's currently working on the second.

driven snow. The living contradiction that beats within our hearts and worms through our minds is, as Maya Angelou testified, that we don't want change; we want EXchange. We do not only want to usurp the power of white wealthy heterosexual cisgender non-disabled men; we also want to sit on their thrones—irrespective of the fact that the thrones are made from the skeletal remains of the conquered.

This explains the misogynoir of black men, the transmisogynoir of black women, the ableism of black queers, and so on in every possible pairing. Our concept of liberation is just as thin and narrow as our oppressor's, boxed in just enough to ensure that the hierarchy is a different shade, has a new set of genitals, or possesses a remade sense of lust. But under the condition that the hierarchy, itself, remains.

Bettie Jones. Amadou Diallo.

In tribute to Fear, the one true god, we have become sitting ducks, plucked off body by shimmering body in one of the slowest, but most ingenious, genocides ever designed. Masked by propaganda and positioned as democracy, America has convinced the entire world that our deaths are for its own good—and theirs. And, as a gesture of goodwill, it has agreed to help murder any traces of us around the globe, obliterating brown and black alike as though it were tending to dead leaves in the garden.

We have returned to the days of execution-as-public-spectacle.

America, the slave ship. America, the Christian nation. America, the genocidal nation. Grand synonyms. Alter egos. Exacting the same toll on colored flesh.

Ezell Ford. Alberta Spruill.

There is no escape. Death is here; it is the province of devils and those that would do their bidding.

Kathryn Johnson. Philando Castile.

This is a war. And it is not that we are losing —

Freddie Gray. Natasha McKenna.

It is that we have already lost.

This collective being goes beyond "collective consciousness." It relates to and potentially exceeds the inability of a black subject to act on their own. Most—if not all—black Americans are familiar with the feeling. It is your parents telling you to behave in public, not just for the sake of the family's image but implicitly because you represent the whole race. It is the media treating the Dallas shooter as a representative for all black Americans, forcing the Black Lives Matter organization to either claim or condemn him (ultimately condemn) and the rest of us to temper our public disdain for law enforcement. It is the necessity to "come correct," for you are never simply yourself.

Historically, our collective being has always been scattered, stretched across continents and bodies of water. But given how formations like Black Twitter now foster connections and offer opportunities for intense moments of identification, we might say that, at this point in time, the most concrete location we can find for this collective being of blackness is the digital, on social media platforms in the form of viral content—perhaps most importantly, memes.

While I want to argue for an entwinement of blackness and memes, I would be remiss—irresponsible, even—to go any further without noting another way that blackness continues to circulate, with perhaps less frequency but with just as much, if not more, reach: through the aggressive circulation of videos that document black death or violence in general against black people. These videos proliferate alongside memes, brushing up against each other on the same platforms. Further, black death and black joy are pinned to each other by the white gaze, and if we see their intersection anywhere, it's in the neo-mandingo fights of WorldstarHipHop. While these forms overlap in their mode of transmission and their involvement of black bodies, such violent clips are no longer thought of as "memes." The term has evolved: once used to describe ideas or behaviors that are passed from person to person, "meme" now refers metonymically to internet memes, which are as trope-filled and easy-made as stock imagery, but are unprofessional and intentionally funny, with often-absurdist text floating on or above a low-res image.

Beyond the obvious, meme has taken on a more difficult and speculative connotation: that of #relatability, an ability to provoke a feeling of identification in the viewer. It is conceptually linked to the French même, which can be used to mean "same." Recent meme history keeps the concept alive through the ongoing presence of such formats and language tropes such as "it me" and "that feeling

when" (TFW). Relatability helps memes sustain a kind of cohesion in "collective being," a collective memory that can never be fully encompassed; one can never zoom out enough to see it in its entirety.

One of the greatest tasks of blackness as collective being has been to hold itself together in something like cohesion, to exhibit some legible character. This cohesion only becomes necessary, perhaps, as the collective being is made visible to nonblack society. When considered on its own, in what to some are the shadows, this collective being is allowed to expand and contract at will. But when society shines a light on it, what is atomized and multi-plicitous hardens into the Black.

In these shadows, in the underground, blackness has worked its magic. Think of the backrooms and basements where turntables were repurposed to birth hip-hop. Now, if as Laur M. Jackson contends, "blackness is the living tissue of memes," then memes, so black in so many ways, black as hell, constitute something similar to Robinson's "ontological totality," a black collective being.

On the contemporary internet, things have been turned inside out. Exchanges that have historically taken place in the under-ground of black social spaces are now vulnerable to exposure, if not already exposed. The call-and-response creativity of Black Twitter is overheard and echoed by White Twitter, and viral dance phenomena like the whip are seized on by the likes of Hillary and Ellen. Together these objects—and the countless others in circula-tion, literally countless—create widespread visibility for blackness online. Blackness once again takes up its longstanding role as the engine of American popular culture, so that we find ourselves where we were in the 1920s with jazz, in the 1950s with rock 'n' roll, in the '80s with both house and hip-hop—in a time loop wherein black people innovate only to see their forms snaked away, value siphoned off by white hands.

All the creative labor of the black collective being aside, there is a palpable blackness to much of this viral content—especially memes—that circulates independently from actual black people. This depersonalized blackness is shifty and hard to pin down—as is the blackness of any object or subject, really. It makes itself known through language, through an aggressive use of maneuvers asso-ciated with black vernacular speech, explicated in manuel arturo abreu's "Online Imagined Black English." One finds captions littered with "bruh," "fam," "lit," and, of course, "nigga." This blackness is also signaled vaguely through the presence of black subjects. Athletes like Michael Jordan, rappers like Lil Mama and Birdman, and actresses like Skai Jackson have become vessels for affects

Screen capture of a person's Twitter account. User @E4sy_E, ostensibly a black man, writes: "Cops need to start killing these black women instead. D*mb ass h**s. Several other users co-sign and approve. (H/T Quanshay Deseray Wallace)

We would rather die randomly, without forethought. We would prefer if some cop, or some black-but-wanna-be-white-so-bad man, catches us unawares, as we sleep on a couch; as we sit silently reading a magazine on a public bench; as we walk down a public street minding our own business; as we shop in a depart-ment store; as we reach for the identification they just asked for; as by virtue of our bodies alone, their imaginations alight with the thrill of stop-and-frisk and its sibling yo-baby-yo; as we say no to their invasions.

If a seven-year-old girl being shot in the head, as she lay sleeping pleasantly on a couch, by a police officer who wanted to grand-stand during the filming of a reality show wasn't enough for us to take up whatever arms we had at our disposal (for they ensure to limit our access to them) and refuse to go gently into that good night, then nothing ever will. I can only conclude that we want to be victims mourned, rather than martyrs remembered.

Laquan McDonald. Yvette Smith.

The core truth of the matter is that revolution isn't a preferable choice for us because we, too, have come to love the comforts provided by our proximity to white supremacy. Certainly, this closeness has proven tremendously risky in most ways. But it has also been cold water in the summertime and a warm coat in the

Voting is symbolic only and material never.

John Crawford III. Janese Talton-Jackson.

Boycotting, which might have some effect, is a failure before it begins because we forever lack consensus and eternally refuse a united front because bling feels so good even when crafted by bloodied hands.

Tanisha Anderson. Eric Garner.

Every option save one has been explored:

Insurrection.

Akai Gurley. Jessica Hampton.

But we are cowards, most of us. We won't revolt because we are afraid to die, especially with purpose. We lack the moxie of our earliest ancestors, who jumped from ships of their own volition rather than be made into the get-off machines of rapists. We lack the resolve of our later ancestors, who made it to the mainland and lost body and mind in their refusal to be beasts of burden. We are the children of some of the most courageous, resolute people the world has ever seen and we squander it.

Lennon Lacy. Renisha McBride.

Either that or, perhaps, we are the descendants of the ones who sold out; the ones who could not beat them, so joined them; the ones who bred lighter and lighter until the only way you could tell was through the hair and so they covered it or shaved it off completely; the ones who threw their bodies to the ground so Missus could walk over it and deny the ground the chance of muddying her feet; the ones who smiled when Massa instructed them to whip the shit out of the n*gg*r who forgot their place.

Perhaps, this cowardice, then, is genetic. Perhaps shared love can unite us in action where shared trauma has only led us to blunder. The key, though, is that the love must actually be present.

Tyreece "Reecey" Walker. Walter Scott.

When u meet his mom and she says "Oh so you're the girl he's always on FaceTime with" but you got an android

extending beyond their own individual capabilities. It's likely that many of us know Jackson not as a star on the Disney Channel but as the blue-dress girl, her picture used, with changeable yet ever familiar text, to signify levels of pettiness that exceed language.

The blackness of memes goes deeper than their contents, which is why they can't be seen individually. Laur M. Jackson points out that memes are also black in their survival tactics, that the ways they mutate and twist and split and circle back on themselves embody the already established trends of black cultural production and circulation. "Memes not only contain components of Black language, gravitate towards a Black way of speaking," Jackson writes, "but in their survival latch onto Black cultural modes of improvisation to move through space and subsist in an ultra-competitive visual-verbal environment."

Survival for some is simply competition for others. We have seen the content of popular memes "diversify" in recent months. On Instagram accounts run by largely nonblack, hip millennials, these memes wield some mimicry of African American Vernacular English, but usually to describe cultural phenomena affiliated with a more moneyed class of tastemakers. (See: the "goes to Berlin once" starter pack, or the plethora of belated #woke and "feminist" memes.) We have also seen the strange arrival of the SpongeBob image set, using cartoon rather than human subjects to communicate a dizzying array of affective positions. While Mr. Krabs may be a widely resonant, or enjoyably absurd, reference for our generation, his barely explicable appearance on the meme scene reeks of an anxiety around the raced human form and a subconscious

When you on the aux and the song boutta
end, but you haven't found the next song
to play

impulse toward maximizing #relatable-ity toward blurry univer-salism. Jackson's point about the blackness of the movement of memes is all the more important as the blackness of their contents gets vacuumed out.

The blackness of memes isn't just in their survivalist measures; it pushes further, extending to their involuntary movement into non-black networks as well. Memes move like blackness itself, and the meme's tactical similarity to historical black cultural forms makes them—predictably—vulnerable to appropriation and capture. The meme is a form that allows for a sense of collective ownership among those who come into contact with it—black or nonblack. The meme seems open to appropriation and interpretation by who-ever possesses it for a moment, echoing Fred Moten's description of blackness as being only what we hold in our outstretched hands.

When we say that the internet extends and exacerbates the same old offline relations, we mean it. In keeping with historical precedent, the cultural and affective labor of black individuals online largely goes unrecognized and un(der)compensated. Compare the nonexistent returns seen by black teens for introducing the whip to the lifetime supply of Vans shoes gifted to the Damn Daniel kid or the nearly half–million dollars worth of swag that Chewbacca Mom received for her most abject display of consumerist bliss.

These dynamics make it tempting to enter conversations about cultural appropriation and property, about positive and negative representation, inheriting some of the constrictions of early black cinematic theory. We can make it about who owns an image: Does a white meme admin have any business posting an image of a black person? Are they laughing with or at us? Are they capable of laughing with us? Has my Explore feed been gentrified?

Blueprint drawings of a slave ship. The chart is entitled "Plan and Section of a Slave Ship." It depicts various looks at the exterior and interior of a slave ship, including drawing of how the enslaved were to be arranged, very cramped, into the interior space.
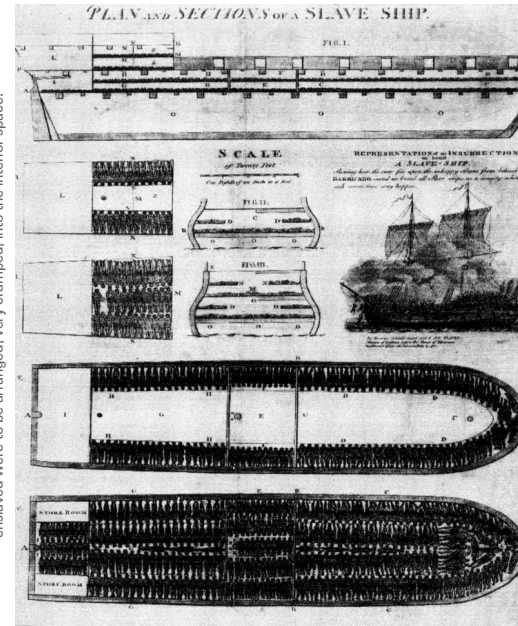
starvation, but any keen observer recognizes it is merely for His amusement.

There will come a time when we will understand that we cannot appeal to the conscience of an entity devoid of one—whether that be god or America.

Islan Nettles. Tamir Rice.

Prayers are useless.

Charleston 9.

Begging inspires guffaws.

Mary "Unique" Spears. Jonathan Ferrell.

Marching only guarantees callouses.

Michael Brown. Sandra Bland.

Protesting has only amounted to theater because our witnesses refuse to do anything but applaud.

Rekia Boyd. Kendrick Johnson.

Robert Jones, Jr.

Representation of an Insurrection Aboard a Slave Ship

Jehovah is a pathological liar.

Every single weapon formed against us has prospered.

Mary Turner. Emmett Till.

It may be time for us to face the fact that a war has been declared against us. It has not been declared in the conventional sense, nor was it done in stealth. Congresses have created the anti-human laws. Presidents have signed them. Supreme Courts have upheld them. Cops have enforced them. Citizens have taken them into their own hands. And we have been sacrificed in the name of them.

Negro spirituals may help the pain subside temporarily, but only because they traffic in delusional thinking. It is the melody of a shared trauma that offers no plan of action other than to wait on "god" to finally do the right thing, ignoring the truth that for any white god (and make no mistake: Jehovah is white), righteousness involves black death.

Rashawn Brazell. Sakia Gunn.

With one slice of Massa's blade, our throats are opened to sing: And it pacifies with lullabies of a fictitious netherworld ruled by kind, though sadistic, Jehovah, who only recently saw fit to allow some of us through the pearly-white gates. For what purpose are we now allowed to pass? The holy texts can only mislead us in this respect. They claim that passage will be an end to torture and

But in the online attention economy, this imbalance is more complicated than the familiar, semi-linear relationship between black production and nonblack appropriation. The labor of online content production is done with hopes of an audience in mind; memes are created for the very purpose of virality and, by extension, appropriation. Memes move in cycles of production, appropriation, consumption, and reappropriation that render any idea of a pre-existing authentic collective being hard to pin down. "Rather than capital 'incorporating' from the outside the authentic fruits of the collective imagination," Tiziana Terranova argues in "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," "it seems more reasonable to think of cultural flows as originating within a field that is always and already capitalism." Likewise, memes—even when produced by black users—cannot be viewed as objects that once authentically circulated in black circles for the enjoyment of the black collective but instead are always already compromised by the looming presence of the corporate, the capitalist.

As such, the meme will probably never manifest blackness in a traceable form such that it might be fully claimed by the black cultural body. The internet, which was advertised as a way to free us from our bodies, has merely confused our limits and identifications, providing just enough flexibility to, in artist Keith Townsend Obadike's words, "make the same old burnt cork blackface routine easier." Admittedly, it is difficult by contrast to mobilize the blackness of memes toward any sort of liberatory politics—to take it past essays like this one that just tease out these relationships. The meme's structure is at once its potential energy, its possibility, and its limit. That is, the very properties that make the meme black make it seemingly impossible for black people to protect it, let alone benefit from it.

If memes reiterate the inequities of cultural appropriation, where could their potential energy and possibility lie? The meme resists

When you walking through your
brothers room and step on a Lego piece

traditional configurations of authorship and intellectual property,
embodying the "post-productive" mode that had Nicolas Bourriaud
so jazzed nearly 20 years ago when he declared it an ultimate
threat to the prevailing "ideology of ownership" implicit in appro-
priation critiques. Memes replace the "ideology of ownership" with
another form of value, one that Hito Steyerl argues is defined by
"velocity, intensity, and spread." In Steyerl's "In Defense of the Poor
Image"—a text that might as well be a treatise on the meme—she
describes the "poor image" as "a snapshot of the affective condi-
tion of the crowd…The condition of the images speaks not only
of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless
people who cared enough about them to convert them over and
over again, to add subtitles, re-edit, or upload them." In other
words: TFW Hito Steyerl defines TFW.

   Like the poor image, the meme finds its home only in this circu-
lation—its true content is the many bumps and bruises that have
occurred along the way. It is a copy without an original—a copy of
a copy of a copy, and so forth. For better or worse, a meme asks
instead to be considered as its total sum presence in circulation.

   But most important is how the poor image, according to Steyerl,
"constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared
history." Memes, too, function this way, coalescing into a collective
archive surrounding an event or cultural touchstone. A recent ex-
ample is Desiigner's recent performance at the BET awards. How-
ever, Steyerl's "anonymous global networks" resonate in another,
weirder way; her poor image shares the descriptors of blackness.
What is the African diaspora but an "anonymous global network"?

my thumb. I'm waiting to hear my fate: am I forgiven, am I loved? The air is thick as thighs; walking feels like swimming. The dark green trees go black at night and in the forests they hold night in between them.

There is a method of fishing where you put your hand in the water and beckon the fish, come, come, and it comes. There is a method of hunting where you follow the animal until you and the animal become one and then when you're ready you kill that part of you and eat it.

The dog's bark and the slug's obscenely vulnerable body mix together in the road. The wheat all grows to the same height, what's up with that? Maybe the sheaves huddle together for protection from birds, so only a few are taken and not all. In a blank field newly planted with seed there is a scarecrow assembled from junk, CDs dangling from the wrists for hands, saucepan for a head. Farmers can negotiate with crows because crows know what death is. That's also how humans get corralled into factories, offices, plantations, ships, camps, living graves, forced togetherness, unwanted solitude. Learn to forget death as often as you can?

Everything here is man-made...human-made...worker-made, though to city-trained eyes it looks like pure nature, whatever that ever was. Trees interrupt the neatly planted wheat. Writing an email in the head: I know I can be unkind... This unkindness, my own, I own it, dwindles the night- tending shades of green to undif- ferentiated grays. Between piled corpses and everyday pains, faith in revolutionary struggle is a not-even-successfully-obscene ob- scenity, like the bathetic dicks of the park flashers, emerging from the high grass to astonish our childhood. We ran away laughing, feeling chosen and afraid. Now I flash the dick of my high hopes, I say, This can't go on forever, meaning capitalism; I say, Remember it's only been like this for a few hundred years, as if I'm living the long life of a biblical patriarch, as if I'm rancid with homesickness in a world made new by extreme violence and death is crawling its way here from Spain.

Hannah Black is an artist and writer from London.

So what if, in a crude transitive operation, we imagine blackness as a meme as a poor image? That is, the poor image might also be black.

The way Steyerl talks about poor images circulating, having been pushed out of the mainstream and into new alternative circulations, rings true of blackness. The poor image vibrates along the frequency of Fanon: In its gesture toward the unreality and nonontology of the image itself, it also points toward the extra-ontological black (non) subject. The black, the meme, the poor image is a subject or object whose definition exceeds her body, whose instantiation is contingent on her history, and on the "shared history" of all other subjects/ objects like her, even when in the hands of others.

Edouard Glissant and Fred Moten, too, write of blackness as, in Moten'swords, a continual "consent not to be a single being." For the most part, historically speaking, we could characterize the collective being's attitude toward this consent as begrudging, held in opposition to the desire to constitute ourselves as complex, individual subjects. This "consent not to be a single being" reflects the same fungibility that means that violence against one black body cannot be isolated and understood as being against that body alone, where I am you and you are me, where "we are all [insert #nameofpersonmurderedbypolice here]." As Kanye notes in the recently released "Saint Pablo": "When I turned on the news… they was buryin' me."

To claim this fungibility would contravene the inheritance of 20th century identity politics and antagonize it to its core. The 20th century taught us that one of our rights is a right to representation, not only politically but personally—that we have a right to be represented as we are, for our images to hold true. But what if one says to hell with that? Blackness, as poor image, as meme, is a copy without an original. There is no articulable ontology of blackness, no essential blackness, because blackness's only home is in its circulating representations: a network that includes all the bodies that bear its markers, the words produced by such bodies, the words made to appear to have been produced by such bodies, the flat images that purport to document them, and so forth.

The meme as poor image, as black, operates against the rich image: the full-bodied high-res representation for which identity politics and visual theory taught us to strive. The meme is always writing and rewriting itself, operating, as Steyerl writes, "against the fetish value of high resolution." In taking up this stance, it resists the co-conspirators of surveillance and neoliberalism in the ordering of bodies and desires. Perhaps we can render ourselves opaque, through our own serial, iterative excess.

All of these connections and equivalencies are clumsy oper-ations that scribble a line from memes to blackness to the poor image, encircling them all together with a perforated line labeled "circulation." What they have in common, at the bottom of it all, is their inability to stand on their own. They are made what they are by the circumstances of their larger body. Perhaps these strange resonances between the meme, Steyerl, Fanon, Moten, and more could be used to emphasize the circulation of blackness online and offline as an always already defining feature, and not one that is purely digital or contingent upon it.

This echoes something that artist Hannah Black said a few years ago at a panel discussion organized by Rhizome: "We use words like modern and contemporary to signal changes in the arrangement of meaning of images. But I wonder if we could put more pressure on these apparent novelties if we could situate the present in this long history of circulating bodies." The meme could be regarded as the latest development in this history. From the Middle Passage onward, we have been in circulation—shipped as goods to the new world, circulated throughout the Americas as labor, circulating ourselves as fugitives.

I am not thinking of memes themselves, as actual objects, as liberatory by any stretch of the imagination. If there is liberation, it will not take place on corporate platforms, where Mark Zuckerberg profits directly from the reproduction of our deaths, gruesomely replayed by well-meaning users with subconscious glee. Instead, there may be some power in the readily made, readily unmade, ever shifting, ever distributed meme—power in a "poor image" that slips through borders for those of us who are heavily policed, whom the state and other forces would like to make fixed.

It may seem trite, in times like these, to focus on objects whose banality is without comparison. However, I think that it also has never been more useful. As black people, we are constantly grap-pling with this question of collectivity. Where do you end and the next person begins? Faced with the immense pain of watching other black people die on camera, our sense of autonomy is thrown. When we speak of "we need," we grieve," "we hope," "we demand," and so forth, we speak of something beyond a collection of individuals and something beyond a community. The history of western thought denies this sort of organization of bodies and subjectivities, instead figuring us all as static, even proposing that we all aspire to this static individuation. As the world crumbles around us, all of us—and this would seem dramatic were it not for the fact that many have taken to counting down the days since

As I have no desire to write about Redacted I'm surprised to see her here. Although the entire atheistic religion of my family was undeclared worship of the dead, I could never work out if I thought the dead stayed around in any way but in the cheap shitty apartment of memory. To split the difference between faith and doubt, I said vaguely to Redacted's ghost: If you want to be somewhere, you can be in my body... The offer was insulting; the offer was perfect. The evidence that nothing took it up is various, but I sentimentally invoke it just in case. I set 18-year-old Redacted down here too, alongside the death-measuring colonial bureaucrat, beginning this. More years have passed than I like to think of, but she comes back very vividly. Although she was older than me, I am older now than she was ever older; although I am older now than she ever was, she is still older, because she is dead.

Death is ordinary, it's nothing, it's something becoming nothing. My mother's mourning for her mother filled the whole horizon, and there were no more deaths after that. Thus Redacted is not really dead, and I will never die, and nor will you: that is my mother's gift to us all. "Hitler ruined my life," said my grandmother's mother, a judgment (on Hitler? on herself?) passed down through genera-tions like a comedian's catchphrase. A ruined life is a living death, a living death does away with death, but any mention of those tropes, cartoon Nazis and cartoon Jews, feels sticky with bad politics, grimy from overuse. These concerns are not global but domestic, they are my mother lying on the floor next to me sobbing, "I want to go home too," in the high melodrama of our long bad romance. She wanted a brown baby and she got a black daughter. Life is hard and soft in the wrong places. Begin again.

Redacted believed she had seen angels taking her father's soul away. Hi Redacted, I'm happy to see you again. We never talked about any of this, but I think you were descended from witches, I believe that about you about as much as I believe in anything, i.e. circumspectly and without faith, so (so?) I think you would under-stand. Thank you for brightening the misery of adolescence. You were burned to hygienic ash in a dress you made with your own hands, but I hold you in my mind fleshed and upright, I pay this rent. Illustrious dead, illustrious because dead, please help this writing pass into the world like a living being passing into death, like some-thing alive and urgent that becomes a colonial holding, extracted from and projected into.

If death came by email we would all live very short lives, the lives of flies, flaring up in hope in the morning and cut down by the afternoon. I refresh Gmail on my phone by stroking the screen with

A colonial priest/bureaucrat wrote, referring to the long distances messages had to cross from the imperial center to its New World holdings, "If death came from Spain, we would all live very long lives." I read this in a high-school history textbook, in the stunned autumn after Redacted died. Now the fact of the death is as important as the name, which I leave to her privacy. The slow news from Spain stuck in my head and now I regurgitate it here: the self-satisfied melancholy of a death-dispensing bureaucrat, and/or the disoriented bitterness of a creature far from home.

Death did come from Spain, in new forms of disease, labor, violence, distance, communication, religion, nascent speciesization of the human at the moment of humanity's invention, mass slavery, the prototype of the android worker already R&D'd in assaults on the peasants of Europe, etc. This long-distance, up-close kind of death has never stopped coming since, augmented and sustained by the intricate invention of race.

What is race?

"Group-differentiated proximity to death."

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

What is race?

"Hey girl, are you Spanish?"

stranger, Brooklyn.

What is race?

Body in the street.

What is race?

Not fate: the beautiful white girl dies first, unlike in the movies.

What is race?

Awaking from a nap, sleepy-headed disorientation in the grey afternoon momentarily takes the form of the terror of those experiences vaguely called history: how can all this have happened, how can we be its evidence?

the last tragedy, and it's rarely a number in the double digits—it is worth questioning some of the things that we have been told we desire. In America, as we—black people—find ourselves toe-to-toe with the state, challenges to selfhood become useful not only in understanding our heartsickness and grief, but also in stirring the collective body toward political action.

Thinking of circulation instead of content, I wonder if memes can guide us toward a post-representational, post-identity politics, answering Fred Moten's call in "Black Optimism, Black Operation" for an analytic that moves in and out of the shadows, "that moves through the opposition of voluntary secrecy and forced exposure." What we need, he writes, "is some way to understand how the underground operates out in the open." The meme moves so quickly and unpredictably as to establish a state(lessness?), a lack of fixity that might be able to confront our simultaneous desire for visibility and awareness of the violence it brings. It sustains an appearance of individuality ("it me") while being wholly deindividuated ("same").

The meme's success is just this: its reach and its rarity; its ability to snake through the underground only to re-emerge and mutate; its continued operations of hiding, incubating, and exposing black cultural elements. As object lesson, the meme teaches a queer body politic, an Afropessimistic, black accelerationist approach to rendering oneself and rendering and rendering and rendering and rendering and rendering. (I use the word "accelerationist" with caution.) We have long been digital, "compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed" across time and space. For blackness, the meme could be a way of further figuring an existence that spills over the bounds of the body, a homecoming into our homelessness.

Aria Dean is an artist, writer, and curator based in Los Angeles.

manuel arturo abreu

An amotivational speech

This is an amotivational speech. Refusal of work means I don't want to go to work because I prefer to sleep. But is it really true that this laziness is the source of intelligence, of technology, of progress?

The white British philosopher George Edward Moore has an argument against the solipsist who says an external world is unprovable. These kinds of skeptical positions go back thousands of years, at least as far back as the paradox of the butterfly dream in Zhuangzi, a 3rd century BC Chinese text. The paradox goes: "Once upon a time, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting about happily enjoying himself. He did not know that he was Zhou. Suddenly he awoke, and was palpably Zhou. He did not know whether he was Zhou, who had dreamed of being a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhou. Now, there must be a difference between Zhou and the butterfly. This is called the transformation of things." Another version of this argument is Descartes' Evil Demon, who presents the entire world as an illusion to misguide him. A pop version is the Matrix. These are all quite compelling. We have all felt like the butterfly, facing the evil demon in the Matrix, his laughter soundless like a gathering storm on your wings. This is the butterfly effect.

Anyway, G.E. Moore's response to these kinds of arguments is as follows:

Here is one hand,
And here is another.
There are at least two external objects in the world.
Therefore, an external world exists.

Q: YOU ALWAYS WRITE ABOUT FLYING, WHY

A: BECAUSE I AM SO FUCKING EVIL

(admittedly she cannot be trusted)

Moving east to west, a plane progresses into an endless day. Reduced to a toy by lack of connection, the phone shows the night into which the daytime of origin has progressed, while the sun rises in dawn colours on the horizon described by the sky's curve inwards, its fidelity to the planet. When I flew less, I thought the clouds looked like heaven. Now I travel all the time, staring at a screen, arranging coloured circles in a game that has no purpose and only the barest trace of history—that's its purpose.

Dissolved into this no-time, this toy-time, I have forgotten how the plane sat for three hours in its berth while engineers attended to a broken engine. The same wounded machine later successfully elevated itself into the sky, automated by a computer further away and nearer than my body, which is woozy with airline wine. No one showed any collective emotion of any kind, though we remained held by the machine's vulnerability, a minor vulnerability linked to the major vulnerability of the bodies we have gathered out of sleep and bed and hometowns or beloved people we have visited or work trips we resented or were glad to have an excuse for, all of us here. No one showed any emotion, and then the pilot accidentally announced the flight's destination as Bangkok, and people laughed loudly and applauded ironically.

Let's not die ironically! But at this stage in history is there any other way to go?

Q: HE TOOK COINS OUT OF THE FOUNTAIN, WHERE
   PEOPLE HAD THROWN THEM, TO MAKE A WISH,
   AND WITH THESE COINS, HE BOUGHT CRACK

A: THIS IS THE ULTIMATE DESTINY OF WISHES

Q: CAN YOU LOVE ME?

A: PROBABLY NOT

My Apocalypses (excerpt)

This is from a book in progress called My Apocalypses

But first:

"She runs to the church crying that she's evil / the priest opens his arms and says come child everyone's evil"

   half-remembered poem in a Bloodaxe collection

"My smile is brilliant, my glance is tender
But I'm noted most for my unspoiled gender
...I want to be evil"

   Eartha Kitt, 'I Want To Be Evil'

"Maybe that's why sometimes I am going around sometimes looking like the urchin that I really know I am inside of myself...that little ugly duckling I was, she was always told she's an ugly duckling, nobody wants you, and she was always looking for someone to say "it's all right, you're wanted too," but nobody's done that yet, maybe I haven't given them a chance to, I don't know. But she keeps hoping"

   Eartha Kitt, interview

OK. This is called the transformation of things. Motivation is giving an account for one's actions. It's a statement of causality, of reasons. The psycholinguistic visualization of a pattern. It's the answer to the question "why." It's virtual in the sense that intent doesn't really matter, as in, intent doesn't change effects. The noun "motive" comes from the Old French "motif," meaning "will, drive, determination." In modern English motif means pattern or theme. This separate word must be kept in mind as historically enmeshed with the word "motive," whose Old French ancestor "motif" comes from the Medieval Latin "motivus," meaning "moving, impelling," from Latin "motus," motion. Peter Sloterdijk, a white German male academic, says that the ontology of modernity is motion: a frictionless dream of forward progress. But the underbelly of motion is pattern, that is to say, surveillance, and violence, for without pattern motion is random, better said, unmotivated. This is the violence of naming and necessity.

It is true that haters are my motivation, in that hate is what constructs the pattern and the fixity, in that Oregon was founded in 1859 as a white settler solution to the "Negro problem" by making black and brown bodies illegal. But when I speak of being amotivational I mean the rejection of the motion- surveillance dyad that results in static taxonomies, in the solipsistic position, in the white collegiate stoner saying "Dude, what if everything is just inside my head?" This Enlightenment-era project is summed up well by the white French theorist Gregoire Chamayou when he says that in the West, "it is the unknown itself that becomes targeted." In this sense, all white people are assigned cop at birth, and Socrate's gynophobic metaphor of knowledge as midwifery, or elenchus, becomes a form of surveillance. That's not what teaching is about.

Edouard Glissant states that the Middle Passage made possible the consent not to be a single being. What it means for my diaspora, to whom I am indigenous, to be dividual across the longue durée. To be more than, but also not even, a single person. I used to be antiwork until I realized being antiwork is racist. The Cuban Marxist Paul Lafargue writes in 1880, "The Greeks in their era of greatness had only contempt for work: their slaves alone were permitted to labor: the free man knew only exercises for the body and mind...The philosophers of antiquity taught contempt for work, that degradation of the free man, the poets sang of idleness, that gift from the Gods." This is not saying that no-one should work, it is a tacit acknowledgment that right to be lazy is exclusive: the luxury of idleness requires work to be displaced to a marginalized class. Is this really contempt for work, or more like contempt for slaves?

Given that in America, blackness is criminalized, and slavery is only illegal unless as punishment for a crime, the question of a true anti-work position is fraught.

The Activities-Based Intelligence paradigm, instated by the FBI in 2010, finds its roots in the chronogeography of the 1960s. Its white Swedish founder, Torsten Hägerstrand, describes chronogeography as a way of treating human lives like paths: "In time-space the individual describes a path…the concept of the life path…can easily be shown geographically if we agree to collapse a three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional plain…" However, Hägerstrand lamented that if we describe social reality mainly through aggregates of large numbers such as those necessary for positing life-paths, then "we regard the population as made up of 'dividuals' instead of individuals." This is why the dividual sticks a post-it over their laptop camera. This is why it is said I am lucky: I used to be undocumented, now much of my work goes undocumented! Something is to be said for the violent didacticism of documentation.

And dividuality is a state of being in which the person is recognized as composite and multiply- authored. People are composed of social relations with others to the degree that they owe parts of themselves to others. While the individual is the domain of the fixed self, the dividual is the becoming self. In this formulation, the debt of dividual is the very basis of community and relation: what we owe to each other by virtue of being persons. In this sense, debt is financial capitalism's means of acquiring a new moral dimension. Debt, too, is impossible without pattern. Here is one invisible hand, here is another. We have to think about what is lost when the third-dimension is flattened in the formulation of the life path. We have to think about what a phenomenon is besides its behavior as we gaze at it.

Dredging the bog of etymology (Caliban Cannibal Carib). Dog-headed anthropophage, Saint Christopher, Anubis god of the dead. Anxiety of influence about my other selves in parallel universes. What is it like to remain in the hold of those transatlantic ships, inhabiting the space of being both more than and not even a single being? What did you mean by telling me I was born in "the first city of the New World" (Santo Domingo)? At the horizon of the eugenic impulse my blood quantum asks unintelligible questions about Bartolome de las Casas. I sweep dust into a pile in the kitchen, this is my newest sculpture.

Lose what you never had. Forget what you never remembered. Exolinguistics is in again. You cannot colonize the unconscious.

15

Hito Steyerl, "Is a Museum a Factory?" *e-flux journal*, issue 7 (June, 2009).

16

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1972), 43.

17

Taking the cue from Gil Leung's reflection, "After before now: Notes on In Free Fall."

A cognition that is to bear fruit will throw itself to the objects à fond perdu [without hope]. The vertigo which this causes is an index veri; the shock of inclusiveness, the negative as which it cannot help appearing in the frame-covered, never-changing realm, is true for untruth only. [16]

A fall toward objects without reservation, embracing a world of forces and matter, which lacks any original stability and sparks the sudden shock of the open: a freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing, and always already unknown. Falling means ruin and demise as well as love and abandon, passion and surrender, decline and catastrophe. Falling is corruption as well as liberation, a condition that turns people into things and vice versa. [17] It takes place in an opening we could endure or enjoy, embrace or suffer, or simply accept as reality.

Finally, the perspective of free fall teaches us to consider a social and political dreamscape of radicalized class war from above, one that throws jawdropping social inequalities into sharp focus. But falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place. Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backwards onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation.

Hito Steyerl is a filmmaker and writer and teaches New Media Art at University of Arts Berlin.
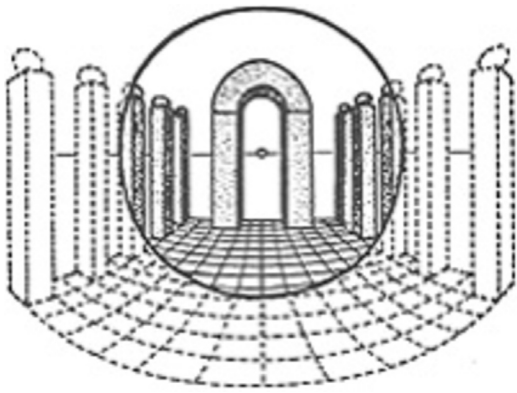
14
These techniques are described in Manessh Agrawala, Denis Zorin, and Tamara Munzer, "Artistic multiprojection rendering," in *Proceedings of the Eurographics Workshop on Rendering Techniques 2000*, ed. Bernard Peroche and Holly E. Rusgmaier (London: SpringerVerlag, 2000), 125–136; Patrick Coleman and Karan Singh, "Ryan: Rendering Your Animation Nonlinearly Projected," in NPAR '04: *Proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium on Non-photorealistic Animation and Rendering* (New York: ACM Press, 2004), 129–156; Andrew Glassner, "Digital Cubism, part2," *IEEE Computer Graphics and. Applications*, vol. 25, no. 4 (July 2004): 84–95; Karan Singh, "A Fresh Perspective," in *Proceedings of the Eurographics Workshop on Rendering Techniques 2000*, ed. Bernard Peroche and Holly E. Rusgmaier (London: SpringerVerlag, 2000), 17–24; Nisha Sudarsanam, Cindy Grimm, and Karan Singh, "Interactive Manipulation of Projections with a Curved Perspective," *Computer Graphics Forum 24* (2005): 105–108; and Yonggao Yang, Jim X. Chen, and Mohsen Beheshti, "Nonlinear Perspective Projections and Magic Lenses: 3D View Deformation," *IEEE Computer Graphics Applications*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January/ February 2005): 76–84.

for expensive renderings; a simple green screen collage yields impossible cubist perspectives and implausible concatenations of times and spaces alike.

Finally, cinema has caught up with the representational freedoms of painting and structural and experimental film. As it merges with graphic design practices, drawing, and collage, cinema has gained independence from the prescribed focal dimensions that have normalized and limited the realm of its vision. While it could be argued that montage was the first step towards a liberation from cinematic linear perspective—and was for this reason ambivalent for most of its existence—only now can new and different sorts of spatial vision be created. Similar things can be said about multiscreen projections, which create a dynamic viewing space, dispersing perspective and possible points of view. The viewer is no longer unified by such a gaze, but is rather dissociated and overwhelmed, drafted into the production of content. None of these projection spaces suppose a single unified horizon. Rather, many call for a multiple spectator, who must be created and recreated by ever new articulations of the crowd. [15]

In many of these new visualities, what seemed like a helpless tumble into an abyss actually turns out to be a new representational reedom. And perhaps this helps us get over the last assumption implicit in this thought experiment: the idea that we need a ground in the first place. In his discussion of the vertiginous, Theodor W. Adorno scoffs at philosophy's obsession with earth and origin, with a philosophy of belonging that obviously comes packaged within the most violent fear of the groundless and bottomless. For him, the vertiginous is not about the panicked loss of a ground imagined to be a safe haven of being:

You (I, rather) can only act as the dreamer cajoling the jester of lost civilizations, breaking the seal of conquest and letting gush forth the unfinishedness of the temporal, of the past which is in fact only (or as well) a memory of the future. Before water there was ice, and before this they threw small rocks at skinny trees and sometimes, just sometimes, the trees would throw them back. Think how hostile moments are when they engorge with meaning, randomly like a pufferfish. Think how explanations drain phenomena of their potency, but boglike become a space for new smearing.

manuel arturo abreu (b. 1991, Santo Domingo) is a poet and artist from the Bronx, currently living and making in a garage in Southeast Portland. They work with text, ephemeral sculpture, and photography. Recent and forthcoming work is included in Apogee Journal, SFMoMA Open Space, Poor Claudia, Vetch, Rhizome, As It Stands LA, the NON Quarterly publication, NewHive, and more. They co-facilitate home school, a free pop-up art school in Portland. They wrote List of Consonants (Bottlecap Press, 2015) and transtrender (forthcoming Quimérica Books). Find manuel at twigtech.tumblr.com.

Hito Steyerl

In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective

Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.

Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness. [1] We cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best, we are faced with temporary, contingent, and partial attempts at grounding. But if there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike. But why don't we notice?

Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as if you are floating—or not even moving at all. Falling is relational—if there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling. If there is no ground, gravity might be low and you'll feel weightless. Objects will stay suspended if you let go of them. Whole societies around you may be falling just as you are. And it may actually feel like perfect stasis—as if history and time have ended and you can't even remember that time ever moved forward.

As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. Pilots have even reported that free fall can trigger a feeling of confusion between the self and the aircraft. While falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise.

Space debris or junk (such as rocket stages, defunct satellites, and explosion and collision fragments) orbiting the earth. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

[11]

In fact, the perspective of the floating camera belongs to a dead man. Most recently, a dehumanization (or post-humanization) of the gaze is perhaps nowhere as literally allegorized as in the film *Enter the Void* (Gaspar Noé, 2010), where, for most of the film, a disembodied point of view endlessly drifts over Tokyo. This gaze penetrates any space, moving without constraint and with unrestricted mobility, looking for a body in which to biologically reproduce itself and reincarnate. The point of view in *Enter the Void* is reminiscent of the gaze of a drone. But instead of bringing death, it is looking to recreate its own life. To this end, the protagonist basically wants to hijack a fetus. But the film is also very picky about this procedure: mixed race fetuses get aborted in favor of white ones. There are more issues that link the movie to reactionary breeding ideologies. Floating and biopolitical policing are mixed into a computer-animated obsession with superior bodies, remote control, and digital aerial vision. The floating gaze of the dead man thus literally echoes Achille Mbembe's powerful description of necropower: necropower regulates life through the perspective of death. Could these tropes allegorized in a single (and frankly, godawful) movie be expanded into a more general analysis of disembodied hovering point of views? Do the aerial views, drone perspectives, and 3D dives into abysses stand in for the gazes of "dead white males," a worldview which lost its vitality, yet persists as an undead but powerful tool to police the world and control its own reproduction?

[12]

Paraphrasing Elsaesser's notion of the "military-surveillance-entertainment complex."

[13]

Assuming there is no ground, even those on the bottom of hierarchies keep falling.

abysses and splintered terrains of occupation, surveilled aerially and policed bio-politically, they may also—as linear perspective did—carry the seeds of their own demise within them.

As linear perspective began to tumble down with the sinking bodies of slaves thrown into the ocean, for many people today the simulated grounds of aerial imagery provide an illusionary tool of orientation in a condition in which the horizons have, in fact, been shattered. Time is out of joint and we no longer know whether we are objects or subjects as we spiral down in an imperceptible free fall. [13]

But if we accept the multiplication and delinearization of horizons and perspectives, the new tools of vision may also serve to express, and even alter, the contemporary conditions of disruption and disorientation. Recent 3D animation technologies incorporate multiple perspectives, which are deliberately manipulated to create multifocal and nonlinear imagery. [14] Cinematic space is twisted in any way imaginable, organized around heterogeneous, curved, and collaged perspectives. The tyranny of the photographic lens, cursed by the promise of its indexical relation to reality, has given way to hyperreal representations—not of space as it is, but of space as we can make it—for better or worse. There is no need
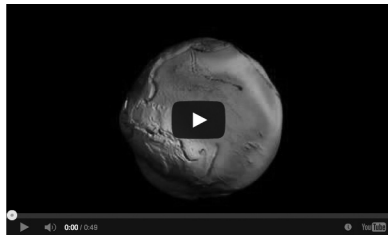
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Dieter Roelstraete and Jennifer Allen both describe this new normality from different perspectives in very good texts. Dieter Roelstraete " (Jena Revisited) Ten Tentative Tenets," *e-flux journal*, issue 16 (May, 2010); and Jennifer Allen, "That Eye, The Sky," *Frieze* 132 (June–August 2010).

10

Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

privileged subject—link to the hypothesis that we currently inhabit a condition of free fall?

The answer is simple: many of the aerial views, 3D nosedives, Google Maps, and surveillance panoramas do not actually portray a stable ground. Instead, they create a supposition that it exists in the first place. Retroactively, this virtual ground creates a perspective of overview and surveillance for a distanced, superior spectator safely floating up in the air. Just as linear perspective established an imaginary stable observer and horizon, so does the perspective from above establish an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground.

This establishes a new visual normality—a new subjectivity safely folded into surveillance technology and screen based distraction. [9] One might conclude that this is in fact a radicalization—though not an overcoming— of the paradigm of linear perspective. In it, the former distinction between object and subject is exacerbated and turned into the one way gaze of superiors on to inferiors, a looking down from high to low. Additionally, the displacement of perspective creates a disembodied and remote controlled gaze, outsourced to machines and other objects. [10] Gazes already became decisively mobile and mechanized with the invention of photography, but new technologies have enabled the detached observant gaze to become ever more inclusive and all knowing to the point of becoming massively intrusive—as militaristic as it is pornographic, as intense as extensive, both micro and macroscopic. [11]

The Politics of Verticality

The view from above is a perfect metonymy for a more general verticalization of class relations in the context of an intensified class war from above—seen through the lenses and on the screens of military, entertainment, and information industries. [12] It is a proxy perspective that projects delusions of stability, safety, and extreme mastery onto a backdrop of expanded 3D sovereignty. But if the new views from above recreate societies as freefalling urban
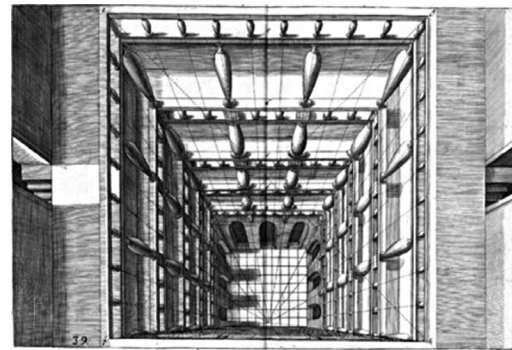
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Examples of so-called anti- and post-foundational philosophy are given in the preface to Oliver Marchart's introductory volume *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 1–10. Briefly speaking, such thought, as proffered by the philosophers under discussion, rejects the idea of a given and stable metaphysical ground and revolves around Heideggerian metaphors of abyss and ground, as well as the absence of ground. Ernesto Laclau describes the experience of contingency and groundlessness as a possible experience of freedom.

This disorientation is partly due to the loss of a stable horizon. And with the loss of horizon also comes the departure of a stable paradigm of orientation, which has situated concepts of subject and object, of time and space, throughout modernity. In falling, the lines of the horizon shatter, twirl around, and superimpose.

A Brief History of the Horizon

Our sense of spatial and temporal orientation has changed dramatically in recent years, prompted by new technologies of surveillance, tracking, and targeting. One of the symptoms of this transformation is the growing importance of aerial views: overviews, Google Map views, satellite views. We are growing increasingly accustomed to what used to be called a God's-eye view. On the other hand, we also notice the decreasing importance of a paradigm of visuality that long dominated our vision: linear perspective. Its stable and single point of view is being supplemented (and often replaced) by multiple perspectives, overlapping windows, distorted flight lines, and divergent vanishing points. How could these changes be related to the phenomena of groundlessness and permanent fall?

First, let's take a step back and consider the crucial role of the horizon in all of this. Our traditional sense of orientation—and, with it, modern concepts of time and space—are based on a stable line: the horizon line. Its stability hinges on the stability of an observer, who is thought to be located on a ground of sorts, a shoreline, a boat— a ground that can be imagined as stable, even if in fact it is not.

The horizon line was an extremely important element in navigation. It defined the limits of communication and understanding. Beyond the horizon, there was only muteness and silence. Within it, things could be made visible. But it could also be used for determining one's own location and relation to one's surroundings, destinations, or ambitions.

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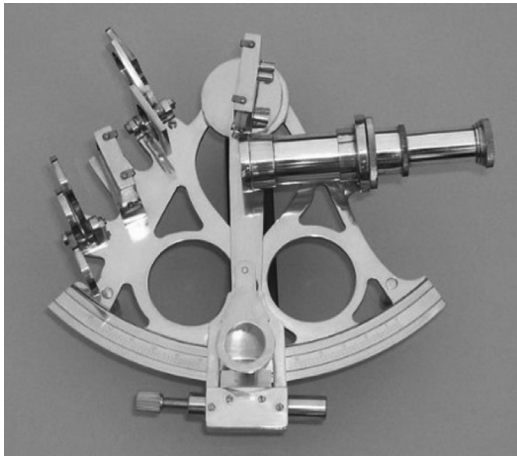
Peter Ifland, "The History of the Sextant."

3

Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive alssymbolische Form," in *Erwin Panofsky:Deutschsprachige Aufsätze II*, ed. Wolfgang Kemp et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 664–758.

4

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. H.Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 261. See http://www.marxists.org/ refe rence/archive/benjamin/1940/ history.htm.

Early navigation consisted of gestures and bodily poses relating to the horizon. "In early days, [Arab navigators] used one or two fingers width, a thumb and little finger on an outstretched arm, or an arrow held at arm's length to sight the horizon at the lower end and Polaris at the upper." [2] The angle between the horizon and the Pole star gave information about the altitude of one's position. This measurement method was known as sighting the object, shooting the object, or taking a sight. In this way, one's own location could be at least roughly determined.

Instruments like the astrolabe, quadrant, and sextant refined this way of gaining orientation by using the horizon and the stars. One of the main obstacles with this technology was the fact that the ground on which sailors stood was never stable in the first place. The stable horizon mostly remained a projection, until artificial horizons were eventually invented in order to create the illusion of stability.

The use of the horizon to calculate position gave seafarers a sense of orientation, thus also enabling colonialism and the spread of a capitalist global market, but also became an important tool for the construction of the optical paradigms that came to define modernity, the most important paradigm being that of so-called linear perspective.

As early as 1028, Abu Ali alHasan ibn al-Haytham (965–1040), also known as Alhazen, wrote a book of visual theory, Kitab al-Manazir. After 1200, it became available in Europe and spawned numerous experiments in visual production between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, which culminated in the development of linear perspective.

In Duccio's Last Supper (1308–1311), several vanishing points are still evident. The perspectives in this space do not coalesce into a

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The following quote by Elsaesser can be seen as blueprint for this paper, whose inspiration derives from an informal conversation with the author: "This means that stereoscopic images and the 3-D movie are part of the new paradigm, which is turning our information society into a control society and our visual culture into a surveillance culture. Themovie industry, civil society and the military sector are all united in this surveillance paradigm, which, as part of a historic process, seeks to replace"monocular vision," the way of seeing that has defined Western thought and action for the last 500 years. It is this means of seeing that gave rise to a wide range of innovations like panel painting, colonial seafaring and Cartesian philosophy, as well as the whole concept of projecting ideas, risks, chances and courses of action into the future. Flight simulators and other types of military technology are part of a new effort to introduce 3-D as the standard means of perception – but the development goes even further to include surveillance. This encompasses an entire catalog of movements and behaviors,all of which are intrinsically connected to the monitoring, steering and observation of ongoing processes, and which delegate or outsource what was once referred to as introspection, self-awareness and personal responsibility."Thomas Elsaesser, "The Dimension of Depth and Objects Rushing Towards Us. Or: The Tail that Wags the Dog. A Discourse on Digital 3-D Cinema."

7

Eyal Weizman,"The Politics of Verticality."

8

Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* vol. 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 29.

to occupy a vertical dimension. Vertical sovereignty splits space into stacked horizontal layers, separating not only airspace from ground, but also splitting ground from underground, and airspace into various layers. Different strata of community are divided from each other on a yaxis, multiplying sites of conflict and violence. As Achille Mbembe contends,

Occupation of the skies therefore acquires a critical importance, since most of the policing is done from the air. Various other technologies are mobilized to this effect: sensors aboard unmanned air vehicles (UAVs), aerial reconnaissance jets, early warning Hawkeye planes, assault helicopters, an Earth observation satellite, techniques of "hologrammatization." [8]

Free Fall

But how to link this obsessive policing, division, and representation of ground to the philosophical assumption that in contemporary societies there is no ground to speak of? How do these aerial representations—in which grounding effectively constitutes a

abandons representation to a large extent and demolishes linear perspective in cubism, collage, and different types of abstraction. Time and space are reimagined through quantum physics and the theory of relativity, while perception is reorganized by warfare, advertisement, and the conveyor belt. With the invention of aviation, opportunities for falling, nose diving, and crashing increase. With it—and especially with the conquest of outer space—comes the development of new perspectives and techniques of orientation, found especially in an increasing number of aerial views of all kinds. While all these developments can be described as typical characteristics of modernity, the past few years has seen visual culture saturated by military and entertainment images' views from above.

Aircraft expand the horizon of communication and act as aerial cameras providing backgrounds for aerial map views. Drones survey, track, and kill. But the entertainment industry is busy as well. Especially in 3D cinema, the new characteristics of aerial views are fully exploited by staging vertiginous flights into abysses. One could almost say that 3D and the construction of imaginary vertical worlds (prefigured in the logic of computer games) are essential to each other. 3D also intensifies hierarchies of material required to access this new visuality. As Thomas Elsaesser has argued, a hardware environment integrating military, surveillance, and entertainment applications, produces new markets for hardware and software. [6]

In a fascinating text, Eyal Weizman analyzes verticality in political architecture, describing the spatial turn of sovereignty and surveillance in terms of a vertical 3D sovereignty. [7] He argues that geopolitical power was once distributed on a planar maplike surface on which boundaries were drawn and defended. But at present, the distribution of power—he cites the Israeli occupation in Palestine as his example, but there could be many others—has increasingly come

horizon line, nor do they all intersect in one single vanishing point. But in Miracle of the Desecrated Host (Scene I) (1465–69), painted by Paolo Uccello, who was one of the most ardent experimenters in the development of linear perspective, the perspective is aligned to culminate in one single vanishing point, located on a virtual horizon defined by the eye line.

Linear perspective is based on several decisive negations. First, the curvature of the earth is typically disregarded. The horizon is conceived as an abstract flat line upon which the points on any horizontal plane converge. Additionally, as Erwin Panofsky argued, the construction of linear perspective declares the view of a one-eyed and immobile spectator as a norm—and this view is itself assumed to be natural, scientific, and objective. Thus, linear perspective is based on an abstraction, and does not correspond to any subjective perception. [3] Instead, it computes a mathematical, flattened, infinite, continuous, and homogenous space, and declares it to be reality. Linear perspective creates the illusion of a quasi-natural view to the "outside," as if the image plane was a window opening onto the "real" world. This is also the literal meaning of the Latin perspectiva: to see through.

This space defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable. It allows the calculation of future risk, which can be anticipated, and therefore, managed. As a consequence, linear perspective not only transforms space, but also introduces the notion of a linear time, which allows mathematical prediction and, with it, linear progress. This is the second, temporal meaning of perspective: a view onto a calculable future. As Walter Benjamin argued, time can become just as homogenous and empty as space. [4] And for all these calculations to operate, we must necessarily assume an observer standing on a stable ground looking out towards a vanishing point on a flat, and actually quite artificial, horizon.

But linear perspective also performs an ambivalent operation concerning the viewer. As the whole paradigm converges in one of the viewer's eyes, the viewer becomes central to the worldview established by it. The viewer is mirrored in the vanishing point, and thus constructed by it. The vanishing point gives the observer a body and a position. But on the other hand, the spectator's importance is also undermined by the assumption that vision follows scientific laws. While empowering the subject by placing it at the center of vision, linear perspective also undermines the viewer's individuality by subjecting it to supposedly objective laws of representation.

Needless to say, this reinvention of the subject, time, and space was an additional toolkit for enabling Western dominance, and the

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Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

dominance of its concepts—as well as for redefining standards of representation, time, and space. All of these components are evident in Uccello's six-panel painting, Miracle of the Desecrated Host (1465-69). In the first panel, a woman sells a Host to a Jewish merchant, who in the second panel tries to "desecrate" it. For this, the Jewish merchant ends up at the stakes. Along with his wife and two small children, he is tied to a pillar on which parallels converge as if it were a target mark. The date of these panels shortly prefigures the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in 1492, also the year of Christopher Columbus's expedition to the West Indies.[5] In these paintings, linear perspective becomes a matrix for racial and religious propaganda, and related atrocities. This socalled scientific worldview helped set standards for marking people as other, thus legitimizing their conquest or the domination over them.

On the other hand, linear perspective also carries the seeds of its own downfall. Its scientific allure and objectivist attitude established a universal claim for representation, a link to veracity that undermined particularistic worldviews, even if halfheartedly and belatedly. It thus became a hostage to the truth it had so confidently proclaimed. And a deep suspicion was planted alongside its claims for veracity from its inception.

The Downfall of Linear Perspective

But the situation now is somewhat different. We seem to be in a state of transition toward one or several other visual paradigms. Linear perspective has been supplemented by other types of vision to the point where we may have to conclude that its status as the dominant visual paradigm is changing.

This transition was already apparent in the nineteenth century in the field of painting. One work in particular expresses the circumstances of this transformation: The Slave Ship (1840), by J. M. W. Turner. The scene in the painting represents a real incident: when the captain of a slave ship discovered that his insurance only covered slaves lost at sea, and not those dying or ill on board, he ordered all dying and sick slaves to be thrown overboard. Turner's painting captures the moment where the slaves are beginning to go under.

In this painting, the horizon line, if distinguishable at all, is tilted, curved, and troubled. The observer has lost his stable position.

There are no parallels that could converge at a single vanishing point. The sun, which is at the center of the composition, is multiplied in reflections. The observer is upset, displaced, beside himself at the sight of the slaves, who are not only sinking but have also had their bodies reduced to fragments—their limbs devoured by sharks, mere shapes below the water surface. At the sight of the effects of colonialism and slavery, linear perspective—the central viewpoint, the position of mastery, control, and subjecthood—is abandoned and starts tumbling and tilting, taking with it the idea of space and time as systematic constructions. The idea of a calculable and predictable future shows a murderous side through an insurance that prevents economic loss by inspiring coldblooded murder. Space dissolves into mayhem on the unstable and treacherous surface of an unpredictable sea.

Turner experimented with moving perspectives early on. Legend has it that he had himself tied to the mast of a ship crossing from Dover to Calais, explicitly to watch the horizon change. In 1843 or 1844, he stuck his head out of the window of a moving train for exactly 9 minutes, the result of which was a painting called Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway (1844). In it, linear perspective dissolves into the background. There is no resolution, no vanishing point, and no clear view to any past or future. Again, more interesting is the perspective of the spectator himself, who seems to be dangling in the air on the outer side of the rails of a railroad bridge. There is no clear ground under his assumed position. He might be suspended in the mist, floating over an absent ground.

In both of Turner's paintings, the horizon is blurred, tilted, and yet not necessarily denied. The paintings do not negate its existence altogether, but render it inaccessible to the viewer's perception. The question of horizon starts to float, so to speak. Perspectives assume mobile points of view and communication is disabled even within one common horizon. One could say that the downward motion of the sinking slaves affects the point of view of the painter, who tears it away from a position of certitude, and subjects it to gravity and motion and the pull of a bottomless sea.

Acceleration

With the twentieth century, the further dismantling of linear perspective in a variety of areas began to take hold. Cinema supplements photography with the articulation of different temporal perspectives. Montage becomes a perfect device for destabilizing the observer's perspective and breaking down linear time. Painting