

# SUSCEPTIBILITY

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And black life is circum-sacred, it is a kind of life that is antagonistic to the division between sacred and secular, holy and profane, and is enacted when such a distinction is not allowed to be believed. Circum-sacred names the fact of the centrifugal-centripetal—which, together, is the centrifugitive—movement as constituting a way of life. Black life is about relation, about sociality, in orbit. Because of the circum-sacred, what is marked is the deep and complex relationship between that which is considered to be black religiosity and that which is considered to be, on the other side and categorically distinct, black sociality. This division, I argue, is illusory and unnecessary, impossible to order, impossible to enclose, impossible to maintain. And, I also argue, the circum-sacred performance staged in the space of Blackpentecostalism—the fleshliness, the speaking in tongues, the use of breath, the commenting on and critique of language as speaking in tongues, the shouting and euphoria—the Black Church, in general, is imagined in popular culture as Blackpentecostal.

That is, what Blackpentecostals are known to do, what they are known to have cultivated, is how the Black Church as a historical institution is imagined in the social imagination. This does not mean that every church is or does what Blackpentecostals are or do, but that the imagined relation to popular culture is one of this particular performance. This also does not mean, importantly, that Blackpentecostals own or are the originators of the practices they engage. It just means that they cultivated, tended to, and allowed to flourish a particular mode of refusal.<sup>1</sup> Blackpentecostalism is *exemplary* of otherwise possibility, not the normative space from which possibility emerges, because it does not emerge from any space as a kind of pure object. The sacred does not belong to particular religious traditions or to the zone and category and enclosure called the religious itself. This

epistemological shifting, the search for otherwise possibility of religion and the social as nondivisional, is the gift of friendship and the interruption to political theology.

Further, yet, and still, I argue that all black performance is imagined to have the capacity to produce circum-sacred possibility reached for in Blackpentecostalism. Because of the illusory division between black religiosity and black sociality, what black popular culture, in general, reaches and strives for is the affective mood and movement (but not, it must be said and maintained, the doctrinal and theological thought) of Blackpentecostal energy, fervor, and verve. Blackpentecostalism is *an* example—not the only one, of course—of what black life performs, practices, produces in terms of joy, love, relation. The spirit, the movement, and verve desired in religious Blackpentecostal performance is reached for and desired for all black performance. And so, we speculate on characters and characterizations in black popular culture that announce black religiosity to learn something about black gender and sexuality, and to learn about and contend against the interruption to political theology simultaneously. Black performance is complex and complexity, it is complicated and it complicates. This is a speculative writing, attempting to reach for energy and spirit and verve in the cause of love.

The (assumed to be cisgender) male choir director and male church pianist and organist have, in circum-sacred performance, been made to carry the content of queerness as objects of desire as well as carry queer desire and queerness *as* desirous.<sup>2</sup> Because they are friends. And because friendship can serve as a way of life (Foucault 1997). As such, the male choir director and male musician, imagined as Blackpentecostal, are meant to stand in for a range of queer possibilities in black social life in general (and I think black men singing non-gospel music also have to contend with the imagined queerness of black singing because of these characters). Notions of black masculinity are often antithetical to spirituality precisely because of the worry over porosity and vulnerability that spirituality seems to require.

This article is an attempt to put into relation various modes of black performance: the vibration emanating from a Hammond organ; the practice of friendship of Black American Muslim women; what I call the *anepistemology* of feeling; the sound of Islam; the problem blackness poses to the concepts *political* and *theology*. This writing jumps and leaps and moves like chord changes, the thread that binds together being the *key signature*, and resolving in the tonic, of black performance, the idea that anything can be put in relation if we attend to performance of possibility. This article contends that characters in black popular culture might give us a way to think the generativity and spirit of black life. And the hope is

that this article will prompt the imaginations of readers to consider characters and characterizations in ways that augment and enliven what is here, what is here but not fleshed out, what is here but remains hidden.

I

And we have to figure out a way to be together. To begin here with the word *and* is to begin with the joint, with the connection, with the hinge. But then and also, to begin with the word *and* is to imply with intense force that there was something before that could be connected, that there was a mode of operation that is announced by a kind of absence, an absence that is present in the word, in the concept, in the beginning, such that beginning is *not*. And . . .

There is a presence that pervades black life, a presence that Western constructions for rationality and instrumentality have renounced. But this presence remains in and as blackness—blackness as the refusal of renunciation of the flesh, of the social—a presence found in what I call circum-sacred performance, a presence that is about marking relation, existence, or being *with*, a presence that is about sociality as the ground of irreducibly plural existence. This circum-sacred is that which black life is gathered around but is, like vibration detected as sound and song of music some might call nothing,<sup>3</sup> there but barely raised to the level of detection though it is sensed, felt, known. Like blackqueerness, the fact of the presence of “nothing” does not necessarily occasion the celebration of it, and for some produces relinquishment, the giving up of it, though—like blackqueerness—that which is considered by some to be “nothing” is what makes life worth living. What can the vibration-as-sound-and-song emanating from the Blackpentecostal worship space tell us about life and love as queer horizon and thrust?

In his argument about words and things, about knowledge and how it is ordered, Michel Foucault turns to the enunciative power of the breath, of the word, of the spoken, which is another way to say, he turns to the performance of relation made through sound. He says (1990: 27), “There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. . . . There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.” Silence is the surround, it is the wraparound, the turnaround chord, it is the inventive space of possibility because one must hear into the silence, feel its vibration, understand something of what such silence—before and after words, a kind of stylizing of momentary quietude—is attempting to say. Silence is like, and is, nothing. Can you feel it?

The Hammond B-3 organist in the Blackpentecostal tradition helps me think about silence, saying, and the relation between. The Hammond B-3 organist also lets me think about the power of the flesh that produces protest through praise. With the Hammond musician, I think about the ways—and investigate the fact—that there is no binary division between what the instrument says and plays and what it does not say and play, such that attending to relation between what is and is not sounded out is raised to the level of existential concern and, perhaps even, an attempt to wrestle with an, if not *the*, existential crisis: what does it mean to be, to be in relation, to be otherwise than Man?<sup>4</sup> The musician stages and performs—which, stated plainly, heightens the awareness of listeners to the ongoing presence of—the intersensual and the intersonical, which tells us something about how life emerges against binary logics of thought, performance, practice, breath. The fact of intersensuality and intersonicality cannot go unremarked.

The intersensual is here defined as the production of feeling and feel as a communal practice and process, feeling and feel as a collective, improvisational intellectual practice. The intersensual names the fact that feeling and feel is always *between things*: whether the mechanical instrument and the musician, the musician's chording and the congregation, the congregation and preacher, between congregants, or—most likely—between all these various objects in varied intensities. The intersensual names the fact of sense as communal and always in-process. What can attending to these mutually constitutive, and at times overlapping, at times contentious, relations reveal about blackness, the sacred, and the practice of social life? And what when such social life is practiced by way of rumor, gossip, and categories that attempt to contain and denounce the very fact of its existence? The intersensual announced that fact of feeling and feel always being in relation, only ever being about and belonging to the social.

And I define *intersonicality*, here, as the space between instrumentalists; it is about the relationality that is played out—that emerges—in the vibrations of sound and song, that is supposed to mark the difference of the same, a difference that is about relation and sociality. Interasonality is one practice of the intersensual, though there are certainly others. The intersensual and intersonical index the fact of openness and availability as the way knowledge is produced through feeling, through what the musicians play, through which the music is felt. What is carried, what is the content released, from such performance? The sounding out of the instrument is about what is not played and what is played and the relation, complex and ongoing, between the two. But there is no easy division between what is and is not; it is a relation of intensity and dynamism. It is the practice of everyday black-queer life.

One thing unsaid but certainly felt and told is the blackqueerness of black sacred music. One way the unsaid is felt and told is through rumor and gossip that circulate about the density and potentiality of blackqueer relationality (Crawley 2013). Alisha Lola Jones (2017: 216), for example, notes, “When I share with African American gospel enthusiasts that I research Black men’s performance of gender and sexuality in gospel music, the most frequent responses I receive are: ‘Why are there so many “effeminate” men in music ministries? And why are so many choir directors gay?’” I want to linger with the question, not of gayness and effeminacy as forms of identity per se, but with the idea that with the very contemplation, with the very thinking about, with the practice of sound and song, a space is opened up for us to think about blackness and queer possibility as emerging from an intensely and intentionally sacred desire and relation to worlds.

I agree with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2008: 24): “There is a large family of things *we know* and need to know about ourselves and each other with which we have, as far as I can see, so far created for ourselves almost no theoretical room to deal.” I inflect this to consider the ways blackqueerness as circum-sacred is known but also how this knowing can only emerge by way of rumor and gossip, and how rumor and gossip can be the theoretical space of operation, how rumor and gossip can be the theoretical room in which thought can occur, flourish, be argued over, contended with and against. Listening to the Hammond and considering circum-sacred sound and song of black popular culture is of vital importance and urgency because we must continue to sense and feel and contend against the effects of ongoing misogynoir, homophobia, transphobia, and a general antagonism against blackqueer life and flourishing. There is a presence of blackqueerness, like the sound and song of nothing music, with which there is no theoretical room to deal and which creates the occasion for the violence against blackqueer life.

Yet the presence of blackqueerness makes possible the very practice of praise and worship. A strong claim, to be sure, but one I am willing to wager in the hopes of a liberatory practice, a liberatory form of life. Often considered to be the sissy in the sanctuary,<sup>5</sup> the category of this character is a kind of containment that simultaneously announces and denounces the presence of blackqueerness. To quote from Sedgwick (2008: 27), again, I seek “to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*.” What does placing blackqueerness in the music *do* in terms of a full range of affectional possibility, without ever reducing such possibility to the Western constructs of intimacy and delimitation? What do the characters of the sissies—whether choir director or Hammond musician—*do* to the life of a doctrinal position and theological inclination that demean queerness

as a way of life? What does the categorization of the music—as the space from which queerness emerges and returns for the circum-sacred performance of blackness to occur—produce in terms of relational possibility, even if such possibility is denounced after having been put online?

But I also agree with later, post-*Epistemology*, Sedgwick (Sedgwick and Frank 2003: 124): when speaking about whether research about HIV/AIDS was a racialized, sexualized, militaristic conspiracy, she said, “Whether or not to undertake this highly compelling tracing-and-exposure project represents a strategic and local decision, not necessarily a categorical imperative.” She continued by stating that it is important “to open a space for moving from the rather fixated question Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to the further questions: What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?” This means, for me, that I must ask the question, why the concern about tracing the blackqueerness of this music: what does it allow us to do, to make, to think, to be?

My search for the rumor and gossip, and what this mode makes available for thought, for imagination, in black popular culture as uniquely situated to bespeak something about blackqueerness, is not a reading of and with paranoia as object, as Sedgwick describes. Mine is a descriptive project, an attempt to think relation and not suppression. I am interested in the many ways—after Foucault—relation happens through what is veiled suppression, veiled repression; we have to seek relation otherwise, sociality like and as feeling the spirit in the dark. This is a blackqueer sensing (I am resisting the word *reading* here for the moment) of possibility that goes in multiple directions simultaneously. It is not a search for symmetry that Sedgwick posits paranoia does as method, it is not a search for equilibrium and balance; this is a search for the affective excesses that are blackqueerness, a mode of living and relation that is previous to situation—philosophical, theological, political or, here even, psychoanalytic. I am not attempting to for the last time uncover “the truth” of blackqueerness as some kind of coherent object that can be known in fullness, that can be fully exhausted. I am searching for the practice of blackqueerness as the undergrounded destabilizing force that allows the flourishing of the question of black life itself, the question of nothingness, the playing of existential concerns.

And I think post-*Epistemology* Sedgwick is correct to argue that visibility and *exposure* of the “truth” will not itself change the epistemology of violence and violation that makes the doctrinal and theological practices that shame black-

queerness. She asks (Sedgwick and Frank 2003: 141), “The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends . . . on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings. What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent?” What is necessary, and what this article attempts, is a sensing of vibration as sound not to replace sight but to say the visibility of exposure as the possibility for correction is itself part of ocularcentric epistemology of Western thought with its very modern liberal subjects. Sound occasions an epistemological ordering that allows for the full range of sense experience to be the grounds, not a hierarchy, of fleshed feeling.

I am attempting to think with the Black Church’s production of music and musicality to think about the construction of gendered and sexed flesh, and I argue that a sound-studies analysis of music making makes vulnerability and openness not possible but noticeable, not possible but detectable. What the vibration-as-sound-and-song announces, underscores, and undergrounds is the anoriginal vulnerability and openness as a fleshly, unbounded way of life. There is a complex relation between musicality and race when thinking about masculinity, when thinking about the aspiration for manhood, straightness. Music making is a place that opens up and breaks down such possibility for aspiration. I want to ask what we can know from the musicality of black religiosity, what the *anepistemology* of black sacred sound making is. This is explicitly a project drawing on black feminist, womanist, blackqueer critiques of ethics, of epistemology, of Man, ethics, worldviews, and a moral center based on exclusion and renunciation of the flesh, which is to say blackness and the feminine and queerness.

## II

And it’s all about friendship, right? It’s all about the possibility for establishing, and, after having established, maintaining relationship. But what would it mean to say that it—life, the worlds we inhabit, the zones from which we have been excluded or in which we have been included—is itself about the practice of friendship? It is, for me at least, to go where I always go, to Foucault and his interview “Friendship as a Way of Life” (1997); it is to underscore the fact that what we are is ephemeral and inventional, that ours is a way of life we have to commit to fashioning, as Foucault might say, to invent from *A* to *Z* a practice of relation that is formless in its inception. But more, I think about the “joyful militancy” of friendship:

Can friendship be revalued as a radical, transformative form of kinship? . . . Under neoliberalism, friendship is a banal affair of private preferences: we hang out, we share hobbies, we make small talk. We become friends with those who are already like us, and we keep each other comfortable, rather than becoming different and more capable together. . . . This neoliberal friend is the alternative to hetero- and homonormative coupling: “just friends” implies a much weaker and insignificant bond than a lover could ever be. Under neoliberal friendship, we don’t have each other’s backs, and our lives aren’t tangled up together. But these insipid tendencies do not mean that friendships are pointless; only that friendship is a terrain of struggle. (Bergman and Montgomery 2017: 93)

Friendship is a site of struggle. It is not a thing we know, it is not an object we can hold. It is only a practice in which we share, a practice that has the capacity to unmake us over and over again. It is formless. And to make a claim for the formlessness of the initial, of the previous to form and constitution, is to say that incoherence, dissidence, or what my friend Sylvia Chan-Malik (2018) might call *againstness*, is what we have as our right of birth and breath. Friendship is not just theoretical, it is about a practice of being in the world with others, practicing difference as dissidence, practicing difference as the very possibility for care. To say that friendship is formless at its inception is to say that something could be connected, could be joined, could be hinged such that friendship would be the result, that—like the word *and*—there was something that could be connected, that could be joined, that could be hinged. I am after that thing, that thing that precedes form that makes available and possible connection, I am interested in what kind of thought practice is necessary, what do we think we are and have to be, in order for there to be possibility?

Chan-Malik’s *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* makes me think about friendship, friendship between women, which is another modality of the possibility of connecting and joining and hinging the same with difference. I think about the way she discusses Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, how “they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them” such that they had to “set about creating something else to be” (Chan-Malik 2018: 33), which meant a kind of reckless abandon against what the world would tell them they should be and do and how they should behave, a reckless abandon as a kind of social ecstasies, an outpouring and being beside oneself in the service and cause of the one that is different, the one that could be joined, as friendship. What Chan-Malik’s rumination on friendship of two women in *Sula*



poses for me is the question: can this be a model for how we can be together, can it help us figure out how to practice with one another?

What Chan-Malik demonstrates, especially in the chapter “Four American Moslem Women,” is that it takes courage and wisdom—as Stephen Shukaitis (2011) might say—to make worlds, and theirs was a courageous intellectual practice of wisdom precisely because there was no model by which they could detect black women as Muslim except by what they imagined, what they constituted together with texture and verve. What they were, what they’d become, was through what Chan-Malik (2018: 44) calls their visionariness—“women who came to look at, inhabit, and experience the world as Black American Muslim women during a time when there was no such thing. To see the world as Muslim women required their continual vigilance and labor, not only in terms of Islamic practices, like praying or fasting, but also by navigating how they as Black women could enact and embody Islamic practices in the racialized and gendered environments in which they lived.” This is a visionariness that I would augment and describe as their audiovisual imagination, a choreosonic way of life.

What I mean by *choreosonic* for the four Black American Muslim women in the photograph with which Chan-Malik produces a speculative ahistoriographic way for us to understand the day-to-day operations, particularly of Sister Zeineb, is that they had to choreograph and sound out continually together as mutually constitutive practice, a way that was formless, a way that utilized their inventional and creative impulses, the practice of a collective improvisational imagination. The photograph Chan-Malik thinks about displays women who are utilizing the technologies they have in order to practice piety that desired to inculcate, Saba Mahmood might argue,<sup>6</sup> their sartorial style as unique to the individual but in the service of a collective practice of difference.

But to dress as they did—and one wonders what the result of such dress would be on Wabash Avenue in 1920s and 1930s Chicago—in the time that they did, to call attention to themselves as such dressing must have done, is to say that there was a kind of courage and fortitude, a kind of joyful militancy, to use the language of Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery, and delight and pleasure from marking out difference, a kind of practice of exuberance and seriousness. They practice what Chan-Malik (2018: 15) describes as *affective insurgency*, “the multiscalar, diffuse, and ever-shifting forms of againstness” that life takes when one lives as difference, whether desired or forced or some combination thereof. Againstness, the affective insurgency, Chan-Malik says, “is not, nor has never been directed at a single target; instead it is a set of affective responses that emerge out of the ways Islam is consistently lived insurgently by women, responses that arise

out of the ways US Muslim women engage, navigate, and encounter the ways Islam is imagined as an unruly and insurgent political presence at various moments in history” (16).

Friendship is on my mind because of the urgency of our times, by which I mean this long historical moment called modernity with its thought-philosophical, thought-theological, thought-political, thought-ethical, thought-epistemological that was inaugurated before 1492 and that remains with us. Perhaps Cedric J. Robinson would say the gestating moment of racial capitalism as a thought practice was deployed on and against Europeans first, and finds its *perfection* with its encounter with Amerindians and Africans stolen and transported to the so-called New World. We are still in the *thenwhere* of that *whenwhere*. This political economy is about perfectibility grounded in Christian doctrine that considers itself the perfectible, or even supersessionist, form of Greek thought. And if we are still living the *thenwhere* of that *whenwhere*, then perfectibility seeks to devour still.

This to say that perfectibility might be a problem for thought, a problem against the flourishing of life, a problem thwarting friendship. The perfectibility problem in Western thought is continual and is the grounds for various forms of violence. New modes of violence—Islamophobia, for example—with regard to perfectibility do not come to replace settler colonial genocide as ongoing or anti-black violence as perpetual but come to augment with otherwise modalities of the same, targeted toward same old new populations.

Robinson, in his *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* ([1983] 2000), sharpens for readers the idea that racial capitalism is a mode of organization that is internal to European thought, that racialization is not universal but is an ethnocentrism that has taken on global force and magnitude. The encounter with African and New World labor was a *making perfectible* the racialization logic; thus I focus on perfectibility as a problem for thought, a problem of interrogation. Robinson says,

Europe was God’s world, the focus of divine attention; the rest of mankind belonged for the moment to Satan. For perhaps a thousand years or more, western European world historical consciousness was transformed into theosophy, demonology, and mythology. And, indeed, in a most profound sense European notions of history, both theological and pseudo-theological, negated the possibility of the true existence of earlier civilizations. The perfectibility of mankind, the eschatological vision, precluded the possibility of pre-Christian civilization having achieved any remarkable development in moral law, social organization, or natural history (science). (86)

Perfection would then not just be a problem of thought but also a problem thwarting thought and the flourishing of possibility. Other resonances of this problem are sensed in the Greek concept of the ideal and the Christian and monotheistic religions' concept of salvation. This, perfectibility, is what apophatic and cataphatic thought presupposes, a perfectibility that leads to silence standing in the presence of the divine, the perfect one. But what if we did not organize ourselves around the desire for the perfect or perfectible? What if we gave up our need for perfectibility?

What we have to have is a preferential option for the practice of ongoing imperfectability. The forgetfulness of *alternative modes of sociality* is because of the concept of perfectibility, supersession, and dialectics, that what is "originary" needs to be worked in order to be perfected. We have to get over our obsession with perfection. Perfection and perfectibility are produced in Western thought by the ideas that it is a goal worth aspiring toward and that it is attainable. And its modern strain finds one strand of its genesis in Newtonian conceptualizations for space-time as linear and self-corrective over temporal measures.

And it is because of Wabash Avenue. Florence Watts, who would eventually become Sister Zeineb, lived blocks away and eventually joined the Al-Sadiq mosque at 4448 Wabash Avenue. This would be and still is the oldest mosque in the United States and would serve as a site of interracial spiritual community. And as Chan-Malik shows, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq sought black women in the *Chicago Defender*, advertising in the Women's Page about the Sunday meetings. The mosque was commissioned in 1923. But it is Wabash Avenue that intrigues me. Years later in 1929, the First Church of Deliverance would organize in the home of Father Clarence Cobb's grandmother in the Bronzeville section of Chicago at 3363 South Indiana Avenue. The first building they acquired was at 4155 South State Street. And, important for me in this writing, they held their first meeting on June 8, 1933, at what is now their present location, 4315 South Wabash Avenue.

These places of worship are between 43rd and 45th Streets on Wabash, so they are quite literally across the street from each other and one-minute's walking distance from one another. It is not that I think the church and mosque have the same theologies and doctrines but that by focusing on Sister Zeineb and others walking down the street, we can speculate how they would have encountered various kinds of people who would have had to work together in order to live peaceably. But I don't just want to focus on the coincidence of these two worship spaces on the same street, I want to think about the exchange between that the street allows me to imagine. Is there the possibility of interreligious friendship? Is there the possibility for relationality? What can the sound of the Hammond organ incite in our imaginations toward formless and always-on-the-move sociality?

To tell the story differently is to begin otherwise, to produce a version of the same that inflects. So a return, like in the coda of *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, to First Church of Deliverance in Chicago and the musicianship of Kenneth Morris. Credited for introducing the Hammond organ to black gospel music, Morris had a sonic imagination charged by and cultivated within a centrifugitive, choreosonic mode of sociality. The mode of sociality in which Morris engages and extends takes as instrument any tool, any technology, and this in the service of praise and worship.

The centrifugitive, choreosonic force of the black sonic commons is about the making instrument of various forms, various technologies. And it is a sonic imagination that cannot ever be private property but is a critique of the proper. What Morris was able to imagine with the sound of the Hammond organ was because of what had made him possible, the mode of sociality, the black sonic commons. The sound of the Hammond organ, its electricity and vibration and hum and buzz and—eventually, with the Leslie speaker—its spin and breath, will have been an emphatic demonstration of Morris’s participation in such a commons. But more, it was the kind of church that First Church of Deliverance was, a black-queer space of vitality, that perhaps gives a cue and clue into the relationality I investigate.

First Church of Deliverance was a major stop on the blackqueer nightlife circuit in the mid-twentieth century. “Former members of the First Church of Deliverance on Wabash Avenue remembered it as a major stop on the gay nightlife circuit in the 1930s and 1940s. The church welcomed gay people and Reverend Clarence Cobbs, along with many of his staff, was rumored to be gay,” and “after attending the live broadcast at the church, which ran from 11:00 pm to midnight, club goers would simply walk from First Church of Deliverance to one of the area nightspots, usually the Kitty Kat Club, the Parkside, or the 430” (Best 2005: 188). In this particular work, I am seeking to intentionally think about the blackqueerness of the vibrations felt as sound and song, emanating from the relationships created by vibrations being made instrument in the service of praise and worship for congregants. The sound of the Hammond organ emerging from First Church of Deliverance for me is a way to think blackqueerness and the sacred in intentional and intense ways. This space was a place of gathering, the practice of friendship in the flesh. The sound of the instrument emerges and becomes felt and known through a blackqueer space of potentiality that perhaps we might consider the practice of circum-sacred performance.

And I am informed about circum-sacred performance that Langston Hughes fictionally narrates and that provides cues and clues. In his short story

“Blessed Assurance” (2002: 374–75), the character Delmar, the young son of the main character John and wife Arletta, was “turning out to be a queer.” More, “Delmar sang in the Junior Choir,” and they “even went so far as to want to render a jazz recessional—Delly’s idea—which was vetoed.” In the story, the Minister of Music, Dr. Manley Jaxon, wrote a song based on the story of Ruth:

‘Entreat me to not leave thee,  
Neither to go far from thee.  
Whither thou goeth, I will go.  
Always will I be near thee. . . .’

The work was dedicated to Delmar who received the first handwritten copy as a tribute from Dr. Jackson. In spite of its dedication, one might have thought that in performance the solo lead—Ruth’s part—would be assigned to a woman. Perversely enough, the composer allotted it to Delmar. . . . So without respect for gender, on the Sunday afternoon of the program, Delmar sang the female lead. Dr. Jaxon, saffron robed, was at the organ. (376)

The story continues,

As the organ wept and Delmar’s voice soared about the choir . . . backwards off the organ stool in a dead faint fell Dr. Manley Jaxon. Not only did Dr. Jaxon fall from the stool, but he rolled limply down the steps from the organ loft like a bag of meal and tumbled prone onto the rostrum, robes an all. *Amens* and *Hallelujahs* drowned in the throats of various elderly sisters who were on the verge of shouting. (377)

What this story marks out is a way to think about the queerness of circum-sacred performance, a performance that is never about the one but about the plural, never about the individual but about the social from which the individual emerges. What is marked are the various intensities of relationality not that the music makes possible but that the vibration gathered as sound and song makes evident as always already happening, the otherwise possibility in the flesh. Hughes gives us a cue and clue regarding the allowed to flourish in and as nothing, ceaseless noise as sensed and felt through temporal shifting, imagined and rumored of, which is to say the practice that, queering, queers the vibration of blackness. These relationships and feelings of intensity and emotion emerge from anti-institutional practices of affection, love, joy, heartbreak. They are practices of friendship as a way of life.

C. Riley Snorton (2017: 11) asks, “What does it mean to have a body that has been made into a grammar for whole worlds of meaning?” I expand upon this question to ask how Blackpentecostal intersensual and intersonical performance allows the feeling and flourishing of blackqueer possibility to transform the performance of vibration-as-sound-and-song into the possibility for an entire range of affectional directional movements. Hughes’s story gives at least one example of a blackqueer relationality that is a kind of friendship that has all kinds of affect dripping out of its pores and enclosures and impossibilities. James Baldwin, too, gets at this through his various depictions: whether of John Grimes’s longing for the pianist and friendship with Elisha; or Arthur’s relationship with Crunch made possible by singing. This happens through friendship. Friendship, *through sound and song*, is a generative staging ground through which to think about intimacy, desire, blackqueer possibility.

The vibration emanating as sound and song from within Blackpentecostal life is a grammar of blackqueerness as a vital and vitalizing force: it lives and causes life. This to argue, then, that we all have the capacity for queerness insofar as we have the potential for relationality. It is just that some of us live into, rather than practice renunciation against, this idea. I am interested in how blackqueerness is the ante-Man, a prior form not in a linear temporality but in terms of anepistemological possibility. Blackqueerness is life as *and*. We are trained into the epistemological delimitations of Western thought regarding Man, the human, the person, the subject, the citizen, and varied intensities for pleasures and relationalities are possible, and this is the grounds for existence. This is not to say that everyone is gay, but that the queer potentialities are anoriginal, are originary displacement, are marks for the very possibility for relationality of any sort. I am seeking to figure out why the musicking in the Blackpentecostal anaesthetic field I investigate has been made to carry these potentialities; why is it the song, the sound, and its necessary sensorium? It is all about feeling and feel.

### III

And what I’m trying to say, in other words, is that the *anepistemology* through and in which the vibration of sound and song is played, through and in which the Instrument—the musician and the mechanical object of the Hammond organ *together*—is made, is an *anepistemology* of feeling, a critique of Man’s epistemological possibility. Listen to Elbernitá “Twinkie” Clark (TheClarkSistersTV 2008).

Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015: 18) says, “A given epistemic framework developed through a cultural system enables us to recognize and name, say, a G#. In

other words, G# is historically situated within a chromatic, tempered scalar system that is culturally bound to the Western tonal system.” What does it mean to recognize the vibration-as-sound-and-song emanating from the Blackpentecostal space as the potential for blackqueer life? It means that there is an epistemology in operation—which is also the critique of Man and *his* epistemological possibility, here called the *anepistemology*—that has blackness, queerness, and the sacred together as co-constitutive. It means that we have to investigate the epistemology of operation—the *anepistemology* of feel—to get at what is there, what is there for us to learn, what is there for us to utilize to disrupt the practice of racial capitalism and its violence.

Listening to the soft chording and pad music of Jason St. Clair (marshall1517 2010)—what I describe in *Blackpentecostal Breath* (Crawley 2016) as “nothing music”—allows us to think about the way flesh inhabits space-time within the context from which emerges the imagination of blackqueer life. What I hear in Jason St. Clair’s playing is the joy of nothing, the pleasure in the vibration of sound and song called nothing music. The changing tonic center to me highlights the fact that there is no center of the universe such that the very concept of centering needs to be played with, another way to say the instrument—through arpeggio and chord resolve—interrogates. We land in centers but also steal away because, as the spiritual says, we ain’t got long to stay anywhere called here. St. Clair’s playing of nothing music is an existential claim played out in the vibration of sound and song, enunciated through the chording of nothing that is music.

Soft chording as nothing music lets me ponder softness, the feminine, the maternal, the reproductive, and nothing/lack from which emerges life that we should not escape out of but retreat into. These terms, these concepts, are renounced in the service of becoming-normal, becoming-normative. But instead of escaping from them, what if we had a preferential option for secreting into the interior? To make a claim for feeling as the *anepistemological* ordering through which the Instrument makes vibrations of sound and song on the Hammond is to make a claim for blackqueerness as celebratory and worthy of protection and care. And to make a claim for blackqueerness is to threaten the normative striving, the desired assumption into aspirations for inclusion in white supremacist practices of exclusion and violence.

Though song selection may occur previous to the church service—of course, these performances do not *lack* form or organization—musicians do not coordinate or schedule or consult with pastors or other musicians regarding when and how to respond to various modes and moods of intensity during the church service. Rather, they feel their way into it: they feel the congregation, they feel for

the preacher, they feel for the Spirit and reach for spirit in the way they play. It is the intellectual practice of the collective ensemble. The congregation and preacher respond to the instrument, and the instrument responds likewise to them. They are continually pushing each other and also pulling on one another. What we are after, what we detect in the Blackpentecostal instrument, is the enfleshment of a nonproprietary and improper (improper insofar as it is the refusal of the making of private property and thus the making of the proper) relation to sound, the enunciation of a relation to sound making that is about the gathering of vibration in the service of connecting with the congregation.

Fumi Okiji (2018: 2) states:

A musical work, through the way it comes together in composition and unfolds in performance, points to a way for us to be together in the world, against the world's tendency to reduce us, qualitatively. On various levels of structuration a composition is formed through a productive tension between particularity and communion. The composer wrestles with an active pool of found musical material; chords, intervals, feel, and generic sensibility may all pull in divergent directions. The single note similarly stakes its claim to significance against the phrase or chord in which it falls.

The work of sound making in the Blackpentecostal circum-sacred performance is always the labor, courage, and, yes, wisdom, to make worlds otherwise, to make worlds alternate, to make worlds plural. The vibration—whether sound or song—is the practice of composition, of architecture, of fashioning and bringing together through particularity, through the possibilities enfleshed by being in the space with others, through the practice of friendship. The composer is always more than the individual, the composer is the plural possibility of the event; the Hammond musician with mechanical object—as instrument—is the coming together of forces social, mechanical, ecological. This *coming together*, however, is a misnomer. What I should have said, rather, is the *letting happen* of the social, mechanical, and ecological, the plural event of existence, the practice of *and*.

The harmonic structure of the Instrument typically accommodates a tritone song, and this—tritonality—is the primary thrust of music from within this space. This marks difference from other choral musics and thus from the accompaniment of such music. As such, even the nothing music is the would-be evidence of this general organizational thrust, the arpeggio and riff, the chromaticism and chronoticism—what I consider to be the breaking with temporality through arrangement, organization, and capacity overflow. Both play with and at the rela-



tion to the tritone as its sonic form. Such that focus on the Hammond musician as Instrument—as mechanical flesh, as always in dialogue with other musicians, as always in concert with the congregation, as, in other words, an irreducibly social object and socially produced possibility—helps to avoid “the term *individual*, which in its most common usage leads us to the image of the defunct bourgeois subject of earlier and less malignant permutations of capitalism,” to avoid “an abstraction that leads to the fetishization of the solo as the essence,” not only of jazz but of gospel musicianship as well (Okiji 2018: 7).

Blackqueerness, like nothing music, is the zone from which emerges the normative but also, importantly, the infinite range of possibility otherwise than the normative. The infinite range of otherwise possibility, the infinite range of plurality, is the space of the social, the space of the common and commons, the space of the popular and criminal. Circum-sacred possibility is enacted from within such a zone of plurality, and it is the renunciation of this anoriginal, primordial fleshliness, openness, dissidence from which the normative, with violent force, is produced. The point is the practice against the normative in the service of life’s flourishing.

The problem with the confrontation with the terrible triteness and violence of homophobia, transphobia, and the general antagonism against the feminine, the maternal, and queerness that exists within and emerges from the same space that produces the vibrations gathered as sound and song is not only that it causes folks marginalized by this rhetoric to flee after having been excluded then considered by those who remain to be unsensed nonsense, transformed into cogs that do not feel. The problem is also, and more fundamentally, about the ordinary and quotidian and the practice of the everyday, that because of the general *anepistemology* of feeling that grounds the circum-sacred life of blackness, the terribleness, triteness, and violence is felt *along with and inside* the same social, cultural, religious space that produces pleasure, joy, delight. It’s not that we don’t feel but that we feel too much. How to continue on in the practice of openness and vulnerability to feeling while protecting with care from harm those exposed to the violence such openness and vulnerability make happen?

Blackqueer folks ask, in varied registers because of theologies and doctrines of our supposed sinfulness and shame: *Am I broken? Am I beyond repair? Who will love me? Who will touch me?* This is a question of the *letting be* of the social, the mechanical and the ecological, a question of the Instrument. This is, following Sedgwick (2007), an attempt at reparation, a reparative *sensing*, a reparative (more than) reading. She said, “What one already is puts its inevitable spin on what one says, does, and perceives—and vice versa” (641). I am not interested

in the rumor and gossip that circulate queerness in order to tattle-tell, in order to expose the risqué subjects. I am attempting to figure out what we already *is*, and how this is heard through the Hammond, through the relationship the musicking allows folks to notice.

What perhaps is heard on the Hammond, announced and enunciated for and with and in congregation with others, is the possibility for putting to question doctrine, theology, politics. What perhaps is heard on the Hammond, announced and enunciated in the practice of nothing music, is the question of existence. What is experiential for blackqueer people—through normative theology-philosophy—spills over into the existential. It's not that some of us do not have relations—many of us do—but it's that the relations themselves are repulsive for many, that they are that which cause family and friends to recoil in horror. At times, we recoil from our very selves. We are made to feel, because of the fact of our existence, that we are supposed to endure and carry shame others project onto us. The problem of disavowal, of a general renunciation of what we all have the potential for being, is that it produces hierarchies of persons and sustains hierarchies with violent force.

Lawrence Lyles feels it (Lyles music 2012). At the end of the song, when the congregation sings repetitiously, “saith the lord,” he plays certain chord changes that the congregation responds to by changing *their* harmonic structures within the same song. The lyrics are repeated with sonic material difference such that the song and the musician are constantly in flux and flow, the practice of improvisation, song as unalterably open to change. What if the congregation took the organist's play as a demand to live in the world differently, a demand to respond to the life and verve and force of blackqueer possibility by changing the harmonic structure within the same space of articulation? What would it mean to feel into one another using the vibration-as-sound-and-song as our guide? What the Instrument must do is practice openness and vulnerability in order for their being made instrument to happen, for their being made instrument to occur. To be made instrument, to be made implement, to be hollowed out such that wind and breath and vibration can happen through and to the flesh, is to make oneself available, splayed.

I am not fundamentally asking about doctrine and theology, because doctrines create hierarchies of persons based on who follows, does not follow, does not adhere, so this is not an argument for the augmentation of doctrine. Rather, this is an attempt to interrogate why—with doctrines of the human and theologies of original sin—these figures continue to show up and become conduits, instruments, for praise and worship. This is an *atheology* of the flesh, asking how it can remain undone, porous, open, vulnerable while simultaneously protecting from harm those

who would exploit this undone, porous, open, vulnerable way of life. On one hand, we have to recognize that seeking the antitheses of these intensities does not, in fact, protect or produce care even though there is group differentiated vulnerability to the violence of not being protected. On the other hand, we have to contend with the idea that perhaps everything we have been taught to want is itself a problem.

I have so far been discussing the concept of renunciation of the blackqueerness that makes the Blackpentecostal instrument—the gathering of vibration-as-sound-and-song—possible. This renunciation is similar to what Neil Roberts (2015: 29) calls *disavowal*, as “a simultaneous *double movement*: an acknowledgment *and* a denial. By simultaneously acknowledging and denying an event, one does not silence its existence. Rather, one strategically locates an event and then rejects its relevance, knowing full well that it occurred. The double movement produces negative traumatic effects more damaging than silence.” The rumor and gossip of blackqueerness as occupying the space of vibration-as-sound-and-song is both the acknowledgment and the denial. I use the concept of renunciation precisely because this disavowal with its double movement is always more than double (Chandler 2000). It is plural, it is irreducible in the ones aspiring toward ascendance, aspiring toward normativity, it is a double gesture without end because one can never reach ascendance nor normativity. But there is still violence done in such reaching, in such striving.

To renounce what we have been, to escape the noise of the social in the desire for purity, normativity, is the process of making Western Man, the person who is created by possessive individualism. Some of us cannot renounce because of the imposition of racial capitalism such that any aspirational move or desired perfectibility toward the Ideal is a failed project, because racial capitalism is predicated on exclusion and its attendant violence. But what if you don’t want what was not offered in the first place? What is the *anepistemology* of such a not-wanting? What does it mean to feel something and to privilege feeling as the *anepistemology* of operation? Or, more precisely, not to privilege but to allow to unfold and refuse to renounce feeling as the ground for existence.

It means to think otherwise than normative function and form, to listen into the vibrations of sound and song as the emergence for relations of plentitude and possibility. It means to think that we might become what we have already been. But we have to have the verve and nerve for such an otherwise way of life. It would be an *anepistemology* of openness, of a sacred commons that announces availability and openness against enclosure, a commons from which to draw resources to tell the world about the joy of life and beauty and breath.

**IV**

And a gesture. The poem “In Lovely Blue,” written by Friedrich Hölderin (1984: 249), begins:

In lovely blue blooms the steeple blossoms  
 With its metal roof. Around which  
 Drift swallows cries around which  
 Lies most loving blue . . .

Blue allows for the blossom, blue against the roof, the roof swirls and song is heard against loving blue. It’s like the phrase says what it says twice, that the content of the idea—that blue is lovely, and that one can be in it—is repeated with difference. It is a minuscule moment, a quick happening, in a very long poem. The way the phrase ends “by most touching blue” is a turnaround; like a Hammond musician, it is intentional. The turnaround in the chord structure that Hammond musicians employ is how they end a phrase between lines, between choruses and verses, between verses. The turnaround is the place for invention, but the practice does not belong to the one but to the plural, what is marked is the relation between musicians. This turnaround, like Hammond musicianship in general, reminds me of the fact that dance and play are in the turnaround, the choreosonic space of improvisational drive and verve, it marks the same with difference.

What was originally titled *Les Mots et Les Choses* (*Words and Things*) was rendered in English as *The Order of Things*, written by Foucault (1994), and *The Order of Things* was chosen precisely because the publisher wanted to avoid confusion. But what was avoided is for me the occasion to think about the interpretation of thought as opposed to translation, about the movement of thought with the attempt to maintain the *quality* of the anoriginal phrase, a search for something that is quite literally the same with difference.

In two versions of the same, Fred Moten in “Preface for a solo by Miles Davis” (2007: 217) opens with:

To speak from the position of the not supposed to speak is to submit to an even more fundamental disqualification: that in speaking from that position one relinquishes the possibility of thought or of being thought insofar as one (merely) provides the material conditions (in speech that is, as it were, beneath speech; speech borne in a soma-sonority that refuses to disavow itself) for another’s thought and for another’s being thought.

And in *Black and Blur* (2017: 66):

To speak when and where one is not supposed to speak is to resist an even more fundamental disqualification: that such spatiotemporally disruptive enunciation relinquishes the possibility of thought or of being thought insofar as one (merely) provides the material conditions (in speech that is, as it were, beneath speech; speech born in a phonocarnality that refuses to disavow itself) for another's thought and for another's being thought.

Further, again, Moten's two versions of the same:

Jacobs cannot give the consent that, nevertheless, she can withhold. (2007: 218)

And

Insofar as Jacobs cannot give consent that, nevertheless, she can withhold, she consents not to be a single being. (2017: 67)

These are the same lines with difference, attempting to capture something of the same. They are the flatted fifths of one another, the blue notes, the turn-around that is the same with intentioned difference to produce surprise, delight, deeper investigation, a digging in, a reaching back. The colloquial understanding of Negro spirituals and black gospel to come is that they can be played with only the black notes, what Western musicology and notation call the pentatonic scale. In jazz and the blues, the blue note is supposedly lower than an expected tone, and is the alternation of a quarter tone for a semitone. The blue note is about registering difference, but difference is anoriginal.

The blues retains a relationship to, and thus a mode of collective consciousness of, Islam. Sylviane Diouf (n.d.) offers the following:

About 24 percent of the 400,000 Africans who landed in this country came from that West African area also known as Senegambia. Among them were a large percentage of Muslims. Peoples of the Western Sahel had been in contact with the Arab-Berber Islamic world since the eighth century and Islam had spread in a consistent manner since the first decades of the eleventh century.

Among the cultural exchanges that took place between North Africa and the Middle East on the one hand and the Sahel on the other—through trade, migrations, and pilgrimages—was music. The Arab/Islamic musi-

cal style was adapted and transformed by West Africans into something entirely theirs that was at the same time very close but different. Similarly, West Africans deported through the trans-Saharan trade brought their music and rhythms (including those that had already been changed by the Arab/Islamic contact) North to the Maghreb. There was much cross-fertilization on both sides of the desert and it is this complex heritage that West African Muslim captives brought to the United States where it found a fertile ground.

She continues,

Two American specificities can thus explain the emergence of the blues. Of all the countries in the Western hemisphere, the United States received the highest proportion of men and women from Senegal, Gambia, Mali, and Guinea; and it is also the only place where drumming was forbidden. So it is not by chance that the blues evolved only there. What makes this music so different from Caribbean and Afro-South American music is specifically the presence of Sahelian/Arabic/Islamic stylistic elements. They can be found in the instrument playing techniques, the melodies, and the singing style.

To attend to the Muslimness of the blues is to think about style and the production of sound. What Diouf and others demonstrate are the ways the Black Muslim inventiveness was produced in the Americas as a sonic device. This sonic device is a gesture. This gesture is memory. And I want to consider the relationship that the blues has to gospel music and to think about this relationship as a kind of hiddenness that carries the content of black mysticism, a refusal of the individual subject as a mystic, a kind of individuation that is about the production of an identity to be claimed or renounced, but a mysticism that is about the practice of the plural, of the many, hidden in plainsong and sound. Listen, for example, to the relation between, on one hand, a Senegalese practice of the Adhan (Rahman TV 2019) or this bluesy version (Yahia Hegazy 2016) and, on the other, the Alan Lomax recording of the Levee Camp Holler (Grammercy Records 2012). Listening to these sonic events, there is a consistency that stretches beyond Islam and the blues. For example, “A Charge to Keep I Have” (Meeting Place Church 2014) in the Black Christian tradition shares in sonic relationship to the Adhan and the Levee Camp Holler.

The audiovisual, spatiotemporal incoherence enunciates itself as the melis-

matic rupture on the note, the ornamentation heard with each breath of each prayer or song, the melodic structure the prayer takes, the increase in antiphony between prayer leader and congregation, the elongation of notes, the worrying the note and line. This is all heard in the Islamic recitation, and the relationship of sound to song and breath is maintained across space, time, and, importantly, religious tradition. What is heard in the relation of black gospel to the blues to Islamic call and convocation is perhaps best described as *feeling the spirit in the dark*, where darkness is the enfolding of spirit as a practice of protection and care; where darkness enfolds to practice a kind of hiddenness in the service of ongoing encounter with the otherwise than this.

In other words, what is played out in black gospel music is the hiddenness of the blues, which would then be the hiddenness of the social and spiritual relation the blues enunciates and announces with every taken breath. Such hiddenness includes the blackqueer priority of life, previous to situation. Such a hiddenness is given and is withheld in sound and song, and the sonic manifestation of hiddenness is grounded in the ongoing play and dance of blackness and nothingness. What is carried is the relationship to augmentation; or, as the four Black American Muslim women demonstrate (and as Chan-Malik reminds us), what is carried is the relationship to invention, to the impulse to make worlds.

What is heard in black gospel music is the undercommon sound and song that infuses the circum-sacred practice of Islam. And it's about renunciation, the ongoingness of the sound means we have to make an inquiry into the ways blackness and Muslimness have been forgotten (and this rather than hidden), and how this forgottenness of what makes the tradition possible is one we must interrogate in order to more fully understand the black radical tradition as a spiritual striving, condition and *anepistemological* ordering. This means the refusal to think the gospel sound as the perfectibility and supersession of the Islamic call and convoking of the divine is one task, to attend to the undercommon sensuality is to refuse logics of overcoming, conquering, and settler colonial theft and exploitation. Like Robinson, I do not necessarily want to exhaust the subject of the possibility for interrelation, I want to merely point to what is there, and in the service of causing a reckoning—in the hope of thinking the possibility of a refusal to submit to doctrine and theology that separates—and, rather, think the possibility of friendship.

## V

And I want to practice friendship. Political theology is an articulation of racial categorization and pure distinction. Robinson reminds us that racial capitalism,

that capitalism is itself a racialized concept, was used first to distinguish peoples in Europe for a project of labor exploitation by theft of labor power transformed into profit for the capitalist class. To build with Robinson is to assert that there is racial theologism, that theology is itself and likewise a racialized concept that is itself used to distinguish peoples as available for and vulnerable to the violence of exploitation in the forms of land theft, forced labor, and physical displacement.

To make a claim for racial theologism is to consider the ways political theology is an articulation of Western constructions of purity and categorical difference, taking language and its conceptual delimitation from the theological; taking, in other words, the racialization fundamental to capitalism and theology as organizing principles for now, what Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) calls a global idea of race. To think against racial capitalism and racial theologism is to think with the *atheological-aphilosophical*. The negation of capitalism-theologism, which must be more than simple negation, is the *aphilosophical-atheological-ahistorical-anethical-ane pistemological*; it is the more-than negation. One articulation of this more-than negation is found in the sounding out as sensual plea and pleasure of prayer, a mysticism of connection that negates the formation of the modern liberal subject and of its being a useful tool in the projects of capitalist political organizing and the political theologism that is the displacement of language for that organizing project.

If both the political and the theological were defined for and by what Sylvia Wynter (2003) calls the overrepresentation of Man—whether 1, 2, which I think includes a kind of biotechnological Man that overrepresents Technology as the cyber and digital—these categories together, as political theology, do not augment and widen the possibility for inclusion but sharpen for us the fact of exclusion. What sounding out of the Instrument and listening to the sound and song of Blackpentecostal vibration on the Hammond organ might gift us is a way to interrogate current conceptions of the Human and post-Human with their reliance on self-correction, evolution into the digital while also not having an aversion for using objects. Katherine McKittrick is useful here in her reading of Sylvia Wynter and her engagement with Jimi Hendrix. For example, she says she is interested in “how improvisational music and music making might be acts that are creatively scripted outside governing codes, and thus evidence of unbounded or ungoverned brain activity,” and that “this attention to the scientific contours of the arts—which takes very seriously the physiological and neurological—challenges us, as intellectuals, to rethink how we take up racial-sexual justice precisely because it located knowledge making as connective to flesh, blood, bones, muscles, and brain matter while also forcing us to notice new forms of scientific life in the arts” (2014: 156).



She offers another way to understand human creaturely existence with art that does not submit itself to the ideas of technology as the answer of the goal or the end of who we are, have been, or could be. I argue that with Hammond musicians and their engagement with the mechanical object, we find other examples of this motive and practice. Relation exists. Can a speculative relationality—the relation of the musician to the mechanical object, a friendship along the lines of social, mechanical, and ecological flesh—produce the occasion of the whenwhere of a liberatory possibility?

Political theology is fundamentally concerned with sovereignty as a problem for thought (see, e.g., Schmitt 2010, 2015). In this way, political theology mines and is adjacent to minoritized knowledges, but these minoritize knowledges are not only or even primarily *about* the articulation of this problem, these knowledges are not in a dialectical relationship to political theology in any simple sense. And this because these knowledges are an attempt to articulate, as a fundamental anoriginal question and concern, what it means to live, to have life, to be in the world with others. That is, minoritized knowledges—and here I am thinking of black and blackqueer and black feminist and indigenous strains of knowledge production, strains that are otherwise possibilities of the normative, the practice of alternatives without ever making a claim that the alternative reached is “the” “one” that should be valorized; otherwise possibility does not negate the practice of interrogation or criticism but allows it to flourish—are not only or even primarily about an articulation of difference as much as they are about their lifeworlds. They articulate difference because they must, but they are more, Robinson might say.

In “Friendship as a Way of Life,” Foucault (1997: 137) argues that friendship, as he detects it in gay life (which I expand to be blackqueer life), is a kind of relation that makes one *infinitely more susceptible to pleasure*. He notes, “What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure [*plaisirs*]. We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers’ fusion of identities.” He does not say that one has infinite pleasure or that desire must be liberated—though it certainly should not be incarcerated or held in repression—but that one becomes more susceptible, more open, more vulnerable, which is to say the possibility for pleasure intensifies, increases. This susceptibility emerges through the practice of escape: of oneself and of others, together, as a social practice, escape of the normative world, normative striving.

One becomes *susceptible to*, and this is a gift of relation; one can begin to sense possibility for otherwise modalities for existence, alternatives to the normative, when one engages queer life. This is a question of, and against, political

theology because it is not about the concern over the sovereign but about a practice that is against the very constitution of sovereignty. Becoming *susceptible to* is labor, is work, must continually be unsettled and practiced, is never reached as a complete, and is never an object of property to own. Being *susceptible to* is the practice of a general openness and zest for life, joy, and breath.

### Notes

This research was completed while I was a Yale Institute of Sacred Music fellow, 2018–19.

1. For an extended argument about Blackpentecostal practice as an iteration and practice of blackness, see Crawley 2016.
2. Another character that must be explored but is very much beyond the scope of this article is the black woman preacher in twentieth-century black popular culture. Often called or thought to be “mannish,” or occupying the “role” of the male pastor, black women too in black religiosity carry queer content, carry the possibility for thinking and conceiving blackqueer life.
3. See the “Coda” in Crawley 2016 for an extended discussion of “nothing music.”
4. I am using *Man* informed by Wynter 2003.
5. For extended discussions about the character of the sissy in the Black Christian imagination, see Johnson 2008, Johnson 1998, and Crawley 2013.
6. For a discussion of inculcation, see Mahmood 2011.

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