

Interludes in Madtime

Black Music, Madness, and Metaphysical Syncopation

La Marr Jurelle Bruce

It came as a rush of fury. . . . My explanation didn't make sense because the words tumbled out in a rush—I couldn't speak quickly enough to release the torrents inside my head. . . . I had it in my mind to kill someone, I didn't know who, but someone I could identify as being in the way of my people getting some justice for the first time in three hundred years. [My husband] didn't try to stop me, but just stood there for a while and said, "Nina, you don't know anything about killing. The only thing you've got is music." . . . I sat down at my piano. An hour later I came out of my apartment with the sheet music for "Mississippi Goddam" in my hand. It was my first civil rights song and it erupted from me quicker than I could write it down.

—Nina Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*

Nina Simone is mad, with good reason. Urged to "go slow," to keep calm in the thick of antiblack carnage, to abide beneath the blood-stained heel of white supremacy, and to patiently, passively await "some justice," Simone finally unleashed a "rush of fury" and burst of song that "erupted . . . quicker than [she] could write it down." In the aftermath of the atrocious 1963 Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing—a conspiracy to pulverize and terrorize black life—Simone detonated an explosion of her own—a musical conflagration meant to galvanize black life and resistance. The outcome was Simone's 1964 protest anthem, "Mississippi Goddam," the sound of freedom dreams deferred blasting from the mouth of a black radical prophethess.¹

I hear "Mississippi Goddam," and the church bombing that incited it, as opposing interventions in what Michael Hanchard might call the

“racial time” of mid-twentieth-century America.² Antiblack terrorism sought to suspend black people in a state of pseudocitizenship or else thrust them backward in time to formally enslaved rightlessness and legally codified subhumanity. Meanwhile, leaders of America’s liberal establishment, purported allies of black progress, admonished black people to “go slow” in seeking liberation.³ Into the din of terrorist explosions and liberalist admonitions, Simone raises her resounding contralto and delivers a devastating malediction:

This whole country is full of lies
You’re all gonna die and die like flies
I don’t trust you any more
You keep on saying “Go slow!”
“Go slow!”

But that’s just the trouble
Too slow!
Desegregation
Too slow!
Mass participation
Too slow!
Reunification
Too slow!
Do things gradually
Too slow!
But bring more tragedy
*Too slow!*⁴

She recites a litany of structural transformations (“desegregation,” “mass participation,” and “reunification”) that have been perniciously postponed by an antiblack and white-supremacist status quo. Meanwhile, her band members exclaim “too slow!” like a fight chant to drown out hegemonic calls for patience or a rally cry to jump-start liberation. In live audio of Simone performing the song at Carnegie Hall in 1964, she announces that “this is a show tune, but the show hasn’t been written for it yet.” She is Afrofuturist par excellence, restless to author and enter revolutionary futures. I imagine that as-yet-unwritten show to be a stunning spectacle of racial revolution or maybe a dreamy fantasia of racial justice achieved.

In video footage of Simone performing the song, fury seems to inflect her voice, furrow her brows, and propel her arms as she pounds the piano in thunderous fortissimo.⁵ In addition to that rage, so vividly on display, three other overlapping iterations of madness also infuse this performance. First, Simone invokes what I call “phenomenal madness”: an unruliness or chaos of mind entailing fundamental crises of perception, selfhood, and meaning (as when she sings of existential turmoil and

terror amid antiblackness). Second, she brandishes “psychosocial madness”: a state of psychosocial alterity that radically transgresses or subverts psychonormativity. (To be black and woman and shout “Goddam!” into the snarling face of Jim Crow was surely to subvert white-supremacist and patriarchal psychonorms.) Third, Simone experienced severe mental illness, which is to say “medicalized madness,” that impacted her music-making in the mid-1960s. In her autobiography, she discloses episodes of psychosis and describes symptoms later diagnosed as manic depressive disorder and schizophrenia.⁶ While I refuse to reduce Simone’s performance to psychiatric symptom, I recognize that, say, manic impulsivity and racing thoughts might have intensified her audacity, hastened her impatience, diminished her inhibition, and otherwise stoked her brilliant delivery. The potential presence of psychiatric disorder does not demean Simone’s artistry, nor does it deny the immanent genius, revolutionary politics, and radical love that might interanimate her performance, along with madness.

Regarding the relation between affective state and musical form in “Mississippi Goddam,” Malik Gaines suggests that the song possesses a “bouncy” and “up-beat Vaudevillian quality [that] belies the anger of the lyrical content and the earthy ferocity of [her] performance.”⁷ However, a quick cadence and jaunty delivery do not necessarily indicate levity. Bounciness might accompany a cheery, light-hearted gambol through blooming pastures, but it might also mark a jittery, harried scramble through bloody trenches. I propose that Simone’s “up-beat Vaudevillian” style does not belie but rather emphasizes the frantic, manic content of the lyrics. With her irreverent rapid-fire delivery, Simone performs the very refusal to “go slow” that she describes. Her autobiographical phrase, “a rush of fury,” aptly captures both the quickening and maddening momentum of the song.⁸

Thus it appears that madness, in various iterations, is the song’s impetus, its method, its theme, its key, and its existential time signature.⁹ Regarding the latter, I propose that Simone performs “Mississippi Goddam” in “manic time,” within a broader system that I call “madtime.”¹⁰ This essay’s primary purpose is to unfurl a theory of madtime via black music. Madtime refers to any mode of doing time or feeling time that coincides with renegade rhythms of madness. Its variations are endless, including, for instance, manic time, depressive time, schizophrenic time, and melancholic time. (Notably, each of these examples combines something of the phenomenal, psychosocial, and medicalized properties outlined above). Madtime is multidirectional and polymorphous, errant and erratic, dazed and dreamy, unruly and askew. It tears calendars, smashes clocks, dances to the lilt of the voices in its heads, builds makeshift time machines from scraps, and ignores calls for timeliness. Furthermore, it

tends to stagger, lunge, twirl, moonwalk, or sit still, rather than march teleologically forward. In the process, madtime defies the Eurocentric, heteronormative, capitalist, rationalist clock-bound time that prevails in the modern West. Let's call that normative temporality Western Standard Time (WST).

WST relentlessly periodizes the world, establishes normative time lines for both quotidian and epochal events, and institutes benchmarks for the "good" life. According to J. Jack Halberstam, such benchmarks include "the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death."¹¹ In step with that (appearance of) "narrative coherence," WST stages grand parades toward hegemonic teleology, toward normative futures, toward narrow horizons of happily ever after tailored to white, heteronormative, middle-class, rationalist subjects.¹² Exalted by Euromodernity, WST accrues a metaphysical aura and prestige, as though it is a quintessential element and deterministic force propelling human history.¹³

Invested with such preponderant power, Western Standard Time tends to exclude Euro-modernity's Others (black people, queer people, and mad people among them) from its triumphal parade. It works to sequester subjugated people to the sidelines, or shove them out of time, or trample them underfoot, or choose a token few to march in its second line. In the face of such violence, madtime might function as an occasion for subversion, a deconstructive provocation, a resounding protestation, and an act of metaphysical syncopation. I forward the term "metaphysical syncopation" to signify ways of being and doing that defy, escape, subvert the metaphysics of WST. Accordingly, madtime consorts with other syncopated subjectivities, especially black temporalities and queer temporalities, to which I now turn.

Concerning black temporalities, Calvin Warren theorizes a "black time" born out of the "metaphysical violence" and "temporal domination" that Africans endured in transatlantic slavery.¹⁴ Warren writes that "*slavery is the vicious enterprise of situating a being outside the time of man and in the abyss of black time.*"¹⁵ I share Warren's concern with metaphysics and his conviction that blackness resides outside dominant structures of WST, but I arrive a different notion of black temporality. Alongside and against Warren's pessimistic formulation, I want to posit another take on blackness and time. Frequently articulated in African American vernacular traditions and practiced in black quotidian contexts, "colored people's time" resists the tyranny of clocks, takes its precious time, and saunters in late; or maybe it rushes in, breathless, shining with sweat, belated but blessedly here nonetheless. Whether it is sauntering or scrambling, colored people's time seems to recalibrate clocks, rearrange minutes and years, and modulate metaphysics, so that said colored person is not late after all—but is

right on time. This colored people's praxis of black time is imbued with mighty agency, even if it was born in abysmal abjection. The abyss may have no bottom, but blackness has no top, no limit.

As for queer temporalities, Elizabeth Freeman describes a "queer time" attuned to "ways of living aslant to dominant forms of object-choice, coupledness, family, marriage, sociability and self-presentation and thus out of synch with state-sponsored narratives of belonging and becoming."¹⁶ Queerly positioned in relation to normative models of historicity, contemporaneity, and futurity, queer time takes up critical projects of speculation, fantasy, camp, longing, wandering, loitering, cruising, backward thinking, and beyond.¹⁷ In the process, queer time recovers queer pasts, practices queer nows, and imagines queer futures against the oppressive schedules of heteronormativity.

To chart the orientations of madtime, I home in on black expressive culture (including its queer content). I center a black archive, in part, because antiblack modernities frame black people as always already subrational, wild, and effectively mad, while casting Africa as before or behind history and outside of time.¹⁸ That blackness bears dual ascriptions of madness and untimeliness makes it a quintessential site for thinking through madtime. I also privilege blackness because of its extravagant aptitude for remaking time.

This essay owes its genesis to a mad black musician and pioneer of early jazz, Charles "Buddy" Bolden. In particular, I am provoked by a poignant irony of Bolden's life and art: he helped innovate the *metrical* time of jazz but was later confined to an asylum and thus excluded from the *epochal* time of jazz, known as the Jazz Age. I want to linger with Bolden for a moment. Born in 1877 in New Orleans, Louisiana, he emerged at the turn of the twentieth century as a locally acclaimed cornetist and band leader who was dubbed "King Bolden" in the Crescent City musical milieu.¹⁹ While marching and performing in a New Orleans Labor Day parade in 1906, he allegedly experienced some sort of mental breakdown. Since there is no decisive historical account of Bolden's breakdown, one wonders whether he collapsed to the ground, overtaken by some agony; or veered suddenly off the parade route to chase a phantasm; or wandered away in a dreamy daze. In the months that followed, Bolden experienced increasing mental disturbances, unleashed violent outbursts, plunged into poverty, withdrew from family and friends, abdicated his role as "King," and left performing behind. Within a year, he was diagnosed with dementia praecox (an early twentieth-century diagnosis commensurate with schizophrenia) and institutionalized in the "colored" dormitory of a Jim Crow insane asylum in Jackson, Louisiana. He would remain there for nearly a quarter century—the rest of his life.²⁰

That Bolden's breakdown happened at a Labor Day parade is rife

with symbolism. Such parades are public tributes to proletariat labor, a force that turns the gears, but does not set the time, of capital's clock. The protocols of parade processions—with emphases on hierarchy, pageantry, synchronicity, and forward march—manifest the rank and file, artifice, lockstep, and teleology of WST.²¹ When Bolden swerved off that parade route, he also symbolically swerved away from sanity, away from music, away from capital, and away from normative time. When he died in 1931, Bolden left no known recordings, no known diaries or writings, and only a single faded photograph; thus he swerved away from conventional historiography, too.²² His life resists historiographical notation like his jazz improvisation resists musical notation.

Bolden is a resonant case study in the tragedy and tribulation that often assail black radical creativity amid antiblack worlds. Thankfully, too, he is exemplar of the improvisational and syncopative genius that often infuses such creativity. While Fred Moten has riffed on the improvisational aspects of black expressive cultures, I want to accent the principle of syncopation.²³ Blackness sponsors exquisite practices of musical and metaphysical syncopation: it stages “disturbance or interruption of the regular flow,”²⁴ swoops and weaves between official notes, disobeys the dominant beat, and activates and aestheticizes the offbeat.

In the remainder of this essay, I sample the songs of Nina Simone, Charles Mingus, Lauryn Hill, Kendrick Lamar, and Frank Ocean—and occasionally the lyrical literatures of Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, and Adrienne Kennedy—to produce a medley in madtime. In particular, I stage four brief interludes, each riffing on a different mode of supposed psychopathology: the quick, restless time of mania; the slow, sorrowful time of depression; the infinite, exigent now of schizophrenia; and the spiraling, zigzagging now-then-now-then of melancholia.²⁵ In each interlude, I describe properties of a designated mode of madtime and analyze how it functions as a sort of radical time signature in black American music. In the process, I forgo traditional protocols of chronology, linearity, and historicism—a fitting approach for an account of transgressive times. Instead, I crisscross within and between many historical periods and genres, chasing madtime where and when I hear it.

Throughout these pages, I highlight what black liberation struggles might critically glean and ethically adapt from madtime. It is crucial that such movements address madness in their accounts of black psychic and social life. Beset by slavery, rape regimes, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, lynching spectacles, disenfranchisement, police violence, and other schemes of brutality, degradation, and exploitation, some black Americans have gone *mad* (angry, crazy, and otherwise) with good *reason*. Yet mad people are frequently treated as casualties, and madness as liability, in progressive discourse. Challenging such logic, following Nina Simone,

and allying with mad studies, I want to imagine a critical, ethical, and political madness.²⁶ All the while, I refuse to blithely romanticize madness or flatten it into mere metaphor for resistance. Instead, I explore the messy phenomenology of madness, which may be a source of felt pain and abjection even as it is a resource for embodied resistance and relief.

“A Rush of Fury”: Manic Time

Exquisitely theorized in Simone’s autobiography and epitomized in her “Mississippi Goddam,” manic time accelerates beyond the pace of WST and speeds toward something like manic subjectivity. Darting about with frantic, urgent, exhilarated force, this mode of madtime shares the racing thoughts, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that psychiatry ascribes to mania.²⁷ As provocation for protest, manic time ignores hegemonic calls for patience and rejects dominion’s demand for endless long-suffering. It is a locus of energetic impatience and hasty audacity that might be harnessed to expedite change.

To further clarify this mode of madtime, I turn to jazz composer, bassist, band leader, memoirist, and self-avowed madman Charles Mingus.²⁸ In 1958—fifteen years into a career that yielded sublime jazz compositions and a reputation as the “Angry Man of Jazz”—Mingus found himself in New York City struggling with severe fatigue, great personal anguish, and possibly a flare-up of bipolar symptoms. He admitted himself to Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital and, on his third day there, composed “All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother.” The song would appear on his 1960 album *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*.²⁹

At the start of the track, before the music begins, Mingus offers words of introduction that are muffled, mumbled, and spoken so rapidly that they are difficult to discern: “And now, ladies and gentlemen, you have been such a wonderful audience. We have a special treat in store for you. This is a composition dedicated to all mothers. And it’s titled ‘All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother,’ which means if Sigmund Freud’s wife was your mother, all the things you could be by now. Which means nothing.”³⁰ If the muffle, mumble, speed, and curious content of his words were not enough to evade easy understanding, Mingus concludes with another enigmatic gesture: he flatly rescinds and negates the elaborate title that he has just spoken—likely leaving many listeners puzzled. All this, before a single note is played.

Before exploring the song’s musical substance, I want to briefly remark upon its genealogy. “All the Things You Could Be by Now” is a radical remake of the jazz standard “All the Things You Are,” composed by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II. The lyrics of the original song read:

You are the promised kiss of springtime
That makes the lonely winter seem long
You are the breathless hush of evening
That trembles on the brink of a lovely song
You are the angel glow that lights a star
The dearest things I know are what you are

Someday my happy arms will hold you
And someday I'll know that moment divine
When all the things you are are mine.³¹

Kern and Hammerstein's tune, as famously performed by Ella Fitzgerald, is about pleurably deferred gratification and joy in waiting. The song basks in that which is "promised" but not yet received, that which is "on the brink" but not yet arrived, that which is "someday" but not this day. The singer marvels at an adorable "you" who is perched on a distant but still vividly visible horizon. "You" are described as a celestial event: sunset, season, and starlight. Remarkably, these forces of nature all help humankind measure the passage of time. But Lady Ella is not parsing time or preoccupied with its passage. Her canonical vocal rendition unfurls at a leisurely pace; so sure is she of "what you are" that she can serenely, confidently wait. She seems to sing with blithe assurance that "you" will come.

Mingus excises all lyrics and radically revamps the song in manic time. The eight-and-a-half minute cut features Ted Curson on trumpet, Eric Dolphy on alto sax, Dannie Richmond on drums, and Charles Mingus on bass in an ensemble of improvisation. Rapid, strident outbursts of trumpet and saxophone dominate the song, forging calls and responses like frantic, manic interlocutors in clamorous conversation. The two instruments sometimes seem to speak in unison, sometimes seem to bicker, sometimes seem to murmur in agreement, and sometimes seem to rave and rant, while the drums and bass alternately heckle and cheer them on.

Notably, the alterations within the song itself are anticipated by the alterations in its title. From Hammerstein's indicative clause "All the Things You Are," Mingus shifts to a subjunctive, "All the Things You Could Be" and then specifies a hypothetical status, "If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother."³² Perhaps he is so antsy because he does not know "what you are" for sure and therefore cannot rest assured the way Fitzgerald could. Of course, when Mingus composed "All the Things You Could Be," there were other exigencies in his lifeworld that impeded resting easy. Though he initially entered Bellevue voluntarily, he was kept there for weeks against his will and placed under the care of a virulently antiblack doctor. I suspect that the song's manic quality reflects the impatience of a psychiatric hospital detainee longing for release and a black

person yearning for racial justice. Penned in a psychiatric institution, performed with great speed and clamor, and named to conjure histories of psychopathology, “All the Things You Could Be” is exemplar of manic music. Mingus retools a florid love song into an intriguing artifact of confinement and a sly act of signifying on Freud, Euro-modernity’s pre-eminent arbiter of psychopathology.

I want to tarry at the site of confinement, even as I pivot to another performer, genre, and era in black music. In July 2013, hip-hop phenom and post-soul protest musician Lauryn Hill was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to three months in a minimum security women’s prison in Connecticut. Fifteen years earlier, Hill’s 1998 album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* had earned her critical acclaim and commercial success. However, by 2001, with the release of her *Unplugged* album, she would repudiate her “forbiddingly perfect”³³ *Miseducation* persona and fall from the favor of the pop music industrial complex. By the time of her incarceration, Hill’s unconventional behaviors—tearful eruptions on stage, “rambling” album interludes, combative exchanges with audiences, eccentric attire, and her own proclamations that she might be mad—were met with widespread allegations of craziness.³⁴

On 4 October 2013, Hill was discharged from prison and debuted a new song called “Consumerism.” Named for the systems of voracious materialism and ubiquitous commercialism that characterize neoliberal capitalism, “Consumerism” is an emphatic condemnation of its name-sake. Accompanied by a sinuous flute (reminiscent of showdown leitmotifs in film westerns) along with a pounding drumbeat and blaring electric guitar, Hill rhymes

Consumerism’s running through them like a tumor in ’em
Ageism, sexism, racism, chauvinism
Capitalism running through them like the rumor business
Separatism, skepticism, modernism, atheism
Television running through them like an organism
Mechanism, despotism, poisoning the ecosystem
Satanism running through them like a politician
Hedonism, hypocrisy, nihilism, narcissism
Egotism running through them, need an exorcism.³⁵

The song describes a gnarled web of social ills. Perhaps Hill’s tax evasion was a surreptitious attack on the capitalistic excess and exploitation that she rebukes in the lyrics above. In any event, it would seem that Hill, like Mingus, found artistic provocation in the site of confinement. After enduring the compulsory stagnation and repetition of carceral time, perhaps Hill felt a surge of urgent, insurgent energy that hastened her release (of new music) upon her release (from prison).

Speed also characterizes Hill's marvelously manic lyrical delivery on "Consumerism." She raps phonetically intricate, many-syllabled words at an average of 6.5 syllables per second with virtuosic verbal dexterity. Hill's rapid rhyming generates another impressive effect that we might call "sonic bombardment." She inundates listeners with a litany of complex terminologies (e.g., "despotism," "nihilism," and "neo-McCarthyism") spewed at a dizzying pace and often arranged as non sequiturs. As a result, the song is likely to disorient, frustrate, or overwhelm listeners much like those social ills disorient, frustrate, and overwhelm vulnerable populations. Hill's musical onslaught dramatizes the sociopolitical onslaught of the afflictions she names.

"Consumerism" is not Hill's first foray into manic music. Like Mingus before her, Hill remakes popular music in manic time. Whereas Mingus manically alters Kern and Hammerstein's jazz standard, Hill transforms her own *Miseducation*-era soul and hip hop hits. Concerning a 2010 concert, the *Atlantic* reported that Hill "opened her set with a *manic* rendition of 'Lost Ones,' dancing and rhyming at spitfire *speed*. 'Ex-Factor' was not the same nuanced song of pain as it is on the album, but it had its own *furious* energy about it," while in 2012, the *Washington Post* described a performance that "ended in a *speedy* punk-rock rave-up and a *primal howl*" (emphases mine).³⁶ These are two of dozens upon dozens of mainstream concert reviews that pair observations about Hill's quickness with comments about her purported madness, as though her speed is symptom.³⁷

In sum, Hill mobilizes manic time as a vehicle for virtuosic performance and tool for sociopolitical critique. In Hill's custody, manic time animates black radical performance praxis—what Daphne Brooks calls "Afro-alienation acts"³⁸—defying musical and sociopolitical status quos, refusing to temper her tempo to suit consumerist comprehension, jolting listeners out of complacency, brandishing bodacious black womanhood, and generating an innovative sound all the while.

"I Will Still Be Here": Depressive Time

Depressive time lags behind. It is a slow motion that seems to mimic sensations of depressed subjectivity. Among its properties are listlessness, belatedness, inertia, inactivity, and what mainstream psychiatry labels "psychomotor retardation," that is, the slowing of thoughts and movements.³⁹ What critical and ethical illumination might we find, slowly and painstakingly, in depressive time? How might depressive time be taken up within radical praxis?⁴⁰

To answer the above queries, I turn to the lifeworlds of enslaved black people in antebellum America. When slave traders ordered slaves to

“step it up lively” on auction blocks, those captors were not only compelling captives to feign joy (a process Saidiya Hartman calls “simulated jollity”), they were also demanding the performance of *speed*.⁴¹ Compulsory speed structured plantation time, too: slaves were constantly coerced to hurry. They were subjected to mandates for rapid “breeding”; quotas for daily agricultural output; insistence that sick, injured, and postpartum slaves convalesce with superhuman (or, more precisely, subhuman) speed; the abbreviation of slave “childhood,” such that toddlers were sometimes forced to enter the slave workforce; and the hasty arrival of death for many.⁴²

For a slave to move about in depressive time—more slowly and listlessly than that compulsory liveliness—was to commit an act of insubordination. Within their severely stifled repertoire of agency, slaves practiced defiant slowness (quite contrary to the compliant slowness that Simone rebukes in “Mississippi Goddam”) in the form of work slowdowns and malingering. In so doing, they covertly disrupted plantation economies, stalled the schedules of slavocratic order, and decelerated racial capital.⁴³ Remarkably, the American Psychiatric Association recognizes that depressed temporality disrupts economy; the association’s diagnostic description of depression emphasizes its tendency to impair one’s ability and desire to work.⁴⁴ In a revealing linguistic convergence, *depression* is a negative keyword in both psychiatry and political economy. Depressive time undermines WST’s paradigms of progress, happiness, timeliness, and/as capitalist productivity.

Depressive time also centers sorrow. This is a critical intervention, considering how frequently blackness consorts with sadness in the US and how rarely such sadness is honored in America’s public spheres. Antiblack regimes of slavery, terror, brutality, degradation, and death have systematically induced sadness in black people. Then, to add insult to atrocity, agents of antiblackness and WST consistently devalue that sadness, insisting that black people just *get over it* and *move on*. Depressive time invites aggrieved subjects to mobilize their sadness, ironically by tarrying within it.⁴⁵ Together, manic time and depressive time constitute a powerful counterhegemonic complementarity: manic time defies directives that black people *go slow* toward justice, while depressive time resists pressure to prematurely *get over* existential hurt.

The title of Amiri Baraka’s 1961 poem “Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note”⁴⁶ announces its residence in depressive time: first, because it references “suicide,” which is occasionally the tragic culmination of depression; and second, because it specifies an object, “a twenty-volume suicide note,” that connotes both sorrow and postponement. Some suicidal affect entails a desire to cut life short and expedite death as a means of ending profound, protracted anguish. In such a state, drafting a twenty-

volume suicide note would likely be an excruciatingly long process. Ironically, though, composing such a lengthy note might forestall the very self-destruction it foretells.

The poem begins:

Lately, I've become accustomed to the way
The ground opens up and envelops me
Each time I go out to walk the dog.
Or the broad edged silly music the wind
Makes when I run for a bus . . .

Things have come to that.

And now, each night I count the stars.
And each night I get the same number.
And when they will not come to be counted,
I count the holes they leave.

Both sadness and slowness pervade these verses. The task of walking a dog and the process of gazing at temperamental stars are cast as rituals of elegy. "Preface" depicts a sorrow so consuming that it makes its bearer lackadaisical to the Earth opening up beneath him and the cosmos rearranging itself above him. In the process, the poem provides a glimpse of existential angst in a black radical(izing) artist within the sociopolitical and cultural upheavals of 1960s America.

Also amid those upheavals, Nina Simone's 1969 live cover of Sandy Denny's "Who Knows Where the Time Goes?" generates a similar affect and effect. In her spoken prelude to the song, Simone declares, "Time is a dictator, as we know it. Where does it go? What does it do? Most of all, is it alive? Is it a thing that we cannot touch and is it alive? And then one day you look in the mirror, you're old and you say where did the time go? We leave you with that one." After posing those sweeping existential questions, she listlessly sings,

Across the morning sky
All the birds are leaving
How can they know
That it's time to go?
Before the winter fire
We'll still be dreaming
I do not count the time

Who knows where the time goes?
Who knows where the time goes?

Sad deserted shore
Your fickle friends are leaving
Oh, but then you know
That it's time for them to go
But I will still be here
I have no thought of leaving
For I do not count the time

Who knows where the time goes?
Who knows where the time goes?

But I am not alone
As long as my love is near me
And I know it will be so
Until it's time to go
All through the winter until the birds again return in spring
I do not fear time⁴⁷

Simone describes birds that instinctively know the season and migrate at the appointed time toward the appointed destination. To the contrary, people lose track of time, or refuse to count it, or sometimes sullenly stay behind. The song lingers on that “sad deserted shore” with the singer who has “no thought of leaving.” Though her “love is near,” her plaintive delivery suggests that she is nevertheless saddened over the passage of time and abandonment by “fickle friends.” “Who Knows Where the Time Goes?” depicts a refusal to move on—a depressive praxis—and draws the listener into its tarrying temporality and rueful affect.

While the lyrics ostensibly concern personal loneliness and private grief, it is crucial to situate this performance within Simone’s lifeworld and the broader geopolitical context. The performance took place at the New York Philharmonic Hall in 1969: amid the fervor of the Vietnam War, the year after what many mark as the close of the civil rights movement, and the year after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Simone’s avowed “King of Love.”⁴⁸ In the custody of Simone, lyrics about romantic love, lost friends, and passing birds doubly evoke political love, lost leaders, and passing eras. She endows a wistful love song with powerful protest resonance.

I want to tarry with Martin Luther King Jr. and simultaneously turn to Lauryn Hill’s appearance at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Martin Luther King Concert Series in August 2007 in Brooklyn, New York. To the chagrin of audience members and media pundits, Hill arrived two hours late and unrepentant. I have elsewhere pondered this performance in depth, but for now I want to briefly remark on the symbolic resonance of her lateness to an event named for King.⁴⁹ Hill’s Afro-alienated *delinquency* stands

in stark relief alongside King, America's favorite icon of liberal racial *progress*. Her bodacious *impudence* is especially conspicuous when apposed with America's most revered agent of racial *reconciliation*. In the process, Hill joins that long tradition of black insurgent refusals to perform timely labor, a heritage extending back to plantation slowdowns. Notably, this is one among many incidents of Hill's multihour tardiness to high-profile performances, as documented in countless disgruntled op-eds and social media posts frequently framing Hill's lateness as pathological.⁵⁰

There is another manner in which Hill is commonly viewed as dysfunctionally slow and stubbornly lagging behind Western Standard Time: namely, her refusal to produce a punctual follow-up studio album after *Miseducation*. In a 2012 issue of *GQ*, Amy Wallace writes that hip-hop and soul producer Questlove "has a theory about what happens to black genius—what he calls 'a crazy psychological kind of stoppage that prevents them from following through. A sort of self-saboteur disorder,'" and Wallace implies that Questlove views Hill as one of the afflicted.⁵¹ The problem with Questlove's claim (beyond its glib pseudopschoanalyzing) is its consumerist sensibility, as Hill herself might describe it. The "stoppage" indexed by his "self-saboteur disorder" is a drought in commercial productivity within a pop music industrial complex. Indeed, if our criteria for follow-through are attuned to Columbia Records' production schedules and quarterly earnings reports, we are indeed left with an impression of stoppage. However, other vital modes of creativity persist outside corporate regimes. If we take into account Hill's continued (if uneven and irregular) performance and productivity in various festivals and small tours, it becomes clear that she does not suffer from stoppage but, rather, flows through waterways other than the mainstream. Furthermore, if we decenter musical productivity altogether and instead center self-care, spiritual evolution, knowledge acquisition, familial proliferation, among other personal metrics of life accomplishment, Hill's trajectory is full of flow and progress.⁵² Hill's delinquent noncompliance with corporate calendars instrumentalizes slowness, endures allegations of madness and tragic decline, disrupts labor, and therefore activates depressive time.

"It Is Always Now": Schizophrenic Time

My theory of schizophrenic time is provoked, in part, by Michel Foucault's description of schizophrenia in *Madness: The Invention of An Idea*. Whereas most clinical accounts of schizophrenia delineate symptoms like psychosis, paranoia, and auditory hallucinations, Foucault's description homes in on temporality. He claims that in the case of schizophrenia, "spatiotemporal coherence that is ordered in the here and now has collapsed, and all that remains is a chaos of successive heres and isolated moments." He writes,

furthermore, that “the fragmented world that [a schizophrenic person] describes accords with his dispersed consciousness” and “the time without future or past in which he lives reflects his inability to project himself into a future or recognize himself in a past.”⁵³ Alongside and against Foucault, I want to suggest that even if schizophrenic subjectivity cannot “project” outward toward past or future, it is available to intrusions of past and future into its perpetual precarious present. Indeed, schizophrenic subjectivity, like all subjectivities, is vulnerable to violent irruptions of traumatic pasts and precarious futures into its timespace. (When the intrusion arrives from the past, some call it *haunting*). If such trauma and precarity are frequent features in the lifeworlds of schizophrenic persons, it is not merely because of an ontogenetic unwieldiness of mind. Trauma and precarity are socio-genetic effects of vicious persecution and stigmatization that assail mad persons under anti-mad regimes.⁵⁴ In such a context, there is no need to “project” outward toward past or future; past trauma and future precarity are prone to break in. Schizophrenic time undoes tidy distinctions between “then,” “now,” and “hereafter.” “Now” might last for eternity (as Foucault proposes) and eternity might pile into now (as I contend).

Hortense Spillers exposes how antiblack slavery sought to imprison the enslaved in an utterly abject perpetual present. According to Spillers, antiblack slavocracy cast black slaves as “the essence of stillness,” “fixed in time and space,” manifesting an “undynamic human state” and thus unfit for modernity.⁵⁵ Proslavery discourse alleged that such fixity was an ontological quality of black slaves; meanwhile, slavocratic rule imposed fixity (in the form of physical and mental fetters) on those slaves, fabricating tautological “proof” of its own specious claims. Even beyond formal abolition, antiblackness conspires to excise blacks from history and imperil their futurity, consigning them to an always already embattled now. Indeed, antiblackness attempts to weaponize a sort of schizophrenic time against black people.

What insurgent insights might we glean in and against such a beleaguered state?⁵⁶ I want to suggest that the inhabitant of schizophrenic time achieves a dogged wariness and vigilance while confronting that “chaos of successive” presents, each presenting novel perils and opportunities. Schizophrenic time collapses everything into an exigent now, thus frustrating fantasies of triumphal teleology and thwarting the seductions of nostalgia. Confronting constant “collapse” and “chaos” induces a heightened alert and existential paranoia that qualifies these subjects for—and yet potentially paralyzes them amid—the terror and turmoil of the world in which they live, *in which we all live*. Vis-à-vis the ongoing history of slavery and the persistence of antiblackness, schizophrenic time attunes us to a terrible truth: When atrocious pasts and ominous futures collide upon our present, as Morrison’s ghost reminds us, “it is always now.”⁵⁷

Adrienne Kennedy's 1964 play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, unfurls an elaborate dramatization of schizophrenic time. The "pallid Negro" protagonist of *Funnyhouse* cohabits that house with her multiple personalities and psychotic hallucinations made manifest in a drama that bizarrely skews subjectivity, space, and time. That protagonist experiences herself as first-century Jesus Christ, nineteenth-century British royalty, and twentieth-century Congolese freedom-fighting martyr colliding in a mishmash of trauma within the ever-arriving and ever-vanishing present of theatrical performance.⁵⁸ Portraying its protagonist's terrifying life-world, *Funnyhouse* yields devastating critiques of racial and sexual abjection in civil rights-era America.

From civil rights, I pivot to another US-based and globally resonant black liberation struggle, #BlackLivesMatter (BLM). In particular, I want to engage the work of an emcee popularly associated with the latter movement: Kendrick Lamar. He came to mainstream fame in 2012 and 2013 (the same period when Trayvon Martin's killing and George Zimmerman's acquittal haunted American public spheres and invigorated black protest movements) and has since emerged as a preeminent voice of "conscious" hip-hop in the BLM zeitgeist. In confessional songs, Lamar bares something of his psychic interior—fraught with existential crises, effervescent joy, "suicidal thoughts," "depression," triumph, self-doubt, self-loathing, and self-love—all while exposing systems of racial, sexual, and economic hegemony that tempt and taunt him.⁵⁹ In "The Blacker the Berry," a track on his 2015 *To Pimp a Butterfly* album, Lamar performs a mad persona, explicitly invoking schizophrenia and activating schizophrenic time.

For the first twenty seconds of the song, Lamar mumbles and growls barely decipherable words over high, ominous strings and blaring bass. To mumble, slur, speak aloud to oneself, or utter protracted stretches of speech incoherent to normative hearing is to attract the pathologizing logics of psychonormativity. Furthermore, paroxysmal nonverbal vocalizations like hisses, shrieks, grunts, and growls are often labeled animalistic and crazy. By opening the song with an extended passage of mumbled and growled words, Lamar heralds the madness to come.

Even when those opening words are deciphered and transcribed, they resist glib understanding:

Everything black, I don't want black
I want everything black, I ain't need black
Some white, some black, I ain't mean black
I want everything black⁶⁰

Lamar recites a series of self-contradictions, suggesting profound indecision or perhaps a psychic unruliness commensurate with phenomenal

madness. In the verses above, blackness is alternately claimed and denied, desired and rejected in a sort of intrapsychic tug-of-war. In fact, these contradictory declarations read like a man debating with an antagonistic voice inside his head. Within the purview of schizophrenic time, he appears to veer among a succession of nows, each disjointed from the one before, each fraught with the history and imminence of antiblackness. Lamar performs a schizophrenic temporality that fractures continuity, resists coherency, refuses resolution, and yields a series of paradoxes.

In a subsequent verse, Lamar declares that “I’m black as the moon.” Since the moon typically appears pale to earthly observers, this declaration contravenes conventional logic. Any radical departure from normative perception is vulnerable to being read as delusional or psychotic. Furthermore, to liken oneself to the moon is to hail ancient myths that the moon itself incites madness—myths embedded in the word *lunatic*, from the Latin root *luna*, meaning moon. When Lamar later proclaims that “I’m black as the heart of a fucking Aryan,” he once again conjures a paradoxical blackness, a blackness whose description inverts expectation. The verse rhetorically blackens persons invested in white racial purity but also likens Lamar, in persona, to an overt agent of antiblackness. He cites this likeness elsewhere on the track when he confesses that he has internalized antiblack disregard for black life.⁶¹ Lamar further conveys callous disregard for life and morbid relish for death in these verses:

Six in the mornin’, fire in the street
Burn, baby burn, that’s all I wanna see
And sometimes I get off watchin’ you die in vain
It’s such a shame they may call me crazy
They may say I suffer from schizophrenia or somethin’⁶²

Lamar describes pyromaniacal pleasure in witnessing burning streets and sadistic joy in “watchin’ you die in vain,” further revealing a maliciously mad persona. He explicitly hails madness in the lyrics—anticipating that others will diagnose him “crazy” and conclude that he “suffer[s] from schizophrenia.” He later concedes that he may be homicidal, but adds that “you made me a killer,” placing the blame on an antiblack “you” who “hates” the rapper and whose plan “is to terminate [his] culture.” In fact, “you” may be antiblackness personified. Lamar proceeds to diagnose the madness within antiblackness: he judges it to be paranoid, antisocial, and self-loathing; he proclaims, “you’re evil” and “you hate me just as much as you hate yourself.”⁶³

In “The Blacker the Berry,” the madness of an antiblack world and the madness of a nihilistic black persona commingle in virulent symbiosis. However, it is crucial to note that these are drastically different iterations

of madness. The fact is that antiblackness and white supremacy are not psychosocial alterity in the modern West; to the contrary, they are psychosocial hegemony. Over the long arc of American history, antiblackness is commensurate with, not divergent from, America's psychosocial norms. In other words, *white supremacy's blues ain't like Lamar's blues*.⁶⁴ Antiblackness's (socially sanctioned) madness ain't like Lamar's (socially censured) madness. Meanwhile, I recognize that Lamar's depiction of a sadistic and malicious person under the sign of "schizophrenia" may contribute to the stigmatization of those living with the condition. However, it is critical to note that the song's potentially schizophrenic protagonist is complex, conscious, charismatic, and empathetic—not a crude, flat caricature. What's more, this potentially "schizophrenic" persona is tasked with the righteous work of repudiating antiblackness. Ultimately, then, Kendrick Lamar activates schizophrenic time and affect to dramatize a malignant madness under regimes of antiblackness. Moreover, he invokes madness to denounce and diagnose antiblackness itself.

"Circles and Circles of Sorrow": Melancholic Time

In the final words of the novel *Sula*, Toni Morrison describes the wail of a woman longing for her deceased friend. In the process, Morrison traces the shape of melancholic time: "[The cry] had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow."⁶⁵ Like depressive time, melancholic time centers sorrow. However, the path and motion of these temporalities diverge. Whereas depressive time slows or else stops to tarry in its grief, melancholia travels along melancholic spirals, zigzags, and circles of sorrow. Described by Sigmund Freud as "pathological mourning,"⁶⁶ melancholia occurs when a subject loses some precious "object," whether person, possession, or ideal. The subject feels profound grief but also festering resentment for that object because it has abandoned her. In an attempt to keep hold of the lost object, she identifies with it and incorporates it—along with the resentment she feels for it—into her ego.

I propose that melancholia is a mode of multidirectional time travel navigated by the melancholic subject-*cum*-time traveler. The process begins when that cherished object is torn away from the melancholic subject. The resulting rupture is a psychic wound and portal: a sort of tear in existential time that opens toward the memory of the lost object. The "pathological" mourner enters that tear in time, commutes backward into a past where the lost object existed, retrieves a phantasm of that lost object, carries it (bound up with resentment and reproach) into the aggrieved present, unloads the sorrowful cargo into the ego, and then repeats the melancholic journey, along circles of sorrow, over and over again.

What insights might the melancholic time traveler teach critical

theory and political praxis? How might melancholia inspire or inform a protest agenda? David Eng and Shinhee Han offer a compelling response to these queries. Theorizing the insurgent uses of melancholia, they highlight its “militant refusal on the part of the ego to let go” which is “at the heart of melancholia’s productive political potentials.”⁶⁷ Melancholic subjects might “refuse to let go” of their lost objects and instead clutch them and brandish them while picketing in circles of sorrow and proclaiming loss. Traversing Anne Cheng’s binary of phenomenal “grief” contra politicized “grievance,” I picture a melancholic picketer whose mournful wails are always already demands for redress.⁶⁸

To further articulate the insurgent potential in melancholic time, I return to the lifeworlds of enslaved people (a melancholic turn and return that I keep performing in this essay). Slavocracy perpetuated a myth of black insentience, casting black slaves as brute subhumans insensitive to pain, estranged from tenderness, and incapable of deep feeling. Slave owners perpetrated astounding physical and psychic abuses—grueling work demands, ruthless acts of physical and sexual torture, whimsical rending of families—on supposedly unfeeling slaves. That rending of families, in particular, meant that enslaved people amassed a colossal store of lost objects. Melancholia was a towering, sprawling structure of feeling in the lifeworlds of slaves.⁶⁹

Eva Tettenborn describes melancholic slaves forced to feign happiness. She writes, “Beyond being an assault on the slave’s sadness, the master’s order to sing or dance . . . or to prepare for a party instead of a funeral . . . is an expression of a severe white anxiety regarding the slave’s potential for melancholia [which] would threaten the system because it presupposes and claims the existence of the black subject and thus contests the limitations imposed on slaves.”⁷⁰ To demand that despondent slaves perform mirth was to impede their ability to process sorrow. Tettenborn persuasively argues that, in such a context, the slave’s melancholic practice of “claiming possession of someone to whom he or she has become attached” undermines the master’s legal prerogative of absolute possession of human chattel.⁷¹ Freud’s melancholia involves the incorporation of the lost object into the self, but according to the logics of chattel slavery, neither that lost object nor even the self belonged to the slave. As Tettenborn illuminates, slavocracy systematically sundered slaves’ the attachments to kin, even melancholic attachments to lost kin.

On very different registers, freedom and unfreedom are the themes that concern Lauryn Hill on her *MTV Unplugged No. 2.0* album. The album’s longest song, “I Gotta Find Peace of Mind,” is a poignant account of rebuking an emotionally abusive partner, vanquishing self-doubt, and striving toward psychic and spiritual redemption. I have elsewhere performed an extended exegesis of the song,⁷² but for present purposes, I want

to remark upon one particular musical gesture that activates melancholic time. Recalling her former subjection to that oppressive partner, Hill hoarsely repeats over and over again, “that old me is left behind” before bursting into sobs. I want to suggest that the phrase “that old [her]” signifies two iterations of bygone Hill. Within the song itself, “that old [her]” refers to the earlier incarnation of herself who battled radical insecurity and endured a hurtful partner. If we interpret the song to have broader autobiographical significance, we might read “that old [her]” as reference to that “forbiddingly perfect” and widely lauded *Miseducation* persona that she would later repudiate. It is possible, then, that Hill’s “old” self is a lost object for which she feels melancholic identification and reproach. Toward the song’s end, Hill entreats her audience and herself to “free your mind” and “get free now.” She tearfully repeats the word “free” fifteen times, generating a melancholic riff that is also a freedom chant. It is as though the singer harnesses the kinetic energy in that spinning sorrow and finally lurches loose and freewheels toward freedom. In the process, Hill reminds us that it is possible to chase freedom along melancholic routes.

Unplugged 2.0 was widely lambasted for its melodic redundancy within songs and lengthy interludes between songs. *Newsweek* would lament Hill’s “rambling monologues,” one of which, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, “meanders on for an interminable 12 minutes.”⁷³ The *Village Voice* would proclaim that *Unplugged 2.0* is a “full-length double-CD of wordy strophic strolls that often last six, seven, eight minutes, accompanied solely by a solo guitar Hill can barely strum (the first finger-picked figure occurs on track 10, where it repeats dozens upon dozens of times, arghh).”⁷⁴ These frustrated reviewers describe and decry a performance in melancholic time: a sonic sadness that repeats itself over and over again (“dozens and dozens of times”), vexes normative listening, bespeaks melancholia, and gathers energy in circles of sorrow.

I now turn to one final figure performing in melancholic time within postmillennial black music. Singer-songwriter Frank Ocean is acclaimed for his wistful, minimalist anthems of romance and heartache. His 2016 visual album, *Endless*, is an intoxicating brew of hip-hop, R&B, electronica, and ambient music about three central themes: love, loss, and labor. More often than not, songs on the album take up the excruciating labor of lost love, which is to say, melancholia. If the album’s lyrics suggest that love is work, he stages a striking visual analog in the video of *Endless*. Accompanying his dreamy vocals are scenes of multiple Frank Oceans—he is visually cloned into two and sometimes three figures—who mill about in an industrial workshop space. The Oceans are laboring to build a wooden spiral staircase that ultimately extends just a few yards into the air before ending abruptly or, from another vantage point, not properly ending at all—and thus achieving endlessness.

The track “Wither,” in particular, activates melancholic affect and time:

Over where the trees burn down
Place where the fields went down in flames
You could put a hole in the ground
Throw seeds and dance for rain
.....
There’s no place to hide out here
These skies are filled with planes
And both our hands are filthy
Pointing up at the moon
.....
Hope a garden grows where we dance this afternoon
Hope our children walk by spring and flowers bloom
Hope they’ll get to see my color
Know that I’ve enjoyed sunshine
Pray they’ll get to see me, me wither
See me wither⁷⁵

“Wither” is a song about death and romance, wherein the only instrumental accompaniment is a strumming guitar that slowly, listlessly alternates the same two chords over and over again. The lyrics begin with the description of burning trees, burning fields, and a “hole in the ground” that, in the aftermath of fiery destructions, might be taken for a grave. However, the fourth line reveals that the hole is actually a seedbed, the tomb is womb. On the heels of this revelation, the lyrics shift to the livelier processes of planting seeds and dancing with a sweetheart under the sky. In fact, in the space cleared by the razing of trees, Ocean and his companion will sow something new in the soil. They will dance to bring rain, whet and wet their romance, and ready the soil beneath their feet to grow a garden.

If melancholia is the vexed convergence of love and loss, Ocean poeticizes this confluence when he proclaims, “Pray [our children] get to see me, me wither / See me wither.” He exploits the phonetic similarity between “with her” and “wither” such that the sound signifying his love also signifies his decay. Notably, this ambiguous phrase contains the song’s only reference to the gender of the lover. It is possible, then, that the word is only “wither” and the lover is not “her” at all—an intriguing prospect in light of Ocean’s 2012 revelation of same gender desire.⁷⁶ Alongside that disclosure, Ocean released the album *Channel Orange* (2012) that included a track called “Bad Religion.” The latter song’s love object is unambiguously “him,” but he does not love Ocean in return:

This unrequited love
to me it's nothing but a one-man cult
and cyanide in my styrofoam cup
I can never make him love me
never make him
love me
love me⁷⁷

In the passage above, what begins as a concession that “I can never make him / love me” soon sounds like a petition for him to “love me / love me / love me . . .” This shift from concession to petition, from surrendering the lost object to doggedly claiming it, might signal a transition into a melancholia, a shift to melancholic time. As Ocean repeats “love me” ten times, he enunciates a queer melancholia: a sorrow that echoes over and over again in the cavernous void left by “him.” When Ocean divulges that he’s holding a cyanide-laced drink, he invokes homophobic tropes of the tragic, lonely, finally suicidal queer. Of course, if queerness is tragic it is because structural homophobia operates to obstruct, imperil, thwart, mute, kill, and erase queer personhood and love. Thus, on one register, “Bad Religion” is an artifact of the queer tragic: a testament to the abject precarity of queer affection in antiqueer worlds. At the same time, the song is an act of black queer defiance, an incantatory utterance of black queer longing, and a loud clamor for black queer love amid the din of antiblackness and homophobia.

I now return briefly to “Wither.” As the track nears its close, Ocean wails the word “be” eight times. The word is dubbed over the final verses so that one hears “be, be, be, be, be, be, be, be” floating through the songscape, untethered to the syntax of those verses. It sounds to me like a mantric affirmation of existence, of *being*, in the face of withering that awaits. Indeed, in Ocean’s custody, melancholic riffs are a technology for articulating imbrications of death and romance, misery and fantasy, loss and love—especially fraught intersections for a black queer subject. It is poignant that Ocean gave his 2017 album (the home of “Wither”) the title *Endless*. Remember that melancholia does not want to rest or subside. It would rather wander in “circles and circles of sorrow,” with “no bottom” and “no top,” with no beginning and no end. It would rather be, well, endless.

Coda

I have assembled an ensemble of black musicians performing in madtime: a manic time that rushes forth to defiantly demand change; a depressive time that slowly nurses its sorrow and refuses to glibly get over it; a schizophrenic time that is “always now” and eschews easy nostalgia or teleology; and a melancholic time that travels backward to retrieve and carry its lost object, no matter how heavy. Having culled lessons from each mode of madtime, I want to briefly acknowledge the risks that haunt these temporalities: manic time might rush recklessly into danger; depressive time might become so wedged in its woe that it cannot ever get free; schizophrenic time might be crushed between history’s hurt and future’s threat; melancholic time might break beneath its heaping load of lost objects. These admissions do not fundamentally undermine the efficacy of the madness unfurled on these pages. Madness, after all, is multifarious and ambivalent: potentially a wellspring of inspiration and/or pit of despair. I have chosen, here, to wade in the wellspring even as I remain acutely aware of the pit.

I leave the reader-listener to linger in the echo of mad music and also in the resonance of these parting questions: How might music in madtime enhance our playlists for protest and soundtracks for revolution? What might protest movements achieve by staging actions in madtime—hasty or slow or still or repeating—and at what costs? How might madtime be incorporated into the cadence of our speeches, the formats of our historiographies, and the timing of our demands? While seeking justice, how might we conscientiously activate madtime in the very rhythm of our footsteps, our keystrokes, our chants, our dances, our breaths? How might we critically, radically, ethically go mad without losing our minds?

Notes

This essay is culled from my forthcoming book, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity*. Many thanks to the *Social Text* editorial collective, the “Time as Actor” working group at the 2014 meeting of the American Society of Theatre Research, as well as Guthrie Ramsey, Joseph Roach, Tim Rommen, Isaiah Wooden, Aida Mbowa, and Wendell Holbrook for feedback on various iterations of this material. The epigraph comes from Nina Simone and Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 89–90.

1. Four black girls were murdered in that terrible church bombing. Their names are Addie Mae Collins (age 14), Carol Denise McNair (age 11), Carole Robertson (age 14), and Cynthia Wesley (age 14). The expression *freedom dreams deferred* merges Robin D. G. Kelley’s “freedom dreams” and Langston Hughes’s “dream deferred.” See Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*; Hughes, *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 426.

2. In “Afro-Modernity,” Michael Hanchard writes, “Racial time is defined as the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially

dominant and subordinate groups. When coupled with the distinct temporal modalities that relations of dominance and subordination produce, racial time has operated as a structural effect upon the politics of racial difference. Its effects can be seen in the daily interactions—grand and quotidian in multiracial societies” (253). For other critical meditations on blackness and time, see, for example Bhabha, “‘Race,’ Time and the Revision of Modernity”; Hartman, “The Time of Slavery”; Johnson, “Possible Pasts”; and Warren, “Black Time.”

3. In “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King Jr. (icon of the civil rights movement whose revolutionary richness is ritually misremembered in the American public sphere and collective memory, often abstracted into a milquetoast dream or flattened into a token of assimilation) wrote these words on racial time: “I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was ‘well timed’ in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’ It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never’” (69).

4. Simone, “Mississippi Goddam” (1964). Lyrics transcribed by author.

5. Simone, “Mississippi Goddam” (1965a); “Mississippi Goddam” (1965b).

6. Simone’s description of psychotic symptoms appear in Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 111. Concerning her alleged schizophrenia diagnosis, see Cohodas, *Princess Noire*, 377. Regarding her alleged diagnosis with manic depressive disorder, see Garbus, *What Happened, Miss Simone?*

7. Gaines, “Quadruple-Consciousness of Nina Simone,” 253.

8. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 89.

9. While my focus in this essay is madness and time, I take up madness and sound in *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*.

10. The very term *madtime* refuses a syntactical break between *mad* and *time*, squeezing them together like some of the compressions of time I describe in this essay. In *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*, I extensively explore what madness sounds like.

11. Halberstam in Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” 182.

12. This “narrative coherence” is an ideal—a sort of aspirational fiction—but not an ontological uniformity or phenomenological consistency. WST contains messy ruptures, tensions, and self-contradictions that must be effaced and obscured to maintain a sort of ruse of self-synchronicity.

13. I use the term *metaphysical* to reference knowledge claims concerning deep, abiding, fundamental structures of very existence—knowledge claims that exceed measurement by the tools of empirical science but are nevertheless articulated as firm universal truths. For powerful critiques of the racialization of metaphysics, see Warren, “Black Time”; and Lackey, “Redeeming the Post-Metaphysical Promise of J. Saunders Redding’s ‘America.’”

14. Warren, “Black Time,” 58, 60.

15. *Ibid.*, 62 (emphasis in original).

16. Freeman, *Time Binds*, xv.

17. See, for example, *ibid.*; Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities”; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Love, *Feeling Backward*; and Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

18. Concerning the claim that Africa exists outside of history, see Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 91–99.

19. Remarkably, some credit Bolden as the founder or inventor of jazz music. See, for example, Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya*, 35–36. Although Bolden was decisive to the advent of the music, the fact is that jazz is the culmina-

tion of collaborative contributions of innumerable agents of its formation (from West African griots to enterprising slaves to French soldiers) over decades or centuries.

20. For the most extensive account of Bolden's life, see Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden*.

21. See Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism in his "Author's Preface." I am aware of the revolutionary potentiality Marx ascribes to the proletariat, a potentiality that is precisely antithetical to the interests of capitalism. However, the state-sanctioned occasion of Labor Day honors proletariat labor inasmuch as it sustains and benefits capital.

22. See Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden*. Despite the dearth of archival evidence of his life, the legend of Bolden has been taken up by a wide range of artists including Jelly Roll Morton, Nina Simone, August Wilson, Michael Ondaatje, and Natasha Trethewey. See Morton, "I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say"; Simone, "Hey Buddy Bolden"; Wilson, *Seven Guitars*; Ondaatje, *Coming through Slaughter*; and Trethewey, "Calling His Children Home."

23. The improvisational content of black culture is a central concern of Moten in *In the Break*.

24. Hoffman, *NPR Classical Music Companion*, 239.

25. In this essay, I do not attempt to generate or adhere to a clinical diagnostic for any of these conditions. Rather, my interest is specifically on how they might impact one's experience of time.

26. To date, the most extensive collection of scholarship in mad studies is LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, eds., *Mad Matters*. The anthology that takes up critical, ethical, and political dimensions of madness.

27. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, "Bipolar I Disorder."

28. Remarkably, several iconic jazzmen after Bolden would be institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals and asylums. These men include Lester Young, Bud Powell, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, and Charles Mingus. I take up the figure of the mad jazzman further in *How to Go Mad*.

29. Concerning Mingus's brief stint in Bellevue, see Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 327–48. Hortense Spillers culls this title for her influential essay on race and psychoanalysis, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race."

30. Mingus, "All the Things You Could Be." Introduction transcribed by author.

31. Ella Fitzgerald, "All the Things You Are." Lyrics transcribed by author. Remarkably, Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Carmen McRae, Michael Jackson, Norm Lewis and Audra McDonald, and many others have recorded vocal covers of the song. John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis, among many others, have recorded jazz instrumental renditions.

32. In *How to Go Mad*, I ponder some specific "things" that this imagined child of Freud's wife might become. In the process, I unfurl a meditation on Freudian "family" drama, "miscegenated" psychoanalysis, and epistemological inheritance.

33. Regarding Hill's public persona during the *Miseducation* era, Sia Michel declared "She's almost forbiddingly perfect, but so thanks-to-god about it that it's impossible to begrudge her" (Michel, "Dream-Girl Disenfranchised").

34. I explore these events in depth in Bruce, "People Inside My Head."

35. Hill, "Consumerism." Lyrics transcribed by author.

36. Zafar, "In Defense of Lauryn Hill"; Richards, "Lauryn Hill Moves Her R&B toward Progressive Rock."

37. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 4–5.

38. Concerning Afro-alienation, in *Bodies in Dissent* Brooks writes that “just as Brecht calls for actors to adapt ‘socially critical’ techniques in their performances so as to generate ‘alienation effects’ and to ‘awaken’ audiences to history, so too can we consider these historical figures as critically de-familiarizing their own bodies by way of performance in order to yield alternative racial and gender epistemologies. By using performance tactics to signify of the social, cultural and ideological machinery that circumscribes African Americans, they intervene in the spectacular and systemic representational abjection of black peoples” (5).

39. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, “Bipolar I Disorder.”

40. In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich also explores how one might mobilize depression by tarrying within it. Illuminating the “productive possibilities of depression,” her work “aims to be patient with the moods and temporalities of depression, not moving too quickly to recuperate them or put them to good use. It might instead be important to let depression linger, to explore the feeling of remaining or resting in sadness without insisting that it be transformed or reconceived” (14).

41. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 23.

42. For a compelling account of how slave owners worked to control all aspects of slaves’ time and, indeed, weaponized temporality within the arsenal of domination, see Johnson, “Possible Pasts,” 488–99.

43. Concerning the use of work slowdowns within campaigns of subterranean resistance, see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Regarding the potential resistant power of stillness, see Young, *Embodying Black Experience*. Young illuminates historical cases in which the “performance of stillness opens up new possibilities for critical reading strategies, and, indeed, positionings for cultural historians and scholars” (44).

44. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, “Bipolar I Disorder.”

45. In their suggestive essay “Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” Eng and Han make a similar claim about melancholia’s politically resonant refusal to simply move on. However, melancholia is categorically provoked by and directed toward a lost object. Depressive, on the other hand, is not necessarily attached to or aimed at a lost object. It may be quite diffuse.

46. Baraka, “Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note,” 3. At the time that he published this 1961 poem, Baraka was known as LeRoi Jones.

47. Simone, “Who Knows Where the Time Goes?” Lyrics transcribed by author.

48. In the aftermath of King’s death, Simone wrote and recorded a musical elegy and eulogy for him called “Why? (The King of Love Is Dead).”

49. Bruce, “The People inside My Head, Too,” 379–81.

50. For a music journalist’s account of Hill’s lateness, see Harvilla, “The Disorientation of Lauryn Hill.” Tabloid media has also devoted much attention to Hill’s tardiness; see Jagannathan, “Lauryn Hill Slammed after She Shows Up Two Hours Late”; and Webber, “Lauryn Hill Explains Her Concert Tardiness.”

51. Wallace, “Amen! (D’Angelo’s Back).”

52. Furthermore, Hill has borne six children, a noteworthy accomplishment of black maternal productivity—which Hill seems to prioritize over commercial music productivity.

53. Foucault, *Madness*, 29, 47.

54. Frantz Fanon decisively differentiates between “ontogeny” and “sociogeny” in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Ontogenetic conditions originate in the ontology of the individual whereas sociogenetic traits result from sociocultural causes. He writes, “Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud

insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny" (*Black Skins*, 11.)

55. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 78.

56. Morrison, *Beloved*, 210. In "The Time of Slavery," Saidiya Hartman similarly asserts "the distinction between the past and the present founders on the interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath" (758).

57. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari tout the insurgent potential within schizophrenia. To have them tell it, the condition called schizophrenia is a locus of unwieldy free-flowing desire that resists repressive incursions of capitalism and psychoanalysis. The latter, according to Deleuze and Guattari, are systems of power that curb and stagnate desire, interpellating subjects as neurotic, repressed, constrained, governable, and readily available to fascism. The schizophrenic is "somewhere else, beyond or behind or below [the] problems" (24) that concern the normative (read: neurotic, governable) ego, residing perhaps in madtime and mad space.

58. Regarding the ephemerality of performance, see Phelan, *Unmarked*.

59. It is not clear whether Lamar has been clinically diagnosed with depression or is using the term colloquially to describe intense sadness. See Markman, "Kendrick Lamar Talks."

60. Lamar, "The Blacker the Berry." Lyrics from genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-the-blacker-the-berry-lyrics.

61. Lamar's final verses in the song read, "So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street / When gang banging make me kill a nigga blacker than me? / Hypocrite!" Lamar, "The Blacker the Berry." Lyrics transcribed by author.

62. Lamar, "The Blacker the Berry." Lyrics transcribed by author.

63. Toni Morrison similarly diagnoses whiteness, declaring to Charlie Rose "The people who . . . practice racism are bereft. There is something distorted about the psyche. . . . It's a profound neurosis that nobody examines for what it is. It *feels* crazy. It *is* crazy . . . It has just as much of a deleterious effect on white people . . . as it does on black people."

64. I'm riffing on the title of Bebe Moore Campbell's 1992 novel, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, inspired by the murder of Emmett Till and the courage of his mother, Mamie Till-Bradley.

65. Morrison, *Sula*.

66. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 587.

67. Eng and Han, "Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," 365. Eng and Han propose a melancholic ethic: "[The] preservation of the threatened object might be seen . . . as a type of ethical hold on the part of the melancholic ego. The mourner, in contrast, has no such ethics. The mourner is perfectly content with killing off the lost object, declaring it to be dead yet again within the domain of the psyche."

68. Concerning "racial melancholia" and the distinction between grief and grievance, see Cheng, *Racial Melancholia*.

69. I am inspired by José Esteban Muñoz's claim that melancholia operates as a "'structure of feeling' that is necessary and not always counterproductive and negative. I am proposing that melancholia, for blacks, queers, or any queers of color, is not a pathology but an integral part of everyday lives. . . . It is this melancholia that is part of our process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians, and gay men" (*Disidentifications*, 74).

70. Tettenborn, "Melancholia as Resistance," 109.

71. Ibid., 109.
72. See Bruce, “The People Inside My Head.”
73. *Newsweek*, “Songs in the Key of Strife”; Browne, “Lauryn Hill’s ‘Unplugged’ Draining.”
74. Christgau, “Not Hop, Stomp.”
75. Ocean, “Wither.” Lyrics transcribed by author.
76. In a letter posted to his public *Tumblr* account, Ocean recounted his nineteen-year-old self falling in love with a young man in an enchanted summer when “time would glide.” Eventually, though, the love became “malignant.” Ocean, “thank you’s.”
77. Ocean, “Bad Religion.” Lyrics transcribed by author.

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