

**Abstract** This article examines how literary imaginaries of the haptic in Black speculative fiction attend to the racial politics of the Anthropocene and the centrality of sensory praxis to ecological thought. Reading Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M Archive* and N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy, the article considers how ecological touch—or what Erin Robinsong calls *geohaptics*—emerges as a central literary trope that imagines new forms of sensory wayfinding and worldmaking that unearth and contest the epoch's racial ecologies of power. Expanding the concept's uses and forms, what the article terms Gumbs's and Jemisin's *Black feminist geohaptics* crafts new political forms of sensory dwelling and planetary futures of environmental liberation for Black life. Sense, these works show, makes legible and transforms the Anthropocene's geographies of power, unearthing how the categories of the human, inhuman, and more than human are generated and mobilized within the matrix of domination. Their works articulate the production of Black women's geographies within and against the racial, patriarchal, and colonial Anthropocene, orienting sense and touch as central political figurations for anticolonial and abolitionist ecological thought.

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There's an air of the broken world—and revolutionary geology predicts this waft in time, this disruptive plume, insurgency's panache—that just keeps on tearing shit up and swirling it around. And it seems like there's always someone who can't help but ask how to survive intact in and as that solidity of waste and shame that comes at the expense of spirit.

—Fred Moten, *Black and Blur*, 2017

we broke the earth and now we fall through time. deep gashes in the ground. we scale the edges of our knowing. the smoother the worse, the more jagged the more better. what we stand on is not masonry. it is the torn place unhealed. the footholds come from how unclean the break.

—Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive*, 2018

In Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018), a hybrid-genre speculative poem and archive that documents a postapocalyptic environmental future, geology is pictured as a wounded planetary body whose "deep gashes in the ground" shape the "jagged" and "torn" footholds of the broken earth (139). Footholds, as geology's sculpted bodies, become the site where planetary damage is made legible through touch, the mode through which, as the epigraph above states, "we scale the edges of our knowing" in the flashpoint of the Anthropocene. Touch, as the narrator-archivist tells us, reveals the knowledge that "the cracks where the earthquakes expressed themselves were exactly the same contours of the fissures in our minds and the breaks. all the breaks in our hearts" (9). This body-land dialectic cultivates connectivities between biological and geological life through touch: "do you know how long it takes to train hairs that would stand on end at any touch to become pores open with thanksgiving? . . . once upon a time the core of the earth made the magma solid, built crust around itself where dreams could safely plant and grow. we are of that lineage" (78). *M Archive* presents hapticity as a more-than-human heuristic that emplaces humans in intimate geological lifeworlds across vast time frames and geographies. As the narrator-archivist further notes, "If you could look close enough (or listen carefully enough, the critical geologists would have corrected), you could see the churning planet making herself brown" and feel the "energy close to the core of the earth where the planet felt more alive, soft, hot, and in production" (23). If you could look, listen, and feel more closely the animate planet in motion—this centering of embodied knowledge articulates a geophysics of sense in which haptic bodies conjure intimate forms of life with the earth and its sensuous materialities of embodiment, perception, and transformation. It conjures what Fred Moten (2017) writes as the insurgency of "revolutionary geology" that, materializing within the "air of the broken world," induces new domains of environmental judgment.

A different geophysics of sense appears in N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy (*The Fifth Season* [2015], *The Obelisk Gate* [2016], and *The Stone Sky* [2017]), a speculative fiction series that chronicles a climate-ravaged Earth in the unknown future, characterized by seasons of massive climate catastrophes that continually transform a supercontinent named the Stillness. An Anthropocene allegory of everyday climate catastrophes, the trilogy introduces orogenes, a fantastical race of people who become crucial to human survival because they can

seismically sense and shape the very geology of the continent through special sensory organs that grant them “awareness of the movements of the earth” (Jemisin 2015: 465). In one early scene, the trilogy’s protagonist, Essun, and her companion Alabaster perform orogeny to quell an impending cataclysmic earthquake:

She feels her own connection to the earth, her own orogenic awareness. . . . Alabaster has chained them together somehow, using her strength to amplify his own. . . .

And then they are together, diving into the earth in tandem, spiraling through the massive, boiling well of death that is the hot spot. It’s huge—miles wide, bigger than a mountain. . . .

... But then it becomes easy, easy to smooth the ripples and seal the cracks and thicken the broken strata so that a new fault does not form here where the land has been stressed and weakened. She can see lines of striation across the land’s surface with a clarity that she has never known before. She smooths them, tightens the earth’s skin around them with a surgical focus. . . . And as the hot spot settles into just another lurking menace and the danger passes, she comes back to herself. (127–28)

A contradictory grammar of animacy displaces the categorical divisions of human/nonhuman and life/nonlife, as Essun and Alabaster subdue the earth’s rumbling strata in a meeting of equal force through orogenic terraforming. As Essun and Alabaster “dive” into the earth to smooth out erupting hot spots, minerals burst onto the narrative stage in an entwined dance of agency and affectivity. Showcasing geology as a sensory nexus of body-land relationalities, Jemisin’s trilogy, like *M Archive*, imagines a sensuous geology whereby bodies intimately interface with inhuman lifeworlds through haptic wayfinding and place-making. *M Archive* and the Broken Earth trilogy show how emergent forms of life sitting at the juncture of geological and biological worlds materialize first and foremost through sense. Sense, as these works further show, makes legible and transforms the Anthropocene’s geographies of power, unearthing how the categories of the human, inhuman, and more than human are generated across race, gender, and matter.

This article examines how literary imaginaries of the haptic in Black speculative fiction attend to the racial politics of the Anthropocene and the centrality of sensory praxis to ecological thought. In what follows, I consider how ecological touch—or what Erin Robinson calls *geohaptics*—emerges as a central trope in Gumbs’s and Jemisin’s speculative climate fictions that imagine new forms of

sensory wayfinding and worldmaking that unearth and contest the Anthropocene's racial ecologies of power. *Geohaptics* names the "extreme intimacy of ecological entanglement, via the air, water, and matter we take in and continually re-become," describing how sensory experiences "soften and move through borders of discrete or individual bodies or substances" (Robinson 2018: 39).<sup>1</sup> Expanding the concept's uses and forms, what I term Gumbs's and Jemisin's *Black feminist geohaptics* crafts new political forms of sensory dwelling and planetary futures of environmental liberation for Black life. These works map the making of Black ecologies—the "foremost sites of ongoing injury, gratuitous harm, and premature death" and the "insurgent visions of an environmental future free of the relations and geographies engendered by the racial capitalocene" (Roane and Hosbey 2019)<sup>2</sup>—by pinpointing the epoch's forms of sensory necro/biopower, on the one hand, and mapping abolitionist, anticolonial ecologies fashioned through insurgent geohaptics, on the other. Demonstrating how the senses configure different forms of ecological relations that demarcate or undo the boundaries of the (in)human, these works read race as sensory assemblages of embodiment and perception that entwine with the disciplining of humans and nonhumans across race, gender, and matter. Black feminist geohaptics assembles new forms of attunement and animacy by ecologizing sense as more-than-human placemaking praxes that upend the ontological partitions between human/nonhuman, life/nonlife, and subject/object that underwrite Western colonial metaphysics. The attendance to Black women's geographies (McKittrick 2006) within and against the racial, patriarchal, and colonial Anthropocene articulates an ethics of ecological relationality and sensory freedom whose Black feminist and ecological frameworks are neither irreducible nor inextricable from one another—a coalitional theory of Black liberation, ecological alterity, and justice that Chelsea Frazier (2020) theorizes as Black feminist ecological thought (see also Ducre 2018). Their Black feminist sensory imaginations orient touch and perception as central political figurations for anticolonial and abolitionist ecological thought.

By illuminating sense's central role in mapping the Anthropocene's racial ecologies, these speculative fictions imagine new distributions of the sensible, the systemic apportionment of political power and life in which "aesthetic acts as configurations of experience . . . create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity" (Rancière 2004: 9).<sup>3</sup> What forms of animacy and attunement attend the broken earth of the Anthropocene, in which the

entanglements of inanimate matter and racial formation generate categories of the human and inhuman? Touch, as Gumbs and Jemisin show, animates new attunements to more-than-human lifeworlds; in turn, non-human lifeworlds, equipped with their own repertoire of affectivity, agency, and autopoiesis, decenter the human sensorium as the proprietary seat of liberal humanist personhood. This haptic imagination orients sense and sensation as intersubjective forms and processes through which bodies encounter more-than-human forces, thereby displacing humanist perspective and power. Seen this way, the architecture of perception itself emerges as a reciprocal mode of more-than-human assembly that make personhood and placemaking possible as such. Black feminist relationality forges these novel ecologies by engaging, and undoing, the categories of the (in)human that propel the “matrix of domination” (Collins [1990] 2000: 18). Inventing alternative, speculative ecologies of more-than-human intimacies, *M Archive's* and the Broken Earth trilogy's Black feminist geohaptics show how “geography, the material world, is infused with sensations and distinct ways of knowing,” whose “alterability of space and place” (McKittrick 2006: ix) redefine the human as sensory praxis (McKittrick 2015). Sense becomes the modality through which abolitionist, more-than-human ecologies are felt, reimagined, and transformed.

### Touching the Broken Earth

In the last decade, two dominant paradigms have animated environmental and Anthropocene studies, often in conflict and contestation: the school of new materialisms revitalizing the primacy of nonhuman ontologies and agencies, on one hand, and new and ongoing analyses of the epoch's ecologies of power via race, gender, disability, colonialism, and capitalism, on the other. In tandem with work critiquing the expunction of power and difference in dominant Anthropocene and new materialist theories, a growing body of work has productively interrogated the intersection of these two areas of critical inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Such approaches examine how nonhuman worlds, such as those of animals, minerals, energy, waste, and infrastructure, converge with and generate the political domains of race, capitalism, and colonialism. As Sylvia Wynter (2003: 260, 267) argues, forms of racial mattering and material formations of race are propelled by the “coloniality of being,” whereby the formation of the white universal human subject is legitimized through racial hierarchies that coemerge with and coshape the “systemic stigmatization of the Earth in terms of its being made of a vile and base matter.” In the case of antiblackness and its racial

ontologies, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020: 3) argues, “the fleshy being of blackness is experimented with as if it were infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, such that blackness is produced as sub/super/human at once, a form where form shall not hold.” Examining the production and disciplining of bodies, Mel Y. Chen’s (2012: 55) theory of animacy engages the transmutation of racialized, gendered bodies into inanimate, abject matter under Western coloniality’s animacy hierarchies, foregrounding how animacy is “a craft of the senses” that “endows our surroundings with life, death, and things in between.” Put together, these adaptive configurations of race and matter manufacture the fantasies and fictions of the Anthropocene’s racial ecologies.

Where and how, then, do these forms of life emerge? Dana Luciano (2015: 7) argues that the “most compelling contribution of the new materialisms is not conceptual or analytic, strictly speaking, but sensory,” in which the attendance to nonhuman matter fundamentally posits “a reorganizing of the senses.”<sup>5</sup> Seen this way, critical couplings of feminist, queer, decolonial, and critical race theories with new materialisms potentialize “rematerializations of race” in which racial formation is understood as “synthetic and syncretic” by tracing “its material-semiotic links to places where it no longer seems to be ‘about’ race at all” (Huang 2017; see also Tompkins 2016). Sensory thinking offers a vital entry point into these questions by examining the centrality of sense to the making of modernity and to how senses mediate the relations between self and environment, human and nonhuman, subject and object.<sup>6</sup> Such approaches not only understand senses as “assemblages of knowledge, narrative, and historicity that . . . reconceive of the ways in which human and nonhuman bodies alike affect each other simultaneously at and below the threshold of perception” but also work toward a “new critical sensorium . . . in which (white) Man is displaced as the prime locus of sensation” (Fretwell 2018: 7, 2).<sup>7</sup> Seen this way, race materializes as “assemblages of somatosensory experience and intersubjective affectivity” (Sekimoto and Brown 2020: 22) that shape, and are shaped by, various modes of ecological attunement and animacy.

Against this backdrop, ecological attunement and animacy translate into a politics of knowledge that raises the central question of ecology’s scope as a field and object of study, in relation to its different epistemologies that bifurcate ecology as a domain of scientific versus embodied knowledge. In the former, for instance, the transdisciplinary field of Earth system science has produced new frameworks for understanding planetary ecological processes and systems through new technologies

that amass climatological, geological, hydrological, and other environmental data. Similarly, across the earth sciences (geology, ecology, oceanography, hydrology), remote sensing has long provided environmental data by extracting, mapping, and visualizing information from environments through various satellite and sensor technologies. These domains of knowledge become powerful metaphors for engaging planetary thinking, providing “an (auto)biography of humans when humans have become a question for themselves” (Chakrabarty 2019: 30–31). In contradistinction to these approaches, many sensory theorists argue that such forms of scientific knowledge do not adequately apprehend or generate meaningful categories of environmental knowledge and judgment. They theorize instead forms of “intimate sensing” (Porteous 1990: 201) and “sensuous geographies” that center “the senses both as a relationship to a world and the senses as in themselves a kind of structuring of space and defining of place” (Rodaway 1994: 4; see also Serres 2008). This epistemological politics is central to Gumbs and Jemisin’s Black feminist ecologies. In contrast to scientific knowledge, their geohaptic imaginations offer alternative embodied epistemologies that assemble more-than-human lifeworlds, an orientation made clear by the genre markers of *M Archive* as a “speculative documentary work” that is discovered by a future “post-scientist” (Gumbs 2018: xi), and the Broken Earth trilogy’s fantasy mode as an epistemological critique of scientism. Their works read geology as the material and discursive domain through which the earth’s deep-time histories are encountered and where the political ontologies of being and matter are coproduced and entangled with colonialism, race, and gender.

A speculative archive of poems comprising four main elemental archives—“Dirt,” “Sky,” “Fire,” and “Ocean”—that documents the end of the world and emergent Black ecologies in the postapocalyptic future, Gumbs’s *M Archive* illuminates the limits of environmental judgment borne out of scientific knowledge. One poem identifies the impetus of planetary ecological crisis as the insufficiency of recognizing the sociopolitical stakes of climate apocalypse:

they never proved it, but we know. some of the hand-waving women  
had always known. some of the metaphysicians had been trying to  
say. no one took them literally. until the earth broke apart.  
and then. with the probe technology, with the accurate diagrams.  
with the skilled cave divers going deep into the fault lines. . . .

. . . .

... It became impossible to ignore. (Gumbs 2018: 9)

This passage pinpoints the failure of scientific knowledge—whether produced from probe technologies and diagrams or the study of fault lines—in preventing climate apocalypse and attending to the crucial environmental judgment that the “hand-waving women” and “some of the metaphysicians had been trying to say” all along. “Hindsight is everything,” the narrator-archivist says, “if the biochemists had diverted their energies towards this type of theoretical antioxidant around the time of the explicit emergence of this idea . . . , everything could have been different. if the environmentalists sampling the ozone had factored this in, the possibilities would have expanded exponentially” (6). What, then, is this knowledge, the theoretical antioxidant to scientific knowledge? It is, as *M Archive* tells us, “black feminist metaphysics. which is to say, breathing” (6), a form of ecological relationality that holds “the reality of the radical black porousness of love (aka black feminist metaphysics aka us all of us, *us*)” (7). Prior to the proliferation of scientific data that verified the incontrovertible reality of environmental crisis, “it was the black feminist metaphysicians who first said it wouldn’t be enough,” that is, the fundamental Western-colonial fiction about “one body. the unitary body,” since “one body was not a sustainable unit for the project at hand” and “not the actual scale of breathing” (6). By contrast, the relational metaphysics of *M Archive*—composed of the “black simultaneity of the universe also known as everything also known as the black feminist pragmatic intergenerational sphere” (7)—articulates a different form of felt intimacy with the earth:

we took off our leaden clothes and we skipped out of our concrete shoes and we went barefoot enough to bear the rubble we had created just before. we let the sun touch us and felt what we had done to the ozone in our daze. we noticed that skin was just as thin as it should have been and all that we had been calling skin before were layers of accumulated scars.

we touched each other’s hands and found them warm and ridged with remembering. we traced the lines and found home again and again. home was like a pulse. home was where the hurt was. we lunged and pressed towards each other’s chests. we let longing lead long past our labored lack. we held each other’s hands. they did not break. (83)

In contrast to scientific knowledge, this geohaptic imagination—of people finding “home again and again” through haptic interfacing with the soft earth to feel its “lines” and “pulse”—opens new sensory

geographies in which bodies come into contact with the earth's elemental ecologies of dirt, air, and water. It illustrates how touch, as a form of prosthesis, "invents by drawing the other into relation, thereby qualitatively altering the limits of the emerging touched-touching bodies" to index "a surplus or excess of the biological organism" (Manning 2007: xiv, 155–56). The reciprocity of remembrance and refuge forged through the fusing of bodies and the earth bears witness to ecological catastrophe and resilience through a praxis of situated knowledge and action ("to bear the rubble we had created just before," "we touched each other's hands . . . and found home again and again"). The description of their skin being "just as thin as it should have been" with "layers of accumulated layers" mirrors the broken earth's own bodily strata, linking violence against the earth and the body. This Black feminist spatial imagination shows how, as Katherine McKittrick (2006, ix) writes, the "earth is also skin."

*M Archive's* sensuous geographies open up the elemental genealogies and ecologies that make up the geographical and social afterlives of the Middle Passage. Written in close engagement with M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2006), *M Archive* examines how the Middle Passage continues to inhabit the climate-ravaged future by showing that "the crossing was not only a geographic transfer of millions of people but also a movement of energies and elements into a relationship that persists, a material and conceptual relationship we navigate with the potential and compelled crossings we make in each movement" (x). This Middle Passage elemental afterlife is illustrated in a key poem wherein a group of "critical black marine biologists, scientists of the dark matter under fathoms," discovers the possible "causal relationship between the bioluminescence in the ocean and the bones of the millions of transatlantic dead": the magnesium and calcium of the transatlantic dead "has infiltrated the system of even the lowest filter feeders. so any light that you find in the ocean right now cannot be separated from the stolen light of those we long for every morning" in the ocean, "that place where the evolutionists and creationists all agree that life began" (Gumbs 2018: 11). Orienting the Middle Passage as a planetary afterlife, archive, and ecology, the poem cultivates new epistemologies of ecological dwelling that scientific knowledge cannot provide. Moreover, the knowledge of this elemental historical ecology is made legible through touch, as another poem illustrates wherein future Black oceanists dive into the depths of the ocean and immerse themselves within the deep fathoms that contain the elemental afterlives of the Middle Passage. This journey into the seafloor's

elemental ecologies dramatizes Christina Sharpe's (2016: 41) analysis of the residence time of Africans in the Middle Passage: the "amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean," in which Black people "exist in the residence time of the wake, a time in which 'everything is now.'" Notably, as they descend into the depths, the knowledge they discover develops as a form of sensory dwelling that forges new multispecies intimacies in the realms of the unknown and unknowable: training themselves "not to be afraid of going black. . . . they were not afraid to slow and evolve their breathing. they were not afraid of their kinship with bottom crawlers who could or could not glow. they were not afraid of being touched by what they could never see, never bring back to the light, never have a witness for" (Gumbs 2018: 10). Linking touch to ecological intimacy, knowledge, and wonder that allow bodies to "evolve their breathing" and expand their "kinship" to ordinary and extraordinary nonhuman forms and environments, the poem materializes history itself as an elemental archive written/created by sensuous matter and life forms. Geohaptics reads the Middle Passage as a future-anterior planetary archive and afterlife that continually remakes Black ecologies: it opens up, as Alexander (2006: 7–8) writes, the "urgent task of configuring new ways of being and knowing and to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity."

This Black feminist sensory praxis is exemplified in another poem in "Archive of Dirt":

not big and blue. they were small brown women. the way their hair was silver heaven the way their skin was deep brown earth and how its texture mapped hills and valleys and tributaries of grace. it was there for anyone to see, really. or anyone to hear in the heightening or deepening tones of their voices, in the shaking vibration of their wisdom. if the people could not listen to the air all around them, if they could not place their hands on the cracked earth and know, they would only have had to pay attention to the small brown women who demonstrated it every day in language and action. (Gumbs 2018: 35)

Not "big and blue" but "small brown women"—this passage articulates an epistemological vantage point that begins not with the god's-eye view of the earth from outer space (the "blue marble" image) but with sensuous, situated geographies whose "more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities" show how "bodies have formed themselves in

delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth” (Abram 1996: 22). This sensory becoming and worldmaking—“it was there for anyone to see,” “anyone to hear”—unearths multiscalar Black women’s geographies across place and planet in which ecological judgment emerges through felt experience, knowledge, and collectivity—what Audre Lorde ([1978] 1984) names as the primary register of the erotic. This body-planet dialectic is illustrated in another poem wherein the unnamed protagonist presses her body upon the earth, putting “her face directly in the dirt” that was “hard enough and soft enough to hold her” with “no back to brace her to loop up at the sky”: “Part of the day she pounded the earth with her fists and screamed blame and despair. part of the day she let soil slip through her fingers and felt comforted. most of the day she just acclimated herself to solid breathing and seeing all there was. which was brown” (Gumbs 2018: 68). This passage stages a landscape of felt experience and knowledge—of blame, despair, and comfort—in which the wounds of the broken earth entwine with the woman’s, as the materiality of the Middle Passage’s elements and energies permeate the geographies of the future broken earth. Yet, by intimately lying on and with the earth, breathing and touching open up geographies that “cross into a metaphysics of interdependence” (Alexander 2006: 6). This is a conjuncture of grace and grief in which the “geographic meaning of racialized human geographies is not so much rooted in a paradoxical description as it is a projection of life, livability, and possibility” (McKittrick 2006: 143).

If *M Archive* “centers Black life, Black feminist metaphysics, and the theoretical imperative of attending to Black bodies in a way that doesn’t seek to prove that Black people are human but instead calls preexisting definitions of the human into question” (Gumbs 2018: xi), Gumbs articulates this futurity by locating felt intimacies with the earth that resist the racial, colonial, and patriarchal terrains that shape Anthropocenic life. A similar geology of sense appears in Jemisin’s Broken Earth trilogy in which the genealogies of slavery, antiblackness, climate apocalypse, and Black feminism entwine. Yet, as the next sections show, whereas *M Archive* envisions Black ecological futures borne from the postapocalyptic afterlife of the Middle Passage through the speculative documentary genre, the Broken Earth trilogy dramatizes the mythological animacies of nonhuman lifeworlds that deflect and generate emergent Black ecologies through its fantasy genre. In contrast to the radical forms of worldmaking cultivated through new reconceptions of sensory praxis and Black feminist metaphysics in *M*

*Archive*, the Broken Earth trilogy conjures fantastical sensory ecologies in which touch materializes as uncanny forms of terraforming that allow humans to encounter otherworldly geological lifeworlds.

### Sensory Imperialism and Georacial Mattering

Chronicling the deep-time geohistories of a supercontinent subject to frequent cycles of climate cataclysms, Jemisin's speculative climate fiction exemplifies what Walter Benjamin (1968: 88) in "The Storyteller" claims as the central task of imagining "the transformation of epic forms occurring in rhythms comparable to those of the change that has come over the earth's surface in the course of thousands of centuries." In the world of the *Stillness is the Sanezd Equatorial Affiliation*, or *Sanezd Empire*, an elite race of humans who dominate and govern the continent and its diverse group of races and nations. The *Sanezd Empire's* success in mitigating and surviving massive climate catastrophes, known as Fifth Seasons, is made possible by their rule over orogenes, an enslaved race of people who have the special ability to "sess" (to sense) and terraform the continent's geologies. Due to special sensory organs located in their brainstem called "sessapinae," orogenes are equipped with fantastic forms of exteroception (sensitivity to the body in relation to external stimuli) that allow them to quell and control the *Stillness's* geologies, as well as attune to other environmental and affective phenomena such as "the presence of predators, to others' emotions, to distant extremes of heat or cold, and to the movement of celestial objects" (Jemisin 2015: 343). Providing the power to variously "see," "hear," "feel," and "touch" the earth in this way, orogeny's multisensory capacities transform touch into a kaleidoscope of overlapping sensory modalities and affectivities. Their enslavement under *Sanezd* rule is made possible by a special class of soldiers called Guardians, who have the special capacity to control and negate orogeny's sensory-terraforming powers. Against this backdrop, the storyline follows the protagonist Essun, a Black orogene woman who is in search of her lost daughter, Nassun. Together, the two eventually come to discover the nature of Fifth Seasons: the animate planet, known as Father Earth, perpetuates Fifth Seasons to punish humanity due to the loss of his companion, the moon. Through their power of orogeny, Nassun and Essun return the moon back into the earth's satellite orbit to thereby save the planet by abolishing the cycle of Fifth Seasons. By exploring the relationship of sense to geology through orogene racialization and ecological apocalypse, the

trilogy orients race as an “assemblage of sensuous realities with texture, movement, rhythm, temperature, and weight” that “materializes as a bodily, affective, and sensorial *event*—something that *happens*, rather than something that *is*” (Sekimoto and Brown 2020: 3).

While speculative narratives abound featuring characters with earth-moving abilities (also known as elemental manipulation, semio-kinesis, and geokinesis)—prominent examples include *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–8) and the Terra, Sandman, and Avalanche series in Marvel Comics—the trope of geokinesis in the Broken Earth trilogy is distinctive for its environmental and racial significations. A key text that parallels Jemisin’s sensory imagination in this register is Octavia E. Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy (*Dawn* [1987], *Adulthood Rites* [1988], and *Imago* [1989]), a speculative fiction series that features the Oankali, an alien race that possesses special tentacular sensory organs that allow them to extract genetic, emotional, and biochemical information from organisms through touch. The Oankali exemplifies posthuman futures in which novel life forms fashion new multi-species attunements and animacies through touch. Sensation acts as the dynamic site in which more-than-human relations are produced and evolve, and also where newly generated forms of racial and gender violence raise complex dilemmas of ecology and power.<sup>8</sup> Like Jemisin’s trilogy, Butler’s novels imagine speculative multispecies ecologies emerging in corporeal human-nonhuman contact zones. Whereas the Xenogenesis trilogy engages the themes of posthumanism, race, gender, and ecology through biological forms of sensory life, however, the Broken Earth trilogy explores geological forms of sensory life in which humans encounter the mineralogical worlds of inhuman matter. Along with orogenes and Guardians, the trilogy features fantastical mineralogical beings called obelisks and stone eaters, huge floating minerals that hover across the Stillness’s skies and immortal stone figures that can travel through the earth’s strata, respectively. This shift from biology to geology in Jemisin’s trilogy crystallizes the racial politics of antiblackness, racialization, and minerality in the Anthropocene, or what Kathryn Yusoff (2018: 6, 9) calls the “geologies of race,” in which race is understood as a geological formation whereby the “transactions between geology and inhumanism [materializes] as a mode of both production (or extraction) and subjection (or a violent mode of geologic life).” Critics have examined the trilogy’s engagement with environmental injustice and Afrofuturism (see Fitz-Patrick 2020). Lisa Dowdall (2020: 151), for example, examines Jemisin’s linkage of Afrofuturism and geology to argue that the trilogy

“uses geology to question widespread cultural assumptions about the ‘natural’ divisions between race, species, and matter that underpin hierarchies of the human.” This imaginary, I argue, centrally emerges through Jemisin’s geohaptic imagination, in which sense mediates and transforms the animacy hierarchies of the Anthropocene’s racial ecologies.

The narrative logic of orogene racialization and orogenes’ terraforming capacities drives the trilogy’s georacial imagination. For millennia, orogenes are enslaved by the Sanzed Empire, who harness their orogeny to seismically control the supercontinent’s geologies (quelling earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and other seismic activities) and to create infrastructure such as roads, clearings, and architecture. Known as a race who are “born evil—some kind of agents of Father Earth, monsters that barely qualify as human” (Jemisin 2015: 124), orogenes are racialized as subhumans whose geokinetic powers emplace them in an adjacent animacy hierarchy with nonhuman matter. In the eyes of nonorogenes, otherwise known as stills, “they threaten, and manipulate, and use. They’re evil . . . as Father Earth himself” (Jemisin 2016: 310). Through the twofold process of disciplining “inhuman life” (orogenes) to discipline inhuman matter (earth), the colonial logic of the Sanzed Empire illustrates how racialized extraction (harnessing orogeny) intersects with racial mattering (orogenes regarded as inhuman matter like the earth itself). Crucially, the historical origins of orogene racialization are traced back to the advent of Sanzed colonialism and cannibalism in the long past, when during a particularly hard season of food scarcity Sanzed communities—or “comms”—united to attack “comms of any lesser races” (Jemisin 2015: 417) to steal their resources, abduct people, and eat them. As the orogene Alabaster notes, “That’s *when* they started calling us ‘lesser races,’ actually” (417), in which the dispossession, enslavement, and killing of orogenes led to the rise of the Sanzed Empire. Since orogenes are only legible and discovered as such when their sensory capacities are revealed to stills, orogene racialization is not biologically but sensorily marked. In this way, the narrative logic of orogene racialization and thingification registers “racializing assemblages,” an understanding of race “not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of socio-political processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (Weheliye 2014: 4).

By focusing on a central cast of Black orogenes—Essun, Nassun, Alabaster, and others—the trilogy’s racial allegory centers Black liberation and antiblackness even as the racial significations of orogenes

also indexes other forms of racialization. Thus, while the trilogy does not posit an isomorphism between Blackness and orogeny, since orogenes of different racial identities exist, the allegorical register of orogene racialization nevertheless centrally engages (anti)Blackness, a figuration made apparent, for example, with the derogatory term for orogenes, *roggas*, connoting antiblack racial slurs.<sup>9</sup> Read this way, the Broken Earth trilogy is a speculative neoslave allegory that dramatizes the geological “afterlife of slavery” (Hartman 2007: 6) in a climate-ravaged future, in which orogenes struggle for liberation as they exist within perpetual states of enslavement, fugitivity, and climate catastrophes that continually generate new diasporas and crises. This allegorization is made clear by the nature of orogene enslavement: the Sanzed Empire kidnaps young orogene children across the Stillness to train them under the supervision of Guardians at the Fulcrum, a special academy where orogenes are disciplined to learn, control, and use their orogeny for the empire’s ends. Moreover, many orogene mothers are forced to become “Breeders” for the Fulcrum to produce more children, while others are frequently sent off to various regions across the continent to perform various tasks for villages, towns, and cities. This enterprise of extracting and reproducing slave labor metonymically figures the Fulcrum as a plantation. The central storyline chronicling Essun’s search for her daughter, Nassun, in particular resonates with the histories of US slavery, as the family narrative begins with a miscegenation and passing plot that leads to the fragmentation of Essun’s family: upon discovering that her two children have inherited her orogeny, Essun attempts to train them to hide their orogeny from stills, as she has done herself. Eventually, however, her husband, a still, discovers their children’s orogeny, beating their son to death and kidnapping Nassun. This plot line eventually turns into a fugitivity narrative, as Essun, along with Alabaster, flees to the small island of Meov off the coast of the Stillness, following their violation of Sanzed laws and escape from the Fulcrum. There they find refuge in an island community where orogenes can freely exist and live, and they eventually have several children. This sanctuary, however, is later destroyed when the Sanzed Empire discovers their whereabouts and invades the island. Rather than give her child Corondum away to a life of enslavement under the Fulcrum, Essun decides to kill him, a scene alluding to the history of the enslaved African American woman Margaret Garner, who similarly killed her daughter to save her from a life of enslavement. The trilogy in this way stages a speculative afterlife of slavery that keys in on the material conditions

of sexuality, reproduction, and dispossession for enslaved Black women and the improvised forms of Black feminist mothering and fugitivity that resist and refuse the Sanzed Empire. In the storyworld of racial injustice, gender violence, and climate apocalypse wherein orogenes search for freedom and ecological sanctuary, the abolition of racial-colonial empire becomes inextricably entwined with the abolition of Fifth Seasons.

Powered by the entwined disciplining of racialized bodies and environments, the Sanzed Empire's control over the orogenic uses and limits of bodies culminates in a sensory imperialism that maintains mastery over life and land. As it turns out, orogenes are enslaved, disciplined, and killed through forms of sensory dominion implemented by Guardians, designated masters who train and surveil orogenes and ultimately reshape their orogeny for the empire's terraforming undertaking. Equipped with their own specialized sensory power through a surgical procedure and brain implant, Guardians possess sessapinae that are "repurposed, made sensitive to orogeny and not to the perturbations of the earth" (Jemisin 2016: 176). This procedure equips them with specialized abilities to incapacitate orogenes by negating their orogeny through proximity and touch, such that orogenes are no longer able to sess environments if they are inflicted by this haptic violence. Furthermore, in contrast to orogeny's ability to terraform external environments, Guardians can turn "orogeny inward" (Jemisin 2015: 290) through touch to implode the flesh of orogenes and kill them. This exteriority-interiority dialectic between orogenes' and Guardians' sensory powers stages contested forms of ecological worldmaking between centrifugal relationality (a liberatory haptics that indexes and generates more-than-human lifeworlds) and centripetal coloniality (an extractive haptics that seals and severs lifeworlds).

Sensory imperialism generates segregated domains of environmental habitability through racialized animacy hierarchies, shaping the making and maintenance of life and nonlife. Whereas the Fulcrum's training and breeding programs exemplify sensory biopolitics, the Sanzed Empire's sensory necropolitics culminates with the construction of node networks, hidden infrastructures installed all across the continent that seismically stabilize different regions of the Stillness. As Essun discovers to her horror during an expedition, node networks in fact consist of underground node maintainers: enslaved child orogenes who are lobotomized at a young age and imprisoned in underground facilities that harness their orogeny to stabilize local tectonics such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Tied down to wire chairs equipped with food, medicinal, and waste tubes and put in a

vegetative state through surgical operations that reduce them to their orogenic state, these imprisoned orogenes exist in a state of perpetual pain from their continual exertion of orogeny, until death. This somato-sensory enslavement, in which orogenes housed within the strata of the earth are used to tame and discipline the earth itself, literalizes a form of necropolitical extraction in which racialized bodies are reified into the empire's infrastructures of ecological habitability. Sanzed dominion over lands and peoples is made possible through forms of georacial mattering that position both orogenes and the earth as abject, inanimate matter. Moreover, the empire operates through adaptive forms of social reproduction and killing: to ensure the prevention of future Fifth Seasons, the Fulcrum's breeding program secures an abundant population of orogenes to stabilize the Stillness; on the other hand, Seasonal Laws dictate that, if need be, orogenes must be killed during particularly harsh seasons in order to preserve, and become, resources for other humans. The trilogy's hybrid neoslave and Anthropocene allegory links slavery to geology through these vectors of sensory imperialism, such that slavery is understood as "a geologic axiom of the inhuman in which nonbeing was made, reproduced, and circulated" (Yusoff 2018: 5). In this way, the trilogy registers the transmutation of Black and other racialized bodies into inhuman matter as inextricably tied to the manufactured habitability of the imperial continent.

These segregated political domains of biological and geological life illuminate how Western colonial metaphysics sever ecological lifeworlds through extraction, accumulation, and dispossession. This racial-colonial matrix of domination—seen through the emplacement of orogenes in hierarchized taxonomies of life (Guardians, stills, orogenes, animals) and nonlife (orogenes, minerals, earth)—configures adaptive animacy hierarchies that arrange humans, nonhumans, and nonlife forms into different "orders of value and priority" (Chen 2012: 13). If Hortense J. Spillers (1987: 67) distinguishes "flesh" from the "body" to name the "zero degree of social conceptualization" that structures Black corporeality and subjectivity, the trilogy's augmented formulation affixes flesh to stone to explore forms of racialized mineralogical corporeality in the Anthropocene. This georacial interstice illuminates how Black women's bodies become "the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world" (Spillers [1984] 2003: 155) that generates different racializing assemblages and animacy hierarchies (see also Hartman 2016). Chronicling the supercontinent's geological transformations across millennia, the trilogy imagines a

speculative geohistory of the planet that illustrates the mineralization of race within the earth's strata. Like Gumbs's archival aesthetic in *M Archive* that explores Blackness in relation to Earth's geohistories, Jemisin's speculative geology shows how racial mattering and formation become part and parcel of colonialism's earth-shaping across deep time frames, indexing antiblackness as a stratigraphic force that shapes the habitability of the planet. By unearthing the contact points between Blackness and the Anthropocene, the trilogy engages the "problem for thinking of and for Black non/being" (Sharpe 2016: 5) in the geological wake of slavery in climate-ravaged futures.

### Sensory Insurgency and the Geological Network

Against the Sazed Empire's regime of sensory imperialism, Jemisin's trilogy envisions a form of sensory insurgency that assembles abolitionist, anticolonial ecologies. After their separate escapes from the Fulcrum, Essun and Nassun eventually discover that their orogenic terraforming power comprises only a small fraction of their larger abilities. Free from the Fulcrum's disciplining of orogeny, they learn and cultivate another crucial form of sensory attunement that lies beyond orogeny: the ability to sense and interact with magic, or what is also called *silver*, "the stuff underneath orogeny, which is made by things that lived or once lived" (Jemisin 2017: 242). Whereas Fulcrum-led orogeny is predicated on human-dominated terraforming, magic is powered by relational forms of worldmaking crafted together by non-humans and humans. Perceiving the natural world anew with magic-oriented sensoria, Nassun and Essun eventually learn to alter the molecular composition of matter to heal and transform myriad life and nonlife forms through multiscalar magic, among other things. As Essun's mentor Alabaster teaches her, the Fulcrum's "methods are a kind of conditioning meant to steer you toward energy redistribution and away from magic," such that "you learn to think of orogeny as a matter of effort, when it's really . . . perspective. And perception" (Jemisin 2016: 203, 204). As a paradigm shift made possible through a transformation in sensory perception and power, magic upends the fictions of human exceptionalism and Western colonial metaphysics, reimagining geological bodyminds (Schalk 2018) in which more-than-human worldmaking emerges within the conjuncture of race, disability, body, and geology.

Significantly, Essun discovers the power of magic when she also learns the origin story of Fifth Seasons and why they have existed for

millennia: long ago, an elite race of humans attempted to extract magic power from the earth's core to gain infinite energy, a project called Geoarcanity that attempted to "lock the raw magical flows of the planet into an endless cycle of service to humankind" (Jemisin 2017: 333). Like the Sanzed Empire's history, Geoarcanity was created through the enslavement of a special race of bioengineered life forms called tuners, who harness magic for energy extraction and distribution. The calamitous failure of the project, causing the moon's orbital displacement from the earth, led to the discovery of the earth as an animate planet, named Father Earth by humans. Angered by the loss of his child, the moon, Father Earth kick-started the cycle of Fifth Seasons. With this newfound knowledge of the planet's animacy and history, Essun senses that the "silver deep within Father Earth wends between the mountainous fragments of his substance in exactly the same way that they twine among the cells of a living, breathing thing. And that is because *a planet* is a living, breathing thing. . . . All the stories about Father Earth being alive are real" (242). Eventually, the trilogy's neoslave and climate allegories interlink as Essun's search for her long-lost daughter coincides with her new quest to unlock the Obelisk Gate, a network powered by the obelisks, to harness the planet's magic to bring the moon back into Earth's orbit and thereby permanently abolish Fifth Seasons.

Magic catalyzes insurgent sensoria whose perspectival and perceptual transformations fashion new forms of attunement to more-than-human worlds. As their magic power evolves, Essun and Nassun learn to connect to obelisks, which turn out to be network conduits and batteries whose "crystalline structure emulates the strange linkages of power between the cells of a living being" (Jemisin 2016: 136). Upon connecting to an obelisk, Essun discovers a geological network of magic spread across vast distances (narrated in second-person point of view):

what you suddenly understand is this: Magic derives from life—that which is alive, or was alive, or even that which was alive so many ages ago that it has turned into something else. All at once this understanding causes something to shift in your perception, and  
and  
and

You see it suddenly: *the network*. A web of silver threads interlacing the land, permeating rock and even the magma just underneath, strung like jewels between forests and fossilized corals and pools of

oil. Carried through the air on the webs of leaping spiderlings. Threads in the clouds, though thin, strung between microscopic living things in water droplets. Threads as high as your perception can reach, brushing against the very stars.

And where they touch the obelisks, the threads become another thing entirely. For of the obelisks that float against the map of your awareness—which has suddenly become vast, miles and miles, you are perceiving with far more than your sessapinae now—each hovers as the nexus of thousands, millions, *trillions* of threads. This is the power holding them up. (361–62)

This passage articulates a speculative multiscale geohaptics—a new “map of your awareness”—in which the human sensorium extrudes beyond the corporeal boundaries of the body and expands into the elemental ecologies of air and sky, magma and cosmos. The new perceptual horizons of this geohapticity enable touch to map new temporalities and spatialities of the world that reconfigure the body’s ontological terrestriality and unity. When Essun, in another moment, connects to a topaz obelisk, her body transforms into a more-than-human network that feels, inhabits, and ultimately becomes the elemental ecologies of the Stillness: “Then you’re in the topaz and through it and stretching yourself across the world in a breath. No need to be in the ground when the topaz is in air, *is* the air; it exists in states of being that transcend solidity, and thus you are capable of transcending, too; *you* become air. You drift amid the ash clouds and see the Stillness track beneath you in humps of topography” (245). Haptic bodies not only inhabit space but also create and transform it through sense and sensation. By plugging into the geological network, Essun and Nassun experience touch as a posthuman praxis that unfurls the multiscale interactivities and interconnectivities that comprise the planetary web of life.

In contrast to the Fulcrum’s extractive node networks, magic’s network form is powered by infrastructures of relationality and care. Magic, as Essun later learns, can also operate through forms of collective attunement called *parallel scaling*, networks that link orogenes together to “form a whole group working in parallel, in . . . a mesh” (Jemisin 2016: 356) to generate aggregate magic power. Magic’s network logic, in this way, lays the groundwork for reconceiving the political ontology of life, land, and belonging. This new form of sensory attunement requires Essun to unlearn the Fulcrum’s extractivist framework of orogeny: when she first experiences her attunement to

an onyx obelisk, she wonders whether the connection is analogous to orogenes' servitude to Guardians—a bondage made of “chains” (89). As a friend corrects her, however, attunement to obelisks is fundamentally different since it is formed around a logic of attraction: the onyx is “drawn to your presence. . . . It lingers around you because it can't help itself” (89). This attraction is predicated on the recognition that minerals wield the agency to negotiate their own terms of attunement to humans, as illustrated when another character connects to an onyx obelisk:

it snatches at my awareness the instant I come near, trying to pull me deeper into its rampant, convecting currents of silver. When I have connected to it before, the onyx has rejected me. . . . but now, when I offer myself and the onyx claims me, suddenly I know. *The onyx is alive*. . . . It *sesses* me. It learns me, touching me with a presence that is suddenly undeniable.

. . . .

So the onyx yields to me now because, it senses at last, I too have known pain. My eyes have been opened to my own exploitation and degradation. I am afraid, of course, and angry, and hurt, but the onyx does not scorn these feelings within me. It seeks something else, however, something more, and finally finds what it seeks nestled in a little burning knot behind my heart: determination. I have committed myself to making, of all this wrongness, something right.

That's what the onyx wants. *Justice*. (Jemisin 2017: 332–33)

Staging the onyx's own haptic capacities to claim, learn, and touch human bodies, this moment articulates a nonhuman sensorium in which geology senses humans into being, upending the sensory episteme of liberal humanism in which embodiment and affect are understood to be the sovereign praxis and locus of the unitary human subject. It imagines a speculative stone sensorium that “undermines our fantasies of sovereign relation to environment” by showing how “stone sediments contradictions . . . [and] ignite[s] possibility, abiding invitation to metamorphosis” (Cohen 2015: 9, 6). As vibrant mineralogical life forms, obelisks autonomously grant or refuse attunement by determining the forms of reciprocity that will or will not cohere between connected parties, opening a traffic of affects and desires between humans and nonhumans (the communication, negotiation, and sharing of human “determination” and the onyx's “justice”). Transformed by Nassun and Essun's Black feminist spatial praxis, touch becomes

a multiscale technology that upends the anthropocentric boundaries of perception and embodiment that deny sense and sensation as coconstitutive practices generated at the interface between bodies and more-than-human forces. Touch, in short, intuits and inhabits a sensate earth.

Unlocking magic and the earth's geological network in this way, Essun and Nassun's sensory insurgency become central to the trilogy's Black feminist spatial imagination. In the final climax, when Essun reunites with Nassun in a battle to determine whether to destroy the earth or to save humanity, the trilogy stages the fate of the planet's ecological future such that the abolition of climate apocalypse is inextricable from Black women's liberation from the racial-colonial-sexual matrix of power. When Essun connects to the Obelisk Gate and risks her life to save humanity, "what the onyx finds . . . is something different this time: Fear for kin. Fear of failure. The fear that accompanies all necessary change. And underneath it all, a driving need to make the world better" (Jemisin 2017: 381). As Essun and Nassun struggle over competing visions of the future by fighting over control of the Obelisk Gate through their magic power—activate the gate to bring the moon back into orbit or destroy the earth by turning everyone into stone to abolish further injustice, pain, and suffering—Essun finally sacrifices her life to save Nassun's own life, granting her power over the Obelisk Gate to decide the planet's fate. Turning into stone due to magic overflow, Essun shows "what mothers have had to do since the dawn of time: sacrifice the present, in hopes of a better future" (284). Upon realizing her mother's sacrifices to save both her daughter and the planet, Nassun decides to follow her mother's wishes to end Fifth Seasons and save humankind. Thus, the trilogy's ending imagines ecological futures in which the abolition of the Sazed Empire, orogene liberation, and climate revitalization are forged and made possible through Black feminist praxis. This manifestation of Black feminist ecological judgment, borne from the conjuncture of Essun's mothering, care, and love for her daughter and her drive to abolish Fifth Seasons, shows how "the poetics of landscape, as a projection of black femininity . . . imagine[s] new forms of geography, seeing the world from an interhuman (rather than partial) perspective" (McKittrick 2006: 144). It centers the axiom that, "after all, a person is herself, and others. Relationships chisel the final shape of one's being" (Jemisin 2016: 1).

The geological network's figuration of ecological relationality is finally formalized through the trilogy's narrative architecture. Notably, the trilogy's multifocal narration switches between second- and

third-person narration, along with an unidentified first-person master narrator (in *The Fifth Season*, for example, three separate plotlines narrating Essun's, Damaya's, and Syenite's stories are eventually revealed to be the same character in different stages of her life with different names). The trilogy's last installment finally unveils that the entire story is narrated by the stone eater Hoa, Essun's companion, after he has "reassembled the raw arcanic substance" (Jemisin 2017: 396) of Essun's being, following her sacrifice and death, to revive her anew as a stone eater. The trilogy is finally understood as a retrospective narration of the story to a new Essun who will eventually reanimate as a stone eater with lost memories in an unknown future—the climactic manifestation of a Black feminist ecology of extraordinary more-than-human bodyminds. In this way, the trilogy's narrative architecture itself materializes as a geological process—a stratigraphic text through which knowledge and history is transmitted through geology as medium and archive. This metafictionality poses a central paradox: how is Hoa able to gain access to Essun's and Nassun's interiorities and narrate their simultaneous whereabouts and actions? One possible answer points to the history of stone eaters themselves. As it turns out, stone eaters are the tuners who were a part of Geoarcanity millennia ago (the special race of bioengineered life forms who were built to harness magic) and who were then transformed into stone eaters following the catastrophe of the Geoarcanity project. As hybridized geological and biological beings who are able to "earthtalk" (101) through vibrations, tuners have the ability to "speak" through the earth via vibrations, temperature, and pressure—a form of geosemiosis powered by sensory communication through the earth. Seen this way, the trilogy itself manifests through the narrative logic of earthtalk, a geohaptic language—made communicative across vast distances through temperatures, pressures, and reverberations—that, like the geological network itself, is relational, felt, and boundless. As Hoa states in the trilogy's end, "I remind myself of why I continue to tell this story through your eyes rather than my own: because, outwardly, you're too good at hiding yourself. . . . But I know you. *I know you*. Here is what's inside you" (156). These metafictional addresses, found throughout the novels, dramatize a more-than-human affectivity in which bodies encounter one another through the earth as media infrastructure, even as such modes ultimately elide linguistic signification: "I wish that I were still a tuner, so that I could speak to you through temperatures and pressures and reverberations of the earth," Hoa declares; "to make this telling simpler, I will translate it all as words,

except where I cannot” (166, 100). Speculative forms of sensory communication render language itself into sensuous form in Jemisin’s trilogy to imagine a geohaptic textuality in which the reader encounters and intuits fantastical attunements with the sensuous earth.

### **Animacy, Attunement, Apocalypse**

Gumbs’s and Jemisin’s geohaptic imaginaries illuminate the imperative of sensory thinking to the racial politics of the Anthropocene and the affordances of sensory aesthetics in Black feminist speculative fiction. Black feminist spatial praxis, these works show, becomes the transformative site of social life and environmental justice that invents new forms of animacy and attunement in the Anthropocene. These forms of sensory life and abolitionist planetary futures in *M Archive* and the Broken Earth trilogy are borne out of “cartographies of struggle” wherein “Black women’s geographies and poetics challenge us to stay human by invoking how black spaces and places are integral to our planetary and local geographic stories” (McKittrick 2006: 146). Sensory praxis ushers in, as *M Archive* puts it, “a species at the edge of its integrity, on the verge or in the practice of transforming into something beyond the luxuries and limitations of what some call ‘the human’” (Gumbs 2018: xi). This practice of transformation in these works is made possible by reading the planet as a sensate archive whose histories, materialities, and vitalities are made legible through touch. It is a practice of sensing for, with, and through the planet, in which “there are no sense-borders: sense is not a limit-concept. To sense is to world unlimitedly” (Manning 2007: 155). By sensing the racial ecologies of the Middle Passage, slavery, and fugitivity through time and space, these works understand geology as a site of healing and resistance in the afterlife of slavery and apocalypse of climate catastrophe. To feel the broken earth anew, these works show, is to reclaim Black ecologies from the wreckage of the Anthropocene, to refuse the severance of sense and life, and to retrieve new forms of liberatory life.

Mapping insurgent ecological futures within the Anthropocene’s racial terrains of dispossession and ecological violence from below, *M Archive* and the Broken Earth trilogy enact what Fred Moten (2003: 229, 191) calls the dialectic of the “ensemble of the senses and the ensemble of the social” that names the conditions of possibility of “the drive for, and the knowledge of, freedom.” Their Afrofuturist works illuminate abolitionist worldmaking as a form of reparative futurism

on the broken earth, in which more-than-human relationalities are cultivated through an ethics of care, relation, and sensuality. Emplaced within the future conditional, these Black feminist ecological futures are predicated on the abolition of normative models of the human produced by racial-colonial power. Sense and sensation become infrastructures of care that forge novel ecologies of relationality emancipated from the matrix of domination. The manifestation of Black feminist ecological futurism in the postapocalyptic prolepsis of the present—as seen in *M Archive*'s future-anterior archival aesthetic (“we broke the earth and now we fall through time” [Gumbs 2018: 139]) and the Broken Earth trilogy's narrative cyclicity (“Let's end with the beginning of the world, shall we?” [Jemisin 2017: 1])—enacts a geophysics of Blackness whose “epiphenomenal time” (Wright 2015: 4) crystallizes the entangled past, present, and future within the thickened ontology of the present. Geohaptics unfurls multiscalar sensory worlds made legible within the movements between sense and ecology, touch and liberation. It assembles novel forms of ecological life within the broken earth that, as *M Archive*'s narrator-archivist insists, “multiply by every pore touched, every memory made skin again, every word of love and the lips that share them” (Gumbs 2018: 5).

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## Notes

- 1 For works on haptics, see, e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2002; Paterson 2007; and Jones 2018.
- 2 For an earlier work on Black ecology, see Hare 1970.
- 3 For Jacques Rancière (2004: 13), *aesthetics* names “the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the places and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.”
- 4 For works on race and the Anthropocene, see, e.g., Vergès 2017; Pulido 2018; and Karera 2019. For works engaging geology and the Anthropocene, see Pálsson and Swanson 2016; Povinelli 2016; Yusoff and Clark 2017; and Bobbette and Donovan 2019.
- 5 What Luciano (2015: 2) terms *affective geology* transforms the “necessarily speculative work of geology into a form of aesthetic and sensory experience.”

- 6 For an overview of sensory studies, see Bull et al. 2006.
- 7 As Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez (2013) argue, “The modern/colonial project has implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception.”
- 8 For a critical examination of Blackness in relation to posthumanism, new materialism, and animal studies, see Jackson 2020.
- 9 Jemisin describes the trilogy as a “Black female power fantasy” and clarifies that the trilogy “wasn’t specifically depicting just the African-American experience” but “was drawing a lot of material from a number of different experiences of oppression” (qtd. in Hurley 2018: 470, 472).

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