

What unites and consolidates oppositional groups is not simply the fact of identity but the way in which they perform affect, especially in relation to an official “national affect” that is aligned with a hegemonic class. . . . Not in terms of simple being, but through the nuanced route of feeling. . . . a certain mode of “feeling brown” in a world painted white, organized by cultural mandates to “feel white.”

—José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Brown” (2000)

Being white was never enough. Not without being black.

—Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007)

The Caribbean Americas is the ground from which this preface speaks. And my orientation to the Caribbean Americas is crucial to the difference that *The Cry of the Senses* holds in its synesthetic corpus, which theorizes the poetics of a violently “unincorporated territory” (the Puerto Rican archipelago in Puerto Rico’s colonial status vis-à-vis the US) *beside* the poetics of a violently “incorporated” landscape (the Sonoran Desert in the state of Arizona).¹ Because poetics emerges from and thrives on plurality and division, on the senses’ and nonsense’s movements rather than on reason’s frozen “sense” of itself as central to thought and writing, its modalities are keen at thinking differences in relation. A reader might ask: Does poetics *elide* colonial differences? No. This is vital: To critique Western epistemic univocality, individuation, self-possession, and violent monolingual/imperial/unimaginative expectations of meaning matching mandated utterance (all of which require regimes of representation, inclusion, and progress to control unruliness and variation of desire), why reinscribe practices that demand singularity and feign auto-

consistency? Let us turn to poetics, which shows how to listen to difference without forcibly overcoming it.

One of the conceptual challenges of listening over time to this book's Caribbean, Latinx, and African diasporic archives has been thinking through the semiotic, aesthetic, and social positionings of brown, white, and mestizx Latina/o/x, Afro-Latinx, black, African American, and indigenous. This book is particularly aware of the assassin- and massacre-state's project of fixing black being in a hemisphere where black signifies plurality: fugitivity; death; thingness; rupture; vitality; Haitianness; refusal; uncapturability; brown; the nonbeing of being, or *nothing*—as in Calvin Warren's conception of the "onticide of African being" as what produces black being and as requisite to how human being overrepresents itself; and, in another vein, the historical and social consciousness of Africans, or what Cedric Robinson calls "the embryo of the demon that would be visited on the whole enterprise of primitive accumulation."² It is how these significations move in semiotic, aesthetic, and social relation, beside each other, sometimes at odds with each other, and sometimes in each other that interests me. Relation's irreducibility to a *foundation* or an *essence*, and to the assertions of *facticity* lodged in such claims—which can become, at turns, literalist, policing, and funereal in how they aim for resolution—compels me to listen for what Fred Moten calls "anteontological affiliation, a social and historical para-ontology theorized in performance," and in poetics, and for how differences of ontological ruptures cannot be entirely blurred in the name of relation.³ A poetics of besiderness on maroon grounds, constituted by defiant sonic ruptures of sense, and attentive to the differences of how things get together and yet remain broken, is afoot.⁴

In the fields gathered on this book's ground, *brownness*, *Afro-Latinx*, and *blackness* are among keywords in critiques of identitarian and representational limits forced upon and legislated against migrant, fugitive, and sensorially errant people, thought, and aesthetic forms. Not as an object of knowledge, but as a mode of critical feeling, arguments for brownness's negative affects refuse to reconcile the white affects attendant to and reproductive of the visual racism at the heart of the Western episteme. Leticia Alvarado sublimates feeling brown into negative minoritarian affects and a Muñozian conception of "being-with" (a notion that imaginatively reworks Jean-Luc Nancy's writings on poetics and communism) under the rubric of a "camp of queer theory."⁵ Ever the anti-literalist, Joshua Javier Guzmán calls brown an "immiscible" color—as in, not mixed; rather, it shows its streaks of irresolvable variation.⁶ Note the imagery at the end of Guzmán's complex entry on "Brown" in *Keywords in Latina/o Studies* (2017): "Here is the drama within the color brown: it is itself a mixture of yellow, red, and black—the iridescent reminder that we are in brownness and of brownness, here and now." Brown

is “immiscible,” he says, on his way to situating “the failure of reconciliation to be the onto-poetic ground in which we find our contemporary United States of America.”⁷

Yet I continue to circle around how brownness—which evokes fundament, mud, shit, and color—and immiscibility reside in the eye of the beholder. For in this hemisphere, of which the US is one part, the optics of brownness return to the black/white, racist epidermal schema that, among many other erroneous practices, calls brown skin colors black, and minimizes blackness to the misrecognition of skin color.

Afro-Latinx conceptions of the hemisphere, particularly what Yomaira Figueroa calls the position of “the Afro-Atlantic hispanophone world,” refuse to reconcile the visual racism at the heart of the post-Enlightenment schema of the world by signifying blackness’s geographic range of histories and imaginaries, and showing how African diasporic aesthetic and literary production has been erased, distorted, and peripheralized by the projects of white supremacy, coloniality, and academic disciplinarity.⁸ Afro-Latinidad, as a point of view, conjoins and grounds a conception of blackness and Latinidad, jarring US-centrist notions of blackness as singularly and primarily African American, and critically exposing US Latina/o/x studies’ varied tendencies to *incorporate* black thought and forms, when it does not outright reject or trivialize them, rather than positioning them as constitutive.⁹ Afro-Latinidad also points to the ontological and epistemological quandaries of blackness. Black being, when imagined in the Americas since the early 1500s, *simultaneously* signifies ontological rupture, or, the void of foundation, *and* Africanity as reasserted (and creolized) indigeneity, or marronage.

There is a current—and likely transitive—tension between brownness and Afro-Latinidad, which operates on two levels: 1. that of methods and of bibliographies of study, which generate different relationships to and valuations of the very grounds of critique, identity, and what constitutes anti-identitarian scholarly and imaginative work; 2. that of the body, particularly when imagined in the racist epidermal schema, in that some scholars who theorize brownness in the US academy are not of African descent, and some have (sometimes inadvertently and sometimes deliberately) read the term away from Muñoz’s repetition that it is not a placeholder for identity, but a veer of affect. But this may also be because we cannot shake the signified of color where the optical and ontological are contiguous. I will not resolve any family matters in this preface. But I acknowledge them so as to redirect critique to prevalent and minoritarian valences of (white *and* mestizx) Latina/o/x studies that order an odd relationship to (its) blackness; sound a call for close readings of how brownness operates in relation to—and not—blackness, black thought, and black citationality; and reorient us to other valences that enjoin

us to think about sensorial practices that are part of black lifeworlds—echoing Mary Pat Brady’s invocation of “other sensual knowledges of space, including those derived from auditory, tactile, and olfactory capacities.”¹⁰

There are openings imaginable, for example, when Caribbean literary studies scholar Dixia Ramírez asks, what is there “after, before, or beyond representation,” what other nonwhite epistemes and cosmogonies are imaginable, and less visible?¹¹ Whiteness does not have spatial, temporal, cosmogonic, or imaginary primacy in this hemisphere; it trespasses with its apparatuses of property, it deranges diverse ecologies and imaginaries, and it also knows *nothing* of the epistemic and sensory arrangements in parts of this book. Yet, as Guzmán, in conversation with Antonio Viego, shows, “Whiteness [also] operates like Lacan’s master signifier, existing outside of any signifying chain, yet highly organizing, because it makes (racial) difference possible. This. . . reveals Whiteness as both terrifyingly blinding while making perception possible.”¹² In a Latinx psychoanalysis, whiteness is not only phenotypic, but also the “unconscious fantasy for wholeness,” a fantasy against which brownness plays out.¹³ But there’s a deeper issue here, for if “language cuts up the body, and the primordial loss suffered by the subject of language is that of a ‘hypothesized fullness prior to the impact of language,’ a sense of wholeness that was taken away, blemished, or forgotten. . . . [And attuning] to Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular and a politics of loss in general allows Latino Studies to think about the profound and complex ways racialized bodies experience loss,”¹⁴ then what do we do with how language has not only “cut up” Africanity, but also rendered particularly black women’s bodies as *flesh*, black as physiological, linguistic, and ontological incoherence?¹⁵ Viego’s psychoanalytic treatment of Latinx studies shows us the panic-inducing political, semiotic, and temporal *incoherence* of the sign of Latinx. But that incoherence is charged with hyper-reproductive futurity—one he jars with his reading of Spanglish and the hysteric.¹⁶ (I would say something similar of the incoherence of “brownness,” which I see, in Latinx studies, as a middle term seeking equivalence to blackness, but wishing to be a third way.) This marks a difference with the incoherence of the sign black, whose female biological organism is dispossessed of motherhood, and also of historicity and futurity, whose offspring are disposed of the sign of “family,” whose social formations disturb the white patriarch’s legitimate progeny, and who are ontologically un-given primordially, except as rupture.

In some instances, a Latinx discourse of brownness enacts a semiotic maneuver in the important names of affect and critical negativity that minimizes blackness’s incarnation in the Americas through the negation of African being. We see a trace of my concern with this in the epigraph from Muñoz, who is influential to this book, but where in an argument for queer of color feeling displaced into the

sign of “brown feeling,” “simple being” is evoked as something that certain representations of identity construct. But from the perspective of the black radical tradition, as da Silva’s line reflects, there is no such thing as “simple being.” *Mitsein’s* requisite *Dasein* is black nonbeing. There is work for future investigators to do with these different starting places for relation. What I interject into this onto- and semiotic irresolvability is that Caribbeaness offers a third way.

The sign of Caribbean—what does it mean but multiplicity and indefinability? The “Caribbean,” and “Hurricane,” Hortense Spillers writes, are the sublimated keywords of *Keywords*, the flesh engendered by Europe’s making of America.¹⁷ In Ronald Judy’s reading of the Spanish scholastic tradition as it was engendering the Americas for Spanish dominion, we read that “the very moment in Western history when the recognition of alternative worlds becomes possible, is the moment when that possibility is precluded by the correctness of Reason and the ignorance of the affectivity of experience.”¹⁸ Multisensorial poetic listening, the methodology of this book, critiques the regime of reason, and disperses affect into sense. Judy continues, “At its inception, modernity is caught by a malaise, *whose pathology is undetermined* until it reaches the point of crisis that we find ourselves in at this point, when contravening action is virtually inconsequential to the outcome. . . . *The multiplicity of worlds* is what modernity has sought to annihilate all along.”¹⁹ Judy’s critical explication of Francisco de Vitoria’s and Hernán Cortés’s writings shows how discursive force rendered Indians as natural slaves, as children, and as lacking a *literati*, and, therefore, required enslavement by Christians to humanize them. I must emphasize the not only cartographic but also cosmogonic backdrop of this “multiplicity of worlds”: the Indies, the Caribbean, the Antilles, including the troubling maroon region of Veracruz—the black and Caribbean *part* of Mexico. The “multiplicity of worlds” of which the Western episteme still cannot make proper sense is the place of many names and the maroon ground for this book. It is the archipelagic place from which Glissant theorized relation, from which I draw my theorization of besideness, which invites us to slow down with solidarity.

If we imagine Latinx Studies in relation to ecological and sensorial losses that are not gone, but submerged, chimerical, and metamorphosed, and in ethical relation to black and Caribbean studies, then what field concerns and possibilities arise? If we imagine the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary as anti-ecological, imperial-economic, spatial derangements that the Caribbean and parts of Mexico, and even the US, have in common, then how do Latinx, Caribbean, and African diasporic practices of division, or poetics, change?

This book aligns with a range of nonwhite, queer refusals of US imperial, settler colonial, military invasive, majoritarian legal, nationalist affective, and ocularcentric projects. *The Cry of the Senses* swerves here: it does not reassert *visual-*



Figure FM.1 Xandra Ibarra in *Nude Laughing* (2016). Queibre Performance Festival, Rio Piedras, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Photograph by Walter Wlodarczyk.

ity, which returns us to specific conceptions in the hemisphere of racial mixture, to what Sylvia Wynter, after Frantz Fanon, calls “the sociogenic principle,” or socialized historically racist notions of regulating black people in the law and extrajudicially (think from vigilante committees to “BBQ Becky”). But it also does not naively champion sound or rhythm as the anti-ocular, or foolishly pretend to be post-ocular. Opening terms enmeshed in visual regimes to the *immiscibility of synesthesia*, to detours of perception, changes our perceptions of them.

My book assumes the “onto-poetic ground” to be fugitive, and potentially weaponizable by those who Fidel Castro said are of the ground in history, living with sensory deprivation, sensory overload, and itinerant sensoria in anticolonial struggle. *The Cry of the Senses* listens for the sounds of synesthetic poetics that erupt from what was there before the US, and from places beyond and beside US regimes of representation—from waters, under-waters, post-military, and post-Enlightenment desert and island ecologies decentering and detouring from the supremely unstable claims of US sovereignty, which benefits from but does not singularly engender hemispheric white supremacy. I am interested in how the ground morphs in ecological and multisensorial spatio-temporalities of relation. The introduction discusses Puerto Rico as a “hystericized” site of archipelagic, geological, extrajudicial, and psychic *ataques* [attacks] not only on the United

States and its colonial representations of the archipelago, but also on hemispheric economic paradigms that benefit from US military hegemony. The final chapter reads the Sonoran Desert in an imaginary of recent border crossing, migrant, maroon, mournful, and pleased movement. Anticolonial sensorial solidarities flourish in the breaks between places overdetermined by a continental imagination, the geographic-discursive bedmate of Manifest Destiny. Here, the ground gives way to water, wind, and other unsovereign elements and ideologies.

As I now see it, this book emerges *à l'heure entre chien et loup*, at the hour between dog and wolf, of twilight—on an elemental, geological scale. *Homo modernus* rears its head today knowing that its time is over. Let us use whiteness's ideological and affective confusion, its cultural illiteracy, its post-halcyon flares of fascist self-consolidation, to study how to blur ourselves into the landscape and make relations, not of transparency, but of opacity, abnormal pleasures, unruly and unsovereign refusals, sensorial errancy, and migratory refuge for ecstatic mourning of solidarities lost, where lost is not the same as gone. What has been lost grows otherwise. Landed narratives of self-determined futurity are running out of earth. The earth itself seems to have fierily aligned with the position of the hysteric. Let us make a poetics that listens for the creaturely, vegetal, tidal, and maroon movements and stories stirring in the gloaming.