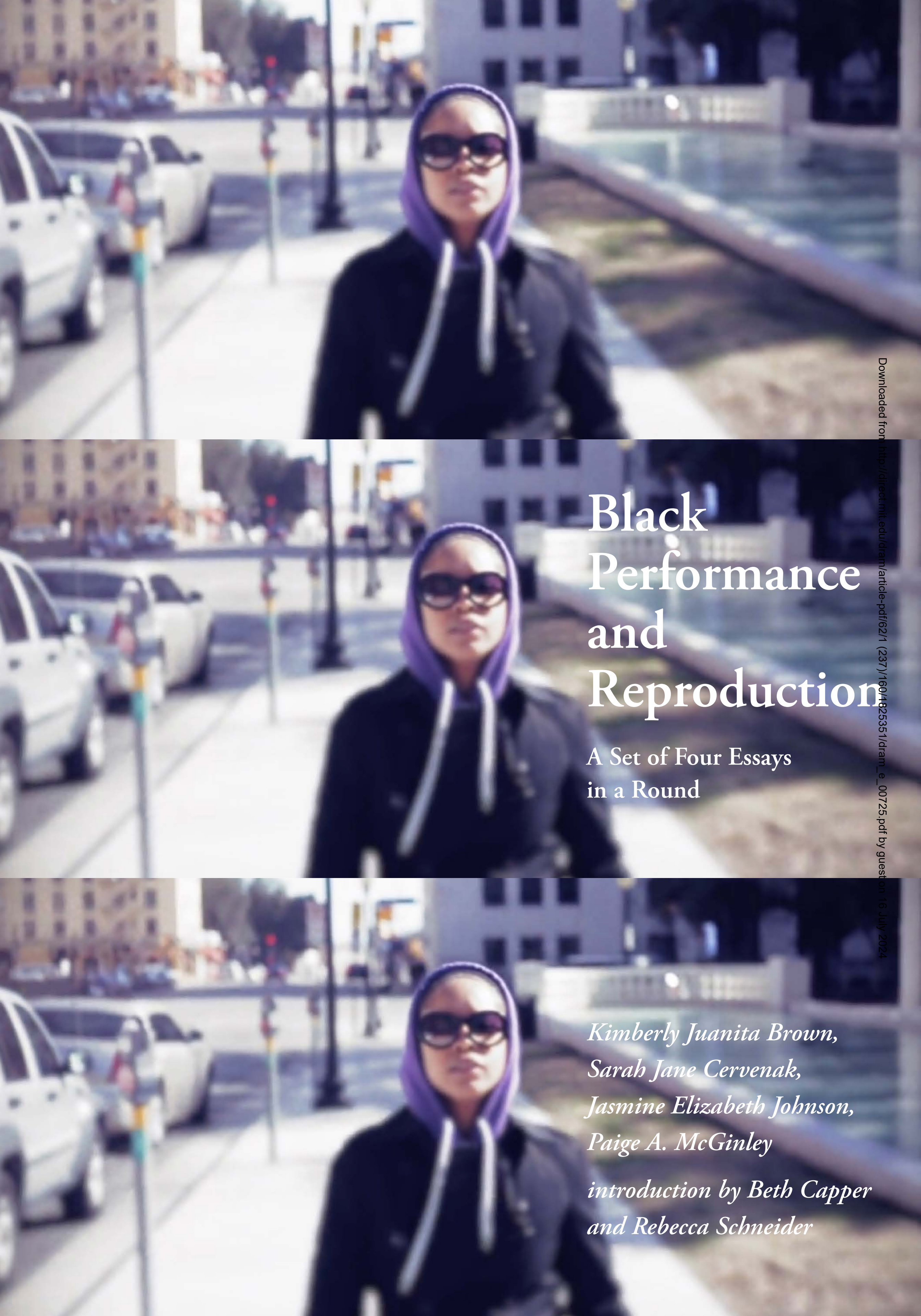

Black Performance and Reproduction

A Set of Four Essays in a Round

Kimberly Juanita Brown, Sarah Jane Cervenak, Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson, Paige A. McGinley

introduction by Beth Capper and Rebecca Schneider

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Introduction

"The conjunction of reproduction and disappearance is performance's condition of possibility, its ontology and its mode of reproduction," writes Fred Moten (2003:5). This conception of performance's ontology, or what Moten describes as performance's "anoriginal drive," owes an (unpayable) debt to black reproduction, to an insurgent and "improvised" maternity that marks and galvanizes the persistent fugitivity of black performance to enclosure, capture, and genesis (28). In this section of the issue, four short essays illuminate and reconceive the performance of this persistent fugitivity, or the fugitivity of this persistent performance, across multiple mediums, political histories, and social practices. Each of the pieces here, whether read individually or in a round, as around a roundtable, takes up the question of black performance in relation to reproduction and/or black reproduction in relation to performance. While other contributions in this issue also explore black performance, the purposefully short format of these entries might allow them to resound with and against each other in interesting and unexpected ways. Our authors did not write *together*, and yet across the four short pieces, certain similarities sound and rebound with uncertain differences.

Opening this section, Kimberly Juanita Brown ("Erykah Badu's Ambulatory Acts") attunes us to the "ambulatory acts" of singer-songwriter Erykah Badu in her music video *Window Seat*. An ambulatory act, Brown contends, is "always already a reproduction, embedded in repetition and simultaneous movement." Through Badu's virtuosic performances that attest to "the spectacular ordinariness of a black woman walking," Brown illuminates how Badu reproduces her (nude) body over and against the spatial restrictions that have constrained black mobility. Similarly, Sarah Jane Cervenak ("'Black Night Is Falling': The 'Airy Poetics' of Some Performance") reflects upon "a particular and general ambulation" that contours the "airy poetics" (Englemann 2015) of blackness and black performance. Working with the analytic and collective practice of breath that Ashon T. Crawley (2016) has made newly available, Cervenak considers the atmospherics of "black pneuma" that escape the suffocating enclosures that seek to subject air's wanderings to the violence of measure.

If, as Cervenak suggests, "breathing is reproduction's ur-text," an ur-text without origin or end, Jasmine Johnson and Paige McGinley trace, respectively, the interrupted transmissions and generational schisms through which the reproduction of black performance brings to crisis dominant logics of movement, inheritance, and genealogy. Attending to the "casualties" that fall away "through ongoing enactments of choreographic transference" in West African dance, Johnson ("Casualties") explores the possibilities of failure, loss, and "choreographic death" for forging and reproducing diasporic communities. McGinley ("Generational Schism, Fannie Lou Hamer, and the Future of Protest") closes this roundtable with a reflection on cross-generational black struggle and the "future of protest." Asking how we might intervene in a binarism that proclaims either generational reproduction or refusal as the only two options for understanding the Black Lives Matter Movement, McGinley tracks practices of "disruption of the chrononormativity of activist discourse." Gathered together in a room with students and community members days after the 2016 presidential election, McGinley recalls how the poet Treasure Shields Redmond conjured the presence of Fannie Lou Hamer in a cross-temporal performance that rendered the "labor of black reproduction—and black generation—visible, audible, haptic, vibrational."

Taken individually or taken together, these short essays crucially signal how blackness chiasmatically constitutes *and* disfigures the very rubrics of performance and reproduction with which this issue has been concerned.

Figure 1. (facing page) Erykah Badu in her music video Window Seat *(2010). See "Erykah Badu's Ambulatory Acts" by Kimberly Juanita Brown in this section. (Screenshot by Kimberly Juanita Brown)*

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Erykah Badu's Ambulatory Acts

Kimberly Juanita Brown

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I have been thinking lately about the space black women occupy and the occupied space they represent to others. As a scholar of slavery and its contemporary reverberations, I am also cognizant of the visual register of tantalizing promise Saidiya Hartman refers to, what she calls the "glimpse of freedom" between slavery's end and its not-yet-past (1997:120). Can we elongate this glimpse and burrow into it, hold it against the violent imprint of the present moment? Can we place our bodies against the temporality of erasure, the looping inference of architecture? Erykah Badu thinks we can, and to this end she presents us with her artistic encroachment upon history, memory, and movement using the reproduction of her body over space.

The Remix

A black woman enters Dealey Plaza on foot. The infamous Dealey Plaza, where President John F. Kennedy's public, witnessed, and filmed assassination sent the United States into an avalanche of mourning. A native of Dallas, Texas, where Kennedy's assassination took place, Erykah Badu's ambulatory act for her 2010 music video *Window Seat* binds history to movement and troubles the line between the witness, the victim, and the voyeur.

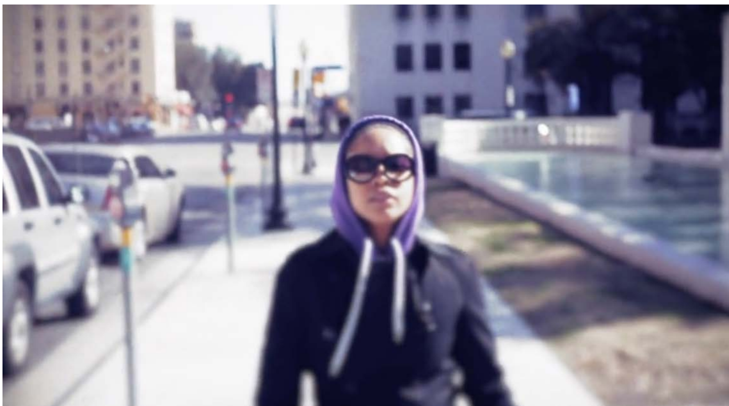

Figure 1. A black woman enters Dealey Plaza on foot. Music video for "Window Seat," performed by Erykah Badu. Directed by Coodie and Chike (Creative Control), 2010. (Screenshot courtesy of Kimberly Juanita Brown)

I want to think about artistic practices that utilize the reproduction of space to elucidate and elongate the patterns of visibility marking black bodies in very precise ways. In a seemingly unyielding visual archive, repeated and mobilized for swift digitized movement, blackness continues to be impacted by a tethering to public space, and

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black people continue to negotiate the parameters of bodily mobility and bodily restrictions. *Window Seat* enters this discourse with the singular production of Erykah Badu's paced ambulatory engagement.

Figure 2. Badu will be followed along her path by the man on the right side of the frame. Music video for "Window Seat," performed by Erykah Badu. Directed by Coodie and Chike (Creative Control), 2010. (Screenshot courtesy of Kimberly Juanita Brown)

Window Seat has ocular connotations rooted in both movement and proximity. In the video Badu demarcates movement and proximity as the locus of both progress and tragedy. If we see Kennedy and Badu (through her re-articulation) as victims of progress, tragedy, and corporeal modulations, then this collective cadence brings the video out of its guerrilla-style presentation and into a thickly threaded meditation on what it means to come into being through the reproduction of sight and site. Krista A. Thompson writes, "The literature on the political significance of public space in African American urban history confirms that black Americans historically have redefined urban space through their unorthodox occupation of city environments" (2007:26). As unorthodox as any occupation of city space has ever been, Badu's slowed coming into being with each layer removed from her body is an opportunity to use this body as a collective force of will—the vantage point of hypervisible black subjectivity enacted by public space. Her purposeful saunter is an act of disambiguation, the spectacular ordinariness of a black woman walking—but this is no ordinary black woman and this is no ordinary walk. Indeed, this is the emboldened engagement of one woman with multiple personas, genres of artistic representation, and multiple ways of seeing and being seen.

A Seat at the Window

The video begins with the sound of a radio recording from 22 November 1963, the morning of Kennedy's visit to Dallas and his subsequent murder.[1] As the radio broadcast plays we see Badu driving her vehicle into a parking spot. The radio announcer from KLIF AM Dallas tells of the procession line "jam-packed with spectators" eager for the opportunity to "see" the president as the vehicle carrying Kennedy, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, and Texas Governor John Connally and his wife Nellie moves through the downtown Dallas area.[2]

Figure 3. The singer removes articles of clothing as she continues to walk. Music video for "Window Seat," performed by Erykah Badu. Directed by Coodie and Chike (Creative Control), 2010. (Screenshot courtesy of Kimberly Juanita Brown)

1. Description is based on the YouTube video; lyrics were transcribed from the video (ErykahBaduVEVO 2010).

2. For the complete broadcast from KLIF see the YouTube posting by Bill Marcks (2013).

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Adorned with her trademark cluster of large rings, sunglasses, and a purple hoodie underneath a dark overcoat, Badu first removes her sunglasses in the video, placing them in her coat pocket. The singer next removes her overcoat, her right, then left shoe before jogging forward for a bit. Two male observers are on the right side of the frame — one in a light-colored shirt and the other wearing a red baseball cap and a red jacket. The latter will continue to follow Badu as she walks along the route, picking up the clothes she discards along the way. After taking off the hoodie and running for a bit, Badu crosses the street while taking off her shirt. This is the first time we are able to see the word written across her back: EVOLVING.

An ambulatory act is always already a reproduction, embedded in repetition and simultaneous movement. Though not the most exceptional visual act in a long and exceptional musical career, *Window Seat* offers us the site-specific, black-woman articulation of what it means to claim space. In her swift but purposeful sauntering (slowed down to match the song's tempo), Badu's walking path ends near the precise spot where a sniper's bullet ended the life of the 35th president of the United States. In the aftermath of the event and its civil rights legislative implications, African American witnesses to the event have all but disappeared from the historical archive. In the reproduction of the photographs of crowds assembled along the route of the procession, very few include a view of the hundreds of African Americans present for the event.

Figure 4. Erykah Badu evolving. Music video for "Window Seat," performed by Erykah Badu. Directed by Coodie and Chike (Creative Control), 2010. (Screenshot courtesy of Kimberly Juanita Brown)

Because of the timing, the framing, and the mode of this video performance, it is possible to lose some of the potency Badu brings to the visual sphere with this work. "Music is a method," Shana Redmond asserts, but for Badu, the world of the visual is her practice (2013:1). She is a singer, songwriter, dancer, rapper, DJ, poet, actress, comedian, and tweeter extraordinaire. She brings all of these artistic identities to bear on *Window Seat* with the paced propulsion of a grainy visual refrain.

"Window Seat" the song is a meditation on the mechanisms of layering that necessitate careful removal, so that evolving can occur. It is a song that places gendered vulnerability at the center of its cadence and its order. "Don't want nobody next to me," Badu sings. "I just want a ticket outta town / a look around / and a safe touchdown." In the rendered attempt at private interiority, "Don't want nobody next to me," we hear a plea for the kind of solitude too infrequently afforded black people in public spaces. "But," she continues, "I need you to want me / need you to miss me / I need your attention / I need you next to me / Need someone to clap for me." From private interiority ("I need you to want me / need you to miss me") to a collective call for recognition and adoration ("I need your attention / I need someone to clap for me") Badu commands a collective black consciousness to embolden her engagement with interiority and public space (Badu and Poyser 2010).

A black woman's nakedness encroaches on a public space of historical import and manages to highlight what Katherine McKittrick calls the "see-able-public-invisible women, in and across the black diaspora" (McKittrick 2006:52). Her presence also highlights the "seeable-public-invisible" engagement of black witnessing, black cultural production, and black women's

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artistic practices. Knowing much about the hypervisualized surveillance apparatus that attends black women's public engagements, as well as the repetition of misrecognition located there, Badu takes her inspiration for *Window Seat* from the Matt and Kim video *Lessons Learned*. In that video, which won the 2009 MTV Breakthrough Video of the Year award, the Brooklyn indie duo take off all of their clothes in the middle of New York's Times Square (Arsenault 2009).

Figure 5. Badu approaches the end of the procession route, near the grassy knoll where Kennedy was shot. Music video for "Window Seat," performed by Erykah Badu. Directed by Coodie and Chike (Creative Control), 2010. (Screenshot courtesy of Kimberly Juanita Brown)

"If architecture can be seen as an ally in inhabitation," Anne Cheng writes, "it also points to the profound challenges inhering in the acts of inhabiting and connecting ourselves, both to places and to our own bodies" (2011:98). Erykah Badu's solo inhabitation of Dallas draws together the act of seeing and being seen, the courageous presentation of corporeality against architecture, and the artist's own imagistic and musical evolution.

Window Seat compels the viewer to slow down the tempo of performative visibility so that the viewer and the viewed find a balance of order. This, I believe, is why Badu's video functions quite differently than Matt and Kim's *Lessons Learned* (though both women are killed at the end of the videos). Instead of an MTV Breakthrough Video Award, the video for *Window Seat* provided the Dallas Police Department with the evidence to charge Badu with disorderly conduct.[3]

At the intersection of history and visibility, a black female artist claims space within a space of national importance, a place that is also home for her. By doing so, she not only reconfigures her own creative and musical trajectory, but saunters forth through a city's quiet refusal to negotiate the parameters of race and citizenship. Badu's efforts to utilize her nude body, its motions and progressions, in order to illuminate the geographical specificity of her hometown are in the service of history, memory, and public space.

A black woman places her body in the center of history, cognizant of her presumed peripheral status. She wants you to look. In doing so she highlights the quiet cloaking of nation over race, and gender over geography and space.

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3. It was the reproduction of the video that was used as evidence to charge Badu. According to Christina Boyle and Soraya Roberts "A Dallas police spokesman said they have received calls from people across the country complaining about Badu's behavior." (This "behavior" is described by the two New York *Daily News* journalists as "a public striptease" that cost the singer $500 in misdemeanor fines.) (Boyle and Roberts 2010).

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"Black Night Is Falling"

The "Airy Poetics" of Some Performance

Sarah Jane Cervenak

In his poem, "Properties," Ed Roberson offers a history of the world told through the journey of water into sky: "the verdant tropical mists' drip / tears gathering into the cold / bloody rivers of the atlantic / grinding ashore / captured into the plantations' white glacial field." And in the last stanza: "Black with the roads' dusts / the atmosphere, solid, on the ground / turns into a pool, the / ground's mirror / and picks up the sky again" (1995:82–83).[1]

Rain. Tear. River. Ice. Stream. Sky.

The movement of mist, water's becoming air bespeaks a particular and general ambulation. The "bloody" Atlantic along with the "glacial" devastation wrought by the plantation traces the devastating course of antiblackness, from the breaking of life to the breaking of current. Stolen flesh and soil. An ecohistory of the middle passage, with whiteness glacializing every field into flesh, flesh into field.

Even still, the particular is undercut by the deregulated movement of the general; the thieved or privately shed tear moves the stream that bursts from the frozen wall into the air.

1. Regarding the two quotes in the title of this essay: "Black Night Is falling" appears in Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's meditations on black study (2013:19); "airy poetics" is a concept developed by Sasha Engelmann (2015).

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The stars bear witness to the ethereal portrait engendered from that movement, all the while glistening as the celestial miracles that illuminate passage.

In some ways, Roberson's attention to the complex, atmospheric harboring of such "scenes of subjection" (Hartman 1997) offers another modality of thought that, following Timothy Choy's important work, contends with the "materiality of air and the density of our many human entanglements in airy matters" (2011:145). With Roberson and Choy, I wonder how such attention to the airy entanglements, water's after/life elucidates something about this question around the intersections of blackness, reproduction, and performance and does so by poeticizing an answer that only the sky can decipher.

To live within air is to be in common. A postaquatic commons. A pneumatic commons. Respiration is a choral practice; the interplay between oxygen, hydrogen, and carbon dioxide complexly threads the reproductive fates of oceans, trees, flesh, and cells together. We might say breathing is reproduction's ur-text.

To concede this elaborates most acutely Fred Moten's assertion that "antiblackness is antilife" (Kelley and Moten 2015). The long history of antiblackness as antilife moves from the terroristic middle passage to antireproductive eugenics projects to the ongoing (extra) legalized killing of black people by the state; all of which deeply bespeaks a mythic investment in breath's particular privatization. Eric Garner's last words, "I can't breathe," terribly, tragically reveals (once again) the lengths whiteness and propertied personhood will go in expunging blackness from a commons they mythically imagine they control.

Even still, the thing about breath is that it manages somehow to stay around. And what is more, as Choy (2011) writes, air "drifts" beyond the telos of the "human," wandering past the notion of life itself as beginning and ending with what Sylvia Wynter calls "biocentric" man (2003:267).

Ashon Crawley's deeply brilliant and beautiful recent work *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* speaks precisely to the perambulatory, para-ambulatory, earthly movements of "black pneuma," enfleshed breath (2016:38). His engagement with black Pentecostal preachers Dorinda Clark-Cole and Juandolyn Stokes's airy animation of an improvised syllable at the end of particular words—for example, Stokes's insertion of "vocables [what Crawley also calls 'impure appendages'] such as 'hah' and 'tuh'" at the end of each line of a sermon—indexes both the always-more-than-one quality of air and the way air's very performativity cuts against the various interdictions, the failed performatives, that terribly sustain whiteness's suffocating, earth-killing animation.[2] Following Choy and Crawley, air's reproductivity is larger than the individualized performances of inhalation and exhalation. We might say it unmoors reproduction from teleology. In other words, we do not know the shape one's exhalation takes, what and who are its expressions and conditions, the path it follows from ocean to tear to blossom, from one dying woman's last breath to the first wail of another. J. Kameron Carter and I (2016) have considered whether there's a metonymic relation between blackness and ether (airy matters), even as the project of modernity has brutally consigned blackness to air's opposite, brute materiality...trespassable ground (see Battersby 2007). Forgotten ocean.

This is complicated; both blackness and air have been, as Crawley instructively documents, counterposed. Blackness is said to endanger air's mythic purity, threatening a set of enclosures ranging from white fences to white heteronormative families.[3] Whiteness, we might say, creates a climate of antiblack suffocation, even as it presumes atmospheric reach. There is an important distinction to make here, one between climate and atmosphere; that is, since the Enlightenment, "climate" has been said to be empirically assessable and as such scientifically

2. See Crawley's beautiful discussion of Stokes and Clarke-Cole's airy innovations (2016:43–47).

3. See Crawley's important discussion on lynching and what he calls "racial emphysema" (2016:63–85).

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knowable; plainly stated, climate is defined as the experience and subsequent averaging of atmospheric tendencies. A straightened out figuration of what surrounds.[4]

Any talk about climate often presumes the nonerrancy of air.

Moreover, it's terribly instructive that the Enlightenment preoccupation with weather, which in turn animated an American presidential obsession with its particular recording, was never far from concerns about the fraudulent precarity of America as a "pure," white, settler state.[5] Where a white nationalist obsession with the weather was never not, following Christina Sharpe, an obsession with a fictionalized Black pneumatic in/capacity that in turn perversely figured juridically/racially/pseudoscientifically as the conjured in/ability to breathe "free" air (2016:111).

Still
even still, air drifts.

Beyond the space/time of the state's asthmatic deprivations and interruptions, breath endures as nonteleological destination and extra-fleshly life. A fugitive choreography between water, flesh, mist, and sky. In that way, anxieties about the atmosphere's inherent waywardness are always already anxieties about blackness. Unheld flesh, earth without title, homes without doors, oceans without claim, passage without destination, companionships that unsettle any arbitrary enclosures suggested by body, border, self, matter. Roamings beyond the end of the "world."

Blackness as enfleshed errancy, just like atmosphere, historically figures as reproduction's urtext—a making of life without end. This is precisely and grossly why whiteness's attempts to enclose and control the atmosphere, which is also to say blackness, is often animated by a fear of a kind of mythically hyped-up and wayward reproductivity. Tears to sky.

And so too, we might say, this antireproductivity is a fear of the nonteleological movement of performance-in-the-world; its wandering. What oceans moved in that added syllable ethereally imbued and gifted from the lungs of visionary preachers?

There is something and someone that will breathe, or inhale. Lungs will press in and out, a rose will bend a certain way, oceans will be harbored in prayer. This quilted pneuma threaded with sunlight, mist, and tree, the offering made by the one who breathes wildly in the face of death, or even beyond that and more tragically, the insistent last exhalation of the one who lay dying bespeaks blackness and reproduction's dramatic and undisclosed unfolding somewhere beyond the end of the world.[6]

4. I am interested in the epistemological and disciplinary unavailability of the surround, as it extends from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's argumentation on the surround: "In films like *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) or *Shaka Zulu* (1987), the settler is portrayed as surrounded by 'natives,' inverting, in Parenti's view, the role of aggressor so that colonialism is made to look like self-defense. Indeed, aggression and self-defense are reversed in these movies, but the image of a surrounded fort is not false. Instead, the false image is what emerges when a critique of militarised life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it. The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure. The surround antagonises the laager in its midst while disturbing that facts on the ground with some outlaw planning" (2013:17).

5. In her book *British Culture and The Climate of Enlightenment* Jan Golinski writes: "In America itself, the belief that the climate was being changed was taken to heart by the settler population as the United States claimed its independence. Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), reported as a result of his own research among the settler population that 'both heats and colds are become much moderate within the memory even of the middle aged.' Late in his life, he called for a national network of weather observers to compile prolonged observations in order 'to show the effect of clearing and culture towards changes of climate'" (2007:197).

6. Here the notion of breathing wildly is inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy's (1987) notion of wild laughter. So too, Denise Ferreira da Silva (2014) thinks blackness's movement beyond "the end of the world" (of category, climate, and linear space time) in relation to a black feminist poethics.

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Hydrogen. Oxygen. Carbon dioxide. The aquatic-pneumatic reach of black song becomes a floral blossom uprooting the fence. Air's reproductivity is the ur-text of the earth. Its blackness forged through the damp air of undisclosed performers, unlocatable respiration forming the possible and impossible themselves.

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Casualties

Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson

A guiding philosophy of any dance class is to reproduce: reproduce an instructor's choreography, reproduce an obedience to rhythm, reproduce a social order. In a class, we dancers pay, in part, for an occasion to mime. Dancers arrive with an intention to encounter the limits of their own body and to train that physical mass toward a new iteration of itself. Dancers—and here I am directing my attention to those who deliberately show up to a dance class ready to pay a fee for an embodied experience—arrive with assumptions in tow. In addition to tutoring the body, to attend a dance class is to traffic in community building—however robust, thin, or fleeting.

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Dance classes are also a sum of losses.

If one is there to reproduce a choreography or to experience the transmission of embodied information, one is also reproducing an African diasporic social order. West African dance classes are moments of contention, of identity slicing, and of policing. All dancers shed, redesign, or abandon a past version of themselves; each one matters to the space. The less-rhythmic dancer makes the skilled appear cleaner. A close public relationship with a teacher means that one can chase the rhythm and still provoke the patience, if not the tutoring, of the advanced students. One's social context influences the terms with which a dancer's movement is measured (see Scott 1997).

Scholars of African diaspora studies have theorized diaspora as both a noun and a verb; the African diaspora *exists* and it is in a constant state of *enactment* (Edwards 2001; Hall 1996; Hartman 2007; Nelson 2011). Analyzing diaspora through the framework of *articulation*, Brent Hayes Edwards writes:

> If a discourse of diaspora articulates difference, then one must consider the status of that difference—not just linguistic difference but, more broadly, the trace or the residue, perhaps, of what resists translation or what sometimes cannot help refusing translation across the boundaries of language, class, gender, sexuality, religion, the nation-state. (2001:64)

Further, Edwards mobilizes the French word *décalage*—"the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water [...,] an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed"—to capture the fundamentality of difference in the making of diaspora (2001:65). According to both Stuart Hall and Edwards, décalage explains the ambivalent nature of linguistic translation. Thus décalage provides an occasion to regard African diasporic communities as heterogeneous, incommensurable, and performatively constructed.

While décalage has been historically applied to the logocentric, this theory of (mis)translation is activated even when few words are uttered. Translated as a "gap," "discrepancy," "time lag," or "interval"—"décalage" rubs up against a related term: *casualties*. Reading for casualties can assist scholars of black diasporic dance in mapping the force of West African movement in reproducing racial and gendered difference.

Scholarship on West African dance has tended to focus on its healing properties for African diasporic people and its capacity to suture difference (see Daniel 2005; and Welsh 1998). Dance is a means through which people (black and not) pursue a connection to the African diaspora, sometimes through monetary exchange. For black Americans, this mode of recuperative identity politics directly challenged anti-black histories that positioned African Americans as beginning with the institution of slavery. Non-black West African dance participants have sometimes treated the dance practice as a spaceship launching toward racial transcendence and sexual freedom.

While scholars have attended to the notion of transmission as central to the act of teaching, it might also serve us to turn our attention to what falls away through ongoing enactments of choreographic transference.

Applying the logic of décalage to West African dance practice exposes a configuration of African diasporic dance politics that moves beyond its capacity to repair racial injury. It provides a useful framework through which to consider West African choreographies themselves—how they circulate transnationally, transform, and undergo choreographic casualties as they transfer between bodies. A casualties framework helps theoreticians of diaspora to chart the nonverbal "utterances" that get taught, translated, and remixed through dance pedagogy. It also reveals the making of a black diasporic dance space as rendered by a number of choreographic deaths rather than embodied victories. It respects what can be gained in terms of community forma-

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tion precisely through loss. This failure is not depressing, nor does it undermine the potential making of diaspora. The losses are the cohesion.

West African dance classes are pulled between two poles of failure: doing "too much" or doing "too little." While the body accumulates information through a dance class, it also forgets, missteps, and misarticulates. If an organizing principle of a class is to train toward the choreography and physical affect of the teacher, then a dancer is in a constant state of becoming more principled in the dance form by jettisoning previous embodied knowledge. Of course, there is a direct connection between choreographic casualties and capitalism here: it is the student's desire to want to replicate the instructor, or to more firmly belong to that particular space, that fuels their paying to return.

In West African dance there is an ambition toward reproduction, but what if we trained our eyes to look at what falls away, rather than what echoes? We well know that replication, no matter how close, is never quite the thing itself. That other body is wearing that "original" differently. One is never a perfect replica of the teacher; the teacher is growing, too. This gathering and vanishing are what make a dance class.

No matter how closely our embodiment of the choreography resembles the instructor's, our power is in our difference: the ability to utter with our own bodies that we have mastered the rhythm enough to add flair to it—rather than offering zeal in lieu of an effort—is what demonstrates true mastery of the choreography at hand. Whether or not one is chasing or riding a rhythm, what we share is our difference in pursuit of it.

Focusing on what is lost in translation is not to say there is no cohesion, community, or family formation being constituted. Rather, it is to say that the proof of diaspora is where the body fails, does differently, or does extra. Choreographic casualties are not bleak. They merely force us to reason with the importance of technique, skill, and sonic precision—rather than privileging effort, enthusiasm, and healing that too often dominate West African dance classes. (While we each, of course, ought to make the dance our own, we can only accomplish this when accumulating enough of a foundation upon which to riff.) We cannot afford to skip over the fact of craft in lieu of an approach to Africanness that masks the operations of technique, and of capitalism, which cofunction to reproduce West African dance.

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Generational Schism, Fannie Lou Hamer, and the Future of Protest

Paige A. McGinley

little member

the word say this little tongue can
make big trouble. i use simple words:
free, land, free, medicne. they push back
with big words: marxist, social, exprmnt. just
one little woman talkn, will raise cain.
never met karl marx, but i know
a good idea when i hear one.

—*Treasure Shields Redmond (2015:33)*

A.

These were not the conditions I had agreed to. On 10 November 2016, a couple dozen graduate students and a few faculty and staff gathered in a small conference room in the basement of a campus building. Along with poet, scholar, and educator Treasure Shields Redmond, I had been invited to reflect on "The Future of Protest"—presumably, given my research on training, performance, and protest during the civil rights movement, by looking to the past. Implicit

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in the prompt issued months earlier was a circumstance that had not come to pass: what would be the future of Black Lives Matter and affiliated social justice movements during a Hillary Clinton presidency? I faced the room—as I had faced my students earlier that day and the day before—conscious of the generation gap between us. These were not the conditions that we had agreed to.

By November 2016, "not your grandfather's civil rights movement" had become a shorthand description of Black Lives Matter, deployed as both praise by the movement's supporters, and as criticism by its detractors. Pointing to the decentralized organizational structure of BLM, new tactics enabled by social media, and a focus on police brutality and mass incarceration, "not your grandfather's civil rights movement" also suggests young people's fatigue with the ways that nonviolence—often simplistically understood—has been upheld as the only acceptable model for dissent.[1] Ta-Nehisi Coates eloquently expresses this ethos in *Between the World and Me*: "it seemed that the month [of February] could not pass without a series of films dedicated to the glories of being beaten on camera" (2015:32).

But can the generational model—even expressed as generational schism—invite anything other than reproduction or its refusal?[2] Is there another way?

B.

Somewhere along the way, we lost the mothers. The first public utterance of this generational schism between Black Lives Matter and the civil rights movement is traceable to the St. Louis rapper Tef Poe (Kareem Jackson), who exclaimed "this ain't your daddy's civil rights movement!" at a gathering of young people, community leaders, and civil rights elders in St. Louis in October 2014, just two months after the murder of Mike Brown and the massive demonstrations that followed (superbrotha 2014). Glen Ford proclaimed "this ain't your grandfather's civil rights movement" in a blog post in November 2015; Jelani Cobb picked up the phrase in his profile of movement leaders in *The New Yorker* a few months later (Ford 2015; Cobb 2016).

Focusing on "daddies" and "grandfathers" allows Tef Poe, Ford, Cobb, and others to highlight the leadership of young women at the forefront of today's struggle—and to draw a contrast with the patriarchal leadership that characterized the civil rights movement. But while there is no doubt that the most visible leaders of the mid-century struggle were men, the contributions of women—from those in leadership roles to those who made sandwiches—have been chronicled in detail in recent years (Holsaert, et al. 2012; McGuire 2011; Ransby 2003). Decades before the Mothers of the Movement (those contemporary mothers of young men and women killed by police) were what Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) member Charles Sherrod called "the mamas" of the civil rights struggle: "the 'mamas' were usually the militant women in the community—outspoken, understanding, and willing to catch hell, having already caught their share" (in Lee 1999:xii).

1. See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (2016) for its incisive account of the rise of Black Lives Matter and the struggles—and alliances—between older and younger activists.

2. I take a cue here from Judith Roof's critique of the generational model as it has been applied to feminist "generations" in intellectual history, which "superimpose[s] assumptions about property, propriety, and precedence that attempt to ensure that feminism's offspring remember their mothers and in so remembering reproduce their mothers' gains, while honoring their mothers appropriately" (1997:71).

Figure 1. (facing page) In this 17 September 1965 file photo, Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, Mississippi, speaks to Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party sympathizers outside the Capitol in Washington after the House of Representatives rejected the party's legal challenge to the seating of the Mississippi Congressional delegation, on the grounds that black Mississippians were prevented from voting in the 1964 election. (Photo by AP Photo/William J. Smith, File)

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C.

And so we're back to the conference room, tasked with the future of protest. Rather than choose from the familiar menu of handwringing and outrage that characterized those early days, Redmond rose to her full height and commenced to read—no, sing— from her book of poetry entitled *chop: a collection of kwansabas for fannie lou hamer*. These 30 poems adhere to the strict rules of the kwansaba form: seven lines, with seven words per line. Together, they trace the arc of the life of Fannie Lou Hamer—a "mama" who made visible and audible the laboring black women of the rural Jim Crow South.

Hamer, a sharecropper and the youngest of 20 children from Ruleville, Mississippi, emerged as one of the most significant grassroots leaders of the Mississippi movement in the 1960s. Her powerful oratory, door-to-door canvassing, citizenship pedagogy, and fearless advocacy for the vote were indispensable as she worked as a field secretary for SNCC, and served as a delegate of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Known for her physical strength (she was renowned for picking hundreds of pounds of cotton a day), Hamer experienced cruelties and indignities as a consequence of her advocacy—but also simply because she was born black and poor in the Jim Crow South.

And here is Redmond, herself a black woman born and raised in Mississippi, making the labor of black reproduction—and black generation—visible, audible, haptic, vibrational:

> *poll tax*
>
> weren't right how they did us. wouldn't
> kick no dog that ain't bark'n hell,
> i was 44. told that doctor 34.
> *auntie, we just gone make it so*
> *you don't be bothered with eve's curse*,
> he say. i votes for them babies.
> babies that won't never stand in line. (Redmond 2015:11)

As the poem suggests, Hamer was given a hysterectomy without her consent in 1961. Such involuntary sterilizations were widespread, a prevalence Hamer acknowledged when she described the procedure as a "Mississippi appendectomy." In the poem, Redmond has Hamer respond to the biopolitical power of the medical establishment—backed up by the force of the state—with an act of civic defiance: her vote. Denied reproductive choice, Hamer exercises an electoral right for which she fought, voting "for them babies," a generation that could never come to be.

What is the future of protest? And what is its relationship to the past? Conjuring that counterfactual generation, bringing the imagined voice of Hamer into the room, Redmond stages political transformation not solely through a normative chronology of generation that demands either nostalgic celebration or Oedipal rejection of one's elders, but as a disruption of the chrononormativity of activist discourse. Bringing Hamer to us not as a grandmother, exactly, but as someone to *stand with*, to *hear from* "just one little woman, talkn."

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